

Role of agriculture in Bangladesh's economic growth

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The same goes with the Qurbani season. We used to import livestock but today we're meeting this demand with our own efforts. Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman initiated subsidy support in farming, especially fertilisers, in his policy planning to ensure food security. It is still being followed. The infrastructure Bangabandhu built for seeds, irrigation and agricultural extension has helped us a lot. This is a huge service sector today. Most importantly BADC (Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation) has worked well with the high yielding variety seed, that is why Bangladesh is experiencing such crop diversity with huge productions. The question comes in, did the lifestyle or standard of the people involved with farming change? I would say, the farming sector has individually employed more than 40.6 percent people still, directly or indirectly. Previously,



Farmers have to be provided with technologies based on their local climate change scenarios.

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farmers were really poor, but today, their fates have changed with their relentless labour and definitely with quality seed support. The change has taken place because they are getting more production because of the seeds and more money than in the past. It means farmers' buying capacity has also increased. They can now

feed themselves and their families, send their children to school. However, the question still rises: what is the quality of food they are eating? What is the quality of clothes they are wearing? What is the quality of education their children are receiving? We have to bring these issues into focus. If only they could get a fair price for their produce, they could have good quality life, food and clothing. The media has also played a vital role in bringing out the real facts and figures and the causes and prospects of farming and farmers over nearly 50 years. Today, with the help of mass media and also digital media platforms, a lot of farmers can share, exchange and learn from the experts and replicate the best examples or learn about the new trends and crisis in farming.

Another aspect is the three driving forces of our economy, i.e., farming, RMG and remittance—in all these sectors, the sons and daughters of farmers are working. And they're sending money to their parents in the villages. And this money is being invested in farming, either

at small scale or in large scale farming initiatives. This has not only strengthened our economy but has empowered the youth, especially the women. Moreover, agricultural tourism has opened a new door for us. I have seen in many European countries and USA the concept of the family farm. In Bangladesh, young entrepreneurs have started wonderful eco-resorts across the country and people from around Bangladesh are going to these beautiful places where they can come close to nature. There are many resorts very near to Dhaka even where you would find resorts being built, keeping the farming environment in mind so that the visitors can go and enjoy the rural setting. During the past decade, there have been so many resorts built in this manner and concept, which is really a positive approach.

Climate change is a big challenge, which we have to face with the facilitation of new agricultural technologies and adaptability. Farmers have to be provided with technologies based on their local climate change scenarios. We must come

up with new seeds based on salinity and other adversities. We can't make anyone a climate refugee, rather we must try to make their life accommodating with the given changes. We must follow global adaptation technology and concentrate more on new examples of climate adaptability which fit our settings. More emphasis on agricultural mechanisation and ICT in farming should be given. This will help us to fight climate change. In the same way, we should also focus on the weather-based index, crop insurance which will ensure real empowerment of farmers and will make them more resilient. We have to make sure that new technologies of the sub-sectors of farming are being adopted and used skilfully. The challenge of the government would be to ensure that these new technologies reach the farmers, as well as the subsidies.

As the prices of the fertilisers increased across the world, the amount of subsidy has now gone up to Tk 22,000 crore (USD 2569 million). If the prices increase further, then how would the government manage equality among farmers and industries? How would they make up the fiscal gap? The course curriculum of higher studies in agriculture should be organised keeping in mind the fourth industrial revolution (4IR). Those who would train the students and farm-level officers must be able to get global-standard training (ToT) so that they can properly teach others. After completion of studies, I am sure this new generation of students could work more effectively in the field and assist the farmers with easy and handy solutions, with help of the best and most advanced technologies with government support. We must give importance to all the components of the fourth industrial revolution. Since building a "Digital Economy" is a must for implementing Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Vision 2041, Sheikh Hasina Institute for Frontier Technologies and hi-tech parks are being set up to develop the next generation with skills to face the 4IR. We must build our skilled human resources to handle these initiatives.



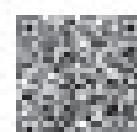
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Opening up possibilities

We are living in a world where social and economic inequalities limit potential. Most affected are the young people who often cannot access the skills and opportunities needed to close the income gap. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this even worse. To tackle this, we are working with development partners to reach out to economically vulnerable youth and prepare them for a better living. During the pandemic we have delivered essentials to the communities, supported critically affected COVID-19 patients and frontline health workers.

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