

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: BGD30767
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Keywords: Bangladesh – Bikolpo Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) – Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

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

Questions

- 1. Please provide information regarding when and how Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) was formed, its policy platform and standing in the upcoming elections.**
- 2. Is there any evidence to suggest that ordinary BDB supporters and activists are being adversely treated by the government of Bangladesh?**
- 3. Is there any evidence to suggest that ordinary BDB supporters and activists are being adversely treated by members and supporters of BNP? If so, how, at what level and what has been the government's reaction, if any?**
- 4. Is there any evidence to suggest that BNP members who have defected to BDB have faced a stronger reaction by BNP members and supporters?**
- 5. Is there any evidence to suggest the presence of "pro-independence" and "anti-independence" factions within the BNP?**
- 6. Is there any evidence to suggest that one faction is more dominant or one faction is being adversely treated by the other?**
- 7. Is there any evidence to suggest that the "pro-independence" supporters of the BNP are being adversely treated or otherwise harmed by Jamaat-e Islami?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please provide information regarding when and how Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) was formed, its policy platform and standing in the upcoming elections.**

The *Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh* (BDB; or Alternative Stream Bangladesh also *Bikalpadhara Bangladesh*) was founded by Professor A.Q.M. Badruddoza Chowdhury. Badruddoza Chowdhury was formerly a member of the BNP and the President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. He is reported to have quit the office of the Presidency in mid-2002 after his former colleagues in the BNP orchestrated a revolt against him. In 2003 Badruddoza Chowdhury began to speak out on the need for a third force in Bangladesh politics. He expressed an interest in recruiting "civil-society members" for a proposed party that would

“purge corruption and terrorism from the country and establish good governance”. Badruddoza Chowdhury referred to his ideas and his envisaged party as an *alternative stream* in Bangladesh politics. In March 2004 Badruddoza Chowdhury was joined by his son, Mahi Badruddoza Chowdhury, and, also, former BNP lawmaker, Major (retd) Abdul Mannan, who defected from the BNP to become the leading figures in the new party. Reporting on the defections, a *One World South Asia* article also notes the BDB claim “that at least 30 members of Parliament (MPs) are ready to quit the BNP to join Chowdhury”. The BDB has continued to make this claim, while refusing to name names, although no other BNP parliamentarians appear to have defected to the BDB at his time. There have, however, been defections from the BDB’s ally, the *Islami Oikya Jote* (IOJ; or Islamic Unity Front). In June 2006, it was reported that: “Some 300 leaders and activists of Mufty Fazlul Haque Amini-led IOJ from Sarail in Brahmanbaria joined BDB formally”. (For information on Chowdhury’s interest in recruiting “civil-society members”, see: ‘B Chowdhury-Lawyers’ 2004, *United News of Bangladesh*, 6 January – Attachment 15; for further information on Badruddoza Chowdhury’s quitting of the BNP and the Presidency, for the stance on corruption and terrorism, see: ‘B Chowdhury-Platform’ 2004, *United News of Bangladesh*, 25 January – Attachment 16; for information of the defection of Mahi Badruddoza Chowdhury and Major (retd) Abdul Mannan, see: Khan, S 2004, ‘Bangladesh Government Guns for Defectors’, *One World South Asia*, 18 March <http://southasia.oneworld.net/article/view/81874/1/> – Accessed 10 October 2006 – Attachment 9; for information on the IOJ defections, see: ‘300 IOJ activists join BDB’ 2006, *Bangladesh Observer* website, 6 June <http://www.bangladeshobserveronline.com/new/2006/06/06/national.htm> – Accessed 11 October 2006 – Attachment 11).

