

Less crop land, less food

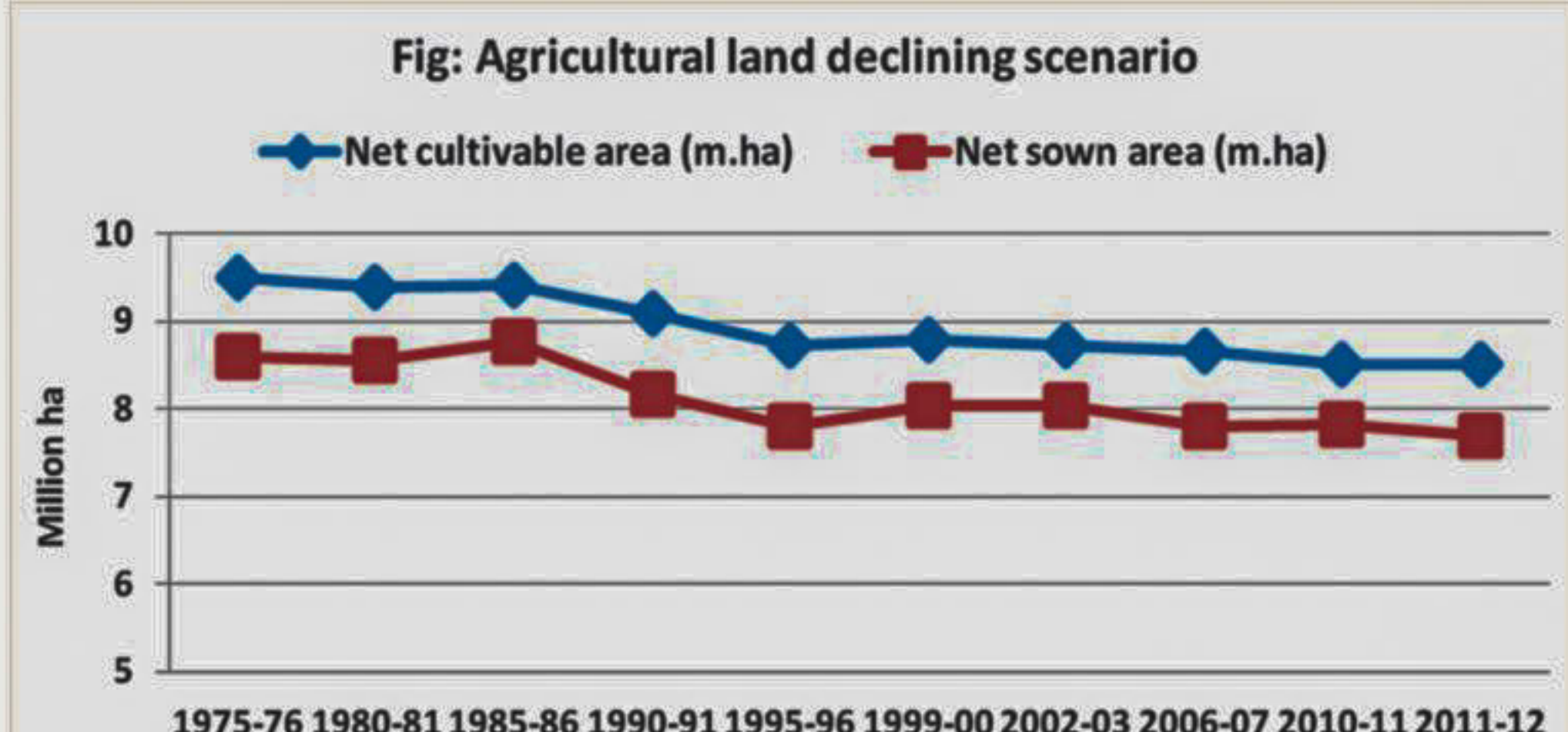
DR. M. SHAHE ALAM

NEARLY 80 percent of Bangladeshis live in the rural areas and more than 66 percent of them are engaged in agricultural activities. More than three-fourth of the country's total crop land are devoted for cereal food production. In such a subsistence-oriented agrarian economy domestic food production plays vital role in food security.

Over the last few decades, production of food grains have increased tremendously but there is still a need to increase cereal (especially rice) production to meet the increasing food demand for a growing population. In a country where cultivable land is becoming so scarce, it is important to increase the productivity of land to grow more grains. Even though the food grain sector has shown remarkable growth performance the reality is that with around two million people being added each year, this has barely made a dent towards improving the food security condition.

