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BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF STUDY

British Council, Dhaka (BC) assigned MRDI to produce a TV discussion program on mainstream Muslim under the British High Commission's Engaging with the Islamic World Program. Purpose of the program is to evoke the voice of a silent majority of Bangladeshi society that is the mainstream youth against terrorism and extremism.

Dealing with such a sensitive issue over media was not an easy task. Design of the program had to be developed with much care and attention. A properly designed program would be able to create some desired impact on the viewers about the issues discussed. The need for conducting a pre-design research was felt to make the program more acceptable to the viewers and keep it above bitter debates. Different segments of potential audience were involved with the study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study aimed at

- Understanding the attitude and mindset of the young people regarding development, education system, human rights, democracy, peace and relation of these issues with Islamic values and thoughts.
- Getting an overview of the human rights, democracy, peace and related issues in the context of Islam.
- Identifying questions and issues to be raised in the TV program as well as the probable topics.
- Deriving suggestions on the format of the program.

METHODOLOGIES

Following three methodologies were applied to conduct the study:

- Focus Group Discussion (FGD): Ten FGDs were conducted with the students of the institutes of different systems including public university, private university, English medium, Bangla medium, madrasa and also the young professionals. Some guiding questions were used in carrying out the discussions to know their views on the target issues. Their comments on the format of the program and some open remarks were also taken. A total of 85 boys and girls took part in the exercise.

- Rapid Assessment Survey (RAS): RAS was conducted by using a set questionnaire among 100 respondents. A quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the responses were done.
- Desk research/literature review: Publications and on line documents on Islamic perspectives of peace, harmony, human rights, democracy, education issues were reviewed and a report was prepared for the background study and as a resource material.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGD)

A total of 10 FGDs were conducted during December 2006 and January 2007 as a part of pre-design research on TV program. Eighty five young people of different segments studying and working in and outside Dhaka took part in the exercise.

The FGD aimed at understanding the attitude and mindset of young people regarding democracy, human rights, education system, peace, women's role and relation of these issues with Islamic values and thoughts. The discussions also attempted to identify what role young people could play in improving the image of the country and carrying forward its development and what would be the format of the program. Another purpose of the exercise was to find out some potential girls and boys who would participate in the TV program.

While conducting the sessions, some guiding questions and issues for discussion were used. During the course of discussion, some issues beyond the guiding questions also came up and some lively debates took place. (*Report in Annex-1*)

LIST OF FGD SESSIONS

The following 10 FGDs took place in and outside Dhaka. Mr. Md. Shahid Hossain and Ms. Syeda Saima Ahmed conducted and facilitated the sessions respectively.

Sl. #	Focused group	Date	Venue	Participants		
				M	F	Total
01.	Students of public universities	20.12.2006	Gourmet Garden	7	2	9
02.	Students of private universities	29.12.2006	Gourmet Garden	6	3	9
03.	Young professionals	29.12.2006	Gourmet Garden	6	2	8
04.	College students	29.12.2006	Gourmet Garden	7	3	10
05.	Undergraduate students from outside Dhaka seeking admission	12.1.2007	Gourmet Garden	6	1	7
06.	Madrasah Students	20.1.2007	British Council	4	4	8
07.	Boy scout and girl guide	24.1.2007	Candle Light	5	5	10
08.	English medium students	24.1.2007	Candle Light	7	1	8
09.	Peri-urban adolescents	26.1.2007	Ghorasal	6	2	8
10.	Peri-urban madrasah students	26.1.2007	Ghorasal	6	2	8
Total				60	25	85

ISSUES RAISED FROM THE FGDS

The FGD sessions were highly participatory. The participants enthusiastically took part in the discussions and put their views and comments on the topics. They also raised some pertinent issues for debate and discussion. Here are some major issues and comments of the participants.

ON EDUCATION

- There is a communication gap in the existing education system that is segmenting the 'main stream youth' and the 'others'.
- There should be a common curriculum that would shape all the students irrespective of class, educational backgrounds or social strata.
- The mainstream youth needs to have regular dialogues with the other so called 'streams'.
- Madrasa education is not 'modern'

ON EXTREMISM

- Extremism is not a matter related only to the Madrasa students. Many colleges and universities have students who are more extremists.
- The general idea of the people is that Madrasa and extremism are linked with each other
- Bangladesh will never become an extremist nation.

