

PDB in personnel crisis

Shortage of technical manpower tells on power generation

RAZIUR RAHMAN

With the country's rickety power infrastructure under strains to meet a 10 per cent annualised demand growth, manpower shortage, especially at technical positions, is serving a double blow to Power Development Board (PDB) activities.

The board is running short of at least 170 officials, including some top and technical ones.

Even the six-member PDB board, which covers different technical and commercial aspects of the sector, is operating at half its strength.

Overall, more than 6,000 posts lie vacant at present and the number is on the rise as recruitment remains extremely slow, sources said.

The post of member (generation) has remained vacant for more than 20 months since SM Shamsul Islam went on leave prior to retirement (LPR) on August 2000.

With demand for power growing and the sector undergoing thorough reforms, the post is very important, said one PDB official.

The post of member (transmission) lies vacant for five months and member (planning and designing) for more than a month.

The PDB is also short of 167 engineers and, insiders say, shortage of technical manpower has told upon the quality of the country's power supply scenario over the last few years.

According to the government-approved organogram, the PDB should

have 28,077 officials and employees. However, at present, there are 21,909 people on its payroll.

The personnel shortage has led rise to various complications in PDB operations, sources said, adding that some officials and employees have to carry out additional responsibilities.

Even the PDB chairman has to bear additional burden. Syed Abdul Mayeed has been filling in for member (generation) and member (planning and designing).

Meanwhile, Rahmatul Bari, who is member (distribution), has been discharging the duties of member (transmission).

In a letter to the prime minister on March 14 this year, the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) expressed concern over the vacant posts on the PDB Board, calling for immediate steps to fill these in with eligible engineers, sources said.

The government approved the current PDB setup in the early 1980s.

Over the last two decades, new plants, and transmission and distribution lines have been installed to meet an increasing demand for power.

However, according to sources, the authorities remain reluctant about fresh recruitment.

"You cannot expect a better service when you are operating with inadequate

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Khaleda invited to co-chair microcredit summit in NY

UNB, Dhaka

US-based Microcredit Summit Campaign has invited Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to co-chair its November summit in New York. The invitation came as part of the appreciation of her government's success in microcredit and women's empowerment.

Sam Daley-Harris, director of the organisation, conveyed the invitation to the prime minister when he called on her at the latter's office yesterday.

He praised the steps taken by the previous BNP government in the 1991 to 96 period and the present government for microcredit and women's empowerment, free education for women and scholarship for female students up to class XII

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PHOTO: PD

Director of the Microcredit Summit Campaign Sam Daley-Harris called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday.

Find alternative to hartal, Hasina asks shopowners

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Leader and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked for alternatives to hartal in protesting 'repression' by the government.

Responding to a plea of shop owners not to call hartal anymore, Hasina said, "We don't want people to suffer. That's why we opted for peaceful programmes like hunger strike. But they (the government) barred us from doing that as well."

The Dhaka Metropolitan Shop Owners' Association leaders met Hasina at her Dhanmondi residence yesterday evening and urged her not to call hartal anymore.

Referring to the government's crackdown on meetings, processions and use of loud speakers, the AL president said, "As they (the government) repeatedly denied us the right to stage peaceful programmes, people wanted us to call hartal for two or three days at a stretch. But we only called a one-day hartal."

She recalled her earlier promise not to call hartal and said, "When I made the promise, the then opposition

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Juba Dal leader murder: Abu Taher, 15 others chargesheeted

BSS, Laxmipur

Laxmipur Awami League leader and Municipal Chairman Abu Taher and 15 others have been chargesheeted in Juba Dal leader Kamal Hossain murder case.

Officer-in-charge (OC) of Laxmipur sadar thana and investigation officer of the case Kamrul Hassan submitted the charge sheet to the court yesterday.

Mohammad Kamal Hossain, son of Alaaddin and leader of town unit of Juba Dal, was kidnapped from his South Majupur residence on August 31, 2000.

The miscreants took Kamal to the house of Abu Taher, beat him with hammer and then sent him to Laxmipur Sadar Hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries after few days.

Kamal's father lodged the case accusing 16 persons with Sadar thana police on October 25 in 2001.

