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“Unexpected intrusions of beauty. This is what life is.”

— Saul Bellow, Herzog

SNAPSHOT

PHOTO: MD MOAZZEM MOSTAKIM

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It's time to wake up

The miserable scenario of the hill tracts of Chittagong division after the landslide on June 13, portrayed in the *Star Weekend* of June 23, left me speechless for a long time. I could feel the misery and hear the wailing of the vulnerable inhabitants there who lost their siblings or offspring. We can easily surmise that it is a manmade disaster. But who are the people responsible for this catastrophe? It is us, Bengali settlers there, who are trying to extract the very life from the hills.

We are cutting hills, we are cutting down trees. And the poor inhabitants and indigenous people living there are suffering as a result. It is the failure of the government and administration as they could not take any necessary actions to stop hill cutting and deforestation there. Reports show their negligence towards these offences as required actions are taken in very few cases and the whole process for punishing offenders involved in hill cutting is very slow. The government has always tried to promote the hills as tourist spots but they have not thought of the safety of the people living there. This landslide shows the vulnerability of people residing in the hill tracts and teaches us the importance of keeping balance with the environment. It is time we all wake up and raise our voice against hill cutting and deforestation.

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PHOTO: PAHN CHAKMA

THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THESE LETTERS DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF THE STAR WEEKEND.

Some reflections on the budget

Finally, the Tk 4,00,266 crore budget was passed suspending the execution of the VAT (Amendment) Act 2012 for the next two years. Right from the day when the Finance Minister proposed the budget for the coming fiscal year, the introduction of newer mechanisms of squeezing more tax out of the pockets of the public made it unpopular. Especially the plan for raising one-third of the revenue target of Tk 2,48,000 crore by increasing the current VAT scale limits was opposed strongly.

However, introduction of newer taxes and raising existing tax bars would not necessarily fill up government coffers with plenty of cash in a more balanced way. We have often emphasised on widening the tax net by bringing in more and more eligible tax evaders in this regard.

More technically, the continuation of 10 percent tax on bank deposits of up to Tk 6.50 lakh a year actually gobbles up much of the income tax slab. Squeezing more and more tax out of the public hugely discourages local and foreign investment. In the light of the above circumstances, we urge that some of the budget's features be amended in a balanced manner to serve and protect public interests. Repeated over-ambitious budgets have helped little in actual terms in the past.

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