

Hill cutting continues unabated



Hill cutting at Fatehabad in Hathazarai

NURUL ALAM

Despite a ban, illegal hill cutting continued unabated in the port city and its surrounding areas while the authorities concerned could do little to check it.

Consequently, the natural beauty of the hill bound port city is on the wane in addition to posing a threat to ecological imbalance.

Chittagong having a unique combination of hills, sea and river unlike other parts of Bangladesh carried potentialities and prospects of developing it into a tourist spot, but the hopes were dashed by the menace of illegal hill cutting, residents said.

According to unofficial reports, about 200 hills were razed to the ground here during the past ten years period.

Most of the hills were leveled down at Nasirabad, Kulshi, Polytechnic area, Jakir Hossain

road, Lalkhan Bazar area, Jalalabad, Hathazarai and Kumira either for development of housing estate or for selling earth. At Kumira and Hathazarai areas, a number of brick fields are running after cutting hills illegally, witnesses said.

When contacted sources in Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) said incidents of illegal hill cutting had come down gradually in the port city after some cases were filed against the violators. "But we are to depend on police to launch raids on receipt of information of any illegal hill cutting", the CDA sources said.

Talking to this correspondent former chairman of CDA Col. Jalalabadi said, "only police action can stop this menace of illegal hill cutting, CDA alone can not do anything."

"Police are enough to check illegal hill cutting", he added.

When asked commissioner of Chittagong metropolitan police

(CMP) Shahidullah Khan said, "We have already taken serious steps to check illegal hill cutting and few days ago we have arrested four persons from the spot."

"Besides, we have set some sources here to provide us information at the time of cutting hills," CMP commissioner said.

But sources said that illegal hill cutting continued at night in collusion with police on the basis of 'token system'.

A section of earth and sand traders were allegedly involved in illegal cutting of hills secretly, sources said.

Director of local environment department Md. Ismail said, "Some traders on earth and sand are secretly cutting hills. But when we receive any information we usually call police to nab the violators."

"Sometimes, we file cases against the violators if they are caught red handed" Ismail said adding "many hills were destroyed

in Chittagong as there had been a continuation of cutting hills from British period while the ban came later with the creation of awareness about environment." "Such indiscriminate hill cutting will really create ecological imbalance no doubt", he added.

President of a local environment journalists forum and women entrepreneurs association Monwara Hakim Ali said, "With illegal hill cutting Chittagong started to lose its charm and beauty day by day."

"The authorities concerned must rise to the occasion to protect our hills, otherwise it will be difficult to keep up the natural beauty here," Monwara added.

Chittagong city corporation sources said during the rainy season many city areas experience waterlogging due to siltation in the drainage systems with the onrush of mud and sand following the hill cutting.

Rule of extortionists

Even national cricketer Akram Khan not spared

SHAHIDUL ISLAM

Since the BNP-led alliance government came to power, the people including business community of the port city have been held hostage by the extortionists belonging to the ruling party backed hoodlums and its student front. Even they did not spare national cricketer Akram Khan.

In most cases, the 'victims' preferred not to lodge any complaint with police station fearing further intimidation and harassment by the goons. Instead, they obliged to the demand of the extortionists or come to some sort of compromise with them.

To add to their misery, the police administration here kept mum and were blind in the affairs, especially when the culprits have any 'slightest' connection with the ruling party or its rank and file.

Akram Khan, the national hero who led his country in her historic victory in the ICC Trophy back in 1997, might consider himself 'somewhat' lucky as he succeeded to settle a huge 'extortion demand' by paying at last only Tk.10-thousand to the criminals!

Sources said, dividing the entire city area, comprised with 12 police stations, into five zones the JCD groups had long been controlling all the incident of extortion. CMP-listed criminals and JCD cadres Tinku, Shahed, Bakkar, Habib, Chhoto Alamgir and Shibir cadre Habib Khan were leading these groups.

