

Immigration and
Refugee Board of CanadaCommission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Canada

[Français](#)[Home](#)[Contact Us](#)[Help](#)[Search](#)[canada.gc.ca](#)

Issue Papers, Extended Responses and Country Fact Sheets

[Home](#)

Issue Paper BANGLADESH POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS DECEMBER 1996-APRIL 1998 May 1998

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Research Directorate of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada on the basis of publicly available information, analysis and comment. All sources are cited. This document is not, and does not purport to be, either exhaustive with regard to conditions in the country surveyed or conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. For further information on current developments, please contact the Research Directorate.

Table of Contents

[MAP](#)[GLOSSARY](#)

1. [INTRODUCTION](#)
2. [KEY POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS](#)
 - 2.1 [Prosecution of 1975 Coup Leaders](#)
 - 2.2 [Ganges Water Sharing Agreement](#)
 - 2.3 [General Strikes and Restrictions on Rallies](#)
 - 2.4 [Elections](#)
 - 2.5 [Chittagong Hill Tracts \(CHT\) Peace Treaty](#)
3. [LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS](#)
 - 3.1 [Law Reform Commission](#)
 - 3.2 [Judicial Reform](#)

[3.3 National Human Rights Commission \(NHRC\)](#)

[3.4 Special Powers Act \(SPA\)](#)

4. [OPPOSITION PARTIES](#)

[4.1 Bangladesh Nationalist Party \(BNP\)](#)

[4.2 Jatiya Party \(JP\)](#)

[4.3 Jamaat-e-Islami \(Jamaat\)](#)

5. [FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS](#)

[REFERENCES](#)

MAP

See original.

Source: UNHCR Refworld Database.

GLOSSARY

AL

Awami League

BNP

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (Jatiyatabadi Dal)

CCHRB

Coordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh

CHT

Chittagong Hill Tracts

FEMA

Fair Election Monitoring Alliance

ICS

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

IOJ

Islami Oikya Jote (Islamic Unity Front)

JAGPA

Jatiya Ganotantrik Party

Jamaat

Jamaat-e-Islami

JP

Jatiya Party

JP(Z-M)

Jatiya Party (Zafar-Moazzem faction)

PCJSS

Parbatya Chattyagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (Shanti Bahini political wing)

PCP

Pahari Chhatra Parishad (Hill Students' Council)

PGP

Pahari Gano Parishad (Hill People's Council)

SPA

Special Powers Act

VDP

Village Defence Party

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper provides information on political developments in Bangladesh between December 1996 and April 1998. For information on events prior to this period, please see the following Research Directorate papers: *Bangladesh: Human Rights Situation* (January 1997), *Bangladesh: Political Developments and Political Violence* (December 1996), *Bangladesh: Chronology of Events January 1994-December 1995* (March 1996) and *Bangladesh: Political Parties and Political Violence* (May 1994). The latter document provides basic information on the political system and political parties in Bangladesh. Please refer to the December 1996 paper for information on Bangladeshi media sources, which are used extensively in this paper, as well as the context to many of the events discussed in this paper.

2. KEY POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

2.1 Prosecution of 1975 Coup Leaders

In June 1996, soon after assuming power, the Awami League (AL) government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed announced that it would be prosecuting all those involved in the 15 August 1975 coup and murders of Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his wife, three sons and 27 others^[1] (Reuters 20 Jan. 1997; AFP 17 Apr. 1997; AI May 1997, 2). The government moved quickly to repeal the Indemnity Ordinance, which had granted the coup leaders and others involved in the murders constitutional immunity from prosecution (AFP 19 Oct. 1997; AI May 1997, 2). Several of the accused, which included former army officers and government ministers, had fled the country soon after the AL was elected, but those who remained were arrested and charged under the Special Powers Act (SPA) (AFP 16 Jan. 1997; AI May 1997, 2; *Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1615). Although the Indemnity Repeal Act, passed in November 1996, was upheld by the High Court on 28 January 1997 (*Asian Survey* Mar. 1997, 267; AI May 1997, 3; *Dhaka Courier* 26 Dec. 1997a, 14), the trial was delayed another five months as defence lawyers challenged the indictment on a number of procedural points (AFP 6 July 1997; AI May 1997, 8). When the trial finally began at the high-security Dhaka Central Jail complex on 6 July 1997 (AFP 6 July 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 25 Feb. 1998, 12; AFP 17 Apr. 1997), only five of the nineteen accused coup plotters were actually in custody and present in court (ibid. 19 Oct. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 25 Feb. 1998, 1); the rest, either in custody or in hiding in a number of different countries, are being tried in absentia^[2] (AFP 19 Oct. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 25 Feb. 1998, 1, 12). The trial was ongoing as of early April 1998, with 13 of 74 prosecution witnesses still to make their depositions to the court (ibid. 2 Apr. 1998a, 10; ibid. 25 Feb. 1998, 12). Amnesty International and other observers welcomed the repeal of the Indemnity Ordinance and the investigation of past human rights abuses (AI May 1997, 7; Reuters 21 Jan. 1997), but have raised concerns about allegations of torture and ill-treatment of the accused (AI May 1997, 8), as well as the possibility that the trials will undermine government efforts to establish political stability in Bangladesh (Reuters 21 Jan. 1997). The government initiative is supported by the Jatiya Party (JP) and left-wing Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), and opposed by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat) (AFP 16 Jan. 1997; Reuters 21 Jan. 1997).

2.2 Ganges Water Sharing Agreement

On 12 December 1996 the AL government signed a treaty with India guaranteeing Bangladesh its share of Ganges River water if the flow falls below a specified level (PTI 1 Jan. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 1 Jan. 1998, 1). The agreement, which took effect on 1 January 1997, fulfilled an AL election promise and ended a long-standing dispute between the two countries (IPS 15 Jan. 1997; PTI 1 Jan. 1997; *Asian Survey* Feb. 1997, 139, 142). Relations between India and Bangladesh had been strained since the expiration of an earlier agreement in the 1980s, and both countries were eager to improve relations (*Asian Survey* Feb. 1997, 142; IPS 15 Jan. 1997; PTI 1 Jan. 1997). While the accord was considered by some to be a "breakthrough in ... Indo-Bangladesh relations" (*Bangladesh Observer* 1 Jan. 1998, 1) and a "major foreign policy victory" for the government (PTI 1 Jan. 1997), BNP leader and former prime minister Khaleda Zia, a "bitter critic" of India, attacked the agreement as being unconstitutional and undermining Bangladeshi sovereignty (IPS 15 Jan. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 1 Jan. 1998, 1; Reuters 18 Apr. 1997). According to an article in *Asian Survey*, the water-sharing agreement was the first success in a series of foreign policy initiatives undertaken by the AL government to improve relations with regional neighbours such as India, China and Pakistan (Feb. 1997, 142).

2.3 General Strikes and Restrictions on Rallies

Figures compiled by the Coordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh (CCHRB) indicate there were 6 nation-wide and 99 local-level general strikes (hartals) in Bangladesh in 1997 (*Bangladesh Observer* 31 Dec. 1997, 12). Most of these were called by opposition political parties and their student wings and worker organizations, as well as various business and local organizations (ibid. 31 Dec. 1997, 12). Five of the six nation-wide hartals were called by the BNP to pressure the government to meet various political demands (ibid. 31 Dec. 1997, 12). Hartals were most numerous in the three-month period July-September 1997, when four nation-wide and 40 local hartals were called (ibid. 31 Dec. 1997, 12), but overall the number was "greatly reduced" as compared to 1996 (*Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1626). Both government and opposition party supporters used armed violence and intimidation to enforce hartals or disrupt rival parties' demonstrations and street rallies, resulting in at least 18 deaths and hundreds of injuries (ibid. 1998, 1615). For example, at least seven people were killed and 200 injured in a series of clashes between AL and BNP supporters in Chittagong from 27 to 30 November 1997 (*Bangladesh Observer* 1 Jan. 1998, 3; *Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1615, 1616).

In 1997 and early 1998, ostensibly for reasons of public security, the government took measures to restrict where and when political rallies and demonstrations could be held (ibid. 1998, 1620; AFP 9 Oct. 1997). On 31 August 1997 the AL mayor of Dhaka, Muhammad Hanif, banned political rallies from city streets (*Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1620; AFP 9 Oct. 1997). Although political marches and parades were still permitted to pass through city streets, demonstrations and rallies were required to be held at seven open-air venues designated by city council (ibid.; *The Hindu* 26 Sept. 1997). The government claimed the ban was instituted not for political reasons but to prevent traffic jams, but opposition parties denounced the measure as an unnecessary restriction on the right to freedom of assembly (AFP 9 Oct. 1997; *Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1620). Although some opposition parties that opposed the ban held their events at the government-approved sites (AFP 9 Oct. 1997), the BNP was determined to defy the government (*The Hindu* 26 Sept. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 23 Sept. 1997, 1; AFP 25 Sept. 1997). On 22 and 25 September 1997, the BNP called general strikes in an attempt to force the government to back down (*The Hindu* 26 Sept. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 23 Sept. 1997, 1; AFP 25 Sept. 1997), but strict enforcement of the ban resulted in repeated violent clashes between police and opposition protesters (*Bangladesh Observer* 23 Sept. 1997, 1; AFP 25 Sept. 1997; *Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1620). In late September Dhaka's mayor, on the advice of President Shahabuddin

Ahmed, organized a meeting to discuss alternate venues, but both the BNP and Jamaat declined to attend (AFP 9 Oct. 1997; *Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1620; *The Hindu* 26 Sept. 1997). Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina indicated the government would not repeal the ban (AFP 9 Oct. 1997).

The government also used section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure to prohibit opposition party rallies and public assemblies in 1997 and early 1998 (*Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1620; *Bangladesh Observer* 28 Sept. 1997, 1, 12; *ibid.* 10 Nov. 1997, 11; *ibid.* 26 Feb. 1998, 12). Section 144 allows government authorities to ban public assemblies when two or more groups have scheduled rallies for the same time and place and violence is imminent (*Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1620). In practice, however, political parties, after learning of a rival party's rally, simply schedule their own event for the same time and place, with the result that both rallies are cancelled (*ibid.*; *Bangladesh Observer* 28 Sept. 1997, 1, 12). Sources indicate that government authorities imposed section 144 in Kishoreganj thana (10 Sept. 1997), Joypurhat (27 Sept. 1997), Mirershorai thana (9 Nov. 1997) and Arahazar thana, Narayangaj district (25 Feb. 1998), among other places (*ibid.* 11 Sept. 1997, 12; *ibid.* 28 Sept. 1997, 1, 12; *ibid.* 10 Nov. 1997, 11; *ibid.* 26 Feb. 1998, 12). In at least one case where a pro-government group scheduled a rally at the same time and place as one previously scheduled by a group opposed to the government, the pro-government rally was allowed to proceed (*Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1620).

