



Does end justify the means?

Housing project for destitute families being carried out by cutting a hill in Ctg

SIFAYET ULLAH

There's little doubt about the nobility of the Ashrayan-2 housing project. Under the project, houses will be constructed and handed over to destitute families as the prime minister's gift, allowing them to live in comfort.

However, when the project is undertaken by allegedly violating environmental rules, question arises whether it could have been done any other way, without harming nature.

In Chattogram's Anwara upazila, the

Around 50 houses of the Ashrayan-2 project have already been built, with locals further alleging that at least 1,000 trees have been cut down in the area to implement the project.

According to the Bangladesh Environment Preservation Act 1995, cutting of hills is prohibited without approval from the authorities concerned. If anyone breaks the law, the punishment is up to two years' imprisonment or Tk 2 lakh fine, or both, for the first time. For the second time, it is up to 10 years' imprisonment or Tk 10 lakh fine or both.

However, the district administration officials claimed that cutting this particular

Asked why this particular piece of land was chosen, the DC replied, "We chose this land for the project to save it from encroachment."

However, the Department of Environment (DoE) officials maintain that the local administration is simply cutting the hill without obtaining permission from them.

"Permission is required to cut down any hill, regardless of land class change or whatever," said Mufidul Alam, director of the DoE (Chattogram region). The Deyang hill is being cut by Anwara upazila administration without the permission of the DoE, he said.

But there are more twists to this story.

Contacted, Jamirul Islam, project implementation officer (PIO) of Anwara Upazila, said, "We started the works after the assistant commissioner (land) office handed over the land to us. But the upazila land office is dealing with the issue, so I don't know the details of the hill cutting."

Tanvir Hasan Chowdhury, AC land of Anwara upazila, said, "Part of Deyang hill is being cut to build 130 new houses under the Ashrayan-2 project in Guchhogram area of Barkhain Union."

When asked whether written permission has been obtained, the AC land said, "The district administration office verbally allowed the construction works to start on the land."

Contacted, Dr Mohammad Kamal Hossain, a professor of Institute of Forestry and Environmental Science of University at Chittagong, said, "Many people are illegally occupying government land all over the country. The Ashrayan project houses could be built on government land. This project should not have been implemented by cutting down the hills."

"Besides, those who are implementing the project think no one will tell them anything..." he added.

The number of hills in Bangladesh is much less than what is needed for ecological balance. Chattogram region has some hills but if these are not protected, the habitats of plants and animals will be destroyed, he said.

district administration is at it constructing houses under the project by razing a 50-60 feet high hill.

Locally known as "Deyang Pahar", the hill is located in Hajigaon area of Barkhain Union.

The hill is being razed for the last one and a half months. When this correspondent visited the area recently, he saw it was being cut off with an excavator, with the soil being taken elsewhere on trucks.

hill is not illegal as the class of the land is being changed from "hill" to "bhita" for the project.

Mohammad Mominur Rahman, deputy commissioner (DC) of Chattogram, told The Daily Star, "We have forwarded a proposal to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to change the current class of the hilly land."

"There is a guideline that the class of any land could be changed to implement the Ashrayan project," claimed the DC.

According to the Bangladesh Environment Preservation Act 1995, cutting of hills is prohibited without approval from the authorities concerned. If anyone breaks the law, the punishment is up to two years' imprisonment or Tk 2 lakh fine, or both, for the first time. For the second time, it is up to 10 years' imprisonment or Tk 10 lakh fine or both.

Syndicate identified after 10yrs probe

They used to import high-end vehicles under carnert facility, says PBI

MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) has identified an importer and forwarding (C&F) agent involved in importing a BMW car through Chattogram Port by submitting fake documents in 2010.

Shahidul Islam, of British Bangladeshi origins, imported the car under the carnert facility.

Kamrul Hasan, owner of HK International, was responsible for redesigning the car from the port on behalf of the importer, PBI sources said.

The sources also said though PBI has interrogated Shahidul over phone, they could not arrest him as he's living in England.

PBI identified the syndicate while investigating a case filed with Bandar Police Station by Chattogram Customs House in 2012.

Though there are 119 such car owners, who imported vehicles using the carnert duty-free facility, submitting fake documents, this is the

Though there are 119 such car owners, who imported vehicles using the carnert duty-free facility, submitting fake documents, this is the first time a culprit was identified, that too after 10 years of investigation.

first time a culprit was identified, that too after 10 years of investigation.

According to the National Board of Revenue (NBR), the vehicles were imported using the "UN Customs Convention on the Temporary Importation of Private Road Vehicles of 1954" facility, with a duty-free privilege called Carnet de Passages, between 2008 and 2012.