Three influential leaders within the ruling party and the government allegedly giving every possible shelter and safety to those cadres 'directly' and 'indirectly', sources concerned said.

A source in the CMP, however, attributed to some political and 'willful' appointments of a section of the police personnel for the increasing crimes and extortion in the city during past few months.

Those officers have got their postings here only for their political allegiance to the present government, and neither for their competence nor performance, the source said. "And because of this political obligation and intimacy with the cadres, they seldom show any urgency to nab the culprits who

have had any link with the ruling parties."

It is learnt that the top officials concerned recently objected seriously to the 'inefficiency' and 'controversial role' of three Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Khulshi, Panchlaish and Doublemooring police stations, but no action so far was taken against them for political reason and influence.

Sources said, the building of country's leading courier service - 'SA Paribahan', near city BNP office, has recently been sold out at Tk.2.5-crore. Later, JCD cadre Habib demanded a toll of Tk.10 lakh from the building-owner Harun. Later, some JCD cadres took position around the building. Fortunately, Harun the ill-fated owner of the building, was saved as police rushed to the spot to rescue him.

The building owner did not dare to file any case against the culprits fearing reprisals.

The criminals also did not spare the small traders in the city. The business community of Jubilee Road and Kazir Dewri areas were passing their days in great sufferings, falling prey to the uncontrol-

lable extortion and intimidation by CMP-listed notorious criminal and extortionist Chhutoo, the prime accused in the sensational 'jewellery shop' looting case at Apollo Shopping Centre few years back.

Chhutoo returned home recently ending a long exile in Middle East and began in full swing his criminal activities in the city, sources said. He had realised Tk.10 thousand from two mosaic shops as toll few days ago, they said.

In last two months, the gang led by the JCD cadres had extorted huge amount of money and looted valuable from some departmental shops and restaurants in city's Pathantuli, Mugalutuli, Agrabad and Barik Building intersection areas, sources said.

Four months ago, a police sergeant detained a 'hundi' trader along with Tk.32 lakh from city's Sadarghat area and brought him to the thana. The trader was later released as per 'secret understanding' with police, thanks to the initiative of an influential city JCD leader. In return, the JCD leader had received Tk.1 (one) lakh as a 'gift', sources concerned said.

Stop marine pollution, save sea

CAPT. M. HABIBUR RAHMAN

Since the Rio de Janeiro earth summit in 1992, mankind's relationship with planet has undergone a revolution. Men's use and enjoyment of the sea is one of the oldest relationships, hardly surprising as it represents 75 per cent of the living space of the planet. The total annual input of petroleum hydrocarbons into the sea is approximately three million tonnes of which some 15 per cent is due to accident related to exploration, production and transportation.

The opening statement of chapter 17 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) agenda 21 concluded:

The marine environment including the oceans, seas and adjacent coastal areas form an integrated part, is an essential component of the global life support system and a positive asset that represents opportunities for sustainable development.

Bangladesh is a maritime nation. The sea coasts of Bangladesh extend over 700 kms in the Bay of Bengal. The area of EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) is approximately 40,000 sq.mls.

Bangladesh imports around 1.20 million tons of crude oil and 0.5 million tons of refined oil yearly and most of the traffic passes through Chittagong port. A major portion of these oil are transported to inland areas of Bangladesh through smaller tankers. The main risky areas for marine pollution exist within Chittagong port limit. Mongla, the second largest port is also exposed to oil pollution due to ship movement.

Each year approximately 1500 ocean going vessels including 40 oil tankers call at Bangladesh ports. As per international convention, ocean going vessels are required to keep their waste oil, oil mixed bilge and other trash on board and remove/dispose or transfer them whole at berth. But till now for want of reception facilities in Bangladesh ports no infrastructure has developed either to recycle these wastes or dump them underground. Crude or refined oil is transferred at outer anchorage from big tankers to lighter tankers because of the draught restriction in Chittagong port. During this transfer process certain portion of oil leaks into the sea. Further more, there exists the risk of larger pollution resulting from accidents.