2.4 Elections

The 30 June 1997 by-election in Manikganj-3 constituency, a BNP stronghold, was seen as a major test of the AL government's commitment to strengthening democracy in Bangladesh (*Dhaka Courier* 4 July 1997a, 11; *India Abroad* 18 July 1997, 19). In the run-up to the election BNP leaders repeatedly threatened they would topple the government with a "second Magura"^[3] if the election was rigged in favour of the AL candidate (*Dhaka Courier* 4 July 1997a, 11; *India Abroad* 18 July 1997, 19). All parties committed minor election code violations during their campaigns (*Bangladesh Observer* 29 June 1997, 3), but sources indicate the government, in order to deprive the BNP of any opportunity to launch street agitations, went to great lengths to ensure a fair election (*Dhaka Courier* 4 July 1997a, 11; *India Abroad* 18 July 1997, 19; *Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1622). Although it lost the election, at least one observer believed the AL had "won politically by not allowing the BNP to create a 'second Magura'" (*India Abroad* 18 July 1997, 19). Despite the lack of violence in the run-up to the election (*Bangladesh Observer* 29 June 1997, 3), and the major parties and chief election commissioner stating their satisfaction with how the poll was conducted, at least 25 people were injured in post-election clashes between AL and BNP activists (*Bangladesh Observer* 6 July 1997, 11).

The Union Parishad^[4] (council) elections, which began 1 December 1997, were considered the first major test of the AL's popularity since assuming office (DPA 30 Nov. 1997; *Daily News* 3 Feb. 1998; *ibid.* 12 Nov. 1997). Although Union Parishad politics are not party-based, most parties consider the elections to have implications for national politics and back non-party candidates in order to strengthen their rural power bases^[5] (*ibid.* 12 Nov. 1997; AFP 20 Oct. 1997; *ibid.* 14 Dec. 1997). Government authorities took a number of preventive measures in anticipation of widespread election violence (*Daily News* 12 Nov. 1997; AFP 20 Oct. 1997). These measures included staggering the voting over four weeks (*Daily News* 12 Nov. 1997; DPA 30 Nov. 1997), deploying 27,000 police and paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel to maintain security (AFP 14 Dec. 1997), and rounding up thousands of people identified as potential trouble makers (*ibid.* 20 Oct. 1997). Police reportedly arrested almost 23,000 suspected "terrorists" and confiscated more than 2,500 firearms in advance of the polls^[6] (*Daily News* 3 Feb. 1998). Election Commission officials also identified about 23,600 polling centres as being either "risky" or "less risky" and requiring special precautions (*Bangladesh Observer* 7

Jan. 1998, 5).

Despite the security precautions, numerous incidents of election-related violence and voting irregularities were reported (ibid.13 Dec. 1997, 1, 12; ibid. 7 Jan. 1998, 5; ibid.19 Jan. 1998, 1; *Daily News* 3 Feb. 1998). Sources indicate that at least 16 people were killed and 200 injured in pre-election violence (*Daily News* 3 Feb. 1998; ibid.12 Nov. 1997; DPA 30 Nov. 1997). A "highly conservative" Election Commission estimate put the election death toll at 31; NGOs put the figure closer to 50, while unofficial estimates put it at over 100 (*Bangladesh Observer* 19 Jan. 1998, 1). While most of those killed during the election died in clashes with political rivals, six were reportedly killed by police (*Daily News* 3 Feb. 1998).

Officials with the Fair Election Monitoring Alliance^[7] (FEMA) reported numerous instances of voting irregularities, fraud, manipulations by polling officials and obstruction and intimidation of FEMA workers (*Bangladesh Observer* 7 Jan. 1998, 5; ibid.13 Dec. 1997, 1, 12; *Daily Star* 27 Dec. 1997). For example, the presiding officer at one polling centre in Galiapara union in Comilla Sardar thana "openly supported a candidate in collusion with an influential local leader", who was seen intimidating voters both inside and outside the polling station to vote for his candidate (*Bangladesh Observer* 13 Dec. 1997, 1). At one polling centre in Dattapara union of Laxmipur thana, AL supporters of a candidate for chairman stuffed ballot boxes in the presence of FEMA observers; the presiding officer told FEMA observers that he was afraid to intervene (ibid., 12). FEMA officials also saw polling officials and agents at some polling centres in Nittanandapur union of Jhenidah district stamping the ballots of female voters, in violation of the law (*Daily Star* 27 Dec. 1997). On-duty police personnel were seen stamping ballots at some polling centres; at others they either stood by or played a partisan role as armed groups took over the stations, stamping and stuffing ballot boxes in favour of their candidate (ibid.). In Gangni union of Mollarhat thana a FEMA observer was abducted at gunpoint by 20 to 25 armed men and forcibly confined; in Chunkhola union in the same thana the brother of a candidate for chairman pointed a gun at a FEMA observer and threatened to kill him (*Bangladesh Observer* 13 Dec. 1997, 12). As well, many FEMA observers were prevented from entering polling stations despite having valid accreditation (ibid.). An Election Commission official later told the *Bangladesh Observer* that more than 30 election officials were "subjected to penal measures for their direct involvement or indirect support to candidates" during the election (ibid.19 Jan. 1998, 1; see also *Daily Star* 27 Dec. 1997). Results at 399 polling centres of the total 39,728 were cancelled because of violence and voting irregularities; repolling was carried out from 1 to 15 January 1998 (*Bangladesh Observer* 19 Jan. 1998, 1).

Despite the irregularities and violence at some polling centres, security at most polling centres was described as "adequate" and independent observers judged the elections to be "substantially free and fair" (ibid. 13 Dec. 1997, 12; *Country Reports* 1997 1998, 1622; *Daily Star* 4 Jan. 1998b). Election Commission officials estimated voter turnout at about 80 per cent overall (*Bangladesh Observer* 19 Jan. 1998, 1; *Daily News* 3 Feb. 1998), and close to 75 per cent for women, an "unprecedented" figure (IPS 21 Jan. 1998; *Bangladesh Observer* 7 Jan. 1998, 5). This surge of interest among women voters was attributed in large part to a September 1997 amendment to the Local Government Act that allowed for the direct election of three women members to each council (*Observer Magazine* 20 Mar. 1998, 2; AFP 15 Dec. 1997a). Prior to this change women were nominated by male council members, with the result that most women council members were the wives or close relatives of influential people^[8] (IPS 21 Jan. 1998; *Observer Magazine* 20 Mar. 1998, 2). Once permitted, women ran for office in record numbers; more than 44,000 women ran for 12,954 reserved seats, and nearly 4,000 women ran against male opponents for unreserved seats (*Observer Magazine* 20 Mar. 1998, 2; *Bangladesh Observer* 19 Jan. 1998, 1). Sources indicate that up to 90 per cent of women candidates were members of NGOs working

for the empowerment of women (AFP 15 Dec. 1997a; IPS 21 Jan. 1998). Women candidates were particularly successful in Gaibandha district, about 330 kilometres north of Dhaka, where women now dominate many councils (*Observer Magazine* 20 Mar. 1998, 2; IPS 21 Jan. 1998). Dhaka-based political observers have reportedly described the December 1997 elections as "historic" for women (IPS 21 Jan. 1998).

2.5 Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Treaty

On 2 December 1997 the government and the Parbatya Chattyagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS), the political wing of the Shanti Bahini rebel group, signed a peace accord ending the tribal insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (*Dhaka Courier* 5 Dec. 1997a, 9; *Times of India* 3 Dec. 1997, 16). The 23-year conflict had claimed the lives of 20,000 to 25,000 insurgents, government soldiers and civilians, both tribal and Bengali, and forced more than 50,000 tribals to seek refuge in India's Tripura state (IPS 22 Oct. 1997; *Times of India* 3 Dec. 1997, 16). The accord, which culminated a year-long series of peace talks initiated by the AL government in December 1996^[9] (*Bangladesh Observer* 20 Dec. 1997b, 5; *Dhaka Courier* 5 Dec. 1997b, 18), also ended a major source of friction between Bangladesh and India (ibid. 31 Oct. 1997, 19; ibid. 6 Feb. 1998, 12).

The PCJSS initially demanded complete provincial autonomy for the CHT, but later dropped this demand in favour of a five-point "charter of demands" that included limited self-rule, restoration of land rights of indigenous people, guarantees of fundamental rights, and preservation and development of the hill people's culture (IPS 22 Oct. 1997; *Dhaka Courier* 31 Oct. 1997, 18). The accord provides for the establishment of a regional council, to be elected for a five-year term, comprising the local government councils of the three hill districts of Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban (ibid. 5 Dec. 1997a, 9). The chairman of the 22-member council, who must be a tribal, is directly elected by the council members and enjoys the status of minister of state (ibid.). Two-thirds of regional council members also must be tribals (ibid. 5 Dec. 1997a, 9). The regional council will "coordinate and supervise" administrative, law and order, disaster relief and development activities in the CHT, and issue licences to industry (ibid.). Although tribal laws and the dispensation of social justice also fall within its purview, the regional council is not a legislative body and law-making powers remain with the government (ibid.; ibid. 31 Oct. 1997, 18). Under the terms of the accord a land commission will be established to settle disputes involving lands owned by tribal people, and Shanti Bahini members who surrender their arms will be amnestied and provided with Tk.50,000 (Cdn\$1,550) to facilitate their return to civilian life (ibid. 5 Dec. 1997a, 9; *Dawn* 17 Feb. 1997; *Dhaka Courier* 30 Jan. 1998a, 13). The accord also provides for the gradual demilitarization of the CHT, although no specific timetable is set out (ibid. 5 Dec. 1997a, 9).

Although supported by the armed forces, public opinion^[10] and at least two opposition parties (AFP 15 Dec. 1997b; *Daily News* 20 Nov. 1997; *Times of India* 3 Dec. 1997, 16; *The Hindu* 4 Feb. 1998), the treaty also has its critics. Foremost among these is the BNP and its allies, the Jamaat and several smaller right-wing groups (IPS 22 Oct. 1997; *Times of India* 3 Dec. 1997, 16; *Dhaka Courier* 20 Feb. 1998b, 14). BNP leader Khaleda Zia has charged the government with conceding far too much to the tribals at the expense of non-tribal settlers, and accused the government of compromising Bangladeshi independence by handing over the CHT to India (IPS 22 Oct. 1997; *Times of India* 3 Dec. 1997, 16; AFP 15 Dec. 1997b). The BNP and its allies initially planned to call a country-wide general strike on the day the treaty was signed, but later backed off (*Daily News* 20 Nov. 1997; *Times of India* 3 Dec. 1997, 16). Other critics have called the treaty discriminatory and unconstitutional and predicted it would entrench conflict in the CHT (*Dhaka Courier* 30 Jan. 1998b, 10; ibid. 13 Mar. 1998, 41).

Several tribal groups have come out sharply against the accord (ibid.13 Feb. 1998b, 9; *India Abroad* 20 Feb. 1998, 20). The Hill Student's Council (Pahari Chhatra Parishad, PCP), Hill People's Council (Pahari Gana Parishad, PGP), and Hill Women's Federation (HWF) accused the PCJSS leadership of betraying the hill people when it agreed to drop the demand for full autonomy in the CHT (*Dhaka Courier* 13 Feb. 1998b, 9; *India Abroad* 20 Feb. 1998, 20). Clashes between pro- and anti-treaty groups of tribals were reported in several areas of the CHT during the arms surrender process in February and early March 1998 (*Bangladesh Observer* 23 Feb. 1998, 1, 12; ibid.14 Mar. 1998, 10; *Dhaka Courier* 27 Feb. 1998, 11). There was also at least one major clash between CHT treaty opponents and the security forces: two people were killed and 70 injured, most of them Bengali-speaking settlers but also at least 10 policemen and BDR personnel, in a 14 December 1997 clash in Matiranga thana in Khagrachhari district (ibid.15 Dec. 1997, 1, 11).