The Political Handbook of the World states that: “The BDB was launched in May 2004”. *The United News of Bangladesh* reported the launch of the BDB on 11 March 2004. In a recent article on Bangladesh politics, the prominent Bangladeshi journalist Zafar Sobhan states that: “ex-president and ex-BNP secretary general, Badruddoza Chowdhury, ... split from the party to form the Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) in 2003”. An overview of the available country information suggests that the BDB, as a formalized party, came into being in March 2004 and that, from December 2003 up until this time, the nascent beginnings of the BDB were formative in the “alternative stream” movement which was organizing support for the ideas of Badruddoza Chowdhury. The earliest reports that could be located on the movement appeared on 18 December 2003. On this day *United News of Bangladesh* reported Badruddoza Chowdhury’s claims that police had attacked an “Alternative Stream” demonstration. It was also reported on 18 December 2003, by *The Independent*, that AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury had held a press conference during which Badruddoza Chowdhury had hinted that he was considering forming a new party: “it seems that government wants me to float a political party soon”, he is reported to have said, commenting on the manner in which he felt that the government was mishandling its responsibilities. On 6 January 2004 *United News of Bangladesh* reported that “Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury today said that civil society cannot run government so he would form a political party through the current process of eliciting opinion of the civil-society members”. The report also stated that: “Chowdhury, advocating for an alternative stream in the present state of national politics, didn’t specify the time or how, when and with whom he will float his political platform”. On 25 January 2004 *United News of Bangladesh* reported that: “Badruddoza Chowdhury today disclosed [that] he would announce his political ‘platform’ next month”. And, on 11 March 2004 *United News of Bangladesh* reported that: “A much-orchestrated new political platform styled Bikalpa Dhara (Alternative Stream) with former President Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury as its convenor was announced today amid raging commotion” (Banks, A.S., Muller, T.C. &

Overstreet, W.R. 2006, *The Political Handbook of the World*, CQ Press, Washington DC, p.93 – Attachment 19; Sobhan, E. 2006, ‘Musical Chairs’, *Economic and Political Weekly* website, 16 September 2006 <http://www.epw.org.in/articles/2006/09/10543.pdf> – Accessed 10 October – Attachment 10; ‘B Chowdhury says, his initiative is for alternative force’ 2003, *The Independent*, 18 December – Attachment 14; ‘B Chow-Condensation’ 2003, *United News of Bangladesh*, 18 December – Attachment 13; ‘B Chowdhury-Lawyers’ 2004, *United News of Bangladesh*, United News of Bangladesh, 6 January – Attachment 15; ‘B Chowdhury-Platform’ 2004, *United News of Bangladesh*, 25 January – Attachment 16; ‘Bikalpa-Committee’ 2004, *United News of Bangladesh*, 11 March – Attachment 17).

In the lead up to the 2007 elections the BDB has set itself in opposition to the ruling BNP and has sought to enter into a number of alliances to enhance its standing. On 1 September it was reported that “Jatiya Oikya Mancha President Dr Kamal Hossain, Bikalpadhara Bangladesh President Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and Bangladesh Tarikat Federation President Syed Majibul Huq Maijbhandari [had] launched the Jatiya Oikya Front (National United Front) to bring about meaningful and qualitative change in politics and governance”. Further details follow concerning the platform of the JOF and its burgeoning association with the Awami League (AL) led 14-party coalition:

In its 7-point programme, the JOF advocated electing honest and competent representatives of the people, responsible parliament and a government accountable to the electorate.

About its relations with AL-14 party combine, JOF leaders said they have already “psychological attachment” with the mainstream opposition, which could be broadened into an electoral understanding in future as part of a greater election “morcha” (platform). (‘Drawing the battle lines’ 2006, *United News of Bangladesh*, 1 September – Attachment 18)

For an overview of the standing of Bangladesh’s major political groupings in the upcoming 2007 elections, see Zafar Sobhan’s recent article on the subject which is supplied as Attachment 10 (Sobhan, E. 2006, ‘Musical Chairs’, *Economic and Political Weekly* website, 16 September <http://www.epw.org.in/articles/2006/09/10543.pdf> – Accessed 10 October 2006 – Attachment 10). For further information on the BDB alliance with the JOM, see: ‘B. Chy, Kamal demand govt’s resignation’ 2004, UN Sustainable Development Networking Programme website, 29 September <http://www.sdnbd.org/sdi/news/general-news/Sept-2004/29-09-2004/Political.htm> – Accessed 10 October 2006 – Attachment 12.

