

Establishment Of Agricultural Estates In Bangladesh

Successive governments since Pakistan days promised to bring about a green revolution in their region, which is Bangladesh but still we are heavily dependent on food imports from outside. The author who has successfully established a couple of model Agricultural farms in Bangladesh Air Force establishments at Shamsheernagar and Lalmonirhat has given a beautiful outline of what should be immediately done.

BANGLADESH is a vast rural society, very thickly populated (about 10 crores in 55,000 Sq. miles area) and people are extremely poor. About 90% of the people live in the rural areas majority of whom fall below poverty line. The per capita income of these people is US \$130 and more than half of the population live below subsistence level (calorie intake is less than 1,800). It has about 27 million labour forces and about one third of the local labour forces are either unemployed or under employed specially during slack season. The low productivity in agriculture, low purchasing power, high rate of population growth (2.3% annually) and low literacy rate (25% only) are the major problems of the economy. Amenities of life in the rural areas are grossly inadequate.

Bangladesh is predominantly an agricultural country and most of the rural people are directly dependent on agriculture. Majority of our population are engaged in this profession, still we cannot feed all the people. In USA 4% of their people live on farm and feed 96% of their people and produce enough to spare for hungry parts of the world. In Bangladesh 90% people are engaged in agriculture but they are underfed. The yearly food import is about 20 lacs tons. With the increase of population it will be more acute and more people will remain underfed and it will affect the health and mental development of the people and the nation will gradually become crippled.

Though rural development was considered as central theme for planning; agricultural development was interpreted as synonymous with rural development. Strategies and programmes were directed towards increasing agriculture production as achievement in the field of agriculture will be beneficial to the rural people. The Government has planned and implemented many programmes for rural economy and agriculture like Rural Works Programme (RWP), Food for Works Programme (FFWP), Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Gramin Bank Prokalpa (GBP), Swanirvar Bangladesh (Credit Programme), Rural Finance Experimental Projects (late 1970's) and many other Government Departments and Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and foreign Philanthropic Or-

ganisations have been working with due priority for agricultural development. But question arises how agriculture is accorded priority. Government planning machinery is the best instrument to measure it. But the existing rate of development will take long time which we cannot afford to wait. So, we must take some pragmatic steps to attain food autarky in a shortest possible time.

The main drawback of our agriculture is the absence of scientific approach to agriculture. I have the gruelling personal experience of developing two agricultural projects in Bangladesh Air Forces — one at Shamsheernagar air-field and one at Lalmonirhat air-field. By adopting scientific method the output of Shamsheernagar project is worth Tk. 5 lacs annually as net income in 250 acres of land and producing substantial amount of pineapples, lemon, guava jack-fruits, paddy etc. At Lalmonirhat the area is 800 acres and we installed 8 DTWs for irrigation and produced sugar-cane worth of Tk. 10 lacs in 1984 and wheat and paddy of about 15,000 mounds is under "Contract Growers Scheme" (CGS). The main characteristics of these projects are that these are being conducted in an organised way and ensures higher production by application of modern technology. I believe that few projects of these types will have huge production impact and can bring radical change in the field of agriculture and on our rural economy.

Agricultural Estates. For this, an institutional framework is required. Some isolated programmes suffer organisational deficiency and weakness in developing integrated package programme of production. I propose that we should establish agro-based industries in private sector with educated persons for commercial

agricultural production. Industrialisation will help mechanisation of agricultural for higher yield. Giving the advantage to private initiative; the possibilities of success is much more. First agriculture should be recognised as an industry. Some Agricultural Estates should be formed as industry in line with BSCIC Estates in some selected places of Bangladesh where some small scale agricultural farms of various types can be set up. In fact this proposal of agricultural industrial units should be set up in our country in addition to the prevailing system. The existing system has failed to raise the desired per acre yield due to lack of organisational network. For example the most flourishing projects for shrimp culture in coastal areas (earns about Taka 200 crores annually in foreign exchange) is dwindling in the bottom due to lack of appropriate facilities. In fact this is a way out for industrialisation of agriculture in an organised method for revolutionary change in the rural economy. The leading industrialized countries of today were once predominantly agricultural and economic historians have traced the various ways in which a prosperous and expanding agriculture formed the basis for subsequent establishment and expansion of industries. The role to be played by agriculture and industry in the economic and rural development of UDCs are complementary.

Selection of Educated Persons. The agriculture is very painstaking and highly complex science with very tough production techniques. It requires highly qualitative job and quality material at right time. The technical know-how is grossly inadequate amongst the existing illiterate farmers. It is a futile effort to expect such sophisticated agriculture from the existing illiterate

farmers. For this, we must attract the educated people in agricultural profession. In all developed countries of the world only the educated people with innovative ideas are doing agriculture. Saudi Arabia which was a desert land, has become self sufficient and they never allowed any entrepreneur to undertake agricultural projects unless the modern technology is applied for higher production. This project under the Agricultural Estates are to be allotted to the educated persons with capability, initiative and drive. They will carry out the projects as private enterprise with all assistance from the Government. They will be allotted one project each with specific production target who will furnish an undertaking certificate to reach the target within the stipulated time. They may be selected from the retired military and civilian officials technical experts, businessmen or alike from other professions.

Aims of the Project. The main aims of the Estates are:

a. To organise the agriculture into an Agro-based industry with all modern facilities of mechanised and improvised agriculture.

b. To attain food self-sufficiency in the various fields of agriculture in the fastest way by boosting up agricultural production. The project will be pioneering venture and strong base to attain accelerated production.

c. To accelerate production of fruits, vegetables, milk, meat, chickens, eggs, fish etc to raise the nutritive standard of the people and reduce the dependence on cereals.

d. To encourage the educated people to participate in agricultural profession and also to properly utilize the manpower resources of rural areas for agricultural production.

e. To reduce the margin of foreign exchange expenditure on essential goods like dry milk, improved seeds, etc. Our present expenditure on import of dry milk is valued about Tk. 60 crores in foreign exchange and in vegetables seeds of about Tk. 2.00 crores.

f. To make an opening for large scale foreign exchange earnings by exporting vegetables, fruits and meat. There are many countries in the world which de-

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