

*This column puts together some empirical evidence and relevant statistics to show importance of rice in Asian economies.*

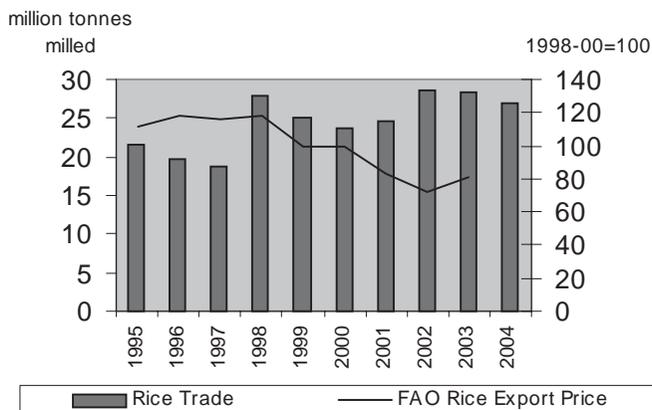
Rice remains the staple food of more than half of humanity. However, rice yields would have to rise at least one percent annually over the next 30 years to keep up with an expanding population. IRRI projects the number of people eating rice will almost double to 4.6 billion by 2025. On the genetically modified variety of rice that is being currently tested in the Philippines, the feedback so far has been that the resistance to diseases is good and it will have an impact on the productivity. An international team of scientists from 10 countries had completed the sequencing of the rice genome. Scientists had completed mapping some 370 million out of 390 million base pairs or 95 per cent of the genome — with an accuracy of 99.99 per cent. This development is expected to lead to the acceleration of research on rice and the potential development of new varieties of rice.

In Asia, where 90 per cent of all rice is grown and consumed, more than 2 billion people obtain 60-70 per cent of their calories from rice. More than half of the world's 1.3 billion poor are Asian rice farmers and consumers, and Asia's poorest - urban slum dwellers and rural landless - still spend up to 40 per cent of their income on rice. Among the top ten exporters of rice in the world six are from the Asian region. Thailand (8 million. tonnes), Vietnam (4 million. tonnes) and India (4 million. tonnes) are the top three rice exporters in the world (Table 1). Incidentally, the top three importers of rice are also from Asia viz. Bangladesh, Philippines and Indonesia. As table 2 shows the area under

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\* Prepared at RIS Biotechnology Unit.

### Global Rice Trade and FAO Rice Price Index



modern rice varieties in major economies of Asia is considerably high. In major exporters like Thailand (30 per cent), Vietnam (92 per cent) and India (76 per cent) is under rice. Even among major importers the area under modern rice varieties is considerably high for instance, in Bangladesh (65 per cent), Indonesia (84 per cent) and Philippines (96 per cent).

According to the trade estimates available from Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations rice market monitor, the contraction in rice trade reflects smaller expected deliveries to Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines. Much of anticipated drop in trade would also reflect smaller sales by exporters in India, as well as Vietnam and the United States, as some of their traditional markets are forecast to shrink. Supply constraints might also result in lower (food aid) shipments by Japan and the Rep. of Korea.

**Table 1: Top Ten Rice Exporters in 2003**

Country	Million MT
Thailand	7.75
Viet Nam	4.25
India	4
US	3.4
China	2.25
Pakistan	1.1
Myanmar	1
Uruguay	0.65
Egypt	0.4
Argentina	0.35

Source: AS&PM Magazine, Vol. 11 No. 1, Jan/Feb. 2004

**Table 2: Rice Area under irrigation and modern varieties in Major Asian Countries**

Country	Area under Rice ('000 Ha.)		% rice , area irrigated 1998	% rice area under modern varieties, 1998	Paddy yield (t/ha), 2001
	1998	2002			
Bangladesh	10116	11059	42	65	3.58
China	31572	28177	99	98	6.26
India	44598	44622	50	76	3.08
Indonesia	11716	11500	78	84	4.23
Myanmar	5459	6200	30	76	3.42
Nepal	1506	1517	49	74	3.17
Philippines	3170	4046	70	96	3.14
Sri Lanka	829	715	72	96	3.83
Thailand	9900	9990	20	30	2.72
Vietnam	7363	7485	85	92	4.15

Source: FAOSTAT 2002 and FAO Production Yearbook, various volumes