

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Questions

- 1. What is the current status and level of activity – formal and informal – of the political parties?**
- 2. In particular, what is the current situation of the Awami League and the BNP and their leaders, national and local?**
- 3. What is the post's prognosis for the evolution of the situation over the next 12-24 months?**
- 4. What are the roles presently of the police and the army?**
- 5. What is the current level of political violence, including retaliation against opponents?**
- 6. Who is in charge?**

RESPONSE

- 1. What is the current status and level of activity – formal and informal – of the political parties?**

On 3 May 2007 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) provided the following advice:

At the time of writing, all political activity is banned under the prevailing State of Emergency. The Caretaker Government has indicated it may partially lift the ban in May 2007 but whether this transpires remains to be seen. Many leaders and senior officials of the political parties have been arrested and corruption charges are being prepared against them. The parties themselves remain extant, although factionalised and the question of their future leadership remains unclear.

The Caretaker Government has announced its intention to hold elections in late 2008 but under new electoral laws which are still being framed, and are not expected to be announced until possibly June or July 2007. It is anticipated that the Election Commission will introduce electoral laws requiring the registration of all political parties, requiring greater transparency

of political party finances, and banning those who have been convicted on corruption charges from running for public office.

Under the State of Emergency, all power is vested in the Caretaker Government, which is backed by the military. Political persecution of opponents has been practised by both the BNP and the Awami League (AL) in the past but this has ceased under the State of Emergency, which has deprived all parties of the machinery of state which they used corruptly for political persecution and personal vendettas conducted in the name of politics.

The student wings of all the political parties face the prospect of an outright ban on their activities (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report 636: RRT Information Request: BGD31628*, 3 May – Attachment 1; for the RRT Country Research Email which elicited this response, see: RRT Country Research 2007, Email to DFAT: ‘Country Information Request – BGD31628’, 4 April – Attachment 2).

2. In particular, what is the current situation of the Awami League and the BNP and their leaders, national and local?

On 3 May 2007 DFAT provided the following advice:

The parties themselves remain in a state of flux, uncertain about the future political landscape in Bangladesh and their role in it, and the longer-term agenda of the military. The future of the party’s leaders, Sheikh Hasina (AL) and Khaleda Zia (BNP), and the levels of patronage they commanded down through the levels of their parties, also remains unclear at this stage (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report 636: RRT Information Request: BGD31628*, 3 May – Attachment 1; for the RRT Country Research Email which elicited this response, see: RRT Country Research 2007, Email to DFAT: ‘Country Information Request – BGD31628’, 4 April – Attachment 2).

3. What is the post’s prognosis for the evolution of the situation over the next 12-24 months?

On 3 May 2007 DFAT provided the following advice:

The prognosis for the evolution of the situation over the next 1-2 years is also unclear. Given the uncertainty about the future of the parties, and their leaders, and the fact that events are still unfolding, this could well remain the situation for some time. The Caretaker Government has announced plans to hold elections towards the end of 2008. Both parties have publicly acknowledged they recognise they need to reform themselves but their willingness and commitment to doing so is likely to depend on the forthcoming electoral laws and the fates of their senior leaders and officials presently facing corruption charges.

The Caretaker Government is currently working on an agencies of good governance overhaul, including separating the executive from the judiciary, giving teeth to the Anti-Corruption Commission, reforming the Public Service Commission, and establishing a National Human Rights Commission. If these aims can be achieved, they would provide the basis for additional checks and balances in a system which has traditionally had a “winner takes all” mentality (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report 636: RRT Information Request: BGD31628*, 3 May – Attachment 1; for the RRT Country Research Email which elicited this response, see: RRT Country Research 2007, Email to DFAT: ‘Country Information Request – BGD31628’, 4 April – Attachment 2).

4. What are the roles presently of the police and the army?

On 3 May 2007 DFAT provided the following advice:

The disciplined services have provided full backing to the Caretaker Government and its objectives. They have also been actively pursuing a clean out of the corruption that has bedevilled Bangladesh (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report 636: RRT Information Request: BGD31628*, 3 May – Attachment 1; for the RRT Country Research Email which elicited this response, see: RRT Country Research 2007, Email to DFAT: ‘Country Information Request – BGD31628’, 4 April – Attachment 2).

5. What is the current level of political violence, including retaliation against opponents?

On 3 May 2007 DFAT provided the following advice:

Politically motivated violence has all but disappeared under the Caretaker Government. A survey of popular attitudes conducted recently by The Asia Foundation in all districts of Bangladesh found that levels of criminality, particularly extortion which was often conducted with impunity by politically-connected individuals, have fallen dramatically, with former practitioners either arrested, detained, fled or gone underground. Much of the so-called political violence was common criminality being conducted under the guise of politics.

Some salient results from the surveys conducted in February and March as follows:

- About 60 percent of respondents noted improved law and order was the predominant aspect of the current situation that provided assurances to the community;
- Almost 95 percent of respondents noted the virtual disappearance of politically patronised criminals in the community since the Caretaker Government assumed power, while 90 percent reported a decline in the incidence of criminal activities;
- Approximately 80 percent of respondents reported a considerable improvement in the behaviour and practice of the police (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report 636: RRT Information Request: BGD31628*, 3 May – Attachment 1; for the RRT Country Research Email which elicited this response, see: RRT Country Research 2007, Email to DFAT: ‘Country Information Request – BGD31628’, 4 April – Attachment 2).

6. Who is in charge?

On 3 May 2007 DFAT provided the following advice:

The Caretaker Government is presently running Bangladesh under the relevant provisions of the Constitution. It is being supported by the disciplined services (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report 636: RRT Information Request: BGD31628*, 3 May – Attachment 1; for the RRT Country Research Email which elicited this response, see: RRT Country Research 2007, Email to DFAT: ‘Country Information Request – BGD31628’, 4 April – Attachment 2).

List of Sources Consulted

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

List of Attachments

1. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report 636: RRT Information Request: BGD31628*, 3 May.

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2. RRT Country Research 2007, Email to DFAT: 'Country Information Request – BGD31628', 4 April.