



CONFERENCE REPORT

Day-long Regional Conference

“Maritime Issues in the Bay of Bengal Region”

Date: July 11, 2019

BILIA Auditorium

Background:

The Bay of Bengal (BoB) is emerging as a new region of trade, commerce, connectivity, and dispute as well. The littoral states of the BoB as well as other external actors are now engaging themselves within the region because of its growing geo-strategic importance. Thus, to discuss about several aspects of the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA), the oldest civil society think tank has recently organised a day-long regional conference on “**Maritime Issues in the Bay of Bengal Region**”. The conference was held on Thursday, **July 11, 2019** at BILIA’s own auditorium. The conference last from 10:00 a.m. to 05:35 p.m. The conference was focused on three thematic areas as follows:

- 1. 1st Working Session: The Rise of Asia: Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh and Beyond;**
- 2. 2nd Working Session: Traditional Issues in the Bay of Bengal; and**
- 3. Working Session 3: Non-Traditional Issues in the Bay of Bengal**

A total number of ten keynote papers covering several issues in the BoB have been presented during the conference.

The 1st working session of the conference was focused on the issue “**The Rise of Asia: Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh and Beyond**”. Here, relevant to the main theme, three keynote papers were presented by Dr. Lailufar Yasmin, Professor, Dept. of International Relations, University of Dhaka and Deputy Director (Part-Time; International Affairs), BILIA; by Dr. Smruti S. Pattanaik, Research Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), India; and by Dr. Rajiv Ranjan, Assistant Professor, College of Liberal Arts, Institute for Global Studies, Shanghai University, China. The session was chaired by Former Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, Chairman, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) while Dr. Niloy Ranjan Biswas, Associate Professor, Dept. of International Relations, University of Dhaka.

The second working session of the conference was related to the issue “**Traditional Issues in the Bay of Bengal**”. Four keynote papers were presented in this session. The keynote presenters here were: Dr. Raj Kumar Kothari, Professor, Dept. of Political Science, Vidyasagar University, India, Mr. Md. Mahmudul Hoque Moni, Senior Assistant Secretary, Assistant Director (Training), BCS Administration Academy, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Dr. Salvin Paul, Senior Assistant Professor, Peace

and Conflict Studies and Management, Sikkim University, India, and Mr. Md. Saifullah Akon, Lecturer, Department of Japanese Studies, University of Dhaka. The session was presided over by Dr. Fahmida Khatun, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). On the other hand, Dr. Lailufar Yasmin, Professor, Dept. of International Relations, University of Dhaka and Deputy Director, (Part-Time; International Affairs), BILIA was the designated discussant for this session.

The third and the final working session of the conference was focused on the issue “**Non-Traditional Issues in the Bay of Bengal**”. Here, relevant to the main theme, the keynote presenters were: Dr. Mostafa Naser, Lecturer, School of Business and Law, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia, Australia, Ms. Mansura Aktar, Assistant Professor, Department of Maritime Law and Policy, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University and Mr. F. M. Arafat, Adjunct Faculty, Global Studies and Governance, Independent University Bangladesh (IUB). The session was presided over by Dr. C. R. Abrar, Professor (retired), Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, whereas, Dr. Rumana Islam, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Dhaka and Assistant Director (Part-Time; Law), BILIA was the designated discussant.

Inaugural Session

Welcome Address:

The inaugural session commenced with the welcome address by Dr. Shahdeen Malik, Honorary Director, BILIA. In his speech, Dr. Malik gave an overview of the institution. For instance, he talked about the historical legacy of the institution as it is named after the great leader Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy. Dr. Malik also mentioned about BILIA's affiliation with two of the major ministries of the government of Bangladesh, i.e., the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs.

Inaugural Speech:

Right after his speech, Dr. Malik invited Rear Admiral (Retd.) Md. Khurshed Alam, ndc, psc, Secretary, Maritime Affairs Unit (MAU), MoFA to give the inaugural speech. Mr. Alam started his speech with a very informative PowerPoint presentation that was very much relevant to the conference theme. Mr. Alam said “**Today's theme is praise**

worthy. Today we are focused on the BoB”.

