



Khaleda knew her polls fate

STAR REPORT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia herself admitted before the proposed January 22, 2007 parliamentary polls that election performance of her four-party alliance would decrease to a great extent in comparison with the 2001 election.

She made the prediction when the then US ambassador Patricia A Butenis met her to discuss prevailing political situation on October 31, 2006, according to US diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks on August 30 this year.

Khaleda's rival Sheikh Hasina was happy, in contrast, with BNP's popularity declining, and predicted that the Awami League-led grand alliance would net at least 220 out of 300 seats.

Asked to predict BNP's election performance the next day, Khaleda told Butenis, when the latter met her, that her alliance would win 180-190 seats, compared to the 220 in the immediate past parliament.

This outcome presumed support from the Jatiya Party (JP), "which she said Ershad (JP chairman) has already promised her", the confidential cable sent to Washington on November 2, 2006 said.

In 2001 elections, BNP alone won 193 seats out of the 300. The tally stood at 220 after incorporating the seats of its allies including Jamaat-e-Islami and those won by the coalition candidates in by-elections.

"(Khaleda) Zia insisted that, opposition assertions aside, her party has strong support from the Hindu community," Butenis wrote in the cable.

An active move was on for a few months then to convince Ershad to join the BNP-led alliance. But the former dictator had yet to give any decision in that regard.

In an apparent sign of development in the negotiation, two long-standing corruption charges against former president Ershad were dropped on August 24 after the investigating officer had told the court the charges could not be proven.

"Ershad has stated that he will join the ruling coalition if all corruption charges against him are satisfactorily resolved," Butenis wrote in a cable sent to Washington on August 24, 2006.

The former military ruler, in parallel, was continuing talks with the leaders of the AL-led electoral alliance to secure a better promise of accommodation in the new government after the polls.

After a "bargain", Ershad tied knots with Hasina frustrating Khaleda in early November of 2006.

With the elections scheduled for January 22 cancelled, the ninth parliamentary polls were held finally on December 29, 2008 after a series of drama, which included state of emergency, crackdown on politicians, detention of Khaleda and Hasina.

The result brought shock for BNP and its allies and surprising delight for AL-led coalition: the AL alone bagged 230 seats while the number went up to 262 incorporating the seats of its allies, and BNP-led four-party bagged 32 seats that included 29 seats of BNP.

BNP bins WikiLeaks cables

FROM PAGE 1
WikiLeaks.

Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, BNP acting secretary general, yesterday conveyed the party's observation in a statement he issued following publication of newspaper reports based on diplomatic cables sent by former US ambassador James F Moriarty and chargé d'affaires Geeta Pasi on BNP Senior Vice-chairman Tarique Rahman.

Following is the unedited full version of BNP's statement signed by its Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi:

First, the period which the "leaked cable" refers to is long before Ambassador James Moriarty had taken up his assignment in Dhaka. In fact, he joined as Ambassador to Bangladesh sometimes during the later part of 2008. At the time of the declaration of the State of Emergency by President Iajuddin in January 2007, Patricia Butenis was the US Ambassador. Following her departure for Iraq as Deputy Head of Mission in the summer of 2007, there was a prolonged gap of almost a year before Ambassador Moriarty arrived. In the interregnum, Ms Geeta Pasi was Charge d'Affaires of the US Embassy. Clearly, Ambassador Moriarty could not have been privy to any of the "information" provided in the "leaked cable". These had to be provided to him by someone with a specific, and an ill, motive.

Second, the tone and



Hasina in childhood admired Shaikhul!

Salman F Rahman told US envoy about AL's controversial electoral deal

STAR REPORT

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina had become a great admirer of religious bigot Shaikhul Hadith Azizul Haque and penned a controversial electoral deal with Khelafat-e-Majlish in late 2006, said a recently leaked US embassy cable.

Hasina "pandered to the son of Azizul Haque, a hard-line leader of Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) whose anti-Jamaat-e-Islami views have driven him away from the BNP-led four party alliance," noted the cable quoting Hasina's adviser Salman F Rahman.

