

CHATTOGRAM

a city of fading greenery

47pc green coverage disappeared in 30 years
Housing, industrial block engulfing green space
Urban sprawl making it difficult to conserve hills
Port city expanded 618pc in last 40 years
affecting 2,178 hectares hilly areas

MOSTAFA YOUSUF and SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

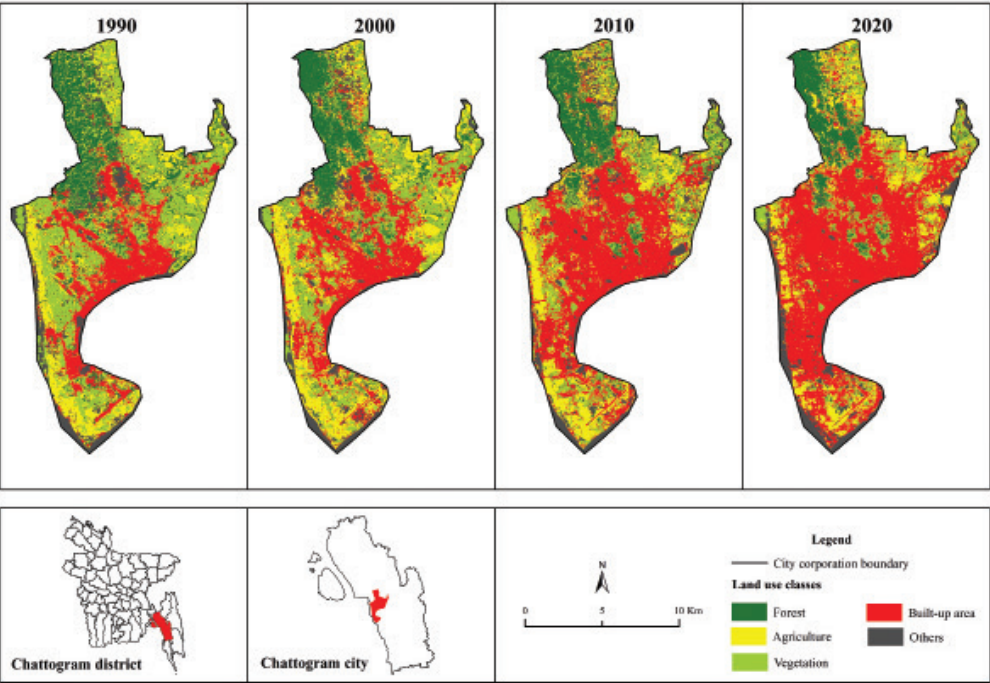
Once upon a time, the country’s port city was celebrated for its lush vegetation and green hills. However, in the last three decades, the city has already lost half its greenery to unchecked, unplanned urbanisation.

A study by the Department of Geography and Environment at Dhaka University has found that the green cover of Chattogram city, which was 68.34 percent in 1990, has gone down to 36.51 percent over the last 30 years. This translates to a 46.57 percent decline.

The study, titled “Green space dynamics in response to rapid urbanisation: Patterns, transformations and topographic influence in Chattogram City” was authored by Sumaiya Siddique and Md Mahin Uddin – two MPhil students from the department.

The study found that housing construction has significantly gone up in the last three decades, leaping from 21.84 percent in 1990 to 53.98 percent in 2020.

Mahin Uddin, one of the authors of the study, told The Daily Star that smaller and less steep hills suffered the most losses.



1990-2020 with 9.9 percent forest cover loss, 7.6 percent agricultural land loss and vegetation cover loss of 14.3 percent.

The study, which assessed 167 square kilometres of the city, found that the growing demands of the urban population are straining the city’s forest and vegetation, leading to the fragmentation of green spaces, she said.

“Chattogram is economically thriving but at a cost. Economic development has brought an enormous number of migrants to the city, leading to haphazard growth and depletion of green spaces,” Mahin said.

Contacted, Sharif Chowhan, president of People’s Voice, a civil platform for the conservation of hills in Chattogram, said whoever has come to power patronised people who cut hills for various commercial purposes.

“Areas like Arefin Nagar, Lalkhan Bazar, Roufabad, Chandranagar, Akbar Shah and Tiger Pass – once an undulating hilly landscape – have now been grabbed by ruling party men because of the regulatory body’s inaction. The canals too, have been encroached upon and are of no use. Now the rivers are also being targeted. The government must put an end to this to protect the greenery of Chattogram,” he said.

Eminent poet and educationist Abul Momen, who has been living in Chattogram since his birth in 1948, said Chattogram was a city of hills and green valleys during his childhood and had an abundance of trees.

“The first attack on the hills, to the best of my knowledge, was in 1960 during the then Ayub Khan regime to build a stadium in Kazir Dewri area. But it was at a tolerable level,” he said.

“The massive razing of hills started during the boom of the real estate business in the 80s. Housing construction and shopping malls took over the hilly areas,” he added.

He urged the government to come forward to protect the few hills left in the city. Otherwise, those too will be lost to the greed of the rich and influential, he said.

Asked, Mofidul Alam, director of the Department of Environment, Chattogram, said they had sent a proposal to the DoE headquarters to survey the hills of the port city.

“The proposal is not approved yet. Once approved, we will look into how many hills have disappeared and how many are left. The survey will help get the accurate data to deal with the loss of green space,” he said.



