

CPD-CMI  
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8

Political Parties  
in Bangladesh

Rounaq Jahan

# **POLITICAL PARTIES IN BANGLADESH**

*CPD-CMI Working Paper 8*

*Rounaq Jahan*

Publishers

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The present Working Paper Series has emerged from a joint collaborative programme implemented by the **Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)**, Dhaka, Bangladesh and the **Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI)**, Bergen, Norway. This three-year research cooperation programme focused on issues of common interest to both the organisations and would service the demands of Bangladesh economy in a number of key sectors. This programme had been implemented with support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation and partnership with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka.

The **CPD**, established in 1993, is a civil society initiative in Bangladesh to promote an ongoing dialogue between the principal partners in the decision making and implementing process. A key area of CPD's activism is to organise dialogues to address developmental policy issues that are critical to national, regional and global interests with a view to seek constructive solutions from major stakeholders.

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It may be of interest to note that in recognition of the track record in research, dialogue and policy influencing, CPD was selected as one of the awardees under the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) through a globally held competitive selection process. TTI is supported by a number of governments and foundations, and is implemented by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada (more information is available at: [www.thinktankinitiative.org](http://www.thinktankinitiative.org)).

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The purpose of this Working Paper Series is to disseminate the outputs of the CPD-CMI programme among the various stakeholders with a view to ensuring wider outreach of the programme outputs.

**Series Editors:** *Professor Mustafizur Rahman*, Executive Director, CPD and *Dr Arne Wiig*, Senior Researcher and Coordinator, Poverty Dynamics, CMI

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This study was carried out under the CPD-CMI Research Co-operation Programme funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Apart from myself, the research team consisted of *Dr Inge Amundsen*, Senior Researcher, Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI); *Ms Meherun Nesa*, Research Associate, CPD; *Mr Abdul Alim*, Consultant, CPD; and *Ms Ida Jacobsen*, Research Assistant, CMI.

The overall research was designed by me; data for this project was collected by *Ms Meherun Nesa* and *Mr Abdul Alim* under my guidance and supervision. *Ms Meherun Nesa* collected data, and prepared tables and references. *Mr Abdul Alim* updated and revised the data, and collected information about party practices from two selected districts and upazilas. *Ms Nadee Naboneeta Imran*, Intern, CPD checked references and revised some tables. *Mr A K M Fazley Rabbi Faruque*, Publication and Print Associate, CPD assisted with collection of books and documents. *Mr Abdul Quddus*, Senior Administrative Associate, CPD typed the manuscript through different stages.

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This study provides an overview of the evolution of political parties since the birth of Bangladesh. It analyses and compares the ideology, organisational structure, leadership and support base of four major electoral political parties, Bangladesh Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami. Key features of party practices and their impact on political development are identified. The state of internal democracy within parties is a particular focus of the study. Six indicators are used to assess the state of internal party democracy. The indicators are leadership selection, candidate nomination, policy-setting, social diversity of leadership, transparency and accountability of party towards election funding, and inter and intra-party violence. Challenges facing the parties are highlighted and actions are suggested to improve the functioning of political parties.

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# Acronyms

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ACC	Anti-Corruption Commission
AL	Bangladesh Awami League
ASK	Ain o Salish Kendra
BAKSAL	Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
CAC	Central Advisory Council
CC	Central Committee
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CMC	Central Members' (Rokon) Conference
CMI	Chr. Michelsen Institute
CMS	Central Majlish-e-Sura
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
CWC	Central Working Committee
EC	Election Commission
FPTP	First Past the Post
HUJI	Harkat-ul-Jihad Islami
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JMB	Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh
JMJB	Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh
JSD	Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MP	Member of Parliament
NAP	National Awami Party
NC	National Committee
NCG	Non-Party Caretaker Government
NEC	National Executive Committee
NSC	National Standing Committee
RPO	Representation of the People Order
TIB	Transparency International Bangladesh
UN	United Nations



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Political Parties and Political Development

Political parties have been viewed as central to the proper functioning of representative democracy. Many roles of political parties have been identified. The first much discussed role is that of interest aggregation and articulation. Parties bundle the demands of different groups in realistic policy packages and alternatives, seek support for these policies, and propagate and articulate them. The second role is that of political recruitment and socialisation. Political parties engage, select and train people for elected positions and offices. The third role is that of representation and mobilisation. Parties nominate candidates for election to public offices, and structure voting choices of citizens. The fourth role is to facilitate accountability of government. Political parties monitor the performance of the government. The fifth role is to connect citizens with the government. Parties inform the government about public opinion and keep the public informed about the government's policies and actions. Parties also perform other roles. For example, parties can create political legitimacy for regimes, conciliate and manage conflict among competing groups, facilitate national integration, and promote political stability.

Though some of the classic works on political parties have pointed out the built-in tendencies of party organisations to be autocratic, such as Michels' "iron law of oligarchy" (1915 [6th edition (1959): 372-392]) or have argued in favour of authoritarian leadership style, such as Duverger's view that "a party that organizes itself along authoritarian and autocratic lines is superior to others" (1954: 134), in recent years, the role of political parties in promoting and consolidating democracy has been highlighted by academics as well as practitioners of democracy-building projects<sup>1</sup> (Scarrow 2005).

Those who highlight the role of political parties in democracy promotion and consolidation underscore the importance of intra-party democracy. Their arguments are relatively straight forward: that parties must practice what they preach, that if a party is run in an autocratic manner and is not inclusive, it can hardly be expected to nurture these values outside.

While evidence from liberal democracies of the West has led to the development of the classic models of roles of political parties which has been discussed above, experiences of many developing countries increasingly shows a very different picture. In many new democracies political parties are marked by strong clientelism which is characterised by a chain of transactional relationship, i.e. access to resources and resource distribution with the patrons as the source of largesse and as the object of loyalty (Randall and Svaasand 2002).

In places where clientelist party politics is dominant, ideology or policy/programmes play less important roles in defining parties. The majority of electoral parties propagate similar policies and programmes. They are generally populist and run election campaigns using popular grievances and making vague promises for the future.

The prevalence of clientelist party politics leads to undemocratic and corrupt practices. Since parties need patronage system to mobilise and sustain a support base, clientelist parties generally depend on distribution of state resources. This creates an incentive to 'win' elections at all costs and hang on to state power. The compulsion of 'winning' elections at all costs often leads to undemocratic practices such as election-engineering, and suppression and oppression of the opposition parties.

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<sup>1</sup>Many international and donor agencies are providing support to developing countries in democracy-building effort, including support to promote internal democracy within parties.

The democratic deficits in the party practices of developing countries often originate in structural factors of these countries such as long tradition of colonial or military rule, which leaves behind autocratic leadership practices that become embedded in political culture. Lack of development of formal institutions make informal personal access to decision-makers an important vehicle of representation of interests. Political parties in developing countries face these challenges constraining their development as democratic institutions.

Unlike many new democracies, Bangladesh has a long tradition of multi-party and electoral politics. Awami League (later Bangladesh Awami League), which led the nationalist struggle, was founded more than sixty years ago in 1949. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which has regularly rotated in power through elections in the last two decades, was founded in 1978. Jammāt-e-Islami (Jamaat), the dominant Islamist party is even older; it was established in 1941. The parties in Bangladesh have mobilised people for participation in movement politics as well as in electoral politics. But notwithstanding their long experiences, several aspects of party development in Bangladesh seem paradoxical and pose interesting research questions.

## 1.2 The Bangladesh Paradox

Bangladesh presents contradictory images of political parties. On the one hand, political parties have a positive image for their contributions in the nationalist struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, and in the movements for realising democracy in the 1980s. But at the same time the parties have failed to strengthen democratic practices within their own organisations. Inter-party relationships are also not democratic and are highly confrontational. There are frequent media reports of corrupt and criminal activities of party activists, and their impunity from justice that illustrate their role in eroding rule of law in the country.

Some of the practices of political parties are puzzling and run counter to theories of political development. First, one of the theories of party development, based on empirical evidence of Western liberal democracies, is that a two-party system would lead to political stability. However, in Bangladesh a two-party system has created political confrontation and instability, and has rather led to a sense of perpetual crisis.

Second, it is generally believed that organisation of regular free and fair elections and rotation of power between parties would institutionalise electoral democracy over time. But in Bangladesh, even after four free and fair parliamentary elections held in 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008, which each time brought the opposition party back to power, the two main parties, (Bangladesh) Awami League and BNP, could never reach an agreement on basic rules of organising credible elections acceptable to both sides.

Third, another theory of party development, again building on evidence from liberal democracies of the West, posit that spread of party organisational structure and partisan identification contribute to greater institutionalisation of parties. In Bangladesh over the years we have witnessed greater spread of organisational structures from national to grassroots levels and a deepening of partisan identification, but at the same time the parties exhibit significant organisational weaknesses. The parties have focused on building their organisation through patronage distribution rather than commitment to an ideology or a set of policies. As a result factional contestations and conflicts to grab public resources have increased which has led to high level of intra-party violence.

Finally, yet another theory of political development is that organisation of regular elections and transfer of power between parties as a result of electoral verdicts will eliminate the need for agitational street

politics to overthrow regimes. But in Bangladesh agitational street politics demanding overthrow of elected governments has become an integral part of opposition party's election campaign though state power has been transferred more or less peacefully four times since 1991 as a result of elections.

These paradoxes of political party behaviour have not yet been fully explored by research. This study has been undertaken to generate data and facilitate informed debate about the role of political parties in Bangladesh. This project has been undertaken under the research collaboration programme between the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in Bangladesh and Chr. Michelson Institute (CMI), Norway. It is a follow-up of the earlier study on parliament (Jahan and Amundsen 2012) under the CPD-CMI collaboration. A key finding of the parliament study was that shortcomings in the functioning of the parliament, and indeed democracy in Bangladesh, originate in the weakness and malfunctioning of political parties.

### 1.3 Objective, Scope and Data

The main objective of this study is to enhance knowledge about the role of political parties in the political development of Bangladesh. Though political parties are subjects of much popular discussion and debate in the media, academic research and empirical data on political parties have been limited. In the last forty-three years since the independence of Bangladesh, only a few books and articles have been published on political parties. A broad overview study on political parties was published first in 1996, and was later updated in 2008 (Khan *et al.* 1996, 2008). Several books on specific parties have been published. These include studies on the Awami League (Ghosh 1990) and the Jamaat-e-Islami (Kabir 2006; Shehabuddin 2013). In recent years there has been some work on Islamist politics and parties (Riaz 2004, 2010). But there is no comprehensive study which discusses the evolution of the party system, and the major features of political parties in Bangladesh. The state of internal democracy within parties, though a topic of much public debate, has not been systematically studied. This research has been undertaken to fill this vacuum in our knowledge and understanding of party politics.

The study focuses on four major electoral political parties of Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Awami League (AL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jatiya Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami. It is organised in five sections. Following the introduction, Section 2 presents a brief overview of the evolution of political parties in Bangladesh. Section 3 discusses the main features of the four parties selected for this study. Section 4 provides an analysis of the state of democracy within parties. Section 5 is the conclusion that summarises the key findings of the study and puts forward some suggested actions.

The study is based on review of existing secondary sources as well as analysis of primary data. We reviewed party constitutions which describe the standards and norms. We also investigated how far these standards are followed by parties in practice. This was done through review of newspaper reports and interviews with selected leaders of political parties. Research for the study was mainly conducted during 2012-2013.

Information about party ideology and organisation was collected from party constitutions. Data about leadership, factionalism and violence were gathered from various newspaper reports, journal articles and reports of different organisations. In addition, CPD research team visited two randomly selected districts and *upazilas* (sub-districts) to collect information on the practice of party politics. The first district was located in a municipal town which had four parliamentary constituencies and 1,033,252 voters in the electoral rolls in 2008. AL had won all four parliamentary seats in both 2001 and 2008 parliamentary elections in this district, but later in a by-election held in 2010, a BNP candidate won. The second district was located in a city corporation with 1,709,436 voters in the electoral rolls in 2008. It had six parliamentary constituencies. In 2001 BNP won four seats, Jatiya Party won one and the Jamaat won one seat in this district. But AL won all the six seats here in 2008.

Data collection from political parties was not easy. Party documents were not generally available in party offices. The party office bearers repeatedly cancelled meetings with the research team. Jamaat leaders were much pre-occupied with war crimes trials and their offices remained closed mostly. The BNP leaders were also busy with agitational street politics. Therefore only a few selected leaders of AL, BNP and Jatiya Party at the national level were available for interviews for this study. As for Jamaat, only a few interviews could be managed with leaders in the two selected study areas.

We recognise the data constraints. But, with the combination of methods – perusal of secondary materials, presentation of quantitative data and statistics, and in-depth interviews of selected leaders – we are reasonably confident that our findings are valid, despite constraints of time and resources.

## **2. EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN BANGLADESH**

The party system inherited by Bangladesh at birth underwent significant changes over the years. During the first three years of elected civilian rule (1972-1975), the country moved from one-party dominant to a single-party system. During the following fifteen years of military rule (1975-1990) we witnessed a return to a multi-party system, but at the same time emergence of state-sponsored political parties. Finally, the period after the restoration of electoral democracy in 1991 is marked by a two-party system which later evolved into two electoral alliances led by the two major parties. The key features of party development in the three periods are briefly discussed below.

### **2.1 From One-Party Dominant to a Single-Party System (1972-1975)**

After independence Bangladesh initially emerged as a one-party dominant political system. In the historic 1970 National Assembly and Provincial Assembly elections, the first free and fair elections held in Pakistan, the Awami League, campaigning on a Bengali nationalist agenda, won overwhelming majority of seats both in the National and Provincial Assemblies.

In the National Assembly elections, Awami League won 167 out of 169 seats allocated to what was then East Pakistan and now Bangladesh.<sup>2</sup> In the Provincial elections, Awami League won 288 out of 300 seats (Ahmad 2010: 14). The members of the National and Provincial Assemblies elected in 1970 formed the Constituent Assembly in Bangladesh in 1972. Out of 403 members of the Constituent Assembly, 400 belonged to Awami League, one belonged to the National Awami Party (NAP), and two were independents.<sup>3</sup> The Constituent Assembly also acted as the national parliament. The constitution was drafted within a year.

In the aftermath of independence, the opposition to the Awami League was extremely weak. Islamist political parties who opposed independence such as the Muslim League, Jamaat, Nizam-e-Islam and Pakistan Democratic Party were regarded as collaborators with Pakistan. Jamaat earned the most notoriety as many of its leaders and workers were believed to be actively involved in committing war crimes in Bangladesh (International Crisis Group 2012). Many of the Jamaat leaders together with other collaborators were arrested under the Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunal) Order which was promulgated on 24 January 1972. The Jamaat and other religion-based parties were banned under Articles 12 and 38 of the Bangladesh constitution which prohibited organisation of religion-based political parties.

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<sup>2</sup>See *Proclamation of Independence*; available at: [http://www.banglapedia.org/HT/P\\_0289.HTM](http://www.banglapedia.org/HT/P_0289.HTM); [http://www.banglanews24.com/Law/English/details\\_news.php?nssl=eccbc87e4b5ce2fe28308fd9f2a7baf3&nttl=3](http://www.banglanews24.com/Law/English/details_news.php?nssl=eccbc87e4b5ce2fe28308fd9f2a7baf3&nttl=3) (accessed on 14 August 2013).

<sup>3</sup>Liton (2011).

As the Islamist and rightist parties became inactive, the main opposition to the AL was mounted by the leftists. Several groups of underground Marxist-Leninist parties opposed the liberation war of 1971. The leftist parties, which supported the liberation war, functioned openly, but these parties were factionalised and weak. The most vigorous opposition came from a new party, titled the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) which was formed in October 1972 by a group of AL's own student front leaders together with some radical former military officers.

But none of these parties could muster significant electoral strength. In the first parliamentary elections which were held in March 1973, AL again achieved overwhelming victory winning 276 out of 300 general seats in parliament. Though eleven other parties contested, only three of them could win a total of four seats. Independent candidates won nine seats.

The AL's continued dominance, however, did not bring political stability. As the massive victory in the first parliamentary elections did not give immunity from attacks by the underground extremist parties, or the opposition parties operating in the open, debates started within various factions of the ruling AL about the need for changing the political and party system. Finally, in January 1975, through the fourth amendment of the constitution, passed by the first elected parliament, drastic changes were brought about. A presidential form of government and a single-party system was introduced. The single party was named the Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League (BAKSAL). All political parties including the AL were dissolved and their members were asked to join the BAKSAL. *Bangabandhu*<sup>4</sup> Sheikh Mujibur Rahman became the president as well as the chairman of the BAKSAL.

But the experimentation with the single-party system did not last long. Within six months, on 15 August 1975, *Bangabandhu*, together with members of his immediate and extended family were killed by a group of military officers. A series of coups and counter-coups followed in November 1975 which ushered in fifteen years of military rule in the country. Martial law was declared and political parties were barred from functioning.

## 2.2 Emergence of State-Sponsored Political Parties during Military Rule (1975-1990)

Bangladesh during the period between November 1975 to December 1990 was essentially ruled by two military dictators with a short interregnum of rule by a civilian president (Justice Abdus Sattar: June 1981-March 1982). Both military rulers, Major General Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and Lieutenant General Hussain Muhammad Ershad (1982-1990) followed a number of common strategies of governance and party-building. Both Zia and Ershad initially ruled under martial law prohibiting open political and party activities. Yet both later 'civilianised' themselves. They floated their own state-sponsored parties which were branded as *sarkari* (government) parties. To build these parties both used state patronage as well as state machinery, most notably the intelligence agencies. A key strategy of their party-building was to exploit factionalism within existing parties. Break away groups from parties as well as some retired civil-military bureaucrats and technocrats joined these *sarkari* parties. To increase political support both Zia and Ershad made political use of Islam and rehabilitated the Islamist groups who had gone underground or became politically inactive after the national liberation war of 1971. Both military rulers were committed to presidential form of government. Both organised presidential and parliamentary elections which resulted in victory for them and their parties. But these elections were never perceived as free and fair. They were widely regarded as 'engineered' by the government.

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<sup>4</sup>*Bangabandhu* means 'The Friend of Bengal', a name bestowed upon him because of his leadership before and during the independence of Bangladesh.

### **2.2.1 Party-Building by Major General Ziaur Rahman: Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)**

Though open political party activities were prohibited with the imposition of martial law in November 1975, the new military regime led by Major General Ziaur Rahman started discussions with various political leaders and began party-building efforts almost immediately. In building political support, Zia was ideologically pragmatic appealing to both leftist and rightist political forces.

Early on, the regime was able to get the support of the leftist NAP (Bhashani). In December 1975 Zia repealed the Collaborators Act of 1972, which facilitated the rehabilitation of politicians who opposed Bangladesh. These leaders then became Zia's political allies.

