
Families and Political Recruitment in Bangladesh: A Study of Major Political Parties

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Abstract

Political dynasties play an important role in many modern states including some present-day democracies. There has been a remarkable increase in the role of families in political parties and politics in recent times. Members of political dynasties and powerful political families commonly hold important party and government offices in Bangladeshi politics. Political dynasties are not only at work at the national level but also at the regional or local level. Like other South Asian countries, Bangladesh also has its share of family-based political recruitment. This paper assesses the extent and reasons for the significance of selective powerful families in Bangladesh. Political dynasties enable dynastic politicians to preserve and extend their power in Bangladeshi politics. An attempt has been made here to describe recruits of local and national level leaders of three major parties in Bangladesh from the members of the families of the powerful local and national leaders of those parties. This paper claims that cultural tradition, the importance of blood connections or kinships, and lack of institutionalisation give rise to dynasticism in Bangladesh politics.

Keywords: Bangladesh, political parties, Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party, political families

Bangladesh has a long history of the struggle for democracy. It earned her independence through a long democratic movement. Bangladesh has about 100 political parties of which 40 are officially registered with the Election Commission. Most of the political parties are dynastic. People of Bangladesh seem to value their dynastic leaders. They value politicians who can ensure a continuous flow of material patronage from above, maintain continuity with their past

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ideologically and biologically, and satisfy their psychological need to be led by their beloved leaders and their heirs. They prefer leaders with personal qualities like education, wealth, and generosity, and when asked they explain that ordinary people do not make good political leaders.¹ Dynasty is an efficient branding, mobilisation, and vote-winning method in a country where party programmes are vague and actual policies are moving into the populist middle. Political parties in Bangladesh are neither totally autocratic nor fully democratic. But like most other South Asian countries, they incorporate elements of autocracy, oligarchy (dynasty), and democracy.²

Like other South Asian countries, Bangladesh also has its share of dynastic politics. Like them, political parties in Bangladesh also recruit leaders and officials from among the members of selective powerful families. As a result, state affairs turn into the affairs of a few families belonging to some important parties that control the political landscape and politics, public policy, and state affairs. While one can argue that as a result of this 'dynastic politics' or 'dominance of families' growth of democracy gets thwarted, it can, however, be said that family connection compensates for the lack of institutionalisation and weakness of the party. 'Inheritance of blood' at least saves the parties from getting split. As opposed to 'inheritance of ideology', 'inheritance of blood' has proven to be more efficient, valuable, and powerful as a source of authority and legitimacy. Dynasticism "works in modern political systems because it appeals to notions of inherited charisma that help legitimize leadership succession and minimize organizational division."³

Left, right, centrist, religious, all types of parties follow more or less the same pattern of recruitment. This recruitment pattern is based on the following assumptions:

1. Ascriptive criterion rather than achievement criterion is followed;

2. Family connections prove to be a more powerful source of legitimacy than anything else;
3. Leaders with family ties can satisfy the psychological needs of the party activists and supporters;
4. They seem to be more efficient and capable than non-family member leaders;
5. Supporters and activists are expected to be better served by the family members of the original leader;
6. Over time, leaders of 'inheritance of blood' establish full control over the party. They then create a place for themselves.

This study is designed to discuss the issue of leadership recruitment by Bangladeshi political parties. The primary focus of this paper is to understand the extent and reason for the significance of family in leadership recruitment by the Bangladeshi parties. It describes political recruitment strongly based on familial connections in Bangladesh. Secondary sources like newspaper, magazines, journal articles, TV reports, as well as primary sources like personal interviews, telephone calls or messages of various kinds with the leaders. It describes the recruitment pattern of three major parties in Bangladesh: the Awami League (AL), the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and the Jatiya Party (JP) to show the nature and reasons for recruitment of leaders from the families of the senior leaders of the parties.

Awami League

Bangladesh Awami League (AL) is the largest political party in Bangladesh. It was founded in 1949 in opposition to the ruling Muslim League in Pakistan with Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani as its President and Shamsul Huq as the General Secretary. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Sheikh Mujib) was one of the founding Assistant General Secretaries of the party. Three years later, he became the General Secretary and remained so until 1966 when Mujib took charge of the

AL as its president. Mujib began consolidating his hold on the party during the 1950s and was instrumental in strengthening the Awami League throughout East Pakistan. In 1957, when he was given the option to stay either with the parliamentary party or the party organisation, he chose to remain with the organisation. Mujib metamorphosised from an organisational man to a charismatic leader in the 1960s. After HS Suhrawardy died in 1963, the Awami League suffered a leadership vacuum. Mujib felt the need to revitalise the party and decided to step forward as the leader. Soon after assuming the party presidency, he launched the Six Points movement, which not only brought the Awami League into the limelight but also the programme's formula turned Sheikh Mujib into a champion of the Bengali causes.⁴ Ideologically, the AL was initially oriented to left-of-centre on the political spectrum. But since 1992, when it changed its manifesto and adopted a 'free market' economic policy, the AL has essentially become a centrist party.⁵ Bangladesh got her independence under the leadership of Sheikh Mujib who is affectionately called '*Bangabandhu*' (Friend of Bengal) and 'father of the nation'. He was Bangladesh's first President, who wanted to establish Bangladesh as a secular, socialist, and democratic state.

