

April-June Quarter 2016

Report from PCB; Prepared by: Edward Ayub



Figure 1View of our house

Family: We are enjoying the blessings of living in the above house. We are privileged to show hospitality to local and international guests. My wife Jostna was sick due to her pressure and gastric problem. She was hospitalized and now she is fine. Our son Utthan is spending his month-long vacation with us. He has completed his another semester of his study in Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering. Please pray for him because he has to complete 3 more semesters before he is assigned in a Naval base.

I have thought that this would be meaningful to describe the present situation of our country. With that you would be able to pray for us more effectively. In addition to that, I would report on our Study Center where many lives are changed and many are equipped for witnessing and church planting among the Muslims in Bangladesh.

A. COUNTRY SITUATION:

Bangladesh has been going through terrorists activities. There are more than 125 Islamic fundamentalist groups active and they want to see Islamic rule because to them democracy unislamic. Many of these groups are trying to be connected with ISIS in the Middle East and Pakistani terrorist groups. There are some significant phase of ISIS move to explode bomb near the Masjidun Nabi [the mosque at the Muhammad's shrine and the second holiest place for Islam after Kaaba]. ISIS recently has also announced to attack Kaaba in Mecca

blaming the Muslims going there to worship stone which must be stopped. In the meantime they have destroyed many of the world heritages in Afghanistan and Iraq. Another turning point in Bangladesh is that students from the rich well-to-do families have joined fundamentalist groups. There has been a general understanding that only the poor madrasah students are becoming fundamentalists. But the students from English medium school and expensive private universities and also having good quality education have become the terrorists. Up-to-date more than 100 such educated youths are missing from their families. Internationally well known private universities are training terrorists according to the intelligence agencies. On the other hand, Dr. Zakir Naik, the Founder of Islamic Research Center based in India and top-most Islamic scholar polemicist in the present world preaching Islam and attacking other religions tirelessly. India this week banned Peace TV owned by Zakir Naik broadcasted from Dubai. Today on 10 July Bangladesh has also banned Peace TV channel after examining the lectures of Zakir Naik. Zakir Naik claims that 90% Muslims in Bangladesh are his listeners and 80% like him. Muslims in Bangladesh are now saying that Islam is losing ground due to the terrorists' interpretation of Islam and recent attacks. So we are living in the midst of complexity and crisis period of Islam.

Christians are in fear after seeing the killing of foreigners, Christian priests, Christians and people from other minority religious groups. Altogether 52 have been killed in last 3 years. Gulshan [Dhaka] attack and killing of 20 foreigners and attack at Sholakia Kishoregonj Eid prayer assembly increased the fear [the largest Eid Jamaat in Asia with more than 400,000 Muslim devotees gather every year since more than 135 years]. Christians are also in fear because most of the intellectuals in Bangladesh believe and propagate widely that USA has given birth to ISIS in the middle East so USA is responsible for worldwide terrorism. Bangladeshis see USA as Christian nation so Christians are blamed for this.

Prayer for the terrorists and our country have become a regular item now. Along-side with prayer, there are practical measures taken - our church at Bhurungamari in Kurigram is protected by a police camp of 4 policemen living at our 4-Bigha Project. Local Muslims think that the government is planning to destroy the nearby madrasah recently built there. This is true that the madrasah is from a controversial background of Islam according to the police officer. We have warned all our church planters and workers to be careful all the time but to

take more evangelistic initiatives. I live very near of PCB HQ, but I and my wife watch the short-distance road to the office whether any motor bike or any vehicle or any unknown men and women are following us or not. I have instructed the guards too to keep their eyes when we visit PCB back and forth. I am thinking to carry licensed arms because I do not want to die without defending our lives. We should not surrender our lives in the hands of terrorists without protesting them. The Gospel Reformation Center gate is always closed and a guard has been placed in front of the gate to protect the building and lives. All the guards and staff have been briefed on the ongoing situation. We have informed the nearby police station about our existence in the area. There are unknown faces visiting our PCB Complex and time to time asking our guard at our home whether I am at home or not. Every Christian is in fear that he or she could be the next target.

