

Power minister shown the door over crisis

FROM PAGE 1 ministers and advisers. Some of them do not have executive power while two ministers do not even have any portfolio.

The inaction and wrong actions of the four-party alliance government have now led the country to a daily load-shedding of nearly 2,000 megawatt (MW). The country's daily demand for power is 5,200MW, while it can generate between 3,000MW and 3,500MW.

According to sources, PM Khaleda Zia at first decided to oust Iqbal from the cabinet due to a number of reasons. But some senior ministers appealed to her not to do so as that might affect Iqbal's popu-

larity in his Sirajganj constituency and, in turn, the popularity of BNP.

Iqbal has been even suggested not to attempt to take any executive decision in the agriculture ministry now headed by MK Anwar.

Sources said Iqbal does not even have an office at the agriculture ministry as the only available room for a state minister there is allocated to information Deputy Minister Abdus Salam Pintu, who was removed from the industries ministry last month.

The sources pointed out that the PM took the decision to remove Iqbal in the context of public outcry for power and reports of various intelligence agencies against him.

Although Iqbal has denied any corruption in his domain at various public forums, the agencies reported that he has huge deposits with some foreign banks and made fortune out of various deals in the power sector.

He has made huge money by selling concrete electric poles to the Rural Electrification Board through his company Khamba, which is co-owned by some leaders of the alternative powerhouse of the government.

Asked about his involvement with Khamba last year, Iqbal did not categorically deny the fact to The Daily Star, saying many people spread many rumours about him.

The PM is reportedly unhappy about Iqbal's recent comment that the country could not set up new power plants because the government was not allocating any fund.

She is also unhappy about his performance as an executive of the power ministry. He did not assert the

minimum command in running the ministry.

Iqbal, however, had been publicly indicating since early last year that he had no executive power as the PMO and the PM's principal secretary were taking all the decisions, indirectly passing the blame of his failure on the PMO.

The state minister and the principal secretary were found talking against each other on various occasions.

IQBAL'S PERFORMANCE

The power ministry, which gained high importance during the previous Awami League rule due to unbundling of the sector, has been in the grip of corruption and lack of direction since the beginning of the present alliance government.

Upon coming to power, the government got the fruits of the previous government's success in the sector as there were various power projects—with a total production capacity of 1,400MW—under implementation.

Iqbal initially put a full stop to privatised power, saying it was draining out the national exchequer.

According to the 1995 master plan of the power sector, it was essential to generate 5,000MW electricity to meet the demand of 2006. To achieve this target, the government needed to produce 1,800MW additional power.

However, in its nearly five-year rule, the alliance government's only power deal was the 80MW Tongi power plant under government funds awarded to the dubious Chinese company Harbin.

Although it floated several tender bids, the alliance government could not implement any other single project during this time.

"Because of corruption and favouritism, the government machinery was busy finding ways to bend rules to award bids to favoured parties. This has killed time and created the crisis," pointed out a power ministry official.

The local agent of Harbin had told The Daily Star that they had to bribe a large number of officials and policymakers to have the deal done.

After all this, the Tongi plant has tripped 75 times since it started operation early last year.

The government further awarded two more contracts to Harbin—the 150MW Chandpur plant and the 90MW Fenchuganj plant.

It has also awarded the Meghnaghat-2 450MW power plant to Orion and Belhasa, severely violating the rules and regulations as none of these companies has ever built a power plant. The chief of Orion is close to the alternative powerhouse of the government.

While there was no new power generation, the rural power network doubled at an astonishing pace in the last five years mainly because of the interest of the concrete pole suppliers and the ruling party politicians who wanted to impress people in their constituencies.

As a result of the huge power network growth against huge power supply shortfall, public grievances flared up like never before.

In recent times, donors have been categorically pointing fingers at the power ministry for corruption.

Known as a smooth talker, Iqbal has been throwing counter-challenges to the donors asking them to prove the allegations.

