

Parliamentary elections, scheduled to take place on January 22, 2007, were postponed January 11 when President Iajuddin Ahmed resigned from his position as Chief Advisor of the Caretaker Government, declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew. Polls were expected to elect 300 members to the 9th Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament) for a five-year term. The five-year tenure of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led four party alliance ceased at midnight on October 27, 2006 and was marked by two days of intense violence between party activists from the four party alliance and the main opposition party, the Awami League (AL).

Crackdown on Corruption

After the resignation of the members of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) on February 7, 2007,¹ Lt. Gen (Rtd) Hasan Mashud Chowdhury was appointed Chairman of the ACC. Lt. Gen Mashud formerly served as an advisor in the previous Caretaker Government appointed in October 2006. On his appointment, Lt. Gen Mashud stated that any person engaged in corrupt activities would be dealt with accordingly regardless of their status.

In the continuing drive against corruption, at midnight on March 7, joint forces arrested the Senior Joint Secretary General of the BNP and son of former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, Tareque Rahman. Rahman was taken from his mother's house, where he had been residing since the declaration of the State of Emergency. Rahman was arrested under the Special Powers Act² and, as of March 19, is currently being detained on charges of extortion while police continue to investigate his past business deals. Rahman's trial resumes on March 29, 2007.

Sudha Sadan, the residence of AL leader, Sheikh Hasina, was also searched on March 7 in an attempt to arrest her cousin,

Sheikh Helal, who is wanted for questioning on corruption charges. Additionally, the bank accounts of the former Law Minister, Moudud Ahmed and his wife were frozen.

The ACC published a list of 50 people who were given 72 hours to submit wealth reports to the Commission. Twenty-one people on the list have already been arrested and many of the remaining individuals were arrested by joint forces on their exit of ACC offices.

In total, over 100 top political leaders, mostly from the BNP government, but also the former AL government of 1996-2001, have been detained or arrested. See page three for a list of high profile detainees.

Election Commission

The newly re-constituted Election Commission (EC) began preparing draft proposals for electoral reforms and said they will take as much time as needed to implement their plan. Additionally, the EC is exploring the possibility of a voters' list with photographs as well as voter identification cards. The Army has offered to assist the EC in the preparation of voter ID cards. The Commission is also planning other reforms, including instituting mandatory registration

¹ THE ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION (ACC) WAS ESTABLISHED IN 2004 BY THE BNP-LED GOVERNMENT TO REPLACE THE HIGHLY POLITICIZED BUREAU OF ANTI-CORRUPTION (BAC) DUE TO PRESSURE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO CURB CORRUPTION. HOWEVER, THE ACC WAS VIRTUALLY INEFFECTIVE BECAUSE MOST ACC MEMBERS WERE THE SAME OFFICIALS OF THE DEFUNCT BAC AND COULD NOT AGREE ON A COMMON ANTI-CORRUPTION POLICY. ON HIS APPOINTMENT AS CHIEF ADVISOR, DR FAKRUDDIN AHMED PLEDGED TO ACT ON CORRUPTION THROUGH THE ACC AFTER NEEDED REFORMS TO MAKE IT MORE EFFECTIVE.

² THE SPECIAL POWERS ACT OF 1974 ALLOWS FOR THE DETENTION OF INDIVIDUALS WHO MIGHT COMMIT "PREJUDICIAL ACTS" AGAINST THE STATE AS WELL AS SPEEDY TRIALS FOR OFFENDERS. THIS ACT HAS BEEN USED BY VARIOUS GOVERNMENTS IN BANGLADESH TO DETAIN AND ARREST OPPONENTS.

(Continued on page 2)

of political parties; limiting the number of constituencies candidates can contest to three (they can currently run in up to five); requiring candidates to cover the cost of the by-elections; and banning all expenditures on campaigning, including posters and rallies (exceptions would include door-to-door campaigning).

Political Parties

A new factor in the political landscape is the stated intention of Nobel Laureate, Dr. Mohammad Yunus, to start his own party, *Nagorik Shakti* (Citizens' Power). After his announcement in February 2007, public support was mixed. Further details about the party remain unclear and it is uncertain if anyone has, or will, join the party. During the recent convocation at Dhaka University, members of the student wing of the AL, Bangladesh Chhatra Dal, clashed with police during a demonstration against Dr. Yunus' presence at the event.

