

Whither the Growth Rates in Rice Production?

NOTWITHSTANDING its declining share to the overall GDP in recent years, the agricultural sector (especially its rice sub-sector) still continues to be the linchpin of sustained economic growth and development of the country.

The burning question is whether the recent deceleration is a "transitory" phenomenon or something that is hooked on to our agrarian structure.

Seachange in BR

Bangladesh Railway is reportedly being made into a corporation very soon. Nineteen of BR's more profitable branch lines are going to be leased out to private parties.

The whole point of the projected structural seachange seems to be making the railway cost-effective and even profit-making. How can we be certain that even this narrow-focus target, to hit which the railway business-house will be needing to execute a vast array of improvements in efficiency and service and a lot of complementary and helpful government actions, will indeed be achieved without compromising further the role railway has in the economy of our nation and the potential of a far bigger role it must play in the future?

While profit-hunting may very well do a lot of good to BR specially in heeling its obesity and related maladies, the nation must not forget that it has a national point — overriding the commercial and entrepreneurial one — to care for. Railway is a big and important economic tool of the nation holding a key to its material well-being and prosperity.

If we want to have this in view, on top of business success, we must enquire as to why and how railway failed so miserably in Bangladesh. We must take lessons from our poor and very expensive performance.

Better and Bitter Statistics

So far so good. Of late, however, the notion that the trend growth rates of rice production in Bangladesh have been facing a down-hill turn is beginning to gain currency. Even available government statistics on acreage and production of various types of rice seem to substantiate a decline over the last four years.

here that all of these conundrums seem to emanate from the apparent connivance of our policy makers at the highest citadel of agricultural affairs. Dr Quazi Shahabuddin of the BIDS, one of the ace researchers in the field of agriculture, endeavoured to closely examine the trend growth rates in rice acreage, yield and production that spans over a decade or so.

At disaggregated level, the hero seems to have turned into villain. The trend growth rates of the HYV boro production — the hero of our Green Revolution — seems to have gone down substantially.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



the growth rate in aman during the last four years provides room for some consolation with a growth rate of 1.2 per cent as compared to 0.03 per cent of the preceding period. However, in the case of aman production also, the rate of growth of the last four years still trails behind the decade's trend rate.

the late eighties (1984/85-1989/90) to 2.2 per cent during the last five years (1989/90-1993/94). The last five years' trend rate also falls far short of the decade's trend rate of about 8 per cent.

Likewise, a considerable deceleration in the growth rates of STW irrigation — from 20 per cent in the late eighties to 9 per cent during 1989/90-1993/94 period — is also being observed. This is aggravated by a fall in the capacity utilization ratio of DTWs over the same period.

Moot Concerns and Root Causes

Suffice it to note here that all these disconcerting discomforts occurred during the period when natural hazards like flood, drought etc did not make their "usual" visits to Bangladesh.

However, the burning question is whether the recent deceleration is a "transitory" phenomenon or something that is hooked on to our agrarian structure.

In the meantime, discussions with some of those related to agricultural development lend some points to ponder with. First, it might appear that this deceleration owes itself to policy shifts over the years.

tion, one would require mammoth data generation and analysis of a general equilibrium nature. Second, and possibly more plausible, reason relates to agronomic factors. Had the land productivity gone down over the years?

Concluding Remarks

It is, perhaps, a forgone conclusion that the trend growth rates of rice are decelerating and there could hardly be any one available to contest the view.

To the Editor...

In response to the increased number of letters we are receiving from our esteemed readers everyday, we have decided to devote half a page every Saturday to the letters column.

'Is DCC Blind?'

Sir, The letter of Vihar Moituddin 'Is DCC blind?' in your 8 February issue was read by me with interest. In fact we share a building at 52 Motijheel Commercial Area, with the publisher of your paper.

know if DCC is competent enough to leave the footpaths and lanes for use and comfort of the pedestrians and not for the business of the traders and hoteliers.

A N A H Siddiqui MCA, Dhaka

BTV's 'Mati o Manush'

Sir, BTV programme 'Mati o Manush' (land and people) is very popular among all sections of the viewers. It is telecast once in a week.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantonment

Women oppression vs men oppression

Sir, A lot of thanks to the government for taking necessary measures to establish women's rights. For the development of a country both its men and women are equally important.

Illas Ahmed Lecturer in English Govt V M College, Mantagarj

When class arrangements are changed without apparent reasons/suddenly.

When a new teacher is introduced during the term.

When a teacher unwittingly threatens another student.

If there are certain unhygienic situation — bathrooms, dirty furnishing etc.

Over-crowding in the classes.

Again, there are certain complex family process at work that can make school phobia more akin to a separation anxiety.

The problem is not going to school, it is more about leaving the home. This habit do not grow overnight and parents are the ones who sow the seeds of bad school attendance in the early stage of a child's life.

Some parents see their child's 'distress' and decide to leave the complaining child at home.

They feel that if the child is deprived of going to school the symptoms will disappear.

This makes many parents more protective and more unsure about the wisdom of attending classes.

This way of thinking gradually make the parents anxious about separating from the child.

In case where the parents consider schooling at the early age not necessary, they are apt to be rather relaxed.

When families oversleep or the child wakes up late and shows unwillingness to go to school, they normally don't bother.

The silent message conveyed that school is a dismissible option.

And law abiding citizens of the country. It was a matter of great regret that police did not fire even a tear gas shell to disperse the rioting mob.

I started pondering, why and how this is happening in presence of a police contingent? Why the police is not taking any action even though they are equipped with sophisticated riot control arms and munitions?

Have they been told not to take any action just to save the popularity of the so-called democratic government? Have they been advised not to take action just to blame the opposition activists for all these anti-state activities and damages?

WHAT POLICE COULD DO

(1) Police knew that a procession was coming from PG Hospital side towards Sonargaon Hotel.

Why did they close the road for traffic at the Sonargaon Hotel crossing?

(2) Could not the police fire tear gas shells to block the road by tear gas smoke?

(3) Could not the police fire rubber bullets from their anti-riot shot guns to scare and disperse the rioting mob?

All the above actions were possible by the police without destroying the popularity of the democratic government. That could possibly save the life and property of the law-abiding citizens.

How long should this go on? Are the public going to tolerate all these mismanagement of the government functionaries. How long? As the police has failed to protect us, should we not ask the government to allow us to use arms and munitions to fight the evils of the society to save our own life and property?

Biman's Responsibility

We are delighted to learn that Biman, our national carrier, has decided to do its own maintenance. This, as the civil aviation minister maintained, would halve the maintenance cost.

In raising these questions, our intention is not to denigrate the capability of our national airline, but to put forward some legitimate concerns which Biman will have to face in the marketplace of competition for reliability and efficiency.

Technical challenge in maintaining one's own air fleet is considerable. We hope that Biman is fully conscious of the responsibility that it is taking upon itself.

National Immunisation Day

We congratulate the government, especially the health ministry, for hitting on the idea of observing two national immunisation days (NID) each year from now on.

That is the best value for money we can ever expect to get, and that also for a cause, whose value cannot be counted in money alone.