



Home Office

# **Country Policy and Information Note**

## **Bangladesh: Political parties and affiliation**

**Version 3.0**

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# Preface

## Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

## Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- The general humanitarian situation is so severe as to breach Article 15(b) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC (the Qualification Directive) / Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules
- The security situation presents a real risk to a civilian's life or person such that it would breach Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- A claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

## Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

## Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

## Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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# Assessment

Updated: 24 September 2020

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm from the state and/or non-state actors because of the person's actual or perceived political opinion.

### 1.2 Points of interest

1.2.1 For the purposes of this note, actual or perceived political opinion may include: leaders, activists or supporters of opposition political parties; activists or supporters of the ruling party fearing opposition party activists; activists or supporters of political parties fearing rival factions within the same party.

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## 2. Consideration of issues

### 2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).

2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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### 2.2 Exclusion

2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses applies. If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.

2.2.2 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and [Restricted Leave](#).

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### 2.3 Convention reason(s)

2.3.1 Actual or imputed political opinion.

2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.

2.3.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

## 2.4 Risk

### a. State treatment

- 2.4.1 Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy (see [Parliament, President and Prime Minister](#)). The two main parties that dominate politics and have a long-standing rivalry are the [Awami League](#) (AL – the ruling party since 2009) and the [Bangladesh Nationalist Party \(BNP\)](#), both said to have several million members. Other major parties include the [Jatiya Party](#) and the [Jamaat-e-Islami \(JI or Jamaat\)](#), a BNP ally, albeit deregistered as a political party in 2013.
- 2.4.2 The incumbent AL swept to victory in the December 2018 elections, with the party's coalition securing 288 out of a possible 300 directly elected seats in parliament, and officially winning 96% of the popular vote. The Jatiya Party won 22 seats and became the official opposition despite being allied with the AL coalition during the election campaign. The Jatiya Oikya Front (aka National Unity Front – NUF), the main opposition alliance led by the BNP and also included JI members, was left severely weakened. It won 8 seats: 6 for the BNP and 2 for the Gono Forum Party (see [National elections 2018](#)).
- 2.4.3 Foreign and domestic analysts assessed that the election was neither free nor fair. There have been accusations of ballot-box stuffing, voter intimidation and harassment including voters and opposition polling agents being denied access to polling places and ruling party activists occupying polling places and casting ballots in the place of voters. Over 10,500 BNP and JI party activists were arrested in the run up to the election (see [Election violence and irregularities](#) and [Politically-motivated harassment, arrests and detentions](#)).
- 2.4.4 The system of governance is based on political patronage. Law enforcement agencies are politicised in favour of the ruling AL and are used to suppress and silence the opposition and those affiliated with it, including family members, particularly during times of heightened political tension, such as during election campaigns, student elections or during political demonstrations. Whilst some police officials discreetly support the BNP, most are allied to the ruling party and are alleged to be recruited on the basis of their political affiliation (see [Political influence on the police](#)).
- 2.4.5 BNP and JI officials claimed mass arrests and detentions of their supporters pre-2018 election, with thousands facing 'trumped up' charges or under the Digital Security Act for posting/liking posts against ruling party members on social media. The leader of the BNP, Khaleda Zia, was jailed for 17 years in early 2018 on charges of corruption. Filing cases against the opposition is common although, on many occasions, cases are reportedly dismissed by courts for being without merit. There are reports of police extortion, whereby numerous arrested activists and leaders are routinely released on condition of payment. There are also reports of torture in police custody, extra-judicial killings and disappearances and restrictions on movement (see [Election violence and irregularities](#), [Politically-motivated harassment, arrests and detentions](#) and [Freedom of movement](#)).

- 2.4.6 Recorded clashes between the BNP, its student wing (Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal – JCD) and the police occurred, though far fewer were reported in 2019 (4 clashes) compared to 2018 (38) (see [Politically-motivated harassment, arrests and detentions](#)). Although the law provides for freedom of assembly, such rights are sometimes curtailed or restricted for opposition parties (see [Freedom of assembly](#)). Street-level informers are employed and digital technology is used to monitor and surveil opposition leaders and activists both domestically and abroad (see [Surveillance](#) and [Sur place activities](#)).
- 2.4.7 In general, low-level members of opposition groups are unlikely to be of ongoing interest to the authorities and are unlikely to be subject to treatment that is sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, to amount to persecution. Opposition party activists, particularly those whose position and activities challenge and threaten the government and raises their profile, may be subject to treatment, including harassment, arrest and politically motivated criminal charges by the police or non-state actors, which amounts to persecution.
- 2.4.8 Decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors specific to the person which would place them at real risk. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to show that they would be at real risk of serious harm or persecution on account of their actual or perceived political affiliation.
- 2.4.9 For further information on human rights violations by the state, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Bangladesh: Actors of protection](#).
- 2.4.10 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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b. [Politically-motivated violence](#)

- 2.4.11 Reports indicate that the 2018 national election was relatively peaceful in comparison to previous ones. In the lead up, at least 470 incidents of violence were recorded, leading to the deaths of 34 people, including 19 AL supporters and 4 BNP supporters. 18 people were reported killed on election day (see [Election violence and irregularities](#) and [Politically-motivated harassment, arrests and detentions](#)).
- 2.4.12 Inter-party political violence (mainly between the AL and BNP) usually involves armed clashes between the youth and student wings of the parties, targeting largely low and mid-ranking political party members and individuals affiliated with opposition groups, with impunity. Auxiliary organisations occasionally engage in criminal activities, including violence and extortion of local businesses. There are allegations that members of student wings are sometimes party activists rather than genuine students (see [Student wings and auxiliary groups](#) and [Bangladesh Chhatra League \(BCL\)](#)).
- 2.4.13 Between 2008 and 2018, university campus violence accounted for 13% of political violence in Bangladesh. Violence also occurred off-campus; in Sylhet, student groups took part in 50% of all political related violence between 2008 and 2018. In 2019, 4 AL-BNP clashes, resulting in 57 injuries, were recorded, compared to 16 clashes in 2018, which resulted in 151



injuries and 1 death. No incidents of inter-party violence targeting the JI or its student party were recorded in 2019 or 2018 (see [Student wings and auxiliary groups](#) and [Inter-party violence](#)). Due to the AL's dominance in the political arena, there is reportedly close co-operation between the security agencies and AL's student wing, the [Bangladesh Chhatra League \(BCL\)](#), with reports of police standing by when BCL members attack the opposition. BCL sometimes commit acts of violence with impunity although, in 2019, 25 members of the BCL were charged with the murder of a student, alleged to be a member of the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) (see [Student wings and auxiliary groups](#), [Political influence on the police](#) and [Inter-party violence](#)).

- 2.4.14 Violence has shifted from inter-party to predominantly intra-AL clashes due to factional divisions in its student wing, the BCL, which dominates university campuses. Internal clashes between AL members are far higher than between BNP members (see [Intra-party violence](#)). BCL members may restrict opposition party members access to campus activities, accommodation and examinations (see [Bangladesh Chhatra League \(BCL\)](#) and [Party membership, recruitment and documentation](#)).
- 2.4.15 Ruling party-opposition violence often occurs during periods of heightened political unrest such as elections or political protests, though the level of violence has reduced in recent years. Political violence, which has resulted in deaths, takes place between youth and student wings of the parties with impunity. However, the number of people who are affected by politically-motivated violence remains low in proportion to the size of the major parties.
- 2.4.16 Decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors specific to the person which would place them at real risk. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to show that they would be at real risk of serious harm or persecution on account of their actual or perceived political affiliation.
- 2.4.17 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm by the state, they will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.5.2 Where the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm from non-state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.
- 2.5.3 Law enforcement agencies are aligned with the ruling party. Political affiliation may be a motive for the arrest and prosecution of people on criminal charges. The police and the criminal justice system are functioning, but their effectiveness is undermined by poor infrastructure and endemic corruption, which severely compromises the state authorities ability to provide effective protection, particularly for active members of opposition political parties. There are reports of incidents in which members of the security forces engaged in human rights abuses, police ignoring complaints from the opposition and of not attempting to stop violence perpetrated by

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the ruling Awami League.

- 2.5.4 The willingness of the authorities to protect will depend on the profile of the person, in particular their links with the ruling party. However, each case must be considered on its facts. The onus is on the person to demonstrate that they would not be able to seek and obtain effective state protection.
- 2.5.5 See also the [Country Policy and Information Note on Bangladesh: Actors of protection](#).
- 2.5.6 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 Freedom of movement is sometimes curtailed, members of the opposition are reported to use tactics to avoid surveillance by the authorities and some senior opposition officials reported extensive delays renewing their passports; others reported harassment and delays at the airport when departing the country (see [Freedom of movement](#) and [Surveillance](#)).
- 2.6.2 If the person's fear is of persecution or serious harm at the hands of the state, they will not be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.6.3 If the person's fear is of persecution or serious harm from non-state actors, such as supporters of rival political parties or factions within the same party, that threat may be localised. Relocation to another area of Bangladesh is likely to depend on the profile of the persecutor as well as the facts of the case and the individual circumstances and profile of the person.
- 2.6.4 Women, especially single women with no support network, may be vulnerable if forced to internally relocate (see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Bangladesh: Women fearing gender-based violence](#)).
- 2.6.5 See also the [Country Policy and Information Note on Bangladesh: Background including internal relocation](#).
- 2.6.6 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.7 Certification

- 2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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# Country information

Section 3 updated: 19 August 2020

## 3. Political system

### 3.1 Constitution

- 3.1.1 The [Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh](#) was approved by a Constituent Assembly and came into effect on 16 December 1972<sup>1</sup>.
- 3.1.2 Article 7(2) provides, 'This Constitution is... the supreme law of the Republic, and if any other law is inconsistent with this Constitution that other law shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be void.'<sup>2</sup>
- 3.1.3 Article 142 provides that the support of at least two thirds of Members of Parliament is required for an amendment to the Constitution<sup>3</sup>.

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### 3.2 Parliament, President and Prime Minister

- 3.2.1 As noted in the Australia Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Country Information Report on Bangladesh, dated 22 August 2019, based on a range of sources:

'Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy. The unicameral National Parliament [Jatiyo Shangsad<sup>4</sup>] and the largely ceremonial presidency both have five-year terms. Parliament comprises 350 seats, of which 300 are directly elected and 50 reserved for female members nominated by political parties based on their share of elected seats. The president is elected by a simple parliamentary majority, and can be impeached by a two-thirds majority. A simple majority passes legislation, but constitutional amendments require a two-thirds majority.'<sup>5</sup>
- 3.2.2 As prescribed in the Constitution, the Prime Minister is appointed by the President and presides over a cabinet that is collectively responsible to Parliament<sup>6</sup>. Parliament is composed of ministers selected by the Prime Minister<sup>7</sup>. The President may dissolve parliament upon the written request of the Prime Minister<sup>8</sup>. Article 70 of the Constitution provides that an MP must vacate his/her seat if they vote against their party in parliament<sup>9</sup>.
- 3.2.3 Article 55 of the Constitution entrusts all executive power in the Prime Minister rather than Cabinet<sup>10</sup>. As noted in the DFAT report, the political system is characterised by a considerable degree of centralised executive

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<sup>1</sup> [Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh](#), 1972

<sup>2</sup> [Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh](#), 1972

<sup>3</sup> [Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh](#), 1972

<sup>4</sup> Bangladesh Parliament, '[Name and Composition of Parliament](#)', nd

<sup>5</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 2.24), 22 August 2019

<sup>6</sup> [Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh](#), 1972

<sup>7</sup> [Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh](#), 1972

<sup>8</sup> [Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh](#), 1972

<sup>9</sup> [Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh](#), 1972

<sup>10</sup> [Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh](#), 1972

control<sup>11</sup>. The DFAT report also noted ‘The Prime Minister also relies on unelected advisers alongside elected officials. This centralisation of authority in the executive has been a feature of all Bangladeshi governments regardless of party allegiance.’<sup>12</sup>

- 3.2.4 Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League has been the Prime Minister of Bangladesh since January 2009 and Abdul Hamid has been the President since April 2013<sup>13</sup>.

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### 3.3 Political participation and affiliation

- 3.3.1 Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) noted in a report, based on a range of sources, dated September 2018:

‘The right to form political parties and their activities are approved in the Constitution of Bangladesh. Laws provide that no political party can be formed with the objective of propagating any opinion or acting in a manner, prejudicial to the sovereignty, integrity or security of Bangladesh and no one will be allowed to form, organize, set up or convene a foreign-aided party. Laws also provide that political parties having the purpose of participating in the parliamentary elections must be registered with the Election Commission (EC). The laws provide safeguards against the arbitrary dissolution of Parties by the Government.’<sup>14</sup>

- 3.3.2 According to the Dhaka Tribune, reporting in October 2018 (prior to the December 2018 elections), ‘While the number of political parties in Bangladesh can be estimated at over 100, only 39 are officially registered after three recently had their registrations cancelled by the election commission.’<sup>15</sup> As of 29 May 2020, 40 political parties appeared listed [in Bengali language only, at time of access] on the Election Commission website<sup>16</sup>.

- 3.3.3 Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI), a think-tank, which assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries, noted in its BTI 2020 Country Report for Bangladesh, covering the period 1 February 2017 to 31 January 2019:

‘Power is concentrated in the hand of the prime minister, who enjoys unquestioned authority. Her position both as president of the party and as prime minister helps her to control the party’s parliamentarians. The system of governance is based on political patronage, and each minister’s ability is evaluated on the basis of his or her loyalty to the political leadership and the party. For the purposes of day-to-day administration, the government depends on the bureaucracy, which itself is highly politicized, as appointments and transfers are made by the government. Given the patronage structure, the police force also has developed a stake in the

<sup>11</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 2.25), 22 August 2019

<sup>12</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 2.25), 22 August 2019

<sup>13</sup> CIA, ‘[World Factbook: Bangladesh](#)’, updated 4 August 2020

<sup>14</sup> TIB, ‘[Governance and Integrity in Election Manifestos ...](#)’ (page 8), 17 September 2018

<sup>15</sup> Dhaka Tribune, ‘[Polls and party system ...](#)’, 15 October 2018

<sup>16</sup> Election Commission, ‘[Political parties](#)’, nd

continuance of [Awami League] AL in power. The military, which has the ability to challenge the government, is kept happy with a large defense budget and is allowed to procure advanced military hardware. As the Awami League is in power for the third time in succession, it needs a strong patronage-based system to survive in power. Without the support of the police and bureaucracy, it would have been difficult for the AL to win the election. Given the support that the ruling regime received from the administration in winning the election, the military and police would be in a position to exercise veto power to protect their institutional interests and develop a sense of impunity. The pre-election alliance with one of the fundamentalist groups, the Hefazat-e Islam, has strengthened this group, which will work to veto any government decision that might violate its idea of Islam.<sup>17</sup>

#### 3.3.4 The DFAT report stated:

‘Politics in Bangladesh generally centres on political personalities, and social, political and workplace connections, alongside or instead of broader party policies. Political patronage to particular figures is a motivating factor in voting, campaigning and party membership. Similarly, family alliances tend to be very important. Both of the major parties are organised into auxiliary organisations, for example student leagues or women’s leagues, sometimes based around particular professions, such as lawyers or doctors ...

‘Being a member of a political party or one of its auxiliary organisations may assist in getting a job ... There are, however, a very large number of job seekers in Bangladesh, and such membership is unlikely to be the sole determinant of whether or not someone is able to gain employment. Social networks and personality-driven politics are important in Bangladesh. Payment of bribes to secure employment is also common, along with patronage and cronyism.’<sup>18</sup>

#### 3.3.5 The Dhaka Tribune reported in December 2019 that ‘Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, another top BNP leader, said: “BNP supporters are losing jobs, the younger ones are not being employed because of their political affiliations”.<sup>19</sup> The BTI 2020 report noted ‘While the country has a basic administrative structure in place, it lacks efficiency. Marginalized portions of the population do not have access to basic administrative structures to redress their grievances, as corruption is rampant and political affiliation is an important criterion for the provision of service. Law enforcement agencies are used as political instruments to silence the opposition.’<sup>20</sup>

See also [Political influence on the police](#), [Politically-motivated harassment, arrests and detentions](#) and [Student wings and auxiliary groups](#).

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<sup>17</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, ‘[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)’ (page 8), 2020

<sup>18</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (paras 3.63-3.64), 22 August 2019

<sup>19</sup> Dhaka Tribune, ‘[2019 for BNP: One step forward, two steps back](#)’, 30 December 2019

<sup>20</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, ‘[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)’ (page 7), 2020

### 3.4 Participation of women

3.4.1 For general information on women's role in politics see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Bangladesh: Women fearing gender-based violence](#).

