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NEXT STEP

The life and times of the Bangladeshi mariner

A career in marine engineering is well known in our country nowadays. However, the market for mariners has not been the same. It has been as rollercoaster ride, with its brutal ups and downs. Read on to find out about the path that a cadet takes on his or her journey in the marine life, and the present situation of the job market.



THE GLORY DAYS

Established in 1962, the Marine Academy, presently known as Bangladesh Marine Academy (BMA), is the first training institute of its kind in the sub-continent. Since, the Marine Academy has consistently supplied quality officers to the national fleet of Pakistan and later Bangladesh.

The academy has also been recognised as one of the branches of the World Maritime University (WMU), Malmö, Sweden in 1989 for its academic excellence, top-notch training, and dependable marine manpower. Bangladesh also made it on the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) white list in the year 2000.

PICKING A SPECIALTY

Students sit for the admission exams at marine academy in July. HSC or A-levels with Mathematics and Physics are the only pre-reqs but undergrads cannot apply after the age of 21. Cadets have to

pass the written exam, an extended series of physical tests, as well as the viva voce.

The two streams at BMA are Nautical Science and Marine Engineering. The training period, or the Pre-Sea course, is 24 months long. These two years consist of rigorous schedule in the academy. After a year of experience in the sea as a Deck Cadet or six months as Cadet Engineer, they get their Bachelor of Maritime Science degree.

NAUTICAL SCIENCE

Students of Nautical Science, or Deck Cadets, undergo training as an officer on the ship and master the fields of navigation, ship and cargo handling, and maritime law. After obtaining the Pre-Sea Nautical Science certificate, cadets are promoted to the rank of Third Officer, a navigating officer. The next rank is Second Officer who is in charge of passage planning. This is followed by the Chief Officer or the second-in-command of a ship, in charge of cargo work and deck maintenance. After months on the sea, one is finally promoted to the rank of Captain –

the representative of the ship's owner and the sole party responsible for the ship.

MARINE ENGINEERING

The marine engineering stream starts with the rank of Cadet Engineer. The trainee engineer usually reports back to the Second Engineer and their main task is to learn by assisting their seniors. The Fourth Engineer comes after and is responsible for electrical and sewage treatment, the oil and water separation system and other tasks. The Third Engineer is in charge of boilers, engines, fuel and feed system, while the Second Engineer is second-in-charge of the engine room after the Chief Engineer. The Chief Engineer looks after the operations and maintenance of all machinery and operations on the ship.