Giving the overview of the formation of the planet Earth, Mr Khurshed Alam also described the major part of the sea which a country owns by international law. For instance, Mr. Alam briefly discussed about the Territorial Sea, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), Continental



Shelf and so forth. He also reiterated that the settlement of the maritime dispute between Bangladesh and its neighbouring countries, i.e., India and Bangladesh also increased the importance of the BoB. Thus, Bangladesh can now be an **ocean-centric country** rather than just being a riverine country.

Another important aspect which was focused in Mr. Alam’s speech that the recently taken Indo-Pacific Strategy is also affecting the BoB in a great manner. The strategic competition between India and China in the BoB has also great future implications for the region. For instance, China is engaged in the establishment of Myanmar’s kyaukpyu port while India is investing in the building of the Sittwe port. All these have major implications for the future of Asia.

Putting shed on the Strait of Malacca, Mr. Alam said that both India and China are building economic corridors to secure their respective position in the BoB. It is estimated that 13.4 billion oil is shipped through the Strait of Malacca. Thus, China is building the ports and economic corridors to avoid the Strait of Malacca which is adjacent to the South China Sea countries. Thus, China wants to secure its oil and gas import through the BoB. India is also building the Kaladan Multi Modal Project through Myanmar which will connect its North-eastern states so that it can avoid using the Kolkata port. Thus, this kind of strategic significance of the BoB is day by day increasing.

Citing the sailor’s view of the ocean, Mr. Alam stated that many of the national economies depend on the sea. For instance, Mr. Alam reiterated that the ocean contains resources worth of US \$24 trillion. However, the human beings only use US \$2.5 trillion of that resources. Henceforth, the future will be the ocean. The “Blue Economy”, the economy which is derived from the sea will hunt our future policy formulation. So, in future, while making the policies, we have to keep in mind the blue economy.

Finally, Mr. Alam concluded his speech by stating some major aspects of the sea. Mr. Alam pointed out in his speech that the resources of the sea need to be used in a sustainable way. He also said that we are not focused on **Marine Plants** which can be a great source of oil. Thus, Mr. Alam suggested that we can at least start with the fish oil. The most important fact that Mr. Khurshed Alam unearthed in his speech is that there are already 812 million plastics in the sea while the total number of fish is only 150 million. By 2050, there will be 850 million plastics in the sea but the fish number will be the same it is today. Thus, focusing on the need of maritime security and training and education regarding the sea, Mr. Alam concluded his speech.

1st Working Session: The Rise of Asia: Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh and Beyond

Presentation of Dr. Lailufar Yasmin:



The 1st working session commenced with the presentation of Dr. Lailufar Yasmin. Dr. Yasmin in her paper titled *“Changing International Landscape and the Bay of Bengal: Bangladesh Finds the Sea”* stated that the 21 century is the post-world war era where we can

see the rise of China. Dr. Yasmin emphasised the rise of Bangladesh as a littoral country to the BoB. Thus, she reiterated that China cannot remain oblivious to Bangladesh. The same goes with the USA. The USA has shifted its policies of the “Pivot to Atlantic and Pacific” towards the “Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean”. By citing the authors, i.e., Sasika Sassen, Parag Khanna, and Mark Leonard, Dr. Yasmin analysed the rise of Bangladesh. Dr. Yasmin stated, **“What can be the bargaining tools for Bangladesh’s rise?”** Answering this question Dr. Yasmin stated that the Bay of Bengal is the largest bay in the world. Bangladesh developed itself a long way and is now focused on the BoB after resolving the maritime dispute with both India and Myanmar. Besides, Bangladesh is the fastest growing South Asian country with an annual growth rate of 9%. The BoB is often described as the third neighbour of Bangladesh. Thus, these can be the future bargaining tools for Bangladesh to be vocal in the international platform. Dr. Yasmin

also figured out that the robust economy of Bangladesh and its market of 160 million people are already attracting other countries to come in Bangladesh. Thus, being the littoral country to the BoB, Bangladesh can be the natural player in the region. Finally Dr. Yasmin concluded that Bangladesh can re-establish its natural claim, not only for being just a littoral state, but also in terms of gaining traction in its foreign policy endeavour—on the Bay.

