

2 generals sought US support for coup

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League minister Lt General (retd) Noorudin Khan had asked for support from the US government in ending Bangladesh's administration in 2004 and bringing a government of national unity consisting of senior leaders from both the major parties.

Also, another ex-chief of Bangladesh Army and standing committee member of BNP, Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman, had told the US ambassador that the military would always look to the US government for a signal to go ahead with a coup.

Thomas was referring to his encounters with the two in quick successions on September 13 and 16 in 2004 when they had asked for such support and signal.

The ambassador dined with Noorudin on September 16, 2004 when the latter sought US assistance in bringing a government of national unity to power and ridding Bangladesh of Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia through a series of mass agitations.

According to the cable, the ambassador told Noorudin that the US supports democracy and stability and cannot sanction any extra-constitutional means of removing the government.

A member of AL government's cabinet in 1996, Noorudin responded that Bangladesh's future is hostage to two women who cannot put aside their difference for the nation's sake. He accused the Bangladesh government of bankrupting the military.

He said the seven top generals, whom he derided as the "malevolent seven", were classmates of the then prime minister Khaleda's brother Major (retd) Eskander. They were chosen for their loyalty and not



Lt Gen (retd) Noorudin

competence.

The government had started the politicisation of the officers' corps during Khaleda Zia's first term (1991-96) and Sheikh Hasina during her tenure (1996-2001) had accelerated it, he added.

The ex-army chief recommended General Abu Tayeb Mohammad Zaahirul Alam (called Gen Zahir), commandant of the National Defense College, for taking charge of the country.

Gen Zahir is a true supporter of democracy and would form a government with competent ministers from both parties for two to three years to improve the country's weak institutions, draft a new constitution, end corruption and attract much needed foreign investment before holding internationally observed democratic elections, he said.

He further alleged the administration then had feared coups even from Eskander's batchmates and sidelined Maj Gen Rokan to the Quartermaster Corps earlier in 2004 because he was thought to be a threat to the government.

Noorudin, resigned from Awami League in early 2004, frustrated with its inability to focus on the future. He accused Hasina of losing her cards after the August 21 grenade attack that year.

Instead of calling for an independent investigation and taking the moral high ground, she insisted on



Lt Gen (retd) Mahbub

repeated strikes and attempted to bring the government down. She lost popular support and an unintended consequence may be that the government no longer felt compelled to solve the crime, he said.

He said an interim military government is the only alternative to continued dynastic politics. He said Khaleda Zia's two sons -- Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman -- would terrorise the country, extort money from businesses and ruin the economy.

He also belittled the political abilities of Hasina's son and sister, asserting they were equally corrupt and venal like the Rahmans.

Noorudin, in part, blamed himself for the country's current predicament. He said when Bangladeshi military dictator Gen Ershad was forced out of office in 1990, then Pakistani military chief Alam Beg, an old friend and colleague, sent him an emissary urging that Noorudin become the President.

As he refused, Alam Beg asked whom should Pakistan support. Noorudin recommended Pakistan support BNP because it consisted of military officers and small businessmen he believed would lead the country in the right direction.

Pakistan then used the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to fund BNP and India's Research and Analysis Wing

(RAW) began funding Awami League. Such funding continued to this day, he said, adding: "We have become the playground for India and Pakistan."

He also claimed that New Delhi was unhappy with Sheikh Hasina's performance and funded both parties during the 2001 elections.

He said RAW funded Tarique Rahman, who pledged to win over his mother on gas exports and water sharing differences but was unable to do so. He predicted New Delhi would work hard to bring Hasina back to power in 2006.

According to the leaked cable, Noorudin said the government is catering to the "disastrous policies" of Islamic parties in the four-party ruling coalition to ensure its win in the 2006 elections.

He blamed the government's decision to ban books of the Ahmadiyya sect and not to follow-up on attacks in Sylhet on the then British high commissioner in Bangladesh and city mayor on its need to protect the Islamists.

On September 13, 2004, Lt Gen Mahbubur Rahman, also a BNP lawmaker, told Thomas that the military would always look to the US government for a signal to go ahead with a coup.

