

Self-confessed

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tarnishing his and his ministry's image, said a meeting source.

Forty-two officers of the department voluntarily went to the now-defunct Truth and Accountability Commission and got clemency by handing over portions of their ill-gotten money to the government. Wives of some of those officials also faced the truth commission and got clemency from corruption charges.

Those officials are widely blamed for leaving many important highways across the country in poor state.

One of them died while few others retired from the service, and a dozen are now on leave preparatory to retirement (LPR). Action will also be recommended against the corrupt officials on LPR, said ministry sources.

Instead of punishing the corrupt officers, the communications ministry promoted many of them, including immediate-past RHD chief engineer Shahab Uddin. Many pointed fingers at the communications minister for the promotion.

The Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday announced that it started a process of taking actions against 448 alleged corrupt government officials including RHD officials who faced the truth commission.

**IMAGE CRISIS**  
RHD is facing a serious image crisis as the self-confessed corrupt officials are holding important positions, and are allegedly still involved in various irregularities.

"The department is now known as a department of corruptionists," regretted an officer.

Officials and employees, who thought the corrupt officers would be punished to clean the department, have been very frustrated lately.

"We celebrated Shahab Uddin's resignation from the department, but many of his loyalists are still there to serve him," said the officer.

**MYSTERY ABOUT SHAHAB UDDIN**

None in the communications ministry could say for sure what is the current status of Shahab Uddin who resigned from the post of RHD chief engineer last month in the face of widespread criticism against his alleged corruption, and to avoid departmental action against him.

Despite repeated attempts, it could not be known whether his resignation was accepted or not.

An official of the ministry said Shahab Uddin's resignation letter was not accepted so that action could be taken against him while another believed the man was attached to the ministry but he did not join the office.

**YET ANOTHER CONTROVERSY**

Following Shahab Uddin's resignation, Abdul Quddus was appointed as the RHD chief engineer by superseding five senior officers, a move that is being seen as another mistake of the communications ministry.

Many officials believe the decision will hamper the chain-of-command and normal functioning of the department. On top of that there are corruption allegations against Quddus as well.

"An officer with a clean image should be made the chief engineer to regain our lost image through performance," observed an officer of the department.

Quddus however said he is getting support from all his colleagues.

Govt to issue

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Earlier, in an advertisement in March, the government said it would issue three ITC licences.

Nine companies applied for the work. Of them, Fibre at Home, Summit Communication, Novocom, Asia-AHL JV, BD Link Communication and Mango Teleservices have been selected for the licences, said ministry sources.

The cables will pass through Meherpur, Benapol, Sylhet and Comilla borders.

Currently, the country is linked to the world through lone submarine cable SEA-ME-WE 4, without any backup facility.

The terrestrial cables will provide a route alternative to the sub-sea connectivity.

POOR NAVIGABILITY

BIWTC faces loss in ferry operations

ZAHANGIR SHAH, Manikganj

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation is incurring a loss of about Tk 16 lakh a day for the last one week due to the disruption of ferry services on Paturia-Daulatdia route in the Padma for poor navigability, BIWTC officials said.

The ferries now carry vehicles less than half their capacity. A Roll-on Roll-off (Ro Ro) ferry now carries 8-10 vehicles against about 24 it normally ferries. This has forced goods-laden trucks to stand in queues for at least three days, said Abdul Matin, BIWTC deputy general manager at Aricha terminal.

Nine Ro Ro ferries and a K-type one now operating on Paturia-Daulatdia route risk damage to their propulsion systems costing crores of taka, he said.

Asked about dredging the ferry channel, Tarequl Hasan, executive engineer (dredging) of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority at Aricha, said they engaged two dredgers on Sunday night for making a permanent approach channel to Daulatdia terminal. He however said one of the dredgers went out of operation for technical faults Monday morning.

Meanwhile, a K-type (small) ferry carrying nine vehicles ran aground near Daulatdia terminal soon after it sailed in the early hours of Monday.