Available country information indicates that BDB meetings and rallies have been attacked, on a regular basis, by supporters of the BNP and/or the supporters of BNP allied parties and front organisations. There is also evidence to suggest that senior figures in the BDB are being targeted by the BNP in a sustained and ongoing program of systematic harassment (for reports of attacks on BDB supporters, see Question 2 and Question 3). For example:

- On 30 April 2006, *The United News of Bangladesh* reported that “[a] mysterious fire [had] broke[n] out at the Baridhara residence of former President and Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) chief Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury”. In the aftermath, Chowdhury “alleged that it was an attempt to kill him and his family members” (‘Fire at former President Prof. B Chowdhury’s residence’ 2006, *United News of Bangladesh*, 30 April – Attachment 6).
- On 12 February 2006, *The United News of Bangladesh* reported that “[a]t least 13 activists of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) were injured as their procession came

under attack by miscreants in the town Saturday night. Witnesses said the attackers also damaged the door and windows of residence-cum-office of Firoz M Hasan, senior secretary general of BDB, and beat up his guard. ...Local BDB leaders blamed Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student wing of ruling BNP, for the attack” (‘13 BDB activists injured in attack in Thakurgaon’ 2006, *United News of Bangladesh*, 12 February – Attachment 7).

- On 29 October 2005, *The Independent* reported that “[a]ctivists of the ruling BNP and its youth front Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal (JJD) allegedly launched an attack at a press conference of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) Saturday afternoon in Noakhali leaving five people, including its secretary general Major (rtd) Abdul Mannan, injured” (‘BNP men attack BDB activists in Noakhali’ 2005, *The Independent*, 29 October <http://independent-bangladesh.com/news/oct/30/30102005pl.htm#A3> – Accessed 9 October 2006 Attachment 3).
- Mannan was reportedly also attacked at the time of the mid-2004 Bangladesh by-elections. According to *The News From Bangladesh*, the BDB was adversely affected by a number of electoral irregularities at this time in “the by-poll to Dhaka-10 constituency”: “in most of the centres the agent of the BDB candidate Major (retired) Abdul Mannan whose election symbol was “kula” was not seen. Major (retired) Mannan was also attacked by a gang of youths at Nakhhalpara Hossain Ali High School centre at noon” (‘Mannan to move HC for cancellation of polls result-2 observer teams see instances of fraud’ 2004, *News From Bangladesh* website, 3 July <http://bangladesh-web.com/view.php?hidDate=2004-07-03&hidType=POL&hidRecord=0000000000000000000013350> – Accessed 9 October 2006 – Attachment 4).
- On 26 October 2004, *The Daily Star* reported that “activists of ruling BNP’s front organisations” had twice “disrupted a mass dialogue of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) and Jatiya Oikya Mancha” during the month of October (first in Rangpur and then in Mymensingh). On the latter occasion the youths who caused the trouble are reported to have run “to the dais to attack the leaders. But BDB and Oikya Mancha adherents, with a dozen police, formed a shield and successfully fended off the attack” (Mahmud, S. & Islam, A. 2004, ‘BNP activists disrupt BDB, Oikya Mancha meet in Mymensingh’, *Daily Star*, 26 October <http://www.thedailystar.net/2004/10/26/d4102601022.htm> – Accessed 9 October 2006 – Attachment 2).

The BDB maintains a website at: <http://www.bikolpodhara.com/>

2. Is there any evidence to suggest that ordinary BDB supporters and activists are being adversely treated by the government of Bangladesh?

There have been reports BDB supporters being threatened and attacked by the police. These attacks have typically occurred at BDB rallies or meetings. One report was located which detailed claims a BDB supporter had been pursued by police outside this context for the purpose of extortion, and that police had arrested and tortured the man in question (see Attachment 21). An overview of the available reportage is presented below in reverse chronological order. This overview attempts to provide an impression of the nature of the

reports which have appeared since late 2003, and should not be considered an exhaustive list of all the reports available.

