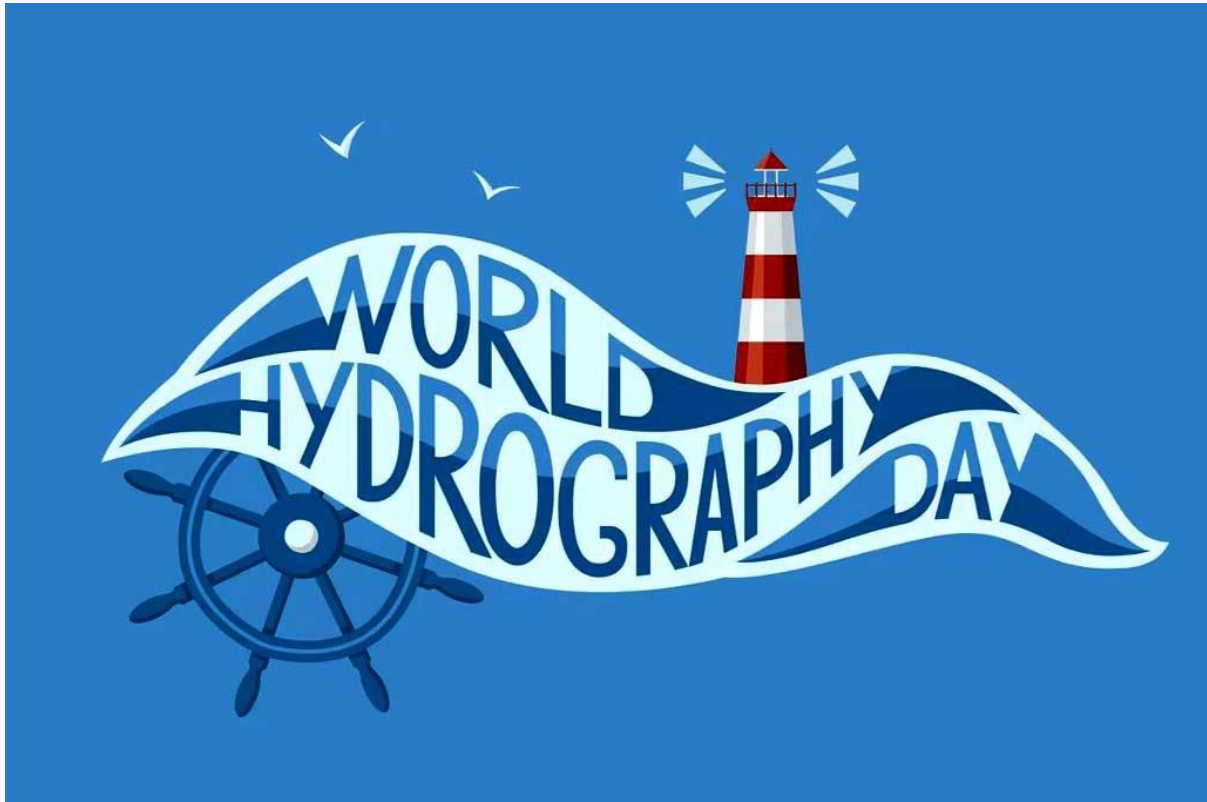


An Outsider's Perspective of World Hydrography Day



The origins of contemporary hydrography can be traced to the late 1800s when international hydrographers and oceanographers recognized the necessity for uniform charting techniques and supervision of hydrographic operations. The creation of the International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB) in 1921 was a major achievement, signalling the beginning of worldwide collaboration in hydrography. Today, the presence of Hydrographic Services in almost every country with a coastline is a testament to the global recognition of the significance of hydrography in nautical issues, connecting us all insiders and outsiders alike, to a shared responsibility for our seas and oceans.

Since 2006 the World Hydrography Day (WHD) is celebrated on 21st June 'to give prominence to hydrography and the work of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) and its member states around the globe' selecting pertinent themes to ensure safe and responsible use of our oceans. The theme chosen this year is "Hydrographic information- Safety, Efficiency, and Sustainability of Marine activities." The theme appears to be appropriately chosen implying data accuracy', which is a prerequisite to support safe, efficient and sustained maritime activities. And the theme likely intends also to raise public awareness that there are higher definition and higher resolution charts of the faraway Mars and Moon than of many parts of our neighbouring seas and coastal waters.

