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How we can manage our marine resources better

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Seas have always been instrumental in defining the destiny of the world, be it as means of transportation or as trade routes or as hub of resources. They have also played a significant role in bringing people closer, breaking barriers down cultures and religions; and it definitely helped in spreading new ideas and thoughts. Today, as we stand in the 21st century, seas are important not only for military needs but also for the economy. Today, almost as high as 90 percent of world trade and commerce travels through the sea. Majority of the much needed source of energy, like oil, gas, petroleum is being extracted from and transported through

the seas. In fact, maritime trade routes form the life-lines of modern civilisation. Today, the whole rhythm of human civilisation's development and prosperity depends on the prowess of nations at sea.

Today, seas are crucial for global food security, human health and regulation of climate. The livelihoods of over 3 billion people worldwide depend upon services from marine and coastal biodiversity. Earlier, seas brought development and prosperity by facilitating trade and commerce, ensuring uninterrupted supply of raw materials for industrialisation and redistribution of finished products and goods around different corners of the world.

In those days technology was not very advanced and people only focused on fishing and extraction of oil. But today, advent of advanced new technologies has opened up new vistas of opportunity for nations. Basing on the states' rights and jurisdictions on their sea front, nations are now trying to exploit and explore the marine resources (both living and non-living) of the sea for their economic well-being. These days it is hard not to be aware of the importance of the sea and the sea bed as sources of energy (oil, gas, even wave and tidal power and of vital raw materials). There is an apparently endless list of chemical and mineral resources to be found in the seas, everything in fact

from thorium to gravel; and already explorations are underway of the ocean beds beyond the continental shelf where yet more of these assets doubtless lie in rich profusion.

In case of Bangladesh, the sea plays an even greater role. Being blocked from three sides, the Bay of Bengal (BoB) in the south is the only exit for us for international trade, and as a source of marine assets. One fifth of the country's total population is directly dependent on the marine or maritime sector for economic activities, ranging from fishing, salt cultivation, shrimp production, other aqua-culture, oil and gas production. While inaugurating an international workshop on Blue Economy in September 2014, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has very lucidly mentioned that "the role of marine resources in poverty alleviation, acquiring autarky in food production, protecting environmental balance, facing adverse impacts of climate change and other economic activities is unlimited". Our economy is advancing towards a prosperous future and very shortly Bangladesh will transform itself into a middle-income country. At that time, for maintaining the pace of development and industrialisation, and in view of depleting land-based resources and population growth, Bangladesh has to look more towards the sea as a source of energy, food, medicine and other strategic minerals. In the past, our main setbacks were in terms of technological limitations and non-delimitations of maritime boundaries with the neighbours. But today, Bangladesh has very successfully resolved the delimitation issue and gained a total of 118,813 sq. km of territorial sea, 200 nautical miles of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and a substantial share of extended continental shelf in the Bay of Bengal. On the

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other hand, we now have the economic wherewithal to go for state-of-the-art technologies.

We have proved our capacity by undertaking mega projects like the Padma Bridge. All these have opened up opportunities for ocean-based economic growth and development for Bangladesh by the prudent use of marine resources. Utilising these marine resources, a whole plethora of ocean activities can take place in the form of harvesting of living resources (for sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, pharmaceuticals, chemicals etc.), extraction of non-living resources and response to ocean health challenges. Interest in marine biotechnology has been gaining momentum across the globe and the activity is expected to generate 10-12 percent annual growth in the coming years. The promising pharmaceutical and coastal aquaculture sectors as well as livelihoods of poor people of the country would benefit if marine organisms can be used as a source of new materials/products especially for applications in health



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