

# Green Tech



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## GP blazes green trail

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**T**HERE was a time when heavy use of conventional lighting and air-conditioning system prevailed among the newly-built corporate houses of Bangladesh. Some corporate houses -- big or small -- still follow this rule of thumb while building their new office.

Things have changed in the last two to three years as a new concept of sustainable architecture comes into focus. Big corporate entities now thrive to house themselves at an endurable structure that is popularly known as the green building.

Bangladesh's leading cell phone operator Grammenphone (GP), a concern of Telenor, Norway, made no mistake to seize this opportunity. They took the leading edge to accommodate themselves in a structure, where different avenue of green initiatives are fused together in a single house.

It is difficult to say exactly which elements make a structure green, but it is clear from the opinions of different experts that a green structure must be responsive to the environment in a positive way.

There is a customary belief that to be a green building, a structure must have solar power system. GP, through their unique building, showed the sustainability can be achieved without using solar power system in every process -- from power to water supply.

According to GP, the associa-



GP House at Baridhara-Basundhara in the capital. Telecom operator Grammenphone inaugurated the building last year.

tion with environment that is advocated by the house makes it arguably the most energy-efficient building of recent times.

The large country-yard of the house is the key attraction of the building, and all other spaces of the office evolve around this open yard.

Kazi Monirul Kabir, chief communications officer, said GP House is a unique green office. "Incorporating a new way of work, environmentally

responsible work practices and technologies, and truly sustainable architecture and contemporary art hub have translated our corporate identity into a different level," he said.

It represents Bangladesh into global context with the nation's pride, values, heritage and growth, Kabir added.

To save energy in the air conditioning system of the office, GP uses a special cooling process. At the south plaza garden of the building,

fresh air is collected by the air-catchers, which gets cooled as it passes over the water-body, and is eventually drawn into the fresh air supply system.

To maximise the use of daylight in the house, reflected sunlight is balanced by shading from the roof over the courtyard in eastern and western facades, so that natural illumination in the interior of the spaces is even and finely distributed.

According to the necessity of lighting, in some places daylight is drawn deep into the interior, and in other places the light enters gently, or forms thin piercing rays.

To make a quick response to the local climate and following the principle of indigenous regional architecture the top of the building is constructed following a state of the art technology.

The roof consists of two layers where the outer metal

shield floats above a concrete slab, encouraging a cool flow of air in between and optimising the building's passive thermal performance.

The central water recycling system of the building is a key milestone in the structures' compliance to the environment as wastewater is purified and recycled for toilets and watering the trees.

According to the GP officials, rainwater will also be collected from the roof, terraces and used along with the recycled wastewater. To maintain integral ecosystem, the internal road pavement is permeable to rainwater, paving a way to allow rainwater to return to the ground.

The GP officials claimed the seamless geometry and nature-friendliness of the GP House makes it unparalleled in the world of the contemporary architecture.

Added to the sustainability of the building, there are local art and sculptures to embellish the structure and interior. The house is ornate with artworks and statuette by thirty-five leading and emerging artists of Bangladesh.

The GP communication chief said the cutting edge and contemporary artwork is an attempt to address the identity and spirit of the company and the country. The house encompasses local heritage with global presentation while adding to the beauty of the structure at the same time, he added.

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## An eco-resort that stands apart

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**C**OX'S BAZAR is no more clamouring to be listed as one of the New Seven Natural Wonders of the World, but it attracts tourists in increasing numbers from home and abroad.

Pechar Dweep, only a 15-minute ride from Kalatoli point of Cox's Bazar toward Himchhori, is a place of natural beauty where the waves of the sea kiss the foothills.

It is rare that someone making a trip to Cox's Bazar should be missing out on the panoramic Himchhori.

As you venture out on the long black tarred road to Himchhori and have travelled a few kilometres with the choppy sea on your right, a bright sign on a weather-washed board "Mermaid Eco Resort". A cluster of tiny thatched cottages must attract your attention. There you are on the threshold of an eco-resort housed on five acres.

