

Khaleda was advised

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that a last-minute BNP boycott of Parliamentary elections organized by former military dictator Ershad in 1986 burnished the party's image and led to its success in elections two years later."

"Similarly, the Awami League boycotted the Parliamentary vote in February 1996 yet prevailed in elections four months later. The lesson from recent Bangladesh history is that boycotts work," read the dispatch.

Two senior BNP advisers privately told the embassy's political officer that the elections could be postponed till February 2009 to give the party adequate time to make preparations.

The then US ambassador wrote that such a lengthy delay seemed unlikely for some reasons.

The dispatch said BNP's arch-rival Awami League was confident of its victory in the December parliamentary elections, and its leaders had repeatedly said the vote must be held on December 18 as planned. Later, it was rescheduled for December 29.

Former adviser Maj Gen (ret'd) Ghulam Quader told US Ambassador Moriarty on November 12 that he believed BNP would not participate in December 18 elections because it was not ready for the polls.

On November 16, four days after Moriarty met AL

President Sheikh Hasina, the then US ambassador wrote, "Hasina believed some in the military must have encouraged [Khaleda] Zia to boycott the 1986 polls. Hasina thought history might be repeating itself, with [Khaleda] Zia trying to encourage a segment within the army to intervene on her behalf."

Referring to discussions with the AL chief, the US ambassador said Hasina noted that all parties had agreed to take part in the 1986 elections.

"At the last minute, Begum Zia pulled out of those elections after giving an inflammatory speech calling on the army to rise up. Zia then disappeared for three days amid rumors she had been taken into custody.

According to Hasina, this was all an elaborate charade," wrote Moriarty.

The then US ambassador, who held a series of meetings with advisers to the caretaker government and senior leaders of major political parties, wrote, "A boycott this year, however, could well lead to a major reshaping of the political landscape that would leave the BNP substantially weakened."

"Should Zia call for a boycott, party reformers and the BNP's most important ally, the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami, would have to quickly decide whether to defy her and contest the election anyway.

"Scores of former BNP members of Parliament are in the reformist camp and could decide to campaign as independents or with smaller reform-minded parties, including the Liberal Democratic Party and the Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh Party, each led by former BNP members," Moriarty observed.

He said Jamaat would be uncomfortable campaigning outside its alliance with the BNP, but some Jamaat leaders had said their party might contest the election in any way to ensure it remained engaged in the democratic process.

"Jamaat would be much less competitive running on its own, but Quader suggested the Awami League could help the Islamists win at least a few seats to ensure their presence in Parliament," Moriarty wrote in the cable.

Former adviser Quader told Moriarty on November 12 that all government and political leaders were committed to elections. The then Chief of Army Staff Gen Moeen U Ahmed in meetings with USG officials had repeatedly voiced strong support for the elections, the cable said.

The then advisers Quader and Hossain Zillur Rahman told the US ambassador that they and their colleagues in the caretaker government were uninterested in serving beyond the end of 2008, the cable said.

No room

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coup, and in 2001, the then caretaker government had removed 13 pro-liberation secretaries from their posts.

She said the next general elections will be held under the supervision of the Election Commission and all political parties will participate in the polls.

"The government won't intervene in anything of the elections," she added.

She also criticised opposition leader Khaleda Zia's demand for caretaker government, and blamed the opposition for causing sufferings to the mass people by calling hartal.

"People are very conscious. They know that the opposition party is calling hartals just to save the war criminals and the two corrupt sons of the opposition leader," Hasina said.

Bangladesh wants to maintain peaceful, friendly relations not only with India but also with all the neighbouring countries, she added.

Asked about Paschimbanga Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's role in delaying the long-awaited Teesta Water sharing Treaty, the prime minister said it is not that negotiations between India and Bangladesh have stopped.

"Negotiation is an endless process. As far as I know, she [Mamata] will come to Bangladesh soon after her legislative election ends."

She said none can take away all the waters from the Teesta, and Bangladesh will, of course, get its share.

Hasina said the Ganges water sharing treaty had been signed and the Teesta treaty would also be signed.

Replying to another question on Mamata Banerjee, the prime minister said that as a woman she feels proud that a woman is now the Chief Minister of Paschimbanga, formerly known as West Bengal.

The premier sought cooperation of the people and the international community to build Bangladesh as an abode of peace and prosperity.

She also said her government shows zero tolerance for militancy and any other forms of terrorism.

"Abu Mazen did his job at the UN and put our demands on their table and I'm here at the Muqataa today to say to him: thank you."

1 shot dead

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Baghaichari upazila of Rangamati yesterday morning.