The vessel was salvaged about nine hours later.

He was critical

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that with the curfew being lifted, future steps would include the gradual re-opening of universities, with DU likely be the last.

The then army chief explained that he had bypassed normal protocol channels to see the US charge d'affaires once he became aware that "we [US diplomats] were seeking a meeting."

The cable dispatched to Washington on August 28 said Moeen confided that during a recent one-on-one meeting he had told the then chief adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed that the recent violence was a "wake-up call" to the regime and outlined a series of steps that would be taken in the coming days to resume implementation of the electoral roadmap.

He also bemoaned the lack of political savvy on the part of the then council of advisers, noting that they lacked "tentacles" into civil society.

The cable said in addition, he argued that the caretaker government had to develop a comprehensive communications strategy, including an end to press harassment.

"Acknowledging that the government's own actions were at times self-defeating, Moeen said he had tried to dissuade the home ministry from charging thousands of unnamed individuals with crimes related to the demonstration.

Moeen said he realised that this antiquated practice only served to confuse the public and create public relations challenges for the government.

In less strident tones than reported by the press, Moeen explained how a relatively minor scuffle between army officers and students at the university had blossomed into countrywide demonstrations in the last week of August 2007.

He said the situation would have been easily defused by the army agreeing to pull back from the campus had Dhaka University Teachers not interfered and added new demands.

He also claimed that politicians had provided funds to demonstrators and also added their own people to the students who were protesting.

Moeen said that the army troops and police involved in controlling the demonstrations had shown great restraint in the face of provocations, which included a number of their own being injured.

He said that commanders were compelled to "cool down" their subordinates who had wanted to take a harder line. Moeen confided that there were bad feelings among some in the military who had been restrained from responding more directly to attacks.

The day after beginning of campus violence, the US diplomat, Pasi, in another cable titled "Government faces toughest test as violent protests rock Dhaka" said Bangladesh's eight-month caretaker government is facing its severest political test yet after student protests at Dhaka University spilled into the capital's streets on August 21.

"If mishandled, the protests threaten to weaken the caretaker government and could tarnish the reputation

Student politics

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of Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), told some officials of the US embassy in Dhaka about the plan.

"The government will soon announce a ban on student politics, noting that student politics are a potential source of violence that must be curbed," Amin said at a meeting with the then US charge d'affaires Geeta Pasi and other officials on July 17, 2007.

According to the leaked cable sent by Pasi to Washington, Brig Gen Amin, however, conceded that the move could create problems.

Amin, who was one of few influential army officers during the past caretaker government regime, also anticipated the then ban on politics would be lifted in late August/September, "if things work out".

On August 20, 2007, the campus violence began when a few army men beat up three students and insulted a teacher during a football match on the university's gymnasium field. Following the incident, thousands of Dhaka University students took to the streets protesting the incident and demanded withdrawal of the on-campus army camp and an apology from the troops.

There had been pitched battles between students and police forces for the next two days, which left over 250 people, mostly students, injured. As violence spread through educational institutions in the capital and elsewhere, the government imposed a curfew in the divisional headquarters and closed universities and colleges on August 22.

After the violence began, the US embassy in another cable on August 21 said it is no surprise that the unrest broke out at Dhaka University, which traditionally has been at the vanguard of political activism in Bangladesh; for example, students there initiated a movement that eventually toppled military leader HM Ershad in 1990.

"More recently, many Dhaka University students have been rabid supporters of the AL and BNP and have been particularly frustrated by the caretaker government's ban on political activity and its jailing of many of both parties' top leaders on corruption allegations," reads the cable published by WikiLeaks on August 30 this year.

Later, in an address to the nation on September 9, the then chief adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed announced a raft of decisions, including a relaxation of the ban on indoor politics. The relaxation of the ban allowed political parties to sit for talks with the Election Commission, as the later drafted a set of proposals for electoral reforms and sought parties' opinion on them.

