

ROUNDTABLE

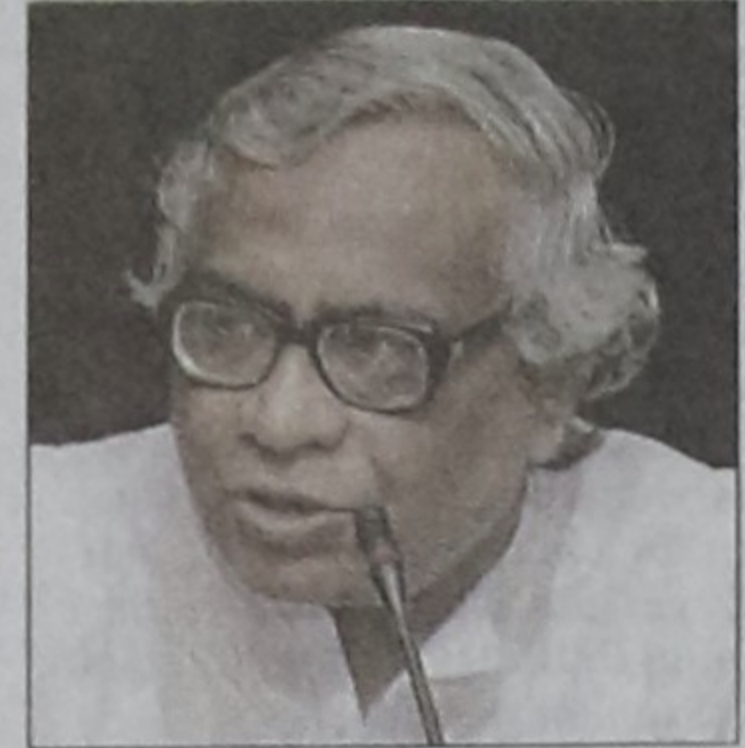
## Challenges of Dev: Hill Cutting and Landslide

The Daily Star Chittagong Office organised a roundtable titled, "Challenges of Development: Hill Cutting and Landslide" at the Institution of Engineers Bangladesh (IEB), Chittagong Centre on August 30. The roundtable was the second of the series roundtable The Daily Star is organising in Chittagong. Engineers, architects, academics, government officials, journalists and NGO representatives participated in the roundtable, moderated by Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam.

DoE could be blamed. Construction of CDA proposed East-West connecting road passing by Asian University without following control line, CCC's move to develop Lake City housing projects razing hills and DoE overlooking such activities and absence of enforcement environmental laws are indicative to disregards to conservation of hills. Many powerful individuals and real estate developer cut hills for housing. All these people have made these hills a death trap where landslide claims lives.



**Mahfuz Anam**  
Hills are being devoured here in Chittagong while the same is being done to the river Buriganga in Dhaka. The environment is being damaged all over the country. In the last 35 years, the population has doubled dramatically, but the land remained the same as it was. We can't get back the same cities as what they used to be in the past. But we must raise awareness about unplanned urbanisation, which is causing degradation of the environment. Flats are being constructed on lands after cutting hills without any consideration that such activities may cause landslides, which can destroy them within a moment. We have to live with nature, not damage it. Political will is needed to stop such bad practices. But our collective political will is so weak that the political parties can easily disregard or ignore them. The Daily Star approaches you about focusing on landslide and cultivating a collective political will to stop it.



**Dr Anupam Sen**  
Vice-Chancellor  
Premier University, Chittagong  
In our childhood Chittagong was a beautiful town nestled with numerous lush green hills, fields and ponds. There were more than 1000 ponds. Death in landslides was something we didn't hear of until 1990 in this exotic city. The Fairy Hill (Paris Pahar) was levelled to construct New Market and State Bank during the Pakistan period. A good portion of Batali Hill was reduced in 1960. Culture of hill-cutting started in this way. All people, rich and poor, were responsible for hill-cutting. It is not a separate matter. It is related to poverty. People who come here from rural areas for livelihood usually go to the hill slopes for easy accommodation and cheaper habitat. Hill-cutting is now not confined only in Chittagong city. People already started reducing down the hills at different remote areas in the adjoining upazilas and habitation at those foothills is a common picture. Government officials and civil society people should look into the matter seriously as landslides are being happened in the entire region.

areas that will require special Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) before undertaking any development activity are to be demarcated.



