**Taking advantage of the sea**

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Oceans and seas have played a very important role throughout the history of humanity. Nations that understood the utility of seas ruled this world because of their extended reach, economical voyages and lift capacity.

World economies have been sustained and survived over sea trade. A nation which has the sea is considered blessed as enormous potential lies underneath the seas which if exploited optimally accrues great advantages. Pakistan is also one such blessed country.

Despite having a 1050 km long coastline, 240,000 sq km exclusive economic zone and 50,000 sq km continental shelf, Pakistan seems deprived of its due share from the sea and marine resources. It’s simply not understandable why this incongruity prevails in our country when nations around us make good use of their marine resources.

India, Iran, UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia all lie in our region and take substantial benefit from their waters. Pakistan has mostly been focussing on land resources and attention towards our marine resources has been minimal. Successive governments could not accord due importance to this vast resource that lies in our south. The marine potential under our sea therefore seems untapped.

The term ‘blue economy’ has been coined to underscore the important contribution of marine resources to the overall economy of a country without degrading the environment. The coast forms the backbone of the ‘blue economy’ as all the projects related to the blue economy are either established onshore or offshore.

Pakistan has two distinct coasts -- the Sindh Coast and the Makran Coast, on the east and west of Karachi respectively. Both the coasts are distinct in their features and potential which can bring huge dividends to the country. However, as of now, unfortunately both the coasts are in a dismal state of development with even basic commodities scarcely available.

The Pakistan Navy besides its core tasks has always been cognisant of creating awareness about the maritime sector, the blue economy and the significance of marine resources. It conducts formal and informal sessions for people from all strata of society through workshops, lectures, visits, exposures through media etc. Pakistan Navy also conducts Exercise AMAN biannually wherein navies from around the world are invited to Pakistan to participate in a variety of naval and maritime activities. The next Exercise AMAN is scheduled in 2023.

In continuation of its resolve to project Pakistan’s maritime potential, Pakistan Navy under the aegis of Ministry of Maritime Affairs has taken another initiative of organizing first ever Pakistan International Maritime Expo and Conference (PIMEC). It will be clubbed with Exercise AMAN next year from February 10-12. The idea of PIMEC is very noble yet not unique as such exhibitions are held by various other countries on a regular basis. Iran, China, India, Myanmar and Singapore have been regular in organizing such exhibitions. Its purpose is to showcase the country’s potential while affording an opportunity of collaboration between local and foreign entrepreneurs.

Pakistan’s maritime sector is in desperate need of investment. And it is not only foreign investment that we must seek; local investment is also minimal right now and merits to be pursued. It is needless to mention that investors will be ready to invest capital if and only if they consider it to be secure. Governments around the world therefore formulate and implement policies and create an environment that is favourable for investment. The motive should be that the atmosphere must automatically lure investment. This is what Defence Minister Khawaja Asif vowed to have during his speech as chief guest on the occasion of soft launch of PIMEC on the 26th of July this year.

If the government of Pakistan formulates and implements investor friendly policies for the maritime sector, initiatives like PIMEC will certainly bear the fruit. The security along our coast had been disturbed during the past few years yet a favourable secure environment persists currently. This has been achieved through the dedicated efforts of our security forces and law-enforcement agencies.

Security can be further improved if commercial activities are promoted all along our coast and people are incentivised to visit these areas frequently. This will also help in contributing to the socio-economic uplift of the locals which is as yet in a bad state. Also, all commercial projects will be a beneficial incentive for the foreign investors and shall automatically form part of the blue economy.

The idea of PIMEC is worth appreciating yet it will accrue true potential when supplemented and supported by favourable policies and environment. It’s a momentous opportunity being created by the Pakistan Navy and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs to uplift our maritime sector. The opportunity must hence be seized by all stakeholders and this untapped maritime potential may now be finally capitalized upon.

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