On information, police recovered the body of the victim, Mohon Lal Chakma, 35, son of Kistomohon Chakma of Ugalchari village in the upazila.

According to Naimuddin, officer-in-charge of Baghaichari Police Station, a gang of criminals on a Chander Gari (local name of flatbed pickup trucks modified to carry passengers) around 9:45am went to a tea stall at Talukdarpara where Mohon was having tea.

Sensing danger, Mohon tried to run away but the criminals shot him in the back leaving him dead on the spot, the OC added.

The dead body was sent to Khagrachhari Adhunik Hospital for autopsy. Later, the body was handed over to the victim's relatives.

Alokes Chakma, a leader of anti-CHT peace treaty UPDF, Rangamati unit, b l a m e d P a r b a t y a a Chittagong Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) for the killing and demanded arrest and exemplary punishment of the culprits.

However, Sajib Chakma, assistant publicity secretary of PCJSS central committee, said it is UPDF's internal conflict that is to be blamed adding that PCJSS does not believe in killing and terrorism.

"Lift your heads up high, you are Palestinian!"

The crowds applauded wildly, waving the Palestinian flag and the yellow banner of Abbas's Fatah party.

Thousands had begun gathering at the Muqataa several hours before Abbas arrived.

Ahead of Abbas's arrival, Mohammed Amudi said he had come to show his sup-

Wasa knocks

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freeing a 1.5-kilometre area of the three-km long canal, stretching from Shia Mosque to Gabtoli, of illegal settlements.

Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) demolished at least 50 structures on Shekhertek bank of the canal on Saturday.

He said they could not remove a half a kilometre road built illegally by a private housing company, as there is no alternative road for the residents of the housing.

Asked how so many illegal structures had been built on the canal over the years, he said the district administration, responsible for looking after the canal, had not previously demarcated its area for reclamations.

At least 200 illegal makeshift structures and a dozen buildings were built encroaching on the canal.

Wasa will resume its drive today to clear the canal of the remaining illegal structures.

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Education MP style

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colleges, one madrasa, three secondary schools and one junior school.

Besides, his wife and three associates—who studied till SSC or below—chair managing committees of four institutions.

Sources at local schools and colleges allege the lawmaker and his aides are abusing their posts to make a fast buck by appointing teachers. They have earned over Tk 6 crore by appointing some 150 teachers in the last two years.

Talking to The Daily Star, several newly recruited teachers admitted they each paid Mannan and his men Tk 3 to 4 lakh to land the job.

Most of the teachers, however, would not say much about the matter, as they fear getting the sack.

"It's true I didn't pursue my education beyond class eight. At first, I could not understand how to run the college. But with time, I have learned the ins and outs from some capable teachers," he added.

Joyal Abedin, who looks after Mannan's local business interests and collects rent from tenants of the lawmaker's properties, is the head of Lautalda College governing body.

He is also president of Kaliganj unit Sramik League.

Another close associate of the MP, Biswanath Bhattacharya, alias Joga Babu, is at the helm of Raigram Secondary School's managing committee.

He said, "The MP has appointed us chiefs of the managing committees to honour us as we have been serving him for years."

The same school has recently appointed a teacher without a Bachelor of Education degree, though it was a prerequisite for the post as per job advertisement, said Farid Mia, a member of the school's managing committee.

Asking not to be named, a newly appointed teacher of the school claims to have paid Tk 3.5 lakh for the job.

Two other candidates gave Tk 4 lakh each, of which the MP got Tk 3 lakh and a middleman pocketed Tk 1 lakh, the teacher added, seeking anonymity.

Locals say Mannan did not bother considering minimum qualifications

and experience while having his wife and associates appointed managing body chair.

Eman Ali, one of his three sidekicks made managing committee chiefs, was a night guard at a bank some years ago, said a college teacher.

Eman told The Daily Star that MP Mannan has made him the chief of Borobazar College governing body because he is the president of Borobazar union Awami League.

"Don't you know that party people are picked for these posts?" he questioned taking away the phone set from his wife and claimed there had been no irregularities in selecting his wife.

Annoyed at more queries, the lawmaker said, "Who are you to ask me about these?"

A few minutes later, Shamim Ara called back and said she did not know about her being selected as managing committee chairman at Gazir Bazar School.

She claimed people wanted her to see in the Kabilpur College governing body.

