

P5 **People worried over OMS halt**
Port city residents urge govt to resume service



P7 **Support to Taiwan**
Chinese envoy says it can spark US-China war



P11 **Barty breaks hoodoo**
First Australian to win Aus Open in 44 yrs



B1 **Naz Garden up for sale**
Akij in talks to buy the hotel in Bogura



GREENS FLOATING IN...
Fresh, green vegetables being carried by a boat on a dark and murky Turag at Amin Bazar. The districts and upazilas surrounding the capital send in a huge quantity of vegetables every season to meet the city dwellers' demand. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

EC search panel may be unveiled today

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The search committee, which will suggest names for the appointments of the chief election commissioner and other commissioners, is likely to be formed by the president today, sources said.

As per the law passed in parliament on Thursday, the search committee will recommend the names to the president.

The committee will be comprised of six members, including a female. It will be headed by a judge of the Supreme Court's Appellate Division, who will be nominated by the chief justice.

Sources said either Justice Muhammad Imman Ali, who is currently on leave, or Justice Obaidul Hassan is most likely to be made the committee head.

Justice Obaidul was a member of the search committee formed in 2017 before the last general election in 2018.

The five other members will include a High Court judge, to be nominated by the CJ, the comptroller and auditor general, the chairman of Bangladesh Public Service Commission and two distinguished citizens nominated by the president. Among the two, one will be female, as per the law.

Mohammad Muslim Chowdhury is currently the comptroller and auditor general. Md Soharab Hossain is the PSC chairman.

Sources said former cabinet secretary Ali Imman

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

PUBLIC-PVT PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

Whimper drowns the hype

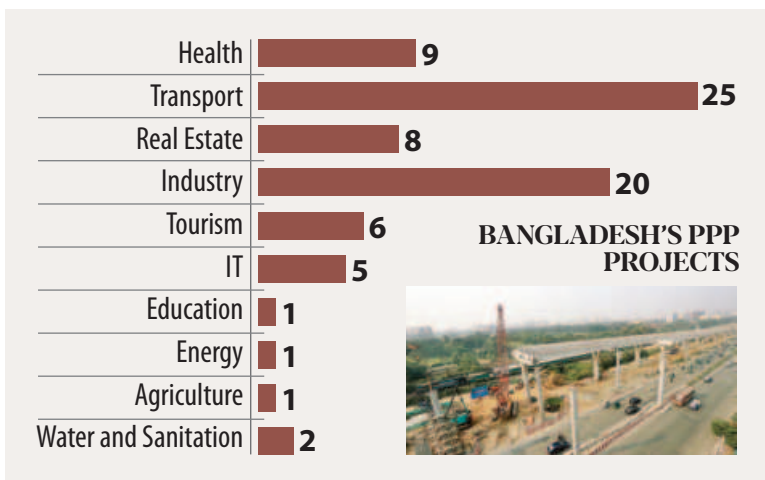
MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

The more things change, the more they stay the same, observed the French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr. And looking at the state of progress of the projects undertaken under public-private partnership (PPP), one is reminded of the saying.

Government projects getting completed on time is almost unheard of. So to give exigency to the implementation of infrastructure projects to keep pace with Bangladesh's economic aspirations, the government in 2010 decided to go the PPP way.

As many as 78 projects involving \$36.5 billion were taken up under PPP. So far, only one of the projects – haemodialysis centres in Dhaka and Chattogram implemented with Indian Sandor Medicaids – have become operational.

This leaves one wondering: are the inherent bottlenecks a mountain too high for even the business-like private sector players to climb?



The state of implementation of the PPP projects echoes the implementation of the ongoing infrastructure projects, said Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

"We see the same problems in such projects year after year."

But those are not met head-on.

As is the practice in government projects, the development project

proposals are ignored, so the projects invariably end up getting revised multiple times, according to Rahman.

Negotiating with private sector players about the risks and the sharing of responsibility adds another layer of complexity, he said, adding that the delay in land acquisition is another reason for the lacklustre progress of the PPP projects.

"This causes both cost and time overruns and deprives people of proper services," Rahman added.

