

More attention needed for the agriculture sector



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

SHYKH SERAJ

The agriculture sector is one of the key economic pillars of Bangladesh. Just after liberation in 1971, its contribution to GDP was around 60 percent. It is the most important sector in Bangladesh that helps with peoples' livelihoods, employment, and contributes to GDP, we all know that. But its share of GDP has decreased over the last decade, going from 17 percent in 2010 to 12.6 percent in 2020.

Countries around the world are now facing serious inflationary challenges mainly due to the Russia-Ukraine war, which is greatly harming the global economy. The global commodity market is facing considerable instability due to supply chain disruptions. Bangladesh has also been affected by all these, and is struggling to cope with the situation. The country was already experiencing significant inflationary pressure, and the added price hike has made the situation almost unbearable for the general people.

On the other hand, its foreign currency reserves have been going down. The impact of the three Cs – climate change, Covid-19, and conflict (Russia-Ukraine war) – has given birth to another "C" which is quite evidently, the cost. However, these could be tackled with three As – agriculture, austerity and assistance – which could

save all of us.

Over the years, Bangladesh has written a remarkable story of poverty reduction and development, especially during the past decade. After its independence in 1971, it was one of the poorest countries in the world. But Bangladesh successfully reached the lower-middle-income status in 2015 and is now on track to graduate from the UN's Least Developed Countries (LDC) category by 2026.

However, compared to many other countries of the world, we are still lagging behind in terms of technology, education, economy, farming, and in numerous other sectors. Bangladesh is now an important part of the global village. And it will not always be easy for Bangladesh to overcome different global shocks. It is because we currently have so many issues to cope

Ukraine war and global food price hike. He proposed an allocation of Tk 33,698 crore for food, fisheries, and agriculture for the coming fiscal year, which is only 6.2 percent of the total budget. He talked about increasing fertiliser subsidies from Tk 12,000 crore (2021-2022) to Tk 16,000 crore.

The significance of farming as a whole, including the sub-sectors, service and industry sectors, has increased manifold. The cultivation of high-value fruit orchards and vegetables also played a significant role in boosting the economy. Not only the farms, but the value addition of these agricultural products provided a much-needed boost for the agricultural service sector. Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) must be credited for the grain production and they have been quite remarkable, I

production and for developing technologies that are environmentally friendly and sustainable.

The farming sector has individually employed more than 40.6 percent people, either directly or indirectly. Previously, farmers in our country were really poor, but today, they have changed their fates with their persistent labour and certainly with quality seed support. And that has also led to farmers' buying capacity increasing. They can now feed themselves and their family and also send their children to school.

If we look at the three main driving forces of our economy – i.e., farming, RMG, and remittances – we will see the sons and the daughters of farmers working in all three sectors. Oftentimes, they send their earnings back to their parents in their villages.

new door for us. I have seen in many European countries and in the US the concept of the family farm. Many young entrepreneurs in Bangladesh have started a number of wonderful eco-resorts across the country and people from around Bangladesh are visiting these beautiful places to get close to nature and farming.

Climate change is a big challenge, which we are facing and will have to face with the use of new agricultural technologies and adaptability. We must closely follow global adaptation technologies and concentrate more on new examples of climate adaptability which is best suited for us. More emphasis should be given on agricultural mechanisation and the use of ICT in farming, as this will help us greatly in fighting back against climate change. In the same way, we should also focus on the weather-based index and crop insurance which will ensure real empowerment of farmers and will make them more resilient. Artificial intelligence will play a key role and I don't think family farms will remain, but the pattern of farming will change entirely. Overall, the system will change and we will go through a global paradigm shift. Ultimately, we will have to face the challenge of hidden carbon emission and we will need technologies to overcome it. After 50 years, farming will become more expensive, but there will be a global export market where Bangladesh will hopefully be at the forefront.

Despite the high population, decreasing arable land, and frequent natural disasters, Bangladesh has made significant progress in achieving self-sufficiency in producing cereal crops and reducing poverty. Almost half of the population is now employed in the farming sector. Therefore, our state policies must be aligned with the interest of this sector, especially at a time when we are facing numerous challenges as a nation. I believe that, if we could safeguard the marginal farmers, bring in modern technologies, properly execute the Delta Plan, and strengthen inter-ministerial coordination, the country will keep moving forward and the farming sector will continue to flourish.



Over the years, Bangladesh has written a remarkable story of poverty reduction and development.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

with that the government announced a measured budget for the fiscal year 2022-2023.

In his budget speech for the fiscal year 2022-2023, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal emphasised on boosting food production to ensure food security amid the Russia-

must say. Alongside the production, the research didn't stop for a day and with responsibility, it moved ahead with the support of Bangladeshi Agricultural Research Institute (BARI). Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) also deserves credit for their advanced techniques in boosting agricultural

And this money is used to invest in farming – both in small- and large-scale initiatives. This has not only strengthened our economy, but has empowered the youth, especially women, and has also helped raise the voice of the impoverished. Moreover, agricultural tourism has opened a



More emphasis should be given on agricultural mechanisation and the use of ICT in farming.

PHOTO: STAR