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LAND RECLAMATION PROJECT FOUND SUCCESSFUL

Manava GULF MIRROR in English 4 Nov 79 p 33

[Text] IN the Arabian Gulf where petrodollars conjure up images of Cadillacs and other conspicuous, Iraq is ploughing its oil revenues back into the earth.

This leftist state looks positively austere next to its petro-neighbours. But its government is determined to achieve a self-sufficient state by the time its oil reserves start to dwindle.

Unlike the desert oil states, where greater emphasis is put on industrialisation, Iraq has formulated a long-term and comprehensive plan to develop its agriculture.

Fertility

A few weeks ago the first crop of barley was ready for harvesting on a site known wistfully as "KJ." Things haven't been so good there for almost a thousand years.

The product of several years of labour by teams of international consultants and contractors, the barley harvest marks the return of fertility to the barren, semi-desert Lower Khalis region. And like a good omen for this massive irrigation and land reclamation project, this first crop surpassed the expectations of everyone involved, from the drawing board to the plough.

The project, one of the biggest of its kind in the world,

maintains the 5,000 year old heritage of irrigation in Iraq — said to be the oldest in the world.

In the earliest days the inhabitants of Mesopotamia relied on the natural floods of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris to water their crops. Later a complex network of canals was developed and the land flourished.

It was around 1,000 years ago that this stretch of the Fertile Crescent was rendered barren by a national process which left the soil ridden with deposits of salt.

When the Lower Khalis project is completed, it will bring high intensity irrigation and mechanised agriculture to 90,000 hectares of land between the Tigris and Diyala rivers, an economically important area immediately north of Baghdad. Some 9,000 kilometres of field drains are to be constructed in the area.

The first contract to start — "KJ," in 1975 — involved the construction of 1,000 kilometres of field drains. It is now 90 per cent complete.

The net cultivable area of "KJ" is 6,000 hectares. The second and third contracts (K2 of 24,500 hectares and K1 of 15,000 hectares) were both started in 1977 and are thus over 15 per cent complete. The Iraqi government has provided the £200 million necessary for the scheme.

Distribution

Britain's Sir M MacDonald and Partners, who had carried out an initial feasibility study in 1971, were appointed consultants to design and supervise the work by the newly-formed General Agricultural Establishment. Their job over a period of five years was to develop a progressive agricultural plan based on cereals, fodder crops and citrus fruits. Sub-consultants for agricultural and social aspects are Housing Technical Services of Britain.

A major delay, and one which is becoming common to such projects the world over, is that of land distribution and administration.

Some 70 per cent of the land is still owned by 5 per cent of its people. A single person is not supposed to own more than 300 donams (roughly 1,200 hectares).

With its socialist strategy, the Baghdad government duly proposed to confiscate all the land concerned and redistribute it in packages of 300 donams to the local farmers.

That has not happened. Resistance has come from landowners, some in influential public positions. There is also the fact that the politics of land tenure are complex, although it is known that the government is ultimately keen on utilising collective and state farms. Government control will come gradually, it seems.

proclamation of the Tehia movement there is also Rabbi Eliezer Waldman, head of the Eiryat Arba Talmudic Academy, an academy, as other academics, whose students are alumni of the educational system of the National Religious Movement, where they were trained in Torah. What need can be filled for a Torah educator by a "mixed" party with no strictly religious image? Will his students be educated by the rhetoric of Gouleh Cohen?

The surprise, of trainees of the NRP in a secular movement, is in effect the answer. Trainees of the Mizrahi have always gone over to secular parties. This process has continued for decades. Even before establishment of the State, one of the ideologists of the Mizrahi, Rabbi Israel, the rabbi of Tel Aviv, complained to his book, "The Spiritual Problems in

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