



The Daily Star



REGD. No. DA 781 | Vol. XXXI No. 339 | Poush 15, 1428 BS | **Your Right to Know** | JAMADUL AWAL 25, 1443 HIJRI | 16 PAGES PLUS SHOUT PRICE : Tk12.00

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



A signboard at Cox's Bazar Laboni Point demarcates a "reserved area for women and children", inaugurated by Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Ali yesterday. The measure has drawn criticism with many terming it primitive and questioning why women and children need a separate zone at a tourist spot to be safe. On December 22, a woman visiting the town with her husband and small child was raped after being abducted from this point of the sea beach. PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAT

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.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

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

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

Better equipped; worries still there

MOUJID 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.

"The oxygen production and supply situations are much better now. But keeping everything functional

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

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.

With deaths, new cases and infection rates also low at the start of 2021, the year had begun with hope after the first wave.

The people of the country, the economy, and the businesses were eyeing some sort of normalcy as the vaccination campaign rolled out on February 7.

But that was not to be, at least for some months, as the government practically put all its eggs in one basket. The supply of shots from India stopped

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

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

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

WHO warns of 'very high' Omicron risk

Covid-19 cases surge 11pc in a week globally, raising testing and quarantine fears

AGENCIES

Omicron still poses "very high" risk and could overwhelm healthcare systems, the WHO warned yesterday, as the highly transmissible coronavirus variant fuelled record outbreaks in many countries.

Almost two years after China first reported a cluster of "viral pneumonia" cases in the city of Wuhan, the regularly mutating coronavirus is wreaking havoc in many parts of the world, forcing governments to rethink quarantine and test rules.

Case numbers have shot up 11 percent globally in the last week, forcing governments from China to Germany and France to find a difficult balance between anti-virus restrictions and the need to keep economies and societies open.

The Netherlands and Switzerland said Omicron had become the dominant strain in their countries, and while some studies suggested it causes milder Covid-19, the World Health Organization urged caution.

"The overall risk related to the new variant of concern



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.