MAKING A COMEBACK

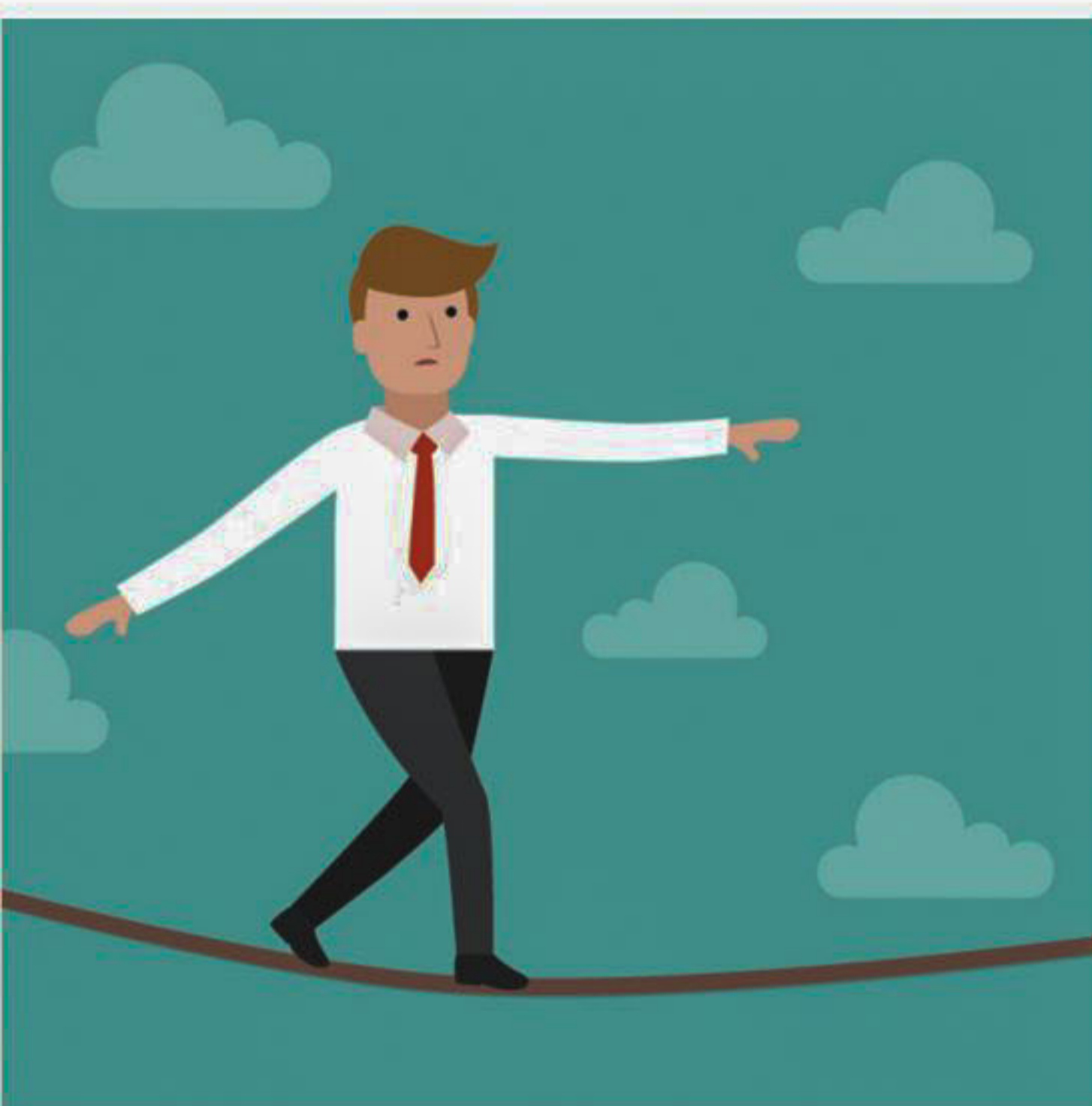
The marine industry is a rewarding sector for incoming remittance for the country and this market is actually under-served. But concerned authorities in public and private institutes need to forecast the market demand before setting the recruitment limit. Grads who are waiting several years to receive their professional degree and get on-board a ship can utilise that idle time to pursue an MBA or another field of study. The government needs to simplify the visa application process and take essential legal measures. The mariner community holds the most important responsibility of all – to re-brand our country via their service and professionalism.



NAVIGATING THE JOB MARKET

Marine engineering does not have a job market as constant as that of say business graduates. Students who'd set their sights on making some foreign cash and having an adventurous career were horribly disappointed when the job market hit a low in 2013. Why this sorry state for such a lucrative career that makes up to BDT 600 crore in remittance each year for Bangladesh? Political unrest since the 2000s and agencies sending illegal and unqualified workers to the Middle East in 2009 have made employers abroad wary of the green passport. A senior mariner and Chief Engineer states, "I have worked in Singapore for many years. In the early days, we did not need any visa to go to Singapore, but in 2002, I started to face immigration problems. When I was in Singapore, there were many cadets and junior officers from China, India, Indonesia and the Philippines. I advised the authorities to recruit from Bangladesh. Their answer was that they would go through the trouble for a Chief Engineer or Captain but not for a Third Mate or Fourth Engineer."

HASIBUL ISLAM



Living on the edge Top five most dangerous jobs in Bangladesh

The typical sedentary nine to five desk job may bore you to death, but most of us are content with our warm revolving chairs, shielded from all possible worldly dangers by the five feet high walls of our cubicle fortresses. While frequent smoking breaks and staying up all night seven nights in a row to finish your entire department's paperwork is as life-threatening as it gets, and although paper cuts really are the worst, a slow death induced by stress and bad lifestyle choices doesn't really make the cut for the title of most hazardous occupation. Yes, the real daredevils and thrill-seekers of the working world have it much worse, facing life-and-death situations every day without a second thought. Here they are in no particular order.

