

# National Blue Economy Initiative in Bangladesh: The Driving Motor of Long-Awaited Maritime Development

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## Introduction

Bangladesh is a maritime nation, both geographically and historically. The Six Point Movement (1966), and Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones Act (1974) testify to the efforts for maritime jurisdiction and security before and after the birth of this country. However, soon after the sad demise of the Father of the Nation, the maritime perspective of this newborn country went into oblivion, and Bangladesh has long been neglecting the enormous potential that remained hidden beneath the seas.

Nevertheless, Bangladesh has achieved immense progress in the last two decades, and all economic and

socio-cultural indicators have testified to its graduation out of the Least Developed Country (LDC) group. To become a developed country in line with the 'Bangladesh Govt's Vision 2041', Bangladesh needs to accelerate her economic progress without detrimental effects on her environment. With over 167 million population increasing rapidly within a tiny land area of 1,47,570 sq km, the demand for food, energy, and other resources has been putting much strain on limited land-based resources. Therefore, sustainable maritime economic activities can be the game-changer to turn Bangladesh into the 'Prosperous Golden Bengal', dreamt by the Father of the Nation.

'Blue economy' is a concept of sustainable development framework of spatial planning that integrates conservation and sustainable use of living resources, including energy production and development of the marine transport sector. The core of the Blue Economy concept is the decoupling of socio-economic development from environmental degradation, as opposed to the usual 'brown scenario' of high energy, low employment, and industrialized development models.

Soon after Bangladesh's maritime dispute settlement, Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina presided over a meeting on August 20, 2014 with all maritime stakeholders and formulated a national strategic blue economy plan bringing all blue economic activities under one umbrella: National Blue Economy Initiative (NBEI). On January 05, 2017, National Blue Economy Cell (NBEC) was formally inaugurated at Energy and Mineral Resource Division, and Petro-Bangla was assigned to coordinate these activities as the 'Lead Organisation'. Since then, all concerned ministries/ departments/ organizations and related maritime stakeholders quarterly update NBEC about their current activities and future planning.

### **National Blue Economy Initiative**

The main objective of Bangladesh's NBEI is to promote smart, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth and employment opportunities through sustainable maritime activities in the short, medium, and long term. NBEI specifically aims to promote synergies and foster framework conditions to

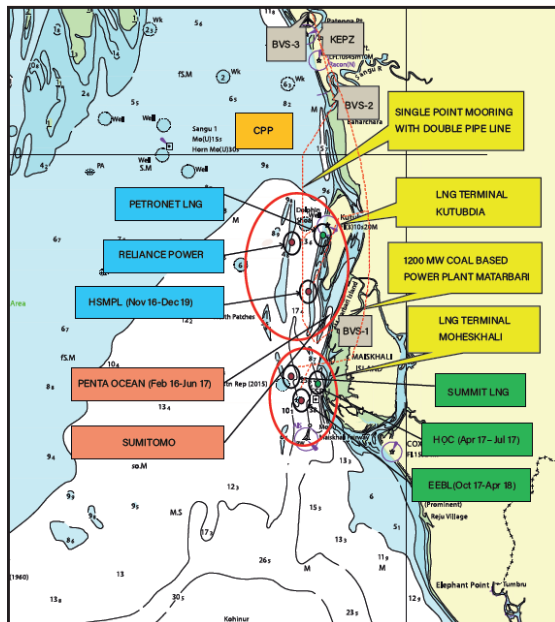
support maritime economic activities and their value chains. So far, twenty-six maritime economic functions have been identified, among which fishery, maritime trade, shipping, energy, tourism, coastal protection, and maritime surveillance are worth mentioning.

**Ongoing NBEI Projects.** The ongoing projects under NBEI are:

**Single Point Mooring with Double Pipeline.** The construction of two separate pipes for crude & diesel oil transfer from offshore platforms has successfully been completed. China Petroleum Pipeline Engineering Company Ltd. worked as Engineering Procurement and Construction contractor, while Germany-based ILF Consulting Engineers appointed as a consultant. The pipelines are placed west of Maheskhali; the storage tanks and pump stations are on Moheskhali island. Ships will station at single-point mooring (27m depth), and LPG will be stored inside tanks. Then it will be transferred to the eastern refinery through a 70km offshore and 34km onshore pipeline. The SPM will unload imported crude oil and finished products in 72 hours which used to take 11 days to unload 100,000 DWT (Deadweight) tankers. The project started in November 2015; trial run has already been completed and is expected to be fully operational soon.