3.4.2 A study on student politics and violence in Bangladesh, published March 2020, noted:

'Women participate in student politics to a lesser extent than men and tend to be less violent; they are also less likely to be incentivized or threatened into joining specific parties since the access to a place in a female dormitory tends to be less politicized and women's participation in violence is uncommon. Yet, in several locations (e.g., Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi) female party members are on the rise but appear more interested in issues than self-interest-based politics. An exception must be made for female student leaders that rose the party ranks due to strong political kinship ties (e.g., father MP or mayor).'<sup>21</sup>

3.4.3 According to the same source, women, '... face a considerable amount of societal pressure that discourages them from joining (student) politics. Women in student politics are generally considered "loose" or "easy", and their families find it difficult to find suitable husbands for them. Women also have to endure rumors suggesting they are romantically involved with male student politicians.'<sup>22</sup>

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### 3.5 Main political parties

3.5.1 The DFAT report noted:

'Bangladesh has long had a two-party political system dominated by the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The AL has traditionally been broadly secular, liberal, rural-based and broadly in favour of relations with India, while the BNP has traditionally been more accommodating of political Islam, conservative, and urban-based. The parties do not necessarily strictly adhere to these policy platforms. In recent years, for example, the AL has worked to cultivate close ties with conservative Islamists.'<sup>23</sup>

3.5.2 The table below is reproduced from a working paper, which explored the functioning of political parties in Bangladesh, written by Rounaq Jahan and published in 2014 by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI)<sup>24</sup>. The table notes the main parties self-described ideologies, drawn from each party's constitution:

Political party	Ideologies
<a href="#">Awami League</a>	Bengali Nationalism Democracy

<sup>21</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, '[Student Politics and Political Violence...](#)' (page xiii), 31 March 2020

<sup>22</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, '[Student Politics and Political Violence...](#)' (page 90), 31 March 2020

<sup>23</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.61), 22 August 2019

<sup>24</sup> Jahan, R., '[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)' (page 11), August 2014

	<p>Secularism – freedom of all religions and non-communal politics</p> <p>Socialism – establishment of exploitation-free society and social justice</p>
<a href="#">Bangladesh Nationalist Party</a>	<p>Bangladeshi nationalism</p> <p>Democracy</p> <p>Free market economy</p> <p>Preserve the teachings of Islam, religion of the majority and other religions</p>
<a href="#">Jatiya Party</a>	<p>Independence and sovereignty</p> <p>Islamic ideology and freedom of all religions</p> <p>Bangladeshi nationalism</p> <p>Democracy</p> <p>Social progress and economic emancipation</p>
<a href="#">Jamaat-e-Islami</a>	<p>Establish Islamic way of life</p> <p>Establish just, exploitation-free society and state</p> <p>Faith and trust in Allah, democracy, economic and social justice</p> <p>Ensure basic needs of all citizen irrespective of religions and ethnicity</p> <p>Fraternity with World Muslims and friendship with all states</p>

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### 3.6 Student wings and auxiliary groups

3.6.1 An overview of student and youth groups was provided in the report of a May 2017 fact-finding mission (FFM) to Bangladesh undertaken by the UK Home Office. It stated:

‘A human rights organisation alleged that some student groups are “criminal fronts”. Sources stated that some student leagues, such as the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student subsidiary of the Awami League, and the Jubo League, a youth wing of the AL, committed violence and extortion “with impunity”, although not all student groups act in this way. [...]. Members of the press noted that there are many student groups, with different names and local leadership...’<sup>25</sup> Members of the press also indicated that opposition party students and youth activists were more likely to be targeted and face charges<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> UK Home Office, [FFM Bangladesh](#) (para 2.2.1), September 2017

<sup>26</sup> UK Home Office, [FFM Bangladesh](#) (page 73), September 2017



- 3.6.2 A November 2018 report, published by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), noted that both the AL and BNP parties ‘... have a vast organisational structure and are deeply entrenched into Bangladeshi society through front organisations including youth and student clubs, female wings, and labour unions.’<sup>27</sup>
- 3.6.3 According to the DFAT report:  
‘Both the AL and BNP (and other Bangladeshi political parties) have large auxiliary organisations, including wings for students, volunteers, youth, and professionals (such as doctors, lawyers or labourers). These organisations might be known by other names, such as “fronts”, “wings”, “associates” or “leagues”. While the exact size of these organisations is unknown, they are large [...] The sheer size of the auxiliary organisations means that, in practice, the central leadership of the relevant political party exercises only a limited amount of control over their activities, and the auxiliary organisations maintain a high degree of autonomy.’<sup>28</sup>
- 3.6.4 A 2019 Working Paper, published by the Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) Research Centre, part of the University of Manchester and authored by David Jackman of the University of Oxford (ESID Working Paper), based on research conducted between February and September 2018, which focussed on repressive forms of intervention used by political regimes to achieve dominance in Dhaka, noted ‘The character and organisation of both [the AL and BNP] to a great extent mirror each other, being at core dynastic, highly centralised, organised at all administrative levels, factional, and supported by powerful auxiliary organisations representing particular interest groups, such as students (chattrā), youth (jubo) and workers (sramik).’<sup>29</sup>
- 3.6.5 The DFAT report noted:  
‘The auxiliary organisations support the political parties through fundraising and election-related activities. However, they also play a major role in inter- and intra-party violence. DFAT assesses as credible allegations that members of student wings are sometimes party activists rather than genuine students, and that auxiliary organisations engage in criminal activities on occasion, including violence and extortion. Student elections, like other elections, can turn violent and be characterised by inter-party and intra-party violence in a pattern similar to civic elections.’<sup>30</sup>
- 3.6.6 A study on student politics and violence in Bangladesh, published March 2020, noted:  
‘Student party wings play a central role in the organization of parties in Bangladesh. The student wing of the ruling party has generally been able to consolidate power on campuses over the past years; and accordingly, the Awami League’s (AL’s) student wing, the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), currently dominates student politics across the country. However, the

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<sup>27</sup> ACLED, ‘[The Anatomy of Violence in Bangladesh](#)’, 9 November 2018

<sup>28</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.89), 22 August 2019

<sup>29</sup> Jackman, D., ‘[Dominating Dhaka](#)’ (page 5), November 2019

<sup>30</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.90), 22 August 2019

phenomenon is not unique to AL and was consistent under previous ruling party administrations.<sup>31</sup>

- 3.6.7 The same source noted that between 2008 and 2018, campus violence accounted for 13% of political violence in Bangladesh<sup>32</sup>. Off campus violence in which students participated was higher, at 27%<sup>33</sup>. The study added that in some urban areas, such as Rajshahi and Sylhet, student groups took part in 50% of all political-related violence<sup>34</sup>. It was also noted that there was a high level of factionalism in Sylhet<sup>35</sup>.

See also [Awami League auxiliary groups](#), [BNP auxiliary groups](#), [Islami Chhatra Shibir \(ICS\)](#), [Politically-motivated harassment, arrests and detentions](#), and [Politically-motivated violence](#).

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### 3.7 Party membership, recruitment and documentation

- 3.7.1 The 2014 working paper by Rounaq Jahan noted:

‘Membership requirements of AL, BNP and Jatiya Party are very similar. A person who is at least 18 years of age, a Bangladeshi citizen, not against the independence, sovereignty and integrity of the country and not involved in any anti-social or anti-people activities can become a member of these three parties by filling a membership form and paying a subscription fee. The membership fee differs. [...] There is no religious requirement to become a member of AL or BNP or Jatiya Party.’<sup>36</sup>

- 3.7.2 Unlike the AL, BNP and Jatiya Party, the Jamiat-e-Islami (JI) is limited to Muslims only<sup>37</sup>.

- 3.7.3 The DFAT report noted ‘DFAT has not seen evidence of forced recruitment to political parties, and considers it unlikely to occur. Parties hold membership campaigns each year, through which parties recruit large numbers of members. According to a 2018 survey by the Asia Foundation, around 80 per cent of Bangladeshis have a limited interest in politics, and those that do are not necessarily members of any party.’<sup>38</sup>

- 3.7.4 In July 2017, The Daily Star reported that both of Bangladesh’s main political parties, the AL and BNP, had initiated a ‘mission to recruit new members ahead of the next general elections.’<sup>39</sup> According to the executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh (quoted in the same Daily Star article), membership drives are ‘usually for short-term electoral advantage’, to boost numbers of party members<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, [‘Student Politics and Political Violence...’](#) (page ix), 31 March 2020

<sup>32</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, [‘Student Politics and Political Violence...’](#) (page 1), 31 March 2020

<sup>33</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, [‘Student Politics and Political Violence...’](#) (page 1), 31 March 2020

<sup>34</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, [‘Student Politics and Political Violence...’](#) (page 1), 31 March 2020

<sup>35</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, [‘Student Politics and Political Violence...’](#) (page 5), 31 March 2020

<sup>36</sup> Jahan, R., [‘Political Parties in Bangladesh’](#) (page 33), August 2014

<sup>37</sup> Jahan, R., [‘Political Parties in Bangladesh’](#) (page 33), August 2014

<sup>38</sup> DFAT, [‘Country Information Report Bangladesh’](#) (para 3.65), 22 August 2019

<sup>39</sup> Daily Star, [‘AL, BNP Prepare for Next Polls: Searching for new members’](#), 8 July 2017

<sup>40</sup> Daily Star, [‘AL, BNP Prepare for Next Polls: Searching for new members’](#), 8 July 2017

- 3.7.5 A March 2020 report on student politics and violence noted that ‘Student political wings use strong incentives to encourage new students to join, and disincentives for non-participation.’<sup>41</sup> Benefits for joining a student wing included access to on-campus accommodation, which was generally in short supply<sup>42</sup>. According to the report, such benefits were gained by first year students if they joined in party protests, where they were often required to initiate violence, and/or by providing security to more senior student wing leaders<sup>43</sup>. Enticements extended off campus to access to jobs and networks linked to influential local or national politicians<sup>44</sup>. In contrast, those who did not participate in student politics were denied satisfactory accommodation, access to on-campus resources or protection from criminal activities of dominant political wings<sup>45</sup>.
- 3.7.6 See Awami League – [Membership and support base](#) and BNP – [Membership and support base](#) for further information on recruitment drives. See also [Bangladesh Chhatra League \(BCL\)](#) for more on student politics.
- 3.7.7 In consultation with the Research Directorate of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) in 2016, a professor of South Asian studies at the University of Oslo, who has studied Bangladeshi politics for many years, indicated that ‘political parties in Bangladesh do not follow registration formalities and do not issue membership cards, fees or lists [...]’.<sup>46</sup>

3.7.8 According to DFAT report:

‘Political party documents may be subject to fraud, as they do not contain the security features of other documents. The patronage-based nature of political participation means that an analysis of the person’s political relationships may be more useful in determining their membership of a party. Obtaining such documents fraudulently may be facilitated through patronage networks, in which case it is probable that the bearer is a member of the party.’<sup>47</sup>

For further information on documentation in general, see the [Country Information Note on Bangladesh: Documentation](#).

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Section 4 updated: 19 August 2020

## 4. Bangladesh Awami League (AL)

### 4.1 Overview, leadership and structure

- 4.1.1 According to the DFAT country information report on Bangladesh, ‘The AL traces its history to the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, and emphasises its role in the separation of East Pakistan to become Bangladesh. Its policy

<sup>41</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, [‘Student Politics and Political Violence...’](#) (page ix), 31 March 2020

<sup>42</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, [‘Student Politics and Political Violence...’](#) (page ix), 31 March 2020

<sup>43</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, [‘Student Politics and Political Violence...’](#) (page ix), 31 March 2020

<sup>44</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, [‘Student Politics and Political Violence...’](#) (page ix), 31 March 2020

<sup>45</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, [‘Student Politics and Political Violence...’](#) (page ix), 31 March 2020

<sup>46</sup> IRB, [‘Bangladesh: the Liberal Democratic Party \(LDP\)...’](#), 4 May 2016

<sup>47</sup> DFAT, [‘Country Information Report Bangladesh’](#) (para 5.43), 22 August 2019

platforms include secularism, liberalism, cooperation with India, and rural and agricultural based policies.<sup>48</sup>

- 4.1.2 The AL constitution describes the party's fundamental principles as nationalism, democracy, secularism and socialism<sup>49</sup>.
- 4.1.3 The DFAT report noted, 'At the top of the party is the Central Committee, known as the Presidium. There are 15 members of the Presidium, including the Prime Minister. The Presidium is part of an 81-person Central Working Party and is supported by an advisory committee of technical advisers. Each district and sub-district (upazila) has its own committee.'<sup>50</sup>
- 4.1.4 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is the AL president and Obaidul Quader is the general secretary<sup>51</sup>. In its organisational structure, the [AL website](#) listed 17 Presidium members alongside the names of other members and their roles, as of 21 December 2019<sup>52</sup>. The BTI 2020 Report noted 'Under the Awami League government, the prime minister has been the most powerful actor. In making most decisions, she has consulted her four unelected advisers more closely than the cabinet ministers. The new cabinet contains 47 members, including 22 ministers, 12 state ministers and one deputy minister; they are mostly businessmen.'<sup>53</sup>
- 4.1.5 In a query response on the Bangladesh Awami League (2017-January 2020), prepared after researching publicly accessible information, published 10 February 2020, the Research Directorate of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) cited the [working paper](#) written by Rounaq Jahan, published in 2014. The paper explored the functioning of political parties in Bangladesh, noting the AL has 7 organisational bodies at the national level. The IRB response summarised these bodies:
- 'Council: It is the largest forum in the party with a membership of 6,000 councillors, representing every city AL and every 25,000 people per district. It adopts policies for party objectives and elects the president and the general secretary, among other responsibilities;
  - 'National Committee: It consists of 166 members who are elected or nominated. One of its tasks is to coordinate between the council and subordinate bodies;
  - 'Central Executive Committee/Central Committee/Central Working Committee (CEC/CC/CCW): It brings together 73 members, consisting of top party representatives. It prepares accounts and approves appointments or dismissals of staff by the general secretary, among other activities;
  - 'Presidium: It reunites 15 members drawn from the CEC/CC/CWC and includes the president and the general secretary of the party. It is the

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<sup>48</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.71), 22 August 2019

<sup>49</sup> Bangladesh Awami League, '[Constitution](#)', nd

<sup>50</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.72), 22 August 2019

<sup>51</sup> Bangladesh Awami League, '[Organization](#)', 21 December 2019

<sup>52</sup> Bangladesh Awami League, '[Organization](#)', 21 December 2019

<sup>53</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, '[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)' (page 29), 2020

highest decision-making body and one of its tasks is to take decisions on party programmes and issues;

- ‘Central Advisory Council: It consists of 41 nominated members. It is “designed as the think tank of the party. It reviews the work of the party and how this relates to the political, economic and social issues facing the country,” among other tasks;
- ‘Parliamentary Board: It consists of 11 members, including the president, the general secretary of the party and the leader of the parliamentary party. It is mainly responsible for functions related to elections;
- ‘Parliamentary Party: It includes all of the elected MPs and functions on advice of the CEC/CC/CWC (Jahan Aug. 2014, 15-19).’<sup>54</sup>

4.1.6 Jahan’s 2014 working paper also noted the party has organisational bodies at a sub-national level, which included:

‘... committees at zila/district, upazila/thana, union, ward, metropolitan city, metropolitan thana, metropolitan ward, metropolitan unit, municipal committee (“A” category and other), municipal ward and village levels. The party constitution stipulates that the members of the zila/district, upazila, metropolitan city executive committee, metropolitan thana committees are to be elected through triennial councils but no specific election/selection procedure has been spelled out regarding the election/selection of other sub-national committees.’<sup>55</sup>

4.1.7 The IRB query response noted:

‘Sources indicate that the AL has led two political party coalitions, the Grand Alliance [an “electoral” alliance (The Daily Star 27 Oct. 2018)] (Al Jazeera 3 Jan. 2019; The Daily Star 27 Oct. 2018; Dhaka Tribune 5 Oct. 2017), and the 14-party alliance [an “ideological” alliance (The Daily Star 27 Oct. 2018)] (The Daily Star 27 Oct. 2018; Dhaka Tribune 5 Oct. 2017). An article by Al Jazeera about the 2018 general election, using information from the Bangladesh Election Commission and the Daily Star, indicates that the Grand Alliance partners in 2018 consisted of the following members: AL, Jatiya Party, Worker’s Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) - Inu, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, Tarikat Federation, Jatiya Party (Manju), and the Ambia-led JSD (Al Jazeera 29 Dec. 2018). As for the 14-party alliance, according to a 2017 article in the Dhaka Tribune, a national English-language newspaper in Bangladesh,

‘[t]he most prominent members ... are the Bangladesh Tariqat Federation, JaSad [Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal] (Inu), Workers’ Party [of Bangladesh], Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal (Marxbadi-Leninbadi), Ganatantri Party, Communist Kendro, Gana Azadi League, National Awami Party (NAP-Mojaffor), Jatiya Party (JP-Manju) and the Ganatantrik Majdur Party. (Dhaka Tribune 5 Oct. 2017).’<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> IRB, ‘[Bangladesh: The Bangladesh Awami League \(AL\)...](#)’, 10 February 2020

<sup>55</sup> Jahan, R., ‘[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)’ (page 28), August 2014

<sup>56</sup> IRB, ‘[Bangladesh: The Bangladesh Awami League \(AL\)...](#)’, 10 February 2020

## 4.2 Membership and support base

- 4.2.1 Jahan's 2014 working paper noted that, although the AL is formally committed to secularism and pluralism, it '... has greater support base among the religious and ethnic minorities. Traditionally, AL also drew support from the rural areas but in recent years the party has also picked up support from the urban middle classes and business groups.'<sup>57</sup> The DFAT report cited the AL's support as traditionally 'rural-based'<sup>58</sup>. Jackman noted in the ESID Working Paper that the AL 'are in alliance with the Jatiya Party, as well as left-leaning parties such as the Bangladesh Workers Party and National Socialist Party...'<sup>59</sup>
- 4.2.2 Sources indicated that the AL actively recruits new members, usually through periodic membership drives. For example, a May 2017 article published by New Age Bangladesh reported on 'a countrywide drive to recruit fresh members to revamp the organisational strength' of the ruling party. According to the report, 'The drive would also renew membership of existing members.'<sup>60</sup>
- 4.2.3 Reporting on the same event, the Daily Sun noted that the May 2017 membership drive was the first membership campaign since 2010, adding that membership should be renewed every 3 years at a cost of 20 Taka<sup>61</sup> (around 20 UK pence<sup>62</sup>).
- 4.2.4 Providing additional detail about the activities involved in the 2017 membership drive, The Independent (Bangladesh) reported, in October 2017, that '[...] the party's central and grassroots-level leaders to go from door-to-door to enrol new members. At the latest central working committee meeting held at Ganabhaban, AL president Sheikh Hasina once again directed her party's central leaders to gear up the membership drive.'<sup>63</sup>
- 4.2.5 The same article noted that the 2017 membership campaign targeted 'young and female voters': 'Party insiders said they are receiving overwhelming response at the grassroots level, as people seem to believe that the party will remain in power for two or three more terms. This time the party is enrolling fresh members by targeting young and female voters for the next national election slated for 2019.'<sup>64</sup>
- 4.2.6 In July 2017, The Daily Star reported that the AL stated that it was 'now aiming for first-time voters and to bring them under the party umbrella before the 2019 national elections. It also puts emphasis on recruiting women.'<sup>65</sup>
- 4.2.7 The Independent (Bangladesh) reported on membership targets, and deadlines for meeting these targets, associated with the membership campaign: 'The AL leadership has a target to enroll two crore [20,000,000]

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<sup>57</sup> Jahan, R., '[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)' (page 34), August 2014

<sup>58</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.61), 22 August 2019

<sup>59</sup> Jackman, D., '[Dominating Dhaka](#)' (page 6), November 2019

<sup>60</sup> New Age Bangladesh, '[AL to start countrywide party membership drive](#)', 25 May 2017

<sup>61</sup> The Daily Sun, '[Awami League begins member collection campaign](#)', 20 May 2017

<sup>62</sup> Xe.com, '[Currency converter live rates](#)', as at 29 June 2020

<sup>63</sup> Independent (Bangladesh), '[AL membership drive gains pace](#)', 25 October 2017

<sup>64</sup> Independent (Bangladesh), '[AL membership drive gains pace](#)', 25 October 2017

<sup>65</sup> Daily Star, '[AL, BNP Prepare for Next Polls: Searching for new members](#)', 8 July 2017

new members from across the country that will include at least 25 [2,500,000] lakh new members from the capital. The target will be completed by next January [2018]. After new members are enrolled, the party will scrutinise the list. [...] The AL had conducted its last membership drive in 2010.<sup>66</sup>

4.2.8 Conversely, The Daily Star, reporting in 2017, quoted an AL leader as stating that membership targets were not set, rather the leader stated that 'we will collect as many [members] as we can.'<sup>67</sup>

4.2.9 According to the same Daily Star article, the AL did not keep records of its existing members or membership numbers, with leaders claiming that membership stood at 'a few million'. The article noted 'major parties of Bangladesh are more interested in recruiting new members and renewing existing memberships than keeping records.'<sup>68</sup>

4.2.10 The same source added:

'The AL has temporary and permanent members. If members do not pay the triennial fees, they could lose their memberships but party officials have no idea how many members pay the fees since they have no record. AL sources said almost every day its 77 organisational district units collect forms and receipts from the party president's Dhanmondi office for recruiting new members and renewing memberships, but the units do not return those.'<sup>69</sup>

4.2.11 The DFAT report noted that the Awami League:

'... holds membership campaigns every year through which people can apply for membership. Applicants are required to pay a fee of about 20 taka (about 30 [Australian] cents [20 UK pence<sup>70</sup>]). Once people have joined it takes two years for them to be admitted as full members. People are involved at different levels, including in village politics or in auxiliary committees. There is no official distinction between levels of supporters, but people are commonly involved in different wings of the party and focus on different jurisdictions, such as the village or district level.'<sup>71</sup>

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### 4.3 Awami League auxiliary groups

4.3.1 According to the DFAT report, the AL has large auxiliary organisations, although the exact size of these groups was unknown<sup>72</sup>. Cited from a range of sources, the IRB response of February 2020 indicated the bodies associated with the AL:

- Bangladesh Chhatra League, the student wing;
- Jubo [Juba] League or Awami Jubo League, the youth wing;

<sup>66</sup> Independent (Bangladesh), '[AL membership drive gains pace](#)', 25 October 2017

<sup>67</sup> Daily Star, '[AL, BNP Prepare for Next Polls: Searching for new members](#)', 8 July 2017

<sup>68</sup> Daily Star, '[AL, BNP Prepare for Next Polls: Searching for new members](#)', 8 July 2017

<sup>69</sup> Daily Star, '[AL, BNP Prepare for Next Polls: Searching for new members](#)', 8 July 2017

<sup>70</sup> Xe.com, '[Currency converter live rates](#)', as at 29 June 2020

<sup>71</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (par 3.73), 22 August 2019

<sup>72</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.89), 22 August 2019

- Bangladesh Mahila [Mohila] Awami League, the women's wing;
- Awami Swechhashebok League or Swechchhasebak League, volunteers' wing;
- Bangladesh Krishok [Krishak] League, the farmers' wing;
- Jatiyo [Jatiya] Sramik League, the workers'/labour wing;
- Awami Ainjibee [Ainjibi] Parishad, the lawyers' wing;
- Jubo [Juba] Mahila [Mohila] League;
- Bangladesh Tanti League;
- Swadhinata Chikitsok Parishad;
- Mohila Sramik League<sup>73</sup>.