The surrender of arms took place in four phases, beginning 10 February 1998 (*Dawn* 23 Feb. 1998; *Dhaka Courier* 20 Feb. 1998b, 14; ibid. 30 Jan. 1998a, 13). When the final stage was completed on 5 March 1998, nearly 2,000 Shanti Bahini fighters had given up their arms (*Bangladesh Observer* 5 Mar. 1998, 1, 12; *Dhaka Courier* 20 Feb. 1998b, 14).

Repatriation of tribal refugees from six camps in Tripura state, India, begun in February 1994^[11], resumed in November 1997 after the government provided an enhanced benefit package to returnees (Xinhua 13 Oct. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 27 Feb. 1998, 1; *Dhaka Courier* 5 Dec. 1997, 18). The sixth and final phase of repatriations took place on 27 February 1998, bringing to 59,239 the number of tribal refugees, mostly Chakmas, returned to the CHT under government repatriation and rehabilitation programmes (*Bangladesh Observer* 27 Feb. 1998, 1; ibid. 28 Feb. 1998a, 1, 12).

On 30 March 1998, under the terms of the agreement, the government began recruiting former Shanti Bahini members into the police force in Rangamati district (ibid. 31 Mar. 1998, 1; ibid. 25 Mar. 1998b, 11). About 1,000 former rebels will be recruited in Rangamati district, according to the *Bangladesh Observer* (ibid. 31 Mar. 1998, 1), with Khagrachhari and Bandarban hill districts soon to follow (ibid. 25 Mar. 1998b, 11). The new recruits will reportedly be given six months basic training at police training centres (ibid.). On 2 April 1998 the *Bangladesh Observer* reported that nearly 3,000 Village Defence Party (VDP) members, equipped with firearms to assist the army in policing the three hill districts during the insurgency, had been disarmed (ibid. 2 Apr. 1998c, 1). The move was reportedly undertaken to build confidence in the CHT peace process (ibid.).

On 12 April 1998, four bills giving "legal coverage" to the peace accord were introduced in parliament (*Bangladesh Observer* 19 Apr. 1998a, 12). On 16 April 1998, however, the PCJSS charged that "amendments and insertions contradictory to the agreement" had been made to many provisions, curtailing the power of the CHT regional council to make by-laws and rules, and stated that the PCJSS would not comply with the accord until these inconsistencies were removed (ibid. 17 Apr. 1998a, 1, 12; ibid. 18 Apr. 1998, 1; ibid. 21 Apr. 1998, 1). The government "immediately responded to the PCJSS request to discuss the issue," according to the *Bangladesh Observer* (18 Apr. 1998, 1), and on 19 April the two sides opened talks to discuss their differences (ibid.; ibid. 19 Apr. 1998a, 1). On 21 April, after three days of negotiations, government and tribal leaders announced they had reached a "workable understanding" on the four bills (ibid. 21 Apr. 1998, 1). While the precise content of the understanding is not clear, a joint statement read by AL chief whip Abdul Hasnat Abdullah indicated that "tribal leaders have accepted the [government's] explanations," and PCJSS leader Shantu Larma has reportedly described the talks as "satisfactory" (ibid.). By early May three of the four bills had been passed by parliament and were awaiting President Shahabuddin Ahmed's signature (*The Hindu* 7 May 1998).

Despite the early successes, smooth implementation of the CHT peace accord is not assured (*Dhaka Courier* 13 Feb. 1998, 9; *Bangladesh Observer* 28 Feb. 1998b, 5; *The Hindu* 7 May 1998). As of early May all of the opposition parties, including the JP, were united against the agreement and apparently gaining strength (*ibid.*). As well, militant factions of several tribal groups have continued their demands for full autonomy and have reportedly armed themselves and established checkpoints in some areas of the CHT (*Dhaka Courier* 17 Apr. 1998b, 14; *The Hindu* 7 May 1998; *Bangladesh Observer* 19 Apr. 1998b, 12). Some 4,000 disarmed VDP members in Khagrachhari district have demanded that they too be recruited into the CHT police force (*ibid.* 17 Apr. 1998b, 14). Restoration of land rights to tribals and removal of Bengali settlers from tribal lands are also seen as major obstacles to achieving lasting peace in the CHT (AFP 15 Dec. 1997b; *Bangladesh Observer* 20 Dec. 1997b, 5; *Dhaka Courier* 17 Apr. 1998b, 14).

NOTES

[1] Mujibur Rahman was Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's father (AI May 1997, 1; AFP 16 Jan. 1997). [\[back\]](#)

[2] Sources indicate that several of the coup leaders are in countries such as the United States, Canada, Britain, Zimbabwe, Hong Kong, Kenya and Libya (AFP 19 Oct. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 25 Feb. 1998, 1, 12). The whereabouts of the majority is still unknown, however, although most are believed to be in Europe (*Bangladesh Observer* 25 Feb. 1998, 1, 12). Each of the 14 fugitives has a court-appointed lawyer (AFP 17 Apr. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 25 Feb. 1998, 12). [\[back\]](#)

[3] Allegations of massive election fraud in the March 1994 Magura-2 by-election united the AL, JP and Jamaat into an anti-government movement that resulted in the collapse of the BNP government two years later (*Dhaka Courier* 4 July 1997, 11; *India Abroad* 18 July 1997, 19). For further information please see the March 1996 Research Directorate paper entitled *Bangladesh: Chronology of Events January 1994-December 1995*, as well as Response to Information Request BGD23944.E of 18 April 1996, which provides a copy of the February 1995 *Asian Profile* article entitled "Parliamentary By-Election in Bangladesh: The Study of Magura-2 Constituency." [\[back\]](#)

[4] Each Union Parishad, which is the lowest tier of rural government (AFP 20 Oct. 1997; *Daily News* 12 Nov. 1997), is elected for a five-year term and consists of a chairman and 12 members (AFP 20 Oct. 1997; *Observer Magazine* 20 Mar. 1998, 2). The December 1997 elections involved nearly 50 million voters and were contested by nearly 150,000 candidates vying for 38,223 seats on 4,298 councils (*Daily News* 3 Feb. 1998; AFP 14 Dec. 1997). [\[back\]](#)

[5] A survey by the independent Power and Participation Research Centre found that 84 per cent of chairman candidates were affiliated to political parties (AFP 15 Dec. 1997). [\[back\]](#)

[6] Some Tk.260 million (Cdn\$8 million) of the Tk.440 million (Cdn\$13.6 million) budgeted for the election went to the law enforcement agencies; the remainder, Tk.180 million (Cdn\$5.6 million), went to the Election Commission (*Bangladesh Observer* 19 Jan. 1998, 1). All currency conversions in this paper were performed on 31 March 1998. [\[back\]](#)

[7] Established in 1995, FEMA is a broad-based national coalition of over 180 NGOs that seeks to enhance economic development in Bangladesh by ensuring clean elections (IFES n.d.; *Bangladesh Observer* 22 Mar. 1998c, 10). FEMA has undertaken a study on electoral law reform for the Bangladesh government, and is expected to submit its final report to the president and chief election commissioner by December 1998 (*ibid.*). [\[back\]](#)

[8] For further information on women's involvement in local politics, please see Extended Response to Information Request BGD21350.EX of 6 October 1995, which is available at Regional Documentation Centres and on the IRB Website <www.irb.gc.ca>. [\[back\]](#)

[9] The previous BNP government had held 12 or 13 rounds of peace talks with tribal rebels, but these talks were inconclusive (IPS 22 Oct. 1997; *Daily News* 20 Nov. 1997). [\[back\]](#)

[10] Of 6,071 people polled in a nation-wide survey by the Bhorer Kagoj daily in late November 1997, 70 per cent supported the peace pact (*Daily News* 20 Nov. 1997). [\[back\]](#)

[11] About 12,000 tribals had returned to Bangladesh under the terms of an earlier agreement, in three phases: February 1994 (1,841), July 1994 (3,345) and March 1997 (6,708) (Xinhua 13 Oct. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 27 Feb. 1998, 1; *Dhaka Courier* 5 Dec. 1997, 18). The decision to resume the repatriation process was taken following September 1997 discussions in Dhaka between Chakma leaders and Prime Minister Hasina (Xinhua 13 Oct. 1997). [\[back\]](#)

3. LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS

.1 Events Leading Up to the 15 February 1996 General Election Soon after assuming office in June 1996, the Awami League government announced that it would be undertaking a series of initiatives to reform Bangladesh's outdated laws and legal and judicial systems (*Asian Survey* Feb. 1997, 139; *Dhaka Courier* 26 July 1996, 9; *Bangladesh Observer* 8 Jan. 1998, 1, 12; *ibid.* 12 Jan. 1998, 12). Among these were the establishment of a permanent law reform commission, national human rights commission and judicial training institute, and better separation of the judiciary from the executive (*Asian Survey* Feb. 1997, 139; *Dhaka Courier* 26 July 1996, 9; *Bangladesh Observer* 8 Jan. 1998, 1, 12; *ibid.* 12 Jan. 1998, 12). Currently under consideration is the establishment of metropolitan sessions courts in Dhaka and Chittagong to speed disposal of criminal cases, and of grameen (village) courts to deal with minor disputes in rural areas (*ibid.* 8 Jan. 1998, 1, 12; *ibid.* 12 Jan. 1998, 12). The law ministry is reportedly overseeing 17 separate projects to modernize and "thoroughly recast the country's legal system" (*ibid.* 8 Jan. 1998, 1; *ibid.* 22 Mar. 1998a, 12), with a three-member committee composed of Chief Justice Abu Taher Mohammad Afzal, Minister of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Abdul Matin Khasru and law commission chairman former chief justice Kemal Uddin Hossain to monitor the whole process (*ibid.* 22 Mar. 1998a, 12). Several of these projects are being undertaken with assistance and funding from the World Bank and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (*ibid.* 12 Jan. 1998, 12; *ibid.* 9 Dec. 1997, 1; *AI* June 1997, 1; *ASK* 9 Feb. 1998), and from foreign governments (*Bangladesh Observer* 7 Feb. 1998, 10; *Dhaka Courier* 27 Mar. 1998a, 13). Law minister Khasru has reportedly taken a very active role in the process (UNHCR 5 Apr. 1998).

3.1 Law Reform Commission .1 Events Leading Up to the 15 February 1996 General Election

Many of Bangladesh's laws were framed during the colonial period and are in urgent need of updating (*Bangladesh Observer* 6 Jan. 1998, 5; *Dhaka Courier* 10 Jan. 1997, 15). Within weeks of taking power the government drafted a bill to establish a permanent law reform commission; the Law Commission Bill 1996 was passed by parliament on 2 September 1996 (*ibid.* 26 July 1996, 9; *Bangladesh Observer* 3 Sept. 1996, 1, 12; CCHRB Apr. 1997, 116). The three-member commission, which comprises a chairman and two members, all appointed by the government, has been charged with reviewing all existing laws and recommending areas where laws need to be reformed or repealed, or where new laws need to be enacted (*Dhaka Courier* 26 July 1996, 9; *Bangladesh Observer* 3 Sept. 1996, 1, 12; CCHRB Apr. 1997, 116). The law commission is authorized to review laws relating to human rights, the efficiency and independence of the judicial system, criminal justice matters and even to business and trade (*Dhaka Courier* 26 July 1996, 9; *Bangladesh Observer* 3 Sept. 1996, 1, 12; CCHRB Apr. 1997, 116). Its offices are located in Dhaka and it is required to report to the government each year on the previous year's activities (*Dhaka Courier* 26 July 1996, 9).

