



How do we save our forests when the agencies that are supposed to protect them do the opposite? VISUAL: STAR

## Who wants a piece of forest?



OF MAGIC & MADNESS

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BADIUZZAMAN BAY

In director Syed Ahmed Shawkri's critically acclaimed first season of the prison thriller *Karagar*, there is a scene where a leader of the inmates, a follower of the mystery man known as Gazi Peer, tells fellow inmates that they are living in relative comfort but lack one crucial element in their life. "What do we not have here?" he asks, and then, prompted by a lackey, answers, "We don't have a guardian we can call our own" – a vacuum, he goes on to suggest, Gazi Peer could fill.

I bring this up in an op-ed on forests merely to show – in as whimsical a way as all problems in Bangladesh seem to be connected – the absurdity of a recent case involving prisons and forests, and to suggest that prisons can cause this feeling of a lack of guardianship not just within their cells but outside as well. The central characters in this case are two departments of the government, prison and forest, who should have nothing to do with each other ordinarily. Yet, in this land of precious little land, the two traded metaphorical blows over a piece of forest recently, after the prison authorities started a bid to build an "open prison" there.

According to a report by *The Daily Star*, the problem began after the 160 acres of forestland in Ukhya, Cox's Bazar was allotted to the prison department by the land ministry, after which the former placed demarcation flags around it. But then the forest department removed those flags since no prior clearance was taken from them. This is where things get tricky. Forest officials say the land is part of a protected forest. Prison officials, however, say it is *khas* land. It can be both and yet retain its distinct character. The question is: can the prison department get out of the obligation to obtain permission on a technicality? Can they approach protected forestland the same way they would unforested *khas* land? And why would the land ministry even allow for the destruction of a natural resource of which we have so little?

It is ironic to think that any sense of a lack of guardianship with regard to

our fast-depleting forests would come from having too many guardians. It can only mean having no real guardian at all. This is as true for our forests as it is for our hills and rivers. The latter, despite being granted a "living entity" status by the High Court and having the National River Protection Commission assigned as their "legal guardian," continue to be in dire straits. With protectors like these, who needs predators?

**What the authorities – and, frankly, all of us – need urgently is a renewed sense of guardianship of what little forest coverage we still have left and to try and protect it. Change is possible only if we realise how critical forests or wildlife are to our existence.**

The forest authorities may be on the right side of things for once, but its history remains equally tainted. Note its line of argument in case of the Ukhya incident. When approached for comments over the conflict, a forest officer said they had "no issues" with the prison authorities; all they ask is for them to "go through proper procedure." As if that would have justified clearing a forest.

Not long ago, after the government allowed the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) to build a residential training facility on 20 acres of land in a reserved forest in Cox's Bazar's Ramu upazila, the minister of environment, forest and climate change supported handing over the land. He claimed that there was "no alternative" to it and that "we will make sure that any harm to the forestland is kept to a minimum." That's a BIG minimum, as revealed by an internal estimate, which says that 30,000 trees will have to be felled for the construction of the centre. Last

year, the land ministry, a frequent violator of forest conservation rules and directives, also allotted 700 acres of a forest adjacent to the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf Marine Drive to the public administration ministry to build a civil service academy there.

Could these projects be taken elsewhere? Certainly. Could we get back a forest if ravaged? Certainly not. You can't simply wish a forest into existence or have it magically regrown elsewhere. The last two forests in question are designated Ecologically Critical Areas (ECAs), which makes them extremely important to conserve.

But forget the criminality of using forests for non-forest purposes. What we are witnessing here is an environmental free-fall with forests being encroached with the blessing of those whose very responsibility it is to prevent it. This is being done mostly through what we can call *illegally legal* means, such as "de-reserving" part of a reserved forest, keeping the option for decriminalising a takeover through "proper procedure," leasing out forestland, etc. And it's happening at a time when the reserved forests in Cox's Bazar have been facing a great onslaught, with more than 7,000 acres of forestland already razed to the ground by refugees in Ukhya and Teknaf. Not to be outdone by their official counterparts, illegal encroachers also sliced away more than 50,000 acres of a total of 186,457 acres of reserved forests across the coastal region.

There are precious few forests left in Bangladesh. I'm not going into details, nor are details what move our policy goalsposts. If it did, Bangladesh's commitment at the COP26 summit last year to stop deforestation – and increase forestland by 25 percent – by 2030 would have translated into drastic action given the short window of time. Instead, we are putting everything we hold dear at the altar of development. We're driving away indigenous communities who traditionally protected these lands. And we're continuously encouraging official encroachment under various pretexts through various wings of the administration, when they should be on hyper-alert to stave off such attempts.

What they – and, frankly, all of us – need urgently is a renewed sense of ownership and guardianship of what little forest coverage we still have left – a paltry 11 percent or so – and to try to protect and build upon it. Change is possible only if we realise how critical forests or wildlife are to our existence.