4.3.2 Jahan's 2014 working paper noted that 'the Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jatiya Shramik League are to be run according to their own constitutions.'<sup>74</sup>

4.3.3 The IRB query response of February 2020 noted:

'Sources indicate that there are many unrecognized organizations that use names associated with the AL, such as "Awami," "League," "Bangabandhu," (The Daily Star 5 Nov. 2019; Dhaka Tribune 22 June 2017), or "Muktijodhha," with estimates of "over 200" organizations using AL-related names (The Daily Star 5 Nov. 2019). The Daily Star indicates that "[m]ost of these platforms in their official documents mention the AL headquarters at 23 Bangabandhu Avenue as their official address, but none of the offices could be found there" (The Daily Star 5 Nov. 2019). Sources indicate that these groups can exploit connections with party leaders and use the influence gained by name usage for receiving government contracts (The Daily Star 5 Nov. 2019; Dhaka Tribune 22 June 2017), or "extort[ing] money, grab[bing] property, deal[ing] drugs and ... other crimes" (Dhaka Tribune 22 June 2017). An article in the Daily Star cites the AL Joint Secretary General as indicating that the AL has communicated with the Dhaka Metropolitan Police and the Home Ministry about these organizations, but that "they have again become active recently" (The Daily Star 5 Nov. 2019).'<sup>75</sup>

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#### 4.4 Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL)

4.4.1 The DFAT report noted that local sources estimated the BCL, the student wing of the AL, has 10 million members<sup>76</sup>. In January 2020, whilst reporting on the BCL's 72<sup>nd</sup> anniversary, media sources named the President of the BCL as Al-Nahean Khan Joy and the General Secretary as Lekhak Bhattacharjee<sup>77 78</sup>. According to the Daily Star, in September 2019,

<sup>73</sup> IRB, '[Bangladesh: The Bangladesh Awami League \(AL\)...](#)', 10 February 2020

<sup>74</sup> Jahan, R., '[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)' (page 29), August 2014

<sup>75</sup> IRB, '[Bangladesh: The Bangladesh Awami League \(AL\)...](#)', 10 February 2020

<sup>76</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.89), 22 August 2019

<sup>77</sup> Daily Star, '[Nahian, Lekhak made BCL president, gen secy](#)', 4 January 2020

<sup>78</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[Chhatra League celebrates its 72nd founding anniversary](#)', 4 January 2020



'Rezwanul Haque Chowdhury Shovon and Golam Rabbani were removed from the posts of BCL president and general secretary for their controversial activities.'<sup>79</sup>

4.4.2 The DFAT report stated 'The BCL has effectively controlled public university campuses since 2009, preventing members of other parties' student wings from undertaking activities and even from sitting examinations. In rural areas, AL members and activists have reportedly extorted business owners affiliated with the BNP, threatening them with violence if they do not comply with demands for money.'<sup>80</sup>

4.4.3 According to Jahan's 2014 working paper:

'... two of the [AL's] associate organisations, Chhatra League and Jubo League, have earned a negative image for the party as their members frequently indulge in violent contestations to grab business tenders and extort money or to establish authority in various educational institutions. Though the AL president and other party leaders have many times lamented about the criminal activities of these associate organisations and the party president has tried to distance herself from these organisations, the AL central leaders have not been able to control the rent-seeking and violent behaviour of the members of these associate organisations.'<sup>81</sup>

See also [Jubo League](#).

4.4.4 The US Department of State Country Report on Human Rights for 2019 (USSD HR Report 2019) noted 'AL-affiliated organizations such as their student wing, the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), reportedly carried out violence and intimidation around the country with impunity, including against individuals affiliated with opposition groups.'<sup>82</sup>

4.4.5 A March 2020 study on student politics and violence noted that the BCL was 'by far most active in violence' across most locations with a noteworthy dominance in Rajshahi, Sylhet, Savar, Hathazari and Kushtia<sup>83</sup>.

4.4.6 The Bangladeshi human rights group, Odhikar, noted in its annual human rights report for 2019, which was based 'on data collection, reports sent by human rights defenders associated with Odhikar from different districts of the country and information published in various media'<sup>84</sup>, that Chhatra League 'leaders and activists committed criminal activities throughout the country in 2019 and enjoyed impunity and political patronage.'<sup>85</sup>

4.4.7 Reporting on the period January to March 2020, Odhikar noted 'During this period, allegations of various criminal activities, including attacks on the opposition party leaders-activists, abduction, beating of a university teacher,

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<sup>79</sup> Daily Star, '[Nahian, Lekhak made BCL president, gen secy](#)', 4 January 2020

<sup>80</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.90), 22 August 2019

<sup>81</sup> Jahan, R., '[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)' (page 29), August 2014

<sup>82</sup> USSD, '[Country Report for 2019](#)' (section 3), 11 March 2020

<sup>83</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, '[Student Politics and Political Violence...](#)' (page 23), 31 March 2020

<sup>84</sup> Odhikar, '[Annual Human Rights Report 2019 Bangladesh](#)' (page 2), 8 February 2020

<sup>85</sup> Odhikar, '[Annual Human Rights Report 2019 Bangladesh](#)' (page 7), 8 February 2020

brutality on students and ordinary citizens and violence against women, were found against the Chhatra League leaders and activists.<sup>86</sup>

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## 4.5 Jubo League

- 4.5.1 The Bangladesh Awami Jubo League was founded on 11 November 1972 by Sheikh Fazlul Haq Moni, with an aim to alleviate poverty and establish the rights of youths<sup>87 88</sup>.
- 4.5.2 The Dhaka Tribune reported in November 2019 that Sheikh Fazle Shams Parash, son of the organisation's founder, was elected unopposed as the new chairman of the Jubo League. Mainul Hossain Khan Nikhil, incumbent president of Dhaka city (North), was named as general secretary of the youth front<sup>89 90</sup>.
- 4.5.3 The Dhaka Tribune added, 'The new leadership of Jubo League comes at a time when several leading Jubo League leaders have been expelled or arrested for their alleged involvement in numerous criminal activities, including running underground casinos and gambling places in Dhaka city.'<sup>91</sup>
- 4.5.4 Some of the expelled leaders included: Ismail Hossain Chowdhury Samrat, Jubo League President (Dhaka South unit); organizing secretary Khalid Mahmud (Dhaka South unit); self-proclaimed Cooperative Affairs Secretary of the Jubo League Central Committee, GK Shamim; Joint Secretary General Tarequzzaman Rajib (Dhaka North unit); and Jubo League Chairman Omar Faruk Chowdhury<sup>92 93</sup>. According to Odhikar, 'It was reported that members of the police, ruling party leaders and bureaucrats were involved in and regularly received money earned illegally from the casinos. There were allegations that these Jubo League leaders laundered billions of Taka abroad.'<sup>94</sup>
- 4.5.5 Odhikar noted that Jubo League 'leaders and activists committed criminal activities throughout the country in 2019 and enjoyed impunity and political patronage.'<sup>95</sup>

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Section 5 updated: 19 August 2020

## 5. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

### 5.1 Overview, leadership and structure

- 5.1.1 In a query response on the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (2017-May 2019), prepared after researching publicly accessible information, published 22 May

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<sup>86</sup> Odhikar, '[Three-month Human Rights Monitoring Report ...](#)' (page 22), 1 May 2020

<sup>87</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[Parash named Jubo League chairman, Nikhil GS](#)', 23 November 2019

<sup>88</sup> Daily Star, '[Parash chairman, Nikhil gen secy of Jubo League](#)', 24 November 2019

<sup>89</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[Parash named Jubo League chairman, Nikhil GS](#)', 23 November 2019

<sup>90</sup> Daily Star, '[Parash chairman, Nikhil gen secy of Jubo League](#)', 24 November 2019

<sup>91</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[Parash named Jubo League chairman, Nikhil GS](#)', 23 November 2019

<sup>92</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[Parash named Jubo League chairman, Nikhil GS](#)', 23 November 2019

<sup>93</sup> Odhikar, '[Annual Human Rights Report 2019 Bangladesh](#)' (page 13), 8 February 2020

<sup>94</sup> Odhikar, '[Annual Human Rights Report 2019 Bangladesh](#)' (page 13), 8 February 2020

<sup>95</sup> Odhikar, '[Annual Human Rights Report 2019 Bangladesh](#)' (page 7), 8 February 2020

2019, the Research Directorate of IRB Canada noted ‘Sources indicate that the BNP is the main opposition party in Bangladesh [...]’.<sup>96</sup>

- 5.1.2 The DFAT report of August 2019 noted that the BNP ‘... was founded in 1978 following the assassination of President Mujibur Rahman, and was established on a platform of Bangladeshi nationalism and Islamic identity. At its founding, and at the 2014 election, it cooperated with [[Jamiat-e-Islami](#)] JI. In the lead-up to the 2018 election, however, BNP attempted to distance itself from JI as a way to demonstrate that it did not support extremist ideology.’<sup>97</sup>
- 5.1.3 In 2018, the leader of the BNP, Khaleda Zia, was imprisoned on corruption charges<sup>98 99 100</sup>. Acting chairperson, Tarique Rahman (Zia’s son) was also convicted for corruption and sentenced to prison whilst living in exile in the UK<sup>101</sup> (see [Politically-motivated harassment, arrests and detentions](#) for further information). The IRB query response noted that, according to a range of sources, the BNP’s Secretary General was Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir<sup>102</sup>.
- 5.1.4 As noted in the May 2019 IRB query response, at the time of the December 2018 elections, the BNP participated ‘... as the leader of the Jatiya Oikya Front (National Unity Front, NUF), a coalition of multiple parties [...]. Sources further indicate that, at the time of the election, the NUF was led by Kamal Hossain.’<sup>103</sup> Transparency International Bangladesh (TI Bangladesh) noted, in a study on the 2018 elections, that ‘In October 2018 the Jatiyo Oikfront was formed with some of the mainstream political parties, that include BNP, Gono Forum, Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Krishak-Sromik Janata League and Nagorik Oikyo.’<sup>104</sup> According to the Dhaka Tribune, reporting in December 2019, a year after the elections, ‘The BNP alliance with the Jatiya Oikya Front has not seen any coordinated political movement since the polls. [General Secretary] Mirza Fakhrul said: “We formed the Jatiya Oikya Front for the election. Now our focus is on strengthening the party, but we will work together again if it is necessary”.’<sup>105</sup> (see also [National elections 2018](#)).
- 5.1.5 The BNP rejected the results of the 2018 Parliamentary elections<sup>106</sup>. The USSD HR Report 2019 noted ‘Despite their initial announcement of a boycott of the newly formed parliament, terming it illegitimate, the BNP MPs-elect, except BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, joined the parliament session on April 29 [2019].’<sup>107</sup> (see [Election violence and irregularities](#)).

<sup>96</sup> IRB, ‘[Bangladesh: Bangladesh Nationalist \[National\] Party \(BNP\)...](#)’, 22 May 2019

<sup>97</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.77), 22 August 2019

<sup>98</sup> Al Jazeera, ‘[Khaleda Zia jailed for five years in corruption case](#)’, 8 February 2018

<sup>99</sup> Dhaka Tribune, ‘[Jail term doubled for Khaleda in graft case](#)’, 30 October 2018

<sup>100</sup> DW, ‘[Bangladesh’s ex-PM Khaleda Zia given new jail sentence](#)’, 29 October 2018

<sup>101</sup> Al Jazeera, ‘[Khaleda Zia jailed for five years in corruption case](#)’, 8 February 2018

<sup>102</sup> IRB, ‘[Bangladesh: Bangladesh Nationalist \[National\] Party \(BNP\)...](#)’, 22 May 2019

<sup>103</sup> IRB, ‘[Bangladesh: Bangladesh Nationalist \[National\] Party \(BNP\)...](#)’, 22 May 2019

<sup>104</sup> TIB, ‘[Election Process Tracking...](#)’ (page 6), 21 October 2019

<sup>105</sup> Dhaka Tribune, ‘[2019 for BNP: One step forward, two steps back](#)’, 30 December 2019

<sup>106</sup> Al Jazeera, ‘[Bangladesh election makes mockery of democracy...](#)’, 31 December 2018

<sup>107</sup> USSD, ‘[Country Report for 2019](#)’ (section 3), 11 March 2020

- 5.1.6 Reporting on 2019 events, the Freedom House Freedom in the World 2020 report noted 'In the first half of 2019, the BNP and other opposition parties boycotted local elections, which saw historically low turnout. In September, the BNP reversed the decision, saying it plans to participate in future elections. Earlier, in April, four of the six BNP members who won seats decided to take the oath of office.'<sup>108</sup>

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## 5.2 Local branches (executive committees)

- 5.2.1 The DFAT report noted 'The BNP Standing Committee is the top decision-making body of the party. Various secretaries have responsibility over political portfolios, such as foreign affairs or information, within that body. Various committees at the district and upazila level also exist.'<sup>109</sup>

- 5.2.2 An August 2014 query response by the IRB referred to the roles and responsibilities of the executive members of the local branches of the BNP and noted that:

'The BNP Constitution describes the structure of the union-level council and executive committee as follows:

'Union council and union executive committee The union council will be formed with the members of all ward executive committees under a union. This council will elect a union executive committee from its members with maximum 71 members including one president, three vice presidents, one general secretary, two joint secretaries, one organizing secretary, two assistant organizing secretaries, one publicity secretary, one office secretary and one treasurer for two years. The upazila or thana committee will approve this committee.'<sup>110</sup>

- 5.2.3 The same response added 'In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a US-based professor of political science, who is a specialist in Bangladeshi politics, and who has conducted field studies and published research on democracy, governance and political issues in Bangladesh, indicated that "all executive committees, at all branch levels, from national to union-level, are generally structured following the same hierarchy".'<sup>111</sup>

- 5.2.4 A senior researcher at the Chr. Michelsen Institute [CMI – independent development research institute], who specialises in democratisation and political parties in Africa and Bangladesh, provided the following information to the IRB Research Directorate in August 2014:

'According to the Senior Researcher, the BNP is not "sufficiently organized" to have executive committees at the local level in every zila [district], upazila [sub-district] and union [...]. He expressed the view that "on paper most local branches are organized [with executive committees] but in reality only a few bigger ones are functioning like this". He indicated that larger branches are organized with a number of different types of executive positions, but smaller branches may work with only a president and general secretary.

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<sup>108</sup> Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2020 – Bangladesh](#)' (section B2), 4 March 2020

<sup>109</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.78), 22 August 2019

<sup>110</sup> IRB, '[Bangladesh: Roles and responsibilities of the executive members...](#)', 15 August 2014

<sup>111</sup> IRB, '[Bangladesh: Roles and responsibilities of the executive members...](#)', 15 August 2014

‘Similarly, the Professor [of political science] indicated that the BNP is supposed to have committees at every level “theoretically”; however, they “do not necessarily have them at every upazila branch” and do not have them in every union [...]. He also indicated that at the union level “there is a lot of variation in terms of the sizes of executive committees” and that not all positions are filled, but that “most of the important positions are always filled”.’<sup>112</sup>

#### 5.2.5 The IRB response continued:

‘A May 2014 document titled “Political Parties and Democracy in Bangladesh,” posted on the website of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Bangladesh, which presents the findings of a CPD study on internal party democracy in four electoral parties in Bangladesh, including the BNP, indicates “in practice parties do not follow their own rules” regarding party constitution stipulations that committee leaders must be elected at the national and sub-national levels, and to associate organizations [...]. According to the CPD, the BNP was reportedly “functioning with ad-hoc committees both at district and upazila levels”. The Professor similarly indicated that “most” district level committees are not directly elected by party members, but are often chosen by the central committee, and that below the district level, at the upazila and union level, executive committees are formed in an ad hoc manner [...].

‘The [CMI] Senior Researcher indicated that it is “impossible” to describe the different roles and responsibilities of local executive members, as the party is not “explicit” in describing these roles [...]. The Professor indicated that as with other parties in Bangladesh, the BNP hierarchy at the local level is “determined/selected based on a number of considerations, including name recognition in the locality, ability to mobilize resources, commanding support of [the] rank and file, and the blessings of Central leaders” [...]. The Professor described the responsibilities of the organizing secretary and the publicity secretary as follows:

- ‘Organizing Secretary: The organizing secretary is perceived by BNP members, informally, as the third most influential position in the executive hierarchy, after the President and the General Secretary. Their role is to be the first point of contact between local party activists and the executive committee. They are responsible for being in contact with party organizers who mobilize activists to participate in BNP events and demonstrations. The Organizing Secretary is essentially responsible for outreach activities to mobilize local support for the party.
- ‘Publicity Secretary: This is a relatively lower level position within the branch and is seen as a training ground for the person to develop experience within the party and become connected to local party activists. Their role and responsibilities would be to publicize events, contact local media for BNP activities or demonstrations, and be a spokesperson for the executive committee at the union level. [...]