Following the brutal murder of *Bangabandhu* and his close associates between August and November 1975, the AL faced a leadership crisis. From his murder on 15 August 1975 to 1981, the AL was in a deep leadership crisis and its future seemed uncertain. Inefficient leadership lacking charisma and internal squabbling threatened its effectiveness as a major party. Considering all this, in May 1981, the Awami League leaders appealed to Sheikh Hasina to end her exile in India, return home, take charge of the party, and lead the struggle for the restoration of democracy, rehabilitate *Bangabandhu* with befitting honour and dignity. Sheikh Hasina accepted their request, returned to the country, and assumed the leadership of the AL. As Mujib's daughter, politics was in Hasina's

blood. Sheikh Hasina was active in student politics. She was directly involved in making history in the birth of a new country, Bangladesh, from East Pakistan under the leadership of her father. Since 1981, she has been the President of the Awami League. She played a key role in the pro-democracy movement during 1982-90 against the military rule of General Hussain Mohammad Ershad. She considered it her duty to protect and preserve the legacy of *Bangabandhu* that successive governments had doggedly denigrated and tried to erase. Due to her leadership quality and political maturity, she was able to keep the AL united and brought it to power in 1996 after 21 years of oblivion. "The Awami League saw its victory as the return to power of the rightful rulers of Bangladesh, an end to two decades of domination by anti-liberation forces, and an opportunity to restore Sheikh Mujib's Sonar Bangla."⁶ She has brought the AL again to power in 2009 and has kept it in power since then. She became the most mature and charismatic leader of the country. Sheikh Hasina is not the only one who has entered politics from the Sheikh Mujib family. A host of members of the 2nd, 3rd, and even 4th generations of Sheikh Mujib family got involved in the AL politics and have assumed important positions.

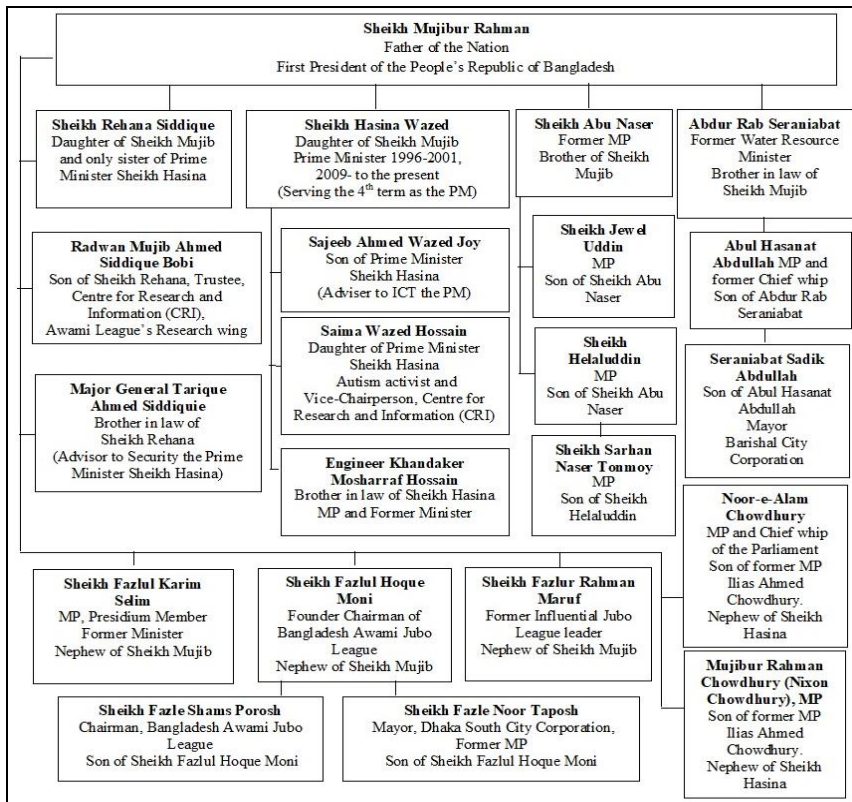
Sheikh Hasina's son Sajeeb Ahmed Wazed Joy is the Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) adviser to his mother Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. He joined politics in February 2010 as a member of Rangpur District Unit of the Awami League. Sheikh Hasina's younger sister, Sheikh Rehana Siddique, is Hasina's informal 'adviser' and confidant and companion on state visits and functions. She has been made the adviser of Tungipara Upazila unit of AL in Gopalganj. In 2007-08, while Sheikh Hasina was imprisoned under the emergency rule of Fakhruddin Ahmed's caretaker government, Sheikh Rehana organised the AL secretly on Hasina's behalf. Radwan Mujib Siddique Bobi is the eldest among three children of *Bangabandhu's* younger daughter Sheikh Rehana and academician Professor Shafiq Ahmed Siddique. He plays important

role in the Awami League's research wing, Centre for Research and Information (CRI), and is working to empower and inspire the youth through its Young Bangla platform. The brother-in-law of Sheikh Rehana retired Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique has long been Sheikh Hasina's security adviser. Former Minister, Presidium member, and an MP Engineer Khandakar Musharrof Hussein is the brother-in-law of Sheikh Hasina.⁷

Sheikh Hasina's cousin Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim (Sheikh Selim) is a member of the Presidium, member of parliament, and former minister. Many members of the next generation are also active in AL politics. Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh, son of Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni (nephew of Sheikh Mujib and founding Chairman of the Awami Jubo League—the party's youth wing) has been an MP since the 9th parliament (2008). He has been elected Mayor of Dhaka South City Corporation on an AL ticket. Very recently, Sheikh Fazle Shams Parosh, another son of Sheikh Moni, has been elected the president of Jubo League upon Sheikh Hasina's desire. Disgruntled army personnel killed their parents (Sheikh Moni and Arzu Moni) at their Dhanmondi residence on 15 August 1975. They, their two uncles, and a few family members survived. Another brother of the Sheikh Moni and Selim, Sheikh Fazlur Rahman Maruf (Sheikh Maruf), was the Presidium member of Awami Jubo League. Sheikh Fazle Fahim, son of Sheikh Selim, is the President of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI). Sheikh Fazle Nayeem, another son of Sheikh Selim, was an influential leader of the Jubo League. Abul Hasanat Abdullah is the running MP and was the former chief whip of the parliament. He is the son of Mujib's brother-in-law Abdur Rab Serniabat who was the water resource minister under *Bangabandhu*. He was also murdered on 15 August 1975 at his Minto Road house. Shahan Ara Abdullah, the wife of Abul Hasanat Abdullah, was the vice president of Barishal District Awami League, who survived the August massacre in 1975. Serniabat Sadik Abdullah, son of Abul Hasnat

