

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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

Questions

Can you please provide updated information on the Chattra League and Chattra Dal and the relationship between the BNP and the Awami League? Please also provide details of elections and the parties in power in Bangladesh since 1995.

RESPONSE

Can you please provide updated information on the Chattra League and Chattra Dal and the relationship between the BNP and the Awami League? Please also provide details of elections and the parties in power in Bangladesh since 1995.

The two main political parties in Bangladesh are the Awami League (AL) led by Sheikh Hasina and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by Khaleda Zia. Khaleda was prime minister between 1991 and 1996, and again from 2001 to October 2006; Hasina was prime minister from 1996 to 2001. The AL and the BNP have a history of bitter political rivalry and violence, much of which has been carried out by their respective student wings, the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD).

However, events in early 2007 resulted in the peaceful installation of a military-backed caretaker government, which remains in control of the country. Many leaders of both the Awami League and the BNP have been arrested and charged with corruption, or have agreed to leave the country. At the time of writing, the political landscape of Bangladesh has changed considerably: emergency rule has been declared, all political activities are currently banned, and new elections are not expected to be held until late 2008.

The information below has therefore been grouped under two headings, covering the political history of the country up to the end of 2006; and the political events of 2007.

Politics in Bangladesh before January 2007

The *BBC*'s country profile on Bangladesh provides a useful summary of Bangladeshi politics since the country came into being in 1971, when "the two parts of Pakistan split after a bitter civil war which drew in neighbouring India". The country spent 15 years under military rule, and although democracy was restored in 1990, the political scene remained volatile, with political tensions spilling over into violence and hundreds of people killed in recent years. Opposition rallies and public gatherings have been targeted, as well as senior opposition figures. The profile states:

Politics is dominated by arch-enemies Begum Khaleda Zia, the chief of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and Sheikh Hasina, leader of the Awami League. Khaleda was prime minister between 1991 and 1996 and again from 2001 to October 2006, when she handed over power to a caretaker administration ahead of elections. Hasina was prime minister from 1996 to 2001...

...The hostility between the women stems in part from differences over who played a greater role in the country's independence struggle – Hasina's father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, or Khaleda's husband, General Ziaur Rahman. After independence from Pakistan in 1971, Mujib was named father of the nation in the country's 1972 constitution. But when Khaleda assumed power in 1991 her party pushed the idea that her husband was an equally key player in the independence struggle. Khaleda's government amended the constitution in 2004 to delete the reference that Mujib was the father of the nation. Khaleda and Hasina sank their differences when military ruler Hossain Mohammad Ershad was in power from 1982 to 1990. The two cooperated in the movement to oust Ershad. But their alliance ended with Ershad's departure and they have been uncompromising rivals ever since on a range of issues. Hasina accuses Khaleda's BNP and its Islamic allies with links to outlawed Islamist groups blamed for a series of bomb attacks in 2007. Khaleda says Hasina's statements amount to treason. Hasina escaped an assassination attempt in August 2004 when grenades exploded at a rally she was addressing. Twenty-three people were killed in the attack, which the Awami League said could be linked to parties in the ruling coalition ('Country Profile: Bangladesh', *BBC News*, 26 March http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/country_profiles/1160598.stm – Accessed 17 April 2007 – Attachment 1).

An October 2006 report by the International Crisis Group (published not long before the military takeover) provides a more detailed analysis of politics in Bangladesh, and includes discussion of the two main parties:

The two main political parties are often described in opposing stereotypes: the BNP is right of centre, middle class, urban, anti-Indian, pro-Pakistani, of an Islamic bent and generally favoured by the business community; the Awami League is left of centre, secular, pro-Indian, rural and favoured by farmers. While these descriptions are generally true, they disguise some realities. Both parties are highly personalised and centralised, revolving around the founding families and brooking no dissent to their views and interests. Neither is particularly ideological nowadays, and neither views policy development and implementation as central to their missions. Both are about power, often in its rawest forms. Both are widely believed to maintain links to criminals, who are used as enforcers, fundraisers and election mobilisers. The parties have also spread their networks across a wide swathe of institutions: civil society is increasingly divided, as is the media and civil

service. There is very little non-partisan space. While the BNP is said to be the business party, most powerful and wealthy families maintain a foothold in both camps.

