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Issue Paper BANGLADESH CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS JANUARY 1994-DECEMBER 1995 March 1996

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MAP

See original.

Source: *Bangladesh: A Country Study* 1989, p. xxvi.

GLOSSARY

AL

Awami League

BCL

Bangladesh Chhatra League (Awami League student wing)

BNP

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (Jatiyatabadi Dal)

CCHRB

Coordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh

ICS

Islami Chhatra Shibir (Jamaat-e-Islami student wing) Jamaat Jamaat-e-Islami Party

JCD

Jatiyabadi Chhatra Dal (BNP student wing)

JCS

Jatiya Chhatra Samaj (Jatiya Party student wing)

JP

Jatiya Party

PBCP

Purbo Banglar Communist Party

SKOP

Sramik Karmochary Oikya Parishad (Workers' and Employees' United Front)

SPA

Special Powers Act

thana

A police station, but also a local administrative unit

UAC

United Action Council (also Combined Action Council, Combined Islamic Action Council, United Islamic Action Committee)

INTRODUCTION

This chronology supplements and updates the May 1994 DIRB Question and Answer Series paper entitled *Bangladesh: Political Parties and Political Violence*, and should be read in conjunction with it. Although significant events involving women and children, treatment of the press, police abuses and the ongoing problems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts are included, the primary focus, as with the earlier paper, is on political factionalism and violence.

The most significant development in the period under review was the opposition boycott of parliament, the resignations of most opposition MPs, and the frequent violent demonstrations and general strikes to force Prime Minister Zia to step down and hold early general elections under the supervision of a nonpartisan caretaker government. The prime minister has consistently refused to accede to opposition demands. As research for this paper neared an end, parliament was dissolved and a general election scheduled for 18 January 1996. The opposition parties have refused to participate in the elections unless the government accepts their conditions, so it is not clear that this election will resolve the current political deadlock.

Another important trend was the increase in religious fundamentalism, which had implications for both society and politics. The growing strength of conservative Islam was perhaps most evident in the Islamists' campaign against writer and feminist Taslima Nasreen, their demands for enactment of a blasphemy law, and the rash of attacks on NGOs that provide training and assistance to women and the poor.

A third major trend is the ongoing campus violence, which in many respects is an extension of the political struggle between the government and the opposition parties. Reports indicate that at least 35

students were killed, about 900 wounded and thousands of rounds fired in campus violence in 1994 (*Asian Survey* Feb. 1995, 175), and, as indicated in the following chronology, there was little evidence of the violence declining in 1995.

Many of the sources consulted do not provide information on the authorities' response to the events discussed in this chronology, or do not follow up on reported events. Where such information is provided, it is included in the paper.

CHRONOLOGY

1994

18 January

Following talks with Chakma refugee leaders, the governments of India and Bangladesh announce that agreement has been reached on the repatriation to the Chittagong Hill Tracts of at least some of the 53,500-56,000 Chakmas who have taken refuge in the Indian state of Tripura since 1986 (USCR 1994, 95; *ibid.* 1995, 104; *Keesing's* Jan. 1994b, 39821). Although only a few Chakmas chose to return under a May 1993 agreement (*ibid.*), Chakma leaders reportedly accept the latest plan under "tremendous pressure" from the Indian government (*ibid.*). The 16-point reintegration and repatriation package includes US\$250 per family in financial assistance from Bangladesh, housing material, free rations for six months and a promise to remove Bangladeshi Muslim settlers from the returnees' lands (*ibid.*; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 120; USCR 1994, 95; *ibid.* 1995, 104).

30-31 January

As many as 14 people are killed and 50 to 200 wounded in clashes during and after city corporation elections in Bangladesh's four largest cities, Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna (*Keesing's* Jan. 1994a, 39821; UPI 31 Jan. 1994; AFP 30 Jan. 1994; Reuters 30 Jan. 1994). The violence reportedly broke out when armed activists in Dhaka, some allegedly members of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), stormed polling stations and stuffed ballot boxes on hearing rumours that the Awami League (AL) had made significant gains (*Keesing's* Jan. 1994a, 39821; Reuters 30 Jan. 1994; *ibid.* 31 Jan. 1994). Police use clubs and tear-gas to disperse the militants, but more violence breaks out later the same day (*ibid.*). Six or seven people are killed in post-election violence in Dhaka when supporters of a defeated BNP candidate fire on local residents, possibly including victorious Awami League supporters (*Keesing's* Jan. 1994a, 39821; Reuters 31 Jan. 1994).

Amid opposition charges of widespread fraud and vote-rigging (Reuters 30 Jan. 1994), election results show that the BNP has won in Khulna and Rajshahi but lost to the Awami League in Chittagong and Dhaka, the two most important cities (*Asian Survey* Feb. 1995, 172; Radio Bangladesh Network 31 Jan. 1994; *Keesing's* Feb. 1994, 39867). The Jatiya Party (JP) and Jamaat-i-Islami, both expected to make substantial gains, have been nearly eliminated (*ibid.* Jan. 1994a, 39821).

15 February

A group of more than 280 Chakma refugees returns to their homes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, followed by another 500 two days later (USCR 1994, 95; *Keesing's* Feb. 1994, 39867). Some 1,850 return by the end of the month, but Chakma leaders indicate that future repatriations will depend on the success of the first group (USCR 1995, 104; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 120).

Late February

Opposition parties begin a boycott of parliament, demanding early elections under a neutral caretaker government. The government rejects the demands as "unconstitutional and undemocratic" (AI 1995, 67; *Asian Survey* Feb. 1995, 172).

20 March

The BNP wins a by-election in Magura constituency, long considered an AL stronghold (*Keesing's* Mar. 1994, 39916). The election is seen as a crucial test for the BNP following its losses to the Awami League in the 30 January city corporation elections (*ibid.*). The opposition, accusing the BNP government of "massive vote-rigging and manipulation" (*ibid.*; Japan Economic Newswire 8 Apr. 1994), renews its demands for new elections under a caretaker government and for a constitutional amendment providing that all future national elections be held under neutral caretaker governments (*Asian Survey* Feb. 1995, 172; Reuters 10 Apr. 1994; UPI 7 Apr. 1994).

April

The home minister announces that all political cases begun under the Ershad government (1982-1990) will be dropped. Many of the cases involved political opponents of the former government who were arrested on false charges (AI 1995, 68).

The BNP government announces that it will establish a law reform commission, but by year's end no commission has been established (AI 1995, 68).

6 April

Janakantha, an independent nationally distributed daily with a circulation of 100,000, loses its state advertising because of an article it published on six politicians, including energy minister Khandokar Mosharraf Hossain (*Index on Censorship* July-Aug.Sept.-Oct. 1994, 66). Most Bangladeshi newspapers have small print runs and are heavily dependent on government advertising, which accounts for 80 per cent of all newspaper advertising (*ibid.*, 65-66; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 22). According to the Coordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh (CCHRB), "state advertising is used as a weapon against any newspaper critical of the government" (*ibid.*; *Country Reports 1994 1995*, 1208; *Index on Censorship* July-Aug.Sept.-Oct. 1994, 66).

7 April

Three to six people are killed and about 60 injured in violent protests to demand that the Zia government resign because of corruption, inefficiency and electoral fraud (Japan Economic Newswire 8 Apr. 1994; Reuters 7 Apr. 1994; AFP 7 Apr. 1994; *Keesing's* Apr. 1994, 39963). The opposition parties want new elections under a neutral caretaker government (*ibid.*; AFP 7 Apr. 1994; Reuters 7 Apr. 1994). These demands are restated during a general strike on 10 April (*Keesing's* Apr. 1994, 39963; Reuters 10 Apr. 1994; *ibid.* 26 Apr. 1994).

