

Citizens, too, must step up to ensure our food security



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND
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SHAMSAD MORTUZA

My personal experience of living in both capitalist and socialist countries occasionally surfaces in my Marxist theory classes. In the former, I found the price of a gallon of milk teasingly close to that of a litre. To tempt consumers further, there were often “buy one, get one free” offers. Therefore, I would visit the supermarket for a litre of milk, only to return home with two gallons, each with a short expiration date. The challenge was to consume the extra purchase: the response ranged from preparing impromptu milk-based dishes, inviting guests, or discarding most of the excess milk. The surplus makes you buy more and more, changing both your culinary and social behaviours. Instead of being remorseful for the waste, you boast about the innovative ways you used the milk. In contrast, in a socialist country, the milk box size varied from 250 grams to one litre. If you need more for a party, buy several boxes according to your need. In the process, you

become a responsible consumer. Looking at some stats related to dairy cows, I discovered that the US is ranked seventh in terms of the population of cows, but it tops the list in terms of milk production. On the same list of cow populations, we are ranked 15th, but we don't even appear in the top

provided for rice production have yielded near self-sufficiency in Boro and Aman breeds. However, this does not apply to other products. Researchers have held the use of soil for rice responsible for the degradation of soil quality and zinc deficiency. The report makes some beneficial suggestions on food

security. As a non-expert, what concerns me is the sudden disappearance of a particular product from the market due to the potential price hike in the coming days. For instance, the cartel behind the market hoards onions and potatoes before Ramadan, believing that their profits will increase when our eating habits change during the month of self-control. After a day-long fast, we will long for

land for private resorts. Tourism is changing the ecosystem of our paddy fields and fisheries. Meanwhile, the lure of foreign investment in special economic zones (SEZs) has led to land consolidation for cash crops and industrial goods meant for affluent countries. The result? Food shortages and skyrocketing prices have left citizens vulnerable to crisis and unrest. The unchecked prioritisation of misguided development projects and

We need to plan meals wisely and store foods properly to minimise waste. This way, we can reduce pressure on our food supply, even if just a little bit. Land conversion for tourism complexes and luxury villas is both unreasonable and irresponsible. Citizens with access to land—even small plots—can grow kitchen vegetables like chillies, tomatoes, and leafy greens. Rooftops and balconies can transform into urban gardens with minimal efforts. Our rivers and wetlands are a treasure trove of resources waiting to be revitalised. Supporting local fisheries and livestock farms can reduce our dependency on imported proteins. People can champion sustainable practices and encourage others to buy locally produced fish, dairy, and meat. Corruption in agricultural programmes often sidelines the most vulnerable farmers. We can demand greater transparency and accountability by joining community monitoring initiatives. Every voice counts in ensuring that resources reach the right hands. National pride isn't just about cultural celebrations; it's about uplifting our farmers. Buy directly from local markets and support small-scale growers. Every purchase strengthens our agricultural backbone and helps build a resilient food system. Citizens must advocate for policies that prioritise agriculture over nonessential development. Let's push for infrastructure that benefits farmers, such as irrigation systems and storage facilities. We need to incorporate agricultural knowledge and sustainable practices into school curricula. Teach children to grow their own vegetables and respect the work of farmers. A well-informed generation is our best bet for long-term food security. Bangladesh's journey toward food security is a test of national character. By prioritising agriculture, revitalising traditional practices, and embracing local solutions, we can break free from the humiliation of being dependent. Let's stop sacrificing our fertile lands for fleeting gains and start building a future rooted in resilience and self-reliance. Together, we can ensure a food-secure Bangladesh worthy of its people and its legacy. Let's start planting the seeds of change today.