‘The Senior Researcher stated that, to his knowledge, one person can occupy several positions in an executive at the local level. However, the

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<sup>112</sup> IRB, [‘Bangladesh: Roles and responsibilities of the executive members...’](#), 15 August 2014

Professor indicated that “usually” someone would only hold one position because the party wants to develop the “political capital” within the executive, and that someone holding two posts might be perceived to be favoured.’<sup>113</sup>

- 5.2.6 Prothom Alo reported in April 2017 that, in preparation for the national elections, BNP party leaders were directed to complete the formation of executive committees in 75 district units. A committee in Sylhet district was approved by BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, where Abul Kaher Chowdhury Shamim and Ali Ahmad were made president and general secretary of the unit, respectively<sup>114</sup>. In July 2017, a BNP committee was formally announced in Chittagong city, comprising of 275 members (opposed to the 151 members as per the party constitution) to accommodate activists and leaders who had been deprived of a post for 20 years<sup>115</sup>.

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### 5.3 Membership and support base

- 5.3.1 Jahan’s 2014 working paper noted that the BNP ‘... was founded with greater support from the urban and higher income groups, particularly civil and military bureaucracy and business community.’<sup>116</sup> The DFAT report noted, ‘[T]he BNP has traditionally been more accommodating of political Islam, conservative, and urban-based.’<sup>117</sup>
- 5.3.2 According to an article by The Daily Star, dated 8 July 2017, the BNP did not hold records of their existing members, indicating their membership stood at ‘a few million’, according to party leaders<sup>118</sup>. The same article noted that membership cost 10 Taka (approximately 10 UK pence<sup>119</sup>) per year<sup>120</sup>.
- 5.3.3 The Daily Star article further reported ‘According to its charter, BNP headquarters must have a database of its members with their addresses. All its organisational district units also have to have the same. Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, senior joint secretary general of the party, told The Daily Star, “We have a database of the party’s executive committee members but we do not have any database of primary members”.’<sup>121</sup> According to Rizvi, ‘the BNP has millions of activists and supporters across the country and it was difficult to keep their records in a database.’<sup>122</sup> Most organising secretaries of the BNP said they did not maintain a list of primary members or say how many members its units had<sup>123</sup>. In 2010 the BNP set a target of recruiting 5 million new members, but did not know if that target had been achieved<sup>124</sup>. At the

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<sup>113</sup> IRB, ‘[Bangladesh: Roles and responsibilities of the executive members...](#)’, 15 August 2014

<sup>114</sup> Prothom Alo, ‘[Sylhet district BNP gets new committee](#)’, 26 April 2017

<sup>115</sup> Dhaka Tribune, ‘[Chittagong city BNP gets full-fledged committee after 20yrs](#)’, 11 July 2017

<sup>116</sup> Jahan, R., ‘[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)’ (page 34), August 2014

<sup>117</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.61), 22 August 2019

<sup>118</sup> Daily Star, ‘[AL, BNP Prepare for Next Polls: Searching for new members](#)’, 8 July 2017

<sup>119</sup> Xe.com, ‘[Currency converter live rates](#)’, as at 29 June 2020

<sup>120</sup> Daily Star, ‘[AL, BNP Prepare for Next Polls: Searching for new members](#)’, 8 July 2017

<sup>121</sup> Daily Star, ‘[AL, BNP Prepare for Next Polls: Searching for new members](#)’, 8 July 2017

<sup>122</sup> Daily Star, ‘[AL, BNP Prepare for Next Polls: Searching for new members](#)’, 8 July 2017

<sup>123</sup> Daily Star, ‘[AL, BNP Prepare for Next Polls: Searching for new members](#)’, 8 July 2017

<sup>124</sup> Daily Star, ‘[AL, BNP Prepare for Next Polls: Searching for new members](#)’, 8 July 2017

time of The Daily Star article (July 2017), the BNP aimed to recruit 1 crore (10 million) members in 2 months<sup>125</sup>.

#### 5.3.4 The BTI 2020 report noted that:

‘Over the years, the BNP’s support base has declined, since it has been out of power for the last 12 years. There is a strong culture of clientelism that connects the parties to its cadres, who work tirelessly to support the party organization at the grass root level. In turn, they expect to benefit once their party comes to power. At times, they have mounted pressure on their parties when their expectations have not been met, and this lingering dissatisfaction sometimes leads to political fragmentation. This was very much evident during the election. Party leaders who were denied nomination filed nomination as rebel candidates, splitting the support base. The BNP support base has eroded, as the party has been in the political wilderness for so long. The party has experienced a leadership vacuum and lacked a visionary political narrative to fight the ruling party. Its political narrative was confined to the release of its leader [imprisoned on corruption charges. See BNP – [Overview, leadership and structure](#) and [Politically-motivated harassment, arrests and detentions](#)]. Its lack of political confidence was apparent when it could not cut its ties with Jamaat in spite of some senior leaders opposing the alliance. As a result, the opposition alliance remained fragmented.’<sup>126</sup> See also JI – [Overview, leadership and structure](#).

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## 5.4 BNP auxiliary groups

5.4.1 The DFAT report noted that, like the AL, the BNP has large auxiliary organisations, but the exact size was unknown<sup>127</sup>. As reported in the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) December 2017 report on Bangladesh, ‘The BNP’s Constitution states that “front organizations” for the BNP have their own “proclamation, constitution, flag and office,” but “fall under the discipline” of the BNP.’<sup>128</sup> The DFAT report provided a list of the BNP’s key auxiliary groups:

- Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) (student wing);
- Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal (JJD) (youth wing);
- Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal (women's wing);
- Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Krishak Dal (farmers' wing);
- Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Muktijoddha Dal (freedom fighters' wing);
- Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Sechchasebak Dal (volunteers' wing);
- Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangstha (cultural wing);
- Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal (workers'/labour wing);

<sup>125</sup> Daily Star, ‘[AL, BNP Prepare for Next Polls: Searching for new members](#)’, 8 July 2017

<sup>126</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, ‘[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)’ (page 12), 2020.

<sup>127</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.89), 22 August 2019

<sup>128</sup> EASO, ‘[COI Report Bangladesh: Country Overview](#)’ (page 28), December 2017

- Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Tanti Dal (weavers' wing);
- Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Olama Dal (religious wing);
- Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Matshayajibi Dal (fishermen's wing)<sup>129</sup>.

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## 5.5 Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD)

An August 2014 query response by the IRB referred to the roles and responsibilities of the executive members of the local branches of the JCD noted that, according to a US-based professor of political science, specialising in Bangladeshi politics:

‘The [Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal] is a completely separate organization from the BNP, and it has completely separate executive committees from the BNP structure and leadership. The [Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal] structures its executive committees in a similar way to the BNP, however there is no overlap between the two organizations, as there is a practice of “graduation” of activists from the [Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal] who then move into the BNP. The executive committees have the same positions and responsibilities as those of the BNP. [...]

‘According to the Senior Researcher [at the Chr. Michelsen Institute], the executive committee structure of the Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal is “even more informal” than the BNP [...].’<sup>130</sup>

See also BNP – [Local branches \(executive committees\)](#)

- 5.5.1 On 19 September 2019, Fazlur Rahman Khokon was elected president of the JCD and Iqbal Hossain Shamol was elected as the general secretary. Direct voting to elect JCD leaders had not taken place for 27 years<sup>131 132</sup>. In December 2019, Khokon released a list of new JCD leaders in the 60-member partial central committee, which included 15 vice-presidents, 15 joint-secretaries, 15 assistant general-secretaries, one organising-secretary, 11 assistant organising-secretaries and one assistant office secretary<sup>133</sup>. New Age Bangladesh provided a list of the [committee members](#)<sup>134</sup>. In October 2019, some JCD members protested against their exclusion from the committee because they were married<sup>135</sup>. According to a New Age Bangladesh article, dated 24 December 2019, a group of about 40 leaders and activists led by Dhaka University unit JCD president Al Mehedi Talukder held a demonstration outside the BNP central office, protesting against the central president Fazlur Rahman Khokon and general secretary Iqbal Hossain Shyamol, claiming the committee was illegal<sup>136</sup>.

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<sup>129</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.91), 22 August 2019

<sup>130</sup> IRB, ‘[Bangladesh: Roles and responsibilities of the executive members...](#)’, 15 August 2014

<sup>131</sup> Dhaka Tribune, ‘[Chhatra Dal elects central leadership after 27 years](#)’, 19 September 2019

<sup>132</sup> Daily Star, ‘[Khokon, Shyamol new president, gen secy of JCD](#)’, 19 September 2019

<sup>133</sup> New Age Bangladesh, ‘[JCD gets 60-member partial committee](#)’, 22 December 2019

<sup>134</sup> New Age Bangladesh, ‘[JCD gets 60-member partial committee](#)’, 22 December 2019

<sup>135</sup> UNB, ‘[Married JCD leaders go on hunger strike demanding party posts](#)’, 30 October 2019

<sup>136</sup> New Age Bangladesh, ‘[Deprived JCD leaders protest at new committee](#)’, 24 December 2019



## 6. Jatiya Party

### 6.1 Overview, leadership and structure

#### 6.1.1 Jahan's 2014 working paper noted:

'The constitution of Jatiya Party describes its key ideological principles as independence and sovereignty, Islamic ideology and freedom of all religions, Bangladeshi nationalism, social progress and economic emancipation. Ideologically, Jatiya Party is not very different in its orientation from the BNP. This is not surprising since its founder H M Ershad also came from military background and its front ranking leaders were drawn heavily from the BNP. [...] in 1988, the Jatiya Party-led government incorporated Islam as the state religion through the eighth amendment of the constitution.'<sup>137</sup>

#### 6.1.2 The Jatiya Party was part of the coalition Grand Alliance led by the AL in the 2018 elections<sup>138</sup> (see also AL – [Overview, leadership and structure](#)), and secured 22 seats<sup>139</sup> emerging as the second largest party<sup>140</sup> (see [National elections 2018](#)). In January 2019, the Business Standard reported that leader of the Jatiya Party, H M Ershad, indicated that the party would 'sever ties with the Awami League-led Grand Alliance' and serve as the main opposition party<sup>141</sup>. Ershad's brother and co-chairman of the Jatiya Party, G M Quader, would act as deputy leader of the opposition<sup>142</sup>. Moshir Rahman Ranga was party secretary general<sup>143</sup> <sup>144</sup>. The USSD HR Report 2019 noted 'Parliament conferred the official status of the opposition to the Jatiya Party...'<sup>145</sup>

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### 6.2 Membership and support base

#### 6.2.1 Jahan's 2014 working paper noted 'Jatiya Party's support base is similar to that of the BNP [cited in the working paper as 'urban and higher income groups, particularly civil and military bureaucracy and business community'<sup>146</sup>]. It also has regional support in the northern districts which is the home of its founder, Ershad.'<sup>147</sup> According to the BTI 2020 report 'The Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami [JI] have a combined support base of 10% to 12%.<sup>148</sup> (see also JI – [Membership and support base](#)).

<sup>137</sup> Jahan, R., '[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)' (page 13), August 2014

<sup>138</sup> IRB, '[Bangladesh: The Bangladesh Awami League \(AL\)...](#)', 10 February 2020

<sup>139</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, '[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)' (page 8), 2020

<sup>140</sup> Business Standard, '[Jatiya Party's Ershad to lead main opposition...](#)', 4 January 2019

<sup>141</sup> Business Standard, '[Jatiya Party's Ershad to lead main opposition...](#)', 4 January 2019

<sup>142</sup> Business Standard, '[Jatiya Party's Ershad to lead main opposition...](#)', 4 January 2019

<sup>143</sup> Daily Star, '[JP grows restive as polls near](#)', 4 December 2018

<sup>144</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[GM Quader: Bad politics ruining youth](#)', 22 October 2019

<sup>145</sup> USSD, '[Country Report for 2019](#)' (section 3), 11 March 2020

<sup>146</sup> Jahan, R., '[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)' (page 34), August 2014

<sup>147</sup> Jahan, R., '[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)' (page 34), August 2014

<sup>148</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, '[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)' (page 12), 2020

- 6.2.2 In Jahan's 2014 working paper, the membership fee for the Jatiya Party was cited as 100 Taka (about 95 UK pence<sup>149</sup>), but did not indicate how often membership should be renewed<sup>150</sup>.

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### 6.3 Jatiya Party auxiliary groups

- 6.3.1 As noted in Jahan's 2014 working paper:

'Jatiya Party lists seven front organisations which include Jatiya Jubo Sanghati, Jatiya Mohila Party, Jatiya Krishak Party, Jatiya Swechhashebok Party, Jatiya Olama Party, Jatiya Sangskritik Party and Jatiya Prakton Soinik Party.

'Jatiya Party also lists five associate organisations. They are Jatiya Shramik Party, Jatiya Ainjibee Federation, Jatiya Chhatra Samaj, Jatiya Matshyajibee Party and Jatiya Tanti Party. The associate organisations are to operate according to their own constitutions and declarations [...].'<sup>151</sup>

- 6.3.2 Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader met with leaders of the youth wing, Jatiya Jubo Sanghati, in October 2019<sup>152</sup>. Also at the meeting, party secretary general Moshiur Rahman Ranga indicated a fixed age limit for the JP's associate bodies, such as Chhatra Samaj and Jubo Sanghati. He also noted a new leadership election for the councils of Jubo Sanghati and Swechchasebak Party should be held by 10 December 2019<sup>153</sup>.

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Section 7 updated: 19 August 2020

## 7. Jamaat-e-Islami (JI or Jamaat)

### 7.1 Overview, leadership and structure

- 7.1.1 Jahan's 2014 working paper stated 'Since its founding in 1941, as Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, the Jamaat has been committed to establish an Islamic state and Islamic society. The party rejects secularism, socialism and nationalism, three of the four guiding principles of the state established by the Bangladesh constitution.'<sup>154</sup> The same source noted 'Party leaders and workers at all levels are obligated to be well versed in the Quran, Hadith and Islamic literature, as well as to regularly attend discussion meetings, contribute to the Jamaat funds and recruit new workers.'<sup>155</sup>

- 7.1.2 The 2014 working paper noted

'According to article 13 of the constitution of the Jamaat the party has the following five bodies at the national level:

- Central Members' (Rokon) Conference (CMC)

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<sup>149</sup> Xe.com, '[Currency converter live rates](#)', as at 29 June 2020

<sup>150</sup> Jahan, R., '[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)' (page 33), August 2014

<sup>151</sup> Jahan, R., '[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)' (page 30), August 2014

<sup>152</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[GM Quader: Bad politics ruining youth](#)', 22 October 2019

<sup>153</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[GM Quader: Bad politics ruining youth](#)', 22 October 2019

<sup>154</sup> Jahan, R., '[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)' (page 13), August 2014

<sup>155</sup> Jahan, R., '[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)' (page 13), August 2014

- Ameer-e-Jammat
- Central Majlish-e-Sura (CMS)
- Central Working Committee (CWC)
- Central Executive Committee (CEC).<sup>156</sup>

7.1.3 Sources reported that Shafiqur Rahman, former general secretary of JI, was elected party leader (Ameer-e-Jamaat) in December 2019<sup>157</sup> <sup>158</sup>. Ameer-e-Jamaats are elected for a 3-year period<sup>159</sup>.

7.1.4 The DFAT report noted ‘Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) is the largest Islamist party in Bangladesh [...]. JI is committed to the creation of an Islamic state with a sharia legal system, and to the removal of “un-Islamic” laws and practices.’<sup>160</sup>

7.1.5 The JI was deregistered as a political party in 2013 and banned from participation in the 2014 election on the basis of its anti-secular views<sup>161</sup> <sup>162</sup> <sup>163</sup>. The Freedom House Freedom in the World 2020 report, covering 2019 events, noted ‘The constitution bans religiously based political parties, and the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) party was prohibited from taking part in the 2014 and 2018 elections because of its overtly Islamist charter, though some JI members ran as independents.’<sup>164</sup>

7.1.6 A March 2018 media article, while noting JI’s attempts to rebrand itself as ‘a conservative Islamic political party in opposition’, described the ideology and future direction of JI:

‘It is not incorrect to say that Jamaat-e-Islami is a “political party” where they are registered as such. However, that is no more accurate a description of the organization than it would be to refer to an entire person as “an arm.” In reality, Jamaat-e-Islami is a transnational organization with an agenda of replacing democracy with their vision of a theocratic Islamic state. They pursue this agenda by exploiting legal and democratic processes with the intention of undermining and ultimately removing them, and they encourage, condone, justify and support the commission of violent acts to achieve their political, ideological, religious, and social goals – the very definition of violent extremism.’<sup>165</sup>

7.1.7 In the 2018 elections, JI members contested a small of seats, albeit under the banner of the Jatiya Oikya Front<sup>166</sup> (aka National Unity Front, NUF<sup>167</sup>),

<sup>156</sup> Jahan, R., ‘[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)’ (pages 24-25), August 2014

<sup>157</sup> Dhaka Tribune, ‘[New Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur sworn in](#)’, 5 December 2019

<sup>158</sup> Bangladesh Jamaat, ‘[Dr. Shafiqur Rahman elected ...](#)’, 12 November 2019

<sup>159</sup> Jahan, R., ‘[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)’ (page 25), August 2014

<sup>160</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.83), 22 August 2019

<sup>161</sup> USSD, ‘[Country Report for 2019](#)’ (section 3), 11 March 2020

<sup>162</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.86), 22 August 2019

<sup>163</sup> Jackman, D., ‘[Dominating Dhaka](#)’ (page 8), November 2019

<sup>164</sup> Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2020 – Bangladesh](#)’ (Section B1), 4 March 2020

<sup>165</sup> Oldmixon, S., ‘[Jamaat-e-Islami: ...](#)’, 28 March 2018

<sup>166</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.86), 22 August 2019

<sup>167</sup> IRB, ‘[Bangladesh: Bangladesh Nationalist \[National\] Party \(BNP\)...](#)’, 22 May 2019

with its main alliance partner, the BNP<sup>168</sup>. However, although allied in the 2018 elections, according to the DFAT report, the BNP ‘... attempted to distance itself from JI as a way to demonstrate that it did not support extremist ideology.’<sup>169</sup> (see also [National elections 2018](#) and BNP – [Overview, leadership and structure](#)).

7.1.8 The DFAT report added:

‘JI strongly supported the Pakistani army during the Liberation War. Five JI leaders convicted by the ICT [International Crimes Tribunal] of war crimes committed during the Liberation War were executed between December 2013 and September 2016 [...]. JI has periodically held major strikes and violent demonstrations across the country, particularly against the ICT, which have resulted in large-scale property damage and the deaths of numerous protesters at the hands of security forces. In response to these demonstrations and to militant attacks, authorities have detained thousands of JI members in counter-terrorism operations, including through enforced disappearances...’<sup>170</sup> (see also [Politically-motivated harassment, arrests and detentions](#)).

