

# FROM CHALLENGED BEGINNINGS TO STANDING TALL

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## The relentless efforts and achievements of our farmers

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Third Industrial Revolution, is changing everything at a rate never seen before. Most importantly, this change is positively influencing the sectors related to farming. Changes in information technology around the world—through smartphones, the Internet of Things (IoT), the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in equipment management, robotics, biotechnology, quantum computing—have started the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

AI and the IoT are now key parts to the world's latest agricultural machinery. Effective use of modern information technology is being made to facilitate production efficiency and marketing strategy. The biggest success in agricultural mechanisation of Bangladesh has come in land ploughing. In case of ploughing the land, 95 percent is done through power tillers. Similarly, 95 percent threshing machines or threshers and 95 percent power pumps



PHOTO: TITU DAS

agricultural machinery has increased day by day. As a result, crop production has increased at a significant rate.

The agricultural machinery manufacturers of our country are continuing their efforts to combine IoT and artificial intelligence with the manufactured machinery. IoT has now started to be used in dairy and livestock farms in the country. We have a promising breakthrough in the fisheries sector. That is the technology of controlling ammonia in fish farming ponds and giving the necessary food to the fish.

In the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, there has been a great challenge in the field of agriculture, despite the multifaceted success in increasing productivity and commercialisation of farming goods. The key thing that is missing is the optimal

market structure for the farmers. It hasn't been possible yet. That is why despite the increase in crop diversification and production, farmers are still not getting the right price for their produce and the intermediary is still there in different forms. Farmers have no right to fix the price for their agricultural produce and the government hasn't set up a price commission for producers. This is a grave crisis for our farmers. No effective and sustainable initiative has been taken to address this issue yet. Farmers get some price at the beginning of each crop season, but the losses only multiply in later periods of the season. Farmers in some areas can make up for the loss by doing four crops a year. But small and marginal farmers in most areas cannot do that and hence they fail to make much profit to cover up the loss.

We are lagging behind when it

comes value addition. As one can see, the market for processed food products in the world is USD 70 billion. Our position in this market is not visible. We export only goods worth USD 500 million. Considering the global market, our export value is a tiny 0.2 percent. We can also look at the calculation of labour force in agriculture. 60-70 percent of our total workforce is involved in the farming sector. Only 2-3 percent are involved in the agro-processing industry. The agro-processing industry is much more labour-intensive. We are lagging behind in production as well as in terms of other agricultural employments. In this case, if our capacity is increased, our exports can turn far better where farmers would also get better prices. We don't see different agricultural goods in the foreign markets. We are not able to enter the big hypermarkets of Europe and USA with

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our agricultural products. I have been working on this issue for the past 10 years and seen that we lack the infrastructure and effort to move forward for export-oriented agricultural production and export-focused global market. I humbly request the policymakers to focus their attention on this matter.

I must give credit to the government for their diversified efforts which brought success to the sector. But at the same time, I would like to add that there is a need for great effort, considering the dedication of our relentless farmers and agro-entrepreneurs who are fighting every second for agricultural success.

*Shykh Seraj is Bangladesh's pioneer development journalist. He received the country's two highest civilian honours, Swadhinata Puroshkar and Ekushey Padak, respectively.*



PHOTO: RAFIKUL ISLAM (FARMER FROM JESSORE)

are being used for threshing paddy. In other areas of agriculture, mechanisation is slow. 1.5 percent is used in harvest and less than 0.5 percent is used in planting or sowing. However, the use of

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