

National Seed Policy of Bangladesh: A Critique

by M. Gul Hossain, PhD

Had we been wise, we could have an agricultural policy to sustain our production base and at the same time increase productivity and farmers' income, keeping the diversified nature of our traditional agriculture.



Siltation of river beds

problems in agricultural production, in rural socio-economic conditions as well as on environmental fronts.

In the context of Bangladesh, some of the problems with the high input and high output technology of the Green Revolution are:

High input agriculture means capital intensive agriculture which our poverty-stricken farmers can hardly afford. As a result farmers use unbalanced inputs, and this led not only to the failure to realize much of the potential crop yield but also to soil degradation.

Even if we assume that in the future enough credit is going to be made available to our farmers, experiences so far tell us that farmers in most cases have been unable to repay loans whether from institutional sources (banks) or from non-institutional sources (money lenders). In many cases a good part of the credit money was appropriated by touts (in the case of institutional loans), or the terms of credits from money lenders

were too harsh.

Capital intensive, high input agriculture did not prove profitable to the majority of the farmers, because the lion share of the gains from increased output was appropriated by non-farmers, either because of the faulty marketing system and/or through high price for inputs. In recent years, high input and high output rice technology has become a major losing concern for our farmers.

It is no more debatable that high input agriculture speeded up landlessness and rural pauperisation. Today some 65 per cent of the rural households are landless as compared to less than 18 per cent in the mid '60s when the new technology was introduced.

The high input-intensive Green Revolution technology led to rapid depletion of soil's organic matter, and depletion of both major and minor plant nutrients endangering the future agricultural production base. A crude estimate suggests that in Bangladesh about 250 to 300 kg of nutrients are being mined from soil reserve per hectare of cultivated land

per year as compared to 39 kg in India and about 58 kg in China (FAO, 1992).

The use of irrigation water, a must for the high input and high output cereal production, led to indiscriminate mining of water resources resulting to: Lowering of aquifers below the range of irrigation pumps used; huge wastage of irrigation water (to the tune of 45 per cent — 60 per cent; pollution of water bodies with chemical inputs used in crop fields, posing threats to human, animal and aquatic life forms including fishes.

It is not only the water that was polluted. The use of poisonous inputs like pesticides, weedicides including chemical fertilizers contributed to an immeasurable damage to our environment endangering beneficial soil microorganisms, natural predators of pests, domestic and wild animals. Also the overuse and abuse of irrigation, fertilizer, pesticide and energy for many agricultural operations ended up in land degradation (salinity, soil erosion, waterlogging), silting of water bodies, and along with these the depletion of non-renewable resources.

The high input cereal monoculture led to the rapid loss of biodiversity of both cereal and non-cereal crops, loss of forests, and increased susceptibility of crops to plant diseases and pests. Monoculture also contributed to the erosion of traditional diversification of sources of useful genes for future use in crop breeding.

If these were the consequences of high input and high output technology, one would question the wisdom of our seed policymakers in making a blanket, emphatic recommendation for it. Large scale expansion of high input and high output technology, without adequate safeguards, may not only lead to further pauperisation of farmers, but also will further jeopardize our future production base.

This is not to say, we should abandon such technologies altogether. Rather, we should seriously take into consideration sustainability issues, including long term economic benefit to producers. From that point of view, future agricultural research must be directed to high output without mining, rather by enriching our natural resource base.

The writer is associated with BARC.

Revival of Lost Cotton Culture

by Hosain Ridwan Ali Khan

WEALTHY and resourceful country as Bengal was, she had already prior to the advent of British domination, achieved certain commercial and financial features in the economy that would be conducive to the development of a modern economy. British colonization destroyed that potential. Ten years after the beginning of the British rule in Bengal, the Industrial Revolution (IR) started in England. Many economists believe that resources (revenue and profits) transferred and earned on account of the domination over Bengal was instrumental to the start and progress of the IR.

Very soon cotton fabrics, manufactured in Britain, flooded the world markets and the industry in Bengal suffered inevitable decline. In Bengal, the British perpetrated demoralising atrocities to the native people in order to force them to cultivate indigo, tobacco and so on. Of them, indigo culture does not exist today. Tea is a major exportable. Tobacco culture is located in a vast area in North Bengal which was the home of the cotton cultivation.

There was a time when weavers in the present day Bangladesh used to grow the best cotton fabrics in the world, and her fields used to grow a type of cotton which was better in quality than the famous Egyptian cotton. This fabric was being exported to all over the civilised world. While Bengal was in enormous surplus in foodgrains and many other merchandise, particularly cotton fabrics contributed a huge amount of gold. But it may seem astonishing to many to hear that not only that brilliant cotton weaving was gone but also the production of world's best cotton came to an end soon after the colonisation of the country by the British and those never revived. The land once producing world's best cotton is now producing low grade tobacco which is mostly used to manufacture handmade cigarettes to be consumed by the poor people of Bangladesh.

