

Tuna Fisheries: Present Scenario of Bangladesh

Afifat Khanam Ritika



Tunas are among the largest, highly valued, most popular and commercially important (Collette 1983) in the international market, primarily found in temperate and tropical oceans around the world. Tuna accounts for one-third of the global marine fisheries exports (DoF). A significant proportion of the world's fishery products come from Tuna species. It has been found that 67% of the world's tuna catches are made in the Pacific Ocean by Japanese and American fleets, 12% in the Indian Ocean, and 12% in the Atlantic. The Tuna resources of the Indian Ocean are the 2nd largest globally and significantly contribute to food security throughout the region. Neighbouring countries like India and Sri Lanka have developed deep-sea fishing capacity and earned substantial foreign currencies from Tuna fisheries.

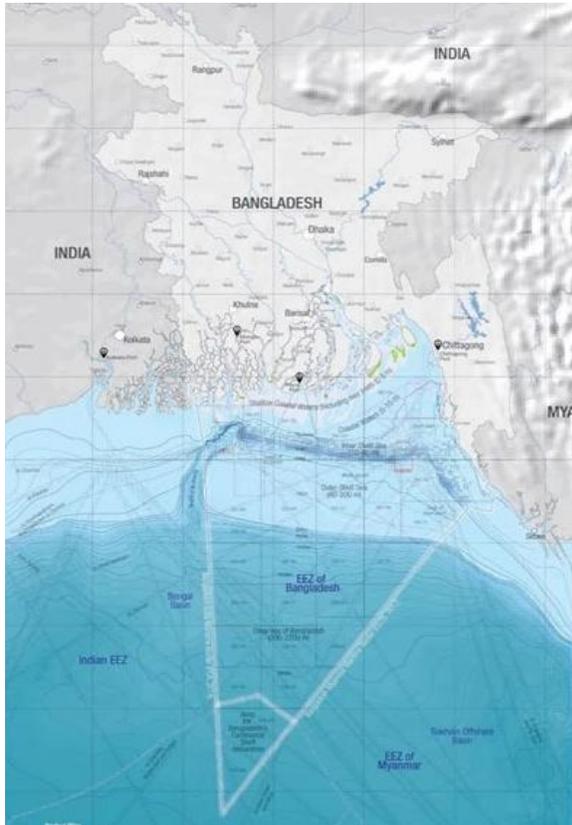
Tuna and Tuna-like other highly migratory deep pelagic sea species have become a high concern on the priority list of the government of Bangladesh for a few years, especially after the successful demarcation of maritime boundary with the neighbours. This leads to opening up the access of Bangladeshi fishers to the Area Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) of high seas. Many studies have ensured a vast prospect of Tuna fishery in Bangladesh. However, the Bangladesh-Thai joint venture surveys mentioned an excellent abundance of large pelagic, i.e. Tuna & Tuna-like fishes and sharks in Bangladesh marine water (Rahman, 1993). Not only that,

Tuna is one of the dominant groups of migratory pelagic fishes in the EEZ of Bangladesh. Sometimes a minimal amount of Mackerel or Tuna family-like Eastern Little Tuna, locally known as 'Bom Maittya', 'Long Tail Tuna' known as 'Kawua' and 'Bullet Tuna', locally known as 'Bullet' are found in the marine water of Bangladesh jurisdiction (Marine Fisheries Department). The 'Eastern Little Tuna' with an average weight of 4-5 kg, is more valuable than others in the local markets of the greater Chattogram region.

However, there is no specific Tuna fishery in Bangladesh. Tunas are bycatch of midwater industrial trawlers and artisanal gillnetters primarily operated in South-Eastern & North-eastern parts of the Bay of Bengal at Cox's Bazaar area. Statistically, in Bangladesh, gillnet and long lines fishing contribute 59.58% and 2.21% to our marine catch's total production. Tuna caught by long lines contributes less than 0.5%, and in gill nets fishing, less than 1.0% to the total catch value. In industrial production, tuna fish contributed only 2.22% (DoF, 2012-2013, Adhir et al, 2016). Bangladesh has a multi-trophic and multi-species fish capture trend, but no specific tuna fishery is solely involved. Simultaneously, few studies have been conducted on Tuna Fisheries in Bangladesh. No stock assessment data is available due to a lack of technological advancement.

