

The Sustainability of Ocean: Protector Needs Protection



We often blatantly ignore the precautions about irreversible damage to us, whether it's about our life or our environment. For example, "Smoking kills"- does this quote on the cigarette packet refrain us from smoking? Again, the death of millions of people due to Covid worldwide, a terrible experience the world has ever faced, couldn't stop us from doing careless acts.

The consequences of the Dengue outbreak could not be a lesson for us about maintaining hygiene. We use tonnes of non-biodegradable polythene bags daily and throw them into nature, acknowledging the possible environmental impacts.

However, we can neither ignore our life nor the nature where we live. Sea is one of our great natural resources, which is also considered one of the main stems of economic growth.

'Blue Economy', the maritime pillar of our future strategy, conceptualizes sustainable economic achievement using ocean resources to preserve the health of the ocean ecosystem. Exploitation and exploration of marine resources and ocean-oriented activities contribute significantly to the economy and livelihood of millions of people.

Often, the exploitation of resources occurs at an unsustainable rate, resulting in a deteriorated ecosystem. The oceans, which protect us from the adverse effects of natural and human perturbations, need our attention now.

Aquatic pollution has become a worldwide concern recently. Metals discharged from mining, industrial and agricultural activities, shipping, fossil fuels, and urbanization pollute water and disturb aquatic life processes, their abundance and distribution.

Often we ignore it, but unregistered vessels are the most unexpected source of pollution. Tonnes of plastic wastes enter the ocean annually and persist for hundreds to thousands of years. Do we ever consider how these plastics pose a severe hazard to the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, biodiversity and human health?

Multiple utilizations arise multiple vulnerabilities in the coastal zone of Bangladesh. Pollution alters the soil's properties and reduces crop production.

The layer of oil released from ships and fishing boats impedes sunlight penetration, photosynthesis and carbon sequestration and, as a result, increases the global temperature.

The non-biodegradable metals are redistributed throughout the water column and accumulate in sediments, constituting the long-term metal contamination source to the food web because of desorption and remobilization. diverse and complex food network predicts a stable and healthy ecosystem. Pollutants eliminate sensitive native species or sometimes reduce species abundance causing reproductive impairment and diseases. Thus, the marine ecosystem is losing its diversity, impacting the whole functional integrity. Marine pollution causes eutrophication, which eventually results in the hypoxic condition of seawater.

It may be one of the reasons for the creation of the Dead Zone in the ocean. It may also enhance the intensification of the Oxygen Minimum Zone, adversely affecting the ecosystem and coastal livelihood.

Unfortunately, pollution declines marine production and obstacles to their life processes. Heavy metals binding with the biological compounds disturbs their normal physiologies. It also changes the texture and quality of fish and shellfish. These toxic substances do not stop their journey here.

Aquatic animals have a considerable aptitude for bioaccumulation and bio sorption of trace metals. Micro plastics and heavy metals use fishes and shellfishes as pathways to enter the human body.

Therefore, acute exposure to heavy metals damages or reduces the central nervous system and mental function and damages humans' blood cells, kidneys, liver, lungs, and other vital organs. What is more alarming is that these micro-plastics easily penetrate our bodies and provide a comfortable environment for bacteria with high antibiotic resistance to thrive. This might be a triggering fact for the increasing number of cancer patients globally. This is how we get trapped in our ignorant acts.

Human lives are intertwined with the waters. Our economy greatly depends on the exploitation of marine lives. Millions of coastal people worldwide live on marine resources and ocean-oriented activities. We depend on the Bay of Bengal, which governs our economy by providing different goods and services.

The sustainable economic growth of a nation depends on how sustainably it manages its resources. Unfortunately, we have made this water endangered by our irresponsible acts. If we fail to take necessary measures immediately, the country may suffer from irreversible humanitarian and economic losses.

The recent declaration about the exemption of 5 percent supplementary duty on polythene bags may question the stance on Sustainable Development Goal-14. Here statements regarding environmental protection and a business-friendly approach may contradict each other. The incentive for once-banned polythene production may make our environment more vulnerable.

Polythene was banned in 2002 in Bangladesh and is still being used due to the lack of law enforcement. A pilot project was also taken up for the commercial production of an eco-friendly golden bag or jute bag, and the project's duration has expired. We are yet to see its remarkable success.

Retaking the project and introducing jute bags in the global market will help us to boost our economy besides reducing plastic pollution.

The ocean is a fluid environment. None of the coastal countries can deny the impact of marine pollution. This global issue threatens the sustainability of marine ecosystems' natural and socio-economic goods and services.

Bangladesh needs to enact a comprehensive "Marine Pollution Prevention Law" to strengthen the existing consistency among the national laws. Besides implementing the national policies, regional initiatives should be taken following the global agreement to control transboundary river pollution.

Our unconscious actions are making the largest storehouse of biodiversity into a garbage carrier. The ocean is occupied by millions of tonnes of polythene bags and plastic bottles. It's we who are responsible for making our oceans trash bin. The blame game should not persist only among the owners of industries, factories, ships, and boats for unexpected environmental disorders.

We must count on ourselves first to protect our environment, save our ocean, and secure future generations. We should not take advantage of slack enforcement of the law. The awareness campaigns and individual willpower should be the main parameters to achieve our green ocean strategy.

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