

Hill cutting threatens environment

ARUN BIKASH DEY

A portion of Probortok Hill has been cut and a number of trees felled to build a multi-storied shopping mall and apartment complex triggering further environmental degradation in the port city of Chittagong.

A developer company made a fence around the hill to continue plundering and hiding its activities.

The Executive Committee of Probortok Samgha (ECPS) and the developer R F Properties signed an agreement in this connection, prompting protests by different socio-cultural and environmentalist organisations.

The organisations have come out in the street to protest hill cutting and felling of trees for construction of such a giant building on a historic and protected area.

Probortok Samgha signs deal with R F Properties to build shopping mall

A series of programmes are being observed under the banner of Probortok Samgha Raksha o Samrakshan Committee (Committee for saving and protecting Probortok Samgha) and some other organisations in Chittagong for the last few days protesting the signing of agreement with the developer.

The protesters alleged that ECPS has given a portion of Probortok Samgha's land to the developer company for construction of the shopping mall, violating the Environment Protection Act 2010.

Legal battle
Meanwhile, a legal battle also began over the agreement signed with R F Properties.

Probortok Samgha Raksha O Samraksha Committee filed a case with the Fourth Additional District Judges Court Chittagong on December 1, 2010 for violating the injunction of the court. The court ordered the respondents to show cause as well as to appear before it in person on January 3, 2011.

The Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) also issued a show cause notice to both Probortok Samgha Executive Committee and R F Properties asking why the plan should not be cancelled.

Earlier, the CDA approved a plan of 12-storied commercial building with a basement and semi basement by Probortok Samgha on June 22 in 2008. CDA approved the plan on 48 terms and conditions. One of the conditions (condition no 20) is ECPS can not build any shop around 50 metres of the main road.



R F Properties makes fence, top, around Probortok Hill, cuts hill and fells trees, bottom, to build a shopping mall and housing complex in the Probortok Samgha areas in the port city .



Department of Environment issued No Objection Certificate (NOC) for the project on December 2 in 2008. The DoE renewed it twice, with the last one till December 2, 2010.

R F Properties made a fence around the proposed project area few days back. They cut a portion of hill and fell a number of trees. Different environmental organisations including Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) protested the activities by forming human chain in front of the project area.

DoE Director Zafar Alam said he visited the spot and issued a show-cause notice both to R F and Probortok

Samgha managing committee for violating the environment protection act. He said they would go for further steps after getting reply of the notice. He said no one would be allowed to make fence throughout the project area in future.

When asked, Ehsanul Habib Joy, Business Development Manager of R F Properties, said they have cut only a small number of trees that stood in a scattered way. He said they would plant trees three-fold in a planned way. He said they have not violated any law and determined to abide by the law of the country.



Beginning of dispute
Parimal Chowdhury, former secretary of Probortok Samgha Executive Committee, said the then committee led by Vinod Bihary Chowdhury and Parimal Chowdhury offered Sukumar Chowdhury to sell a portion of the land in 1996. Sukumar offered Tk 5 lakh per ganda that the committee rejected. The committee signed an agreement with T K Group to sell the same portion of land at Tk 7 lakh per ganda in 1997. But the agreement was not implemented in the long last.

When asked Sukumar said he was not

given such an offer as he is not involved in any such business.

Advocate Rana Dasgupta, member of the executive committee, said 15 days after the signing of the agreement, a lot of posters were seen on the walls in the city under the name of Probortok Samgha Raksha Committee. Later Advocate Pranab Hore along with 21 others filed a case with a court demanding that the committee has no right to sell the land property, he added. The court dismissed the case as the allegation was found false, Rana Dasgupta said. Then the committee decided to develop the portion of land on its own,

changing earlier decision to sell it. Accordingly, they signed an agreement with Chevron to build a multi storied building in accordance with "Build, Operate, Transfer System," he added.

Meanwhile, Advocate Mridul Guha, member secretary of Probortok Samgha Raksha O Samrakshan Committee, said they filed a case with the fourth Additional Judges Court, Chittagong and the court passed an order for an injunction against either to sell or to give lease of the land and it still prevails. But the committee gave lease portion of the land to Chevron for 25 years, violating the injunction.

Committee Secretary Tinkari Chakrabarty said they have not given lease of any portion of land to Chevron rather, they rented the building to them for 25 years.

Anjan Sen, life member of Probortok Samgha Managing Committee, said a decision has been taken unanimously in the annual general meeting (AGM) on July 9 this year to construct a building with own finance. It was also approved by the new executive committee at the first meeting on July 28. But the committee signed an agreement with R F violating the AGM decision, he said.

Oldest philanthropic organisation

Probortok Samgha is the country's one of the oldest philanthropic and welfare organisations which is also linked with the independence struggle of Indian people against British colonial rule. In 1911 after Banga Bhanga Rod (Repealing the Break up of Bengal), one of the followers of the non-violence movement of Mahatma Gandhi, Mati Lal Roy, fled from Kolkata and took shelter in Chandan Nagar. He published a newspaper from there named "The Prabartana" as the editor. He along with his some followers decided to educate the poor children. Accordingly, they started a school named "Probortok Samgha" and later spread throughout the undivided Bengal and opened new branches.

