

COX'S BAZAR ECOLOGY AT STAKE

A third of forests, hilly land grabbed

*28,000 of 89,162 hectares in the district
illegally occupied or destroyed*

MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAT, *Cox's Bazar, and*
ENAMUL HUQ

Amzad Hossain came from his village Moghnama in Pekua upazila to Cox's Bazar town two decades ago and began working as a newspaper hawker. He bought two decimal land and built a house on a hilltop at Baidyaghona.

Encouraged by him, his close relatives came to the town and built six houses in the same area.

In the last nine years, more than 200 people died in mudslides in Cox's Bazar alone, but still people continue to build houses on hill slopes and hilltops ignoring the risk.

There are many reasons behind the rising habitation on hills -- the price of land on the

plains is skyrocketing; the demand for housing is rising due to ever increasing population; a huge number of coastal people are becoming environmental refugees; Rohingyas are entering Bangladesh from Myanmar in large numbers; and the tendency to grab government land is on the rise, according to Cox's Bazar Civil Society, Cox's Bazar Forest and Environment Protection Council and several environmental groups.

Already, more than 30 percent of the total hill and forest land in Cox's Bazar, 89,162 hectares, has been lost to grabbers, said Deepak Sharma Dipu, founder president of Cox's Bazar Forest and Environment Protection Council.

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