ON DEMOCRACY

- Islam is abused and misused in the name of democracy in Bangladesh
- Political situation in Bangladesh is not at all ensuring democratic rights of the citizens.
- Our democracy has been crippled by corruption and detached from the general people.

Two opposite views on compatibility of democracy with Islam

1. Democracy does not fully comply with Islamic norms. Because democracy implies authority of people, whereas Islam believes in supreme authority of Allah over all His creations.
2. Allah has created man (human beings) as His representative on earth. So authority of people over earthly matters does not conflict with authority of Allah.

ON HUMAN RIGHTS

- In Bangladesh most of the people are not aware of their own rights.
- Generally children, women and the under privileged are the victims of human rights violation.
- Islam has given many rights to women but our systems are such that we fail to restore the rights of women.

ON RELIGION (ISLAM)

- The mainstream youths are not very well educated on religious aspects or for that matter the true teaching of Islam.
- Family plays the most important role to shape the belief towards Islam from the very beginning.
- Religion matters very less to the mainstream youth and there are many misconceptions about religion at both sides.
- Most of the mainstream youth get confused and mixed ideas about religion
- Religion is more related to politics than faith now a day.
- Islam is used as a power weapon by the politicians and thus manipulating it to a great extent.
- Islam gives high priority to human rights and never speaks of the Jihad we know today as a first priority. The major Jihad is the Jihad-e-Akbar.
- Islam never discourages women to work outside.
- Islam is secular. 'Lakum deenukum walya deen' which means your religion is for you and mine for me.

ON THE MAINSTREAM YOUTH

- The mainstream youths are more career-focused than patriot.
- Bangladeshi youths are now in a state of identity crisis.
- The mainstream youth believe in Islam in their weakest moments.
- The mainstream youth do not consider Islam as easy and modern for the misconceptions. Only those with a good knowledge know it.
- The mainstream youth are afraid to discuss about religion.
- The mainstream youth are not interested to discuss Islam.
- The mainstream youth need to change their mentality and also others need to develop their mentality in order to work side by side for future development.
- The mainstream youth need to learn how to protest and be involved more in different issues.

ON FUTURE BANGLADESH

- Bangladesh is having an image crisis.
- There's a serious system loss and decreasing investment situation prevailing in our country at present.
- Illiteracy and religious misconceptions will hinder progress of future Bangladesh
- Bangladesh is not bringing up the future as one but in numbers through the different educational, social or communal/religious backgrounds.
- There will be greater leadership and democracy crisis in the near future.
- Government should get more involved in supporting the right measures for the development of the young generation.

THE WEST AND GLOBALIZATION

- The west is relating Islam with extremism, fanatics and fundamentalism in the negative sense.
- The western media is playing an important role to decide what and how to represent the religious Diaspora.

- We are remaining behind for the lack of quality measures in the process of globalization.

FORMAT OF THE PROGRAMME

Most of the participants suggested talk show type of discussion over TV channel as the appropriate format of the programme. They demanded that comments and opinions of the young people should be heard side by side with responding to their questions. Few of them also preferred TV debate on the issues.

SOME MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ISLAM PREVAILING IN THE SOCIETY AS IDENTIFIED BY THE YOUNG PEOPLE

In course of discussion the participants of the FGDs opined that some misconceptions prevail in our society about Islam. They were asked to identify those. Some common misconceptions identified by them are mentioned below.

- No need of education for women.
- Woman becomes bad if they go outside home.
- No need of education other than Islamic education.
- Islam is against family planning
- Women should not participate in social, political and economical activities.
- People become dependent on fate for religion.
- Women should not go in front of male doctors for treatment.
- Visiting Majar and Dorga Sharif is haram in Islam.
- It is sin for women to do politics.
- Those who practice tablig promote Borkha. It is a misconception that parda is not possible without borkha.
- Alems at the time of waaj only talk about woman's parda and neglects man's attitudes.
- Heaven lies under the feet of the husband.
- All sins disappear once people perform Hajj.
- Islam doesn't permit songs and music
- Islam is backdated, and contradictory with modern science.

