

Bangladesh Agriculture: From Crisis to Development

BANGLADESH agriculture is suffering from a bewildering set of intractable problems. While paddy production increased by the satisfactory rate of 3.2 per cent per annum during 1981-1991, the performance in respect of all other crops as well as fishery, livestock and forestry outputs has been highly unsatisfactory.

As regards the future, sustainability of growth in paddy production during 1990s is up against a new constraint due to decline in farm-gate prices. Returns to farmers are tending to fall below cost of production. Clearly this is a crisis situation. Bangladesh agriculture needs a bold new strategy of development covering the sector as a whole instead of further promoting monoculture of rice only which itself is facing new difficulties.

The traditional approach to development of crop agriculture involved spread of irrigation and use of fertiliser for HYV rice cultivation as Boro or early Aus crops. Growth in Aman paddy cultivation remained modest. Wheat was successfully introduced although outputs after the phenomenal ten fold increase by early 1980s, have now stabilised at around one million tons. Since food self-sufficiency as the prime development objective is defined in terms of the adequacy of domestic production of paddy and wheat, the related strategy of development came to be closely identified with maximisation of cereal production (rice plus wheat). It was a limited objective which had served its purpose. Now unless we branch off into several new directions through an integrated approach to development covering the entire sector of agriculture plus related agro-industries as well as infrastructures, the persistent crisis in agriculture can never be overcome. This would imply that in spite of rapid growth in manufacturing for export, poverty and deprivation

would not only endure but prevail as the recurrent nightmare of the nation.

The new sectoral strategy for Bangladesh agriculture must consist of numerous innovative approaches to development — well beyond the scope of seed-fertiliser-irrigation based government projects implemented so far. First and foremost, marketing, in particular export marketing prospects have now emerged as a critical variable in promoting the growth of agriculture sector. The examples given below will clarify the issue further.

Potato Processing

Russet Burbank potato favoured by the fast food industries world over, is a high yielding variety with stable yields. The variety would grow in Bangladesh since it needs cool evenings and warm days exactly the conditions that prevail in our country in December and January. But Macdonald's, Wedy's and other fast food enterprises don't buy potatoes, they buy frozen french fries and that means a potato processing plant. The fast food enterprises are rapidly expanding in ASEAN countries but given the humid tropical weather conditions prevailing in those countries, there are bright possibilities to grow such potatoes in our country and organise export of frozen french fries to places like Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok. It will be a new business although modest in size but as a result of it, the farm level returns from potato cultivation should improve considerably. During 1981-1991, total potato output declined by 20 per cent and the yield by as much as 30 per cent. The situation is bound to change for the better if export markets for potato products could be developed.

Pineapple

On the other hand, Thailand is the world's leading exporter of canned pineapple since

1980s and recently it has also become the top exporter of pineapple juice and the exports have been growing by leaps and bounds, recording a six-fold increase in a mere four years (1987-1991). At the height of the season in Bangladesh, prices of pineapple fall to abnormally low levels, the wastages are extremely high and lacking in adequate returns, production is likely to decline in the future — if it has not started to decrease already. There is a government owned fruit juice plant but after the black money or windfall gains from purchase of machinery and equipment have been realised by the interested few, it has met the usual fate: like many other enterprises, the factory remains idle with no juice coming out of it. It should be handed over to the private sec-

would not be lacking provided quality and adequacy of outputs of relevant crops are ensured.

In case of poultry, the small scale operations have failed to bring about any cost effective development. The modern feed milling, mixing and pelletizing industry should be encouraged initially based on imported feed ingredients but quickly bringing about import substitution through rapid expansion of maize cultivation, fishmeal industries, deoiled ricebran cake as well as pharmaceutical industries focusing on poultry vaccine, drugs and vitamins.

In the fishery sector, we have concentrated only on shrimp farming but that is not all. Intensive rural aquaculture given extensive water bodies of our country, can give rise to fish outputs which in value would rival rice production within the

single most important commodity produced in the country but bumper harvest means rock bottom prices received by the poor farmers. As a result, they cannot repay the money borrowed to buy fertiliser and seeds. In the following year the areas under high yielding varieties of paddy tend to decline.