- On 30 March 2004 *The Daily Star* reported that “Police arrested a trader apparently for supporting Bikalpa Dhara (Alternative Stream) Sunday and allegedly extorted Tk 1 lakh from his family for fair treatment in custody”. The arrested man’s wife “alleged that police tortured Nasir in custody for a bribe of Tk 1 lakh. “Police hanged him by a chain from the ceiling and beat him at night until we paid the sum,” she told newsmen, adding, “We gave the money to Sub-inspector Mosharraf.” Police denied the allegation, and reportedly claimed the arrest concerned “a case filed in 2000 under the Narcotics Control Act” (‘Cops nab one, take ‘bribe’ for supporting Bikalpa Dhara’ 2004, *Daily Star* website, 30 March <http://www.thedailystar.net/2004/03/30/d40330011818.htm> – Accessed 19 October 2006 – Attachment 21).
- On 17 June 2004 an editorial piece in *The Daily Star* alleged police complicity in attacks on BDB supporters by supporters of the BNP. The piece refers to two attacks, observing that: “It is extremely worrying that the police intervened only during the second attack, which goes to imply that the first assault was allowed to happen”. The piece also states: “However, we note that both Mannan and Mahi rushed into the police headquarters where they felt safe” (‘Attack on Bikalpa procession’ 2004, *Daily Star* website, 17 June <http://www.thedailystar.net/2004/06/17/d40617020231.htm> – Accessed 19 October 2006 – Attachment 31)
- On the 18 December 2003 *United News of Bangladesh* reported that: “Former President Prof Dr AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury today condemned police attack on a peaceful procession of Alternative Stream and arrest of two youths in Rajshahi” (‘B Chow-Condensation’ 2003, *United News of Bangladesh*, 18 December – Attachment 13).
- On 18 December 2003 *The Independent* reported the claim of AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury that “intelligence agencies were videotaping the patients and people coming to [his] KC Memorial Clinic. He said posters were also pasted on the walls in the area where he resides warning people with dire consequences if they attended the milad mahfil at KC Memorial Clinic or went there” (‘B Chowdhury says, his initiative is for alternative force’ 2003, *The Independent*, 18 December – Attachment 14).

Nonetheless, there have also been reports that police have sometimes acted to defend, or provide protection to, BDB leaders and supporters (for examples, see: Mahmud, S. & Islam, A. 2004, ‘BNP activists disrupt BDB, Oikya Mancha meet in Mymensingh’, *Daily Star*, 26 October <http://www.thedailystar.net/2004/10/26/d4102601022.htm> – Accessed 9 October 2006 – Attachment 2; ‘Bikalpadhara’s programme foiled as local administration imposes section 144 at poura auditorium’ 2005, *United News of Bangladesh*, 19 June – Attachment 30; ‘Attack on Bikalpa procession’ 2004, *Daily Star* website, 17 June <http://www.thedailystar.net/2004/06/17/d40617020231.htm> – Accessed 19 October 2006 – Attachment 31).

3. Is there any evidence to suggest that ordinary BDB supporters and activists are being adversely treated by members and supporters of BNP? If so, how, at what level and what has been the government's reaction, if any?

There have been reports of BDB supporters being threatened and attacked by supporters of the BNP or BNP allies. At least two BDB supporters have been killed by persons suspected to be BNP supporters (see Attachment 25 and Attachment 32). Attacks have typically occurred in the context of BDB rallies or meetings, and it is often reported that police have failed to intervene or that the police force has even acted to facilitate the attacks. An overview of this reportage is presented below in reverse chronological order. This overview attempts to provide an impression of the nature of the reports which have appeared since late 2003, and should not be considered an exhaustive list of all the reports available.

