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4 May 2016

BGD105504.E

Bangladesh: the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), including structure, leaders, activities; membership cards and confirmation letters, and activities; treatment of members by authorities (2014-April 2016)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

The LDP was formed in 2006 by former leaders of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) who separated from the BNP (*PHW* 2015, 119; Jahan Aug. 2014, 35; *Dhaka Tribune* 8 June 2015). For information on the BNP, including treatment of members, please see Response to Information Request BGD105262.

Sources report that the following people were involved in founding LDP:

- Oli Ahmed (*Dhaka Tribune* 8 June 2015; *PHW* 2015, 119), a BNP "dissident" (*ibid.*);
- Sheikh Razzak Ali (*Dhaka Tribune* 8 June 2015);
- AQM Chowdhury, former President of Bangladesh (*PHW* 2015, 119).

According to its website, the LDP's party platform includes a focus on the following dimensions:

- Anti-corruption and democratic governance (including electoral reform);
- A "welfare oriented and humane" system of economic development;
- Educational reform;
- Peaceful foreign policy, enhancing the "friendship and good-will with neighbouring countries";
- The "suppression" of national and international terrorism;
- Human rights promotion ("subject to legal rules and obligations");
- The creation of a "free and objective" media policy;

- Universal access to medical care and housing;
- Political access for indigenous communities and minorities;
- Addressing environmental issues (LDP n.d.a).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of South Asian studies at the University of Oslo who has studied Bangladeshi politics for many years, stated that "'Liberal Democratic' is more a name than an agenda," noting that despite its name, the LDP "does not reflect liberal democratic values in any real sense" (18 Apr. 2016). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a senior researcher with the Christian Michelsen Institute (CMI), a development research institute addressing "issues that shape global development," based in Norway (CMI n.d.), who has researched Bangladeshi politics, characterized the LDP as a "small, moderate and *not* [sic] particularly Islamist opposition party" (Senior Researcher 15 Apr. 2016).

1.1 Political Representation and Regional Support

Sources indicate that the LDP is part of a multi-party alliance led by the BNP (*PHW* 2015, 119; *The Independent* 27 Oct. 2015; Senior Researcher 15 Apr. 2016), which boycotted the 2014 elections due to a disagreement with the ruling party over the reinstatement of a "caretaker government" to oversee the elections (*PHW* 2015, 118). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a PhD candidate at the University of Ottawa's School of International Development and Global Studies who has several years of experience conducting research on Bangladesh, and who interviewed a representative of the LDP while collecting information for this report, noted that the LDP is part of the BNP-led alliance formed in 2012 "to strengthen the anti-government movement" (PhD Candidate 19 Apr. 2016). The *Political Handbook of the World (PHW) 2015* indicates that the LDP won one parliamentary seat in the 2008 election, but that the party participated in the opposition boycott of the 2014 elections (*PHW* 2015, 119). Similarly, the Professor of South Asian studies stated that to his knowledge, only one person was ever elected to parliament "on an LDP platform" in 2008 and that the party joined the BNP-led alliance boycott of the 2014 election (Professor 18 Apr. 2016).

The Senior Researcher noted that the LDP has "a stronghold" in Chittagong (15 Apr. 2016). According to the PhD Candidate, the party has a higher visibility in Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi; however the party is "not active" in other districts (19 Apr. 2016). The Professor indicated that the LDP is active in Dhaka and Chittagong, but also that the party has "virtually no grass-roots organization and no street presence," adding that "their mob is limited in size, and probably hired or borrowed from allies" (Professor 18 Apr. 2016).

Sources indicate that the LDP did not submit nominations for the 31 March 2016 Union Parishad elections for 651 Union Parishads [1] (*The New Nation* 6 Mar. 2016; *The Independent* 3 Mar. 2016). According to the Senior Researcher, the LDP nominated only one mayoral candidate for the 2016 local elections (15 Apr. 2016). Other sources similarly indicate that when the BNP-led alliance nominated candidates for the mayoral elections of December 2016, the alliance left only one municipality for the LDP (*Dhaka Tribune* 20 Dec. 2015; *The New Nation* 4 Dec. 2015).

2. Leadership

Sources indicate that Oli Ahmed [Ahmad] is the President (LDP n.d.c) or Chair of the LDP (*PHW* 2015, 119). The Professor notes that the LDP is "largely a one-man party" of Colonel Oli Ahmed (also known as Dr. Oli) who was a founding member of the BNP and had close ties to the BNP leadership (Professor 18 April 2016). *PHW* 2015 also indicates that Redwan Ahmed is the LDP's Secretary General (*PHW* 2015, 119). A list of other members of the LDP's national executive committee according to the LDP's website is attached to this response.