Commission chairman Justice FKMA Munim, who recently resigned because of old age (*ASK* 9 Feb. 1998; *Bangladesh Observer* 2 Mar. 1998, 10), has been replaced by 75-year-old former chief justice Kemal Uddin Hossain (*ibid.*; *ibid.* 9 Mar. 1998, 3). The commission members are Justice Aminur Rahman Khan and Justice Naimuddin Ahmed (*ibid.*). Although the law minister has claimed the law commission

is "actively working" to modernize the laws (ibid. 20 Dec. 1997a, 12), sources indicate there has been little substantial progress on law reform since the commission was appointed in September 1996 (BAFI 17 Feb. 1998; CCHRB 17 Feb. 1998; UNHCR 5 Apr. 1998).

3.2 Judicial Reform

In September 1996 the government established an "expert committee" within the law ministry to develop proposals to better separate the judiciary from the executive (*Bangladesh Observer* 23 Jan. 1997, 1, 12; *Dhaka Courier* 24 Jan. 1997, 9). Improving judicial independence was a key plank in the AL's 1996 election platform (*Bangladesh Observer* 23 Jan. 1997, 12; *Dhaka Courier* 24 Jan. 1997, 9; *Asian Survey* Feb. 1997, 139). In January 1997 the committee submitted its report to the government (*Bangladesh Observer* 23 Jan. 1997, 12; *Dhaka Courier* 24 Jan. 1997, 9). The committee recommended revisions to 11 articles and schedule four of the Bangladesh constitution, and the inclusion of a new article (*Bangladesh Observer* 23 Jan. 1997, 12; *Dhaka Courier* 24 Jan. 1997, 9). The existing articles govern such matters as the appointment and tenure of judges, the rule-making power of the Supreme Court, superintendence and control of courts, the binding nature of Supreme Court decisions, establishment of subordinate courts, transfer of cases from subordinate courts to the High Court division, and appointments, promotions and discipline in subordinate courts (ibid.; *Bangladesh Observer* 23 Jan. 1997, 12). Proposed article 95(A) would require the government to set up a permanent judicial commission, to be headed by the chief justice, to make recommendations to the president for the appointment of Supreme Court judges (*Bangladesh Observer* 23 Jan. 1997, 1; *Dhaka Courier* 24 Jan. 1997, 9).

Initially it was expected that a constitutional amendment would be required to implement the proposals, but an early May 1997 High Court ruling precluded the need to introduce such a bill (AFP 8 May 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 8 May 1997, 12). The ruling, which came on a writ petition filed by lower court judges, stated that the terms and conditions of appointment to judicial service also applied to judicial magistrates, meaning that lower court judges were "not government servants" and no longer under the jurisdiction of the Administrative Tribunal, the government body that determines the service conditions of civil servants (AFP 8 May 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 8 May 1997, 12; ibid. 18 May 1997, 5). The court further ruled that a constitutional amendment was not required to implement the necessary changes, and ordered the government to take "immediate steps" to separate the judiciary from the administrative hierarchy (AFP 8 May 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 8 May 1997, 12; ibid. 18 May 1997, 5). Although hailed as a "landmark verdict" that cleared the way for government action (AFP 8 May 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 18 May 1997, 5), sources indicate that little has changed since the ruling (*Dhaka Courier* 27 Mar. 1998a, 13; BAFI 17 Feb. 1998). As of late March 1998 the government was awaiting a decision on a matter before the Supreme Court before introducing a bill in parliament (*Dhaka Courier* 27 Mar. 1998a, 13).

3.3 National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

According to Amnesty International, the idea of a national human rights commission has been around for several years in Bangladesh (June 1997, 1). In March 1996 the previous BNP government and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed an agreement under which the UNDP would fund a study of the institutional development of human rights in Bangladesh (IDHRB), the primary purpose of which was to lay a foundation for an institution to promote and protect human rights in Bangladesh (ibid.). The project was launched in July 1996, and in November 1996 a national consultative committee (NCC) of "eminent personalities" and members of NGOs and government agencies was established to advise on it (ibid., 1, 2). Both the NCC and IDHRB are chaired by law minister Abdul Matin Khasru (ibid., 2). Over the next several months NCC and IDHRB members met

with a United Nations special adviser on human rights and toured national human rights commissions in several Asian countries (ibid.). The IDHRB released its report in late May 1997 (ibid.), and in December 1997 the government was reported to be finalizing a draft bill to establish the NHRC (*Bangladesh Observer* 9 Dec. 1997, 1, 12; ibid. 20 Dec. 1997a, 12).

According to Dr. Hameeda Hossain of the Dhaka-based human rights and legal aid centre Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), the draft legislation has had only limited circulation in the capital city, and a number of human rights organizations have demanded more open consultation on the bill and assurances on the NHRC's autonomy (ASK 9 Feb. 1998).

The Bangladesh Observer reports that under the draft bill, the NRHC will be composed of a chairman, to be appointed from among the retired justices of the appellate division of the Supreme Court, and four regular members with knowledge of and/or practical experience in human rights-related matters, at least one of whom must be a woman (*Bangladesh Observer* 9 Dec. 1997, 1). The five-member commission will be constituted by Bangladesh's president, in consultation with the prime minister, speaker of parliament and leader of the opposition, and will sit for a five-year term (ibid.). It will be empowered to institute an inquiry upon receipt of a petition or complaint from a person alleging human rights abuse or negligence by a public servant, and can intervene in any court proceeding involving an allegation of human rights violation, with the approval of the concerned court (ibid., 1, 12). The commission will encourage the efforts of NGOs and other private organizations working in the human rights field, and will recommend measures to prevent acts that inhibit the enjoyment of human rights (ibid., 12). The NHRC will be "deemed to be a civil court with judicial proceedings and all members of the commission will function without political or official interference, [and] the annual or special reports of the commission will be placed before the parliament" (ibid.). The NHRC will reportedly be financed through a trust fund to be created by the government (ibid.).

Although the bill was expected to be introduced in parliament in January 1998 (ibid. 9 Dec. 1997, 1), Dr. Hossain indicated in February 1998 that the draft still had not been finalized (ASK 9 Feb. 1998; also see BAFI 17 Feb. 1998). June 1998 has also been suggested as a likely date for introduction (*Daily Star* 4 Jan. 1998a), with establishment of the NHRC expected before the end of the year (UNHCR 5 Apr. 1998). However, in late March the government was reportedly contemplating the appointment of an ombudsman to hold the offices of both ombudsman and chairman of the NHRC (*Dhaka Courier* 27 Mar. 1998a, 13). The move was explained as a temporary measure to save money during the initial start-up period (ibid.). The ombudsman's office would have many of the same powers as the NHRC, would answer to parliament (*Bangladesh Observer* 20 Apr. 1998, 5), and would share personnel with the NHRC (*Dhaka Courier* 27 Mar. 1998a, 13). Although the government has yet to define a structure for the NHRC or appoint someone to both offices, law minister Khasru has reportedly indicated that a retired High Court judge or someone of similar status would fill the position (ibid.).

3.4 Special Powers Act (SPA)

The Special Powers Act (SPA) of 1974 provides the government with sweeping powers to detain citizens for up to 120 days without a formal charge or specific complaint (*Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1616, 1617; AI 26 Mar. 1997; AFP 12 Mar. 1997). The law was enacted in the post-independence period, ostensibly for national security reasons, and has been used by successive governments to circumvent the judicial process and harass and intimidate political opponents (*Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1614, 1617; AI 26 Mar. 1997). While in opposition Prime Minister Hasina had repeatedly demanded the SPA be abolished (*Bangladesh Observer* 14 Mar. 1997, 1; *Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1616, 1617), leading some to believe she had promised to repeal the law once in power (*Dhaka Courier* 13 Mar. 1998, 24), but on 11 March 1997 she announced the law was essential to running the state

and would not be withdrawn (AFP 12 Mar. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 12 Mar. 1997, 1, 12; *Dhaka Courier* 14 Mar. 1997, 26). The prime minister reportedly told parliament that three past governments had also deemed the SPA necessary to govern (AFP 12 Mar. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 12 Mar. 1997, 1).

Sources indicate that about 3,500 people were arrested under the SPA in the first nine months of 1997 (*Dhaka Courier* 20 Feb. 1998a, 25; *Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1617), and approximately 2,750 were released (*ibid.*). Government figures indicate that about 2,000 people were kept in detention under the SPA in 1997 (DPA 5 Feb. 1998; *Country Reports 1997 1998*, 1617). Human rights groups and political activists claim that since coming to power the government has used the SPA "primarily ... to harass and intimidate political opponents" (*ibid.*); hundreds, perhaps thousands, of opposition party supporters have been detained under the SPA and released when charges could not be brought (*ibid.*; *Dhaka Courier* 13 Feb. 1998a, 24).

4. OPPOSITION PARTIES

4.1 *Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)*

Many of the political developments in Bangladesh in 1997 and early 1998 took place in the context of a sustained BNP-led boycott of parliament and anti-government campaign of general strikes and other street agitations to protest the Chittagong Hill Tracts peace process, price hikes, abuses against opposition party workers and other issues (Xinhua 7 Dec. 1997; DPA 23 Mar. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 6 Aug. 1997, 1; *Dhaka Courier* 4 Apr. 1997, 7). The *Dhaka Courier* reports that after nearly a year of AL rule, BNP popularity was in decline and the party was becoming "desperate" to mount an effective political response (*Dhaka Courier* 4 July 1997a, 11; *ibid.* 18 July 1997a, 9; *ibid.* 15 Aug. 1997a, 14). The BNP's course of action was made that much easier, according to some analysts, by a few hasty decisions from an overly complacent AL government (*ibid.* 5 Sept. 1997, 15).

The BNP's first major confrontation with the AL government occurred on 23 March 1997, when the party called a hartal to protest government handling of a number of issues, including the Ganges water sharing agreement, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the decision to grant India a transportation corridor through Bangladesh, and a move to form a subregional economic grouping with other south Asian nations (DPA 23 Mar. 1997; *Dhaka Courier* 28 Mar. 1997, 5; *ibid.* 4 July 1997a, 11). The strike largely went off as planned, with public transportation, shops, banks, schools and commercial and industrial enterprises remaining closed in Dhaka and other major cities (DPA 23 Mar. 1997; Reuters 23 Mar. 1997), although at least three people were killed, 200 injured and another 150-200 arrested in strike-related violence (*ibid.* 23 Mar. 1997; *Dhaka Courier* 28 Mar. 1997, 6; *Bangladesh Observer* 24 Mar. 1997a, 1). The 23 March hartal was especially notable for a government decision to move pre-emptively against the BNP, arresting four former BNP ministers under the SPA on 20 March on vaguely formulated charges of "involvement in various subversive activities, including ... acts of terrorism..." (AFP 21 Mar. 1997; *Dhaka Courier* 28 Mar. 1997, 5-6; *ibid.* 11 July 1997, 12; AI 26 Mar. 1997). Writ petitions challenging the arrests were immediately filed in the High Court, however, and on 7 April 1997 the court threw out the charges and ordered the government to pay each detainee compensation of Tk.100,000 (Cdn\$3,100) for "mala fide [intent] and political victimisation" (*Bangladesh Observer* 8 Apr. 1997, 1; *ibid.* 24 Mar. 1997b, 1; AFP 7 Apr. 1997). It was an unprecedented ruling, according to the *Bangladesh Observer* (*Bangladesh Observer* 8 Apr. 1997, 1).

