

# The struggle continues

## BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

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The clock was ticking towards a potential trade deal with the US when, on Thursday afternoon, we gathered at ULAB to discuss the enduring relevance of the recently deceased Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Our session was the concluding panel of the conference themed "La luta literaria continua" ("The literary struggle continues") with a particular focus on Ngũgĩ from a Global South perspective.

I began by reflecting on the possible consequences for Bangladesh's RMG sector if tariff rates remained higher than those of our competitors. Thankfully, by Friday, we received welcome news: the rates had been finalised at 20 percent. The White House's official statement listed Bangladesh among the "trading partners [who] have agreed to, or are on the verge of agreeing to, meaningful trade and security commitments... to align with the United States on economic and national security matters."

While we heave a huge sigh of relief, we are compelled to dig beneath the surface. Ngũgĩ's play, *I Will Marry When I Want* (1977), provides an opportunity to look for parallels. In the play that got the author imprisoned, Ngũgĩ narrates the tale of a peasant couple, Kigũnda and Wanjikũ, who are promised upward social mobility through marrying their daughter into a rich family. They are led to believe that by mortgaging their only piece of land for a church project, they would earn social prestige and become worthy of their in-laws. Instead, they fall prey to the trap of the wealthy elite and the church and end up losing their land. Ngũgĩ's allegory is not just Kenyan. It is the post-colonial condition that we experience on a daily basis.

To support the RMG business sector, we are already hearing that the national flag carrier will buy 25 Boeing aircrafts worth Tk 50,000 crore. There will be additional purchases of wheat, cotton and other items for a more balanced trade. We want to become an upper-middle-income country, and our paths are strewed with promises. This is a continuing struggle that is mirrored in



The author, left, at a panel discussing the late Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o's work.

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literature. Our ability to decide on our own is often compromised.

For long, education has been seen as the Jacob's Ladder to climb into an alternative state. But it is education that has reminded us of its entrapment. Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chain, said French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. Ngũgĩ adds, "Colonialism planted its flags not only on our land but in our minds." Today, when we question whose education it is, we return to Ngũgĩ's first novel, *The River Between* (1965). The river separates two

are sifting which medium of education will head towards which possible pay scale. The spirit of July that calls to end discrimination must solve this question once and for all.

Revolutionary literature all over the world has shown the frequent bitterness of post-independence betrayal. *Petals of Blood* (1977) by Ngũgĩ serves as an example. The drought-stricken villagers of Ilmorog sends their elders to Nairobi seeking aid. The relief comes not as salvation but as development projects. Villagers see how money flows in to make them landless. Imagine the people

unleashed a grotesque vitriol of greed that shows no shame. The shameless admission by the former premier that her attendant had accrued Tk 400 crore offers a local example of Ngũgĩ's devil's feast. The feast of the devil returns when we see that cost of metro rail expansion has skyrocketed.

Last year, when the students extended the calendar to include the days of July in the month of August, they wanted to decentre the fascist mindset. Ngũgĩ's collection of essays, *Moving the Centre* (1993), teaches us how we can rethink the centre. He shifts

the focus from economics to culture. The traditional "centre" of cultural authority, enjoyed by the Global North, needs to be decentred. He relocates the centre to the spaces where most of the world population lives. And to do so, Ngũgĩ argues, we need to stop seeking validation of the Global North, to measure our cultural worth. This is the hardest challenge: are we ready to think of a university as world class if it is not ranked by QS or THE? Are we willing to think of an author powerful without a review in *The New York Times* or a prize in Stockholm?

To decentre, we need to create an alternative space that celebrates local knowledge, curates indigenous performances and traditions, and intellectually engages with the world on equal terms. This will require our ability to translate both at human and AI-enabled levels so that there is a seamless correspondence with the world.

