

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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

Questions

Please provide an update on the situation for Awami League (AL) supporters now.

RESPONSE

1. Please provide an update on the situation for Awami League (AL) supporters now.

Definitive information on the current situation for Awami League (AL) supporters was not found in the sources consulted. Country information indicates that the AL won the general election in December 2008. The new government reportedly stated that it would reject party politics, however, it appears little has changed. Sources also stated that the government had announced that it would withdraw “politically-motivated” cases. Most cases recommended for withdrawal are against AL leaders and activists. News articles also continue to report attacks on AL supporters by Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) activists which have resulted in deaths and injuries. In some instances the attacks are a result of past enmity between local leaders. Little information was found in the sources consulted on the outcome of any police investigations.

In the December 2008 general elections the AL won an overwhelming victory over the BNP. Sheikh Hasina Wajed, the AL leader, again became Prime Minister of Bangladesh. In May 2009 the US State Department reported that although there were hopes that the “new government would reject the highly partisan politics of the past, it soon became clear little had changed” (‘Country Profile: Bangladesh’ 2009, *BBC News*, 23 October http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1160598.stm – Accessed 23 November 2009 – Attachment 1; ‘Bangladesh’ 2009, *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition*, CQ Press, Washington http://library.cqpress.com/phw/document.php?id=phw2009_Bangladesh&type=toc&num=1 – Accessed 23 November 2009 – Attachment 2; US Department of State 2009, *Bangladesh: Background Note*, May – Attachment 3).

According to the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) the Bangladesh government has decided to withdraw “politically motivated” cases which were pending before the courts. The government has set up “committees in central and districts levels to receive applications from the aggrieved persons regarding politically-motivated cases”. The AHRC stated that the withdrawal of “politically-motivated cases” is not new in Bangladesh. Similar committees were formed by the BNP when it was elected in 2001 (Asian Human Rights Commission 2009, ‘Clear government policy is needed to end fabrication of charges and politically motivated prosecutions’, 19 February – Attachment 4).

Also in respect of withdrawing “politically-motivated cases”, a news article dated 13 November 2009 stated that “the national review committee on withdrawal of politically-motivated cases” had received 5,132 cases recommended for withdrawal by district committees. It reported that the national committee “had so far recommended 1,183 cases” for withdrawal, mostly “AL leaders and activists” and two against BNP leaders. The committee was also reviewing “harassment cases” during the BNP’s period of government (2001-2006) and the 2007-2008 period of the caretaker government (‘Bangladesh: Govt to withdraw 293 more political cases mostly against AL men’ 2009, *Plus News Pakistan*, 13 November – Attachment 5).

Attacks on and by AL and BNP supporters, attacks by party members on opposing groups as well as clashes between AL factions continue to be reported. Some attacks involved past enmities or the establishment of supremacy over a local area. The following news articles refer to these matters.

In February 2009 BNP supporters reportedly attacked the house of an AL activist and “beat up his family members and neighbours” (‘AL man’s house attacked: 14 hurt’ 2009, *The Daily Star*, 1 February <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=73822> – Accessed 4 February 2009 – Attachment 6).

Also in February 2009 *The Daily Star* reported a clash between AL and BNP supporters in Narail district. The clash was said to have taken “place at Padmabila village under Lohagara upazila over previous enmity between the supporters of AL activist Matiar and BNP leader Nayeb Ali”. Although the news article indicated that that police were present and people injured, it did not mention any action taken by the police (‘AL-BNP clash in Narail’ 2009, *The Daily Star*, 13 February <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=75696> – Accessed 13 February 2009 – Attachment 7).

In June 2009 a clash between rival groups, which was said to involve “long enmity over establishing supremacy” over a village, was reported in the following terms:

Saltha police chief Sankar Kumar Das said Alim Matubbar, a supporter of ruling Awami League, and Abdul Hye, an opposition BNP follower, had long enmity over establishing supremacy over the village Kathalia.

On Sunday afternoon, the two sides equipped with arms stood face to face at Kathalia Bazar and at one stage they started pelting each other with stones, leaving some 50 injured, Sankar said.

