

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Please provide overview of the treatment of Catholics in Bangladesh generally – especially in recent years under the caretaker government – and any comment/analysis on the prospects under the new AL administration.**
- 2. Please provide background on the Catholic community in Dhaka, including any incidents or concerns.**
- 3. Please provide background on the Catholic community in Bonpara, in particular (a) its size and strength, and (b) whether Muslims have targeted members.**
- 4. Please provide information on the Catholic Youth Commission.**
- 5. Are there reports of Catholic Youth Commission members or persons associated with the Catholic Bishops Conference being targeted by Muslims?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please provide overview of the treatment of Catholics in Bangladesh generally – especially in recent years under the caretaker government – and any comment/analysis on the prospects under the new AL administration.**

A review of source information on the recent situation on Catholics in Bangladesh is presented below under the following sub-headings:

- [*Situation Prior to Caretaker Government*](#)
- [*Reports on Situation of Catholics and Christians under the Caretaker Government*](#)
- [*Specific Reports of Incidents involving Catholics during Caretaker Government*](#)
- [*Specific Reports of Incidents Involving Christians during Caretaker Government*](#)
- [*Commentary by Catholic Clergy and Community on Recent Situation in Bangladesh*](#)

- [Information on Situation of Catholics and Christians under current Awami League Government](#)

Situation Prior to Caretaker Government

The 2008 Annual Report on Bangladesh by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom provides a brief description of the surge in violence against religious minority communities in Bangladesh which occurred in the wake of the victory of the BNP/*Jamaat-e-Islami* alliance at the 2001 parliamentary elections:

In the 2001 national elections, Islamist political parties, including the now-prominent *Jamaat-e-Islami*, were courted by and subsequently supported the center-right Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Members of *Jamaat* allegedly then used their positions in the BNP-led government to deny funding to or otherwise disadvantage groups viewed as opposing the Islamist political and social agenda championed by *Jamaat*. Although some of those who call for a more Islamist Bangladesh engaged in peaceful political and social activities, others adopted a more violent approach towards perceived opponents of Islam.

The 2001 elections occasioned the most serious episode of anti-minority violence since independence, with killings, sexual assaults, illegal land-seizures, arson, extortion, and intimidation of religious minority group members, particularly Hindus, because of their perceived allegiance to the Awami League. The new BNP-led government essentially denied the scope of these abuses and few perpetrators were brought to justice (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2008, *USCIRF Annual Report for 2008 – Bangladesh*, 1 May – Attachment 2).

Previous RRT Research Responses refer to background information on the situation of religious minorities, including Christians, in Bangladesh. RRT *Research Response BGD16828* of 5 July 2004 refers to source material on the situation of Christians in the wake of the victory of the BNP and *Jamaat-e-Islami* alliance at the October 2001 Bangladesh parliamentary elections. A 2003 article by Bertil Lintner argues that the inclusion of Islamist parties *Jamaat-e-Islami* and the *Islami Oikyo Jote* in the BNP-led governing coalition had led to an increase in attacks by other militant Islamic groups, including attacks against religious minorities, stating that “[w]hile the *Jamaat* may not be directly behind these attacks, its inclusion in the government has meant that more radical groups feel they now enjoy protection from the authorities and can act with impunity” (Lintner, B. 2003, ‘Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation’, Asia Pacific Media Services web site, source: *Faultlines*, Volume 14, The Institute of Conflict Management, New Delhi, July. http://www.asiapacificms.com/papers/pdf/faultlines_bangladesh.pdf – Accessed 15 June 2004 – Attachment 3; RRT Country Research 2004, *Research Response BGD16828*, 5 July – Attachment 4).

RRT *Research Response BGD30942* of 23 November 2006 refers to reports on the situation of the Christian community in Bangladesh in 2005, including an article published on the *Christian Today* website in August 2005, which states that “[a]s Muslim fundamentalism rises in Bangladesh, church leaders report that Christians in the country are facing a growing threat”. The article notes the following claims made by Dipak Karmakar, General Secretary of the Church of Bangladesh, in relation to a series of bomb explosions in Bangladesh in August 2005 in which “two people were killed and 100 wounded”:

Karmakar accused the government of sheltering the culprits saying that no arrests have been made and are not likely to be made even though Christians have marched in protest in Dhaka.

He said that the Islamic fundamentalist lobby has spread into the government machinery as the administration is presently headed by a coalition in which the Bangladesh Nationalist Party shares power with the Jamat-e-Islami party ('Bangladesh & Sri Lanka Christians Face Persecution Threat' 2005, *Christian Today* website, 27 August <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/bangladesh.sri.lanka.christians.face.persecution.threat./3800.htm> – Accessed 16 November 2006 – Attachment 5; RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response BGD30942*, 23 November – Attachment 6).

A September 2005 article published on the *Catholic World News* website refers to concerns in the Catholic community following the bomb explosions in Bangladesh in August 2005. The article refers to fears held by Bishop Moses Costa of the Dinajpur diocese in Bangladesh over “an upswing of Islamic fundamentalism”, noting that eight Protestant and Catholic leaders had “sent an open letter to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia calling on the government to guarantee protection, security, and peace for the people, religious minorities in particular” ('Bangladesh: Christians worried by rising Islamic fundamentalism' 2005, *Catholic World News* website, 19 September <http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=39696> – Accessed 16 November 2006 – Attachment 7).

Reports on Situation of Catholics and Christians under the Caretaker Government

Question Two of recent RRT *Research Response BGD34172* of 5 February 2009 provides a discussion of source material on the recent situation of Catholics and Christians in Bangladesh in 2007 and 2008 (RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response BGD34272*, 5 February – Attachment 8).

The US Department of State's report on religious freedom in Bangladesh in 2008 remarks of the religious demography of Bangladesh that “[a]ccording to the 2001 census, Sunni Muslims constitute 89.7 percent of the population and Hindus account for 9.2 percent. The rest of the population is mainly Christian (mostly Roman Catholic) and Theravada-Hinayana Buddhist” (US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008 – Bangladesh*, 19 September, Section 1 – Attachment 9).

An article published by the *Union of Catholic Asian News* in January 2009 provides information on the number of Catholic clergy and laity in Bangladesh, noting that according to the 2007 Catholic Directory of Bangladesh, there are around 310,000 Catholics and 350 priests in the country ('Bangladesh: Priesthood 'Boom' Gets Added Boost This Year' 2009, *Union of Catholic Asian News* website, 22 January <http://www.ucanews.com/2009/01/22/priesthood-boom-gets-added-boost-this-year/> – Accessed 2 February 2009 – Attachment 10).

A report published on the Aid to the Church in Need website in 2008 is critical of the situation of the Christian community and other religious minorities in Bangladesh under the caretaker government, pointing to a “dramatic rise in extremist activity”, and stating that “[r]eports show that Christians increasingly feel they are offered little or no protection, despite a constitution which describes religious freedom as a priority”:

A dramatic rise in extremist activity in 2007-08 has alarmed Christian and other minority groups. Reports show that Christians increasingly feel they are offered little or no protection, despite a constitution which describes religious freedom as a priority. The caretaker government, in place after a state of emergency was declared on 11th January 2007, has been accused of increasingly bowing to extremist groups in a bid to shore-up its powerbase. The new administration was further weakened by a series of crises, such as the November 2007 cyclone, which stretched resources almost to breaking point.

By then, the government had finally given official recognition to *madrassas* (Islamic schools), a significant proportion of which are considered to be deeply intolerant of other religions. According to some sources, within 20 years the number of *madrassas* has grown from barely 4,000 to 64,000. In tribal areas especially, Christians and other minority groups experience discrimination. Extremist groups put pressure on them to convert, sometimes threatening violence. This persecution against religious minorities, which includes the Ahmadis, often has the aim of depriving families and entire villages of their properties. Minority religious groups can only hope that the long-awaited general elections, postponed in January 2007, will give the government renewed impetus to crack down on militant activity (Pontifex, J & Newton, J. (eds) 2008, *Persecuted and Forgotten: A report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2007/2008*, Aid to the Church in Need, p.15 http://www.aidtochurch.org/pdf/Persecuted_&Forgotton_comp.pdf – Accessed 2 February 2009 – Attachment 11).

Reports were located which deal more broadly with the situation of religious minorities, including Catholics and other Christians, in Bangladesh in 2007 and 2008. The US Department of State report on religious freedom in Bangladesh in 2008 provides the following summary of the situation for religious minorities in Bangladesh. It should be noted that the overall assessment with regard to religious freedom in Bangladesh provided in this report is not significantly different to the assessment provided in previous reports for 2007 and 2006:

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period. Citizens were generally free to practice the religion of their choice. Government officials, including the police, were nonetheless often ineffective in upholding law and order and were sometimes slow to assist religious minority victims of harassment and violence. The Government and many civil society leaders stated that violence against religious minorities normally had political or economic motivations and could not be attributed only to religious belief or affiliation.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice during the period covered by this report. Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities experienced discrimination and sometimes violence by the Muslim majority.

... There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious belief or practice during the period covered by this report. Clashes between religious groups occasionally occurred. Violence directed against religious minority communities continued to result in the loss of lives and property, but the motives – religious animosity, criminal intent, or property disputes – often were unclear. Religious minorities were vulnerable due to their relatively limited influence with political elites. Like many citizens, they were often reluctant to seek recourse from a criminal justice system perceived to be corrupt and ineffective. Police were often ineffective in upholding law and order and were sometimes slow to assist religious minorities. This promoted an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence against such minorities. However, persons who practiced different religious beliefs often joined each other's festivals and celebrations such as weddings. Shi'a Muslims practiced their religious beliefs without interference from Sunnis.

... Reported incidents against religious minorities during the reporting period included killings, rape, torture, attacks on places of worship, destruction of homes, forced evictions, and desecration of items of worship. Many of these reports could not be verified independently. There also were reported incidents of members of the Muslim community attacking each other on holidays, due to a perception that some events were un-Islamic. The

Government sometimes failed to investigate the crimes and prosecute the perpetrators, who were often local gang leaders.

... Reports of harassment and violence against the Christian community were recorded during the reporting period (US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008 – Bangladesh*, 19 September – Attachment 9; for earlier reports see US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2007 – Bangladesh*, 14 September – Attachment 12; US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2006 – Bangladesh*, 15 September – Attachment 13).

A report published by Bangladesh legal aid and human rights NGO Ain O Salish Kendra entitled 'Human Rights in Bangladesh 2007' features a chapter on the 'Right to Freedom of Religion'. The chapter does not refer to Christians or Catholic specifically, but focuses on the vulnerability of Hindu minority communities to attacks by non-state actors. The report provides the following general summary of the situation of religious minorities, which is followed by examples of attacks on members of the Hindu and Ahmadiya communities:

While there were few reports of interference with the practice of religion, there were incidents of discrimination against certain religious groups in terms of denial of equal protection of the law with respect to enjoyment of property as well as in respect of acts of violence by private parties and little evidence of action to effectively investigate and prosecute in such cases. The year saw continuing reports of expropriation of land, both through use, or rather abuse, of law and through forced evictions and occupations, as well as sporadic reports of attacks on individuals within certain religious communities (Hossain, S. & Siddiqi, D.M (eds) 2008, 'Human Rights in Bangladesh 2007', Ain O Salish Kendra website http://www.askbd.org/web/wp-content/uploads/2008/11/ASK_Human%20Rights%20Report_07.pdf – Accessed 19 January 2009 – Attachment 14).