- Jihad is needed to establish religion

MEASURES TO BE TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION

(ROLE OF YOUTH AND OTHERS)

During each FGD, participants were asked to write on a card their open views on what they themselves and the others can do to improve the prevailing situation of Bangladesh in the context of human rights, religious fundamentalism, democracy, education and other aspects of development. Some of their important comments are mentioned below:

- Create self awareness
- Disseminate the real teachings of Islam
- Aware people about protecting human rights at the family, community and national levels
- Young people to discharge their own duties and responsibilities properly
- Young people's preparedness to take part in the decision making process.
- Optimum utilization of young people's capacity
- Developing a culture of mutual respect, love and commitment
- Utilization of media for creating mass awareness on rights issues.
- Young people can play pro-active role in creating people's awareness on human rights and related issues.
- Student exchange programs may be started by the government among the different streams of education
- Ensure equal job opportunity fro all
- Madrasa students can spread the light of education by taking proper education themselves.
- Develop religious tolerance and respect to other faiths.
- Young people to discuss on religion in groups
- Young people can organize a community for the development of poor children.
- Young people can write on religious values, HR and related issues in newspapers and journals.
- Madrasa students should come forward to establish the image of Bangladesh as a peace loving nation.

RAPID ASSESSMENT SURVEY (RAS)

A Rapid Assessment Survey (RAS) was conducted as a part of the research study among young people most of whom (94%) were students of school, college, university and madrasah through a set questionnaire. Number of total respondents was 102 of whom the male-female ratio was 64:36. Survey locations were six divisional cities Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet.

The survey aimed at identifying the views of young people regarding education system, madrasa education, religion, secularism, extremism, role of donor countries and human rights.

Two sets of questionnaire were used in conducting the survey which included quantitative and qualitative aspects of the issue. (*Questionnaire in annex-2*)

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF RAS

The analysis of responses to the quantitative questions of two sets of questionnaire show the following findings:

Among the respondents 84% were in favor of common curriculum for all students while 14% were against it. 12% thought that poverty is the only reason for sending children to madrasa and 88% opposed the view. Equal percentages of respondents were in favour and against the view that the madrasa students are segregated from the mainstream youth. 55% were of the opinion that madrasa education has no impact on career development while 44% said that it has some impact. 23% opined that only madrasa students are exploited by the extremists to carry out their activities and 72% opposed the view. 7% identified secularism and absence of religion as synonymous and 93% gave the opposite opinion. 30% were in favour of Fatwa and 63% found it unnecessary in a country governed by constitution. 7% expressed their ignorance about it. Positive response to the statement "Islam is tolerant and respectful to other religions" was almost unanimous (98%). Only 2% opposed. 65% of the respondents thought that the developmental activities supported by other countries in Bangladesh are truly helpful to our development. 33% gave different view. 14% considered human rights as a luxury in a developing country like Bangladesh whereas 86% termed it as a necessity. A negligible percentage of the respondents, however, expressed their ignorance on some of the issues.

In the second set of questions the respondents were asked to give their views on barriers to development, identity, description of Bangladesh, global connection, source of information and democratic environment.

Huge majority of the respondents identified illiteracy, political instability and corruption as major barriers to our development. While responding to the question which identity comes first, 67% said it is the national identity (Bangali or Bangladeshi) and 32% preferred religious identity. 61% described Bangladesh as a democratic country, 22% as a Muslim country and 15% as a secular country. 63% of the respondents opined that connection with the global community is very helpful to our development and 37% said it is helpful to some extent. Majority of the respondents identified TV and newspaper as the most important sources of information and news. Regarding existence of democratic atmosphere in Bangladesh, 24% said there is favorable atmosphere to practice democracy and 76% gave the opposite view.

