



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Bangladesh Nationalist Party stages hartals in opposition to government, 2010

**Time period notes:** *It is not certain that the campaign is actually over. BNP held another hartal in February which had primarily different objectives but could end up connecting to the rest of the campaign. Furthermore, it has not been so long since their last known action that further action is unforeseeable. Possibly ongoing.*

May

2010

to: November

2010

**Country:** Bangladesh

**Location City/State/Province:** Dhaka and the rest of the country

### Goals:

A solution to the water, gas, and electricity crises, the resignation of the Election Commission, cancellation of the most recent peace treaties with India, sooner elections, and, later in the campaign, the release of arrested protesters.

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 162. Sit-in

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 118. Hartal

### Methods in 3rd segment:

- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

### Methods in 4th segment:

### Methods in 5th segment:

### Methods in 6th segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 118. Hartal

**Notes on Methods:**

There were other demonstrations at other times, but it is unclear of timing within the middle 3 segments.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Democracy

Economic Justice

**Group characterization:**

- Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) members

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Bangladesh National Party leader Khaleda Zia; party vice-president Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury

**Partners:**

Three other political parties

**External allies:**

Not Known

**Involvement of social elites:**

Not Known

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

- Political party Jamaat-e-Islami

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**

It is not clear when the other two political parties, IOJ and BJP, joined.

**Segment Length:** 5 weeks

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Ruling party Awami League, under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Students and other Awami League groups would threaten to hold demonstrations at the same time and place as BNP demonstrations, allowing the government to ban all demonstrations at that time and place and effectively stopping BNP from holding their demonstrations.

**Campaigner violence:**

Some campaigners fought back against the police violence. It does not seem that the leadership condoned this violence.

**Repressive Violence:**

Police arrested hundreds of protesters at each hartal, and also attacked them using batons and tear gas. At one point, law enforcement officials broke into an opposition leader's home and beat the protesters assembled there.

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

0 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

2 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

Since the campaign seemingly ended quite recently, and could even still be ongoing, the ruling party could still grant them their demands. Their current failure is only reflective of the current state, and does not mean that the campaign could not succeed in the coming months.

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Historically, hartals have been a common form of resistance in Bangladesh, although there was a three-year period without hartals from 2007-2010. On May 19, 2010, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, the main Bangladeshi opposition party, held a rally, where party leader Khaleda Zia announced a nationwide hartal for June 27, in opposition to the Awami League, the ruling party. She also announced that there would be many sit-ins and rallies nationwide leading up to the hartal. The BNP was expressing its unhappiness at government corruption, extortion, salary hikes, oppression of opposition leaders, government control of media, ruling party land grabs, and harassment of females in the education system. They demanded a solution to the water, gas, and electricity crises, the resignation of the Election Commission, cancellation of the most recent peace treaties with India, and sooner elections. This rally was the first of many such protests. The rally stopped communications between the capital and northern parts of the country and backed up traffic on two highways.

For the next month, the BNP planned to hold a sit-in on June 9 at the Institute of Engineers in the capital to express discontentment with the government's overactive role in the judiciary and its corrupt appointments, demanding a fairer justice system. They also planned to have protest rallies on June 17 to demand trials of people who had assassinated journalists and to demand an end to the killing of journalists, as well as to protest the government shutdown of a private TV station.

On May 26, the BNP received a legal notice demanding that they call off the hartal within the next seven days. However, they did not, and the hartal proceeded on Sunday June 27 as planned. The government deployed at least 10,000 officers into the capital city of Dhaka on that day, and they arrested between 200 and 1,000 strikers. Some of the arrests were of activists accused of arson and other violence. Security officials also committed acts of violence against opposition members, at one point breaking into an opposition leader's home and beating the supporters assembled there. Furthermore, security forces used tear gas and batons against the activists, particularly those blocking major roads. Police violence may have injured as many as 500 activists. The activists occasionally responded with violence.

