

OPINION

World ocean day and economic potential of oceans

THE World Ocean Day is celebrated internationally on 8 June every year since 2008, with an aim to advance awareness of the vital importance of oceans, the role they play in sustaining a healthy planet, and to foster public interest in their protection, and the sustainable management of their resources. This year's theme is "The Ocean: Life and Livelihoods". The oceans cover over 70% of the planet. It is our life source, supporting humanity's sustenance and that of every other organism on earth. These produce at least 50% of the planet's oxygen. It is home to most of earth's biodiversity, and is the main source of protein for more than a billion people around the world. The oceans are key to our economy with an estimated 40 million people being employed by ocean-based industries. The mode of transportation through the sea is the cheapest as compared to rail, road and air. There are around 56,000 merchant ships trading internationally. Some 11 billion tons of goods are transported through seas.

The oceans offer many organisms including dried sponges, corals & jellyfish, shells of crabs, oysters, conch and other mollusks, pearls and cuttlefish 'bones', sea cucumbers, sea horses and many other marine animals to prepare medicines such as antibiotics, powders, ointments and decoctions. Oceans are also a big source of energy in the form of oil and gas. An average 28% of world energy source is from off shore. The coral reefs which are found closer to the coast provide an important ecosystem for life underwater. Thousands of species can be found living on one reef. The reefs protect coastal areas by reducing the power of waves hitting the coast, and provide a crucial source of income for millions of people.

Another important aspect is Deep Seabed Mining (DSM) to collect metal-rich resources from the deep seafloor, like seafloor massive sulphides, cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts, and polymetallic nodules. Oceans are also a big source of entertainment and sports. As of December 2018, there are 314 cruise ships operating worldwide. This has become a major part of the tourism industry, with an estimated market of \$29.4 billion per year, and over 19 million passengers carried worldwide annually. Numerous type of water sport is provided by the seas such as surfing, sailing, swimming, water skiing, scuba diving, canoeing, fishing and snorkeling etc. It is pertinent to mention that in the Holy Quran, the sea (Albehar) is mentioned 41 times in the verses giving its importance to mankind. One is quoted here, "It is He who has subjected the sea onto you, that ye may eat fish thereof that is fresh and tender, and extract there-from ornaments to wear, and thou seest the ships therein that plough the waves that ye may seek to enrich yourself of the bounty of Allah and that ye may be grateful (16:14)".

The oceans need special attention from the mankind to keep these clean especially from various forms of pollutants. The developing and underdeveloped countries usually discharge industrial waste and sewerage into the seas and harbours without proper treatment which pollute the beaches and the harbours. Ships cruising through the oceans sometimes discharge their sludge to clean bilges and sewerage tanks. This unwanted waste virtually reaches to the beaches. It is also injurious to marine life. Although IMO laws exist not to pollute the oceans but some dhows and other small vessels do not follow in letter and spirit. Mangroves are special plants which grow in the salt water in the swampy areas. These are breeding ground for the marine life and provide valuable ecosystem services by protecting the coastline. These plants need special attention for preservation as well as regular forestation.

Pakistan is blessed with about 1002 km long coast. The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) extends up to 200 Nautical Miles (370 KM) and extended continental shelf 350 NM (648 km), total area 290,000 square km. Pakistan has not been able to utilize its vast area except for carrying out fishing and means of transportation. Pakistan needs to utilize this huge area by employing latest technological developments in the maritime field to derive maximum economic benefits. Mangroves along the coast are usually used by the poor residents because of no alternate source of energy. The supply of LPG at subsidized cost may be considered. The enforcement of laws regarding industrial waste and sewerage going to sea without proper treatment may be ensured by the concerned authorities. Pakistan needs to focus on a 'Sustainable Ocean-led Development Paradigm' to 'improve the policy and governance of the marine ecosystem.' Citizens should be made aware of the importance and potential of this sector for the economy and for job creation. Regular TV talk shows may be conducted for the awareness of the masses. Maritime-related subjects should be included in the curriculum of the universities.

—The writer who is affiliated with National Institute of Maritime Affairs (NIMA) Islamabad, contributes to the national press on a regular basis.

VIEW



DR ANJUM SARFRAZ