In Bangladesh the growth in food grain production during the last few decades originated from the expansion of area under high yielding varieties of rice and wheat developed by the concerned research institutes. In fact, the key to meeting the challenge of sustainable food security is to devote more areas under the available high yielding modern rice genotypes to achieve higher productivity. In order to feed the growing population, cereal food production must increase by 0.45 million tons per annum.

The existing land use scenario indicates that more than three-fourth of the rice cropped area is devoted to cultivating the available high yielding modern rice varieties based on the land suitability. The remaining areas are considered to be unsuitable for modern rice technologies because of the prevalence of various abiotic constraints (e.g. salinity, drought, submergence, early



flash flood etc). Almost two-thirds of the country's total landmass of 14.4 million hectares has been brought under cultivation. According to official statistics the net cultivated/sown area in Bangladesh during the eighties ranged within 8.56 and 8.22 million hectares. Over the last decades, the cultivated land has declined perpetually (dropping to 7.8 m. ha in 2011/12) due to housing, industrialisation, infrastructure and commercial development.

The growth of rural settlement however, is considered to be the main driver of the land lost from crop agriculture followed by urbanisation and industrialisation. In fact, housing to accommodate the ever increasing population in Bangladesh is expanding towards agricultural land. A recent FAO commissioned study revealed that agricultural land availability declined at 0.18 percent annually during the period 1976-2000, and the declining trend accelerated sharply after 2000, recording a decline of 0.45 percent annually during the period 2000-2010. This indicates that a sharp change is taking place in the trend of shifting land from

crop agriculture towards settlement, infrastructure and commercial development. The consequence is a continuous reduction of crop land and hence much needed food grains production.

The shrinking trend in land availability for crop production is a serious challenge ahead of the economy. For a developing country like Bangladesh, self sufficiency has been and will remain as key focus in food production strategy in order to meet food deficiency. Since food security is the main concern of the government, necessary steps should be taken to protect agricultural land from shifting to non-agricultural uses. In sustaining the growth of domestic food production in line with the needs of a growing population, it is indeed time for the policy makers taking steps to impose regulations to stop the consistent decline of crop land.

The writer is the former Chief Economist and Head of Agricultural Economics Division of BRRI, Gazipur and former National Economic Advisor of the Dhaka based Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. Email: msalam_07@yahoo.com

How to solve a stinking problem



NO STRINGS ATTACHED
AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

THE video a loved one sent me to cheer me up certainly did the trick. It was a very well edited documentary of the Ministry of Religious Affairs about a unique move to solve the problem of men using the walls of the city as public toilets. The film showed how despite explicit written prohibitions in Bangla regarding this on the walls, men of all ages and backgrounds did what they had to do. So the Ministry decided to try a novel method - they wrote the same message in Arabic, which most people consider more sacred than any other language, even if they don't know what the words say. Miracle of miracles! As soon as they saw the Arabic script, those who had squatted without thinking, quickly got up and left. The film showed some men showing obvious remorse by holding their

ears while others actually touched the wall and then their foreheads in reverence. The Minister said with confidence that he was quite certain that he had found the solution to this indiscriminate defiling of public places and soon he would make this a hundred percent success story.

My initial reaction was of applauding the Ministry for such an ingenious idea. That's how to get people to follow the rules - by duping them into believing they were defiling something sacred. But the documentary revealed some disturbing facts: Most of these men were either illiterate or just didn't care about the Bangla writing on the wall. Instead of building more public toilets, the more logical answer - we have 45 under the Dhaka South City Corporation and 25 under the Dhaka North City Corporation, most of them unusable - the authorities are relying on people's blind faith in Arabic script. And what about women, who no matter how full their bladders, have managed to hold it all these years till they get home or to a relative/friend's place? Do they not deserve public toilets for women only all over the city?

It's true, we are getting more eccentric as we age. But that should be applicable for human beings, not a nation's governance. It is rather quirky that in order to reduce the



number of child marriages in the country, instead of enforcing the original anti-child marriage act, the powers that be are thinking about lowering the legal marriageable age of females to 16 from 18. So a 16-year-old is no longer a child, but a grown up woman who is ready to take on the responsibility and physical burden of child bearing, child rearing, household tasks and taking care of the in-laws.