Presentation of Dr. Smruti S. Pattanaik:

After the presentation of Dr. Lailufar Yasmin, the paper titled *“India, Bangladesh and Synergising Cooperation*

in the Bay of Bengal Region: Exploring Bilateral and Regional Framework” was presented by Dr. Smruti S. Pattanaik, Research Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), India. In her presentation, Dr. Pattanaik narrated the importance of the BoB as the sub region of the Indian Ocean.



Again she stated that whenever we talk about the BoB, we seek it as the source of cyclonic storm for the South Asian countries. However, Dr. Pattanaik also emphasised that the BoB is a great source of natural resources, mineral resources and fishing as well. Thus, it can be the major supply of food to feed the growing number of people. Dr. Pattanaik also argued that in the past, the BoB was the hub of cultural contact and trade with Southeast Asia. Thus, she stated that we should revive how the ancient people looked into the BoB.

Dr. Pattanaik added that now the nations adjacent to the BoB are reviving the connectivity and commerce, cultural and civilizational linkages. She also talked about the security issues in the Bay of Bengal. Dr. Pattanaik emphasized that the security issues need to be handled together. There are also environmental issues. Dr. Smruti S. Pattanaik asserted that we have to look for sustainable food and economic development in the bay. In the concluding remarks, Dr. Pattanaik narrated that the institutional framework regarding the BoB is still going on. For instance, BIMSTEC is still in progress and the IORA has identified six priorities for the BoB. Finally, Dr. Pattanaik urged

everyone that we can work on the six pillars identified by IORA for capacity building and multifaceted engagement in the BoB.

Presentation of Dr. Rajiv Ranjan:

Dr. Rajiv Ranjan, Assistant Professor, College of Liberal Arts, Institute for Global Studies, Shanghai University, Shanghai, China presented a paper on *“The Rise of China and Bay of Bengal: Connectivity Conundrum and Strategic Calculus in Indian Ocean”*. His paper was mainly focused on China and its initiatives. Dr. Ranjan stated that China took the idea of the Maritime Silk Road from the Iranian movie “Maritime Silk Road (2011)”. Dr. Ranjan argued that with its gigantic projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has moved from hiding its capacity. Thus, China is now opening up to the world. Dr. Rajiv Ranjan reiterated that China’s engagement in the BoB has increased in recent years. This is because South China Sea is still the hot bed, according to him. Hence, China wants to shift the world’s focus from the South China Sea to the regions.

Regarding the Indo Pacific Strategy, Dr. Ranjan stated that the BoB is the linchpin of it. Apart from this, the BoB connects South Asia and Southeast Asia. Thus, we can understand the geostrategic significance of the BoB.

Dr. Ranjan also pointed out that China resolved its land dispute with other countries but it does not resolve the maritime dispute while India does the vice versa. So, having greater engagement in the BoB, China wants to change the focus from the South China Sea to the BoB. Thus, BoB has is very significant to China in terms of Strategic importance. The SAARC, the regional forum of the South Asian countries is less effective, hence, the Chinese scholars now a days talk about forming BIMSTEC+1. This is because BIMSTEC does not include Pakistan which is a great concern for India. Thus, China wants to utilise the BoB and the existing institutions flourished on the basis BoB consistent with its own interest.

Comments by the Designated Discussant:

After the three presenters presented their papers, the designated discussant of the session Dr. Niloy Ranjan Biswas, Associate Professor, Dept. of International Relations, University of Dhaka commented on the papers. Dr. Biswas briefed about the first two papers that those were mainly policy focused. Dr. Ranjan asked that if the typical IR theories could help understand the BoB in the Indian Ocean. Describing the balancing

and rebalancing approaches, he said that Bangladesh is now trying to rebalance between China and India. To understand the significance of the Bay of Bengal, geopolitical lens is also important. Dr. Ranjan also reiterated that although there is a competition between India and China, However, China is still the largest bilateral trading partner of India. So, Dr. Ranjan suggested that if we focus only on conventional IR theories then it would be difficult to be policy focused and thus, the importance of the BoB will remain unfocused in the policy formulation.