**Architect and Town Planner**  
**Zarina Hossain**  
Director, Logistics & Planning  
Asian University for Women (AUW)  
Our land records for hilly landscape are not properly prepared. Many places identified as hills in our land records are not hills at all. A hill in the record is found as a canal in practice. Land Department does not have that sort of professionalism to choose proper land to lease out. So, it becomes difficult to go for sustainable develop on leased out land in a hilly area. In the project site for Asian University and lands in adjoining areas proved a lot of such wrong marking in the land records. CDA is constructing east-west connecting road running in front of Asian University filling up a drain without doing any geo-technical studies. Different institutes, including a tobacco company, whoever took lease of land there for development projects raised land through filling up the drain. CCC also has developed a housing project named Lake City there. So that bed level of the drain and catchments in the creases of the hills have been filled up and rose up at least by five feet. The drainage in the hilly topography has virtually been stopped. Due to these interventions after a short period of time the entire Sholoshahar and adjoining areas become inundated. So we are facing problem to maintain the drain. So land recording system in hilly areas should need georeferencing. All activities regarding land should be done under a separate planning function management or an individual planning department with planners. Topographical survey is needed before leasing land. A separate town and country planning department is needed for the whole country.

officials and all the concerned people including us, I think, the deaths could be stopped. In fact none of us are ready to take the responsibility of these tragic deaths. All the government, non-government institutions, people irrespective of rich and poor and even journalists have invaded the hills. This is the ugly face of the whole reality. I also think that lack of commitment from both the political parties and common people are the main reasons. Chittagong City Corporation established a university encroaching on a large drain. Can you believe this? Accountability and responsibility of the government and people should be ensured to get rid of such things.



**Prof AQM Mahubb**  
Dept of Geography & Environment  
Dhaka University  
Influential people are cutting hills and developing slums at the hill-pockets. Poverty forces the poor to live in these slums near their workplace. A section of dishonest officials are involved in the bad practice and provide utility services like water and gas to these slums for the money collected as rent. The government should take all the vulnerable hilly areas under its possession to use the land as open space or as something developed in a planned way. Accountability has to be there. The poor are being made scapegoat. Ministers, MPs or those belonging to political parties are mainly responsible for hill-cutting. Formulate law immediately to stop hill-cutting and determine the planned and environment use of hilly land. Lands along the roads running through hilly areas should be acquired and protected through afforestation to check development of structures there.



**Md Masud Rana**  
Programme manager YPSA  
Not all the hills, only those which are cut down and left with vertical slopes slide. After June 11 landslide the cabinet division formed a Hill Management Committee headed by Chittagong Divisional Commissioner. The committee submitted its reports with recommendations to stop hill-cutting and consequent landslides. Construction of Zakir Hossain Road and proposed East-West connecting road through hilly topography inspires hill-cutting for development of residential and commercial structures along them. CDA is responsible for construction of these roads.



