

The Birth of the American Association of Bangladesh Engineers

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It all began with an idea of forming a BUET-alumni association in the USA, first suggested by a small but enthusiastic group of BUET-alumni meeting sometime in late 1981 at the house of Badrul Huda, in Irvine, California. The meeting was set up at the request of BUET Electrical Engineering Professor A. Matin Patwary who was then at the California Polytechnic University, Pomona, ECE department, as a Visiting Professor on his sabbatical leave from BUET. Both Professor Patwary and Badrul Huda were themselves graduates of Ahsanullah Engineering College (1956 and 1959 respectively), the predecessor to EPUET that subsequently became BUET. The formal meeting notes, if any were taken, are no longer available, neither is the list of attendees, but in a letter dated January 20, 1982, and addressed to BUET alumni in USA in general, Professor Patwary discussed the decisions taken at that meeting.



It was suggested that BUET alumni associations be formed in different states, beginning with California (seemingly having a larger number of such alumni), and then these be combined into a national or federal association titled the Bangladesh Engineering University Alumni Federation of North America (to be abbreviated as BEUAFNA). Professor Patwary further provided an enumerated list of the suggested aims and objectives of that organization. These were seven in number and the salient ones were: keeping a close liaison with BUET, creation of local and national directories of BUET alumni in the USA, creation of an Alumni Fund to provide scholarships to BUET students in need and to finance construction of an Alumni Hall at BUET, providing books, journals or research materials to BUET to foster research and scholarship, helping newly arrived BUET alumni in North America, arranging annual or biannual gatherings, and any other activities that might further the aims and objectives. Professor Patwary's letter was mailed to those whose addresses were available to the California group.

The effort to organize such an organization on the East Coast was taken up by Chowdhury Fazlur Rahim (BUET-EE'72), then working in New Jersey. He was in touch with Professor Patwary frequently and strongly encouraged by the latter to be more proactive as a BUET alumnus. I am not sure how soon after receiving the letter did Dr. Rahim contact Ferdous Jan (EPUET-ME 1968) by phone and discussed Dr. Patwary's plea. In a handwritten note dated August 5, 1982, accompanying a copy of the Patwary letter, that are available in my records, he apologizes for the delay in sending it, and requests that an informal meeting be arranged by both at a mutually agreed upon place on August 29, 1982.

The meeting finally took place in the afternoon of July 30, 1983 at the residence of Ferdous Jan in Exton, Pennsylvania. The following were present at that meeting: Ferdous Jan, Shamsul Huda (WPUET-EE'69), Sohrab Hossain (EPUET-ChE'62), Dr. Ayub Iqbal



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(EPUET-CE'62), Dr. Fazlur Rahman (EPUET-CE'67), K. M. Rahman (EPUET-ME'66), Dr. Faruq and Mrs. Shahida Siddiqui, both BUET-CE'76 alumni. Dr. C.F. Rahim, the original convener of the meeting, was delayed for personal reasons and arrived at the end of the meeting. However, he provided a summary of developments that had taken place since the meeting at Badrul Huda's residence. I was "selected" to be the Secretary and record the meeting minutes.

The participants-to-be were informed prior to the meeting that the objective of this meeting would be to discuss the possibility of establishing an organization for Bangladeshi Engineers. The necessity of such an organization was obvious to all attendees but the form or structure was vigorously debated among the participants. K. M. Rahman and Sohrab Hossain, suggested a casual organization; Dr. Iqbal suggested that it be organized around a well-known personality -- someone similar to the late Dr. F. R. Khan so as to attract more participants. Ferdous Jan and I disagreed with the ideas presented and suggested a more formal and structured entity while others seemed to be receptive to all ideas. Unaware of the actual contents of the Patwary letter, I further suggested that a local organization be set up for the time being while inviting others at various population centers to set up their own similar organizations. "These 'nucleus' organizations could then set up a larger national organization" (Excerpt from Minutes). It was felt by the majority that setting up a national organization would be too ambitious and a local organization would be more feasible. A decision to postpone the form and concept of the organization was taken but it was decided that a letter be sent to all Bangladeshi engineers in the local area. To stimulate discussion at the proposed meeting, it was suggested that a "kernel of ideas be included in the letter" (Meeting Minutes). The meeting would take place at the residence of Dr. C.F. Rahim in Bridgewater, New Jersey, on September 11, beginning at 12:00 noon. The "kernel of ideas" suggested were objectives for the organization that were similar to the original ones proposed by Professor Patwary, but there was no reference to any alumni organization or BUET. The consensus was to allow any Bangladeshi engineer irrespective of his or her alma mater affiliation, to join and participate actively in the formation of this organization. All present pledged their time and efforts towards making this organization a reality. The proposed agenda was limited to three topics: (i) Form of the proposed organization, (ii) Objectives of the proposed organization, (iii) and Discussion of regulations/laws relating to establishment of a non-profit organization. The meeting, which began at noon, interrupted by a short break for lunch, was finally adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

The letter mentioned above and dated August 7, 1983 was mailed the same day to all Bangladeshi engineers residing in the Greater Delaware Valley area, that encompasses all counties contiguous with the metropolitan Philadelphia area and parts of Central and South Jersey, and northern Delaware. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was enclosed to let the organizers know if the recipient would be attending the meeting and also to send in his or her own ideas. August 27 was set as the deadline for receipt of all responses.