Area confce of Zonta Int'l Dist 25 held

Area conference of Zonta International District 25, Area 2, with the theme "synergic of women power" was held at Kurmitola Golf Club on Saturday, says a press release.

Australian High Commissioner Douglas Fosket was the chief guest and Judith Chammas, Deputy Chief of Mission, USA was the special guest on the occasion.

Hasna J. Moudud presented the thematic paper.

Dilruba Ahmed, Governor District 25, reviewed the biennium and expressed satisfaction at the outcome of projects undertaken in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. Area director Nilufer Zafarullah briefed about the club activities.

The chief guest and the special guests lauded the efforts of Zontians in advancing the status of women and urged them to work unitedly to ensure development in their mission to build a secure future for women and to render assistance in the forthcoming election in Bangladesh.

Service Award was given to Prof Sufia Ahmed for her outstanding contributions to the community. Outstanding Zontians of District 25 India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were adjudged. Najma Islam from Bangladesh, Renuka Fernando from Sri Lanka, Mahajaver Dallal from India were awarded for their outstanding performances.

Other club leaders Hasna Moudud, Zubaida Munawar, Fahmida Karim and Gulshan-ara Chowdhury along with the district board members Nilufer Zafarullah, Nazneen Mahbub, Naheed Moyeen and Rubina Farouq received service awards.

Begum Laila Morshed was awarded for her contribution to Zonta. Begum Sarwari Rahman and Nilufer Zafarullah spoke on the occasion.

Feeder vessel MV Reo Loren leaves Singapore for Chittagong

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Newly introduced feeder vessel MV Reo Loren in Singapore-Chittagong route with carrying capacity of 1155 TEUs (Twenty Equivalent Units) of containers on its maiden voyage left Singapore for Chittagong port yesterday.

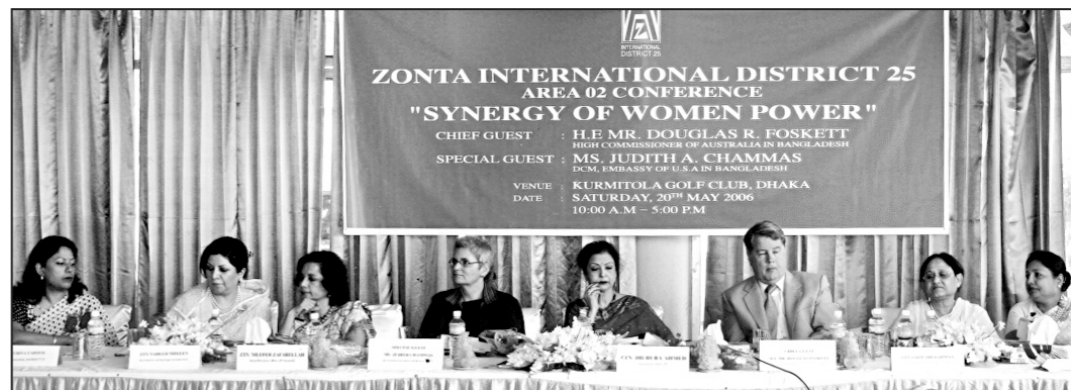
With a maximum speed of 20 nautical miles per hour, the vessel under Liberian flag will arrive at Chittagong port in three days as against five days taken by most of the vessels of this route, said the concerned charterer of the vessel.

Singapore based Chittagong Feeder Trade Committee member and feeder vessel operator QC Shipping chartered the vessel.

The vessel was commissioned on July 5 last year, said the sources.

The feeder vessel with such a carrying capacity is expected to help ease the congestion of vessels at Chittagong port to some extent, they hoped.

A congestion of vessel is now prevailing at Chittagong port with some eight vessels berthing at jetty and eleven other staying at the outer anchorage waiting for berthing till yesterday, sources said.