In November 1976, a year after emerging as the strongman of the regime Zia stepped forward as its frontman and became the chief martial law administrator. In April 1977 Zia became the president of the country. The day after becoming president, through a martial law ordinance, Zia changed the fundamental principles of the state. Secularism was dropped and was replaced with the word "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah."

Several religion-based political parties again became active. Muslim League was revived; Jamaat and Nizam-e-Islam branded together to form the Islamic Democratic League. Maulana Abdur Rahim who was leading the clandestine Jamaat became the *ameer* (the party top position). Professor Ghulam Azam, Jamaat's former ameer returned to Bangladesh in 1978.

In September 1978, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was launched with Zia as the party's chairman. The party had both leftists (NAP-B and United People's Party) and rightists (Muslim League) amongst its members. The disparate groups were held together by strong antipathy to the AL as well as their desire to share in government patronage. All power was concentrated in the hands of the party chairman.

In the initial years of the BNP the different groups within the party, the left and the right, freedom fighters and the non-freedom fighters were kept within the party discipline by Zia. But after Zia's assassination in May 1981, the feuds between the various groups became acute and his successor, Justice Sattar, found it difficult to manage and balance the various factions. After much persuasion Zia's widow, Khaleda Zia was brought in as the executive vice chairman of the party. In late 1984 Khaleda Zia became the chairperson of the BNP when Sattar relinquished his position as the head of the party. Since then Khaleda has remained the chairperson of the BNP. She succeeded in transforming the BNP from a state-sponsored sarkari party to an opposition party as she decided not to participate in parliamentary elections organised by the military ruler Ershad.

### **2.2.2 Party-Building by Lt General H M Ershad: Jatiya Party**

Ershad who was the second military ruler (1982-1990) followed the path of his predecessor, Zia. Ershad also pursued the strategy of breaking existing parties and using state machinery and state patronage. Though the country was still under martial law when party activities were banned, Janadal, a new party was formed in 1983 with President Justice Ahsanuddin Chowdhury as the convenor in November 1983. In 1985, Ershad floated another party called the Jatiya Front. Finally, in January 1986, a new political party called the Jatiya Party was launched with Ershad as the party chairman. Jatiya Party consisted of the Janadal, break away factions and individuals from the BNP and the United People's Party, factions from the Muslim League and Ganatantrik Dal.

Unlike Zia who faced little street mobilisation against his regime, Ershad had to tackle opposition from political forces from the beginning. BNP under Khaleda Zia did not participate in parliamentary elections



and was instead engaged in mass mobilisation demanding restoration of democracy. AL, which initially participated in the 1986 parliamentary elections, eventually resigned from the parliament as a prelude to initiating street demonstrations against the regime. Ershad dissolved the parliament and called for another parliamentary election in March 1988. Both BNP and AL boycotted the elections to the fourth parliament. Jamaat also did not participate and joined in the pro-democracy movement.

The country was repeatedly shut down by continuous *hartals* (general strike). Finally, Ershad resigned on 4 November 1990. A Non-Party Caretaker Government (NCG) with Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed as its head, took over on 6 November 1990, and parliamentary elections were organised within the next three months. This election, organised by the NCG on 27 February 1991, was regarded as the first free and fair election in the country. The election results showed the emergence of two major parties in the country. Both BNP and AL won 31 per cent of popular vote. But the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system gave BNP a clear seat advantage. It won 140 seats as opposed to the AL's 88 seats. Surprisingly, though Ershad was in prison, his Jatiya Party emerged as the third largest party. Jamaat won 6 per cent popular vote and 18 seats. Lacking absolute majority of seats, the BNP was able to form the government with the support of Jamaat. Thus, Jamaat became the king maker in the aftermath of a closely contested election. Khaleda Zia became the prime minister.

## **2.3 Two-Party/Alliance System and Confrontational Politics during Electoral Democracy (1991-Present)**

### **2.3.1 BNP Regime (1991-1996): Contestation over Election and Movement for NCG**

Following the fifth parliamentary election, initially there were some bi-partisan engagement between the AL and the BNP. Indeed, the twelfth amendment of the constitution, which restored parliamentary democracy, was passed in 1991 with the opposition members and backbenchers of the ruling party working together.

But this initial bi-partisan engagement between BNP and AL in the fifth parliament gradually eroded as the two parties confronted each other on a number of issues. One major issue revolved around Professor Ghulam Azam resuming the leadership of Jamaat. The other major issue that began to pit AL and BNP in open conflict centred around the organisation of elections. The media reported widespread vote rigging by the BNP in a by-election in Magura in March 1994.

This manifestation of an electoral malfeasance prompted the AL-led opposition to start boycotting parliamentary sittings and demand the organisation of future parliamentary elections under an NCG. In support of this demand, AL also initiated street agitations reinforced by repeated hartals. Jamaat, which had earlier supported the BNP to form the government, this time supported the AL's movement for an NCG. The BNP government, however, did not respond to the demand for an NCG which eventually led to the resignation of the opposition parties, consisting of AL, Jatiya Party and Jamaat from the parliament on 28 December 1994.

The parliament was eventually dissolved on 24 November 1995, and parliamentary elections, boycotted by all major parties except BNP, were held on 15 February 1996, resulting in an abnormally low voter turnout. The sixth parliament, where the BNP held 278 seats met for only 12 days. Its main business was to approve on 28 March 1996 the thirteenth amendment of the constitution which provided for organisation of parliamentary elections under an NCG. The BNP government resigned and handed over power to an NCG which organised the elections to the seventh parliament in June 1996, which was again regarded as free and fair by domestic and international observers. This time AL with 37 per cent of votes emerged as the single largest party in parliament with 146 seats. BNP with 33 per

cent vote gained 116 seats. Jatiya Party (32 seats) again became the third largest party in parliament. Jamaat's vote share remained as before, but its seat share declined significantly; it secured only three seats. Falling short of absolute majority, AL was able to form the government with the support of the Jatiya Party (32 seats) and JSD (one seat). Sheikh Hasina became the prime minister.

### **2.3.2 Awami League Regime (1996-2001): BNP's Electoral Alliance-Building**

To gain electoral victory in 1996, AL sought to transform the image of the party and assumed a more centrist posture. At the policy level, AL and BNP differed on a number of issues. BNP opposed the signing of the Ganges water-sharing treaty with India and Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) peace accord, two major achievements of the AL government.

BNP refused to participate in parliamentary by-elections and other local bodies' elections and demanded organisation of all local elections under an NCG. It also began boycotting parliamentary meetings and instead opted for hartals and street agitations. However, side by side with street mobilisation, BNP also began building an electoral alliance with the Islamist parties. Three parties, Jamaat, the Islamic Oikkya Jote and a faction of the Jatiya Party (Naziur Rahman) joined this alliance which was titled as the Four Party Alliance. This alliance further hardened an Islamist/rightist vs secularist/leftist political divide in the country.

At the end of its five-year term, the AL government handed over power to an NCG which organised the eighth parliamentary elections on 1 October 2001, which was again certified by domestic and international observers as free and fair (ANFREL and Forum-Asia 2002). This time the BNP-led Four Party Alliance won a two-third majority in the parliament securing 216 seats though it received only 47 per cent of popular vote. Khaleda Zia again became the prime minister. Two members of the Jamaat became cabinet ministers. Thus, the Jamaat, which opposed the independence of Bangladesh and was banned afterwards, became sharer of state power in the Four Party Alliance government.

### **2.3.3 BNP-led Four Party Alliance Regime (2001-2006): Rising Violence and Extremism**

Unlike the 1991 and 1996 elections, which were generally peaceful, the 2001 election was followed by widespread violence. The supporters of the victorious Four Party Alliance launched massive violence against the AL supporters in many areas. Minority voters were specially targeted as they were perceived to be vote banks for the AL (Amnesty International 2001).

The political confrontation between the two major political forces took a turn for the worse during the tenure of the BNP-led Four Party Alliance government (2001-2006). A number of AL members of parliament (MPs) including a former finance minister were assassinated. A grenade attack at an AL rally in Dhaka on 21 August 2004 targeted Sheikh Hasina who narrowly escaped death, but it killed 23 people including a senior AL leader, and injured many other AL stalwarts.

Violence not only plagued the BNP-AL contestation, but also contestations between the other parties and within the parties. Intra-party violence became as much of a problem as inter-party violence. The eruptions of intra-party violence served as manifestations of the breakdown in the control and discipline of the party organisation and the ascendance of money over ideology in Bangladesh politics.

Whilst the principal electoral parties were disengaging themselves from ideological engagement, the Islamist parties started becoming more active. Extremist groups such as the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), its front organisation the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), Harkat-ul-Jihad Islami (HUJI), Hizbul Tahrir and Hizbut Tawhid were the more visible manifestations of these



new forces. Some of these groups such as the JMB/JMJB and the HUJI were engaged in widespread terrorist activities.<sup>5</sup>

The Four Party regime initially denied the existence of Islamist terrorist groups. But faced with continued media reporting of the terrorist acts by the Islamists within and outside Bangladesh<sup>6</sup>, the regime finally moved against them. Several leaders of the JMB/JMJB were arrested. Following an international ban on JMB and Hizbul Tahrir, these groups were also banned by the government.

Witnessing the success of BNP's electoral alliance strategy, AL too started to look for parties to build an electoral alliance. AL's major alliance partners were Ershad's faction of the Jatiya Party, JSD (Inu), Bangladesh Workers' Party and ten other small parties. The AL-led Grand Alliance pledged wide ranging political and governance reforms. Many of them were based on proposals put forward by civil society groups, who mobilised during 2004-2006 campaigning for clean politics and transparency and accountability in governance (CPD 2007; Sobhan 2009).

However, conflict started brewing between the AL and BNP-led political forces over the issue of the fairness of the ninth parliamentary election. There were indications that the government was trying to exert partisan influence over the next NCG and the Election Commission (EC). Faced with the prospects of a near civil war between the two principal political alliances, the military finally intervened on 11 January 2007, declared a state of emergency, and installed an NCG under the leadership of a civilian.

#### **2.3.4 Military-Backed NCG (2007-2008): Failure of Political Reforms**

The military-backed NCG ruled the country for two years (2007-2008) and attempted to implement major governance and political reforms. But its agenda of cleaning up politics faced many hurdles and eventually had to be abandoned.

The government's attempt to democratise party politics by ousting the two leaders, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia popularly named as the 'Two Minus Strategy', failed. At first, attempts were made to exile the two leaders and bring democratic reforms within the two parties through some of the senior leaders of AL and BNP. But the two leaders refused to go into exile and instead opted to embrace imprisonment within the country. The 'reformist' senior leaders of the two parties could not generate support from the rank and file members of their respective parties against the two dynastic leaders. After failing to discredit Hasina and Khaleda in the eyes of their party members and supporters, the military sponsors of the NCG, gave up on its 'Two Minus Strategy'. The two leaders along with many other party stalwarts who had been detained on charges of corruption were released from prison and were allowed to contest in the parliamentary election.

The ninth parliamentary election was organised by the NCG on 29 December 2008. Again the 2008 parliamentary election was perceived as free and fair by all domestic and international observers (ANFREL 2009). The AL-led Grand Alliance was the winner with 262 seats and 57 per cent of popular vote. The opposition, BNP-led Four Party Alliance secured 34 seats.

#### **2.3.5 The AL-Led Grand Alliance Regime (2009-Present): Deepening Confrontation and Web of Crisis**

The Grand Alliance formed the government on 6 January 2009 with Sheikh Hasina again as the prime minister. There were high expectations that the government will initiate major reforms to change

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<sup>5</sup>Manik (2011).

<sup>6</sup>Ahmede (2003).

undemocratic political practices. It was hoped that the two political forces would learn from their past mistakes and be able to resolve their differences through democratic discussion and debate, and not resort to street politics and violence. But unfortunately after the election, both sides decided to continue on their old path of political confrontation.

BNP started boycotting parliamentary sittings again and called for street agitations. Contrary to its pre-election promise of building consensus, the ruling alliance used its three-fourth majority in parliament to push through the fifteenth amendment of the constitution in June 2011 which introduced several changes opposed by the BNP-led alliance. The first and most important of the changes, opposed by BNP, was the abolition of the provision of the NCG to organise future parliamentary elections. BNP refused to participate in the parliamentary elections under a party government.

The other contested issue between the two political forces, which generated high levels of violence was the trial of the war criminals of 1971. AL committed itself to war crimes trials in its election manifesto for the 2008 parliamentary elections, and following their victory the AL-led Grand Alliance government started implementing this pledge. The Jamaat activists, particularly members of the Islami Chhatra Shibir, unleashed a wave of unprecedented street violence including armed attacks on law enforcement agencies after the verdicts of the war crimes trials began to be announced from early 2013.<sup>7</sup>

The confrontation between the two political forces became even more intense after several student and youth groups led by young bloggers started street mobilisation in support of war crimes trials in February 2013 under the banner of *Shahabag Movement*. They demanded capital punishment for war criminals as well as banning of Jamaat. The Shahbag mobilisation was quickly countered by an Islamist mobilisation on the streets in April-May 2013 by Hefazat-e-Islam who branded the Shahabag Movement as atheist, and demanded implementation of an extreme Islamist agenda. In August 2013 following a High Court judgment Jamaat's registration with the EC was cancelled, and it was thus barred from participating in the elections.

The Grand Alliance government was able to confront the violent street mobilisations led by BNP and Jamaat, and pushed ahead with the scheduled tenth parliamentary elections as well as war crimes trials. Efforts by the United Nations (UN) to persuade the two political forces to come to a negotiated settlement about a poll-time government failed. The BNP-led alliance boycotted and attempted to thwart the scheduled parliamentary election by enforcing *oborodh* (blockade) and hartals. The government countered with harsh actions including repeated and large scale imprisonment of BNP leaders. There were unprecedented violent clashes between Jamaat activists and law enforcement agencies. However, the government was able to organise a one-sided parliamentary election boycotted by the BNP-led forces. In majority of the parliamentary seats (153) MPs belonging to the AL-led alliance were 'elected' unopposed. In the remaining 147, contestations took place with a very low voter turnout on 5 January 2014. A parliamentary opposition was engineered with a faction of the Jatiya Party who decided to join both the government as ministers and also serve as opposition in parliament. The AL-led alliance formed the government on 12 January 2014.

Prior to and immediately after the elections the AL-led alliance gave some signals that there would soon be another interim election which would be inclusive of all parties. After the elections, BNP also gave some signals that it was ready to come to a negotiated settlement through dialogue and not mount any violent street movement. The BNP participated in the upazila elections which followed the parliamentary elections. The upazila elections were marked by violence and irregularities.

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<sup>7</sup>See the report by *The Daily Star*: <http://www.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/jamaat-terror-continues/> (accessed on 31 July 2013).

The government's response to BNP's repeated calls for dialogue was that the latter must sever connection with Jamaat which the government claimed is a terrorist organisation. The absence of a political roadmap to move out of the continuing confrontation between the two major political forces has deepened a sense of crisis and created uncertainties about the democratic future of the country.

### 3. MAJOR FEATURES OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES

This section briefly discusses the major features of the four political parties selected for the present study. We look at party ideology, organisational structure, leadership, membership, support base, and factionalism. Commonalities as well as differences between the parties are highlighted. We have attempted to distinguish between what the party constitutions stipulate as standards and how the parties function in practice.

#### 3.1 Ideology

Constitutions of the four political parties specify certain ideological principles and goals. Table 1 illustrates these self-described ideologies. We will discuss the evolution and changes of the ideological principles over time for each of the parties.

**Table 1: Self-Described Ideologies of the Political Parties**

Political Party	Ideologies
Awami League	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bengali Nationalism</li> <li>- Democracy</li> <li>- Secularism – freedom of all religions and non-communal politics</li> <li>- Socialism – establishment of exploitation-free society and social justice</li> </ul>
BNP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bangladeshi nationalism</li> <li>- Democracy</li> <li>- Free market economy</li> <li>- Preserve the teachings of Islam, religion of the majority and other religions</li> </ul>
Jatiya Party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Independence and sovereignty</li> <li>- Islamic ideology and freedom of all religions</li> <li>- Bangladeshi nationalism</li> <li>- Democracy</li> <li>- Social progress and economic emancipation</li> </ul>
Jamaat*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establish Islamic way of life</li> <li>- Establish just, exploitation-free society and state</li> <li>- Faith and trust in Allah, democracy, economic and social justice</li> <li>- Ensure basic needs of all citizen irrespective of religions and ethnicity</li> <li>- Fraternity with World Muslims and friendship with all states</li> </ul>

**Source:** Constitutions of the Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat.

**Note:** \*Jamaat has, revised the ideology of the party several times since 2008 to conform to the EC guidelines for party registration. The revised version plays down its Islamist ideology. However, the revised constitution of the party was not accepted by the EC. Jamaat's party constitution is available at: [http://www.jamaat-e-islami.org/en/articlepdf/108\\_Jamaat%20Constitution-2008.pdf](http://www.jamaat-e-islami.org/en/articlepdf/108_Jamaat%20Constitution-2008.pdf) (accessed on 5 August 2013).

#### ***Bangladesh Awami League***

The Awami League which led the struggle for national liberation, self-describes itself as the 'pro-liberation force' in Bangladesh politics committed to promoting secular and social democratic values associated with the nation's foundational principles: nationalism, democracy, secularism and

socialism.<sup>8</sup> When founded in 1949, the party was initially named as the Awami Muslim League, but in 1953, Awami League dropped Muslim from its name to make it a secular oriented organisation. From the beginning, Awami League's principal goal was to address the political and economic deprivation of what was then known as East Bengal. This agenda was reflected in the 21-points programme which served as the manifesto of the *Jukto* (United) Front campaign for elections to the East Bengal legislature in 1954. In the early years, Awami League did not explicitly commit itself to a socialist agenda and remained the standard bearer for Bengali nationalism, as manifested in the 6-points programme enunciated in 1966. The move towards a more explicit socialist agenda was partly inspired by the 11-points programme presented by the political mobilisation programme which led to the downfall of the Ayub Khan regime in 1969. The election manifesto of Awami League for the 1970 national elections amalgamated the 6-points with the 11-points programme. The end product was a political agenda committed to democracy, nationalism, secularism and socialism.

After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, when Awami League formed the government, the party remained committed to the agenda spelt out in the 1970 election manifesto. This was reflected in the framing of the constitution in 1972. But over time, the party made some changes in its ideological orientation, the most visible shift being in its commitment to socialism. Between 1975 to 1990 the economic policies of the two militarised regimes of Ziaur Rahman and H M Ershad were heavily influenced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and this moved the country to embrace market-oriented policies and the progressive expansion of the role of the private sector. AL too adjusted with this change, and embraced market-friendly and pro-private sector economic policies.