INFORMATION OF INTERVIEWEE

RATIO OF INTERVIEWEE MALE/FEMALE

Gender	Number	%
Male	65	64%
Female	37	36%
Total	102	100%

PROFESSION OF INTERVIEWEE

Profession	Number
Student	95
Service holder	3
Businessman	1
Housewife	1
Unemployed	1
Rickshaw puller	1
Total	102

INSTITUTE OF INTERVIEWEE

Institutes	Number
College	44
University	32
Madrasah	19
Not applicable	6
School	1
Total	102

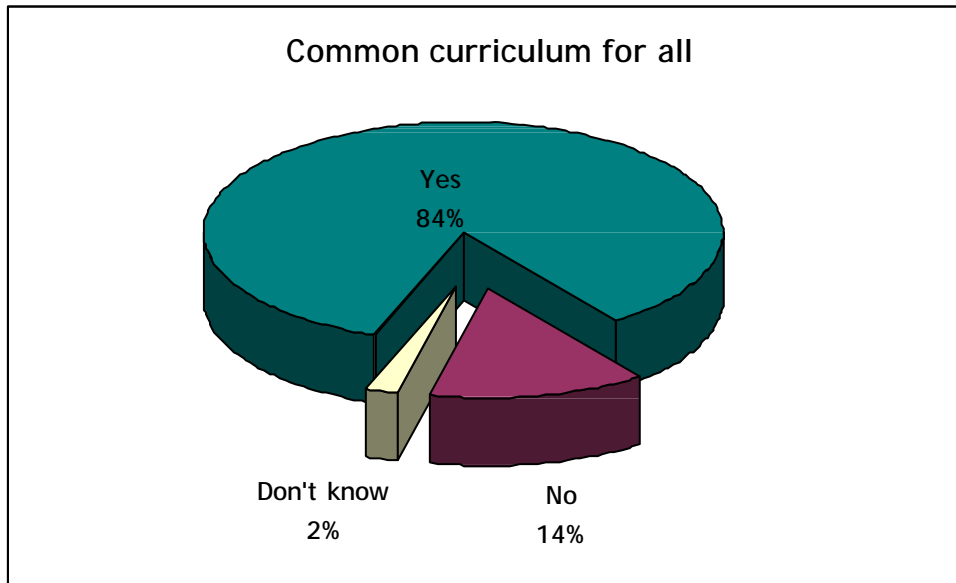
QUESTIONS

QUESTION-1

Q-1.1

Common curriculum for all

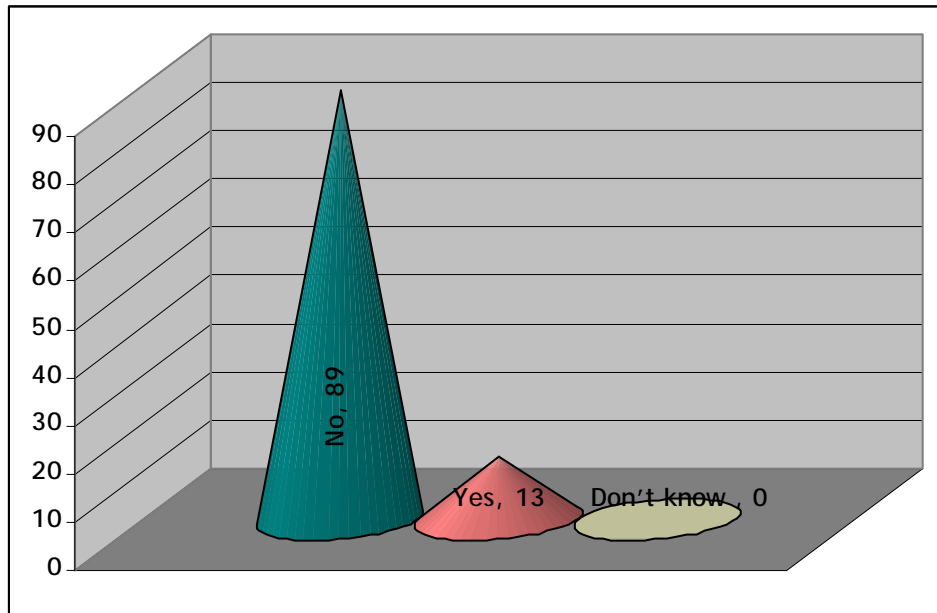
Answer	Number	%
Yes	86	84%
No	14	14%
Don't know	2	2%
Total	102	100%



Q-1.2

Poverty is the only reason for sending children to Madrasa

Answer	Number
Yes	13
No	89
Don't know	0
Total	102



Q-1.3 Are the Madrasa students segregated from the mainstream youth?