Although the 23 March hartal was generally considered successful, one report states the BNP "could not come up with any meaningful follow-up action," nor was it able to capitalize on the arrest and subsequent release of the four MPs (*Dhaka Courier* 4 July 1997a, 11). A second nationwide hartal

called to protest the national budget, and timed for 3 July to capitalize on any violence or allegations of fraud in the Manikganj-3 by-election, failed to build momentum when the BNP candidate emerged victorious (see subsection 2.4) (ibid.). Sources indicate that at least part of the problem was the BNP leadership's inability to decide on a consistent, coherent strategy to advance its anti-government movement (ibid.; ibid.15 Aug. 1997a, 15; *Dhaka Holiday* 18 Aug. 1997).

In early August 1997 the BNP met with a number of other opposition parties, primarily right-wing and pro-Islamic groups, to discuss formation of a coordinated program of anti-AL street agitations (*Dhaka Courier* 15 Aug. 1997a, 14; AFP 22 Aug. 1997). The move followed a 5-6 April 1997 conference, attended by the Jamaat, Muslim League, Jatiya Ganotantrik Party (JAGPA) and other Islamic groups, where BNP leader Khaleda Zia reportedly called for "greater unity of all 'nationalist and Islamic forces' against the ... government's 'subservient policy towards India,'" as well as a 15 July BNP-supported full-day hartal called by the Jamaat and Islami Oikyo Jote (IOJ) to protest an incident in Israel in which a Jewish woman blasphemed the Prophet Muhammad (*Dhaka Courier* 18 July 1997b, 7; ibid.18 July 1997a, 8; *India Abroad* 29 Aug. 1997, 9). Many BNP leaders reportedly believed the party could use the right-wing and Islamic groups to further its anti-government program (*Dhaka Courier* 18 July 1997b, 7). The move provoked a sharp split in the party between those in a "hard-line" faction, most of whom had lost their seats in the previous election and who wanted to move the party to the right, and a group of younger members, "deadly opposed to ... forming an alliance with 'anti-liberation forces,'" that wanted a reorganization of the party leadership (ibid.15 Aug. 1997a, 15; *Dhaka Holiday* 18 Aug. 1997). The split was particularly pronounced in Chittagong, where violent factional clashes in August 1997 resulted in injuries to several BNP activists (ibid.).

Bolstered by the new seven-party alliance, the BNP called a nationwide hartal on 24 August 1997 to protest a government fuel price hike (Xinhua 24 Aug. 1997; *Dhaka Courier* 5 Sept. 1997, 15; *Bangladesh Observer* 31 Dec. 1997, 12). While the Jamaat and JAGPA launched simultaneous strike calls, the other right-wing and Islamist groups, which did not have their own anti-government programs, extended their moral support (*Dhaka Courier* 5 Sept. 1997, 15). The shutdown was judged a success, especially in Dhaka (ibid.). On 30 August 1997, citing a variety of grievances including repression of party workers and a lack of free speech in the legislature, the BNP walked out of parliament^[12] (VOA 13 Jan. 1998; *Dhaka Courier* 6 Mar. 1998a, 9; *Dhaka Courier* 6 Mar. 1998b, 13; *Dawn* 2 Mar. 1998). The Jamaat, which initially did not join the BNP walk-out, withdrew its members in early December to protest the signing of the CHT peace accord (*Bangladesh Observer* 6 Mar. 1998, 1). To back up its demands, the BNP called hartals on 23 and 25 September (*Bangladesh Observer* 23 Sept. 1997, 1; AFP 25 Sept. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 31 Dec. 1997, 12). Other hartals, nationwide and local, full-day and half-day, occurred at regular intervals throughout the fall months (ibid.13 Nov. 1997, 1; Xinhua 7 Dec. 1997; *Dhaka Courier* 26 Dec. 1997a, 19; *Bangladesh Observer* 31 Dec. 1997, 12). The strikes called toward year end were generally to protest the "anti-national" and "black peace deal" in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Xinhua 7 Dec. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 31 Dec. 1997, 12; *Dhaka Courier* 26 Dec. 1997b, 11).

However, despite the seven-party alliance, walk-out from parliament, program of street agitation and repeated pronouncements from the party leadership, the BNP was unable to sufficiently capitalize on any issue to mount a serious challenge to the AL government (ibid. 6 Mar. 1998a, 9; ibid. 20 Feb. 1998c, 15). The "inaction and inertia" of the party leadership apparently came as a disappointment to many BNP backbenchers and mid-level leaders and workers, and at a mid-January 1998 caucus meeting the majority of MPs voted to return to parliament (ibid. 6 Mar. 1998a, 9-10; ibid. 23 Jan. 1998, 18; *Bangladesh Observer* 1 Mar. 1998, 1). The BNP high command rejected any suggestion of ending the

walk-out, however, prompting outspoken MP Major (Rtd) Akhtaruzzaman to write an open letter to BNP leader Khaleda Zia expressing his dissatisfaction with the boycott, and recommending an immediate return to parliament (*Dhaka Courier* 6 Mar. 1998a, 10; *ibid.* 16 Jan. 1998, 9-10; *ibid.* 30 Jan. 1998c, 7). For his efforts Akhtaruzzaman was suspended from party membership (*ibid.* 6 Mar. 1998a, 10; *ibid.* 30 Jan. 1998c, 7).

The BNP's political allies were also becoming increasingly frustrated with the "confusion and contradictions" within the party leadership, in particular its inability to develop a tough program of action on a politically volatile issue like the CHT peace treaty (*ibid.* 6 Mar. 1998a, 10; *ibid.* 20 Feb. 1998c, 15). The party leadership was split on the question of street agitations, and reportedly had taken a soft stand on the CHT treaty because it had been overwhelmingly endorsed by donor countries and agencies and the Bangladeshi public (*ibid.* 6 Mar. 1998a, 10; *ibid.* 20 Feb. 1998c, 15). By mid-February 1998 the opposition alliance "appear[ed] to be in total disarray" and incapable of mounting an effective challenge to the government (*ibid.*). The defection of BNP MPs Hasibur Rahman Swapan and Mohammad Alauddin to the AL in February and rumours that more were prepared to follow only increased pressure on the BNP leadership (*ibid.* 6 Mar. 1998a, 9, 10; *Dawn* 19 Feb. 1998; *India Abroad* 20 Feb. 1998b, 20; *ibid.* 27 Feb. 1998, 18).

On 27 February 1998, BNP and AL leaders began four days of negotiations in the speaker's office to try to end the six-month parliamentary stand-off (*Dhaka Courier* 6 Mar. 1998a, 9; *ibid.* 6 Mar. 1998b, 13; *Bangladesh Observer* 3 Mar. 1998a, 1). Under the terms of their 2 March 1998 accord, the BNP agreed to return to parliament by 8 March while the government agreed to four provisions: first, that all cases filed against BNP leaders and activists for harassment purposes would be withdrawn, subject to investigation, by 31 March 1998; second, that either Manik Mia Avenue or Panthapath Road would be designated a public meeting site within 15 days; third, that all 113 BNP MPs would be included in the 35 standing committees of parliament; and fourth, that government radio and television would provide equal coverage of government and opposition in parliament (*Dhaka Courier* 6 Mar. 1998a, 9; *ibid.* 6 Mar. 1998c, 15). The Jamaat, refusing to follow the BNP lead, decided to continue its boycott and street agitations to protest the CHT peace accord (*ibid.* 6 Mar. 1998d, 11; *Dawn* 9 Mar. 1998a; *ibid.* 9 Mar. 1998b).

The BNP returned to parliament on 8 March 1998, but soon made clear that it had not abandoned its anti-government campaign (*ibid.* 9 Mar. 1998a; *ibid.* 9 Mar. 1998b). Party officials stated that the new BNP strategy was to "stoke the movement both inside and outside parliament" (*ibid.* 9 Mar. 1998a; *ibid.* 9 Mar. 1998b; *Bangladesh Observer* 6 Mar. 1998, 12). While party leader Khaleda Zia worked to build the anti-government movement on the street, BNP MPs attacked the government in parliament (*Dhaka Courier* 27 Mar. 1998b, 9; *Bangladesh Observer* 25 Mar. 1998a, 1), staging brief walk-outs on 10, 23 and 24 March to protest, among other things, the behaviour of ruling party MPs and non-acceptance of questions from BNP members during question period (*Dhaka Courier* 27 Mar. 1998b, 9; *Bangladesh Observer* 25 Mar. 1998a, 1). The BNP also accused the government of not honouring the terms of the four-point AL-BNP agreement (*ibid.* 1 Apr. 1998, 1), but on 31 March the government authorized the holding of public meetings on Manik Mia Avenue, and announced that a decision would be taken that evening on the withdrawal of political cases against BNP workers and leaders (*ibid.*). As well, the AL and BNP chief whips were reportedly finalising the list of BNP MPs to be appointed to the various standing committees of parliament (*ibid.*).

As of early May 1998 the BNP-led seven party alliance was intact and moving forward with its program of anti-government agitation (*The Hindu* 7 May 1998). Half-day nationwide hartals to protest the CHT peace treaty took place on 15 April and 7 May (*The Hindu* 7 May 1998; *Dhaka Courier* 17 Apr.

1998a, 12; *Bangladesh Observer* 16 Apr. 1998, 1), and on 27 April 1998 the BNP staged a noisy walkout of parliament to protest police abuses against party activists (*Dawn* 28 Apr. 1998). One source indicates that by early May the sustained opposition campaign was beginning to have an impact on the government (*The Hindu* 7 May 1998).

4.2 Jatiya Party (JP)

On 9 January 1997 the Jatiya Party leader, deposed former president Hussain Muhammad Ershad, was released from jail on a Tk.500,000 (Cdn\$15,500) bail bond halfway through a 13-year sentence for corruption charges (AFP 9 Jan. 1997; *Keesing's* Jan. 1997, 41449). Ershad's political opponents, the BNP in particular, accused the AL government of releasing him as a political pay-off for his crucial support after the June 1996 elections (AFP 9 Jan. 1997; *Keesing's* Jan. 1997, 41449; *The Economist* 25 Jan. 1997).

Ershad's first task after six years in prison was to reorganize and reinvigorate his party (*Dhaka Courier* 7 Mar. 1997, 15). Party workers and district-level leaders had become increasingly disillusioned with the party leadership for its failure to provide a tough, focused program; the party policy of supporting the AL "only for its good deeds" and criticizing it for the bad had, many believed, turned the JP into an Awami League "B team" (*Dhaka Courier* 7 Mar. 1997, 15; *ibid.* 21 Mar. 1997, 13; Reuters 11 Apr. 1997). These differences over direction, strategy and ideology broke into the open at an 18 March 1997 party rally, when JP presidium member Kazi Zafar Ahmed got into a scuffle with another party leader after criticizing Ershad and the party's support for AL policies (*Dhaka Courier* 21 Mar. 1997, 13; *Bangladesh Observer* 19 Mar. 1997, 1; Reuters 11 Apr. 1997).

