

Son of Pinak-6 owner held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two days into the arrest of the owner of the sunken Pinak-6, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) detained Omar Faruque Limon, the eldest son of the owner, from his relative's house in the capital's Khilkhet area early yesterday.

Limon, who was said to have been looking after the vessel's overall operation, went into hiding just after the launch capsized.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of Rab-1 detained Limon around 3:30am, said Mufti Mahmud Khan, legal and media wing director of the elite force.

On Wednesday, Rab arrested his father Abu Bakar Siddique from his relative's house in Agrabad Housing area in Chittagong city. A Munshiganj court sent him to jail the following day after fixing Monday for a seven-day remand hearing.

Both Siddique and Limon are among the six accused in a case filed with Louhojang police station soon after the vessel sank in the turbulent waters of Padma on August 4.

The launch, which was on its way to Mawa from Kawrakandi, was carrying more than 200 passengers against a capacity of 85 only.

After an eight-day search, the rescuers on Monday packed up and left, declaring the search operation

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A few sets of signal lights lie abandoned in a ramshackle state beside Hatirjheel-FDC intersection. A number of pricey traffic light posts have been dismantled for the construction of a flyover there and left on the roadsides carelessly, causing a waste of public money.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Police cordon off BNP office

Leaders, activists barred from entry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law enforcers cordoned off BNP headquarters in the capital, stopping its leaders and activists from entering the office yesterday, a day before the BNP-led 20-party alliance's silent processions in protest at Israeli offensive in the Gaza strip.

More than a hundred policemen and plainclothes intelligence officers, equipped with armoured personnel carriers, water canons and prison vans, started gathering in front of the BNP office since 8:00am, a BNP office staff told The Daily Star.

Due to police interception, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and various other front organisations of BNP could not celebrate BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia's birthday programme at the party office, a party insider said adding that they could not take necessary preparations for today's silent processions in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

The BNP and the allies last week decided to bring out silent processions carrying black flags across the country in protest at the killing of Palestinian people in Gaza.

However, BNP Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed, Khaleda Zia's adviser Shamsuzzaman Dudu and two other BNP leaders were allowed to

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Pinak-6 lacked safety gears

FROM PAGE 1

Shipping department Director General Commodore M Zakiur Rahman Bhuiyan admitted that vessel lacked all these.

The vessel, built about 23 years ago in Pirojpur, even lacked life-saving gears like lifebuoys and life jackets. It was required to have as many life jackets as passengers on board, but it did not have a single one.

Mirza Saifur Rahman, the department's vessel surveyor at Dhaka river port, who issued permits to the vessel, said the Pinak-6 was required to

have 23 lifebuoys for 91 people, including 85 approved passengers and six crew members, at a ratio of one for four.

However, records show that he issued the vessel a 45-day temporary permit mentioning the vessel only had 10 lifebuoys.

The surveyor issued the permit without ensuring updated payment of mandatory government revenue, including survey fees, advance income tax, river disaster trust fund and conservancy fees, said sources at the department.

The trust fund is utilised to com-

pensate victims in case of a disaster.

They permitted the vessel to ply illegally in the name of one Md Abu Bakar Siddique of Munshiganj as owner since February 2009, even though the launch was, according to the vessel's registration certificate, owned by one Md Moniruzzaman Khokon and his wife Kohinoor Zaman Kajol.

Records show that the shipping department surveyor had illegally issued dubious "fitness certificates" to the vessel three times, suppressing the declaration of his survey findings about the vessel.

It was required by the Inland Shipping Ordinance to make a declaration to the department's director general.

Saifur, the surveyor in question, said they allowed passenger vessels to ply without a pilot and an engine driver in violation of the law.

"It has been going on like this for a long time," he said, adding, "I would not be able to enforce the law even if I wanted to due to the owners' pressure."

Interestingly, AKM Fakrul Islam, who is also the department's chief surveyor, said, "It is not illegal to

operate a passenger vessel without a pilot and an engine driver, as we had decided several years ago in the face of owners' pressure."

Asked about the legal basis of their decision, Fakrul did not make any response. He, however, said pilots and engine drivers show no interest in working on this category of vessels due to poor pay, which is less than Tk 4,000, and there was no accommodation for them on board.