The US government had played a positive role in helping to thwart two potential coups in 1996 and a no from the US government would always carry weight, Mahbubur said.

While expressing disdain for Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, he predicted that Bangladesh would be under dynastic leadership for at least another generation.

He said the army viewed itself as Bangladesh's only respected organisation and did not want to interfere in civilian politics.

Details of the deals

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had been envisaged during the visit of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh to India in January 2010. The Joint Communiqué issued on that occasion notes that the two prime ministers agreed to put in place a comprehensive framework of cooperation for development between the two countries, encapsulating their mutually shared vision for the future.

The Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development signed by the two prime ministers on September 6, 2011 in Dhaka provides the template for future cooperation between India and Bangladesh.

2. Protocol to the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement

The protocol to the agreement concerning the demarcation between India and Bangladesh and related matters signed yesterday between the foreign minister of Bangladesh and the external affairs minister of India seeks to address all outstanding land boundary issues and provide a final settlement to the India-Bangladesh boundary. The outstanding issues addressed include (i) undemarcated land boundary in three sectors viz. Daikhata-56 (West Bengal), Muhuri River-Belonia (Tripura) and Dumabari (Assam); (ii) enclaves; and (iii) adverse possessions. The undemarcated boundary in all three segments has now been demarcated. The status of 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh with a population of 37,334 and 51 Bangladesh enclaves in India with a population of 14,215 has been addressed. The issue of adversely possessed pieces of land along the India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam has also been mutually finalised. The boundary settlement has been concluded keeping in view the aspirations of the people.

3. Addendum to the MoU between India and Bangladesh to facilitate Overland Transit Traffic between Bangladesh and Nepal

The MoU seeks to facilitate rail transit to/from Bangladesh and Nepal by using the Rohanpur-Singhabad route as agreed during the visit of Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina to India in January, 2010. It also facilitates rail transit between Bangladesh and

Nepal using Indian territory through the Radhikapur-Birol line once the Bangladesh portion is converted into broad-gauge. The signing of this MoU will facilitate bilateral trade between Bangladesh and Nepal.

4. MoU on Conservation of the Sundarbans

The MoU seeks to facilitate cooperation in the areas of conservation of biodiversity, joint management of resources, livelihood generation for poverty alleviation and development, cataloguing of local flora and fauna and studying the impacts of climate change. A working group would be set up to implement the activities under the MoU. The MoU is valid for an initial period of five years which can be extended further through mutual consent.

5. MoU on Conservation of the Bengal Tiger of the Sundarbans

The Protocol on Conservation of the Bengal Tiger of the Sundarbans provides for bilateral cooperation in undertaking scientific research, knowledge sharing and patrolling of the Sundarbans waterways on their respective sides to prevent poaching or smuggling of derivatives from wildlife and bilateral initiatives to ensure survival and conservation of the Bengal Tiger in the unique ecosystem of the Sundarbans. The protocol also provides for cooperation to promote understanding and knowledge of Bengal Tigers, exchange of personnel for training and promotion of education.

6. MoU on Cooperation in the field of Fisheries

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on Cooperation in the field of fisheries seeks to promote development of cooperation in fisheries and aquaculture and allied activities between the two countries through joint activities, programmes, exchange of scientific materials, information and personnel. A joint working group would be set up to facilitate cooperation under the MoU and review progress. The Ministry of Agriculture of the Government of India and the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock of the Government of Bangladesh would coordinate imple-

mentation of the MoU. The MoU would be valid for an initial period of five years and can be extended further through mutual consent.

7. MoU on Cooperation in the field of Renewable Energy

The Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of renewable energy between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh aims to establish the basis for a cooperative institutional relationship to encourage and promote technical, bilateral cooperation in the areas of solar, wind and bio energy on the basis of mutual benefit, equality and reciprocity.

8. MoU on Educational Cooperation between the Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Dhaka University

An MoU on educational cooperation between Jawaharlal Nehru University and Dhaka University was signed between the vice-chancellors of the two universities in Dhaka on September 6, 2011.