An Ain O Salish Kendra summary report on human rights in Bangladesh in 2008 is generally critical of the approach of the Caretaker government to religious issues in Bangladesh:

The government flip-flopped on the relationship between religion and state policy, seemingly capitulating to religious extremists at crucial moments and allowing religion and culture to become sites of contention in national politics, as the expense of promotion of the gender equality or protection of freedom of expression.

... In many ways, then, 2008 did not protect full rights of ethnic and religious minorities or prevent their violations. A number of new developments at year end were especially ominous, however, notably those surrounding demands for blasphemy laws (which found fruit in manifesto commitments to enact such a law being made by JP and JJ) and, in a direct challenge to the Constitution, the demand, responded to in the AL's election promises, that no law "contrary" to the Holy Quran and Sunnah would be passed. Also disturbing were demands from right wing groups (and government responses to them) to dismantle any form of public art that religious extremists claimed to find objectionable and "anti-Islamic", accompanied by actual assaults on statutes across Dhaka city with virtually no response from the authorities ('Human Rights In Bangladesh 2008: Dashed Hopes, Receding Horizons, New Frontiers – Summary' (Undated) Ain O Salish Kendra website http://www.askbd.org/web/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/human_rth_rpt.pdf – Accessed 9 January 2009 – Attachment 15).

At the time of completion of the present response, the full text of this report was not available on the Ain O Salish Kendra website.

A 2008 report published by the United States International Commission on Religious Freedom comments on the situation for religious minorities in Bangladesh, indicating that under the Caretaker Government, religious minorities continued to face threats:

Although the political context has been altered considerably with respect to the ongoing suspension of democracy, the Commission finds that religious freedom remains under threat in Bangladesh. If left unchecked, current trends toward greater intolerance and religiously-motivated violence, particularly toward Hindus, non-Muslim tribal residents, Ahmadis, and Christians, could further undermine human rights protections for all Bangladeshis. Accordingly, the Commission continues to place Bangladesh on its Watch List.

...Hindus, Christians, and representatives of other minority religious communities continue to express concerns regarding the safety of their co-religionists, citing the growth in Islamist radicalism and instances of violence, including fatalities, in which the victims' religious affiliation or activities may have been factors. In June 2005, there were arson or bombing attacks against Ahmadi mosques in three locations. In July 2005, two Bangladeshis working for a Christian NGO were murdered, allegedly for showing a film depicting the life of Jesus. There are also occasional reports of violence by members of the majority religious community against individuals who convert from Islam to Christianity (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2008, *USCIRF Annual Report for 2008 – Bangladesh*, 1 May – Attachment 2).

The same report also notes that under the Caretaker Government “Islamist groups have risen in political prominence and public visibility”, and comments on various actions by these groups during 2007 and 2008:

Since the onset of the state of the emergency, Islamist groups have risen in political prominence and public visibility. In September 2007, restrictions on assembly under the emergency rules were apparently waived to allow Jamaat and other Islamist group supporters to burn effigies and stage widespread public protests against the publication of a newspaper cartoon they believed mocked an element of Bangladeshi Islamic culture. The newspaper Prothom Alo was pressured into firing a deputy editor, and the cartoonist, Arifur Rahman, was jailed without charge until his March 2008 release, following a global campaign by human rights and legal activists. In March 2008, restrictions on assembly were again lifted to allow protests by Islamic groups against a policy proposed by a consortium of women's organizations to strengthen the constitutional provision for the equal rights of women (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2008, *USCIRF Annual Report for 2008 – Bangladesh*, 1 May – Attachment 2).

Previous RRT *Research Response BGD33461* of 30 June 2008 refers to varied source information on the recent operational ability of militant Islamic groups in Bangladesh under the caretaker government. A 2007 Freedom House report stated that a government crackdown on Islamist groups in 2006 had limited their capacity to conduct attacks, noting that “[a]lthough they continue to operate, attacks by Islamists dramatically decreased in 2006. (Freedom House 2007, ‘Freedom in the World – Bangladesh (2007)’ – Accessed 28 December 2008 – Attachment 16; RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response BGD33461*, 30 June – Attachment 17).

The subsequent 2008 Freedom House report on Bangladesh remarks on the activities of “Islamist extremist groups” in Bangladesh in recent years, noting that “[t]he threat of Islamist violence subsided after the 2006 crackdown, but it has not disappeared altogether”:

General lawlessness has increased in recent years, partly due to bombings and other attacks by Islamist extremist groups. Two of the largest – the Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) – were banned in February 2005, and following an escalation of violence in late 2005, a government crackdown yielded the arrest of JMB leader Sheikh Abdur Rahman and JMJB head Siddiquil Islam (popularly known as Bangla Bhai, or “Bengali brother”) in March 2006. Some 800 members of the two groups were also detained. In May 2006, these two men and several other JMB leaders were sentenced to death for the 2005 attacks, and six of the seven convicted militants were executed in March 2007. The threat of Islamist violence subsided after the 2006 crackdown, but it has not disappeared altogether.

...Islam is the official religion, but about 10 percent of the population is Hindu, and there are smaller numbers of Buddhists and Christians. Although religious minorities have the right to worship freely, they face societal discrimination and remain underrepresented in politics and state employment. In recent years, minorities have experienced an increase in both general intolerance and attacks. Two Islamist parties were members of the last coalition government, and both the AL and BNP have made alliances with Islamist groups for political reasons (Freedom House 2008, ‘Freedom in the World: Bangladesh’ – Accessed 31 July 2008 – Attachment 18).

Advice of August 2007 from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade suggested that the institution and actions of the caretaker government had weakened the BNP and other political groups, and had resulted in a diminished overall risk of attacks on individuals by political organizations, stating that “the transformation of the political landscape and restriction and ban on ‘internal politics’ during the State of Emergency period has led to very limited political activities and significant reduction of politically motivated violence throughout Bangladesh consequently reducing the likelihood of threats to individuals” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 679 – Bangladesh: RRT Information Request: BGD31915*, 3 August – Attachment 19).

An International Crisis Group report on Bangladesh published in April 2008 argued that under the caretaker government, *Jamaat-e-Islami* and other legal Islamist parties were not subject to the same degree of restrictions applied to the BNP and Awami League:

The Jamaat-e Islami, the largest Islamist party and a BNP ally, remains relatively untouched, arousing suspicions of a mullah-military nexus.

...The Islamist parties, mainly the Jamaat-e Islami, have weathered the emergency far better than the Awami League and BNP, mostly because they have not come under nearly the same pressure. The Jamaat’s dual status as a religious organisation and political party has allowed it to remain relatively active. It and smaller Islamist parties, like the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) are relatively untouched by the anticorruption drive. Only eight Jamaat members have been imprisoned and eleven charged.

...Even without direct support, undermining the mainstream secular parties as the military has done during the emergency creates more space for others. As a Western diplomat said, “by marginalising the political parties, the military is creating a vacuum that will be filled by the radical Islamist parties”.

The legal Islamist parties have not been limited during the emergency to the same extent as the secular parties. During 2007 and 2008, activists from Shibir, Jamaat-e Islami’s student wing, have carried out attacks on fellow students and journalists and destroyed a campus after the CTG decided not to upgrade the college to a university. Hizb ut-Tahrir has conducted

violent demonstrations and continues to threaten small shopkeepers who sell the *Prothom Alo* newspaper. A new jihadi group, Jadid al-Qaeda Bangladesh (New al-Qaeda Bangladesh), surfaced on 1 May 2007 with simultaneous bomb attacks at three railway stations. The banned Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), which claimed responsibility for over 300 explosions throughout the country in 2005, may be recruiting new cadres (International Crisis Group 2008, *Restoring Democracy in Bangladesh*, International Crisis Group website, 28 April, pp. 5, 25, 31-32

http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/asia/south_asia/151_restoring_democracy_in_bangladesh.pdf – Accessed 25 June 2008 – Attachment 20).

Specific Reports of Incidents involving Catholics during Caretaker Government

Limited reports were located of attacks against members of the Catholic community in Bangladesh in 2007 and 2008. Question Two of recent RRT *Research Response BGD34171* of 5 February 2009 refers to several reports of attacks on Catholics, including an article published on the International Christian Concern on 13 June 2008 which provides information on the rape and murder of a 14 year-old “Christian schoolgirl” in Gazipur district. The article indicates that on 30 April 2008, “three Muslim men” who had previously harassed Bituni Silva on her way to school forcibly entered the girl’s home, raped Bituni and her mother Shima, and poisoned Bituni, who died the following day. The article refers to arrangements being made with parish priest Rev. Abel Rozario, for Bituni to be buried in the local Catholic graveyard (‘Mother and Daughter Gang-Raped by Muslims in Bangladesh’ 2008, International Christian Concern website

<http://www.persecution.org/suffering/pressdetail.php?presscode=220> – Accessed 3 February 2009 – Attachment 21; RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response BGD34272*, 5 February – Attachment 8).

A subsequent article published by the *Union of Catholic Asian News* on 9 June 2008 reports on a protest over the killing, and refers to the following comments by Rosaline Costa of Hotline Human Rights Bangladesh, who claimed that “only 5 percent of rapes against the minority communities receive publicity”, and that “only 2 percent of the rapists are arrested”:

According to Rosaline Costa, coordinator of Hotline Human Rights Bangladesh, the rate of violence, including rape, against minority women has been increasing in the country over the last few decades.

Costa claimed some Islamic fundamentalists consider rape “the number-one instrument for cleansing the minority community.”

Costa told UCA News on June 8 that previously the media did not report rapes, but that the press now reports about 25 percent of these cases. However, she said only 5 percent of rapes against the minority communities receive publicity.

...“Once an issue of the rape of a minority girl or woman is published in the press, more pressure (from the offenders) is created for the victims,” Costa said, claiming only 2 percent of the rapists are arrested.

The Catholic rights activist suggested rapists see minority communities as weak and powerless, since their numbers are small. She claimed that sometimes local law-enforcement authorities prefer to resolve a rape through local arbitration rather than recording it as a criminal case, allowing rapists to get away with minimal punishment (‘Christian And Muslim Leaders Demand Punishment For Rape, Killing Of Christian Girl’ 2008, *Union of Catholic Asian News* website, 9 June <http://www.ucanews.com/2008/06/09/christian-and-muslim->

[leaders-demand-punishment-for-rape-killing-of-christian-girl/](#) – Accessed 3 February 2009 – Attachment 22).

A report published by *Compass Direct News* on 16 October 2008 describes the situation of a Muslim man in Dhaka whose son had reportedly converted to Christianity, and claimed asylum, while in Australia. The article indicates that the man was ostracized and robbed by members of the Muslim community after he revealed news of his son's conversion, and relates statements of intent by members of the Muslim community to punish the son for his conversion:

Muslim clerics and neighbors have ordered the father of a man who converted to Catholicism to remain confined to his house until retaliatory punishment can be exacted from the convert.

“Are you not ashamed that your son became Christian?” the founder of a mosque here asked Ruhul Amin Khandaker, father of a 32-year-old businessman who went to Australia earlier this year to court a Philippine Catholic woman, converting to her faith in April. “Why did you not sacrifice your son like cattle before telling the news to us?”

Khandaker has become a social outcast whose family lives under threat from fellow Muslims, in violation of Bangladesh's constitution and international human rights safeguards. His son, Rashidul Amin Khandaker, has applied for protection from Australian immigration officials as he believes police in 88 percent-Muslim Bangladesh would do nothing to protect him from Islamists threatening to kill him (‘Bangladesh: Christian Convert's Life Threatened’ 2008, *Compass Direct News*, 16 October

<http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=5634> – Accessed 2 February 2009 – Attachment 23).

