

BHBCUC-USA DELEGATION MET THE CHIEF ADVISOR



The BHBCUC-USA Delegation with the Chief Advisor & the Foreign Affairs Advisor

A high-level delegation of BHBCUC-USA (Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, USA) met the Chief Advisor (CA) of Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Dr. Fakruddin Ahmed on September 28, 2007 at the Consular Office of Bangladesh in New York, while the CA was on a mission to attend the UN General Assembly. The delegation that included Mr. William Gomez, Mr. Ratan Barua, Dr. Dwijen Bhattachajrya, Mr. Nabendu Dutta, Mr. Sitangshu Guha and Mr. Rup Kuamr Bhowmick, representing the religious minorities handed over a memorandum to the CA. The memorandum is pasted below.

What actually went on in the meeting was that the Foreign Affairs Advisor Dr. Iftikhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Ambassador to USA Mr. Humayun Kabir, Bangladesh's Representative to the Permanent Mission at the United Nations & the Consul General Mr. Shamsul Haque and his chief Protocol officer and the press, welcomed the Delegation.

The Ambassador and Consul General received Delegation at the lobby and escorted to the Chief Advisor's meeting room. During the waiting period, the Delegation discussed various issues with the Foreign Affairs Advisor Dr. Iftikhar Ahmed. Thus, the tone that the embassy staff and the Foreign Affairs Advisor set was very friendly and cordial.

After exchanging greetings/shaking hands, the members of the Delegation were formally introduced and then 12 demands were verbally presented to the CA. After the presentation was made, it was reiterated by the presenter "No political parties ever tried to address any of our problems in a meaningful way and shall never do it either because they have to appease their voters. Your government is uniquely positioned to solve all our problems through ordinance if you want to."

In response, Dr. Fakruddin Ahmed said, "My government believes that Bangladesh is a pluralistic country where people of all religions have the same right to be protected by the law." Talking about specifics, he frankly said, "I don't know about the details of the Enemy Property Act, so I have to go home, study the issue and then try to act."

BHBCUC-USA in specific lobbied for the release of Professor Nim Chandra Bhowmick and protection of Professor Abul Barakat. The CA was given books and materials relating to the minority persecution, Enemy Property Act and the lawsuit by Jamaat-E-Islami against Professor Barkat (It was based on his research that the U. S. Department of State recorded the fact that 2.5 million acres of minorities land has been seized by the government).

Finally, the Delegation as "concerned citizens of Bangladesh" urged the CA to show leniency toward the University Professors who are presently in custody.

What did the Delegation gain? Though, no specific promises, but the CA was apprised of the facts and it would perhaps be reasonable to hope that he might address one or two issues. Even if he fails to do that, at least the fact he met the Delegation of Religious Minorities would send out a signal to the Islamists of Bangladesh that this government would not allow them to unleash a reign of terror as they did in the past and viciously they did after October 2001 and onward till 1/11.

New York, USA

28 September 2007

September 28, 2007

The Honorable Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed
Chief Advisor to the Caretaker Government of
The People's Republic of Bangladesh
Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Re: The plight of Bangladesh's religious & ethnic minorities and a permanent solution to their problem.

Esteemed Chief Advisor:

The point of this memorandum is to urge you to eliminate all the instruments and practices of minority persecution that remain in force in Bangladesh, thus paving the way for a permanent solution to the threat of total elimination facing the country's 25 million religious & ethnic minorities.

Your government has taken a series of unprecedented bold steps, which has reversed the dangerous course the country had taken; and, this, in turn, has not only earned you international acclaim but also restored the civilized world's confidence in our country - - Bangladesh.

The signature achievement of your government has undoubtedly been prosecution of the criminals/corrupt politicians and meting out the justice they deserve. This will certainly act as a deterrent in the future. The minorities of Bangladesh expect you to deal with those who ordered and or perpetrated such heinous crimes as arson, rape, massacres, and murders against the country's religious & ethnic minorities exactly the same way, so it will act as a deterrent against targeted hate crime/crime against them.