Dengue back again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dengue is back again. And a number of city hospitals and private clinics have reported receiving dengue patients in the past one month.

With the onset of seasonal rains, the mosquito borne disease, which claimed 93 lives in the country in 2000, has reemerged and experts fear it would be equally fatal this season like the previous years. More than 5000 people were infected with the viral disease last year.

Al-Raji hospital at Farmgate reported receiving two dengue patients this past week. Both the patients were diagnosed with clinical dengue infection. They were however released after recovery.

Samorita Hospital at Panthapath received five patients since early March. "All the patients had classical dengue," said a doctor yesterday.

Nibedita Child Hospital at Dhanmandi received 12 children with dengue since mid-March. Two patients are still under treatment there.

The Central Hospital also received two dengue patients, who got cured after seven days of high fever.

The Dhaka Medical College Hospital and the Shishu Hospital also received three patients each in last one month.

Meanwhile, some city diagnostic centres also found dengue virus in a



number of blood tests. Most of the centres used the alisa method to confirm the presence of the antibody. Lab-Aid received more than 20 suspected blood samples in the last two weeks and found dengue virus in three.

Popular Diagnostic also diagnosed dengue in eight samples in the last two weeks.

Dengue has become a major international public health concern. Bangladesh is the latest among about hundred other countries that experienced the deadly disease in

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Armed youths ransack cyber cafe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some armed youths allegedly belonging to Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) ransacked a cyber café at Sukrabad in the city's Mohammadpur area yesterday.

A gang of six youths identifying themselves as 'men of JCD leader Eleen' entered Pace Cyber Café in the evening and asked employees to call its owner. When told that he went to hospital to see a relative, the elements forced an employee to come out.

Then they gave him a mobile phone and made him talk with 'their leader Eleen.' At this time, they pulled out their revolvers apparently to terrify those around. One of the gang members then talked with their 'leader.'

"The armed gang then entered the café again, threatened customers to leave immediately to avoid any attack on them and ransacked it," an eye witness said.

The youths then threatened a business partner of the café owner, who was present there, to close down the café from today. "Today (Wednesday) would be your last day if you defy our order," one of them shouted.

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Govt to implement its pledge made at Paris meet, hopes EU envoy

UNB, Dhaka

New Head of Delegation of the European Commission here Esko Kentraschynskyj hopes that the government would initiate a follow-up action to implement its commitment made at the Paris meeting with donors to promote democracy and the rule of law alongside steps for economic development.

Ambassador Esko, who presented his credentials to the president yesterday, said the European Union shares the concern expressed by other development partners at the Paris aid talks last month on deterioration of law and order and alleged human rights violation in the country.

"We hope the government will follow up to meet its commitment made at the Paris meeting," the EU ambassador told a reporters in his first exchange of views at a city restaurant.

In a reply to a question, he said development partners at the Bangladesh Development Forum meet let out concern about different matters, including law and order, and the government would have to follow up now to what it committed to the donors.

Esko, however, said the European Union

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Terrorists set afire shoe factory in city

BSS, Dhaka

A gang of terrorists set fire to a shoe factory at Nawabganj in the city yesterday.

Police and locals said the terrorists attacked the workers of the factory at Abdul Aziz Lane at about 6 am blaming them for helping police arrest their ring leader.

The terrorists set fire to the factory after locking it from outside.

Hearing screams of the workers, local people rushed to the spot and rescued Iran, 29, and Imon, 20, employees of the factory, by breaking open the door.

Police and fire officials sent the two injured employees to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Local people said Lalbag police recently arrested an identified terrorist, Shafique, for his alleged involvement in various crimes.

Accomplices of Shafique suspected that police arrested him on the basis of information given by the workers of the shoe factory.

A year after batamul carnage Chhayanaut prepares for programme at the same venue

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

The spirit of the Bangla New Year will remain indomitable this year round despite a gory carnage at the last year's Pahela Baishakh celebration and the police's negligence to bringing the terrorists to book.

Against all odds, Chhayanaut, which has been organising the Pahela Baishakh celebration in the Ramna Park for the last 45 years, will hold the annual function at the same venue this year too.

Chhayanaut has sought permission from the authorities concerned to hold the annual cultural programme. "We have sought permission from the authorities and started rehearsing for the programme," an official of Chhayanaut said.