This is clear that we have become targets in the eyes of the Islamic fundamentalists. Because we are in sensitive works which are directly against Islam according to them. We evangelize them, publish books for their reading and defending our faith, we train them and converts from their background, we are visible, and planting churches in their communities.

But in spite of all these complexities, I believe that this is the time of more witnessing. People are ready to hear the Gospel of Hope and Love. They are frustrated with Islam. I believe that God is in control and Christianity would advance in this country if we the church can take the advantage of the situation.

B. STUDY CENTER [Center for Religious Studies].



Figure 2 Classroom of the Study Center

In this quarter, I would emphasize covering the Study Center. I think that this is the time we can do some evaluation.

1. History of the Center:

After the mission works of Korean Presbyterians closed down where I was working, I have started a center named Center for Christian Studies. This Center has started offering 15-days long training on the basics of Christian faith for Christian youths. We were able to train more than 100 in two years of 1996-97. Most of those have joined Christian ministries. But when God has led me to start a church planting ministry named PCB [Presbyterian Church of Bangladesh], we have changed the name from Center for Christian Studies to Center for Religious Studies since we have started offering course in comparative religion between Christianity and Islam. The length of the course also was extended up to one year.

2. Goals & Objectives of the Study Center:

- To equip and mobilize graduating students of the Center in planting churches in the whole country through personal evangelism, tract distribution, follow up and on-going discipleship.
- To produce specialized church planters through offering two courses - five months residential course on Islam and five months residential course on Christian Doctrine and Discipleship.

- To encourage writing and publishing quality literature and research papers about relevant practical and religious issues.
- To soften the hearts and minds of fundamentalists of both religions – students from all religions are living with mutual respect and acceptance toward each other.
- To equip students in the Constitution and laws of various religions so that they can deal the issues of persecution and do some counseling and if necessary advocacy.
- To offer occasional seminars on Comparative Study and current issues.

3. Who are Coming at the Study Center?

Anyone from any religion having at least 12 years of education in secular school or equivalent in madrasah [Islamic institute] may enroll at the Study Center. We prefer couples.

4. Study Center Curriculum:

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| <p>Focus on Christian Doctrine: 20 SUBJECTS [1st Term: Classes Start on 01 February 2016, Monday]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 01. Old Testament Survey 02. Study about Sin & Salvation [Soteriology] 03. History of Jewish Religion 04. Study about the Bible [Bibliology] 05. Study about God [Theology] 06. Religious History of Bangladesh 07. Study about Quran 08. Peacemaking 09. Westminster Shorter Catechism 1 10. Evangelism Explosion 1 <p>Vocational Training [Classes End on: 16 April 2016, Saturday]</p> <p>[2nd Term: Classes Start on 18 April 2016, Monday]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 01. New Testament Survey 02. Contextualization & Cults 03. Biblical View of Suffering 04. BD Constitution & Christian Acts 05. Church History: Reformation 06. Study about Man [Anthropology] 07. Study about Future Things [Eschatology] 08. Life of Mohammad & Hadis 09. Westminster Shorter Catechism 2 10. Evangelism Explosion 2 <p>Vocational Training [Classes End on 30 June 2016 Thursday]</p> | <p>Focus on Islam: 20 SUBJECTS [3rd Term: Classes Start on 01 August 2016, Monday]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 01. Christian Ethics in Muslim Context 02. Bible Study Methods 03. History & Expansion of Islam 1 04. Arabic 1 05. Contemporary Islam 06. Apologetics 07. Homiletics 08. Study about Mission [Missiology] 09. Discipleship 1 10. Westminster Shorter Catechism 3 <p>Vocational Training [Classes End On: 15 October 2016, Saturday]</p> <p>[4th Term: Classes Start on 17 October 2016, Monday]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 01. Counseling 02. Interpretation of the Bible/Hermeneutics 03. Study about Church [Ecclesiology] 04. History & Expansion of Islam 2 05. Arabic 2 06. Sects & Schools of Thought in Islam 07. Study of Christ [Christology] 08. Research Method 09. Discipleship 2 10. Westminster Shorter Catechism 4 <p>Vocational Training [Classes end on: 21 December 2016, Wednesday]</p> |
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5. Teachers: This is a good move to invite the PCB staff, PCB members graduated from the Center to teach at the Center. Now Reaz, Muktabur, Elder Tapon, Saddam, Motier are teaching at the Center. So teachers from other denominations are less invited. Through this, they themselves are having the chances to study the Word of God more and developing their teaching skills. They are inspired to become more committed to PCB.