1. The BNP

Established by General Zia in 1978, the BNP has moved away from its origins in the military but is still seen as the more overtly nationalistic party, mostly because it takes a harder line against India. General Zia moved the country away from its secular nationalistic origins, establishing a more conservative state whose identity merged Bengali cultural aspects and Islam. The BNP favours closer relations with Muslim majority states and tends to view the AL as willing to compromise this Bangladeshi identity through ties with India and secularism. Military governments under Zia and Ershad had close ties to the Pakistani military.

The BNP's conservatism has meant it has been mostly comfortable in alliances with religious parties such as the Jamaat-e-Islami, though the relationship is not always easy. BNP leaders maintain that JI is firmly under their control but critics believe the Jamaat is hollowing out the BNP and making it more religiously based. The BNP certainly suffers in some comparisons with the Jamaat, a Leninist-style party with generally disciplined and well-educated cadres who are not seen as corrupt. Religious minorities such as Hindus are suspicious of the BNP, which has targeted them in the past. Although Khaleda Zia's grip on the party remains strong, there are tensions as her son, Tareq Rahman, builds his own powerful base. Widely credited with crafting the 2001 election strategy, he and his advisers have become a second source of power within the party. When senior leaders criticised him in August 2006, they immediately faced calls from the national executive committee to resign.

2. The Awami League

The AL was founded by Sheikh Mujibur Rehman to struggle for Bengali rights in Pakistan before the 1971 split. Its manifesto has long been based on four principles: nationalism, secularism, socialism and democracy. Its brief time in power before it was overthrown by the military and Sheikh Mujib assassinated has left it with distrust for the military and the BNP. Like the BNP, it has opted for patron-client relationships rather than internal democracy.

Critical of the involvement of religious parties in government, the AL reminds voters of the role of groups like Jamaat in violence during the independence war. It has forged its own ties to religious parties in the past and is now linked to smaller, left-leaning parties. Despite attempts to groom her son Joy for office, Sheikh Hasina is unlikely to hand over the party in the near future. Her son has shown no great appetite to abandon his life in the U.S. and enter Bangladeshi politics, nor are there powerful anti-Hasina factions that might force an early retirement (International Crisis Group 2006, *Bangladesh Today*, Asia Report No.121, 23 October, pp.3-4 – Attachment 2).

The same report discusses the prevailing political culture until recently:

Political culture has been corroded by the personal enmity between the BNP and AL leaders and the corruption, criminality and organised violence that have become an integral part of politics. This has taken place in a wider context of consistent human rights violations and exclusion from power of marginalised groups.

Mainstream enmity.

Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina are not on talking terms; their parties are locked in a bitter struggle they consider a zero-sum game. "The confrontation between [the] two leaders is worse than ever", observes the head of a major NGO.⁴² Lack of communication at the top has undermined parliament and blocked consensus even on issues of common interest. Still, rivalry does not cripple all cooperation. A pro-AL college lecturer relates that "our college founder is an

AL leader, and our current parliamentarian is from the BNP, and a minister as well. But still he's helped our college – financially, morally and in other ways. He used to be a lecturer in a government college himself". Pragmatism still holds for many: "Sure, the AL and BNP are bitter rivals but it's been quite normal for families to keep a foot in both camps", says a member of a prominent AL family. "There are marriages between supporters of the two parties, and businesspeople always want to keep channels open on either side. That's still the case – if it starts to change we'll know things are really deteriorating".

Corruption, governance, criminality and violence.

Bangladesh is regularly one of the worst performers in Transparency International's index of public perceptions of corruption. A college lecturer says: "We have a large population and high pressure to succeed. So many people are tempted into illegal activities – even as basic as cheating in exams – to boost their chances". Entering politics early is a way of boosting career prospects: "There is no official student politics on our campus but most students are involved. It gives them some power, some experience. And if they play it well, it can help to build their career". Still, corruption cannot be laid solely at the parties' feet: "Politicians are the pioneers but all others are also involved".

An economist identifies a deeper structural problem: "Criminalisation involves four constituencies: bureaucrats, politicians, military bureaucracy and business community. These used to be more or less separate but look at the marriage patterns in the 1980s – they created webs of kinship across these groups. And economic criminalisation has increased the effective demand for political criminalisation". These trends have embedded violence as an essential political tool. "Politics has gone to "M and M": money and muscle", observes a senior lawyer. "Apart from these, nothing else counts. I've been in politics for decades but only indirectly, with no chance of standing. People with education and honesty are kept out". There is extremely low tax collection: most taxes are indirect, and 70 per cent of all income tax comes from ten or eleven payers.