26 April

Most banks, businesses and government offices remain closed in Dhaka and transportation services are disrupted as the opposition parties stage another nationwide general strike to demand cancellation of the 20 March Magura constituency by-election results, Zia's resignation, and early general elections under a neutral caretaker government (*Keesing's* Apr. 1994, 39963; IPS 28 Apr. 1994; Reuters 26 Apr. 1994).

Chakma refugee leaders visit returnees to Bangladesh and find that the authorities have provided less than half the promised financial aid, and that returnees have been unable to reclaim their lands because the authorities have not removed the Muslim settlers who occupy them (USCR 1995, 104; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 120).

5 May

Eight opposition parties boycott the inaugural session of parliament to reinforce their demand that the BNP government resign and early elections be held under a neutral caretaker government (*Keesing's* May 1994a, 40011).

9 May

The Statesman, an English-language newspaper in Calcutta, quotes controversial Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasreen^[1] as stating that the Koran should be "thoroughly revised" to eliminate encouragements to discrimination against women (AI Oct. 1994, 14; *Asian Survey* Nov. 1994, 981; *Current History* Oct. 1994, 349; *Keesing's* May 1994b, 40011). Nasreen claims she was misquoted and clarifies her statement in a letter to the newspaper two days later (ibid.; AI Oct. 1994, 14; *Asian Survey* Nov. 1994, 981). Nevertheless, several conservative Islamist groups renew the call for her death, and the head of one group offers a cash reward to anyone who kills her (AI Oct. 1994, 14-15; *Current History* Oct. 1994, 349; *Keesing's* May 1994b, 40011).

3-4 June

"Several thousand" people attack the Dhaka offices of *Janakantha* following publication of an article criticizing Muslim religious leaders for issuing *fatwas* (religious sanctions/injunctions) against NGOs that provide training, legal aid and health care to poor women (AI 17 June 1994; ibid. 1995, 68; *Index on Censorship* May-June 1994, 165; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 25; UPI 3 June 1994). In recent weeks Islamists have repeatedly demonstrated against *Janakantha* and another daily, *Bangla Bani*, because of activities deemed anti-Islamic (ibid.; AI 17 June 1994; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 25; UPI 21 May 1994; ibid. 3 June 1994).

4 June

The government charges Nasreen under section 295A of the 1860 Bangladesh Penal Code with "offending the religious sentiment of Muslims" (*Current History* Oct. 1994, 349; AI Oct. 1994, 15; *Asian Survey* Nov. 1994, 981), a crime punishable by up to two years in prison (ibid. Feb. 1995, 174; AI Oct. 1994, 15). Nasreen goes into hiding the following day (*Keesing's* June 1994b, 40058). One observer states that the decision to prosecute Nasreen is a "sop to the extremists" (*The Times* 11 Aug. 1994), and another that the government has "caved in to the increasing fundamentalist pressure" (*FEER* 4 Aug. 1994, 27). Within days the Islamist campaign against Nasreen intensifies, with a series of violent demonstrations (*Keesing's* June 1994b, 40058; AI 17 June 1994).

8 June

Arrest warrants are issued under section 295A of the Bangladesh Penal Code for four editors of *Janakantha*, apparently in connection with a 12 May 1994 article on a group of religious leaders known as the *Fatwahaz* (*Index on Censorship* May-June 1994, 165; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 25; AI 17 June 1994; ibid. Apr. 1995, 10). Two of the journalists are arrested immediately while the other two go into hiding (*Index on Censorship* May-June 1994, 165; AI 17 June 1994). The two detained journalists are released on 23 June 1994 (CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 27).

10 June

At a rally in Dhaka, over 10,000 protesters demand that Taslima Nasreen be put to death and threaten to kill her if the government will not guarantee her punishment (AI 17 June 1994). Islamist groups soon expand their demands, demanding that all "apostate" and "infidel" writers and journalists be executed, "un-Islamic" publications and NGOs banned, Ahmadis declared non-Muslim, and a blasphemy law carrying the death penalty introduced (*ibid.* Apr. 1995, 10).

17 June

About 12,000 Islamists led by the Jamaat-i-Islami march through Dhaka streets, demanding that Taslima Nasreen be executed (PTI 17 June 1994). The Jamaat announces an 11-day program of agitation and street demonstrations, to culminate in an eight-hour nationwide general strike on 30 June to press the government to arrest and execute Nasreen (*ibid.*).

22 June

The appellate division of the Supreme Court upholds a lower court ruling restoring the citizenship of Jamaat-i-Islami leader and alleged war criminal Gholam Azam (*The Guardian* 1 July 1994; Radio Bangladesh Network 22 June 1994; *Keesing's* June 1994a, 40058). A former citizen of Pakistan, Azam had been granted Bangladeshi citizenship by the Dhaka High Court in April 1993, a decision the government subsequently appealed^[2] (*ibid.*; Radio Bangladesh Network 22 June 1994).

26 June

About 12 people are injured in Dhaka when about 1,000 youths, most of them students and members of the Sammilito Sangskritik Jote (Alliance of Cultural Forums), attack an Islamist rally with sticks and stones (Reuters 26 June 1994). A day earlier thousands of Awami League activists had marched in Dhaka to protest the resurgence in religious fundamentalism and support a student call for an anti-fundamentalist general strike on 30 June (*ibid.*).

27 June

In preparation for a major confrontation between conservative Islamists and secular student groups, Dhaka's police commissioner orders an indefinite ban on the carrying of sticks, knives, firearms and explosives (Reuters 28 June 1994; DPA 29 June 1994; Xinhua 29 June 1994; AP 29 June 1994). More than 200 people have been injured in street battles between conservative Islamists and their secularist opponents over the last three days (*ibid.*; DPA 29 June 1994).

28 June

Four press photographers are beaten when Islamists attack mourners at the funeral of Jahanara Imam, who launched a campaign against anti-independence Islamic forces in 1992 (Reuters 28 June 1994). In a separate incident, anti-fundamentalist youths attack the offices of the pro-Islamic Dhaka daily *Dainik Inqilab*, firing several shots and beating the driver of a vehicle owned by the paper's editor (AFP 29 June 1994).

30 June

One person is killed and 100 to 200 injured when police and protestors and rival groups of protestors clash during one-day nationwide general strikes called separately by conservative Islamist groups and the Anti-Communal Students Society, a coalition of six opposition student groups (DPA 29 June 1994;

AI 29 June 1994; *ibid.* 14 July 1994; Xinhua 30 June 1994). The Islamic groups, led by the Jamaat-i-Islami, demand the arrest and punishment of Taslima Nasreen, while the students demand an end to religion-based politics (*ibid.*; AI 29 June 1994; *ibid.* 14 July 1994).

2 July

Reuters reports that at least nine people were injured in fire-bomb attacks on five newspapers and that three journalists were beaten by suspected Islamic militants in street demonstrations during the previous two weeks (2 July 1994).

11 July

Ashrafuddin Alam, one of 13 Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) student activists accused of shoplifting and arrested under the Suppression of Terrorist Activities Act (also known as the Antiterrorism Act), dies in Rangpur jail under "suspicious circumstances" (AI 1995, 68; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 146). According to Amnesty International and other human rights monitoring groups, the law's vagueness allows the government to use it to harass its political opponents (AI 1995, 68; OAA Dec. 1994, 9; *Country Reports 1994 1995*, 1207).

21 July

Between 500 and 1,000 writers, artists, journalists, university professors and students take to Dhaka streets in a demonstration organized by the Bangladesh Lekhak Shibir (Writers' Forum) to protest against growing Islamic fundamentalism and demand that the government resist Islamists' calls to enact a blasphemy law (Reuters 21 July 1994; AFP 21 July 1994).