Other components of the AL's original party agenda such as secularism, democracy and nationalism were less affected over time. The party remained committed to secularism which distinguished it from the other three parties, BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat who had supported the excision of secularism from the Bangladesh constitution. However, this contestation over the issue of secularism did not constrain AL from joining hands with Jatiya Party, and even Jamaat, in the political mobilisation against the BNP regime, elected to office in 1991, demanding organisation of parliamentary elections under an NCG during 1994-1995.

Though AL retained secularism in the party constitution, the fifteenth amendment of the constitution, pushed through the parliament by the AL-led Grand Alliance government in 2011, reflects contradictory stands on the issue of secularism. The fifteenth amendment restored secularism as a guiding principle of state, but at the same time retained Islam as the state religion of Bangladesh which was first incorporated by H M Ershad in the constitution in 1988. Notwithstanding such compromises with its founding ideals on secularism, AL both in and out of power has taken a strong stand against religious extremism and political use of religion.

### **Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)**

The ideological principles of BNP can be drawn from the aims and objectives of the party as described in the party constitution which include: Bangladeshi nationalism, democracy, free market economy and "preserving the age old human values of the Bangladeshi people through the teaching of Islam, religion of the majority of Bangladeshi people and other religions."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Article 2 of the constitution of Awami League. *Awami League constitution* is available at: [http://www.albd.org/albd3/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=106%3Athe-constitution-of-the-bangladesh-awami-league&catid=37&Itemid=101](http://www.albd.org/albd3/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=106%3Athe-constitution-of-the-bangladesh-awami-league&catid=37&Itemid=101) (accessed on 3 August 2013).

<sup>9</sup>Article 2 of the constitution of BNP. *BNP constitution* is available at: <http://bangladeshnationalistparty-bnp.org/content.aspx?tablename=webitem2&id=8&child=null&parentid=null> (accessed on 3 August 2013).

BNP has long been committed to democracy though the party was founded by a military ruler. The party has participated in the pro-democracy movement in the 1980s, and with the exception of the tenth parliament, the BNP has participated in all elections to the national parliament since 1991. The party has been elected to office in 1991 and 2001.

In some areas, such as the repudiation of secularism, BNP has remained quite consistent in its practice. BNP's founder, Ziaur Rahman removed secularism from the Bangladesh constitution and allowed Jamaat, which had been banned by the post-liberation AL regime, to re-enter the political mainstream. Since 2001 BNP has been in an electoral alliance with two Islamist parties, Jamaat and Islamic Oikkya Jote. During the tenure of the BNP-led Four Party regime (2001-2006) the country witnessed a surge in religious extremism, with the government recognising the problem only after a series of bomb attacks by some of the Islamist extremist groups. Though a few of the militant organisations, such as JMB and HUJI were finally banned in 2005, the action was considered to be too small and too late as little action was taken by the government in the wake of several well-known terrorist attacks such as the grenade assault on the British High Commissioner in Bangladesh in May 2004 and an AL public meeting in August 2004 which killed and injured large numbers of AL party members. The AL leader Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped getting killed. In recent years, BNP has sometimes talked about taking actions against religious extremism but given the party's past record, its electoral alliance with the Islamist parties and lenient posture towards the Islamist forces, such as Hefazat-e-Islam, the commitment is more open to question.

A confrontational approach to Indo-Bangladesh relations has long been BNP's principal point of contestation with AL. However, after the recent visit of Khaleda Zia to India to meet with the high command of Indian politics, the party has given some indications that it may be rethinking its approach to Indo-Bangladesh relations. But it remains to be seen whether BNP will desist from exploiting this issue in its future electoral campaigns, and how it will handle relations with India if it is to be elected to office.

### ***Jatiya Party***

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.<sup>10</sup>

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. As noted earlier in 1988, the Jatiya Party-led government incorporated Islam as the state religion through the eighth amendment of the constitution.

### ***Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami***

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. It excludes non-Muslims from membership. 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.

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<sup>10</sup>Article 4 of the constitution of Jatiya Party.

Since 2008 Jamaat has revised its constitution several times to conform to the EC requirements for party registration. It changed its logo containing *Allah* and *Aqimuddin* as these were found to be in conflict with the Representation of the People Order (RPO) which called for conformity with the country’s constitution. It deleted various provisions and incorporated others in the party constitution. For example, Jamaat deleted the phrases “establishing just rule of Islam through organised efforts” and “bringing about necessary changes to the state system to ensure complete observance of Islam” from its constitution.<sup>11</sup> Instead the party incorporated the phrase “establishing just rule through democratic means”.<sup>12</sup> However, in August 2013 the High Court declared the registration of Jamaat with the EC to be illegal which made the party ineligible to contest in the tenth parliamentary elections.

Despite its opposition to the Bangladesh national liberation war and involvement in war crimes during 1971, Jamaat had been successful in rehabilitating itself through a shrewd strategy of alliance-building with other non-Islamist mainstream parties. Over the years Jamaat had shifted its alliance partners several times in order to legitimise and consolidate its position both in electoral and in movement politics. Indeed, through its alliance politics Jamaat was able to influence the ideological orientation of its partners and advance its own ideological agenda.

### 3.2 Organisational Structure

Table 2 illustrates the organisational structures of the four political parties at the national level. There are many similarities in the organisational structure of the four parties. All have a national council that elects a smaller executive body to make key decisions for the party. The elections to these offices are to take place every three years. Jamaat’s organisational structure is a little different from that of the other parties. The organisational structures of the four parties at the national level are briefly described in the following section.

**Table 2: Organisational Structure of the Political Parties at the National Level**

Political Party	National Bodies of the Party	Highest Decision/ Policy Making Body	Highest Forum of the Party	Members of the Highest Decision/ Policy Making Body	Tenure of the Highest Decision/ Policy Making Body
Awami League	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Council</li> <li>2. National Committee (NC)</li> <li>3. Central Executive Committee (CEC)/ Central Committee (CC)/Central Working Committee (CWC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President</li> <li>• General Secretary</li> <li>• Presidium Members</li> <li>• Secretaries</li> <li>• Treasurer and</li> <li>• 26 Members</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Presidium</li> <li>5. Central Advisory Council (CAC)</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CEC/CC/CWC</li> <li>• Presidium</li> </ul>	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CEC/CC/CWC - 73</li> <li>• Presidium - 15 (including President and General Secretary)</li> </ul>	Three years

(Table 2 contd.)

<sup>11</sup>Article 3 of the revised constitution of Jamaat.

<sup>12</sup>Article 7 of the revised constitution of Jamaat.

(Table 2 contd.)

Political Party	National Bodies of the Party	Highest Decision/ Policy Making Body	Highest Forum of the Party	Members of the Highest Decision/ Policy Making Body	Tenure of the Highest Decision/ Policy Making Body
	6. Parliamentary Board 7. Parliamentary Party				
BNP	1. National Council 2. National Executive Committee (NEC) 3. National Standing Committee (NSC) 4. Advisory Council to the Chairman 5. Parliamentary Board 6. Parliamentary Party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NEC</li> <li>• NSC</li> </ul>	National Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NEC - 351</li> <li>• NSC - 19 (including Chairman, Senior Vice Chairman and Secretary General)</li> </ul>	Three years
Jatiya Party	1. National Council 2. Central Executive Committee (CEC) 3. Presidium <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chairman</li> <li>• Secretary General</li> <li>• Vice Chairman</li> <li>• Secretaries</li> <li>• Executive Members</li> <li>• Treasurer</li> </ul> 4. Advisory Council 5. Parliamentary Board 6. Parliamentary Party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CEC</li> <li>• Presidium</li> </ul>	National Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CEC - 299</li> <li>• Presidium - 42</li> </ul>	Three years
Jamaat	1. Central Members' ( <i>Rokon</i> ) Conference (CMC) 2. Ameer-e-Jamaat 3. Central Majlish-e-Sura (CMS) 4. Central Working Committee (CWC) 5. Central Executive Committee (CEC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CMS</li> <li>• CEC</li> </ul>	CMC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CMS</li> <li>• CEC - 16 (including the ameer-e-Jamaat)</li> </ul>	Three years

Source: Constitutions of the Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat.

### 3.2.1 Organisational Structure of the Political Parties at the National Level

#### ***Bangladesh Awami League***

The constitution of Awami League provides for the following seven organisational structures at the national level.<sup>13</sup>

- Council
- National Committee (NC)

<sup>13</sup>Article 4 of the constitution of AL.



- Central Executive Committee (CEC)/Central Committee (CC)/Central Working Committee (CWC)
- Presidium
- Central Advisory Council (CAC)
- Parliamentary Board
- Parliamentary Party

### *Council*

**Composition:** The council, with a membership of 6,000 councilors, is the largest forum within the party structure. The constitution stipulates that the council shall consist of a fixed number of councilors, elected by the sub-national level bodies such as the district AL and different metropolitan city AL at an interval of three years. Every city AL and every 25 thousand people belonging to every district shall each elect a single councilor.

The constitution of the party provides for the councilors to assume office both through election and nomination. The members and office bearers of the CEC/CC/CWC, by virtue of their office, become the councilors during the time of the council meeting. A specified number of representatives from the associated bodies of AL are also nominated as councilors. Moreover, there is a provision to co-opt one hundred primary members from any branch of AL into the council as its members. Furthermore, a fixed number of office bearers from the district and metropolitan committees are inducted as councilors.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the constitution also provides for selection of councilors both from the national/central level as well as from the sub-national levels.

Although the council is held triennially, the general secretary, as mandated by the president can summon the council at any time. A special council can also be summoned once a year. Furthermore, at the request of 20 per cent or one-fifth of the councilors, the council can also be convened.<sup>15</sup>

**Functions:** According to Article 16 of the constitution of the AL, the council's responsibilities are as follows:

- Adopt any proposal which seek to enact, change, improve or amend the constitution and election manifesto.
- Adopt any policy, strategy or motion to achieve the objectives of the party.
- Elect the office bearers of various central committees including the president and general secretary of the party.
- Confer any power, consistent with the constitution and declaration of the party upon the CEC/CC/CWC, conditionally or unconditionally.

**Meetings:** Since the establishment of AL in 1949, the party so far has arranged 19 councils which means that, on an average, the party has organised one council in every 3.3 years. During the period 1949-1975, on an average, the party convened one council every 2.6 years, while during the period 1976-2008, the party convened one council in every 4.6 years. After getting party registration with the EC in 2008, AL has organised two councils – one in July 2009, and the most recent one in December 2012. AL has thus followed RPO provisions regarding timely organisation of councils. The party had arranged only one special council meeting in 2000.

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<sup>14</sup>Article 6 of the constitution of AL.

<sup>15</sup>Article 11 of the constitution of AL.



Though AL organised its last two national council meetings on time, these meetings were held without organising the district and *thana* (sub-district) council meetings of the party which is mandated by the party constitution as preparatory steps to organising national councils. It is reported that council meetings of approximately 60 to 70 per cent of grassroots organisational structures of the party were organised before the 2012 national council meeting.<sup>16</sup>

#### *National Committee (NC)*

**Composition:** The NC consists of 166 members.<sup>17</sup> The AL constitution provides for recruitment of members both by election and nomination. The elected members are drawn from the office bearers of the AL and representatives from the district committees, while 21 nominated members are appointed by the party president. The president and general secretary of the AL are the ex-officio president and general secretary of the NC.

**Functions:** According to the constitution of the party the NC has the responsibilities to:

- Maintain coordination between the CEC/CC/CWC and the council.
- Assist council to take decisions on urgent and important national and international issues.
- Review the decisions and functions of the CEC/CC/CWC.
- Receive and approve accounts of the AL.
- Consider an appeal against punitive measures against any member.
- Frame rules for the conduct of the parliamentary party.<sup>18</sup>

**Meetings:** Although, the constitution stipulates that the meetings of the NC must be held every six months<sup>19</sup>, it was reported that the NC meeting held on 13 October 2012 was convened after more than 10 years.<sup>20</sup> However, the responsibilities of the NC are subsumed by the CEC/CC/CWC.

#### *Central Executive Committee (CEC)/Central Committee (CC)/Central Working Committee (CWC)*

**Composition:** AL has a *Karjo Nirbahi Committee* which is alternatively termed in English as the central executive committee or central committee or central working committee. The committee has a total of 73 members. Its members include the president, presidium members, general secretary, secretaries of the party executive committees, the treasurer and 26 members nominated by the president of the party in consultation with the presidium members.<sup>21</sup> Apart from the president, the general secretary, and the members of the presidium, the CEC/CC/CWC has 31 departmental secretaries to look after various party issues.<sup>22</sup> The general secretary, in consultation with the president, summons the CEC/CC/CWC meetings. In case the general secretary cannot call a meeting, the president himself/herself can assume this responsibility.

**Functions:** Article 24 of the constitution of AL authorises the CEC/CC/CWC to discharge certain functions such as to:

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<sup>16</sup>Prothom Alo (2013).

<sup>17</sup>Article 17 (a) of the constitution of AL.

<sup>18</sup>Article 17 (b-g) of the constitution of AL.

<sup>19</sup>Article 17 (i) of the constitution of AL.

<sup>20</sup>Liton and Tusher (2012).

<sup>21</sup>Article 18 of the constitution of AL.

<sup>22</sup>Article 20 of the constitution of AL.

- Re-elect the vacant posts or form ad-hoc committees in any branch of the party.
- Prepare accounts of income and expenditure in order to present it before the NC.
- Approve any expenditure amounting to less than Tk. 10,000 (BDT ten thousand).
- Approve the appointment or dismissal of staff by the general secretary of the AL.
- Summon the election meeting of the council or annual or special meeting.
- Consider an appeal against punitive measures taken against any member of the party by any of the units of the AL.

**Meetings:** The constitution of the party does not specify the frequency of the CEC/CC/CWC meetings. Newspaper reports indicate an increased frequency of CEC/CC/CWC meetings during 2008 when AL convened a minimum of 12 meetings. But number of meetings reported in newspaper decreased in 2009, 2010 and 2011 possibly because the party was in government power and many CEC/CC/CWC members were preoccupied with running the state.

#### *Presidium*

**Composition:** The presidium of AL may possibly be recognised as the highest decision-making body of the party. Its 15 members are drawn from the CEC/CC/CWC and include the president and the general secretary of the party.<sup>23</sup>

**Functions:** The key responsibilities of the presidium are to:

- Advise the president about nomination of the members of the CEC/CC/CWC.
- Take decision on all programmes including training of members about the ideals, principles, aims, objectives, programme and organisational affairs.
- Take decision on important national as well as international issues.
- Take decision on issues of utmost urgency and importance for the party.<sup>24</sup>

**Meetings:** The party constitution does not specify the frequency of meetings. However, newspaper reports indicate that presidium meetings are organised more regularly and frequently than that of any other body of the party. A presidium member informed the CPD study team that on average one meeting a month is held.

#### *Central Advisory Council (CAC)*

**Composition:** The CAC of AL consists of 41 members.<sup>25</sup> The members of this body are exclusively nominated by the president of the party. Moreover, the constitution gives authority to the party president to increase the number of members, if necessary. The CAC has three cells: political, economic and social.

**Functions:** The CAC is designed as the think tank of the party and commissions research and evaluation related to the party. It reviews the work of the party and how this relates to the political, economic and social issues facing the country. The CAC also provides information, data and statistics to help in the preparation of party statements, comments and publications.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Available at: [http://www.albd.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=188&Itemid=110](http://www.albd.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=188&Itemid=110) (accessed on 11 April 2013).

<sup>24</sup>Article 25 (b) of the constitution of AL.

<sup>25</sup>Article 26 of the constitution of AL.

<sup>26</sup>Article 26 of the constitution of AL.

**Meetings:** The party constitution does not stipulate the frequency of meetings of the CAC. It is learnt from discussions with the AL leaders that the meetings of this body are held very rarely. Some of the key informants argued that in recent years the CAC has evolved into a dumping ground for senior party figures, who might normally have been eligible to be members of the presidium, but are temporarily out of favour with the party leadership. This would explain the marginalised role of the CAC and its failure to discharge its intended mandate as a think tank of the party.

#### *Parliamentary Board*

**Composition:** The parliamentary board of AL has 11 members.<sup>27</sup> The president and the general secretary of the party and the leader of the parliamentary party are ex-officio members of the board. The remaining eight members are elected by the council from among its members. The tenure of the parliamentary board is fixed by the council.<sup>28</sup>

**Functions:** The parliamentary board is responsible for all functions related to the election. The board is empowered to prepare the election manifesto and election-related programmes, and oversee the process of party nominations and conduct of the election.

**Meetings:** The meeting of the parliamentary board is generally held prior to election.

#### *Parliamentary Party*

**Composition:** All the MPs elected from AL are the members of the parliamentary party. There is also a provision to select a leader and a deputy leader of the parliamentary party.<sup>29</sup>

**Functions:** Article 27 (c) of the AL constitution stipulates that the members of the parliamentary party, shall be obliged to perform their functions according to the advice and direction of the CEC/CC/CWC.

**Meetings:** The parliamentary party is supposed to meet before each of the parliamentary sessions, and if necessary, during parliamentary session.

#### ***Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)***

Article 6 (a) of the BNP constitution describes the following six organisational structures at the national level:

- National Council
- National Executive Committee (NEC)
- National Standing Committee (NSC)
- Advisory Council to the Chairman
- Parliamentary Board
- Parliamentary Party

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<sup>27</sup> Article 27 (b) of the constitution of AL.

<sup>28</sup> Article 27 of the constitution of AL.

<sup>29</sup> Article 28 (b) of the constitution of AL.

### *National Council*

**Composition:** The national council of BNP consists of the president and the general secretary of every *zila*/district executive committee, *mahanagar*/metropolitan executive committee, *upazila*/thana executive committee, *pouroshova* (municipality) executive committee, two women members from every *zila* and *mahanagar* nominated by every *zila* and *mahanagar* executive committee, members of the parliamentary party, members of the NEC and members of the NSC. There is a provision of recruiting the councilors both by election and nomination, from the grassroots as well as from the central level. The chairman of the party is authorised to nominate 10 per cent of the numbers.<sup>30</sup>

**Functions:** The key responsibilities of the national council are to<sup>31</sup>:

- Implement the policies and programmes of the party.
- Elect members of the NSC and the NEC.
- Amend the party constitution.
- Consider any issue sent by the party chairman.
- Discuss and accept the report of the secretary general.
- Consider any other important issue proposed by one-third members of the national council.

