



CATCH the '74 monsoon!

Bottle it in the biggest man-made lake in Kerala, a sprawling 70 billion cubic feet of storage formed by damming up the rivers Periyar and Cheruthoni in the Cardamom Hills. And barrel through to first power at the Moolamattam powerhouse by mid-'74.

There are two opinions about that. The Kerala State Electricity Board officials at the fabulous Idikki project are more optimistic than their Canadian colleagues. After '75, says Marcel Tremblay, Senior Canadian Engineer at what is already the Canadian International Development Agency's Indian showpiece.

Nobody knows, really. What is a deadline worth when a project that envisaged first power in '71 is still at least one year away from it? KSEB engineers reckon on plugging the Idikki dam diversion around March and letting the 1974 rains (160 inches or so if it's an average year) flood their reservoir to the 2,300-foot level. But that depends on getting the third dam in the complex, the Kulamavu, to requisite height.

Where's the hurry when first power is still so far away? For one thing, they don't want to leave Idikki too long without pressure. India's first double curvature arch dam, at 555 feet the loftiest in Asia, would have water up to three-fifths of its height under the KSEB floodings schedule. Thereby the water side of Idikki might get to look less like a chunk of cosmic tennis ball and more like, say, the stern of some vast super-tanker steaming down the Periyar.

The hitch is Kulamavu, a 328-foot-high rubble masonry dam which has seen more than its share of labour trouble even for this strike-bedevilled project. The KSEB engineers, who are directly in charge of this sector, reason: To top 2,300 feet we need so many more million cubic feet of masonry. We have so many days to lay it. Therefore we'll lay so many cubic feet of masonry a day from now till February. The Canadians figure the other way around: We've averaged so many cubic feet of masonry a day. We need so many cubic feet to top 2,300 feet. Therefore it will take so many more days.

As it happens, both cynicism and optimism are in order. On the one hand, as a KSEB engineer put it: "Idikki is being watched by everybody and when there is any problem it is solved." But at what cost in time and money? What in 1966 was conceived