Area conference of Zonta International District 25, area 2 was held at the Kurmitola Golf Club on May 20. Sitting from left are Ztn Rubina Farouq, Ztn Nahid Moyeen, Ztn Nilufer Zafarullah, Judith Chammas, Ztn Dilruba Ahmed, Douglas R Foskett, Ztn Sarwari Rahman and Ztn Nazneen Mahbub.

1400 bottles of illegal foreign liquor seized in Ctg

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) recovered over 1400 bottles of foreign liquor imported illegally in Chittagong yesterday.

On information, a squad of Rab-7 of Chittagong raided Charpara near Patenga Sea Beach in the port city at 1:30am.

During the raid they recovered 485 bottles of Ram each containing

350 ml, 475 bottles of Ram each containing 700 ml, 238 bottles of 775 ml of country dry gin and 215 bottles of 365 ml of Country dry gin, from an abandoned place.

The recovered liquors were handed over to the Patenga Police Station.

Meanwhile, a team of Pahartali Police Station raided Baro Quarters area and recovered 20 bottles of contraband phensidyl and arrested

Muktar Hossain, 26, yesterday.

In another incident, a team of Panchlaish police while patrolling Rahman Nagar residential area arrested an alleged drug peddler identified as Mostafa Mia, 25, of Naikhang Charri of Banderban.

Later they recovered around 39 cans of illegal beer from the possession of Nazir, sources said.

JMB chief charged

FROM PAGE 1 the first week of April. The committee made the recommendation after detecting some flaws in it while giving it a final check.

Accordingly, the case was transferred to the Detective Branch (DB) and Inspector Saiful Alam Chowdhury was made the investigation officer (IO).

As the charge sheet could not be made ready during the stipulated time, extensions for completing the job was given twice, which ends this week.

Charges of possessing bombs and a large amount of explosive materials have been brought against eight persons, excluding the minor children, who were arrested along with the JMB chief, his family members and two of his aides by Rab and police in the morning of March 2 from a East Shaplabag house in Sylhet.

The accused are Abdur Rahman, his wife Nurjahan Begum alias Rupa, daughter Afifa Rahman, his two aides Moizul Islam Chowdhury alias Hridoy Chowdhury and Abdul Aziz alias Hanif, Hridoy's wife Sabina Islam, Moulana Saidur Rahman and Shabbir Ahmed.

Former amir of Habiganj district Jamaat, Saidur, is accused of serving as a courier for supplying money and other logistics to the JMB chief and its activists in the region. Shabbir of Brahmanbaria is accused of arranging money transfer to the Islamist militants in Sylhet from Dhaka and Brahmanbaria through his bank account.

The case filed under the Explosives Act was initially investigated by Inspector Shafiqur

Rahman Mukul, OC of Kotwali police station but with the transfer of the case to DB, Inspector Saiful Alam Chowdhury was made the IO. A three-men team of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) officials from the capital were also in Sylhet for monitoring the investigation at the initial stage.

Shabbir, 38, had been arrested by Brahmanbaria police from a private firm at Purana Paltan in Dhaka and was brought to Sylhet. He gave a confessional statement to the magistrate court admitting to his link with JMB. A chequebook of his bank account was found at the East Shaplabag house, Surjodigholbari. He is stated to be a close friend of Hridoy.

JMB's ehshar member also a former Islami Chhatra Shibir cadre, Hanif, also gave a confessional statement to the magistrate court admitting to his complicity with the series of bomb blasts in Sylhet city.

A bank chequebook issued to Saidur was also found at Surjodigholbari. Saidur could not be apprehended yet even after repeated attempts by Rab and police in Habiganj, Sunamganj and Sylhet districts. Saidur's son also an ex-Shibir leader, Shamim, who was arrested from Habiganj after the August 17 series of blasts, is in jail.

Sub Inspector Waliullah of Sylhet Kotwali PS filed two cases after the surrender of Abdur Rahman. A charge sheet in the case under the Arms Act was also submitted to the court on April 13.