**Md Zafar Alam**  
ADC (revenue), Chittagong  
& Member Secretary  
of Hill Management Committee  
Phulbaria and Matijharna are not the same. In Phulbaria the public were affected. But, in Matijharna everyone is beneficiary and nobody is with us -- the district administration, CDA and CCC, who are trying to relocate the vulnerable people. So, only some 15 people could develop all the slums illegally on the railway and Chittagong Wasa land there. After formation of Hill Management Committee, recommendations were made to stop hill-cutting and landslide. A good number of works were done. We evicted affected people but they returned having no alternatives. So we should come out of the debate on development in hills. The land records made with georeferencing some 20 to 30 years back may have some problems. Such records would never like the satellite image. A system cannot be discarded entirely depending on a rare example (like Asian university site). It is the matter how we would work in reality. Leasing out of hilly land has been postponed since 1994. Estate acquisition act of 1950 allows all sorts of use of a piece of land. Only the Building Construction (BC) rules and City Corporation rules impose some restriction on land under the area of CDA or CCC. DoE has some very ineffective laws to file case against hill-cutting. DoE filed some cases that only prompted the accused to file writ petitions and go ahead with levelling of hills. At present we are facing some 100 such writs. We are trying to stop landslides establishing the slopes and protecting hills through application of geo-technical methods like tree plantation, anchoring and nailing instead of constructing costly retaining walls. In the Hill Management Committee report we also suggested sharing experience with hilly people for development in the hills in the city areas here.



**Abdul Haq**  
Chairman  
Department of Geography  
Chittagong University  
We, the public, have to form a common platform to stop hill cutting and pressurise proper management of hills to stop deaths in landslides. **Shahinul Islam Khan**  
Deputy Chief Town Planner  
Chittagong Development Authority  
As a town planner I take my responsibility. We are working with BC rules ahead of which we were supposed to follow planning rules. Planning rules say what sorts of



construction may be allowed on what sorts of land. In absence of any planning the BC rules to determine the land use. CDA proposed for including some planning parameters in the BC rules to check unplanned development. Besides, the draft BC rules also propose formation of committees comprising members from, civil society and all the authorities concerned to approve plan for development in hilly areas.



**M Nasirul Hoque**  
City Editor  
The Suprabhat Bangladesh  
After June 11 tragedy last year, a total of six committees were formed and 14 meetings held over the issue where a number of recommendations were made. We want immediate implementation of the recommendations. We can consider temporary rehabilitation at the hillsides after measuring extent of the mud or landslide by engineering survey. The pressure of population in the city will reduce if we can expand the city to the southern and northern sides after development of infrastructure.



**Komol Sen Gupta**  
Deputy Executive Director, Community Development Centre (Codec)  
Thirty to 40 owners are controlling the existing slums built on the foothills across the city. The slum owners in the Matijharna area earn Tk 1.5 lakh each a month from 260 houses. But, they who are taking the money don't live in the area. We have to take proper steps much ahead of any disaster. **Shahriar Khaled**  
Social worker  
If we look back to the history of Chittagong we see that the entire city has taken today's shape by cutting or developing hills. The court building known as 'Paris Pahar', the office building of Department of Environment and this IEB Bhaban where we sit for today's roundtable were once hills. Its up to the architects and geographers to suggest how can we construct building saving the hills. **Engr AMM Zia Hussain**  
Adviser & CEO, Youngone Bangladesh  
Chittagong is land-hungry like other parts of the country and the ratio between man and land is decreasing day by day. Lack of land for habitation is forcing the people towards the hills. The problem may be solved to a some extent if we can develop the hills following the development



