



**Moeen was 'unaware'**

STAR REPORT

Former army chief Moeen U Ahmed had disavowed some DGFI activities during the tenure of the army-backed caretaker government between 2007 and 2008, said a recently leaked US diplomatic cable.

He had not sanctioned certain initiatives of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) during the caretaker government's tenure, the cable quoted him as saying at a farewell dinner hosted by UN Resident Coordinator Renata Dessallien in June, 2009.

"He claimed the counter-terrorism chief under the CTG (caretaker government), Brigadier General A.T.M. Amin, did not keep him informed about, nor did Moeen approve many of his actions," read the cable the US embassy in Dhaka sent to Washington on July 14, 2009.

The cable said the DGFI led efforts to tackle Bangladesh's endemic corruption by arresting and building legal cases against hundreds of politicians including Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, business people and government officials.

"DGFI's conduct during the CTG (caretaker government) drew wide criticism, including allegations of torture of suspects in custody. DGFI's Amin also foolishly attempted to engineer the creation of an Islamic political party out of the domestic terrorist group Harakat ul-Jihad-Islami-Bangladesh (HUJI-B), allegedly in the misguided belief that as a legitimate political party, HUJI-B would be easier to monitor and control."

Moeen, believed to be the most powerful man during the nearly two-year rule of the caretaker government, retired from army in mid-June, 2009.

DGFI TARGETED POLITICAL PARTIES

# Of miscarriage of reform, its victims

STAR REPORT

The Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) was a key force behind the attempt to split political parties in the name of reform during the army-backed caretaker government rule, leading to the estrangement of some senior leaders.

The move began immediately after the start of crackdown on politicians in February but was expedited in mid-2007 when an attempt was also in force to launch a "king's party", according to leaked US embassy cables.

On June 25, 2007, the then BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan announced a package of 15 reform proposals to amend the party's governing rules, which he claimed would democratise the party.

"Among the reforms is a bar against the chair from simultaneously being the head of government and of the party. The proposals would also limit the incumbent of the position of party chair and/or Prime Minister to a total of two terms. These conditions disqualify current chair Khaleda Zia from further terms as party chair or Prime Minister," reads a cable sent to Washington on June 28, 2007.

Khaleda Zia welcomed "any reform proposals" but "underlined the need to have any reforms approved by a party council meeting", the cable added.

It quoted BNP reformers to be seeing "a politically weakened Zia, more concerned with corruption charges against her sons and other relatives and restricted by the government from contacting and meeting potential allies, but discounted a possibility of a party split."

In response to the reform proposals, BNP chief Khaleda announced plans to develop alternative proposals, the cable read.

"Actively supported by elements of the DGFI", as said in a US embassy



M Saifur Rahman

Amir Hossain Amu

Mannan Bhuiyan

Tofail Ahmed

cable, the BNP standing committee met on October 29, 2007, and appointed former finance minister M Saifur Rahman as the party's acting chairperson and replaced Khandaker Delwar Hossain with Major (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed as acting secretary general when Khaleda Zia was detained in a sub-jail.

This divided BNP into two factions -- "pro-Khaleda" and "reformist".

Four months before the formal split, Mannan Bhuiyan, who was spearheading the reform move in BNP, expressed his fear of arrest and said they would not be acting without a military nod, according to another cable sent on June 19, 2007, by the then US ambassador Patricia A Butenis.

The reformists -- former BNP Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf and his brother, former MP Chowdhury Akmal Ibne Yusuf -- met the then DGFI director general Golam Mohammad and its counterterrorism chief ATM Amin, James F Moriarty said in a cable of July 3, 2008.

"The DGFI leaders said it therefore was important for BNP reformists to compete in the election even if the mainstream Khaleda Zia loyalists called for a boycott. The DGFI said it would ensure victory for the reformists and likeminded candidates," the cable quoted the two "reformist" BNP leaders.

Moriarty also quoted the two as talking about meeting in June 2008 "at which three senior DGFI officials insisted the military needed to exercise control over the government for three years to ensure political reforms stuck".