6. Mission Eco:

There is 1-hour mandatory works for all staff and students at the Study Center for working in the garden at PCB Complex. We name it Mission Eco on the foundation of Biblical references like Gen 2: 15; 3: 17-19 and Rom 8: 18-25. We have developed a culture of serving the nature through PCB Complex. There are lots of works in the garden – like watering, applying natural fertilizer, pruning, sizing the trees, giving support during rain and storm, cultivating and growing vegetables, harvesting fruits and vegetables and selling, keeping records of all the works, clearing harmful grasses, cleaning the forest, etc. Every day there are so many works even though the team of more than 15 men work in the garden. On the other hand, the female staff and students keeps the walkways clean, take care of the cottages, watering the flowers at the tubs, working at the pond to raise fish, maintaining the beautification of the Complex, cutting grass from the sports field and leveling the ground, etc.

All of us work from 04:00-05:00 pm every day except Sunday. If we do not work, the whole PCB would be a jungle.

Some students are totally ignorant of trees and agriculture. But they are learning at the Study Center. The two floors of the Gospel Reformation Center building is covered by trees. The visitors have increased significantly. They have become our clients of our fruits and vegetables.

7. Testimony:

Masud Rana and his wife Kolpona were Muslims. They are from Madargonj in Jamalpur where Insiders claim that they have strong ministry. Rana met some of the Insiders who were Christians once but later started going to the mosque. So he was confused about

Christianity. He met Pastor Suruj [a PCB pastor] and Suruj sent him to the Study Center. This is practiced by our church planters if someone as Muslims wants to know about Christians and our church planters think their work would be difficult, they send those to the Study Center. We gladly accept them because we know what we are going to see. Many such Muslims have come to the Lord Jesus after 1-year training at the Study Center so we are optimistic about them.

Masud Rana & his wife Kolpona [their son Konok] – This couple was from Islam. They came to know about Jesus Christ and the Bible. They have gone through struggle since they did not have any enough money for the baby food of their son. The local congregation Madargonj Presbyterian Church tried to help them a little but not enough. We do not pay any pocket allowance at the Study Center so that students do not depend in us and our education does not go completely free of costs. They must bear some expenses. Rana and his family could not pay their tuition fees so they worked at PCB Complex in Mission Eco program. After 2 terms for six months, we have seen some changes in their lives. Their way of lives, eagerness for study, question in the classroom and comments on Islam started to be changed. We have seen that the process of Christianization by the Holy Spirit has started in their lives. They were excited when they hear the teachings of Jesus. They started saying negative things while talking about Islam. At the end of their 4th term, they shared that they want to be baptized because they are now in Christian faith. We suggested them to go to Madargonj Presbyterian Church, a PCB's local congregation for baptism. So they have completed their course and went home. On 8th July, they have been baptized. Before their leaving, they shared with us that they want to become witness for Christ anywhere in the country through PCB.

This is to mention that Minhaz, another graduate with Rana has been baptized at Gazipur City Presbyterian Church and now he is in the ministry with PCB. The most important thing in his life he has experienced is to be reconciled with his father. He did not keep any contact with his father for one year. But because of our teaching and advice, he finally called his father. His father cried and is now happy that Minhaz is working with PCB.

C. UPCOMING PROGRAMS:

1. Module during 19-30 July 2016
2. Bill's Visit during 20-26 August 2016: First ever Teachers Training on PCB Discipleship Curriculum

D. PRAYER ITEMS: Pray for

1. The safety of our staff, Study Center students and church members.
2. The students of the Study Center – for their conversion and calling for ministry.
3. Change of the hearts of the Islamic fundamentalists.
4. Our staff team so that they can be faithful in any kind of pressure.
5. The building project at Golachipa 4-Bigha Project.
6. Land purchase at PCB Complex.
7. The wall and chapel building at 4-Bigha Project at Bhurungamari in Kurigram.