According to the NBR, a total of 369 vehicles were imported under carnert till 2013, although Bangladesh was not a signatory to the treaty under which the Carnet de Passages facility is given.

Later, NBR realised this issue and took steps to stop the practice in 2013.

Before the embargo, 129 cars were shipped back to their countries of destination, 120 cars were abandoned at the port, while 119 cars stayed in the country, of which only one paid its due.

According to the facility, if the owners still wanted to use the cars in Bangladesh, they would have had to pay between 150 and 833 percent of the cars' value in tax.

Chattogram Customs House filed the case against Shahidul accusing him of wrongful information – PBI sources said both addresses mentioned by him in Bangladesh and UK were fake – and over unpaid revenues worth around Tk 3 crore.

PBI has seized the car.

The 119 posh cars, including BMWs, Land Rovers, Lexus and Jaguars, are now being used in the country dodging tax of over Tk 400 crore, according to customs documents.

A tribute to revolution and resistance

FM MIZANUR RAHMAN

In the port city's Dampara area, stands a 14 feet tall red building with a single door – bearing the history of a revolution's inception. The building – a British armoury back in the time – was attacked by a group of young revolutionaries under the leadership of Surya Sen on April 18, 1930, following which Chattogram was cut off from the rest of British India for four days.

The structure still stands with all its revolutionary glory and pride and has currently been turned into a museum by Chattogram Metropolitan Police (CMP).

The history of revolution attached to this red building doesn't just come to halt at the armoury raid of 1930. On March 28, 1971, Pakistan armed forces attacked Dampara Police Lines in the early hours. The attack was valiantly resisted by Bengalee policemen on duty, with the most minimal arrangement of resources. SP Shamsul Haque, OC Abdul Khalek and 49 other policemen sacrificed their lives in the fight.



The memories of these two battles, along with those of the 82 CMP policemen martyred in different battles throughout the Liberation war, are well preserved in the new museum with uniforms, firearms, rank badges, caps, and radios used by the then policemen.

The museum also has a Bangabandhu Corner, an audiovisual corner and a laser show portraying the history of police starting from the Mughal to the modern era.

This correspondent visited the museum on March 26 and found people from all walks of life coming in to visit the museum with joy and curiosity.

"I saw the Liberation War from up close. I came here to recall the horrors and bravery attached to this history. The museum is unique in all senses," said 70-year-old Md Rizvi Bakar Ibul Mann.

"The intention is to pass on the glorious and revolutionary history to the younger generations with the museum," said CMP Commissioner Saleh Mohammad Tanvir.

VENOM: let there be cure

CMC research centre dedicated to finding anti-venom for the snake-bitten

ARUN BIKASH DEY

Venomous snakes. In boxes, inside a laboratory.

Not just one or two, a total of 60 of them, belonging to various species of cobra, krait and vipers, are being reared with utmost care at the Venom Research Centre of the Department of Medicine in Chattogram Medical College (CMC).

To feed the snakes, rats and lizards are also being reared in the centre. Chicks are also brought in for them.

The snakes are part of a research, the first of its kind for the country, which aims to produce anti-venom for the treatment of snake-bitten patients.

The government has taken up the project under the non-communicable diseases control programme, with 15 researchers from CMC Medicine Department and Chittagong University's zoology department jointly implementing it.

The five-year project started in March 2018.

Dr Aniruddha Ghosh, principal investigator of the project and professor of CMC's medicine department, told The Daily Star around six lakh people fall victim to snake bite every year in Bangladesh.

The anti-venom available in hospitals



doesn't work in many cases, resulting in the death of many snake bite victims, he added.

Currently, the country's anti-venom is usually imported from India.

He mentioned that the World Health Organization (WHO) has found in a research that properties of snake-venom may vary according to geographical location.

"The anti-venom which works for snakes of one country may not work the same in another country," he said.

Dr Aniruddha also said, "In 2017, WHO took up a resolution that snake-bite patients would have to be treated with anti-venom produced in their own country."

The government has initiated the project in this light.

He also said the CMC Venom Research

Centre now has stock of venoms of all the medically important venomous snakes of the country.

"The WHO has already contacted us over collecting venoms as we're the only research centre which can supply them all types of venoms found in the country. WHO officials directly contacted us, but we've asked them to come through government channel," Dr Aniruddha said.

Abdullah Abu Sayeed, assistant professor



of CMC's medicine department and co-investigator of the project, said, "We have collected venom from all sorts of common venomous snakes in the country."

"We are conducting studies on the structure of the venoms and are looking into variation among them with respect to the snakes' age and habitat location," he added.