Meanwhile, officials speaking on condition of anonymity confirmed that Mannan is governing body chief at Mahtab Uddin Degree College, Alhaj Amzad Ali and Faizur Rahman Women's College, Shoib Nagor Fazil Degree Madrasa, Nalanda Bhusan Pilot Secondary School, Sallimunnesa Girls School, Kola United Secondary School and Ayesha Khatoon Junior Secondary School.

It will be a flagrant breach of the rules if an MP holds the managing committee chairman's posts at seven institutions, said Rashed Khan Menon, chief of the parliamentary body on the education ministry.

Queried about their educational background, Biswanath said he had studied up to class 10 and Joyal passed SSC.

Anwarul Azam Anar, chairman of Kaliganj upazila parishad, said the lawmaker abused his power to appoint his wife Shamim Ara Mannan as head of Gazir Bazar Secondary School managing committee.

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and experience while having his wife and associates appointed managing body chair.

Voters rejected nearly all national BNP leaders who ran for parliament. Only three nationally prominent BNP figures won: Chairperson Khaleda Zia, who won three seats; Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, who won one seat and lost another; and Vice Chairman MK Anwar, it added.

She has also been made an executive member of the governing body of Kabilpur College.

Mannan started his political career with Jatiya Party. Before joining AL, he was with BNP, said Anwarul, also

media reports said BNP won just 29 seats, a mind-boggling drop from the 195 seats it captured alone in the 2001 election.

"Bangladeshis also applauded Caretaker Government actions to clean up corruption although results of those efforts were mixed."

"AWAMI LEAGUE WIN: GREAT OPPORTUNITY, GREAT RISK"

AL leaders have vowed to continue efforts to fight corruption, even though the caretaker government had detained Sheikh Hasina on graft charges, the cable said under the head line "Awami League win: Great Opportunity, Great Risk."

"Some of the party's winning candidates have highly tainted reputations as well," Moriarty wrote.

He also added that the party has promised to give BNP a meaningful role in government in what would be a huge break from Bangladesh's past winner-take-all politics.

"While the Awami League may nonetheless extend an olive branch to the BNP, it is unlikely to do so to Bangladesh's leading Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, which won just two seats compared with the 17 captured in 2001. The two top leaders of Jamaat, which is the main BNP ally, lost their seats."

"Nazrul, the BNP joint secretary general, acknowledged the branding of Jamaat leaders as "war criminals" for siding with Pakistan in Bangladesh's war for independence was effective, particularly among young voters," the cable said.

Moriarty wrote it was not clear how Jamaat, which has been committed to democracy in promoting its Islamist philosophy, would respond to its election debacle.

In the conclusion, he, however, said he would maintain close contact with Jamaat to encourage it to continue to pursue its Islamist agenda through non-violent, democratic means despite its election defeat.

The diplomatic cable said the electorate also might have tired of the BNP's constant trashing of the military-backed caretaker government, which came to power in January 2007 to end months of political violence, for imposing a state of emergency.

"Should Awami League President Sheikh Hasina make good on her promise to clean up Bangladesh's historically graft- and violence-plagued politics, the election could prove a watershed toward better governance of this critically important, predominantly Muslim nation of 150 million people," said the cable in its summary.

"AVOTE AGAINST THE BNP"

Under the subhead "a vote against the BNP," the dispatch attributing to local

communities yesterday alleged that transport operators were charging at will on the pretext of fuel price hike.

"It will take one more week to complete the task," BRTA Director (engineering) Saiful Haque said yesterday.

Auto-rickshaw drivers were found more desperate to make extra profit taking the advantage of lack of sufficient public transport in the city.

Harun-or-Rashid, a school teacher, who went to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment of his wife, said he had to pay an auto-rickshaw driver Tk 200 for taking them to Jatrabari from the hospital. It was the best bargain, he said.

Many bus operators handwrote new fares on tickets.

"A fare of Tk 15 had been printed on tickets but bus staff handwrote Tk 20 on them," said Sadeq Hossain, a retired air force staff, who rode a bus of Belal Enterprise to Farmgate from Uttara.

Most bus operators on this route are doing the same thing, he alleged.

"Bus operators have been asking for Tk 12 against the usual fare of Tk 8 for travelling from Nilkhel to Banani for the last two days. They often demand Tk 15 on the pretext of the recent fuel price hike," said Farah Tanjee, a Dhaka University student.

Yasin Elahi, a government employee, said the bus fare from Shahbagh to Agargaon had been increased to Tk 10 from Tk 6 after the fuel price hike.

"We suffer a lot, as our income does not increase in keeping with the hike in commodity prices and transport costs," he said.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Sarak Paribahan Samity, an organisation of transport owners, urged all bus operators not to increase fares until further notice from the organisation.