Anyone should easily understand that the resort operators must be an environment-conscious group as one glances at the nice sign of Mermaid painted on a piece of recycled wood pegged at the rather unassuming entrance.

Anisul Huque Chowdhury, managing director, explains why he says Mermaid is an eco-resort.

"Since I began the construction of this resort in 2003, one thing I kept in mind that there must not be any harm done to the natural beauty of the place," Chowdhury said.

He said the resort would not be put in place without the sophisticated design of Ziauddin Khan, the chairman of the resort. "We invested around Tk 4 crore to develop and build the resort. The materials used in construction were mainly old blocks of wood."

But the authorities did not allow felling a single tree within the resort area, keeping all the trees falling within the accommodation zone also intact, he said. "Also, we planted around 40,000 saplings to make the resort greener."

Chowdhury said the first venture was Mermaid Café in Kalatoli area, where recycled materials were used in construction and fresh organic foods were served to the cus-

tomers.

"The success of that café motivated us to build a resort some distance away from the town."

The resort owner recruited 70 percent of the staff from the locality, most of whom had earlier been struggling to make a living by poaching natural resources from the nearby hill forests.

Chowdhury said a plant recycles the waste generated at the resort. "The end of the day sees us separating the food wastes, paper and bottles for recycling."

Food wastes are recycled to generate fertiliser that again is used in the organic farming of vegetables the resort serves to the guests.

Chowdhury said Mermaid

distributed the excess organic fertilisers among the village farmers.

The waste bottles are used in the decor of the resort and mixed with other materials to make mortar used in construction, he said.

Razib Ahmed, the marketing manager of Mermaid, said the resort wanted to attract mainly those tourists who are environment-conscious.

Christopher Craig, country director of a multinational company, said he felt at home being a guest at Mermaid and was happy with the standards maintained by the resort.

"To protect the natural beauty of the countryside like Cox's Bazar, there is no alternative to building this kind of

eco-resorts," he added.

According to Craig, Cox's Bazar is already congested and overburdened with dense concrete structures. He said, "It is not a very good thing for ecotourism."

"As an environment conscious traveller, I feel Mermaid makes efforts to protect the nature against contamination," he added.

Ria Maria who visited the resort on several occasions said: "It is the best resort in the country as far as my experience goes." Maria said the resort did not use any air conditioners; the natural air is sufficient there and so they save energy.

"The rather simple cottages and other structures were built

in a way so that the natural atmosphere remains intact there," she added. Maria said her friends who visited the resort had the same feelings.

There was a time, when ecotourists avoided visiting Cox's Bazar because of the widespread pollution of the local environment and the sea. Chowdhury said: "We got a lot of tourists in the last one year who really cared about the environment and enjoyed their stay at our resort."

Tourists who come to Cox's Bazar are mostly residents in different cities living in tall buildings, he added. "Tourists prefer a place which is in a natural setting and far from any noise."

"We raised Mermaid using recycled wood and other materials, not exceeding the height of the existing trees."

Mahfuz Ahmed, manger of the resort, said since inception they had received around 10,000 guests till then. Of them, more than 40 percent were foreigners and some of them revisited the resort on a number of occasions, he added. The tourism minister, diplomats, writers and many other environment lovers visited the resort.

Talking about their future plan, Chowdhury said he plans to instal solar panels of 5KW capacity soon. "We have a plan to supply power to the local households also, as Pechar Dweep does not have any other power supply." A central effluent treatment plant is also included in his future plan.

The resort owner is building another resort, Club Mermaid, near the existing one.



Left, a cottage of Mermaid Eco Resort; top right, a view of the sea from the resort, and the front view.

*Anisul Huque Chowdhury, managing director of Mermaid Eco Resort: The materials used in construction were mainly old blocks of wood*