The prospect of Tuna fishing in the Bay of Bengal is dangling in the balance owing to a lack of interest of licensee firms in bringing trawlers to catch the commercially important fish. According to the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, from April 2016, the government started giving licenses for exploring Tuna and other pelagic fishes beyond the 200-metre depth of the Bay and in international waters. It issued licenses to 17 firms for longline and purse seine fishing till April 2018. None of the firms had driven trawlers till the end of 2019, despite the passing of one and a half years. There is a massive gap in Tuna fishery outline in the Bay of Bengal that discourages going for Tuna fishing. The requirement for investing a large amount of capital, lack of data on Tuna stocks, data on available species and study on Tuna fishing grounds have kept licensee firms away from bringing the vessels blindly into the sea.

In an interview, Planning Minister MA Mannan (New Age, 2020) stated that the Department of Fisheries (DoF) had made at least half a dozen attempts to send private sector fishers to the deep sea, where only Tuna and other pelagic fish are available. But the attempts come fruitless in the end. Many reasons have been identified, including the vessel size and structure. The vessels used for Tuna fishing are wholly different and more prominent in size from the wooden trawlers used by the fishers in Bangladesh. Those wooden boats with shallow capacity can mainly go within 80-100 kilometres of the sea and are engaged primarily in catching Hilsa. Besides this, training facilities and experts are rare among the fisher community for deep-sea fishing practice in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has signed an agreement with the European Union (EU) for sustainable Tuna fishing in Bangladesh water for the sustainable management of marine living resources in the EEZ, valid for 5 years starting from 1st January 2020 to 31st December 2025. In 2015, Bangladesh was awarded membership by the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), an intergovernmental organization responsible for managing Tuna and Tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean. As a member of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, the country has to provide information on Tuna stocks in its water boundary. Without catching capacity, it is impossible to know about the Tuna stock. So, whatever or wherever we would like to engage ourselves for the sustainable catch or management data is necessary.



However, failing to run after the private sectors and prioritizing the Tuna fishery as a top economic sector, the government of Bangladesh has solely taken a pilot project to catch commercially important Tuna fish. The expected value is worth Tk 61.06 crore, which is planned to end in 2023, aiming to build expertise with the aid of overseas training in Tuna fishing and encouraging the possible private sectors to get involved in the much-needed venture. Under this project, three fishing vessels with long liner technology and modern features like satellite connection are being procured.

Proper attention is needed in every aspect of exploitation, handling and processing, export and marketing, and biological and institutional management strategies for the flourishing Tuna fishery in Bangladesh. Bangladesh could extend her capacity and capability for Tuna fishery through regional cooperation regarding information and technological knowledge sharing.

A standard fishing policy for shared resources should develop regionally. There should be a clear and transparent licensing system as well. No fishing vessels with poor capacity and over-aged should be allowed for deep-sea fishing. There should be some clear criteria for fishing vessels to be allowed fishing in the deep sea. Promoting the Tuna fisheries through sustainable blue funds should be kept under consideration.

Deep-sea fishing is mainly a sector of enormous collaboration, financial involvement and the use of proper data with advanced fishing technology. Bangladesh has a huge prospect with lots of improvement in the overall marine fisheries sectors. The SDG 14-life underwater and its targets for sustainable fishery cannot have any prospect of success without harnessing the deep-sea resources, especially the highly valued Tuna fishes. Marine Fisheries are one of the utmost priorities for "Vision 2041" for its high prospect and less effort with a high return nature. Bangladesh is still lagging behind in harnessing marine fish. International cooperation along with national coordination among the concerned organizations, authorities, universities, and think tanks are essential. Fruitful steps should be taken in a combined approach to go for a developed country with the successful utilization of a considerable marine sector.

Writer: Afifat Khanam Ritika is a Research Officer, BIMRAD

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