Zafar was expelled from and then readmitted to the JP, but the rift resurfaced in April when Zafar and two other top leaders, Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury and Shah Moazzem Hossain, called on Ershad to step down as party chairman and hand over power to the party presidium (*Bangladesh Observer* 11 Apr. 1997, 1; Reuters 11 Apr. 1997). The dissidents alleged Ershad had "turned the party into his own property and indulged in activities that not only tarnished his personal image but disturbed the party's rank and file" (*ibid.*). Key among his alleged transgressions were turning the JP into an "extension of [the] Awami League" to serve the interests of India, his 14-year love affair with JP MP Zinat Hossain, and his appointment of his friends, relatives and wife to the party presidium (*News-India Times* 13 June 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 11 Apr. 1997, 1; Reuters 11 Apr. 1997). On 4 June 1997 Zafar, Moazzem and a third dissident leader, Shamim Al Mamoon, were expelled from the party^[13] (*Bangladesh Observer* 5 June 1997, 1). They were joined 10 days later by four more expelled JP leaders, Vice-Chairman Mostafa Jamal Haider, Joint Secretary-General Ismail Hossain Bengal, central committee member Mainuddin Bhuiyan, and Professor Nurul Islam Milon (*Bangladesh Observer* 14 June 1997, 1; *ibid.* 16 June 1997, 12). The split became official on 30 June 1997 when the rebel faction, claiming it was supported by a large number of party delegates, declared itself the "real" Jatiya Party (PTI 30 June 1997; *Dhaka Courier* 4 July 1997b, 18). JP(Z-M) co-chairman Kazi Zafar Ahmed was soon urging all nationalist and Islamic forces to "wage a united movement against [the government's] anti-people and anti-nation activities" (*ibid.* 15 Aug. 1997b, 48; *ibid.* 4 July 1997b, 18), and in mid-August joined the opposition alliance with the BNP, Jamaat and other right-wing parties (see subsection 4.1) (*ibid.* 15 Aug. 1997a, 14; *ibid.* 15 Aug. 1997b, 48).

The Jatiya Party's problems did not end with the expulsion of the rebel faction. On 2 March 1998, in a bid to return the JP to the political limelight with a more independent, anti-government role, Ershad asked Anwar Hossain Manju, the party's secretary-general and communications minister in the AL national consensus government^[14], to resign from the cabinet (*Bangladesh Observer* 3 Mar. 1998b,

1; *ibid.* 3 Mar. 1998c, 12; *Dhaka Courier* 6 Mar. 1998e, 17). When Manju did not resign his cabinet position, he was removed as JP secretary-general (*Bangladesh Observer* 3 Mar. 1998b, 1; *Dhaka Courier* 6 Mar. 1998e, 17), and Ershad announced the JP was withdrawing from the national consensus government^[15] (*The Hindu* 9 Mar. 1998; *Bangladesh Observer* 15 Mar. 1998, 12). But Ershad's actions, in conjunction with rumours that he had reached some sort of an understanding with the BNP, had divided the party; on 6 March 1998, 14 of the JP's 33 MPs issued a joint statement opposing the decision to sack Manju, who enjoyed substantial support not only among MPs but among the party rank and file (*Dhaka Courier* 6 Mar. 1998e, 17; *Bangladesh Observer* 7 Mar. 1998, 1; *The Hindu* 9 Mar. 1998). Another split had become almost inevitable, according to sources (*Dhaka Courier* 6 Mar. 1998e, 17; *The Hindu* 9 Mar. 1998), with the Manju faction expected to join with the Awami League (*Dhaka Courier* 6 Mar. 1998e, 17).

In late March Ershad announced the JP could not support the CHT peace agreement, which he criticized as being unconstitutional and undermining Bangladesh's sovereignty (*Bangladesh Observer* 22 Mar. 1998b, 12; *ibid.* 25 Apr. 1998, 12). In early April he announced the party had appointed a new secretary-general and, in its new role as an active opposition party, would not be participating in cabinet (*ibid.* 2 Apr. 1998b, 12). At public meetings in late April, Ershad charged the AL government with being "totally inefficient" and of having violated all its election promises (*ibid.* 25 Apr. 1998, 1; *ibid.* 26 Apr. 1998, 12); by early May the JP had reportedly joined the anti-CHT treaty lobby (*The Hindu* 7 May 1998).

4.3 Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat)

The Jamaat-e-Islami suffered a severe setback in the June 1996 election, dropping from 18 to only three seats in parliament (*Dhaka Courier* 20 Mar. 1998a, 14; *ibid.* 6 Dec. 1996, 11; *Country Reports 1997* 1998, 1625). In the months following the election the party leadership was reportedly worried about the party's very existence, much less whether it could continue as a viable political force (*Dhaka Courier* 6 Dec. 1996, 11). The Jamaat's poor showing caused much dissatisfaction among party workers and mid-level leaders, who blamed the party's declining fortunes on the leadership's decision to join the Awami League-led anti-BNP movement during the 1994-1996 period (*ibid.* 20 Mar. 1998a, 14; *ibid.* 6 Dec. 1996, 11). Many party members believed the Jamaat had "shelved [its ideals] to the detriment of its political future," and the leadership was worried about the possibility of mass defections to the BNP^[16] (*ibid.*). One bright spot for the Jamaat was its student wing, the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), which was reportedly strong and increasing its sphere of influence (*ibid.*; *Country Reports 1997* 1998, 1620).

The government adopted a tougher stand against the Jamaat and other religion-based political groups in 1997 (*Index on Censorship* Nov.-Dec. 1997, 99; *India Abroad* 8 Aug. 1997, 15). In early August the cabinet committee on law and order stressed the need for "stern but cautious" action against fundamentalist groups and their activities (*ibid.*). As well, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) opened an investigation into a number of people currently or previously involved in Jamaat politics and alleged to have committed war crimes (*Index on Censorship* Nov.-Dec. 1997, 99). The government's position prompted the Jamaat, IOJ and other small parties, which rarely find common ground on religious and social issues, to submerge their differences and agree to work together (*India Abroad* 8 Aug. 1997, 15; *Dhaka Courier* 18 July 1997b, 7). Several of these small groups joined the Jamaat and BNP in the seven-party opposition alliance (see subsection 4.1).

The Jamaat was not invited to the 27 February-2 March 1998 speaker-mediated negotiations between the AL and BNP, a development that reportedly left the party isolated and its leadership bitter

and disillusioned (ibid. 20 Mar. 1998a, 14; *Bangladesh Observer* 21 Mar. 1998a, 12). On 16 March the three Jamaat MPs met with government leaders in the speaker's office to discuss a face-saving way of returning to parliament (*Dhaka Courier* 20 Mar. 1998a, 14; *Bangladesh Observer* 17 Mar. 1998, 12; ibid. 21 Mar. 1998a, 1). Although it had been contemplating a possible 22 March return to the House (*Dhaka Courier* 20 Mar. 1998a, 14), several days after the meeting the Jamaat announced it would return to parliament only after examining the text of the bill on the CHT peace accord (*Bangladesh Observer* 21 Mar. 1998a, 1). The government was expected to introduce such a bill on 13 or 14 April, a day or two after resuming the current session of parliament (*Dawn* 6 Apr. 1998). In the interim the Jamaat is continuing its program of anti-government agitation (*Dhaka Courier* 27 Mar. 1998b, 9; *Dawn* 6 Apr. 1998).

NOTES

[12] This was the second such walk-out by the BNP. The first "parliamentary strike," which began 10 November 1996 to press a similar set of political demands (VOA 14 Jan. 1997; AFP 12 Jan. 1997), ended when the AL and BNP signed a four-point agreement on 14 January 1997 (*Dhaka Courier* 6 Mar. 1998a, 9; *Asian Survey* Mar. 1997, 259). [\[back\]](#)

[13] Mianzur Rahman Chowdhury had returned to Ershad's fold a week earlier (AFP 4 June 1997). [\[back\]](#)

[14] Please refer to the December 1996 Research Directorate paper *Bangladesh: Political Developments and Political Violence* for further information on the AL's government of national consensus. [\[back\]](#)

[15] Ershad had threatened to withdraw from the government in September 1997, in an earlier bid to assert JP independence (AFP 2 Sept. 1997; *Bangladesh Observer* 13 Sept. 1997, 1; *Bangladesh Observer* 14 Sept. 1997, 1). [\[back\]](#)

[16] Defections are not uncommon in Bangladeshi politics. On 11 February 1998, for example, 375 local-level Jatiya Party workers in Rajshahi reportedly defected to the BNP (*Bangladesh Observer* 12 Feb. 1998, 16). No reason was given for the defection. [\[back\]](#)

5. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

While the Awami League swept into power with widespread popular support, analysts predicted it would soon have to deal with a number of difficult issues (*Asian Survey* Feb. 1997, 140-41). These included keeping its many election promises, dealing with a bitter and resentful BNP that forms the largest and strongest parliamentary opposition party in Bangladesh's history, tempering its own inexperience in government and tendency to see conspiracies in every corner, resisting pressure from powerful lobby groups, and dealing with a rapidly deteriorating law and order situation (*Asian Survey* Feb. 1997, 140-41; *Dhaka Courier* 27 Mar. 1998c, 17; ibid. 20 Mar. 1998b, 22). The law and order situation is seen as a particularly urgent problem, one that threatens the future of democracy in Bangladesh, yet the government seems unable to mount an effective response (ibid. 27 Mar. 1998c, 17; *Bangladesh Observer* 21 Mar. 1998b, 5; ibid. 27 Jan. 1998, 5). One observer indicates the public is quickly losing patience with the government's handling of the law and order and other pressing issues, and predicts the mayoral elections scheduled for 1999 will be a major test for the Awami League government (*Dhaka Courier* 27 Mar. 1998c, 17).

REFERENCES

Agence France Presse (AFP). 15 December 1997a. "Bangladeshi Women Elected in Rural Poll Aim to Boost Status of Women." (NEXIS)

_____. 15 December 1997b. Nadeem Qadir. "Bangladesh Opposition at Odds with Government over

Peace Pact." (NEXIS)

_____. 14 December 1997. "24 Killed in Bangladesh Rural Council Poll Violence." (NEXIS)

_____. 20 October 1997. "Bangladesh Opposition Leader Fears Bloodshed in Upcoming Polls." (NEXIS)

_____. 19 October 1997. "Sheltering Leaders of 1975 Bangladesh Coup Breaks Human Rights: PM." (NEXIS)

_____. 9 October 1997. "Bangladesh PM Allows Public Rallies in Open Spaces, Not Streets." (NEXIS)

_____. 25 September 1997. "Bangladesh Opposition Strike Ends Amid Tension." (NEXIS)

_____. 2 September 1997. "Bangladesh Parliament Speaker Initiates Talks to End Opposition Boycott." (NEXIS)

_____. 22 August 1997. "Moslem Fundamentalists Rally in Dhaka Mosque Row." (NEXIS)

_____. 6 July 1997. Anisur Rahman. "Trial of Those Accused in Bangladesh's 1975 Coup Starts." (NEXIS)

_____. 4 June 1997. "Deposed Bangladesh President's Jatiya Party on Verge of Split." (NEXIS)

_____. 8 May 1997. "Bangladesh Court Orders Government to Separate Judiciary." (NEXIS)

_____. 17 April 1997. Nadeem Qadir. "Coup Plotters Go on Trial in Bangladesh After 22 Years." (NEXIS)

_____. 7 April 1997. "Bangladesh Court Frees Four Opposition Leaders."

_____. 21 March 1997. "Four Opposition Leaders Arrested Under Special Act." (NEXIS)

_____. 12 March 1997. "Bangladesh's Special Powers Act Will Not Be Scrapped: PM." (NEXIS)

_____. 16 January 1997. Nadeem Qadir. "25 Charged Over Bangladesh Coup to Face Trial Next Month." (NEXIS)

_____. 12 January 1997. "Bangladesh's Main Opposition Slams PM for Threatening By-Elections." (NEXIS)

_____. 9 January 1997. "Former Bangladeshi Dictator Ershad Freed from Jail After Six Years." (NEXIS)

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Dhaka. 9 February 1998. Fax communication from Hameeda Hossain.