Mobilising finance, ensuring operational efficiency and maintaining quality are amongst the most difficult challenges for infrastructure and service projects implemented solely by the government, said M Masrur Reaz, chairman of Policy Exchange of Bangladesh, a private think-tank.

On paper, this is where PPP projects can make a big difference – and the government can complete the critical and high-impact development projects like port and power infrastructure and special economic zones in a strict time-bound manner through this route.

In practice, the line ministries prefer to develop and implement good projects with direct government funding under the public procurement system – sending the less appealing projects for PPP consideration, he said.

The private sector is unlikely to

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Highest Covid deaths since Oct

Positivity rate at all-time high

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health directorate yesterday reported 21 new Covid-19 deaths – the highest since October 6 last year.

With this, the total number of deaths due to Covid-19 rose to 28,329.

In the past week till yesterday, 120 Covid-19 patients died. The number was 73 the previous week.

Of those who died yesterday, 14 were male and seven female.

Experts said the spike in casualties is a consequence of the Omicron variant.

First reported on December 9 last year in the country, the highly transmissible Omicron variant began the third wave of Covid-19, raising the positivity rate to an all-time high, according to DGHS data.

"We have to wait for a few more days to be sure about how much havoc the Omicron will wreak" Dr Mushtuq Hussain, consultant of the Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) told The Daily Star yesterday.

A total of 10,378 people tested

positive in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

The positivity rate rose to 31.10 percent after testing 33,373 samples countrywide.

Hospitals have been swarming with new patients every day.

According to the DGHS, there were around 3,000 Covid-19 patients undergoing treatment in hospitals across the country as of yesterday noon.

The overall bed-occupancy rate has increased to almost 20 percent yesterday, from around five percent on January 1, according to DGHS's Covid-19 Dynamic Dashboard.

The ICU bed-occupancy rate has also increased to 26 percent from 12, while in the High Dependency Unit it went up to 30 from 10.

The rise in the transmission has also put healthcare staffers involved in testing under pressure.

"We have been forced to hire people from outside as many of the staffers involved in Covid-19 testing are now infected. Doctors, nurses and other

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

PROFESSIONAL DRIVING LICENCE

Dope tests begin today; hospitals not ready yet

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government initiative to conduct dope tests before issuing professional driving licences from today is set to face challenges due to a lack of testing facilities and preparations at the designated hospitals in the capital.

At a time when people face trouble in getting services from Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), such a move, in all likelihood, will only aggravate their sufferings, fear many of the service seekers.

According to a decision of the authorities concerned, negative dope test reports from government-affiliated hospitals or laboratories will be mandatory to get or renew professional driving licences from today.

Six government hospitals were designated for the dope tests in the city.

The Daily Star contacted the authorities of five of the hospitals yesterday. Two of them said they would not be able to do the tests for now while another said they were not even aware of the matter. Two other hospitals said they had "limited capacity" to carry out the tests.

The BRTA issues around 4 to 5 lakh licences every year, 40 percent of which are given from its three offices in Dhaka, one of its top officials said.

It issued or renewed 4.62 lakh driving licences last fiscal year across the country. However, it couldn't be known how many of them were professional licences.

"If any problem arises regarding dope tests in Dhaka city, the entire process will face trouble," the official said, wishing anonymity.

BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder said they have taken the move in consultation with the Directorate General of Health Services

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



The capital's Green Road is already narrow as it is and heavy traffic leads to congestion all day long. On top of this, workers of a power supply company have dug up the pavement and left mud piled up on the road, further narrowing the road and increasing traffic congestion. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

EC formation law takes effect

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

President Abdul Hamid last night gave his consent to the newly passed law on appointing the chief election commissioner and other commissioners, the parliament secretariat said in a statement.

The law came in force with the president's consent.

Meanwhile, sources in the Bangabhaban said a gazette on forming the search committee, which will recommend names to the president on the EC appointments, was likely to be issued in a day or two.

With some minor changes, parliament passed the law on Thursday amid opposition by MPs from the BNP, Jatiya Party, Gonoforum and Workers Party MPs.

Participating in

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7