- On 9 August 2006, *The United News of Bangladesh* reported the claim of “Bikalpadhara Bangladesh (BDB) president Prof. AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury” that: “fearing a debacle in next election, BNP has let loose its pet goons on leaders and workers of his party and other opposition parties” (‘Fearing election debacle, BNP let loose its goons on opposition, allege B Chowdhury’ 2006, *United News of Bangladesh*, 9 August – Attachment 5).
- On 4 May 2006 *United News of Bangladesh* reported that “At least five workers of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) were injured in separate attacks by terrorists in Harishpur and Tebaria areas of the town on Wednesday” (‘Five Bikalpa Dhara activists injured in attack by terrorists in Natore’ 2006, *United News of Bangladesh*, 4 May – Attachment 27).
- On 12 February 2006, *The United News of Bangladesh* reported that “[a]t least 13 activists of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) were injured as their procession came under attack by miscreants in the town Saturday night. Witnesses said the attackers also damaged the door and windows of residence-cum-office of Firoz M Hasan, senior secretary general of BDB, and beat up his guard. ...Local BDB leaders blamed Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student wing of ruling BNP, for the attack” (‘13 BDB activists injured in attack in Thakurgaon’ 2006, *United News of Bangladesh*, 12 February – Attachment 7).
- On 29 October 2005 *United News of Bangladesh* reported that: “Local BDB leaders alleged that they were manhandled by ruling party cadres while they were holding the news conference protesting an earlier incident that left four local BDB leaders injured” (‘Bikalpa Dhara leader Major Mannan injured in attack in Noakhali’ 2005, *United News of Bangladesh*, 29 October – Attachment 28).
- On 29 August 2004 *United News of Bangladesh* reported that “At least seven crude bombs were exploded in front of Bikalpadhara office at the city’s Baridhara tonight (Sunday night), creating panic in the neighbourhood..., none was injured in the explosions” (‘Bikalpadhara-Bomb’ 2004, *United News of Bangladesh*, 29 August – Attachment 29).
- On 8 June 2004 *News from Bangladesh* reported that: “A supporter of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh was stabbed to death when armed men attacked a procession celebrating the victory of its young leader Mahi B Chowdhury who was elected MP on Sunday in a by-election to the Munshiganj-1 constituency... Police arrested one Babul, a BNP

activist, from Kamargaon in connection with the murder” (‘Mahi’s victory procession attacked, Bikalpa activist killed’ 2004, *News from Bangladesh*, 8 June <http://bangladesh-web.com/view.php?hidDate=2004-06-08&hidType=TOP&hidRecord=0000000000000000000010736> – Accessed 19 October 2006 – Attachment 32).

- On 20 May 2004, *the News From Bangladesh* reported that “Kawsar Alam Talukder alias Rony (30), a supporter of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) was shot dead by a gang of miscreants at his village home at Madhya Bazra under Sreenagar Thana at about 10 am yesterday”. It was also reported that: “According to BDB sources, three minibuses, engaged in the election campaign of Major (Rtd) Mannan, were damaged by miscreants near CSD Godown at Tejgaon...The campaigners also came under another attack allegedly by a group of BNP supporters at Tejgaon Rail Colony at about 5 pm”. The report further notes that: “Earlier, on May 15, a gang of six terrorists attacked a motorcade of Major Mannan at Moghbazar Wireless crossing and beat up some supporters of Major Mannan. They snatched away the banners, damaged a vehicle and threatened the BDB supporters not to continue the campaign for BDB” (‘Bikalpa Dhara activist shot dead in Sreenagar- More violence ahead of by-elections feared’ 2004, *News From Bangladesh*, 20 May <http://www.bangladesh-web.com/view.php?hidDate=2004-05-20&hidType=POL> – Accessed 19 October 2006 – Attachment 25).
- On 12 March 2004 *The Weekly Holiday* reported that “known BNP activists forcibly occupied the Mukhtangan area, under the banner of the so-called Bastuhara Kalyan Parishad, and that too with the active support from the police. The BNP boys did not allow the supporters of Badruddoza to gather at Mukhtangan. The BNP activists assaulted some supporters, with the law enforcers playing the role of onlookers” (‘Police, BNP men foil Mukhtangan rally’ 2004, *Weekly Holiday* website, 12 March <http://www.weeklyholiday.net/120304/front.html> – Accessed 19 October 2006 – Attachment 22).

