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parties are also awash in cash, and spend big money for their own activities, some of which are illegal. (*Prothom Alo* February 9, 2007) reported that Awami League requires about Tk. 12 crore for regular operations of the party each year. BNP, on the other hand, spends about Tk. 15 crore annually. These huge sums of money are often extorted from corrupt businessmen or are collected from them in exchange for "selling" official favours, as well as from foreign sources. For example, the former state minister for home during the last regime, who is now in jail, is reported to have alleged that BNP received Tk. 300 crore from three foreign countries prior to the 2001 elections. It may also be noted that some of Bangladesh's top political leaders are now in custody on charges of extortion.

Muscle power

Influence of muscle power on elections is a fact of life in many countries, including Bangladesh. Muscle power is normally used for the following ends: intimidating opposing candidates, their representatives and supporters; driving away the polling agents of oppo-political sing candidates on election day; threatening the poor and minority voters to prevent them from voting; snatching ballot boxes; stuffing ballot boxes; disrupting the law and order situation around the polling centers to slow down the voting rate, or chasing away voters or stopping voting altogether; capturing polling centers; disrupting the counting of votes or destroying ballot papers or result sheets; altering the polling results and the broadcasting of those results; and so on.

Muscle power is exercised both during the pre- and post-poll periods. Violence leading to death and injuries is often the outcome of the demonstration of raw muscle power. During the 8th parliamentary elections held on October 1, 2001, terrorism and violence were used against opposing candidates and minorities even in the days following the elections. The reported deaths and injuries during the July 15 through October 10, 2001 period, which was the period of a non-party caretaker government (CTG), pieced together by the Society for Environment and Human Development from major newspaper reports, show that at least 217 persons were killed, including one woman, and 6,686 were injured in 415 major cases of violence across the country. Of those killed, 93 were identified as leaders and supporters of Awami League and its front organisations, 43 belonged to BNP and its front organisations, and the remaining 81 were innocent people. However, these figures do not tell the full story because many violent incidents were not reported.

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