Little respect for basic rights.

The constitution enshrines fundamental rights but the state has a poor record of safeguarding rights, particularly in regard to minorities. The impunity accorded violent Islamists is less surprising when viewed within the established climate of tolerance for rights violations, especially against women and religious and ethnic minorities. A promised National Human Rights Commission has still not been set up, and human rights activists continue to face harassment and attacks. Bangladesh is dangerous for local journalists, especially those who investigate the nexus between politics, crime and militancy (International Crisis Group 2006, *Bangladesh Today*, Asia Report No.121, 23 October, pp.7-8 – Attachment 2).

A 2006 research response by the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board provides information on the Awami League. It states that the party's student wing is the **Bangladesh Chhatra League**, that Liakat Shikdar is the president of this group and that Nazrul Islam Babu is its general secretary (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2006, *BGD101503.E – Bangladesh: The Awami League (AL); its leaders; subgroups, including its youth wing; activities; and treatment of AL supporters by the authorities (2004-2006)*, 27 July http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=450371 – Accessed 29 March 2007 – Attachment 3).

Question 1 of a 2004 RRT Research Response provides some background on the BCL, stating that they claim to be Bangladesh's "leading and oldest student organisation" and had recently celebrated their 56th founding anniversary. Question 4 of the response looks at the position of AL supporters, including BCL members, and contains several news reports of

violent incidents involving the BNP and the AL (RRT Country Research 2004, *Research Response BGD16450*, 9 February – Attachment 4).

Question 4 of a 2006 RRT Research Response states that the **Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal** (JCD) is the student-wing of the BNP. The JCD is represented at many universities and colleges in Bangladesh and is frequently involved in violent clashes with rival student organisations, including the BCL. A 1996 DFAT opinion is quoted which states that universities in Bangladesh have often been the scene of “considerable politically-related violence” since the country’s independence, and that many student groups are accused of being “little more than gangs of armed thugs”. (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response BGD30397*, 7 August – Attachment 5).

A December 2006 report by Human Rights Watch on torture and extrajudicial killings by Bangladeshi security forces contains references to JCD members as both the victims and the perpetrators of violence:

In a well-known “crossfire” case from Chittagong, on November 30, 2004, RAB-7 arrested a local leader of the BNP’s student wing, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, and a notorious suspected criminal, Iqbal Bahar Chowdhury, age 33. The police wanted Chowdhury, known as Iqbialla, for murder, extortion, and rape. Undercover RAB [Rapid Action Battalion] members working as street vendors arrested Iqbialla in the early evening and, according to a witness who spoke with Human Rights Watch, led him away blindfolded and with hands bound. “One-and-half hours later I heard he had been killed in Fatehabad, Hathajari, about 20 kilometers outside of town,” the witness said. “RAB said it was an ‘encounter,’” meaning an armed clash between security forces and an armed group (pp.31-2).

On October 1, 2004, in Dhaka, members of RAB-4 arrested Anisur Rahman, a local leader of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the BNP’s student wing, together with two friends. RAB released the two friends after a brief detention but transferred Rahman to the hospital on October 2, where he died from wounds apparently suffered in detention. The 27-year-old Rahman was an organizing secretary of the JCD’s ward No. 47 unit and a Dhaka City Corporation contractor from the area of Mohammadpur. The reasons for his arrest and apparent death in custody remain unclear. RAB claimed he was a criminal, but a local member of parliament and the victim’s relatives said he was innocent of any crime. According to Ain o Salish Kendra, which investigated the case, RAB was actually searching for Anisur’s older brother Sohel, who is a businessman and central committee member of the JCD (pp.39-40).

After Sumon’s death, his parents attempted to file a complaint with the Khilgaon police station, but officers at the station refused to register the case, they said.¹¹³ On July 6, Sumon’s mother instead filed a case with the Dhaka court against Home Minister Babar, Home Secretary Safar Raj Hossain, RAB Director General Abdul Aziz Sarkar, several RAB-3 officers and a leader of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (the BNP’s student wing). The judge ordered a judicial inquiry into Sumon’s death. The case was ongoing at this writing. According to Sumon’s father, the family has received repeated threats from visitors in civilian clothes, and anonymous phone calls. They warned him not to pursue the case and that he would face the same fate as his son if he does. On March 18, 2006, Abdul Hakim said, the police detained him without explanation and beat him with a large baton. Four days later he showed Human Rights Watch dark and large bruises on both legs and the right arm. **According to Sumon’s parents, their son was killed because he had recently switched from the youth league of the BNP to the Awami League.** On May 6, they said, while distributing leaflets about a proposed overpass being built in their neighborhood, a local Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leader threatened Sumon that he would teach him “a good lesson.” “But even if he had been a criminal, he should have been judged by a court – not by RAB,” Sumon’s mother said. (pp.43-4) (Human Rights Watch 2006, *Judge, Jury and Executioner: Torture and*

Extrajudicial Killings by Bangladesh's Elite Security Forces, Volume 18, No.16(C), December – Attachment 6).