7.1.9 As noted in a March 2017 article published by the European Foundation for South Asian Studies (EFSAS):

‘Even though Jamaat-e-Islami was initially able to orchestrate protests against the execution of its leaders, gradually its power weakened in the face of a spirited response by government security forces. Presently, with several Jamaat-e-Islami leaders lodged in prison and many others on the run from the police, it has become difficult for the party to organize protests. Despite this pressing situation for the party, violence in secret continues against people such as intellectuals, minorities and social activists.’<sup>171</sup>

7.1.10 According to DFAT, ‘... despite its reduced size, JI is still well organised and influential in Bangladesh.’<sup>172</sup>

7.1.11 In May 2020 it was reported that JI reformist leaders (disillusioned at the JI for not apologising for its role in the liberation war and for not reforming<sup>173</sup>) launched a new political party, the Amar Bangladesh Party (AB Party)<sup>174 175</sup>, formerly the Jana Akhangkhai<sup>176</sup> (or Jana Akankhyar Bangladesh – formed a year ago<sup>177</sup>). Expelled JI leader and former president of the Islami Chhatra Shibir, Mujibur Rahman Monju, announced the AB Party and its 222 convening committee members on 2 May 2020<sup>178 179</sup>. AFM Solaiman Chowdhury, a former leader of the JI, was named as convener of the AB

<sup>168</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, ‘[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)’ (page 35), 2020

<sup>169</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.77), 22 August 2019

<sup>170</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.84), 22 August 2019

<sup>171</sup> EFSAS, ‘[Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh: Past, Present and Future](#)’ (page 6), March 2017

<sup>172</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.86), 22 August 2019

<sup>173</sup> Prothom Alo, ‘[Former Jamaat leader Razzak runs AB Party behind the scenes](#)’, 14 May 2020

<sup>174</sup> Bdnews24, ‘[Reformist Jamaat-e-Islami leaders launch new political party](#)’, 2 May 2020

<sup>175</sup> Daily Observer, ‘[Jamaat reformists float new party, Amar Bangladesh Party](#)’, 3 May 2020

<sup>176</sup> Prothom Alo, ‘[Former Jamaat leader Razzak runs AB Party behind the scenes](#)’, 14 May 2020

<sup>177</sup> Bdnews24, ‘[Reformist Jamaat-e-Islami leaders launch new political party](#)’, 2 May 2020

<sup>178</sup> Bdnews24, ‘[Reformist Jamaat-e-Islami leaders launch new political party](#)’, 2 May 2020

<sup>179</sup> Daily Observer, ‘[Jamaat reformists float new party, Amar Bangladesh Party](#)’, 3 May 2020

Party and Monju as the member secretary<sup>180 181</sup>. Prothom Alo, one of the largest Bengali-language newspapers in Bangladesh, reported ‘A significant number of former Jamaat leaders and activists, including many among the younger generation, are reportedly eager to join AB party.’<sup>182</sup> In an interview with Prothom Alo, AFM Solaiman Chowdhury said the party would be all inclusive, regardless of religion<sup>183</sup>. It was said that former assistant secretary general of the JI, Abdur Razzaq (exiled in the UK<sup>184</sup>), who resigned from the JI in February 2019<sup>185</sup>, would eventually take up the leadership of the AB Party<sup>186</sup>. According to Monju, the party will launch its activities after the coronavirus crisis ends<sup>187</sup>.

7.1.12 However, a May 2020 article published by Joyeeta Bhattacharjee, Senior Fellow with the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), noted that:

‘People feel the party [AB Party] was launched for the necessity to survive in politics more than commitment to an ideology. The popular perception about ABP is that it is a party only with a changed name to continue with the activities of the Jamaat. [...]

‘Considering the trends in Bangladesh’s politics, the success of this new party is mired in doubts. Bangladesh’s politics is dominated by two major political parties, Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party, any new entrant could orchestrate a major impact.’<sup>188</sup>

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## 7.2 Membership and support base

- 7.2.1 Jahan’s 2014 working paper indicated ‘Jamaat draws support from the Islamist forces. It also has regional support in some of the border districts.’<sup>189</sup> Non-Muslims are excluded from membership<sup>190</sup>. Jahan added ‘The membership requirements include regular performance of the faraz (obligatory works) and wajib (obligatory works of lesser importance) of shariah. The membership requirements also include renouncing assets earned through haraam sources and giving up involvement with any organisation contrary to Islam’s principles and the ideology of the Jamaat.’<sup>191</sup>
- 7.2.2 According to the DFAT report, the JI has ‘... historical strongholds in Rajshahi (northern Bangladesh) and Chittagong, the country’s second-largest city.’<sup>192</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Bdnews24, [‘Reformist Jamaat-e-Islami leaders launch new political party’](#), 2 May 2020

<sup>181</sup> Daily Observer, [‘Jamaat reformists float new party, Amar Bangladesh Party’](#), 3 May 2020

<sup>182</sup> Prothom Alo, [‘Former Jamaat leader Razzak runs AB Party behind the scenes’](#), 14 May 2020

<sup>183</sup> Prothom Alo, [‘Liberation war is an unforgettable national achievement’](#), 14 May 2020

<sup>184</sup> Prothom Alo, [‘Former Jamaat leader Razzak runs AB Party behind the scenes’](#), 14 May 2020

<sup>185</sup> Dhaka Tribune, [‘Barrister Abdur Razzaq resigns from Jamaat’](#), 15 February 2019

<sup>186</sup> Prothom Alo, [‘Former Jamaat leader Razzak runs AB Party behind the scenes’](#), 14 May 2020

<sup>187</sup> Bdnews24, [‘Reformist Jamaat-e-Islami leaders launch new political party’](#), 2 May 2020

<sup>188</sup> ORF, [‘A new party by Jamaat-e-Islami reformists in Bangladesh’](#), 11 May 2020

<sup>189</sup> Jahan, R., [‘Political Parties in Bangladesh’](#) (page 34), August 2014

<sup>190</sup> Jahan, R., [‘Political Parties in Bangladesh’](#) (page 13), August 2014

<sup>191</sup> Jahan, R., [‘Political Parties in Bangladesh’](#) (page 33), August 2014

<sup>192</sup> DFAT, [‘Country Information Report Bangladesh’](#) (para 3.83), 22 August 2019

- 7.2.3 The DFAT report also stated ‘JI’s size has significantly reduced in recent years in the wake of the mass arrests, with many former JI members joining other parties (including the AL). DFAT understands, however, that despite its reduced size, JI is still well organised and influential in Bangladesh. Many supporters of JI strongly link their religious and political identities, resulting in a deep personal investment in the party.’<sup>193</sup>
- 7.2.4 According to the BTI 2020 report ‘The Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami have a combined support base of 10% to 12%.’<sup>194</sup> (see also Jatiya Party – [Membership and support base](#)).

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### 7.3 Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS)

- 7.3.1 Jahan’s 2014 working paper noted ‘Though the constitution of Jamaat does not refer to any associate organisation or front organisation in practice Islami Chhatra Shibir functions as its associate organisation.’<sup>195</sup>
- 7.3.2 According to information on its [website](#), the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) was established on 6 February 1977 by 6 students at the Central Jame mosque at the University of Dhaka<sup>196</sup>. As of 30 December 2019, the Central President and General Secretary for the 2020 session were named as Md. Sirajul Islam and Salah Uddin Ayubi, respectively<sup>197</sup>.
- 7.3.3 Jahan’s 2014 working paper noted:  
 ‘Shibir is very active in the campuses of educational institutions. Newspapers often report about violent clashes between Shibir activists and activists of the AL’s Chhatra League or the BNP’s Chhatra Dal. The Shibir activists are known to be militant, and violent. Newspapers frequently report about a particular kind of Shibir violence, i.e. cutting the tendons of their opponents. All through 2013 Shibir activists were in the forefront of creating countrywide violent attacks against security personnel and innocent citizens to thwart the war crimes trials.’<sup>198</sup>
- 7.3.4 The DFAT report noted ‘The Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) is the JI’s student wing, and is one of the largest Islamist student organisations in South Asia. ICS is reportedly one of the strongest student fronts in the Universities of Chittagong, Rajshahi, and Jahangirnagar, with a notorious reputation for violence.’<sup>199</sup>
- 7.3.5 According to lawyers, interviewed as part of a May 2017 fact-finding mission (FFM) to Bangladesh undertaken by the UK Home Office, ‘The Islami Chhatra Shibir face restrictions and are strictly prohibited from participating in rallies openly’. According to the lawyers, ICS organise indoor rallies for which they obtain permission from authorities<sup>200</sup>.

<sup>193</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.86), 22 August 2019

<sup>194</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, ‘[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)’ (page 12), 2020

<sup>195</sup> Jahan, R., ‘[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)’ (page 30), August 2014

<sup>196</sup> ICS, ‘[Our Activities](#)’, nd

<sup>197</sup> ICS, ‘[Setup of Chhatrashibir for 2020 session has been completed](#)’, 1 January 2020

<sup>198</sup> Jahan, R., ‘[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)’ (page 30), August 2014

<sup>199</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.83), 22 August 2019

<sup>200</sup> UK Home Office, ‘[FFM Bangladesh](#)’ (page 80), September 2017

- 7.3.6 A March 2020 study on student politics and violence noted:  
 ‘The Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI)-affiliated ICS is one of the more disciplined student organizations, and is less likely to engage in intra-organizational violence. ICS has a stronger presence outside of Dhaka (and especially in Kushtia Chittagong and Rajshahi), but it has been driven underground in most places. Despite being publicly marginalized by BCL however, many interviewees report it is still well organized and remains active. At the same time, violence with ICS involvement (as victims, but also as perpetrators) tends to be relatively more lethal.’<sup>201</sup>
- 7.3.7 According to a 2018 report by Human Rights Watch (HRW), ‘Supporters of Jamaat, and its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, are at severe risk of abuse in police custody because Awami League officials describe them as razzakars – those that opposed Bangladesh’s secession from Pakistan – and accuse them of being militants. Even those not born at that time can be accused because of family links.’<sup>202</sup>

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## 7.4 Islami Chhatri Sangstha (ICS)

- 7.4.1 Only limited information on the Islami Chhatri Sangstha (the female student wing of JI<sup>203</sup>), could be found among the sources consulted by CPIT (see [Bibliography](#)). The group appeared to have 2 related Facebook pages, under the names [Bangladesh Islami Chhatri Sangstha](#) and [Bangladesh Islami Chhatri Sangstha](#).
- 7.4.2 According to media sources, in September 2016 the government’s education ministry requested that educational institutions shut down the activities of ICS, claiming it was involved in anti-state and militant activity<sup>204 205</sup>. A local ICS leader was arrested in June 2017 for alleged subversive activities<sup>206</sup>. In October 2017, 21 members of ICS were reportedly arrested in Dhaka for plotting against the government<sup>207</sup>. In October 2019, 14 ICS members, including a madrassa principal, were arrested in Pabna district following a police raid, in which a number of jihadi books were reportedly seized<sup>208 209</sup>.

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Section 8 updated: 24 September 2020

## 8. Parliamentary elections

### 8.1 National elections 2018

- 8.1.1 The BTI 2020 report noted ‘Unlike the 2014 elections, which were boycotted by the opposition, Bangladesh witnessed a multiparty participatory

<sup>201</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, ‘[Student Politics and Political Violence...](#)’ (pages xii-xiii), 31 March 2020

<sup>202</sup> HRW, ‘[“Creating Panic”...](#)’ (page 20), December 2018

<sup>203</sup> Daily Star, ‘[21 Islami Chhatri Sangstha activists held in Dhaka](#)’, 18 October 2017

<sup>204</sup> Independent, ‘[Govt asks varsities to ban Islami Chhatri Sangstha...](#)’, 23 September 2016

<sup>205</sup> New Nation, ‘[Ban on activities of Islami Chhatri Sangstha likely](#)’, 23 September 2016

<sup>206</sup> Dhaka Tribune, ‘[Islami Chhatri Sangstha leader held in Panchagarh](#)’, 22 June 2017

<sup>207</sup> Daily Star, ‘[21 Islami Chhatri Sangstha activists held in Dhaka](#)’, 18 October 2017

<sup>208</sup> Bangladesh Post, ‘[14 Islami Chhatri Sangstha activists held in Pabna](#)’, 14 October 2019

<sup>209</sup> Daily Observer, ‘[13 Islami Chhatri Sangstha women held in Pabna](#)’, 15 October 2019

parliamentary election on 30 December 2018. The election took place under the incumbent government, as the demand to restore the caretaker government continued to be rejected by the ruling party.<sup>210</sup>

8.1.2 The same source noted:

‘BNP party chairperson and former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia was not allowed to participate in the election due to her conviction in two graft cases, for which she was sentenced to jail for 10 years by the High Court [see [Politically-motivated harassment, arrests and detentions](#)]. Since the BNP had boycotted the 2014 election, it had no option but to participate in the [2018] election to save its registration as a political party with the Election Commission (EC). To avoid its candidates’ nomination papers being rejected by the EC, the BNP decided to file 696 candidates for 295 constituencies, while the ruling Awami League (AL) party submitted nominations of 281 candidates for 264 constituencies.’<sup>211</sup>

8.1.3 The BTI 2020 report added:

‘Interestingly, while the EC rejected 141 of the BNP nominations, it rejected only three of the AL candidates on the basis of incomplete submissions, corruption charges and having defaulted on a loan. A total of 18 opposition candidates could not contest the election on legal grounds, leaving these seats without an opposition candidate. The opposition complained to the Election Commission (EC) that it was not being provided with a level playing field, and that its candidates were being frequently attacked and were not being allowed to campaign. However, the EC refused to act on these complaints.’<sup>212</sup>

8.1.4 DFAT noted in its report ‘The Bangladesh Electoral Commission (BEC) oversees elections. Elections in Bangladesh have not always been free, fair and inclusive, although regular changes of government have conferred some legitimacy on the electoral process. The Grand Alliance of the ruling AL won Bangladesh’s most recent election on 30 December 2018, winning over 96 per cent of seats [...]’<sup>213</sup>

8.1.5 The BTI 2020 report noted ‘While AL and its allies won in 288 seats, the opposition received only eight seats, with the BNP having won six seats. The Jatiya Party, with 22 seats, is the official opposition, even though the party contested the election as an ally of the ruling party.’<sup>214</sup> The IRB query response noted that sources reported that the AL (leading the Grand Alliance) won 288 out of 300 available seats, while the BNP (leading as the NUF) won 7 seats<sup>215</sup>. The Dhaka Tribune stated ‘The Oikya Front [NUF] secured eight seats in total – BNP six and Gono Forum two...’<sup>216</sup> (see also BNP – [Overview, leadership and structure](#)).

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<sup>210</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, [‘BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh’](#) (page 7), 2020

<sup>211</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, [‘BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh’](#) (page 7), 2020

<sup>212</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, [‘BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh’](#) (page 8), 2020

<sup>213</sup> DFAT, [‘Country Information Report Bangladesh’](#) (para 2.26), 22 August 2019

<sup>214</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, [‘BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh’](#) (page 8), 2020

<sup>215</sup> IRB, [‘Bangladesh: Bangladesh Nationalist \[National\] Party \(BNP\)...’](#), 22 May 2019

<sup>216</sup> Dhaka Tribune, [‘2019 for BNP: One step forward, two steps back’](#), 30 December 2019



- 8.1.6 The Daily Star provided a breakdown of results by district<sup>217</sup>.
- 8.1.7 The DFAT report noted ‘While JI was banned from participation in the 2014 election on the basis of its anti-secular views, some JI members contested a small number of seats in the 2018 election under the banner of the Jatiya Oikya Front (which also included the BNP). DFAT is not aware of any reports of arrests, harassment, or other forms of discrimination against JI members who contested seats under the Jatiya Oikya Front banner.’<sup>218</sup>

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## 8.2 Election violence and irregularities

- 8.2.1 The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) human rights and democracy report, covering 2018 events, noted, in regard to the Bangladesh 2018 general election, ‘While it was encouraging that all opposition parties eventually contested the elections, there were credible accounts of obstacles, including arrests, which constrained or prevented campaigning by opposition parties, and of irregularities in the conduct of elections on polling day which prevented some people from voting.’<sup>219</sup>
- 8.2.2 Shortly after the elections, Al Jazeera reported, in an opinion piece ‘The December 30 [2018] election was relatively peaceful in comparison to Bangladesh's previous election cycles. However, the relative peace was achieved through the systemic oppression the state machinery carried out against the opposition over the past 10 years, leaving it effectively hobbled and neutered.’<sup>220</sup>
- 8.2.3 In the period leading up to the 2018 general elections, BNP and JI officials stated that over 10,500 party activists were arrested, with thousands detained<sup>221</sup>. According to Agence France-Press (AFP), reporting on 25 December 2018, ‘The BNP and its allies have also accused police and ruling Awami League party activists of attacking their activists and candidates.’<sup>222</sup> Human Rights Watch cited attacks on a number of BNP candidates in the lead up to the elections<sup>223</sup>.
- 8.2.4 The human rights group, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), in its annual report on human rights covering 2018 events, prepared on the basis of various news published in the national newspapers as well as ASK’s fact finding on incidents of human rights violations, indicated the levels of election-related violence. From the announcement of the election schedule, until 31 December 2018, at least 470 incidents of violence took place, leading to the deaths of 34 people<sup>224</sup>. These included 19 AL supporters, 4 BNP supporters, 10 members of the general public and 1 member of Ansar<sup>225</sup>.