The coastline of the Bay of Bengal extending from Faujderhat

to Kumira is being used for ship breaking. Oil from broken ships or other oil related wastes may pollute the sea in these areas.

Currently, as many as 2500 registered vessels including the tankers and hundreds of unregistered small mechanised boats ply in the inland waters. In addition to these approximately 1300 cargo ships and boats ply in the coastal waters. The fishing trawlers and boats in the Bay of Bengal number few thousands. Burnt oil, oil mixed bilge and other wastes are dumped into sea and rivers from these ships.

Borne by water of rivers and canals, the industrial waste of factories founded beside rivers and canals, chemical fertilisers used in agriculture and the waste from the sewerage of towns and cities end up in the Bay of Bengal. Dry docks to facilitate repair and maintenance of vessels and oil exploration with offshore drilling unit also pollute the sea.

The oil discharged from the above-mentioned sources and the waste of different other sources destroy the marine life, fish, aquatic plants and other aquatic organisms living in the sea. They harm the agricultural and forest resources and the recreational spots along the 700 km long coastal land of Bangladesh. They also pose serious health hazards for people living in the coastal areas.

Future remedies in real term in Bangladesh there is no authority to monitor marine pollution caused by vessels and coastal industrial ventures, and no body knows the exact extent of the pollution that has taken place in the Bay waters so far over the years.

- 1) To create reception facilities in order to remove oil and other wastes from ocean going vessels calling at Chittagong and Mongla ports. If the port authority takes time to set up reception facilities, as an interim alternative arrangement private owned agencies may be hired through tender to remove waste oil and other waste.
- 2) All industrial wastes to be treated to ensure its biological safety prior to discharging to the estuaries or sea.
- 3) The coast guard, in addition to supervising various duties in the territorial water of Bangladesh, will also work to examine and prevent pollution of sea environment.
- 4) To guard against oil spill a well equipped surveillance and reporting station VTRS (Voluntary Traffic Reporting System) be established at Cox's Bazar and second station at Patenga. A complete ship tracking system will be available at these

stations as well as powerful patrol boats for immediate dispatch.

- 5) To create national awareness of the danger of pollution, seminars and workshops may be arranged at regular intervals involving ship owners, ship agents, ships officers and port users.
- 6) Each year on the eve of World Maritime Day efforts are made to stress the need of sea conservation and create mass awareness by holding seminars, workshops, publishing pamphlets, airing special programmes on TV and Radio.
- 7) A comprehensive Maritime Administration is needed to coordinate the total work of monitoring by different agencies. A contingency plan to fight pollution to be adopted by Maritime Administration, Port Authority, Bangladesh Navy, Coast Guard, Environment Directorate, Fish and Livestock Directorate and Forest Directorate.
- 8) To curb damage, resume salvage of the affected areas certain equipment such as aircrafts, communication equipment, oil booms, cleaning materials may be kept ready under the disposal of proper authority.
- 9) The Environmental Directorate in the light of Montreal Guide may take steps to prevent the pollution of water by the waters of river or canals carrying waste products discharged by the sewage system.
- 10) The SAARC countries in

collaboration with the countries situated along the coast of Bay of Bengal can form a regional contingency plan to fight and combat pollution.

- 11) Immediate steps may be taken to enforce the Sea Conservation laws. Ratification of MARPOL 73/78 convention is essential.

Save the sea is both a goal and an obligation for the world's maritime industry despite economic constraints and increased costs in implementing national and international regulations. Environmental protection costs money and increasingly so for those who do not practise it.

It is high time to realise that, any ecological imbalance will bring about a bad effect to a country as a whole. In that case we create a better living place for our next generation. Earlier, it is realised by those at the helm of our country the better is the future. Lets come out with contingency plans combating risk of pollution and preserving our God gifted excellent ecological status for our beloved generations to come.

Capt. M. Habibur Rahman is a Nautical Surveyor in Mercantile Marine Department in Chittagong, Bangladesh.