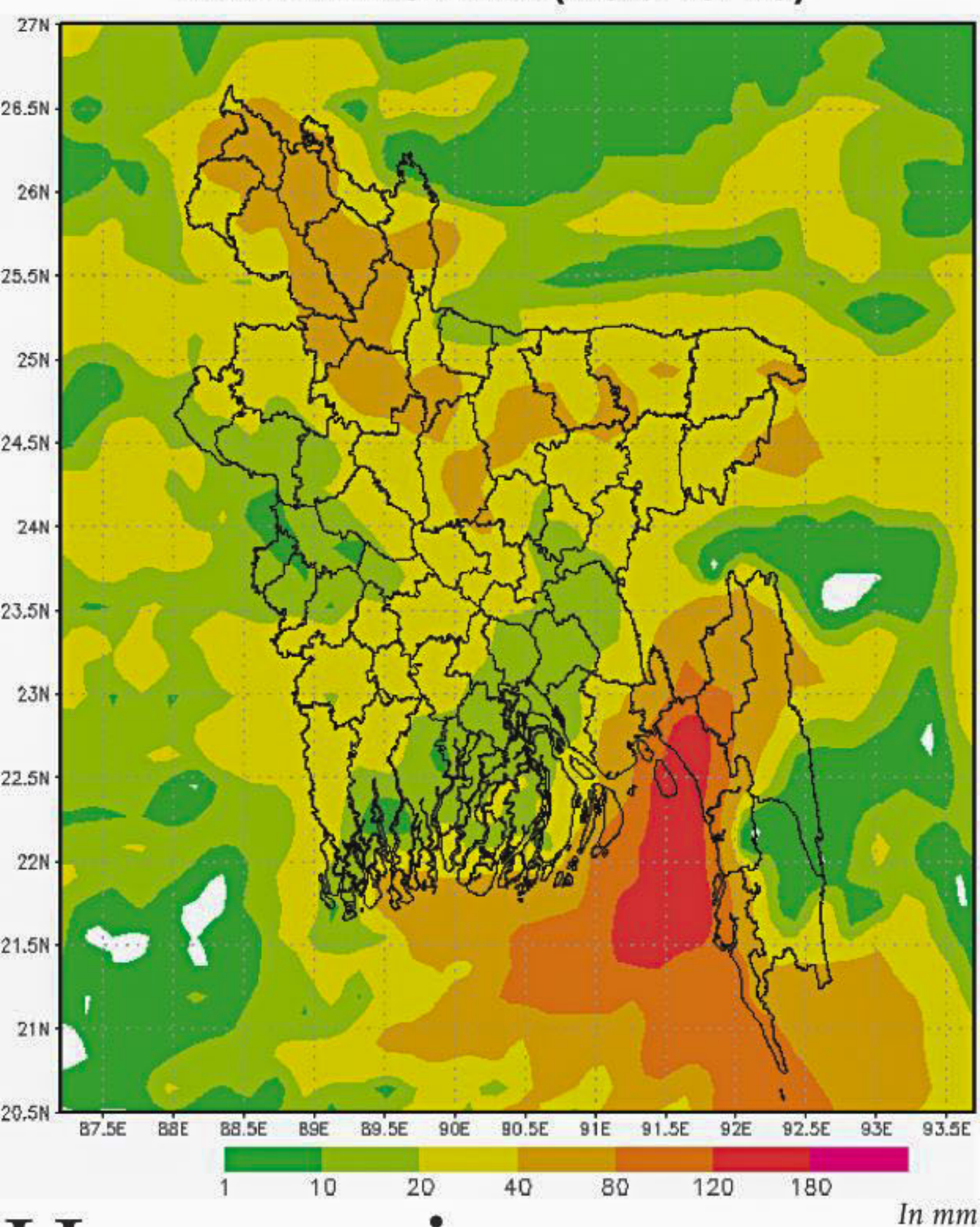
The department's Director General Commodore Zakiur said, "Gross anomalies occurred regard-

ing the issuance of the permit to the Pinak-6."

Asked why they allowed the officer concerned to continue despite obvious gross anomalies and an ongoing enquiry into the Mawa tragedy, Commodore Zakir said, "We have a severe dearth of manpower. How can I run the office if we withdraw or transfer him?"

Saifur, among others, was also held partially responsible for the Meraj-4 disaster in the Meghna in Gazaria of Munshiganj in which 56 people were killed on May 15, said official sources.

RAINFALL CHART (AUG 15-16)



Heavy rain

FROM PAGE 16

The Met office bulletin warned that landslides may occur at places in the hilly areas of Chittagong and Sylhet divisions under the influence of heavy rainfall.

Our Chittagong office reports: Incessant rainfall since Thursday evening has led to water logging in many parts of the port city, causing immense suffering to city residents.

The city's Chowkbazar, Shulakbahar, Kapasgola, Urdu Goli, Katalganj, Badurtola, Bakalia, Bhandarila, Navy Colony, East Katgar, Agrabad Excess Road, Halishahar, Muradpur intersection and Sholoshahar Gate Number-2 intersection areas went under knee-deep to waist-deep water due to rains.

Cheikh Farid Ahmed of Chittagong Met office said downpours might continue in the Chittagong region till the next 24 hours as monsoon was still active there. The Chittagong river port has been asked to hoist signal number two.