**Meetings:** Since the establishment of the party in 1978, the BNP has so far arranged five national councils although the constitution of the party stipulates that the national councils must be convened every three years. The first three meetings were held in 1978, 1983 and 1988. But the last two meetings, the fourth and the fifth national councils, were held on 1 September 1993 and 8 December 2009 respectively. This indicates that during the five years (1996-2001), when BNP was the principal opposition party in parliament, and more significantly during a further five years when BNP was in the office (2001-2006), no meeting of the national council was convened.

The most recent national council, held after a long gap of sixteen years was basically arranged in order to comply with the RPO provision, mandating all parties to seek approval of the EC for their revised constitution for purposes of registration. The parties were obliged to convene their national council within six months of the first day of the first session of the ninth parliament. Accordingly, all the parties were compelled to organise national council by 25 July 2009. Again, significantly, BNP failed to meet this deadline, and was obliged to seek a six month extension from the EC, so that the fifth national council was finally held on 8 December 2009, under article 9 (a) of the constitution of BNP. BNP has not been able to hold any national council meeting since 2009. Nor has the party been able to organise the council meetings of all district, metropolitan and thana levels which is required by the party constitution as preparatory steps to holding of the national council.

### *National Executive Committee (NEC)*

**Composition:** According to article 11 of the party constitution, the NEC of the BNP consists of a maximum of 351 members. Where necessary, the party chairman has the authority to expand the number of officials or members, but not beyond 10 per cent of the stipulated 351 members. The presidents of every *zila*/district executive committee and *mahanagar*/metropolitan committee, by virtue of their post, are the members of this committee. At least one-third of the committee members are drawn from the national council. The tenure of the NEC is three years.

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<sup>30</sup>Article 10 (a) of the constitution of BNP.

<sup>31</sup>Article 10 (b) of the constitution of BNP.

**Functions:** The key responsibilities of this committee are to:

- Control and coordinate the duties and responsibilities of different committees.
- Address disciplinary punitive issues.
- Oversee implementation of programmes.
- Mediate internal conflicts.
- Coordinate the activities of the associated organisations.
- Perform other duties as directed by the NSC.<sup>32</sup>

**Meetings:** Although, the BNP constitution provides for the NEC to meet every three months, in practice the meetings are infrequent. For example, the party did not convene any NEC meeting during the period September 2006 – May 2009, which overlapped with the exit of BNP from office at the end of its tenure and the subsequent two-year regime of the military backed NCG.<sup>33</sup>

#### *National Standing Committee (NSC)*

**Composition:** The NSC is the highest decision-making body of BNP.<sup>34</sup> The committee consists of 19 members which include the chairman, senior vice chairman, the party secretary general and 16 other members elected by the national council. The chairman heads this committee. The members of the NSC remain ex-officio members of the national council.

**Functions:** The responsibilities and the duties of the NSC are to:

- Formulate policies and programmes.
- Take final decisions on disciplinary matters.
- Interpret party proclamations, its constitution, rules, sub-rules and articles.
- Approve the content of all party publications.
- Temporarily suspend or postpone activities of any executive committee of the party from village to national level.
- Ask NEC to submit reports on particular issues.
- Oversee the activities of the NEC.<sup>35</sup>

**Meetings:** The old constitution of the BNP provided for monthly meetings of the NSC which at present is to be held every three months.<sup>36</sup> But when in power, the party had convened few such NSC meetings. For example, a newspaper report noted a gap of four years between two NSC meeting (22 June 2002 and 23 August 2006).<sup>37</sup> The amended constitution of the party stipulates that the meetings of the NSC will have to be held at least once every three months.<sup>38</sup> In recent years the frequency of NSC meetings appears to have increased. It is reported that during the period September 2008 to August 2012, the party had convened at least 26 NSC meetings.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Article 11 (a-g) of the constitution of BNP.

<sup>33</sup>See the report by *The Daily Star*: <http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=87409> (accessed on 11 April 2013).

<sup>34</sup>Article 12 (a) of the constitution of BNP.

<sup>35</sup>Article (b-h) of the constitution of AL.

<sup>36</sup>Article 9 (c) of the constitution of BNP.

<sup>37</sup>*Prothom Alo*. 21 August 2006.

<sup>38</sup>Article 9 (c) of the constitution of BNP.

<sup>39</sup>This is an incomplete statistics collected by the study team from the newspapers, there might be some more meetings but not covered by the newspapers.

### *Advisory Council to the Chairman*

**Composition:** The Advisory Council consists of 15 members, but the chairman can increase the number as needed. All members are nominated by the chairman and have the status of vice-chairman of the party.<sup>40</sup>

**Functions:** The main responsibility of the advisory council is to advise the chairman on different issues.

**Meetings:** The constitution does not specify how frequently the advisory council should meet. A newspaper report in 2013 noted that there was only one meeting of the advisory council after its formation through the national council held in December 2009.<sup>41</sup>

### *Parliamentary Board*

**Composition:** The NSC of the party works as the parliamentary board. The party chairman serves as the president of the parliamentary board. The president and the general secretary of the zila/district from whom a nomination is sought are considered ex-officio member of the parliamentary board. If any member of the board competes for candidacy, s/he cannot take part in the relevant board meeting. Although any panel formed by a ward, union, upazila/thana or zila/district committee (if any) of the constituency concerned may initially nominate its candidates, the board remains the ultimate decision-making authority.

**Functions:** According to article 13 of the BNP constitution, the parliamentary board is responsible for nominating candidates for the national parliamentary election or any other by-election.

**Meetings:** The parliamentary board only meets during the time of election exclusively to select its candidates.

### *Parliamentary Party*

The parliamentary party of the BNP is formed with the party members elected to parliament. The party, in consultation with the chairman, selects its leader, deputy leader, chief whip and other whips. Members of the parliamentary party are recognised as ex-officio members of the national council.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Jatiya Party***

The constitution of the Jatiya Party provides for the following six structures at the national level:

- National Council
- Central Executive Committee (CEC)
- Presidium
- Advisory Council
- Parliamentary Board
- Parliamentary Party

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<sup>40</sup>Article 16 of the constitution of BNP.

<sup>41</sup>See the report by *The Daily Star*: <http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=177549> (accessed on 26 August 2013).

<sup>42</sup>Article 14 of the constitution of BNP.

### *National Council*

**Composition:** National council is the highest assembly of the party which is mandated, under its constitution, to be convened every three years. The presidium of the party is responsible to set the date, time and agenda of the national council, but its decisions must be approved by the chairman of the party.<sup>43</sup>

The Jatiya Party constitution requires recruitment of councilors not only from the national and upper tiers of sub-national levels; it also mandates recruitment of councilors from the grassroots, i.e. union, pourashova and ward committees.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, there is an option to co-opt some councilors from among the party's primary members, fellow-travelling professionals, intellectuals and any other persons the chairman of the party thinks suitable for contributing to the deliberations of the national council.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, if any local body of the party fails to send the name of councilors within the specified date, the party presidium can nominate the councilors from that body.<sup>46</sup>

**Functions:** According to the article 15 of Jatiya Party, constitution the national council is mainly responsible to:

- Elect chairman, presidium, secretary general and the CEC.
- Review the activities of the CEC and the report of the secretary general submitted to the national council.
- Discuss and decide on policy/programmes.
- Approve any revisions and modification of the constitution.
- Discuss and approve the income and expenditure of the party.

**Meetings:** According to a media report since its establishment in 1986, the Jatiya Party has convened seven national councils, the last of which was held on 24-26 July 2009<sup>47</sup> where its revised constitution was approved in line with the provisions of the RPO. The study team was not able to confirm the information about the number of meetings from interviews with Jatiya Party members.

### *Central Executive Committee (CEC)*

**Composition:** The CEC of the Jatiya Party is responsible for taking executive decisions and implementation of those decisions. The CEC consists of 299 members and elects the 41 members of the presidium, which is the highest decision-making body of the party. The presidium members are also designated as ex-officio members of the CEC.<sup>48</sup>

**Functions:** The central executive committee is responsible for the following tasks:

- Implement decisions taken by the presidium.
- Coordinate, distribute and supervise activities among various committees.
- Implement decisions about disciplinary actions taken against any member of district, mahanagar or CEC.

<sup>43</sup>Article 12 (1-2) of the constitution of Jatiya Party.

<sup>44</sup>Article 12 (5) of the constitution of Jatiya Party provides that president and general secretary of each union and pour ward can be the councilors.

<sup>45</sup>Article 12 (8) of the constitution of Jatiya Party.

<sup>46</sup>Article 12 (6) of the constitution of Jatiya Party.

<sup>47</sup>See the report by *The Financial Express*: <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2009/07/24/74102.html> (accessed on 3 June 2013).

<sup>48</sup>Article 11 of the constitution of Jatiya Party.



- Resolve intra-party conflict.
- Coordinate activities of the various wings of the party.
- Perform any other tasks delegated to it by the presidium.<sup>49</sup>

**Meetings:** The constitution of the party does not specify how frequently the meetings of either the CEC or the presidium are to be held. The study team was also not able to collect any information regarding this from the party office or interviews with party leaders.

#### *Presidium*

**Composition:** The presidium consists of 41 members.<sup>50</sup> The constitution provides that members of the presidium are to be elected by the national council of the party. The chairman and the secretary general of the party are ex-officio members.

**Functions:** Presidium is the top decision-making body of the party.<sup>51</sup>

#### *Advisory Council*

**Composition:** The party constitution does not specify how the advisory council is to be composed.

**Functions:** The advisory council appears to function at the will of the party chairman. It is responsible for providing written suggestions and advice to the party chairman.<sup>52</sup> If the chairman approves the advisory council members can also attend presidium meetings and give their opinion. But they cannot vote.

#### *Parliamentary Board*

**Composition:** Jatiya Party has a parliamentary board consisting of seven members. The chairman and the secretary general of the party work as the president and member-secretary of the parliamentary board. The other five members are selected from the presidium based on seniority, but the board is given the right to co-opt additional members in order to ensure a more balanced regional representation of the board.<sup>53</sup>

**Functions:** The main responsibility of the parliamentary board is to nominate candidates for various elections.

#### *Parliamentary Party*

Parliamentary party of the Jatiya Party consists of the MPs elected from the party. The leader, deputy leader, chief whip and other whips are selected from those who are considered dependable by the party chairman.<sup>54</sup>

#### ***Bangladesh Jammāt-e-Islami***

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

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<sup>49</sup>Article 19 of the constitution of Jatiya Party.

<sup>50</sup>Articles 11 (3), (2) of the constitution of Jatiya Party.

<sup>51</sup>Article 20 (3) of the constitution of Jatiya Party.

<sup>52</sup>Article 20 (6) of the constitution of Jatiya Party.

<sup>53</sup>Article 21 of the constitution of Jatiya Party.

<sup>54</sup>Article 22 of the constitution of Jatiya Party.



- Central Members' (*Rokon*) Conference (CMC)
- *Ameer-e-Jamaat*
- Central *Majlish-e-Sura* (CMS)
- Central Working Committee (CWC)
- Central Executive Committee (CEC)

#### *Central Members' (Rokon) Conference (CMC)*

**Composition:** Article 14 of the constitution of the Jamaat stipulates that the CMC is the highest forum of the party. The CMC is to be convened every three years or whenever the ameer-e-Jamaat or the CMS deems it necessary. However, if for any reason it is not possible to hold the CMC at the stipulated time, the CMS must formally take the decision to defer the meeting. Moreover, if at least one-third of the CMS or the CMC of the organisational districts pass a proposal demanding a CMC, the CMC could be held within a period deemed appropriate by the CMS.

**Functions:** The CMC is responsible to elect the ameer-e-Jamaat through secret ballot.

**Meetings:** Since Jamaat started its activities in Bangladesh in 1979, the party has reportedly convened eight CMCs, the most recent conference being held on 3 June 2006.<sup>55</sup> However, the study team was not able to collect any documentary evidence from the party office. Jamaat has not been able to hold any CMC in the post-1/11 period to approve its revised constitution which was prepared to meet the requirement of party registration. Since 2011 many of the top leaders of the Jamaat have been in prison on charges of war crimes.

#### *Ameer-e-Jamaat*

Articles 15-17 of Jamaat constitution define the procedures of election and responsibilities of the ameer. The ameer is the executive head of the Jamaat responsible for all organisational and movement activities. The ameer is to be elected through secret ballot of the CMC for a three year period. The CMC is to elect a panel of three for the election of the ameer, but the CMC members can also elect an ameer outside of the panel. The ameer is to act in consultation with the CMC on all important matters, and is accountable to the CMC and the CMS. His responsibilities include:

- Appoint or dismiss *nayb-e-ameer*, secretary general, assistant secretary general and department secretaries in consultation with CMS.
- Approve or reject membership of the party.
- Dissolve or postpone any other organisational body of the party.
- Spend funds from the *Baitul Maal*.
- Invite non-members to the meeting of the CMS.
- Delegate his authority to others.

#### *Central Majlish-e-Sura (CMS)*

**Composition:** According to article 18 of the party constitution, the CMS is the policy and decision-making body of the Jamaat. Its key functions are to provide assistance and advice to the ameer-e-Jamaat. The tenure of the CMS is three years. The ameer-e-Jamaat is the ex-officio chairman of the

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<sup>55</sup>See the report by *bdnews24.com*: <http://ns.bdnews24.com/pdetails.php?id=35492> (accessed on 28 August 2013).

CMS. The secretary general of the party, if not already a member of the CMS would also be an ex-officio member of the CMS. The members of the CWC as well as the members of the central women's majlish-e-sura are also to be the member of the CMS.

Before every election of the CMS, the ratio of representation of the *rokons* (members) of Jamaat in the CMS has to be decided by the outgoing CMS. As determined by the outgoing CMS, the subsequent CMS members are to be elected in proportion to the number of rokons, keeping in mind the need to ensure representation of all its organisational districts.

**Functions:** The key responsibilities of the CMS are to:

- Revise and interpret the party constitution.
- Appoint an auditor to audit the accounts of the Baitul Maal and review the report submitted by the auditor.
- Interrogate and investigate the activities of the ameer-e-Jamaat and the secretaries of the central divisions who are working under the ameer-e-Jamaat.
- Determine the representative number of members to participate in the members' conference in emergency situation if necessary.
- Compile regulations for the meetings of the CMC and the CMS.
- Approve the release of duties of the ameer-e-Jamaat based on the opinion of two-third members of the party.
- Delegate its power (fully or partially) to the CWC or any committee or board made up of the members of the party, ameer or secretary general of the party or any other individuals.
- Decide the proportional rate of the representation for the election of the CMS.<sup>56</sup>

**Meetings:** According to article 19 of the party constitution there should be at least two meetings per year of the CMS. Presence of one-third members constitute a quorum for the meeting. Ameer-e-Jamaat can call a meeting at any time. Alternatively, one-third members of the CMS can sign and call a requisitional meeting.

#### *Central Working Committee (CWC)*

**Composition:** According to article 23 (a) of the party constitution, the CWC is to be formed with unspecified number of nayb-e-ameers, one secretary general, unspecified number of assistant secretary generals, divisional secretaries and other members. The members of the women's working committee are also the members of the CWC.<sup>57</sup> The CWC is to be elected by members of the CMS. The CWC is accountable to the CMS and the ameer-e-Jamaat.

**Functions:** According to article 23 (a) of the constitution of the party, the key functions of the CWC are to provide overall assistance to the ameer-e-Jammat. The members are to be elected every three years after the election of the CMS. The ameer-e-Jammat has the authority to convene the meetings of the CWC. The CWC can function as CMS if for some reason meetings of CMS are not convened. But it cannot remove the ameer-e-Jamaat or change the constitution of the party.

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<sup>56</sup>Article 23 (2) of the constitution of Jamaat.

<sup>57</sup>Article 23 (a) (1-2) of the constitution of Jamaat.

*Central Executive Committee (CEC)*

**Composition:** The CEC is a 15-member body directly elected by the members of the CMS. The ameer-e-Jamaat has the authority to convene the meeting of the CEC and the CEC is accountable to the ameer-e-Jamaat<sup>58</sup> and the CWC.

**Functions:** The key function of the CEC is to implement the decisions taken by the CMS and the CWC.

**3.2.2 Organisational Structure at the Sub-National Level**

Table 3 illustrates the organisational structure of the political parties at the sub-national level. Again there are many similarities in the sub-national level structures of the four parties. Generally, the structures below the national level are established following the model of the administrative divisions of the country. They go down from the district to upazila, and union, and from metropolitan to municipal levels.

**Table 3: Organisational Structure of the Political Parties at the Sub-National Level**

Political Party	Sub-National Bodies	Member	Tenure
Awami League	Zila/District Executive Committee	71	Three years
	Upazila/Thana Executive Committee	67	Three years
	Union Committee	65	Not specified
	Ward Committee	51	Not specified
	Metropolitan City Executive Committee	71	Three years
	Metropolitan Thana Committee	67	Three years
	Metropolitan Ward Committee	65	Not specified
	Metropolitan Unit	37	Not specified
	Municipal Committee of 'a' category	67	Three years
	Municipal Committee (other)	65	Not specified
	Municipal Ward Committee	51	Not specified
	Village Committee	31	Not specified
BNP	Zila/District Executive Committee	151	Two years
	Upazila/Thana Executive Committee	101	
	Union Executive Committee	71	
	Mahanagar/Thana Executive Committee	121	
	Mahanagar/Ward Executive Committee	71	
	Mahanagar Executive Committee	171	
	Pouroshova Executive Committee	101	
	Ward Executive Committee of Union	51	
	Ward Executive Committee of Pouroshova	71	
Jatiya Party	Zila/Mahanagar Executive Committee	111	Two years
	Upazila Executive Committee	71	
	Union Executive Committee	51	
	Union Ward Executive Committee	41	
	Municipal Ward Executive Committee	35	
	Municipal Executive Committee	71	

*(Table 3 contd.)*

<sup>58</sup>Article 23 (b) of the constitution of Jamaat.

(Table 3 contd.)

Political Party	Sub-National Bodies	Member	Tenure
Jamaat	District Majlish-e-Sura & Working Committee		Two years
	Upazila/Thana Majlish-e-Sura & Upazilla/Thana Working Committee		One year
	Municipal/Union Majlish-e-Sura & Municipal/Union Working Committee		One year

Source: Constitutions of the Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat.

### ***Bangladesh Awami League***

According to articles 29-45 of the constitution of the AL, the party has several organisational bodies at the sub-national level which include 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.

However, many of these sub-national level bodies are not constituted on a regular basis through council meetings. They are often formed on an ad-hoc basis. Sometimes committees have to function beyond their terms because of lack of council meetings.

