

# MARITIME VISION OF THE FATHER OF THE NATION BANGABANDHU SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN

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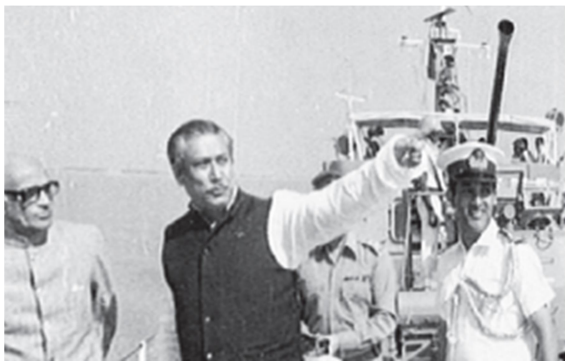


From the age of sail until the modern era, humankind has consistently ventured and explored sea to ensure better livelihood. In the contemporary context, as land resources are depleting at an unprecedented rate, ocean-borne activities have flourished immensely. The United Nations (UN) has taken the matter into cognizance and highlighted it in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Goal No. 14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development).

Oceans are the lifeblood of the planet earth and humankind, covering 71% of the earth's surface (approx 362,000,000 Sq Km). Over 3 billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity for their livelihoods. Oceans generate 50% of oxygen, absorb as much as 40% of CO<sub>2</sub>, provide food, minerals, energy, medicine, recreation, and carry out 90% of the global trade. The vast sea area of Bangladesh is full of marine fish, hydrocarbon, rich biodiversity, and other undiscovered valuable mineral resources. It also has huge economic potentials for shipbuilding and ship recycling industries. The

impact of pollution and climate change on food security, ecosystem, and biodiversity are important factors that need to be properly addressed to develop the country sustainably. Hence, there is no alternative to using the potentials of the untapped marine resources for the sustainable development of the nation. The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was very aware of this prospect of the maritime sector of Bangladesh, and he had a strong foresight about the wealth of the sea for future exploration. He was also aware of our glorious maritime past and his initiatives to protect our maritime interest became a potent platform to connect the missing link to the past, exploring the future.

### **Maritime Vision of BANGABANDHU**



After independence, the maritime sector of our war-torn country was very disorganized. The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took successful and ainstaking initiatives during 1972-75 to build and develop a maritime Bangladesh. Immediately upon his return to newly liberated Bangladesh, he reestablished the devastated Mercantile Marine Academy as Bangladesh Marine Academy and Seamen's Training

Centre intending to develop world-class maritime leaders. He established-'Bangladesh Shipping Corporation' on 5 February 1972 and managed to procure 19 ocean-going ships at almost free of cost from various friendly countries by 1975. He ensured that the hidden/floating mines and submerged hazards were cleared off from the Karnaphuli channel in 1972 by Russian maritime experts. He took challenges to build new ships (upto 1,000 DWT) in Khulna Shipyard (1972), established Marine Fisheries Academy (1973), and started construction of Chittagong Dry Dock & Heavy Industries. To ensure the optimum use of maritime resources for the development of the Nation, he also initiated the oil and gas exploration in the Bay of Bengal (1973) and more importantly being the Prime Minister, he ran the shipping ministry as the Shipping Minister for a short period.

The Father of the Nation saw the potentials of huge untapped resources for the socio-economic development of the newly born Bangladesh. His maritime vision was reflected through the enactment of Territorial Water and Maritime Zones act in 1974 to establish the country's rights in the vast sea area. Till today, researchers and analysts are amazed to comprehend the brilliant step taken by the Father of the Nation back in the time when the whole nation was recovering from a devastating war. More importantly, the United Nations enacted the Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982, eight years after the enactment of the Maritime Zones Act 1974 by Bangladesh. The law fundamentally delimits the baseline and territory of the sea where we can exploit the untapped resources.

Bangladesh was the first Asian country to enact laws on maritime issues. The adoption of the "Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones Act, 1974' is a testimony of the visionary leadership of Bangabandhu for which it has become easier to acquire a huge maritime zone in recent times. To ensure the maritime security of a maritime Bangladesh, he took personal initiatives to develop a stronger navy and started acquiring ships for Bangladesh Navy namely BNS PADMA, SURMA, KARNAPHULI, TISTA and commissioning of naval establishments namely BNS ISSA KHAN, BNS HAJI MOHSIN, and BNS TITUMIR. Bangabandhu also established Naval Headquarters at Dhaka and wanted to establish a world-class naval academy to provide quality training for the naval officers.

