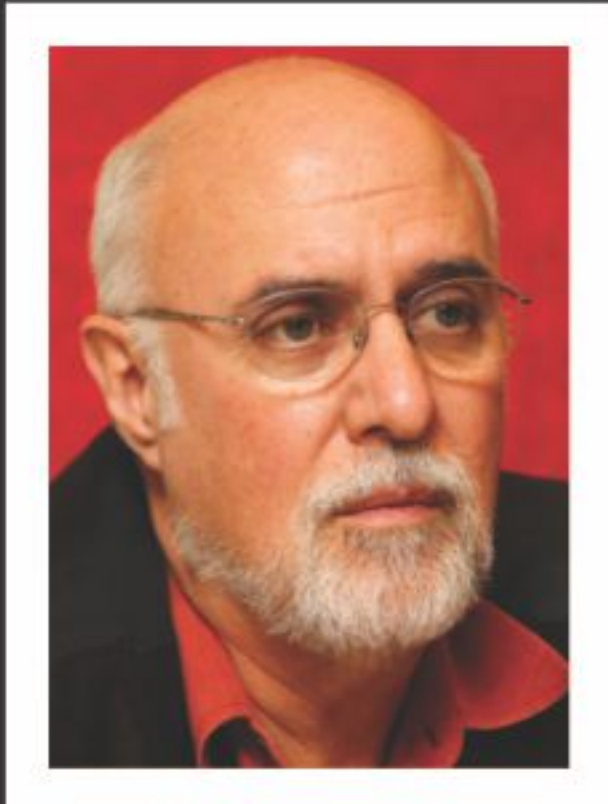


The murder of Major General Abul Manzur, Bir Uttam

Second of the four-part series



LAWRENCE LIFSCHULTZ

IN the field of intelligence when you are taking a major action against your opponent and you must disguise what you actually are doing, you create what is called a “false flag” operation. According to one definition, “A ‘False Flag’ [or *Ruse de Guerre* in French] describes covert or paramilitary operations designed to deceive in such a way that the operations appear as though they are being carried out by other entities, [or] groups...than those who actually planned and executed them. False flag operations . . . seek to hide the real organization behind an operation.”

Geraint Hughes of Kings College, London uses the term to describe acts carried out by “military or security force personnel which are then blamed” on others such as terrorists, or any opponent one wants to destroy by creating a false pretext for their annihilation. The use of “false flags” is one of the most elementary tactical concepts in military and civilian intelligence training. From the Reichstag Fire in 1933 to the Gulf of Tonkin Incident in 1964 “false flags” have been used as standard forms of deceit to mislead the public and the press.

accomplished. This had enormously significant ideological and political implications for Bangladesh's future.

With the rise of the Ershad dictatorship, known *razakars*, such as Syed Mohammad Qaisar, joined Ershad's Jatiya Party. He also joined the cabinet, as a state minister. Qaisar, who headed the “Qaisar Bahini” has recently been charged with crimes against humanity dating to back to 1971. The Qaisar Bahini had a reputation in the Habiganj and Brahmanbaria areas of brutally attacking the Hindu minority, but it also served as an important auxiliary to Pakistani military forces.

In a single decade Bangladesh had traveled from the Liberation of Dhaka and the defeat of the Pakistan Army to a military dictatorship lead by a repatriated general who invited collaborators of the Pakistan Army into his government. For veterans of the Liberation War it was not accidental that Ershad and his associates embarked on a systematic purge of “Mukti Bahini” officers and soldiers from the army immediately after General Manzur's murder. It was one of those coincidences that appeared too coincidental to be a coincidence.

While attending the 2009 opening of a documentary film entitled “Bloodbath in the Bangladesh

Adjutant General . . . It is learnt from their depositions that after the killing of Zia the mutineers hustled the [surviving] members of the [President's] Guard Regiment into a car and took them from the Circuit House to the Chittagong Cantonment. Before the guards were bundled into the car the mutinying officers warned them that after reaching the Cantonment they should not say anything to anyone. If the GOC Manzur came to them and enquired about the incident at the Circuit House, they were told they should say, “Owing to the storm, rain and darkness, we could not see who was firing.” These circumstances [described in the report] prove that the killing [of Zia] was perpetrated without Manzur's knowledge.”

Moin then told me an even more significant story. He described his meetings in Bangkok while he was Bangladesh's Ambassador to Thailand with Major Khaled and Major Muzaffar who were among the group of junior officers that had gone to abduct Zia from the Circuit House on that storm blown night of May 30th, 1981. It is best if I quote from the translation that Moin sent me of his book, rather than the summary he gave me while I sat with him in his small library at his

and a few others who were known to be corrupt. These junior officers were greatly antagonized by Ershad's corruption, the nepotism, the harassment of Freedom Fighters and their wholesale transfer to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Their mutiny was an outburst of this simmering resentment.”