Open Discussion:

After the comments by the designated discussant, the Chair opened the floor for open discussion. The discussion was a fruitful one with the participation of academicians, former ambassadors, former Rear Admirals, Navy Officials, maritime affairs experts, lawyers, researchers, distinguished fellows, students and others.

**Concluding Remarks:**

After the open discussion session, the Chair of the event Former Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, Chairman, BISS gave the concluding remark appreciating the papers. He made some comments on the papers. Mr. Ahmad said that India is emerging gradually and thus, it can play the role of a regional leader in South Asia. He also reiterated that SAARC is the right place for India to show its leadership. Lastly, Mr. Ahmad urged that in connectivity there is no us and them. Connectivity is all inclusive. So, the future

connectivity through the BoB can also flourish in a rapid manner if the regional players want so. Finally, the chair ended the session by thanking all.

2nd Working Session: Traditional Issues in the Bay of Bengal

Presentation of Dr. Raj Kumar Kothari:

The second session of the Conference started with the presentation of Dr. Raj Kumar



Kothari, Professor, Dept. Political Science, Vidyasagar University, West Bengal, India. In the paper titled *“India’s Maritime Connectivity: Importance of the Bay of Bengal”* Dr. Kothari discuss about the geo-strategic importance of the BoB. Dr. Kothari argued that in the near future, fresh water will become a serious and there will be scarcity of pure drinking water.

Thus, there is a way to utilise the sea water. The BoB is a source of huge natural resources. Dr. Kothari pointed out that with the help of technology the sea water can be converted into portable water. For instance, the UAE and Israel are already applying this technology. However, at the same time this technology is very expensive. Nonetheless, the countries should at least think of this technology as water will become the burning issue in the upcoming years.

Dr. Kothari also reiterated that the BoB can also be the route of trade and commerce. Connectivity is also need to be taken in consideration. For instance, India has already taken the Kaladan Multi Modal Project through Myanmar’s Sittwe port. This project will ease the transportation facility to Northeast India. Regarding connectivity, Dr. Kothari hoped that better maritime connectivity will easily connect South Asia to the Southeast Asia. After discussing the geo-strategic importance of the BoB, Dr. Raj Kumar Kothari then analysed his paper through the lens of predominant IR theories of Realism and Liberalism. Dr. Kothari argued that Realism focuses only on national interest and

military power while Liberalism talks about cooperation and avoids conflicts. So, Dr. Kothari emphasised on Liberalism because the liberal approach focuses on the fact that marine environment can be retained as a subject of collective order and legal regulations.

Finally Dr. Kothari concluded that in a world of interdependence, the political centre of gravity has shifted from land to oceans. The BoB have emerged as the critical arenas for security, trade, environment and maritime geopolitics. Thus, in the coming years BoB is going to be the new growth zone in Asia.

Presentation of Md. Mahmudul Hoque Moni:

Mr. Md. Mahmudul Hoque Moni in his paper titled, "Geopolitical and Economic Importance of the Bay of Bengal for Bangladesh in the Rising Asia Context: A Political Economy Perspective" tried to bring up the economic and geopolitical importance of the Bay of Bengal through a political economy perspective. Mr. Moni pointed out six major concerns of his presentation where the Rohingya issue was mentioned as the biggest problem. He further suggested some paths following which Bangladesh can pursue economic stability with the advantage of the Bay of Bengal.

To explain the geopolitical condition of Bangladesh Mr. Moni mentioned the classical model of geopolitics. He also mentioned that Bangladesh is working as a corridor because of its geopolitical position and the New Silk Route of China can be an opportunity for Bangladesh to flourish in the international system.