Considering the large number of students from Bangladesh pursuing their academic career in India, especially at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, a formal mechanism on Educational Cooperation between Dhaka University and the Jawaharlal Nehru University would foster and institutionalise existing cooperation between the two universities.

The MoU is designed to be a framework agreement for educational cooperation between the two institutions whereby the two sides express their commitment towards cooperation in identified sectors. Social Sciences, International Relations, Computer Science etc -- through the annual calendar of events. The MoU is expected to benefit scholars and researchers of both India and Bangladesh.

9. MoU on Cooperation between Doordarshan (DD) and Bangladesh Television (BTV)

An MoU on cooperation between the Doordarshan, India and the BTV, Bangladesh was signed by the representatives of two organisations in Dhaka on September 06, 2011.

Under the agreement, both the public broadcasters would make available live telecasts of news, cultural

and educational programmes for mutual broadcast. Doordarshan and BTV may also broadcast live of any specific events such as visit of high dignitaries to each others' countries or of cultural events of significance. Further, they would explore the possibilities of jointly co-producing television programmes. Doordarshan, having a well equipped staff training institute for carrying out training in advanced broadcast techniques for its staff will endeavour to provide such training to BTV in the fields of programme production, technology and management. In addition, Doordarshan may also provide consultancy on technical services to BTV.

The agreement would provide an opportunity for BTV and Doordarshan, in general, and DD Bangla, in particular, to telecast its programmes in India and Bangladesh, respectively. The MoU is intended to redress, to the extent possible, the paucity of Bangladesh programmes on Indian TV.

10. MoU between the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), New Delhi and BGMEA Institute of Fashion Technology (BIFT), Dhaka

The Memorandum of Understanding on Academic Cooperation between National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), New Delhi and Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) Institute of Fashion Technology (BIFT), Dhaka seeks to promote cooperation between the two institutes in the areas of exchange of students and faculty and training and research activities concerning design, management and technology. The MoU defines the principles, policy guidelines & procedures of cooperation.

NIFT is a statutory institute under the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. It was set up in 1986 to train professionals to meet the requirements of the textiles industry. The institute has pioneered the evolution of fashion education across the country through its network of fifteen centres. BIFT, established in 1999 by the BGMEA, is affiliated to the National University of Bangladesh.

Khaleda agreed

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Rahman spoke with the US embassy and confirmed it of Khaleda's decision to leave.

"Dr Rahman said Koko's [Koko] arrest, coupled with threats by the military to file charges against Zia and 'create more trouble for' Tarique, left Zia with no other choice," the cables said.

"Dr Rahman claimed the only condition the family is seeking to impose is the release of Tarique on bail on compassionate grounds with permission to travel abroad for medical treatment."

US Ambassador Patricia A Butenis paid her farewell call on the BNP chief at a small function room at the Sheraton Hotel in Dhaka on May 25, 2007.

Accompanied by a notetaker, the US ambassador met Khaleda Zia and Zubaida Rahman privately before having a broader political conversation that included a dozen party functionaries, largely unknown, according to the cable.

It said Khaleda, noticeably thinner but still elegantly coiffed and attired in a lace sari, turned to her daughter-in-law to plead Tarique's case and appeal for US and international support.

An articulate pediatrician who normally says little at social functions, Zubaida argued passionately that her husband was being falsely charged and abused out of envy over his mass popularity and his unwavering commitment to national service.

Handing over copies of medical reports dating back to 2003, she said Tarique should be given bail on medical grounds and should be shifted out of the general jail population to the special quarters reserved for social elites, the cable said.

The cable said: "Khaleda Zia urged the ambassador to support her embattled sons Tarique and Koko, asserted she was ready to leave Bangladesh but the government failed to get her a Saudi visa, said she has no contact with the military, and is mystified by the military's actions and objectives."

Tarique was the most influential BNP leader during the tenure of the last BNP-led coalition government. He

used to run controversial Hawa Bhaban, an alternative power centre of the government.