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The minutes of the September 11, 1983 meeting, recorded by Dr. C.F. Rahim, mentions a list of the attendees while not appended to it and also states that fourteen were present. It is very possible that as the list, containing both addresses and phone numbers of those present, was to be used for mailing the next announcement, it was removed from the handwritten minutes to which it was attached. A perusal of the discussions, however, indicates that those present included, the host C.F. Rahim, K. M. Rahman, Ferdous Jan, Sohrab Hossain, Dr. Ayub Iqbal, Shamsul Huda, Nironjan Roy (EE-BUET'72), Sudhamoy Bhattacharjea (ME-EPUET'69), Dr. Bakhtier Farouk (ME-BUET'75), Abu Fazlullah (CE-Oklahoma'65), Shamsul Alam Akhand (ME-EPUET'64), Manzurul Haque (ME-Loughborough'64, UK), and of course myself and my wife. Dr. Aziz Mian, a chemical engineer with DuPont Chemical Co. and a resident of Wilmington, Delaware, sent his comments about the aims and objectives and his regrets about being unable to attend.

The form and the structure were again debated and finally a consensus was reached that the organization be a formal registered non-profit corporation with officers who had to abide by a charter, and that it be incorporated either in Delaware or Pennsylvania. Choosing a name for the organization was the next item discussed. The names that were put forward included,

- American Association of Bangladesh Engineers (AABE)
- Bangladesh American Engineers Association (BAEA)
- Organization of Bangladesh Engineers of America (OBEA) and
- Bangladesh Engineers Association (BEA)

All these names were individually evaluated for their appropriateness and then presented for voting. The process of successive elimination by discussions followed by voting led to the first being the choice of the majority. However, the consensus was that the name could be changed through a constitutional process, still to be established, in the future.

Discussions then centered on the aims and objectives of the proposed organization. After considering Dr. Aziz Mian's comments about using the phrase "technology transfer" being inappropriate as it could lead to legal objections, the phrasings of the first and the last objectives were combined to read as the "sharing of ideas, technology and experience" between engineers in America and Bangladesh. These aims and objectives have remained nearly unchanged.

An Ad-Hoc committee was nominated consisting of K. M. Rahman as the Chairman, Dr. Ayub Iqbal, Dr. Bakhtier Farouk and myself and charged with the responsibility of gathering all pertinent and necessary information about incorporation, formalizing the aims and objectives, developing a constitution or by-laws governing the operation and management, and the activities for the short term to garner and attract more members. The latter included preparation of a newsletter and possibly a seminar in the near future. The participants decided that a fund of \$500 be collected to defray the expenses that will be incurred in the short run and annual individual



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membership dues were set at \$25.00. Various tasks were assigned to each Ad-Hoc committee member as well as those who volunteered their time. The next meeting of the group was selected to be in December when the Ad-Hoc committee would present its work.

The Ad-Hoc committee met multiple times during the next three months during which a draft constitution was prepared, funds and addresses were collected, and the wording of the aims and objectives were further refined. Somehow, although being the youngest member of the group, I was entrusted with the daunting task of writing the first draft of the constitution. However, I was already a member of ASCE (American Society of Civil Engineers) and as an engineering faculty member, I had easy access to the Constitution and By-Laws of ASCE as well as those of its sister organizations like ASME and IEEE. I was also fortunate enough to have a copy of the same for several other smaller non-profit professional organizations, and within several weeks, I was ready to present my first draft to the Committee for discussions. After some minor revisions, the Constitution was ready for ratification at the next meeting that was scheduled for December, 1983.

I visited Bangladesh at the year's end and had the opportunity to be present at the annual convention of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB). My father, the late M.F.A. Siddiqui, a former government secretary, chairman of the Water Development Board and the Joint Rivers Commission, was then the President of the Institution. In his annual address to the convention, a printed copy of which was available to the attendees, he surprised me by extemporaneously mentioning the impending formation of AABE in the USA and welcomed me as its representative to the 1983 IEB annual convention. I also still remember the comments of Professor Sohrab Ahmed of the CE Department when I mentioned the formation of AABE at the BUET CE Department common room for staff and faculty where several faculty members were having their mid-morning tea. Upon learning the AABE name, he remarked "Eta abaar ki dhoroner naam holo" and commented about the ungrammatical use of "Bangladesh" and not "Bangladeshi" as the qualifying word for "Engineers" in the title. I assured him that we chose it nonetheless, while being aware of the unconventional grammar, and had debated the issue thoroughly.

The final ratification of the Constitution and election of officers under its rubric took place on January 29, 1984. The following were elected as the first officers of the organization under the new Constitution:

President: K. M. Rahman
President Elect: Dr. Ayub Iqbal
Secretary: Dr. C. F. Rahim
Treasurer: Dr. Faruq M. A. Siddiqui
Executive Member: Sohrab Hossain
Executive Member: Shamsul Huda



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The newly elected officers immediately set about preparing the papers and documents for incorporation of AABE as a not-for-profit corporation and a professional and charitable organization in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The application for the incorporation was logged in at the offices of the Pennsylvania Corporation Bureau on April 30. On the same date, a letter announcing the formation of AABE was mailed to all Bangladeshi engineers throughout the USA. The first annual general meeting of the entire membership was scheduled for September of that year.

The application for incorporation was finally approved in July 1984 after additional submission of materials required because of the word “Engineers” in the name and their subsequent approval. The September annual general meeting was also postponed.

In his letter dated October 15, 1984, also sent to all engineers in the USA, President K.M. Rahman noted that AABE was now a formal, registered organization. He again invited everyone to join AABE and make it a vibrant and active organization.

Later that year, C.F. Rahim moved to San Jose, California, and Ferdous Jan was chosen as the replacement. In the following year, K.M. Rahman moved to Texas and President-Elect Dr. Ayub Iqbal had to take up the helm of the organization. Losing two main officers for any organization would have been fatal, but AABE, even in its infancy, survived the loss and went on with its proposed activities albeit at a slower pace than was originally envisioned.