On the other hand, Mr. Moni mentioned that the Rohingya crisis is an economic barrier for Bangladesh. The large amount of land and wealth that are spent due to the Rohingya Crisis is working as a barrier against the development of coastal areas of Bangladesh. He suggested that the Government needs to pursue two interests. One is political interest, where he said that Rohingya repatriation is important for Bangladesh to prove the political strength of Bangladesh as well as to gain an upper hand in coastal related issues, ensuring the balancing of power will help Bangladesh from getting exploited by neighbouring nations. And the second one is economic interests that include developing infrastructures for improving trade, utilising the resource collected from the Bay of Bengal, and building up trade partnership with stronger Asian economic powers.

Mr. Moni also talked about the treaties and pacts signed between Bangladesh and her neighbours but are partially ignored by the neighbours, as a result many of the goals are still incomplete; along with pointing out the tourism projects that are destroying the environmental balance of the coastal area.

Presentation of Dr. Salvin Paul:

Dr. Salvin Paul in his paper titled, “Geopolitical Aspirations of China and India in South Asia through the prism of Bangladesh” began with by discussing the different dimensions of security such as traditional and non-traditional security as well as geopolitics. According to him, after 1972 the traditional perception of security has been changed and the idea of securitisation which is different and broader than the idea of security has emerged. He talked about Freedom from want, freedom from fear in his discussion of human security or non-traditional security.

In his discussion, Bangladesh and its geopolitical significance were in focus. Considering all the geopolitical theories, he thinks Bangladesh is in a very significant position politically, economically and strategically, especially for the two major powers of Asia – India and China. And there is a competition over Bangladesh to take the control of the Asia Pacific-Bay of Bengal-Indian Ocean region. But it must be kept in mind that, everybody wants Bangladesh as a corridor but Bangladesh is an independent country and for that, it should act in a sovereign manner.

On the other hand, while talking about India, he put forth the issue of illegal Bangladeshi migrants as a barrier for its development. However, indicating the gradual economic development of Bangladesh, he delivered an experience of his visit to a Bhutanese village and an orchard from where the best quality oranges are exported to Bangladesh rather than India. Moreover, He identified several scopes and challenges of Bangladesh in the way of development. Finally he concluded his presentation by saying that the graduation of Bangladesh from LDC to a Middle income country within 2024 is very pleasing to hear but it is very challenging and there is a debate whether Bangladesh is ready to face the challenges or not.

Presentation of Md. Saifullah Akon:

Mr. Md. Saifullah Akon in his paper titled “Race for Deep Sea Port in Bangladesh: Politics in the Bay of Bengal” mainly focused on two aspects. One is about exploring the politics of naval domination among the great powers like India, USA, Japan and China to have deep sea ports in Bangladesh. And secondly, to find out the potential opportunities and possible challenges of deep sea port deals for Bangladesh. Mr. Akon started with mentioning the importance of the sea ports. Denoting them as transportation hub he stated that international maritime trade depends on geographical, strategic and technical capabilities of the ports. He mentioned Deep Sea Port as one of the top Priorities for Bangladesh as her geographical location provides port facilities. However, he also showed the ineffectiveness of Bangladesh’s two existing ports: Chittagong and Mongla due to poor infrastructure, facilities, equipments and also depth. He also mentioned about too much dependency on the Chittagong Port which is 90% of Bangladesh’s sea trade volume.

Furthermore, he discussed about the geo-strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as well as the strategic, geographic and economic importance of the Bay of Bengal where he emphasised on the politics of domination as international powers race to finance in building deep sea port in Bangladesh. Here he explicated China’s “String of Pearls” (string of ports) strategy that narrates the Chinese intentions in the Indian Ocean of containing or encircling India by financing other countries’ seaports e.g. Gwadar, Hambantota etc. along with establishing Chinese naval military bases and command facilities throughout the Indian Ocean region to increase Chinese influence. On the other hand, there is India, Japan and USA’s counter containment of China’s ‘string of pearls’ strategy that aims to contain Chinese dominance in the IOR by deterring China from getting access to new ports which already showed its result in the context of Bangladesh. Bangladesh already cancelled its contract with China to build Sonadia seaport in 2016, took the Japanese funding in Matarbari deep seaport building and also is in pressure in regarding the selection of investor to convert Payra Port into a Deep Sea Port.