## Kennan's 1946 'Long Telegram' from Moscow: Is it relevant for Beijing?

Coexistence, not containment, should be the way forward



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SAYEED AHMED

On February 22, 1946, George Kennan, American chargé d'affaires in Moscow, sent an 8,000-word-long telegram to his State Department bosses. Later known as the "Long Telegram", it became the most influential foreign policy paper for dealing with the communist state. It helped articulate the US government's increasingly hard line against the Soviets and became the basis of the US Cold War policy toward the Soviet Union. In 1947, Kennan wrote an article titled, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct", arguing that its regime was inherently expansionist and that its influence had to be "contained". It deeply influenced President Truman who adopted a "containment policy" to stop Soviet communism's expansion. Kennan argued for isolating the Soviet Union and waiting for it to fall under its own weight, which it eventually did in 1991.

Meanwhile, in 1978, China launched its economic reforms under Deng Xiaoping. Riding on its economic success, Beijing bolstered its military muscle as well. Xi Jinping, after becoming China's president in 2012, undertook renewed measures to build an army to "fight and win" global wars. In 2013, he launched the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to build large infrastructures in Asia, Africa, Europe, and other regions.

The rise of an assertive Beijing alarmed Washington. In 2015, President Barack Obama undertook a rebalancing of power toward Asia. Containing China became America's major policy issue. In December 2017, the US declared China's rise a military threat and launched the China containment policy by borrowing a page from Kennan's playbook.

The policy extended to the tech sector as well. In 2012, an American congressional investigation concluded that the

equipment of Huawei, a Chinese tech giant, could pose a threat to US interests. Accordingly, President Obama banned companies from using Huawei's products. Biden intensified the tech war by including semiconductors in it. Washington also persuaded its allies to adopt the same policy towards Beijing's tech initiatives, turning it into a global tech war. Biden signed the CHIPS and Science Act in August to increase American hold on the semiconductor industry. He also launched the Chip 4 initiative involving Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, with an express aim of keeping China out of this crucial technology.

The China containment policy has thus taken deep roots following Kennan's anti-Soviet postulations. But will what worked against the Soviets also apply to China? On the surface, there are some similarities between the two; both are under authoritarian regimes, and both are founded on the same communist idea. But there are some striking dissimilarities too.

Kennan aptly noted that the Soviet leadership perceived itself as perpetual war with capitalism. The Soviets did not see the possibility of any peaceful coexistence with the capitalist world, and they persistently aimed at advancing the socialist cause. There was nothing in capitalism they could adopt. China, in sharp contrast, did see the benefits of a market economy and used it to its benefit. It opened up international trade and foreign investment and did everything required to take advantage of capitalism's strengths.

Second, China has a long tradition of doing business with adversaries which its rich silk road history shows. As the ancient traders embarked on perilous journeys through the tribal territories in Central Asia, Chinese emperors didn't attempt to bring those territories under

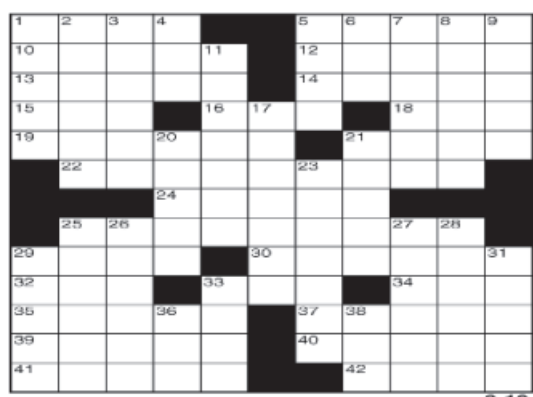
their total control. Instead, they made trade more attractive to the tribes than looting or war. The same game is being played today, as Beijing aggressively pushes ahead with its BRI projects. The 11,000 km long train route linking China's Chongqing with Germany's Duisburg, which opened in August 2012, is carrying tens of thousands of containers each year (currently, an alternative route is used bypassing Russia due to the Ukraine war).

Third, China is intricately connected to the international trade and economic system, making it almost impossible to isolate it without harming the global economy. It became the world's largest exporter of goods in 2009, and the largest trading nation in 2013. In 2017, its share of global goods trade rose to 11.4 percent (from 1.9 percent in 2000). It is also the largest export destination for 33 countries and the largest source of imports for 65. It received the second largest Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from 2015 to 2017. China was also the world's second largest source of outbound FDI over the same period. In 2019, 1.2 million American jobs depended on exports to China of which 245,000 were lost after the start of the trade war. China accounts for a third of Germany's car sales. Almost 40 percent of Australian exports go to China. Beijing controls 90 percent of the supply of processed rare earth minerals that is essential for refining petroleum and making advanced weaponry, high-end electronics, electric vehicles, and wind turbines without which the modern economy will crumble.

