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Blue Economy and Maritime Cooperation in the Bay of Bengal: Role of Bangladesh

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Abstract

The concept 'blue economy' refers to ocean based economies. It encompasses conservation in tandem with sustainable usages of maritime resources through seamless and integrate spatial planning. Blue economy transforms the ocean resources into development instruments. In latter days, the realm of Bay of Bengal has veered into a synonym of economic and strategic significance. Settlement of maritime boundary disputes and the potentials of blue economy prospects are spearheading its littoral states for economic growth. However, like other ocean regions, the Bay of Bengal is also rigged with the problems of IUU fishing, marine pollution, ineffective marine regulation and the non-traditional security menace.

The proposed paper endeavours to analyse how Bangladesh, as one of the littoral states of the Bay of Bengal region, is responding to the challenges of ocean governance and revving up initiatives to garner blue economy benefits from the Bay of Bengal. The article also highlights the vista and potentials of regional cooperation in the blue economy related areas such as regulation of coastal marine environment; marine protected areas; maritime safety as well as security of ports and sea lanes of communication.

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1. Introduction

Ocean entwines the two-thirds of surface of the earth. From that perspective, blue waters of the oceans are deemed as the bloodstream of this planet earth. Without it, pure thrombosis would occur to human civilization. The United Nations Environment Program in its report under the rubric of 'Green Economy in Blue World' compares the resources of ocean as 'cornucopia' for human civilization [1]. Here, the term cornucopia is a Greek mythical lexicon that refers to cone shaped ornament which is abundant with whatever its owner desires. Hence, there has been brewing global concerns for preservation and sustainable utilization of ocean resources. For centuries, the practical usage of ocean was few confining to coastal fishing, commercial voyages and naval battles for the expansion of empire. Consequently, the maritime affairs in preceding centuries was special concern of only handful of seafaring nations, and thence, the nature and contents of the law of the sea was determined largely by the dominant interests of the maritime powers [2]. However, the situation has been swerved and the concept 'blue economy' is posed as foghorn of such changes. The concept blue economy has veered into a buzzword for sustainable development. Blue economy enters into the maritime lexicon during the time span of United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which is much familiar as the Rio+20 Conference. The concept conduits environmental, economic and social development to seas

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and oceans. The concept is coined by Gunter Pauli, a Belgian economist [3]. Blue economy defines sustainable economic development through utilizing the advantage and strategy of exploring the resources of the blue water [4]. In general, it refers utilization of ocean resources through systematic way. The concept aims to garner radical resource efficiency and minimal waste. As the coastal states' ocean activities continue to expand, concerns as to maritime safety would also wade to the fore. Due to this, maritime security falls under the rubric of blue economy. The principles of blue economy aim at generating new jobs, building up social capital and augmenting income [5].

The maritime domain of the Bay of Bengal is expected to contribute its littoral states, through blue economy, towards the thoroughfare of prosperity. Sustainable use and management of living and non-living marine resources of the Bay of Bengal would leverage employment creation, socio-economic development and gilt edge food security. Bangladesh considers the Bay of Bengal its third neighbour [6]. This coastal country is located in the pivotal geo-strategic location of the Bay of Bengal [7]. For a maritime nation like Bangladesh, blue economy concept has provided an impetus to sail for new sea lane of economic development. In fact, the concept blue economy is an apt model for littoral state like Bangladesh to achieve sustainable economy [5].

2. Nature and Definition of Blue Economy- An Appraisal

The concept 'blue economy' was propounded in the Rio Summit of 2012, which is also familiar as 'Rio+20', by the United Nations Environment Program. Practically, the proposed concept is an application of both 'green economy' in tandem with 'green growth' concepts to the ocean realm [8]. Improving human wellbeing and social equity in parallel with less environmental harm and efficient resource utilization- were the vital causes behind underpinning the blue economy concept in the Rio+20 summit [9]. Blue economy recognizes the ocean realm as the newly inducted platform of ocean development as well as ocean governance [10]. The concept mirrors the dragging line between socio-economic development and reckless environmental degradation [9]. Blue economy also encompasses an assortment of new technology oriented sectors that are capable of supporting maritime prosperity through maritime exploration and research of maritime issues. From that view point, blue economy is a science intensive maritime concept [11]. Scholars belonging to maritime domain are used to illustrate blue economy in inclusive manner encompassing marine environment, maritime economic and trade activities [9]. However, it is pertinent to mention here that at present, a universally accepted definition of blue economy has yet to be formulated [8]. There is neither any standards for measureable and calculable terms has yet been established [9]. Nor any working definition has yet to be underpinned on regional basis [10]. Nevertheless, various research institutions, international organizations and think tanks defines the concept blue economy from motley of perspectives.

According to the World Bank, the concept blue economy delineates such marine based economic development which at the same time spearheads the human wellbeing and social equity in tandem with decreasing the potential environmental harm and ecological scarcities [8]. The Economist magazine in its report, under the title of 'The Blue Economy: Growth, Opportunity and a Sustainable Ocean Economy' explains blue economy as 'sustainable ocean economy'. A salient feature of such sustainable ocean economy requires the usage of balanced economic activity in the ocean realm which would enable the marine ecosystem to remain resilient and healthy [12]. The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), a vibrant regional forum of littoral states of the Indian Ocean, defines blue economy as the integration of ocean economy development that enhances human welfare in a holistic manner. In the definition of the IORA, the concept ocean economy development encompasses the practices of social inclusion, environment sustainability and innovative business model [10].

3. Blue Economy Dimensions of the Bay of Bengal- A Boon for Bangladesh

Among 64 bays in the world, the Bay of Bengal is deemed as one of the largest. It is the indefeasible part of the Indian Ocean. The littoral states entwining realm of the Bay of Bengal have a populace of approximately 1.4 billion [6]. It is the sea that forms the north-eastern part of the Indian Ocean; 1,300 miles long and 1,000 miles wide, bordered on the west by Sri Lanka and India, on the north by Bangladesh, and on the east by Myanmar and Thailand. A salient feature of the Bay of Bengal is that it lies in its location in the downstream of one of the world's most active delta [7]. Furthermore, the Bay of Bengal is one of the vital wings of the Indian Ocean which is highly

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