

Fifteen years of BNP: An overview

The Fourth Council Session of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) began in the city yesterday. Founded in 1978 by the general turned politician, former President Ziaur Rahman, the party's fifteen year history contains many ups and downs including the assassination of its founder, removal from power through army coup, betrayal and defection by party stalwarts, repression by military dictatorship, participation in the mass movement that toppled autocracy and, finally, bouncing back to power in the election of Feb '91. We present here a brief overview of the history of BNP which has been prepared by the newly launched news agency, PROBE.



TRAVELING a 15-year-long history of ups and downs, the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) holds its long-awaited fourth national council in the capital from September 1-2. The opening day also marks the 15th founding anniversary of the party.

Although the party constitution has the provision for the council to be held every year, it has been repeatedly postponed in the past due to conflicts and dissension in the central leadership as well as adverse situation during the Ershad regime.

Floated as a party in power on September 1, 1978, BNP held its first national council on January 24, 1980 and the second one on February 9, 1981. The third council was held from March 8-9, 1989.

Since the promulgation of Martial Law on March 24, 1982 it had not been possible for BNP to hold its council on a very large scale but there have been quite a few changes on the leadership level over the years. The party has seen four secretaries general since its inception, the present SG Barrister Salam Talukdar holding the portfolio for the longest period of time.

Many of the central leaders had broken away to join Ershad's Jatiya Party cabinet. BNP had experienced hard times during the Ershad era. But its greatest triumph was return to power after a nine-year movement against the autocratic regime.

The founder of BNP, Ziaur Rahman, had been propelled to power by the sepy-mass uprising of November 7, 1975. On April 21, 1977, he assumed the presidency by allowing the resignation of President Sayem on grounds of ill health. On May 30, Zia held a referendum to legitimize his presidency.

From his position of presidency and army administrator, Major General Zia formed the Jatiyatabadi Gonatantrik Dal (Jagodal) led by Justice Abdus Sattar on June 3, 1977. The party gradually set up its organisational network on a district and thana level.

Later, on May 1, 1978, Jagodal, NAP (Mashhur), UPP (Kazi Zafar), Muslim League (Shah Aziz), Labour Party and Tafsil Jati Federation merged to form the Jatiyatabadi Front of which Zia was elected chairman.

The presidential polls was held on June 3, 1978 and Zia won the election as the candidate of Jatiyatabadi Front. He then dissolved the front, floated the Jatiyatabadi Dal or Bangladesh Nationalist Party on September 1, 1978 and announced a 19-point programme.

Except UPP (Kazi Zafar), all other components of the front merged into BNP and Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury was made party secretary general. Zia avoided the appointment of a Prime Minister due to conflict between the leaders coming from various parties to BNP, but gave Mashhur Rahman the post of senior minister.

From the very outset of BNP, there was a sense of competition between the progressive group (NAP and UPP) and the rightist group (Muslim League and Jagodal). With the death of Mashhur Rahman in 1979, the progressive group was weakened considerably. Parliamentary elections were held under Martial Law on February 10, 1979. BNP won 205 seats in the 300-seat parliament and the main opposition party Awami League secured 29 seats. AL and other contesting parties brought about allegations of rigging in the polls.

On March 14, 1979, by means of the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution the word

'secular' was excluded from the Constitution, and Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim incorporated and 'socialism' replaced by balanced distribution of wealth based on social justice. The amendment also ratified all actions under Martial Law.

The Martial Law was lifted in April, 1979 and a civil government formed with Shah Azizur Rahman as the Prime Minister.

On February 9, 1980, President Zia was reelected party Chairman. At this time the conflict between the progressive and rightist groups within the party reached a height. The progressive group led by Barrister Moudud Ahmed and S A Bari AT suggested more democratisation of the party. President Zia accused this group of creating dissension within the party. The group became known as the 'rebel group' and Moudud finally lost his job as Minister for Post and Telecommunications.

Conflicts intensified in the party and its Standing Committee met at the party central office on May 22, 1981 with Chairman Zia in the chair to resolve the conflicting issues, including those of Chittagong

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BNP. But the issues at stake remained unresolved.

Zia told the meeting that politics must be freed from corruption and the party should be cleansed of dubious persons. He announced that a Standing Committee meeting would be held in Chittagong on May 29 to take up the issues again, particularly the simmering conflicts in Chittagong BNP.