Later, he talked about the opportunities for Bangladesh that include getting investments, development projects, special economic zones, enhanced port facilities and enhanced role in regional politics; whereas the challenges include, maintaining

sovereignty as India and the USA are interfering in Bangladesh by pressuring it against the Chinese investment, precluding external influences on policy outcomes and also preventing of collapse of the development projects, for example, China was denied twice in Sonadia and Payra. Hence, apart from emphasising the role of greater impact of deep sea ports in the exports, imports and economic development of Bangladesh, he pointed out Bangladesh's sandwiched position between the interests of China and her strategic opponents for which it needs to be more precautionous.

Comments by the Discussant:

After the keynote paper presentations, Professor Dr. Lailufar Yasmin made her comments on the papers. She stated that the natural resources of the Bay of Bengal are not often taken into account properly as we have to provide food from there and also have to figure out how we can work with that in a more effective way. She also pointed out BIMSTEC and stated that how it can provide us a proper platform is still questionable. Furthermore, she questioned about how far Bangladesh should take consideration once become a middle income country from LDC in 2023-24 as well as what lies ahead and what can happen next. Regarding the deep sea port which she thinks was comprehensively analysed, she expressed her concern on how Bangladesh can play more efficiently among the power game of Japan, India and China, where she emphasised on to figure out how other regional powers can be partners with the feelings of the weaker states not dictators.

Open Discussion:

After the comments from the designated discussant, the chair invited the audience to participate in the open discussion. There questions were asked regarding the growing India-USA relations if it would affect the India's over US\$100 billion trade with China. Question was raised about India's failure in showing proper evidence regarding the proper number of the illegal Bangladeshis in India. Also India's avoidance of taking the blame of illegal Bangladeshi migrants came to light as the Indian contractors or thikadars are the ones who make ways for them to get the illicit access in India so they can exploit cheap labour.

Concluding Remarks:

At the end, the Chair of the session Dr. Fahmida Khatun touched upon few issues. She particularly talked about how well Bangladesh would tackle the challenges after transforming into a developing country. She showed her optimism stating that Bangladesh has already become the emerging economic power with 8% growth rate which is way more than all the Bay of Bengal countries and also has been successful in attracting a lot of foreign investments. And hence, Bangladesh may tackle these challenges quite well. However, she also expressed her concern that Bangladesh lacks experience in maritime issues. Hence, it needs to be cautious with both the Indian and Chinese lines of credit. And finally she concluded that the future of global economy is the East and Bangladesh has lots of potential for it as well. But for this Bangladesh has to be very diplomatic politically, strategically and economically.

Working Session 3: Non-Traditional Issues in the Bay of Bengal**Presentation of Dr. Mostafa Naser:**

Dr. Mostafa Naser in his paper titled, “Integrating Blue Carbon Ecosystems in Climate Change Governance in Bangladesh: Challenges and Responses” narrated the importance of Blue Carbon mechanism to combat the hazards of climate change in the context of Bangladesh. He initiated his primary discussion referring to a number of international conventions on climate change such as UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol and the Bali Action Plan. Then he moved towards a comprehensive approach to connect the strategies in those conferences and adoption of Blue Carbon mechanism as a feasible initiative for Bangladesh. Dr. Naser showed that the UNEP Blue Carbon report estimated a reduction of 25% of the total required emission reduction which can be a great advancement in the climate related concerns. Next to that, he foreshadowed how the commitment of Bangladesh as a part of the revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) could pave the way for a brighter progressive approach for the sustainable development of the economy.

He also mentioned other legal and regulatory mechanisms including the REDD and the REDD+ programs adopted by the UNFCCC. Both of the aforementioned projects help the states to allocate necessary funding and long-term anti-deforestation strategies including a monitoring project for successful implementation. According to them, the Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action (NAMA) can also be used by Bangladesh to increase the sinking capability of the blue carbon ecosystem while addressing the protection of the mangrove forests, salt marshes and sea-grasses. Finally he concluded the presentation marking the importance of a wholesome adaptation of the 'Blue Economy' which shall be on par with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the policy-regulatory-management-governance frameworks.

