

# Bangladesh losing over 2,500 hectares of arable land annually: expert

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Around 2,500 to 3,000 hectares of cultivable land are converted and used for non-agricultural purposes every year in Bangladesh, raising serious concerns about future food security, according to experts and stakeholders.

The population is increasing day by day while the amount of land under cultivation is decreasing, Md Sawkat Osman, director for the crops wing at the Department of Agricultural Extension, said at a seminar yesterday.

"Many people are constructing houses, brick kilns and other structures on cultivable land. This could have a significant impact on the nation's ability to meet its growing food demand."

The seminar was jointly organised by the Consumers Association of Bangladesh and Friends in Village Development Bangladesh at the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority office.

Osman said the DAE has undertaken a new plan to produce safe food.



In the first phase, 2 crore farmers will be given smart cards, which will be used to organise agricultural production by region. The initial phase targets the production of eight specific crops, with a focus on increasing agricultural output through the use of organic fertilisers, he added.

Muhammad Nazim Uddin, senior scientific officer of the Horticulture Research Center at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute, said: "The organic nature or fertility of our soil has drastically decreased."

"There is no guarantee that the food being consumed is completely safe. Although these issues have been discussed for a long time and some initiatives have been taken, there has not been any significant development so far," he added.

Uddin added that adopting sustainable and environmentally friendly agricultural technologies at the production level in Bangladesh is crucial to ensuring food security and combating the challenges of climate change.

He also said the formulation and implementation of policies to ensure a balance between demand and supply for the consumers in the country were essential.

Fakir Muhammad Munawar Hossain, director for the operations and laboratories department of the Directorate of National Consumers' Right Protection, said proper enforcement of laws must be ensured alongside social awareness to ensure safe food for consumers.

Raising social awareness requires creating a social movement, which in turn necessitates political commitment, he added.

Zakaria, chairman of the BFSA, said it was essential for people involved in food production to have proper knowledge and training. Online training programmes alongside training centres need to be established for restaurant staff and owners, he added.

He also cited the need to increase manpower at the BFSA, pointing out that there is only one official designated for the whole Mymensingh region, which has a population of 60 lakh.

As of 2023, there were 88.29 lakh hectares of cultivable land in the country, according to data from the Ministry of Agriculture.



PHOTO: MD QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT

According to tulip growers and agricultural officials, the country's weather and soil are not suitable for the cultivation of this flower, which mainly grows in southern Europe and central Asia.

# Except for tourism, tulip in Tetulia shows little prospect

MD QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

In addition to its lush tea gardens and the breathtaking view of the majestic Kanchenjunga, blooming tulips have emerged as another jewel in Panchagarh's winter landscape – but only as a tourist attraction, as farmers struggle to maintain cultivation and earn a profit.

According to tulip growers and agricultural officials, the country's weather and soil are not suitable for the cultivation of this flower, which mainly grows in southern Europe and central Asia.

Besides, tulip bulbs are scarce in Bangladesh, often requiring imports and careful preservation in controlled temperatures before planting.

This season, 13 female farmers from Tetulia's Darjeepara and Sharialloth villages planted 20,000 tulip bulbs on a collectively contributed 70-decimal plot. This is half of the 40,000 bulbs planted in 2022.

In that year, eight farmers in Tetulia first cultivated the flower in the upazila under a pilot project of the Eco-Social Development Organisation (ESDO), a non-governmental organisation.

ESDO initially imported the bulbs from the Netherlands. However, some of the bulbs planted this season were preserved from the previous year's yield.

"After consulting with an agro-expert from the Netherlands, we experimentally preserved 3,000 locally produced bulbs in a cold storage facility, maintaining a temperature of 4 degrees Celsius. These bulbs were taken out at the beginning of the current winter season and planted in the field," said Aynul Haque, project supervisor and head of inclusive microfinance

at ESDO.

However, Haque told The Daily Star that the locally preserved bulbs failed to bloom properly or exhibit adequate growth.

Tamanna Ferdous, upazila agriculture officer of Tetulia, said that Bangladesh's weather is generally not conducive to tulip cultivation, but Tetulia's winter temperature, which hovers around 20 degrees Celsius during the



more closely tied to tourism.

"People prefer to purchase tulips before they bloom, but locally cultivated tulips tend to bloom prematurely due to higher-than-required temperatures," she explained.

Moreover, there is no viable way to reuse locally preserved bulbs because of weather constraints. "After blooming, the bulbs require at least a month under optimal

temperature conditions to mature properly for preservation, which is not feasible in the local climate," she added.

Md Shahid Uz Zaman, executive director of ESDO, said that in recent years, many visitors from different parts of the country have come to Tetulia to catch a glimpse of Kanchenjunga, the world's third-highest mountain peak.

"If tulip cultivation proceeds in Tetulia as planned, it could become an additional attraction for tourists and boost the northern region's tourism sector, ultimately improving the lives of the locals," he said.

As winter lasts for about four months in Tetulia, the temperature is almost ideal for tulip cultivation, he added.

# MBA: Evolve or expire

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

During a job interview, Hassan, an MBA graduate, confidently highlighted his unique strengths as being his versatile skills and strategic thinking. However, when asked about specific skills like coding, data analytics, or AI, he conceded that he had not mastered any. The interviewer jokingly called him a "Jack of all trades but master of none", to which Hassan gingerly added that he was working on becoming a "Jack of all trades but master of one" but had not chosen which one yet. Everyone present laughed, realising, at least for now, humour remained beyond the scope of AI automation.