### ***Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)***

According to article 6 (a) of the BNP constitution the sub-national bodies of the BNP include committees at zila/district, upazila/thana, union, mahanagar, pouroshova and word levels.<sup>59</sup> The members of all the sub-national committees are supposed to be elected through the biennial council of the party. However, in practice these council meetings are rarely organised on a regular basis.

### ***Jatiya Party***

The organisational bodies at the sub-national level of the Jatiya Party include committees at zila, mahanagar, upazila, union and municipality levels. These committees are to be elected through the biennial councils of the party.<sup>60</sup> In Jatiya Party too the council meetings are not regular.

### ***Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami***

Jamaat has majlish-e-sura and working committees at district/zila, upazila/thana and municipal/union level. The members of the executive bodies of these committees are to be elected annually by the members of the majlish-e-sura, of that particular level.<sup>61</sup> The study team was not able to collect information about what happens in practice.

<sup>59</sup> Article 6 of the constitution of BNP.

<sup>60</sup> Articles 2 (b), 3 (b) and 5 (b) of the constitution of Jatiya Party.

<sup>61</sup> Articles 38, 47 and 51 of the constitution of Jamaat.

### 3.2.3 Associate Organisations and Front Organisations of the Political Parties

All four political parties have some associate organisations or front organisation. Following the rules of the party registration established by the RPO in 2008, AL now does not list any front organisation. It only lists associate organisations. BNP and Jatiya Party on the other hand still list both front and associate organisations. Jamaat does not refer to any front or associate organisation though the Islami Chhatra Shibir in practice acts as its associate organisation. The front and associate organisations listed by the political parties are briefly discussed below.

#### ***Bangladesh Awami League***

Article 25 (a) of the constitution of the AL lists eleven associate organisations. They are Bangladesh Chhatra League, Bangladesh Mohila Awami League, Bangladesh Krishak League, Bangladesh Awami Jubo League, Bangladesh Jubo Mohila League, Awami Swechhashebok League, Jatiya Shramik League, Awami Ainjibee Parishad and Bangladesh Tanti League. It is noted that the Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jatiya Shramik League are to be run according to their own constitutions.

Frequent newspaper reports highlight a lack of discipline in the functioning of many of these associate organisations. They are faction ridden and often use violent means to settle their disputes. It was reported that in 2012 the council meetings of five associate organisations, Jubo League, Chhatra League, Swechhashebok League, Shramik League and Krishak League were organised, but the full committees of these organisations could not be formed because of internal factionalism.<sup>62</sup> In addition to organisational weakness, two of the 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.

#### ***Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)***

BNP lists nine front organisations. These are: Jatiyatabadi Muktijoddha Dal, Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal, Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal, Jatiyatabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangstha, Jatiyatabadi Krishak Dal, Jatiyatabadi Swechhashebok Dal, Jatiyatabadi Tanti Dal, Jatiyatabadi Olama Dal and Jatiyatabadi Matshyajibee Dal.

As the RPO prohibits establishment of any organisation as an affiliated body drawn from teachers or students of any educational institution or the employees or workers of any financial, commerce or industrial institutions, BNP lists two organisations, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and Jatiyatabadi Shramik Dal as associate organisations of the party which are to operate according to their own constitutions. However, in practice these two organisations function very much as front organisations. The committee members are chosen by the BNP chairperson. Similar to the AL, BNP's associated student and labour organisations are perennially engaged in inter and intra-party violence. Their contestations too revolve around the same kind of issues such as grabbing business or land or extorting money or establishing authority in campuses of educational institutions. Newspaper reports indicate that the leadership of the Chhatra Dal is dominated not by students, but by middle aged people who are engaged in business or service or are full-time politicians.

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<sup>62</sup>Prothom Alo (2013).

### **Jatiya Party**

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. At present Jatiya Party's front and associate organisations do not appear to be active.

### **Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami**

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. 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.

### **3.3 Leadership**

There are some commonalities in the leadership patterns of political parties in Bangladesh. First, the top party leadership position has remained unchanged for nearly thirty years in the three major parties. Sheikh Hasina has been the president of AL since 1981; Khaleda Zia has been the chairperson of BNP since 1984; and H M Ershad Chairman of Jatiya Party since the founding of the party in 1986. Even in Jamaat, Professor Ghulam Azam was the ameer from 1992 to 2000, and Maulana Matiur Rahman Nizami from 2000 till his imprisonment on war crimes charges in 2011.

It should be noted that while there has been no challenge for the position of the party chief, there has been contestation for the second leadership position, i.e. the general secretary/secretary general of the party (Tables 4 and 5). However, these contestations were never resolved through secret ballot in the party council meetings. Rather the person who was favoured by the party chief was chosen to fill this important second position through back room negotiation. Thus, whatever contestation took place amongst various factional leaders for this post, it was resolved prior to the party council meeting and councilors were never given a choice to vote and choose amongst alternative candidates.

**Table 4: President and General Secretaries of Awami League: 1981-2013**

President	Tenure	General Secretary	Tenure
Sheikh Hasina	1981-Present	Begum Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury (Acting)	1982-1987
		Begum Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury	1987-1992
		Zillur Rahman	1992-2002
		Md Abdul Jalil	2002-2009
		Syed Ashrafal Islam	2009-Present

**Source:** List of Presidents and General Secretaries of the AL since the inception of the party, Telephone Directory, Department of Publicity and Publication, Bangladesh Awami League.

**Table 5: Chairmen and Secretary Generals of BNP: 1981-2013**

Chairman	Tenure	Secretary General	Tenure
Abdus Sattar	1981-1984	A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury	1979-1990
Begum Khaleda Zia	1984-Present	Abdus Salam Talukder	1991-1996
		Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan	1996-2007
		Advocate Khandaker Delwar Hossain (Acting)	2007-2009
		Advocate Khandaker Delwar Hossain	2009-2011
		Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir (Acting)	2011-Present

**Source:** Khan *et al.* (2008: 119); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Q\\_M\\_Badruddoza\\_Chowdhury](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Q_M_Badruddoza_Chowdhury) (accessed on 25 May 2013); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdul\\_Mannan\\_Bhuiyan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdul_Mannan_Bhuiyan) (accessed on 25 May 2013); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirza\\_Fakhrul\\_Islam\\_Alamgir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirza_Fakhrul_Islam_Alamgir) (accessed on 25 May 2013); <http://welovebnp.webs.com/historyofbnp.htm> (accessed on 25 May 2013).

The second common feature shared by the three major parties, AL, BNP and Jatiya Party, is the predominance of dynastic succession. Both AL and BNP are led by two dynastic inheritors. Sheikh Hasina is the daughter of the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Khaleda Zia is the widow of Ziaur Rahman, the founder of the BNP. In BNP, Khaleda Zia's eldest son, Tareque Rahman has been promoted to the position of the senior vice chairman and is clearly identified as the dynastic successor. In AL, there is no clear dynastic successor to Sheikh Hasina, but speculation has centered around several family members including her sister Sheikh Rehana and son Sojib Wajed Joy. In Jatiya Party, the founding president Ershad is still alive but his wife Raushan Ershad has now been made the leader of the parliamentary party. Another group contesting her leadership is led by Ershad's brother G M Qader.

The third common feature is the prevalence of familial politics. In AL and BNP many family members (near and extended) of Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia have already held important political positions. Though Sheikh Hasina has recently defined her family to include only her sister and their children, seven members of Sheikh Hasina extended family have been elected to the tenth parliament. They include, three cousins, three nephews and the father-in-law of her daughter. Her son, Joy and her sister, Rehana's son Redwan Siddique Boby have not yet been elected to any political office, but both are involved in party and campaign activities. Joy has also been named the technology advisor to the Prime Minister.

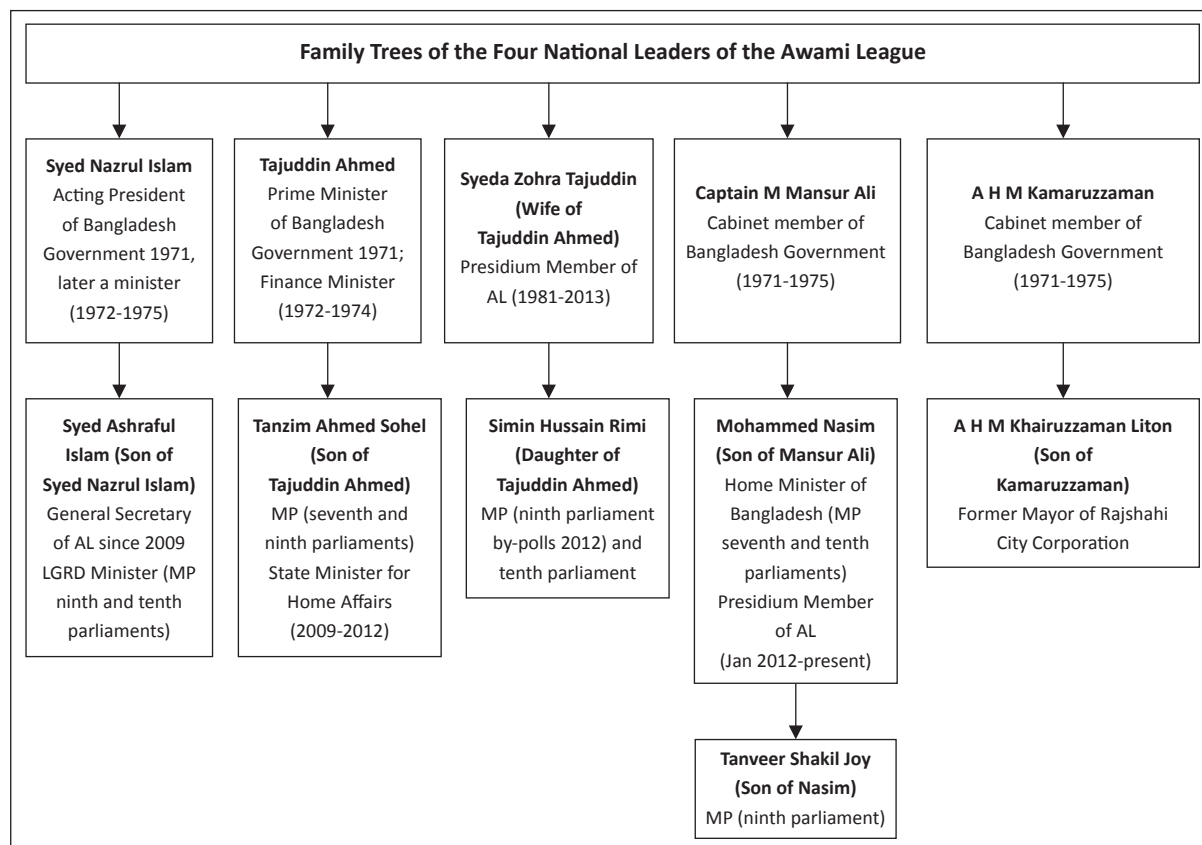
In BNP too, in addition to her son Tareque Rahman, Khaleda Zia's sister was a member of the eighth parliament as well as a cabinet minister. Khaleda's brother was also a member of the eighth parliament. Three of her nephews were politically influential.

In Jatiya Party, Ershad's brother, sister as well as his wives have been MPs and held various party positions.

Dynastic succession and familial politics have not been limited to only these three top leaders. There are many political families in different political parties where leadership positions have been passed down to two or three generations. Figure 1 shows the pattern of dynastic succession in the families of four national leaders of AL. Tajuddin Ahmed's widow, Syeda Zohra Tajuddin became AL's convenor in 1977. His son Tanzeem Ahmed Sohel Taj inherited his parliamentary seat and won in the seventh and ninth parliamentary elections. After Taj's resignation, his sister Simin Hussain Rimi succeeded him in the same parliamentary seat. Syed Ashraf Islam succeeded his father Syed Nazrul Islam who was the acting president of Bangladesh in 1971 and later a minister. Ashraf is now both a minister and also the AL's general secretary. Captain Mansur Ali was succeeded by his son S M Nasim, and Nasim



**Figure 1: Family Trees of Four National Leaders**



Source: Several newspaper articles.

was succeeded by his son Tanveer Shakil Joy as MP in his constituency. A H M Kamruzzaman’s son Khairuzzaman Liton is the former mayor of Rajshahi City Corporation.

The leadership of some of the smaller parties such as the Bangladesh Jatiya Party and the Bikalpadhara Bangladesh, also show similar patterns of dynastic and familial politics. Bangladesh Jatiya Party’s president Andaleev Rahman Partho is the son of Naziur Rahman who founded the party. Bikalpadhara’s president Badruddoza Chowdhury’s likely successor is his son Mahi B Chowdhury. Even Jammatt is reportedly grooming dynastic successors to some of the leaders who are currently in prison and are being tried under the International Criminal Tribunal.

Family connections are particularly important for women to gain leadership position in political parties. Many women MPs get nomination as successors to their father’s or husband’s seats. For example, as Table 6 shows in the ninth parliament out of the 18 directly elected women MPs (with the exception of Hasina and Khaleda) more than half are dynastic inheritors.

However, members of political families do not necessarily stick to one party. They may belong to different parties. For example, Rashed Khan Menon who is the president of the Bangladesh Workers’ Party has siblings who are/were involved with other parties. His sister, Selina Rahman was a minister in a BNP government and at present a member of the NSC of the BNP. His brother Enayetullah Khan was a minister in a previous BNP government and another brother A Z M Obaidullah Khan was a minister of Ershad government. There are many more such examples of family members being active in opposing parties. How the members of these families survive in the midst of our confrontational politics has not been explored in depth in this study, but deserves to be a topic of a separate research.



**Table 6: Women MPs with Dynastic Roots in the Ninth Parliament**

No.	Name of the MPs	Constituency	Party Affiliation	Dynastic Roots
1	Raushan Ershad	Rangpur-3	Jatiya Party	Wife of H M Ershad Party president and the former president of Bangladesh
2	Rumana Mahmud	Sirajganj-2	BNP	Wife of Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Former MP of BNP (Sirajganj-2)
3	Begum Sultana Tarun	Kushtia-4	AL	Wife of Abul Hasan Tarun Former MP of AL (Kushtia-4)
4	Habibun Nahar	Bagerhat-3	AL	Wife of Khulna Mayor Talukder Abdul Khaleque
5	Rebecca Momin	Netrokona-4	AL	Wife of Late AL leader Abdul Momin
6	Simin Hossain Rimi	Gazipur-4 (By-Polls)	AL	Daughter of Tajuddin Ahmed PM of Bangladesh Government in Exile, 1971; Finance Minister (1972-1974)
7	Meher Afroze Chumki	Gazipur-5	AL	Daughter of former MP Moyez Uddin Ahmed of AL
8	Begum Nilufer Zafar Ullah	Faridpur-4	AL	Wife of AL presidium member Kazi Zafrullah
9	Hasina Ahmed	Cox's Bazar-1	BNP	Wife of former State Minister for Communications during the BNP-led Four Party Alliance government Salauddin Ahmed

Source: Several newspaper articles.

### 3.4 Membership and Support Base

#### 3.4.1 Membership Requirement of the Political Parties

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. It is Tk. 5 in BNP, Tk. 10 in AL and Tk. 100 in Jatiya Party. There is no religious requirement to become a member of AL or BNP or Jatiya Party.<sup>63</sup>

The membership requirement of Jamaat is different. Membership is specifically kept limited amongst Muslims. 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 *haram* sources and giving up involvement with any organisation contrary to Islam's principles and the ideology of the Jamaat.<sup>64</sup>

#### 3.4.2 Support Base of the Political Parties

Similar to most parties in South Asia which appeal to and try to secure support across communities, classes and occupational groups, the major political parties in Bangladesh, especially AL, BNP and Jatiya Party are mostly 'catch all' parties (International IDEA 2007: 66). These are electoral parties, and hence they need to demonstrate that they represent all classes and groups, and not specific social groups. However, these 'catch all' parties still maintain some core group of supporters.

<sup>63</sup>Constitutions of the AL, BNP and Jatiya Party.

<sup>64</sup>Article 7 of the constitution of Jamaat.

Of the four parties in this study, two, AL and BNP, have the widest support across the country. Each of these two parties had demonstrated nearly 30 per cent of vote share in the parliamentary elections held since 1991. No study has looked at the specific support base of the different political parties. However, it is believed that AL, which is formally committed to secularism and pluralism, 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>65</sup> BNP, in contrast, was founded with greater support from the urban and higher income groups, particularly civil and military bureaucracy and business community. Jatiya Party's support base is similar to that of the BNP. It also has regional support in the northern districts which is the home of its founder, Ershad. Jamaat draws support from the Islamist forces. It also has regional support in some of the border districts.

### **3.5 Factionalism**

In the 1970s and 1980s fragmentation of political parties due to factional splintering was very common in Bangladesh. Most of the splits took place because of the personal ambitions of leaders either to gain or retain power. The party-building strategies of the two military rulers, Zia and Ershad who depended on breaking existing parties and picking up support of factional groups, also contributed to party fragmentation.

Virtually every major party split several times. The breakaway groups sometimes formed new parties or sometimes kept the name of the original party. In the latter case the name of the factional leader was appended to the name of the party to distinguish one from the other. Since splintering took place mainly due to power struggle among leaders, policy issues tended to play a minor role or no role in party fragmentation.

In many cases, however, factional groupings were contained within the party and did not lead to open splits. Indeed, while factional splits were more endemic in the earlier period, since 1991 the top party leaders have succeeded in keeping control over factions and have avoided formation of new parties with breakaway groups and leaders. We briefly discuss below the factional splintering and factional contestations within the two major parties, AL and BNP.

#### ***Bangladesh Awami League***

AL was born out of factional splintering of the Muslim League. The intra-party conflicts within the Muslim League climaxed in early 1949 when the progressive elements established the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League at a convention held on 23-24 June 1949 under the leadership of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani. But in 1957, in the council of the AL held in Kagmari, Tangail, there was a sharp division between the leftists led by Bhasani and the pro-western liberal democrats led by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy. Bhasani and his followers formed a new party called the National Awami Party (NAP).

During 1970-1972 period, at least two groups left Awami League and formed their own parties, i.e. the Jatiya League led by Ataur Rahman Khan in 1970 and the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) led by leftist students and youth leaders in 1972. In 1975, AL switched over to a single party system called the Bangladesh Krishak Shramik Awami League (BAKSAL). After the assassination of Bangabhandu, AL broke up into several groups. A number of leaders left AL and formed new parties. For example, Abdur

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<sup>65</sup>See the report by *New Age*: <http://newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2012-12-22j&nid=34199#.UOvC7-R19qw> (accessed on 25 December 2012).

Rashid Tarkabagish formed Gana Azadi League, General Mohammad Ataul Gani Usmani formed Jatiya Janata Party, and Khondaker Mustaq Ahmad formed Democratic League. But none of them attracted popular support.

