

RAZING HILLS for chicken shed

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Upazila Nirbahi Officer
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SIFAYET ULLAH

A vested quarter has been accused of cutting hills in Chattogram's Dharmapur union of Fatikchhari upazila, to construct a chicken shed.

This act has been carried out without obtaining any approval from the Department of Environment (DoE), leaving locals and environmentalists dismayed.

The ownership of the hills is attributed to Abu Bakkar and Taslimul Alam, according to the land office of the union. However, a local source, seeking anonymity, has alleged that Nahar Agro, an agro business company based in Chattogram, is behind the hill cutting, using their connections with influential figures.

During a recent investigation conducted by this correspondent in the area, it was observed that workers were carving through the hills with heavy machinery, including an excavator and a soil-cutting machine. Additionally, an on-site mud house was being constructed to accommodate the workers involved in this project.

Mohammad Rashed, a day labourer said, "I have been working for Nahar Agro on this project for the past two days."



Nahar Agro... I cannot say whether there is permission to cut the hill."

Abu Bakkar, owner of a part of the hills, told The Daily Star, "We have sold the land to Rakibur Rahman Tutul, managing director of the Nahar Agro Group, but the registry deed has not been completed yet."

However, he did not disclose when he sold the hills.

Rakibur Rahman Tutul, managing director of the Nahar Agro Group, claimed that his company isn't cutting hills there.

"We are only talking with the owners of hills to buy the land. We haven't bought the land yet," he claimed.

However, the workers involved in hill cutting admitted that they are employees of Nahar Agro and they collect their salary from the nearby Nahar Agro office.

Mentionable, Nahar Agro has already constructed another shed next to the area where chickens have been reared for the past one year.

Meanwhile, upazila administration officials confirmed that they visited the area and found evidence of hill cutting.

Sabbir Ahmed Sunny, upazila nirbahi officer of Fatikchhari, said, "We filed a case under the soil management act with the local police station against the owners of the hills on Tuesday."

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

Punishment as per this act includes up to two years' imprisonment or Tk 2 lakh fine, or both for first-time offenders. For subsequent offence, it is up to 10 years' imprisonment or Tk 10 lakh fine, or both.

Meanwhile, DoE officials confirmed that none had taken any permission for cutting hills there.

Ferdous Anwar, deputy director of the DoE Chattogram, told The Daily Star, "We will take legal action against those who razed hills after necessary investigation."

According to data from Bangladesh Environment Forum, 120 hills disappeared from Chattogram city in four decades. In 1976, there were 32.37 square km of hills in the port city, which decreased to 14.02 square km in 2008.



CTG INTER-CITY ROUTE

Tourist bus launched for first time

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

For the first time, two double-decker bus services have been introduced in Chattogram city for tourists. The buses, operational since last Saturday, is set to ply the port city's Tiger Pass-Faujdarhat DC Park-Patenga sea beach route.

The Chattogram District Administration and Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation joint venture was inaugurated by ABM Amin Ullah Nuri, secretary of the Road Transport and Highways Division, on Saturday at the city's Circuit House.

The buses are making two trips on weekdays, with the first one starting at 3:00pm from Tiger Pass, followed by the second one an hour later from the same spot.

Three trips on the same route is available on Fridays at 9:00am, 3:00pm, and 4:00pm, while four others are scheduled for Saturdays at 9:30am, 10:30am, 3:00pm, and 4:00pm, according to Chattogram District Administration.

The return trips are scheduled from Patenga beach at 12:00pm, 7:00pm, and 8:00pm on Fridays, and at 1:00pm, 2:00pm, 7:00pm, and 8:00pm on Saturdays.

The ticket prices range between Tk 30-70 per person.

"These two buses were gifted by the prime minister to boost tourism in the district. We plan to introduce new buses with better facilities on other routes too," said Abul Bashar Mohammad Fakhruzzaman, deputy commissioner of the district.

Omar Faruq Emon, a local, said, "We had to spend much more to visit these spots. However, bearing the concerns over security in mind, I believe the tourist police should be engaged to serve local and foreign travellers better."

