

International Workshop on Blue Economy

Inaugural Ceremony

Address

By

HE Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Mr Chair,

Dear Colleagues,

Experts and participants of the workshop from home and abroad,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu Alaikum and Very Good Morning to you all.

I welcome you all at the inaugural ceremony of the international workshop on Blue Economy, a concept which can significantly contribute in the Socio-economic Development of Bangladesh. Blue economy concept has ushered in a new horizon for economic development of the coastal countries through utilizing the sea and marine resources at national and international level.

The role of marine resources in poverty alleviation, acquiring autarky in food production, protecting environmental balance, facing adverse impacts of climate change and other economic activities is unlimited. Alongside the existing land-based development activities, the marine-based economic activities/management of sea and its resources through Blue Economy may be considered as a new horizon for development of the coastal countries and the small island developing states.

The Bay of Bengal is an inseparable part of Bangladesh and is our third neighbour. There is no doubt that sea-related subjects like expansion of international trade, use of marine mineral resources for long-term energy security, proper management of marine fish resources and protecting marine environment and bio-diversity would determine Bangladesh's future development and economic growth.

We have to ensure sustainable development through proper utilization of the potentials of the sea and marine resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Considering vast multi-dimensional potentials of the Bay of Bengal, the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman enacted the Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones Act 1974 to establish Bangladesh's sovereign rights over the sea and its resources.

Consequent to this some of the important provisions of Bangladesh's Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones Act of 1974 were also included in the UNCLOS 1982. Especially the articles 7(2) of the UNCLOS on deltaic base line for highly unstable coastline were incorporated due to insistence of Bangladesh.

As a coastal country of the Bay of Bengal, the people of Bangladesh are directly associated with the sea and its resources. However Bangladesh could not harness resources of

the sea due to non delimitation of maritime boundary with our neighbors' - India and Myanmar.

Successive governments in Bangladesh did not take any realistic steps to settle the issue of maritime boundary, rather created various complexities. Owing to the absence of maritime boundary demarcation, people of Bangladesh were not able to take any effective steps to exploit and explore the marine resources of the Bay of Bengal. Our fishermen in one hand faced difficulties in exploiting fishes in the sea, on the other hand, fishermen of other countries easily plundered our fish resources due to unsettled maritime boundary.

After assumption of office in 1996, my government ratified the UNCLOS in 2001 with a view to ensuring legal rights over marine resources. After the ratification, Bangladesh was supposed to submit relevant scientific and technical data to the UN for establishing extended continental Shelf. In March, 2010, we conducted the first marine seismic survey in the history of Bangladesh. After completing all the technical and legal documentation details, we lodged our submission with the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) on 25 February 2011; five months before the scheduled deadline.

Sustained efforts by my government also ensured the declaration of verdict by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) in Germany in the delimitation case with Myanmar on 14 March in 2012. The award helped us establishing sovereign rights over the living and nonliving resources of the Bay of Bengal in the Exclusive Economic Zone within 200 nm and in the continental shelf beyond 200nm.

In the same way, the verdict with India declared on 7 July 2014 also allowed Bangladesh's sovereign rights on all the living and mineral resources of the Continental Shelf extending up to 354 nautical miles.

Bangladesh has thus set an example in Asia in settling maritime boundary peacefully with its neighbor.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

History of development of many countries tells us that the countries which utilized the sea and its resources became economically more prosperous than others. Bangladesh should be of no exception to this development. Our international trade is totally sea borne. With 130 billion dollar GDP, Bangladesh's economy is the 44th in the world in terms of GDP. Export earning surpasses 30 billion dollar mark. The total international trade comprising export and import stands at 65 billion dollar.

With more than 6 percent GDP growth, Bangladesh's economy is advancing towards a prosperous future. An increased export is crucial for economic uplift and growth. Today, 90% of the country's trade is transported through the sea.

The fish stocks and other inorganic resources in the Bay of Bengal can contribute greatly to our economy. Bangladesh earns substantially by exporting marine fishes. It is now more appropriate than ever to rely on ocean resources and management of such resources through the concept of Blue economy.

The delimitation of boundary with India and Myanmar has created a scope to explore mineral resources from the seabed without any obstacle.

A huge stock of living and non-living resources is available under the seabed and water column. But we have a dearth of skilled manpower to ascertain the availability and explore the resources. Besides, there is also lack of proper technology for exploiting deep sea fishes and seabed resources. To build skilled manpower in these sectors, we have taken steps to impart higher education on Oceanography at the Dhaka University and Chittagong University. The first National Oceanographic Research Institute' is being established at Ramu, Cox's Bazar to create a marine scientific community for research.

The history of ship building in Chittagong port during the seventeenth to nineteenth century is widely known. Although, Bangladesh later lagged behind, the last ten years have seen an unprecedented growth in building ships of international-standard.

In Khulna Shipyard, for the first time in history, patrol boats have been built for Bangladesh Navy. Beside, the government enterprises, several private sector companies are now engaged in the ship-building industry. Bangladesh is now exporting her locally manufactured ships. The ship recycling industry is also contributing to our economy.

Our seaports are also playing a significant role in expansion of trade through sea line. We have also taken appropriate measures to improve the capability of our coast guard in containing armed robbery at sea.

To keep the international sea-line communications open and secure, and to safeguard resources in our Exclusive Economic Zone and in our Continental Shelf, we have also taken necessary steps to strengthen Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Coast Guard.

We have also taken steps to produce skilled manpower for the management of marine transportation sector. At present, nearly 600 to 800 marine cadets are getting opportunities to work in domestic and foreign ships every year.

You are also aware about the contribution of the largest mangrove forest, 'Sundarbans' in protecting the ecological balance. For the protection of marine environment and biodiversity of the Bay of Bengal, we are taking steps to declare a certain region of the Bay of Bengal as marine protected area.

From time immemorial, the beauty of the sea-beaches has attracted mankind. Capitalizing on this, tourism industries have flourished in the coastal zones. We have taken effective measures to establish a strong tourism industry in Cox's Bazar, Saint Martin's and Kuakata.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We feel that sustainable development of Blue Economy is possible through utilization of the existing natural and mineral resources in the Bay of Bengal and its adjoining oceans. We would like to learn from your experiences so that we can initiate appropriate steps to ensure economic emancipation of our people through the sea resources in an ecosystem based approach.

There is no doubt that we are lagging behind in terms of proper planning, appropriate knowledge and methods for coordinated development of Blue Economy. I am sure this workshop will guide us and open a new horizon for our participants to the immense possibilities of blue economy.

I hope that the workshop will help prepare appropriate recommendations which will play a significant role for long-term economic development of Bangladesh. I wish the workshop a grand success and declare the workshop open. Thank you all and special thanks to our friends from abroad.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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