As is noted above, there have also been reports that police have sometimes acted to defend BDB leaders and supporters from the attacks of BNP supporters at BDB meetings and rallies. There have also been reports that police have acted to defuse certain situations. For instance, on 27 August 2006, it was reported that “Section 144 was imposed [by police] banning public meeting on Sunday in remote Amdai union of Sadar Upazila to avoid clash between Bikalpa Dhara and BNP”. The BNP had announced its intention to hold a rally “at the same venue and at same time [as the BDB] creating tension in the area”. “Upazila Nirbahi Officer Sabina Alam imposed...sent police to ward off trouble”. At other times there have been reports that Section 144 has been employed by police simply to prevent BDB rallies outright. Generally speaking, it appears that the government works to diminish security levels according to its interests. For example, in the lead up to the 2004 “parliamentary by-polls” it was reported that the “Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed [had] expressed dissatisfaction over frequent violation of the code and attacks on Bikalpa Dhara supporters” and that “[t]hey would discuss deployment of army in the constituencies when it sits to review law and order”. The BNP government failed to meet this recommendation and the absence of the army, and adequate security, was later cited by the BDB amongst the electoral irregularities which it claimed had occurred during the 2004 by-polls. The BDB has again recently commented at length on its “concern over the bias attitude of the civil and police officials. The BDB leaders said they are seriously concerned about the safety and security of their

workers in conducting the political activities”. The report on the BDB’s concerns is supplied as Attachment 26. (For Section 144 incidents, see: ‘Ban on Bikalpadhara and BNP meetings’ 2006, *United News of Bangladesh*, 27 August – Attachment 23; and also: ‘Bikalpadhara’s programme foiled as local administration imposes section 144 at poura auditorium’ 2005, *United News of Bangladesh*, 19 June – Attachment 30; for the comments of the Chief Election Commissioner, see: ‘EC asks officials to act against code violators’ 2004, *Daily Star* website, 20 May <http://www.thedailystar.net/law/2004/05/03/week.htm> – Accessed 19 October 2006 – Attachment 20; for the absence of the army in by-polls security, see: ‘Poll robbed: BDB’ 2004, *Daily Star* website, 2 July <http://www.thedailystar.net/2004/07/02/d4070201033.htm> – Accessed 19 October 2006 – Attachment 24; ‘Opposition parties demand flawless voter list, reconstitution of EC for credible polls’ 2006, *United News of Bangladesh*, 7 August – Attachment 26.)

4. Is there any evidence to suggest that BNP members who have defected to BDB have faced a stronger reaction by BNP members and supporters?

No reports could be located which addressed this issue as it pertains to supporters at the lower level. At the leadership level the BDB have been branded traitors by the BNP and there have been a number of reports of attacks upon BDB figures, events and supporters. *One World South Asia* has reported that Badruddoza Chowdhury’s office was bombed and that he and his supporters were attacked by BNP supporters following the defection of Badruddoza Chowdhury’s son, along with Mannan, to the BDB on 10 March 2004. According to this report, local police were also involved in the mistreatment experienced by the BDB:

In a swelling wave of intolerance in Bangladesh, two prominent ruling party politicians faced attacks and harassment after their defection to an alternative political front last week, triggering protests from civil society and political parties in the south Asian nation.

Former Member of Parliament (MP) Abdul Mannan, who served as a state minister from 1991-1996, saw his industrial establishments targeted daily after his resignation from the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) last week.

...One of the attacks damaged properties worth US \$2 million. On Tuesday, bypassing the legal system, the government froze five of his business accounts.

Mannan says the BNP threatened to “destroy” him if he did not return.

...Mannan left the BNP for an alternative political platform recently set up by former Bangladesh president and founding secretary general of the BNP, Dr AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury.

Chowdhury says he decided to establish such a platform because the BNP’s failure to improve law and order and its involvement in corruption like the previous Awami League government has intensified people’s mistrust of conventional parties.

Chowdhury was forced to resign from presidency in June 2002 following differences with BNP parliamentarians. Ever since, the BNP and he have gone separate ways.

Although Chowdhury’s platform is yet to take concrete shape, it already has the support of a wide range of people – teachers, physicians, engineers, professionals, businessmen and

lawyers. He wants civil society to play a lead role and attempt to oust black money owners and criminals who dominate politics.

Significantly, Chowdhury's anti-BNP stance has gained him the support of all Bangladesh's opposition parties.

Ruling party sources also claim that at least 30 members of Parliament (MPs) are ready to quit the BNP to join Chowdhury.

The BNP enjoys a two-third majority in Parliament.

On March 10, when parliamentarians Mahi B. Chowdhury, son of Badruddoza Chowdhury, and Mannan resigned from the BNP, the party's secretary general and Minister for Local Government Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan remarked, "The defection of one or two lawmakers will not affect the party or the government."