Yesterday's highest rainfall was recorded in Teknaf, which was 177 millimetre in 15 hours till 3:00pm.

Visiting different areas in the port city in the morning, The Daily Star found that water had entered into houses, shops and other establish-

ments.

Sabitri Das and her two children were waiting on KB Aman Ali Road. "We are going to our village home in Patiya upazila to attend a family programme. We've been waiting here for a CNG-run auto-rickshaw for about two hours, but in vain."

Traffic was very thin on roads as only a few motorised vehicles plied the submerged streets. Commuters had to wait for long hours to catch a vehicle to reach their destinations.

In Feni, the flood protection embankment along the Muhuri and Kohuya rivers was breached on Thursday night and yesterday morning at Uttar Sripur, Daulatpur and Bairagypur in Phulgazi, reports our correspondent.

A few thousand people have been marooned in the affected 15 villages of the upazila.

The main road of Phulgazi and the Feni-Parashuram road went under two-foot deep water, said Mahidur Rahman, the upazila nirbahi officer.

The Teesta at Dalia, the Khowai in Habiganj and at Ballah were flowing above their danger levels by 23cm, 120cm and 23cm while the Someswari at Durgapur, Muhuri at Parashuram and Halda at Narayanhat were flowing above their danger levels by 22cm, 25cm and 55cm.

How Gen Zia took the helm of army

FROM PAGE 1

entering the chief of [army] staff's office," Zia told Hamid in a cheerful mood.

Hamid was stunned. Zia smiled and waved a piece of paper in front of Hamid. "Sit down, read it."

Hamid went through the paper quickly. It was an official letter issued by the defence ministry. Zia had been appointed army chief. Hamid got up from his chair, embraced Zia and congratulated him.

"Hamid, tell me what to do now."

"Did Shafiullah [chief of army staff] get any letter? Does he know it?" asked Hamid.

Zia replied: "No, nobody knows as yet."

"Then a copy must go to him. He may take a few days to hand over [command] to you. Now keep quiet," Hamid suggested.

"Shut up, I will take over tomorrow."

Hamid tried to make Zia understand that he had not staged any coup to grab the office of army chief. The government made the appointment and issued the official letter.

"You can't understand all these. He [Shafiullah] is a very clever person. You order all officers and soldiers of all units under Dhaka station to gather at a large field," Zia asked the station commander.

Hamid understood that Zia did not want to wait any more. After some argument, Hamid said: "All the units of Dhaka station are not under my command. It will be better if you summon the log area commander and give him the order."

Zia agreed with the proposal. Without wasting time, Zia phoned Brigadier Mashrul Haq, who was the acting log area commander, asking him to rush to his office immediately.

Hamid left Zia's office for his own one. On the way, he saw Mashrul in his car moving towards Zia's office at the headquarters.

A tense situation prevailed in Dhaka Cantonment the next morning. Officers and soldiers gathered at the signal mess ground. Nobody had any idea of what was going to happen.

At 7:30 in the morning, deputy chief of army staff Gen Zia appeared on the dais. Everyone paid attention to him.

Gen Zia roared: "From today, I am chief of army staff. All of you maintain discipline. Otherwise stern punitive action will be taken."

Making the announcement, Zia left the dais quickly, boarded his car and left the venue. Everyone was surprised and stared at one another. Hamid smiled.

Army chief General KM Shafiullah was in the dark about all these things.

He was struggling helplessly to control the fast deteriorating situation in the army that had developed after the August 15 coup. He was yet to get any letter on his removal as chief of army staff.

Shafiullah called Hamid. "Hamid, what's going on? Who is giving all these orders? Who ordered the convening of the morning meeting of officers and soldiers?"

Hamid, who was also a course mate of Shafiullah, tried to convince him to keep patience. Shafiullah felt disturbed and insulted. But he accepted the situation due to the changing circumstances. For his loyalty to Bangabandhu, he was forced to leave the post of army chief with humiliation. From the next day, he stopped going to his office.

Khondokar Moshtaque Ahmed's government, installed by the disgruntled officers who assassinated Bangabandhu and most of his family members, thus in a major move replaced Shafiullah with Zia. The important change was made effective all of a sudden.

Everyone in the army understood that this happened under the pressure of two disgruntled majors -- Faruk and Rashid -- who masterminded the August 15 changeover.

Some changes took place very fast following the August 15 coup. Within a few days both Major Faruk and Major Rashid became Lt Colonels and continued to be in the Bangabhaban. They were mingling with politicians there. They were participating in discussions on policy.

In brief, they were running the government led by President Moshtaque, who was only a puppet. Even some senior army officers made efforts to maintain good relations with Faruk and Rashid.

This caused irritation and unease in the army, particularly among many officers at the army headquarters and 46 Infantry Brigade in Dhaka Cantonment. Faruk and Rashid were officers of units under the command of 46 Brigade and Col Shafayat Jamil was its commander. This also annoyed Shafayat Jamil.