A recent Amnesty International report comments on the major role that student groups play in carrying out human rights abuses and political violence:

Amnesty International remains concerned about reports that indicate a persistent pattern of human rights abuses perpetrated by members of the main political parties including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Awami League and Jamaat-e-Islami.

When in opposition, Bangladeshi political parties have often expressed their concern about human rights violations inflicted on their members. Such violations have included: arbitrary arrests at the instigation of the ruling party officials; use of the police force to torture or ill-treat members of opposition parties; and the filing of politically motivated criminal charges against opponents. However, the same political parties have often remained silent in relation to human rights abuses reportedly carried out by their own members.

Abuses by political parties have usually been carried out by the “student” wings of the major parties. These groups include: Bangladesh Chattra Dhal (BCD), affiliated to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party; Bangladesh Chattra League (BCL) affiliated to the Awami League; and Islami Chhatrashibir, affiliated to Jamaat-e-Islami.

When their parties are in government such “student” groups, who reportedly keep and use fire arms, can become unchallenged perpetrators of human rights abuses reportedly under the patronage of their party leaders.

The involvement of such armed “student” and other groups in the political process is believed to be one of the major causes of continued high levels of political violence, including patterns of killings and serious injury in Bangladesh. Political parties have pledged, but failed, to disarm their own “student” groups (Amnesty International 2006, *Bangladesh: Briefing to political parties for a human rights agenda*, ASA 13/012/2006, October, pp.2-3 – Attachment 7).

Political events of 2007

A February 2007 report from *Jane's Intelligence Review* describes the events of December 2006 and January 2007:

Under Bangladesh's constitution, a neutral caretaker government usually led by the chief justice governs the country for three months before each general election. However, in October 2006, three months before elections were due to be held, the then-ruling BNP and the opposition AL failed to agree on the choice of an impartial chief advisor to the interim administration. As a result of the political impasse, President Iajuddin Ahmed, a BNP appointee, stepped in to run the country ahead of the national polls.

By late December, the AL had become increasingly critical of Iajuddin Ahmed's regime, in particular accusing him of bias towards the BNP. Moreover, the AL and the 16 smaller parties allied with it announced on 3 January that they would boycott the upcoming elections in protest of the government's failure to produce an accurate and updated voter list. The AL and most Bangladeshi newspapers suggested that millions of 'fake' voters had been included on the electoral roll.

As a result, violent clashes erupted between AL and BNP supporters in early January, leaving more than 40 people dead and hundreds more injured. In addition, the AL launched a wave of

national strikes and transport blockades on 8 January in an attempt to weaken Iajuddin Ahmed's administration. Against this backdrop, donor agencies and diplomats continued to mount pressure on the caretaker government and the political parties to resolve the ongoing crisis and warned Iajuddin Ahmed that elections would not be acceptable without the participation of all political parties.

In late December 2006, Bangladeshi public opinion was also sceptical about the legitimacy of upcoming elections, given that a BNP-appointed chief election commissioner, M A Aziz, was in charge of overseeing the poll. However, despite these doubts, the country's business community and other sections of the middle class a core constituency of Wazed's opposed the imposition of national strikes and transport blockades by the AL and its allies. The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry estimated that around USD7 million was lost each day during a strike. Moreover, the import and export of goods from Chittagong one of only two ports for manufactured goods to be shipped to Europe and the US was also suspended owing to the AL's actions.

As a result of the damage caused to Bangladesh's economy, the AL lost much of its credibility among the urban middle classes. On 10 January, the Dhaka and national chambers of commerce and industry demanded that elections be postponed and a state of emergency be declared in order to save the national economy.