Presentation of Mansura Aktar:

Ms. Mansura Aktar in her paper titled, "Marine Spatial Planning for Sustainable Management of the Marine Resources of Bangladesh" started by clarifying the basic definitional aspects of the study like the fundamental differences between Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM). She provided a comprehensive understanding of MSP to make the audience visualise the processes of MSP by denoting the importance of zoning in the maritime area. Afterwards, she explained the main contribution of the study by identifying the scope of applying MSP to the sustainable management of marine resources of Bangladesh. Then she briefly outlined the current zone-wise features of maritime area of Bangladesh as well as the opportunities of Bangladesh as far its marine resources are concerned. Tracing the limitations and hazardous ecological consequences of the current 'unsustainable' management system of marine resources in Bangladesh, Ms. Aktar outlined the comparative advantages of MSP to manage the marine resources of Bangladesh in a sustainable way. She concluded her presentation by recommending a step by step roadmap for Bangladesh Government to implement MSP for sustainable management of marine resources.



Presentation of F. M. Arafat:

Mr. F. M. Arafat in his paper titled “The Pathway to regional Cooperation in the Bay of Bengal: BIMSTEC vs. BRI” basically tried to draw distinction between BIMSTEC (The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) and BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) by highlighting the geopolitics surrounding the Bay of Bengal by two of its regional superpowers, China and India that has been intensified in recent years, where he stated that two simultaneous developments extend more options and leverage yet leave difficult choices for the smaller states in the region. He asserted that the Regional Cooperation in the Bay of Bengal Region is not found its feet yet; particularly in South Asia due to longstanding political and historical baggage as well as mutual mistrust among the states.

Mr. Arafat elaborated about an Indian ‘Monroe Doctrine’ over the Bay of Bengal region, with India having a special role as the custodian of regional security to counter China revisionist approach with BRI in this region and BIMSTEC works as perfect projection of this doctrine that simultaneously isolates arch-rival Pakistan. On the other hand, he described BRI as “globalisation with Chinese characteristics” or “economic globalisation” that states that neo-liberal globalisation is laden with political and cultural elements which ultimately leads to backlash and division. In retrospect, Chinese style economic globalisation is supposed to be “inclusive, mutually-beneficial and equitable”. And finally he gave a comparative analysis between BIMSTEC and BRI where he also put forth both their limitations along with their negative effects for the countries.

Comments by the Discussant:

After the presentation of the keynote papers the designated discussant Dr. Rumana Islam made her remarks on them. At first, she pointed out issues like blue economy and blue carbon ecosystem denoting them as diverse. Then she raised the question that how far these issues have been taken into account in national and international levels and also how far Bangladesh has been monitoring these. She thinks CDM is a very good opportunity for Bangladesh. However, showing her concern, Dr. Rumana asserted that the voice of the people who are affected by this shouldn't be ignored. She advised that there should be initiatives to check the allocations are fair and equitable. Moreover, she

stated that in the context of geopolitics, Bangladesh must figure out how to balance between India and China diplomatically, politically and economically as well as sorting out how much BIMSTEC and BRI can take care of Bangladesh's interests.

Open Discussion:

After the discussant's comments, the honourable chair initiated the open discussion session for the audience. The third open discussion session was comparatively shorter than the first two, however, several questions related to the environment and ecosystem of the Bay of Bengal region were asked and discussed there.

Concluding Remarks and Closure of the Conference:

After the open discussion session, the honorable Chair Dr. C. R. Abrar made his concluding remarks where he pointed out how treaties are signed without taking note of the interests of weaker countries and as a result they don't get the rightful share from these international treaties. That is why he thinks Bangladesh has a long way to go to be properly benefitted from these treaties. And finally after his concluding remarks, thanking everyone he enclosed the whole Conference.

__The End__