

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

21 November 2012

BGD104178.E

Bangladesh: Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), including its leaders, factions, associate organizations and activities; treatment of members and supporters by authorities (2007-September 2012)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Bangladesh Nationalist Party

1.1 General Information

Sources describe the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Dal, BNP) as one of the main political parties in Bangladesh and as a centre-right party (BBC 10 July 2012; US 6 Mar. 2012). The official website of the BNP states that the party "has been opposed to communism and socialism since its inception and advocates vigorous free market policies" (BNP 25 Dec. 2011). The BNP website also states that the party "is more popular among the country's business class, military, and conservatives" (ibid.).

In addition, sources indicate that the party promotes Islamism in Bangladesh (ibid.; *Jane's Intelligence Review* 12 Feb. 2009; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 45). According to *Political Parties of the World*, the BNP was first elected to government in 1979, on a platform of "inscribing Islam into the constitution and pursuing social justice rather than socialism" (ibid.). The BNP's website states that "[t]he [p]arty believes that Islam is an integral part of the socio-cultural life of Bangladesh, and favo[u]rs Islamic principles as well as cultural views" (BNP 25 Dec. 2011). The BNP has also formed alliances with Islamic parties within Bangladesh (BBC 10 July 2012; *PHW* 2012, 109, 116; *Jane's Intelligence Review* 12 Feb. 2009). The BNP's allies include the the Jamaat Islami and the Islami Oikya Jote (Islamic Unity Front) (ibid.; *PHW* 2012, 109, 116).

The party has also reportedly been accused of having links with Islamist militants (*Jane's Intelligence Review* 12 Feb. 2009; SATP [2012]; BBC 10 July 2012). The BBC indicates that the Awami League (AL) leader, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, accused the BNP of being linked to "outlawed Islamist groups" who were reportedly responsible for bomb attacks in 2007 (ibid.). According to *Jane's Intelligence Review*, while in power (2001-2006), the BNP and its allies were criticized for their "tacit support of radical Islamist groups such as the Jamaat ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh," which was reportedly behind bomb attacks in 2005 (12 Feb. 2009). The South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), a website dedicated to security issues maintained by the Institute for Conflict Management, an NGO based in India (SATP n.d.), similarly states that while the BNP was in power, "Bangladesh ... had been in focus for harbouring various Islamist extremist and terrorist elements" (ibid. [2012]).

The BNP's main opponent within Bangladesh politics is the AL (BBC 10 July 2012; BNP 25 Dec. 2011; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 43). Sources indicate that this rivalry, personified by the respective leaders of the parties, Begum Khaleda Zia Rahman of the BNP and Sheikh Hasina of the AL, has been an ongoing factor in Bangladesh politics for decades (BBC 10 July 2012; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 43). After the 2008 election, Sheikh Hasina took office as prime minister of the country while Khaleda Zia became leader of the opposition (US 24 May 2012, 22; Freedom House 2012).

1.2 Leaders

The BNP was formed in 1978 under the leadership of General Ziaur (Zia) Rahman, who was president of the country at the same time (BNP 25 Dec. 2011; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 45).

According to *Political Parties of the World*, the BNP has been led by Begum Khaleda Zia Rahman since January 1984 (2009, 45). Khaleda Zia is the widow of General Ziaur, who was assassinated in 1981 (*PHW* 2012, 108; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 45). Khaleda Zia was prime minister of Bangladesh from 1991 to 1996 and from 2001 to 2006 (BBC 10 July 2012; *PHW* 2012, 109, 113; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 43, 45-46). According to *Political Handbook of the World (PHW)*, she was re-elected chair of the BNP in December 2009 (2012, 113).

Sources indicate that Tarique Rahman, the son of Khaleda Zia, is the senior vice-chair of the BNP (*PHW* 2012, 111, 113; BNP 25 Dec. 2011). Sources also indicate that Rahman was named joint secretary general of the BNP (*Political Parties of the World* 2009, 46) by his mother in June 2002 (*PHW* 2012, 113).