The AL president reportedly blamed her home minister for ordering Shaikhul's brief detention during her previous tenure in government. She said she had read his books in her childhood with great reverence.

Salman indicated that Hasina would not have subjected herself to such a display unless she was serious about broadening her electoral coalition, the cable maintained.

Directed by Hasina, the then AL general secretary Abdul Jalil signed the

deal with Khelafat-e-Majlish, a splinter faction of IOJ, triggering a huge outcry both in and outside of AL.

After the deal, the then US envoy Patricia A Butenis wrote in another cable to Washington on December 28 in 2006 that the AL had long castigated BNP for its willingness to include "militants" from the IOJ in its coalition.

"Nonetheless, with the election on the line, the AL's leadership has shown it is ready to go to almost any length to secure a winning coalition," Butenis noted.

The news that AL would contest the election was overshadowed by reports that the party had entered into an election pact with an Islamic party.

The press reported that Jalil had signed a memorandum of understanding with Khelafat-e-Majlish. The concessions it made to bring Khelafat on board and the publicity surrounding the agreement, are unprecedented for the AL, mentioned the cable.

The agreement stipulated that if the AL-led alliance is elected, no law will be enacted that contradicts Quranic values and sharia; steps would be taken to

ensure the government recognises the certificates and degrees from kwami madrasas; laws would be enacted acknowledging Mohammad (PBUH) as the last and greatest prophet; laws would be introduced criminalising criticism of the "prophets and their associates" and certified Islamic leaders will be permitted to issue fatwas, the embassy wrote to Washington.

Several AL leaders denied the agreement initially. Suranjit Sengupta claimed the story was "baseless" and a "hoax".

AL leader Aktaruzzaman told the embassy that it was not possible and offered to call Abdul Jalil to verify the story was false.

Anonymous "dismayed" AL leaders attributed the decision to a small clique of advisers around Hasina, including Kazi Zafarullah and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and businessman Salman Rahman.

Once Jalil had confirmed the story in the press, several of the AL's partners declared that the MoU was "inconsistent" with the AL-led grand alliance's common platform.

IJUDDIN'S INTERIM GOVT

Who nominated who

STAR REPORT

The then opposition Awami League had fared well with its nominees for advisers to the caretaker government led by the then president Iajuddin Ahmed, a leaked US embassy cable says.

The cable, created on November 1, 2006, by the then US ambassador in Dhaka Patricia A Butenis, also discloses that a number of advisers were appointed on nominations of AL, BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami.

"Awami League leaders greeted the appointments with caution, noting they are learned and respected people who will be judged by their actions," the US ambassador wrote after Iajuddin appointed 10 advisers to his caretaker government.

According to the cable published by the WikiLeaks, three advisers were appointed on AL's nominations. They were CM Shafi Sami, a former foreign secretary, Dhiraj Kumar Nath, a former

secretary, and Sultana Kamal, a well-known human rights leader.

On BNP's choosing, the then president Iajuddin Ahmed appointed two advisers - Dr Akbar Ali Khan, a former cabinet secretary who served both AL and BNP governments, and Yasmin Murshed, president of Scholastica, a reputable private school in Dhaka.

Lt Gen (retd) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury, a former army chief, was appointed adviser on nomination of Jamaat-e-Islami, the cable said.

The cable described the four other advisers as follows:

M Azizul Haque: A former inspector general of Police during the 1996 caretaker government and stayed in that position for 17 months under the new AL government before being prematurely retired.

Mahbubul Alam: Editor of the English-language daily newspaper "The Independent". No known party affiliation, but his newspaper is owned by a

business conglomerate, BEXIMCO, which has close AL ties.

"[Mahbubul Alam] served as ambassador to Bhutan during the Ershad regime. Comes from the same district [Munshiganj] as President [Iajuddin] Ahmed, believed to have been Ahmed's personal choice."

Professor (Emeritus) Sufia Rahman: Widow of Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, a former caretaker government adviser and Attorney General during Sheikh Mujib's government.