As you know, ever since the minorities were robbed of their status of first rate citizens of the country through the passage of the 5th and 8th Amendments, while the state itself has discriminated and persecuted them, the cadres of the political parties that are actively engaged in transforming the once secular Bangladesh into a theocratic state, have conducted atrocities against them forcing millions of them to leave the country.

For obvious reasons, no political party will ever take any meaningful measures to eliminate the instruments of discrimination and persecution of the minorities. Your government, which, unlike elected governments, does not need to appease anyone, is uniquely positioned to resolve almost all the problems facing the country's minorities.

Under your leadership, Bangladesh is clearly headed toward becoming the pluralistic secular democratic society that it became in 1971 through the sacrifice of three million lives, dignity of 250, 000 women and an exodus of 10 million people in the face of atrocities. In such societies, minority empowerment through affirmative action is the norm. We are a civilized nation, and we urge you to do the same for the minorities Bangladesh, while you are in power.

We believe that, by taking the following steps, all of which can easily be done through ordinance, you can enable the minorities of the country live there in their ancestral homeland with human dignity and equal rights:

- i. Instituting an independent commission like the Sachar Commission to produce a report about the socio-economic status of the minorities as well as a White Paper about the systematic crimes that have been committed against them for decades, and then prosecuting and punishing those who ordered and/or perpetrated (as is done

under Hate Crime Law) those crimes (They could include the criminals who ordered and or conducted the Logang/Baniar Char massacre, or the Mahalchari/Luxmi Bazaar/Bhola/Dighinala pogroms, raped the minors like Purnima or Rita Das or murdered the popular minority community leader & Upajila Chairman as Kalidas Baral of Chitalmari, Bagerhat); and, at the same time, giving the victims compensation and help them rehabilitate.

- ii. Repealing the *Vested (Enemy) Property Act* and unconditionally returning the seized 2.7 million plus acres of land to their rightful owners/heirs or to the Minority Foundations that your government is being requested to create).
- iii. Empowering the religious & ethnic minorities by hiring them in great numbers (in the spirit of Affirmative Action) in government, semi-government, autonomous bodies including the Foreign Ministry, Home Ministry, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, armed forces, police administration, PSC, academic administration, etc.
- iii. Rescinding the BNP-Jamaat government's Order of Relocation of the Ramna Kali Temple & Ma Anandamayee's Ashram from its historical site of centuries.
- iv. Implementation of the *Chittagong Hill tracts Peace Accord* of 1997 fully.
- v. Please create separate foundations for the Hindus, Buddhists & Christian Communities following the model of the existing Islamic Foundation.
- vi. Creation of a Minority Council.
- vii. Ensuring that there is adequate minority representation in the Human Rights Commission, Constitutional Council, and National Security Council that are being formed.
- viii. Initiation of the process of repealing the notorious 5th and 8th amendments that were deliberately enacted to effectively force the minorities to leave the country.
- ix. Ensuring that every voting age member of the minority communities is included in the voter list, and specific measures taken to protect them against pre/post-election violence.

We also urge you to protect Economist/Professor Abul Barakat, who has been sued by Mr. A. H. M. Hamidur Rahma Azad, the Secretary of Jamaat-e- Islami, for revealing how much minority property was seized by which party's members/followers (CR cASe 1970/2007 (Southern Region) under section 499/500/501/109 BDB - Please see attached).

We fervently hope that you will take necessary measures to make the minorities of Bangladesh feel that they are also "equal citizens" of the country and thus enable them to live in their ancestral homeland with human dignity and enjoying the basic human rights that all humans enjoy in civilized nations.

Thank you for your anticipated action to eliminate the instruments of discriminations & persecution of minorities that remain in force at the state level and create set of bulwarks to combat those evil practices.

Sincerely,

William Gomez

Ratan Barua

Nabendu Dutta

Sitangshu Guha

Dwijen Bhattachajrya, Ph. D.

Rup Kumar Bhowmick