



[Home](#) > [Research](#) > [Responses to Information Requests](#)

## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIRs](#) | [Help](#)

13 September 2011

### BGD103808.E

Bangladesh: Information on the Awami League (AL), including its leaders, subgroups, youth wings, and activities (2008-July 2011)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

### Background

The Bangladesh Awami League (People's League, AL) is a political party formed in 1949 under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (*Europa 2010* 2010, 785, 800; *Political Parties of the World* 2009, 44). It led the movement for independence from Pakistan and became the ruling party upon the establishment of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1971 (*ibid.*; *Europa 2010* 2010, 785). AL's four basic principles are nationalism, secularism, socialism, and democracy (US 24 May 2011, 4). Sheikh Mujibur Rahman remained in power until 1975, when he was assassinated during a military coup that overthrew the government (*ibid.*; *PHW 2011* 2011, 107; *Europa 2010* 2010, 785). The AL was re-elected in 1996 and remained in power until its defeat by the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) in the subsequent 2001 election (*PHW 2011* 2011, 108-109; *Europa 2010* 2010, 787-788). Under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed (commonly referred to as "Sheikh Hasina"), the AL returned to power in 2009 at the head of an electoral coalition, following the general election of December 2008 in which the AL won 230 of approximately 300 elected parliamentary seats (US 8 Apr. 2011, Sec. 3; Freedom House 2011). The *Europa World Handbook 2011* estimates its membership at 1,025,000 (2011).

The relationship between the AL and the BNP is described as a "shared history of confrontational politics" (US 24 May 2011, 7) and a "vicious cycle of winner-takes-all" (*The Economist* 13 Aug. 2011). Several sources suggest that tensions between the two parties are partly driven by the personal rivalry between Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia, leader of the BNP (Freedom House 2011; *The Economist* 13 Aug. 2011; BBC 8 Mar. 2011). Both parties, when in opposition, have led and incited boycotts of Parliament as well as nation-wide strikes in protest of the sitting government (*PHW 2011* 2011, 108-109; *Europa 2010* 2010, 787-789; Freedom House 2011). Freedom House notes that such boycotts impede Parliament's ability to act as a check on the government and that, due to boycotts led by the BNP in 2009 and 2010, the AL has been able to "dominate" legislative proceedings due to its significant majority (2011).

### Leadership

Sheikh Hasina has been the President of the AL since 1981 (Bangladesh Awami League n.d.a). She was sworn into office as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh in January 2009 and previously held the post between 1996 and 2001 (*PHW 2011* 2011, 107; *Europa 2010* 2010, 787, 790). Mohammed Zillur Rahman holds the "largely ceremonial" post of President of Bangladesh (US 24 May 2011, 8) and has held leadership positions in the AL since the 1950s (Bangladesh n.d.). The Awami League website lists Syed Ashraful Islam as the General Secretary of the party and a Member of Parliament (MP) (Bangladesh Awami League n.d.b).

### Subgroups and overseas wings

Electoral reforms announced in 2008 mandated the disbanding of front organizations for political parties, including student organizations (UNB 7 Aug. 2008) and overseas units (Freedom House 2011). According to the United States (US) Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010*, the formal separation of auxiliary student wings from political parties occurred in 2010, although some politicians from the major parties have continued to encourage student organizations to participate in rallies and demonstrations (8 Apr. 2011, Sec. 1a).

Some local sources continue to refer to the the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) as the student wing of the Awami League (*New Age* 4 Jan. 2011; Odhikar 1 Jan. 2011, 14), while the Dhaka-based *Daily Star* now describes it as a "pro-Awami" student organization (*The Daily Star* 11 July 2011). At its 27th national council in July 2011, the BCL elected Badiuzzaman Sohag as Central Committee President and Siddique Nazmul Alam as General Secretary (ibid. 12 July 2011).