Justice Fazlul Haque: No specific party affiliation.

Of the 10 advisers, Akbar Ali, Shafi Sami, Hasan Mashhud and Sultana Kamal resigned on December 11, 2006, seething with frustration over Iajuddin Ahmed's frequent unilateral actions on election issues.

The rest remained in office until Iajuddin resigned as chief adviser and declared state of emergency on January 11, 2007, amid growing political turmoil.

NOMINATED BY AL



SULTANA KAMAL




DHIRAJ KUMAR NATH




CM SHAFI SAMI


NOMINATED BY BNP, JAMAAT



DR AKBAR ALI KHAN



YASMIN MURSHED



LT GEN (RETD) HASAN MASHHUD

NO PARTY AFFILIATION



M AZIZUL HAQUE



MAHBUBUL ALAM



JUSTICE FAZLUL HAQUE



SUFIA RAHMAN

that light. To this day no credible evidence has been provided except those extracted under extreme physical torture from so called witnesses.

Not having succeeded in establishing the corruption charges against Mr Rahman, an attempt has been made to link Tarique Rahman with terrorist organizations. Here mention has been made of a "cable" from Ms Geeta Pasi, purportedly recommending denial of entry of Mr Rahman to the United States.

Let us now look at yet another fact.

The content of the "leaked cable" is supposed to cover the period between 2001 and 2006. If any of these were true, how can one explain that the then US Ambassador to Bangladesh Harry K Thomas helped

arrange a visit for Mr Rahman to the United States in his capacity as the Senior Joint Secretary General of the BNP? The visit was preceded by an exclusive dinner hosted by the Ambassador at his Residence in Mr Rahman's honour. In Washington DC, Mr Tarique Rahman was received by senior US Administration and Congressional leaders, including Senators and House Members. He also had substantive meetings in the State Department and the Pentagon. He was feted at high profile social events by leading business and social organizations. A ranking US Senator, who at one time ran for the US Presidency, described Mr Rahman as being the future leader of Bangladesh. Evidently, he was not seen as

being involved in "kleptocracy", as is indicated in the "leaked cable".

It is perhaps worth recalling here that when the "wikileaks" sensation first hit global headlines about a year back, a whole lot of the western powers, including the United States, went to town describing the disclosures as "fantasies", "acts of sensation seekers", "having no relation with the truth". This one certainly fits under all of the three categories.

Now that the fantasy surrounding this particular "leaked cable" has been clearly established, let us look at the bigger, and potentially more alarming, picture. From the sudden glut of wikileaks "leaked cables" emanating from the Dhaka based US Embassy, one can discern the re-emergence of a pattern of

discrediting politicians and the prevailing politics in the country, with the aim of depoliticizing Bangladesh. This time the planners are using the "leaked cables" by wikileaks as a tool for pushing forward their evil design. The timing of the publishing of the "leaked cables" cannot also be ignored. Spurned by the abject failure of the Awami League-Jatiyo Party grand alliance government on all fronts and the all pervasive despondency this has created, the agents of depoliticization seem to believe that the time to act is near. One can also see the same very faces in this game. Perhaps there are others also.

Ambassador Moriarty's "leaked cable" of November 2008, and that of Geeta Pasi, is only a part of that larger scheme.

Hasina wanted UN-run polls

Expected chiefs of forces to 'pressure' Iajuddin

STAR REPORT

The Awami League-led grand alliance chief Sheikh Hasina resorted to all possible means to stop her rival BNP-led coalition from holding the parliamentary polls scheduled for January 22, 2007.

Hasina sought a UN-mediated election rather than the prospect of the general election under the then caretaker government led by Iajuddin Ahmed, according to US diplomatic cables leaked by WikiLeaks.

With street agitation getting a momentum, Sheikh Hasina also aspired that chiefs of the three forces -- army, navy and air force -- would exert their power to make Iajuddin step down as the chief adviser (CA).

"Hasina wrote to the UN Secretary General in December [2006] asking for UN monitoring of the election," reads a January 7, 2007, cable sent by the then US ambassador to Dhaka Patricia A Butenis. She, along with the then British high commissioner Anwar Chowdhury, met the AL president the day before.

