



Destroying hills for a dumping station

According to Bangladesh Environment Preservation Act 1995, (amended in 2000), cutting a hill without the approval of the Department of Environment (DoE) is illegal.

SIFAYET ULLAH

When a garbage dumping station is comes at the expense of destroying hills and jeopardising the environment, the act becomes highly contentious.

Apparently, Banskhali municipality authorities have done just that, by cutting huge portions of two hills in Banskhali upazila of Chattogram.

During a recent visit to the area, this correspondent found over 10,000 square feet of the two hills have been cut. Two excavators were seen razing the hills and three dump trucks were seen transporting the soil.

Seeking anonymity, a worker said they have been cutting hills for the past three months.

Jamal Uddin, a local, said, "The dump station is being built by cutting the hills for about six months now."

Arif Mainuddin, a Banskhali municipality councillor, claimed that despite having alternative sites for disposing household garbage, the mayor has chosen hilly areas to raze hillocks under the guise of building a dumping station, and then sell the soil of the



razed hill.

"Each truck of soil is being sold for Tk 2,000," he added.

Contacted, SM Tofail bin Hossain, mayor of the municipality, admitted to razing hills, claiming that the municipality owns those.

He did not elaborate further and evaded questions from this correspondent.

Contacted, Banskhali UNO Saiduzzaman Chowdhury said, "We have already talked

about the matter with the mayor. We will take legal action against those involved as it is illegal to cut hills without permission."

Mohammad Kamal Hossain, former professor of Institute of Forestry and Environmental Science at Chittagong University, said after the dumping facility is built here, the local ecosystem will suffer.

According to Bangladesh Environment Preservation Act 1995, (amended in 2000), cutting a hill without the approval of the Department of Environment (DoE) is illegal.

The punishment for breaking the law is up to two years' imprisonment or Tk 2 lakh fine, or both for the first time. The second time, it is up to 10 years imprisonment or Tk 10 lakh fine or both.

According to Bangladesh Environment Forum data, a total of 120 hills disappeared from Chattogram city within just four decades. In 1976, there was 32.37 square km of hills in the port city and it decreased to 14.02 square kilometers in 2008.

The data showed that there were 200 hills in the port city 40 years ago and 60 percent of those have disappeared now.

Occupying forestland by building a wall

Construction goes on despite HC stay order



SIFAYET ULLAH

RF Builders, a real-estate firm appointed by a group called Prabartak Sangha, is constructing a boundary wall in a disputed land in Prabartak area under Panchalaish of Chattogram, despite a stay order issued by the High Court.

According to forest officials, the area is a protected forestland.

The High Court on September 1, 2022, stayed construction of any establishment on the disputed land for six months, said Abdul Malek, ranger of the Chattogram North Forest Division's city range.



Abdul Malek, ranger of the Chattogram North Forest Division's city range, said the land is a protected forest. But Prabartak Sangha grabbed the land illegally many years ago. Authorities of the Chattogram North Forest Division filed a case against Prabartak Sangha in 2016 and also applied to the court for a stay order on this land.

During a visit to the place on February 10, this correspondent saw that around 15 workers were building a boundary wall in the disputed area. However, none of the workers agreed to speak to this reporter.

Juwel Dey, a security guard next to the land, told The Daily Star that officials of the RF builders and Prabartak Sangha often come here to supervise the construction works.

Abdul Malek told The Daily Star that the land is a protected forest. But Prabartak Sangha grabbed the land illegally many years ago. Authorities of the Chattogram North Forest Division filed a case against Prabartak Sangha in 2016 and also applied to the court for a stay order on this land.

Soon after, a Chattogram court gave a stay order on this land that year, he said.

However, another court of Chattogram revoked the status quo in 2019, following an appeal by Prabartak Sangha. The Forest Department then appealed to the High Court against the withdrawal order. After a long hearing, the High Court ordered a stay order on the disputed land last year.

"But Prabartak Sangha didn't obey the order and they have illegally occupied the government property," said Mozammel Hoque Shah Chowdhury, divisional forest officer of the Chattogram North Forest Division.

We have already informed the police station in writing about the construction of the wall in violation of the stay order of the court, he added.

Contacted, Indu Nandan Dutta, president of the Prabartak Sangha, claimed that they had nothing to do with the construction works.

However, Kamrul Hasan Bacchu, managing director of the RF builders, said, "We are building a boundary wall in that land as we have many valuable resources there."

Advocate Rabi Shankar Chowdhury, a retainer of the forest division of Chattogram, said, "Disobeying the stay order is a contempt of court. We have already advised the forest department to bring the matter to the attention of the court."

According to data from the forest department, the Calcutta gazette issued in 1934 by the Forest department recorded the land as forestland.

But later, the 8.33 acres land was mistakenly recorded in the name of Prabartak Sangha in Bangladesh Survey (BS), claimed Mozammel Hoque Shah Chowdhury.

A case is going on in the court regarding the disputed land. The court will decide who owns this land and we are waiting for the court's verdict, said Indu Nandan Dutta, president of the Prabartak Sangha.

Teribazar, all things clothing

The business hub has a tradition of selling whole cloths for around 80 years.

Abdul Mannan, former general secretary of Teribazar Merchants Association

ARUN BIKASH DEY

Chattogram's Teribazar is the most sought after destination for people from all walks of life for reasonably priced full-sized cloth.

Located at the heart of the port city just around a hundred yards off Anderkill, the business hub stands with around 2,500 shops and 82 shopping malls. Not only retail customers but also the traders from different upazilas in the district come here to shop wholesale cloths.

According to traders and businesspersons, its the second largest hub for wholesale full-sized cloths in the country after Islampur in

Dhaka.

Although Teribazar was once famous for selling whole cloths at a reasonable price, in the transition of the last few years a number of shopping malls that offered ready-made attires mushroomed, said traders and locals.

The business hub has a tradition of selling whole cloths for around 80 years, said Abdul Mannan, former general secretary of Teribazar Merchants Association. "I've grown up in Ghat Forhadbegh area adjacent to Teribazar and since my childhood, I saw people from remote areas coming here to shop."

"The traders from different upazilas also



used to come here to purchase cloths at a wholesale price and this trend have still been continuing," said Mannan.

According to sources, some one-stop malls, where clothes for all ages and genders are found under the same roof, have been appearing one after another in this hub since 2000.

Megamart is one of those malls. It is located on the second, third and fourth floors of Ibrahim Mansion at Teribazar. During a visit in last week, it was seen that the mall was abuzz with customers.

Tamanna Binte Rashed came to the mall with her son and daughter for shopping.

"The advantage of shopping at a one-stop mall is that there are attires for all ages and genders here," she said. "I don't have to go from one shop to the other for buying attires and the price here is also reasonable."

Apart from one-stop shopping malls, around 2,000 shops are selling cloths here.

Traders said keeping buyers' demands in mind on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, all kinds of cloths including katan, linen, jamdani, cotton, net, georgette, chiffon and digital print fabrics have been imported.

Besides, the demand for local cloth has also increased by leaps and bounds.

Gautam Chowdhury, proprietor of Adrika Fashion, said the demand for imported cloths overwhelms that of local cloths. "Indian and Chinese fabrics are on top of the demand of customers at my shop."

Aminul Haque, president of Teribazar Merchants Association, said they are taking steps to enhance the modern facilities so that the hub can attract more customers.



Neon signboards of shops offering various products hang amid a narrow alley in Teribazar, the largest hub for retail and wholesale clothes in Chattogram.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN