

# Need of Strengthening Fisheries Governance to Prevent IUU Fishing in Bangladesh

Affat Khanam Ritika



The delimitation of the maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal (BOB) has opened a new economic frontier for Bangladesh. Bangladesh resolved maritime area disputes with Myanmar in 2012 and India in 2014. To utilize its unexplored marine resources, Bangladesh is already taking initiatives to flourish its Blue Economy. Before the exploitation of marine resources, sustainable management should be kept in mind. Otherwise, long-term resource growth and economic benefit are not possible. The well-being and security of sea raises worries that incorporate marine shipping accidents, unlawful fishing, piracy, smuggling, etc., which are considered dangerous to oceanic interests. Generally, Ocean Governance is that part of that which accumulates all the policies, actions, and affairs regarding maritime issues for the sustainable use of the ocean. So, ocean governance is a system of "government" in which formal and informal rules would have a place, the presence of old and new structures which consider resources management, and

stakeholders benefit from solving conflicts regarding access to the ocean.

Over the last decade, Bangladesh has focus on the sustainable use of ocean. Though the country lacks an appropriate ocean governance mechanism or marine policy, few government bodies, NGOs, and private authorities are working on this. They are implementing national acts on marine environmental protection in Bangladesh to integrate ocean governance and resource management. From the marine fisheries aspect, The Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones Act of 1974 was the first instrument to declare Bangladeshi territorial waters and maritime zones in the BOB. The Marine Fisheries Ordinance 1983 was enacted as the first comprehensive legal instrument for exploiting, conserving and managing national marine fisheries resources. The Marine Fisheries Ordinance 1983 was replaced by the Marine Fisheries Act 2020 with some modifications for better management targets. Bangladesh has a

National Fisheries Policy 1998 with specific regulations on fish species. The Bangladesh Merchant Shipping Ordinance of 1983 is a comprehensive law for the maritime shipping sector participating in the seagoing vessel registration. The Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act of 1995 (Amendment 2000, 2002) and The Environment Conservation Rules of 1997 are the central government branches dedicated to environmental conservation and protection and controlling and mitigating environmental pollution. The Coast Guard Act 2016 specified the duties of Bangladesh coast guard for protecting the marine environment and maritime safety.

The threats are always considered as constraints in successful ocean management within the Ocean Governance mechanism. Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing is one of the threats affecting ocean governance. Ocean Governance in the BoB has tremendous economic and strategic significance. In most Indian Ocean countries, illegally caught fish is not landed or processed in the country in whose waters. Presently IUU fishing incidents are seriously affecting the economy and transnational security of the littorals of BOB. According to the IUU fishing index, Bangladesh is in a moderate position, and actions should be taken to combat IUU activities. IUU activities not only affect the socio-economic opportunities, but also seriously threaten the ecosystem. In severe cases, many commercially important species are extinct due to overfishing and destructive fishing methods. Generally, in Bangladesh, IUU fishing is practiced by local commercial and artisanal fishing vessels and by foreign fishing vessels. IUU fishing by foreign vessels has recently been a significant concern of Bangladesh's fishing community. Foreign fishing vessels are not allowed to capture fish within the Bangladesh EEZ. It is against the law to send off fishing vessels in Bangladeshi

waters. Our local small-scale fishers always complain that the foreign vessels involved in IUU fishing are more organized and advanced. Their indiscriminate fishing during the fishing ban period destroys all the management success accomplished by Bangladesh Government for the sustainable growth of marine resources. IUU fishermen are the riskiest riders to the sea. They cause severe threats to the social, economic, and environmental benefits of the coastal and marine fisheries through exclusively dangerous fishing practices. Not only that, but our local fishers also promote IUU fishing through illegal activities and violating Government's rules respectively. Local fishing without a license, fishing in a protected area, using prohibited gear, exceeding a quota, or fishing for prohibited species are all examples of IUU fishing in Bangladesh.

Ocean Governance and Maritime threats like IUU fishing activities are inversely related. Illegal activities accelerate disobeying Government actions and leave the ocean under uncertainty. Due to IUU fishing, the accurate stock assessment, management mechanism, environmental destruction, biodiversity loss, and loss in business by local communities can happen, which is against the Governance intention.

Our small-scale fisher community alleged that almost 80% of the total catch of the BoB comes from IUU fishing, whereas Bangladesh is the worse sufferer as Bangladesh has little capacity to catch in the deep sea. In the past, the sea was out of supervision, and activities were indiscriminate. However, in 2019, Department of Fisheries (DOF) has prepared a National Plan of Action to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing. Bangladesh has become a member of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), which provides Bangladesh with the right to catch fish in the deep sea. Furthermore, Under the Merchant Shipping Ordinance

1983, Bangladesh mechanized fishing vessels over 15 net tons must be registered. The management and implementation of these registrations are the responsibility of the Mercantile Marine Department (MMD). But the present Marine Fisheries Act 2020 defines that all vessels require registering once and obtaining an annual safety certificate. In addition to monitoring and controlling the number of fishing vessels, MMD and Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (MoFL) ensures that fishing vessels cannot obtain a valid registration certificate without prior authorization for the building or importation of the vessel. Further, a fishing vessel seeking to reflag to Bangladesh and receive an industrial vessel registration must provide proof of de-registration and undergo a background check by the Marine Fisheries Office for any IUU fishing history before approval by MMD. All those activities discourage any illegal activities in Bangladesh's marine area.

Under the Sustainable Coastal and Marine Fisheries Project of the World Bank, for the very first time, Automatic Identification Systems (AIS), Global Systems for Mobile Communication (GSM) in the artisanal fishing vessel, and Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) in industrial trawler have been started in Bangladesh as a pilot project to control

IUU fishing. Also, to get accurate stock assessment data, e-reporting system has been under process. Hopefully, in January 2023 the pilot project will be started for e-reporting and vessel monitoring. In line with that total vessel counting survey has been started under this project. Bangladesh has already been a member of the Bay of Bengal Inter-Governmental Organization (BOBP-IGO). It is a regional organization to enhance cooperation among member countries that provide technical and management advisory services for sustainable coastal fisheries development and management in the BoB region. For proper inspection and control of IUU fishing, we have only one inspection site in Patenga. Under the Sustainable Coastal and Marine Fisheries Project, a total set up of 17 inspection sites has been planned all around the country. To synchronize the joint fishing ban period to avoid IUU fishing, Bangladesh has proposed to India through the joint working group. In Marine Fisheries Act 2020, IUU fishing has been prioritized in a separate section. So, Bangladesh has taken so many steps to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing. Such action will accelerate successful ocean governance, resolving all the issues regarding IUU activities in the near future.

**Writer: Afifat Khanam Ritika is a Research Officer, BIMRAD.**  
**Email: [ibnatritika@yahoo.com](mailto:ibnatritika@yahoo.com)**