The US Department of State report on religious freedom in Bangladesh in 2008 provides information on the alleged harassment in 2007 and 2008 of members of the indigenous Khasia Catholic community in Moulvibazar by government Forestry Department officials. The report states that Khasia leaders “stated several forest officials had filed false cases against members of their community, including the head of the local Catholic mission, in order to intimidate them” (US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008 – Bangladesh*, 19 September, Section 3 – Attachment 9).

Specific Reports of Incidents Involving Christians During Caretaker Government

More numerous reports were located which provide specific accounts of attacks against Christians in Bangladesh in 2007 and 2008. These reports either fail to specify the denominational affiliation of the persons involved, or indicate their affiliation with a non-Catholic Christian group. Reports located focus on incidents which appear to be connected to conversions to Christianity, and to evangelical activities. A survey of reports from 2007 and 2008 is presented below in chronological order.

A May 2007 bulletin published by the Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad (Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council) provides limited details on the rape of Christian woman in Nougaoon district:

A Christian young woman was raped in the Nidds International Primary School. Tense situation is prevailing in the Christian Community (‘Communal Attack and Repression on Minority: May 2007’ 2007, Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad website, May <http://www.bhbcop.org/bulletin/2007/may/atrocities.html> – Accessed 13 February 2009 – Attachment 24).

RRT *Research Response BGD32159* of 27 August 2007 refers to reports published by *Compass Direct News* on a series of incidents involving members of the Christian and Muslim communities in Nilphamari. An article published by *Compass Direct News* on 3 July 2007 reports that following the baptism of 42 people on June 12 2007, Christian converts had been attacked by Muslim villagers in Durbachari and Laksmirdanga villages. The article states that “Muslim villagers had attacked the Christians on June 26 and on Wednesday (June 27) given them a 24-hour deadline to leave the village or face further beatings and the destruction of their homes”, and indicates that police had “stationed a special protective team in Durbachari for three months, allowing the converts to stay in their homes and return to work in their fields” (‘Bangladesh: Officials Offer Protection For Attacked Converts’ 2007, *Compass Direct News* website, 3 July <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=4928& backpage=index&critere=&countryname=&rowcur=0> – Accessed 16 February 2009 – Attachment 25; RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response BGD32159*, 27 August – Attachment 26).

A subsequent article published by *Compass Direct News* on 21 August 2007 reports that police stationed in Nilphamari on 28 July 2007 to protect Christian converts were withdrawn on 5 August, and that “Muslims in Durbachari village then began capturing and hauling all male converts to a mosque to return to Islam” (‘Bangladesh: Muslims force converts back to Islam’ 2007, *Compass Direct News* website, 21 August <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=4998> – Accessed 23 August 2007 – Attachment 27).

Previous RRT *Research Response BGD33007* of 3 March 2008 refers to several examples of attacks against Christians, including an October 2007 article published on the *Compass Direct News* website which reported on the spread of rumors in Bangladesh that Christian organizations were offering financial incentives for Muslims to convert to Christianity. The article states that these rumours had “served as the rationale for violence against Christians not just from Muslims, but from Buddhists who make up less than 1 percent of the population”, and refers to an incident in which a former Buddhist who had converted to Christianity was attacked and wounded on 6 September while travelling to a village to show a Christian film in Khagrachori district (Shalom, Aeon 2007, ‘Bangladesh: Anti-Christian Rumor in Bangladesh Helps Fuel Attacks’, *Compass Direct News*, 16 October – Attachment 28; RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response BGD33007*, 3 March – Attachment 29).

Reports were also located on the *Compass Direct News* website regarding a fatal attack on a 70 year-old woman in Rangpur district. A report published on 24 January 2008 states that Rahima Beoa, who was planning to be baptized, suffered burns to 70 percent of her body after unknown assailants set fire to her house. The same report notes Beoa’s son-in-law and his wife had converted to Christianity two years earlier, and that “[c]lose relatives and neighbors were said to be angry with the couple for their conversion from Islam”. The report refers to statements by a local official of the Isha-E-Jamat Christian church, who indicated that in 2006, “more than 7,000 local Muslims came to vandalize the houses of area Christians”, and that the local Christian community manages to live in the area “[w]ith the help of the local government officials and police”. A subsequent report of 4 February 2008 from the same source states that Beoa had died of the injuries she had sustained when her house was set on fire (‘Bangladesh: Elderly Christian Woman’s Home Set Ablaze’ 2008,

Compass Direct News website, 24 January

<http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=5204> – Accessed 29 February 2008 – Attachment 30; ‘Bangladesh: Elderly Convert From Islam Dies From Burns’ 2008, *Compass Direct News* website, 4 February <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=5211> – Accessed 29 February 2008 – Attachment 31).

A report published on the Hotline Human Rights Bangladesh website in February 2008 provides information on an attack on a Christian family in Savar, near Dhaka, stating that “[a]ttacks on a Christian family in Kamalapur village under Dhorenda Mission, Savar, Dhaka by a group of about 70-90 Muslims armed with lethal and deadly weapons left four persons seriously injured”. The article indicates that the attacks were connected to a land dispute (‘Attacks on a Christian family in Kamalapur village’ 2008, Hotline (HRs) Bangladesh website, 16 February <http://hotlinebd.org/?p=27> – Accessed 12 February 2009 – Attachment 32).

The US Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008 – Bangladesh* states that “[a]ccording to Christian Life Bangladesh (CLB), members of a Muslim fundamentalist group attacked two Christian men at Rangunia in Chittagong on April 12, 2008, as they were showing a film to build social awareness about arsenic pollution, child marriage, and other social ills” (US Department of State 2008, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2008 – Bangladesh*, 19 September, Section 3 – Attachment 9).

Question Two of recent RRT *Research Response BGD34272* of 5 February 2009 refers to numerous examples of recent attacks on Christians in Bangladesh, including a May 2008 bulletin published by the Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad which contains the following report of the armed robbery and assault of a Christian family in Gazipur district:

A gang of armed robbers broke open the doors of the house of Peter Amal Ojha, a member of the Christian community, and tied up all the inmates there at gun-point and looted goods worth 4 lacs of taka including 1 lac taka in cash, 10 bhoris of gold ornaments. Going to put up resistance, Peter Amal Ojha (47), his wife, Rose Rita Ojha (44), his mother, Kamola Baridda (70) got beaten up and wounded (‘Communal Attack and Repression on Minority’ 2008, Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad website, May <http://www.bhbcop.org/bulletin/2008/may/atrocity.html> – Accessed 2 February 2009 – Attachment 33; RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response BGD34272*, 5 February – Attachment 8).

A *Compass Direct News* article published on 6 June 2008 reports on the alleged gang-rape of Christian pastor Motilal Das’ 13 year-old daughter in Fulbaria. The report states that “Das said the villagers were upset at his evangelistic efforts and raped his daughter in an effort to drive him from the area”, and that the families of the alleged rapists had bribed members of forensic team to falsify a medical report to indicate that the girl was not sexually assaulted (‘Rape case medical report called false’ 2008, *Compass Direct News* website, 6 June <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&idelement=5419&lang=en&length=short&backpage=index&critere=&countryname=&rowcur=25> – Accessed 2 February 2009 – Attachment 34)

A *Compass Direct News* article published on 18 June 2008 reports that “Muslim fundamentalists” had issued death threats against a pastor of the Isha-e-Jamat Bangladesh

(Jesus' Church) in efforts to prevent him from establishing a church on land purchased in Lokmanpur village, Gaibandha district. The article indicates that the pastor and several other Christians had been assaulted and that members of the local Muslim community had filed a legal challenge disputing ownership of the land ('Muslims Fight To Keep Church Out Of Village' 2008, *Compass Direct News* website, 18 June

<http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=5443&backpage=index&critere=&countryname=&rowcur=25> – Accessed 13 February 2009 – Attachment 35).

An article published by *Compass Direct News* on 14 January 2009 reports that after Ishmael Sheikh and his wife Rahima Khatun converted to Christianity on 9 November 2008, "Muslim neighbours" in their village in Meherpur district had pressured the couple's adult sons to force them from their home. The article indicates that the couple were living in a shelter, and begging for food ('Muslims drive Christian grandparents from home' 2009, *Compass Direct News* website, 14 January

<http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=5760&backpage=archives&critere=&countryname=&rowcur=0> – Accessed 16 February 2009 – Attachment 36).

The same article refers to reports that Christian convert Ahsan Ali of Shoilbari village had been detained and "interrogated...with torture" by the Rapid Action Battalion on 24 November 2008 after the RAB found "bombs and other weapons behind his house that Muslim neighbors had placed there". The article indicates that Ahsan Ali was released the following day ('Muslims drive Christian grandparents from home' 2009, *Compass Direct News*, 14 January

<http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=5760&backpage=archives&critere=&countryname=&rowcur=0> – Accessed 16 February 2009 – Attachment 36).

An article published on the *Christian Freedom International* website on 12 December 2008 reports that on 1 November 2008, members of a family who had earlier converted to Christianity in 1991 in "southeastern Bangladesh" were attacked and injured by a group of "Muslim neighbours". The article states that the attackers filed false charges of assault against the Christian family, and that the family was "threatened by governing officials" when they reported the attack (Bower, M. 2008, 'Christian Family in Bangladesh Falsely Accused After Suffering Brutal Assault', *Christian Freedom International* website, 17 December <http://www.christianfreedom.org/cfi-news/1-latest-news/357-christian-family-bangladesh-falsely-accused.html> – Accessed 2 February 2009 – Attachment 37).

A subsequent article published on the *Christian Freedom International* website on 22 December 2008 reports that former Buddhists who had converted to Christianity in Khagrachari district had been forced to reconvert to Buddhism by "militant Buddhists", who had also burned down a local church ('Church Burned, Pastor Attacked in Bangladesh' 2008, *Christian Freedom International*, 22 December <http://www.christianfreedom.org/cfi-news/1-latest-news/360-church-burned-pastor-attacked-in-bangladesh.html> – Accessed 4 February 2009 – Attachment 38).

Commentary by Catholic Clergy and Community on Recent Situation in Bangladesh

Commentary on the recent position of the Catholic Church and congregation in Bangladesh by members of the local clergy and community was located. Previous RRT *Research Response BGD34272* refers to an article published on the Aid to the Church in Need website

on 9 March 2007, which quotes a statement by Bishop Bejoy Nicephorus D’Cruze of Khulna, indicating of the Catholic community that “[w]e are afraid of fundamentalism. We still need protection, which the state is ready to give us”:

“Christians in Bangladesh are a tiny minority, but the Church has its role, especially where we have churches and institutions,” Bishop Bejoy Nicephorus D’Cruze of Khulna, South West Bangladesh, said during his March 7 visit to Aid to the Church in Need (ACN). “We are afraid of fundamentalism. We still need protection, which the state is ready to give us,” he added. According to the Bishop, in Bangladesh there are only about 300,000 Catholics and some 200,000 Protestants, among 147 million people.

“We have the best schools and colleges and good hospitals too. In Khulna diocese, there are 61 Catholic schools and 4 Catholic hospitals. Education is a priority for me. I have 53 well-trained catechists. Some 35 percent in my diocese come from a low Hindu Background, Christianity can give them human dignity,” the bishop said (‘Bangladesh: Christians are a tiny minority’ 2007, *Aid to the Church in Need*, 8 March <http://members4.boardhost.com/acnaus/msg/1173394108.html> – Accessed 2 February 2009 – Attachment 39; RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response BGD34272*, 5 February – Attachment 8).