**Matarbari 1200 MW Power Plant.** The 1,200 MW coal-based power plant at Matarbari is expected to be in service by 2024. The artificial channel has been dredged up to 8km (breadth - 250m, depth - 18m) and up gradation of jetty facilities have been completed.

The formal inauguration of the deep sea port is scheduled for 2026, but 112 cargo ships have already arrived at Matarbari jetty in the last two years.



**2D/3D Seismic Survey.** Bangladesh Govt has signed contracts with foreign companies for 3D deep sea seismic surveys to explore oil and gas. In the rest of our coastal area, non-exclusive multi-client 2D seismic survey is being carried out. On completion, Bangladesh is expected to have seismic data of her entire maritime area, which will expedite oil/gas exploration.

**Construction of LNG Terminals.** Two floating LNG terminals will be built off Kutubdia and Moheshkhali and will be subsequently connected to the national gas line. To alleviate the country's energy shortage, the govt is set to establish two land-based liquefied natural gas terminals alongside the floating terminal. The sites being considered for the land-based LNG terminals are in Kutubdia, Moheshkhali, Payra, and other places.

**Shipbuilding, Ship Recycling.** The fastest-growing shipbuilding industry contributes significantly to the national economy by providing ships and marine equipment. Similarly, recycling old ships provides scrap steel, around 65-75% of local steel demand.

**Future Projects.** The following NBEI projects are expected to start operations shortly:

**Coastal Shipping with India, Myanmar.** Bangladesh has signed coastal container shipping agreements with India and Myanmar to carry goods directly from/to these two countries for reducing cost, congestion, and pollution. While coastal shipping with India is already in operation, it might take a while to inaugurate coastal shipping with Myanmar due to the ongoing Rohingya issue.

**Coastal, Cruise Tourism.** Coastal tourism is the primary source of foreign exchange earners for half of LDCs and one of the top five export earners for many developing countries. Having the world's longest unbroken sandy beach, largest mangrove forest, and unique culture and heritage, Bangladesh has the potential to make sustainable coastal tourism the driving motor of her economy. Therefore, Bangladesh Govt. has taken many steps to promote coastal and cruise tourism, e.g. Sabrang Tourism Park at Teknaf, Eco-Tourism activities at Sonadia, etc.

**Fishery and Marine Aquatics.** The marine geology of the Bay of Bengal is influenced by the continuous flow of soft water through the rivers, high concentrations of bio-organic materials, and abundant plankton off

the Sundarbans. These sea resources, ecosystems, and ecological processes provide immense opportunities for the fishery industry, offering us protein, medicine, leather, beauty care, and many essential products.

**Tuna and Pelagic Fishing.** Bangladesh Govt. has taken a 'Pilot Project on Tuna and Similar Pelagic Fishing in the Deep Sea' as part of Blue Economy initiative. However, despite numerous attempts, till now this sector could not attract the necessary private-sector investment.

**Mid-Term Projects.** Following NBEI projects are expected to take place in the future:

**Upgradation of Ports.** Sea Ports are the gateways for all oceanic activities. The proposed Matarbari deep-sea port will facilitate numerous activities like worldwide shipping, coastal transportation, tourist ships, fishing activities, offshore oil/gas exploration, marine mining, etc. Meanwhile, Chittagong Port is constructing Bay Terminal to expand its activities.

**Exploration of Oil, Gas, and Minerals.** Fossil fuel is the leading global energy source and will remain so long. Exploring offshore oil and gas involving specialized support ships will ensure energy supply for various economic activities. Oceanic minerals can be explored as polymetallic Sulphur, ferromanganese crusts, manganese nodules, and rare earth elements.

**Renewable Energy.** Wind, current, tidal stream, wave, and other marine-based renewable energy can offer carbon-free clean energy supplies and

employment opportunities for coastal communities. Bangladesh is exploring the possibilities of harnessing renewable clean energy in coastal areas.

**Land Accretion.** Around two billion tons of sediments carried by the rivers are lost yearly in the BoB. Every year, Bangladesh gained an average of 20 sq km along the coast, totaling 592 sq km of new land in the three decades through natural deposition (almost double the size of the Maldives).

## **Conclusion**

Bangladesh has achieved laudable progress in all socio-economic indicators and is designed to become a developed country by 2041 under 'Vision 2041'. To achieve this, the country needs a holistic approach to accelerate national development, lift the remaining people out of poverty, ensure food and energy security, ameliorate environmental and ocean health, and thus, save the planet from the devastating consequences of climate change and natural calamities. Therefore, the Govt. of Bangladesh has announced a remarkable shift from the traditional brown economy to NBEI for sustainable development and employment generation ushering the much-needed economic prosperity without detrimental environmental effects.

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