

Staff Reporter

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has underscored the marine-based economic activities and management of sea and its resources through 'Blue Economy', saying such activities could create new horizon for the development of a coastal country like Bangladesh.

She also emphasized on using the huge potentials of sea and sea resources through proper management to ensure sustainable development of the Blue Economy.

The Prime Minister made the observations yesterday during the inaugurating a two-day "International Workshop on Blue Economy" at a hotel in the capital.

Hasina said the marine-based economic activities through Blue Economy alongside the existing land-based development activities could further expedite the development of the coastal countries like Bangladesh and the developing coastal states.

"It is time-befitting in the present perspective to continue sustainable trend of Blue Economy using huge natural and mineral resources in and under the sea and the adjoining areas of the ocean."

She also mentioned the unlimited role of sea resources in various economic activities including poverty alleviation, achieving self-sufficiency in food production, maintaining environmental balance and facing the adverse impacts of climate change.

The Prime Minister stressed creating skilled manpower to exploit the marine resources from within the country's huge sea boundary, saying that the nations utilizing the sea and its resources became more prosperous economically than others.

She mentioned that the Bay of Bengal could determine Bangladesh's future development and economic growth through expansion of international trade, use of marine mineral resources for long term energy security, proper management of marine fish resources, and protection of bio-diversity and marine environment.

"The economy of Bangladesh is totally sea borne and with 130 billion dollar GDP, Bangladesh's economy is the 44th in the world in terms of GDP," she said.

Hasina said Bangladesh has a dearth of skilled manpower to ascertain the availability and explore marine resources as well as lack of proper technology for exploiting deep sea fishes and seabed resources although it has a huge stock of living and non-living resources available under the seabed and water column.

She also mentioned that as a coastal country of the Bay of Bengal, the interests of Bangladesh are associated with the sea and the main obstacle to establish rights there was unsettled sea boundary with India and Myanmar.

Recalling the farsighted initiatives of the Father of the Nation considering multi-dimensional and huge potential of country's sea resources, the Prime Minister said Bangabandhu enacted the "Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones Act, 1974" to establish rights of Bangladesh in the sea.

She, however, alleged that successive governments in Bangladesh did not take any realistic steps to settle the issue of maritime boundary, rather created various complexities.

She said: "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 while the country's fishermen on one hand faced difficulties in exploiting fishes in the sea and on the other hand, fishermen of other countries easily plundered our fish resources."

Hasina said that it was her government that ratified the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 2001 creating huge opportunity for establishing Bangladesh's rights in the sea on

the basis of international laws and regulations.

With continuous efforts of her government, she said, Bangladesh won the maritime boundary cases with India and Myanmar establishing the country's sovereign rights in the sea through the verdicts of the international courts which created huge scopes to explore mineral resources from the seabed without any obstacle.

Talking about discarding the name of Bangladesh from the list of high-risk zone, the Prime Minister said the International Maritime Bureau has done it recently after long 20 years following the government's strong protest.

In this regard, she said steps have been taken to strengthen Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guards to resist illegal use of animal and mineral resources in the exclusive economic zone as well as to keep international sea line open and safeguard the free movement of commercial ships.

Hasina said that her government has taken steps to impart higher education on Oceanography at the Dhaka University and Chittagong University to create skilled manpower in marine sciences.

"The first National Oceanographic Research Institute is being established at Ramu in Cox's Bazar to create a marine scientific community for research."

In this context, she emphasized taking necessary steps with the assistance of industrialized countries to use modern technologies in these fields.

Referring to the contributions of the world's largest mangrove forest, the Sunddribans, in protecting the ecological balance, the Prime Minister said that her government is taking steps to declare a certain region of the Bay of Bengal as marine protected area for the protection of its marine environment and biodiversity.

The inaugural function was also addressed by Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Industries Minister Amir Hossain Amu, Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan, Forests and Environment Minister Anwar Hossain Manju, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Saidul Haque, State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid Bipu and Assistant Director General of FAO Árni Mathiesen.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmud Ali gave the welcome address.