For the first time in the 45 years history of the traditional cultural function, the Public Works Department (PWD), the custodian of the Ramna Park, has demanded Tk 3,000 in fees for the space, he said.

Chhayanaut officials recently met the inspector general of police (IGP) seeking adequate security.

"We hope the people will not avoid the function," the official told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity when asked whether this year's celebration would be in a glum mood.

Even one year after the Ramna Batamul carnage that left ten people killed and scores injured, the police made little headway in their investigation.

Police did not frame the chargesheet on the case as the pace of the investigation snapped after the government formed a judicial investigation committee later last year.

Headed by the former justice of the High Court and two joint secretaries, the committee was formed to probe into all sensational bomb incidents.

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New incentive package for loan recovery

SHAHRIAR KARIM And RAZIUR RAHMAN

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) yesterday announced a uniform incentive package for recovery of classified loans for four NCBs.

The move is aimed to cut back on classified loans of the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs), said a circular issued by the BB yesterday.

According to the new incentive package, an NCB staff will pocket seven per cent of the loan for helping the bank recover it, which remained unrealised for seven years or more and has already been labelled as bad debt.

In case of recovery of bad debts that remained unrealised for three to seven years, the staff would get six per cent of the amount, while he or she will receive five per cent of the amount as incentive for realising other bad loans.

Besides, a bank staff would get four per cent in case of realisation of

doubtful loans. The incentive would be given on yearly basis upon closure of a loan account, the BB circular said.

This uniform incentive package would be applicable to staff of branches and different offices of Agrani, Rupali, Sonali and Janata banks. Till September last year, total classified loans of the banks stood at Tk 24,116 crore, of which the NCBs have Tk 12,412 crores.

The incentive packages would not be applicable if a branch fails to slash five per cent on classified loans of the previous year.

The incentive will come into play only for loans that have been categorised as classified on December 31, 2001. Besides, a staff has to work for six months at a stretch at a branch or office to be eligible for receiving the incentive.

The previous arrangements of incentives for bank staff will also exist, the BB circular added.

Criminal case Mockbul's bail prayer rejected

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka yesterday rejected the bail petition of former Awami League MP Alhaj Mockbul Hossain, accused in a criminal case.

Judge Ahmed Jamil Mostafa passed the order upon a criminal appeal filed by the defence lawyers.

In the order, the judge said there are specific charges against Mockbul. The case against him is at a primary stage of investigation. So, the petition for bail is rejected.

Earlier, the defence lawyers had appealed to the Judge's Court for bail following rejection order by the CMM's Court, Dhaka.

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Graft case against Rafiqul sent to Sessions Judge's Court

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The graft case against former state minister for power Prof Rafiqul Islam was sent to Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka yesterday for trial.

CMM Mohammad Ayub passed the order when the case was placed before the court.

In the case, filed with Ramna thana, it has been alleged that Rafiq misappropriated Tk 23 crore in connection with the Meghna ghat power project.

The government paid a Chinese contractor, CWHEC, Tk 141.65 crore for developing the project site of Meghna ghat phase 1 power plant.

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DCC commissioner candidate held with arms in Pallabi

BSS, Dhaka

Police and BDR personnel arrested a DCC ward commissioner candidate along with a pistol from the city's Pallabi area on Monday night.

Acting on a tip off, they raided an election office of Saiful Islam Chowdhury alias Ripon, a candidate for ward number-8 and arrested him.

Police said the arrested person is facing various criminal charges including two murders.

Three defamation suits against Shikal editor

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Three defamation suits were filed against the Daily Shikal and its Chief Editor Sakhawat Ibne Moyeen Chowdhury for publication of reports on alleged corruption of three government officials.

"A vested quarter that does not want free press and welfare of the society is trying to gag my paper," Sakhawat told the correspondent at his office yesterday.

Some government officials threatened him with dire consequences for publication of the reports on their alleged corruption, he added.

"I was threatened on my cellular phone that more defamation cases would be filed against me."

Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Abdus Sobhan filed the first defamation suit on March 12 after the newspaper published a week ago two reports on the allegations of corruption of the UNO.

The report said the UNO was involved in illegal activities like land-

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