

Bangladesh Marine Academy Barishal- A Stepping Stone for Human Resource Development

Capt S M Atiqur Rahman, (G), NUP, psc, BN



Introduction

Bangladesh is a small country with limited resources, but has a large population. The country has emerged as a middle-income country recently. Remarkable positive changes have occurred in Bangladeshi people's lifestyle, including food, culture, education, profession, and so on. We now need a sustainable economy to maintain and develop further. Earning foreign remittance is one of the important aspects of a sustainable economy. Bangladesh has been expanding its human resources in RMG, IT, food processing, assembling, etc. sectors for a long time. Recently, the government has also broadened the horizon of shipbuilding, infrastructure development for seafarers, and international shipping in the maritime sector. Merchant Marine is a global profession, and Bangladesh has long experience in producing competent mariners and employ them in the profession. This sector can positively impact

our national economy by successfully increasing ratings and officers and engaging them in the international arena.

Bangladesh Marine Academy, Barishal is a government-owned educational institution. The honorable Prime Minister of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the academy on 06 May 2021. The academy is situated on 10 acres of land on the western bank of river Kirtonkhola in the district of Barishal. It has modern training facilities, including accommodation for 250 students; facilities are sufficient to train the students of both the Nautical and Engineering departments. The aim of establishing the new marine academy is to reduce the unemployment problem through human resource development, spread maritime education among Bangladeshi people, prepare competent seafarers and earn foreign currency through their employment.

Prospect of Merchant Mariners

Bangladesh is a small country, but it has a large population. Most of the people are literate, but they are non-skilled. Therefore, a large population remains unemployed. So far, we have supplied mostly non-skilled human resources worldwide. On the contrary, producing competent mariners has been a proven sector in Bangladesh since its independence. Bangladeshi mariners are reputed worldwide and compete with the mariners of top maritime nations like Russia, Ukraine, India, etc. Moreover, this sector and profession are respected worldwide.

It is well known that 90% of world trade passes through the sea and is an ever-increasing sector. Therefore, more and more mariners will be required with time. The vacancies for competent mariners are there, and it is likely to increase soon (Figure 1). If we can prepare more mariners, they will definitely be absorbed and keep Bangladesh in a dominant position in this sector. High salary is also an attractive feature of marine employment (Figure 2). Optimum exploitation of this situation may promote this sector as the highest foreign remittances earning source for Bangladesh.

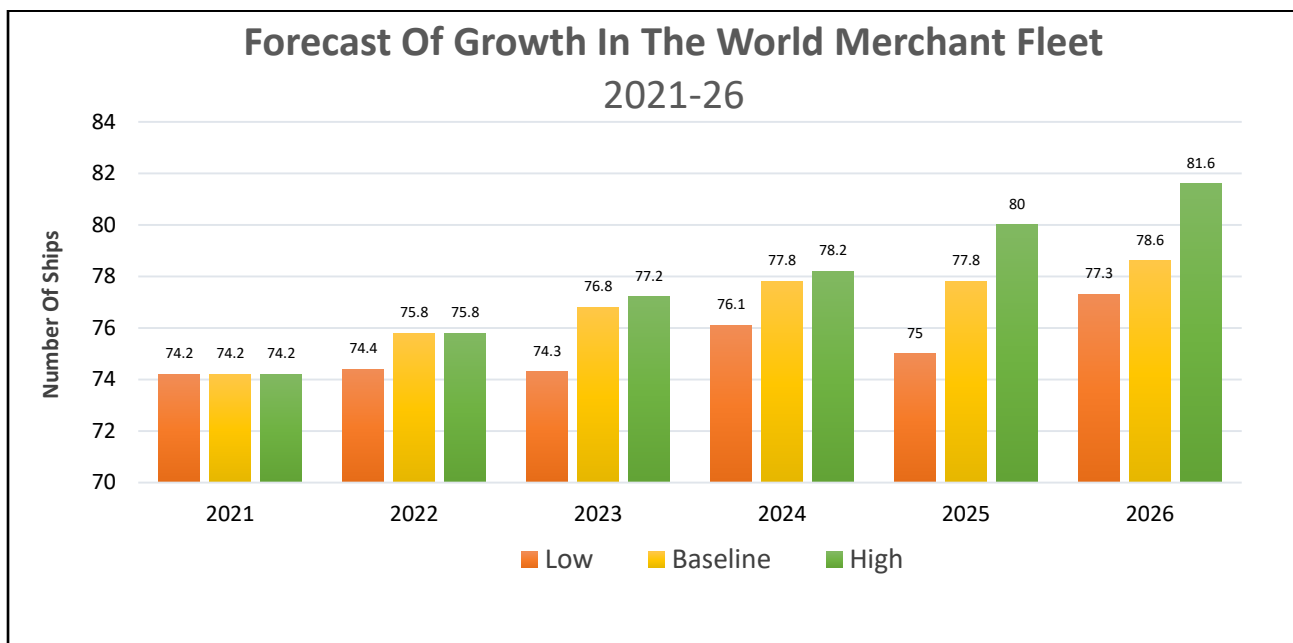


Figure 1: Forecast of Growth in the World Merchant Fleet

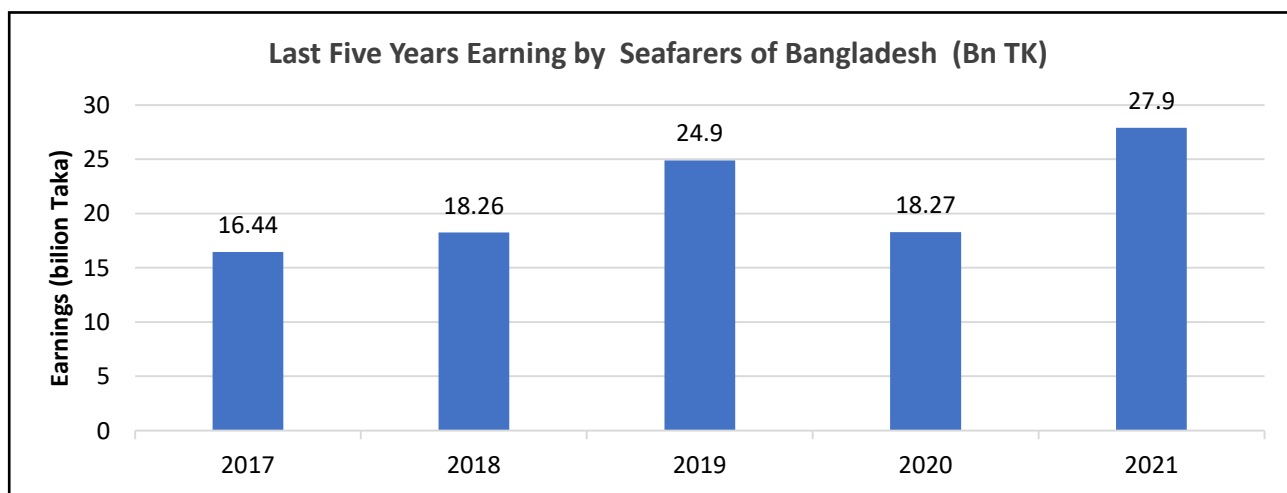


Figure 2: Last Five Years Earning by Seafarers of Bangladesh (BDT)

The marine profession is challenging and keeps a mariner long time away from friends and family. People from developed countries like Canada, the UK, other European countries, etc., are losing interest in the marine profession. So, a vacancy already exists in this profession. Moreover, Russia-Ukraine conflict has a catalyst effect for increasing the vacancies since both Russia and Ukraine were important contributors in this sector. So, the shortage of mariners will be more acute in the world market. Bangladesh should take immediate and appropriate steps to grab the vacancies.

