

Post-COVID-19: Maximum Utilisation of Maritime Resources to be Ascertained

M R Rashed



The history of human civilization is the history of living socially, which emerged over 6 million years of hominid evolution. Over time, human beings gradually evolved into a well-developed society and secured their lives through advances in education, culture, science & technology. However, an unknown and unseen virus has broken all the barrier of modern social security. We have produced technologies to secure every sphere of life, yet we are helpless against the new virus, named as novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). It has become clear that due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the supply chain of fundamental rights including health, education, food and security are disrupted. Many people around the world have lost their lives or dearest ones, and numerous people have become unemployed. The World Bank

has expressed its concern that the world is going to face the biggest economic crisis since the 1930s great depression. From the beginning of creation, human being lived socially for mutual betterment. The guidelines of the World Health Organization's for maintaining social distancing hit that foundation hard.

The COVID-19 outbreak has had an impact on our beloved motherland and its economy. As a result, there is a risk of slow growth in comparison with the rapid economic growth of the last decade. However, the bold and far-sighted steps taken by the government and the innate ability of the people of Bangladesh to remain resilient in the time of major crisis have been keeping the wheel of the economy rolling. The government has taken several initiatives to ensure safety in the

bearing of export-oriented readymade garments. Besides, the supply-chain for agriculture and agro products has been kept uninterrupted. Import of necessary food items, medicines and life-saving medical products has been handled in major seaports without any obstacle. The government also took measures to keep the unhampered flow of remittances from abroad. However, extraction of resources from all viable sources need to be effectively explored for the transition to a successful and sustainable middle-income nation and subsequent fulfil the dream of a developed nation. Maritime resources such as maritime trade, seafood, oil & gas, minerals, pharmaceuticals, renewable energy from the sea compose a significant part in accelerating the development of the country.

Maritime Trade

Bangladesh has a long legacy as a

Maritime Nation, and the Bay of Bengal should be considered as a source of resources or development Space. The country has a coastline of 710 km and a sea area of 118,813 sq km, which are more than two-thirds of the total landmass of Bangladesh. According to many maritime experts, there is an immense potential for achieving economic growth through the extraction and sustainable use of resources deposited in the vast sea areas of Bangladesh. About 90% of foreign trade in Bangladesh is being transported by sea and about 64% of the world's container shipments transported throughout Asia. To ensure a fair and large scale share of the maritime transport trade and to face the challenges of about 15 per cent growth rate of this trade, we must be adequately prepared with infrastructural development, advanced technology and necessary training.



Marine Fisheries Resources

It is a natural reality of the coastal people that a large part of them are economically dependent on fishery resources. About 17 millions people of Bangladesh are directly or indirectly reliant on fishery resources, which is about 11% of the total population of the country. According to the statistics of the financial year 2017-18, out of about 4.3 million metric tons of fishery resources, only 0.6 million metric tons of fish were caught in the sea area of Bangladesh. The matter of more concern is the ability to catch fish up to a depth of 40 metres only in the coastal region, which in many cases has a direct destructive impact on the valuable fishery resources, biodiversity and the environment. In order to increase the fishing capability in the deep sea including Tuna, it is necessary to ensure Fish Stock Assessment as well as the use of advanced technology and essential training. In addition, considering the success of aquaculture in Bangladesh, there are abundant opportunities to develop marine fisheries resources through innovation and strategies like mariculture, cage culture in the vast coastal areas of Bangladesh.

Marine Non-Living Resources

According to expert, sea area adjacent to Bangladesh is potential in oil, gas and valuable mineral resources like uranium, thorium, etc. In addition to heavy minerals such as Limonite, Garnet, Colemanite, Zircon, Rutil and Magnetite there is a large amount of clay used as raw materials for making cement, which requires further research and necessary action. We have a long history of shipbuilding, and the industry is flourishing again. By

developing this industry, along with reviving our heritage, we can aspire to keep the sustainable growth of the economy of Bangladesh.

Maritime Tourism

Needless to say, the importance of the tourism industry is immense for the development and economic dynamism of any country. Bangladesh is a land of natural beauty. It has long fascinating beaches, hills, mangrove forest Sundarbans, scenic coral island, vast wildlife, glorious history and colourful culture. We must enrich the tourism industry by exploiting the current emerging image of enormous possibilities. To advance our tourism industry, it requires the development of the necessary infrastructure, improvement in the quality of service, branding Bangladesh as a tourist-friendly country, proper hospitality, training and above all presentation of the tourism industry efficiently as a product.

Blue Energy

Let's discuss the Blue Energy option for Bangladesh. Researches are underway on the possibility of getting naturally occurring Blue Energy after environment-friendly Green Energy. Steps need to be taken to assess the feasibility of Blue Energy production by utilising high currents, tides, waves and winds in the Maheshkhali channel, Sandwip channel, Hatia, Karnaphuli estuary and other coastal areas of Bangladesh. Many experts believe that Blue Energy will save valuable foreign currency, and the environment will be pollution-free.

Mine Biotechnology

When look at other developed countries, we see that many of them including China, are extracting precious medicine supplies, healthcare, skin-care ingredients, bioactive compounds, nutrition supplement from the sea resources. Production of new generation antibiotics, cancer treatment medicine and even bone replacement from sea resources are actively researched worldwide. Therefore, to get significant results, we also urgently need mass awareness, research, proper maritime education and training as well as pragmatic steps in the production and processing of maritime products. In this way, we must never forget that the sea is the source of our living. It gives the oxygen we need for life. It absorbs carbon-di-oxide, transfers heat and changes the weather. Sea fosters biodiversity. Therefore, we need to increase our maritime awareness and ensure proper pollution management in coastal areas to protect the future of maritime Bangladesh.

Concluding Remarks

In order to continue the sustainable development of the country after the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to increase research on the Blue Economy. Coordinated planning or Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) is needed to ensure resource exploration and sustainable exploitation with maximum economic output. For the sustainable use of these resources, we seriously need to consider the concerns of biodiversity conservation, marine pollution control and improve maritime connectivity. Besides,

prevention of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, drugs, human and arms trafficking should be addressed with appropriate attention from a maritime security perspective.

There is no alternative of developing strong security forces and the necessary infrastructures in order to ensure the freedom of navigation at sea, safeguard the exploration and exploitation of the Blue Economy, and to meet the future challenges. If necessary, an overall ocean policy can be formulated with the cooperation of friendly neighboring countries. Strong division like 'Maritime Resource Division' under the Hon'ble Prime Minister or a separate ministry, like 'Ministry of Maritime Resources' may be formed to coordinate this maritime leap well. The development of the maritime sector and sustainable extraction of marine resources are being given utmost importance. Needless to say, development of necessary infrastructure, technology and training as well as honesty, devotion, ethics, values and above all patriotism will work as catalysts or influencers towards peace and prosperity. People of Bangladesh love to dream. They dream for a smooth and sustainable transition to a middle-income nation on the golden jubilee of independence and subsequently a developed nation by ensuring maximum utilization of maritime resources under the bold and far-sighted plan of the visionary government.

Writer: Research Director (Science & Technology), BIMRAD