“On the night of the mutiny a storm was blowing. Zia was fast asleep on the first floor of the Circuit House. At around 4 am in the morning, the officers suddenly attacked. A distinct aspect of this attack was that no soldier, JCO or NCO was directly involved in the action. The junior officers themselves split into two groups and lobbed a rocket by using a launcher into the Circuit House. One group then stormed into the Circuit House firing incessantly. As Zia came out of his room hearing the sound of gunfire, a few officers stood surrounding him. At this time Lt. Colonel Motiur Rahman, drunk and staggering, climbed up the staircase shouting, ‘Where is Zia? Where is Zia?’”

“With the twinkling of an eye from his Chinese sten gun he [Motiur Rahman] pumped into Zia's body a whole magazine of 28 bullets from the range of one yard. At least 20 of the bullets pierced Zia's body as it was peppered with shots. The other officers were dazed by the suddenness of the attack. They did not fire a single shot. Several of them cried out, ‘What are you doing? What are you doing?’ By that time Zia had collapsed on the floor.”

“When I visited Dhaka in 1991 during my tenure as Ambassador in Thailand, I apprised Prime Minister Khaleda Zia about my discussions with Majors Khaled and Muzaffar. Of the officers who were witnesses to the killing of Zia these two were the only ones alive . . . In 1993, Major Khaled died in Bangkok from a heart attack, and his body was sent to Dhaka. When I spoke with Manzur on the morning of the incident [the attack on the Circuit House] I was then convinced that Manzur was not involve in the killing of Zia. My views were corroborated by what I later learned from Major Khaled.”

In a public meeting not long after her husband's death, Khaleda Zia publicly accused General Ershad of involvement in her husband's killing at the Circuit House. Khaleda's accusation raised the curtain on a more troubling scenario. Had the DGFI infiltrated an *agent provocateur* into the group of junior officers that included Moti, Mahbub, Khaled and Muzaffar, and played on known resentments they all had? Had they been egged on to abduct Zia while being unaware of another “wheel within their wheel” that planned to kill Zia all along?

In general I am exceedingly careful not to be drawn in by such speculation. However, a very careful, retired Bangladesh Army officer, raised this scenario with me and indicated that a group of his colleagues were searching for an inside source among the DGFI cadre, who were active in 1981, and might be in a position to confirm this theory one way or another. The fact that this retired officer has been very cautious, precise and accurate in the information he has shared with me over the years has led me not to dismiss this view out of hand. Furthermore, the fact that Ziaur Rahman's wife, Khaleda Zia has expressed the belief that General Ershad was behind her husband's death cannot be ignored.

What is the meaning of all this? It raises the question whether the killing of Zia, followed by the immediate decision to deliberately vilify Manzur as the “assassin”, promptly followed by the murder of Manzur in Army custody, were all part of a single unified operation organized by the DGFI. Is this true? We do not know. Obviously, if it is true, the implications are rather significant. This Sherlock Holmes style mystery may in time unravel as have other once unanswered questions.

In 2006 as I sat with General Moin, I asked him, if after *Silent Witness* had been published, he had been approached by the Public Prosecutor, or investigators working for the Prosecutor. He smiled, a very grim smile, and said, “No”.

We then discussed how long the ostensible investigation, and prosecution of Ershad had been going on, and how no political or judicial will existed to find knowledgeable witnesses who would be prepared to testify against Ershad and several of his associates. As indicated, Moin argues in his book that Ershad and others close to him were directly involved in organizing Manzur's killing.

Moin contrasted the years of inaction in the Manzur Murder Case with the gruesome two-week trial in July 1981 that led to the execution of 13 officers, all of whom had been freedom fighters, veterans of the Mukti Bhaini. Their “express” Field Court Martial, *only a month after Zia's death*, had in General Moin's view violated every legal protection of their right to a defense guaranteed under Bangladesh's military code of justice.

Moreover, all of the accused were brutally tortured to confess to a false narrative that claimed they, like Manzur, had organized a *coup* against Zia. They had been beaten. Their nails were ripped from their fingertips to obtain their confessions. Their genitals burned. These facts are meticulously documented by the writer, Julfikar Ali Manik, in his courageous book on this so-called trial. These officers despite having been physically brutalized, bravely and defiantly denounced their accusers when they appeared before the Field Court Martial.

Once again it was evident that the Public Prosecutor and investigators involved appeared to have failed in their duty to seriously follow important investigative leads that General Moin had presented in his book.

Journalists like prosecutors share a common goal and that is to investigate the facts. Like in every profession, some do it well and some do it poorly. It must be noted that a diligent, well funded and determined prosecution team, will face many obstacles, and in Bangladesh, perhaps the threat of death from the once powerful men they are investigating. Yet, the recent Chittagong Arms Case shows that there is the capability within the system to rigorously investigate and prosecute serious crimes, committed by high-ranking officials. What it requires is the political will to do so.