22 July

Unknown attackers bomb the Dhaka home of Kazi Shahed Ahmed, editor of the Bengali language daily *Ajker Kagaz*, which has published articles and editorials criticizing the Islamists' campaign against Taslima Nasreen (AP 23 July 1994; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 27).

26-27 July

Six people are killed and about 150 injured in Chittagong in a violent confrontation between police and members of the United Students Forum, an anti-fundamentalist student group whose members try to disrupt a Jamaat-i-Islami rally (Reuters 27 July 1994). Another 50 people are injured the next day when police use tear-gas, batons and rubber bullets to disperse student protesters (*ibid.*). Among the injured are 15 journalists (CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 27). In Dhaka, hundreds of anti-fundamentalist students demonstrate against the Chittagong killings, damaging at least 20 cars and chasing police officers (Reuters 27 July 1994).

29 July

Six people are killed and at least 20 injured during a "siege" of Dhaka organized by the United Action Council (UAC), a newly formed coalition of 13 Islamic groups that excludes the Jamaat-e-Islami (AI Oct. 1994, 16-17; DPA 10 Aug. 1994; *Keesing's* Aug. 1994b, 40146; *Asian Survey* Nov. 1994, 982). An estimated 100,000 to 200,000 demonstrators demand that the government arrest, punish and even hang Nasreen and other "atheists," enact a blasphemy law, restrain NGOs from engaging in "anti-Islamic" activities such as education and income-generation programmes for women, and ban all anti-Islamic publications (*ibid.*, 982-83, 985-86; AI Oct. 1994, 16-17; *ibid.* 16 Aug. 1994). Attorney General Aminul Huq reportedly states that enactment of a blasphemy law would violate both Islam and

human rights, and encourage a climate of sectarianism and fear (HRW Dec. 1994, 131).

30 July

One person is killed and about 200 injured in clashes in Dhaka and Chittagong during separate one-day strikes called by the Awami League and the Dhaka University Anti-Communal Students' Society (AI Oct. 1994, 17; DPA 30 July 1994; AFP 30 July 1994). The strikes, which follow the previous day's demonstration in Dhaka by Islamists, are to protest against fundamentalist Islam and demand an end to religion-based politics (*ibid.*; DPA 30 July 1994).

3 August

Following the repatriation of another 3,350 Chakma refugees to Bangladesh (USCR 1995, 104; DPA 25 July 1994), Upendra Lal, a Chakma leader who played a key role in the repatriation negotiations, calls for an end to further repatriations, alleging that the Chakmas are being forcibly repatriated and that Bangladesh authorities have failed to return their lands (UPI 3 Aug. 1994). By year's end only 5,200 Chakma refugees have been repatriated, while an estimated 48,300 remain in India (USCR 1995, 104; Reuters 31 Mar. 1995). Officials had hoped the repatriation process would be completed by about mid-April (USCR 1994, 95).

In her first public appearance since going into hiding on 5 June to escape arrest on blasphemy charges, Taslima Nasreen surrenders to and is granted bail by the Dhaka High Court (*Keesing's Aug. 1994a*, 40146; AI 16 Aug. 1994; DPA 10 Aug. 1994). She subsequently goes back into hiding because of death threats from conservative Islamists (*Current History* Oct. 1994, 349). Sources report that the government has been eager to help Nasreen leave the country "for weeks," but only on condition that she first surrender to the courts (*The Times* 11 Aug. 1994; *ibid.* 22 July 1994; IPS 29 July 1994).

10 August

Nasreen arrives in Sweden after officials of the governments of Bangladesh and Norway work out an arrangement allowing her to depart in secrecy (DPA 10 Aug. 1994; *Keesing's Aug. 1994a*, 40146). In a public address in Stockholm one week later, she refuses to consider political asylum and vows to return to Bangladesh to continue her battle against "fundamentalist insanity" (*ibid.*).

11 August

The United Action Council organizes demonstrations in Dhaka and demands that Nasreen be hanged (*Keesing's Aug. 1994a*, 40146; *The Times* 12 Aug. 1994). In response to accusations of government complicity in Nasreen's departure, Information Minister Nazmul Huda states that the government has a "constitutional responsibility" to protect Nasreen, as it does all of its citizens (*Keesing's Aug. 1994a*, 40146).

15 August

One bystander is killed and five injured when rival AL factions fight an hour-long battle at Narajanganj, an industrial town near Dhaka, during a one-day nationwide general strike to press the government to try the officers involved in the 15 August 1975 coup (UPI 15 Aug. 1994). The clash reportedly erupted when one group running a free food centre was attacked by a rival group (*ibid.*).

1 September

Consideration of a bill that would have made the practice of polygamy "almost impossible" is postponed

indefinitely (DPA 2 Sept. 1994). The Muslim Family Law (Amendment) Bill, a private member's bill introduced by female BNP MP Farida Rahman, is blocked when most male members of Rahman's own party walk out of the chamber as the vote is to begin (*ibid.*; ASK 27 Aug. 1995). Rahman has been trying for two or three years to introduce bills in parliament to ban polygamy and guarantee women equal inheritance rights (*ibid.*; DPA 7 Mar. 1995; *The Houston Chronicle* 12 Mar. 1995).

11-13 September

The three main opposition parties call a three-day general strike to demand that the BNP government resign and call early elections (*Keesing's* Sept. 1994, 40186; *Asiaweek* 21 Sept. 1994, 6; Reuters 12 Sept. 1994). The strike begins in Dhaka but soon spreads to the industrial city of Khulna in the south, Rajshahi in the north and the coastal city of Barisal, where schools, offices and businesses close and the transportation systems shut down (*ibid.*; AFP 13 Sept. 1994). In Chittagong port city "dozens" of home-made bombs are exploded (Reuters 12 Sept. 1994), while in Dhaka pro- and anti-strike groups throw home-made bombs at each other (AFP 13 Sept. 1994). The general strike^[3] is preceded by a day of violent confrontations between police and demonstrators in Dhaka that results in 50 to 200 injuries and almost 150 arrests (*ibid.* 10 Sept. 1994; *Keesing's* Sept. 1994, 40186; Reuters 12 Sept. 1994), as well as a three-day transportation strike that shuts down bus and truck service between Dhaka and outlying areas (*ibid.*).

15-17 September

Two farmers are reported killed and 28 injured in clashes with police in Khagrachari hill district in southeastern Bangladesh (DPA 17 Sept. 1994). The farmers, members of Bengali Krishak Kalyan Parishad (Bengali Farmers Welfare Council), had blockaded local roads to press their demand that lands reserved for tribals be opened up to Bengali settlers (*ibid.*). The Chakmas, the largest tribe in the area, want the settlers expelled from the district (*ibid.*).

21 September

Some 9,000 Bangladeshi doctors go on strike, reportedly resulting in an increased number of deaths in government hospitals (*Asiaweek* 5 Oct. 1994, 4; Xinhua 26 Sept. 1994). According to figures published in the Dhaka-based English-language daily *The New Nation*, 45 patients at Dhaka Medical College Hospital died during the first five days of the strike (*ibid.*). The Bangladesh Medical Association is demanding reforms to the health care sector, including more funding for health care, more money for doctors, expansion of health care services to rural areas and removal of the health secretary (*ibid.*; *ibid.* 3 Oct. 1994; *Asiaweek* 5 Oct. 1994, 4). The strike, which was preceded by 24- and 48-hour strikes in August (Xinhua 10 Aug. 1994), is called off when the High Court issues an injunction on 6 October (*ibid.* 7 Oct. 1994; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 68).

