

BSCIC INDUSTRIAL ESTATE IN NILPHAMARI

# A hub for small businesses

But they are fighting for survival due to Covid-19

## DISTRICTS IN FOCUS

EAM ASADUZZAMAN

The industrial estate of the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) in Nilphamari has become a hub for small businesses as it gives them easy access to key markets in the northern part of the country.

However, the estate has experienced its fair share of adversities amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

"Although foreign buyers are not placing orders because of the pandemic, we have continued our production in the hope that things will be better soon," said Nur Islam, a director of Selim Agro.

Selim Agro, the largest factory in the BSCIC industrial estate, employed about 450 people to produce various jute goods for export to India and Nepal during the pre-pandemic era. Now, the number of workers has fallen to 300.

Arman Hossain, the labour supervisor of the factory, said that unlike many mills outside the estate, their workers were paid in a timely manner despite the current situation.

Abul Kashem, president of the BSCIC Factory Owners Association, said the Department of Environment should arrange awareness programmes on safe

factory operations to help tackle the Covid-19 situation.

Established on 11 acres of land in Saidpur municipality's Neyamatpur area in 1986, all 92 plots in the estate were allocated to 49 industries within a few years.

Today, the estate is home to many small enterprises, particularly from the consumer goods, light engineering, chemical, and agro-based product sectors.

"And in the face of increasing demand from young entrepreneurs, the authorities are actively considering a proposal to expand the industrial estate by another 40 acres," said Jewel Chandra Sen, deputy director of the BSCIC district office in Nilphamari.

This sets the Nilphamari estate apart from other BSCIC industrial parks in adjoining districts, where plots either lie useless or are completely monopolised by large enterprises.

"This estate may be considered a breeding ground for small entrepreneurs as one to three plots can be allocated to a single party. Larger units are not preferred since they take up most of the area," said Partha Sarathi Sarker, acting chief of the industrial park.

"Our success lies in the good communication network as the estate is situated beside the Dhaka-Dinajpur highway, which provides access to big markets in Rangpur and Dinajpur," he added.

READ MORE ON B2



EAM ASADUZZAMAN

The industrial estate of the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation in Nilphamari is home to many small enterprises thanks to the good communication network.

# Budgeting to make a difference



ZAHID HUSSAIN

While the pandemic waves on, the budget should focus on crisis management, prioritising spending on health, targeting fiscal support to distressed families and enterprises, restoring the functionality of education, and building on the resilience demonstrated by agriculture while keeping an eye on revenues. A business-as-usual budget like last year will miss the boat again.

There is a lot to learn from the implementation experience in health and social protection. We did not have the benefit last year of knowing what we know now about how the policy response to the pandemic works and where the fault lines are.



Hospitals have struggled with the number of patients and are burdened with shortages of ventilators, ICUs and rooms. These need emergency attention.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



## OPINION

Overambitious targets every year have only produced recycled budget conversations. It is about time we recognise the futility of such targets. Subsidies for financial stimulus packages have worked better for the formal sector large enterprises than the informal and even formal sector cottage, micro, and small enterprises.

Cash and food-based social protection programmes have suffered from the usual red tape and corruption. Implementation of the emergency health project with provisions to expand vitally needed health infrastructure has been dismal. Consequently, the new variant caught our health system unprepared once again!

The pandemic has taught in no uncertain terms that there is no shortcut to public health. A

state of moral decay is glaringly evident in healthcare. The private healthcare industry caters mostly to the wealthy who can purchase the best available care locally or flee to safety in rented jets.

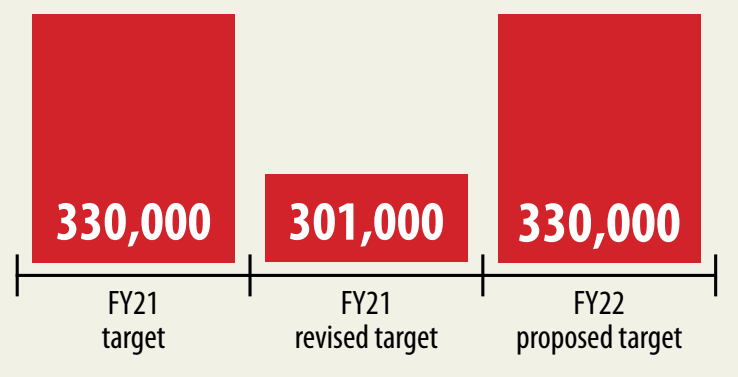
Responding to public health emergencies is resource-intensive and not commercially attractive. It, therefore, does not resonate well with the private sector. Deterred by the expensive healthcare system and no insurance cover, many people choose not to go to the hospitals. Government hospitals have struggled with the number of patients and are burdened with shortages of ventilators, ICUs, and rooms. These need emergency attention.

Vaccination should be priority number one. The management of vaccination centres has been

## REVENUE COLLECTION TARGET

In crore taka

SOURCE: FINANCE MINISTRY



excellent thus far. The government has also done a good job in lining up funds for vaccines. The billion-dollar question is when we will be able to use the money to procure vaccines. The strategy to rely solely on one country and one domestic distributor has brought upon us many regrets, including a weaker bargaining power in negotiating vaccine import and production

deals. Beyond vaccination, testing, diagnosing what behaviour is causing the spread, treating the infected, and non-Covid care deserve a lot of policy and budgetary care. The health ministry and medical service providers should learn from their failures and that of India.

READ MORE ON B2

## GLOBAL BUSINESS

# Job fears, price spikes mean heartburn for Biden

REUTERS, Washington

High unemployment. Rising prices. Gas lines.