Sources indicate that Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir is the acting secretary general of the party (*The Daily Star* 24 Mar. 2012; BanglaNews24.com 20 July 2012; *PHW* 2012, 113). *PHW* notes that he has served in this capacity since the death of the previous secretary general, Khandaker Delwar Hossain in May 2011 (*ibid.*). According to media sources, Barkatullah Bulu is the BNP's joint secretary general (BanglaNews24.com 28 June 2012; UNB 2 Sept. 2012), along with Amanullah Aman (*ibid.*). The vice-chair of the Party is Selima Rahman (*The Daily Star* 23 Apr. 2012; UNB 23 Apr. 2012). Other prominent leaders identified by sources include retired brigadier generals Hannan Shah and Hafizuddin Ahmed (*PHW* 2012, 113) and Dr. Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain (BanglaNews24.com 28 June 2012).

2. Factions

Sources indicate that, while Khaleda Zia was detained from 2007 to 2008, there was a split between a "reform" faction and a pro-Zia faction of the party (*PHW* 2012, 113; *Janes' Intelligence Review* 12 Feb. 2009; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 46). According to *PHW*, the reform faction wanted "greater democracy" in the party (*PHW* 2012, 113). *Political Parties of the World* states that the reform faction wanted to reduce the influence of the Zia family within the BNP (2009, 46).

Political Parties of the World states that "the two factions appeared to reunite in May 2008" (2009, 46). *PHW* adds that internal disputes seemed to subside with the release of Khaleda Zia on bail in September 2008, but notes that reformers were for the most part disregarded as candidates for the 2008 elections (2012, 113). However, *Janes' Intelligence Review* states that internal rifts within the party "undermined" the effectiveness of the BNP's 2008 election campaign (12 Feb. 2009).

In its *Freedom in the World 2012* report, Freedom House states that, in 2011, "the [p]arty suffered from serious internal divisions, particularly over succession issues," but did not provide details (2012). An annual report by Odhikar, a Bangladesh human rights NGO, indicates that there were 104 incidents of BNP internal violence in 2011 during which 3 people died and 1,234 suffered injuries, but does not specify the nature of these conflicts (7 Jan. 2012, para. 133). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

3. Associate Organisations

3.1 Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal

The Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal is the youth wing of the party (*The Daily Star* 8 June 2012; UNB 5 May 2012). The *Daily Star*, a Dhaka-based newspaper, reports that the Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal leads an alliance of opposition-party youth wings similarly to how the BNP has a leading role among opposition parties (8 June 2012).

According to sources, the Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal president is Syed Moazzem Hossain (or Hosain) Alal and its secretary general is Saiful Alam Nirab (or Nirab) (BanglaNews24.com 28 June 2012; UNB 22 May 2012). Other prominent leaders of Jubo Dal include Senior Vice-President Abdus Salam Azad, Joint-Secretary Mortazul Karim Badru and Organising Secretary AKM Mozammel Huq (or Haque) (*The Daily Star* 2 Mar. 2010; UNB 1 Mar. 2010). United News of Bangladesh (UNB) adds that Mamun Hasan, SM Jahangir, Hamidur Rahman Hamid and Rafiqul Islam Majnu have leadership roles in the youth wing's units in Dhaka (*ibid.*).

3.2 Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD)

The BNP also has a student wing, the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) (*BdNews24.com* 18 June 2012). News portal BanglaNews24.com reports that the JCD president is Sultan Salauddin Tuku and its secretary general is Amirul Islam Alim (BanglaNews24.com 26 May 2012). However, according to the same source, both were in detention as of May 2012, and Shahidul Islam was serving as the acting JCD president (*ibid.*). An article from *The Daily Star* states that Amirul Islam Alim was detained on 16 May 2012 on charges of arson in connection with the setting on fire of a vehicle in front of the office of the Prime Minister (14 June 2012). According to sources, he was arrested again on his release from jail on bail in June 2012 (*The Daily Star* 14 June 2012; UNB 12 June 2012), reportedly in connection with his indirect involvement in the death of a bus driver in another incident (*The Daily Star* 14 June 2012). BanglaNews24.com indicates other leaders of the student wing include Vice-President Haider Ali Lelin and Joint Secretary General Anwarul Haq Royel (*ibid.*).