Answer	Number
Yes	50
No	50
Don't know	2
Total	102

Q-1.4 Does the madrasa education at all have any impact on career development?

Answer	Number
Yes	45
No	56
Don't know	1
Total	102

Q-1.5 Do you agree that only madrasa students are exploited by the extremists to carry out their activities?

Answer	Number
Yes	24
No	73
Don't know	5
Total	102

Q-1.6 Secularism and absence of religion are synonymous?

Ans	Number
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Yes	7
No	95
Don't know	0
Total	102

Q-1.7 Is Fatwa necessary when a country is governed by constitution?

Answer	Number
Yes	31
No	64
Don't know	7
Total	102

Q-1.8 Islam is tolerant and respectful to other religions.

Ans	Number
Yes	99
No	2
Don't know	1
Total	102

Q-1.9 Are the developmental activities supported by other countries in Bangladesh truly helpful to our development?

Answer	Number
Yes	66
No	34
Don't know	2
Total	102

Q-1.10 Are human rights a luxury or a necessity in a developing country like Bangladesh?

Answer	Number
Luxury	15
Necessity	87
Total	102

Q-1.11 Is democracy compatible with Islamic values?

Answer	Number
Yes	63
No	33
Don't know	6
Total	102

Q-1.12 Do you think mainstream Bangladeshi have clear conception about Islam (ideology, values, and norms)?

Answer	Number
Yes	22
No	78
Don't know	2
Total	102

Q-1.13 Can violence be justified for religious reasons?

Answer	Number
Yes	0
No	102
Don't know	0
Total	102

QUESTION -2

Q-2.1

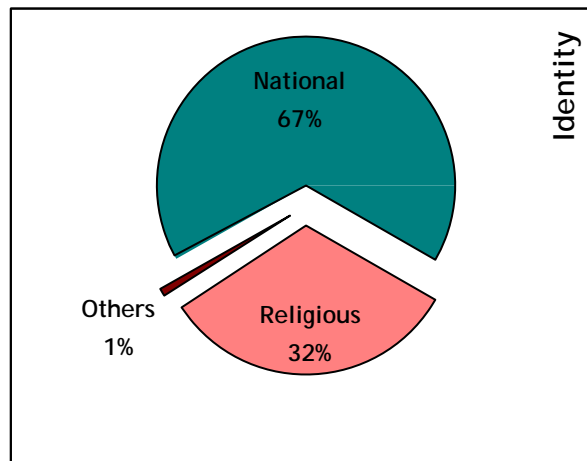
Barriers to our development

Barriers	1 st Priority	2 nd Priority	3 rd Priority	4 th Priority	5 th Priority	Total
Illiteracy	45	11	19	14	13	102
Terrorism	6	10	29	37	20	102
Political Instability	24	33	23	20	2	102
Corruption	26	42	19	15	0	102
Bureaucracy	1	6	12	16	67	102
Total	102	102	102	102	102	

Q-2.3

Identity Comes First

Identity	Number	%
National	68	67%
Religious	33	32%
Others	1	1%
Total	102	100%



Q-2.4

Description of Bangladesh

Description	Number	%
A Secular Country	15	15%
A Muslim Country	22	22%
A Democratic Country	63	61%
No Answer	2	2%
Total	102	100%

Q-2.5

Connection with global community

Scale	Number
Very Helpful	64
Helpful to some extent	38
Not Helpful	0
Harmful	0
Total	102

Q-2.6 Most important sources of information & news

Sources	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	Don't use	Total
Radio	6	6	20	28	41	1	102
Television	46	48	5	2	0	1	102
Newspaper	38	41	16	7	0	0	102

Family/Friends	2	3	42	38	16	1	102
Internet	10	4	19	25	39	5	102
Others	Mobile/Telephone/Book						