On June 4, JCD cadres stopped construction work of the counter box of Silk Line air-conditioned coach service, a new business establishment of Akram Khan and his partners including former national footballer Ashish Bhadra, near the Garibullah Shah Mazar in city's Dampara area for an extortion of Tk. Two lakh.

However, for the sake of their already-invested huge money and to run the business without any future 'disturbance', Akram and his partners had no other option than to come to a negotiation the very next day to pay the least.

Like many other cases, this was also an unreported incident of 'silent extortion' in recent time.

Many people seeking anonymity said the scenario of unabated extortion by the ruling party backed perpetrators in the city and adjoining areas is almost the proto-types like that Akram Khan experienced in the first week of June.

Toll money has to be paid to the criminals if one wishes to construct a building, open or run a business, and to buy or sell land within the periphery of Chittagong city, they added.



Dr. Mahmudul Alam (extreme right) presenting the key-note paper at a seminar on 'Development of Private Universities in Bangladesh' at the Engineers' Institution in Chittagong recently. The Fatehabad Foundation for Education and Work and the Integrated Development Foundation organised the seminar. From left are Prof. Mohit-ul Alam, Prof. Kazi Ahmed Nabi, Prof. Alamgir M Serajuddin and Prof. Mahfuzul Huq Chowdhury.

Police, reptiles capture CU auditorium

ATAUL GANI SUMON

Shaheed Mozammel auditorium of Chittagong University (CU) is now getting worn out day by day. Construction and structural faults and absence of maintenance over the decade are attributed to the present condition of the auditorium that once resounded with cultural activities throughout the year. At present, a small portion of the auditorium houses a police camp while the rest has been lying abandoned and infested with reptiles including snakes and poisonous scorpions for over a decade. The auditorium was established aiming at creating scope for practice of free thoughts and cultural activities on the campus.

The construction works of the auditorium was started in 1971 and completed in 1978.

To make it the most modern with the latest architectural design with spacious galleries the authority ventured to make the primary budget for the construction double. But its construction cost stood at Tk 1.19

crore exceeding the primary budget of Tk. 68 lakh.

The then Vice Chancellor of the university, Prof Mohammed Ali unveiled the name plate of the two thousand-seat auditorium. Thus it became the largest auditorium of the port city and a pride possession for the Chittagong University. Nobel laureate Prof Abdus Salam inaugurated the auditorium through a reception organised in his honour.

The auditorium was renamed after Mozammel Hossain, a student of the university who was killed during the anti- autocracy movement on February 15, 1986. It became resonant with frequently organised cultural functions and programmes and turned to a place of merriment as the culture loving students flock there everyday. Programmes by different student and cultural organisations of the university made the auditorium lively. The important meetings of the university including senate and syndicate were also held at the auditorium regularly.

But the misfortune fell on the auditorium when the devastating cyclone of 1991 caused an irreparable damage to it.

Sources said, the university authorities made several efforts seeking monetary help from the government for its repair and renovation in vain and since then the auditorium has been left in an emaciated condition. The damaged tin-roof of the main room of the three-story auditorium is now completely porous allowing even a little shower get into it freely.

The walls are now worn out and the courtyard of the auditorium has turned into a "water catchments".

Side by side the absence of renovation and maintenance the construction flaws are also blamed for the present wretched condition of the auditorium. The sources in the engineering department of the university said the construction plan was faulty. Not only this auditorium but also the many buildings that were built during Pakistan have many construction faults.

"The structural design for the auditorium building with tin-roof was

not suitable for a country like ours where there is plenty of rains," they said. The rooftop of the building did not have a good arrangement for draining out rainwater forcing it get stuck there for hours as the sanitary pipes are also too narrow, they said.