Shrugged another influential BNP leader, "We've listed a few others who may desert us, but we will not pressure them to stay."

But the same night, bombs exploded at Chowdhury's office and his KC Memorial Clinic in the capital Dhaka, while the police demolished a stage erected to announce the national committee of his alternative political front.

The next day, Chowdhury and his men could not reach the venue of the rally as the police surrounded their motorcade.

When 73-year old Chowdhury, along with Mahi, Mannan and other leaders, started marching on foot, they were attacked by armed activists chanting pro-BNP slogans, scaring them off the street. Another group of armed activists laid siege to the rally's venue.

Attackers injured over 300 people traveling by bus to the rally organized by Chowdhury.

...But Azizul Bari Helal, secretary of JCD – the student wing of the BNP that led the attacks on Chowdhury's rallies – denies the party's involvement, claiming that, "We do not believe in the politics of violence" (Khan, S 2004, 'Bangladesh Government Guns for Defectors', *One World South Asia*, 18 March <http://southasia.oneworld.net/article/view/81874/1/> – Accessed 10 October 2006 – Attachment 9).

The vilification of the BDB's former BNP leaders as traitors appears to have remained an ongoing concern. The following sources give an indication of the sentiment which has continued to be expressed at the level of leadership:

- On 24 May 2006, *News From Bangladesh* reported on a BNP "campaign meeting" which took place at "Kawran Bazar" and involved "BNP leaders who...were mostly from the greater Noakhali district". According to the report, "The speakers criticised the Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) candidate former BNP lawmaker Major (Retd) Abdul Mannan and termed him a 'cheat' for betraying the party and its supporters" ('Ministers, MPs campaign for alliance candidate-Dhaka-10 by-poll' 2004, *News From Bangladesh*, 24 May <http://bangladesh-web.com/view.php?hidDate=2004-05-24&hidType=POL&hidRecord=00000000000000000009267> – Accessed 9 October 2006 – Attachment 1).
- "Dhaka city BNP general secretary Abdus Salam...said Major (retd) Mannan's resignation from parliament was a betrayal of his voters and added that he resigned as

he thought the BNP government would fall as predicted by Awami League general secretary Abdul Jalil” (‘Mosaddek, Mannan barnstorm Dhaka-10 constituency-Campaigns end tonight’ 2004, *News From Bangladesh*, 29 June <http://bangladesh-web.com/view.php?hidDate=2004-06-29&hidType=POL&hidRecord=0000000000000000000012927> – Accessed 9 October 2006 – Attachment 8).

- 5. Is there any evidence to suggest the presence of "pro-independence" and "anti-independence" factions within the BNP?**
- 6. Is there any evidence to suggest that one faction is more dominant or one faction is being adversely treated by the other?**
- 7. Is there any evidence to suggest that the "pro-independence" supporters of the BNP are being adversely treated or otherwise harmed by Jamaat-e Islami?**

Little information is available on this issue but it would appear that a BNP pro-independence faction does exist and that BNP pro-independence identities are under some pressure from the BNP’s parliamentary partner, *Jamaat-e Islami*. On 29 December 2005, an article which appeared in *the Bangladesh Observer* commented as follows:

Today, Jamaat coming out from the ‘closet’ has become the dominant force in the government. Even the top pro-independence BNP leaders are now ‘close-lipped’. They have already learnt a lesson from (BNP lawmaker) Abu Hena, who has already been sacked from his party for his accusing Jamaat of militant connection, and have to speak out of scare of losing jobs. The recent spate of bombings by the JMB [*Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh*] extremists has created a sense of serious insecurity in our national life. Nobody is safe today. On the one hand, the government is on the hunt for the militants and bombers, but it is not nabbing the known “fathers” of these militants on the other. Isn’t it the double standards by the government in its policies? Not striking at the root, apprehending some JMB suspects or their group leaders is nothing but an eyewash (Haque, M.S. ‘Is The Country Being Taken Over By Islamist Zealots?’ 2005, *Bangladesh Observer* website, 29 December <http://www.bangladeshobserveronline.com/new/2005/12/29/editorial.htm> – Accessed 19 October 2006 – Attachment 33).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Search Engines

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

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

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

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