Q-2.7

Congenial atmosphere to practice democracy

Opinion	Number
Yes	25
No	77
Total	102

SUMMARY OF THE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF RAS

During the process of RAS, we placed five open ended questions to the respondents for their views. The questions/issues are:

1. Causes of sending children to madrasa (Q1.2.1)
2. People or groups other than madrasa students who are exploited by the extremists to carry out their activities. (Q1.5)
3. The reasons why the developmental activities supported by the donor agencies are not truly helpful for our development (Q1.9.1)
4. Issues responsible for tarnishing the image of Bangladesh (Q2.2)
5. Barriers to practice democracy (Q2.7.1)

Major findings:

1. While responding to the first question, the respondents mentioned religious belief, values, ideas, influence & feelings, religious conservatism, maintaining family traditions/ family likings/ traditional values, achieve virtue or acquire wellbeing in this life and after life or to get after life reward, acquire religious education, fear of religion/God/Allah and religious mindset as the major causes for sending children to madrasa.
2. The respondents identified poor & unemployed youth / needy and illiterate people/economically insolvent, school & college students, common people

allured for after life happiness or money, drug addicted youth, religiously less educated people, innocent people, young people separated from family, desperate youth separated from society, political workers and teenagers from poor family as the most common groups other than madrasa students who are exploited by the extremists as major groups to carry out their activities.

3. Regarding the question why some of the respondents think that the developmental activities supported by the donor agencies are not truly helpful for our development, the most common responses were that the activities are based on the interest of the donors, they do it for their own profit, they want to exploit local resources, they impose unnecessary conditions, resources are not properly utilized and our foreign policies do not serve our interest.
4. On the issue of image crisis, the respondents identified corruption, political instability, terrorist activities, terrorism in the name of religion, bi-party politics, use of religion in politics, political unrest and intolerance as the major responsible factors.
5. When asked why democracy is not being practiced properly in Bangladesh, the respondents identified illiteracy & ignorance of people, problem within the political parties, political instability & unrest, misuse of power, terrorism, corruption, social obstacles and self interest of the politicians as the major barriers.

SUMMARY OF THE DESK RESEARCH

One of the methodologies of the pre-design research of the TV program was desk research. Information and data were collected from websites and relevant printed documents. This part of the research study was aimed at giving a deeper look into the target issues - democracy, human rights, education, harmony, religious freedom and status of women particularly from the Islamic viewpoint. Gist of the study is placed here.

Islam is a religion of peace and co-existence, wherein there is ample scope for freedom of expression. One can express one's views even if one differs. The decision is arrived at through consensus on all important matters. Prophet Mohammed himself set a tradition by not appointing his successor during his lifetime and left it to the people to decide their leader.

From the beginning, Islam has mandated democracy through a *shura* (elected council of leaders), a process through which people sit together, consult with one another, and select one person to represent them.

A clear example of democracy's role in Islam is manifest in the Prophet's (peace be upon him) passing without appointing a successor to rule the Muslim state. He intentionally left it to the Muslims to come together to make this crucial decision based on what he had taught them.

The democratic election of a leader was the model on which the city of Madinah was founded. The Prophet, while invited by Muslims from that city, became its ruler by the choice of all its citizens, which included Jewish and polytheist tribes.

The Constitution of Madinah, establishes the importance of consent and cooperation for governance in Islam. According to this pact, Muslims and non-Muslims are equal citizens of the Islamic state, with identical rights and duties. Communities of different religious orientations enjoy religious autonomy, which is essentially wider in scope than the modern idea of religious freedom. The principles of equality, consensual governance and pluralism are beautifully enmeshed in the pact of Madinah.

Islam teaches principles of freedom, human dignity, equality, governance by contract, popular sovereignty, and the rule of law that are compatible with but not identical to the cognate principles that belong to the intellectual heritage of liberal democracy. A look at history suggests that the main obstacles being faced by Muslims in their attempts to achieve open political systems and democratic governments are 1) a deeply rooted authoritarian political culture, and 2) manipulated interpretations of the Koran.