Accordingly, on May 29, President Zia left for Chittagong at nine in the morning by a special flight. He was accompanied by party secretary general Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury, and Standing Committee members Ekramul Haque, Amena Rahman, Mahbul Hasan and Razzak Chowdhury.

The four other members of the Standing Committee, Justice Abdus Sattar, Shah Azizur Rahman, Jamiruddin Sircar and Sheikh Razzak Ali stayed back in Dhaka. The latter two were in charge of the council of BNP's student front, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), which was to be held in Dhaka on May 30. On his arrival at the Chittagong Circuit House, Chairman Zia met with some of the local leaders of the party and then the Standing Committee meeting commenced. After a break for Jumma prayers and lunch, the meeting resumed at 7 pm and continued till 11.45 pm. At

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Holding the consulting firm responsible for the damages, sources in Local Government Engineering Department said the constructions would not collapse if the firm worked sincerely. When contacted the consulting firm, however, could not furnish any satisfactory reply.

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12.45 am President Zia took his leave and retired to his bedroom in the Circuit House.

That night a group of army officers attacked the Circuit House and President Zia was killed. Vice President Justice Sattar took over as Acting President. Zia was buried by the lake near Sangsad Bhavan.

Justice Sattar was elected Chairman of BNP. A sixth amendment to the Constitution was brought about to facilitate the Acting President to contest the presidential polls.

The presidential election was first scheduled to be held on September 24, 1981. This was shifted to October 15 and finally to November 15. A total of 39 candidates contested in this election. The BNP candidate was Justice Sattar, the AL candidate Dr Kamal Hossain and General MAG Osmani contested from Nagorik Committee. Justice Sattar was elected president. The cabinet was formed again.

Amidst serious conflicts in the party a notorious murderer Imdu was arrested from the official residence of Juba Dal President and Youth Minister Abul Kashem on February 11, 1982, at the instruction of Home Minister Dr M A Matin. With allegations of corrup-

tion amongst the cabinet ministers reaching a height, President Justice Abdus Sattar dissolved the cabinet on February 22. The cabinet was formed again a day later, agitating the conflict further.

Shah Aziz, Shamsul Huda Chowdhury and Dr Matin began pressuring the President to weaken the progressive forces within the party as a result of which party general secretary Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury was sent abroad as a government representative against his will. Many are of the opinion that the army chief of the time Lt. Gen. HM Ershad was involved in this action.

Perhaps it was felt that in the absence of Dr B Chowdhury, the progressive section of the party would become weak, making it easier for Shah Aziz, Huda and Matin to take over power through Ershad. But President Sattar had to bring back B Chowdhury under pressure from the progressive group led by Deputy Prime Minister S A Bari and the central leadership of JCD.

At that time, there was a move to form a security council in the manner of Turkey comprising the President, the Prime Minister and the three chiefs of the armed forces, but this move was thwarted by the progressive group and the student front.

On March 24, 1982, Chief of

Army Staff Ershad took over power from the elected government by force and Martial Law was imposed. On March 27, 1982 former Justice of the Supreme Court Ahsanuddin Chowdhury was made the President and most of the BNP ministers were arrested.

On April 5, 1982 Chief Martial Law Administrator Lt Gen Ershad met Begum Khaleda Zia at her residence. BNP leaders and workers were being indiscriminately arrested and harassed at the time and old age prevented Justice Sattar from giving able leadership to the party. There was a crisis of leadership in the BNP.

At this stage, party leaders felt that the image of Ziaur Rahman was needed to boost the morale of the party and a group of BNP leaders led by Justice Sattar met Begum Zia. Acquiescing to their request, Begum Zia joined the party and was made the Senior Vice Chairman.

The party was going through a crucial stage at that time with many of the leaders imprisoned. On March 1983, a group of the party leaders led by Shamsul Huda Chowdhury and Dr. M A Matin put forward three demands to party Chairman Justice Sattar. The demands were: (a) the non-political person, Dr B Chowdhury, should be removed from the post of the party Secretary General; (b) the central working committee should be reorganised; (c) democratisation of the party constitution.

The other leaders of the party did not take this move easily and accused Huda-Matin group of conspiring to split the party. An extended meeting of the central working committee of the party was held on April 1, 1983. Present at this meeting were all 148 members of the working committee, 21 of the 27, central office-bearers and 182 of the 251 former members of the parliament.

On April 2, 1983 a national convention was held under the leadership of Huda and Matin at Beauty Cinema Hall, owned by former MP of BNP S A Khaleque. A committee was formed at the convention with Huda as Chairman and Matin as Secretary General.