The hartal halted transportation nationwide and closed most businesses for the day. Private offices, stores, and markets were mostly closed, as were educational institutions. Road transportation stopped, as no vehicles could get by on the roads. Rail and air transportation continued, although there were fewer passengers. Some banks and government offices remained open, but with fewer staff. Stock markets continued trading, and the main ports continued handling cargo. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and other government officials, dismissed the strike, many of them calling it an attempt to incite anarchy. Furthermore, many people opposed to the hartal said that the strategy was overly harmful to the national economy, and that, as the country progressed, hartals should remain a strategy of the past.

At this point, the BNP had an ally in smaller political party Jamaat-e-Islami. It eventually became a 4-party alliance, but it is unclear when the other two, Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) and Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP), joined.

Opposition leaders called for nationwide demonstrations on Monday to protest the beatings and arrests. They said that many of the arrests were arbitrary. Furthermore, that weekend, BNP vice president Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury disappeared. A court granted him and six others bail in early July.

The BNP started planning a nationwide human chain for July 7 to demand the release of everyone else that the police had arrested during the hartal, and to demand that the government drop all charges. The BNP claimed that all the charges were false. Jamaat-e-Islami also planned a roadside human chain for the same day, and the two groups discussed forming the chain jointly; it is unclear whether they ultimately did. On July 7, police obstructed the chain, using violence to stop the entirely nonviolent protesters from standing roadside. Furthermore, police prevented a rally on July 21, and refused to give the activists permission to use Paltan Maidan for their July 25 mass hunger strike. In response to their denial of the Paltan Maidan for the hunger strike, activists held a demonstration on the same day.

The BNP had a large procession along the main streets in Dhaka on August 9 to continue pressuring for their 13 demands, which by this point also included reduced price of commodities, a withdrawal of charges against party leaders, and the release of party leaders.

BNP tried holding a rally on November 7 for National Revolution and Solidarity Day, but they did not receive government permission for either of the locations that they were hoping for. For many months, whenever BNP called a rally, the Awami League youth groups, or other Awami League groups, would call a rally for the same time and place, giving the government the legal ability to ban all protests from that area for that time, effectively stopping the BNP protest.

The BNP called another hartal on Sunday November 14. This hartal also had some violence, with police firing at a BNP demonstration and arresting some activists. Throughout the day, most vehicles stayed off the roads, and many businesses remained closed. This hartal seems to have had less advance planning than the one in June. BNP called it in response to Khaleda Zia's eviction the previous day. The hartal on the following day was an expression of no confidence in the ruling party, and also a criticism of the government's eviction of Khaleda Zia. However, this criticism tied into their larger criticisms of the oppressive government, the politicization of the judiciary, and the lack of justice for opposition members.

The next week, BNP called another hartal for November 30, with many of the same motivations as the June hartal. They also called for rallies and processions nationwide from November 25-27, rallies at divisional headquarters on November 28, and processions in support of the hartal on November 29. Police arrested hundreds of protesters at this last protest. The government declared that they would not object to a democratic hartal, without chaos or violence, but that they would object if anything became violent or undemocratic. Various political parties voiced their support for the hartal, such as JAGPA, NPP, NDP, Labour Party, NAP, and at least two of the other parties in the alliance. However, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Associated asked BNP to call off the hartal, because they felt that it would overly threaten their industry. In response to criticism of their tactic, the BNP declared that it would not call off its hartal, and threatened that there might be even more in the future.

On the day of the hartal, activists tried to stage rallies and marches. Police arrested dozens of activists, saying that they were trying to enforce chaos. People accused of being opposition activists set several vehicles on fire that night.

BNP activism has continued since the November hartal. Particularly, on February 7, the party organized another hartal. However, this hartal seemed to be primarily a protest of the treatment of Khaleda Zia, the police violence at earlier protests, and a proposed airport construction; the earlier demands did not seem to be a central part of this later hartal. Nevertheless, it is still possible that BNP will continue the previous campaign, or that the government will respond to their demands with a more positive outcome.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

Hartals are a common method of protest in Bangladesh, although there had not been any for 42 months before the June 27 hartal (1). Historically, they have frequently included some violence

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