

Beauty to Biodiversity, Connectivity to Commerce: Why to Celebrate World Oceans Day!



Can anyone ever imagine life without the oceans and its enormous blessings?

In 1992, at the UN Conference on Environment and Development i.e., Eco-92 or Rio-92, the idea of establishing 'World Ocean Day' as a commemorative date was proposed by Canada. The UNGA made the date official in 2008 (Resolution 63/ III, Paragraph 171). Since then, World Oceans Day has been celebrated on 08 June each year, selecting various themes reflecting the importance of World Oceans. For this year, 2024, the action theme has been selected, “Catalyzing Action for Our Ocean & Climate” (worldoceanday.org).

Why to celebrate World Ocean Day? The ocean provides more than half of the oxygen we breathe. That means one comes from the ocean for every two breaths we take. The ocean also absorbs significant CO₂ and other Green House Gases (GHGs) generated by burning fossil fuels. Besides being the most critical heat reservoir, oceans regulate the earth's climate pattern and long-term climate change. This indicates that without a healthy ocean, our future is seriously compromised.

Therefore, it is essential that we develop and effectively implement measures that enable us to combat climate change and mitigate its impact. As the seventh most climate-vulnerable country, the later we act, the more difficult it will be to reverse the damage already caused. For instance, the impact of sea level rise currently triggers climate refugees in many coastal and island nations, putting the lives of millions of people at risk.

It is worth mentioning that the ocean is the source of food, medicine, minerals, and energy and the home of diverse life and ecosystems. Researchers argue that the ocean provides food and living conditions for more than 3 billion people worldwide. In economic terms, the ocean could be classified as the 5th economy in the world. According to the World Bank, the Blue Economy, linked to the ocean, generates wealth equivalent to \$3 trillion/ year. Ironically, we know less than 20% of the ocean in this age of incredible scientific development. Everyone, even those who do not live in coastal countries or cities, must understand the role of oceanic

culture and the relevance of getting involved with the theme of World Ocean Day 2024 - "Catalyzing Action for Our Ocean & Climate."

Since the ocean covers more than 70% of the surface of our planet, that is fundamental to life on the planet; as British fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke said, "How inappropriate to call this planet Earth when it's quite clearly Ocean" (alloutafrica.com). Thus, knowing and understanding the impact of the ocean on us and our roles on the ocean is crucial to benefit from the blessings of the ocean responsibly and sustainably.

The economic significance of the ocean is massive, as more than 80% of global commerce is transported through the ocean. For its trade and commerce, mainly being a coastal state, Bangladesh heavily depends on the Bay of Bengal, which is an integral part of the global ocean. Approximately 94% of Bangladeshi trade is accomplished annually via the BoB (mofa.gov.bd). Not only that it covers about 90% of the habitable space on the planet and contains some 250,000 known species, with many more remaining to be discovered. At least two-thirds of the world's marine species are undefined (<https://un.org>). About 879 commercially critical marine species have been identified in the Bay of Bengal, maintaining a substantial economic value for the country. The vast expanse of the ocean with its varying shades of blue and green, rhythmic dance of the waves, enriched biodiversity, and vibrant coral reefs always attract the human heart. Thus, Coastal and marine tourism represents at least 50% of total global tourism –generating a \$9.5 trillion revenue industry. Indeed, for many small island developing states, it is their largest economic sector (World Economic Forum). Bangladesh, with its 710 km coastlines adorned with the Chittagong Hill Tracts, World's largest mangrove forest, and the coral bearing Saint Martin's island, is a tremendous tourist attraction. However, marine pollution has become the dark side of marine tourism. In this regard, binding the tourism industries under legal policy framework, regulation, and monitoring has become mandatory. In this aspect, the idea of marine ecotourism can be brought to light.

Considering the different challenges on the ocean in the era of climate change, numerous national and international authorities, NGOs, and research institutions dedicate themselves to protecting ocean health. Consider volunteering time or donating to support their efforts. These organizations play a crucial role in ocean conservation efforts; even a small contribution can make a big difference.

The nation's first maritime think tank, Bangladesh Institute of Maritime Research and Development (BIMRAD), remains committed to making scholastic contributions and providing consultancy in different maritime sectors, such as maritime affairs and security, marine science and technology, the Blue Economy and climate change, and living and non-living ocean resources.

Celebrating World Oceans Day each year can help unite the world in conservation action. As discussed in this article, the need to celebrate this day is linked to the urgency of raising global awareness, particularly in Bangladesh, about the benefits of the oceans, ranging from beauty to biodiversity and connectivity to commerce, to use the resources wisely. Looking after the world's oceans is not a nation's task. It demands collaborative approaches among different

stakeholders, both nationally and internationally. Unitedly, we can protect our lifeline, the world's oceans. Specifically, we can urge stakeholders to maximize available climate solutions, expedite the just transition to clean and renewable energy, and take initiatives to enable the conservation efforts that are 30 x 30 - protecting at least 30% of the ocean by 2030.

Bangladesh is a role model for climate resilience, and our national leadership is a strong proponent of ocean conservation, which is rightfully applauded internationally. May we celebrate World Oceans Day 2024 in the spirit of the preamble of our constitution: "...that we may prosper in freedom and may make our full contribution towards international peace and cooperation in keeping with the progressive aspirations of mankind."

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