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<sup>217</sup> Daily Star, ‘[Election results 2018](#)’, nd

<sup>218</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.86), 22 August 2019

<sup>219</sup> FCO, ‘[Human rights and democracy...](#)’ (chapter 5), 5 June 2019

<sup>220</sup> Al Jazeera, ‘[A deeper look at the Bangladesh election](#)’, 2 January 2019

<sup>221</sup> AFP, ‘[Opposition: 10,500 Arrests Ahead of Bangladesh Poll](#)’, 25 December 2018

<sup>222</sup> AFP, ‘[Opposition: 10,500 Arrests Ahead of Bangladesh Poll](#)’, 25 December 2018

<sup>223</sup> HRW, ‘[“Creating Panic”...](#)’ (page 30), December 2018

<sup>224</sup> ASK, ‘[Human Rights Situation of Bangladesh in 2018](#)’ (page 7), 30 June 2019

<sup>225</sup> ASK, ‘[Human Rights Situation of Bangladesh in 2018](#)’ (page 7), 30 June 2019

- 8.2.5 Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported in January 2019:  
 ‘Opposition parties, journalists, and voters alleged serious irregularities including ballot stuffing, voters being denied access to polling places, ruling party activists occupying polling places and casting ballots in the place of voters, electoral officials and the police behaving in a partisan manner, and violations of voter privacy in an atmosphere of blatant intimidation. The [BNP] said its polling agents were denied access in 221 constituencies.’<sup>226</sup>
- 8.2.6 Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) similarly reported, in its study of 50 out of 300 constituencies to review the extent of which the electoral process of the 2018 election was free, fair and compliant to the law:  
 ‘Allegations of election irregularities were raised in 94% [of] constituencies included in the study. The main irregularities include sealed the ballot paper [sic] before the night of the election, interested voters threatened and compelled not to enter in the polling center, casting falls votes by occupying booths, forcing voters to give vote for a specific sign, ballot boxes filled up by casting fake votes before the vote begins, ballot papers finished, and the opponents’ polling agent not being allowed to enter the polling center.’<sup>227</sup>
- 8.2.7 The TIB study found ‘On the election day, 18 people were killed and 200 injured due to violence in 24 districts. It was claimed that among them, eight (8) belonged to Awami League and four (4) to BNP supporters. Vote castings were postponed in 22 polling centers.’<sup>228</sup>
- 8.2.8 As noted in the BTI 2020 report:  
 ‘Bangladesh witnessed one of the most manipulated elections in recent years, with most of the institutions and state machinery that were supposed to provide an atmosphere for the conduct of free and fair elections working zealously to reelect the Awami League to power. These forces had a vested interest in the reelection of the AL, as they had enjoyed unrestricted power in the preceding years and are likely to benefit from the continuation of the regime.’<sup>229</sup>
- 8.2.9 The same source added ‘[T]he election was marred by allegations of rigging, ballot-box stuffing, and intimidation of voters and supporters of the opposition political alliance, the Jatiyo Oikyo Front, which included the former ruling party, the BNP. [...] Even though opposition election rallies were attacked by ruling-party supporters and 18 people were killed on election day, the 2018 election was less violent than its predecessor.’<sup>230</sup>
- 8.2.10 DFAT noted in its report:  
 ‘The lead-up to the poll was characterised by violence, including street clashes, and allegations of targeted attacks against opposition figures ... Both independent observers and opposition spokespersons alleged electoral irregularities, including the casting of votes and sealing of ballot boxes

<sup>226</sup> HRW, ‘[Bangladesh: Election Abuses Need Independent Probe](#)’, 2 January 2019

<sup>227</sup> TIB, ‘[Election Process Tracking...](#)’ (page 10), 21 October 2019

<sup>228</sup> TIB, ‘[Election Process Tracking...](#)’ (page 10), 21 October 2019

<sup>229</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, ‘[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)’ (page 5), 2020

<sup>230</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, ‘[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)’ (pages 7 and 8), 2020

before polling day, and the intimidation and harassment of voters at polling places. The aftermath of the 2018 election was relatively peaceful, however, when compared to the aftermath of the previous election in January 2014, the most violent in the nation's history.<sup>'231</sup>

- 8.2.11 In its 2019 human rights report, the FCO echoed the sentiments of other reports, stating 'The elections were marred by reports of intimidation and vote rigging.'<sup>232</sup>
- 8.2.12 The USSD HR Report 2019 noted 'During the [2018 election] campaign there were credible reports of harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrests, and violence that made it difficult for many opposition candidates and their supporters to meet, hold rallies, and campaign freely.'<sup>233</sup>
- 8.2.13 On 7 January 2020, the Dhaka Tribune reported that, in the lead up to the Dhaka city corporation elections, due at the end of January 2020, the Election Commission directed the Dhaka Metropolitan Police not to arrest any candidates or supporters without a court warrant or unless a criminal offence had been committed. BNP leaders were assured that no activists or party leaders would face intimidation, arrests or raids ahead of the elections<sup>234</sup>. However, The Business Standard reported on 31 January 2020 that, according to BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam, on 30 January, 'police raided many of our activists' houses and detained many.'<sup>235</sup> The same source noted that, in an attempt to curb election violence, law enforcement agencies were strategically located in 20 wards across Dhaka where it was thought violence might occur<sup>236</sup>. The report added 'The law enforcers are concerned more about the rebel councillor candidates, especially those from the Awami League, than about the possibility of an Awami League-BNP clash, according to intelligence sources.'<sup>237</sup>
- 8.2.14 In its regional overview for South Asia, covering the period 12-18 January 2020, ACLED reported '... campaigning for mayoral elections in the capital city, Dhaka, was marred by violence. Supporters and activists of the ruling Awami League allegedly resorted to obstructing electioneering and assaulted supporters and activists of candidates backed by the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party.'<sup>238</sup>
- 8.2.15 Reporting on the period 26 January to 1 February 2020, ACLED noted:  
'During the final week of election campaigning in the city, supporters of the ruling Awami League (AL) reportedly shot at and injured a Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal (BJSD) leader, and attacked and injured a senior Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader and at least 10 supporters of BNP. On election day, AL supporters and their student wing reportedly attacked several members of the press who were reporting on irregularities and violations of election code of conduct by AL supporters at polling

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<sup>231</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 2.26), 22 August 2019

<sup>232</sup> FCO, '[Human rights and democracy...](#)' (chapter 4), 16 July 2020

<sup>233</sup> USSD, '[Country Report for 2019](#)' (section 3), 11 March 2020

<sup>234</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[EC to police: No arrest without warrant till Jan 30 elections](#)', 7 January 2020

<sup>235</sup> Business Standard, '[City polls 2020: 20 wards under police scanner](#)', 31 January 2020

<sup>236</sup> Business Standard, '[City polls 2020: 20 wards under police scanner](#)', 31 January 2020

<sup>237</sup> Business Standard, '[City polls 2020: 20 wards under police scanner](#)', 31 January 2020

<sup>238</sup> ACLED, '[Regional Overview South Asia 12-18 January 2020](#)', 22 January 2020

stations. BNP voters and city councilor candidates who visited the polling station were also reportedly attacked by AL supporters. Furthermore, several clashes were reported between supporters of BNP and AL candidates leading up to the polls and on election day. Amidst ongoing violence and intimidation by the ruling party, the voter turnout was reported at around 20 percent in the two city corporations of Dhaka. The opposition BNP also rejected the outcome of the election citing “irregularities”, including intimidation and eviction of their polling agents from polling stations.’<sup>239</sup>

- 8.2.16 Bdnews24 provided live coverage of the elections, which were held on 1 February 2020, noting voter turnout was low and that the polls were ‘largely peaceful.’<sup>240</sup>

See also [Politically-motivated harassment, arrests and detentions](#).

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Section 9 updated: 4 September 2020

## 9. Corruption

- 9.1.1 The BTI 2020 report noted:

‘Corruption remains endemic in the country. Bribery is prevalent in all segments of the administration. The police force is regarded as the most corrupt branch. The Anti-Corruption Commission, established in 2004, has since pursued politically motivated corruption cases against the opposition. Its investigations have been limited to corruption among bureaucrats and officials. It has refrained from persecuting ruling-party politicians accused of corruption.’<sup>241</sup>

- 9.1.2 Freedom House also noted in its Freedom in the World 2020 report, ‘Under the AL government, anticorruption efforts have been weakened by politicized enforcement and subversion of the judicial process. In particular, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has become ineffective and subject to overt political interference. The government continues to bring or pursue politicized corruption cases against BNP party leaders.’<sup>242</sup>

- 9.1.3 The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) reported in June 2020 that ‘... there are reports that members of law enforcement agencies are involved in extortion or taking bribes from people by threatening them with torture.’<sup>243</sup>

- 9.1.4 Odhikar reported that during the reporting period April to June 2020, there were ‘... allegations of corruption and embezzlement in COVID-19 relief distribution, against leaders of the ruling party.’<sup>244</sup>

- 9.1.5 For further information on corruption in Bangladesh, see the Country Policy and Information Notes on [Bangladesh: Actors of protection](#) and [Documentation](#).

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<sup>239</sup> ACLED, ‘[Regional Overview South Asia 26 January-1 February 2020](#)’, 6 February 2020

<sup>240</sup> Bdnews24, ‘[Live: Frustration runs deep as thin presence of voters...](#)’, 1 February 2020

<sup>241</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, ‘[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)’ (page 10), 2020

<sup>242</sup> Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2020 – Bangladesh](#)’ (Section C2), 4 March 2020

<sup>243</sup> AHRC, ‘[Government must end torture and fully implement recommendations...](#)’, 25 June 2020

<sup>244</sup> Odhikar, ‘[Three-month Human Rights Monitoring Report ...](#)’ (page 26) 6 July 2020

## 9.2 Political influence on the police

- 9.2.1 According to the BTI 2020 Report ‘Law enforcement agencies are used as political instruments to silence the opposition.’<sup>245</sup>
- 9.2.2 According to the DFAT report ‘Political and bureaucratic interference is a significant impediment to police efficiency [...]. Both AL and BNP governments have used the police to undermine opposition forces, and many politicians have used the police to advance their personal interests.’<sup>246</sup>
- 9.2.3 In a March 2019 article, pro-democracy activist Pinaki Bhattacharya told the US international broadcaster, Voice of America (VoA) ‘A couple of years after Sheikh Hasina became the prime minister in 2009, her government began cracking down on the opposition forces, largely using the country’s law enforcement agencies...’<sup>247</sup>
- 9.2.4 In a 2018 report, HRW noted:  
‘Opposition parties allege that state institutions, including security forces act on behalf of the Awami League. They also alleged that the two major intelligence agencies, the military Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and the civilian National Security Intelligence (NSI), both directly answerable to the prime minister, as well as other law enforcement, appeared to work in direct support of the ruling Awami League’s political interests, and against its electoral opponents.’<sup>248</sup>
- 9.2.5 The same report noted:  
‘Students and university professors interviewed by Human Rights Watch emphasized the close co-operation between the security agencies and the BCL [AL’s student league]. Video footage of the student protests earlier this year [2018], shows purported members of the BCL attacking unarmed protestors while the police look on. According to students who were arrested for their role in the protests, as well as a lawyer with knowledge of the cases, some victims were beaten by members of the BCL before being handed over to the police and detained.’<sup>249</sup>  
See also [Politically-motivated harassment, arrests and detentions](#).
- 9.2.6 Referring to the AL’s dominance in Dhaka, Jackman stated in the ESID Working Paper ‘Over the past two terms in office, the police and other security agencies have radically grown in importance for the ruling party. While such agencies have always been utilised politically by the incumbent, the extent of investment, degree of dependency, and depth of politicisation of the police, all suggest a magnitude of change not seen in Bangladesh since the country’s return to a parliamentary democracy.’<sup>250</sup>
- 9.2.7 The same source noted:

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<sup>245</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, ‘[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)’ (page 7), 2020

<sup>246</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 5.5), 22 August 2019

<sup>247</sup> VoA, ‘[Bangladesh Police Accused of Harassment With Fake Cases](#)’, 13 March 2019

<sup>248</sup> HRW, ‘[“Creating Panic”...](#)’ (page 31), December 2018

<sup>249</sup> HRW, ‘[“Creating Panic”...](#)’ (page 21), December 2018

<sup>250</sup> Jackman, D., ‘[Dominating Dhaka](#)’ (page 13), November 2019

'It is widely claimed that the police are increasingly direct AL members, particularly associated, in the case of recruits, with the Chattra League (student league). One way this has allegedly been achieved is through recruitment processes. As part of the procedure, approval from the local police station (thana) where one is registered as residing is required (most often a home district). Known or even suspected affiliation with the BNP or Jamaat-elslami is very likely to halt recruitment at this point, and it is claimed that many candidates who have successfully qualified on all other grounds, have fallen at this hurdle.'<sup>251</sup>

- 9.2.8 The report further added 'This politicisation of the police in Dhaka can also be seen in the home district backgrounds of the police appointed, particularly among senior roles. Not only do the police increasingly come from AL backgrounds, it is alleged, but they are also tied to the prime minister through having roots in her home district, Gopalganj, as well as other surrounding AL strongholds, such as Faridpur.'<sup>252</sup>
- 9.2.9 Despite this politicisation of the police, Jackman noted in the ESID Working Paper that there were still many BNP supporters working in the police, particularly at lower levels<sup>253</sup>. He noted the BNP rely on such contacts, who were critical in providing '... early alerts that they are being hunted, that the police will search their house, giving them time to reach a hideout. One activist described having "spies" in the police, who feed them information. During violent confrontations with the police, such support can also become evident. Examples include the police purposefully firing their weapons badly so as not to hurt the BNP, or pretending to lose them in a chase [...].'<sup>254</sup>
- 9.2.10 The report added 'Such support, however small, is highly risky for the police involved, and BNP activists described the phones of BNP-supporting police members also being tracked.'<sup>255</sup> (see also [Surveillance](#)).

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Section 10 updated: 24 September 2020

## 10. Political opponents

### 10.1 The nature of political rivalry

- 10.1.1 The DFAT report provided an overview of the political rivalry between the AL and BNP, noting:

'The relationship between the two parties is characterised by a longstanding political and dynastic rivalry, which has increased over time. Both parties derive their legitimacy from their claim to be the true heirs of Bangladeshi nationalism: the AL led the independence movement before and during the 1971 civil war, while the BNP holds as its institutional basis the ideology of Bangladeshi nationalism. The rivalry between the two parties is also deeply personal at the highest levels: the AL's leader, Sheikh Hasina, is the

<sup>251</sup> Jackman, D., '[Dominating Dhaka](#)' (page 13), November 2019

<sup>252</sup> Jackman, D., '[Dominating Dhaka](#)' (page 14), November 2019

<sup>253</sup> Jackman, D., '[Dominating Dhaka](#)' (page 22), November 2019

<sup>254</sup> Jackman, D., '[Dominating Dhaka](#)' (page 22), November 2019

<sup>255</sup> Jackman, D., '[Dominating Dhaka](#)' (page 22), November 2019

daughter of the ‘Father of the Nation’ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the BNP’s leader, Khaleda Zia, is the widow of the party’s founder, former General and President Ziaur Rahman. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman were both assassinated in office, and their respective parties view them as martyrs.’<sup>256</sup>

10.1.2 The DFAT report added, ‘Since independence, the two parties have, for the most part, alternated in the roles of ruling party and opposition. The ruling party’s affiliated organisations have historically controlled all public institutions while that party has been in power, and both the AL and BNP have used the state machinery against government opponents while in office.’<sup>257</sup>

10.1.3 Jackman noted in the ESID Working Paper:

‘Following the return to parliamentary democracy in 1990, Bangladeshi politics has been characterised by intense competition between the country’s two major political parties, the Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party. In practice, parliament has been largely boycotted by the opposition ..., with competition instead taking place on the streets through violent mobilisation and demonstrations of strength, particularly within urban areas. When in office each party has typically politicised state institutions and directed them against the opposition, while exploiting privileged access to the state and market to support party infrastructure.’<sup>258</sup>

See also [Corruption](#) and [Political influence on the police](#).

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## 10.2 Politically-motivated harassment, arrests and detentions

10.2.1 The BTI 2020 Report noted ‘There is complete intolerance for any point of view that is seen as being in opposition to the government.’<sup>259</sup> According to the Freedom House report, Freedom on the Net 2019, covering the period 1 June 2018 to 31 May 2019, ‘The ruling Awami League (AL) has consolidated political power through sustained harassment of the opposition and those perceived to be allied with it [...]’.<sup>260</sup>

10.2.2 The DFAT report noted that, since the AL came into power in 2008, it had considerably restricted the activities of opposition parties, particularly the BNP and JI, by ‘... using police and other security forces to arrest thousands of opposition political party members and supporters, often in conjunction with political demonstrations; using police and other security forces to prevent opposition parties from holding meetings and demonstrations; and pressuring opposition candidates to withdraw from local and municipal elections, including through preventing them from submitting election nominations.’<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.62), 22 August 2019

<sup>257</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.66), 22 August 2019

<sup>258</sup> Jackman, D., ‘[Dominating Dhaka](#)’ (page 5), November 2019

<sup>259</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, ‘[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)’ (page 27), 2020

<sup>260</sup> Freedom House, ‘[Freedom on the Net 2019](#)’ (Overview), 2019

<sup>261</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.67), 22 August 2019

- 10.2.3 According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), since the 2013 protests by the BNP and other opposition parties, who demanded the reinstatement of a caretaker government to oversee elections:

‘[T]he Awami League government has cracked down on the political opposition. Law enforcement authorities have illegally detained scores of opposition activists and held them in secret without producing them before courts, as the law requires. In most cases, those arrested remain in custody for weeks or months, before being formally arrested or released. Torture in police custody, including mutilations such “knee-capping” has been widely practiced. Others have been killed in so-called armed exchanges, and many remain “disappeared.” Many of these cases appear to have been politically motivated, sometimes targeting the relatives of political opponents.’<sup>262</sup>

- 10.2.4 The HRW report also noted ‘While the police promptly launched investigations and made arrests in attacks on the ruling party, it ignored complaints from the opposition.’<sup>263</sup>
- 10.2.5 The FCO’s human rights report for 2019 noted ‘Violence by organisations associated with political parties continued throughout 2019. In October, a student from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology was beaten to death by members of the student wing of the Awami League, allegedly for posting material online which was critical of the government.’<sup>264</sup>
- 10.2.6 The USSD HR Report 2019 stated ‘Human rights activists claimed police falsely constructed cases to target opposition leaders, workers, and supporters, and that the government used the law enforcement agency to crack down on political rivals.’<sup>265</sup>
- 10.2.7 The same report added:
- ‘Political affiliation often appeared to be a factor in claims of arrest and prosecution of members of opposition parties, including through spurious charges under the pretext of responding to national security threats. The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) maintained that thousands of its members were arrested arbitrarily throughout the year, often in connection with planned and preauthorized political rallies in an attempt to both intimidate and prevent activists and political leaders from participating.’<sup>266</sup> (see also [Freedom of assembly](#)).
- 10.2.8 Reporting on allegations of false criminal cases being filed by police against opposition party members and supporters, a March 2019 VoA article noted:
- ‘Police in Bangladesh have filed criminal complaints against tens of thousands of people for violence-related cases in recent years. But the opposition and rights activists say most of the cases, allegedly involving bombing and rioting, were made up.

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<sup>262</sup> HRW, ‘[“Creating Panic”...](#)’ (pages 11 and 14), December 2018

<sup>263</sup> HRW, ‘[“Creating Panic”...](#)’ (page 29), December 2018

<sup>264</sup> FCO, ‘[Human rights and democracy...](#)’ (chapter 4), 16 July 2020

<sup>265</sup> USSD, ‘[Country Report for 2019](#)’ (section 1d), 11 March 2020

<sup>266</sup> USSD, ‘[Country Report for 2019](#)’ (section 1e), 11 March 2020



'Opposition parties claim most of those targeted were their leaders, workers and supporters, and that the government used the law enforcement agency to crack down on its political rivals.'<sup>267</sup>

10.2.9 Human Rights Watch (HRW) noted in its annual report covering events in the election year of 2018:

'Bangladesh continued a harsh crackdown to suppress those that disagree or are critical of the ruling Awami League. These included members and supporters of the political opposition, journalists, prominent members of civil society, as well as students, and even school children. [...] Thousands of opposition supporters, including senior leaders, faced trumped-up cases. Newspapers reported that even names of individuals who are dead or critically ill in the hospital were included in these arbitrary actions.'<sup>268</sup>

10.2.10 An article in the Dhaka Tribune, dated 30 December 2019, stated:

'The BNP claimed the government filed at least 4,098 cases against nearly 300,000 BNP members and arrested at least 4,300 activists before the 11th election alone [December 2018 election].