The stance that politicised Islamic movements take on the issues of accountable governance and modernisation can often be hard to pin down. Often, rival Islamist groups work at cross-purposes and prevent their countries from developing sound political and economic programmes. In order to accommodate the diversity of opinion among Muslims, the Islamists will have to learn to accept a system based on pluralism, democracy, and the separation of public administration from theological institutions. The Islamic parties in Turkey and Malaysia already seem to have learned this lesson. Islamic values have great potential to contribute to the overall development of the Muslim world, but only if they can be cultivated in ways that do not undermine prospects for democracy.

Koran's guidance in relation to the rights of people on earth is vast and multi-faceted. Justice is the negation of violence, oppression, homicide, abuse of power and tyranny. In Islam, justice is there for everyone. There is no discrimination on the basis of power or position. Islam has therefore uprooted all the sources of evil. Nobody is above the law, even the Prophet and his family are not exempted from it. The Islamic community is governed by the Divine law of Allah. Man on earth is the representative of God. He fulfils His commands with justice, and Islam recognizes the rights of the non-Muslims with the Koran acknowledging monasteries, temples, synagogues and mosques as places of God's worship of in similar manner. (See Koran 40:40).

According to Koranic perspective, knowledge is a prerequisite for the creation of a just world in which authentic peace can prevail. Education makes man a right thinker and a correct decision-maker. It achieves this by bringing him knowledge from the external world, teaching him to reason, and acquainting him with past history, so that he may be a better judge of the present.

This is why Islam attaches such great importance to knowledge and education. The Koran repeatedly asks us to observe the earth and heavens. This instills in man the desire to learn natural science.

One of the most common charges brought against Islam historically, and as a religion, is that it is intolerant. Islam, especially after the collapse of the communism and the disintegration of the communist block, is seen as a source for instigating terrorism and fanaticism. There is widespread propaganda presenting Muslims as being intolerant against other religions and cultures. But real teachings of Islam and the Koran disregard these wrong conceptions and propaganda. Muslims respect all Hebrew prophets and Jesus (PBUH) and Koran consider mother of Christ the most pious woman. According to Koranic teachings one would cease to be a Muslim if he does not acknowledge all the prophets -- named or unnamed - in Koran as God in the holy book says he had sent his messengers to all communities at all ages.

In the translation and interpretation of the Koran the word "jihad" is translated in most cases as Holy War while very the meaning of "jihad" is to "strive and struggle", not any Holy War with the root word comes from *Jahada*, which means to strive for a better way of life.

The Koranic teachings have elevated the position of women to a status unknown to other religions with the holy book saying "Their Lord responded to them: "I never fail to reward any worker among you for any work you do, be you MALE OR FEMALE, YOU ARE EQUAL TO ONE ANOTHER". (3:195). Before the advent of Islam, there was no concept of a woman's right to an inheritance. The advent of Islam raised the position of women in many ways. It is the historical truth that before Islam, women were not allowed to participate in social, religious or any other activities of life. Islam contributed to women's participation in every aspect of life. *(Full text in Annex-3)*

ANNEX - 1

REPORT OF 10 FGD SESSIONS

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 1

20 December 2006

Gourmet Garden, Dhanmondi Dhaka

Participant Group: Students of Public University

Number of Attendees:

Total Participant	Boy	Girl	Ratio (Boy & girl)
9	7	2	77.7%: 22.2%

Represented Universities: Dhaka University, Jagannath University, Shidheshory Girls, Dhaka College and National University

Key issues for Discussion: Development, Human Rights, Democracy, Peace, Islam, Fundamentalism, Education, Global Citizen, Strengths and Weaknesses, Western Concept, Misconceptions, Remedy

The Synopsis:

On Development:

- ❑ Development means assurance of a better lifestyle for the general people.
- ❑ Development means accomplishment of a certain standard and peace.
- ❑ Development means to reach a sustainable and comfortable stage.

HOW TO RELATE DEVELOPMENT

- ❑ Development is related to individual as well as interconnected to society. Therefore, it is important to develop both of them.
- ❑ If we contribute for others' development along with our own, then an overall development process can be ensured.
- ❑ We need to develop human rights, economic, democratic and communication system.