Thus BNP was divided into two factions, the mainstream remaining in favour of Justice Sattar. A central committee meeting of BNP (Sattar) held on April 4, 1983 expelled the leaders of the Huda-Matin faction. It was alleged that they had split from BNP on the basis of talks with the military rule in order to weaken the party. And eventually on November 27, 1986 the Huda-Matin faction joined Ershad's Janadal. Matin was made Secretary General of Janadal.

Meanwhile, it was said that Justice Sattar was no longer able to carry out duties as party chairman due to old age and so on January 10, 1984 Begum Zia became party Chairperson.

Under her leadership the party standing committee decided at a meeting on March 19, 1984 that if the other political parties agreed to open dialogue with the Ershad government, BNP would do the same.

In order to render the anti-government movement more effective, BNP formed a 7-party alliance with like-minded political parties. The other parties of the alliance were UPP (Kazi Zafar), Jatiya League of Ataur Rahman Khan, Gonatantrik Party of Sirajul Hossain Khan, UPP of Sadek Hossain and DL of Abdur Rauf.

On March 1, 1984, the 7-party alliance led by BNP observed a nationwide hartal in protest of the Upazila elections. During the out-Ershad movement, Ataur Rahman Khan, Kazi Zafar and Sirajul Hossain Khan broke away from the alliance to join Ershad's government as ministers.

On April 10, 1984, the BNP Chairperson agreed to hold a dialogue with the government. As Ataur Rahman Khan was representing the government, Begum Zia refused to open talks and simply submitted the demands of the 7-party alliance.

On October 3, 1984 the government announced that parliamentary elections would be held under Martial Law. December 8, 1984 was fixed as the date of the election. At a standing committee meeting chaired by Begum Zia on April 4 BNP decided not to participate in the election.

The 7-party alliance at a public meeting at Baitul Mukarram square on October 14 called for a 24-hour nationwide hartal on the election day. The 15-party alliance led by AL also announced a similar programme.

Shah Aziz differed with the party decision not to participate in the election. In his attempt to bring the party to polls, he planned to accord Khaleda a grand reception at his home district of Kushtia where she would be presented a gold crown and awarded the title 'Bangamati' (Mother of Bengal). Khaleda declined to attend the meeting.

On March 1, 1985, in an address to the nation over radio and television, Ershad banned all political activities, cancelled the election and called for a referendum. The referendum was scheduled for March 21, 1985. Begum Zia was put under house arrest. She was released from arrest on May 25, 1985.

The BNP standing committee was dissolved on June 23 and Dr B Chowdhury was replaced by Lt Col (Retd) ASM Mostafizur Rahman as the party Secretary General.

On June 25, show cause notices were issued against five leaders for their anti-organisational activities. These leaders were Shah Aziz, Moudud, Mayeedul Islam, Abdul Aleem and Sultan Ahmed Chowdhury. They were expelled from the

party on June 29 and a new faction of BNP was formed with Shah Aziz as Chairman and Mayeedul Islam as Secretary General.

In a statement issued on June 30 Justice Sattar announced that he had handed over the office of Acting Chairperson to Begum Zia due to his failing health, but she failed in her duty. He also accused Khaleda of misusing her power. He said he was now handing over the office of Acting Chairman to Shah Aziz.

In 1985, Sultan Ahmed, Moudud and Mayeedul joined Ershad's cabinet on August 2, August 5 and November 2 respectively. In spite of internal and external pressure rocking the party, Khaleda Zia managed to continue in her leadership.

When the government announced the lifting of the ban from politics on January 1, 1986, all the opposition parties including BNP observed a nationwide hartal on the day pressing home a five-point demand.

On March 29, 1986 BNP officially announced that it would boycott the parliamentary elections. The other opposition parties had initially announced a boycott but later decided to participate in the election.

A 'Dhaka siege' programme was observed on November 10, 1987. Lacs of people thronged the streets of Dhaka that day. BNP held a mammoth rally at the Shapla Chattar in Motijheel. Police attacked the rally, injuring many of the leaders and workers.

To mould public support in favour of the boycott, Begum Zia embarked on a nationwide tour on April 1, 1986. She accused the other parties of having betrayed the cause of the five-point demand.

Khaleda Zia was picked up by plainclothesmen on her way back from a meeting in Jamalpur and kept for two days in some unknown place. The government however denied any involvement in the incident. BNP Secretary General Salam Talukdar, Jahanara Begum and a few other central leaders were with her at the time.

