

Why settle for a Jashore without trees?

Development does not equate to ecological disaster. But disingenuity does.



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While the world is finally waking up to the dangers of wrecking ecosystems, and engineers and policy makers around the world are finding ways to minimise the impact of development on the environment, Bangladesh is cutting trees like there's no tomorrow.

In Jashore, Chattogram, Dinajpur and Gaibandha, trees are to be axed to make way for roads and highways. In Faridpur, they will be cleared for a state-owned luxury resort. In Rangpur and Kushtia, they are being sacrificed at the altar of greed. In Habiganj, over a hundred trees are being cut in the name of "beautification". In Naogaon, a lush, dense forest is being cleared in the name of "restoration and conservation of biodiversity", leaving behind a desert.

Yes, there are circumstances under which cutting trees is unavoidable, or even beneficial for people and the environment. But unfortunately, in all of these cases, we are being asked to accept unimaginative, short-term development solutions—if not outright greed, corruption and deceit.

A lack of imagination

In 2018, the Road Transport and Highways Division (RTHD) wanted to cut down 2,312 trees lining the famous Jashore Road—to make way for a four-lane highway. The centuries-old trees lining Jashore Road have a special historical, literary, and cultural significance, having inspired poets and songwriters from around the world, and having shaded the paths of millions of dispossessed and displaced migrants as they fled to India in 1971. Felling these trees would have been an affront to the memory of the Liberation War.

But significantly, we saw that it wasn't trees that were standing in the way of better roads. It was a lack of ingenuity and foresight. Across the Indian border in Petrapole, the old trees were preserved in a median, and the road was expanded without cutting trees. Environmentalists and academics asked why



A tree-lined road in Benapole, Jashore

PHOTO: STAR

the government in Bangladesh had not even considered the possibility of a dual-carriage road, with a parallel road (or roads) on the outside of the trees lining the highway. The RTHD conceded that the government in fact had land available on either side of the highway.

After widespread opposition, the Jashore

Road tree felling plans were scrapped. Unfortunately, other highways and other trees simply don't have the star power that Jashore Road has. But the solutions proposed for Jashore Road certainly hold true elsewhere. There must be an earnest effort to find alternatives to cutting trees or damaging the ecosystem in any infrastructure development project.

And what if there are no alternatives? The

Los Angeles, a distance of 1,249 kilometres of harsh terrain including a mountain range. The project is not free of politics, corruption or controversy. But throughout this mammoth project, there is the commitment to conserving the diverse and complex ecosystems that the railway traverses. The ecological footprint of every aspect is taken into consideration, from emissions to waste management, contamination of water and

of ambition? People will say we're a "poor country". But the World Bank reported that Bangladesh spends more money per kilometre of roads or highways than most other countries in the world. The four-lane highway from Bhanga to Benapole cost \$14 million per kilometre, over 10 times the average cost in India or China. One may compare the roads in China with ours, as well as the landscapes, and ponder where the resources go. It's safe to say that we are a nation of great resources flowing to the wrong pockets.

And yet, when we do manage to properly direct the resources, we build megaprojects that are worth boasting about. The Padma bridge is paraded as an engineering marvel (not very eco-friendly, perhaps, but we're talking about ambition), and indeed, it is a remarkable accomplishment, featuring daring innovations to uniquely Bangladeshi geological challenges, and the country can be proud of the result. But pride won't save lives or fill bellies.

My humble contention is that if my country is capable of producing a work of engineering at the cusp of human capability, then I am unprepared to accept such mediocre and short-sighted thinking as "must cut trees to widen the road" any more. Especially when the cost is especially high in our case.

Cost-benefit analysis

Fewer trees means less rain, more heat and erosion, which leads to poor health, salinisation, desertification, and displacement. If this is difficult to imagine in a place so lovely as Jashore, just go one district south to Satkhira, to Protapnagar, Padmapukur, Gabura, to the vast desert landscapes, the clamour of NGO signboards, and the stories of ruin.

Preserving trees is only a start. For a country whose life and culture are so closely tied to its soil and its environment, Bangladesh should be a leader in eco-friendly development. The fact is that we need the roads as badly as we need the ecosystem. So, the trees, shrubs, canals, flora and fauna—must all be integrated into projects, rather than being replaced by them.

Bad connectivity and unsafe highways are unacceptable in the 21st century. But if we build, we should build like world leaders. Every infrastructure project in Bangladesh should be an example in efficiency, foresight and eco-friendly design. What's lacking is not solutions. It's the desire and drive to find and demand them.

SOLAR STORM AND AURORA

A dazzling display of colourful lights



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QUAMRUL HAIDER

Thirty-three days after the breathtaking total solar eclipse that swept through a vast swath of North America on April 8, the Sun has produced yet another dazzling celestial drama. This time it is a cosmic extravaganza of colourful lights that painted the skies across the Northern Hemisphere during the early hours of the May 11 weekend with vibrant hues of pink, green, and purple. This rare show of lights is referred to as aurora, after the Roman goddess of the dawn. In the United States, it was seen by millions of people as far south as Florida and Southern California.