Amnesty International (AI). June 1997. *Bangladesh: Proposed Standards for a National Human Rights Commission*. (AI Index: ASA 13/03/97). London: Amnesty International.

_____. May 1997. *Bangladesh: Trial of Alleged Killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and His Family Members*. (AI Index: ASA 13/02/97). London: Amnesty International.

_____. 26 March 1997. "Bangladesh: Arrest of BNP Members Could Be Politically Motivated." (AI Index: ASA 13/01/97). [Internet] <www.amnesty.org/news> [Accessed 13 Jan. 1998]

Asian Survey [Berkeley, Calif.]. March 1997. Vol. 37, N^o. 3. M. Rashiduzzaman. "Political Unrest and Democracy in Bangladesh."

_____. February 1997. Vol. 37, N^o. 2. Stanley A. Kochanek. "Bangladesh in 1996: The 25th Year of Independence."

Bangladesh Observer [Dhaka]. 26 April 1998. "Ershad Blasts AL Government."

_____. 25 April 1998. "Ershad Slates AL, BNP for Quarrelling in Parliament."

_____. 21 April 1998. "Govt-PCJSS Talks End: Consensus on Four Bills Reached."

_____. 20 April 1998. "The Office of the Ombudsman."

_____. 19 April 1998a. "Govt-PCJSS Talks on CHT Bills Begin."

_____. 19 April 1998b. "PCJSS Prepares Hit List."

_____. 18 April 1998. "Govt-PCJSS Talks Today."

_____. 17 April 1998a. "PCJSS Finds Faults in CHT Bills."

_____. 17 April 1998b. "4000 Khagrachhari VDP Men Demand Adequate Security."

_____. 16 April 1998. "Four Killed, 100 Injured: Sporadic Clashes Mark Countrywide Hartal."

_____. 2 April 1998a. "Bangabandhu Murder Trial: Moazzem, Obaid Beneficiaries of Aug 15 Incident: PW 61."

_____. 2 April 1998b. "JP Will Be in Opposition Actively: Ershad."

_____. 2 April 1998c. "3000 VDP Men Disarmed in Khagrachhari."

_____. 1 April 1998. "Public Meeting at Manik Mia Ave Allowed: Nasim Tells JS."

_____. 31 March 1998. "SB Men Being Recruited in CHT Police."

_____. 25 March 1998a. "BNP MPs Walk Out: Questions to PM Not Allowed."

_____. 25 March 1998b. "Recruitment of Police from Tribals Begins in CHT."

_____. 22 March 1998a. "CJ's Call to Make Proper Response to Needs of Changing Time."

_____. 22 March 1998b. "JP Can't Support Unconditional Accord: Ershad."

_____. 22 March 1998c. "FEMA to Prepare Draft Report on Electoral Law Reforms By Dec."

_____. 21 March 1998a. "Jamaat to Join JS Session After Examining Bill on CHT Treaty."

_____. 21 March 1998b. "Restoring Law and Order."

_____. 17 March 1998. "Jamaat MPs Hold Talks with Government."

_____. 15 March 1998. "JP No More Part of Government, Says Ershad."

_____. 14 March 1998. "Clash During Arms Surrender in Rangamati."

_____. 9 March 1998. "Law Commission Chairman Calls on President."

- _____. 7 March 1998. "Split in JP Surfaces."
- _____. 6 March 1998. "BNP Radical Group Unhappy over Accord: Jamaat to Continue Boycott."
- _____. 5 March 1998. "Last Batch of SB Men Lay Down Arms: CHT Insurgency Ends."
- _____. 3 March 1998a. "Govt, Opposition Sign Accord to End JS Stand-Off: BNP MPs Return to House By March 8."
- _____. 3 March 1998b. "Manju Removed as Jatiya Party Secy-General: Naziur Given Acting Charge."
- _____. 3 March 1998c. "Ershad to Reorganise JP as Viable Alternative to AL, BNP."
- _____. 2 March 1998. "Justice Kemaluddin Made Chairman of Law Commission."
- _____. 1 March 1998. "Parliamentary Party Meet: BNP MPs in Favour of Joining JS."
- _____. 28 February 1998a. "Last Batch Back Home: Two-Decade Old Tribal Problem Ends."
- _____. 28 February 1998b. "The CHT Affairs."
- _____. 27 February 1998. "Last Batch of Tribal Refugees Comes Home Today."
- _____. 26 February 1998. "Sec 144 Imposed in Araihasar Thana Area."
- _____. 25 February 1998. "Bangabandhu Murder Case: Efforts to Bring Back Fugitives for Trial On."
- _____. 23 February 1998. "5 Injured as Tribal Groups Clash at Arms Surrender Venue."
- _____. 12 February 1998. "375 JP Members Join BNP in Rajshahi."
- _____. 7 February 1998. "Australian Fund to Set Up Independent HR Commission Likely."
- _____. 27 January 1998. "Law and Order-Familiarity and Failure."
- _____. 19 January 1998. "Violence Marked UP Elections."
- _____. 12 January 1998. "Opposition Urged to Resolve Conflict Thru' Discussion."
- _____. 8 January 1998. "Adequate Steps Taken to Make Judicial System Modern: PM."
- _____. 7 January 1998. "Aftermath of UP Polls."
- _____. 6 January 1998. Joynal Abedin. "Government, Society and the Law."
- _____. 1 January 1998. Nerun Yakub. "1997 in Bangladesh-The Year in Retrospect."
- _____. 31 December 1997. "'97 Makes Adieu with 105 Days of Hartals."
- _____. 20 December 1997a. "CJ Tells Workshop: Lawyers Should Know Prejudices of the Judge."
- _____. 20 December 1997b. Muhammad Quamrul Islam. "CHT Peace Treaty: Impact and Implementation Issues-II."
- _____. 15 December 1997. "Violent Protest Against Treaty in Matiranga: 2 Killed, 70 Injured in Firing by Police-BDR: Sec 144 Imposed."

- _____. 13 December 1997. "FEMA Report Says: Violence, Manipulation by Officials Mark Second Week of UP Polls."
- _____. 9 December 1997. "Draft Bill on NHRC Being Finalised."
- _____. 13 November 1997. "8-Hour Hartal in Chittagong Observed: Death Toll Rises to Six."
- _____. 10 November 1997. "Section 144 in Mirershorai."
- _____. 30 September 1997. "Golam Azam Reelected Jamaat Ameer."
- _____. 28 September 1997. "Section 144 Imposed: BNP, AL Call Meet at Same Venue in Joypurhat."
- _____. 23 September 1997. "Hartal Paralyzes City Life."
- _____. 14 September 1997. "Ershad Announces Withdrawal of Support to AL Government."
- _____. 13 September 1997. "Ershad Says: Jatiya Party to Withdraw Support to AL Govt."
- _____. 11 September 1997. "Section 144 Imposed: One Killed in Tablig-Sunni Clash at Kishoreganj."
- _____. 6 August 1997. "Hartal Called in Sylhet Today: Police-BNP Workers Clash: 50 Injured."
- _____. 6 July 1997. "25 Injured in Post-Poll Unrest in Manikganj."
- _____. 29 June 1997. "June 30 By-Polls: Major Parties Violate Code: FEMA."
- _____. 16 June 1997. "4 Expelled JP Leaders Express Solidarity with Zafar-Moazzem."
- _____. 14 June 1997. "Ershad Expels 4 More from Jatiya Party."
- _____. 5 June 1997. "Zafar, Moazzem, Shamim Expelled."
- _____. 18 May 1997. "A Momentous Decision."
- _____. 8 May 1997. "HC Verdict: Constitutional Amendment Not Needed for Judiciary Separation."
- _____. 11 April 1997. "Rebel Leaders Ask Ershad, Monzu to Quit: Zafar Expelled Again."
- _____. 8 April 1997. "HC Orders Release of Four BNP Leaders: Each to Get Tk One Lakh as Compensation."
- _____. 24 March 1997a. "Countrywide Hartal Observed: 2 Killed, Over 200 Injured in Clashes."
- _____. 24 March 1997b. "HC Issues Rule: Detention of 4 BNP Leaders Challenged."
- _____. 19 March 1997. "Kazi Zafar Expelled from JP."
- _____. 14 March 1997. "Ainjibi Parishad Demands Repeal of Special Powers Act."
- _____. 12 March 1997. "No Scrapping of Spl Powers Act: PM."
- _____. 23 January 1997. "Separation of Judiciary: Amendment of Ten Articles Sought."
- _____. 3 September 1996. "Law Commission Bill Passed."

Bundesamt für die Anerkennung ausländischer Flüchtlinge (BAFI), Nürnberg. 17 February 1998. Faxed

response to Research Directorate questions.

Coordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh (CCHRB), Dhaka. 17 February 1998. Letter from Secretary-General Akram H. Chowdhury.

_____. April 1997. *State of Human Rights In Bangladesh 1996*. Dhaka: CCHRB.

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997. 1998. United States Department of State. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office.

Daily News [Colombo]. 3 February 1998. "30 Killed in Bangladesh's Staggered Rural Poll Violence: Officials." [Internet] <www.lanka.net> [Accessed 3 Feb.1998]

_____. 20 November 1997. "Bangladesh Hopes for Full Repatriation of Tribal Refugees in India." [Internet] <www.lanka.net> [Accessed 20 Nov.1997]

_____. 12 November 1997. "Violence Mars Run-Up to Bangladesh Local Elections." [Internet] <www.lanka.net> [Accessed 12 Nov. 1997]

Daily Star [Dhaka]. 4 January 1998a. "Human Rights Commission." [Internet] <www.dailystarnews.com/> [Accessed 9 Apr. 1998]

_____. 4 January 1998b. "FEMA Report Reveals UP Polls Held During Dec. 27 to 31 Last Year Was Generally Peaceful." [Internet] <www.dailystarnews.com/> [Accessed 9 Apr. 1998]

_____. 27 December 1997. "FEMA Releases 4th Interim Report on UP Polls: 8 Killed, 500 Hurt in Violence, Gross Irregularities." [Internet] <www.dailystarnews.com/> [Accessed 9 Apr. 1998]

Dawn: The Internet Edition [Karachi]. 28 April 1998. "BD Opposition Stages Walkout." [Internet] <<http://dawn.com/daily>> [Accessed 28 Apr. 1998]

_____. 6 April 1998. "BD Opposition Calls for Strike." [Internet] <<http://dawn.com/daily>> [Accessed 6 Apr. 1998]

_____. 9 March 1998a. "Bangladesh Opposition Ends Boycott of Parliament." [Internet] <<http://dawn.com/daily>> [Accessed 9 Mar. 1998]

_____. 9 March 1998b. "BNP Members Return to House After 6 Months." [Internet] <<http://dawn.com/daily>> [Accessed 2 Mar. 1998]

_____. 2 March 1998. "BD Opposition Sticks to Parliament Boycott." [Internet] <<http://dawn.com/daily>> [Accessed 2 Mar. 1998]

_____. 23 February 1998. "650 BD Rebels Lay Down Arms." [Internet] <<http://dawn.com/daily>> [Accessed 23 Feb. 1998]

_____. 19 February 1998. "BD Crisis Deepens as MPs Defect." [Internet] <<http://dawn.com/daily>> [Accessed 19 Feb. 1998]

_____. 17 February 1998. "More Tribals Give Up in BD." [Internet] <<http://dawn.com/daily>> [Accessed 17 Feb. 1998]

Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA). 5 February 1998. "Bangladesh Protests U.S. Human Rights Report."