In developed markets, students rarely pursue an MBA immediately after a BBA or graduation because employers are not keen to hire MBAs without work experience. In my 30+ years of corporate life, I am yet to see a fresh MBA magically lead up to a promotion or extra increment. More commonly, MBA is a degree that people earn while working. That said, there is one market where an MBA consistently outshines a regular graduate: the matrimonial market!

For decades, an MBA was considered a ticket to a lucrative career. Graduates from top business schools like Harvard and Stanford earned six-figure salaries and easily climbed the corporate ladder. However, a recent report shows that 23 percent of Harvard MBA graduates in 2024 were jobless even three months after graduation – a stark increase from the 10 percent in 2022.

The scenario is similar in elite institutions in Bangladesh, signalling a global trend. According to the Graduate Management Admission Council's (GMAC) 2024 Application Trends Survey, there is a resurgence in interest in full-time MBA programs, with 80 percent of two-year and 64 percent of one-year MBA programs – the highest in a decade.

One of the key factors driving this shift is the growing influence of artificial intelligence across industries. In Bangladesh, the finance, telecom and retail sectors are adopting AI-driven platforms to improve efficiency, reducing the need for large workforces. While management roles remain somewhat shielded, the impact of AI is becoming evident at other levels.

Another significant challenge is the oversupply of MBAs in the Bangladesh job market. Over the last decade, there has been a boom in business schools offering MBA programs. As a result, the market is saturated with graduates, making competition intense for limited positions.

In Bangladesh, employers, like their global peers, are prioritising general management skills. Proficiencies in areas such as digital marketing, data analytics and artificial intelligence are increasingly getting sought after as companies value specific technical skills that often come at a lower cost than an MBA. This shift reflects a growing demand for professionals that are not just versatile, but highly skilled in a given area – a concept I previously explored in my article, "Jack of All Trades but Master of One."

For aspiring MBA students in Bangladesh, this changing landscape requires careful consideration. An MBA alone may no longer guarantee career success. Supplementary training in specialised fields is becoming essential to stand out in a crowded market. Furthermore, financial investment in an MBA – often a significant expense in Bangladesh or abroad – demands a thorough evaluation of its potential return.

In today's job market, where AI is taking over spreadsheets and undergrads are mastering niche skills, being an MBA without specialisation might just be the most expensive way to wake up to being overqualified and unemployed. A word of caution to future MBAs: choose your skills wisely for versatility without mastery is now just a fancy way of saying "replaceable".

The author is president of the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Bangladesh and founder of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd



# Trump's tariff threats are 'leverage'

## Says informal economic adviser

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump's recent threat to impose 25 percent tariffs on Canada and Mexico is a negotiating tactic, the president's long-time informal economic advisor argued Wednesday.

"Donald Trump is doing exactly what any rational person would do – understanding economics," Arthur Laffer, one of the godfathers of supply-side economics, told AFP in an interview.

"He's using trade as a tool to exact other policies. It's his leverage," said Laffer, 84, who was an economic advisor to President Ronald Reagan and has long informally advised Trump, but is not part of his administration.

"In order for that leverage to be true, in order for that leverage to really work, you have to be convinced that you will put those tariffs on," he added.

Shortly after taking the oath of office on Monday, Trump said he was mulling new tariffs of 25 percent against the

two close US allies starting February 1, accusing them of failing to tackle illegal immigration and drug trafficking.

"I think President Trump believes that they could easily solve the immigration problem for the US, and they could make a big dent in theentanyl problem," Laffer said.

Trump also threatened to impose a 10 percent tariff on China which, he said, had not done enough to tackle the flow of the synthetic opioid to Canada and Mexico, from where it is trafficked into the United States.

Trump's comments drew condemnation from Beijing and Ottawa, while Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum said it was important to "keep a cool head and refer to signed agreements, beyond actual speeches."

Trump's tariff and immigration proposals – which include the mass deportation of millions of undocumented workers – have been criticized as inflationary by many economists, who see these policies putting pressure on the Fed to pause interest rate cuts.

# Solar power surpasses coal in EU for first time

AFP, PARIS

Solar overtook coal in the European Union's electricity production in 2024, with the share of renewables rising to almost half the bloc's power sector, according to a report released Thursday.

Gas generation, meanwhile, declined for the fifth year in a row and fossil-fuelled power dipped to a "historic low", climate think tank Ember said in its European Electricity Review 2025.

"The European Green Deal has delivered a deep and rapid transformation of the EU power sector," the think tank said.

"Solar remained the EU's fastest-growing power source in 2024, rising above coal for the first time. Wind power remained the EU's second-largest power source, above gas and below nuclear."

Overall, strong growth in solar and wind have boosted the share of renewables to 47 percent, up from 34 percent in 2019.

Fossil fuels have fallen from 39 to 29 percent. "A surge in wind and solar generation is the main reason for declining fossil generation. Without wind and solar capacity added since 2019, the EU would have imported 92 billion cubic metres more of fossil gas and 55 million tonnes more of hard coal, costing €59 billion," the report said.

According to Ember, these trends are



PHOTO: AFP/FILE

The photo shows a solar field in Moers, western Germany. Strong growth in solar and wind have boosted the share of renewables in the EU to 47 percent, up from 34 percent in 2019.

widespread across Europe, with solar power progressing in all EU countries.

More than half have now either eliminated coal, the most polluting fossil fuel, or reduced its share to less than five percent of their energy mix.

"Fossil fuels are losing their grip on EU energy," said Chris Rosslowe, lead author of the report.

"At the start of the European Green Deal in 2019, few thought the EU's energy transition would be where it is today: wind and solar are relegating coal to the margins and pushing gas into decline."