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Food shortages and skyrocketing prices have left citizens vulnerable to crisis and unrest. FILE PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

fried items that require onions, potatoes and aubergines. Inabilities to control the market led many of our political leaders to propose alternative recipes, much to the chagrin of daily users. The import of potatoes from our neighbour, with whom we are engaged in a war of words, sprinkles salt dust over our wound of not being self-sufficient in food, even 53 years after independence. The liberalisation of trade has changed the agricultural heart of our nation. We are fast becoming over-reliant on exports, seeking quick cash from industries like tourism and real estate. The new money class is privatising

economic liberalisation has endangered our most basic needs while benefiting the privileged few. We need to let go of the idea that the government must do everything. Food security isn't just a government responsibility; it's a collective effort. We can make a difference by changing ourselves and our food choices. For instance, by diversifying our diets and embracing locally grown, seasonal foods, we can reduce our dependency on imports and support local farmers. By prioritising health over excess, we can contribute to food sustainability and reduce import dependency.

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The liberalisation of trade has changed the agricultural heart of our nation. We are fast becoming over-reliant on exports, seeking quick cash from industries like tourism and real estate. The new money class is privatising land for private resorts. Tourism is changing the ecosystem of our paddy fields and fisheries.

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A mathematical genius with an aura of mysticism



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QUAMRUL HAIDER

For many people, mathematics is a word that evokes feelings of awe. They remember the subject from their school days as a world difficult to get into, the finer points of which they never understood. They also remember that there were always a few students in class who with no apparent difficulty understood maths. They were the brightest students in class that's the halo that mathematicians wear around their heads. This winter solstice marks the 137th birth anniversary of one such extraordinarily bright student who possessed an uncanny ability to see beyond the apparent and transcended the boundaries of traditional knowledge in the realm of mathematics. He was Srinivasa Ramanujan, one of the world's all-time great mathematicians. Born into modest circumstances in Erode, Tamil Nadu, India on December 22, 1887, under signs in the heavens that portend great events, his horoscope, cast by his mother, predicted that he would be a wunderkind beset by great suffering. Ramanujan received almost no formal training in mathematics. Yet, he was so consumed by it that he was unable to focus on any other subject in college and thus, could not complete his degree. When he was in his mid-teens, a friend introduced him to the book *Synopsis of Elementary Results in Pure and Applied Mathematics*. This two-volume encyclopaedic tome played an instrumental role in awakening this mathematical prodigy and set the tone for his career. Since then, Ramanujan committed all of his time to mathematics, proceeding to record his theorems without proofs in his notebooks. As he continued to make deep discoveries of his own, he wrote to the erudite men and women of mathematics for recognition. But they ignored him because his claims seemed too incredible to be the product of someone with no formal background in mathematics. In 1913, while working as a clerk in

the accounts department of the Port Trust Office in Madras, Ramanujan dispatched a letter containing more than 100 theorems to Godfrey Hardy, a famous number theorist at Cambridge University and a Trinity College don. Initially intrigued by the “outlandishly original” theorems, Hardy eventually saw a genius in Ramanujan and invited him



SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Srinivasa Ramanujan (1887-1920)

to Cambridge University in April 1914. Once in Cambridge, Ramanujan produced hundreds of new equations, identities and theorems, mostly without proofs, dazzling his peers who were baffled as to the source of his exceptional abilities. Being a great exponent of exactness and proofs, Hardy was unhappy with just conjectures and wanted Ramanujan to back up his work

with rigorous proofs. But Ramanujan treated proofs as mostly redundant and relied instead on intuition. Unable to convince him that proofs were the currency of mathematics, a frustrated Hardy finally concluded that Ramanujan was otherworldly, a savant who erupted into something never seen before. John Littlewood, another brilliant

Mathematicians around the world marvel at Ramanujan's contributions to mathematics, although the meaning of much of his work is still a mystery. They continue to strive to reach his extraordinary intellect as his insights manifest repeatedly in disparate corners of the world of mathematics.