(NEXIS)

- _____. 30 November 1997. BC Cycle. "13 Killed in Bangladesh Unrest Ahead of Local Polls." (NEXIS)
- _____. 23 March 1997. BC Cycle. "Street Clashes Mark BNP's Strike Against Transit Rights to India."
Dhaka Courier. 17 April 1998a. Rashed Chowdhury. "BNP Hartal: A Confused Move."
- _____. 17 April 1998b. "Brittle Peace."
- _____. 27 March 1998a. Sajjad Shahriar. "Ombudsman and HR Commission."
- _____. 27 March 1998b. Shamim Ahmed. "Opposition Planning Summer Agitation."
- _____. 27 March 1998c. M. Harunur Rashid. "Rape of Women, Rape of Justice."
- _____. 20 March 1998a. Rashed Chowdhury. "Lonely Jamaat's Face-Saving Bid."
- _____. 20 March 1998b. Asma Baki. "Pressure Groups and Good Governance."
- _____. 13 March 1998. Syed Shafique Ahmed. "The CHT Peace Accord and Presidential Oath."
- _____. 6 March 1998a. Shamim Ahmad. "BNP Returns to Parliament."
- _____. 6 March 1998b. MM Rezaul Karim. "What an Unblemished Joy It Is!: Success of AL-BNP Dialogue."
- _____. 6 March 1998c. Farzan Hasan. "Clouds Sail Past Political Sky."
- _____. 6 March 1998d. Sajjad Shahriar. "Parliament Will Vibrate Now."
- _____. 6 March 1998e. Rashed Chowdhury. "JP on the Brink."
- _____. 27 February 1998. Rashed Chowdhury. "Chakma Faction Opposes Surrender."
- _____. 20 February 1998a. M. Maniruzzaman Miah. "Sine Qua Non for a Democratic Society."
- _____. 20 February 1998b. Rashed Chowdhury. "Life After Bush War."
- _____. 20 February 1998c. Sajjad Shahriar. "Opposition Frowns at Each Other."
- _____. 6 February 1998. Rashed Chowdhury. "Hasina Offers Olive Branch."
- _____. 13 February 1998a. M.M. Rezaul Karim. "Human Rights Violation in Bangladesh."
- _____. 13 February 1998b. Shamim Ahmad. "Farewell to Arms."
- _____. 30 January 1998a. Rashed Chowdhury. "All Quiet on the Eastern Front."
- _____. 30 January 1998b. Ziaur Rahman Khan. "A Faustian Bargain for CHT."
- _____. 30 January 1998c. Rashed Chowdhury. "Akhtaruzzaman Will Fight Potol-Aman Gang."
- _____. 23 January 1998. Rashed Chowdhury. "BNP MP Akhtaruzzaman Explains Conduct: Mine Was No Mutiny."
- _____. 16 January 1998. "Akhtaruzzaman Bombs BNP Sanctuary; Dissension Mounts Inside BNP

Stronghold."

- _____. 26 December 1997a. Sajjad Shahriar. "Chronology of Events: 1997."
- _____. 26 December 1997b. Kamal Uddin. "Opposition Toeing Tough Line."
- _____. 5 December 1997a. Sajjad Shahriar. "The CHT Peace Accord Signed."
- _____. 5 December 1997b. "CHT-Chronology."
- _____. 31 October 1997. Ali Murtaza. "CHT at the Threshold of Peace."
- _____. 5 September 1997. Shamin Ahmad. "Rightist Forces Unite Through Hartal."
- _____. 15 August 1997a. Shamim Ahmad. "Opposition's Desperate Move to Form Anti-AL Alliance."
- _____. 15 August 1997b. "The Week That Was: JP (Z-M) Calls for United Movement Against Govt."
- _____. 18 July 1997a. KM Subhan. "Hartal? Why?"
- _____. 18 July 1997b. Shamim Ahmad. "The Islamists' Hartal."
- _____. 11 July 1997. MM Rezaul Karim. "BNP's Second Hartal: What Purpose Did It Serve?"
- _____. 4 July 1997a. Shamim Ahmad. "BNP's Street Agitation."
- _____. 4 July 1997b. Shamim Ahmad. "JP's Peripheral Crack."
- _____. 4 April 1997. Shamin Ahmad. "BNP and AL Pose Threats but Act Responsibly."
- _____. 28 March 1997. Shamim Ahmad. "Govt Feels the Opposition Heat."
- _____. 21 March 1997. Shamim Ahmad. "Ershad Clears Air About Present Stand of JP."
- _____. 14 March 1997. "PM Rules Out Scrapping of Special Powers Act."
- _____. 7 March 1997. Ferdous Masud. "Ershad Rejuvenates the JP."
- _____. 24 January 1997. Swapan Chakrabarty. "Separation of Judiciary: Constitutional Amendment."
- _____. 10 January 1997. Swapan Chakrabarty. "Updating of Laws Urgent."
- _____. 6 December 1996. Touhid Mahmud. "Jamaat Worried About Existence."
- _____. 26 July 1996. Salahuddin Babar. "Law Reforms in Offing."
- Dhaka Holiday* [in English]. 18 August 1997. "Bangladesh: Long-Persisting Intra-Party Differences in BNP Viewed." (FBIS-NES-97-239 27 Aug. 1997/WNC)
- The Economist* [New York]. 25 January 1997. US Edition. "Bangladesh, Ershad's Out." (NEXIS)
- The Hindu* [Madras]. 7 May 1998. Haroon Habib. "Opposition Steps Up Stir Against CHT Pact." [Internet] <www.webpage.com/hindu/daily/> [Accessed 7 May 1998]
- _____. 9 March 1998. Haroon Habib. "BNP Members Return to House After 6 Months." [Internet] <www.webpage.com/hindu/daily/> [Accessed 9 Mar. 1998]

- _____. 4 February 1998. Haroon Habib. "Shanti Bahini Likely to Surrender Arms on Feb. 10."
[Internet] <www.webpage.com/hindu/daily/> [Accessed 4 Feb. 1998]
- _____. 26 September 1997. Haroon Habib. "Row Over Dhaka Ban on Street Meetings Persists."
[Internet] <www.webpage.com/hindu/daily/> [Accessed 26 Sept. 1997]
- Index on Censorship* [London]. November-December 1997. Vol. 26, N^o. 6. David Bergman. "Generation 71."
- India Abroad* [Toronto]. 27 February 1998. "Bangladesh: Another Opposition MP Joins Hasina Government."
- _____. 20 February 1998a. Ershadul Huq. "Bangladesh: Chittagong Rebels Bid Farewell to Arms."
- _____. 20 February 1998b. Ershadul Huq. "MP's Desertion Causes Panic in Opposition Party."
- _____. 29 August 1997. Ershadul Huq. "Bangladesh: Khaleda Zia Courts Religion-Based Groups."
- _____. 8 August 1997. Ershadul Huq. "Bangladesh: Islamic Outfits Sink Differences."
- _____. 18 July 1997. Ershadul Huq. "Bangladesh: Fairness of Vote Is a Boost for Democracy."
- International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES)-Association of Asian Authorities. n.d. Tarikul Ghani. "Developing and Working with NGO's: The Bangladesh Experience." [Internet] <www.ifes.org/> [Accessed 9 Apr. 1998]
- Inter Press Service (IPS). 21 January 1998. Tabibul Islam. "Bangladesh-Politics: No Looking Back for Women." (NEXIS)
- _____. 22 October 1997. Tabibul Islam. "Bangladesh: Pact to End Tribal Insurgency is Near." (NEXIS)
- _____. 15 January 1997. Tabibul Islam. "Bangladesh-Politics: Opposition Tries to Make Trouble for Gov't." (NEXIS)
- Keesing's Record of World Events* [Cambridge]. January 1997. Vol. 43, N^o. 1. "Bangladesh: Release of Ershad."
- News-India Times*. 13 June 1997. Anis Ahmed. "Bangladesh Ex-Ruler Ershad's Party Faces Split."
(*Ethnic NewsWatch*/NEXIS)
- Observer Magazine* [Dhaka]. 20 March 1998. Ruhul Matin. "UP Polls, Victory Boosts Women's Empowerment."
- Press Trust of India (PTI) [New Dehli, in English]. 30 June 1997. "Jatiya Party Splits as Rebels Expel Founder Ershad." (BBC Summary 2 July 1997/NEXIS)
- _____. 1 January 1997. "India-Bangladesh Ganges Water Accord Comes into Effect." (BBC Summary 4 Jan. 1997/NEXIS)
- Reuters. 18 April 1997. BC Cycle. Anis Ahmed. "Political Honeymoon Ends for Bangladesh Leader."
(NEXIS)
- _____. 11 April 1997. BC Cycle. Anis Ahmed. "Bangladesh's Ershad Drops Lover to Save Party."
(NEXIS)

_____. 23 March 1997. BC Cycle. Anis Ahmed. "Police Detain 150 in Bangladesh Strike." (NEXIS)

_____. 21 January 1997. BC Cycle. Anis Ahmed. "Bangladeshis Welcome Trial, Divided on Impact." (NEXIS)

_____. 20 January 1997. BC Cycle. "Trial of Mujib's Killers Begins in Bangladesh." (NEXIS)

Times of India [New Delhi]. 3 December 1997. Zaglul A. Chowdhury. "Dhaka, Tribal Leaders Sign Pact."

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Dhaka. 5 April 1998. Letter received in response to Research Directorate questions.

Voice of America (VOA). 13 January 1998. Douglas Bakshian. "Bangladesh Parliament." [Internet] <gopher://gopher.voa.gov> [Accessed 13 Jan. 1998]

_____. 14 January 1997. Michael Drudge. "Bangladesh Politics." (HURINet)

The Xinhua News Agency. 7 December 1997. "Bangladesh's Opposition Parties Call Hartal in Protest Against CHT Accord." (NEXIS)

_____. 13 October 1997. "Bangladesh's Chakma Refugees to Be Repatriated from India." (NEXIS)

_____. 24 August 1997. "At Least 20 Bangladeshis Injured in General Strike." (NEXIS)

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.




[Top of Page](#)

[Important Notices](#)