This is the paradox of good harvest due to inadequate market infrastructure. There are not enough storage capacities for rice, processing facilities are weak and if it rains during harvest time, lack of drying increase the losses to farmers in terms of reduced crop yields. On the other hand, imagine 400 modern paddy processing plants at thana level, each capable of converting 10 tons of paddy into 7 tons of rice per hour. As a result, not only 80 per cent of the expected paddy output of 1993 will be covered, an additional 1 million tons of high quality non-broken rice could be made available for export. This is feasible because of the higher rate of extraction of rice from paddy in case of modern milling. Further intensification of processing through byproduct utilisation can yield over 350,000 tons of edible rice bran oil as well as over 1.7 million tons of deoiled bran cake, excellent as high quality poultry and fish feed. Such modern processing would automatically ensure mill site storage as well. The potential of poultry and fish feed can be substantially enlarged if maize cultivation is promoted in right earnest. At the same time, modern processing of rice will not result in any loss of employment since many more landless families will be enabled to become poultry farmers with the coming on stream of feed plants adjacent to rice mills.

Processing Complex

What is envisaged is a thana level modern processing complex primarily for grains — rice,

maize and wheat — which anywhere must be produced anywhere and everywhere in rural Bangladesh. After grain, prospects for horticulture crops should be explored linked to processing and marketing ventures. In fact we should concentrate growing of paddy during the rainy season so that dry winter months are available for cultivation of varieties of export oriented vegetable, fruits and other crops. Apart from that, we often fail to realise that 12.5 per cent of the country consist of high to hilly lands where varieties of crops can be cultivated round the year. This includes quick growing tree crops for processing into paper pulp.

Apart from crop agriculture, prospects of fisheries have hardly been explored both in the inland fresh waters as well as out in the deep seas. A substantial portion of the landless can find gainful employment within the fishery sector. We are landless but not waterless. However, processing and marketing development must immediately follow fishery ventures since the product is highly perishable.

The next stage of development in agriculture will be determined not by more areas under paddy but on the rapid development of marketing led by the rise of agro-processing at thana level. The private sector must play the pivotal role in this respect while government should be primarily concerned with provision of liberal credit, utility services and other promotional measures. It is possible to develop the cluster of processing facilities at the thana level for paddy, animal feed, agriculture machinery, fish processing etc, which in turn should ensure a stable remunerative market for the farm produce. This essential market linkage for continuing growth of agriculture is conspicuously lacking in our country — hence the crisis in development.

No to Industrial Wastes

A few US companies seemingly are bent on breaking all past records in violating every business code of ethics and trade or environmental law. They have been eyeing Bangladesh as a convenient dumping ground. According to a report carried in a vernacular daily, at least two exporting companies of America were fined after being forced to take back chemical fertilizer mixed with poisonous industrial wastes from Bangladesh on detection of the foul play. Another company, Stoner Chemical Company, and its allied trading organisation, Transcontinental Imex, no less suspect for the same offence, have been lobbying for establishing an industrial belt of imported wastes in Bangladesh.

This unholy attempt has prompted the Bangladesh Chemical and Biological Society of North America (BCBSNA) to lodge a strong protest with US Vice-President Al Gore against the dumping of chemical refuse in Bangladesh. The society has also sent memoranda to the Bangladesh ambassador in America and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia pleading for a ban on such industries with potential catastrophic consequences on human health and the country's environment. The concern of the BCBSNA will be shared by all well-meaning people both in the country and abroad. But there is no guarantee that the move by these companies will be defeated unless the whole country rose in protest against such heinous design.

At a time when environmental consciousness is rapidly gaining ground the world over, a few multinational companies' attitude towards the Third World appears to be one smacking of disdain and neglect. How come that a company in the US dare send poisonous fertilizer instead of the specified and agreed substance? The fact that a portion of the fertilizer was distributed among farmers in Chittagong and Khulna — and this is despite timely warning by the BCBSNA — thanks to a section of the BADC (Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation) officials, speaks of the underdevelopment we suffer from. The two US exporting companies have already been made to pay by the court in their country for their wrong doing, but surprisingly, BADC, the largest agricultural organisation in the government sector here, has only started contemplating to sue the offending companies.

Clearly, not before the disaster has struck — whether natural or man-made — do we rise up to the reality. The world's largest industrial disaster in Bhopal, India should still be fresh in our memory. The litigation has not yet been fully settled. The mysterious silence of BADC over such a long period can be explained by the blunder — whether deliberate or through ignorance is not known — some of its officials committed. But this is exactly how the interests of the country is compromised. The BCBSNA in America is moving hell and heaven to establish justice and compel the offending companies to compensate for the damage caused to the Bangladesh farmers.

The direct bearing of such a wrong step is quite damaging, and its long-term consequence is bound to be catastrophic. Even before this, we were informed through newspaper reports that foreign ships had time and again tried to jettison their cargo of such industrial refuse into our seas. We are not sure if any such dumping has ever taken place in our territorial water. But there is every likelihood of such incident. After Rio Convention, every nation enjoys some environmental rights and also shares responsibilities. For any environmental offence by any company or country, we can ask for international help — if tackling the problem is beyond our means.