A report published by Catholic news source *AsiaNews.It* on 6 December 2008 refers as follows to comments regarding the situation of the Catholic community in Bangladesh made by Pope Benedict XVI:

In receiving the bishops of Bangladesh for their *ad Limina Apostolorum* visit, which occurs every five years, Benedict XVI urged the prelates to take special care of all those who are put in their trust, who must be seen from the perspective of the witness that a minority can bear.

“I join you in giving thanks to Almighty God for the growth and fervour of the Catholic community in Bangladesh, especially amid the daily challenges it faces. Many of your people suffer from poverty, isolation or discrimination” and need spiritual support and guidance (“Christians must promote “tolerance, moderation and understanding” in Bangladesh, says Pope’ 2008, *Asia News.It*, 6 December <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=12498#> – Accessed 2 February 2009 – Attachment 40).

An article published on the *AsiaNews.It* website on 16 May 2008 refers to comments by Dhaka-based Fr Franco Cagnasso, a missionary with the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions in Bangladesh, indicating that “[t]he Church is growing in Bangladesh and is gradually becoming self-sufficient”, but noting limitations on the ability to evangelise. Fr Cagnasso also notes that “[i]n the cities”, Catholics can “profess their faith more freely”:

The Church is growing in Bangladesh and is gradually becoming self-sufficient. Parishes created by missionaries are being handed over to local dioceses; vocations are being fostered and cooperation with other Christian denominations is taking place. Urban areas with their economic development and huge inflow of rural migrants are becoming an urgent challenge on the frontier of evangelisation.

This is the overall picture of the Church in one of the most populated Muslim countries in the world, one that Fr Franco Cagnasso, a missionary with the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME), described in an interview with *AsiaNews*.

...What guidelines does PIME follow in its mission in Bangladesh?

PIME is turning its attention to the cities as a frontier for evangelisation.

... We only approach Catholics, but when their neighbours see that they have some supportive focal point, they follow. It is fair to say that in urban areas there has never been actual evangelisation, but emigration at times is the only hope for those who want to convert from Islam. Many converts and mixed couples flee their villages for the cities to escape the clutches of their families' closely-knitted system of control and oppression. In the cities they can profess their faith more freely. Urbanisation unsettles Muslims as well and from this point of view it is also fair to say that Muslim religious leaders have "pastoral goals" like ours ('Migrants in the city, evangelisation's new frontier in Bangladesh' 2008, *Asia News.It*, 16 May <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=12277&geo=12&theme=5&size=A#> – Accessed 2 February 2009 – Attachment 41).

An article published on the *Union of Catholic Asian News* website on 6 August 2008 refers to comments on the situation of Catholics in Bangladesh by Father Kamal Corraya, coordinator of the Dhaka Pastoral Assembly, who states that "there are certain limits to what we can do in this Muslim-majority country", indicating that Catholics are under "hidden pressure not to proclaim Christianity openly because in the past we saw that several Protestant preachers were killed":

Father Kamal Corraya, coordinator of the Dhaka Pastoral Assembly, which is implementing Pauline Year programs in the archdiocese, admitted to UCA News "there are certain limits to what we can do in this Muslim-majority country," according to the diocesan priest.

Father Corraya, who also directs the bishops' national communications center in Dhaka, acknowledged proclamation of Christianity in the country is difficult because of possible threats from Islamic extremists.

"We have hidden pressure not to proclaim Christianity openly because in the past we saw that several Protestant preachers were killed in Faridpur, Mymensingh and Jamalpur," he said on Aug. 3. "Therefore, in the light of Pauline Year, we want our Catholics to become life witnesses to people of other religions." ('Life Witness, Bible Reading Core Objectives Of Pauline Year' 2008, *Union of Catholic Asian News* website, 6 August <http://www.ucanews.com/2008/08/06/life-witness-bible-reading-core-objectives-of-pauline-year/> – Accessed 11 February 2009 – Attachment 42).

It may also be of interest to note an article published by the *Daily Star*-affiliated *Star Weekend Magazine* in December 2006, just prior to the takeover of the Caretaker Government in January 2007. The article refers to varied comments by Catholic clergy and laity regarding the situation of the community in Bangladesh:

In a country predominantly Muslim, the beliefs and customs of minorities are often confined to token observance of festivals that have long lost their previous splendour and prominence. Bangladeshi Christians, about to celebrate their most important religious festival, Christmas, make up a small percentage of the population. While the Christian community's legacy in this country is an integral part of our country's history, it is a community that has largely remained in the background due to widespread integration with Bangladeshi culture, an exodus of Anglo-Indian Christians and foreign missionaries and because of the reality of being a minority.

... In a country dominated by Muslims, the minorities have often come under verbal, emotional and even physical attacks. At times, the ones belonging to a religion other than Islam are made to feel alienated in their own country

...For Ramond Rozario, a businessman, every year Christmas is a very lively event at home, like any other Christian family in Bangladesh. "We have friends, neighbours and family members coming together on the day," he says. "We pray and eat together. It also gives us a chance to catch up on the little things that we seem to miss in our everyday lives."

Rozario does not feel alienated in any way in this country, working along with all the other people. However, he thinks that the attacks usually fall upon the Garo Christians and the ones living on the Hill Tracts rather than the ones in the cities.

Indigenous communities, in general, are the most deprived in the country. Many indigenous people who converted to Christianity, continue to live in abject conditions and have very little access to basic rights such as education and health care. This has forced them to come to the cities in search of jobs.

... "I don't really feel threatened because it's my country," says Father Horatio Rozario, Assistant Vice Principal of Notre Dame College who also teaches philosophy. "But it feels uncomfortable when we see all the security around the churches when we go for the Christmas or Easter congregation, although we know we need it."

Earlier, every Christmas Eve, Christians would gather for the midnight mass in the different churches located in different parts of the country. After the bomb attacks and scares, threats the mass does not go beyond 12 am. "In fact," says Gomez, "This year it has been announced that the midnight mass will commence at 8 and finish off by 10 pm," he says.

Churches during Christmas Eve always have high security with RAB officials and the police, a sign that the threat of terrorist attacks is always a possibility, especially against non-Muslims and secular festivities. "The spirit is lost when everyone is checked with a metal detector before entering the church, just so one can pray in peace," says Gomez (Amin, Aasha Mehreen & Karim, Elita 2006, 'A Low-Key Christmas Celebration', *Star Weekend Magazine*, Vol. 5 Iss. 125, 22 December <http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2006/12/04/cover.htm> – Accessed 10 February 2009 – Attachment 43).

Information on Situation of Catholics and Christians under current Awami League Government

Previous RRT *Research Response BGD34262* of 19 January 2009 refers to source information on the recent parliamentary elections held in Bangladesh on 29 December 2008, which the Awami League won by a significant majority. An article published by *The Daily Star* on 2 January 2009 provides the following summary of the election results:

The winning Awami League party, lead by Sheikh Hasina Wajed, took almost half of the popular vote in Monday's election, gaining 48 percent of all votes, election commission spokesman SM Asaduzzaman said. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), lead by her rival Khaleda Zia, won 32 percent, he added. The Awami League won 230 seats of a possible 300 while the BNP garnered just 29, under a system of directly-elected geographical constituencies. The Jatiya Party of ex-military dictator Hussain Muhammad Ershad, which won 27 seats, got seven percent of the vote, Asaduzzaman said. The country's biggest Islamic party Jamaat-e-Islami, which was the third largest party in the last parliament with 17 seats, took only four percent of the popular vote and won two seats this time ('Bangladesh vote sees record 87 percent turnout' 2009, *The Daily Times*, 2 January http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009\01\02\story_2-1-2009_pg20_2 – Accessed 8 January 2009 – Attachment 44; RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response BGD34262*, 19 January – Attachment 45).

An article published on 24 December 2008 by *The Bangladesh Today* refers to comments made by Awami League leader and current Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a meeting with representatives of the Christian Association of Bangladesh several days before the 29 December 2008 parliamentary election:

Later, the AL President Sheikh Hasina also exchanged views with the representatives of the Christian Association of Bangladesh on the occasion of the Christmas day.

Greeting the Christian Community leaders, Hasina vowed that if the AL is voted to power it would ensure the rights of minority group who were harassed and tortured by armed hoodlums belonging to the government after 2001 general election.

“Our religion Islam calls for peace. Harassment, repression and killing are against the humane concepts. We want to build up a secular state where all people would live together,” she assured, urging the minority group to cast vote for AL in the December 29 polls (‘Pvt sector driving force for development’ 2008, *The Bangladesh Today*, 24 December <http://www.thebangladeshtoday.com/archive/December%2008/24-12-2008.htm> – Accessed 10 February 2009 – Attachment 46).

An article by Ravi Prasad, described as an India-based “political and strategic affairs analyst”, published by the *World Politics Review* on 8 January 2009, is positive concerning the prospects for communal relations in Bangladesh under the new Awami League administration, emphasizing the electoral defeat of *Jamaat-e-Islami*:

The outcome of recent parliamentary elections in Bangladesh has not only paved the way for the return of parliamentary democracy, but has also demonstrated that the highly religious but moderate Muslim nation of 144 million is unwilling to embrace divisive Islamist political parties. The elections, initially scheduled for 2007 and the first since 2001, followed the lifting of a state of emergency last month.

Led by Sheikh Hasina of Awami League, the secular Grand Alliance - or *Mohajet* - swept the elections, decimating former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia’s Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and its ally Jamaat-e-Islam, and sending a clear signal that religion does not attract votes in the country.

...Hasina’s Awami League garnered 230 of the 300 seats in parliament, securing an absolute majority. Her allies won another 27 seats.

Khaleda’s four-party alliance managed to secure barely 32 seats. The most humiliating defeat was dealt to Jamaat-e-Islam, which had been confident of increasing its numbers in parliament by riding on religious slogans. But Bangladeshi voters gave a severe thrashing to the Islamist party. It won only two seats (15 less than what it held in the last parliament), and all its senior leaders were defeated.

...Some 74 percent of eligible voters showed up at the polls, with a large number of them young, first-time voters swayed by Hasina’s promises of economic development and modernization of a country that ranks almost at the tail end of the list of developing nations. Analysts say that voters turned against Khaleda’s BNP because of rampant corruption during its rule from 2001 to 2006. They also overwhelmingly rejected the fundamentalists, who wanted to divide the predominantly Muslim nation on religious lines (Prasad, Ravi R. 2009, ‘Bangladesh Elects Secular Alliance, Dealing Blow to Fundamentalism’, *World Politics Review*, 8 January <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/Article.aspx?id=3126> – Accessed 9 February 2009 – Attachment 47).

An article published by the *Union of Catholic Asian News* on 19 January 2008 reports that Catholic Archbishop Paulinus Costa had sent a letter to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on behalf of the Catholic and Protestant communities in Bangladesh, congratulating her on the Awami League election victory, and expressing the expectation that the new government will “create more opportunities” for the Christian community:

Archbishop Costa told UCA News Jan. 18 that he sent the message to formally congratulate the new government. “Through a well-accepted election, we got the desired new government after a long period,” he said.