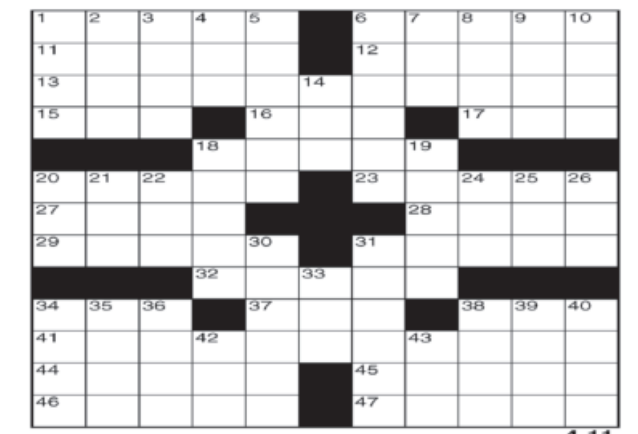
Trinity don who worked closely with Hardy and Ramanujan, opined that Ramanujan ruled out conventional reasoning because his work had an aura of mysticism. Indeed, Littlewood was correct. As a devout Brahmin, Ramanujan perceived a mystic connection between mathematics and his religion. He believed his mathematical formulas came to him as visions provided by Goddess Namagiri. To him, an equation holds no meaning unless it expresses a thought of God. This way of conceptualising mathematics was anathema to Hardy's code, an atheist with a hostile attitude towards religion. This made the two an odd couple with conflicting views of religion but consonant views of mathematics. An amusing anecdote that came to symbolise Ramanujan's genius concerns the number 1729. Hardy once came to visit Ramanujan in a cab numbered 1729, a number he claimed to be totally uninteresting. Ramanujan immediately stated that it was actually a very interesting number. It's the smallest number representable in two different ways as a sum of two cubes: $13 + 123$ and $93 + 103$. Such numbers are now referred to as “taxicab numbers.” Ill health had been an issue with Ramanujan since his birth. In the spring of 1917, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Despite being in and out of sanatorium for the rest of his stay in Cambridge, he continued to make enormously important contributions in the areas of number theory, analysis, and algebraic combinatorics. By early 1919, Ramanujan seemed to

contribution to mathematics was. He replied without hesitation that it was the discovery of Ramanujan. He even characterised their collaboration as “the one romantic incident in my life.” During his short life span, Ramanujan spawned thousands of identities, conjectures, equations, and theorems. His deep intuitive understanding of numbers and their representation as infinite series created identities that were previously unknown to the world of mathematics. Besides his published work, he left behind a priceless treasure: his three notebooks and a few scraps of paper covering around 3,900 equations. Mathematicians around the world marvel at Ramanujan's contributions to mathematics, although the meaning of much of his work is still a mystery. They continue to strive to reach his extraordinary intellect as his insights manifest repeatedly in disparate corners of the world of mathematics. As noted by Freeman Dyson, a renowned theoretical physicist at Princeton University, Ramanujan “discovered so much, and yet left so much more in his garden for other people to discover.” The Vajrayana form of Buddhism, adherents say, provides a quicker path to enlightenment and early freedom from the wheel of incarnations. If this is really true, then Srinivasa Ramanujan, a self-taught Indian mathematical wizard, who revolutionised the field of real analysis, number theory, game theory, continued fraction, infinite series, and many more, is an example of this potent form of Buddhism.

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
1 Tokyo's nation
6 Houston player
11 Find darling
12 "Over There!" writer
13 Bette Davis film
15 CPR expert
16 Star pitcher
17 Writer Stout
18 Skilled
20 City square
23 Western resort lake
27 Compass point
28 Solitary
29 Church areas
31 Star in Orion
32 Winter quaff
34 Atlas page
37 Unruly group
38 London weather
41 Bette Davis film
44 Shoplifted
45 Work byproduct
46 Castle part
47 Bridge costs
- DOWN**
1 Green stone
2 First person
3 Cruise stop
4 Bible vessel
5 Utah neighbor
6 Agree to
7 Lush
8 Role for Chris Hemsworth
9 Quite uncommon
10 Cameo stone
14 Bar rocks
18 Ancient Mexican
19 Shire of "Rocky"
20 Stew sphere
21 Trip around a track
22 Cart puller
24 Sty resident
25 Low bill
26 Sushi choice
30 Grave
31 Hearty
33 Pigeon sound
34 Schooner pole
35 Singing voice
36 Work the fields
38 Sense
39 Egg outline
40 Understands
42 Bar order
43 Binary base



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



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