What causes an aurora? The root cause of an aurora is a solar storm, a dramatic blast of electromagnetic radiation from the Sun. The storm consists of solar flares, which are the most violent form of solar activity. A flare occurs when magnetic energy that has built up in sunspots areas on the surface of the Sun that appear dark because they are relatively cooler than other parts of the Sun's surface is suddenly released. Hence, solar storms are also known as geomagnetic storms.

Flares are most common when numerous sunspots are visible on the solar surface. Near large sunspots, about a hundred flares occur each day. The number of flares also depends on the intensity of solar activity, which goes through a high-low cycle over a period of 11 years. The current cycle that began five years ago is predicted to peak in an activity called a solar maximum, in July 2025.

The intensity of solar activity is measured on a five-level scale, ranging from G1 (minor) to G5

(extreme), with the recent one labelled G4 (severe). It is expected to continue for a few more days, albeit with intensity G3 (strong) or G2 (moderate).



A solar storm caused a cosmic extravaganza of colourful lights that painted the skies across the Northern Hemisphere during the early hours of the May 11 weekend.

FILE PHOTO: AFP

The vast amounts of energy released by a typical solar flare across the entire electromagnetic spectrum heats nearby material, thereby launching a colossal amount of plasma a hot soup of charged particles and magnetic field from the Sun's corona, or upper atmosphere. The phenomenon is termed coronal mass ejections (CMEs). As the flare races towards Earth, its electromagnetic radiation and the CME rip through the upper atmosphere and ionise neutral atoms by removing electrons from them. Occasionally, charged particles

flowing outwards from a CME escape into the solar winds, which are also a stream of charged particles released from the Sun's corona. The effects of these particles on the atmosphere of a planet depend largely on whether the planet has a strong enough magnetic field to divert the charged particles in the solar wind.

On planets like Mars and Venus that do not have strong magnetic fields, charged particles in the solar wind can directly impact the surface of the

atmosphere. Fortunately, Earth's strong magnetic field creates a magnetosphere that acts like a protective bubble surrounding our planet. The magnetosphere deflects most of the charged particles around our planet, thus protecting us from their harmful effects.

Oftentimes the magnetosphere allows a few of the charged particles in the solar wind to get through, especially near the magnetic poles that are relatively close—about 10 degrees—to the geographic poles. Once the charged particles penetrate the magnetosphere, they follow

the magnetic field all the way down to the Earth's atmosphere, where collision with atoms and molecules in the atmosphere sends them into an excited state. The charged particles quickly de-excite the emitting light that creates the colourful display of the aurora dancing around the Earth's magnetic poles. In the Northern Hemisphere, the aurora is often called Aurora borealis, or Northern Lights, and is best viewed at high latitudes. In the Southern Hemisphere, it is called Aurora australis, or Southern Lights.

The energy released by the solar storm can cripple Earth's technological infrastructure, mess up satellites, radio communications, internet, navigation signals from GPS satellites, halt aviation and severely damage electric power grids. If there is a direct hit, the impact could be catastrophic, costing trillions of dollars in damage to our economic and high-tech infrastructures affecting millions of people. However, today there are systems in place to minimise the impact.

Two recent massive solar storms that pummelled the Earth

are the Great Aurora of March 1989 and the Halloween Sun Storm of October 2003. The storm of 1989 blacked out lights for millions of people in Québec, Canada, whereas the Halloween storm disabled many satellites and damaged instruments on a Mars orbiter.

The largest solar storm on record occurred in 1859. It was dubbed the Carrington Event, named after the British astronomer Richard Carrington, the discoverer of solar flares. It bathed "two-thirds of the Earth's skies in a blood-red aurora a night later, and crippled all of global navigation and global communication, such as it was at that time."

Finally, doomsday prophets are worried that solar storms are an omen for the end of the world. They will, however, be disappointed because the thought of a solar Armageddon is far-fetched. This is because the thousands of miles of thick magnetosphere 40,000 miles above will not fail us. Besides, much of the CME is faced away from Earth, and consequently the danger is lessened. In fact, other than the usual inconveniences caused by solar storms, we will always be entertained by a brilliant show of the auroras. Nonetheless, in the future, we can expect a monstrous solar storm that would make the Carrington Event look like a rain shower.

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(পেট্রোবাংলার একটি কোম্পানি)
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Sl. No.	Package No.	Description of Goods	Tender ID	Last Selling of Tender (Date & Time)	Tender Closing & Opening (Date & Time)
1.	28.20.9153.142.14.008.24	Procurement of Paint & Thinner at Rashidpur Gas Field, Bahubal, Habiganj under Sylhet Gas Fields Limited.	981493	02-Jun-2024 15:00 Hours	03-Jun-2024 12:00 Hours

This is online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

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Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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