"Hasina expressed some interest in a UN mediated election, but it was clear she envisioned an election effectively run by the UN and not just UN mediation of the political issues separating the two major political alliances," the cable added.

A January 3, 2007, cable by Butenis mentioned that Hasina had also expressed that the military could play a positive role in restoring order, and said "she [Hasina] now expects that the three service chiefs will pressure Iajuddin to step down as Chief Advisor."

In the run-up to the January 22 parliamentary elections, Hasina declared on January 3 that the AL-led grand alliance would boycott it and announced fresh agitation programme to resist it. On the pretext of continuing constitutional process, the caretaker government (CG), acting on the desire of the BNP-led political alliance, was making necessary preparations for holding the polls on January 22 as scheduled sans the grand alliance.

"After the press conference today [January 3, 2007], Hasina told the Ambassador [Butenis] in private that she will postpone the agitation program if the Election Commission announces a new election schedule before January 5," the US diplomat wrote in the cable.

Hasina explained the boycott was justified on the grounds that President Iajuddin had violated the constitution by taking over as the chief adviser, the cable added.

Although the AL had been willing to overlook his actions and work with the CG, Hasina said it was then clear that Iajuddin had failed to create an environment conducive to free and fair elections.

Hasina provided a list of reasons why the AL believes that free and fair elections were not possible, the cable said, adding that she cited discrepancies in the voter list, claiming the Election Commission (EC) had already provided local election officers with voter lists that omitted the names of AL supporters and minorities.

Among other charges, she said polling stations had been moved to far off locations and alliance supporters were being harassed and arrested by police and Rapid Action Battalion.

Hasina renewed previous demands for the resignation of Iajuddin as CA, postponement of the elections beyond January 22, the reconstitution of the EC and dismissal of local election officials.

To press the demands, the grand alliance announced agitation programme, beginning with a demonstration on January 5, a transport blockade for January 7 and 8, and a "siege" of Bangabhaban until he agreed to resign as CA. She also called on the law enforcement agencies "to side with the people against the vote stealers."

Army at heart

FROM PAGE 1

and/or a national unity government.

The then US ambassador Patricia A Butenis reported these to Washington through a classified cable dispatched in the morning of January 11, 2007, hours before Iajuddin declared a state of emergency that also led to cancellation of the scheduled polls. The day termed by many as 1/11.

Another proposal was sending BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina in exile, the cable said.

Others include a state of emergency declared either by the caretaker government or a newly elected BNP government after January 22 in which the military would have a large policy or political role, or martial law, or a coup.

Some said the military was hesitant to engage without a signal from the US, Butenis wrote in the cable.

A United Nations representative told the ambassador that the then chief of army staff Gen Moeen U Ahmed had complained to her of the horrendous pressure he was under to step in and solicited a UN letter threatening to strip the army of peacekeeping duties should it acted extra-constitutionally.

Citing the discussion of a meeting with former president and Jatiya Party chief HM Ershad on January 8, 2007, Butenis said Ershad also floated a similar scenario suggesting a military-backed national unity government.

The US ambassador, at one point in the cable, mentioned Awami League President Sheikh Hasina earlier told her that she was not troubled by military involvement if it "could make things okay".

"With both sides entrenched in their respective positions, frustration among civic and business leaders continue to fuel public speculation over ways to involve the military and circumvent the BNP and AL," wrote Butenis.

Butenis mentioned in her cable that the US embassy, the British high commission and other missions in Dhaka continued publicly and privately to oppose any extra-constitutional role for the military with senior military officers vowing till then to keep the military politically neutral and to refrain from unconstitutional actions.

They further emphasised that the prevalent situation was the result of political disagreements among the parties and required a civilian, political solution, the ambassador wrote, adding that the military must continue to act solely under and in support of the civilian government and within the boundaries of the constitution.

"While we will continue to see attempts to draw in the military at least through election day, at this point the military is holding firm," she wrote.