Cotton cultivation has several economic linkages which tobacco culture in North Bengal does not have. Firstly, cotton cultivation would imply more labour because cotton picking and tending of cotton plants would require more work. In a heavily populated region with widespread unem-

ployment higher employment is very important.

Cotton is linked forward with a series of activities like spinning, weaving and making garments. There are already such activities existing, making use of imported materials. Home grown cotton will not just replace imported material but it will also help extend

each of the above mentioned activities.

Garments industry is now a promising industry in Bangladesh as an export earner. Domestic production of cotton and enhanced production of cotton goods may greatly help expand and prosper the garments industry. Our cotton may be the best cotton

and so our garments.

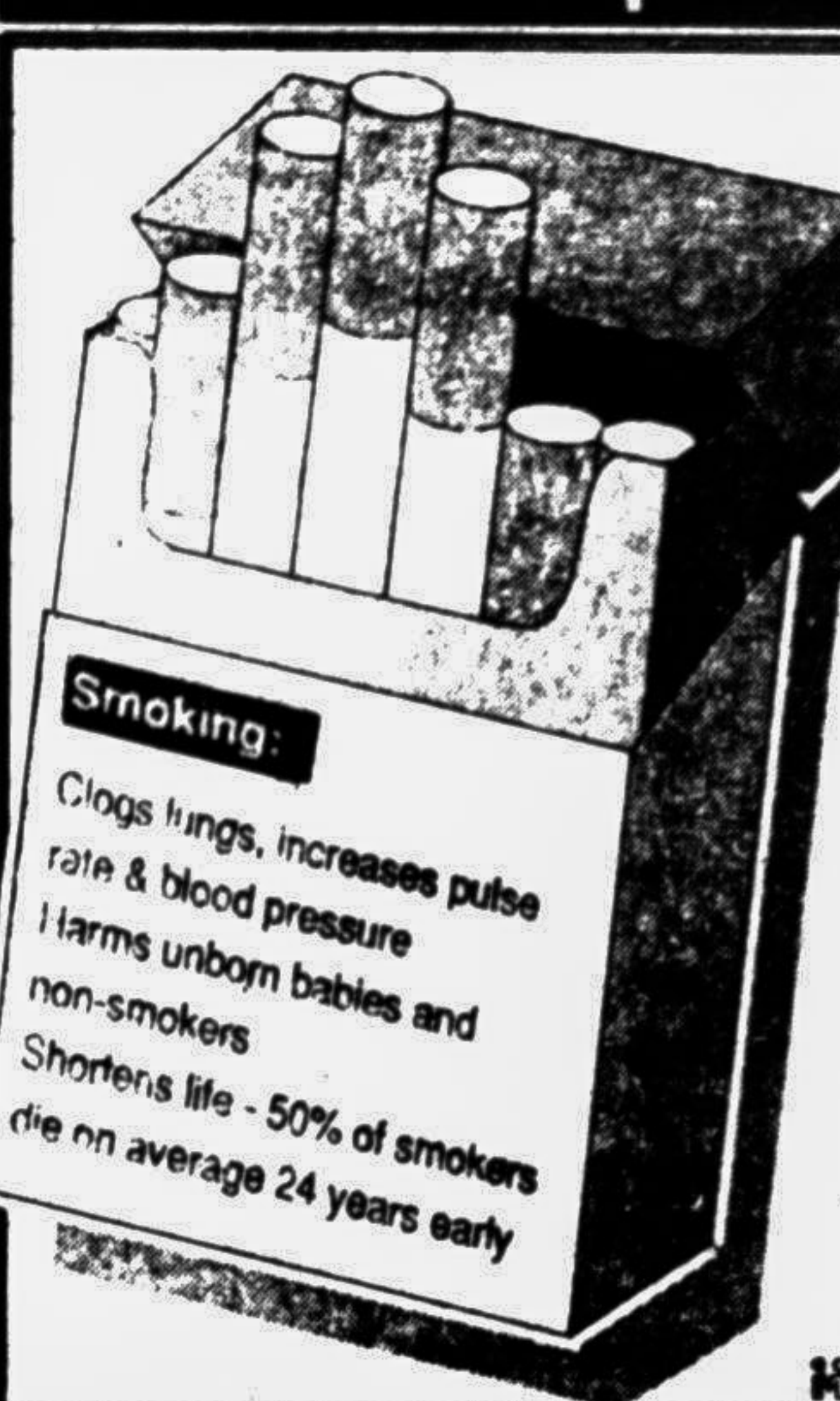
In a sense ultimate domestic consumption of cotton can also be called a linkage effect. Presently people in Bangladesh is ill-clad. With higher availability more people will be able to use enough clothing. Thus more production of cotton will mean more improvement in quality of life. The thing is very different in the case of tobacco. It is not desirable to expand tobacco production to increase the level of domestic tobacco consumption. In fact the reverse is true.