Promoting young filmmakers

3-day documentary festival held in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A three-day documentary film festival titled Liberation Docfest Chattogram 2022 was held in the port city, aiming to promote young film makers at the district level. The festival ended on Saturday.

The event was organised by the Liberation War Museum. The festival is dedicated to documentary, seeking to highlight the struggle for liberation and human rights.

This festival was held in the port city for the first time.

A total of 20 documentaries were screened at the venue – Theatre Institute Chattogram.

Three documentaries – A Mandoline in Exile, Jothorleena and Gitthal me Acchiya – directed by Rafiqul Anwar Russel, Dilara Begum Jolly and Asma Beethe, three promising filmmakers of Chattogram, were screened at the inaugural and concluding sessions.

Eminent social scientist Dr Anupam Sen inaugurated the festival.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony, Liberation War Museum Trustee Mofidul Hoque said there are thousands of stories related to the country’s Liberation War and those can be highlighted through documentaries.

He hoped to arrange such festival in Chattogram every year.

Apart from the documentary screening, a three-day workshop titled “Exposition of Young Film Talent 2022, Chattogram” was also held at the event. The workshop was moderated by festival director Tareq Ahmed and film director Elizabeth D Costa.

The three best projects selected from the workshop were awarded on the occasion.

‘Daughters of the state’



FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Marjina, Mukta and Tania Akhter ended up at state-run Chotomoni Nibash in Chattogram’s Hathazari upazila many years ago. The three were so young that they never even got the chance to know their biological parents.

In 1997, a sub-inspector brought Marjina Akhter to the institution when she was just 45-days old. Mukta, on the other hand, lost her parents at the age of four, while Tania was orphaned at the age of two after her mother passed away at Chattogram Medical College Hospital in 2003.

Never having the fortune to experience parental love, the three grew up in the care of Chotomoni Nibash staffers, along with many other children like them.

The centre is run by the government children’s home under the social service department.

Residing in the institution, the three also completed their higher secondary education. Afterwards, they started working at Chattogram Maa O Shishu Hospital in Agrabad.

They are all in their mid-twenties now.

To aid the start of a new chapter in their lives, Chattogram District Administration organised a colourful wedding for the three “daughters of the state” in the city’s Officer’s Club on Thursday night.

Their grooms are also staff members at CMCH. Before the wedding, their “Gay

Holud” ceremony was held at Chotomoni Nibash premises, entertaining nearly 700 guests.

The ceremonies were adorned by the presence of many distinguished guests. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was also invited to the ceremony.

On behalf of the PM, Deputy Commissioner Md Mominur Rahman handed over gold ornaments, gifts and cash to the couples.

Marjina Akhter tied the knot with

“I have no relatives. I never imagined this beautiful day will come to my life, that too, with love and affection from the people as well as the administration.”

MARJINA AKHTER

CMCH’s office assistant Md Omar Faruq (29).

“I have no relatives. I never imagined this beautiful day will come to my life, that too, with love and affection from the people as well as the administration,” she said.

DC Mominur said, “The premier gifted ornaments, furniture and cash to each couple. They don’t have parents, they have grown up in safe homes. They are our children, so we also wanted a colourful wedding ceremony for them.”

The many legends of KARNAPHULI

ARUN BIKASH DEY

The river Karnaphuli is considered to be what holds the port city, ie the life of Chattogram.

Originating in the Lushai hills in India’s Mizoram, the river travels through 270km of Chattogram Hill Tracts and Chattogram district before falling into the Bay of Bengal.

At a time when road and bridge communications were not up to the standard for Chattogram city, the Karnaphuli played a pivotal role in transporting people and commercial goods by boats.

After the construction of a railway bridge over the river in Kalurghat area in 1931 – which was later converted into a rail and road bridge in 1962 – it connected the city with southern upazilas of the district as well as other districts, including Bandarban and Cox’s Bazar.

Later, two other bridges were constructed over the river in Chaktai area in 1990 and 2010 respectively.

There are two legends about the naming of the Karnaphuli. One of them can be found in the book “A Fly on the Wheel” by Thomas Herbert Lewin, which suggests the ancient name of the river was “Kaincha Khal”.

Once a prince and a princess were enjoying a moonlit boat ride on the Kaincha Khal. They were admiring the beauty of the full moon when the flower tucked in her hair by the prince fell into the water.

The grief-stricken princess immediately jumped into the river to retrieve the flower. Unfortunately, she was carried away by the fast-flowing current and vanished.

The prince dived into the river to rescue her but failed. Out of sorrow, he drowned himself in the river to unite with the princess in the afterlife. That is how the name Karnaphuli came to be – “karnaphul”, meaning the flower adorning the ear.

There have been several pieces of

literature – both prose and poetry – based on these legends. According to another legend, a beautiful highland princess, along with her friends, went to take a bath in the Kaincha Khal. After diving into the water, the princess discovered that her “Karnaphul” was lost.

She had to give up after multiple attempts to find it. After a few days, she passed away due to illness, although it was widely believed that what killed her was her attachment to the lost piece of jewellery.

Yet another legend tells a different story altogether.

During the eighth and ninth centuries, Arab merchants used to bring “Karanphol” (cloves) to Chattogram Port from the hilly areas of Kamarup and Sylhet to export those to Europe. Once, an Arab merchant was bringing “Karanphol” by boat through the river.

However, the boat capsized on the way, and eventually, the river came to know as Karnaphuli.



PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN