Weekly Notes

Railways and the Plan

THE press note issued after the meeting of the General Managers of the six zones into which the Indian Railway system is now divided conveys the comforting assurance, that the highest priority will be given to the schemes essential for the additional carrying capacity needed to meet the increased production target of the Five Year Plan, after providing for rehabilitation. The resources likely to be available to the railways fur additions and expansions, however, will meet only a part of the total requirements. Hence, only a selected number of the many high priority projects awaiting implementation can be taken up for execution during the next five years.

This modest claim, however, glosses over rather than sets out clearly the transport situation in the country. Far from being able to meet even a part of the increased demands for transport that the successful implementation of the various targets in agriculture and industry may call for, independent assessment of the railway transport situation tells quite another story. Unfortunately, railways publish only the statistics of the traffic that they carry. 'the Railway Board does not say how much traffic awaits transport and how much is left out because booking is not available

The bottlenecks in the railway system between the North and the South are so severe and the schemes now on hand are so inadequate, that it is doubtful whether the railways would be aim to carry the traffic that will be currently offering in the next five years, not to speak of offering" additional capacity!

On the problems of traffic between North and South, the note devotes considerable space, but does not throw much light. It recognises that there is growing demand for moving more goods in these two directions and also concedes that increased line capacity must be provided " as early as possible " over' the East Coast route between Bengal and Madias. But it is not on the East Coast alone that there is bottleneck. It seems that it is on the West Coast that improvement is least to be expected, because of the limited capacity of the meter-gauge line that connects North and South. To connect the North and Southern meter-gauge systems through a new line from Khandwa to Hingali will not be enough in view of the volume of traffic that is currently offering. Vet the scheme is only being " re-examined'', nothing more promising than that is vouchsafed. Even before the war, it was considered an urgent necessity. Actually the only relief that is promised for the South is the new meter-gauge line connecting Quilon in Travancore with Cochin, work on which has already been commenced.

It is unlikely that any other major projects will be taken up during the period of the Five Year Plan. The proposal for a broad-gauge bridge across the Ganga near Mokama, however, remains on the cards, after the many vicissitudes through which it has passed, thanks to the hasty choice of site, faulty planning and subsequent changes in the plan.

In view of the above gloomy picture of railway traffic, what demands urgent attention is the future of road transport. In all other countries. even in backward Indonesia railways suffer from road competition. Mere, particularly in the South, railways should welcome it. to relieve them of the traffic which they cannot cope with. A properly organised system of road transport would supplement, and not compete with, the railway system. The attention that the State Governments have been paying to road transport in various ways threatens to keep the trucks off the roads, with no sign of the railways coming forward to carry the traffic

Wonder Scheme of Sudan

THE Gezira scheme in the Sudan is regarded by many as the mots successful and promising of the schemes that have been carried out. for re-habilitating the small-scale farmer in the backward countries. Gezira takes its name from the name of plain lying between the Blue and White Nile Rivers. 'The. word in Arabic means an island. On this 5,000,000 acre plain was built a dam *2* miles long across the Blue Nile and 5,000 miles of canals were dug which now irrigate a million acres. Besides cotton, as much food is produced in the irrigated area now as used to come from the whole plain.

Started in a small way 27 years ago, it is today the financial backbone of the Sudan. The main purpose of the scheme was production of cotton, and the revenue from cotton alone last year was on an average £750 for each of the 25,000 peasant farmers who are members of the scheme. The Government of Sudan's share' of the cotton crop last year was £18 millions *plus* another £10 million from export duty. What these figures mean to a desperately poor country like the Sudan which balanced its first budget at less than £1 million may well be imagined,

The scheme was a three-fold affair between peasant farmers of the district, the Sudan Government and a British commercial firm called the Sudan Plantations. It was a partnership of interests of the local people, of the Government and the company which could not ignore commercial prudence. A special feature about the capital invested was that the Sudan Plantations had a *25* years' concession at the end of which it had to be paid off. 'The company put up the capital, provided factories and workshops, paid supervisory staff, advanced loans to peasants and financed crops. But during these 25 years, the Sudanese Government was able to put aside enough reserve out of the profits of the scheme to provide its own capital and pay back the Sudan Plantations, which it did with thanks from the Sudanese Parliament, Will the Sudan be now able to carry out the scheme successfully? It was no co-operator or philanthropic body which started the scheme. The sponsor was a person whose name is difficult to associate with such things Lord Kitche-

Ceylon Rubber for Chinese Rice

THE premature leakage of its draft proposals for a trade agreement with China has been regretted by the Ceylon Government but it has not been refuted or denied. Mr Senanayake led the Trade Mission to Peking. The agreement now under negotiation is to be effective for 5 years, during which Ceylon will supply 50,000 tons of sheet rubber annually and China will give in exchange rice, presumably in specified quantities.

Long-term agreements on these lines with Communist countries are usually vetoed on the ground that in the absence of a monopoly of foreign trade, Governments cannot possibly enter into long-term commitments for supply of specific commodities in given quantities. All that they can do is to issue export permits. It will then lead to trade