Charting a *Blue* Path: Bangladesh’s Foreign Policy in the 21st Century

Dr. Lailufar Yasmin
Professor, Dhaka University
Introducing the Issue

- Bangladesh is traditionally seen as a ‘small state’
- The decolonization of Afro-Asian countries led to the conceptualization of this concept—the Cold War solidified this understanding
- While we cannot overlook the geographical limitations—Bangladesh’s identity has shifted to a new terrain overcoming its ‘small state’ identity
- Several factors led to this transformation—Bangladesh’s embracing a ‘blue’ path is the strongest of those
What is Blue Economy

- Much has already been said about this
- A new path to development—transition from brown to green to blue economy
- Specifically applied for coastal regions
- Gunter Pauli (1994) introduced this concept that would involve ocean resources for ensuring sustainable development
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Areas</th>
<th>Opportunities and Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) sustainable use of biodiversity</td>
<td>a) shipping and port facilities,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) food security,</td>
<td>b) fisheries,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) unsustainable fisheries,</td>
<td>c) tourism,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) climate change and managing carbon budgets,</td>
<td>d) aquaculture,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) marine and coastal tourism, pollution and marine debris, and</td>
<td>e) energy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) governance and international cooperation</td>
<td>f) biotechnology, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g) submarine mining</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What is Blue Economy**
Connection between Blue Economy and Foreign Policy

- Since the concept of BE is advanced, development planners are enthusiastic to enhance ocean-based resources.
- Many have not seen or studied systematically the connection between this particular type of development and foreign policy goals of a country.
- A number of activities arranged around highlighting probable gains from BE; but these overlook foreign policy and identity issues that may provide a leverage to a country.
- For Bangladesh, this is particularly true.
Suffering from an Identity Crisis

- A small country with no future
- No foreign policy independence due to its particular location—locational reality
- Aid dependence
- Staggering economy
- But the Bangladesh of 1971 and the Bangladesh of 2018 have drastically changed…
## These are the world’s fastest growing economies

**Projected percentage real GDP growth, 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage Real GDP Growth, 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory Coast</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: IMF World Economic Outlook April 2016*
World's fastest growing economies, 2018
(real GDP; % change, year on year)

Note: July 2018 forecasts. Source: Economist Intelligence Unit.
Things are Changing for Bangladesh...

- Bangladesh is experiencing changes in last several years in a massive scale
- What does it owe to?
- Despite being geographically disadvantageous, Bangladesh has found its ‘third neighbor’ with an abundance of resources that have remained hitherto unexplored
- The Bay of Bengal, our southern neighbor, has opened up a new vista of opportunities for Bangladesh
Blue Economy and the Bay of Bengal

- A particular area has strong connections between BE and foreign policy of Bangladesh
  - Shipping and port facilities
- These are the areas that need not only expertise in technical areas but also diplomatic efforts to consolidate Bangladesh’s international position
Shipping and Port Facilities

- Building of infrastructure for its own development
- Providing facilities to landlocked South Asian countries
- Connecting South, Southeast and East Asia together—Indo-Pacific Corridor
Shipping and Port Facilities

Geographical location of Ports in the region
Shipping and Port Facilities

- Bangladesh has inherited both of its ports since its independence.
- Developing infrastructure is the order of the day in today’s globalized world.
- It has aimed to construct a deep sea port (DSP) at Matarbari.
- Sonadia project is officially cancelled although some hope that it is not off completely.
- Shipping and port facilities are supplemented by land-based connectivity as well.
Implications of BE on Bangladesh’s Foreign Policy

- Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina
- “Blue Economy is a concept that can significantly contribute to 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.”
Implications of BE on Bangladesh’s Foreign Policy

- The US Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Tom Kelly (2014)
- “In a broader perspective US values Bangladesh’s geographical location. It sees an important role for Bangladesh in the overall security context of the Middle East, and Indian-Pacific-Oceans region. This is why US wants Bangladesh by its side in its strategic pursuits.”
Implications of BE on Bangladesh’s Foreign Policy

- The connection between foreign policy and advancing BE goals and objectives are strong
- A number of countries are now seeing Bangladesh as the lynchpin of economic hub connecting inter-Asian states
- This is being possible due to offering Bangladesh’s geographic location and functional appeal to the rest of the world
- We are talking about infrastructure building but who would avail this and why—that is a question that needs to be woven with the greater BE policy