Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: BGD33475
Country: Bangladesh
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Keywords: Bangladesh – Advice from DFAT – Current treatment of BNP members – Checks on departure from Dhaka's Zia International Airport.

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Questions
Please seek an update from DFAT (further to information provided in DFAT Report No. 729 of 7 November 2007) with respect to:
1. the situation regarding the detention of BNP members, in the context of the continuing state of emergency in Bangladesh; and
2. whether a person who is the subject of an arrest warrant for offences under the Special Powers Act 1974 would have been able to receive an immigration exit stamp in their passport and legally depart Bangladesh through Dhaka's international airport in February 2008.

RESPONSE

A request for information regarding the above questions was sent to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) on 18 June 2008 (RRT Research & Information 2008, *RRT Country Information Request – BGD33475*, 18 June – Attachment 1).

DFAT's reply, received on 17 July 2008, provided the following details:

> *A. Please provide an update on the situation regarding the detention of BNP members, in the context of the continuing state of emergency in Bangladesh.*
>
> A number of senior members and law-makers from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) still remain in jail after being arrested as part of the current broad anti-corruption drive of the Caretaker Government. High profile members include the former Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia (BNP Chairperson), and her two sons, Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman.
>
> In mid-May, the Dhaka court issued arrest warrants against another twelve senior BNP members accused in a graft case that included former Finance Minister, M Saifur Rahman, a

senior leader of the pro-reform faction of the BNP; expelled BNP Secretary General, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan; and other ex-ministers including Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, MK Anwar, and M Shamsul Islam. Mr Bhuiyan, Mr Anwar, and Mr Islam are currently in jail while Mr Rahman and Mr Chowdhury remain abroad having absconded before they could be detained.

A fresh round of mass arrests began at the end of May 2008. The timing was interesting, occurring just after the two major political parties (BNP and AL) threatened to boycott dialogue sessions with the Caretaker Government unless their leaders were freed. Open source material suggested that over 25,000 people were arrested in a month long period including petty criminals, grassroots leaders and activists of different political parties including the BNP, all of whom were alleged to be involved in criminal activity regardless of their political affiliation.

B. Please advise whether a person who is the subject of an arrest warrant for offences under the Special Powers Act 1974 would have been able to receive an immigration exit stamp in their passport and legally depart Bangladesh through Dhaka's international airport in February 2008.

Most departure points in Bangladesh are not sufficiently networked for electronic movement records. However, Zia International Airport has connectivity and it would be difficult for a person who is the subject of an arrest warrant to legally depart Bangladesh through this exit point.

Please also refer to responses to RRT Requests BGD31628, BGD32419, and BGD32429 for further information regarding the above queries (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2008, *DFAT Report: 850 – RRT Information Request BGD33475*, 17 July – Attachment 2).

List of Attachments

1. RRT Research & Information 2008, *RRT Country Information Request – BGD33475*, 18 June.

2. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2008, *DFAT Report: 850 – RRT Information Request BGD33475*, 17 July.