Both the BNP and the AL have called for the postponed elections to take place as soon as possible. Leader of the AL, Sheikh Hasina, has called for elections to be held by June. Before boarding a plane to the U.S., Sheikh Hasina held a press conference stating that if elected she would legitimize the actions of the Caretaker Government (CG). This statement was met with strong criticism by supporters of the current CG.

Ban on Politics

After the declaration of the State of Emergency, all political processions, meetings and rallies in public were banned by the CG. On March 8, the CG took the ban a step further and announced a ban on all 'indoor' politics and political activities for an indefinite period. All political parties were publicly warned of stern action against any violators of the ban. A press release issued by the Home Ministry stated that the government showed a lenient attitude towards the ban but that recently the political parties were 'misusing the leniency.' As a result of the ban, many party offices throughout the country have shut down, and party head offices in Dhaka shut down indefinitely.

NDI Programs

At a meeting with new members of the EC, NDI offered to assist the Commission with preparations for the election. The Commission outlined their reform agenda and stated that they would like to have the reforms in place in advance of announcing an election schedule.

On March 12, NDI hosted a conference entitled: *Getting the Names Right: An NDI Conference on the Voters List*. The purpose of the conference was to bring together representatives of the EC, political parties and civil society to discuss steps the various actors could take to revamp the current voters' list. Guest speakers at the Conference were Mr. Glenn Cowan, co-founder & CEO of Democracy International and former Director for NDI's Asia Programs, and Mr. Frank Vassallo, an electoral commission and registration expert, formerly of the Australian Electoral Commission who has worked extensively assisting developing democracies with voters' lists. Mr. Vassallo pointed out that if the current voters list cannot be adequately corrected, it would be better to conduct a fresh enrolment. Mr. Cowan remarked that internal political party reform was critical for the holding of a free and fair election. While in Dhaka, Mr. Vassallo held separate meetings with civil society representatives on how they can assist the EC in the voter registration process. Mr. Cowan met with representatives of the BNP and the AL who felt that their involvement in such a process would violate the ban on political activity by the political parties and therefore were not eager to engage in such activities.

High Profile Political Detainees

Name	Affiliation	Former Position	Date Detained	Status
Tarique Rahman	BNP	Senior Joint Secretary General and son of former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia	March 7, 2007	In Jail awaiting trial for extortion charges
Dr Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain	BNP	former Health Minister	March 7, 2007	In jail on fraud-related and corruption charges
ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury	AL	Mayor of Chittagong City Corporation	March 7, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Barrister Nazmul Huda	BNP	former Communications Minister	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges. Allegations of corruption in land deal to his wife's NGO and the licensing of CNG auto rickshaws
Salauddin Quader Chowdhury	BNP	Parliamentary Affairs Advisor to Begum Khaleda Zia and former State Minister	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Iqbal Hassan Mahmud	BNP	former State Minister for Power	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges relating to the power sector during his tenure as Minister
Amanullah Aman	BNP	former State Minister for Labour and Manpower	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Mir Nasir Uddin	BNP	former State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu	BNP	former Deputy Minister for Land	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Al-Hajj Mossadek Ali Falu	BNP	Political Advisor to Begum Khaleda Zia and former MP (won Dhaka 10 By-election in 2004)	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Naser Rahman	BNP	Member of Parliament and son of former Finance Minister, Saifur Rahman	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption and extortion charges
Wadud Bhuiyan	BNP	Member of Parliament, Chairman of Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Manjurul Ahsan Munshi	BNP	Member of Parliament	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Ali Asgar Lobi	BNP	Member of Parliament, Chairman of Bangladesh Cricket Board	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Salahuddin Ahmed	BNP	State Minister for Communications	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Tariqul Islam	BNP	Forest & Environmental Minister	February 5, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Mohammad Nasim	AL	Minister for Home Affairs during AL Government 1996-2001	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir	AL	State Minister for Planning	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Salman F. Rahman	AL	Advisor for Development Affairs to Sheikh Hasina and co-owner of Beximco group of Industries (ceramics & textiles)	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
A.N.H. Mostafa Kamal	AL	Member of Parliament	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Pankaj Debnath	Awami Shechchashebok League	Current President and Secretary	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges
Firoz Mia	Telephone Labourers Union	Current Leader. BNP activist who politicized the Union	February 4, 2007	In jail on corruption charges