Cantonment.

I now report in the pages of *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star* what I told General Moin. I asked him to maintain confidentiality at that stage because I, and others who I did not name, were still looking into these matters. I am also disclosing this information at this time so that Judge Khondokar Hasan Muhammad Firoz, and the Public Prosecutor may be informed, along with the wider public.

The well-informed source to whom I spoke was present at the Chittagong Cantonment when General Abul Manzur was brought into the Cantonment after he had been turned over to the Army by local police forces. My source was present in the area of the Cantonment where Manzur was brought and detained.

Thus, he was able to observe a sequence of events that unfolded before him. He personally knew General Manzur and therefore was able to positively identify Manzur as the person who was being moved to this particular area of the Cantonment, where he was being placed under detention. My informant observed this with his own eyes.

Manzur had cooperatively surrendered to police at the village of Fatikchhari and was later handed over to the Army at Hathazari Thana. This part of the story has been described in great detail by Ziauddin Choudhury, the Deputy Commissioner, in his book. His account is based on first hand discussions with police officers that were present that day at the Hathazari Thana.

My source's account picks up the thread once General Manzur was brought inside the Cantonment. Not long after Manzur was placed in secure custody a senior military officer arrived from Dhaka. It was understood by those present that this senior officer had arrived with orders from Army Headquarters to ostensibly interrogate Manzur.

The identity of this senior officer is known to my source. He immediately recognized this individual because he was well known to my informant and others who were present in the specific area of the Cantonment where Manzur was being held.

My source observed this individual enter the room where Manzur was being kept in solitary confinement. Within minutes of entering the room this senior officer exited the detention area, left the Cantonment and reportedly returned directly to Dhaka. My source was able to enter the room along with others and saw that General Manzur was dead with a single bullet to his head. Manzur had been murdered.

It is my view that this represents new and material information that I am making available to the Court and the Prosecution by publishing this information. Although I know the name of the military officer who my source identified as Manzur's assailant, I am not revealing it here.

It is my view that this is information that my source should provide to the Court and to the Prosecution if a way can be found by the authorities to secure his testimony without putting him in danger. This is a challenge for the government. This individual has been living outside of Bangladesh. Nevertheless, this does not mean he is necessarily out of danger.

What General Ershad and his DGFI Chief, Major-General Mohabat Jan Choudhury unleashed on May 30th had all the characteristics of a classic “False Flag” operation with its attendant disinformation campaign at the heart of the strategy. Blaming Manzur for Zia's death and immediately eliminating him from the scene was the central element to their consolidation of power.

Military” by the filmmaker, Anwar Kabir, a former Chief of Staff of the Bangladesh Army, Lt. General Harun ur Rashid, stated: “I can tell you that the responsibility for the *coups* and killings in the army were part of a strategy to transform the Bangladesh Army into a Pakistani style military and that required the killing of Liberation War veterans.” General Manzur's murder was one of the most important stepping-stones.

MEETING IN BANGKOK

In his book General Moin describes a little known “Court of Inquiry” that took place within the President's Guard Regiment. Four members of the Guard Regiment were killed at the Circuit House on May 30th. In relation to the paying of pensions and other benefits for those killed and injured a special local “Court of Inquiry” was convened. The depositions of two surviving members of the Guard Regiment who were present at the Circuit House when Zia was killed were contained in the final report of this “Court of Inquiry”.

Moin states in his book that the “report deserves serious attention”:

“The report of this “Court of Inquiry” came to my notice as

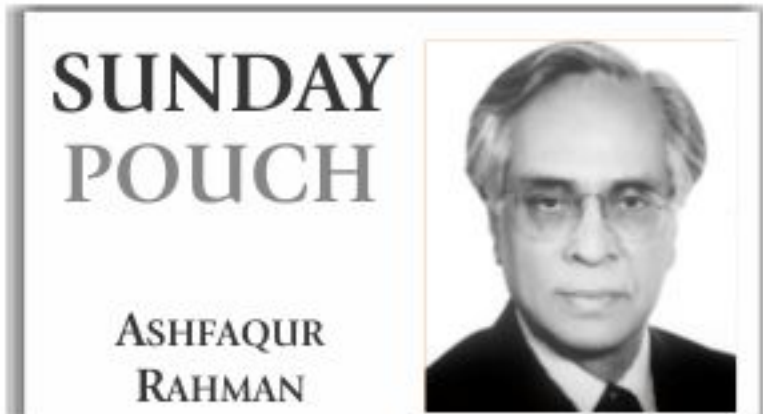
modest flat in Dhaka.