He had been appointed BNP senior secretary general in 2002 following demands from the party's young leaders who also forced the then President Badruddoza Chowdhury to step down in June the same year.

Tarique and his associates' involvement in corruption, and their interference in government activities drew widespread criticism.

But in the meeting with the US ambassador on May 25, 2007, Khaleda and Zubaida stoutly denied that anyone in the family has money or property overseas. Khaleda said: "Blame the corrupt but my family is not corrupt."

Khaleda claimed to be surprised by the military's actions against Tarique and Koko, who was "very sick."

The then BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan spoke about reported corruption of Khaleda's sons and others.

"On March 18, [of 2007] Bhuiyan bitterly criticised to us former Prime Minister Zia for allowing her sons, brothers, and other relatives and political intimates to indulge in unbridled corruption," read the cable.

He said BNP members who were not in Tarique's faction complained about him privately. They sometimes mentioned his corruption and heavy-handed tactics, but what appalled many of them was his youthful arrogance.

Bhuiyan said some claimed to be threatened by intelligence services as a result of their anti-Tarique stance.

"It takes a party leader of Saifur Rahman's stature as finance minister and a party founder to survive losing challenges to Tarique's influence in party affairs, which was driven only by Saifur's desire to protect the interests of his own notoriously corrupt son, BNP MP Nassir Rahman," the cable said quoting Bhuiyan.

The BNP chief did not leave the country in the end. But her two sons went abroad on parole for treatment in September and May, 2008 and are still out of the country.

Together, we could

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manner we have been doing till now, there is no challenge that we together should not be able to overcome," she said.

The premier made the remarks while addressing the banquet hosted in honour of the visiting Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel in the capital.

"This is the opportune moment for both our nations to seize the opportunities presented to us and work together in the best interest of our people. The first steps towards this end were the decisions we had taken during my visit to India in January 2010," Hasina said.

Welcoming the Indian premier to Bangladesh, she said, "Let me reiterate my government's steadfast resolve to continue strengthening our two countries' relations, and to work together for the common good and prosperity of our peoples."

"We face many common challenges such as food and energy security, terrorism, natural disasters resulting from global warming, poverty, sustaining economic growth in the face of global economic and financial uncertainties, to name a few," Hasina said.

The premier said both governments reached understanding in areas as diverse as demarcation of land boundary, sharing of waters of rivers Teesta and Feni, connectivity, power, renewable energy, electronic media, education, and conservation of the common heritage of the Sundarbans.

"Indeed, our discussions today were held, as among the best of friends, in an atmosphere of complete harmony of views and mutual respect," she said.

Hasina said Bangladesh and India share a common heritage in respect of culture, values, language, history and geography. "However, our two countries' relations were

defined in 1971 during our struggle for independence."

"It is impossible for us to forget the supreme sacrifice your people made, even in terms of lives, for the sake of our cause. This year, on the 40th anniversary of our independence, we have taken the first steps towards setting history in its right perspective. We took the decision to confer the Bangladesh Freedom Honour on Sreemati Indira Gandhi for her seminal role in the liberation of Bangladesh," the premier said.

Describing Bangladesh-India relationship as at historic juncture, Hasina said, "Apart from our cooperation in many fields, we jointly celebrated the 150th birth anniversary of our common heritage--Rabindranath Tagore."

Mrs Singh Gursharan Kaur and distinguished guests from India, among others, were present at the banquet.

Extradition

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Chetia, who is the Ulfa's general secretary, is currently lodged in a Dhaka jail. He and his two associates were arrested in Dhaka on December 21, 1997 and sentenced to seven years for illegal intrusion and possession of firearms.

Last month, India's Minister of State for Home M u l l a p p a l l y Ramachandran said New Delhi has taken up security-related issues, including handing over of Chetia and various Indian insurgent group leaders reportedly hiding or detained in Bangladesh with the Government of Bangladesh.

However, the issue did not figure in talks between the two governments at the interior ministers' level in July this year.

Chetia has sought asylum in Bangladesh and refused to return to India, even after his jail term ends here, apprehending insecurity of his life.