1 October

The country's only newsprint mill closes for maintenance, aggravating existing shortages and prompting accusations that the government is exercising an indirect form of censorship (*Asiaweek* 2 Nov. 1994, 4; *Country Reports* 1994 1995, 1208; *Index on Censorship* Nov.-Dec. 1994, 232). Production and distribution of newsprint is a state-run monopoly in Bangladesh (*ibid.*; *ibid.* July-Aug.Sept.-Oct. 1994, 65-67; *Country Reports* 1994 1995, 1208; *Asiaweek* 2 Nov. 1994, 4). On 22 September, Finance Minister M. Saifur Rahman announced that the government might lift a ban on the import of newsprint (*Index on Censorship* Nov.-Dec. 1994, 232), and by year's end the ban reportedly had been lifted (*Country Reports* 1994 1995, 1208).

12 October

About 50 people are injured when right-wing demonstrators clash with police and Awami League activists during a "siege" of a high-security government complex in Dhaka (AFP 13 Oct. 1994; *ibid.* 12 Oct. 1994). The United Action Council, the 13-party alliance of right-wing and conservative Islamist groups, laid siege to the complex to present their 11-point list of demands for stricter enforcement of Islamic law, including the enactment of a blasphemy law and the trial of "infidels" such as Taslima Nasreen (*ibid.*; *ibid.* 13 Oct. 1994). At least 25 people are injured the following day in demonstrations called to protest the police crackdown, as well as the imminent arrival of Commonwealth envoy Sir Ninian Stephen to facilitate an end to Bangladesh's eight-month political deadlock (*ibid.*; *ibid.* 12 Oct. 1994).

23 October

At least one person is killed and "scores" injured during a gun battle in Khulna between supporters of the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), the Jamaat-i-Islami student wing, and the Jatiyabadi Chhatra Daltheir (JCD), their BNP student wing rivals (AFP 24 Oct. 1994; Xinhua 30 Oct. 1994). The following day suspected ICS supporters explode home-made bombs and smash up a government office as a funeral procession for their slain comrade turns violent (AFP 24 Oct. 1994). Sources indicate that despite the increased presence of police on university campuses, student violence has been on the upswing due to Bangladesh's political impasse and recent opposition campaigns for new elections under a neutral caretaker government^[4] (Xinhua 30 Oct. 1994; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 55).

5 November

The two-year-old Suppression of Terrorist Activities Act is allowed to lapse, but an ordinance allows the 489 pending cases to be completed (*Country Reports 1994* 1995, 1207; AI 1995, 68; Xinhua 11 Oct. 1994). Of the 856 people arrested under the act in the first nine months of 1994, only 289 were charged, and of these 14 went to trial, resulting in seven convictions (*Country Reports 1994* 1995, 1207). The opposition parties, which support the decision to allow the act to lapse, have often accused the government of using the act to silence political opponents (Xinhua 11 Oct. 1994).

6 November

In a bid to force the government to concede to their demands, opposition MPs "unanimously" decide to resign en masse from parliament (PTI 6 Nov. 1994; *Keesing's* Nov. 1994a, 40282). Three days later, 92 Awami League and 35 Jatiya Party MPs resign from parliament (also see 28 Dec. 1994) (*ibid.*).

12-14 November

Stepping up their campaign to force the Zia government to resign, the opposition parties call a series of general strikes, first in Dhaka and then nationwide (*Keesing's* Nov. 1994b, 40282; *Asiaweek* 23 Nov. 1994, 6; *Asian Survey* Feb. 1995, 173). Clashes between police and pro- and anti-government demonstrators result in 50 to 100 injuries around the country (*ibid.*; *Asiaweek* 23 Nov. 1994, 6; *Keesing's* Nov. 1994b, 40282). According to *Keesing's*, at least 35 people are injured in the central towns of Sirajgang and Natore on 13 November (*ibid.*).

21 November

Commonwealth envoy Sir Ninian Stephen, who arrived in Dhaka in mid-October to help mediate a

solution to the political impasse, returns to the UK after admitting that his mission has failed (*Keesing's* Nov. 1994c, 40282; *ibid.* Oct. 1994, 40233; *Asiaweek* 30 Nov. 1994, 4; *Asian Survey* Feb. 1995, 173).

29 November

A day-long opposition-led blockade of railways and roads, intended to wring political concessions from the Zia government, disrupts bus and train services in Bangladesh's four main cities (AFP 29 Nov. 1994; *Asiaweek* 7 Dec. 1994, 4; *Keesing's* Nov. 1994b, 40282). A march through Dhaka streets two days earlier attracted an estimated 50,000 opposition supporters (*ibid.*; *Asiaweek* 7 Dec. 1994, 4).

December

Government figures indicate that about 900 people are being detained under the Special Powers Act (SPA) (OAA Dec. 1994, 9). US government reports indicate that in the "vast majority" of SPA cases, the courts rule the cases illegal and order the detainees released (*ibid.*; *Country Reports 1994* 1995, 1207).

4 December

One or two auxiliary police officers are killed and 12 to 40 injured when "several thousand" regular police and paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles, backed by air force helicopters, storm their Dhaka barracks, firing machine-guns, rubber bullets and tear-gas (UPI 4 Dec. 1994; VOA 4 Dec. 1994; *Asiaweek* 14 Dec. 1994, 4). As many as 22,000 auxiliary policemen, called Ansars, had mutinied three days earlier, demanding higher pay, job security and better treatment by their officers (*ibid.*; VOA 4 Dec. 1994; UPI 4 Dec. 1994). Ansars, who are equipped with outdated weapons and paid 45 taka (\$1) per day, help the regular police fight crime in Bangladesh (*ibid.*).

8 December

Three people are killed and "hundreds" injured when police open fire on demonstrators in Feni, 130 kilometres southeast of Dhaka, on the second day of a general strike (*Keesing's* Dec. 1994, 40323).

11 December

Five bombs are thrown at the home of Justice Kazi A.T. Monowaruddin, injuring one person (AFP 12 Dec. 1994; *Asiaweek* 21-28 Dec. 1994, 4; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 39). Earlier in the day the High Court bench on which Monowaruddin sits had ruled that the nine-month-long opposition boycott of parliament was unconstitutional and had directed striking MPs to return to parliament within three days of the beginning of the new session (AFP 12 Dec. 1994; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 39; Radio Bangladesh Network 11 Dec. 1994; *Asiaweek* 21-28 Dec. 1994, 4).

28 December

In an effort to increase pressure on the Zia government by undermining its ability to govern, 147 opposition MPs, including those from the government-allied Jamaat-i-Islami, resign from parliament (*Current History* Feb. 1995, 92; *Asiaweek* 13 Jan. 1995, 21; AFP 29 Dec. 1994a; *Keesing's* Dec. 1994, 40323).

29 December

Demonstrators and security forces clash and bombs are exploded in Dhaka during a one-day

nationwide general strike to back up opposition demands that the Zia government step down (DPA 29 Dec. 1994; AFP 29 Dec. 1994a). The strike shuts down public transportation, banks, businesses and government offices in Dhaka, Khulna, Chittagong and Rajshahi (*ibid.*; DPA 29 Dec. 1994).

In a concession to opposition demands, Prime Minister Zia offers to resign one month before the next election, scheduled for early 1996, on condition that opposition MPs withdraw their resignations (*Keesing's* Dec. 1994, 40323; *Asiaweek* 13 Jan. 1995, 21; *Current History* Feb. 1995, 92; AFP 29 Dec. 1994b). However, the opposition dismisses her proposal as "useless" and demands her immediate resignation (*Keesing's* Dec. 1994, 40323; All India Radio Network 30 Dec. 1994a; *ibid.* 30 Dec. 1994b).

1995

2-4 January

At least 160 people are injured, more than 100 arrested and Dhaka "paralysed" during a three-day opposition-led general strike to back up demands that the Zia government resign and call early national elections (DPA 4 Jan. 1995; *Keesing's* Jan. 1995, 40365; All India Radio Network 3 Jan. 1995).