During the past caretaker government, massive electoral reforms were brought about that forced the political parties to de-link their relations with student organisations to get registration with the commission.

Huda calls

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Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman. We've achieved our independence through Bangabandhu's historical speech. I don't hesitate to call him the father of the nation," he said while addressing a discussion meeting.

Jatiyatabadi Zia Front, a newly constituted pro-BNP body, organised the meeting styled "People's Zia", with its president Akbar Amin Babul in the chair.

We have to come out from the culture of changing history with the changes of governments, observed Huda, a former minister in Khaleda Zia's cabinet.

He suggested renowned historians and common people should write up the country's correct history. BNP national standing committee on November 21 last year expelled the then vice-chairman Barrister Nazmul Huda from the party for violating organisational discipline. It reinstated his primary membership on April 6 this year.

No revenge

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supported Hasina's position not to seek revenge, former US ambassador James F Moriarty quoted in the cable LGRD Minister Syed Ashraf Islam as saying.

Both Hasina and her main political rival, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, were imprisoned on graft charges by the military-backed caretaker government, Moriarty added.

The main opposition BNP and some AL leaders have demanded actions against former army chief and others in the caretaker government and security forces for "extra-constitutional activities and torture of politicians".

The cable, sent to Washington on June 22, 2009, is based on the ambassador's discussion on June

18 the same year with Syed Ashraf, who is also the general secretary of AL.

Syed Ashraf "disparaged" a parliamentary body chairman who was seeking to compel former chairman and commissioners of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to testify about their activities during the caretaker government's tenure, said the cable, adding a note saying: "The committee chairman, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, was convicted in a case brought by the ACC."

The parliamentary standing committee on the public undertakings asked former ACC chairman Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury and commissioners M Habibur Rahman and Abul Hasan Manzur Mannan in early 2009 to appear before it and

explain the commission's activities during the emergency period.

But they refused to respond to the committee's call. Irked by this, the committee drew proceedings against them of contempt of parliament and wrote to the Speaker to order police to ensure their presence before the committee.

The move remains shelved since then.

"Of all the senior Government of Bangladesh leaders, perhaps no one talks as sensibly about policies and politics as Ashraf," Moriarty commented, adding that Ashraf's "reasoned approach to politics is precisely what is needed in Bangladesh, where hyperpartisanship often has hampered and even set back development".

Moeen blames

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sub-committee probing the campus unrest.

In an hour-long teleconference, he spoke to the committee from the US, where he has been staying for the last one and a half years.

Earlier, the then DGFI chief Major General Golam Mohammad and chief of general staff of army Major General Sinha Ibne Jamali told the parliamentary committee that they handled the situation as per instructions from the army top brass.

Headed by Rashed Khan Menon, the four-member sub-committee enquired Moeen about the claim of Golam Mohammad and Jamali.

"Arrest, torture and interrogation of students and teachers for the campus violence were done by the field-level officials of the army, DGFI and caretaker administration. The army top level was not consulted," Menon quoted Moeen as saying.

When the committee asked if this meant there was no chain of command in the army then, Moeen kept mum.

Contacted, sources in the intelligence agency last night said the DGFI was accountable to the chief

adviser at that time.

Briefing the press after the teleconference at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, Menon said, "The committee is not convinced and satisfied with Moeen's replies. He tried to avoid many of our queries and put the blame on others."

The committee, however, thanked the former army chief for appearing before it through teleconference.

Replying to a query, Moeen told the JS body that the army acted in aid of the civil administration to maintain law and order. It had no role in policymaking of the caretaker government.

Queried about the role of the Task Force for Interrogation (TFI) cell in torturing DU teachers and students, he termed the incident "very sad" but avoided saying anything about the army's role.

The TFI cell is comprised of officials from the army, police and various intelligence agencies.

On August 20, 2007, violence erupted on DU campus when some army men beat up three students and insulted a teacher during a football match on the university gymnasium field.