SHOLASHAHAR INTERSECTION

In dire need of a foot-over bridge

ARUN BIKASH DEY

Pedestrians are forced to cross the wide intersection of Sholashahar Gate 2 putting their lives at risk in the absence of a foot-over bridge.

The intersection is one of the most hectic spots in the port city with different public and private vehicles moving towards different routes.

According to Traffic Department at Chattogram Metropolitan Police (CMP), around 2,000 vehicles ply at this intersection in an hour at rush time.

Typically, vehicles traversing four routes within the port city must pass through this intersection.

Locals and traffic department sources said due to the construction of a culvert at Muradpur intersection, which has halted vehicular traffic on the Muradpur to Oxygen route for months, the majority of vehicles travelling on the route



also use the intersection. As a result, it has become busier and more chaotic.

"Every day, we have to cross this intersection putting our lives at risk," said 47-year-old Ismail, a resident of the area. "I am a local in this area and I've never seen a foot-over bridge in this busy intersection since my childhood," he added.

Farzana Akter, another local, said, "Nobody will understand what goes on in my mind when I cross the intersection with my seven-year-old son. Not even a zebra crossing exists in this intersection. Sometimes, I can hear my heart beating when I see any big vehicle coming towards us while crossing the intersection."

Tariqul Islam, traffic inspector of CMP, said, "Even officials of the department of traffic face difficulties in controlling traffic in the area. A foot-over bridge is badly needed in this intersection so that pedestrians can cross the road safely."

Contacted, Rafiqul Islam, chief engineer of Chattogram City Corporation, said a total of 38 foot-over bridges will be built on different roads and intersections in the port city under a mega project, which will start soon. "A foot-over bridge will also be built at Sholashahar intersection under this project," he added.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

TOUGH TIME FOR RAWHIDE TRADERS

They want bank loans to survive



MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Chattogram rawhide traders want bank loans on easy terms to recover losses after the area's 50 percent of tanneries have been closed due to the absence of a competitive market in the port city.

They are going through a tough time with their business and forced to sell their rawhide at cheaper rates.

Rawhide trade was vibrant in Chattogram years ago, but now it has decreased significantly, said traders.

They said during Eid-ul-Azha, most of the rawhide is sold at a lower price than the price fixed by the government. Besides, collection of rawhide has been decreased as the processing industries have almost collapsed, as it is difficult to comply with the regulations of the Department of Environment.

According to the traders, there were at least 22 tanneries in the port city. Since 1971, various reasons contributed to the shutdown of the factories. Among them, only one named Riff Leather owned by TK Group has survived till now.

Due to such closure in Chattogram, the warehouses have to depend on Dhaka, and the arrears of sold rawhide have increased every year, they said.

According to the data of Chattogram Rawhide Warehouse Traders Association, a total of 112 rawhide merchants belong to this

association and another 150 are outside it in Chattogram. However, only 52 merchants, out of 112, are running their businesses and the rest 60 have closed down in the last few years.

Moslem Uddin, president of the association, said, "Most of the products have to be sold in Dhaka as there is no competitive market in Chattogram. Many businesspersons are closing their businesses due to financial crisis. They will be able to restore the business if the government gives bank loans on easy terms."

"In addition, the government should arrange a specific tannery zone for Chattogram and a central ETP, considering the environment pollution," he added.

Enamul Haque, a rawhide trader at Aturar Depot Bazar area, said, "Now Chattogram-based Riff Leather buy only 10-15 percent of total collection of rawhide. And for the rest we have to depend on the tanneries in Dhaka..."

He also said about 20,000 30,000 skins are wasted or damaged every year as the tannery owners are not interested to buy those.

This year, the Chattogram traders are expected to collect at least four lakh pieces of rawhide of cattle after Eid ul Azha. They collected 4.43 lakh in 2022, 4.82 lakh in 2021, 5.12 lakh in 2020, 5.5 lakh in 2019 and 5.75 lakh in 2018.