During 1975-1978, there were two major factions within the AL. One was the mainstream AL led by Abdul Malek Ukil. The other was the BAKSAL led by Abdur Razzaq. In 1978, Razzaq left the BAKSAL and rejoined AL as general secretary, but in October 1983, Razzaq left the party to revive BAKSAL. He again returned to AL after Sheikh Hasina assumed party presidency in 1981. After 1981 Sheikh Hasina gradually succeeded to gain absolute control over AL. In 1992, there was another factional split when Dr Kamal Hossain left AL and formed a new party called Gono Forum.

The factional contestations within AL again became prominent during the military-backed caretaker government of 2007-2008. Four senior leaders of AL Amir Hossain Amu, Abdur Razzaq, Tofail Ahmed and Suranjeet Sengupta proposed democratic reforms within the party. However, these four leaders failed to mobilise support from the rank and file of the party. As a result, after the ninth parliamentary elections, these four leaders as well as many other leaders who supported the idea of democratic reforms within the party were sidelined. However, in contrast to the earlier period none of these 'reformist' leaders left AL to form new parties. They all remained within AL, and were later rehabilitated and rewarded with cabinet posts.

### ***Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)***

BNP did not face any serious factional split when the founder of the party Ziaur Rahman was alive. After his death in 1981, the party was divided into two groups, one headed by Abdus Sattar, who was the acting president and the other headed by Shamsul Huda Chowdhury. The Sattar group became the dominant faction when it succeeded in persuading Khaleda Zia to become first a senior vice chairman, and later the party chairman in 1984. In 1996, there was a factional split in the BNP when K M Obaidur Rahman left the party and formed Janata Dal. In the period 2001-2006, a group of senior leaders left the BNP and formed the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Bikalpadhara Bangladesh. But none of these groups who left the party could draw much popular support.

During 2007-2008 period similar to AL, BNP too was divided into the reformist vs the pro-Khaleda groups, the former demanding internal democracy within the party. The reformists were led by Mannan Bhuiyan, the then secretary general of the party. But Mannan Bhuiyan lost out to the pro-Khaleda group. Before being arrested Khaleda Zia dismissed Mannan Bhuiyan from the position of the party secretary general in 2007. As in the AL, so too in the BNP the reformists were sidelined after the 2008 parliamentary elections. But none of these marginalised leaders left the party to form a new party. Though no formal splits took place factional groupings have continued to persist within the BNP.

## **4. INTERNAL DEMOCRACY IN THE POLITICAL PARTIES**

### **4.1 Indicators of Internal Democracy**

Internal democracy in very broad terms refers to the participation and voice of the rank and file members as well as various strata of the party organisation in the deliberation and decision-making processes of a party. Internal democracy, thus, involves distribution of deliberative and decision-making power between members and leaders and between different organisational structures of the party. It requires transparency and inclusiveness in party practices (Croissant and Chambers 2010).

Different studies have highlighted different elements of internal democracy in parties. The three most commonly acknowledged elements are democratic leadership selection, candidate selection and policy-setting (Scarrow 2005). However, we can also consider other elements to judge the quality of internal party democracy. For example, representation of social diversity in party leadership, transparency and accountability in party and election campaign funding, and peaceful resolution of inter and intra-party conflicts can also be considered as measures of internal democracy in parties. In this study we have, therefore, used six indicators to assess the state of internal democracy in the parties. The six indicators are:

- processes of leadership selection
- candidate selection
- policy-setting
- diversity profile of party leadership
- party and campaign funding
- inter and intra-party conflict resolution

In Bangladesh, the 2008 RPO has established certain norms and rules which the political parties registered with the EC need to fulfill in order to contest in the election. Some of these rules include measures which are designed to promote internal democracy within parties. These include mandating election for leadership selection, establishing a goal of 33 per cent women in all organisational committees and nomination of candidates from the grassroots of the party. In addition to the RPO, party constitutions also provide for steps which aim to ensure intra-party democracy.

We discuss below first the RPO guidelines regarding the political party registration. Next we attempt to assess the state of internal democracy in the parties along the six indicators noted above.

## 4.2 The RPO Guidelines for Party Registration

The RPO guidelines for party registration was first formulated in 2008 prior to the ninth parliamentary elections. The guidelines were revised and approved by the ninth parliament in 2009.

According to article 90B (1) (a) of the RPO, a political party seeking registration with the EC has to fulfill one of the following conditions<sup>66</sup>:

- It has secured at least one seat with its electoral symbol in any parliamentary election held since the independence of Bangladesh.
- It has secured 5 per cent of the total votes cast in the constituencies in which its candidates took part in any of the aforesaid parliamentary elections.
- It has established a functional central office, by whatever name it may be called with a central committee to coordinate the party organisation at various administrative levels in the country, district offices in at least one-third of the administrative districts in the country, offices in at least 100 upazilas or metropolitan thanas having a minimum number of 200 voters as its members in each of them.

In addition, a political party is not qualified for registration if:

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<sup>66</sup>Article 90B (1) (a) of the RPO. *RPO Amendment Order Act, 2009* is available at: <http://www.ecs.gov.bd/MenuExternalFilesEng/262.pdf> (accessed on 6 August 2013).

- The party constitution is found to be contrary to the constitution of Bangladesh.
- The party constitution has any provision which seeks to discriminate against any person by virtue of religion, race, caste, language or sex.
- The party name, flag, symbol or any other activity threatens to destroy communal harmony or contribute to the secession of any part of the country.
- The constitution proclaims the goal of establishing a party-less or one-party system.
- The constitution has a provision for the establishment or operation of any office, branch or committee outside the territory of Bangladesh.<sup>67</sup>

The RPO also includes some guidelines to promote intra-party democracy. For example a party, desiring to be registered with the EC, has to incorporate the following provisions in its constitution<sup>68</sup>:

- It has to elect the members of the committees at all levels including members of the central committee.
- It has to establish a schedule for reserving at least 33 per cent of all committee positions for women including at the central committee level with the goal of reaching the target by 2020.
- It is prohibited from establishing any organisation or body as an affiliated or associated body drawn from the teachers or students of any educational institution or the employees or workers of any financial, commercial or industrial institution or establishment.

All four parties selected for the present study, i.e. AL, BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat were registered under article 90B (1) (a) (i) as all of these parties secured more than one seat under their electoral symbol in Bangladesh. AL, BNP and Jatiya Party also submitted their revised constitutions in compliance with the conditions in article 90B (1) (b) of the RPO within the time set for submitting the application for registration. However, Jamaat, as noted earlier could not submit their revised constitution to the satisfaction of the EC though the party attempted several revisions of the party constitution. In August 2013, Jamaat's registration with the EC was cancelled following a High Court decision.

### **4.3 Leadership Selection Process**

#### **4.3.1 Party Constitutional Provisions**

The constitutions of all the four parties prescribe elections for selecting leadership of various committees both at national and sub-national levels. Table 7 presents the leadership selection guidelines at the national level.

#### ***Bangladesh Awami League***

The constitution of AL has clear provisions that the party would select the leadership of all the central level committees through elections except for its advisory council. The president, general secretary, all members of the presidium, members of the parliamentary board have to be elected through the triennial councils of the party. However, 21 members out of 166 of the national committee and 26 members out of 73 of the CEC/CC/CWC are to be selected through nomination by the party president. The advisory council is also exclusively nominated by the president.

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<sup>67</sup>Article 90C of the RPO.

<sup>68</sup>Article 90B (1) (b) of the RPO.

**Table 7: Party Rules Regarding Leadership Selection Process at National Level**

Party	Positions/Body	Selection Process as in Party Constitution
Awami League	President	Election through the council
	General Secretary	Election through the council
	Presidium	Election through the council
	NC	Election through the council
	CEC/CWC/CC	Election through the council
	Advisory Council	Nominated by the president
	Parliamentary Board	Election through the council
BNP	Chairman	Election by direct vote of the members of the council
	Secretary General	Election by the national council
	NEC	Election by the national council
	NSC	Election by the national council
	Advisory Council to the Chairman	Nominated by the chairman
	Parliamentary Board	NSC members and representatives from concerned district
Jatiya Party	Chairman	Election through the national council
	Secretary General	Election through the national council
	Presidium	Election through the national council
	CEC	Election by the national councils and ex-officio(s) of the grassroots committees
	Advisory Council	Nominated by the chairman
	Parliamentary Board	Ex-officio and election from the presidium, based on seniority; Chairman can break the provision to ensure divisional representation
Jamaat	Ameer-e-Jamaat	Secret ballot by the members of CMC
	Secretary General	Appointed by ameer-e-Jamaat in consultation with CMS
	CMS	Selection, election and ex-officio(s) of various committees
	CWC	Election and ex-officio(s) of various committees
	CEC	Election by the members of the CMS

Source: Constitutions of the Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat.

### ***Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)***

As with the AL, the constitution of BNP provides for election of the leadership in all the central level committees except the advisory council which is exclusively to be nominated by the party chairman. The secretary general, members of the NEC and the NSC and the parliamentary board are to be elected through election in the national council.

### ***Jatiya Party***

Similar to the AL and the BNP, in Jatiya Party too the chairperson and secretary general are to be elected at the party's national council. While some of the members of the 299-member CEC are to be elected by the councilors, others, such as the president and secretary of the metropolitan, city and district committees are to be co-opted as ex-officio members of the CEC. As is the case in both AL and BNP, the members of the advisory council of Jatiya Party are nominated by the party chairman. The parliamentary board members are to be elected from among the presidium members based on seniority, but the party chairman has the right to deviate from the seniority rule in order to ensure representation from the various divisions.

### ***Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami***

The constitution of the Jamaat provides for the election of the ameer-e-Jamaat through secret voting by the councilors. In order to elect this top position, a three-member panel is to be prepared by the majlish-e-sura (CMS) but members are free to vote for any person who is not on the panel.<sup>69</sup> The secretary general is appointed by the ameer-e-Jamaat in consultation with the CMC. The members of the CMS are both elected and nominated from three different bodies: (i) members nominated by the outgoing CMS; (ii) the members of the central working council who are not nominated by the outgoing CMS; and (iii) all members of the women's majlish-e-sura.<sup>70</sup> The CWC is a mixture of both elected persons and ex-officio members.

#### **4.3.2 Leadership Selection in Practice**

Though party constitutions provide for election of top leadership positions in council meetings, in practice for the last three decades there has been no contestation for the position of the party president/chairman in the political parties. Hasina, Khaleda and Ershad have remained unchallenged and they have been authorised by their party councils to select other office bearers of the party.

### ***Bangladesh Awami League***

In interviews with the study team several AL leaders pointed out that over the years the national council meetings had increasingly become a rubber stamp in the hands of the party president. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s the council meetings witnessed lively debates over policies and selection of leaders, in recent years the council meetings had merely endorsed the wishes of the party president.

Since the establishment of the party in 1949, AL had elected seven presidents. The current president of AL, Sheikh Hasina, has been in office since 1981 and she has been elected by eight councils of the AL.

On the occasion of the 2009 council meeting, a three-member election commission, was formed but as there was no competing candidates for the posts of president and general secretary, no election was held and the two positions were voted by acclamation.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the council ceded its electoral powers to the president and general secretary with the authority to choose leaders for 45 posts in the 73-member CEC, although the party constitution empowers the president to choose only 26 members of this committee. The council further abdicated its electoral responsibilities by empowering the president and general secretary to choose the 13 members of the party presidium, 31 departmental secretaries including three joint general secretaries, seven organising secretaries and a treasurer.

In the 2012 council meeting again, both the president and general secretary were re-elected uncontested by the councilors. As in 2009, the councilors bestowed the president and general secretary with powers to bypass the electoral process and select the other members of the presidium, the national committee, the CEC/CC/CWC and the parliamentary board. Newspapers reported that as there was no election, party leaders were found to be lobbying with the party leadership for these vital posts.<sup>72</sup> These unelected committee members were subsequently declared to be office holders by the general secretary on 2 January 2013.

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<sup>69</sup> Article 15 of the constitution of Jamaat.

<sup>70</sup> Article 18 of the constitution of Jamaat.

<sup>71</sup> *The Daily Star's* interview with M A Mannan on 24 July 2009: <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=98487> (accessed on 23 April 2013).

<sup>72</sup> Tusher (2012).



Sheikh Hasina was also the only candidate for the position of party president in 2002 and was empowered by the council to select the members of the presidium and the CEC/CC/CWC. During the tenure of the military-backed caretaker government in 2007-2008, there were reports of debates initiated by some senior leaders in the AL that there was a need to break out of the grip of dynastic leadership and start practicing a democratic leadership selection process. In response to this debate, Sheikh Hasina, in an interview with the *Daily Star*, indicated that she believed that the post of party president as well as other party positions should not be held by the same person for more than two terms. She further proposed that no leader above the age of 60 should be allowed to remain a member of the AL presidium and the CEC/CC/CWC.<sup>73</sup> At that time at least ten presidium members and eight members of CEC/CC/CWC were more than 60 years of age.<sup>74</sup> However, these radical proposals were not followed up by Sheikh Hasina in the subsequent council meetings in 2009 and 2012.

### **Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)**

Since its founding in 1978 the BNP had three party chairmen. Khaleda Zia had remained as the party chairperson since 1984. Unlike AL which at least went through the motions of organising party council meetings, BNP had not bothered to organise party council meetings regularly. As noted earlier there was a gap of sixteen years between the last two council meetings held in 1993 and 2009.

Ahead of the 2009 national council, BNP too formed an EC<sup>75</sup>, but as Khaleda Zia was the only candidate for the chairman's position, the commission declared her to be the chairperson of the party until the next council meeting.<sup>76</sup> Before the council meeting, the NSC of the BNP created a post of a senior vice chairman and incorporated it in the party constitution. The apparent objective of such an amendment was to induct Tareque Rahman, the eldest son of Khaleda Zia, to the proposed position of senior vice chairman. He could thereby be empowered, when needed, to fill in for the chairman of the party. As expected, the council meeting approved the newly created position without any debate and elected Tareque to this new position.

The national council empowered Khaleda Zia to select the secretary general, members of the NSC and members of the NEC. There was no election to any of these positions. Khaleda declared a list of names to fill most of the posts of the members of these committees on 13 December 2009, four days after the council meeting.<sup>77</sup> She took a further 22 days to declare the names of the remaining committee members which were announced on 1 January 2010.<sup>78</sup>

It was reported that there were at least three leaders interested in the position of the secretary general: Advocate Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain and Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir. But as usual, no election took place and Khaleda was authorised by the national council to fill this position. She selected Khandaker Delwar Hossain as secretary general, possibly in recognition of his loyalty to her in defending her leadership of the BNP during the tenure of the military-backed caretaker government in 2007-2008 when she was under detention.

### **Jatiya Party**

Compared to AL and BNP the constitution of the Jatiya Party gives more power to the party chairman to select various leaders at the national level. Since the founding of the party in 1986, Jatiya Party's

<sup>73</sup>See the report by *The Daily Star*: <http://archive.thedailystar.net/2007/06/20/d7062001011.htm> (accessed on 23 April 2013).

<sup>74</sup>See the report by *The Daily Star*: <http://archive.thedailystar.net/2007/06/27/d706271503137.htm> (accessed on 26 August 2013).

<sup>75</sup>See the report by *The Daily Star*: <http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=116155> (accessed on 24 April 2013).

<sup>76</sup>Liton and Suman (2009).

<sup>77</sup>See the report by *The Daily Star*: at <http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=117711> (accessed on 23 April 2013).

<sup>78</sup>See the report by *The Daily Star*: <http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=120112> (accessed on 24 April 2013).



founder H M Ershad, had held the position of the party chairman except for two breaks. During 1991-1997 Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury was the acting chairman and during 2007-2009 Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud was again the acting chairman of the party.<sup>79</sup> However, in the inaugural session of the seventh national council held on 24 July 2009, Ershad informed the party that there was no further need for an acting chairman since he was once again ready to resume leadership of the party and to serve in this position until his death.<sup>80</sup> As in AL and BNP, so in the Jatiya Party, other office bearers of the party were handpicked by the party chairman H M Ershad.

### ***Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami***

The present leadership at the central level of the Jamaat took office on 3 June 2006 through its members (rokon) council. After registration with the EC in 2008, Jamaat has not been able to organise any council meeting till today even though under the RPO it was required to convene such a meeting by 25 July 2009.

### **Leadership Selection in the Two Study Areas Selected by CPD**

In the two districts and two upazilas where CPD collected data, some differences were found between the parties. In Jatiya Party all committees were formed by the party chairman. BNP was functioning with ad-hoc committees both at district and upazila levels. For AL, one district and both upazila committees were formed through 'kontho' (voice) vote. In one district, the committee was formed through secret ballot. In Jamaat, all committees were formed through secret ballot.

## **4.4 Nomination of Candidates**

### **4.4.1 The RPO Guidelines for Candidate Nomination**

The 2008 RPO attempted to encourage democratic practices in selection of candidate for electoral position. It stipulated the following provisions:

- Grassroots committees will have meetings or the local council will prepare a list of panels for each constituency.
- The selected panel of candidates will be sent to the central parliamentary board.
- The central parliamentary board must select candidates from the lists submitted from the grassroots.

The 2009 version of the RPO which was finally ratified by the ninth parliament however weakened the power of the grassroots committees in the candidate selection process. It provided for grassroots committee meetings to prepare a panel of nominations for each constituency, but stipulated that the recommendations of the grassroots committees would not be binding. The central parliamentary board will take into consideration the recommended panel, but will reserve the final authority to select its own candidate.

### **4.4.2 Candidate Nomination: Party Constitutional Provisions and Practice**

#### ***Bangladesh Awami League***

Article 27 of the AL constitution provides for a parliamentary board which is responsible for nominating candidates on behalf of the party for all national level elections including the national parliament.

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<sup>79</sup>Liton (2012).

<sup>80</sup>*The Financial Express*, 25 July 2009.

Persons seeking nomination for election have to apply to the parliamentary board with copies also sent to the AL CEC/CC/CWC through the general secretary of district AL. The district, upazila or thana AL executive committees send their recommendations or opinions along with a detailed description of the qualities and popularity of the respective candidates to the parliamentary board. But the board has the right to take the final decision in selecting candidates.