Media sources also state that the following individuals occupy leadership positions within the LDP:

- Sadat Ahmed is the "senior joint convener," Jahirul Islam is "joint convener" and Khaled Saifullah is the "Dhaka city unit president" of the LDP (*The Daily Frontier* 7 Feb. 2014).
- Kafil Uddin is the "LDP south district president" (*Dhaka Tribune* 4 Jan. 2016).
- M Najimuddin Al Azad, a former minister under military dictator HM Ershad, heads a faction of the LDP (BDNews24 20 Nov. 2015).

3. Structure

According to information provided by the PhD candidate, the LDP has a national central committee of 42 members, and has district committees in 35 of the 64 districts in Bangladesh, with each district committee consisting of 101 members (PhD Candidate 19 April 2016). However, the University of Oslo Professor stated that similar to all mainstream political parties in Bangladesh, the LDP is a "one-man party," and gave the view that although they may have a formal organizational structure, as required by law, formal internal procedures are of "no importance, as the party belongs to Oli, and what he says goes" (Professor 18 Apr. 2016). Similarly, the Senior Researcher indicated that although the LDP has an elaborate structure on paper, in reality it consists of a "very small" group of "loosely organized" individuals (Senior Researcher 15 Apr. 2016). The same source further noted that the party is "not an internally democratic party" (ibid.).

4. Membership

According to the Professor of South Asian studies, it is difficult to get a sense of the size of the LDP, as political parties in Bangladesh do not maintain membership lists (Professor 18 Apr. 2015). The same source further indicated that the number of members is "probably very negligible" and he estimated that the party has "no more than a few hundred thousand supporters" in a country of 160 million inhabitants (ibid.). According to the Senior Researcher, it is "impossible" to assess support for the LDP throughout Bangladesh because of the 2014 election boycott, but that at the national level it is "a small and insignificant party" (Senior Researcher 15 Apr. 2016). The same source expressed the opinion that there are probably only a few thousand active members (ibid.). The PhD candidate similarly estimated that based on numbers of district committees and committee membership, the LDP likely has "less than 5000 members" (PhD Candidate 19 Apr. 2016). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4.1 Membership Procedures and Documents

The LDP's website includes a membership application form, which indicates that prospective party members must provide their name, gender, date of birth, country, district, address, and mobile number when registering (LDP n.d.a). The same web membership application form requires prospective members to declare that they are citizens of Bangladesh, are over the age of 18, are not working as a government employee, are not a member of another political party or an organization that conflicts in views with the LDP, have not been convicted of criminal offences "involving moral turpitude," and support the party's vision (ibid.). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the President of the LDP noted that potential members are invited to join via Facebook or their website, and that members can apply by visiting the LDP office (LDP 20 April 2016). The same source further noted that membership is open to all Bangladeshi citizens who have "adequate educational qualifications and acceptability among the people in their area," and face no criminal or corruption cases against them (ibid.). According to

the LDP President, prospective members must fill out the membership form, and he or she will be informed by telephone of the acceptance of the membership; the party has no funds to facilitate other processes for accepting or confirming membership (ibid.).

The Professor indicated that political parties in Bangladesh do not follow registration formalities and do not issue membership cards, fees or lists; and that in the source's opinion, "the LDP is probably no exception" (Professor 18 April 2016). According to the Senior Researcher, the party "probably" does not have membership fees, formal membership registration, or membership cards (Senior Researcher 15 April 2016). The PhD candidate also stated that LDP members do not receive membership cards (PhD Candidate 19 April 2016). However, the same source indicated that the party does issue receipts for financial contributions; the central committee also issues approval letters to each district committee, reportedly listing the names of members (ibid.). Corroborating and further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Information on membership confirmation letters could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

5. Activities

Information provided by the PhD Candidate indicated that the LDP's activities include making statements to the Bangladeshi media, participating in televised talk shows, and the recruitment of new members (PhD Candidate 19 April 2016). The same source also noted that the LDP tries to be "in the good book of the government" and has not engaged in anti-government public demonstrations "for a year" (ibid.). Similarly, the Professor stated that the LDP is keeping a low profile for the time being, noting that the LDP's activities have been limited to speeches and press conferences, mostly presided over by [party president] Oli (Professor 18 April 2016).