“We expect that the new government will create more opportunities for us, so that we can continue our services in different sectors, including education and health,” he continued. He added his hope that Christian NGOs will have more opportunities to serve the nation under the new government, and said he wished to meet Hasina in person soon (‘Bangladesh Catholic Church Head Greets New Prime Minister After Return To Democracy’ 2009, *Union of Catholic Asian News* website, 19 January <http://www.ucanews.com/2009/01/19/catholic-church-head-greets-new-prime-minister-after-return-to-democracy/> – Accessed 2 February 2009 – Attachment 48).

An article published by *Compass Direct News* on 6 January 2009 refers to an incident in Fulbaria, Meherpur on 9 December 2008 in which Christian Pastor Jhontu Biswas was confronted by local Muslims and accused of “misleading Muslims by distributing Christian booklets”, and “converting poor people by offering money”. The article indicates that local Muslims threatened to harm Biswas and other members of the Christian community “especially in the event of a hard-line Islamic government coming to power following Dec. 29 elections”, and construes the subsequent Awami League election victory as a positive development for the local Christian community:

Biswas denied the accusations against him, and the Muslims threatened to harm him and others who converted from Islam to Christianity, especially in the event of a hard-line Islamic government coming to power following Dec. 29 elections, he said.

“They said, ‘You will be in great trouble at that time,’” Biswas said.

Fortunately for Biswas, the left-leaning Awami League-led Grand Alliance won a landslide victory in the election, and it does not include Islamic fundamentalist parties such as *Jamaat-e-Islami*. Prior to Bangladesh’s national election on Dec. 29, the country was ruled for two years by an army-backed, caretaker government that imposed a countrywide state of emergency.

Had the previous Bangladesh Nationalist Party coalition government including *Jamaat-e-Islami* come to power, area Christians said they would be in even greater danger (‘Bangladesh: Muslims threaten Pastor for Evangelizing’ 2009, *Compass Direct News* website, 6 January <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idement=5754&backpage=archives&critere=&countryname=&rowcur=0> – Accessed 16 February 2009 – Attachment 49).

Two examples were located of violent incidents involving Christians in Bangladesh in early 2009. An article published by *Compass Direct News* on 20 January 2009 reports that on 6 January 2009 in Gopalganj district, “local Muslims” tied up Baptist pastor Rev. Shankar Hazra, and gang-raped his wife. The assailants are also reported to have looted the pastors

living quarters, and “desecrated the church building”. The article is critical of the subsequent investigation of the incident, stating that “[p]olice, influential villagers and local Muslim-owned media are trying to conceal likely anti-Christian motives for the crime” (‘Pastor’s wife gang-raped, home robbed’ 2009, *Compass Direct News* website, 20 January <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=5763&backpage=index&critere=&countryname=Bangladesh&rowcur=0> – Accessed 9 February 2009 – Attachment 50).

Another *Compass Direct News* article of 5 February 2009 reports that on 1 February 2009, pilgrims at the 3-day World Muslim Congregation (*Bishwa Ijtema*) had assaulted Rajen Murmo, a student of Believers’ Church Bible College who had been distributing Christian literature in Uttara in northern Dhaka. The article reports that Murmo was rescued by a Rapid Action Battalion patrol, taken to a police station, and subsequently released (‘Muslim Pilgrims Beat Bible Student’ 2009, *Compass Direct News* website, 5 February <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&idelement=5800&lang=en&length=short&backpage=index&critere=&countryname=&rowcur=0> – Accessed 9 February 2009 – Attachment 51).

2. Please provide background on the Catholic community in Dhaka, including any incidents or concerns.

Background on the Catholic Community in Dhaka

A profile of the Catholic Archdiocese of Dhaka, last updated on 10 March 2006, was located on the *Union of Catholic Asian News* website. The profile indicates that the Dhaka Archdiocese “covers an area of 26,788 square kilometres”, and “comprises the civil districts of Brahanbaria, Chandpur, Comilla, Dhaka, Gazipur, Habiganj, Manikganj, Moulvibazar, Munshiganj, Narshingdi, Narayanganj, Sylhet and Sunamganj”. With regard to the Catholic population of Dhaka archdiocese, the profile states that “[a]s of Dec. 31, 2004, Dhaka archdiocese had 76,371 Catholics, representing 0.25 percent of all 30,577,591 people in the territory. The profile indicates that Dhaka Archdiocese comprises 20 parishes and 22 sub-parishes, in which 43 Diocesan priests, and 67 religious priests, and that the Church runs 3 colleges, 22 Secondary Schools, 30 primary schools (‘Archdiocese of Dhaka’ 2006, *United Catholic Asian News* website, 10 March http://www.ucanews.com/dps/html/dps-ba_dhaka.php – Accessed 9 February 2009 – Attachment 52).

The same source provides a brief summary of the history of the Catholic Church in the area now known as Bangladesh from the 16th century, indicating that Dhaka was established as a Diocese in 1886, and raised to Archdiocese in 1950. The profile states that “[w]hen Bangladesh won its independence from Pakistan in December 1971, Dhaka as the Metropolitan See of this new country grew in importance and received greater responsibility”, and describes Dhaka as “a spiritual capital of the Catholics of Bangladesh” (‘Archdiocese of Dhaka’ 2006, *United Catholic Asian news* website, 10 March http://www.ucanews.com/dps/html/dps-ba_dhaka.php – Accessed 9 February 2009 – Attachment 52).

A undated document on the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Bangladesh website names the Most Rev. Paulinus Costa, D.D as the Archbishop of Dhaka, indicating he was installed in this role on 9 September 2005 (‘Archdiocese of Dhaka’ (undated), Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Bangladesh website

http://www.cbcbsec.org/the_catholic_directory_1_bangladesh.tm – Accessed 13 February 2009 – Attachment 53).

A *Daily Star* article of 25 December 2006 names the following eight Catholic Churches in Dhaka city:

St Mary's Cathedral Church at Ramna, Holy Cross Church at Lakshmibazar, Holy Rosary Church at Tejgaon, National Major Seminary, St Lawrence Church at Kafrul, De Mazenod Church at Nayanagar, St Christians Church at Asad Gate, Mary Queen of the Apostles at Mirpur, and Mary Queen of Lourdes at Mahakhali ('Merry Christmas!' 2006, *The Daily Star*, 25 December <http://www.epaper.thedailystar.net/2006/12/25/d612252502144.htm> – Accessed 16 February 2009 – Attachment 54).

A December 2006 *New Age* article, without specifying denominational affiliations, states of Dhaka that "[t]he areas and business houses in the city where Christians are large in number include Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara, and Sonargaon and Sheraton hotels" ('Christmas celebrated' 2006, *New Age*, 26 December <http://www.newagebd.com/2006/dec/26/front.html#9> – Accessed 16 February 2009 – Attachment 55).

Recent Situation of the Catholic and Christian Community in Dhaka

Limited reports were located which refer specifically to attacks against the Catholic community in Dhaka:

- An article published on the *AsiaNews.It* website on 29 September 2004 reports on a bomb explosion in a "Catholic-owned" building in Dhaka on 17 September 2004 which killed one person and injured seven other, stating that "[p]olice and local media have talked about a gas leak, but there is a widespread suspicion that it was an action by Muslim[sic] fundamentalists against the Christian community" ('Explosion in Dhaka might be attack against Christians' 2004, *AsiaNews.It* website, 29 September <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?art=1575&l=en> – Accessed 10 February 2009 – Attachment 56).
- A March 2007 bulletin published by the Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad provides limited information on an incident in which the land of a Christian in Dhaka was occupied at Tejgaon in Dhaka:

About 30 Bighas land-property of Patrik Gomez was occupied by the miscreants led by Kutubuddin. Tense situation is prevailing in the Christian Community ('Communal Attack and Repression on Minority: May 2007' 2007, Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad website <http://www.bhbcop.org/bulletin/2007/mar/atrocity.html> – Accessed 16 February 2009 – Attachment 57).

- As noted above in response to Question One, a report published on the Hotline Human Rights Bangladesh website in February 2008 provides information on an attack on a Christian family in Savar, near Dhaka city, in which four persons were injured ('Attacks on a Christian family in Kamalapur village' 2008, Hotline (HRs) Bangladesh website, 16 February <http://hotlinebd.org/?p=27> – Accessed 12 February 2009 – Attachment 32).

Media reports were located regarding the activities of the Catholic Church in Dhaka in recent years. Reports indicate that Catholic churches in Dhaka have required the protection of state security services, particularly during major events in the Christian calendar. Reports were also located of Church activities being conducted without disturbance:

- An article published on the *AsiaNews.It* website on 10 December 2005 reports that “[t]he parish of the Holy Rosary, the largest in the Dhaka archdiocese, will not hold midnight Masses to herald Christmas and the New Year because of terrorist threats”, and indicates that persons entering the church were being searched with metal detectors (‘Christmas vigils cancelled in Dhaka’ 2005, *AsiaNews.It* website, 10 December <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=4844&size=A> – Accessed 10 February 2009 – Attachment 58).
- An article published by the *New Age* on 26 December 2006 reports on Christmas celebrations in Dhaka in 2006, stating that “[t]o ensure a peaceful celebration of Christmas, security in the city and many other places across the country was hiked up, with the Rapid Action Battalion and the police put on alert and deployed at various strategic points” (‘Christmas celebrated’ 2006, *New Age*, 26 December <http://www.newagebd.com/2006/dec/26/front.html#9> – Accessed 16 February 2009 – Attachment 59).
- An article published by the *New Age* on 25 December 2007 reports that “[s]ecurity measures have been tightened in the capital and divisional and district headquarters” for Christmas in 2007, and reports on positive statements regarding the Bangladesh Christian community made by President Iajuddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed (‘Christmas Day celebrations today’ 2007, *New Age*, 25 December <http://www.newagebd.com/2007/dec/25/front.html> – Accessed 10 February 2009 – Attachment 60).
- An article published on the *Union of Catholic Asian News* website on 23 December 2008 reports on a recent “pre-Christmas” fair held by the Catholic community in Dhaka; the article indicates that event was attended by around 5,000 people (‘Christmas Fair In Dhaka Offers Chance For “Universal Celebration”’, 2008, *Union of Catholic Asian News* website, 23 December <http://www.ucanews.com/2008/12/23/christmas-fair-in-dhaka-offers-chance-for-universal-celebration/> – Accessed 9 February 2009 – Attachment 61).

3. Please provide background on the Catholic community in Bonpara, in particular (a) its size and strength, and (b) whether Muslims have targeted members.

A review of source information on the Catholic community in Bonpara is provided below under the following sub-headings:

- [*Background on Catholic Community in Rajshahi and Bonpara*](#)
- [*Reports on Activities of Catholic Church in Bonpara and Rajshahi*](#)
- [*Recent Situation of Catholic Community in Bonpara*](#)

Background on Catholic Community in Rajshahi and Bonpara

A page located on the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB) website provides information on the Catholic Diocese of Rajshahi, indicating that it comprises an area of 18,

063 square kilometres, and “has in its jurisdiction” the “civil districts of Rajshahi, Natore, Pabna, Sirajgonj, Bogra, Chapai Nawabgonj, Naogaon and Joypurhat (excluding the Police Station of Panchbibi)”. The same source names the Most Rev. Gervas Rozario, based in Sopura, as the Bishop of Rajshahi, and indicates that of a total population of 15,462,000, the Diocese has 53,151 Catholics (‘Diocese of Rajshahi: Bishop’ (undated), Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Bangladesh website

http://www.cbcbsec.org/the_catholic_directory_6_bangladesh.tm – Accessed 5 February 2009 – Attachment 62).