The AL's declining credibility was reinforced by the increasing willingness of the party's senior leadership to ally with political groups of differing ideologies. For example, the AL, which has traditionally been a leftist and secular party, announced its alliance with the Islamist Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish (BKM) in late December 2006. The deal between the two parties saw Wazed promise that Muslim alim (religious leaders) would be allowed to issue legally binding fatwa on religious and moral issues if the AL came to power. Similarly, Wazed's close relationship to former president and military ruler General Hussein Muhammad Ershad and his Jatiya Party has also been viewed unfavourably by her key supporters. Ershad's decision to loosely ally his party with the AL was the result of a 'bidding war' between Wazed and Khaleda Zia to buy the general's political support.

With domestic pressure building, US and European diplomats also began to signal their displeasure with Iajuddin Ahmed's regime. This culminated in the US and other international electoral monitoring missions pulling out of Bangladesh on 10 January, as allegations of electoral malpractice had dented the international community's confidence that Iajuddin Ahmed's administration could hold credible elections.

Furthermore, the EU withdrew its election monitoring mission on 11 January, stating that it was "not the business of observer teams to scrutinise elections whose credibility clearly falls short of international standards".

Growing fears about the consequences that a possible rigged election could have on Bangladesh's global reputation prompted the country's armed forces to intervene.

Following the withdrawal of EU elections observers and amid the business community's calls to save the economy, senior army officers met with Iajuddin Ahmed on 11 January in a tense three-hour meeting. There, they ordered a state of emergency be declared and the establishment of a new caretaker administration. The military also demanded that Fakhruddin Ahmed replace Iajuddin Ahmed and outlined a five-point agenda for the new government. As a result, Iajuddin Ahmed's government resigned hours after the EU election observers left the country (Wilson, John 2007, 'Dicing with democracy – Bangladesh's political process breaks down', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 15 February – Attachment 8).

The same report continues:

One of the army's key motives in this demand was its concern about the impact that the elections and ensuing political instability could have on its lucrative involvement in UN peacekeeping operations as Bangladesh is currently the largest contributor to UN peacekeeping efforts.

It is likely that the Bangladeshi army acted after consulting the US and European governments, or at least had the tacit support of internationally reputed, domestic non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and Grameen Bank.

Many Western diplomats see a period of military-backed technocratic rule as necessary to restore stability in the country and are prepared to support Fakhruddin Ahmed's regime as long as it does not overstep its constitutional bounds.

Nonetheless, there is a risk that the army could deepen its influence in the political sphere if elections are delayed further, especially given the country's history of military interventions (General Zia ur-Rahman and General Ershad ruled Bangladesh between 1977 and 1981 and 1982 and 1990 respectively). There are many people within Bangladesh and outside the country that have described the army's intervention as a coup (Wilson, John 2007, 'Dicing with democracy – Bangladesh's political process breaks down', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 15 February – Attachment 8).

An April 2007 *BBC* report states the military government has banned all political activities and had many political leaders arrested. In general, the Bangladeshi people have not regarded this treatment as repressive, seeing it as "retribution for the corruption and abuse of power of the past fifteen years". At present it is clear that Bangladesh "has reached a crossroads":

Go one way, and the road leads to cleaner politics with free elections and restoration of representative democracy. But go the other way, and the country risks sliding back into the kind of military-led dictatorship which so blighted Bangladesh's politics and economy in the 1980s. Officials say the tough campaign against "corrupt" politicians and "crime godfathers" is needed to clean-up politics once and for all. To achieve this, they need to dish out exemplary punishment to some "big fish". The biggest fish of them all is Tarique Rahman, son of former prime minister Khaleda Zia and leader of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Rahman's arrest and subsequent charges against him reassured a lot of people that the government meant business (Mustafa, Sabir 2007, 'Bangladesh at a crossroads', *BBC News*, 5 April http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6530781.stm – Accessed 17 April 2007 – Attachment 9).

Other points of note in the *BBC* report include the following:

- Farida Akhter, who "heads a radical NGO in Dhaka", is concerned at the curtailment of political rights, and comments that corruption in the army itself is not being discussed.
- Many in Dhaka think that the caretaker government is aiming to get rid of the existing leadership of both political parties, and that some politicians may be allowed to leave the country in order to avoid imprisonment.
- There is concern that the military is showing "increasing signs of political ambition", although at this stage it seems unlikely that there will be a "military led dictatorship" such as existed in the 1970s and 1980s (Mustafa, Sabir 2007, 'Bangladesh at a crossroads', *BBC News*, 5 April http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6530781.stm – Accessed 17 April 2007 – Attachment 9).