Abdullah and grandson of Abdur Rab Serniabat, is the Mayor of Barisal City Corporation. Sheikh Helaluddin and Sheikh Jeweluddin are the MPs in the 11th parliament. They also play an important role both in the party and government. They are the sons of late Sheikh Abu Naser, brother of Sheikh Mujib and former MP, who was killed on 15 August 1975. Sheikh Sarhan Naser Tonmoy, son of Sheikh Helal and grandson of Sheikh Abu Naser, is an MP of the running 11th parliament.⁸

Noor e Alam Chowdhury Liton, the chief whip of the 11th parliament, and Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury (Nixon Chowdhury), an MP of the 11th parliament, are the nephews of Sheikh Hasina. Both are the sons of former MP Ilias Ahmed Chowdhury who is the nephew of Sheikh Mujib.⁹ AFM Bahauddin Nasim was a former MP. He was Assistant Personal Secretary-2 of Sheikh Hasina during 1996-2001. Now he is one of the influential Joint General Secretaries of Awami League Central Committee. He is a close relative of Sheikh Hasina. Omar Faruq Chowdhury, the brother-in-law of Sheikh Hasina, is a former president of Jubo League. All of them play important role in Awami League politics as well as the government. Zillur Rahman, a veteran AL leader and Mujib's companion, served as the AL's general secretary and minister for many years. He was also the President of Bangladesh from 2009 until his death in early 2013. He led the AL in its crisis time, especially, after the assassination of *Bangabandhu* and during 2007-08 while Sheikh Hasina was imprisoned under the Fakhruddin caretaker government. He was the uncle (by marriage) of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Ivy Rahman, the wife of Zillur Rahman, was the president of Bangladesh Mohila Awami League—the women wing of the Awami League, until her death in the 21 August 2004 grenade attack on Awami League rally in Dhaka. Their son, Nazmul Hasan Papon, is an MP from the AL and also the powerful president of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

Figure 1**Sheikh Mujib Family in Bangladesh Politics**

Source: Information contained in this table was gathered by the author himself from various newspapers, magazines, journal articles, and books.

The most prominent families in the AL after the Sheikh family are the families of the four national leaders. They were close associates of Mujib and played a key role during the War of Liberation in 1971 in the absence of Sheikh Mujib who was in jail in Pakistan at that time. Those four leaders are Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, AHM Kamruzzaman and M Monsoor Ali. They were killed in jail by the killer of Sheikh Mujib on 3 November 1975. The family members of these leaders have a special place in the AL. Many of the members of these families have been placed in important positions of the party and

government.

Syed Nazrul Islam was a trusted companion of Sheikh Mujib. He was the Acting President of the Mujibnagar Government during the war of liberation in 1971. Syed Ashraful Islam was the son of Syed Nazrul Islam. He was a former MP and Minister. Under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, Syed Ashraf served as the General Secretary of the AL for two terms. He played a remarkable role in the 2007-08 emergency period. Syed Ashraf's ascendancy in the party can be to a large extent attributed to his family connection. After the death of Syed Ashraf, his sister Syeda Zakia Nur Lipi got the AL nomination and was elected as an MP in a by-election.¹⁰

Syeda Zohra Tajuddin, the widow of Tajuddin Ahmed, another of the four trusted companions of Mujib and the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh, was the president of Bangladesh Awami League after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib and his four senior companions in 1975. She tried her level best to keep the party united and afloat at a very critical juncture of the party after *Bangabandhu's* assassination. Tanjim Ahmed Sohel Taj, the son of Tajuddin Ahmed, was made an MP and State Minister. His sister Simmin Hossein Rimi has also been made an MP.

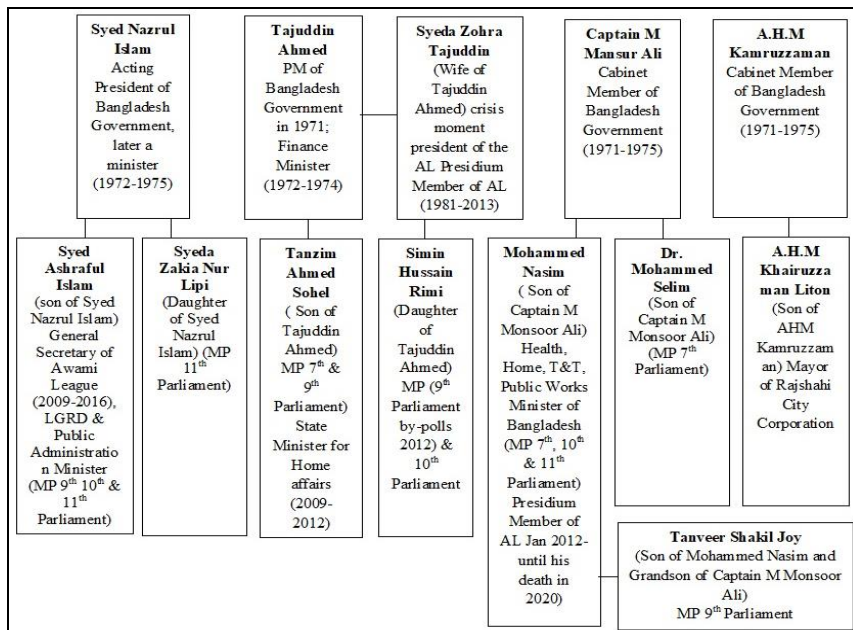
Similarly, Dr Mohammad Selim, the apolitical eldest son of another trusted companion of *Bangabandhu*, Captain M Monsoor Ali, was made an MP in 1996. His younger brother Mohammad Nasim was a party activist and leader. He was a former minister, Presidium member, and coordinator of the AL-led 14-party alliance. His son, Thanvir Shakil Joy, was an MP in the 9th parliament. "Thanvir Shakil Joy and his cousin Sheherin Selim Ripon, son of Dr Mohammad Selim, are seeking nomination in the by-election from Sirajganj-1 constituency after the seat was vacated due to the death of Mohammad Nasim."¹¹