22 January

Two people are killed and at least 100 injured in Chittagong and Dhaka as striking jute and cotton workers clash with police on the first day of a 72-hour nationwide strike (*Keesing's* Jan. 1995, 40365; *Asiaweek* 3 Feb. 1995, 6; DPA 22 Jan. 1995). The workers are demanding a 20 per cent wage increase and protesting a government plan to privatize 33 state-owned textile mills (*ibid.*; *Asiaweek* 3 Feb. 1995, 6). Demonstrations the following day against price increases in essential commodities end in violence when police use tear-gas on protestors attempting to occupy the national television centre in Dhaka (*Keesing's* Jan. 1995, 40365).

24-25 January

Schools, shops and businesses close and transportation shuts down in Dhaka and Chittagong during a two-day opposition-led nationwide general strike to pressure the Zia government to stand down and call early elections (AFP 25 Jan. 1995; DPA 25 Jan. 1995). On 24 January, eight people are detained under the SPA after one or two home-made bombs are thrown at Prime Minister Zia's motorcade (AFP 25 Jan. 1995; *Keesing's* Jan. 1995, 40365). At least 55 people are injured the following day in clashes between police and demonstrators in Dhaka (DPA 25 Jan. 1995). The violence reportedly began when pro-government students attacked an Awami League march (*ibid.*).

5 February

A bill authorizing tough new penalties, including the death penalty, for crimes against women and children is introduced in parliament (*Keesing's* Feb. 1995c, 40410; AFP 5 Feb. 1995). Under the Women and Children Repression (Special Provisions) Bill, 1995, persons convicted of trafficking in women for "prostitution, illegal sexual use and forced marriage" could face up to ten years in jail, while persons found guilty of injuring a woman or child with "harmful, poisonous or corrosive substances" could face up to seven years imprisonment (*ibid.*). Persons convicted of killing a woman for her dowry could face the death penalty (*ibid.*). According to Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, existing legislation such as the Woman Repression (Deterrent Punishment) Ordinance 1983, Anti-Dowry Act 1980 and Children Act 1974 is insufficient to curb such crimes^[5] (*The Bangladesh Observer* 12 July 1995, 1).

12 February

Rajshahi University closes and exams are postponed after a clash between JCD and ICS activists in which two students are killed, more than 50 injured and 45 residence rooms set afire (Xinhua 13 Feb. 1995; *Dhaka Courier* 28 July 1995, 17; *Keesing's* Feb. 1995b, 40410). In the past Rajshahi University has seen "frequent" violent confrontations between rival student groups (Xinhua 13 Feb. 1995), but one source indicates that this is the first such incident since 18 September 1993 (*Dhaka Courier* 28 July 1995, 17).

12-15 February

Seven people are reported killed and more than 100 injured during a 96-hour strike and railway blockade by jute and textile workers in Dhaka and Khulna (*Keesing's* Feb. 1995b, 40410; Xinhua 15 Feb. 1995). Several of the deaths are caused when police, backed by the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles, open fire on the striking workers (AFP 13 Feb. 1995). The strikes reportedly turned violent after employers refused workers' demands for job security and wage increases (*Keesing's* Feb. 1995b, 40410; AFP 13 Feb. 1995).

14 February

About 50 to 100 people are injured when police and ICS activists clash in Dhaka (Xinhua 15 Feb. 1995; AFP 15 Feb. 1995; DPA 15 Feb. 1995). The students, some armed with home-made bombs and sticks, reportedly became violent when police set up road blocks to stop them from marching on the prime minister's office, where they intended to demand punishment for the killers of their two colleagues at Rajshahi University two days earlier, and protest police actions the previous day in which 50 Islamic demonstrators were injured and 17 arrested (*ibid.*; Xinhua 15 Feb. 1995; AFP 15 Feb. 1995). Among the injured are about 20 policemen, Tahmina Shawkat, editor of *Shakuler Khabar*, and three press photographers, who are attacked by ICS activists (*ibid.*; *Index on Censorship* Mar.-Apr. 1995, 170; Xinhua 15 Feb. 1995).

15 February

Four people are seriously injured in Fatikchari town, a conservative Islamist stronghold near Chittagong port city, in a gun battle between rival factions of the "extreme right-wing" National Democratic Party over control of a mosque (DPA 16 Feb. 1995).

23-24 February

Speaker of parliament Sheikh Razzak Ali, who has delayed making a decision for nearly two months, rejects the en masse resignations of 147 opposition MPs on constitutional and technical grounds (see 28 Dec. 1994) (AFP 24 Feb. 1995; *Asiaweek* 10 Mar. 1995, 4; AFP 24 Apr. 1995; *Keesing's* Feb. 1995a, 40410). Prime Minister Zia reportedly offers to meet with AL leader Sheikh Hasina to try to resolve the impasse, but Hasina declares the 28 December resignations "irrevocable" (*ibid.*; AFP 23 Feb. 1995; PTI 24 Feb. 1995).

27 February

Twenty to 100 people are injured in Khulna in clashes between Islamists and JCD members after the overnight murder of Abul Kalam Azad, general secretary of the JCD's Khulna branch (DPA 27 Feb. 1995; *Index on Censorship* Mar.-Apr. 1995, 170). As police arrest 17 Jamaat activists suspected of involvement in the killing, JCD members set fire to local offices of the Jamaat-i-Islami and ransack

businesses owned by pro-Islamic politicians (DPA 27 Feb. 1995; *Index on Censorship* Mar.-Apr. 1995, 170). Azad was reportedly killed in retaliation for the murder of an Awami League politician, Moslemuddin Khan, less than 24 hours earlier (*ibid.*; DPA 27 Feb. 1995).

12-13 March

The opposition campaign to unseat the Zia government intensifies with a two-day general strike that paralyzes Dhaka and other major centres, closing banks, shops, offices and schools and shutting down public transportation (UPI 12 Mar. 1995; *Keesing's* Mar. 1995a, 40456; DPA 12 Mar. 1995). At least 50 people are injured on day one of the strike as security forces and Awami League protesters clash in Dhaka (*ibid.*). The strike kicks off a two-week opposition-led programme of agitation that culminates in an eight-hour "siege" of Dhaka on 28 March (*Keesing's* Mar. 1995a, 40456; DPA 28 Mar. 1995).

18 March

Bangladesh Harmain Parishad, a group of conservative Muslim clerics, accuse leading women's rights advocate and BNP MP Farida Rahman of apostasy and demand that she be put to death (DPA 18 Mar. 1995; *The Times* 31 Mar. 1995; Reuters 29 Mar. 1995). In a speech to women activists in Dhaka three days earlier, Rahman had criticized the Islamic inheritance code, which heavily favours men over women in the distribution of family property (*ibid.*; DPA 18 Mar. 1995; AP 18 Mar. 1995). By the end of March the UAC is leading a campaign to have Rahman hanged, but she stands her ground, refusing to give in to "ignorant mullahs" (Reuters 29 Mar. 1995).

Mid to late March

At least 12 people are killed when nationwide protests by farmers over fertilizer shortages caused by corruption, hoarding and government mismanagement of reserves turn violent (*Keesing's* Mar. 1995b, 40456; *ibid.* Apr. 1995a, 40507; DPA 22 Mar. 1995; *The Economist* 1 Apr. 1995, 30). Rising world prices for urea-based fertilizers reportedly persuaded officials to release Bangladesh's reserve stocks for export, causing shortages, driving up domestic prices and forcing Bangladesh to import new stocks at world market prices (*Keesing's* Apr. 1995a, 40507; *ibid.* Apr. 1995b, 40507). On 29 March the army is called in to help restore order (*The Economist* 1 Apr. 1995, 30).

