

# Subsidy can boost production

The need for subsidising the agriculture sector, which includes crop, livestock and fisheries, and forestry sub-sectors, for some more years can hardly be overemphasised. The steps proposed by the finance minister in his budget speech to attain self-sufficiency in food need close attention for implementation.

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

ON November 2, the government announced reduction in the prices of major non-urea fertilisers -- triple super phosphate (TSP), muriate of potash (MOP) and diammonium phosphate (DAP). Under the revised rates, the prices of TSP, MOP and DAP have been reduced to Tk.22, Tk.25, and Tk.30 per kilogram from Tk.40, Tk.35 and Tk.40 per kilogram respectively. Subsidising the prices of the aforesaid fertilisers will minimise food production costs, particularly of food grains and vegetables, and thereby encourage the farmers to grow more food.

In his budget speech on June 11, Finance Minister A.M.A. Muhith said that in order to attain self-sufficiency in food by 2012 the government had planned to undertake a number of steps, which included, *inter alia*, expansion of irrigation facilities, expansion of cultivable land, creation of opportunities for multiple-cropping, continuation of subsidy on fertiliser and other agricultural inputs, emphasis on agricultural research and rehabilitation.

For providing subsidy on fertiliser and other agricultural inputs to help farmers, he proposed an allocation of Tk.36 billion for the current fiscal year. It is learnt that that the announced subsidy on the above mentioned three fertilisers would cost the national exchequer Tk.5 billion.

Why is it necessary to subsidise the agriculture sector?

First, our economy is agro-based. According to the finance minister, the contribution of the agriculture sector to the economy is 22% of GDP.

Second, according to the latest Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2005-06 of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), our working age (15+) population stood at 61.59% and the agriculture sector employed over 48% of our labour force.

Third, in Bangladesh, food production or availability is normally thought of in terms of production or availability of food grain, that is, rice and wheat. Since rice and wheat provide respectively about 93% and 7% of the country's total cereal intake and together provide about 80% of calories in Bangladeshi diet, this view is easily understandable. Fertilisers play a very important role in the production of food grain.

Fourth, according to the latest Household Income & Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2005 of the BBS, the share of food was 53.81% of the total consumption expenditure at the national level in 2005. In the rural areas, where about 75% of our population lives, this share was 58.54% against 45.17% in urban areas.

Food grain alone constituted 39% of the expenditure, which exceeded 50% in 2007-08 due to very high prices. The most important domestic production is food grain, "the price of which carries nearly 60% weight in the estima-

tion of consumer price index (CPI) -- the most widely used measure of inflation (Mirza Azizul Islam's article in The Daily Star of November 5)."

Fifth, subsidising the prices of fertiliser and other agricultural inputs and providing the other facilities mentioned in finance minister's budget speech to the farmers will help reduce the cost of production of food grain and other agricultural produce. This will benefit both the growers and the consumers.

Sixth, annual population growth rate is outpacing the food production growth rate in the country. According to various studies, the population will double to 280 million at the current rate of growth by 2080 and reach about 180 million as early as 2020. So the challenge for the country in this area is obvious.

Seventh, the developed western countries heavily subsidise their agriculture sector to the disadvantage of the developing countries. Available information suggests that under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), agricultural subsidies to European farmers and fisheries make up more than 40% of the EU budget. The US heavily subsidises grains, oilseeds, cotton, sugar and dairy products. The US farm programs have cost about \$20 billion per year in government budget outlays in recent years.

Eighth, the most important component of food security is food availability, the other two being access to food and utilisation of food. Domestic production of food grain is the main source of food availability. Hence the need for subsidising agriculture sector for increasing food production.

Last but not the least, world population is growing at a rate which is faster than the food production rate. This has been a matter of great concern, particularly for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO). In his article titled "Food for the future" in *The Daily Star* of October 11,



Cheaper inputs needed to raise production.

Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the UNFAO, writes: "For the next decades, the world's population will grow by 2.3 billion and become richer. Meeting the demand of the world's 9.1 billion inhabitants in 2050 will require 70% more food than we currently produce. So unless we take the right decisions today we risk finding the global cupboard dangerously bare tomorrow."

He has also cautioned that "in the years ahead the world food system must deal with the growing challenge of climate change, which may reduce potential agricultural output by up to 30% in Africa and by up to 21% in developing countries as a whole." Climate change has already started impacting the world's food production. Due to severe drought, India, the

world's second largest rice grower, is going to join the club of rice importing countries. Media reports suggest that India may import as much as 3 million tonnes of rice next year, making it a net importer for the first time in 21 years.

The government decision for reducing the prices of non-urea fertilisers has been welcomed by the farmers, media and many others. While *The Daily Star's* editorial of November 4 termed the reduction in fertiliser prices as "a peasant-friendly move," it also cautioned the government to implement its well-intentioned move "through a fair and efficient distribution network that reaches out to the farmers in times of need."

It further stressed on "closer surveillance" to thwart the attempt of the

opportunistic elements to smuggle cheap fertiliser into neighbouring countries. While welcoming the government decision to bring the prices of non-urea fertilisers down, *The Independent's* editorial of November 4 stressed the need for timely implementation of the decision with sincerity and seriousness.

In view of above, the need for subsidising the agriculture sector, which includes crop, livestock and fisheries, and forestry sub-sectors, for some more years can hardly be overemphasised. The steps proposed by the finance minister in his budget speech to attain self-sufficiency in food need close attention for implementation.

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# Sycophancy or efficiency, that's the question

Let us not be oblivious of the fact that sycophancy subverts transparency whereas efficiency promotes it. Persons involved in either politics or in administration need to appreciate that maladministration creeps in and efficiency subsides when the practice of sycophancy is widespread.

SYED NAQUIB MUSLIM

ALONG with corruption, another malady that pervades our body politic and society is sycophancy. Sycophancy is a vile verbal art of showering false admiration on others. It is used as a means to achieve unethical private interests. The word originates from "Sycophantes," the Greek god who used to teach the art of flattery. However, throughout the world, dishonest politicians and inefficient bureaucrats seem to have inherited this art from the royal poets who once used to flatter kings and queens, and then earn income out of this manipulative art.

Today, sycophancy is considered as one of the symptoms of maladministration. It is spreading like wildfire in every sphere of our life. It is observed that persons who are inefficient, corrupt, dishonest, and greedy

usually practice this art to fulfill their unlawful ends. At the workplaces, supervisors who are unsure and suffer from a sense of insecurity enjoy being flattered by workers who want to hide their inefficiency and laziness, which ultimately affects the image of the organisation.

It is unfortunate and discouraging that in our country a few politicians and administrators have become insensitive to the foul games of flatterers and are helping them flourish. Consequently, efficient persons who are not in habit of showering undue praise on incompetent superiors find themselves marginalised.

While US has set up a culture of efficiency at homes and workplaces, Japan has introduced a culture of trust and teamwork in offices and factories, Singapore has created a culture of quality, and Malaysia has installed a culture of ethical values both in the public and the private sector,



The boss is my favourite person!

Bangladesh seems have installed a culture of sycophancy, where sycophants apply Gresham's law and drive efficient people "out of circulation."

The services of honest and competent people are not being used for public welfare.

It seems that sycophancy is in great

demand and, therefore, its supply is continuous. It is liked mostly by incompetent people who have a hunger for receiving false praise. Flattery is used as a tool by incompetent people to consolidate their survival, but genuine appreciation is in short supply. We should not forget that former presi-

dent Ershad's inglorious exit was quickened by a band of sycophants who never revealed the real state of affairs in the country to him, and who contributed little to the welfare of the people.