Unlike the Soviet Union, China is a peer of the US in economic might with increasing tech and military muscle. History has repeatedly shown that wars that were expected to be short and decisive ended up being long and protracted, severely draining both sides. Washington and Beijing know enough to realise that war is not a viable option, but coexistence is. Both sides need to consider the other's realities and reign in the proponents of a war that will be unimaginably disastrous. And finally, each has its history, domestic issues, and political conviction. Understanding that is one good step towards *modus vivendi*, or coexistence.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Cry from the crib
  - 5 Reporter's hope
  - 10 Lab liquids
  - 12 Engine booster
  - 13 Viewed anew
  - 14 "Hello" singer
  - 15 UFO pilots
  - 16 Stirrup setting
  - 18 Procured
  - 19 Apelike
  - 21 Oxford VIPs
  - 22 Moving to the middle
  - 24 Prepared to fire
  - 25 Guru's specialty
  - 29 Glass section
  - 30 "Don't bother"
  - 32 Imitating
- DOWN**
- 1 Stable mothers
  - 2 Vinegar-based
  - 3 "Are you glad I'm back?"
  - 4 Oklahoma city
  - 5 Flag feature
  - 6 Cow's chew
  - 7 Portland setting
  - 8 Stretched
  - 9 Meter pros
  - 11 Worry
  - 17 Showy flower
  - 20 Silly
  - 21 Murdered
  - 23 Send another way
  - 25 Zambia neighbor
  - 26 Tooth layer
  - 27 Kathmandu native
  - 28 Crystal-filled stones
  - 29 Summit goals
  - 31 Plow pioneer
  - 33 Chef's collection
  - 36 Mouse-spotting cry
  - 38 Gun



### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
Local Government Engineering Department  
Office of the Executive Engineer  
District: Naogaon  
[www.lged.gov.bd](http://www.lged.gov.bd)

Memo No. 46.02.6400.07.000.001.22-3568

Date: 02/10/2022 খ্রীঃাব্দ  
১৭/০৮/১৪২৯ বঙ্গাব্দ

**e-Tender Notice No. 07/2022-23**  
Tendering Method (LTM)

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following packages:

Sl. No.	Description of work & Package No.	Tender last selling (date & time)	Tender closing (date & time)	Tender opening (date & time)	Estimated cost (Tk)/Remarks
01.	Rehabilitation of Aktar Hamid Siddiqui Road - Khadail Bazar Road from Ch. 00m-618m [Badalgachi] Road Code: 164065017, District: Naogaon (Package No. e-Tender/LGED/Naog/GoBM/22-23/W-62) (Tender ID No. 736766)	17-Oct-2022 17:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	LTM 19,43,224.00
02.	Rehabilitation of Tilakpur Rty Gate-Ulupur Road from Ch. 00m-1000m [Naogaon-S] Road Code: 164604020, District: Naogaon (Package No. e-Tender/LGED/Naog/GoBM/22-23/W-63) (Tender ID No. 736767)	17-Oct-2022 17:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	LTM 38,53,610.00
03.	Rehabilitation of Bangdom More-Bangdom Uttarpara Road from Ch. 00m-350m [Patnitala] Road Code: 164755045, District: Naogaon (Package No. e-Tender/LGED/Naog/GoBM/22-23/W-64) (Tender ID No. 736768)	17-Oct-2022 17:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	LTM 9,38,784.00
04.	Rehabilitation of Borodadpur Pucca Road - Mohadanga - Bakoil - Moshidpur GC Road from Ch. 1108m-1550m [Porsha] Road Code: 164794042, District: Naogaon (Package No. e-Tender/LGED/Naog/GoBM/22-23/W-65) (Tender ID No. 736769)	17-Oct-2022 17:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	LTM 18,84,904.00
05.	Rehabilitation of Vohtlachar More - Siddikpur Hindo Para Road from Ch. 00m-440m [Mohadevpur] Road Code: 164504110, District: Naogaon (Package No. e-Tender/LGED/Naog/GoBM/22-23/W-66) (Tender ID No. 736770)	17-Oct-2022 17:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	LTM 19,36,145.00
06.	Periodic Maintenance of Chandannagar - Ramnagar Road from Ch. 00m-2000m [Niamatpur] Road Code: 164694014, District: Naogaon (Package No. e-Tender/LGED/Naog/GoBM/22-23/W-67) (Tender ID No. 736771)	17-Oct-2022 17:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	LTM 65,55,518.00
07.	Periodic Maintenance of Jalkai - Guata Road from Ch. 740m-3000m [Raninagar] Road Code: 164854012, District: Naogaon (Package No. e-Tender/LGED/Naog/GoBM/22-23/W-68) (Tender ID No. 736772)	17-Oct-2022 17:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	LTM 77,36,716.00
08.	Periodic Maintenance of Singara More RHD -Sutkigacha Hat Road from Ch. 00m-2100m [Atrai] Road Code: 164034031, District: Naogaon (Package No. e-Tender/LGED/Naog/GoBM/22-23/W-69) (Tender ID No. 736773)	17-Oct-2022 17:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	LTM 91,93,844.00
09.	Periodic Maintenance of Laskarpur-Triomhoni via Gangjoar Road from Ch. 2400m-4710m [Naogaon-S] Road Code: 164604066, District: Naogaon (Package No. e-Tender/LGED/Naog/GoBM/22-23/W-70) (Tender ID No. 736774)	17-Oct-2022 17:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	18-Oct-2022 15:00	LTM 86,22,904.00

This is an online tender where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks branches up to last selling date & time as mentioned above. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP helpdesk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)).

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