Ahead of the ninth parliamentary election the AL, through its CEC/CC/CWC meeting, decided to pick its parliamentary candidates from panels elected by grassroots committees by secret ballot. The party asked its grassroots committees to send a list of five names of potential candidates for a constituency.<sup>81</sup> Accordingly, all the grassroots committees sent a panel containing a list of one to five names, reported an office assistant at the AL office. In many cases, the grassroots committees of the party sent only one name as there was no competition.<sup>82</sup> It was reported that in the majority of constituencies nominations for the ninth parliamentary election were made from the recommended panel. However, in at least 40 constituencies, the party ignored the panel sent from the grassroots and nominated their own candidate.<sup>83</sup>

In selecting candidates for contesting elections to the ninth parliament, the role of the AL candidates during the 2007-2008 military backed government period was considered as an important factor. Those suspected to be involved in the so called 'Two Minus Strategy' or otherwise branded as reformist were not rewarded in the party nomination process. A number of 'reformist' senior leaders who applied for one or more constituencies were each offered nominations in only one constituency though these leaders had, in the previous elections, been nominated by the party to compete in at least two constituencies. Similarly, some of the mid-level leaders belonging to the 'reformist' group, were refused nominations by the party.<sup>84</sup> Several senior leaders against whom cases for corruption had been filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) during the 2007-2008 period, did not receive nomination. In some constituencies, new faces, ostensibly with a 'clean' public image were nominated though they were not recognised as prominent figures in the AL.<sup>85</sup> This suggests that the party leadership had taken cognisance of civil society campaign during 2004-2006 for clean candidates to be nominated for parliamentary elections and had made some effort to exclude such controversial figures from the party lists.

In the two districts and two upazilas where data was collected for the present study, there were nine constituencies. Grassroots committees recommended panels from all and in six constituencies parliamentary board chose from the grassroots panels. Out of nine constituencies, in four the panel consisted of three names and in three only one name. In only one constituency the panel consisted of five names.

### ***Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)***

The NSC of the BNP works as the party's parliamentary board. Although the board may choose a candidate from the panel proposed by a ward, union, upazila/thana or zila/district committee (if any) of the constituency concerned, the panel can be overruled by the parliamentary board whose decision in this regard is considered to be final.

In order to select candidates, before the 2008 parliamentary elections, the BNP formed seven special teams under the leadership of the NSC. The teams collected information from the grassroots and

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<sup>81</sup>See the report by *The Daily Star*: <http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=58324> (accessed on 23 April 2013).

<sup>82</sup>*Prothom Alo*, 10 November 2008.

<sup>83</sup>*The Daily Star*, 29 December 2008.

<sup>84</sup>*Prothom Alo*, 17 November 2008.

<sup>85</sup>*Prothom Alo*, 19 November 2008.

prepared a list of potential candidates for issuing nomination tickets. At the same time all the aspirant candidates were advised to collect party nomination forms. It was observed that the interview of the BNP ticket aspirants was itself a mere formality as the party leadership had already chosen its preferred candidates for the ninth parliamentary election.<sup>86</sup> When our study team interviewed grassroots level committee leaders in our study areas it was reported that the candidates chosen to contest the election for the ninth parliament were exclusively nominated by the parliamentary board through a process of interviews held in Dhaka.

#### 4.5 Policy-Setting

Policy-setting is regarded as yet another important criterion to measure internal democracy within parties. Several questions are pertinent, for example how inclusive or how centralised are the decision-making processes within parties? What roles do party members play in formulating party policies? Do they participate in consultative meetings, party forums and debates over policies? Are there mechanisms for internal party debates? How are policy disputes adjudicated in parties? (Sarrow 2005).

Here, again, we find a big gap between what party constitutions proclaim as standards and what happens in practice in Bangladesh. Election manifestos of parties are drafted by a small group without wide discussion and debate within different strata of the party. Policy discussions also remain generally pro-forma at national level committee meetings. In the two areas where CPD study team collected data party members and activists were found to be not involved in any policy discussion and debate. They were mostly engaged in organising celebration of various special days and/or mobilising protests against opposition.

Though constitutions of all parties provide scope for policy deliberation and debate within smaller key decision-making bodies of the party organisational structure, such as the presidium in AL and Jatiya Party, and the NSC in BNP, it is reported that in practice important policy decisions are frequently taken by the party chief. In our interviews with several leaders of AL, BNP and Jatiya Party we were informed about the highly dictatorial style of decision-making practiced by the party chiefs in formulating key policies for the party. Members of the top decision-making bodies of the parties generally go along with the preferred wishes of the party chief and rarely try to argue a position contrary to the one taken by the party chief for fear of either losing the party chief's favour or invoking the party chief's wrath.

A few examples below illustrate how the party chiefs dominate the decisions regarding key policies.

##### **Awami League: Decision Regarding the NCG System**

An account of the processes leading to the policy-decision by the AL to discard the non-party caretaker system of government underscores the supremacy of the party chief in policy making.

On 21 July 2010 the parliament formed a special committee to propose necessary amendments to the constitution and if needed to hold discussion with outside experts and other stakeholders.<sup>87</sup> The opposition led by BNP did not participate in the committee's work but the ruling alliance members did. The committee held 26 meetings between 29 July 2010 and 28 May 2011.<sup>88</sup> It also consulted various experts including leading constitutional lawyers and civil society leaders. In the committee meetings the AL members, many of whom are senior leaders of the party, recommended that the NCG system

<sup>86</sup>See the report by *The Daily Star*: <http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=65257> (accessed on 23 April 2013).

<sup>87</sup>See the report by *The Daily Star*: <http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=147617> (accessed on 29 August 2013).

<sup>88</sup>Liton, *ibid.*

should be kept without any major change. The other members of the ruling grand alliance also agreed with the recommendation but argued in favour of limiting the NCG for another two terms. The majority of outside experts, consulted by the committee, also recommended retention of the NCG system.

After the supreme court's verdict on 10 May 2011, which declared the NCG system to be *ultra vires* to the constitution, but observed that the next two parliamentary elections can be organised under the NCG for "the sake of safety of the state and its people" if the parliament so approves<sup>89</sup>, the committee met again on 26 May 2011 to discuss the court's verdict and its implications. The committee members discussed various options but came to the decision that the NCG system should be retained given the ground realities of Bangladesh politics. On 29 May 2011, a day before meeting the prime minister, the committee decided to recommend to the prime minister to continue with the NCG system but proposed that the NCG's tenure should be limited to 90 days and its powers should be restricted. But the prime minister did not agree with the committee's recommendations for retaining the NCG system. After meeting with the prime minister the committee then reversed its earlier recommendations and on 8 June 2011, the committee sent its proposals to the parliament recommending scrapping of the NCG system. On 30 June 2011 in the absence of the BNP-led opposition, the parliament approved the fifteenth amendment of the constitution which abolished the NCG system. Thus a key policy decision regarding the amendment of the constitution appears to have been taken by the AL party chief rejecting the unanimous opinion of the senior leaders of her own party.

### **BNP: Expulsion of Secretary General of the Party**

In the BNP too the party chief Khaleda Zia has often taken unilateral decisions without going through a consultative process. An illustrative case is Khaleda Zia's expulsion of the secretary general of the BNP, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and appointment of Khandakar Delwar Hossain as his replacement on 3 September 2007.<sup>90</sup> Khaleda made the announcement on her way out of a magistrate's court following her arrest order.

Earlier on 25 June 2007 Mannan Bhuiyan announced a set of proposals to democratise the party which included setting two term limits for the position of the chairman and secretary general of the party and organisation of a party council meeting to discuss the reform proposals. He picked up the support of many senior party leaders and tried to mobilise support from rank and file members behind his reform proposals. But Khaleda moved with a pre-emptive strike and expelled him exercising the dictatorial power bestowed on the party chairperson by the BNP constitution. Though Mannan Bhuiyan protested against this undemocratic act saying that "it is not logical to abuse power just because someone has it," and he received support from a large number of senior BNP leaders who in a signed statement termed this act of Khaleda as "undemocratic, unconstitutional and unacceptable," ultimately Khaleda's position prevailed. Neither Mannan Bhuiyan nor other senior party leaders could use either the party's internal mechanisms or their grassroots support base to challenge the chairperson's high handed decision. Many of the party leaders, who initially supported Mannan Bhuiyan, later switched their support to Khaleda and she succeeded in keeping control over the party.<sup>91</sup>

### **Jatiya Party**

The decision-making process in the Jatiya Party is even more high-handed. The Jatiya Party constitution itself gives the party chairman more power than in the AL and the BNP. The Jatiya Party chairman often changes his positions making contradictory statements and keeping his senior party leaders guessing

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<sup>89</sup>Sarkar (2011).

<sup>90</sup>Suman (2007).

<sup>91</sup>Suman, *ibid.*

as to what the party's position is on various issues. Ershad openly talks about himself being the final decision-maker in the party and the other leaders amounting to nothing<sup>92</sup>!

#### **4.6 Representation of Social Diversity**

Representation of social diversity is increasingly being recognised as an important quality of the democratisation process. In this study, we have attempted to examine whether the top leadership of the political parties represent the diversity of society in terms of gender, religion and socio-economic status of the population. We selected presidiums in the AL and Jatiya Party, and the NSC in the BNP as the highest decision-making body. We were able to collect data for about approximately half of the members of these bodies from the affidavits they have submitted to the EC for the ninth parliamentary elections. Data shows that these decision-making bodies are generally dominated by men (except in the AL), Muslims and people of higher socio-economic status.

##### **4.6.1 Women's Representation**

All the parties registered with the EC are bound by the RPO mandate to attain the goal of ensuring that by 2020, at least 33 per cent of all committee positions will be occupied by women, including in the party's central committee.<sup>93</sup> But with the exception of the AL, the presence of women is dismal in all other parties. In the AL, 33 per cent of the members of the AL presidium, the party's highest decision-making body, are women. In contrast, in the BNP's NSC and Jatiya Party's presidium only around 10 per cent are women; Jamaat had no women.

Though both AL and BNP have been headed by women for more than thirty years the overall representation of women in the different organisational bodies of the two parties is far from satisfactory. The parties have not made any plan to meet the RPO requirements of having 33 per cent women in all committees by 2020.

##### **4.6.2 Representation of Minorities**

Representation of members from minority communities is marginal in the highest decision-making bodies of all the political parties. The Jamaat constitution prohibits non-Muslims from membership. The Jatiya Party presidium has no non-Muslim member. AL and BNP each have only one Hindu senior party leader.

##### **4.6.3 Socio-Economic Status**

To assess whether people from all classes, rich and poor, have equal opportunities to reach the top decision-making levels of the party, we looked at two variables, occupation and education, to measure the socio-economic status of the leadership.

We could not identify the occupational and educational background of nearly half of the members of the highest decision-making bodies. However, our limited data show the dominant presence of people from upper socio-economic status background in the leadership position of the parties. The majority members have at least graduation and above degrees. Businessmen dominate the leadership positions in BNP and Jatiya Party, while in AL people identifying themselves as politicians appear to be dominant. However, it should be noted that many politicians have also transformed themselves as

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<sup>92</sup>Sayeed (2012).

<sup>93</sup>Article 90B (1) (b) (ii) of the RPO.

businessmen though they may not identify themselves as such. So it is difficult to distinguish a politician and a business person. None of the parties has prepared any plan to ensure the representation of the income-poor in the decision-making bodies of the parties.

## 4.7 Political Party Funding

In recent years the issue of transparency of party funding has become an important agenda in the discourse about party reforms as people with money are increasingly dominating electoral politics. Even a new term *mononoyon banijya* (nomination business) has been coined to describe the phenomenon of rich people getting party nominations for elections. The RPO of 2008 introduced some measures to bring transparency in party and election campaign funding. These are discussed below:

### 4.7.1 Election Campaign Funding

The RPO established some guidelines about campaign funding by parties as well as candidates for the ninth parliamentary election. It established a ceiling of BDT 1,500,000 for a candidate, and Tk. 50,000,000 for a party. The RPO made further provisions to introduce transparency in election campaign funding. It stipulates that:

- All contesting parties have to maintain proper accounts of all its income and expenditure for the period from the date of publication of election notification till the completion of elections.
- The election funds and expenses of a political party must be operated through a separate account with a scheduled bank.
- Every political party nominating any candidate for election shall submit its statement of election expenses to the EC for its scrutiny, within 90 days of the completion of elections in all constituencies.

Table 8 shows the reports of expenditure sent by the four parties to the EC.

**Table 8: Election Campaign Expenditure of the Political Parties**

Political Party	No. of Candidates Set up in the Ninth Parliamentary Election	Total Expenditure Shown (BDT)
Awami League	264	3,60,26,974
BNP	260	450,00,000
Jatiya Party	49	13,67,000
Jamaat	39	74,72,408

**Source:** Political Party Election Expenditure of Ninth National Parliamentary Election, Available at: [http://123.49.39.5/asset/exp\\_return/political.php](http://123.49.39.5/asset/exp_return/political.php) (accessed on 3 June 2013).

The total election expenditure reported by AL was Tk. 3,60,26,974 which implies that on an average the party spent Tk. 136,465 per candidate. The BNP's reported average per candidate expenditure is Tk. 173,076. Jamaat's total was Tk. 74,72,408 which implies its per candidate expenditure was Tk. 191,600; the highest of the four parties. Jatiya Party's per candidate expenditure of Tk. 27,898 was the lowest. The reported expenditures included donations to candidates, printing of campaign materials, rental of vehicles, arrangement of public rallies, honorarium and staff salary, office rental, administration cost and miscellaneous expenditure. The highest expenditure item for each party was incurred for printing of campaign material. AL and Jatiya Party did not directly donate any fund to any of its candidates, while BNP donated Tk. 55,95,000 and Jamaat donated Tk. 1,20,00,000 to their candidates.



The actual campaign expenditure was most likely much higher than what was reported by the parties to the EC. Additionally, candidates themselves spent a higher amount of funds than the RPO ceiling. Several MPs informed the study team that they were compelled to spend much more than the ceiling because the ceiling was unrealistically low.

#### 4.7.2 Non-Election Funding

The RPO regulation of 2008 also established guidelines for parties to receive funds for non-election related expenses such as office rent, administrative costs to run party offices, funds for arranging party programmes, councils/congresses, advertisements, etc. A limit was set for making donations or grants to a party. In the case of individuals, the limit for donations was Tk. 500,000 or its property or service equivalent. The limit in case a company or organisation was Tk. 2,500,000 or its property or service equivalent. The RPO prohibits a registered political party from receiving any gift, donation, grant or money from a foreign country, or a non-government organisation assisted by foreign aid, or from any person who is not a Bangladeshi by birth or any organisation established or maintained by such a person.<sup>94</sup>

Prior to 2008, there were no requirements for the political parties to submit an account of income and expenditure. But under the RPO regulations, political parties are now bound to submit audited yearly income and expenditure to the EC by 31st July of each year.<sup>95</sup> Unfortunately the regulations do not require public disclosure of the audited income and expenditure, which make this provision largely infructuous.

Since 2008 the registered parties have been submitting yearly audited accounts to the EC. Although, these audited reports are not published either by the EC or by the parties, this mandate at least, are compelling parties to submit reports for which they have to maintain some form of balance sheets of income and expenditure. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has observed that in practice the income and expenditure record is hardly maintained properly by the political parties. For example, parties do not always record donations in cash and kind in the register book. Moreover none of the parties has any registry of assets. The treasurer and other top leaders such as the party president/chairperson and the general secretary/secretary general are usually the custodians of the register book. Other members of the parties do not have access to such information. During the party council few of the parties disclose the information on income and expenditure to general members. None of the parties has yet had their accounts externally audited (TIB 2009).

In the two areas where CPD collected data, it was not possible to investigate the source of all the party funds. It appeared party funding was ad-hoc in AL, BNP and Jatiya Party. Funding was never discussed in party meetings. Nor did these parties maintain any account of income and expenditure. Only Jamaat required party members to donate a part of their monthly income to party fund. Account of income and expenditure was maintained and discussed in party meetings. But it was not possible to determine whether the recorded fund was the only source of Jamaat funds.

We should keep in mind that in actual practice, income formally accruing to the party as an institution provides only a small source of party funds. The bulk of funding is privately channeled to party leaders or accumulated by individual party members to sustain individual or party political activities. These funds not only underwrite election and related political expenditures, but also provide livelihood support for particular politicians. Such personalised sources of political funding, mostly provided

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<sup>94</sup>Article 90 (F) (a) of the RPO.

<sup>95</sup>Article 9 (b) of the *Political Party Registration Rule, 2008*: <http://www.ecs.gov.bd/MenuExternalFiles/Eng/238.pdf> (accessed on 5 August 2013).

by wealthy business people, incurs obligations for a politician and even their party while providing leverage to these business groups over a party's political agenda. More significantly, such funds remain undocumented and thus tend to originate from various pools of 'black' money. This contributes to corruption built upon collusive compacts between politicians and businessmen which compromise both the democratic and governance processes (Sobhan 2004).

#### **4.8 Inter and Intra-Party Conflict Resolution**

Political violence has become an integral part of politics in Bangladesh. The bulk of visible acts of political violence are generally carried out by workers and supporters of mainstream electoral political parties which is an indication of extreme intolerance in the political culture of the country. There is not only widespread inter-party violence, more significantly intra-party factional contestations often claim more victims than those between parties. In recent years, particularly during 1999 to 2006, various Islamist groups have unleashed a spate of violence targeting specific groups.

Political violence is triggered by various issues. They can be related to elections (pre and post) or they can be due to non-electoral issues. Often street agitation organised by political parties result in violence. Party activists arrive at meetings/agitations with arms and engage in clashes or destruction of property. Violence also takes places in colleges and universities between student fronts of various political parties. Control of campus is the motivation for this type of violence as the group that controls the campus gains the right to extort money and indulge in other illegal activities. More importantly, control of educational institutions open doors for these student leaders to graduate into major national leaders when they can aspire to get nomination for parliamentary seats. Through control of educational institutions the student leaders can also transform themselves into wealthy businessmen. Additionally, violence takes place for control of specific localities in urban neighbourhoods and in villages. Financial gain is generally the motive, but these non-political conflicts are given a political colour as the opposing sides compete for spoils of the system for building individual and party support.

Newspapers regularly report about inter-party and intra-party acts of violence. Generally student and youth groups affiliated with party use violence. In many areas 'god fathers' nurture violence. Table 9 illustrates the incidences of inter-party violence from 2002 to 2013; Table 10 illustrates the incidences of intra-party violence during the same period; and Table 11 presents data about violence between police and political parties. This information is being regularly documented by Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a leading human rights organisation in Bangladesh.

Several conclusions can be drawn from data presented in Tables 9, 10 and 11. First, the incidence of party-induced violence was much greater under party rule (2002-2006 and 2009-2013) than under the two year military rule (2007-2008). Second, incidence of inter-party violence is higher between the two main parties, AL and BNP compared to other parties (Table 9). Third, intra-party violence is higher when a party is in power than when it is in opposition. This is presumably because a ruling party has more resources to distribute, and hence, there is greater contestation and violence within ruling parties for power and resources. For example, Table 10 shows that compared to AL, more BNP people (ruling party then) lost their lives due to intra-party conflict during 2002 to 2006. The situation was reversed during 2009-2013 when more AL people (then ruling party) were killed by intra-party conflict.