AHM Kamruzzaman was another of four national leaders and trusted companions of *Bangabandhu*. His son AHM Khairuzzaman Liton was made Mayor of Rajshahi City Corporation.

The sons and daughters and other family members of the four “National Leaders” also have been recruited to various positions of importance in the party structure of AL and AL led government. They committed to serving the nation as their fathers did. They got the posts not only for their family connections but also for their popular appeal in their localities.

Figure 2

Dynastic Successors of Four National Leaders of the AL



Source: Rounaq Jahan, *Political Parties in Bangladesh: Challenges of Democratization*, (Dhaka: Prothoma Prokashan, (2015) 118; and information gathered by the author himself from various newspapers, magazines, journal articles, books.

Most of the dynastic leaders did not rise through the ranks, or work for their constituencies at the grassroots level or the society or masses to get voted into power. They were simply from the ‘right’ families. Political parties are flooded with second, third, even fourth-generation members of those few powerful families. Grassroots level leaders are often deprived of nomination or any other position in their

respective parties. The general perception is that political position is determined not by their leadership quality, but by their family connections. Earlier, dynastic leaders used to be found at the national level, but of late many leaders are selected or nominated based on their family or blood connections at all levels from national to local.

Bangladeshi people like their dynastic leaders. They believe that dynastic leaders understand their concerns better, care about them, and address their demands spontaneously. The pattern is found at the local level as well where many of the leaders have been recruited from the important and powerful families of local leaders. Many of the family members of those leaders are emerging as replacements of their parents and grandparents. That has become almost a common form of elite recruitment at the local level.

We can start with the case of ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury of Chittagong. He was a dedicated and very influential AL leader in Chittagong. He was the president of Chittagong City unit of the Awami League and three-time elected mayor of the Chittagong City Corporation. His wife, Hasina Mohiuddin, is also the president of Chittagong City Mohila Awami League. His son Barrister Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury Nowfel was made an organising secretary of the party. Now he is serving as an MP and Deputy Minister of Education. Wasika Ayesha Khan is the daughter of former Presidium member Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser. She is an MP and Finance and Planning Affairs Secretary of AL Central Committee. Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed is the son of former MP, minister, and Presidium member Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury Babu. Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed is an MP and Minister of Land. Khadizatul Anwar Sony is the daughter of former MP Rafiqul Anwar is the MP in the 11th parliament. Former MP Mostafizur Rahman's son, Mahfuzur Rahman Mita, is the MP in the 11th parliament from his father's constituency.

Rezwan Towfiq Ahmed, the son of the President Advocate Abdul Hamid got elected as an MP in the last two parliaments (10th and

11th). Another son of the President is Russel Ahmed Tuhin. He is also active in local politics. Veteran politician, former general secretary of AL, and former Presidium member and Minister Abdur Razzak's son Barrister Nahim Razzak has become an MP after the death of his father. Another former General Secretary of AL and ex-minister Abdul Jalil's son Nizam Jalil is the youngest MP in the 11th parliament. Mohammad Saeed Khokon, former Mayor of Dhaka South City Corporation, is the son of Mohammad Hanif, former AL chief of Dhaka Metropolitan Unit Awami League and Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation. Tanveer Imam, the son of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Public Administration Advisor HT Imam, is an MP in the 11th parliament.

In Sylhet, former Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad was a veteran political leader in AL. His son Mahmud us Samad Don is an MP in the 11th Parliament. Present Foreign Minister AKM Abdul Momen is the brother of AMA Muhit, who was finance minister from 2009 to early 2019. Late Badruddin Ahmed Kamran was a popular leader in Sylhet. He was the Mayor of Sylhet City Corporation. His wife, Asma Kamran is the secretary of Sylhet City Mohila Awami League. Suranjit Sen Gupta was a veteran political leader, renowned parliamentarian, former minister and Presidium member of Awami League. His wife, Joya Sen Gupta was elected MP from his husband's constituency in Sunamganj.¹²

Shamim Osman is the MP for Narayanganj-4, his brother Selim Osman is also the MP for Narayanganj-5. Nasim Osman, their elder brother was first elected MP in 1986, and he was re-elected in 1988, 2008, and 2014. These three Osman brothers (Nasim, Selim, and Shamim) are the sons of AKM Shamsuzzoha popularly known as Zoha. Zoha was first elected MP in the 1970 election. In the first national election in 1973 after the war, Zoha was elected MP again. Zoha's father was Khan Saheb Osman Ali. Osman Ali was a political activist, businessman, social worker, and an MPA. He was elected to the Provincial Assembly in 1946 on a Muslim League ticket. In addition to

these five MPs over three generations from the same family, Sarah Kabori Sarwar was also elected from this Osman family. She was a famous film actress and sister-in-law of Zoha. She was elected MP from Narayanganj-4 in 2008.¹³