The election was held on May 7, 1986 in spite of BNP's boycott. On September 25, 1986 BNP observed a nationwide Demand Day. When the Ershad government announced presidential elections, Begum Zia called upon the people not to participate in such an election as a fair election could not be held under the Ershad government.

On March 17, 1987, Mostafiz was replaced by KM Obaidur Rahman as BNP Secretary General. On October 26 at 10 in the morning Sheikh Hasina invited Khaleda Zia to hold talks at her Dhanmudi residence that day. Khaleda declined saying that any such meeting should take place on a 'neutral place'.

On October 28, the two lead-



ers finally met at the Mohakhali government residence of Dr Wajed, husband of Sheikh Hasina. The Sammitto Sangarik Jote played an important role in arranging this meeting. After half an hour of talks, they issued a joint statement.

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On the following day (Nov 11), Begum Zia and other leaders of BNP's central committee were arrested from a room in Hotel Purbani.

A secret meeting was held between Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina on January 1, 1988. On February 4, at a working committee meeting of BNP it was decided not to participate in the election announced by the government. The election was held on March 3, 1988 while BNP desisted from participating.

Conflicts grew again within the ranks of the party over the question of participating in the

polls and over the anti-government movement. On June 22, 1988 the central working committee and standing committee were dissolved. A new committee was formed on June 3. KM Obaid was replaced by Salam Talukdar as Secretary General of the party.

On July 15, Obaid, Jamaluddin and Abul Hasnat broke away to form a separate faction of BNP. Begum Zia expelled them from her party. On November 10 the first anniversary of 'Dhaka siege' was observed. On November 28 a hartal was observed throughout the country.

On January 18, 1989, Begum Zia was elected uncontested Chairperson of the party. Since falling from power, BNP held its first council session in eight years on March 8, 1989. Many leaders spoke in favour of the parliamentary system.

On November 19, Mirza Golam Hossain was replaced by Lt Gen Shaukat as President of Dhaka City BNP. Though the change was put down to Hafiz's failing health, it was alleged that Khaleda Zia had come to know of a secret meeting held between Hafiz and Kazi Zafar. Brig Hannan Shah resigned as General Secretary of Dhaka City BNP. These moves created negative reactions within the party.

BNP's first national Council was held in 1980. Though party constitution has provision for the council to be held every year, the next national council was held in 1989.

An all-out movement on one-point — resignation of Ershad — began in early 1990 with frequent observance of hartals. In October, the movement took on serious proportions. Students were determined to free the nation of the Autocratic regime.

On November 27, 1990, Joint Secretary General of BMA Dr Milon was killed by goons of the Ershad regime. Attempts were made to arrest Begum Zia on the same day but she remained in hiding. That night Ershad declared a state of emergency in the country, closed down the universities and announced censorship on the press. But disregarding the state of emergency, the people violated curfew and took to the streets. Finally on December 5, the Ershad government collapsed.

On February 27, 1991 parliamentary elections were held under a neutral caretaker government headed by Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed. The election, in general, was hailed as free and fair. BNP emerged as the single largest majority party in the parliament. AL chief Sheikh Hasina alleged that there had been subtle rigging in the polls.

The opening session of the Fifth National Parliament was fixed for April 5. On March 11, Jamaat leaders declared that they would support BNP in forming the government.

On March 18, 1991, the BNP members of parliament, led by Khaleda Zia took oath in the parliament. Then on March 19, BNP formed the cabinet under Acting President Justice Shahabuddin.

On July 2, 1991, the historical 12th Amendment was passed in parliament restoring the parliamentary form of government. BNP had agreed on it although its constitution provided for presidential system.

By-elections for 11 vacant seats of the parliament were held on September 11, 1991. BNP bagged five of these seats, Jatiya Party four and AL two.

A new chapter opened for BNP with the forming of a new cabinet on Sept 20 with 12 ministers and 20 state ministers.

The presidential election was held on October 8, 1991. Speaker of the parliament Abdur Rahman Biswas was the BNP candidate and Justice Badrul Haider Chowdhury contested from AL. In order to win support from Jamaat, BNP left two of the 30 seats reserved for women to Jamaat.

On November 15, 1991 it was announced that Union Parishad elections would be held from January 14/25, 1992. Later this was changed so that the election was to be held between January 22 and February 6. Elections were held in 6,903 union parishads.