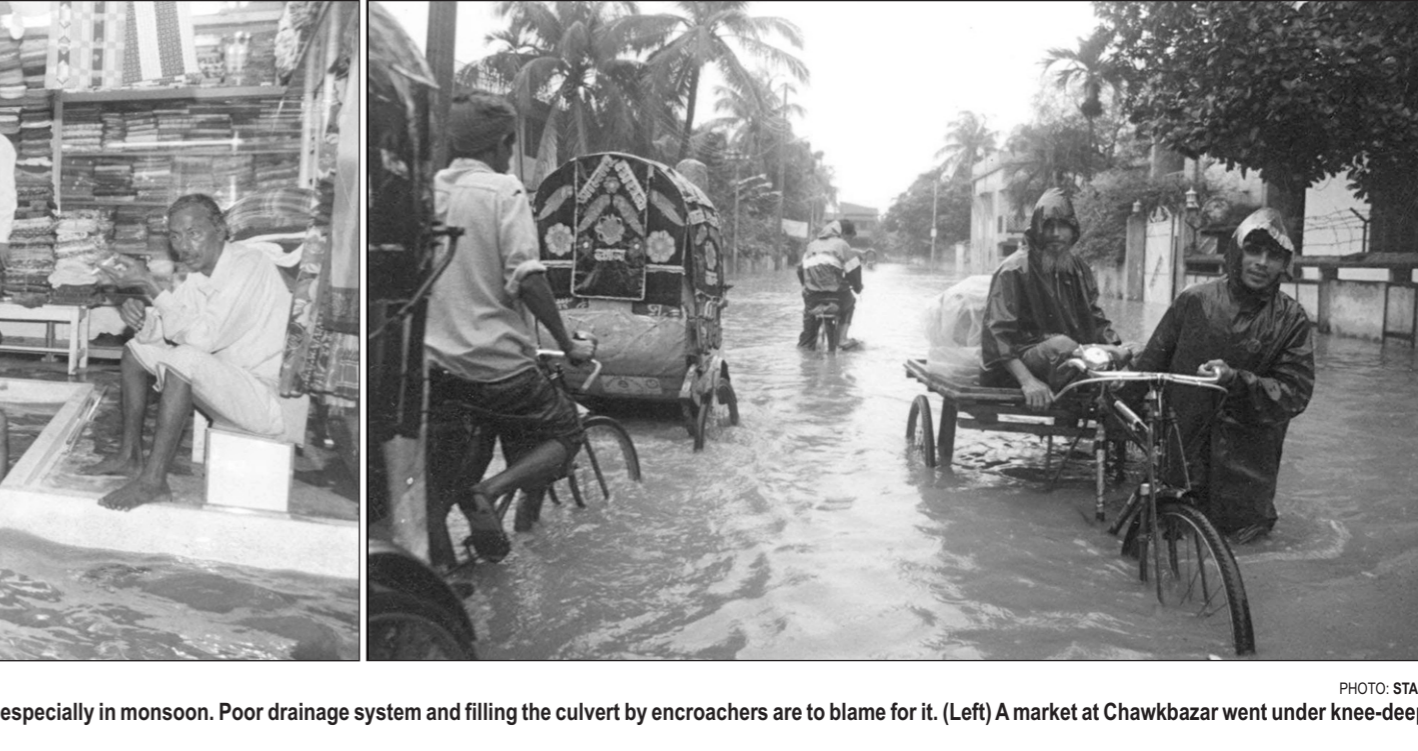
Moreover, the floor of the auditorium also, by now, caved in many places leaving no way for the passage of logged rainwater. The cultural organisations of the university are now using a small room of the CUCSU building to serve the purpose.

Staging a drama or holding a cultural function is very difficult and the programmes have to be held at open spaces such as Jarulata, central field and railway station where both the performers and spectators are insecure.

Rehearsal for the drama or functions in such a small room of the CUCSU is very often hindered by student wings of political parties.



Waterlogging remains a longstanding problem for the residents of Chittagong, especially in monsoon. Poor drainage system and filling the culvert by encroachers are to blame for it. (Left) A market at Chawkbazar went under knee-deep water and (right) the Katalganj area following rains.



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