Afzal Khan of Cumilla is a very influential leader of Cumilla Awami League. He has served on important party position. Nargis Afzal Khan, the wife of Afzal Khan, headed the party's women wing for a long time. His brothers Fazal Khan and Himmat Khan and his nephews Jewel Khan, Mozammel Khan, Kamrul Khan, Kamal Chowdhury, and Jamshed Chowdhury are the most influential leaders of the Awami League in Cumilla district. Among the leaders of the party's student wing is his son Arman Khan. His daughter Anjum Sultana Sheema was AL's Mayoral candidate for Cumilla City Corporation election. Now, she is an MP in the 11th parliament.¹⁴ Zahid Ahsan Russel is the son of famous trade union leader and MP Ahasanullah Master of Tongi. Meher Afroze Chumki is an MP and was the State Minister for Women and Children's Affairs. She is the daughter of former MP Moyezuddin Ahmed, who was a close associate of *Bangabandhu* Sheikh Mujib.

The Siddiquis of Tagnail is an influential family in their locality. There are four brothers of this family in active politics in Tangail. They include Awami League (AL) central leader, former Presidium member and minister Abdul Latif Siddiqui, his younger brother Krishak Sramik Janata League (KSJL) president Abdul Kader Siddiqui Bir Uttam (former leader of the Awami League) and their younger brothers and Tangail district KSJL joint conveners, Murad Siddiqui and Azad Siddiqui.¹⁵ Another influential family of Tangail is the Khan family. The four Khan brothers are Awami League former lawmaker Amanur Rahman Khan (Rana), his younger brother, Shahidur Rahman Khan (Mukti), (former Tangail municipal mayor), business leader Zahidur Rahman Khan (Kakon), Saniyat Khan (Bappa) was the central vice president of Bangladesh Chhatra League. The Khans' father is an elected MP in the

11th parliament.¹⁶

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

Following the assassination of *Bangabandhu* Sheikh Mujib and turmoils in politics and within the military, General Ziaur Rahman (Zia) emerged as the military strongman. He assumed power upon the tragic events of 7 November 1975. After assuming power, following a familiar pattern, Zia attempted to civilianise his military rule. In the process of civilianising his military rule, he took several measures like holding elections and party formation. He contested the presidential election as the nominee of the Jatiyatabadi Front (Nationalist Front), an electoral alliance of both leftist and rightist anti-AL anti-Indian forces.¹⁷ The victory in the presidential election in 1978 set the stage for the parliamentary election in 1979.

His experiment with party formation eventually led to the formation of the BNP. Zia dissolved the Jatiyatabadi Front, formed Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in September 1978 using state machinery and patronage to a large extent as a vehicle to civilianise his rule. The BNP comprised JAGODAL, and factions of various components of the JF.¹⁸ It is a nationalist, centre-right, anti-AL, and anti-Indian political party. This party promotes a free-market economy and is opposed to communism and socialism. Zia took some constitutional measures such as, “replacement of ‘secularism’, a fundamental state principle of the constitution, by ‘absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah’, redefining ‘socialism’, as ‘economic and social justice’; replacement of ‘Bengali’ nationalism and identity with ‘Bangladeshi’ to emphasise territorial rather than ethnic identity.”¹⁹ He used religion as a legitimisation tool for his military rule.

Zia was killed in 1981 in an abortive coup by a faction of the military. The BNP was on the brink of disintegration after its leader's death. But, it survived then and is still in the game due largely to the selection of Zia's widow, Begum Khaleda Zia, as its leader in 1983-84. The party leaders asked Khaleda Zia to assume the party leadership.

Khaleda assumed leadership of the BNP in 1983-84. A housewife with no political background, she led the party during the pro-democracy movement against Ershad's military rule throughout the 1980s and emerged with the image of an uncompromising leader. Zia married Khaleda Zia in 1960 when she was just 15 years old. She was admittedly content to stay in the background and raise their two sons and displayed little enthusiasm for politics until her husband's death.²⁰

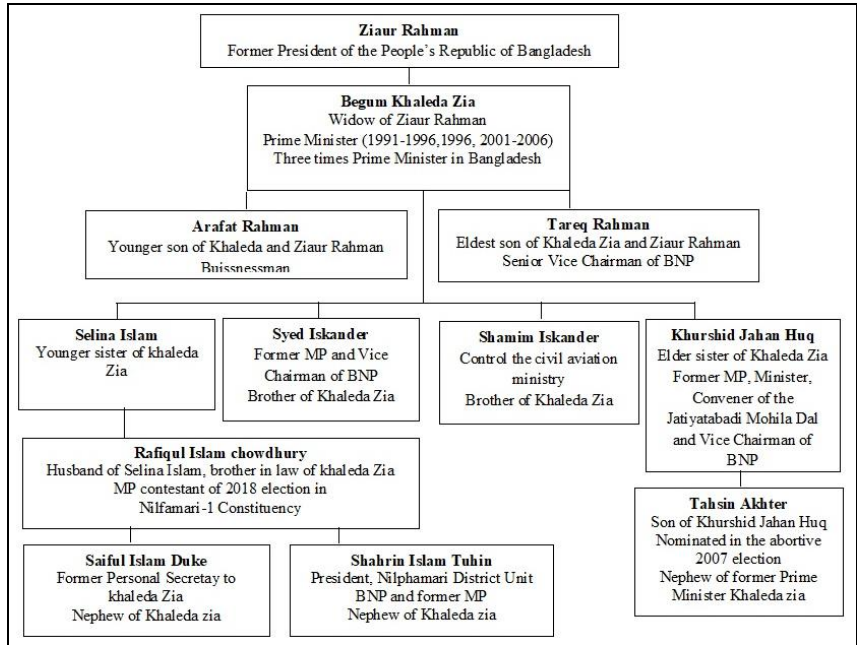
"When my husband was killed, I did not get involved. I did not want to," she told Time. "But party leaders started consulting me and I had to join due to public pressure."²¹ BNP won the general election in 1991 under Khaleda Zia's leadership. She became the first female Prime Minister of the country. In 2001, she became the PM again. To-date, Khaleda Zia remains the Chairperson of the BNP.