It is interesting to note that there is much less incidence of intra-party violence within Jatiya Party and Jamaat. This could be due to the fact that these two parties are not the ruling parties, and hence, do not have monopoly control over the patronage resources. So the factional groups within these two parties do not have that much incentive to engage in violent clashes with each other. However, these two parties do engage in inter-party violence, even contestation with their alliance partners. Again,



Table 9: Inter-Party Violence: 2002-2013

Political Parties	2002-2006			2007-2008			2009-2012			2013		
	Incidents	Injured	Killed	Incidents	Injured	Killed	Incidents	Injured	Killed	Incidents	Injured	Killed
AL-BNP	522	11427	118	24	370	7	563	7534	100	148	2300	31
AL-Jatiya Party	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	155	-	1	7	-
AL-Jamaat	42	391	07	5	58	-	28	270	1	14	130	9
BNP-Jatiya Party	5	36	-	-	-	-	1	15	1	1	10	-
BNP-Jamaat	134	724	8	-	-	-	4	79	-	4	48	1
AL-BNP-Jamaat	8	150	7	-	-	-	11	163	-	6	43	-
BNP-Jatiya Party-Jamaat	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others	34	968	17	3	7	-	2	18	-	31	744	22

Source: Information Desk, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK).

Table 10: Intra-Party Violence: 2002-2013

Political Party	2002-2006			2007-2008			2009-2012			2013		
	Incidents	Injured	Killed	Incidents	Injured	Killed	Incidents	Injured	Killed	Incidents	Injured	Killed
AL	269	4599	37	1	20	-	799	9823	97	167	2072	25
BNP	284	6684	55	8	133	2	229	3383	21	92	1108	8
Jatiya Party	2	15	-	-	-	-	1	10	-	1	20	-
Jamaat	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	3	-	-	-	-

Source: Information Desk, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK).

**Table 11: Violence between Police and Political Parties: 2002-2013**

Political Party	2002-2006			2007-2008			2009-2012			2013		
	Incidents	Injured	Killed	Incidents	Injured	Killed	Incidents	Injured	Killed	Incidents	Injured	Killed
AL-Police	24	854	1	-	-	-	15	262	-	6	49	1
AL-BNP-Police	1	55	-	-	-	-	62	895	3	11	428	3
BNP-Police	6	80	-	1	100	-	81	2612	7	37	722	4
AL-Jamaat-Shibir-Police	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	27	-
Shibir-Police	-	-	-	-	-	-	18	364	1	45	463	9
Jamaat-Shibir-Police	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	208	1	68	1468	37
Jamaat-Police	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	576	-	14	173	11
Hefazat-e-Islam-Police	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	573	55

Source: Information Desk, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK).

violent clashes among alliance partners are greater when the alliance is in power. Thus, BNP-Jamaat became embroiled in many more incidences of violence when the alliance was in power compared to when they are out of power. Similarly no incidence of AL-Jatiya Party violence was reported during 2002-2006 while from 2009-2013, when both are members of the ruling alliance, 28 incidences of inter-party violence have been reported in newspapers.

Fourth, when parties are in opposition they get more involved in police-party violence (Table 11). This is true both for AL during 2002-2006 and BNP during 2009-2012. This demonstrates the intolerance and repressive policy of the government/ruling party towards the opposition.

Finally, 2013 was marked by high levels of political violence. Jamaat emerged as a major actor involved in inter-party and police-party violence. In 2013 Jamaat-Shibir-police violence claimed most injuries and deaths. Clashes between police and other Islamist groups such as Hefazat also led to many injuries and killings (Table 11).

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study has looked at the evolution of party system in Bangladesh over the last forty-three years. We have analysed and compared the main features of four major electoral parties, AL, BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat. We focused on several features such as ideology, organisational structure, leadership, membership, support base and factionalism. Since many observers have identified the lack of internal democracy within parties as the key constraint inhibiting consolidation of democracy in Bangladesh, we have explored in depth the challenge of democratising political parties. We used six indicators to assess internal party democracy. The indicators used are leadership selection, candidate nomination, policy-setting, representation of social diversity, party funding and inter and intra-party conflict resolution. We note below key findings of the study and suggest some priority actions.

### **5.1 Key Findings**

The major findings of the study are summarised below:

#### **Evolution of Party System**

- At the time of independence Bangladesh started with a single dominant party system. (Bangladesh) Awami League (AL) which led the Bengali nationalist struggle under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman swept the polls in 1970 winning a popular mandate for the party's nationalist agenda. AL also won overwhelming majority in the first parliamentary elections in 1973. But the AL-led government shifted to a single party system in 1975.
- The two military rulers floated two state-sponsored parties during 1975-1990. BNP was founded by Major General Ziaur Rahman in 1978 and the Jatiya Party was founded by Lt General H M Ershad in 1986. Both parties were formed with breakaway factions of existing rightist and leftist parties, and state patronage was used to build the parties.
- During the two decades of electoral democracy (1991-present), a two-party system emerged in Bangladesh which later evolved into two major electoral alliances led by the two parties, AL and BNP. Both parties have rotated in and out of power as a result of electoral verdicts.

#### **Party Ideology**

- Over the years the electoral parties have undergone some changes in their ideological orientation. There has been a narrowing of differences on economic policy issues as all the four parties have

committed themselves to market-friendly liberal economic policies. The main ideological divide amongst the parties is on the issue of secularism and definition of national identity. AL supports secularism and a non-religion based definition of national identity (Bengali nationalism), while BNP, Jatiya Party, and Jamaat define identity using Islam as a basis for nationalism (Bangladeshi nationalism). The Jamaat goes to the extreme of supporting the establishment of an Islamic way of life.

- The three electoral parties AL, BNP and Jatiya Party are 'catch all' parties appealing to all social groups to maximise electoral support. Jamaat attempts to draw specific Islamist groups.

### **Party Leadership**

- The party leadership has remained in the hands of single leaders for decades. Sheikh Hasina (AL), Khaleda Zia (BNP), and H M Ershad (Jatiya Party) have held party leadership positions without challenge for more than a quarter century. Even in the Jamaat, party leadership has been in the hands of two leaders, Ghulam Azam (1992-2000) and Matiur Rahman Nizami (2000-2010) for two decades.
- The top leadership in the two main parties, AL and BNP, are dynastic inheritors which make their positions unique and beyond challenge. Dynastic inheritance is pervasive in all the parties. In AL, not only Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's family, but the families of the four national leaders have produced dynastic successors. In BNP and Jatiya Party, several members of Khaleda Zia and Ershad's families have held various party positions and dynastic successors to top leaders are visibly present. Even in the Jamaat dynastic successors are being groomed in several constituencies.

### **Party Organisation**

- In theory, all parties have organisational structures from the national down to the local/ward level following the administrative divisions in the country. However, many of the organisational structures remain mostly in name. They hardly meet. For example, each party is supposed to organise a national council every three years to elect the party president/chairperson, general secretary and other members of different decision-making bodies, but these council meetings are not organised on a regular basis. Compared to BNP, AL has a better record in organising council meetings. Since its inception AL has organised 19 council meetings which means one council in every 3.3 years, but BNP was able to organise only five meetings since its founding which averages one council in 6 years. There was a gap of sixteen years between the BNP's last two council meetings held in 1993 and 2009.
- Not only are the meetings of the different organisational bodies infrequent, the meetings themselves have increasingly become pro-forma without substantial debate and discussion over policy matters in these meetings.
- The only party organisational structures that meet frequently are the top decision-making bodies, i.e. presidium in AL and the national standing committee in BNP. However, in our interviews with party leaders we were informed that the opinion of the party president/chairperson generally prevails in these meetings. Other members either go along with the party chief and/or strongly argue in favour of the leader's views. Few members in these bodies dare to disagree with the party chief or argue against the strongly held views of the party leader.

### **Party Factionalism**

- All parties are faction ridden. As ideology is receding in importance in differentiating various parties, factional groups contesting over distribution of resources are major sources of intra-party conflict

and violence. Often incidence of intra-party conflict is higher than that of inter-party conflict. Factionalism increases the power of the party chief as she/he is the only person acceptable to all contesting groups and can hold together various factions.

- While in the earlier years (1970s and 1980s), factional groups tended to break away and form new parties, since the restoration of electoral democracy in 1991, factional groups have stayed within parties and did not attempt to float other parties.

### **Key Features of Party Practices**

#### ***Party-Building through State Patronage and Clientelism***

- The practice of party-building through distribution of state resources, started by the military rulers during 1975-1990, continued even during the two decades of electoral democracy (1991-present). The control of state power became almost an obsession with both AL and BNP in the last two decades because the ruling party could use state resources to sustain and expand its partisan support, and more importantly punish its opponents. The rewards system for the ruling party included appointments to various institutions, business deals and contracts, impunity to ruling party *mastaans* (musclemen) to extract tolls and break laws and access to wide range of public services. The punishments that could be meted out to opponents included threats by ruling party *maastans*, court cases on various charges, imprisonment, and even physical harm or elimination.

#### ***Integration of Electoral and Movement Politics***

- Though in liberal democracies of the West, electoral politics negates the need of agitational street politics, in Bangladesh, political parties use the instrument of street agitation to boost support during elections campaign. Since 1991 both AL and BNP competed fiercely to win parliamentary elections, but afterwards the losing party demonstrated no interest in playing the role of responsible opposition in the parliament. Instead, the opposition party resorted to boycotting parliamentary sittings and engaged in various forms of street agitation such as hartals and mass agitation to topple the government. Indeed agitational street politics became the favoured strategy of the opposition parties to build popular support for contesting and winning elections.

#### ***Dominance of Money and Muscle Power***

- As contesting elections became more expensive, men with money became more influential in party politics. For many people, politics became a business investment which then had to be recouped with manifold returns. Businessmen contributed to party funds. They invested in particular politicians who could then work as their business intermediaries. Many businessmen also directly entered electoral politics. Politicians too started using their political connections to turn themselves into businessmen. The growing influence of money in politics already visible during the military rule, became further entrenched during the period of electoral democracy. For example, while during the 1970s only a quarter of MPs were businessmen, in the fifth through ninth parliaments over half of the MPs belonged to business class.
- There has been an increasing trend towards criminalisation of politics as *mastaans* became an integral part of political parties and electoral politics. While *mastaans* were sparingly used by politicians in the 1950s and 1960s, in the last two decades their use by political parties has become pervasive. The student and youth fronts of both the major parties are dominated by *mastaans* who have frequently turned campuses of educational institutions into battle fields. Many of these *mastaans* later become party bosses in various constituencies, and continued to practice

their violent and criminal activities. Successive regimes have used law enforcement agencies in a partisan manner to protect their own mastaans and arrest or drive away the mastaans serving the opposition. Mastaans used their immunity from law enforcement to extract tolls from various business and construction contracts to further their own individual wealth. The nexus between politicians, businessmen, mastaans and the law enforcement agencies, have thus, become embedded in the political system during the period of electoral democracy.

## **Internal Party Democracy**

### ***Leadership Selection***

- Though the party constitutions stipulate that the different leadership positions should be elected in the triennial council meetings these meetings are not organised regularly, and even when they are held, the party president/chairperson is elected unopposed. Councilors delegate their power to the party chiefs to select members of all other bodies. For more than a quarter century there has been no challenge to Hasina and Khaleda for leadership positions in their respective parties. They have always been elected unopposed and were given the authority by party councils to select other office bearers.
- However, in all the parties there has been change in the position of party general secretaries. There were rival candidates and factions supporting different candidates. But the fate of these candidates were not decided by votes in party councils. Rather, candidates preferred by the party president/chairman, were finally selected. The party president/chairman similarly selected members of all other key bodies who are supposed to be elected.

### ***Candidate Nomination***

- Of the four parties, AL and Jamaat made some efforts to follow the RPO guidelines during the 2008 parliamentary elections to get the grassroots committees of the parties to prepare a panel of nominees for each constituency. In AL, in many cases the recommended nominees of grassroots committee prevailed. However, in some cases AL ignored the panel nominated by the grassroots committees. BNP, on the other hand, made no effort to get nomination from grassroots committees. Instead seven special teams were formed under the leadership of the NSC to collect information from the grassroots and prepare a list of potential candidates before the 2008 parliamentary elections.

### ***Policy-Setting***

- Though constitutions of all parties provide scope for policy deliberation and debate within smaller decision-making bodies of the party organisational structure, in practice, key policy decisions are frequently taken by the party chief. Other members of the decision-making bodies rarely try to argue a position contrary to the one taken by the party chief. This leads to highly dictatorial style of policy-setting.
- At local levels, party activists are not engaged in discussion and debate of policy issues. They spend their time mostly planning celebration of different special days or organising rallies.

### ***Representation of Social Diversity***

- None of the parties have met the RPO guideline of having 33 per cent women in all its committees. AL has a better record than others. In the top decision-making bodies of the parties, AL has 33 per

cent women's representation; the other parties have much less (BNP: 10 per cent; Jatiya Party: 10 per cent; and Jamaat: 0 per cent). AL also has a better record in nominating and getting women elected as MPs from general seats. However, nearly half of these directly elected MPs are 'proxy' women, inheriting seats from their fathers or husbands. Representation of women in the sub-national level committees is low in all parties.

- The representation of religious minorities in top decision-making bodies of parties is poor. Both AL and BNP has one member each in their top decision-making bodies. There is none in the Jatiya Party. Jamaat only recruits Muslims.
- Businessmen dominate the top decision-making bodies, particularly in BNP and Jatiya Party.

### ***Campaign and Party Funding***

- The RPO guidelines stipulated a ceiling on campaign funding and required parties and candidates to submit reports to the EC. But these reports are gross underestimates of actual spendings. The parties are also required under the RPO to submit annual audited reports to the EC about party funds but these reports are not made public. In actual practice, most party and campaign funds are undocumented and non-transparent. The bulk of funding for party activities and election campaigns is privately channeled to either party leaders or accumulated by individual party members.

### ***Party-Induced Violence***

- Inter-party and intra-party violence is endemic amongst all parties. Various human rights organisations have regularly reported on high levels of violence such as killings and injuries, as a result of clashes between party activists. Generally, student and youth organisations associated with political parties, engage in violent clashes. Some of these violences occur between parties, and some happen within parties. In many cases, the conflicts are not due to ideological differences, but due to struggles over distribution of patronage. Incidence of intra-party violence is generally higher than inter-party violence. Additionally, incidence of intra-party violence is higher within ruling parties compared to opposition parties. This implies that most of the intra-party violence is caused by factional contestations over grabbing of business contracts or other patronage deals.

### ***Erosion of Democratic Roles***

- Though political parties led the democratic movements of the country after the restoration of electoral democracy in 1991 they fell short in institutionalising democracy, promoting good governance and practicing democracy within their own organisations. Mainstream electoral parties tended to become preoccupied with the mission of capturing state power with the goal of expanding their support base through patronage distribution. This weakened their ideological and policy orientation. Parties became less inclined to perform their key roles such as interest articulation, training of leaders, policy making and democratic consolidation.
- As parties became more clientelist, their competition for grabbing public resources encouraged corruption and in some cases criminalisation. Within parties factions have multiplied due to increasing contestation for a share of the spoils. Consequently, party discipline has started eroding. Factionalism and concentration of power in leadership has created a vicious circle. Factional conflicts could be settled only by a supreme leader. On the other hand, the dependence on individual, i.e. the leader rather than rules has removed other democratic means of conflict resolution.
- There are clear indications of erosion of intra-party democracy. Leadership is centralised and tends to be dynastic. Leadership at different strata are more likely to be selected rather than



elected through secret ballot. Grassroots committees retain limited control over nomination of candidates. Ideological and policy issues are rarely debated within party fora. Key policy decisions are generally taken by the party chief. Sources of campaign and party funding remain non-transparent. Parties are becoming increasingly dependent on a new rich class who invest in party activities or get involved in party politics for material gains.

- A new class of political musclemen are increasingly evident in leadership positions at the grassroots level who use violence to acquire huge wealth which is then used to establish their political authority and to maintain close relations with the administration and law enforcement agencies. The rise of such elements is contributing to increasing violence between parties and within parties which threaten the sustenance of democracy.

## 5.2 Suggested Actions

Democracy can be sustained only when parties make a credible commitment to promote democracy in the country and practice democracy within their own organisation.

- To promote democracy in the country, parties need to:
  - ✓ Stop using state agencies and state resources to reward supporters and punish opponents. Rule of law, a critical element of democracy, cannot be established unless parties refrain from using the state to promote partisan interest.
  - ✓ Stop using violence to settle inter-party and intra-party conflicts. The persistent violence between and within parties and between parties and law enforcement agencies constrain development of democratic means of conflict resolution.
  - ✓ Stop the practice of boycotting parliament when they are in the opposition. They need to make parliament the central agency to hold the government accountable.
  - ✓ Shift from being clientelist patronage distribution machines to rule-based policy-oriented organisations. Parties are not able to perform their democratic roles as they are busy building their patron-client networks which are dependent in many areas on corrupt and criminal activities.
  - ✓ Maintain a separation between the party and government. Party officials, e.g. president, general secretary and other office bearers should devote full time to party work and not be assigned to government positions, e.g. cabinet ministers. Separation of party machinery from the government will enable the ruling party to perform a very important role. It can critique the government's policies and make the government accountable to citizens without challenging its electoral mandate.
  - ✓ Focus on their role of aggregating and articulating the interests of all social groups and designing policies to address these interests. Parties are increasingly being dominated by interests of business groups. They need to articulate the interests of the excluded groups who constitute the majority of the electorate.
- To promote the practice of democracy within their own organisations, parties need to primarily follow their own constitutions as well as RPO guidelines. More specifically parties need to:
  - ✓ Select leaders of all committees at all strata through regular elections using secret ballot.
  - ✓ Nominate party candidates for elective offices from panels selected by grassroots committees.
  - ✓ Prepare plans to progressively increase the representation of women, minorities and income-poor in party decision-making bodies.



- ✓ Energise party fora at different levels through discussion and debate of party ideology and policy options.
- The competition to raise huge sums of money for party/campaign activities are making parties dependent on special interests and corrupt and criminal elements. Parties should receive funds from the state budget for funding both the party organisation as well as for election campaign expenses. Additionally the ceiling on campaign and party funding which has been set by the RPO should be monitored by the election commission.
  - ✓ Public funds provided to parties should be managed professionally.
  - ✓ The funds should be independently audited, presented before parliament and made public through website.
  - ✓ Violation of rules regarding campaign and party funding should be investigated. Individual organisations breaking these rules should be punished.

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