We learn from history that the noted poet Voltaire was sacked by Frederick William, the king of Prussia, because the poet corrected a poem written in French by the king. Therefore, every government, every organisation needs a host of people who can expose the ground realities of life and help the leaders in making pragmatic decisions that affect the lives of common people. The leaders, including ministers, have to identify the sycophants who praise the personality but not the performance. We should remember the words of Harry S. Truman: "Sincerity, honesty, and a direct manner are more important than special talent or personal polishing."

Both the flatterer and the flattered remain complacent and happy; they never seek knowledge. They do not like to be informed; they rather prefer ignorance because to them ignorance is blissful. If, somehow, they can coerce votes from the powerless, innocent electorate, they can secure political shelter in the inefficient, incapable parties that have mastered the art of

continuously befooling the public.

Let us not be oblivious of the fact that sycophancy subverts transparency whereas efficiency promotes it. Persons involved in either politics or in administration need to appreciate that maladministration creeps in and efficiency subsides when the practice of sycophancy is widespread.

It is high time that we began putting up a strong resistance against those who are trying to hoodwink the responsible politicians and exploit welfare-oriented administrators through cheap flattery and no work. The efficient persons in the society must unite to eliminate the parasitic sycophants; their days must be numbered.

The price of sycophancy is too heavy. The nation is incurring losses, economic and intellectual, because of the culture of sycophancy. One way to disempower the sycophants is to educate the public and acquaint them with the rules and laws of government. Another way to abolish this unhealthy culture is to introduce the practice of self-monitoring by leaders at all levels, thereby reinforcing their strengths, and taking corrective measures to overcome their weaknesses.

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# In memoriam

TAWFIQ-E-ELAHI CHOWDHURY

IT'S a tough call to unwind almost half a century of life to search out the prints that were left by Imtiaz, for our lives were knotted together over this long stretch. When, in our late teens, we met I do not recall, for life was then a passion on the run lured by hazy dreams; we shared the zest for life, no-holds barred, mostly in the folds of Ramna, the young romantic Dhaka which in many ways mirrored our age.

Imtiaz Husain stood out among friends as a tall, sturdy and handsome man, the envy of many of us in the University of Dhaka in the early '60s. Surely, he was sought by charming young ladies for roles in Shakespeare's plays. He turned down, for reasons he never fully explained, the offer to be the hero in one of the early films in the

then East Pakistan.

Moving on with life, he did his MS in Psychology with a first class, one of the early adventurers in a subject still to be taken seriously by the rest of us. Looking back, that in a way sums up his attitude to life. Imtiaz was always in search of frontiers.

Our lives changed courses -- sometime we were in the same boat and at others, in different ones, but our coordinates were never too far off. We grew into family friends, Neela Bhabhi looking upon my wife Asma as a younger sister, for Imtiaz was a fast friend of late Hashu, the eldest brother of my wife.

With the liberation of Bangladesh, as we were establishing the Bangladesh Freedom Fighters' Welfare Trust, Imtiaz was called upon to move from the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh to join the team at the

Trust along with Shafiq and Kutub. He did so gladly, leaving his preferred carrier as an investment specialist. He made valuable contributions in getting the Trust moving and, in particular, looking after the welfare of the freedom fighters who were then in disarray.

When we were at the Leeds University in 1975, Imtiaz came over to Bradford University nearby. It was there, over delicious kebabs at Karachi Restaurant at Bradford, he met Reaz who, over three decades later, was to be his last companion at Kabul.

Imtiaz was not cut out for jobs. He set up P&M Consultants, one of the first such private initiatives, in late 1970s. Over the years, he went back to work in the capital market, set up his own firm, became the president of Dhaka Stock Exchange and, I dare say, the leading specialist in Bangladesh.