Begum Khaleda Zia was chosen unanimously as the leader of the BNP in the early 1980s. The party had other important leaders, including those who had held the office of prime minister under Zia. The BNP secretary general, Baddurudouza Chowdhury was also a leader of substance. But there was not a squeak from any of the senior leaders or the party ranks. Another South Asian country and the party had accepted dynastic succession as something quite natural and normal.²² Tareq Rahman, the eldest son of Khaleda Zia, has been waiting in the wings to formally take over the leadership of the BNP. Tareq Rahman, reportedly, was the mastermind behind the BNP's successful election campaign and was the key decisionmaker after the 2001 elections, though he held no formal position. On 22 June 2002, he stepped forward and became the Joint Secretary-General and then Senior Joint Secretary-General. Later, he was nominated as the Senior Vice Chairman (second only to his mother, the chairperson of the party). He had the final say about each and every major decision taken by the BNP-led 4-party alliance government during 2001-06. He made the office of the chairperson in the Hawa Bhaban parallel to the Prime Minister's office in the Gonobhaban. He reportedly used government

power to control party and government. Rumours were rife that this was a prelude to consolidating dynastic succession that if BNP had won the next election, Tareq Rahman would have been the Prime Minister and Khaleda the president.²³ Tareq's younger brother Arafat Rahman was a businessman. He was sentenced in court in 2011 in absentia for corruption and money laundering during his mother's premiership during 2001-06. No doubt, he peddled influence during his mother's tenure. He died in exile in 2015. Khaleda's brother Major (Retd) Syed Iskander was a Vice-Chairman of BNP and former MP. Khaleda Zia created a post of Special Secretary-General for Iskander in the BNP. Shamim Iskander, another brother of Khaleda Zia, controlled all business of Bangladesh Biman. Her sister Khurshid Jahan Hoque was a former MP and Minister. She was also the Convener of the Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal (the women wing of the BNP) and Central Vice Chairman of BNP. Upon Khurshid Jahan Huq's death, her son Tahsin Akhter became the leader in his ancestral home district of Dinajpur. He was nominated in the abortive 2007 election. Saiful Islam Duke, former personal secretary (PS) to Khaleda Zia and Shahrin Islam Tuhin, a former MP and President of Nilphamari District BNP were the two nephews of Khaleda Zia. Their father, husband of Khaleda's younger sister Selina Islam, Dr Rafiqul Islam Chowdhury contested in the 11th (2018) national elections as the BNP candidate from Jatiya Oikkya Front (Front of National Unity) Nilphamari-1 (Domar-Dimla) constituency.²⁴

Figure 3

Zia-Khaleda family in Bangladesh Politics



Source: Information contained in this table was gathered by the author himself from various newspapers, magazines, journal articles, books.

Members of the families of other prominent BNP leaders are also being recruited in high positions of the party, not because of their special contribution to the party or their special quality but mostly by virtue of being the members of the prominent families. Such family members of Zia and Khaleda Zia were also included in the Committee announced on 6 August 2016. While the discussion above catalogued the names and particulars of members of the Zia-Khaleda family, below we provide the particulars of the BNP leaders who belong to powerful BNP leaders.

Shama Obaid, the organising secretary of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is the daughter of former Secretary-General and minister KM Obaidur Rahman. She contested the Faridpur-2 parliamentary election 2008 as a BNP candidate. Standing Committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain's son Khandaker Maruf

Hossain, is a Supreme Court lawyer and member of the Central Executive Committee of the BNP. Hanged war criminal and member of the Standing Committee Salauddin Quader Chowdhury's son Hummam Quader Chowdhury is also a member of the Central Executive Committee of the BNP. Salauddin Quader's brother Giasuddin Quader Chowdhury has long been the Vice-Chairman of the party. It should be mentioned that the Chowdhurys come from the powerful Fazlul Quader Chowdhury family in Chittagong. FQ Chowdhury was a hardnosed Muslim League leader and died in 1973 while he was in jail on the charge of collaborating with the Pakistan occupation army during the Bangladesh War of Liberation in 1971. Another standing committee member Jamiruddin Sircar's son lawyer Nawshad Jamir is the international affairs secretary of the BNP. Khaleda Zia has made standing committee member Mirza Abbas's wife Afroza Abbas, the party's assistant women's affairs secretary. Vice-Chairman Abdul Awal Mintoo's son Tabith Awal has also been included in the Central Executive Committee as a member. Tabith contested the Dhaka North mayoral election two times as BNP's nominee. Engineer Ishraq Hossain, son of Sadek Hossain Khoka, former Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation and Vice Chairman of the BNP, contested the Dhaka South City Corporation as the BNP's mayoral candidate. Aninda Islam Amit has been made assistant organising secretary who is the son of late Tariqul Islam, former minister and a member of the standing committee of the BNP. Standing committee member Gayeshwar Chandra Roy's daughter Aparna Rani Roy has been given the post of the assistant secretary for manpower development affairs. Nitai Roy Chowdhury is the vice-chairman of the BNP. His daughter-in-law, Nipun Roy, has become the central executive committee member. Nasima Akhter Kalpana, the widow of the party's leader Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, who died in jail, has been given a post. Salahuddin Ahmed, a member of the standing committee, has his wife, former MP Hasina Ahmed, in the executive committee. Former organising

