

SUMMARY

The flat and fertile Indus Plain of West Pakistan, and the great rivers that water it, are one of the major natural resources of the earth. They are a major physical asset of the world's fifth largest country, Pakistan, with its rapidly growing population of 100 million people. Some 30 million persons dwell on the Plain, and 23 million make their living directly or indirectly from farming it. They produce 75 percent of the food and fibers grown in West Pakistan.

The average annual inflow of the Indus and its tributaries is twice the flow of the Nile, and more than ten times that of the Colorado River. In Europe, only the Danube compares in size, and in the United States, only the Mississippi and the Columbia are larger. Half the water carried onto the Plain by the rivers is diverted into a highly-developed system of irrigation canals, and is used to irrigate some 23 million acres—by far the largest single irrigated region on earth, and two-thirds of all the planted land in West Pakistan. The total area of easily cultivable land in the Plain is more than 30 million acres.

Underneath the northern part of the Plain lies a huge lake of fresh water, equal in volume to ten times the annual flow of the rivers. Elsewhere, there are large reservoirs of natural gas. If properly developed, the underground water could be used as an invaluable supplement to the canal waters, and the known reserves of natural gas could be employed for many decades as fuel for generation of the electric power needed to pump the underground water, and as a raw material for production of nitrogen fertilizers.

In spite of the great potentialities of the Plain, the fact is that poverty and hunger, not well-fed prosperity, are today the common lot of the people of West Pakistan. They are nowhere more desperately evident than in the farming villages of the countryside. In a country of farmers, food must be imported to provide the most meager diet; the gap between food production and the number of mouths to be fed is widening at an increasing rate. With an average caloric content in the human diet of less than 2,000 calories per person per day, and an animal protein intake of less than 8 grams, agricultural production in West Pakistan would need to be increased 15 percent to feed the additional livestock required to meet the deficit of animal protein, and another 20 percent to make up the deficit in food grains and other energy-containing foods. The population is growing at a rate of 2.5 to 3 percent per year, while food production is