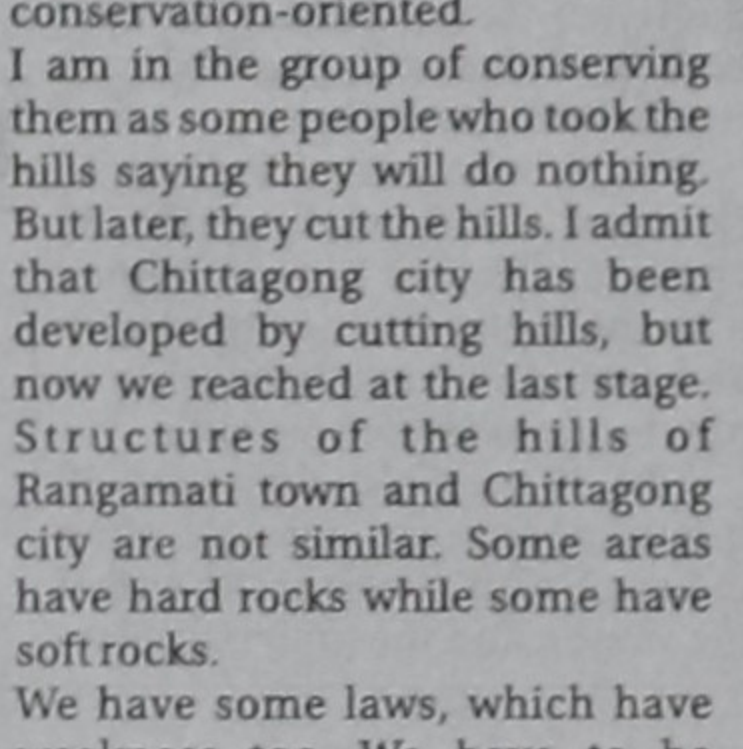
strategy of city's Surson Road area where development was carried out dressing the hilltop and maintaining the hills. In the Master Plan of 1961, it was directed not to cut all hills. Identify which hills will preserve, demolish completely and develop after partially training. A Town and Plan Ministry is necessary. Hill-cutting cannot be stopped completely due to the development. Collective effort is needed for saving Chittagong and its environment.



**AM Ziauddin Khan**  
Deputy Managing Director,  
AK Khan Group  
I think, rather than the blame game, we all have to gather in a common forum. We should have planning with architects, planners, geographers and city authorities as the responsibility lie with them. **Shahidul Islam**  
There is no difference of opinion in the point "Will we keep the hills or not" but there is scope for discussion that the aspect will be engineering, development-oriented or conservation-oriented.



**Prof Nurul Islam Nazem**  
Dept of Geography & Environment  
Dhaka University  
General people destroy the hills to some extent but the government or other authorities are the major plunderers of hills. How the nature would be conserved is not clear in our written Nature Conservation Policy. We need to have planning act for the country. There are separate acts for municipality, city corporation and development authorities. There is no similarity between those and the act is no longer sustainable for controlling the land. Everybody has to obey the acts. But, the authorities discriminate between the rich and the poor. The condition is similar to all the cities across the country. A specification must be made between land use and zoning. Implementation of law and punishment are necessary. Awareness building is also needed through publicity of the law for general people. Civil society, comprising representatives from all sections, can play a role as a pressure group. Most of the things are possible from the engineering point of view, but we have to consider whether it is possible socially or economically?



We have some laws, which have weakness too. We have to be united on the issue that after reforming the existing laws a conservative hill-oriented law should be enacted. Development will go on following the new law, but the approach would be conservation. Rainfall has a relation with the waterlogging, but hill-cutting, deforestation and soil composition are the main causes behind the landslide. If I give one prescription in this regard, I will say that the problem will be solved completely if the report prepared by the technical committee formed after June 11 incident is implemented.



**Prof Dr M Shahidul Islam**  
Department of geography and environment  
Jagannath University  
The two major reasons that hindered development issue of Chittagong seriously in recent times are hill cutting and landslide. Among environmental disasters like waterlogging, filling of ponds and water bodies, encroachments on the Karnaphuli and unplanned urban growth the people in Chittagong face, hill-cutting and consequent landslides have emerged as the most threatening ones. The hills in Chittagong are predominantly composed of sand. Many of them stand at 80 degree when a hill with a 30 to 35-degree slope develops tendency for landslide. Hill cutting posing threat for landslides went on at an alarming rate in the last three decades for housing and construction of different structures. Over 100 hills were simply vanished from areas like Khulshi, Sholoshahar Chashmahill, Cosmopolitan, Hill View, Amin Jute Mill and Raufabad during this period. Massive hill-cutting was going on in and around Foy's lake at Lalkhan Bazar. The main reason behind hill-cutting is huge economic returns. Hill-cutting increases value of land by several times and produces earth to sell at a good price. The recovered earth and soil are used for filling land and at brick kilns. It begins with the leasing out of government land. Then after clearing, burning and firing the hill-cutting starts. Hill cutting goes on unchecked due to weak legal system and bad governance. Housing is blamed largely. But, I have a different approach. Hills are mainly cut down at Foy's Lake and adjoining areas. If it was for housing then there was huge open land in ward No. 2, 3 and 5, at Patenga or in the areas on the other bank of the river Karnaphuli. So why are we invading the hills? It's not for housing, it's actually for a huge economic profit. The authorities of CDA, CCC and



