

Essay on Bangladesh Awami League

The Awami League, which was consistently split during the Zia regime, underwent further turmoil in the aftermath of Ershad's March 1982 coup before achieving a new level of unity. In the 1982-83 period, there were two main groups within the Awami League, one headed by Hasina as president and another headed by Abdur Razzak as secretary-general. In October 1983, Abdur Razzak left the party to form the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League. This group was modeled on the national party of the same name that briefly held power before Mujib's death in 1975. Hasina proved to be a formidable politician and retained absolute control over the Awami League through the 1980s, becoming the major leader of the political opposition in Bangladesh. For several years, the Awami League headed a fifteen-party alliance, but its decision to participate in the 1986 parliamentary elections alienated some leftist parties. This development left the Awami League at the head of an eight-party alliance whose membership was in a state of flux but at one point included the Bangladesh Communist Party, the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League, the Gana Azadi League, the National Awami Party, the Samajbadi Dal, and the Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal.

The Bangladesh Awami League, generally known as the Awami League, is the mainstream center-left, a secular political party in Bangladesh. It is also currently the governing party after winning the 2008 Parliamentary elections in Bangladesh.

The Awami League was founded in Dhaka, the former capital of the Pakistani province of East Bengal, in 1949 by Bengali nationalists Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, Shamsul Huq, and later Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy. The Awami League was established as the Bengali alternative to the domination of the Muslim League in Pakistan. The party under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding

father of Bangladesh, would lead the struggle for independence, first through massive populist and civil disobedience movements, such as the Six Point Movement and 1971 Non-Cooperation Movement, and then during the Bangladesh Liberation War. After the emergence of independent Bangladesh, the Awami League would win the first general elections in 1973 but was overthrown in 1975 after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The party was forced by subsequent military regimes into the political wilderness and many of its senior leaders and activists were executed and jailed. After the restoration of democracy in 1990, the Awami League emerged as one of the principal players of Bangladeshi politics.

The Bangladesh Awami League styles itself as the leader of the “pro-liberation” forces in Bangladesh, promoting secular and social democratic sections of the political establishment in the country which played the leading role during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. The party constitution states, and in two cases defines the reason for, four fundamental principles in guiding its philosophy and policies.

On 14 August 1947, the partition of British India saw the establishment of the Muslim state of Pakistan on the basis of the Two-Nation Theory. The new country comprised of two wings, separated by 1000 miles of Indian territory, in the Indian Subcontinent. The western wing consisted of the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Northwest Frontier Province, and Balochistan, while the province of East Bengal constituted the eastern wing. From the onset of independence, Pakistan was led by its founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah and his Muslim League party.

In 1948, there was rising agitation in East Bengal against the omission of Bengali script from coins, stamps, and government exams. Thousands of students, mainly from the University of Dhaka, protested

in Dhaka and clashed with security forces. In March, senior Bengali political leaders were attacked whilst leading protests demanding that Bengali be declared an official language in Pakistan. The leaders included the A. K. Fazlul Huq, the former Prime Minister of undivided Bengal.

In 1952, the Awami Muslim League and its student wing played an instrumental role in the Bengali Language Movement, during which Pakistani security forces fired upon thousands of protesting students demanding Bengali be declared an official language of Pakistan and famously killing a number of students including Abdus Salam, Rafiq Uddin Ahmed, Abul Barkat, and Abdul Jabbar. The events of 1952 are widely seen by historians today as a turning point in the history of Pakistan and the Bengali people, as it was the starting point of the Bengali nationalist struggle that generally culminated in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

The Awami League won the national election on December 29, 2008, as part of a larger electoral alliance that also included the Jatiya Party led by former military ruler General Ershad as well as some leftist parties. According to the Official Results, Bangladesh Awami League won 230 out of 299 constituencies, and together with its allies, had a total of 262 parliamentary seats. The Awami League and its allies received 57% of the total votes cast. The AL alone got 48%, compared to 36% of the other major alliance led by the BNP which by itself got 33% of the votes. Sheikh Hasina, as party head, is the new Prime Minister. Her term of office began in January 2009. The current cabinet has several new faces, including three women in prominent positions: Dr. Dipu Moni, Matia Chowdhury, and Sahara Khatun. Younger MPs with a link to assassinated members of the 1972-1975 AL government are Syed Ashraful Islam, son of Syed Nazrul Islam, Sheikh Taposh, son of Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni, and Sohel Taj, son of Tajuddin Ahmad.

Since 2009, the Awami League in government faced several major political challenges, including BDR mutiny, power crisis, unrest in the garments industry, and stock market fluctuations. Judicial achievements for the party included restoring the 1972 constitution, beginning of war crimes trials, and a guilty verdict in the 1975 assassination trial. According to the Nielsen 2 year survey, 50% felt the country was moving in the right direction, and 36% gave the government a favorable rating.