According to media sources, new leaders of the JCD central committee were named by the BNP in September 2012 (*The Daily Star* 5 Sept. 2012; *New Age* 5 Sep. 2012; *The Editor* 4 Sep. 2012). These new leaders are President Abdul Quader Bhuiyan Jewel, General Secretary Habibur Rashid Habib, Senior Vice-president Bazlul Karim Chowdhury Abed, Joint General Secretary SM Obaidul Haque Nasir and Organising Secretary Rajib Ahsan (*New Age* 5 Sep. 2012; *The Daily Star* 5 Sept. 2012). According to *The Daily Star*, some sources point out that none of these new leaders have been students for years (ibid.).

News reports indicate that a dozen of JCD members were injured in September 2012 at Rajshahi University during clashes with the Bangladesh Chhatra League (*FE* 12 Sept. 2012; UNB 11 Sept. 2012; *BdNews24.com* 11 Sept. 2012), the student wing of the AL (ibid.).

3.3 Jatiyatabadi Swechhasebok Dal

The BNP also has a "volunteer front", the Jatiyatabadi Swechhasebok Dal (UNB 11 Nov. 2011; *BdNews24.com* 18 June 2012). The *BdNews24.com* article notes that the Jatiyatabadi Swechhasebok Dal had called for a half-day strike in Sylhet Division, the northeastern administrative region of Bangladesh, because its leader had been jailed due to an unspecified accusation made by the wife of a JCD leader (ibid.). Corroboration or further details on the Jatiyatabadi Swechhasebok Dal could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

4. Activities of the BNP

The BNP has been in power several times since 1979 (*PHW* 2012, 108-109; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 42-43, 45-46; BNP 25 Dec. 2011). Following the parliamentary elections in December 2008, the BNP received 30 seats (*PHW* 2012, 113; Bangladesh 27 Jan. 2011). According to *PHW* the BNP also received 33 percent of the total vote cast (*PHW* 2012, 113). The Parliament of Bangladesh has a total of 300 directly elected seats (BBC 10 July 2012; Bangladesh 27 Jan. 2011). An AL-led coalition won over 250 seats in the 2008 election (BBC 10 July 2012; Freedom House 2012; *PHW* 2012, 110; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 44).

According to *Political Parties of the World*, the BNP complained that there were voting irregularities during the 2008 elections, alleging that "at hundreds of polling stations its supporters had been denied the right to vote" (2009, 46). However, sources report that international and Bangladeshi observers felt that the elections were credible and transparent (US 24 May 2012, 22; Commonwealth 16 Feb. 2009; UN 11 Jan. 2009). Freedom House reports that the electoral results were accepted by Zia (Freedom House 2012). Sources also report that the BNP took part in the new parliamentary session (ibid.; US 6 Mar. 2012).

Sources indicate that the BNP has since organized several protests against the government throughout the country, including boycotts (ibid.; Freedom House 2012) and strike actions (ibid.; Odikhar 7 Jan. 2012, para. 138-140; *PHW* 2012, 111). In June 2011, the BNP boycotted a vote that approved a constitutional amendment abolishing the practice of appointing caretaker governments to manage transition after elections (ibid.; Freedom House 2012). According to *PHW*, the BNP and other opposition parties protested that the change "was designed to allow the AL-led government to remain in power after the next round of balloting" (ibid.). Freedom House adds that "[o]ther articles of the amendment termed any criticism of the constitution an act of sedition, and effectively forbade further amendments to large parts of the constitution" (2012).