Hence, while we are thinking of this 'ingenious' way to reduce the official number of child marriages, we are not lifting a finger to enforce the anti-dowry law, laws to prevent and punish violence against women including sexual assault and harassment. We are also not bothered about illegal fatwa being imposed on women which have often led to their deaths. Is the said Ministry that is so diligently trying to solve the public urination problem at all concerned by this?

It is clear from the documentary mentioned above that religion has a far more powerful hold over people than civic sense or even a basic sense of decency. If that is true then religious leaders have the responsibility and potential to inculcate good values in people. They have the moral authority to tell men not to sexually harass women, that rape is a grave sin, that they cannot ask for dowry, least of all torture their wives for it and that they must respect and protect their womenfolk instead of physically attacking them. Unfortunately there are few religious clerics who bother to talk about these issues.

As for using Arabic script to prevent men from relieving themselves in public places, this can only work for a short while. Soon enough people will know they have been duped and will just scrape off the writing (which they have in some places) and go about their business.

And what about all the garbage dumps, official and unofficial, which are also used as public toilets? Obviously using sacred script will not be applicable.

The writer is Deputy Editor, Op-Ed and Editorial, The Daily Star.

ROAD SAFETY WEEK

A lot more needs to be done

DR N. PARANIETHARAN

ACCORDING to the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Global Status Report on Road Safety 2013, road traffic injuries are the eighth leading cause of death globally, and the leading cause of death for young people aged 15-29 years. Approximately 1.24 million people die every year on the world's roads, and another 20 to 50 million sustain non-fatal injuries as a result of traffic accidents. 186,300 children die globally each year from road traffic crashes - that's more than 500 children every day and one every four minutes.

The cost of dealing with the consequences of these traffic crashes runs to billions of dollars. If urgent measures are not taken then road traffic deaths will become the fifth leading cause of death in the world by 2030.

It is time for all the relevant stakeholders to join hands to further strengthen actions. This year, the Third UN Global Road Safety Week (May 4 - 10) seeks to highlight the need to ensure the safety of children on the roads through enforcement of laws and awareness programmes. It includes hundreds of events hosted by governments, international agencies, civil society organisations, and private companies and presenting the Child Declaration for Road Safety policy to policymakers.

In March 2010, the United Nations General Assembly resolution 64/255 proclaimed a Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020. The goal was to stabilise and reduce the forecasted level of road traffic fatalities around the world. The resolution calls upon member states to implement road safety activities, particularly in the areas of road safety management, road infrastructure, vehicle safety, road user behaviour, road safety education and the post-crash response.

National targets relating to each area of activity should be set by individual member states. Thankfully, there is enough scientific evidence behind road safety interventions to support these targets. Adopting and enforcing legislation relating to important risk

factors - enforcing speed limits, drunk-driving prosecution, and use of motorcycle helmets, seat-belts and child restraints - have shown significant reductions in road traffic injuries. Since 2008, 35 countries have passed new laws or amended existing legislation covering one or more of these risk factors. Nevertheless, in many countries these laws are either not comprehensive in scope or are lacking altogether. Governments must do more to ensure that their national road safety laws meet best practices. They must do more to enforce these laws.

In Bangladesh, deaths from road traffic crashes are notably high with an estimated fatality rate of 13.6 deaths per 100,000 people in 2013. For many years this issue did not

receive enough attention in Bangladesh. However, Bangladesh has now adopted a National Road Safety Strategy and a National Road Safety Council to act as a lead agency and the target is to reduce fatality by 10 percent every year. WHO contributed to the development of the National Action plan for Road Safety in Bangladesh 2011-2020. It is estimated that the country's GDP loss due to road traffic crashes is 1.6 percent. However, Bangladesh is yet to formulate laws to address all five key risk factors and struggles to enforce those that exist.

As per the WHO Report on Road Safety 2013, Bangladesh has no child restraint law. Although laws exist to limit speed, against drunk-driving, to use helmet for both drivers and passengers, and to use seat-belt, these are not enforced strictly.

The writer is a World Health Organization (WHO) Representative to Bangladesh.

A comprehensive legislation can be passed that meets international best practices and addresses key risk factors to address this preventable cause of death, injury and disability.

Sufficient financial and human resources can be invested in the enforcement of these laws as an essential component for their success. Public awareness needs to be created so that people understand and support such legislative change and enforcement of laws. Safer road infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists have to be ensured. Finally, non-motorised forms of transport, which can be integrated into a more sustainable and safer transport system, can be promoted. We need to do a lot more to reduce preventable deaths and injuries due to road traffic accidents in Bangladesh.

