

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: BGD32796
Country: Bangladesh
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Questions

1. Is there any information on the treatment of returnees to Bangladesh who were supporters or members of the Freedom Party? Given the current political situation is it likely that a person with such an association would be targeted by government authorities or any other groups after being out of Bangladesh since 1995.

RESPONSE

1. Is there any information on the treatment of returnees to Bangladesh who were supporters or members of the Freedom Party? Given the current political situation is it likely that a person with such an association would be targeted by government authorities or any other groups after being out of Bangladesh since 1995.

Advice on the situation of persons associated with the Freedom Party was received from DFAT on 21 February 2008 and follows below:

In responding to this request, DFAT contacted a notable person from Narsingdi district, who seemed to be informed regarding the activities of the Freedom party, although his association with the party could not be confirmed. It should be noted, however, that it is difficult to confirm anyone's involvement with the party given its origins and history. DFAT provides the following general advice associated with this request:

The party was founded in 1987 by two retired army officers, Lt. Col. (Rtd) Syed Faruq Rahman and Lt. Col. (Rtd) Khandaker Abdur Rashid, both of whom were responsible for the 1975 assassination of Bangladesh's first President, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (and father of current jailed leader of the Awami League Party, Sheikh Hasina) and the murder of four other national leaders in Dhaka Central jail shortly thereafter. The party did not have a strong

popular base, and saw only a handful of its candidates elected to parliament between 1975 and 1996.

When the Awami League formed government in 1996, a number of former army personnel left the country fearing arrest and prosecution. Some others, who were working in Bangladeshi foreign missions, left their posts and went into hiding after they were asked to return to face trial. Those convicted of the above murders escaped trial for about 21 years due to an Indemnity Ordinance. However, they were eventually sentenced in 1998 and in 2004 respectively, to death (three) or life sentences (twelve). Of these, only three remain in jail, including Syed Faruq Rahman, with the others having absconded. It is thought that a number of these are also key members of the Freedom Party.

DFAT provides the following responses to specific questions in BGD32796:

... **Question 6B**

Please provide advice on the treatment of any supporters or members of the Freedom Party who have returned to Bangladesh in the recent year. Given the current political situation, is it likely that a person with such an association would be targeted by government authorities or any other groups after being out of Bangladesh since 1995?

DFAT's source advised that activities of the Freedom Party and its members have remained largely defunct since the late 1990s with major party leaders either in jail or outside Bangladesh to avoid prosecution. Any attack on general party members/supporters by current government authorities or other groups could not be confirmed from source or from available open source publications. Unless specifically convicted or sought on criminal charges, it would be unlikely for a person with such an association to be targeted for political reasons under the current regime.

For further information, please find attached DFAT reports and attachments relating to BGD32419 and BGD32651 about the level of discrimination since the emergence of the Caretaker Government in Bangladesh (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2008, *DFAT Report 778 – RRT Information Request: BGD32796*, 21 February – Attachment 1; for the RRT email which elicited this response, see: RRT Research & Information 2007, Email to DFAT: 'Country Information Request BGD32796', 18 December – Attachment 2; for the previous pieces of DFAT advice referred to by the post, see: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 723 – Bangladesh: RRT Information Request: BGD32419*, 1 November – Attachment 3; and: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 744 – Bangladesh: RRT Information Request: BGD32651*, 5 December – Attachment 4; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 744 – Bangladesh: RRT Information Request: BGD32651, Attachment: Some Trends of Serious Human Rights Violations by State Agents in Bangladesh*, 5 December – Attachment 5; and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 744 – Bangladesh: RRT Information Request: BGD32651, Attachment: Reported Deaths by Law Enforcement Agencies*, 5 December – Attachment 6).

NOTE: the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has subsequently provided further background on the "notable person from Narsingdi district, who seemed to be informed regarding the activities of the Freedom party, although his association with the party could not be confirmed". This information is supplied as part of *Research Response BGD33040* (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response BGD33040*, 18 March – Attachment 7).

List of Sources Consulted

Department of Immigration and Citizenship
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

List of Attachments

1. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2008, *DFAT Report 778 – RRT Information Request: BGD32796*, 21 February.
2. RRT Research & Information 2007, Email to DFAT: ‘Country Information Request BGD32796’, 18 December.
3. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 723 – Bangladesh: RRT Information Request: BGD32419*, 1 November.
4. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 744 – Bangladesh: RRT Information Request: BGD32651*, 5 December.
5. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 744 – Bangladesh: RRT Information Request: BGD32651, Attachment: Some Trends of Serious Human Rights Violations by State Agents in Bangladesh*, 5 December.
6. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 744 – Bangladesh: RRT Information Request: BGD32651, Attachment: Reported Deaths by Law Enforcement Agencies*, 5 December.
7. RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response BGD33040*, 18 March.