28 March

More than 250 people are injured in "pitched battles" between security forces and demonstrators during an opposition-led "siege" of Dhaka (*Keesing's* Mar. 1995a, 40456; DPA 28 Mar. 1995). Despite a 24-hour ban on all types of rallies, meetings, processions and demonstrations and the presence of thousands of riot police and "truckloads" of paramilitary troops in Dhaka (*ibid.*; Radio Bangladesh Network 27 Mar. 1995; *Keesing's* Mar. 1995a, 40456), a procession of about 5,000 anti-government activists, some armed with crude bombs and bricks, attempts to cross a security barricade toward a complex housing government ministries (DPA 28 Mar. 1995). Police wearing bullet-proof vests fire tear-gas and rubber bullets and charge into the procession (*ibid.*). At least seven and as many as 100 people are injured in a gun battle between police and student activists at Dhaka University (*Middle East Times* 2-8 Apr. 1995, 3; DPA 28 Mar. 1995). The students had reportedly barricaded themselves in the university and fired on police with rifles, handguns and automatic weapons; the police retaliated with tear-gas and rubber bullets (*Middle East Times* 2-8 Apr. 1995, 3).

9-10 April

Shops, banks, businesses and schools are closed and streets deserted in Dhaka and three or four other major cities on the first day of an opposition-led two-day general strike^[6] to demand the resignation of the Zia government and early general elections (AFP 10 Apr. 1995; DPA 9 Apr. 1995). At least 50 people are injured in various clashes between police and protesters in the Dhaka suburbs of Tongi and Tezgaon (ibid.). Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina states that the strike is also to protest recent price increases in food and consumer goods and the deaths of 17 farmers in clashes with police during the March protests over fertilizer shortages (ibid.; AFP 10 Apr. 1995).

11-12 April

The Left Democratic Front, a coalition of six left-wing parties, and SKOP (Sramik Karmochary Oikya Parishad, or Workers' and Employees' United Front) (*Trade Unions of the World 1992-93* 1991, 35), an alliance of 18 industrial trade unions, call a two-day general strike to back up their demands that the government halt its privatization of state-owned jute and textile mills, institute a national monthly minimum wage of 950 taka (US\$25), and step down and call early elections (DPA 11 Apr. 1995; *Asiaweek* 21 Apr. 1995, 4; *Keesing's* Apr. 1995c, 40507). The strike principally affects Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna, where for the third successive day shops and businesses remain closed, government offices barely function, public transportation shuts down, and police and paramilitary troops patrol the streets (DPA 11 Apr. 1995). Nearly 1,000 workers in Khulna stage a counter-demonstration to show their displeasure with the strike (*Asiaweek* 21 Apr. 1995, 4). No casualties are reported (*Keesing's* Apr. 1995c, 40507).

19 April

One person and several animals are burned to death in Cox's Bazar, a southern resort town, when about 300 Islamists attack a roving circus party, dousing the animals with paraffin and setting the tents afire (DPA 19 Apr. 1995). The mob attack reportedly occurred after a fatwa was issued by a local Muslim cleric, who declared the performances anti-Islamic—the troupe included women performers—and urged his followers to drive the circus from town (ibid.).

24 April

About 90 to 100 AL and Jamaat MPs stage a noisy sit-in at the office of parliamentary speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali to protest his decision to reject their en masse resignations from parliament (see 23-24 Feb. 1995) (AFP 24 Apr. 1995; *Asiaweek* 5 May 1995, 4). In early May, opposition party members ransack Ali's Khulna home, cutting telephone lines and setting fire to the building (ibid. 12 May 1995, 6). About 50 people, including a police officer, are injured in the mêlée (ibid.).

30 May

Rajshahi University reopens after being closed for 53 days because of campus violence (see 12 Feb. 1995) (*Dhaka Courier* 28 July 1995, 17).

15 June

About 50 people, including five policemen, are injured in Dhaka as hundreds of riot police clash with bomb-and-rock-throwing opposition activists protesting the introduction of a new budget in parliament, an exercise the opposition parties call "illegal" (Reuters 15 June 1995; DPA 15 June 1995).

26 June

The Bangladesh High Court overturns former president Hossain Mohammad Ershad's 1991 conviction on illegal possession of firearms charges and orders him released (*India Abroad* 30 June 1995, 18; *Asiaweek* 7 July 1995, 16). However, Ershad must serve out another 10-year sentence on currency irregularities and corruption charges (*India Abroad* 30 June 1995, 18; *Asiaweek* 7 July 1995, 16). The following day hundreds of Jatiya Party militants go on a "rampage" in downtown Dhaka, stoning police and torching vehicles, during a half-day strike called to press the authorities for Ershad's release (AFP 27 June 1995).

July

Striking AL, JP and Jamaat MPs' seats are reportedly declared "vacant" because the opposition MPs have failed to appear in parliament for several months (AFP 7 Oct. 1995). Under the constitution, any MP who is absent from his seat for 90 consecutive days without proper notification "shall vacate his seat" (Blaustein Jan. 1993, 73; *Asiaweek* 30 June 1995a, 4).

1 July

Four people are injured as rival JCD factions battle with firearms and firecrackers on the Nasirabad Government Commercial Institute campus in Chittagong (*The Bangladesh Observer* 2 July 1995a, 1). It is the second clash between the two groups in less than a week (ibid.). At Dhaka University, rival BCL factions exchange gunfire after a BCL leader is evicted from a dormitory, leaving one student injured (ibid. 1 July 1995, 1). Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Sylhet is closed after a four-hour clash between JCD and ICS supporters leaves five students injured with bullet and stab wounds (ibid. 2 July 1995b, 1). The next day Islamia Degree College in Chittagong decides to ban student politics indefinitely after a 28 June exchange of gunfire between BCL factions left two people dead on campus (-* ibid. 3 July 1995, 1).

5 July

Swapan Kumar Ghosh, a member of the Jatiya Party student wing, the Jatiya Chhatra Samaj (JCS), is killed and 15 JP workers and leaders injured when JCD activists attack a motorcade en route to a JP rally at Mymensingh, near Dhaka (*The Bangladesh Observer* 6 July 1995, 1; ibid. 7 July 1995, 12). Gunmen also attack the rostrum at the meeting site, injuring five (ibid. 6 July 1995, 1).

6 July

Seven members of the Workers Party are killed and two "gravely wounded" when members of the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) raid a village in Chuadanga district in southwestern Bangladesh (Reuters 8 July 1995; *The Bangladesh Observer* 8 July 1995, 1). Police attribute the killings to a leadership struggle between rival underground groups (Reuters 8 July 1995). The PBCP and Workers Party are reportedly two of six such groups operating in southwestern Bangladesh (ibid.).

10 July

Some 1,870 Bangladeshis arrive in Chittagong after being deported from Saudi Arabia for overstaying their visas (*Asiaweek* 21 July 1995, 4). According to *Asiaweek*, in the last 18 months more than 27,000 Bangladeshis have been deported from Saudi Arabia for overstaying their visas, while more than one million emigrated to Saudi Arabia during the same period (ibid.).

11 July

The Women and Children Repression (Special Provisions) Bill is approved by parliament (see 5

Feb. 1995) (*The Bangladesh Observer* 12 July 1995, 1). A report carried in *The Bangladesh Observer* indicates that the new law will be administered by a special tribunal called the Woman and Child Repression Prevention Court, which will dispose of cases within 90 working days (*ibid.*). By mid-October the government claims to have courts running in 61 of the country's 64 districts (Xinhua 12 Oct. 1995; *Statistical Pocketbook of Bangladesh* 1994 Jan. 1995, 20).

22 July

Rajshahi University is closed again after fifty students and four police officers are injured in a series of clashes between ICS and JCD activists (*Dhaka Courier* 28 July 1995, 17; *The Bangladesh Observer* 25 July 1995, 1; *ibid.* 24 July 1995, 1, 12). The violence began when about 500 armed JCD activists, reportedly backed by a "heavy police escort," were attacked by ICS activists after recapturing dormitory buildings they had lost earlier (*Dhaka Courier* 28 July 1995, 17). The violence quickly spread around campus, described by one source as a "terror zone," as about 100 bombs and fire crackers were exploded and 50 rounds fired (*ibid.*).