'Before the election, BNP sent a list of 1,046 "false cases" against its members to the Prime Minister's Office, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina promised to see the issue of false cases before election. But no progress was made.'<sup>269</sup>

10.2.11 Human Rights Watch explained that:

'Since the beginning of 2018, the authorities have dramatically increased the practice of filing false or fictitious cases against the government's democratic opponents, primarily from the BNP. Typically, a single case accuses a list of named individuals, sometimes more than 100, of participating in a crime, plus an unspecified number of "unknown" perpetrators. Other people can then be added to the case later, if the police claim that they were among the earlier "unknown accused".'<sup>270</sup>

10.2.12 Despite the claims that cases were filed against persons who were dead, disabled, absent from the country or in jail at the time of the reported offences, the government insisted such cases were not politically motivated<sup>271</sup>.

10.2.13 Freedom House noted in its Freedom in the World 2020 report, 'The main opposition BNP has been weakened by regular harassment and arrests of key members that have significantly harmed its ability to challenge the AL in elections. The 2018 election campaign was characterized by a crackdown on dissent that saw thousands of people and several political candidates arrested. There were also a number of acts of violence committed against opposition figures.'<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> VoA, '[Bangladesh Police Accused of Harassment With Fake Cases](#)', 13 March 2019

<sup>268</sup> HRW, '[World Report 2019 – Bangladesh](#)', 17 January 2019

<sup>269</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[2019 for BNP: One step forward, two steps back](#)', 30 December 2019

<sup>270</sup> HRW, '["Creating Panic"...](#)' (page 15), December 2018

<sup>271</sup> VoA, '[Bangladesh Police Accused of Harassment With Fake Cases](#)', 13 March 2019

<sup>272</sup> Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2020 – Bangladesh](#)' (Section B2), 4 March 2020

10.2.14 In its concluding observations, dated August 2019, the UN Committee against Torture (UNCAT) noted:

'The Committee is concerned at reports that in January and February 2018, the authorities arrested almost 5,000 supporters of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, including ordinary persons suspected of being opposition sympathizers, ahead of the verdict in the corruption case against the leader of the party, Khaleda Begum Zia. It is also concerned about allegations of thousands of arrests of opposition supporters around the time of the elections and that many of these persons remain in detention.'<sup>273</sup>

10.2.15 The DFAT report noted:

'BNP figures allege that they have been subjected to enforced disappearance after raids on private homes and party offices [...]. While such allegations typically involve houses being raided at night, daylight raids on party offices have also been reported. The BNP claims that authorities have frequently arrested their supporters during protests for alleged criminal damage or assault on police with little supporting evidence, while alleging that violence against BNP supporters perpetrated by AL members occurs with impunity.'<sup>274</sup>

10.2.16 Jackman noted in the ESID Working Paper, that as well as arrests, 'BNP activists and human rights groups allege that many activists face torture, in a strategy seemingly designed to both extract information, but also destroy the morale and motivation of the opposition to contest the ruling party.'<sup>275</sup> A college-level Chattra dal leader relayed the torture of fellow Chattra dal members, which occurred whilst on remand in local police stations (thanas), saying '[Police] are inserting sticks into their backside, they are clipping your tongue and giving you electric shocks, and pulling out all ten nails. It is a very common practice nowadays, very frequent.'<sup>276</sup>

10.2.17 Jackman also described the use of extortion by police as a means of controlling the opposition: 'Following a round of arrests (during a political protest, for example) activists described firsthand how police divide those arrested into different camps. Some face police cases and possible imprisonment, and others are simply threatened with the plan of extorting them. A large number of activists and leaders arrested are thus routinely released on condition of payment.'<sup>277</sup>

10.2.18 On 8 February 2018, Khaleda Zia was sentenced to a 5-year prison term for corruption<sup>278</sup>. Zia's son and vice-chairman of the BNP, Tarique Rahman, living in exile in the UK, was also sentenced to 10 years in prison alongside former legislator Quazi Salimul Haq, former principal secretary to Zia, Kamal Uddin Siddique, Zia's nephew Mominur Rahman and businessman Sharfuddin Ahmed<sup>279</sup>. Zia's sentence was increased to 10 years in October

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<sup>273</sup> UNCAT, '[Concluding observations on the initial report...](#)' (para 36), 26 August 2019

<sup>274</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.80), 22 August 2019

<sup>275</sup> Jackman, D., '[Dominating Dhaka](#)' (page 15), November 2019

<sup>276</sup> Jackman, D., '[Dominating Dhaka](#)' (page 15), November 2019

<sup>277</sup> Jackman, D., '[Dominating Dhaka](#)' (page 16), November 2019

<sup>278</sup> Al Jazeera, '[Khaleda Zia jailed for five years in corruption case](#)', 8 February 2018

<sup>279</sup> Al Jazeera, '[Khaleda Zia jailed for five years in corruption case](#)', 8 February 2018

2018<sup>280</sup> and in the same week she received an additional 7 years for another corruption case<sup>281</sup>.

- 10.2.19 An October 2018 article by Deutsche Welle (DW) stated, 'Filing cases against members of the opposition is a common practice in Bangladesh. On many occasions, courts dismiss cases for lack of legal merit. BNP leaders have claimed that the lawsuits against their leader Khaleda were "intentionally designed" to harass and undermine her political career, a claim denied by Hasina's Awami League.'<sup>282</sup>
- 10.2.20 Jackman noted in the ESID Working Paper that Khaleda Zia's conviction in 2018 '... led to a brief escalation in political mobilisation, with the BNP announcing hartal [strikes], street protests, marches and hunger strikes, most of which were met with a huge number of arrests, violence from Awami League activists, truncheon charges, water cannons, beatings and arrests by the police; and all with relatively little impact on daily life in the city [Dhaka] compared to previous protests.'<sup>283</sup>
- 10.2.21 Reuters reported on 24 March 2020 that Khaleda Zia's prison sentence was suspended for 6 months on humanitarian grounds due to ill health<sup>284</sup>. The suspension was on the condition that she remain in Dhaka to receive treatment for diabetes and arthritis<sup>285</sup>.
- 10.2.22 The DFAT report noted in respect of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI):  
'Authorities have particularly targeted for arrest the JI's senior leadership, few of whom remain free and active. Other targets have included prominent leaders, ICS [[Islami Chhatra Shibir](#) – student wing] members and, in some cases, family members. Lower-level JI members have reportedly been able to avoid the attention of authorities either through the paying of bribes to AL leaders or by physically relocating. DFAT assesses as credible reports that the situation is better for JI members in villages than in cities.'<sup>286</sup>
- 10.2.23 The same source added, 'People who are perceived as being supporters of JI have reported being followed or intimidated, including when abroad [see [Sur place activities](#)]. Some government critics with no affiliation with JI have reported that they have been accused of having such links as a means of attacking their credibility.'<sup>287</sup>
- 10.2.24 The Freedom House Freedom in the World 2020 report noted 'A JI spokesman said more than 1,850 party members were arrested ahead of the 2018 elections, and some party members claimed they had been subject to torture while in custody.'<sup>288</sup> The USSD HR Report 2019 noted 'Security

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<sup>280</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[Jail term doubled for Khaleda in graft case](#)', 30 October 2018

<sup>281</sup> DW, '[Bangladesh's ex-PM Khaleda Zia given new jail sentence](#)', 29 October 2018

<sup>282</sup> DW, '[Could political talks help free Bangladesh's ex-Premier Khaleda Zia?](#)', 18 October 2018

<sup>283</sup> Jackman, D., '[Dominating Dhaka](#)' (pages 9-10), November 2019

<sup>284</sup> Reuters, '[Bangladesh's opposition leader Khaleda Zia to be freed from jail...](#)', 24 March 2020

<sup>285</sup> Al Jazeera, '[Bangladesh releases jailed opposition leader Khaleda Zia](#)', 25 March 2020

<sup>286</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.85), 22 August 2019

<sup>287</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.87), 22 August 2019

<sup>288</sup> Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2020 – Bangladesh](#)' (Section B2), 4 March 2020

forces reportedly used torture to gather information from alleged militants and members of political opposition parties.<sup>289</sup>

10.2.25 Odhikar reported that ‘In 2019, attacks and suppression on the opposition political parties and dissidents by the government became alarming. During this period, there were reports of fictitious cases filed against leaders and activists of the opposition political parties (especially BNP leaders and activists) arrests and re-arrests from the jail gate after a person had been released on bail. Women leaders and activists of the opposition were also arrested during internal meetings.’<sup>290</sup>

10.2.26 Odhikar reported that during January to March 2020, ‘the right to freedom of expression has been massively violated’ and ‘Dissidents, opposition leaders-activists and ordinary citizens and even a Baul artist have been sued under the Digital Security Act 2018 and sent to jail for allegedly writing on social media or posting a “like / share” on a post against high level persons of the ruling party or their family members, the ministers, parliamentarians and even Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi; and for hurting “religious sentiment”.’<sup>291</sup> The same source also described with regards to violence against women that ‘there have been reports of the ruling party leaders making large amounts of money by reconciliation through mediation’.<sup>292</sup>

10.2.27 In August 2020 Amnesty International reported that:

“There is a disturbing pattern of enforced disappearances emerging in Bangladesh in recent years, mainly targeting people who express their dissenting political opinions. Ashraf Uddin Mahdi [a student activist] was forcibly disappeared from the centre of the capital as a brazen tactic to silence him,” said Sultan Mohammed Zakaria, South Asia Researcher at Amnesty International. Student activists have also faced violence from groups closely associated with the ruling party to silence criticism of the authorities. On 8 August, members of Chattro League, the student wing of the ruling party Awami League, beat Saleh Uddin Sifat, a law student of Dhaka University, in the Sitakunda area of Chattogram district after accusing him of “anti-government activities” on social media. The attackers left Sifat in critical condition. He had to be transferred to a hospital where he is currently undergoing medical treatment.<sup>293</sup>

See also [Election violence and irregularities](#).

For further information on human rights violations by the state, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Bangladesh: Actors of protection](#).

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### 10.3 Freedom of movement

10.3.1 In its report covering 2018 events, the USSD HR Report 2018 noted opposition members ‘were sometimes prevented from moving around the

<sup>289</sup> USSD, ‘[Country Report for 2019](#)’ (section 2b), 11 March 2020

<sup>290</sup> Odhikar, ‘[Annual Human Rights Report 2019 Bangladesh](#)’ (page 33), 8 February 2020

<sup>291</sup> Odhikar, ‘[Three-month Human Rights Monitoring Report ...](#)’ (page 5), 1 May 2020

<sup>292</sup> Odhikar, ‘[Three-month Human Rights Monitoring Report ...](#)’ (page 6), 1 May 2020

<sup>293</sup> Amnesty International, ‘[Bangladesh: Rising attacks on freedom of expression...](#)’, 11 August 2020

country or faced harassment and detention when attempting to do so' and that '[s]ome senior opposition officials reported extensive delays renewing their passports; others reported harassment and delays at the airport when departing the country.'<sup>294</sup>

- 10.3.2 The DFAT report also noted, 'Authorities have also prevented opposition figures from leaving the country.'<sup>295</sup> It added 'Many, including former BNP Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, have faced legal sanction[s], including sedition charges. In October 2017, authorities issued two further arrest warrants for Khaleda Zia, who was at the time travelling outside Bangladesh and who has spent extended periods in custody.'<sup>296</sup>

See also the [Country Policy and Information Note on Bangladesh: Background information including internal relocation](#).

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#### 10.4 Freedom of assembly

- 10.4.1 The law allows for the right to peaceful assembly, but in practice this right was limited by the authorities. According to law, assemblies of more than 4 persons may be prohibited at the discretion of the government and gatherings such as protests and demonstrations require advance permission<sup>297</sup>.
- 10.4.2 The USSD HR Report 2019 noted 'According to human rights NGOs, authorities continued to use approval provisions to disallow gatherings by opposition groups and imposed what observers saw as unreasonable requirements for permits. Occasionally, police or ruling party activists used force to disperse demonstrations. [...] Arbitrary arrests occurred, often in conjunction with political demonstrations.'<sup>298</sup>
- 10.4.3 According to the same source:
- 'While the government allowed the primary opposition party, the BNP, to hold political rallies throughout the country during the year, the government occasionally imposed restrictions. In July [2019], Chittagong Metropolitan Police gave the BNP conditional permission to organize a rally the evening prior to the event. Conditions for the rally included making paper copies of the permit for all rally participants, estimated at 100,000-200,000 persons before the event took place.'<sup>299</sup>
- 10.4.4 In September 2019 the Dhaka Tribune reported that the BNP were given permission by local authorities to hold a rally in Sylhet city (on 24 September) to demand the release of BNP leader, Khaleda Zia<sup>300</sup>. However, the Daily Star reported that 21 leaders and activists of the BNP and its associate wings were arrested a few days before the proposed rally in an attempt, according to BNP leaders, to 'spread fear' and deter them from

<sup>294</sup> USSD, '[Country Report for 2018](#)' (section 2d), 13 March 2019

<sup>295</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.68), 22 August 2019

<sup>296</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.68), 22 August 2019

<sup>297</sup> USSD, '[Country Report for 2019](#)' (section 2b), 11 March 2020

<sup>298</sup> USSD, '[Country Report for 2019](#)' (section 2b), 11 March 2020

<sup>299</sup> USSD, '[Country Report for 2019](#)' (section 2b), 11 March 2020

<sup>300</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[BNP holds rally in Sylhet](#)', 24 September 2019

attending the demonstration<sup>301</sup>. Police denied the arrests were connected to the rally<sup>302</sup>.

10.4.5 Odhikar noted in its annual human rights report covering 2019 events, 'In 2019, the government violated the right to hold peaceful rallies and meetings of the opposition party and dissidents by using police and Chhatra League and Juba League activists to attack them. Although the government has imposed restrictions on meetings of the opposition parties, the ruling Awami League and their political allies are able to hold rallies and meeting freely.'<sup>303</sup>

10.4.6 The USSD HR Report 2019 stated:

'Leaders and members of Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat), the largest Islamist political party in the country, could not exercise their constitutional freedoms of speech and assembly because of harassment by law enforcement. Although Jamaat was deregistered as a political party by the government, prohibiting candidates from seeking office under the Jamaat name, the fundamental constitutional rights of speech and assembly of its leaders and members continued to be denied.'<sup>304</sup> (see also [Jamaat-e-Islami \(JI or Jamaat\)](#))

10.4.7 Reporting on the period January to March 2020, Odhikar noted:

'During this reporting period, the rights of freedom of assembly and holding peaceful meetings of the opposition political parties and dissidents continued to be curtailed. Apart from the BNP, the government entities stopped and attacked processions and protest rallies of political parties and other organisations that are critical of the government. The opposition leaders and activists were arrested even from indoor meetings and cases were filed against them for allegedly planning sabotage. Leaders of the ruling party have also stopped the opposition political parties from putting up posters.'<sup>305</sup>

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## 10.5 Surveillance

10.5.1 Jackman noted in the ESID Working Paper:

'Street-level informers working for the security agencies, such as the police and RAB [Rapid Action Battalion], closely monitor BNP leaders and activists. In Bangla, informers are known as source, former or, in student circles, tiktiki (lizards). BNP leaders and activists all portrayed informers as critical for the state to keep tabs on the movements and plans of the opposition. In some cases, particularly for elected representatives and high profile leaders, informers literally followed them, while for others it was more a matter of informers monitoring their activities when they attended to their businesses, or met with other BNP members. This monitoring represents a significant burden, meaning that opposition party members are often unable to continue

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<sup>301</sup> Daily Star, '[21 BNP men held in Sylhet in a day](#)', 24 September 2019

<sup>302</sup> Daily Star, '[21 BNP men held in Sylhet in a day](#)', 24 September 2019

<sup>303</sup> Odhikar, '[Annual Human Rights Report 2019 Bangladesh](#)' (page 7), 8 February 2020

<sup>304</sup> USSD, '[Country Report for 2019](#)' (section 3), 11 March 2020

<sup>305</sup> Odhikar, '[Three-month Human Rights Monitoring Report ...](#)' (page 21), 1 May 2020

their political or business activities, or even go home, fearing arrest or worse.<sup>306</sup>

#### 10.5.2 The same source added:

‘Some source are full-time informers. Such actors can be found in all areas of Dhaka, and in many cases well informed locals will know precisely who the source are. In Kawran bazaar – the city’s largest marketplace – for example, the identity of informers is public knowledge, with labourers able to pick out who works for RAB or the police. However, people across society, professions and classes actively feed information to the police and security agencies, and some opposition members described fearing that even fellow members of the BNP were discreetly working for the ruling party.’<sup>307</sup>

#### 10.5.3 The USSD HR Report 2019 stated ‘Human rights organizations alleged the Bangladesh Police, the National Security Intelligence, and the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence employed informers to conduct surveillance and report on citizens perceived to be critical of the government.’<sup>308</sup>

#### 10.5.4 David Jackman noted in the ESID Working Paper ‘The network of informers described above keep a close watch on the daily movements of important activists, reporting to the local police and wider agencies.’<sup>309</sup> As a result, strategies were used to avoid such surveillance, particularly in the lead up to the 2018 elections, including using hideouts (staying with friends or distant relatives) or using avoidance tactics or disguises when moving around the city<sup>310</sup>. As noted in Jackman’s paper ‘A Chattra dal leader described the situation for senior leaders: “because our leaders are targeted by the AL, they are marked, they often change their dress after the procession, as a way of leaving freely, so the police won’t recognise them”.’<sup>311</sup>

#### 10.5.5 Digital technology was also reported to be used as a means of surveillance by the state although the techniques, organisation and extent to which it was used was, according to Jackman, difficult to gauge. Reports indicate that security agencies have purchased extensive surveillance hardware and software from foreign companies<sup>312</sup>. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that, in the lead up to the 2018 elections, the authorities monitored social media and internet-based communication<sup>313</sup>. The USSD HR Report 2019 stated ‘The government became increasingly active in monitoring social media sites and other electronic communications. The government formed a monitoring cell to “detect rumors” on social media.’<sup>314</sup>

#### 10.5.6 Mobile phones containing sensitive information – for example, contacts, photos and messages – were commonly accessed by police when they stopped suspected opposition party activists on the street or following an

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<sup>306</sup> Jackman, D., ‘[Dominating Dhaka](#)’ (page 18), November 2019

