**Rice exports and Food security of Bangladesh: Five important points**

By Prof. Salim Rashid

There are five important points about Rice exports and Food security that need to be known

1. That Mr Irshadul Huq argued for rice exports in 1993. Since this was forbidden by the laws regulating PL 480---US Food Aid---he obtained a waiver from USAID.
2. In one year 500,000 tons were exported. This interested the Thai government so much that they sent over some officials who offered to buy up the entire export output of rice from BD
3. The GoB did not follow up
4. In 1996-97, Mr Muyeed Chowdhury suggested using options to buffer the emergency food needs of BD. This would save on purchase, storage, and distribution costs. No encouragement and no GoB follow up.
5. There have been two important full length studies of this question; one by IFPRI in 1994, the other by BIDS in 2012. Both are deeply flawed. The minor flaws are technical and can be dealt with separately, but the major flaw is the same in both cases. The agronomists, BARC and BRRI, played no active role, if any, in drawing up the studies.

How can we talk about Rice export or Food security without having agronomists tell us the potential of BD?

To sum up, we are no better off than starting with a clean slate.

   The question of Rice export really introduces several major themes. Of course, there are many kinks to the question, but the broad picture is quite clear.

1. What is the BD economy good at in the long run? By God's grace, this fertile land has no match in the whole world. Why not try to develop our permanent advantage?

2. When Rice export is profitable, it will raise the value of agricultural lands, which will automatically make people hesitate to destroy agricultural land.

3. Simply passing laws to forbid building on 'dhani' land will only give local police and chairmen power to extract bribes. Penalties without incentives are rarely the way to go.

4. If the rice output is deficient, God forbid, then domestic rice will automatically become expensive, and exports will cease to be profitable.

5.  Except for those who are rooted in Dhaka or Chittagong, all other city dwellers either have some rural roots or can easily acquire them. Everyone with a rural base will gain from the profits of rice exports. How can economic policy for 160 million be dictated by some 20 million?

Why do people not recognise the urgency of the problem? I think the most important reason is the fog surrounding agricultural land loss. Many different numbers are generated, so people think this is some academic game. After reading what is available in English, I am convinced that the CURRENT land loss rate is 1%. This frightens me, but I cannot seem to move others.