Meanwhile, Awami League reformers had said they would announce reforms, similar to BNP's, aimed to curb powers of the party chief and separate the ruling party from the government, the cable said. (AL leaders Suranjit Sengupta, Abdur Razzak and Tofail Ahmed held separate press briefings to announce their own reform proposals over the following weeks. Another big shot Amir Hossain Amu was also supposed to come up with reform proposals, but he finally did not do so.)

"AL Chair [president] Sheikh Hasina criticized the reform proposals by criticizing the government for permitting the BNP to discuss political reform proposals in violation of the ban on political activities," said another cable created on June 28, 2007.

(The AL could not be cracked despite some senior stalwarts' interest to exclude Hasina thanks to AL leaders not following BNP dissidents' path.)

Rowshan Ershad, wife of Jatiya Party chairman HM Ershad, announced a 13-point proposal to reform the party, on June 26 proclaiming herself the acting party

chief and offering to make Ershad the "chief advisor", the cable said. She had also claimed to have replaced Secretary General Ruhul Amin Howlader with Golam Moshit, it added.

Anticipating Rowshan's rebellion, Ershad had earlier threatened to expel her from the party and announced a committee to develop a reform proposal.

The same day, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Executive Chairman Oli Ahmed, proclaimed himself the LDP president claiming that LDP President Badruddoza Chowdhury and Secretary General Major (ret'd) Abdul Mannan had left the party.

On June 27, media reported that B Chowdhury and Abdul Mannan dissolved the LDP presidium and announced a new presidium, excluding Oli Ahmed.

"Some politicians, like LDP's Oli Ahmed and Reshaun [Rowshan] Ershad, have made the same calculation we have: with the increased probability that the military-supported government could consist of a coalition of a number of parties, any party no matter how small could be part of the next government," the cable reads.

A year after the declaration of state of emergency, the US embassy in a cable of January 10, 2008, said that as of the end of 2007, efforts at internal party reform within the BNP, and to a lesser extent the AL had stagnated.

# King's Party circus

STAR REPORT

Some officials of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) wasted no time to coerce leaders of established political parties into supporting a new military-backed party after the January 11, 2007, change-over.

The then DGFI high-ups even threatened leaders who were not interested to join the so-called king's party, revealed some US diplomatic cables recently leaked by WikiLeaks.

The men behind such political manoeuvring during the post 1/11 days included then DGFI Counterintelligence Director Brig Gen Chowdhury Fazlul Bari and Counterterrorism Director Brigadier General ATM Amin.

A June 4, 2007, cable by then US embassy counsellor for political and economic affairs DC McCullough mentioned how within weeks of the onset of military-backed Fakhruddin-led caretaker government senior and mid-level leaders of Awami League, BNP, JP (Ershad) and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and several prominent civil society members were urged by Bari and Amin to support the so-called king's party.

"One Awami League MP claimed he was threatened with corruption charges if he balked, but other contacts report the threat was assumed but not explicit. A former BNP minister told us 100 BNP MPs interested in a king's party face or fear they could face corruption charges," the cable read.

Another cable dispatched by then US Deputy Chief of Mission Geeta Pasi on July 25, 2007, reported that Bari continued to promote and recruit for a new party. The cable quoted an unnamed former BNP minister to report "as many as 100 BNP leaders, mostly members of the past parliament, had given him undated letters of resignation to prepare themselves for joining the new party."

The June 4, 2007, cable said in the last 10 days of May, 2007, Bari reportedly met a large group of BNP backbenchers twice at restaurants, one of which Hasina indirectly referred to in public as an example of how some people are above the ban on indoor political activities. Indoor politics was banned then.

However, military's failures on key fronts and mixed signals from DGFI and then army chief General Moeen had left BNP dissidents frustrated and confused by late May, 2007, the cable noted.

While Bari promised that the new party would enjoy full military support, Amin and other officers then maintained that no final decision had been made about the new party. Most intermediaries reported that Moeen assured them he has no political ambitions, though one of them quoted Moeen as saying, "unless the country calls on me to serve."

The dissidents also mentioned other reasons for their frustration like Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus' premature entry into politics failing and constitutional lawyer Kamal Hossain, although well regarded by liberal elites, not having popular appeal and a dismal track record as a politician.

Moeen and Bari denied before US diplomats that they were forging a "king's party" or have any political ambitions.