5. Treatment of Members and Supporters of the BNP by Authorities

5.1 Detentions

According to sources, Khaleda Zia was arrested in 2007 (*PHW* 2012, 109; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 46; US 6 Mar. 2012), on charges of corruption (ibid.; *PHW* 2012, 109). *PHW* specifies that she was arrested on charges of "corruption and other offences allegedly committed during [her] terms in office" (ibid.). *Political Parties of the World* notes that other BNP politicians were also under investigation (2009, 46). Sources explain that this occurred during a state of emergency put in place by a military-controlled interim government during which many prominent individuals, including politicians and former ministers, faced charges related to corruption (*Political Parties of the World* 2009, 43; *PHW* 2012, 109). Sheikh Hasina, the leader of the AL and also a former prime minister, was likewise arrested in July 2007 (ibid.; US 6 Mar. 2012). Khaleda Zia was released on bail in September 2008 (*PHW* 2012, 110; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 46). Both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina were allowed to compete in the 2008 elections (US 6 Mar. 2012; *PHW* 2012, 110).

Tarique Rahman was detained from 2007 to 2008 on accusations of corruption (ibid., 109, 111; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 46). Sources state that he was arrested under the auspices of the military-controlled government that held power at this time (*PHW* 2012, 109; *The Guardian* 8 Mar. 2007). According to *Political Parties of the World*, he was released on bail in September 2008 so that he could seek medical treatment in the United Kingdom, on the condition that he resign his position as joint secretary general of the BNP (2009, 46). Sources indicate that he has been in exile since 2008 (*PHW* 2012, 111; *The Daily Star* 9 Sept. 2011). According to some sources, Rahman claims to have been tortured during his time in detention (ibid.; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 46). *PHW* states that Rahman has been "[a] leading target of Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission" and that, as of July 2010, there

were at least 14 criminal charges pending against him, including for money laundering and embezzlement (*PHW* 2012, 111). However, according to *PHW*,

[w]hile Rahman was often described as one of the more corrupt politicians during Khaleda Zia's last term, the merits of the cases are difficult to ascertain, given that the successive Zia and Hasina governments have established a pattern of launching criminal prosecutions against each other when in power. (ibid.)

Amnesty International's (AI) *Annual Report 2011* states that in 2010, over 1,500 opposition supporters were detained following rallies and protests, sometimes arbitrarily, with most released without charges (2011). AI also indicated that "20 leading members" of the BNP were among over 200 people arrested and detained in June 2010 for taking part in a general strike organised by the BNP (2011).

According to UNB, Saiful Alam Nirob, as well as Mirza Abbas and Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, respectively the Jubo Dal's former president and its former general secretary, were among BNP political figures in detention as of May 2012 (22 May 2012). Sources also indicate that Moazzem Hossain Alal and Saiful Alam Nirob were charged in connection with bomb explosions during a strike action in Dhaka on 29 April 2012 (*BdNews24.com* 31 May 2012; UNB 5 May 2012). Information on recent developments could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

5.2 Prosecutions

Sources indicate that prosecutions are sometimes politicized, with corruption cases against AL members being withdrawn while charges against members of the BNP have been kept in place (Freedom House 2012; AHRC 19 Feb. 2009). The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) also notes that cases against BNP members were withdrawn while the BNP was last in power (ibid.). According to the US State Department *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011*, cases against AL supporters alleged to have taken part in violence against BNP supporters have also been hindered by authorities (US 24 May 2012, 8-9). For example, sources report that, in October 2010, Sanaullah Noor Babu, a local BNP official, was beaten to death when a BNP procession was attacked by AL supporters (ibid.; *The Daily Star* 21 Nov. 2011). *Country Reports 2011* indicates that the suspects in the case were reportedly told by an AL official that they had "nothing to worry about" (US 24 May 2012, 8-9). A *Daily Star* article similarly notes that a police officer said the ruling party was trying to get the suspects released (*The Daily Star* 21 Nov. 2011). Information on recent developments on the affair could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Sources indicate that the Bangladesh government has put in place a tribunal to deal with alleged war crimes dating to Bangladesh's war of independence from Pakistan in 1971 (*BdNews24.com* 30 July 2012; BBC 11 Jan. 2012; AP 28 May 2012). However, according to the Associated Press (AP), some opposition leaders alleged that the "charges are politically motivated" (ibid.), Human Rights Watch estimates that the tribunal does not meet international standards (18 May 2011). Two BNP leaders face charges at the tribunal (BBC 11 Jan. 2012; *BdNews24.com* 30 July 2012).