The Bangladesh Awami Jubo League is the youth wing of the AL and proclaims itself to be the oldest and largest youth organization in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Awami Jubo League n.d.a). It identifies its Chairman (acting) as Md. Omar Faruq Chowdhury and its General Secretary as Mirza Azam, who is also an MP in the Bangladesh government (Bangladesh Awami Jubo League n.d.b).

Other associated organizations, identified by *The Daily Star* as active in 2011, include the Mohila Awami League, Jubo Mohila League, Krishak League, Sramik League, Sechchhasebak League, Joy Bangla Sangskritik Jote, Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote and Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad (17 Mar. 2011).

Among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate, several active international wings of the AL were identified (UNB 30 Jan. 2011; ibid. 8 June 2010; *The Financial Express* 1 June 2011; *The Daily Star* 21 Oct. 2009). The AL's United Kingdom (UK) unit elected Sultan Sharif as President and Syed Sajidur Rahman Faruk as General Secretary in January 2011 (UNB 30 Jan. 2011). Sources identify the All-European AL President as Anil Das Gupta (*The Financial Express* 1 June 2011; UNB 8 June 2010), the Austria AL President as Khandaker Hafizur Rahman (UNB 8 June 2010), the France AL President as Benazir Ahmed Selim (*The Financial Express* 1 June 2011), the Vienna AL leader as Nazrul Islam, the Germany AL leader as Hasnat Miah and the Sweden AL leader as Jahangir Kabir (*The Daily Star* 21 Oct. 2009).

## Political violence (2009-July 2011)

Odhikar, a Bangladeshi human rights non-governmental organization (NGO) that documents and records violations of human rights, reports that politically motivated violence increased after the AL came to power in 2009 (1 Jan. 2011, 12-13). Odhikar recorded 220 deaths, 13,999 injured and 3,010 arrests due to political violence in 2010 (ibid). Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a Bangladeshi legal aid and human rights organization (ASK n.d.a), documented 168 incidents of violence between AL supporters and members of other political parties in 2009, which resulted in 1,833 injured and 20 deaths (ASK n.d.b). The US Department of State adds that there were numerous reports of killings involving political party supporters, although it did not find evidence of support from party leadership (8 Apr. 2011, Sec. 1a).

Odhikar indicates that the majority of the politically motivated violence that occurred since the AL came to power in 2009 was perpetrated by supporters or members of the AL (1 Jan. 2011, 12-13). For example, in October 2010, a local BNP leader was reportedly publicly beaten to death at a BNP rally by AL members (Odhikar 1 Jan. 2011, 16; *The New Nation* 12 Oct. 2010). The incident, which was captured on video, also injured 35 other people (Odhikar 1 Jan. 2011, 16). A few days after the incident, an AL PM reportedly stated at a party rally that the "Awami League government is in power. Nothing will happen to the accused of the murder case" (*The Daily Star* 14 Oct. 2010). Odhikar also stated that the AL failed to "stop extra judicial killings and torture" (1 Jan. 2011, 4).

ASK also recorded 164 incidents of intra-party violence among AL members in

2009, leading to 1,919 persons injured and 20 killed (ASK n.d.b). Noting that it is primarily the youth and student wings of the AL who are involved in intra-party violence, Odhikar has criticized the AL for failing to contain "violence and human rights abuses" perpetrated by these wings (1 Jan. 2011, 4). In addition, Bangaldeshi newspaper *The New Nation* states that since the AL-led coalition took power in January 2009, BCL activists have been involved in "campus violence, intra-group fighting, ... forcible occupation of student dormitories, vandalizing the academic institution, assaulting female students on the campus, tender snatching and extortion" (12 Oct. 2010).

In July 2011, an AL activist was killed and at least 30 other people were injured in an outbreak of violence between BNP and AL supporters which occurred in the Sagar upazila (district) (*The Financial Express* 25 July 2011; *The Daily Star* 25 July 2011). *The Daily Star* reported that the incident took place in reaction to a local election in June 2011, which was won by an AL-backed candidate (ibid.).