"Many Bangladeshis assume, based on their history with the parties launched by generals Zia and Ershad, and also because of the enduring strength of the two big parties, that a king's party with no grassroots organisation could gain traction only with major government support, either by hamstringing the opposition or actually rigging the electoral process," the cable read.

Another cable said during a May 16, 2007, meeting with then US ambassador Patricia Butenis, Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina expressed doubt whether the government was sincere about elections.

Recalling what she had seen in similar situations during the rule of generals Zia and Ershad, Hasina was worried that the government would try to rig the electoral process to produce the two-thirds parliamentary majority for the "king's party" and to compensate the new party's lack of legitimacy.

"We don't want to repeat that cycle," Hasina had said. Hasina also said the military is trying to create the new party with opportunists and threats tied to a politically-biased anti-corruption campaign.

Hasina alluded to criticism of her rule by four senior leaders while she was away but affirmed that the party is solidly united under her leadership after her return to Dhaka. "Defectors can't hurt us because we are not a party, we are an institution."

She parried calls for internal party reforms by saying her party is in perpetual restructuring as reflected by its various electoral amendment proposals.

In a May 12, 2007, cable, Butenis quoted then political secretary to Hasina, Saber Hossain Chowdhury as saying, "The last thing we want is to give the government an excuse to delay elections and buy more time to organise its 'king's party'."

Saber says that he has advised Hasina not to punish her four opponents in the party presidium because the party needs all its strength to defeat the "king's party".

A June 24, 2007, US diplomatic cable cleared by then US Deputy Chief of Mission Geeta Pasi said in early June 2007, former BNP leader Ferdous Ahmed Quarishi announced the formation of a new party. In a two-hour kick-off meeting Quarishi said, "We have started to float a new political party keeping with the spirit of January 11 [2007]."

Quarishi dismissed any ties to the army as unfounded allegations and said his movement is simply to fill "a political vacuum" created by the "collapse" of the two major political parties.

As for reports that DGFI's Fazlul Bari was involved in the formation of Quarishi's movement, he said, "General Bari is a key figure in the government, so it is his duty to advance politics and steer people towards a good election. Naturally, he has to go out and meet politicians."

## DGFI became militants' buddy

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militants and many other important national issues during post-1/11 days, the then DGFI chief Major General Golam Mohammad in late 2008 had to apologise to US diplomat James F Moriarty in 2007-2008. However, details of blackmailing Hasina were unavailable in the cables.

Hasina did not want to see IDP registered and suspected Amin was acting on his own and without the approval of the Caretaker Government or his uniformed superiors.

After coming to power through the December 2008 parliamentary polls, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed her displeasure with DGFI for its role in IDP formation.

Appointing Maj Gen Mollah Fazle Akbar as the director general of the military intelligence agency in February 2009, the PM told him that "under no circumstance" was DGFI to politically or financially support Islamic militant groups as had been the case when Huji-B members floated the DGFI-backed Islamic Democratic Party (IDP) in late 2008, Moriarty in a cable quoted Akbar as saying at a meeting on May 11, 2009.

During the November 12 meeting, Moriarty also informed Golam Mohammad the then army chief General Moeen U Ahmed in a conversation with him on November 8, 2008 interceded to help block the IDP registration.

Mohammad agreed when Moriarty pointed out that Amin's actions appeared to undercut Moeen's efforts. Mohammad speculated that Moeen was likely unaware of Amin's discussions with Hasina and his continued efforts on behalf

of IDP. The cable notes the DGFI chief knew IDP had resubmitted a revised constitution to the EC on November 11, 2008 in the hope that the EC would register the party.

Golam Mohammad also reaffirmed that DGFI and Bangladesh government agreed with Moriarty's assessment of IDP and promised to speak with the army chief and EC to ensure the party was not registered.

Moriarty reminded Mohammad that a number of IDP members had continued ties with terrorist groups, specifically Huji-B.

The US envoy argued that allowing the IDP to continue as a political entity would be a mistake unless Bangladesh government established well-defined condition. Such condition were akin to "lines in the sand" regarding the expectations and tolerance of Bangladesh government with respect to IDP activities.

Maj Gen Mohammad agreed with the ambassador's argument and explained that he initially supported Amin's theory of bringing Huji-B members into the fold through the establishment of IDP or some other type of political organisation.