In such a situation, Brigadier General Khaled Mosharraf, then chief of general staff, and Shafayat Jamil started putting pressure on Gen Zia to rein in the two rebellious army officers at the Bangabhaban and to restore the chain of command in the army. But he refrained from taking any action.

Instead, Zia was trying to consolidate his own position in the army. He did not have good relations with Gen Khaled Mosharraf. He considered Khaled as a threat to his new office,

and so was suffering from a sense of insecurity. At one point, Zia shared this feeling with Major General Moinul Hossain Chowdhury, who was acting as the adjutant general of army then.

There were reasons for Zia's insecurity. General Osmani, who had been made defence adviser to Moshtaque, was no admirer of Zia. Khaled Mosharraf was Osmani's choice as chief of army staff.

But Moshtaque made Zia army chief under pressure from Faruk, Rashid and their collaborators. Osmani had no influence in the appointment of the new army chief.

Being the chief of army staff, Zia moved fast to consolidate his position in the force. But he was not much satisfied with the power of the army chief. He focused on the power of the chief martial law administrator (CMLA).

At the end of November, Gen Zia thought it was not wise to allow President Justice Sayem to continue as the CMLA. He planned to grab the post of the CMLA.

Flanked by some top army officers including Gen Ershad, Gen Manzur, Gen Mir Shawkat, and the chiefs of navy and air force staff, Zia one afternoon met the president at the Bangabhaban to push his agenda. But Justice Sayem refused Zia's request for making him the CMLA.

As Zia kept the pressure on Justice Sayem, the president at one stage asked air force chief AG Mahmud: "Tell me if it's right that I should surrender the authority of the CMLA to this man [Zia]."

The air chief felt embarrassed. Though he had respect for Justice Sayem, he was unable to oppose Zia. "Sir, I'm very sorry. I'm not in a position to influence the course of events in any way. I must only support what he [Zia] says."

Justice Abdus Sattar, special assistant to the president, also persuaded Sayem to relinquish the power of the CMLA to Zia.

Finally around 1:00am, President Sayem gave in and signed a proclamation making Zia the new CMLA.

After grabbing the power of the CMLA, Zia had taken over full control of the Sayem government. Later, he also captured the office of president on April 21, 1977 by forcing Justice Sayem to step down.

ZIA HAD LINKS WITH KILLERS?

There were some incidents which showed close links between Gen Zia and some of the disgruntled army officers who staged the August 15 heinous coup.

For instance, on August 15, armed with a sten gun Major Dalim stormed

into the office of Gen Shafiullah to take him to the radio station to announce his support for the changeover.

Dalim brought Shafiullah out of his office at gunpoint. Zia, who was in Shafiullah's room, was walking behind Dalim. Shafiullah got into his own car.

Looking at Dalim, a smiling Zia said: "Come on Dalim, in my car."

"No, sir, I don't go in a general's car," replied Dalim, and got into his own jeep.

Zia's car initially followed Dalim's one. But at one stage, Zia's car changed direction and went somewhere else.

Another indication of Zia's links with Bangabandhu's killers came when suddenly Major Dalim and Major Noor, another killer of Bangabandhu, started appearing at the tennis court in the cantonment where senior army officers, including Gen Shafiullah, used to play tennis.

One day Shafiullah asked Hamid about it. "Why did junior officers come here to play? Ask them not to come here."

Hamid summoned Major Noor and enquired: "Who gave you permission to come here to play tennis?"

In response, Noor said Gen Zia had given them permission. Hamid informed Shafiullah about it. Shafiullah was annoyed.

There is another instance of the links. One evening in 1975, Gen Moinul, who was leaving Zia's home after chatting with him found Major Faruk standing in front of Zia's residence. Enquired by Moinul about the reason, Faruk replied he had come there to meet Zia.

Next day while talking to Zia Gen Moin raised the issue. Zia said Faruk had come and met him.

Towards the end of September 1975, the situation turned more volatile. A young infantry officer was caught trying to subvert some of the Lancers engaged in guarding the Bangabhaban. Major Rashid interrogated the officer and found that he was a follower of Khaled Mosharraf and Shafayat Jamil.

Rashid informed Gen Zia about the matter and requested him to take appropriate action.

"Rashid, don't you worry. If anything happens, it will be over my dead body," Zia assured Rashid.

[The report is prepared based on the books, "Silent Witness of a General", by Maj Gen (ret'd) Moinul Hossain Chowdhury, "Testimony of a Soldier" by Brig Gen (ret'd) Shamsuddin Ahmed, "Three Army Coups and Some Untold Tales" by Lt Col (ret'd) MA Hamid and Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood by Anthony Mascarenhas.]