In Chittagong the first branch of "Probortok Samgha" was established in the village of Kadurkhal under Boalkhali police station in 1921 by Bankim Sen, one of the followers of Mati Lal. Later, they established a hostel for the poor students in Chittagong town near the "Kata Pahar Kua" (well of Kata Pahar). They shifted it to the residence of Dr Pravat Kusum Dutta at Ghatforhadbeg and later in Asker Dighir Par near the present Ramkrishna Mission.

They first purchased a portion of hilly land on Goal Pahar. And later they purchased 28 acres of hilly land during 1921-1941.

All the 17 members of Prabartak Samgha were killed during the War of Liberation in 1971. A new committee was formed in 1972 with Justice Debesh Chandra Bhattacharya as the president and Yogesh Sen, Pranati Sen and Parul Dey as members. Meera Sinha who was admitted to Prabartak Samgha as an orphan and was brought up there till her youth was elected secretary of the committee.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

theweekthatwas



Indian theatre group Sundaram stages a drama titled "Ja Ney Bharate" on the inaugural day of a three-day cultural festival at Muslim Hall in the port city on Friday.



Bangladesh Scouts, Chittagong unit forms a human chain in front of the Chittagong Press Club in the port city on Saturday demanding steps to stop stalking.

Cultural festival concludes

The cultural festival titled "Ananda Jagya" concluded in the port city on Friday.

The Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC), Indian High Commission, and Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy jointly organised the three-day festival at Muslim Hall in the port city from Wednesday.

Renowned Indian theatre group Sundaram staged the drama titled "Ja Ney Bharate", directed by famous dramatist Manaj Mitra on the inaugural day.

Veteran artists Pandit Jayanta Bose and Pandit Kumar Bose played sarod and tabla at the festival. Many famous Indian films were screened at the festival on the occasion.

BMMOA website launched

Bangladesh Merchant Marine Officers' Association (BMMOA) launched a website in the port city on

Thursday.

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan was present as the chief guest at the launching ceremony at Hotel Agrabad while Shipping Secretary Abdul Mannan was the special guest.

BMMOA President Engr Risiat Hossain Chowdhury delivered address of welcome and Capt Faisal Azim gave vote of thanks at the function.

Shajahan inaugurated the website and gave away crests to Western Marine Managing Director Sakhawat Hossain and Hoque and Sons Managing Director Enamul Hoque for their achievements in business. Later, Close Up star Nishita Barua and Tapash performed at a cultural function.

World Disability Day observed

Speakers at a meeting on Saturday said inclusion of

the persons with disability in the development programme is essential to achieve the millennium development goal.

Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) and Manusher Jonno Foundation organised the meeting at the Social Science Faculty auditorium of Chittagong University marking the World Disability Day.

CU Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Alauddin was present as the chief guest with Disabled Student Society President Jahurul Islam in the chair.

Prof Alauddin said the persons with disability are not liabilities of the society rather resources of the society. He said they are 10 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh and it would be unrealistic to think about development of the country keeping them outside the development programme.

Dr Joyoti Prakash Dutta, Prof Dr Gazi Salauddin, Dr Siddique Ahmed Chowdhury, Dr Akter Hossain, Dr Manirul Hasan, Dr Abdullah Al Harun and Arun Dasgupta also spoke at the meeting.

A cultural programme participated by the persons with disability followed the meeting.

Call to stop stalking

Speakers at a meeting on Tuesday underscored the need for building a social movement to stop stalking and sexual harassment of women in the society.

They called for taking special measures to stop violence against women through discussion with men and women and boys and girls.

They were speaking at a workshop of new generation organised by Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, Chittagong unit at its office at Dosta Building.

Mahila Parishad at the meeting announced the organising month December-2010 to launch a drive to collect new members and renew membership. City unit Secretary Sugata Barua presided over the meeting moderated by Organising Secretary Shirin Akter Hena. Dr Suparna, Farjana Akhter Bandan, Sharmista

Chowdhury Tahshina, Renu Ara, Bijita Roy, Advocate Fatema Idris, Foujia Shafi, Cultural Secretary Mrinalini Chakraborty spoke on the occasion.

Book fair begins Dec 15

"Amra Korbo Joy" formed a committee to organise a book fair titled Smriti-71 on the DC Hill premises on December 15-25.

The chairman of the national council of the committee of "Muktijuddher Boi Mela-10", National Prof Kabir Chowdhury approved the committee on Saturday.

Premier University Vice Chancellor Dr Anupam Sen was elected chairman of the 71-member committee.

Engineer Mosharaf Hossain MP, Chemon Ara Begum MP, Dr Mahfuzur Rahman, Dr Gazi Salahuddin, Artist Hasi Chowdhury, Jobaida Nargis Khan, Dr A QM Sirazul Islam, Dr Abu Taib, Mihir Nandi and Advocate Abul Hashem are members of the committee.