Considering the security perspective, Bangladesh should become self-sufficient in maintaining its sea lines of communication also. Recently, the Bay of Bengal has also become a popular ground of diplomacy for the superpowers. The scenario is further compounded due to the recent geopolitical conflicts. In this situation, the sustenance of Bangladesh has become more vulnerable than ever. Therefore, it has become vital for us to take immediate steps to keep our sea lines of communication open constantly. Self-sufficiency in terms of merchant ships and seafarers will ensure better control of sea-borne import and export. It can also save a lot of our foreign currency in peacetime.

Historical Perspective

Just after the independence of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman understood the importance of sea-borne trade. He took on some important projects in this regard. Firstly, he cleared Kamaphuli Channel to make the main international seaport of Bangladesh functional. Secondly, he increased the number of Bangladeshi flag carriers. Thirdly, he started the Bangladesh Marine Academy to create its own seafarers.

History is repeated during the second decade of the twenty-first century Bangladesh government has established four new marine academies to increase the number of Bangladeshi seafarers. The effort to increase

the Bangladeshi flagships is a priority project now. The number of seaports is growing significantly in Bangladesh. All the concerned agencies related to the sea-borne trade are on their toes to become self-sufficient. In short, merchant marine is one of the focused sectors of Bangladesh to grow its economy and achieve sustenance as a middle-income country.

Training System

HSC passed trainable students join at the Marine academy for regimental training. There are two tangible gains for the students from their four years of training. Firstly, they get a Certificate of Competency (COC), which makes them a professional marine officer. Secondly, they get a graduate degree from BSMRMU. Initial three years (1-6 semesters) study, which is common for both professional and academic purposes, is shown in the central column in Fig-3. However, the third year is basically onboard practical training on the ocean-going ship. During the fourth year, the students again come back to the academy. This time, they simultaneously undergo preparatory courses for a professional examination, i.e, COC Exam, shown in yellow color and 7 & 8th semesters study for the remaining credits of the graduation degree, which is shown in blue color in the same figure. The academy provides full regimental training. The academic curricula also includes food and accommodation for each cadet and ensures a full-time stay inside the campus. The cadets remain under observation 24/7 (hour/day) by competent and experienced mariners. The basic training objectives are:

- a. Transform Each Cadet as Global Citizen.
- b. Providing Traditional Academic Training (both theory and practical).
- c. Providing Practical Oriented Professional Training.