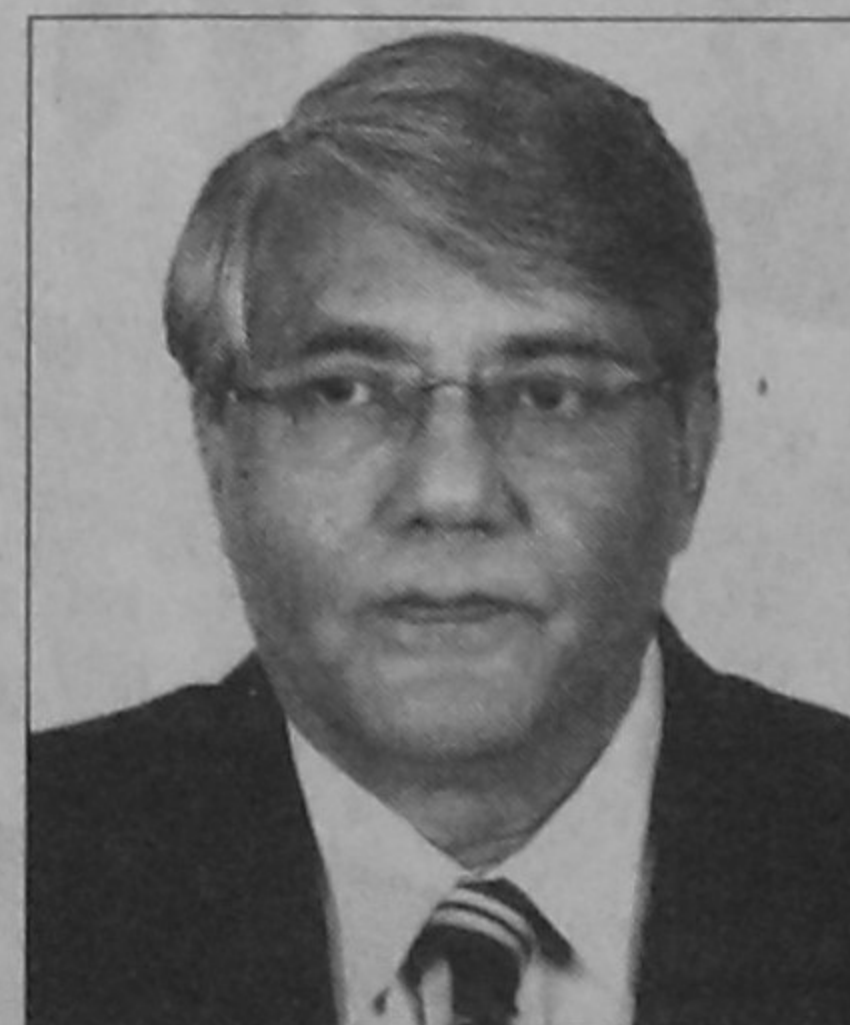
He was the pioneer in introducing automation in the Dhaka Stock Exchange, which he was keen to modernise.

Imtiaz belonged to the school that thought regulation and development of market went in sync, helping and complementing a common goal. Simply put, let market grow with the regulation it can live with for its age. He wrote papers and columns, and gave lectures enunciating a working model for such a paradigm in the capital market of Bangladesh. As part of that pursuit beyond Bangladesh, he went to Kabul on a World Bank assignment to set up the Capital market there -- a challenge few would dare accept. Before he could finish his task, Imtiaz passed away in Kabul on October 29 due to sudden cardiac arrest.

In recent years, we invariably got together at my place before heading

for the Jumma prayers at the Azad mosque in Gulshan. Noon-time Fridays, Imtiaz would walk slowly up the stairs in his typical slow gait while calling out my daughters, Duli and Mridula, whom he had befriended by then. The young and the old would get in to animated discussions on any topic on earth, with Imtiaz occasionally, mischievously, throwing in a controversy.

Imtiaz loved reading, his boundless interests spanned literature, business, economics, arts, history, as also contemporary thoughts on numerous subjects from astrophysics to behavioural sciences. Knowing that he was to travel to Afghanistan, I recently bought him the book by Khalid Hosseni, *Thousand Splendid Suns*, a poignant tale of ordinary folks caught in the tragic twists of the violent history of Afghanistan. Who knew Imtiaz would



Imtiaz Husain

travel there to tie us permanently to a sad story line in that unforgiving land.

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