In his book, *Silent Witness*, Moin wrote the following about the meeting in Thailand with Khaled and Muzaffar:

“When I was the Ambassador of Bangladesh in Thailand (1989-93), Major Khaled, an absconding accused in the Zia Murder Case, was also in Bangkok. Another of those who were absconding, the accused Major Muzaffar, was in India. Muzaffar came [to Bangkok] from India and with Khaled saw me in Bangkok. I had an elaborate discussion with them about Zia's murder. I wanted to ascertain the truth about how the murder had taken place and made the effort to find out.”

“On the basis of my personal effort what I learned is briefly as follows. The officers of the Chittagong 24th Division, led by Moti, Mahbub and Khaled, without the knowledge of the GOC General Manzur, planned to abduct Zia from the Circuit House and to bring him to the Chittagong Cantonment. Their purpose was to realize several demands by putting pressure on Zia in this way. They wanted him to remove several corrupt Army officers including the Army Chief, Ershad, and several ministers, including the pro-Pakistan, Shah Aziz,

Iran emerges from its troubles!



THERE were two items of good news about Iran last week. The first was the agreement arrived at between six major world powers upon a timetable and framework for negotiating a comprehensive agreement to ‘end the confrontation over Iran's nuclear programme.’

The other is that Iran and Britain have officially resumed diplomatic relations, which were cut off after students stormed the British embassy in Teheran in 2011.

Both items are likely to bring cheer to Iran and the six major powers -- USA, Britain, France, China, Russia and Germany. Iran, a major regional power in the near east, has been in a serious

political and economic bind ever since the commencement of the Iranian Revolution under the late Imam Khomeini and the US embassy hostage crisis way back in 1979. In its roller coaster political ups and downs, Iran was subjected to various economic sanctions that limited its capacity to use its oil and gas money for economic development. With the six powers accusing Iran of uranium enrichment, which could produce nuclear weapons, it was difficult for any one of them to work out a solution. The US does not have diplomatic relations with Iran. These constraints had inhibited closer interaction on the nuclear issue.

It is only after Mr. Rohani, who is a moderate in his ideas and attitude towards the western powers, was elected as Iranian president that the Iranian conundrum seems to be nearing a solution.

All sides seem to want success in the first round of comprehensive deal. Every side wants to establish a set of agenda for the talks and to set the

priority of the issues without going into substantive discussion. Yet the Americans seem to be determined to have detailed discussion on uranium enrichment, Iran's heavy water reactor projects, its past military research, and its ballistic research programme.

Iran is now subject to a temporary six month deal to freeze its programme. In return, Iran will get ‘modest relief’ from sanctions. There is no doubt that Iran has an enrichment programme. But the western powers do not want Iran to use this to build a nuclear weapon quickly, or even undetected. Iran, because of the crippling western sanctions, has become a poor country. It needs relief to provide welfare for its people, which Rohani has promised. It also wants to ‘preserve’ its ‘right to carry out peaceful nuclear programmes like other parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The world waits with apprehension as to what Iran might do once sanctions are eased. The west will not allow

Iran to pull rabbits out of its hat once things return to normalcy. Technology is one area where Iran will not be allowed a free rein.

Bangladesh and Iran have historical and deep cultural relations. Today, thousands of junior Bangladeshi doctors and workers are employed there. But fresh employment is rare as sanctions have bitten into Iran's marrow. Intellectual exchanges among institutes are also few and far between. India, on the other hand, has many programmes with Iran that allow its students and teachers to work in Iran.

The Iranian currency is also on the wane. It is as weak as ours. Our trade and shipping volume was substantive in the 1980 and 1990s. Now, however, it has decreased. We now have to be aware of the changing sanctions regime. Once it normalises we can start buying more oil and gas from Iran at competitive prices.

The writer is a former Bangladeshi diplomat to Teheran. E-mail: Ashfaq303@gmail.com

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS

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Auction bids

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Casual talk

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Danger

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Seeps

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Not oblivious

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- garde

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Easy gaits

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Old card game

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Easter find

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Sewing aid

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Intensify

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Naturalness

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Have a spat

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Joined the choir

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Available, in a way

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Checks the fit of

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Candle makeup

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Skill

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Fuming

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Crew member

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Creative sort

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Take the wrong way?

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Turn outward

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Jazz legend

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Retreats
- DOWN

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Soothing music style

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Marigold color

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Tabloid staple

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Surprise hit

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Resort spot

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-lane (car-pooler' place)

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Flowering shrub

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Some singers

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Showed nervousness

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14 pounds

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Burmese capital

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Casual tops

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Book unit

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Anonymous

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Sky sights

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Quiver stock

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Pinhead

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Come to

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Heady brews

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Put to use

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Alarm sound

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Gushing review

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Clean Water Act org

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