Why is it important also for us the outsider's to know about Hydrography? Well, apart from the United Nations view of the importance of hydrography, the revised Chapter V of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention requires the Contracting Governments (Bangladesh's accession was effective from 1982) of SOLAS to

provide and maintain Hydrographic Services and products due to enhanced emphasis on following important factors: the advent of exceptionally deep draught Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC) ships; the need to protect the marine environment; changing maritime trade patterns; the growing importance of seabed resources; and the UN Law of the Sea Convention affecting areas of national jurisdiction.

Hydrography too underpins nearly every activity associated with the sea from resource exploitation, to environmental protection, to maritime boundary delimitation, to national marine spatial data infrastructures, to maritime defense and security to sea level rise, to inundation modelling, to coastal zone management, to marine tourism to marine science! This writer, thus, would argue that seas and oceans, our Bay of Bengal (BoB); are our lifeline, the fabulous fortune, the treasure-trove, to express in one word, the Clausewitzian 'Center of Gravity' (CoG) for a prosperous Bangladesh.

Bangladesh and Hydrography, and what we the outsiders expect? Since inception as Hydrography School in 1983, Bangladesh Navy Hydrographic & Oceanographic Centre (BNHOC) has gone step by step modernization program and steadily provided invaluable information and data essential for the mariners, navy and the nation. The centre is proficiently involved in production, procurement and distribution of navigational charts and publications including maintenance of hydrographic, oceanographic, cartographic, and meteorological data processing instrument/equipment.

While the achievement of BNHOC is laudable, as outsiders, we may expect BNHOC to lead, under the auspices of respective ministries, and the forward looking leadership of BN, to establish Marine Spatial Data Infrastructure to be used for maritime areas of Bangladesh's national interests. These services may include, inter alia, ocean current, boundaries, crowd sourced bathymetry, fishery harbours, fishing grounds, lighthouses, marine traffic, marine weather, marine mammals and sea turtles, marine incidents, wind farms, surfing, aquaculture, biomedicine, shipbuilding, ship wrecks, agro data, coastal forts etc.

Bangladesh needs to bring National Hydrographers to forefront as nautical surveying and charting becomes the basis for Marine Spatial Planning and the Blue Economic aspirations of the nation. Global initiatives such as Seabed 2030 demands that Bangladesh use its own resources to chart the seabed for configurations and resources. The more we know on Bangladesh's seabed, the more we will be confident of making the best sustainable use of these undersea national resources.

Traditionally, the charts used to be printed on paper, but presently they are being increasingly produced and delivered as digital electronic charts. Either on paper or in digital form, as long as they meet the IHO standards, accepted and understood by the mariners' community, they are good. To ensure the best use of hydrographic information, it is also important to make the data easily available through current revolution in IT affairs using georeferenced databases.

As patriotic citizens, let us constantly remind ourselves that the BoB is Bangladesh's central fortune making front yard. It is necessary for us to understand that Bangladesh's National interests extend over its maritime interest that encompasses the whole of BoB, and even

beyond the national maritime jurisdiction. Bangladesh thus needs to enhance, in the realm of hardware and software, hydrographic and oceanographic capacity building by means of collaborative initiatives and methodologies with our friendly countries and responsive maritime organisations.

Bangladesh is blessed with necessary resource personnel, thus, overcoming maritime blindness and attaching more and more importance in ocean literacy is what matters at present! Besides, Bangladesh Navy also needs to be financed a Hydro Oceanographic Research Vessel, for the ocean hydrographic, oceanographic and geological surveys. Money spent to buy such a scientific research vessel is not an expenditure, per se, but ought to be understood as an investment for national prosperity!

As has been reflected, the hydrographic data have many applications. However, the most widely known use is the Nautical Chart, which is essential for sailors' safety. The intrepid initiative of the government for the rapid growth and development of the "Blue Economy" actually creates an urgency to the need of knowing the details of the seas and oceans. However, less than 10% of the world's oceans have been systematically surveyed. It is professionally unacceptable to try to establish sustainable maritime activities in areas where the water depths and other important scientific information and data are either unknown or scanty.

While celebrating WHD, and when we pay our tribute today to all hydrographers, surveyors and cartographers, I feel obliged, though not being myself a hydrographer, rather an outsider, and my current working environs as Director General Bangladesh Institute of Maritime Research and Development (BIMRAD), to extend my sincere greetings to those who silently, anonymously and with selfless dedication, contributes to the gradual development and effective use of our Maritime Prowess for the safety of navigation as well as promoting marine business in Bangladesh's Waters.

Finally, "hydrography – it will remain always much to be done."

Writer: Commodore Syed Misbah Uddin Ahmad, (C), NUP, ndc, afwc, psc, BN (ret'd), Director General, Bangladesh Institute of Marine Research and Development (BIMRAD). Email: misbah28686@gmail.com

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