**Engineer Ali Ashraf**  
Chairman  
Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB)  
Chittagong centre  
People irrespective of rich and poor cut hills in 90 degrees slope. After cutting hills becomes stripped of plant coverage. Nothing is done to stabilise the steep sides or slopes. These hills then become vulnerable to landslide. As engineers, we do not consider development in hills to be a crime as long as the engineering guidelines and policy are followed. It's not a wise suggestion to cut the head to get relieved of headache. Hills are important elements of our heritage, culture and physical landscape. Any future management decision on the development of hilly areas should be based on the principle of sustainable development. Resources should be used in a way, which do not endanger its future use. All developments in the hills must be professionally planned and implemented. The planning should be guided by natural environmental settings. In Malaysia, a beautiful tourist zone was developed in hilly province Sava. Development in a hill doesn't mean that it will damage the hill. For instance, we can talk about picturesque Jilapy Pahar, which is located just opposite to the hill that slid at Matijharna. A road winds up in Jilapy Pahar. The sinuous road was developed in three steps maintaining slopes of the hill and with stairs connecting the steps at different points in a very planned way. Development cost was little as the road covered a longer stretch of land. So, development in hills could be allowed to those who can afford and come up with a professionally designed, environment friendly, architectural and structural design. Hills with high ecological and landscape values may be identified for conservation. Sensitive hill



**Shyamal Dutta**  
Editor, The Bhorer Kagoj  
Referring to different government initiatives after the devastating landslide that claimed 127 people here last year we all thought that no further landslide would occur again in Chittagong. But death of 11 more people within a year made their initiatives meaningless. All their commitments have been proved false and there was no accountability in the government activities. If a murder case could be lodged against the government



**Sharif Chauhan**  
Coordinator,  
Save Chittagong & Jono Uddyog  
We started the hill protecting movement in 2002. Government institutions and the committees formed to oversee the issue are responsible for the hill-cutting. The existing law is very weak in preventing hill-cutting and taking action against the plunderers. The lease system of the hills should be cancelled for the sake of beautiful hills in Chittagong. Legal action against the people directly engaged with the practice will have to be taken. After June 11 last year, the CDA and Department of Environment (DoE) prepared a list of 222 people responsible for hill-cutting. But, later names of some 'special' people, who are really responsible for the crime, were dropped from the list when it was republished.



**Mahfuz Anam**  
Many environmental problems are irreversible. The climate has been changing and polar ice caps have been melting. The climate change is taking place due to development activities by some developed countries as their policies have been lacking in foresight. We have to set up industries and develop housing for both the rich and the poor in a sustainable way. I believe that the solution will not come through blaming each other. But if someone fails or neglect their duties, then they must be blamed. Otherwise, the truth would be suppressed. We want to offer our sincere cooperation to help the people protect the environment and develop the cities. We can provide you with information and facilitate your efforts. Make public the report of the technical sub-committee of Hill Management Committee in order to protect the hills.



**MA Salam**  
First Vice-President, BGMEA  
Lack of manpower and coordination in and among the management agencies are responsible for the problem. None would be able to stop expansion of the city. We have to cut the hills for economic necessity. Professionals and management agencies will have to proceed through coordination.