### **Politicization of the judiciary**

Odhikar and the US Department of State have identified the politicization of the judiciary as a concern in Bangladesh (Odhikar 1 Jan. 2011, 4; US 8 Apr. 2011, intro.). In September 2010, President Zillur Rahman pardoned 20 death row prisoners who were all reportedly members or supporters of the AL and convicted in 2006 for the murder of a BNP activist (AI 13 Sept. 2010; *bdnews24.com* 15 Sept. 2010). The AL has claimed that the original trial, which took place when the BNP was in power, was unfair and politically motivated, while the BNP has criticized the pardon as providing impunity only to government supporters (AI 13 Sept. 2010). According to Amnesty International (AI), "both the trial and the pardon are tainted with political controversy" (ibid.).

In 2009, a review committee led by the Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs recommended to drop approximately 1,817 allegedly "politically motivated" cases filed prior to 2009 by the Anti-Corruption Commission and the government (US 11 Mar. 2010, Sec. 4). Most of these cases were filed against AL politicians, although cases against two BNP officials were also recommended for withdrawal (ibid.). In addition, 13 cases filed against Sheikh Hasina have been withdrawn, although four corruption cases continue to stand against the leader of the BNP (*The Economist* 18 Nov. 2010).

As a result of the politicization of the judiciary, the US Department of State also indicated that access to justice was limited for members of opposition parties (US 8 Apr. 2011, intro.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

### **References**

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK). N.d.a. "About ASK." <[http://www.askbd.org/web/?page\\_id=420](http://www.askbd.org/web/?page_id=420)> [Accessed 8 Sept. 2011]

\_\_\_\_\_. N.d.b. "Political Clash 2009." <<http://www.askbd.org/web/?p=1342>> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

Amnesty International (AI). 13 September 2010. "Bangladesh President Should Commute All Death Sentences." <<http://www.amnesty.org.nz/news/bangladesh-president-should-commute-all-death-sentences>> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

Bangladesh. N.d. National Web Portal of Bangladesh. "President." <[http://www.bangladesh.gov.bd/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=135&Itemid=208](http://www.bangladesh.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=135&Itemid=208)> [Accessed 17 Aug. 2011]

Bangladesh Awami Jubo League. N.d.a. "History." <<http://www.juboleague.com/index.php/about-us>> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

\_\_\_\_\_. N.d.b. "Executive Members." <<http://www.juboleague.com/index.php/about-us/executive-committee>> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

Bangladesh Awami League. N.d.a. "Biography of Sheikh Hasina." <[http://www.albd.org/english/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=100%3Abiography-of-sheikh-hasina-01&catid=37&Itemid=98](http://www.albd.org/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=100%3Abiography-of-sheikh-hasina-01&catid=37&Itemid=98)> [Accessed 29 Aug. 2011]

\_\_\_\_\_. N.d.b. "Secretaries." <[http://www.albd.org/english/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=192&Itemid=124](http://www.albd.org/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=192&Itemid=124)> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

*bdnews24.com*. 15 September 2011. "No Scope for Controversy Over Presidential Pardon: Shafique." <<http://www.bdnews24.com/details.php?id=173406&cid=2>> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). 8 March 2011. "Bangladesh Country Profile." <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/country\\_profiles/1160598.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/country_profiles/1160598.stm)> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

*The Daily Star* [Dhaka]. 25 July 2011. "One Killed, 40 Hurt as AL, BNP Men Lock in Fierce Clash." <<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=195649>> [Accessed 8 Sept. 2011]

\_\_\_\_\_. 12 July 2011. Rakib Ahammed. "BCL Votes for Young Leaders." <<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=193886>> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

\_\_\_\_\_. 11 July 2011. "PM Warns Bad Boys." <<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=193768>> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

\_\_\_\_\_. 17 March 2011. "Nation Observes Bangabandhu's Birthday Today." <<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=178024>> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