According to sources, the government has attempted to implement a ban on international travel for some opposition leaders, including members of the BNP (*BdNews24.com* 26 Aug. 2012; US 24 May 2012, 17). *Country Reports 2011* states that this travel ban was directed towards war crimes suspects, adding that "[t]hese suspects were not stripped of their passports, but immigration officials at the airport in Dhaka occasionally prevented politicians belonging to the opposition BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami from leaving the country," noting that in one case, a senior BNP leader was prevented for travelling for medical reasons, despite a court order (ibid.).

5.3 Eviction of Khaleda Zia

Sources report that BNP leader Khaleda Zia was evicted from her home (AI 30 Nov. 2010) in November 2010 (*PHW* 2012, 111). According to AI, Khaleda Zia had lived in the home for close to 40 years, having leased it from the government after the assassination of her husband in 1981, but the AL government declared that the lease was illegal after it assumed power in 2009 (AI 30 Nov. 2010). Sources report that the eviction resulted in protests and strikes led by the BNP (ibid.; *PHW* 2012, 111). *PHW* states that the strikes and protests "led to clashes between BNP and AL supporters" (ibid.). According to sources, the BNP claimed that thousands of supporters were arrested in the run-up to a nationwide day-long strike that it called in protest over Zia's eviction (*The Guardian* 30 Nov. 2010; AI 30 Nov. 2010; BBC 30 Nov. 2010).

5.4 Disappearances

Sources report that there have been disappearances of BNP-related figures (US 24 May 2012, 4-5; AHRC 20 Apr. 2012; Human Rights Watch 27 Apr. 2012; AI 24 Apr. 2012). On 17 April 2012, Elias (or Ilias) Ali, secretary of the BNP Sylhet Division in Bangladesh's northeast, disappeared (Human Rights Watch 27 Apr. 2012; AI 24 Apr. 2012). According to some sources, Mohammad Chowdhury Alam, a Dhaka city councillor affiliated with the BNP, disappeared in June 2010 (Odhikar n.d.; US 24 May 2012, 5) and was still missing at the end of 2011 (ibid.).

Certain sources indicate that some disappearances are allegedly linked to security forces (ibid., 4-5; AHRC 20 Apr. 2012; Odhikar n.d.).

5.5 Instances of Violence

According to sources, political violence is prevalent in Bangladesh (Freedom House 2012; Odhikar 7 Jan. 2012, para. 132). According to Odikhar, political violence has increased since the AL took power in 2009, in particular between the two principal political parties and as part of internal conflicts within parties (ibid.). Odhikar indicates that there were reports of 135 individuals having been killed and 11,532 persons having been injured due to political violence between January and December 2011 (ibid., para. 133). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

According to *Country Reports 2011*, opposition supporters are reportedly the target of attacks and harassment by government supporters (US 24 May 2012, 4). Freedom House states that, "[h]arassment of the opposition became more widespread in 2011, and ranged from charges being filed against senior BNP members to limitations being placed on political activities, particularly rallies and processions" (2012).

Some sources express concern over the abuse of force by security forces against opposition supporters, including BNP members and supporters (US 24 May 2012, 5-6; Human Rights Watch 27 Apr. 2012). In particular, Human Rights Watch expresses concern about the "apparent excessive use of force by security forces" during a general strike called by the BNP to protest Elias Ali's disappearance, during which two protesters were killed and thousands reportedly injured (27 Apr. 2012). Sources report that BNP Member of Parliament, Zainul Abidin Farroque, was "brutally" beaten by police officers in July 2011 while he was leading a march near Parliament (US 24 May 2012, 6; *The Daily Star* 7 July 2011). According to AI, security forces used "excessive force" in several cities against protesters peacefully demonstrating against the eviction of Zia, reportedly resulting in injuries for over 100 people (30 Nov. 2010).

5.6 Discrimination in Academic Employment

Country Reports 2011 states that "a significant number" of teachers at Dhaka University, including some openly affiliated with the BNP, have been fired or put on extended leave since the AL came to power in 2009, although it was not clear whether the teachers were targeted due to their political connections (US 24 May 2012, 15). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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.

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