Remembering the rebel writer Ngũgĩ as part of our celebration of July created an opportunity to examine different layers of oppression, and the liberation that we seek both economically and culturally. We become aware of the tariff relief as a strategic concession that limits our sovereignty. Culturally, we recognise that our fates in the Global South are intertwined. Kenya and Bangladesh are no different in their negotiations with what George Gordon Byron once called "moral North." What is required, then, is to take control of our economic and cultural productions. It requires what Ngũgĩ labels as the decolonisation of the mind. There are three imperatives that can be applied to our context. First, we need to learn to write for ourselves first. Second, we must form a South-South circuit where we learn from one another and pursue mutual growth. Third, we must create our own canon. We need to revisit our pedagogical model to understand what is important for us without the agenda-ridden prescriptions coming from the West.

The literary struggle that we are pursuing today must be guided by a type of decolonisation that refuses to mortgage our future, land or imagination. We need to stop seeking external validation when we set and prioritise our national goals. As for members of the English department, the struggle, *la luta literaria*, means to keep on telling our own stories without seeking permission. It means creating a creative and critical mass that mirrors our history without propagating someone else's hierarchy.

# How precision agriculture can transform Bangladesh

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Agriculture plays a pivotal role in Bangladesh's economy, employing approximately 35.27 percent of the workforce and contributing about 11.55 percent to the national GDP. Traditional farming methods, however, are becoming less sustainable due to their excessive reliance on synthetic fertilisers and excessive water use. Currently, Bangladesh imports 80 percent of the 6.9 million tonnes of fertiliser consumed annually. Furthermore, about 90 percent of the country's groundwater is used for agriculture. As a result, many parts of the country, especially the northwest and southwest such as Rajshahi, Naogaon, Natore, Dinajpur, and Jashore districts, often suffer from water scarcity.

Precision agriculture offers a promising solution to this acute problem. This method uses advanced technologies to enhance crop production while minimising waste and environmental impact. Tools like sensors, satellites, drones, and GPS-enabled machinery help farmers monitor their fields more efficiently. Soil sensors measure moisture levels, enabling precise irrigation and reducing water usage by 30-40 percent. Drones and satellites capture crop images to detect issues like diseases, pests, and nutrient deficiencies. GPS and sensor data highlight variations in the field, allowing farmers to adjust fertiliser application, which reduces waste and reliance on imports.

Additionally, soil health sensors track pH, nutrients, and organic matter to guide soil improvement. By gathering real-time data on soil moisture, pH, temperature, and electrical conductivity, Precision agriculture helps determine plant water stress and nutrient requirements and allows farmers to make informed decisions. This data is analysed using software and AI to optimise irrigation, fertilisation, and pesticide use. Precision agriculture also enables the automation of these processes, making it easier to apply the right resources at the right time, thus lowering the labour costs. Ultimately, it improves resource efficiency, increases productivity, and

reduces environmental impact.

Traditional rice farming using flooded irrigation method creates an anaerobic soil condition that emits methane, a greenhouse gas 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide. The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) estimates rice farming accounts for 21 percent of Bangladesh's total greenhouse gas emissions. However, the negative impact doesn't end there. The environmental impact

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is exacerbated by the extensive use of diesel-powered irrigation pumps. Large amounts of carbon dioxide and harmful particles are released by these pumps, worsening rural areas' air quality and contributing to climate change. These unsustainable farming practices also pose serious health risks. The constant flooding of rice fields can create breeding grounds for mosquitoes, increasing the spread of diseases such as dengue and malaria. Additionally, methane emission also increases the per capita carbon footprint of our country.

The alternative wetting and drying (AWD), a modern irrigation method introduced by IRRI and the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), has already gained recognition as a sustainable water management practice in Bangladesh. Building on this foundation,

we can more effectively integrate precision agriculture technologies to enhance efficiency and sustainability in rice farming. A combination of these two methods can take water management to the next level. By reducing water usage by 30-40 percent and optimising fertiliser management by 20-30 percent through precision agriculture, methane emissions can be significantly lowered. Furthermore, climate change mitigation can be supported, and rice yields can be increased by 10-20 percent. Additionally, soil moisture sensors can accurately determine irrigation needs, minimise over-irrigation and lead to savings in diesel. AWD can be implemented more effectively, ensuring fields are flooded only when necessary, thus conserving water and reducing methane emissions.

