

# Hill cutting spree in Sreemangal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Moulvibazar*

Illegal hill cutting, for either residential or commercial purpose, defying environmental laws continues unabated in different areas in Sreemangal upazila of the district.

Local people said some influential people and unscrupulous businessmen are involved in razing the hills.

They said Bishamoni village, Mohajirabad village, Radhanagar village, Mirzapur village and Husnabad area are more vulnerable to landslides as illegal hill cutting adjacent to those areas has been continuing for nearly a month.

Many residents of Bishamoni village alleged that one Monir Mia, a local influential person, has been cutting hills near Noven Resort area in the dark of night.

Refuting the allegation, Monir said some people are trying to tarnish his image by bringing such false allegation.

Green activists said thousands of people living in the area are exposed to hill slides in the rainy season due to illegal levelling of hills in most unplanned ways.

Villagers alleged that some local influential people in cooperation with a section of dishonest government officials are involved in hill cutting.

According to local residents and environmentalists, plundering of earth from hills poses a serious threat to nearby houses and business establishments as well.

Salauddin Ahmed, chairperson of Pahar Rakkha O Unnayan Society, said indiscriminate destroying of hills in Sreemangal area is creating a serious threat to biodiversity.

Nearly 30 percent of the hills in Sreemangal are already destroyed, he said, adding that a section of opportunist businessmen and politicians in cooperation with each other are destroying the hills.

Local administration cannot take proper legal steps against them due to their political backing.

Sreemangal Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Mobashsherul Islam said they have raided the areas but did not find anyone on the spot as most of the hills are being cut in the dark of night.

"We have already sent a letter to the Department of Environment (DoE) mentioning names of those involved in the illegal hill cutting," the UNO added.

Moulvibazar Deputy Commissioner Tofayel Islam said, "We have sent a list of those involved in illegal hill cutting to DoE, but are yet to get any reply."