For the reason as indicated just above chain of replacement should be broken at the back of tobacco, that is, replacement of domestic tobacco is not to be made by imported tobacco. Smoking is already a monstrous hazard in Bangladesh and it should be reduced by propaganda and restriction. More enthusiastic smokers can produce their own tobacco in their backyards as was done widely about one decade or two ago. If this things can be materialised new cotton cultivation will be very much like developing a new resource.

It can be easily seen how a process of regional development can be started by the activities related to cotton culture and industry. There will be some locational pull for industrial development toward the source of raw material, namely cotton. And there are spinning and weaving industry already in the region. The heavy regional population may be an enormous and expanding market. Also communication with other regions is going to improve a lot by the completion of Jamuna Bridge project. The region is indeed rich in many other agricultural resources. It is surplus in foodgrains (rice). It produces plenty of jute. The region is the main supplier of mango, an important fruit crop. With the expansion of cotton related activities poverty will reduce. That will increase consumer demand in the region and turn it in a bigger and bigger market for countless multitudes of consumer goods.

The prosperity will not be limited to the region itself. The nation will earn and save more and more foreign currency on account of cotton related activity. Cotton culture can also be extended to other regions.

Perils of a puff



Native Americans smoked and chewed tobacco for its medicinal effects. Introduced to Europe in mid 1500s. Now banned in many public places in Europe and North America. Tobacco smoke contains toxic substances: tar, nicotine, carbon monoxide.

Human Security: Depends on the Interests of the North

by Daya Kishan Thussu

GIVEN that for more and more people across the globe, life is becoming increasingly dangerous, it is not surprising that security should be the key theme of the 1994 Human Development Report.

As shown by the genocide in Rwanda, continued war in Angola and death and destruction in Afghanistan, life is cheap in the poorer parts of the world.

The annual report, published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), defines human security as meaning "safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression" and protection "from sudden and harmful disruption in the patterns of daily life".

What is more disgraceful is the attitude of the North towards mass slaughter, as witnessed in Rwanda. As soon as the mass killings began, the United Nations troops escorted the foreigners out of Rwanda capital Kigali and left the militias to kill and terrorise the civilians. In a span of three weeks up to half a million people are believed to have died and two million were displaced.

While the United States, one of the world's richest country, agonises over the "invasion" of terrorised Haitian "boat people", poor countries like Tanzania, Burundi and Uganda have accommodated hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees, with very little foreign help.

Indeed the US has tried its best to delay sending a 5,500 UN force to Rwanda. Even after two months of massacres there is still only a skeletal UN presence in the ravaged country.

The assumption is that in a so-called "tribal war" outsiders have little influence, expect supplying arms to the combatants.

It is customary to put the blame on the UN, but the real culprits are the powers that control the world body. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali called the Rwandan genocide "a scandal" for which "all of us are responsible the great powers, the African powers, all the international community".

The situation is not dissimilar in the world's other hotspots. Zaire continues to supply arms to UNITA rebels

in Angola and has become a pipeline for stolen diamonds which finance the war. Since the September 1992 election as many as half a million people may have died in the what the UN called as the "world's worst war."

Meanwhile war still rages in Afghanistan. The Mujahideen — once described by the Western media as "freedom fighters" — have become such a threat to regional stability that the CIA is now trying hard to buy back hundreds of Sting missiles it gave them to fight "communism" during the 1980s.

As the UNDP report points out, the arms trade — 86 per cent of which is conducted by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council — only adds fuel to the fire.

And yet, in the same week that the report was launched, the UN Security Council ended the arms embargo on South Africa and Britain lifted its 14-year-old arms embargo against Israel. The US and Australia have said they want to supply weapons to Cambodia, limping back to normalcy after two decades of anarchy.

Should the power which

benefit by selling death be policing the world?

The US, which has the logistical support to transport troops at a short notice, as it showed during the 1990 Gulf crisis when oil was at stake, is reluctant to commit its troops to peacekeeping operations or to put Americans under non-US command. The US is supposed to pay 31 per cent of the \$3.2bn annual UN peacekeeping budget. But despite being more than \$1.1bn behind in paying its share, Washington can still dictate policy at the UN.

That the latest report on human development should devote one chapter to the arms trade is a tribute to its architect Dr Mahbub ul Haq, a former finance minister of Pakistan, a country where defence spending accounts for nearly one third of national budget.