\_\_\_\_\_. 14 October 2010. M. Abul Kalam Azad and Bulbul Ahmed. "AL in Power, no Worries." <<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=158425>> [Accessed 2 Sept. 2011]

\_\_\_\_\_. 21 October 2009. "PM Reaches Stockholm." <[http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/latest\\_news.php?nid=20060](http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/latest_news.php?nid=20060)> [Accessed 8 Sept. 2011]

*The Economist*. 13 August 2011. "The Poisonous Politics of Bangladesh: Reversion to Type." <<http://www.economist.com/node/21525897>> [Accessed 2 Sept. 2011]

\_\_\_\_\_. 18 November 2010. "Politics of Hate." <[http://www.economist.com/node/17525830?story\\_id=17525830&fsrc=rss](http://www.economist.com/node/17525830?story_id=17525830&fsrc=rss)> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

*The Europa World Year Book 2011*. 2011. "Bangladesh Awami League (AL)." <<http://www.europaworld.com/entry/bd.dir.94>> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

*The Europa World Year Book 2010*. 2010. "Bangladesh." London: Routledge.

*The Financial Express*. 25 July 2011. "2 Killed in Clashes." (Factiva)

\_\_\_\_\_. 1 June 2011. "European Jatiya Party President Joins AL." <[http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/more.php?news\\_id=137688&date=2011-06-01](http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/more.php?news_id=137688&date=2011-06-01)> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

Freedom House. 2011. "Bangladesh." *Freedom in the World 2011*.

<<http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2011&country=7993>>  
[Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

*New Age* [Dhaka]. 4 January 2011. "Chhatra League Founding Anniv Today."  
<<http://newagebd.com/newspaper1/national/3798.html>> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

*The New Nation* [Dhaka]. 12 October 2010. "Ruling Party Activists on Rampage In Dists Killers Still At Large." (Factiva)

Odhikar. 1 January 2011. *Human Rights Report 2010: Odhikar Report on Bangladesh*.  
<[http://www.odhikar.org/documents/2010/English\\_Reports/Annual\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Report\\_2010\\_Odhikar.pdf](http://www.odhikar.org/documents/2010/English_Reports/Annual_Human_Rights_Report_2010_Odhikar.pdf)> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

*Political Handbook of the World (PHW) 2011*. 2011. "Bangladesh." Edited by Thomas C. Muller, William R. Overstreet, Judith F. Isacoff, and Tom Lansford. Washington, DC: CQ Press. <[http://library.cqpress.com/phw/phw2011\\_Bangladesh](http://library.cqpress.com/phw/phw2011_Bangladesh)> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

*Political Parties of the World*. 2009. 7th ed. Edited by DJ Sagar. London: John Harper Publishing.

United News of Bangladesh (UNB). 30 January 2011. "Sultan Sharif Elected UK AL President, Sajidur Rahman Faruk Gen Secy." <<http://www.unbconnect.com/component/news/task-show/id-40466>> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

\_\_\_\_\_. 8 June 2010. "Austria AL Elects New President, Secretary."  
<<http://www.unbconnect.com/component/news/task-show/id-22772>> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2011]

\_\_\_\_\_. 7 August 2008. "Council of Advisors Approves Representation of People (Amendment) Ordinance (Full Story)." (Factiva)

United States (US). 24 May 2011. Department of State. *Background Note: Bangladesh*. (Factiva)

\_\_\_\_\_. 8 April 2011. Department of State. "Bangladesh." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010*. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/sca/154478.htm>> [Accessed 21 Aug. 2011]

\_\_\_\_\_. 11 March 2010. Department of State. "Bangladesh." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009*. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/sca/136085.htm>> [Accessed 21 Aug. 2011]

### **Additional Sources Consulted**

**Internet sites, including:** Asian Centre for Human Rights; Banglapedia; European Country of Origin Information Network; Human Rights Watch; United Nations - Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld; United Kingdom - Border Agency.

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