secretary M Ilias Ali's wife, Tahsina Rushdir Luna, is among the 73 members of Khaleda's advisory council. Shahida Rafique, the wife of standing committee member late Rafiqul Islam Miah, has also become a member of the advisory council. Former minister Harunar Rashid Khan along with his daughter Afroza Khan Rita is also in the advisory council of the BNP. She served as the President of Manikgonj District BNP. Nasir Uddin Asim is on the advisory council. He is the son-in-law of former state minister Abdul Mannan. Former whip late Jahed Ali Chowdhury's son Fahim Chowdhury is a member of the executive committee now. Late Secretary-General Khandaker Delwar Hossain's son Abdul Hamid Dablu is also a member of the executive committee. Businessman Faisal Alim, son of late BNP leader, former minister, and a convict on war crimes charges Abdul Alim, who was sentenced to prison until death, is a member of the BNP's Central Committee. Moinul Islam Shanta is a member of Khaleda's advisory council who is the son of late industries minister M Shamsul Islam Khan. Rabeya Siraj, the wife of former environment minister Shajahan Siraj, is an assistant weaving affairs secretary. Anwar Hossain Bulu, brother of former state minister Alamgir Kabir is a member of the executive committee. In Sylhet, M Naser Rahman was elected to the parliament in 2001 in a by-election from a seat vacated by his father, ex-finance minister Saifur Rahman. Naser Rahman remains as a member of the Central Committee. Vice-Chairman Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin's son Mir Helal Uddin has also been made a member of the central executive committee. Lawyer Rumin Farhana, the assistant international affairs secretary of the BNP, is the daughter of Democratic League's president late Oli Ahad. Democratic League is BNP's partner in the 20-Party Alliance. Ms Farhana is an MP in the 11th parliament. Hasina Ahmed was an MP. She is the wife of Salauddin Ahmed, former MP, state minister and standing committee member of the BNP. Barrister Shakila Farzana, a Supreme Court lawyer and a leader of Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi

Forum is active in politics. She is the daughter of Syed Wahidul Alam, former whip and MP.²⁵

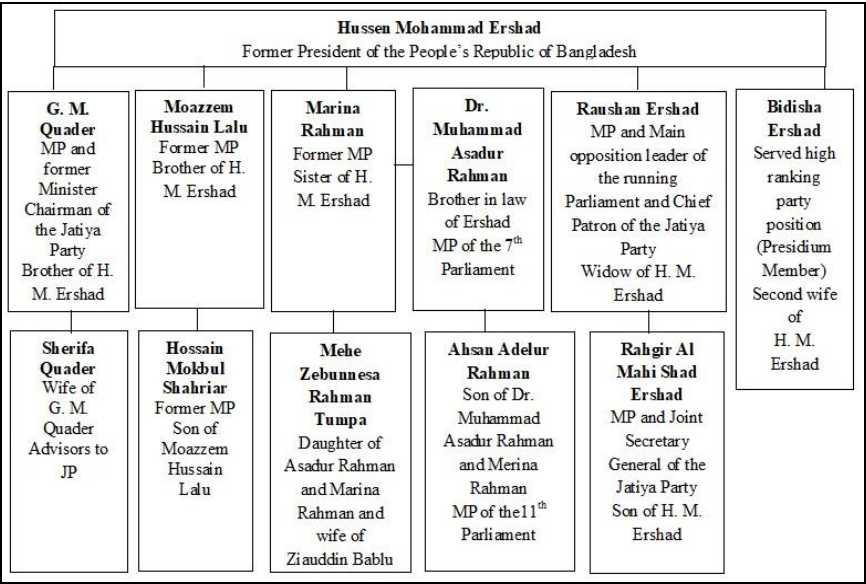
Jatiya Party: On 24 March 1982, General Hussein Mohammad Ershad (HM Ershad) seized power in a bloodless coup overthrowing the elected BNP government of President Justice Abdus Sattar. He ruled till December 1990. Like Zia before him, he also attempted to civilianise his military rule. For that purpose, he formed political parties. He first formed the Janadal (People's Party) with President Justice Ahsanuddin Chowdhury as the convener in November 1983 with a faction of the AL (Mizan), and a faction of the BNP led by Shamsul Huda Chowdhury. The Janadal was the nucleus of Ershad's ultimate party; the Jatiya Party (JP), which was a conglomerate of various smaller parties and factions, and civil-military officials. On 1 October 1985, the ban on political activities was partially lifted. Finally, in January 1986, JP was launched with Ershad as the party Chairman.²⁶ An analyst said that the JP was an 'umbrella party' that assembled under its banner some well-known turncoat politicians whose ideological orientations ranged from the socialist left through moderate to the conservative right.²⁷ Ershad took some constitutional and administrative measures for continuing his military rule. He used religion as a legitimisation tool for the continuation of his power. He made Islam the state religion through the eighth amendment to the Constitution.

Jatiya Party has been the third-largest party in Bangladesh since 1991. Ershad was the party chairman until his death. Like AL and BNP, Ershad's JP also has a dynastic character. His wife Roushan Ershad had long been the Vice-Chair of the JP and is the chief patron of the party now. She is also the main opposition leader in the 11th parliament. Even after her husband died in 2019, she is still active in politics in the JP. Another wife of Ershad, Bidisha Ershad, was also active in politics. She is appointed to a high position (Presidium member) in the party. Ershad's brother, Golam Mohammad (GM) Kader has been elected as the chairman of the party in the recent party

council. Marina Rahman, sister of Ershad was an MP in the 10th Parliament. Asadur Rahman was a Jatiya Party politician and former MP of the 7th Parliament. He was the husband of Merina Rahman and brother in law of Ershad. Their son, Ahsan Adelur Rahaman is an MP of the 11th parliament. Another brother of Ershad, Moazzem Hossain Lalu is a former MP. He is involved in Jatiya Party Politics. Hossain Mokbul Shahriar, son of Moazzem Hossain Lalu, was an MP. Recently, Ershad’s son, Rahgir Al Mahi Shad Ershad, has been elected as an MP in a by-election from Rangpur 3 constituency after the seat was vacated due to the death of his father, HM Ershad. GM Quader also made his wife Sherifa Quader, sister Merina Rahman, and niece Mehe Zebunnesa Rahman Tumpa as advisers to JP in recent party council.²⁸