24 July

The Bangladesh Institute of Technology in Rajshahi is closed until 31 July following an off-campus clash between police and Rajshahi University ICS and JCD activists in which four people are injured (*Dhaka Courier* 28 July 1995, 17).

30 July

Farhad Mazhar, chairman of the editorial board of the biweekly *Chinta* and director of Unnayan Bikalper Nitinirdharani Gobeshona (UBINIG), a policy research and advocacy organization, is taken into 120 days of "preventive" custody under article 2(f) of the SPA (IFEX 18 Aug. 1995). The detention order, issued by the home affairs ministry, reportedly states that Mazhar is "involved in acts creating tension among certain classes" (*ibid.*). In July Mazhar had published an article in *Chinta* accusing the police of excessive brutality in their suppression of the four-day Ansar rebellion in December 1994 (see 4 Dec. 1994) (*ibid.*).

8 August

Reports from Chittagong indicate that more than two dozen wealthy shop owners and businessmen have been kidnapped since the beginning of the year, a marked increase over years previous (*The Bangladesh Observer* 19 Aug. 1995, 1; *ibid.* 15 Aug. 1995, 12; Xinhua 8 Aug. 1995), and a reflection of the deteriorating law and order situation in the port city and the country in general (*ibid.*; *Asiaweek* 30 June 1995b, 39). Although many of the victims have been local jewellers (*The Bangladesh Observer* 19 Aug. 1995, 1), the latest victim, Taher Ali Fakhri, is a non-Bengali millionaire businessman (*ibid.*; *ibid.* 15 Aug. 1995; Xinhua 8 Aug. 1995). Local police reportedly blame the crime wave on tightly organized gangs of criminals from other parts of Bangladesh (*The Bangladesh Observer* 15 Aug. 1995, 12), but one source states that local musclemen formerly employed by political parties are responsible (Xinhua 8 Aug. 1995). In most cases the victims' families prefer to pay the ransom rather than involve the police; only 6 of 23 recent abductions were officially reported to police (*The Bangladesh Observer* 19 Aug. 1995, 1)

20 August

The Dhaka-based news agency Bangladesh Sangsbad Sangstha (BSS) reports that the government plans to introduce on-the-spot trials at airports in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet in order

to reduce smuggling (*The Bangladesh Observer* 21 Aug. 1995, 12; Xinhua 24 Aug. 1995). Smuggling cases will be disposed of by "mobile courts" and the organizations charged with stopping the practice will be awarded one per cent of the sale of all goods seized (*ibid.*; *The Bangladesh Observer* 21 Aug. 1995, 12).

27 August

At least seven people are killed and over 100 injured, 20 of them seriously, in Dinajpur when police open fire on a crowd protesting the death and alleged rape of a young girl while in police hands (Xinhua 29 Aug. 1995; AFP 28 Aug. 1995; PTI 12 Sept. 1995; *The Bangladesh Observer* 28 Aug. 1995, 1). Demonstrators had surrounded Kotwali *thana* (police station) the previous night, preventing police personnel from leaving (*ibid.*). Initial police attempts to disperse the crowd with gunfire failed, resulting in the "pitched battle" between police and protestors the next morning (*ibid.*; AFP 28 Aug. 1995). Following the killings, crowds of angry demonstrators also attack police stations at Munshipara, Balubari, Pulhat and Sadar (*The Bangladesh Observer* 28 Aug. 1995, 1). According to *The Bangladesh Observer*, the girl's death and alleged rape is only the latest in a series of abuses that have led to an "explosion of pent-up outrage" against district policemen and government officials (*ibid.* 5 Sept. 1995). For example, plain clothes policemen had reportedly organized attacks on the Dinajpur Press Club and four local newspapers in retaliation for newspaper reports on "corruption, repression and maleficence" in the police force and district administration (*ibid.*). In an effort to defuse the situation the government imposes a curfew, recalls the district police superintendent, jails the three accused police officers and transfers 30 others out of the district (Xinhua 29 Aug. 1995; AFP 28 Aug. 1995; PTI 12 Sept. 1995).

At least one person is killed and as many as 50 injured, including four policemen, when police use tear-gas and shotguns to separate clashing Awami League and BNP activists in Dhaka (*The Bangladesh Observer* 29 Aug. 1995a, 1, 12; Xinhua 28 Aug. 1995). One account states that BNP activists attacked an Awami League procession marching toward a demonstration at the election commission office (*ibid.*), while another states that AL activists returning from the demonstration attacked a JCD meeting with stones, brickbats, guns and bombs before turning on police and damaging private and public property in several areas of Dhaka (*The Bangladesh Observer* 29 Aug. 1995a, 1, 12).

8 August

Several Jatiya Party activists and passers-by are injured when police use batons and tear-gas to break up a JP demonstration in front of Dhaka Central Jail (*The Bangladesh Observer* 29 Aug. 1995b, 1). The police action reportedly came after successive waves of JP activists assembled outside the jail to protest former president Ershad being named in a murder case, and to demand his release and new elections under a caretaker government (*ibid.*). Police and demonstrators reportedly attack and counterattack one another for two hours (*ibid.*).

2-3 September

Fifty people are injured in violent incidents on the first day of a 32-hour nationwide general strike called by the main opposition parties to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Zia (UPI 3 Sept. 1995; AFP 2 Sept. 1995; Reuters 2 Sept. 1995). More than 30 people are injured and about 30 arrested in one incident as demonstrators throw firecrackers and other small explosives and clash with police (UPI 3 Sept. 1995). On the second day three Awami League members are killed and 10 to 18 wounded when JCD activists open fire on an AL rally in Mirpur, on the outskirts of Dhaka (*ibid.*; Radio Bangladesh Network 3 Sept. 1995). Shops and offices remain closed and rail, air and water

transportation services sharply curtailed or shut down in Dhaka and across the country (UPI 3 Sept. 1995; AFP 2 Sept. 1995; Reuters 2 Sept. 1995).

6 September

One person is killed and at least 50 injured in clashes in Dhaka during a one-day opposition-led nationwide general strike to protest the convening of a "one-party illegal" parliament and demand the resignation of Prime Minister Zia (UPI 6 Sept. 1995; Reuters 6 Sept. 1995; AP 6 Sept. 1995; DPA 6 Sept. 1995). Shops, banks, offices and schools remain closed in Dhaka as opposition protesters, some throwing bombs and brickbats, clash with baton-wielding police and paramilitary units (UPI 6 Sept. 1995; AP 6 Sept. 1995; Reuters 6 Sept. 1995; DPA 6 Sept. 1995).

10 September

BNP activist Tanveer Ahmed Jonghi is killed by a lathi blow to the head when BNP and Jatiya Party supporters clash with clubs, spears and lathis at Dariapur village in Sreepur *thana* (*The Bangladesh Observer* 14 Sept. 1995, 11).

13 September

Abdul Majid and Akram, both members of the outlawed Biplobi Communist Party (M-L), are killed at a village in Tala *thana*, allegedly by members of the PBCP (*The Bangladesh Observer* 15 Sept. 1995, 11).