Of the injured, 23 were admitted to Faridpur General Hospital and seven to Faridpur Medical College Hospital

During the clash, the supporters of Alim Matubbar vandalised and plundered the houses of Abdul Hye and his supporters, he said.

No complaint was registered with the police station, Sankar said

Saltha Union chariman (sic) Delwar said it was not a political clash ('50 injured as villagers clash in Faridpur' 2009, *Bdnews24.com*, 22 June – Attachment 8).

In October 2009 a local AL leader was injured in “an attack by miscreants”. The attack was attributed, by the victim’s family, to a local internal AL conflict ('AL leader hurt in miscreants’ attack’ 2009, *The Financial Express (Bangladesh)*, 9 October – Attachment 9).

AL cadres attacked BNP leaders in October 2009. The BNP leaders reportedly did not file any case in this matter ('4 BNP leaders injured by AL men in Pirojpur’ 2009, *United News of Bangladesh Limited*, 19 October – Attachment 10).

Also in October 2009 police were investigating a failed bomb attack on Fazle Noor Tapas, an AL member of parliament ('12 Hurt in Bangladesh’ 2009, *The New York Times*, 22 October – Attachment 11; 'Bangladesh army probes links to attack on lawmaker’ 2009, *Reuters*, 11 November <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/DHA513534.htm> – Accessed 23 November 2009 – Attachment 12).

A news article, dated 28 October 2009, reported that an AL leader was killed and 15 activists injured by BNP men. It was said that there was “long-standing enmity” between the AL leader and a BNP convenor. There were subsequent reprisal attacks by AL supporters. The police reportedly made 15 arrests:

The deceased was identified as Zillur Rahman, 52, general secretary of AL, Natghar union unit and former chairman of the union.

Witnesses said there was a long-standing enmity between the supporters of Zillur and incumbent chairman of the union Humayun Kabir, also the convenor of union BNP, over taking lease of a shop at Kurighar bazar...

On information, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control after firing blank shots.

As a sequel to the clash, Humayun’s supporters attacked Zillur and his fellow men at about 11am yesterday while they were going to district town, killing Zillur on the spot.

Of the injured nine were admitted to Sadar Hospital while Zillur’s elder brother Elai Mia was rushed to Dhaka in critical condition.

Police arrested 15 people in this connection...('AL leader killed in B’baria clash with BNP’ 2009, *The New Nation (Bangladesh)*, 28 October – Attachment 13).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>
The Daily Star <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/index.php>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. 'Country Profile: Bangladesh' 2009, *BBC News*, 23 October
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1160598.stm – Accessed 23 November 2009.
2. 'Bangladesh' 2009, *Political Handbook of the World Online Edition*, CQ Press, Washington
http://library.cqpress.com/phw/document.php?id=phw2009_Bangladesh&type=toc&num=1 – Accessed 23 November 2009.
3. US Department of State 2009, *Bangladesh: Background Note*, May. (CISNET Bangladesh CX233679)
4. Asian Human Rights Commission 2009, 'Clear government policy is needed to end fabrication of charges and politically motivated prosecutions', 19 February. (CISNET Bangladesh CX233679)
5. 'Bangladesh: Govt to withdraw 293 more political cases mostly against AL men' 2009, *Plus News Pakistan*, 13 November. (FACTIVA)
6. 'AL man's house attacked: 14 hurt' 2009, *The Daily Star*, 1 February
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8. '50 injured as villagers clash in Faridpur' 2009, *Bdnews24.com*, 22 June. (CISNET Bangladesh CX229270)
9. 'AL leader hurt in miscreants' attack' 2009, *The Financial Express (Bangladesh)*, 9 October. (FACTIVA)

10. '4 BNP leaders injured by AL men in Pirojpur' 2009, *United News of Bangladesh Limited*, 19 October. (FACTIVA)
11. '12 Hurt in Bangladesh' 2009, *The New York Times*, 22 October. (FACTIVA)
12. 'Bangladesh army probes links to attack on lawmaker' 2009, *Reuters*, 11 November <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/DHA513534.htm> – Accessed 23 November 2009.
13. 'AL leader killed in B'baria clash with BNP' 2009, *The New Nation (Bangladesh)*, 28 October. (FACTIVA)