WHO Plan for Chittagong

Chittagong is to become a 'healthy' city, so assures the City Corporation's Mayor, Mia Mohammad Nasiruddin. Under a plan of the World Health Organisation (WHO), the city will receive equivalent of Tk 4,000 crore (1 billion US dollars) in phases from 1994 to the year 2000. Taking a leaf from a plan of building healthy urban environment in European cities, WHO is funding a total of 36 cities around the world as model urban centres.

We welcome the inclusion of Chittagong in the WHO plan and thank the world body for its support in making our biggest port city a better place to live. A word of commendation is also due to the Chittagong City Corporation, to its officials, and especially to its Mayor, for doing successful preparatory work in convincing WHO to extend this support.

The money we are talking about — Tk 4,000 crore — is a lot. The plan provides an excellent opportunity to the Chittagong city planners to give a massive face-lift to the city in terms of building health-related infrastructure. According to press reports, the work to be undertaken covers water and sanitation, drainage, improvement of living standard in the slum areas, and setting up health centres for mothers and children. The project will also include income-generating activities.

On the face of it, everything looks fine. But then, everything usually dies at the planning stage. It is at the implementing stage that we usually fall flat. The first question that we would like to raise is whether or not the plan that is to receive a massive fund of Tk 4,000 crore, has been prepared with due care. Was our best experts involved in it? Did we have as much openness and transparency in preparing the plan which would bring our best minds behind it? Most probably the answer to the above questions would be in the negative. And that is where our real concern lies.

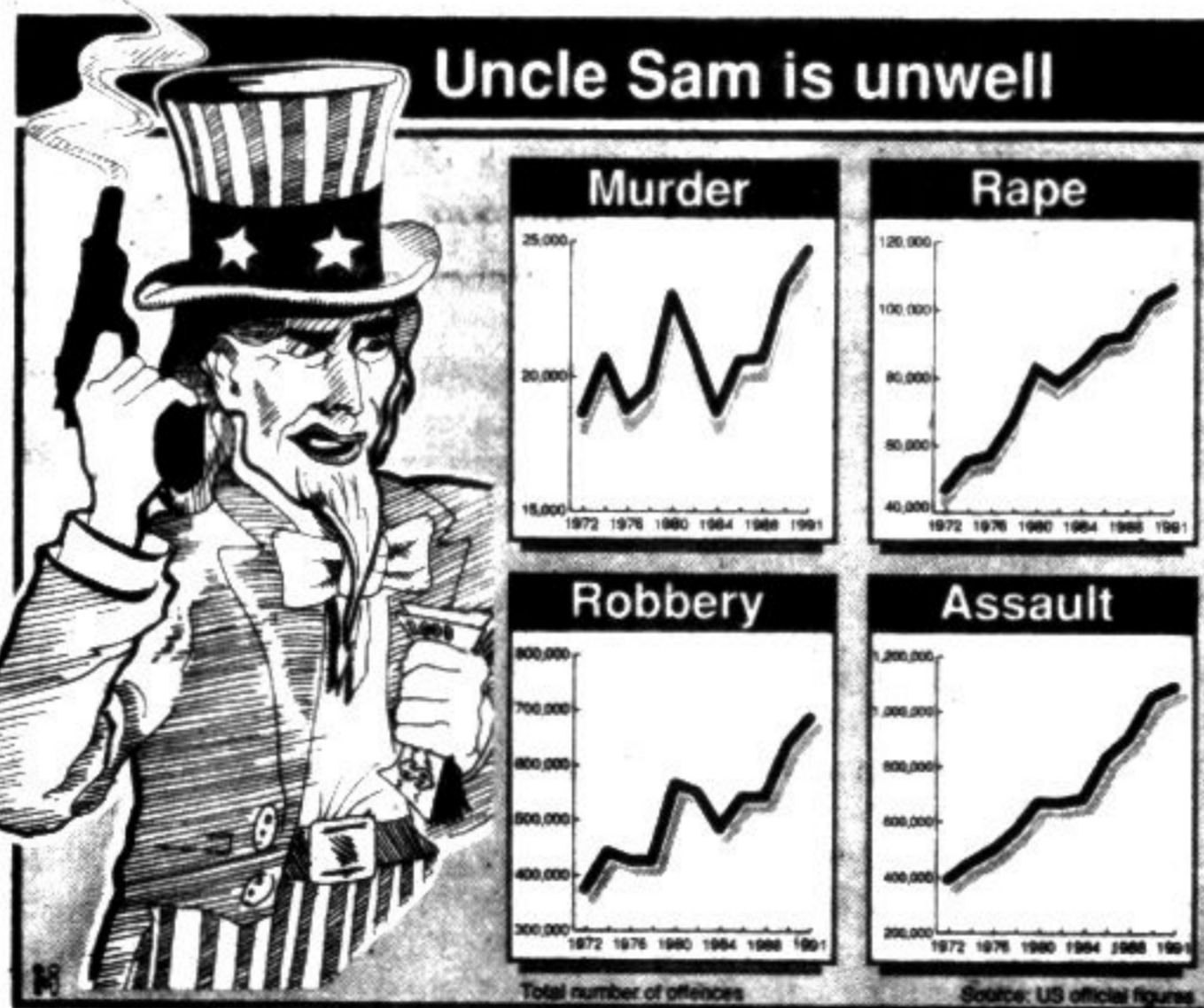
Town planning is an advanced science and there cannot be any second guessing permitted in this field. The condition of Chittagong has remained stagnant for several years now. The ferocious tidal wave of two years ago devastated a lot of the urban infrastructure of our port city. And much of it remains unrepaired even to this day. The city drainage and public health facilities are rudimentary as best. As the second largest city in our country, it has witnessed dramatic rise in its population over the last decade or so. The increased population pressure has stretched the service facilities to their limits. The sewerage and water supply systems need to be modernised. The drainage system needs to be radically upgraded. The improvement of the living conditions in the slum areas is a massive task all by itself. For all this, multifaceted and well integrated planning is a must. Are we proceeding in that line?