Mohammad rationalised that in doing so the Bangladeshi intelligence and security services could monitor and co-opt IDP leaders and arrest those Huji-B members that remained outside of the political process.

Mohammad admitted that while the theory was sound in practice the idea of IDP failed and he now viewed the party in the same light as the ambassador.

ambassador's guidance on the best course of action to take with IDP and other Huji-B reformers who wanted to take a more moderate stance and integrate themselves into the Bangladesh political system if establishment of the IDP was not an option.

Moriarty wrote in his comment, "Mohammad and others in the GOB [including the caretaker advisers] have all professed shock at Amin's actions and have distanced themselves from his attempts to support the IDP. We will continue to press DGFI and others within the GOB to come up with a better strategy for dealing with Huji-B."

A July 19, 2007 cable notes, in a meeting with then US charge d'affaires Geeta Pasi, DGFI director Amin had dismissed threats from Huji-B, saying "We have infiltrated Huji-B and we don't see them attacking western interests."

As for the members of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET), he said, "We have remnants of them surrendering."

Amin was very upbeat about Bangladesh's success in defusing the issue of domestic terrorist group Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

"We are currently conducting surrender negotiations which could include an amnesty and social rehabilitation program."

As for Zaidi al-Qaeda, which claimed responsibility for the explosion of three small bombs in May 2007, Amin downplayed any future threat from the group claiming that they "were really a social problem," and the attacks may have had a personal motive.

Mohammad sought the

## DGFI itself

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2009, the PM gave him the instructions, the then US ambassador James F Moriarty wrote in a cable citing discussion with Akbar on May 11 that year.

"As such, many of his new officers had no intelligence or counterterrorism training and he was relying on the US to help DGFI's counterterrorism capacity building," the cable said quoting Akbar.

The cable, published by WikiLeaks on August 30 this year, also quoted Akbar as saying that Hasina had made it clear to him that the DGFI would focus on counterterrorism issues and work closely with the US government.

Expressing displeasure at the DGFI's involvement in creating Islamic Democratic Party during the caretaker government, Hasina, Akbar told Moriarty, had also cautioned that the agency could not politically or financially support Islamic militant groups under any circumstances.

The ambassador at the meeting asked Akbar for his assessment of the current threat posed by Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

Akbar said the JMB threat had not disappeared and the group was reorganising. That said, the government

assessed the JMB was not close to carrying out attacks in Bangladesh, the cable read.

Asked about JMB's alleged plan to assassinate BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia prior to the December 2008 parliamentary election, Akbar appeared not to know about it, although he acknowledged that JMB might have wanted to influence the election. Nevertheless, he noted, JMB had failed to do that, the cable added.

Akbar further said the government was keeping the known JMB members under "close surveillance".

At the meeting, Akbar touched briefly on DGFI's relations with India's intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). Akbar said that for a variety of reasons the relationship had never been good, Moriarty wrote in the May 14, 2009, cable.

"Acting on guidance from the Prime Minister, Akbar and his subordinates were meeting more frequently with Indian intelligence representatives and information sharing on terrorism suspects was on the rise, particularly with regards to members of Pakistan-militant groups operating in Bangladesh," it reads.

## Tarique's charge hearing deferred

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The same tribunal on September 11 deferred the hearing on charge framing against the accused on the same ground.

The 32 accused in the cases, who are now in jail, were produced before the tribunal. They included Babar and Mojaheed.

Another accused in the cases, Dhaka City Corporation ward council-

or Ariful Islam, now on a High Court bail, was also present during yesterday's hearing.

On July 3, Criminal Investigation Department submitted the supplementary charge sheets mentioning 30 names apart from the 22 accused in the main charge sheets.

Tarique and 18 others were shown as fugitives in the supplementary and first

charge sheets.

Earlier, charges were framed against the accused of the main charge sheets including BNP leader Abdus Salam Pintu and chief of Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami (Huji) Mufti Abdul Hannan.

Twenty-four people including Awami League leader Ivy Rahman were injured and around 200 others injured in the grisly grenade

attack on an AL rally at Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004. The then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped the attack.

Two cases filed in connection under Explosive Substances Act and the other for killing people-- were shifted to the speedy tribunal on September 9 this year for quick disposal.