Developing countries spend twice as much on defence as on health and education. And, what is worse, the report shows that most foreign aid goes to high military spenders.

One out of five people in the

world still goes hungry every day, one in four have no clean drinking water. And yet annual global military spending equals the combined income of one half of humanity. But instead of asking to reduce defence budgets, the World Bank and the IMF are forcing Southern governments to cut back on already meagre welfare spending.

The report recommends putting people "at the centre of development." Nice sentiments in an age when more and more crucial economic decisions are being made in a highly undemocratic way in the swish offices of Gatt, the World Bank and the IMF, often at the behest of the transnational corporations, which are more powerful today than ever before.

Financial security for the vast majority of the people, especially in the developing world, has never been more precarious.

The report recognises that the fundamental global problem is socio-economic insecurity and widening gap between the haves and the have-nots among and between countries. It states that the income disparity between the richest 20 per cent and the poorest 20 per cent of the world's population has doubled over the past three decades.

Haq points out that last year's report warned about the enormous disparities in Mexico between the people in the state of Chiapas and those in the rest of the country, seven months before the Chiapas uprising on January 1.

Unfortunately, such timeliness has not been matched over Rwanda. The genocide there began on 6 April, the Human Development Report was released on 1 June. Despite this time gap, the UNDP press release was appallingly out of date. It merely warned that the country could blow up, with no mention of the terrible massacres. Is it sloppiness on the part of the media managers or does it indicate institutional racism within the UN?

One is tempted to ask whether the press release would have been updated if the dead were not black Africans but white North Americans or Europeans? — Gemini News

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Coordination — The only Answer to Development

by Md Shahidul Haque



Coordinated efforts can only make a real difference in their lives.

sulted due to lack of proper coordination. While the United Nations Decade of the Disabled Persons 1983-1992 has increased awareness of disability issues and has facilitated considerable progress in the prevention of disability and rehabilitation of disabled persons in the ESCAP region, progress towards improving the situation of disabled persons has been uneven, particularly in the developing countries. The Expert Group Meeting to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons in the Asian and Pacific Region, recognized that there was a need for a second decade of disabled persons to consolidate the gains achieved thus far in the ESCAP region.

National Coordination gets the leading focus as one of the major policy categories for formulation of the agenda for action. Along with this, 'Regional Cooperation' was also declared as a basic policy category. Accordingly networking has been promoted to coordinate all sporadic efforts throughout the region.

In this respect the experience of the last year's regional NGO seminar can be discussed. SAARC regional conference on disability was held at Kathmandu in Nepal, with main objective of ascertaining how this year could initiate

some, positive steps for the disabled persons, what the main problems were, in participation of members of organisations working with disabled people in SAARC countries. The problems identified there were — the way 'Disability issue' is being treated and the existing situation lacking co-ordinated efforts among governmental departments and also among the concerned voluntary organisations.

Particularly for Bangladesh, the absence of national level coordination was pointed out when it was found that instead of two country-representatives from each country, there were four participants from Bangladesh. Where the present country-papers from Maldives, India and other SAARC countries depicted a chronological development of the disability issue and also described the relationship between their respective government and other private agencies. The Bangladesh participants had no guideline for coordination meeting prior to going there. By this time India has undertaken several programmes for the development and empowerment of the disabled persons, and even Maldives also is developing a very good coordination effort for the overall development of human life. Representatives from other countries focussed

that these all had been possible due to direct Govt initiative.

In our country there is a special educational complex for the disabled people which can be used and developed as a resource-centre for disabled people of South Asia and also as a training and research centre. But as there was no approval of our Government the proposition on this recommendation could not be holdy raised and it could not be ensured that this will ever become a reality. If prior approval from the Govt was obtained before-hand, the delegates might have been motivated to consider our National Centre for Special Education for the Disabled 'A Centre of the Disabled' for the people of the SAARC countries.

It is high time that we addressed the necessity of effective coordination because only coordination paves the way to real development. In measuring effectiveness, one must look at the question, whether the programme is producing the desired kind of result, comparing actual fulfillment with standard of what is expected of the programme. It involves the identification and measurement of physical or other changes in the environment that are attributable to the programme. The primary concern of measuring effectiveness is thus not whether the programme is being operated as planned nor whether it is need oriented but whether the output of the programme is consistent with the terms of perceivable development out of limited resources without any duplicity. In practice, this concern is totally absent only because of lack of proper coordination among the concerned bodies and agencies. This is not only applicable for the development of the disabled section. So far it sounds this should be applied to all developmental sectors.

We should therefore take an oath that we will make happen in practice what we deliberate in speeches or what we write down on paper. This is not for the nation or others but for our next generation so that they can overcome all these shortfalls and try to build up realistic plans for need-oriented goals through proper and effective coordination.

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