On January 7, 1992, Begum Zia was reelected uncontested Chairperson of the party. Three state ministers were made to resign from the cabinet during the present rule of BNP. They were Osman Ghani Khan, Anwar Ali Siddiqui and Nurul Huda.

In August 1992, Awami League moved a no-confidence motion in parliament against the BNP government but by virtue majority votes BNP survived the no-confidence move.

During Zia's time, a 'political training school' had been set up for party leaders and workers to imbibe them with a sense of nationalism. Present leaders of the party are not in favour of such initiative.

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National

Six newly built culverts collapse in Jamalpur

JAMALPUR, Sept 1: Lack of proper feasibility survey prior to the approval of the project six culverts and a garage were crumbled down immediately after the construction resulting a wastage of Taka 80 lakh, reports UNB.

The Village Development Project-13 for construction of six culverts and a garage was implemented with the financial assistance from the Asian Development Bank under the supervision of Local Government Engineering Department.

Two culverts constructed at a cost of Taka 25 lakh on Islampur-Benuar Char were crumbled down within a month. Another four culverts — two on Katapur Road costing Taka 25 lakh in Madarganj and two in Sadar thana costing Taka 18 — were also damaged in a similar way.

Breaches were also developed at several points on the roof of the garage of the office of the Executive Engineer even before completion of its construction work. The garage was being constructed at cost of Taka 12 lakh.

The authority is now said to be considering to invite a fresh

tender after the demolition of the garage.

According to the local contractors, lack of proper feasibility survey by the Bangladesh Consulting Firm before the approval and implementation of the project caused the damage of the culverts and garage.

Holding the consulting firm responsible for the damages, sources in Local Government Engineering Department said the constructions would not collapse if the firm worked sincerely. When contacted the consulting firm, however, could not furnish any satisfactory reply.

Local people alleged that breaches were also developed in several roads and highways in the district due to the negligence of the consulting firm. They demanded immediate inquiry into the matter.

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Fund crisis, material shortages hit 1000 fishermen

From Our Correspondent

JHENIDAH, Sept 1: About one thousand fishermen in six thanas of the district have been facing manifold problems in carrying out their ancestral profession due to want of fund, scarcity of fishing materials like boats, nets etc.

According to a statistical report about one thousand fishermen are engaged in the age-old professions in Jhenidah, Saitkupa, Harinakundu, Kaligorj, Kotchandpur and Mohespur thanas in the district.

The fishermen of this district are passing their days in extreme hardship due to shortage of capital. In absence of adequate loan from the commercial banks, they are to borrow money from money lenders at an abnormal high rate of interest to purchase fishing materials like, boats, nets etc.

Talking to some age-old fishermen it was clear bank loan is not being distributed among them as most of the fishermen have no land property.

Fruit-bearing trees on decrease

From Our Correspondent

NATORE, Sept 1: The number of fruit-bearing trees is gradually decreasing in the district due to indiscriminate selling of the same.

Poor people both in urban and rural areas here are felling trees like mango, jackfruit, black berry, wood-apple and others.

The poverty stricken rural

people sell the fruit-bearing trees to a section of wood traders when they find no other alternative to survive.

The town residents can not plant fruit-bearing as there is little space for the purpose. In spite of the space problem, they can plant fruit-bearing trees like guava, palm, coconut, banana, lichi, mango, jackfruit,

black-berry.

The trees like, banyan, acacia, chatka, shikoro and cotton trees are also on wane. These trees are being cut down every day in large number in an immature state.

The saw mill owners, biscuit factory owners, brick-field owners have been purchasing wood everyday to meet their require-

ment. Timber merchants of the district send hundreds of trucks loaded with wood to other districts every day for their business purposes.

The Barendra Multipurpose Development Authority (BMDA) has taken up an elaborate programme to check deforestation in northern region.

The authority sources informed this correspondent that they would plant about 4.40 thousand saplings of both fruit-bearing and non-fruit-bearing trees in the region this year to help maintain ecological balance.

The security of life and property has become uncertain in six thanas of the district due to deteriorating law and order situation during last four months.

Dacoity, robbery, kidnapping, hijacking, rape, murder, gambling and other anti-social activities including toll-collection and prostitution have increased in the sadar thana and its adjacent areas the number of crimes stood much higher than the previous year.

An all-party meeting was held recently at Natore Pourashava auditorium with Khondker Jubayer Hossain, the poura chairman in the chair. Speakers at the meeting said



A team of journalists of the national dailies and media visited Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) recently. The team members saw some activities of the institute. — PID photo