A page on the Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website provides statistics on the Diocese for 2007, indicating that of 512 villages in the diocese, 219 had a chapel, and that there were 37 priests, 76 Sisters, and 404 Lay Leaders working in the diocese (‘Annual Return of the Diocese – 2007’ 2008, Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website

<http://www.rajshahicatholicdiocese.com/annual.html> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 63).

An article published on the *Union of Catholic Asian News* website in March 2007 reports on the ordination of Gervas Rozario as Bishop of Rajshahi, indicating that “an estimated 10,000 Catholics” attended the ceremony in Rajshahi city. The article places that the number of Catholics in the Diocese at “more than 42,000”, stating that of this number, most are “*adivasi* with their distinct identity, culture and heritage”, and noting that “[t]here are also a number of Bengali-speaking people in the diocese (‘Local Bishop Ordained For Largely Indigenous Diocese’ 2007, *Union of Catholic Asian News* website, 28 March

<http://www.ucanews.com/2007/03/28/local-bishop-ordained-for-largely-indigenous-diocese/> – Accessed 9 February 2009 – Attachment 85).

A webpage dated 2008, located on the Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website places the number of Catholics in Bonpara parish at 6,819, and identifies Father Dino Giacomminelli as the Bonpara parish priest, and Father Anthony Hasdak as the assistant priest. The document names Our Lady of Lourdes as the Bonpara parish Church (‘Parishes’ 2008, Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website <http://www.rajshahicatholicdiocese.com/parishes.html> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 64).

It may be of interest to note an article published by the *Union of Catholic Asian News* website on 30 January 2006, which refers to comments Joseph Gomes, president of the Borni Christian Welfare and Development Samity, indicating that “there are 2,000-2,500 Catholics from Borni and Bonpara, the other Catholic parish in Natore district, living in Dhaka” (‘Upcountry Muslims And Christians Celebrate Religious Festivals Together In Capital’ 2006, *Union of Catholic Asian News* website, 30 January

<http://www.ucanews.com/2006/01/30/upcountry-muslims-and-christians-celebrate-religious-festivals-together-in-capital/print/> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 65).

Various webpages located on the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Bangladesh website, and the Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website, indicate that the Catholic Church maintains a variety of religious, educational, medical, and social institutions in and around Bonpara:

- A page on developmental and social organisations on the Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website locates in Bonpara the ‘Women Community Development Centre’, led by Sister Ancilla Croci, and the ‘Caritas Bonpara Technical School’ (‘Developmental and Social Organisations’ 2008, Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website

<http://www.rajshahicatholicdiocese.com/development.html> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 66).

- A page on religious congregations and societies on the Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website locates the “Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate” at the Sacred Heart Convent in Bonpara, while another document from the same source locates the ‘Pope Paul VI Seminary’ at Bonpara (‘Religious Congregations and Societies in the Diocese’ 2008, Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website <http://www.rajshahicatholicdiocese.com/religious.html> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 67; ‘Seminary/House Of Formation’ 2008, Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website <http://www.rajshahicatholicdiocese.com/seminary.html> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 68).
- Webpages on educational facilities on the Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website indicate that both St. Joseph’s Primary School, and St. Joseph’s Multilateral High School are located in Bonpara (‘Primary Schools’ 2008, Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website <http://www.rajshahicatholicdiocese.com/primary.html> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 69; ‘High Schools’ 2008, Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website <http://www.rajshahicatholicdiocese.com/high.html> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 70).
- Another page on the Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website indicates that Bonpara is home to St. Joseph’s Boarding School, which caters for 150 boys, and St. Mary’s Girls’ Boarding School, which caters for 130 girls (‘Orphanages / Boarding House / Hostels’ 2008, Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website <http://www.rajshahicatholicdiocese.com/orphanages.html> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 71).
- A page on health facilities in the Diocese on the Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website indicates that ‘St. Mary’s Dispensary and Maternity’ is located in Bonpara (‘Health Centres / Dispensaries / Clinics’ 2008, Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website <http://www.rajshahicatholicdiocese.com/health.html> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 72).

Reports on Activities of Catholic Church in Bonpara and Rajshahi

Limited media reports were located on the recent activities of the Catholic Church and community in Bonpara and Rajshahi:

- A *Daily Star* article of 6 June 2008 reports that “[t]he newly-appointed High Commissioner of Vatican in Bangladesh and the representative of Pope Benedict, Joseph Marino visited Bonpara Catholic Church under Baraigram upazila on Saturday”. The article goes on to state that “[t]o mark the occasion, the Bonpara Catholic Church authorities organised a discussion on Social Safety, Religious Harmony and Activities of Catholic Churches, and that “Father Dino Jacominelli, priest of Bonpara Catholic Church presided” (‘Vatican envoy visits Catholic Church in Natore’ 2008, *The Daily Star*, 2 June <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=39255> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 73).

- An article published on the *Union of Catholic Asian News* website in January 2009 refers to the activities of Dominic Mondol, a resident of Bonpara who is described as Bangladesh's "lone Catholic sculptor":

The country's lone Catholic sculptor now supplies statues for religious sites, communities and individuals. Venues where they can be seen include the Catholic bishops' Christian Communications Center in Dhaka, the shrine of St. Anthony in Nagari, Dhaka, and the Marian shrines in Diang, Chittagong; Baromari, Mymensingh; and Nobai Bot-tola, Rajshahi.

Bishops, priests and nuns from various dioceses and parishes order from him, Mondol said. By his estimate, he is currently delivering religious statues in Dhaka worth about 300,000 taka (US\$4,400) a year.

...Fellow parishioners in Bonpara now call him *murtiwala*, the sculptor.

...Father Dino Giacomini, an Italian missionary with the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions and current parish priest of Bonpara, said he was impressed by Mondol's beautiful pieces of art.

The priest, after buying smaller statues of Mother Mary and Saint Joseph, ordered large-size statues for the church ('Security Guard Turns Into Sculptor Of Religious Statues' 2009, *Union of Catholic Asian News* website, 19 January <http://www.ucanews.com/2009/01/19/security-guard-turns-into-sculptor-of-religious-statues/> – Accessed 9 February 2009 – Attachment 74).

- An article published on the *Union of Catholic Asian News* website in October 2008 refers to an initiative organized by the Catholic Church in Rajshahi to promote interaction between the Bengali and tribal Catholic youth communities:

Shyness and an inferiority complex have hampered Bangladeshi Catholic tribal youth in dealings with their Bengali-majority counterparts.

In Rajshahi diocese, however, change is on the way, according to Father John Mintu Ray, coordinator of the Catholic Diocesan Youth Commission. He told UCA News that the local Church, mindful of the situation, has made efforts to mix youths of different racial backgrounds and that these are bearing fruit.

One such effort was a three-day gathering the commission organized to help smooth out relations between local tribal and Bengali Catholic youth. Traditionally the two groups have not joined together at Church gatherings and would seldom even greet each other.

The social forum that Church workers hoped would iron out misunderstandings that perpetuate the "them-and-us" mentality brought 143 youths and 25 youth leaders from 14 Rajshahi parishes together Sept. 4-6 ('Church Helps Tribal And Bengali-Majority Youth Get On With Each Other' 2008, *Union of Catholic Asian News* website, 7 October <http://www.ucanews.com/2008/10/07/church-helps-tribal-and-bengali-majority-youth-get-on-with-each-other/> – Accessed 12 February 2009 – Attachment 75).

Recent Situation of Catholic Community in Bonpara

Reports were located regarding the situation of the Catholic community in Rajshahi in general, and in Bonpara in particular. An article published on the Union of Catholic Asian News website in October 2008 referred to general comments by Father John Mintu Ray, described as the “coordinator of the Catholic Diocesan Youth Commission”, on the concern of Catholic youth in Rajshahi over the “anti-religious activities” of “some extremists” in the Muslim community. The article does not provide any further specific information about the nature or extent of the anti-religious activities mentioned:

Rajshahi, 260 kilometers northwest of Dhaka, is a heavily tribal area, with roughly 50 percent of the local population being indigenous Santal, Oraon, Munda, Pahari and Mahali, according to Church sources. Catholics make up 53,151 of the area’s 15 million people.

...Division among Catholic youths is not the only concern. Father Ray said Catholic youths generally are affected by what he called the “unforgiving” attitude of some Muslims and the “anti-religious activities” some extremists among that majority community carry out against people of other religions.

Father Patrick Gomes, chancellor of Rajshahi diocese and former youth coordinator, also pointed to the challenge posed by modern Western trends, which “can derail them (youths) morally and spiritually” (“Church Helps Tribal And Bengali-Majority Youth Get On With Each Other” 2008, Union of Catholic Asian News website, 7 October <http://www.ucanews.com/2008/10/07/church-helps-tribal-and-bengali-majority-youth-get-on-with-each-other/> – Accessed 12 February 2009 – Attachment 75).

A post on the Hotline (Human Rights) Bangladesh website of 16 February 2008 provides information on the situation, between 2003 and 2007, of a Christian woman in Natore, Rajshahi, who was forcibly married by a Muslim man. The article does not specify that the woman was Catholic, but refers to her receiving assistance from priests at “Borni Mission and Natore (Bonpara Mission)” (“Case of Shyamoli Rebeiro” 2008, Hotline (HRs) Bangladesh website, 16 February <http://hotlinebd.org/?paged=18> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 76).

Reports were located on the Sweden Bangladesh Democracy and Human Rights Watch website (<http://hemvux.hule.harryda.se/eubanglaforum/sbdhrw/>) of several violent attacks on members of the Catholic community in and around Bonpara in 2002 and 2003. The homepage of this website indicates that it was last updated on 21 February 2004. Information was not located on this website, or in other publicly available sources consulted, to indicate the subsequent occurrence of further violent incidents in the area. It should be noted that the reports located are presented as part of broader news bulletins which refer to a variety of incidents in various locations in Bangladesh. The news reports in these bulletins are attributed to various Bangladeshi news sources, and it is often unclear whether the text from the original news report has been copied verbatim. In some instances, it appears that unattributed commentary (possibly by Roseline Costa of the Hotline Human Rights Bangladesh organization) has been added. A survey of these reports is presented below in reverse chronological order. The reports contain numerous errors of spelling and punctuation; these have been reproduced verbatim in the selections quoted.

A May 2003 bulletin attributed to Roseline Costa of Hotline Human Rights Bangladesh, published on the website of the Sweden Bangladesh Democracy and Human Rights Watch, reports on an incident in Bonpara Mission on Good Friday, 18 April 2003, which allegedly developed from a dispute involving Father Dino Jiacomelli and a local Muslim trader named

Md. Soleman. The report indicates that after a physical confrontation between Father Dino Jiacomelli and the trader, members of the local Muslim community attacked members of the Christian community. While the report refers to “Christians” rather than “Catholics”, the content of the report indicates that the incident centered around the Catholic Church and congregation in Bonpara, led by Father Jiacomelli (Giacominelli). The text of this report follows below in full:

Another attack was in Natore. This time the attack was in Bonpara Mission on Good Friday, 18 April, 2003. At this attack at least 10 people were injured and three of them seriously. They were : (1) Sumon Costa s/o. Francis Costa, (2) Anil Biswas s/o. Ambrose Biswas, (3) Pradip Gomes s/o. Alfred Gomes from Bonpara village; (4) Robi Cruze (38) s/o Jimmy Cruze from Haroa; (5) Sumon Corraya s/o. Alexander Corraya from Kalikapur, Boraigram, Natore; (6) Subhash Purification (40) and his wife (7) Sabita Rozario (32); (8) Sumita Rozario wife of Abraham Purification, (9) Bashanti Gomes wife of Suprian Gomes from Baimainpara village; (10) Laphon Rozario (70) s/o. late Antony Rozario from Bahimali village, (11) Francis Ajoy Rebeiro (38) s/o. Philip Rebeiro from village Haroa; (12) Philip Rebeiro and his son (13) Biplob Rozario (25); (14) Shyamol Rozario (20) s/o. Probhat Rozario from Haroa. Subash and Sabita were beaten by strong lathi (stick) on their back, head arms and legs and were seriously injured. Both were admitted to the Bonpara clinic for treatment. The attackers used iron rods to beat the victims. Shyamol was severely beaten by the iron rod and he was critically injured when he was taken to Rajshahi Medical Hospital.