Thousands of students took to the streets protesting the incident and demanded

withdrawal of the army camp from the campus and an apology from the troops. In the next two days, the violence spread to other educational institutions in the capital and elsewhere.

Four teachers and eight students of DU were arrested in connection with the unrest. The law enforcement agencies also detained six Rajshahi University teachers. Faced with mounting protests, the caretaker government released them in January 2008.

In August last year, the parliamentary standing committee on the education ministry formed the sub-committee.

The committee sent letters to former chief adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed and Moeen twice, asking them to appear before it and testify. The duo sent their reply through e-mail, but the committee rejected those, citing those were incomplete.

When the two were again asked to appear before the committee, Moeen requested that he be allowed to testify via teleconference, saying he was unwell.

As Fakhruddin, also living in the US, did not respond, the JS body decided not to contact him further.

Correction

In a report headlined "Who nominated Who" published in The Daily Star yesterday, we inadvertently identified Professor (Emeritus) Sufia Rahman, former adviser to the caretaker government led by Iajuddin Ahmed, as the widow of Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, also a former caretaker government adviser and attorney general during Sheikh Mujib's government.

We had picked up the information from a leaked cable of US embassy in Dhaka which was published by WikiLeaks on August 30.

SYED ISHTIAQ AHMED & ASSOCIATES brought our attention that Syed Ishtiaq was in no way connected with or related to Prof Sufia Rahman. In fact, National Professor Dr Sufia Ahmed, is the widow of Late Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed.

We stand corrected.

Taliban attack

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Zabiullah Mujahid in the text message to AFP.

Afghan officials said attackers were hunkered down in a multi-storey building under construction that overlooks the Nato headquarters and US embassy, exchanging fire with security forces as two helicopters flew overhead.

Two separate suicide attackers also targeted police in some of the most heavily protected parts of the capital, with the Taliban insurgency at its deadliest since US-led troops ousted the Islamists' regime 10 years ago.

AFP reporters first heard a string of loud blasts shortly after 1:30pm close to the Nato headquarters and the adjoining US embassy.

Afghan police and soldiers attempting to approach the Abdul Haq roundabout about half a kilometre from the Nato base had to retreat under a volley of mortar rounds, gunfire and explosions, an AFP reporter said.

A Western military official confirmed Nato's International Security Assistance Force headquarters was one of the targets under attack. But a spokesman for the US-led military mission confirmed only "an ongoing attack in the centre of Kabul."

The US embassy could not confirm that its compound was under attack but said staff had been ordered to take cover.

If confirmed, simultaneous attacks on ISAF, the US embassy and the NDS would be the Taliban's most ambitious commando-style operation to date in their fight to evict the Kabul government and defeat tens of thousands of Western troops.

President Hamid Karzai insisted the attacks would not derail the transition process but would "rather embolden our people's determination in taking the responsibility for their country's own affairs".

The attacks were the latest sign that security has drastically deteriorated in Kabul, where insurgents have staged increasingly brazen commando-style raids on Western targets, such as on the British Council two weeks ago.

Abul invites

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About the foreign funded projects, Abul said the ministry was following guidelines of the donors. He added that the Padma bridge project is being delayed for considering the suggestions and requests of the World Bank.

He also requested the TIB chairperson to evaluate the justification of a few "false and motivated" media reports that portrayed his ministry in a "negative way".

"I expect your enquiry, evaluation into the matter and necessary instructions," Abul's letter reads.

Welcoming the offer, TIB expressed eagerness to take appropriate steps in this regard after formulating the terms of reference.

In a press release acknowledging the receipt of the invitation, the anti-graft body, however, said it did not receive two files mentioned in the letter -- one on the minister's note to secretaries of the ministry and another on Padma Bridge project.

TIB also termed Abul's stance on the media "inconsistency" with his claim of transparency in the activities of his ministry.

JS masterpiece at stake

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reservation and argument by experts and officials of the communications ministry, meetings sources said.