Sources report on the following events and activities involving the LDP and its leaders:

- On 7 February 2014, the LDP organized a discussion at a press club, where Oli Ahmad called for renewed elections, saying that the 5 January 2014 election had been 'farical;' he accused the sitting government of corruption, political repression and "amassing wealth illegally" (*The Daily Frontier* 7 Feb. 2014);
- On 1 July 2015, the LDP hosted an Iftar [2] party in a convention centre in Dhaka, which was attended by the BNP chairperson (UNB 2 July 2015; *The Financial Express* 1 July 2015);
- On 8 July 2015, the LDP hosted an Iftar party at the Ladies Club in Dhaka where BNP leader Khaleda gave a speech (*The New Nation* 9 July 2014; *The Financial Express* 8 July 2014);
- On 27 October 2015, the inaugural session of the 4th National Convention of the LDP was held in Dhaka, where Oli Ahmed announced that the LDP would participate independently in the "upcoming" municipal and Union Parishad elections (*The New Nation* 27 Oct. 2015);
- On 4 January 2016, the LDP leader Oli held a press conference at his residence in Laldighu regarding the mayoral elections held on 30 December 2015, where he accused the ruling party of ballot stuffing (*Dhaka Tribune* 4 Jan. 2016);
- On 26 March 2016, Oli Ahmed laid wreaths at the national mausoleum and spoke to reporters where he stated that "democracy has no value in this country" (*Daily Sun* 26 Mar. 2016).

6. Treatment by Authorities

Without providing further details, the president of the LDP stated that the government engages in harassment, repression and revenge against the leaders and workers of political parties who do not support their activities (LDP 20 Apr. 2016). He further indicated that "6 false cases have been filed" against him, as well as approximately 50 against other party affiliates (ibid.). The Professor similarly indicated that in Bangladesh authorities increasingly use "harsh measures," including abuse and harassment against opposition parties (Professor 18 Apr. 2016). The source further stated that although the LDP, as a "minuscule party," is less likely to be a concern for the ruling party, members are "likely" to receive the same treatment as members of other opposition parties "if and when they take part in political programmes" (ibid.). According to the Senior Researcher, the Awami League government is "increasingly using imprisonment, detention without trial, and show trials to silence the opposition," and expressed the opinion that since the BNP has been the target of political violence, the LDP likely has suffered the same (Senior Researcher 15 Apr. 2015). Information on instances of arrest or violence and other treatment of LDP members by authorities from 2014-2016, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the PhD Candidate, law enforcement agencies filed a case against the LDPs Joint Secretary General in March 2015 on allegations of promoting violence (PhD Candidate 19 Apr. 2016). The same source notes that he was not arrested and received bail from court (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

A *Financial Express* article reports that the government's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) served a notice to Oli Ahmed requesting him to submit information about his property, quoting an ACC official as stating that a "primary investigation found that the LDP chief amassed a big property illegally" (*The Financial Express* 26 Sept. 2014). Sources further indicate that in January 2015, the ACC interrogated Oli for illegally obtained wealth (*Dhaka Tribune* 2 Jan. 2015; *The Financial Express* 2 Jan. 2015). *The Financial Express* indicates that the LDP leader denied the allegations both in September 2014 (26 Sept. 2014) and after the interrogation in January 2015 (2 Jan 2015).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] A report for the Chronic Poverty Research Centre explains that the Union Parishad is the lowest tier of local government (Hossain Dec. 2007, 7). According to a BDNews24 article, there are 4500 Union Parishads in Bangladesh, 4,279 of which will hold elections in six phases from March through June 2016 (BDNews24 11 Feb. 2016).

[2] According to the Oxford Dictionary, this is "the meal eaten by Muslims after sunset during Ramadan" (Oxford Dictionary n.d.).

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Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; Asia Foundation; Asian Human Rights Commission; Asia Society; Asia Times; Bangladesh – Local Government Division, Police; *The Bangladesh Chronicle*; *The Bangladesh Sun*; *The Bangladesh Today*; BBC; Canada – Public Safety Canada; Channel News Asia; Country of Origin Research and Information; *Dhaka Courier*; *The Daily Star*; ecoi.net; *The Economist*; Fédération internationale des droits humains; Freedom House; *The Guardian*; Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; IRIN News; *Jane's Intelligence Review*; News from Bangladesh; Norway – Landinfo; Odhikar; PrimeNews; Radio France internationale; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Transparency International; UN – UN Development Programme, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Refworld, Reliefweb; US – Department of State.

Attachment

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). N.d. "[National Executive Committee](#)." [Accessed 8 Apr. 2016]

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