The attackers were : (1) Soleman, (2) Akul, (3) Alamgir all sons of Box Pramanic; (4) Yakot Pramanic s/o. Afaz Pramanic; (5) Siddique Pramanic; (6) Bokkar Pramanic, both sons of Boshir Pramanic; (7) Marfat Pramanic s/o. Ayez Uddin Pramanic; (8) Ator Pramanic; (9) Rezaul Pramanic, both sons of Gofur Pramanic; (10) Azahar s/o. Gul Mohammad; (11) Joynal s/o. Gokul Pramanic; (12) Idrish s/o. Yasin Pramanic; (13) Bablu Pramanic s/o. Deen Mohammad, all from Haroa (Abdal Para), Boraigram and Natore, and many others. They carried lethal weapons such as long wooden staff, Hashua (big knife to cut trees or hard materials), iron rod, lance, etc. They beat the Christians arbitrarily whoever were found on their way to the Church for Good Friday celebration in the afternoon. The whole incident was so sudden for the Christians that the people of the villages under Bonpara mission were in panic. Frs. Jiacomelli Dino, PIME and Bernardwere present during the incident. They are the Parish Priest and the assistant Parish Priest of Bonpara Mission.

The report on the incident was published in almost all the national dailies on 19 April, 2003

Fact: Md. Soleman, the No. 1 accused, a small trader who was given the money and materials by Fathers of the Mission for the small trade to maintain his poor family. He had a shop with chanachur (mixture of dry food), nuts etc. and used to sit in front of the dispensary near the Mission gate. The Fathers told him not to sit before the gate on the days when there is any religious ceremony because the children buy food stuff and dirty the church. So the Fathers requested him not to sell his goods during the Holy Week (from Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday) when everyday there was some religious function in the Church. But on Good Friday, (April 18, 2003) at about 9 a.m. before the live Way of the Cross was about to start Fr. Dino told Soleman to leave the campus and not to come till Monday. But Soleman was stubborn and did not leave the place. Again Fr. Dino came back after an hour and told Soleman to leave the place. But still Soleman did not want to leave the campus. Fr. Dino pushed Soleman and said to leave the place soon. During that moment Fr. Dino pushed also the basket Soleman was carrying the staff and some of the staff fell down on the ground. Soleman kicked the basket and threw all the goods on the ground and began to shout and call the nearby rickshaw-pullers to come for his help. He shouted and said, ‘Shaheb has threw all my goods on the ground and we have to give him a lesson. He brought about 20/25 Muslims

people from the main road and attacked the standing Christian youths who were observing the whole fact. They went to the Church for attending the celebration. Seeing the crowd Fr. Dino closed the main gate of the Church campus. The Christian youths ran inside the Church and the attacker Muslims went out to gather more people from nearby villages.

People came to attend the Way of the Cross and when the ceremony was over at around 11 am. and the people were about to leave for their homes, many people with lethal weapons attacked arbitrarily the Christians in their way home. Even some of them when they reached home, they were attacked and beaten up, houses were ransacked and goods looted by the attacker mobs. Sumon Costa (22) was hit first near the Church gate when the Youths, coming out of the Church also responded the attack. At first the Christians were united and prohibited the attack of the Muslim mob and while the Muslims left the place for collecting more people, they began to go home thinking that the attackers have left. But then all the Christians were attacked on their way. They Muslims spread the rumor that Saheb had beaten him and so revenge should be taken to give him a lesson.

After the incident Philip Rebeiro on 19 April 2003 (Case No. 19, Dated 19-4-03 under Cr. P.C. Sections 143/448/323/325/379/114.). Probat Rozario, father ofRozario filed a case on 21 April with the Haroa Police Station and on the Fathers in the name of the Parish Council filed a case on 22 April, 2003. But in the same way the opponents/the attackers also filed a case against the whole mission people including the priests. On 29 April there was a mitigation meeting organised by the local administration and police authorities to settle the matter peacefully. The whole Muslim local administration under the order of the Home Minister forced the Christian Community to solve the problem. More than 700 people attended the meeting most of whom were Muslims including BNP influential leaders. The decisions taken at that meeting were as follows:

1. As the priests are to serve the people, they should not commit any mistake but help the people. The parish priest on the day of the incident threw some goods from the basket of Soleman and so the priest has to say sorry to all the people. But as the Parish priest was not present at that meeting, the assistant parish priest Fr. Bernard Rozario had to say sorry in front of all the people.
2. As Fr. Dino had spoilt some of the goods of Soleman, the parish committee will pay Tk. 2000 as compensation. At this time Soleman denied that he got the basket as well as the capital for his shop were given by Fr. Dino for maintaining his poor family.
3. Tk. 15,000/- would be given for the treatment of the injured people (including the man whose one leg was broken into two places and now being treated in Dhaka).
4. 31 Criminal were identified who committed the crime on April 18 in Bonpara Mission. They were made to sign a bond that if any such things happen in future, they will be responsible and be punished.

The meeting on April 29 was organised by few Christian people (actively involved with BNP politics) in collaboration with the local BNP leaders. Most of the Christians were unhappy with the decision taken at the meeting but as the Christians were at the back, the whole parish people had to accept all the decisions. The decision to say sorry by the parish priest was very degrading and the decision for not punishing anyone for the incident, was also a matter of worry for the whole Christian community (Costa, Rosaline 2003 'Christian Family at Boraigram under attack: Severely Wounded', Sweden Bangladesh Democracy and Human Rights Watch website, 3 May <http://hemvux.hule.harryda.se/eubanglaforum/sbdhrw/1.pdf> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 77).

An undated bulletin published on the website of the Sweden Bangladesh Democracy and Human Rights Watch, contains a report entitled ‘Two Christian Families attacked in land-grab bid’, attributed to the *Daily Star* on 24 September 2002. This report provides information on an attack on two Christian households at Bonpara, indicating that the attack was connected to attempts to take control of the family’s land, and that some of the attackers were BNP cadres. The report does not specify the denominational affiliation of the victims. The text of this report follows below in full:

Two Christian Families attacked in land-grab bid

Armed miscreants in a bid to capture ancestral homesteads of two Christian families, attacked their houses and beat all the inmates including housewives and children at Bonpara Christianpolli in Boraigram upazila in Natore in the early hours of yesterday 23 September, 02.

The 40 or so attackers, equipped with firearms and lethal weapons, entered the houses at about 3:30a.m by breaking the bamboo fences, the victims told this correspondent during a visit.

They ransacked the houses and looted Tk. 28,000, a gold chain and household good.

The injured are Hamdu Crush, 40, (a day labour), his wife Sundori Koraia, 35, his sons

Sumon, 18, Manik, 14, Ratan, 10, and daughter Ratna, 8; Babul Crush, 28, (a day labour and Hamdu’s younger brother), his wife Dipali Gomez, 26, daughters Jui Crush, 7 and Juthi Crush, 3, his sister Nannolina Crush, 32 and Dipali’s brother Nilu Gomez.

However, none of them was hospitalise till yesterday.

The attackers were led by one Ershad Ali Master, an alleged smuggler and his sons Quamruzzaman Raju and Ekramuzzaman Bidyut of Haroa village, according to a case recorded with Boraigram police station.

The victims alleged that Ershad roughed up Dipali after stripping off her clothes. “Ershad Master was shouting at the attckers, saying it will not be a crime to kill two or four Christians”, Dipali alleged while describing the incident.

During their one-hour rampage, they also planted some saplings at the courtyard in a bid take possession of the land, they said.

“The attackers tried to snatch the deeds of the land and also to have my finger mark on a blank deed, but failed as I kept the deeds at one of my relative’s house”, Babul Crush said.

“They want to capture 31.5 decimal land out of the total 44 decimal which we (the two families) inherited from our father”, he said.

“Ershad Master has been threatening for the last few days to evict us from our land. We informed Sayer Uddin, Majhgaon UP chairman and Boraigram upazila covenor of Jubo Dal about the threats. Sayer Uddin has arranged police Vigilance”, he added.

When contacted, Ashrafuzzaman, ASP of Boraigram circle, said that one and a half months ago, Ershad lodged a ‘partisan suit’ with Baraigram upazila judge court claiming that the 31.5 decimal land was sold to him by Babul’s sister Sukumar Crush.

Sukumari and his brothers also filed a counter suit claiming that they did not sell their land.

The court formed a one-member commission with a lawyer to probe the matter. The commission was due to visit the spot yesterday, sources said.

Eleven people have been accused in the case. Police arrested Ershad Ali Master and his sons Quamruzzaman Raju and Erkamuzzaman Bidyut.

Police have has been deployed in the village as panic gripped the area, police sources said.

Villagers at the Christianpolli told this correspondent that Ershad was not directly involved with any political party. But many of the attackers including Ershad's son Raju are cadres of ruling BNP ('Christian House Attacked, Looted and Razed: 30 Severely Wounded' (undated) Sweden Bangladesh Democracy and Human Rights Watch website <http://hemvux.hule.harryda.se/eubanglaforum/sbdhrw/2.pdf> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 78).

A May 2003 bulletin attributed to Roseline Costa of Hotline Human Rights Bangladesh, published on the website of the Sweden Bangladesh Democracy and Human Rights refers to an earlier incident in August 2002 in "Gopalpur village under Bonpara Mission in Boraigram upazila, Natore district", in which four members of a Christian family were injured when their house was attacked by "terrorists". The report refers to claims by members of the Christian family that the attack was connected to attempts by members of the Muslim community to take the family's land, and that the attackers were "supported" by local police and authorities. The text of this report follows below in full:

On 29 August 2002, a groups of terrorists entered into the house of a Christian family and injured severely four inmates of the house in the Gopalpur village under Bonpara Mission in Boraigram upazila, Natore district. The four injured were:

1. Mr. Joseph Gomes (75). His left leg was injured severely by dao (local knife).
2. Mrs. Antony D'Cruze (70), wife of Mr. Joseph Gomes. Her backbone was chopped off by a Chinese ax and was beaten too..
3. Ms. Maria Gomes (35), d/o Joseph and Antony. She was seriously injured on her right arm with many chopping marks and was beaten.
4. Mr. Louis Gomes (25) s/o. Mr. Bernard Gomes and grandson of Mr. Joseph Gomes. He was seriously injured in his eyes, forehead. His right eye has been blinded from the injury.