The WHO plan provides an excellent chance for Chittagong to become a much improved urban centre than it has ever been. But how successful the transformation will be depends on the quality of our planning, and the sincerity and honesty in implementing it. Will we rise to the challenge? Or, once again, will we let ourselves down?

Youth Crime Wave Baffles Americans

Mohamed Hamaludin writes from Miami

In the United States, an increasingly large number of violent crimes are being committed by young children. Tourists are targeted because of the cash and valuables they usually carry. While Americans are realising the problems are rooted in urban poverty, solutions are not easy to find.



harsher penalties than at present.

With the considerable television coverage given to crime in the area, many residents have responded by arming themselves. In a country where just about anyone can obtain a gun legally, gun sales have begun to soar. In just the Miami area, there are now 28,300 registered — not to mention the thousands more who have guns that are not registered.

Florida is considering laws against children possessing firearms, which already exist in 18 other states. No one knows how effective such laws would be, but law enforcement proponents generally feel that the criminal justice system is too lenient with criminals, including juveniles.

And at a time when capital punishment is becoming less popular around the world, the Congress is considering a law that would extend the number of crimes that would be punishable by death.

Others, including many of Florida's African-American elected officials, however, argue that crime is not the main issue, but merely a sign that there are more deep-seated problems in society.

Said Dade County Commission Chairman Arthur E Teele Jr: "Crime is a symptom of the problem, which I would suggest education, family values, lack of discipline and lack of self-esteem are part of."

"It's learned behaviour," says white juvenile court judge, Tom Petersen. "The tragedy is the places where kids learn the behaviour."

To the Editor...

Nobel Peace Prize

Sir, The Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded jointly to Nelson Mandela and F W De Klerk for working to put an end to the evil, vicious and unjust system of apartheid. Only a few years ago, it was rather impossible to think that in the future there will be a white president who would dismantle the apartheid laws of race division and white privilege.

Without any hesitation we can say that the laws of apartheid are cruel and absolutely uncivilised. These laws have cost South Africa to a great amount. For adopting such inhuman rules many countries broke their ties with South Africa. The South Africans were banned from participating in any international sport even. Throughout the world, these laws of apartheid were criticised. These abnormal, barbaric laws have also turned South Africa into a battlefield. The black majority who are subjected to these obnoxious laws have bitten back. They have proven that a handful of

men cannot go on imposing inhuman laws and restrictions on a group of people who they consider to be of very low class for their colour. The denial of the blacks to remain as subservient to the white and to bow down to their unjust laws turned the country into a massive ball of fire. The blacks made it clear that as long as they are deprived of their rights they will fight on.

Then in 1989, F W De Klerk was elected President, he did not lose a single moment and started to dismantle the laws of apartheid. Mr Klerk was wise enough to see and feel that without the support of the blacks that country would be plunged into the darkness of destruction.

Unity is vital for a country to develop economically. Moreover, he was aware that the country was moving towards a civil war. So, for the benefit of both the blacks and the whites and for South Africa itself he started putting an end to the apartheid system. The objective of the Nobel Peace Prize is to give him

inspiration so that he can obliterate this whole nasty system. Let us hope that he succeeds in doing so.