Studies conducted in countries such as the US, India, and the Netherlands have demonstrated that Precision agriculture can minimise chemical runoff and cut water use by 20-40 percent, safeguarding the environment and yields.

To achieve this, pilot projects should be implemented to directly apply precision agriculture in real-world settings. These projects can include training programmes for farmers and demonstration farms to showcase the benefits of these technologies. Farmers can gain hands-on experience in precision agriculture from government agricultural offices at the upazila level.

There are some startups which are already leading the way in precision farming by providing Internet of Things (IoT) sensor-based services to farmers. These startups are helping to bridge the technology gap and can serve as valuable partners in scaling up precision agriculture across the country.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation, BRRI, and other agricultural bodies can come together to form strategic partnerships, creating incentives and support systems to ensure the widespread adoption of precision agriculture. By promoting collaboration between government, industry, and farmers, Bangladesh can adopt precision farming to build a more resilient, sustainable, and productive agricultural future.

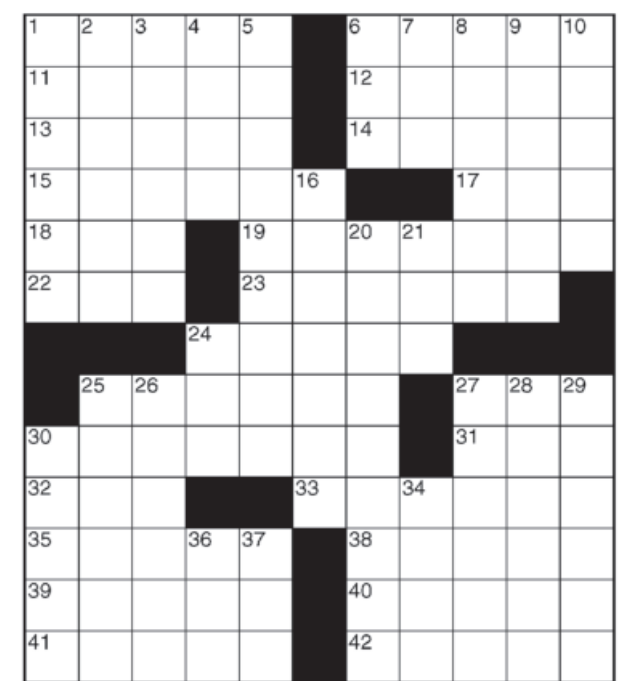
## ACROSS

- 1 Further down
- 6 Cocoa alternative
- 11 Undermine
- 12 Maui greeting
- 13 White of TV
- 14 Works the fields
- 15 Unbroken
- 17 Came together
- 18 Freud topic
- 19 Involving feeling
- 22 Bear's lair
- 23 Jordan neighbor
- 24 Exercised one's right
- 25 Brain cases
- 27 Spot
- 30 Metal hut
- 31 Following
- 32 High times
- 33 Hunting weapons
- 35 Following
- 38 Uniform color
- 39 Like stuffed animals
- 40 Belly feature
- 41 Distress signal
- 42 Graceful birds

## DOWN

- 1 Imposed, as a fine
- 2 Grove growth
- 3 Soup dumpling
- 4 Writer Ferber
- 5 Gasp and guffaws, e.g.
- 6 Pinnacle
- 7 Completely
- 8 Dorm sharer
- 9 Sighed phrase
- 10 Treat the turkey
- 16 More scrumptious
- 20 Works of art
- 21 Wee bit
- 24 Mover's truck
- 25 Recipe amount
- 26 Raised platforms
- 27 Digestive aid
- 28 Late hour
- 29 Stands for artists
- 30 Hearty drink
- 34 Defect
- 36 Stray
- 37 Reuben base

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