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RAY OF HOPE for 6 sugar mills

Govt set to team up with foreign consortium to reopen them

- The consortium proposes to invest Tk 8,000cr (\$1b) under a 50:50 joint venture with BSFIC
- The six mills are in Pabna, Panchagarh, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Kushtia and Gaibandha
- BSFIC incurred a total of Tk 3,976cr losses in last five years

JAGARAN CHAKMA

The government is close to striking a deal with foreign investors for reopening the six shut sugar mills as part of its plan to make the losing Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation (BSFIC) sustainable.

A consortium comprising Thailand's Sutech Engineering Co., the UAE's Sharkara International and Japan's Sojitz Machinery Corporation has expressed interest in investing \$1 billion (about Tk 8,000 crore) to upgrade the outdated facilities at the six mills, according to its investment proposal. The Daily Star has a copy of the proposal.

Production at Pabna Sugar Mills, Shyampur Sugar Mills, Setabganj Sugar Mills, Kushtia Sugar Mills, Panchagarh Sugar Mills and Rangpur Sugar Mills has been on halt since December last year amid mounting losses.

In fiscal 2019-20, the six mills had logged in losses of about Tk 380 SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



INHALING POISON...Without any safety gear, a worker collecting coal in Chattogram's Majhir Ghat area, where coal imported from India, Indonesia and other countries, is stored and then later sold and sent to different parts of the country. Such utter disregard for ensuring health safety measures by the authorities concerned results in serious respiratory and skin conditions for the workers.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAHMAN

Two killed in Rangamati shootout

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two people were killed in a shootout between two groups of Parbatya Chattogram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) and United People's Democratic Front (UPDF Democratic) in Dui Kilo area of Rangamati's Baghaichhari upazila yesterday, said police.

The deceased were identified as PCJSS leader Tujim Chakma, 38, and UPDF leader Janong Chakma, 32, Baghaichhari Police Station Sub-inspector Asadur Rahman said.

The gunfight continued for around an hour from 12:10pm. Later, police recovered the bodies from a hill slope around 30 yards off each other. Another person, a motorcyclist named Monu Mia, 30, from Khagrachhari's Dighinala upazila, was also shot. He was sent to Khagrachhari Sadar hospital.

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DSA was misused

Law minister admits

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Acknowledging that the Digital Security Act (DSA) was misused and abused, Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said steps were taken to stop this practice.

"Many people said Bangladesh needed the Digital Security Act. I acknowledge that the act was misused and abused. I have taken steps to stop this," he said while addressing the annual general meeting of the Crime Reporters Association of Bangladesh in the capital.

He said the first step was the initiation of a dialogue in December last year with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The move was aimed at doing whatever needed to ensure the best use of the law following the best practices in the world.

Besides, a team, led by the secretary of the legislative division, was formed and it is continuing dialogues in this regard, he

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Better equipped now, worries still there

MOUJUD AHMED SUJAN

The major challenges for the healthcare sector of Bangladesh in 2021 was ensuring supply of Covid vaccines, inoculating a huge chunk of the population, and making sure the infected got beds, ICU beds, and adequate oxygen.

Bangladesh is now better equipped to deal with surges in Covid cases, like the one caused by the Delta variant, but experts fear the country is not out of the woods yet.

On the fear of Omicron variant spreading, Prof Nazrul Islam, a member of the National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19, told The Daily Star that if the surge of infections was like that caused by Delta, the crisis would not be as severe but the fear remains.

HEALTH SECTOR 2021

- Nationwide Covid ICU beds in January – 602
- Nationwide Covid ICU beds now – 1,201
- Covid hospital beds in January – 10,495
- Covid dedicated hospital beds now – 21,248
- High-flow nasal cannula in January – 716
- High-flow nasal cannula now – 2,452
- Covid hospitals with central O2 supply – 100
- Covid hospitals with O2 generators – 18

"The oxygen production and supply situations are much better now. But keeping everything functional will be a challenge," Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist, told The Daily Star yesterday while reviewing the achievements and failures in the health sector in 2021.

Omicron will likely start creating pressure on the healthcare system early next year, he warned. After the first wave, the deaths, new cases and infection rates were low when the new year had begun in 2021 with hope for some sort of normalcy.

The people of the country, the economy, and the businesses were eying a return to business as usual as the vaccination campaign rolled out on February 7.

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WHO WARNS OF 'VERY HIGH' OMICRON RISK - P12

Covid cases on the rise again

3 vaccines chosen for booster dose

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country recorded a spike in daily Covid cases as the health directorate logged 495 new infections in 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday.

The previous day, the figure was 397. With this, Bangladesh reported daily coronavirus cases above 400 after two months. On October 19, it logged 469 new Covid infections.

The spike in coronavirus cases comes at a time when the country is seeing cases of Omicron variant. Seven people have so far been infected with the new

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Paranormal turnout

A polling station sees 100 percent vote cast; dead included

MINTU DESHWARA

A Moulvibazar polling centre reported a hundred percent turnout in Sunday's union parishad elections although the voter list included people who have died and those who were not even in the country.

The polling centre in question was the one at Bargaon Government Primary School of Rajnagar upazila's Panchgaon union.

After voting, the result sheet that the centre's presiding officer handed to the union's returning officer showed that all 1,915 votes were cast.

The Daily Star has got a copy of the result sheet and the polling centre's voter list. Scrutinising the latter, it was found that at least 83 people have died and 208 have gone abroad.

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CROWN CEMENT WILL BE USED IN DHAKA-ASHULIA ELEVATED EXPRESSWAY PROJECT

Crown Cement has signed an agreement with The Fifth Major Bridge Engineering Co. Ltd. of China to supply cement to Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway Project. **Mr. Md. Mukter Hossain Talukder**, FCA, Chief Executive Officer of Crown Cement, and **Mr. Wei Haijiang**, Project Chief Engineer of The Fifth Major Bridge Engineering Co. Ltd., signed the agreement on behalf of their respective organizations at a city hotel in Dhaka on 29 December 2021.