The above four persons were taken to the Rajshahi Medical Hospital but the terrorists threatened the doctors and pressured them not to give any treatment to the injured. So the victims were sent off from the hospital when they were taken to the Dingaduba Mission Hospital privately. During the attack these four were at home and at about 2 am the attackers went to the house and shouted and called Joseph saying that some people were robbing the fish from their pond. So Joseph got up and opened the door when the armed miscreants entered the house, began to beat Joseph arbitrarily. Joseph's wife Antony heard the people and the shouting of her husband and got up. Then she was attacked by the attackers and chopped off. At this time Maria and Louis also got up and went to the spot to rescue Joseph and Antony. But in vain, they also were attacked and severely injured. The armed terrorists attempted to enter the house of Joseph's eldest son but by that time some neighbours arrived on the spot. But while leaving the house of Joseph, the armed men acarried away one trunk (big box) with full of clothes and other valuables. There were also the land documents, bank books, money, etc. in the trunk. In fact some days ago before the attack, some Muslims came to Joseph and forced to sign some false land documents but Joseph refused to do that. After the attack, one of the neighbours took the injured people to the Rajshahi Medical Hospital and

there were none to inform the police. But one of the main attackers went to the police station in the morning of 29 August and filed a case of illegal occupation of his land by Mr. Joseph (the disputed land which the Muslim wanted to occupy). Then when Joseph's eldest son, working at the US Embassy, went home and informed the police, for unknown reason the police remained silent. The attackers did not stop here. They went to the hospital and threatened the doctors and prohibit them to treat the victims and forced them to release them without treating them. Then the doctors resealed the victims when they went to the Dingaduba Mission Hospital and were being treated.

Motto of the attack: Joseph and other members of the family and the victims said that since many years a group of Muslims were trying to occupy their land by force and the main target of the attack was to kill all the people and grab the land. With that intention they tried to possess the land documents. The local administration and the police did not help the victims at all rather apparently seems that the armed miscreants were supported by them. On the other hand the man who helped the victims to be taken to the hospital, was arrested by the police. (Source : Sonali Barta, 31 Aug. 2002 and information from the relatives) (Costa, Rosaline 2003, 'Christian Family at Boraigram under attack: Severely Wounded', Sweden Bangladesh Democracy and Human Rights Watch website, 3 May <http://hemvux.hule.harryda.se/eubanglaforum/sbdhrw/1.pdf> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 77).

An undated bulletin published on the website of the Sweden Bangladesh Democracy and Human Rights Watch contains several reports on incidents involving the Christian community in Bonpara. A report entitled 'BNP Activists Beat three Christians in Natore', and attributed to *Prothom Alo*, J.K., and the *Daily Star* on 9 March 2002, provides an account of attacks against members of the Christian community in Natore, including the assault of Sentu Costa, described as a teacher at "St. Xavier's Primary School under Bonpara Catholic Mission". The text of this report follows below in full:

BNP Activists Beat three Christians in Natore

On Thursday morning March 7, a gang of eight persons, Bisha, Shumon, Saiful Islam, Abdur Rahman, Mahmud, Nashed, Nazrul Islam and Sayeed alleged BNP activists of neighbouring Pabuapara village attacked the house of Ashok Corraya, president of Christian Welfare Council of the Christian Community for refusing to pay Tk 25,000 demanded earlier as compensation for expenses of a case. Three days prior to this incident this money was demanded and an ultimatum was given for three days. The activists also beat up Herod Corraya, the vice president of the Council when he came to save Ashok. Both Ashok and Herod were treated at the local health Complex. On this day at least 25 people were injured by the attackers. There are 80 Christian families in this village.

In the afternoon of March 7, the terrorists beat up Sentu Costa, a School Teacher of St. Xavier's Primary School under Bonpara Catholic Mission. Sentu Costa was beaten in front of the Sub-Inspector (SI) Anwar Hossain of Haroa PS at the Bonpara Bazar when he was indentifying the terrorists, riding a motorcycle. The SI arrested two attackers Abdur Rahman and nazrul Islam from the spot.

Ashok lodged a complaint with Boraigram police accusing eight persons. They are Bisha, Shumon, Saiful Islam, Abdur Rahman, Mahmud, Nashed, Nazrul Islam and Sayeed. The Superintendent of Police nazrul Islam and upazila BNP convenor Ekramul Alam visited The local people reported that the beating incident was sequel to a dispute over marriage of a Christian youth Shudarshan Gregory with a Muslim girl Munni from Tangail about a year ago. After the marriage the Muslim girl became Christian and took a new name Aaguess (Agnes) Gregory.

One day after the marriage, some Muslim people from Pabuapara village forcibly took the girl from the house of Shudarshan. Within a few days a court in Natore settled the dispute and the girl returned to her husband. After this soem Muslim people from Pabuapara village led by some BNP activists demanded Tk 25,000 from Shudarshan as compensation for their expenses for the case, the local people said. Both Ashok and the BNP leader Ekramul Alam confirmed the story. The SP Nazrul Islam said that all measures have been taken to avert further violence and police are trying to arrest the rest of the accused. Prothom Alo, JK. and Daily Star, 9-3- 2002 ('Attack on Minorities' (undated), Sweden Bangladesh Democracy and Human Rights Watch website <http://hemvux.hule.harryda.se/eubanglaforum/sbdhrw/20.pdf> – Accessed 12 February 2009 – Attachment 79).

The same document refers to reports, attributed to the *Daily Janakantha* 8 December 2001 edition, that members of the Christian community in Boraigram Upazila, Natore, have been subject to extortion, torture, and rape by persons affiliated with the BNP. The article report refers to the establishment of a “torture cell” at Bonpara Bazar. The text of this report follows below in full:

Give Toll or a Girl per night: 50 Christian Families living in during threat.

Boraigram Upazila, Natore District :

Young growing girls are living in threat and life danger in 50 families in Chatiangacha village under Boraigram Upzila, Natore, reported the Daily Janakantha, the most pro-democratic and secular paper in the country on 8 December.

The report said, the parents spend sleepless nights who have young girls at home. At night the BNP supported terrorists come by motorcycle and search from house to house these young girls. They demanded Taka 10-20 thousand or a girl every night. As soon as they Christians hear the sound of the motor-cycle, they tremble and try to hide their women and daughters.

In Boraigram there are 50 Christian families who have been there for years. After the general election on October 1, the BNP cadres and their associates took away the ripen paddy from their lands. Then they fixed their eyes on the growing young girls of these Christian families. Every night these terrorists enter that village and call the head of the family by name and then ask for his daughter. Sometimes they call the girls by their names. When the father of the girl come out of his room, the terrorists demand taka 10-20 thosand and fix the day within 7-10 days for payment. If falied, they say, “you must give one girl for night”.

Jimmy Corrayia, a resident of Dhaka but went to Chatiangacha under Bonpara Mission some 60 years ago. He asked the journalists/reporter, “what kind of country is it? If cannot meet the demand for toll I have to give my daughter.” His daughter Sufola is candidate for SSC Exams for next year. Three days the terrorists made their attempt to kidnap Sufola. It is known from the local people that Sanaullah Nur Babu, the general secretary of Jubo Dol of Boraigram Upazila and his associates Taz, Mozammel, Hakim, Iqbal, Babul, Bashar and Belal are creating reign of terror in the locality. They demand big amount of money and set time and date for paying it. If failed, notice is being sent to each family on false allegations. They set up a torture cell at Bonpara Bazar and thjose who do not pay the toll or meet their demands, are brought there at the torture cell and are tortured until they confess the false allegations. Then the terrorists force them to pay the fine for their guilt. Signed letter by Sanaullah Nur Babu has been found in many of these houses such as Mr. Joseph Gomes got one. He lives at Haroa village (neat to Chatiangacha). When I got the news in the paper I called the Archbishop Michael Rozario and asked him if he knew the matter. He said, he heard it from one of the teachers of Notre Dame College and saw the news in the paper. He asked me to call the Home Minister and request him to take necessary action on it. I called the Home

Minister Mr. Altaf Hossain Chowdhury on 8 December and along with that I had another information about a Christian who fled his home in Mongla, Bagerhat, Khulna when his home was illegally occupied and land grabbed away by the local terrorists affiliated with BNP students cadres. The Home Minister told me that he would take stern action on both the incidents. J.K. 8-12-2001 ('Attack on Minorities' (undated) Sweden Bangladesh Democracy and Human Rights Watch website

<http://hemvux.hule.harryda.se/eubanglaforum/sbdhrw/20.pdf> – Accessed 12 February 2009 – Attachment 79).

4. Please provide information on the Catholic Youth Commission.

Basic information was located on the website of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB) regarding various youth organizations affiliated with the Catholic Church, including the Rajshahi Diocesan Commission for Youth, and the Dhaka-based Episcopal Commission for Youth:

- An undated page on the CBCB website indicates that the CBCB has a youth organization known as the "Episcopal Commission for Youth", or "Jubo Shebadol", which is based in Dhaka. The Most Rev. Moses M. Costa, Bishop of Dinajpur is listed as the Chairman, and Rev. Fr. Patrick S. Gomes is listed as the Secretary ('Episcopal Commission for Youth (EC-Y)' (undated), Catholic Bishop's Conference of Bangladesh http://www.cbcsec.org/catholic_about_cbc_b_episcopal_9_bd.tm – Accessed 5 February 2009 – Attachment 80).
- Another undated page on the CBCB website features details of the various committees maintained by the Diocese of Rajshahi; this page indicates that the Diocese of Rajshahi has a Diocesan Commission for Youth. The webpage indicates that a Fr. Sonkor D. Gomes is the Secretary of the Rajshahi Commission for Youth, and the Bishop of Rajshahi is the Chairperson (Diocese of Rajshahi: Commission and Committee' (undated), Catholic Bishop's Conference of Bangladesh website http://www.cbcsec.org/directory_6_commission.tm – Accessed 5 February 2009 – Attachment 81).

A page on the website of Rajshahi Catholic Diocese indicates alternatively that a Fr. Subrata P. Purification is the secretary of the Diocesan Commission for Youth ('Rajshahi Diocesan Commissions/Teams' 2008, Rajshahi Catholic Diocese website

<http://www.rajshahicatholicdiocese.com/tems.html> – Accessed 6 February 2009 – Attachment 82).

It may be of interest to note an article published on the *Union of Catholic Asian News* website on 9 July 2008, which refers to a delegation of 21 Bangladeshi youth to the 2008 World Youth Day, organized by the "Bangladeshi bishops' Youth Commission":

Young Bangladeshi Catholics preparing to attend the World Youth Day (WYD) celebration in Australia focused on the spiritual heart of the event by reflecting on Pope Benedict XVI's message for the occasion.

...Salesian Sister Zita Rema, secretary of the Bangladeshi bishops' Youth Commission, told UCA News they have asked the 21 Catholic youth delegates "to reflect on the pope's message and prepare an assignment based on their learning from it."

Sister Rema will accompany the 14 young men and seven young women aged 18-24 along with Holy Cross Bishop Moses M. Costa of Dinajpur, chairman of the commission, Bishop Gervas Rozario of Rajshahi and a priest.

...Dhaka archdiocese and the five other dioceses in the country selected the youth applicants who would go under the auspices of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB) ('Catholic Youths Prepare Spiritually For World Youth Day' 2008, *Union of Catholic Asian News* website, 9 July <http://www.ucanews.com/2008/07/09/catholic-youths-prepare-spiritually-for-world-youth-day/> – Accessed 12 February 2009 – Attachment 86).

5. Are there reports of Catholic Youth Commission members or persons associated with the Catholic Bishops Conference being targeted by Muslims?

No specific reports were located in the sources consulted of recent attacks on, or violent incidents involving, members of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Bangladesh or its associated youth groups.

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UK Home Office Country of Origin Information Service website
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