



Bangabandhu Island in the Bay of Bengal: Potentials and Challenges

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Abstract

Bangabandhu Island (BBI) is a newly emerged offshore island in the western shelf zone of Bangladesh. The Island is a newly awakened Island in the Bay of Bengal. The island is such an island which is enriched with lots of natural heritages, potentials as well as opportunities. The island covers an area of 7.84 square kilometre and which has huge potentials in marine tourism as well as eco-tourism sector of Bangladesh. Like St. Martin's island, which is the only coral island of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu island can also be an fascinating and landmark as well as ideal island for the tourists both inbound and outbound. The article has a sanguine effort to depict the landscapes of the island so far. The article has a sincere endeavour to illustrate the Island including the history and background, potentials as well as challenges of the Island. Finally, the article has also drawn some in-depth and visionary recommendations for the overall development of the island which can assist to reconstruct the island as a sustainable marine tourism island of Bangladesh.

Key Words: Bangabandhu Island, Bay of Bengal, Potentials, Challenges

Introduction

Bangabandhu Island (BBI) is located in the Bay of Bengal, 10 km south of Mongla upazila in the Bagerhat district of Khulna division of Bangladesh. It is a new tourist attraction. The island is also known as Putney Island. The island is surrounded by beaches about nine kilometers long and 500 meters wide. Located about two meters above sea level, this new island is a unique example of the boundless beauty of nature. In 1992, while catching fish in the Bay of Bengal, the first new char was seen by a fisherman named Malek Faraji, a devotee of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. At that time, he named the uninhabited island 'Bangabandhu Island and hung a signboard there. From then the island is recognised as 'Bangabandhu Island'.

History and Background of Bangabandhu Island

The island has been in existence since 1976 through satellite images. The island then occasionally wakes up and sinks again. Subsequently, after 2004 the island is gradually steady in its size. The island since then (is) increasing without sinking. In 2016, a team of researchers from Dhaka University Coastal Research Unit, Department of Geography and Environment visited the

island. There they spent three days and conducted a variety of science-based research, including the island's inland soil, DCP (Dynamic Cone Penetrometre) survey, and visibility analysis.

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Geography and Natural Heritage of Bangabandhu Island

Located at 35 km north of the Swatch of No Ground (SoNG) and 35 km east from India-Bangladesh maritime boarder. Initially the island has an area of 2 acres but now it has a vast area of 7.84 sq. km. The island has 9 km long and 500 metre wide beach. The island is 2 metre high than the sea level. Behind the island, there are lots of small sand fields and sand dunes and at the most behind of the island, there is a green forest and mangrove forest which has been produced in less than a decade.

General Features of Bangabandhu Island

There are some outstanding and unique features of Bangabandhu Island. The features or characteristics which are exceptionally exclusive and by which Bangabandhu Island can be identified separately from the other marine islands of Bangladesh. The features are:

- a) The clear blue waters of the sea around the island.
- b) Soft sand beach and small sand fields as well as sand dunes.
- c) Different types of ferns and shrubs,
- d) Chhanban (Wild Sugarcane Forest).
- e) Various species of birds.
- f) Shark-free and quicksand-free beach.
- g) Fascinating sunset.
- h) Dolphins, red crabs and turtles etc.

Potentials of Bangabandhu Island

There are lots of feasible potentials as well as prospects of Bangabandhu Island. The potentials are of multidimensional such as economic, social and environmental. The potentials can be achieved if proper and accurate initiatives can be adopted for Bangabandhu Island. The potentials are discussed as below.

Economic

There are huge economic potentials of Bangabandhu Island. Proper planning and roadmap are necessary to tap the economic potentials and opportunities from Bangabandhu Island The potentials can be mentioned such as:

- a) Marine Tourism
- b) Eco-tourism as well as Cruise Tourism potential.
- c) Employment creation and GDP contribution.
- d) Another St. Martin's like island activities and mobility.
- e) Prospect of Island Economy.
- f) Possibility of Island town potentials and public living as well as economic functioning etc.

Social

Some social potentials can also be achieved through Bangabandhu Island. Social potentials can also contribute to the development of Bangabandhu Island. Here are some mentions of social potentials which are very much attainable and also can be sustainable. The mentions are:

- a) Migration.
- b) Improved standard of living of the island community.
- c) Poverty reduction.
- d) Cultural exchange.
- d) Development of norms and values.
- e) Business success.
- f) Safety in the community.
- g) Tourism development (Both marine and coastal).
- h) Collective participation in the community services.
- i) Interpersonal communication and skills.
- j) Maintenance of marine heritage etc.

Environmental

Environmental potentials are very important and significant for the sustainability and durability for the development of any sector. The indicators and elements of environmental potentials of Bangabandhu island can be addressed as below.

- a) Potentials of huge mangrove forest and natural forestation.
- b) Sanctuary of marine animals.
- c) Climate change combat potentials.
- d) Anti-marine pollution potentials.

e) Potentials of sustainable and smart health of Bay of Bengal and Bay of Bengal's eco-system and biodiversity etc.

Challenges of Bangabandhu Island

There are some challenges towards the development of Bangabandhu island. Most of the challenges are climatic as well as environmental challenges. Besides these climatic and environmental challenges, there is also a challenge which should be addressed as challenge of sustainability. The challenges can be addressed as below.

- a) Climate change and global warming.
- b) Sea-level rise, soil erosion and marine pollution.
- c) Domestic waste as well as dumping challenges.
- d) Cyclone and storm-oriented threats.
- e) Lack of reservation of the island.
- f) Absence of a roadmap, visionary planning for Bangabandhu Island.
- g) Lack of govt. as well as PPP (Public Private Partnership) enterprises.
- h) Acquisition threats etc.

Recommendations

Bangabandhu Island has lots of potentials as well as prospects. The island has an ample opportunity to be transformed as a model and iconic island. The island has huge potential in marine and coastal tourism. The island can be established as an exemplary developed island in the marine and coastal tourism arena also. But, to do that some landmark initiatives should be taken. There are some recommendations or suggestions stated below.

- a) Bangabandhu Island policy or development framework.
- b) Government proper initiative for sustainable conservation of the island.
- c) GoB (Government of Bangladesh) and PPP (Public Private Partnership) investment enterprises for construction of the island as a model island.
- d) More feasibility study and research endeavors on Bangabandhu Island.
- e) Adequate household installations effort to transform the island into a more vocal and live island.
- f) More patrol and surveillance measures from Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Coast Guard for the sovereignty and security of the island etc.

The above mentioned recommendations, or suggested proposals could be taken to build Bangabandhu Island as a model and tourism-friendly not only in Bangladesh but also it could be a fascinating tourist island to the international tourists. But before the successful scenario, proper measures must be taken effectively as well as sustainably implemented.

Conclusion

Bangabandhu Island is a new island that has been clearly emerged since 2011-2017 in the Bay of Bengal. So, this island can also be addressed as Virgin Island. There are lots of ample opportunities and potentials to develop the island and multidimensional benefits from the island. At the same time, there are huge prospects of marine tourism, coastal tourism, bay tourism, cruise tourism and after all island tourism, it can be comfortably and sustainably established if proper steps can be taken. After all, the island based economic activities can also contribute to the development of blue economy and finally contribute to the national economy of Bangladesh.

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