During the argument, air force chief Air Marshal Shah Mohammad Ziaur Rahman said lawmakers should consider the route along the parliament building. A secretary then said the air force did not consider the route through Bijoy Sarani, which is the most feasible course.

"There will be various legal complications if the route runs through the parliament complex," the secretary argued.

But, referring to Hadith, the air force boss said, "Even a mosque can be demolished for the benefit of the people," a meetings source quoted him.

The meeting was held at the secretariat following objection by the air force against the original route along Bijoy Sarani.

The force put forward three alternative routes, two through Mirpur Road and the other through Khamarbari, adjacent to the Jatiya Sangsad.

Seemingly unhappy, the Jica officials outright rejected the routes through Mirpur Road, but said they might accept the Khamarbari route on condition that there will not be any complaints from lawmakers and the Parliament Secretariat.

"We need a written approval of the Parliament Secretariat to use the land," a meeting source quoted a Jica representative as saying.

The Jica official asked the government to give a final decision on the route within three to four days if Bangladesh wants Japan's loan for the metro rail project. "Otherwise the loan will be delayed by a year."

Jica, which has already accepted a route modification in February this year, is keen on providing 80 percent of the \$1.8 billion project cost as soft loan.

"I'll take the issue of route modification to the prime minister who will make the final decision tomorrow [today]," Finance Minister AMA Muhith told reporters after the meeting.

"Of the three alternative routes, we more or less agreed on the Khamarbari one," he said, admitting that original route was the moist suitable as it would not require demolishing any building on Bijoy Sarani.

The course modification will have an adverse impact on the parliament complex, experts and government officials fear.

"I don't think the lawmakers or the Parliament Secretariat will allow using the land," said an expert wishing anonymity.

If the route runs through Khamarbari, it will also clash with a ramp of the proposed Dhaka Elevated Expressway.

About using the parliament complex, Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury said, "A portion of the parliament garden will be taken by the modification. But we should think about the Kahn's master plan."

Although experts told top air force officials that the elevated rail lines on Bijoy Sarani will not hamper air traffic to and from Tejgaon Old Airport, air force officials did not yield.

The air force has been pressing to move the current route to Khamarbari from the Bijoy Sarani-Crescent Lake crossing, saying if the metro rail runs across Bijoy Sarani, it will cause serious problems in emergencies or war situations.

Experts earlier carried out an extensive study on the current route alignment and put it in the 20-year-long Strategic Transport Plan for Dhaka city. Cabinet approved the route on March 8 this year.

The metro rail to be constructed from Uttara Third Phase to Sayedabad is crucial,

as it will move around 60,000 people across the capital in the rush hours, says the Jica study.

It was the government who first delayed the progress of the project by modifying the route on February 1 this year as it conflicted with Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover project.

According to that modification the metro rail route from Uttara Third Phase to Teachers Students Centre (TSC) of Dhaka University via Pallabi, Farmgate, and Sonargaon Hotel will remain unchanged. But from TSC, the route will be diverted towards Curzon Hall, Jatiya Press Club, Bangladesh Bank and to Kamalapur Railway Station.

The route from TSC was supposed to go past Central Shaheed Minar, Fulbaria, Gulistan, and Tikatuli before reaching Sayedabad in the original plan.

Musa on top

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returned from Baranco camp (13 thousand feet) due to high altitude sickness.

Musa and Niaz on September 11 reached Barafu camp, the last camp on the way to the summit, leaving behind Matchami, Shira and Baranco camps.

They started their summit push at 1:15am local time (10:15pm Sunday Bangladesh time) and finally, after six hours and 33 minutes, climbed Kibo.

The two mountaineers came back to Meoka gate at 10,618 feet on Monday, according an email sent by Musa to The Daily Star.

They were given Uhuru Peak summit certificate by Kilimanjaro National Park and Tanzania National Park authorities at Meoka gate yesterday.

The expedition was sponsored by the Summit Group, Emirates, Shah Cement, JAN Associates Ltd and The Daily Star.