The writer is a World Health Organization (WHO) Representative to Bangladesh.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



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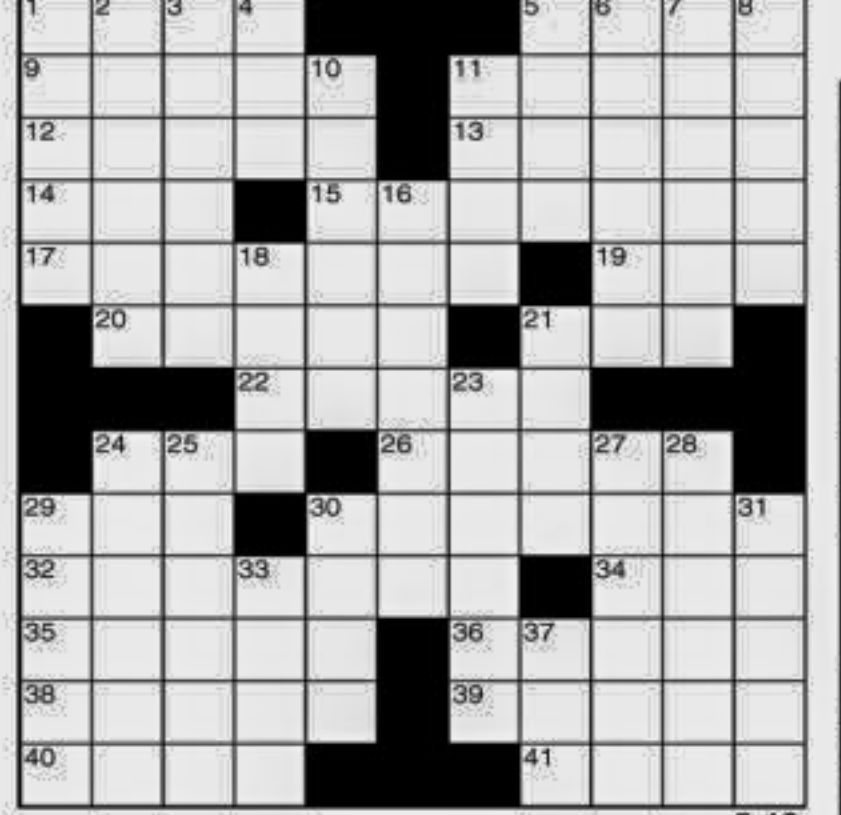
QUOTABLE Quote

I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully. Most people never listen.

Ernest Hemingway

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- China flaw
 - Audition goal
 - Solitary sort
 - Roping contest
 - Fuming
 - Dancer Ailey
 - Hosp. workers
 - Slogan
 - Straight path
 - Rocker/Vicious
 - Meager
 - Desk set item
 - Capital on the Nile
 - Myrna of movies
 - Blunders
 - Team supporter
 - Level of modesty
 - Writer's starting point
 - Web address ending
 - Stellar hunter
 - Conductor
 - Maximum amount
 - Emergency sound
 - Spotted
- DOWN**
- Peas' places
 - Ascend
 - Throgs
 - "I'll be right with you"
 - Fido or Fluffy
 - Trend determiner
 - Counsel
 - Control
 - Muscularly firm
 - Eyescreen
 - Latest fad
 - Immunity trigger
 - Like some lingerie
 - Spot for laps
 - Lovers
 - Hugh of "House"
 - Punctual
 - Barber of opera
 - Deceived
 - Ninnies
 - Intimation
 - Singer Faith
 - Beef cut
 - Energy



Yesterday's answer

WASHUP GATO
ELAINE OMAN
BALLS OFF FIRE
TENOR
MOOR LESS
BONN SLEEPY
ACT TOY VEE
THOMAS BEAN
APEX RANK
LINER
BILLS OFF ARE
OLEO DILLON
GLOW STYLED

CRYPTOQUOTE

HUPPF VJ QZP HLL SOYU EZT QLP HULJF TUL
YZD ZQLPC VH ZDC QZP HLL EVHHEF QLP
HULJF TUL YZDDLH. -- CFPFRALR

Saturday's Cryptoquote: STOP LETTING PEOPLE WHO DO SO LITTLE FOR YOU CONTROL SO MUCH OF YOUR MIND, FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS. -- WILL SMITH

A XYDLBAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.