



For a country reliant on maritime trade for over 90 percent of its economic throughput, Bangladesh remains paradoxically ill-prepared for the future of the ocean economy.

FILE PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

A blue economy moment we can't miss

Many of our traditional food habits can also be turned into healthier ones if we turn to items sourced from the sea. The recent survey discovered sixty-five new marine species in Bangladesh's maritime area that had not been identified earlier. There are so many untapped areas in terms of our maritime resources that it almost leaves one confused as to where to start. In addition to hydrocarbons, the maritime domain is also a major source of renewable energy as the kinetic, potential, chemical or thermal properties of seawater can be transformed into power generation facilities. Oceans are also great sources of minerals for which a great deal of effort needs to be undertaken to identify the potential sources in the coastal area and under the sea, implying seabed mining.

SHIFTING THE PARADIGM OF PERCEIVING MARITIME RESOURCES

In order to realise the full potential of Bangladesh in the maritime domain, there needs to be some fundamental shifts in how we perceive maritime resources. The metaphorical term 'sea blindness' best

and the marine environment. Keeping the maritime area under surveillance and properly governed is fundamentally different from traditional border management. Effective cooperation with neighbouring littoral states is also necessary, alongside robust national capacity to surveil the maritime area. The strategic connotation of maritime resources is often reserved for niche geopolitical aspects, but there are strong interlinkages between these issues.

COORDINATING THE LEAD – A FAR CRY

The required roadmap for the future necessitates a multi-pronged approach. It requires substantial investments, technological advancements, skills development, socio-cultural changes, and the list is far from exhaustive. However, in the absence of any effective coordination mechanism, there will be no progress in any aspect of the maritime domain. The twenty-six sectors of the blue economy identified in the context of Bangladesh require robust coordination among different government and non-government entities.

There is an important issue to be resolved in terms of leading the maritime affairs of the country. In practice, the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock appears to be the most engaged, as fisheries resources have so far been prioritised among marine resources. The Ministry of Shipping is another important agency in terms of augmenting blue economy activities. A dedicated agency, named the 'Blue Economy Cell', has been established, involving different ministries. It was shifted from the Cabinet Division and later repositioned within the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources. Given the nature of its work, it might be prudent to relocate it to the Ministry of Planning, as the ministry specialises in acting as the apex planning body.

The Bangladesh Navy and the Bangladesh Coast Guard are two important agencies, as they are engaged in almost every aspect related to the sea. Given the existing scenario among relevant stakeholders, it is not necessary to create a new overarching body to oversee all aspects of the maritime domain. Rather, effective coordination can be enforced by redesigning responsibilities among existing stakeholders.

There have been extensive suggestions and recommendations, in addition to efforts to decipher the potential of Bangladesh in utilising its maritime resources. Thus, potential and the suggestive narrative have dominated so far. It is high time the concerned agencies reviewed these recommendations and identified the mammoth tasks ahead. Without devising a roadmap or concerted coordination efforts, valuable resources may be expended on initiatives that are not aligned with national interests.



Experts advise that Bangladesh should not abandon the idea of building a genuine deep sea port in Sonadia Island. PHOTO: STAR

describes the phenomenon, as we are yet to turn the rhetoric of being a 'maritime nation' into reality. This explains the disconnect between the identification of potential and regularising it into the national economy, which is also dubbed the blue economy. The market economy of maritime resources is extremely important, since its dynamics will attract investments and generate a sustainable value chain. Failing to mainstream the ongoing initiatives in this sector and remaining stuck in land-centric ideas will further impede growth in this sector.

The maritime domain implies extensive inter-agency cooperation, for which Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is required. This concept entails a comprehensive understanding and coordination of responsibilities relating to the maritime domain, which would impact safety, security, the economy,

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