They're a bad memory for Americans old enough to remember the 1970s - but they're also likely causing a few sleepless nights in the White House, as the United States' economic recovery from the unprecedented coronavirus recession hits some bumps.

The jolts are dampening consumer confidence, ramping up inflation fears, and helping Republicans build their case against President Joe Biden and his ambitious plans to revamp the US economy with trillions in new spending.

As the 1970s show, high joblessness and rising prices the United States saw in April can be a potent political force.

Republicans crafted a "misery index" out of the two factors to attack then-president Jimmy Carter. After hitting 75 per cent approval ratings early in his presidency, the Democrat was trounced in a 1980 landslide.

Support for Biden remains strong and US equity markets remain near record highs.

The White House says there's bound to be surprises as the United States emerges from an unprecedented pandemic.

"We must keep in mind

that an economy will not heal instantaneously," Cecilia Rouse, the chair of the White House Council of Economic Advisers told reporters Friday. "It takes several weeks for people to get full immunity from vaccinations, and even more time for those left jobless from

the pandemic to find and start a suitable job."

Rouse, speaking to reporters at the White House, said a mismatch between supply and demand due to the pandemic and the economic snap-back had pushed inflation higher but that the mismatch should prove temporary.

"I fully expect that will work itself out in the coming months," she said.

The Federal Reserve also is betting heavily inflation will cool on its own, even as hiring picks up steam over the summer, Americans start to travel again, and the Fed keeps its massive crisis levels of support intact.

The White House wouldn't offer a timeline for when the economy will smooth out. But it doesn't expect a repeat of April's weak jobs report, and recent data show applicants for unemployment benefits fell to a 14-month low.

"The trend lines continue to be positive," a senior White House official told Reuters on Wednesday. The White House also believes the Fed can handle what comes up, he said.



US President Joe Biden leaves after speaking about the coronavirus disease response and the vaccination programme from the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington, US.

REUTERS

# US fuel crisis eases as pipeline returns to normal after hack



Motorists fill their cars at one of the few remaining gas stations that still has fuel in Arlington, Virginia on May 13, 2021.

REUTERS

Widespread gasoline shortages along the US East Coast began to ease slightly on Saturday as the operator of the nation's biggest fuel pipeline said it was back to delivering "millions of gallons per hour" following last week's cyberattack.

Ships and trucks were deployed to fill up storage tanks after the six-day Colonial Pipeline shutdown, the most disruptive cyberattack on record, triggered widespread panic buying that left filling stations across the US Southeast dry.

"We have returned the system to normal operations, delivering millions of gallons per hour to the markets we serve," said the company, which had begun gradual restart of the pipeline on Wednesday.

More than 13,400 gas stations surveyed in the east and south by fuel tracking app GasBuddy were experiencing outages on Saturday, down from 16,200 early the previous day.

On Saturday evening, about 75 per cent of gas stations in Washington, DC were still without fuel, an improvement from Friday's figure of 88 per cent, the app showed. Shortages also eased in North Carolina and Virginia, but were about the same in Georgia.

US gasoline demand dropped 12.6 per cent from the previous week, probably due to an easing of "crazed" panic buying just after the pipeline shut, said Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy.

The nationwide average for a gallon of regular unleaded was \$3.04 on Saturday, from \$2.96 a week ago, according to AAA.

The pipeline outage accelerated increases in gasoline prices that were "already rising due to higher crude prices and demand ahead of Memorial Day," said AAA spokeswoman Ellen Edmonds.

She was referring to the May 31 holiday that traditionally kicks off the US summer driving season. Places served by the pipeline saw the biggest price jumps this week - with Georgia and the Carolinas up 20 cents per gallon or more - but they should also see prices decline again as supplies improve, Edmonds said.

Florence, South Carolina had the nation's biggest price increase at 30 cents, while prices rose 9 cents in DC.

Ships deployed under emergency waivers were also moving fuel from US Gulf Coast refineries to the northeast, while 18-wheel tanker trucks were ferrying gasoline from Alabama to Virginia, helping to stem the shortages.

# Taiwan urges no panic buying amid new Covid rules

REUTERS, Taipei

Taiwan appealed to people to avoid panic buying of items such as instant noodles and toilet paper as new curbs on gatherings and movement took effect to rein in the spread of Covid-19 during a spike in domestic infections.

Taiwan raised its coronavirus alert level in the capital, Taipei, and the surrounding city, on Saturday, imposing two weeks of restrictions that will shut many venues and limit gatherings.

While total infections since the pandemic began remain low at 1,475, the recent community transmissions have alarmed a population that had become accustomed to life staying close to normal, with no full lockdowns of the kind seen elsewhere.

In messages late on Saturday, the president, premier and economy ministry took to Facebook to say there was no need to hoard or rush to the shops, after people scrambled to stock up on basic goods, mainly instant noodles and toilet paper.

"After more than a year of preparation, the country's anti-pandemic materials, civilian goods and raw materials are sufficient, and the stores are also operating as usual to replenish goods," President Tsai Ing-wen said.

French supermarket chain Carrefour said it was limiting purchases of items such as masks and instant noodles in its Taiwan stores, asking people to buy only what they need.

The economy ministry showed pictures of warehouses piled to the ceiling with boxes of

instant noodles, saying supplies were "like a mountain" with plenty of toilet paper and canned food to go round as well.

Premier Su Tseng-chang made a similar appeal on his Facebook page. He triggered amusement early last year, during a previous rush for toilet paper, by saying people "only have one butthole" and should calm down.

While not ordering a total lockdown, the government is urging people to stay at home as much as possible.

The health ministry brought out its dog mascot, a shiba inu called Zongchai, to reinforce the message on social media.

"Study Zongchai and stay at home," it said, showing pictures of the canine lying on the floor resting.