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BSCIC estates in a shambles

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Most of the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation's 74 industrial estates across the country are in dire straits, with dilapidated roads and drainage, and unreliable or no gas and power supply plaguing them.

The Meherpur BSCIC estate, for instance, has allotted 64 of its 70 plots to entrepreneurs. During a recent visit however, The Daily Star correspondent saw no more than 11 operational industrial units. These units included printing and packaging, rice mills, and handicrafts.

Established in 2002, the estate is failing to thrive mainly due to poor road network leading to the units, and no gas connection and drainage system, said the caretaker of a factory still running there.

Since the whole estate is without

- BSCIC owns 74 industrial estates
- 43pc estates do not have gas supply
- Most estates lack security arrangements
- Infrastructure, drainage in bad shape
- 496 industrial plots vacant

boundary walls, it has turned into a pasture for cattle to graze and more disturbingly, a safe den for drug addicts, he added.

Our correspondents in Barishal, Kushtia, and Jhenidah gave similar depictions of the BSCIC estates in their areas.

The Dinajpur BSCIC industrial area is however more vibrant with 90 percent units operating as rice mills. But large potholes and piles of ash riddle the roads leading to the 35-acre estate. Even inside the estate, almost all the roads are in bad condition

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Police personnel and Left Democratic Alliance activists scuffle near the capital's Matsya Bhaban after the law enforcers prevented them from marching towards the Prime Minister's Office yesterday. The demonstrators were demanding that the government step down and fresh polls be held under a caretaker government. Story on page 16.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

BERC to get free rein to raise energy prices

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet yesterday approved the draft of Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (amendment) Act, 2019, with a provision to change energy prices more than once a year.

The approval was given at a cabinet meeting at the Prime Minister's Office in the city, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Speaking to reporters at the secretariat after the meeting, Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said the proposed law seeks to amend only one clause of the Act.

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Wahab fifer downs Rajshahi

SPORTS REPORTER

Following unbeaten fifties from Tamim Iqbal and Asif Ali, a fiery spell with the ball from Wahab Riaz saw Dhaka Platoon register a 74-run win against Rajshahi Royals under the lights at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

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THE YEAR IN REVIEW: AWAMI LEAGUE

Discomforts within

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

"It was a tremendous year for the party."

This was how Awami League leader Mahbubul Alam Hanif summed up when asked to look back on 2019.

True, in a sense the country's oldest political party, now in office for a third consecutive term, faced hardly any trouble from political opponents or any outside forces.

The party has been fully dominating the parliament as well as the streets, winning a landslide victory in the December 30 national polls a year back.

It also triumphed in the local body elections -- city corporations, upazilas and municipalities -- held in the first half of the year, virtually becoming the "mighty one party" in the country.

The party should be as happy as it

could be.

But still there were some serious discomforts, mostly stemming from internal issues.

For example, some leaders of its front organisations were found linked to illegal casinos and tender manipulations, which angered party chief Sheikh Hasina and made her take some stringent measures within the party.

During the anti-corruption crackdown beginning on September 18, the highest number of allegations were against leaders of the party's youth front, Jubo League.

At least five Jubo League leaders were expelled from the organisation. They are now in jail for alleged corruption and various irregularities.

The party also relieved the president of Swachhchasebak League, Molla

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RAB-GATEMEN ROW Rail services halted for two hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rail communication between Dhaka and the rest of the country, except Narayanganj, remained suspended for nearly two hours yesterday as gatemen at level crossings around Uttara abstained from work after Rab detained one of their colleagues.

All departing and arriving trains in Dhaka were delayed after 2:00pm, railway officials said.

The gatemen resumed work after the authorities promised them of their colleague's release.

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All loans at 9pc interest from Apr 1

Says finance minister after a meeting with sponsors, MDs of banks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Banks will have to fix the interest rate for lending at 9 percent from April 1 next year as per Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's instruction -- a move that can go on to theoretically break down the market mechanism for funds.

"We earlier took a decision to implement single-digit interest rate for only the industrial sector, but now it will be for all sectors except credit cards," Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal told reporters after a meeting with private banks' sponsors and managing directors at the headquarters of

Bangladesh Association of Banks (BAB).

The PM wanted the single-digit interest rate within the next two months, but banks have sought an additional month, he said, adding that the central bank will issue a notice on this within a day or two.

"The single-digit interest rate will be applicable for all fresh and old loans."

At the same time, banks will have to pay 6 percent interest on deposits.

Quizzed whether the new decision would go against the free market economy, Kamal said: "This is free market economy. When Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy

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A train passes through a kitchen market, illegally set up along the railway line, in the capital's Malibagh area yesterday. The authorities launched drives and removed the market several times in the past, but every time the traders came back and set it up. Such disregard for safety can lead to fatal accidents.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Crude bomb blast again on DU campus

Madhur Canteen staffer injured by splinters

DU CORRESPONDENT

Two more crude bombs went off near the Dhaka University's Madhur Canteen yesterday a day after four exploded at the same place.

Yesterday's explosions occurred a little before 11:00am, leaving canteen waiter Hridoy with minor splinter wounds.

Police and DU authorities have yet to say who could be behind the incidents.

On Sunday, four crude bombs went off in the morning and evening at the same place while an unexploded one was found there on Thursday.

Visiting the spot, DU Proctor Prof AKM Golam Rabbani told reporters, "Some organisations, that exist in name only and do not have any ideology but have motives, are behind this."

There are several conflicting organisations, he said, "Rather than confronting [the opponent] politically, they want to make political gains by creating panic."

Witnesses said they didn't see anyone throwing the bombs.

BORDER KILLINGS BY BSF

43 Bangladeshis killed this year

Show Ain o Salish Kendra data; the number was 14 last year

MUNTAKIM SAAD

There has been a sharp rise in border killings as 43 Bangladeshis were either shot dead or tortured to death this year by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF), according to Ain o Salish Kendra data.

Last year, the number was 14.

"Of the 43 Bangladeshis, 37 were shot dead and six others tortured to death," Abu Ahmed Faijul Kabir, ASK's senior coordinator, told The Daily Star yesterday, citing the rights body's annual report, to be launched at the capital's Jatiya Press Club today.

ASK data show that 46 people were killed along the Bangladesh-India border allegedly by the BSF in 2015. The number came down to 31 in 2016 and 24 in 2017.


Rights defenders describe such killings of unarmed and defenceless people as cold-blooded murders.

The Indo-Bangla border is routinely crossed by locals for trade and commerce.

The latest border killing was reported on December 25, at a time when a director general level conference between Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and the BSF was still underway in New Delhi.

Killing or injuring innocent Bangladeshi citizens and firing on them on the border was one of the agendas of the meeting from the BGB.


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