<sup>307</sup> Jackman, D., ‘[Dominating Dhaka](#)’ (page 18), November 2019

<sup>308</sup> USSD, ‘[Country Report for 2019](#)’ (section 1f), 11 March 2020

<sup>309</sup> Jackman, D., ‘[Dominating Dhaka](#)’ (page 21), November 2019

<sup>310</sup> Jackman, D., ‘[Dominating Dhaka](#)’ (pages 21-22), November 2019

<sup>311</sup> Jackman, D., ‘[Dominating Dhaka](#)’ (page 22), November 2019

<sup>312</sup> Jackman, D., ‘[Dominating Dhaka](#)’ (page 19), November 2019

<sup>313</sup> HRW, ‘[Bangladesh: Crackdown on Social Media](#)’, 19 October 2018

<sup>314</sup> USSD, ‘[Country Report for 2019](#)’ (section 1f), 11 March 2020

arrest<sup>315</sup>. According to the Freedom House report, Freedom on the Net 2019, 'In December 2018, it was revealed that the BTRC [Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission] had collected the personal information of about 70 million mobile subscribers and shared it with other government agencies for a purported "survey".'<sup>316</sup>

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## 10.6 Sur place activities

- 10.6.1 According to the DFAT report: 'While the frequency of political blogging has reduced within Bangladesh, most political blogs about Bangladesh are now written outside the country ... Major political parties have a strong presence abroad, including in Australia. It is unclear whether local party activists based abroad actively monitor social media and/or report back to party headquarters in Bangladesh, but DFAT assesses that this is possible.'<sup>317</sup>
- 10.6.2 According to a 2017 article in The Parliamentarian, the quarterly journal of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, 'There are international groups of the Awami League Party in Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore. These groups have an elected chairperson, a constitution and are extremely active in carrying out political activities abroad.'<sup>318</sup>
- 10.6.3 DFAT noted that the AL 'has overseas wings for the Bangladeshi diaspora, which exist in some major cities in Australia as well as other countries.'<sup>319</sup> The 2017 article in The Parliamentarian noted that the AL in the UK had 'over 100 people in the executive committee and is structured internally into various divisions, such as the Youth Wing, the Student Wing, the Women's Caucus and the Awami League Lawyers Association.'<sup>320</sup> The article in the Parliamentarian estimated that in the UK AL had nearly 30,000 members and, anecdotally, was said to be the largest AL group outside of Bangladesh<sup>321</sup>.
- 10.6.4 According to the DFAT report:
- 'Like the AL, the BNP has a large diaspora network and engages strongly with expatriate Bangladeshi citizens and people of Bangladeshi descent living in other countries, including Australia. BNP members who are not Bangladeshi citizens (but who live in diaspora communities) claim that they have had visa applications to visit the country denied. DFAT does not know whether diaspora organisations report back to the domestic party on activities of their local BNP branch.'<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Jackman, D., '[Dominating Dhaka](#)' (page 19), November 2019

<sup>316</sup> Freedom House, '[Freedom on the Net 2019](#)' (Section C5), 2019

<sup>317</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.69), 22 August 2019

<sup>318</sup> The Parliamentarian, '[Bangladesh](#)' (pages 28-29), Issue 3, 2017

<sup>319</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.73), 22 August 2019

<sup>320</sup> The Parliamentarian, '[Bangladesh](#)' (page 29), Issue 3, 2017

<sup>321</sup> The Parliamentarian, '[Bangladesh](#)' (page 29), Issue 3, 2017

<sup>322</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.79), 22 August 2019



- 10.6.5 The same source noted ‘People who are perceived as being supporters of JI have reported being followed or intimidated, including when abroad.’<sup>323</sup>
- 10.6.6 In February 2018, BNP supporters led a protest, at the Bangladesh High Commission in London, against the corruption charges brought against Khaleda Zia<sup>324 325</sup>. President of the UK BNP, MA Malique, admitted protesters entered the offices and vandalised some property<sup>326 327</sup>. Nasir Ahmad, the president of the UK chapter of the BNP’s volunteer wing, Jatiyatabadi Swechchhasebak Dal, was arrested by Metropolitan Police at the scene<sup>328 329</sup>. According to a news brief on the Bangladesh High Commission London website, dated 5 November 2018, ‘A BNP leader has been fined GBP 1,020 after a court convicted him of vandalising the Bangladesh High Commission in London [on 7 February 2018]’.<sup>330</sup>
- 10.6.7 On 17 April 2018, community website, London SE1, reported that ‘protesters carrying banners bearing the name of the Bangladeshi Nationalist Party (BNP)’, outnumbered supporters of the Awami League, who had come to welcome Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as she arrived at the Overseas Development Institute in Blackfriars Road to give a speech to an invited audience<sup>331</sup>. There was reportedly a large police presence and nearby roads were closed for the duration of the event. According to the article, ‘Several billboard trucks circulated around nearby streets with messages critical of Sheikh Hasina’s regime.’<sup>332</sup>
- 10.6.8 On 19 April 2018, BDNews24 reported on a demonstration held outside Parliament in London by the UK Awami League, where protesters demanded the extradition of BNP Senior Vice Chairman, Tarique Rahman, living in exile in the UK<sup>333</sup>. Tarique was convicted of money laundering and corruption in 2018<sup>334</sup>. According to BDNews24, ‘The protest was also meant to counter demonstrations by BNP activists in London on the same day as Prime Minister Hasina is attending the Commonwealth summit.’<sup>335</sup>
- 10.6.9 According to HRW, reporting in December 2018:
- ‘On September 8, 2018, [Abdul] Khoyer, a British national, was arrested in Sylhet district and accused of car-jacking and robbery. However, relatives said Khoyer was picked up because he is an active member of the UK branch of the opposition BNP, and that he allegedly participated in a protest in London against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during her recent visit [in

<sup>323</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)’ (para 3.87), 22 August 2019

<sup>324</sup> BDnews24, ‘[BNP protesters storm, vandalise ...](#)’, 8 February 2018

<sup>325</sup> Prothom Alo, ‘[BNP vandalise Bangladesh High Commission office...](#)’, 8 February 2018

<sup>326</sup> BDnews24, ‘[BNP protesters storm, vandalise ...](#)’, 8 February 2018

<sup>327</sup> Prothom Alo, ‘[BNP vandalise Bangladesh High Commission office...](#)’, 8 February 2018

<sup>328</sup> BDnews24, ‘[BNP protesters storm, vandalise ...](#)’, 8 February 2018

<sup>329</sup> Prothom Alo, ‘[BNP vandalise Bangladesh High Commission office...](#)’, 8 February 2018

<sup>330</sup> Bangladesh High Commission, ‘[News brief for the 5th of November 2018](#)’, 5 November 2018

<sup>331</sup> London SE1, ‘[Protests as Bangladeshi PM visits ODI in Blackfriars Road](#)’, 17 April 2018

<sup>332</sup> London SE1, ‘[Protests as Bangladeshi PM visits ODI in Blackfriars Road](#)’, 17 April 2018

<sup>333</sup> Bdnews24.com, ‘[UK Awami League demonstrates in London...](#)’, 19 April 2018

<sup>334</sup> Al Jazeera, ‘[Khaleda Zia jailed for five years in corruption case](#)’, 8 February 2018

<sup>335</sup> Bdnews24.com, ‘[UK Awami League demonstrates in London...](#)’, 19 April 2018

April 2018]. Material that was critical of Sheikh Hasina was allegedly uploaded to his Facebook page.<sup>336</sup>

10.6.10 The HRW report added 'In a telephone recording obtained by Human Rights Watch, a voice, apparently of a senior police commander, can be heard explaining Khoyer was arrested for protesting against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in London.'<sup>337</sup> No further information on Khoyer's arrest could be found among the sources consulted by CPIT (see [Bibliography](#)).

10.6.11 The HRW also cited the case of a dual national and leader of the UK branch of the BNP, who was arrested whilst visiting Bangladesh and detained for over 2 months after his name was added to an existing murder case. He was later released on bail and left the country<sup>338</sup>.

10.6.12 The Dhaka Tribune reported on a protest demanding the release of Khaleda Zia, which was staged by members of the UK BNP outside Downing Street in March 2019<sup>339</sup>. According to the article:

'UK BNP President, MA Malique, presided while General Secretary, Koysor M Ahmed, conducted the program. Other leaders, including UK Jubo Dal President, Rahim Uddin, and UK Shecchashebok Dal President, Nasir Ahmed Sahin, spoke at the program. Among others, BNP leader UK unit, Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Barrister Abul Monsur Shahjahan, president of Lawyers Forum, Law Affairs Secretary, Advocate SK Tarikul Islam, and General Secretary of UK Jubo Dal, Afzal Hossain, were present at the program.'<sup>340</sup>

10.6.13 According to the Freedom House report, Freedom on the Net 2019, 'The government has also targeted expatriate Bangladeshis for criticizing the government online. According to a senior officer of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Bangladesh Police, cases were filed against at least 12 expatriates in the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Australia, and Oman for allegedly spreading antistate rumors on social media.'<sup>341</sup>

10.6.14 Though not reported to be related to political affiliation, in July 2020, media sources cited the case of 219 Bangladeshi expatriates who were deported from Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain, after serving prison sentences in those countries for various crimes<sup>342 343 344</sup>. Following return to Bangladesh and a 14-day period of quarantine due to the coronavirus, the migrants were arrested under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure<sup>345 346 347</sup> (which

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<sup>336</sup> HRW, "["Creating Panic"...](#)" (page 15), December 2018

<sup>337</sup> HRW, "["Creating Panic"...](#)" (page 15), December 2018

<sup>338</sup> HRW, "["Creating Panic"...](#)" (page 16), December 2018

<sup>339</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[UK BNP demos on Downing Street ...](#)', 18 March 2019

<sup>340</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[UK BNP demos on Downing Street ...](#)', 18 March 2019

<sup>341</sup> Freedom House, '[Freedom on the Net 2019](#)' (Section C3), 2019

<sup>342</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[219 expats incarcerated for what?](#)', 24 July 2020

<sup>343</sup> Daily Star, '[Pardoned abroad, punished here](#)', 19 July 2020

<sup>344</sup> Business Standard, '[219 expats sent to Dhaka jail...](#)', 6 July 2020

<sup>345</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[219 expats incarcerated for what?](#)', 24 July 2020

<sup>346</sup> Daily Star, '[Pardoned abroad, punished here](#)', 19 July 2020

<sup>347</sup> Business Standard, '[219 expats sent to Dhaka jail...](#)', 6 July 2020

allows arrest without warrant and without specific reason<sup>348</sup>). According to news reports, the police accused the expatriates of tarnishing the image of Bangladesh, but refused to give further details of the cases. A Dhaka court sent all the arrested to jail on 5 July 2020 and on 12 July ordered the police to submit an investigative report<sup>349 350</sup>. No further information on the above cases, or of other cases of repatriated nationals of Bangladesh facing similar difficulties on return, could be found in sources consulted by CPIT (see [Bibliography](#)).

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Section 11 updated: 19 August 2020

## 11. Politically-motivated violence

For information on violence related to the 2018 Parliamentary elections, see [Election violence and irregularities](#).

### 11.1 Clashes with police

- 11.1.1 In 2018, ASK recorded 38 clashes between the police and the BNP, resulting in 573 injuries, and 8 clashes between the BNP's student wing, the JCD, resulting in 237 injuries<sup>351</sup>. In comparison, 1 police clash with the AL was recorded in 2018, with 17 injuries<sup>352</sup>. In 2019, ASK reported fewer clashes with the police: 4 BNP-police clashes resulting in 60 injuries and 1 JCD-police resulting in 15 injuries, whilst no clashes were recorded between the AL and the police<sup>353</sup>.

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### 11.2 Inter-party violence

- 11.2.1 The BTI 2020 Report noted 'Violence is endemic within Bangladesh politics. Violence was used to suppress protest against the government. Law-enforcement agencies engage in arbitrary arrest and use brute force and torture as mechanisms of control. Bangladesh politics has potential for generating violence, but due to the complete decimation of opposition, the potential for violence has in fact declined.'<sup>354</sup>
- 11.2.2 According to a May 2019 report, 'Political violence in Bangladesh usually: involves armed clashes between the political, the youth and student cadre of the parties; and targets largely low and mid-ranking political party members. Both parties have used general strikes and transport blockades for political gain, when in opposition. The ruling party has also used police and security agencies to arrest and harass opposition party activists and leaders.'<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> [Code of Criminal Procedure](#), 1898

<sup>349</sup> Dhaka Tribune, '[219 expats incarcerated for what?](#)', 24 July 2020

<sup>350</sup> Daily Star, '[Pardoned abroad, punished here](#)', 19 July 2020

<sup>351</sup> ASK, '[Political violence \(January-December 2018\)](#)', 14 January 2019

<sup>352</sup> ASK, '[Political violence \(January-December 2018\)](#)', 14 January 2019

<sup>353</sup> ASK, '[Political violence \(January-December 2019\)](#)', 6 January 2020

<sup>354</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, '[BTI 2020 Country Report – Bangladesh](#)' (page 28), 2020

<sup>355</sup> Herbert, S., '[Conflict analysis of Bangladesh](#)' (page 6), May 2019

- 11.2.3 During 2019, ASK recorded 4 incidents of AL-BNP clashes that left 57 persons injured<sup>356</sup>, compared to 16 clashes reported in 2018 that left 151 persons injured and 1 dead<sup>357</sup>. No incidents of inter-party violence targeting the JI or its student party were recorded in 2019<sup>358</sup> or 2018<sup>359</sup>. In 2019, 25 BCL members were charged with the murder of a student over a social media post<sup>360</sup>, which was seen as critical of the government<sup>361</sup>. Because of the nature of the Facebook post, the perpetrators suspected the student was a member of the JI's student wing, the ICS<sup>362</sup>.
- 11.2.4 Odhikar reported that during the first three months of 2020, 'there have been various allegations against Awami League, Chhatra League and Jubo League leaders and activists for attacks on opposition party leaders-activists, abduction, beatings of university teachers, brutality on students and ordinary citizens and violence against women across the country.'<sup>363</sup>

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### 11.3 Intra-party violence

11.3.1 Jahan's 2014 working paper noted that auxiliary organisations of the AL were '... faction ridden and often use violent means to settle their disputes.'<sup>364</sup>

11.3.2 Referring to AL party members, the DFAT report noted:

'Intra-party violence reportedly occurs regularly, including in the lead-up to the 2018 election and around sub-national elections and student organisation elections. Such violence is usually about disputes over candidate pre-selection or internal disputes between business people. While often described as "factional" violence, the factions may be personality or patronage-based rather than ideologically based. The rate of intra-party violence in the lead-up to the 2018 election was reportedly lower than in previous years. The party has strong disciplinary policies to deal with rogue candidates, and has used these policies on occasion to expel such candidates from the party. People involved in political disputes may be both the victims and perpetrators of violence'<sup>365</sup>

11.3.3 A March 2020 study on student politics and violence reported:

'While not new, infighting, and especially BCL factional violence is on the rise. It appears to be spurred by local political rivalries and power contests between influential AL leaders either within the same district/city, or between districts (when the student population is from different regions). In recent

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<sup>356</sup> ASK, '[Political violence \(January-December 2019\)](#)', 6 January 2020

<sup>357</sup> ASK, '[Political violence \(January-December 2018\)](#)', 14 January 2019

<sup>358</sup> ASK, '[Political violence \(January-December 2019\)](#)', 6 January 2020

<sup>359</sup> ASK, '[Political violence \(January-December 2018\)](#)', 14 January 2019

<sup>360</sup> BBC News, '[Abrar Fahad: Bangladesh police charge 25 over murder](#)', 13 November 2019

<sup>361</sup> Daily Star, '[Beat him until he was motionless](#)', 13 October 2019

<sup>362</sup> Daily Star, '[Beat him until he was motionless](#)', 13 October 2019

<sup>363</sup> Odhikar, '[Three-month Human Rights Monitoring Report ...](#)' (page 6), 1 May 2020

<sup>364</sup> Jahan, R., '[Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)' (page 29), August 2014

<sup>365</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report Bangladesh](#)' (para 3.75), 22 August 2019

times this has become the most frequent student violence, albeit not the most lethal.<sup>366</sup>

- 11.3.4 Internal clashes between AL members were far higher than between BNP members. In 2019, ASK recorded 72 incidents of AL-AL clashes, resulting in 1,149 injuries and 9 deaths, compared to 7 incidents, 77 injuries and 1 death in BNP-BNP clashes<sup>367</sup>. Similarly high numbers were recorded in 2018: 86 incidents of AL-AL clashes resulting in 1,453 injuries and 23 deaths compared to 3 incidents involving BNP-BNP, which resulted in 63 injuries and 1 death<sup>368</sup>.
- 11.3.5 Reporting on political violence during the period January to March 2020, Odhikar noted ‘... leaders and activists of Awami League, Chhatra League and Juba League have also been involved in clashes due to internal conflicts of their own interest.’<sup>369</sup> The report recorded 48 incidents of internal violence in the AL, resulting in 384 injuries and 7 deaths, compared to 1 incidence of internal violence within the BNP, injuring 20 people<sup>370</sup>.
- 11.3.6 Odhikar reported that during April to June 2020, ‘citizens were killed and injured in attacks by Awami League leaders and activists. There were other cases of fatalities, as the ruling party men have been involved in clashes with each other over establishing supremacy in areas; and due to internal conflicts. They were seen using various lethal weapons including firearms. The cutting off of a leg of a person from a rival group also occurred, in a violent altercation between the two groups of the ruling party’.<sup>371</sup>

See also [Bangladesh Chhatra League \(BCL\)](#).

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<sup>366</sup> Kuttig, J., et al, ‘[Student Politics and Political Violence...](#)’ (page xii), 31 March 2020

<sup>367</sup> ASK, ‘[Political violence \(January-December 2019\)](#)’, 6 January 2020

<sup>368</sup> ASK, ‘[Political violence \(January-December 2018\)](#)’, 14 January 2019

<sup>369</sup> Odhikar, ‘[Three-month Human Rights Monitoring Report ...](#)’ (page 22), 1 May 2020

<sup>370</sup> Odhikar, ‘[Three-month Human Rights Monitoring Report ...](#)’ (page 22), 1 May 2020

<sup>371</sup> Odhikar, ‘[Three-month Human Rights Monitoring Report ...](#)’ (page 26), 6 July 2020

# Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Political system
  - Constitution
  - Parliament, President and Prime Minister
  - Participation and affiliation
- Main political parties, including organisation, recruitment, membership
  - Awami League
  - Bangladesh Nationalist Party
  - Jatiya Party
  - Jamiat-e-Islami
- Student wings and auxiliary groups
  - Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Jubo League
  - Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD)
  - Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) and Islami Chhatri Shangstha
- Corruption
  - Politicisation of the police
- Parliamentary elections 2018 – were they free and fair?
  - Participation and results
  - Election violence and irregularities
- Treatment of political opponents
  - Political rivalry
  - Treatment by the state (arrest/detention)
  - Surveillance
  - Freedom of movement and of assembly
  - Sur place activities
- Politically motivated violence
  - Inter-party violence
  - Intra-party violence

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# Version control

## Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **3.0**
- valid from **24 September 2020**

## Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and assessment

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