Touheed Feroze
New DOHS, Dhaka

Short term deposit long term loans

Sir, The commercial banks are one of the components of money market. The commercial banks collect money from the depositors and lend it out to the borrowers for business purposes. The depositors' money is withdrawable on demand, excepting for some occasions when deposits usually vary from three months to three years.

Since depositors' money is withdrawable on demand the bankers need to keep their certain portion of money in liquid form. By holding their deposited money for a longer period, say for 10 years, the bankers may face liquidity constraint as and

when a large number of depositors ask for withdrawal of their money.

If banks manage to fulfil the demand of the depositors by borrowing from central bank; then they will be saddled with high cost of fund. In the case of long term finance, the commercial banks should create an alternative fund to meet any eventualities.

Mahbul Haque Chowdhury
Kalabagan, Dhaka

Professionals

Sir, Inter communication and cooperation between all the professional institutions and groups is essential for speeding up the development process and for ensuring greater welfare of the people. With this end in view, I would like to request all the Professional Institutions and Groups to establish regular communication among themselves as well as with us.

M. Zahidul Haque
Sher-e-Bangla Nagar

NATO's First Summit Task is to Agree on its Mission

WASHINGTON — The first priority of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) at its January summit meeting in Brussels should be to agree on where the Alliance is going, NATO expert Stanley Sloan said November 3.

"The most important thing is not the membership issue," Sloan told an audience at the Atlantic Council of the United States. "It is to get straight what the mission of the Alliance is to be in the future."

The Atlantic Council is a Washington-based, public-policy center that concerns itself chiefly with US security interests.

Sloan, a senior specialist in international security policy at the Congressional Research Service (CRS), said NATO "needs to demonstrate to the American people that it is going to be a net benefit, not a net burden" to them.

"The greatest danger is that it may be seen as an irrelevance to Americans in the future," he said.

CRS is part of the Library of Congress that provides members of the US Congress with information on legislative topics.

Other critical issues the summit will have to deal with are whether to expand the organization's membership to include former Warsaw Pact countries, and the relative roles of the United States and Europe in NATO, Sloan said.

Sloan said the January 10 summit meeting looms as "one of the most critical events in the Alliance's history."

"It could lead to a renewal of the Alliance or to a confirmation of its irrelevance. Our it could be a disaster, furthering its decline," Sloan said.

On the membership issue, Sloan said that "leaving out the Visegrad countries of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and perhaps the Slovak Republic, could intensify competition among them," resulting in harmful friction and ethnic conflict.

(At a February 1991 conference in Visegrad, Hungary, the countries of Poland, Hungary

tionally syndicated "Donahue" show recently a 15-year-old girl, already with a two-year-old daughter of her own, was interviewed. Her claim to fame was that, by her own admission, she had once killed another woman and got away with it, along with several other stabbings and offences.

A day later, the newspapers reported that it had all been a hoax and that the police had no information of any such unsolved murders.

Her story is a terrible indictment of the conditions in which she and others like her have to grow up, in the world's so-called richest country. It also demonstrates how America is holding these problems up as oddities to be displayed in public, rather than recognising just how deeply it is failing its children.

— GEMINI NEWS
MOHAMED HAMALUDIN is Managing Editor of 'Miami Times'.

and Czechoslovakia met to coordinate their foreign policy; they have since become grouped in some circles as "the Visegrad countries.")

"On the other side of the argument, bringing in other countries will risk diluting the Alliance, making it inoperable," Sloan said.

"Another argument is that taking in these countries will add another defense burden on the United States, and Congress may not want to do this," he said.

The risks of not expanding NATO are that the former East bloc countries may feel they have nowhere else to look for security but to Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Sloan said.

Sloan said NATO needs to make a complete review of its force structure, and that participation of the United States and that of its allies needs to be explained — not only to the American people but to the people of other NATO member countries as well.

While the US presence in the Alliance is important, "it is Europe's responsibility to make it work," Sloan said.

"The United States wants Europe to take on more responsibility; in my opinion, this will be a long-term process," he said. "It will require a cooperative approach, particularly in military relationships."

A "disaster" scenario for the summit "is all too easy to project," Sloan said.

"If there's any hint of a rift between the United States and its allies, the issues may be overwhelmed by the press coverage," he said.

Sloan said the cooperation of the French is "critically important" for the summit's success.

"I'd like to see the United States do what it can to increase French participation in Alliance activities," he said. "It's in US interests."

Asked if it were possible to have an Alliance in Europe without a substantial American presence, Sloan replied:

"My simple answer is 'no.' We have to have a visible presence there."