### **Steps Taken by the Present Government of Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is a maritime nation, thus she needs to make full use of resources and opportunities available in the maritime domain. Considering the enormous prospects and potentials of maritime Bangladesh and the context of the regional and geopolitical realities, the present government is working relentlessly for the sustainable use of sea resources ensuring maritime security. The peaceful maritime boundary delimitations with Myanmar (2012) and India (2014) under the dynamic leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have opened huge opportunities for exploration and conservation of untapped maritime resources for the development of the country. Those verdicts have enabled the enhancement of medium and long-term energy security interests of the

country. With the expansion of the maritime boundary, the opportunities for the nation's fishing industry have also been enhanced as fishing can be carried out in the deep sea now.

In line with the maritime vision, the government formulated Delta Plan 2100 to ensure long term water and food security, economic growth, and environmental sustainability while



effectively reducing vulnerability to natural disaster and building resilience to climate change and other delta challenges through robust, adaptive, and integrated strategies, and equitable water governance. One of the main components of Delta Plan-2100 is to accelerate the GDP growth through the proper utilization of water resources. Among six hotspots of Delta Plan - 2100, two hotspots namely 'Coastal Zone' (27,738 sq km) and River Systems and Estuaries" (35,204 sq km) have been identified in order to address the flood problem, cyclonic storms and tidal surges. Salinity, water logging, river bank and coastal erosion, fresh-water scarcity, groundwater level decline sedimentation and navigation, river bank erosion and accretion, water quality etc.

In the last decade, the fisheries sector accounted for around 4% of Bangladesh's economy and now it is the country's second-largest export earning sector after garments. The Bangladesh Government has signed a USD 240 million financing agreement with the World Bank on 25 October 2018 intending to expand coastal fisheries and to further increase the fisheries sector's contribution to the economy. This project is helping to improve fisheries management systems, infrastructure, value chain investments, and encourage private sector investment to increase the availability and quality of marine fish. It is also supporting several reforms in fisheries policies and regulations including the draft of the Marine Fisheries Act 2019 keeping many penal provisions of punishment for violation of the law in fishing within Bangladesh's territory both by local and foreign vessels. The government has established four more Marine Academies in Baxishal, Pabna, Sylhet, and Rangpur.

The government has also approved in principle the draft of the Bangladesh Maritime Zones Act 2019 aimed at unlocking huge potentials of the Blue Economy and checking crimes on the sea. Establishment of Pata sea-port, plan for the deep sea-port, setting up of special tourism park-like Sonadia Eco-Tourism park at Moheshkhali Naf Tourism Park, and Sabrang Tourism Park- at Teknaf, and enhancing maritime connectivity program of the government are reflecting the keen interest of developing the maritime sector. The government launched the country's first geostationary satellite Bangabandhu-1 which will be providing e-connectivity services to nearly

39,000 vessels sailing across the country annually. The connectivity is expected to help the vessels to track through the Vessel Tracking and Monitoring System (VTMS) and to avoid accidents as well as allow the crew members to browse the internet, watch television, and conduct other telecommunication activities.

The strict security measures in marine areas are essential for accelerating the national economic growth of the country. In this connection, the government has already formulated a perspective plan called 'Forces Goal 2030' in light with the 'Defence Policy' formulated by the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1974 and started the faster implementation of the plan. Accordingly, the government has taken various pragmatic steps for the development of the infrastructure and boosting of operational efficiency of Bangladesh Navy and other concerned law enforcement agencies to transform into a modern technology-based efficient and time-befitting force. The government is also taking different realistic steps to enhance the maritime cooperation among the littoral nations to combat against maritime non-traditional threats like human trafficking, as and drug trafficking, pollutions, disaster management, climate change resilience through Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectorial Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS), and other concerned associations.

Bangladesh is blessed with her excellent geographical position with a long coastline. To run the growth engine faster, the country needs to look for sustainable exploration of its maritime resources. The maritime research, education, and awareness-building programs need to be enhanced to get rid of the sea blindness of the common people. For better coordination and faster implementation, Blue Economy policy of Bangladesh may be formulated under the national framework and separate ministry like 'Ministry of Ocean Resources' or separate division like 'Division of Ocean Resources' may be established engaging potential

maritime professionals and policy-makers. Maritime Spatial Planning may be specified based on the research information, facts, real database, and analysis in line with the planning of the government. It is great to see the government's willingness and implementation of projects in every maritime sector. We hope and look forward to observing a significant maritime growth to be added to national GDP that will help Bangladesh to achieve upper middle-income country status and subsequently lead Bangladesh to a developed a Country.

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