Figure 4

Ershad Family in Bangladesh Politics



Source: Information contained in this Table was gathered by the author himself from various newspapers, magazines, journal articles, books, etc.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, we tried to describe recruits of local and national level leaders of three major parties in Bangladesh from the members of the families of the powerful local and national leaders of those parties. This kind of recruitment of leaders is done on the ascriptive basis and not based on achievement. Several points can be made from the above discussion in this paper.

Necessity

The first generation of dynastic leaders in South Asia had to emerge out of necessity; a necessity for their respective party. To maintain party unity and to fight against military autocracy, the male members of these parties installed the deceased leaders' family heirs to the leadership position of their respective parties.

Another necessity was psychological. The deceased leader often appeared as the iconic figure staying above all of his companions. Party activists and supporters could not find any of the companions of the deceased leader to embody his charisma, charm, and the 'qualities'. So, the psychological need of the party activists and supporters demanded someone from his family and/or blood connection to take charge. They think that the leader's kin may embody the 'qualities', charm, and charisma of the deceased leader. That is exactly what happened in the cases of Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia. Both the leaders came under the same challenge from the so-called 'inheritors of ideology' of the deceased leader.

Sheikh Hasina was challenged by her General Secretary Abdur Razzak in 1983 who broke away and formed the BAKSAL in 1983-84. But he could not succeed in the face of the overwhelming power and Sheikh Hasina remained the beloved leader as the daughter of the *Bangabandhu*. Razzak, a smart and dedicated student leader and the organiser had to eventually accept the reality. He returned to the AL in 1992 accepting Sheikh Hasina's leadership.

Almost the same was the case with Khaleda Zia. Undoubtedly, she was made the leader of the BNP to keep it united as no other leader in the party could symbolise the charisma or charm and qualities of Zia. No leader could capture the grief of Khaleda Zia, the young widow of just 34 with two minor children. No leader could draw the sympathy as Khaleda could. Few leaders could listen to other colleagues as they could listen to Khaleda. Nonetheless, a series of defections by senior leaders indicate that they did not accept Khaleda as the successor of Zia. Both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia had to work hard and skilfully to establish their control over the party and state.

Psychological Needs of Leaders

The new leader's psychological and security needs brought their relatives to the key positions in party and government. These leaders recruited their family members to important positions for two primary reasons: they needed to do that for their psychological need and security. But things changed later. As politics got degenerated and became a way of earning money, third- or fourth-generation of leaders from families began to be recruited in growing numbers even at the local levels to have firm control of a few families and the supreme leader's family in running the party in collaboration with influential local families belonging to the same party. They are controlling the party and thus controlling the party and the government (when in power) patronage systems. That also explains the acrimonious relations between the parties led by few families because it is related to the control of the patronage system.

The Benefits of Power

When we categorise the types of dynastic leadership. We can see variations in terms of the causes and nature of the emergence of dynastic leaders. Even in the tug of war for the soul of the party between the so-called 'ideological inheritors' and the 'inheritors of blood' of the principal deceased leader, the former lost to the latter

everywhere as the latter proved to be more unifying, more legitimate, more identifying with the party, and closer to the party activists and loyalists. The 'inheritors of blood' encompass both 'ideology' and 'blood connection' of the deceased (in most cases assassinated with the status of a martyr) leader. In Congress in India, Morarji Desai lost to Indira Gandhi. In the case of AL in Bangladesh, Razzak's 'ideological challenge' could not make any dent in Hasina's leadership. In case of the BNP, a series of defections throughout the 1980s by the senior leaders of the BNP, the formation of a separate BNP, and/or joining hands with Ershad's military government can be seen as a challenge to Khaleda's leadership. Henry C Hart, an analyst, does acknowledge that one who "enters top leadership through inheritance alone need to demonstrate very little in the way of character, very little in the way of prior political roles." But he hastens to add, "this statement is less true if succession by inheritance is contested, as it was for Indira Gandhi in the period from 1966 to 1971. She wrested de facto control from what was intended to be a mere formal and perhaps temporary tenure by showing extraordinary will, strategic skill, and popular appeal."²⁹

Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia were recruited by leaders of the two major parties in the early 1980s. It was hoped that their leadership could heal party splits and mobilise popular support. Following the overthrow of the military rule, these dynastic leaders, with competing charismatic inheritance, have alternated in power for over three decades.³⁰ They reached their destination for their patience, commitment, and dedication. They did not come to power overnight. They struggled and worked hard to shape the country's democratic life. They systematically came to power through an election. People's choice and mandate made them popular leaders.

Dynastic succession is a "natural" outgrowth of such family-based political networks. Besides, the saddening pervasiveness of political assassination (particularly in Bangladesh, India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Pakistan) raises the issue of 'inheritance of

blood' more often than would be the case with normal life expectancies.

Since the leadership of the parties in Bangladesh is dominated by a few powerful families connected to a particular party, party contest has, to a large extent, turned into a contest among the families. Family-based parties have turned the democracy into a system of electoral contest among the parties. In this process, the families that lead the party indeed control the patronage system. Party contest has turned out to be a system of control of some families of a party and the control for state and/or party patronage.

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