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Editorial

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Why the decimation of nature?

Balancing between development and environment

It is no wonder that as a developing country with very little land to spare we are constantly being asked to choose between development and the need to preserve the environment? And regrettably, in most cases we find that we are making the wrong choices by decimating nature to build up industrial estate in an unplanned manner. And this has come out very starkly in a report in this newspaper.

The said report reveals that the Korean Export Processing Zone (KEPZ) authorities have been indiscriminately leveling the hills in their allocated areas in Patia of Chittagong district to make industrial plots. The interesting aspect of the issue is that the KEPZ authorities assert that they have necessary permission from the department of environment (DoE) and that they are doing it as per the terms and conditions of the DoE which mandates them to preserve 60 percent of the hilly region in their project area and allows them to cut the rest 40 percent. However, according to the DoE the KEPZ authorities were clearing the area much in excess of their permissible limit. And this is what begs clarification from the KEPZ authorities.

May we ask as to what was the basis of the 40-60 percent equation of cutting down and retention for the purpose of developing the area into an export processing zone in the first place? And may we ask as to what was the mechanism, and indeed whose duty was it, to delineate the area as per acceptable environmental standards in such cases. We wonder too whether there was appropriate mechanism of oversight outside the KEPZ authority to ensure that instructions were followed. Or was it left entirely at the discretion of the KEPZ officials to determine that? Why does the DoE have to depend on a tip-off to react? And what if the tip-off had not come at all?

Admittedly, in Bangladesh we have a difficult choice to make, but that can be overcome by proper planning. At the same time we feel that any project that needs decimation of 40 percent of the natural landscape may need rethinking, particularly about the location of the project.

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