SHIPBREAKERS

While mariners see their fair share of drama and fatality, they don't come close to ship-breakers. The actual tight-rope walkers of manual labour, the lives of shipbreakers are almost always on the line. Media attention in recent times has shed light on the fact that thousands of lives are lost in the shipyards, victims disappearing into the abyss, their deaths unaccounted for and covered up. This is possibly hands-down Bangladesh's most deadly occupation. If a tangle of giant chains, cable lines and natural gas lines doesn't catch them, shipbreakers are never safe from the fire and fury of blow torches and free-moving mammoth-sized ship parts.

DEEP-SEA FISHING

You wouldn't know it but deep-sea fishing is not the serene effortless lifestyle you'd think it is. Battling monsters waves off the coast of Bangladesh is hardly a task for the weak hearted. Surfing waves on a dilapidated fishing boat, what seems like a fun adrenaline rush is actually enough to give you one heart attacks, if the run-down boat doesn't capsize first. Once you're lost out at sea, there's very little that can be done amidst the tropical cyclones to get you out.

METAL CRAFTERS

This is an industry that makes an exception for no one. From children to aging men and women, thousands of Bangladeshis working in metal crafts are

exposed to various chemicals and inhale carcinogenic fumes. While we didn't learn a thing from all those documentaries about electrical refuse worker turned cancer victim in places like China, countless continue to live the unknown dangers of metal work.

CONSTRUCTION SITE WORKERS

Undoubtedly one of the most heard hazardous occupations, there is not a single safe thing about working in construction in Bangladesh. Whether they're working roofs or breaking bricks, if a construction worker doesn't face the risk of falling because a cable cut loose there's always the risk of damaging the fingers and the hand. With millions of day

labourers on the streets and at building sites and little no safety measures, it's no wonder this is on our list.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT DRIVERS/CONDUCTORS

Driving scrap metal buses and taxis have their own dangers, but driving rickshaws, CNGs and lagunas are in a league of their own. Besides the obvious death-traps all over the roads of Bangladesh, there is always the risk of armed robbery and violence. As for bus conductors, imagine missing that step just left to the bus as it's making a stop – it's all or nothing for these guys.

AMIYA HALDER

WATER COOLER CHRONICLES

PERKS OF BEING A SAILOR

Disclaimer – as much as we would like to believe that the life of a sailor is that of Captain Haddock and involves charting the unknown seas and looking for sunken treasures and fighting to restore family legacy, it is not. Though the treasures are long gone, the life of a real sailor is just as adventurous. As a career prospect, not many look towards the sea, but unless one has a debilitating fear of Krakens, it is actually a great job.



The scope of the job is at the same time broad and narrow. Entering the marine academy, one could become a mariner or an engineer. Depending on whether you liked beating kids up at school or were on the other end of the beating because you were too busy hiding behind physics books, take your pick. Whichever you pick, the biggest incentive is the number of places you get to visit. New cultures, new cuisines, new people – a hipster's dream come true. So, if you are the adventurous kind and want a life which involves travelling, can it get any better? Of course, this would also mean spending days on end on ships and the vast landless horizons may soon lose their charm, but it is the final payoff that matters.

Speaking of pay, sailors and marine engineers tend to have a great salary. On the downside, the scope for spending that money may be limited as the job is pretty much an on-board one. This also means a limited social life and family time. A loner's paradise but for people who care, this could mean bouts of solitude. Some would say this builds character; learning to take on responsibility from an early age is something that should be handy. And long term prospects in the industry, with the salary and a steady rise, are things to keep in mind.

A lot of young people do not look forward to a steady desk job for the rest of their lives. Here too, a life on the sea may be the answer – the job is unconventional and the paper pushing is minimum. Besides, the long holidays, career flexibility, and a great pay certainly equal a good bargain.

Two things to keep in mind for their potential career path are definitely the fitness and education. If you are one who gets squeamish every time you were forced to get on those plastic boats in Dhanmondi Lake, then a life at sea may not be for you. As for education, since the Physics and Mathematics in the HSC level is mandatory for applicants, if math is the stuff of your nightmares, then the nautical life is better left for others.

In the end it boils down to your priorities. If a lack of communication and family time is a problem, then the life of a sailor may not be the best choice. On the other hand the high wages and future prospects minus the cubicle life do sound appealing. Depending on how Titanic affected you as a kid, think it through.

And if you still want to see the sea, but the marines and merchants do not cut it, grow out your beard, grab an eye patch and start singing in your best Jack Sparrow voice – Yo Ho it's a pirate's life for me!

MOYUKH MAHTAB

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