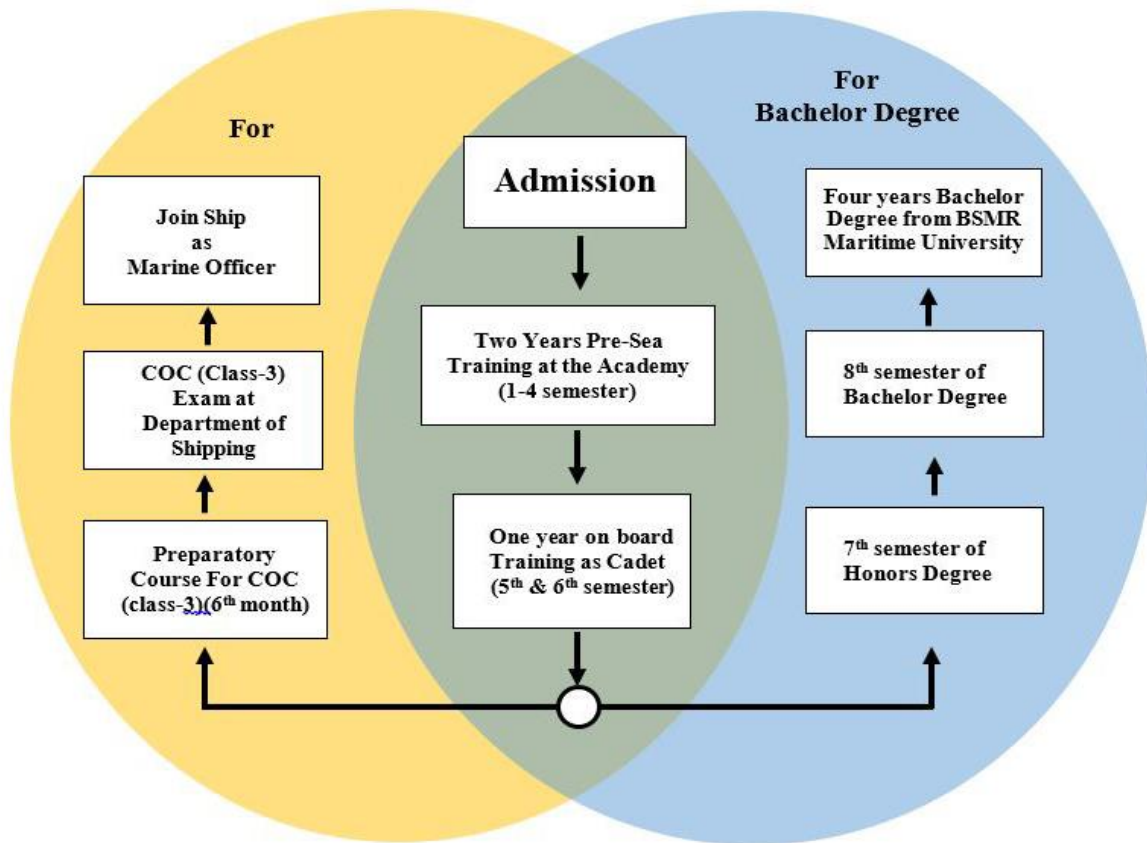


Figure 3: Four Years Training Program

Challenges

The demand for mariners increases or decreases with the international shipping trade which sometimes have a negative effect in this profession. Internal competition among the maritime agencies of Bangladesh is another challenge. Bangladesh is a littoral country and, as such, a maritime nation. Despite having a huge opportunity, Bangladesh currently has a small maritime community. Ministry of Shipping, Bangladesh Navy, Coast Guard, Marine institutions, Sea ports, River ports, and related business communities are the main stakeholders in this regard. The maritime communities should unite and work together to expand the community and thereby derive maximum benefit from this sector of the community and Bangladesh. Bureaucratic complexities are another hurdle in this sector along with lack of transparency of the manning agents. Good governance and transparency in this sector are expected to maximize our benefits out of this sector.

Conclusion

Bangladesh will be elevated to a middle-income country within few years. The lifestyle of the general mass has improved a lot. Now, we need a sustainable economy to maintain the standard achieved. Maintaining economic growth steadily, we must explore new sectors of earning foreign remittance and ensure constant export and import. So far, earnings of our foreign remittance were mainly dependent on the export of agricultural products, RMG products, and supplying of non-skilled human resources. We have reached almost the peak in these three sectors and further expansion is very difficult as these depend on other countries' decisions. On the contrary, there is a huge shortage of skilled human resources worldwide, and Bangladesh can exploit this prospect. We have a large population and mostly, they are literate. Now, if we can develop specific skills among our people, they will appear as resources of Bangladesh.

Worldwide, there is a shortage of human resources in the marine sector, and so far, Bangladeshi mariners have earned a lot of reputation. All the basic requirements are in existence for further expansion in this sector. At the operational level, we are to prepare more and more competent mariners and facilitate them for their employment. The government of Bangladesh has correctly identified the prospect and introduced the foundation by increasing the marine

academies in Bangladesh. Now, the marine community of Bangladesh should work harmoniously to contribute the maximum to the sustenance economy of Bangladesh.

**Writer: Captain S M Atiqur Rahman, (G), NUP, psc, BN is presently serving as Commandant, Bangladesh Marine Academy Barishal.
Email: atiquerana@gmail.com**