An April 2007 *Stratfor* report states that Bangladesh's Electoral Commission has announced that "it will need at least 18 months to verify the country's voter list and implement further reforms, and therefore will need to delay general elections until late 2008". *Stratfor* does not discount the possibility that the two main parties may reassert their power by forging alliances with the military:

The BNP and AL have laid low since [Fakhruddin] Ahmed came to power mainly because the two parties can use the extra time to shore up support. Neither party has a clear advantage over the other in the polls, and both are desperately searching for political allies to gain the upper hand.

But Ahmed cannot be confident that the political parties will remain tame for another 18 months. All too often, officials with interim governments in South Asia have a habit of falling into the pit of corruption. And when the tide starts to turn against the provisional governments while the country's main political parties are still in disarray, the responsibility falls to the military to step in and restore order.

The military's empowerment already has started taking effect in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi army goaded the former president to impose emergency rule and ban political activity Jan. 11. Bangladeshi army chief Lt. Gen. Moeen U. Ahmed has been playing a much more visible role in Bangladesh over the past few weeks, acting more like a politician than a general by delivering speeches throughout the country on "Rethinking Political Development." The general also has issued harsh condemnations of the AL and BNP, saying "In the 36 years since independence, politicians have not given us anything good. They have even failed to give due recognition to the national leaders."

The AL and BNP are taking note of the army's increasing prominence in the caretaker government, as they realize that building closer ties to the military will become all the more necessary for them to escape political irrelevance. The BNP-AL power struggle has split the population pretty evenly, leading both parties to flirt with the country's Islamist parties for larger voting blocs. The Islamists' empowerment worries the Bangladeshi army, which wishes to preserve the country's historically secular identity. Even the BNP and AL are becoming conscious of the dangers involved in spreading Islamist influence, and would not mind military backing to help quell the Islamist rise.

The BNP probably will have a harder time than the AL in winning favor with the army this time around. In October 2006, several members of the BNP deserted to form a new group called the Liberal Democratic Party. Many of the deserters are retired high-ranking military officers that accused the BNP of being too corrupt and too lax in cracking down on Islamist extremism.

The situation in Bangladesh is in some ways similar to Pakistan, where that nation's military has successfully used political instability and security concerns to dominate the state. The difference, however, is that in Pakistan the military continues to rule the country directly through a uniformed president and civil-military hybrid state. In Bangladesh, however, the military is working through a caretaker administration composed of bureaucrats, technocrats and other government functionaries.

Bangladesh, despite its past experience with direct military rule has moved toward a civilian -- albeit somewhat turbulent -- order, so it is unlikely the military will return to direct rule. That said, the political pendulum is slowly moving back toward the military, and the Bangladeshi army is in a prime position to establish itself as the stealth kingmaker of the government ('Bangladesh: Delayed elections and army opportunities' 2007, *STRATFOR*, 5 April – Attachment 10).

A 16 April 2007 report by *Stratfor* states that Khaleda Zia has agreed to leave the country, while Sheikh Hasina is already overseas:

Former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will leave the country for Saudi Arabia under a deal reached late April 16 designed to secure the release of her son, The Daily Star reported, citing an anonymous source. The newspaper said Zia's departure came as a result of "tremendous pressure from the military-backed caretaker government." Zia's older son has been in custody since March, while her second son was detained April 16 and then released as part of the deal. The move will leave Bangladesh without its two main leaders for the first time, as Zia's absence would coincide with former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to the United States ('Intelligence Summary' 2007, *STRATFOR*, 17 April – Attachment 11).

A selection of recent news report on Bangladesh is attached:

- Sheik Hasina has said that she is determined to return to Bangladesh "despite warnings that she will be prevented" ('Bangladesh ex-PM vows to go home' 2007, *BBC News*, 18 April – Attachment 12).
- A *TIME* interview with Fakhruddin Ahmed mentions the possibility that Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, who founded the Grameen Bank, may form a political party ('Fakhruddin Ahmed: The boss of Bangladesh' 2007, *Time*, 22 March – Attachment 13).
- The Anti-Corruption Commission may be given the power to arrest suspects without a warrant ('Bangladesh anti-corruption body to get the right to arrest without any warrant' 2007, *BBC Monitoring*, 17 April, sourced from New Age website, Dhaka – Attachment 14).
- So far "more than 160 politicians, businessmen and former bureaucrats" have been detained ('Top politician is held' 2007, *BBC News*, 13 April – Attachment 15).

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ISYS

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List of Attachments

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