16-18 September

Dhaka stores close and streets remain empty during a 72-hour opposition-led general strike to force Prime Minister Zia's resignation and an early general election under a caretaker government (AP 17 Sept. 1995; AFP 16 Sept. 1995; *The Guardian* 19 Sept. 1995; Reuters 17 Sept. 1995). On the first day of the strike Dhaka police arrest up to 15 university students who reportedly harass and strip government employees who try to defy the strike by walking to work (AP 17 Sept. 1995; Reuters 17 Sept. 1995; AFP 16 Sept. 1995; *ibid.* 17 Sept. 1995). Police also arrest at least 150 street children allegedly hired by opposition parties to stone policemen during an anti-government demonstration (AP 17 Sept. 1995). Paying street children to stage anti-government demonstrations reportedly is a "common practice" in Bangladesh (*ibid.*). Outside Dhaka six people, including three children, are killed on the eve of the strike in clashes in the northern town of Pabna, while on day one at least 200 are injured as strike supporters and opponents clash with crude bombs and guns in at least four towns outside Dhaka, and another 50 to 60 are injured when protesters attack a train in Narayanganj, near Dhaka (*ibid.*; AFP 17 Sept. 1995; Reuters 17 Sept. 1995). At several points around the country industrial workers obstruct rail traffic by sitting or placing logs on the tracks (AP 17 Sept. 1995). The strike is the third since the beginning of the month (*ibid.*), and the longest since the anti-government campaign began 17 months ago (AFP 16 Sept. 1995).

22 September

The Xinhua News Agency reports that Moitree Parishad, a Dhaka-based NGO, has set up a national hotline to which incidents of abuse of children's rights can be reported (22 Sept. 1995).

7 October

Several home-made bombs explode and shops, schools, banks and businesses close in Dhaka and four other major cities on the first day of a 32-hour general strike called to force Zia's resignation and

new elections under a caretaker government (Reuters 7 Oct. 1995; AFP 7 Oct. 1995). Strikes have become so frequent that they are now apparently observed almost automatically and the opposition parties expend "little obvious effort" enforcing them (Reuters 7 Oct. 1995). During the strike AL leader Sheikh Hasina reportedly offers to withdraw her demand that Zia step down if the prime minister will agree to establish a caretaker government to oversee an election (AFP 7 Oct. 1995).

Three young women are reported murdered by their husbands in dowry-related incidents in one 24-hour period in Pabna district (*The Bangladesh Observer* 8 Oct. 1995, 12). Two of the women died from beatings inflicted when their parents were unable to deliver the amount of dowry promised at marriage, while the third was killed when she refused her husband permission to marry for the third time (*ibid.*).

16-20 October

Two people are reported killed and at least 500 injured during a nationwide four-day general strike, the longest so far in the opposition's ongoing effort to topple Prime Minister Zia and force new elections under a caretaker government (*India Abroad* 27 Oct. 1995, 19; AFP 15 Oct. 1995; *ibid.* 16 Oct. 1995). AFP reports that thousands of Dhaka residents, fearing violence, flee the city, some for destinations abroad (15 Oct. 1995).

24 November

President Abdur Rahman Biswas dissolves parliament and asks Prime Minister Zia to stay on until a general election is held (*The Globe and Mail* 25 Nov. 1995, A8; *India Abroad* 1 Dec. 1995a, 1). Zia reportedly asked Biswas to dissolve parliament after the opposition parties refused to participate in a by-election planned for 15 December (*ibid.*; *The Globe and Mail* 25 Nov. 1995, A8). Opposition leaders welcome the election call but renew their demand that the prime minister resign and transfer power to a caretaker government (*India Abroad* 1 Dec. 1995b, 8). Zia reportedly renews her offer to step down 30 days before the elections, but states that a transfer of power to an unelected prime minister would be unconstitutional (*ibid.*; *ibid.* 8 Dec. 1995, 16).

3 December

The election commission announces 18 January as the date of the parliamentary elections, and 17 December as the final day for filing nominations (*India Abroad* 8 Dec. 1995, 16; UPI 11 Dec. 1995). The three main opposition parties reject the election plan as a "ruse," a "conspiracy" and a "trap that would keep Zia in power" (*India Abroad* 8 Dec. 1995, 16), and promise to boycott any election not supervised by a nonpartisan caretaker government (*ibid.*; UPI 11 Dec. 1995). AL leader Sheikh

Hasina announces that a planned shutdown of the country's transportation system to force the government to accede to opposition demands will go ahead (*ibid.*).

9-11 December

Fifty to 300 people, including at least two policemen, are injured in clashes between police and pro- and anti-government demonstrators, some firing guns and throwing bricks and home-made bombs, during a 72-hour opposition-led general strike to force Prime Minister Zia to step down before the election (Japan Economic Newswire 11 Dec. 1995; AFP 12 Dec. 1995; AP 11 Dec. 1995; UPI 11 Dec. 1995; Reuters 11 Dec. 1995). Bangladesh is "paralysed" as banks, businesses and transportation services shut down in Dhaka and more than 60 cities and towns around the country (AP 11 Dec. 1995; Reuters 10 Dec. 1995; Japan Economic Newswire 11 Dec. 1995). About 70 people are injured on the

first day of the strike, most of them in Chittagong, where unidentified attackers set fire to the election commission offices (Reuters 10 Dec. 1995). This latest strike, reportedly the 26th this year (AFP 12 Dec. 1995), brings to over 70 the number of work days lost to political strikes in Bangladesh in 1995 (AP 11 Dec. 1995). The prime minister continues to reject the opposition's demands as unconstitutional (*ibid.*; AFP 12 Dec. 1995).

NOTES

[1] Nasreen first came to prominence with the publication of her book *Lajja* (Shame) in February 1993 (*Asian Survey* Nov. 1994, 981; AI Oct. 1994, 14; *Asiaweek* 30 Mar. 1994, 32). The book describes the fate of a Hindu family at the hands of a Muslim mob during the riots following the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque in northern India in December 1992 (*ibid.*; AI Oct. 1994, 14). In July 1993 the book was banned on grounds that it contained material "prejudicial to the State" that "might create misunderstanding and mistrust" among Bangladesh's various ethnic groups (*ibid.*; *Asiaweek* 30 Mar. 1994, 32). In the fall of 1993 Nasreen petitioned the government for police protection after several militant Islamic groups put a price on her head (*ibid.*; AI Oct. 1994, 14; *Asian Survey* Nov. 1994, 981). [\[back\]](#)

[2] For further information on the Gholam Azam affair, refer to subsection 3.4 of the May 1994 DIRB Question and Answer Series paper, *Bangladesh: Political Parties and Political Violence*. [\[back\]](#)

[3] According to columnist Mobaidur Rahman of the Dhaka-based *Dainik Inqilab*, the events of 11-13 September represent a "qualitative and characteristic change in the opposition movement," having transformed the opposition campaign from a parliamentary boycott aimed at establishing a caretaker government into a "street movement aimed at dislodging the government" (15 Sept. 1994). *Index on Censorship* describes *Dainik Inqilab* as a fundamentalist, pro-Iraqi publication (July-Aug./Sept.-Oct. 1994, 66). [\[back\]](#)

[4] Human rights monitoring groups and reports collected from local newspapers indicate that at least 27 students were killed, 900 to 1,500 wounded and thousands of rounds fired in campus violence in 1994 (*Asian Survey* Feb. 1995, 175; CCHRB 31 Jan. 1995, 56; *Country Reports 1994* 1995, 1206). About 65 institutions "either closed indefinitely or had more than one serious disruption" during the academic year (*Asian Survey* Feb. 1995, 175). Violence most often occurs when rival student wings attempt to establish supremacy on a particular campus (*ibid.*). Demonstration of student support is an important source of political strength in Bangladesh (*ibid.*). [\[back\]](#)

[5] The independent daily *Janakantha* reports that 107 dowry-related murders — "only the tip of the iceberg" — were reported to police in Bangladesh in 1994 (DPA 7 Mar. 1995). [\[back\]](#)

[6] *Asiaweek* reports that 350 hours or about 1.5 months of 8-hour work days was lost to politically motivated strikes in areas outside Dhaka during the first three months of 1995 (19 May 1995, 35). [\[back\]](#)

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