HOW IS DEVELOPMENT HINDERED

- ❑ Violation of Human Rights
- ❑ Political Unrest
- ❑ Illiteracy
- ❑ Misconceptions
- ❑ Corruption
- ❑ Absence of Peace
- ❑ Terrorism
- ❑ Fundamentalism

HOW IS THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

- ❑ There are too many systems
- ❑ The education systems have a gulf of communication gap
- ❑ We are not aware about each other (Learners of one system are not acquainted with the other.)

STEREOTYPICAL CONCEPT ABOUT MADRASA

- ❑ They are almost always associated to militancy
- ❑ It is perceived they know more about Islam than anyone
- ❑ They are more authorized to speak of Islam
- ❑ They are fundamentalists
- ❑ Most of the Madrasa students come from poor background/ deprived section that is economically weak and unable to accommodate a good school
- ❑ Some of them do not go for this but they think it's their faith that guides them to go for this choice.
- ❑ The students are often unemployed for they have no proper (modern) education

HOW IS THE IMAGE OF BANGLADESH BEING HAMPERED DUE TO ACTS OF TERRORISM

- ❑ Foreign investments are decreasing
- ❑ Image of the country is damaged
- ❑ Peace is hampered
- ❑ Society is failing
- ❑ There has been political influence behind the attacks of the Islamic militant

WHAT ARE MISCONCEPTIONS AND REALITY ABOUT ISLAM

- ❑ People do not know the real teaching of Islam
- ❑ Islam is a religion of peace. It does not permit to attack anyone unless they are attacked.

- ❑ The misconception about Jihad has been brain washed among the Madrasa students who receive the militant training. Jihad has two types: Jihad-e-Akbar and Jihad-e-Asgar. The first one is the big one that is to fight against the deadly sins and prejudices within oneself and the second one is less important that speaks of fighting with arms to protect Islam.
- ❑ There are many misconceptions regarding Islam. That's why existing Islamic education is not modern.

HOW ARE WE GLOBALLY LINKED

- ❑ There is a global network working with this existing terrorism.
- ❑ Western media highlight the terrorist activities with priority.
- ❑ We are lagging behind in many respects due to our weak infrastructure compared to other countries.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

- ❑ We need to have a strong systematic educational system
- ❑ We need to create mass awareness
- ❑ We need to bridge the communication gap to understand each other
- ❑ We need to know the real teaching of Islam

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH?

1. Current political situation
2. Political instability
3. Corruption in every sector
4. Lack of real education and illiteracy.
5. Lack of cooperation to each other.
6. Traditional ideology/ conservative mind of the people.
7. Religious misconception

8. Indecision and poor decision making process.
9. Political and economical uncertainty.
10. Unable to realize the need for the betterment of people
11. Bureaucracy
12. Lack of human values

What can we do or what would be our role to face this problem or to overcome the present problems

1. Doing my own duties properly and it is the best way to serve the country.
2. One's good education should be implemented in society.
3. By solving population problem and corruption and by alleviating poverty.
4. Cooperative attitude should be enhanced among all.
5. Love, respect and commitment needed to make our land a developed country.
6. Doing my duties and responsibilities properly.
7. To give the maximum effort by utilizing one's capacity/capability properly.
8. Maintaining social responsibilities properly.
9. Doing my duties properly so that I can be clear to people, my country and myself.
10. Total movement is essential which must have a particular goal. (A movement is must because sometimes people are forced to move in wrong way for socio-economic condition)
11. Creating public consciousness.
12. Future development through self-development.
13. To prepare so that one can take part in decision making process.
14. Cooperative participation

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 2

Date: 29 December 2006

Venue: Gourmet Garden, Dhaka,

Participant Group: Students of Private University

Number of Attendees

Total participants	Boy	Girl	Ratio (Boys & Girls)
9	6	3	66.7%: 33.3%

Represented Universities: Stamford University, North South University, Bangladesh Medical College

Key issues for Discussion: Education, Development, Human Rights, Democracy, Peace, Islam, Fundamentalism & Violence, Impact of Violence, Global Citizen, Strengths and Weaknesses, Western Concept, Misconceptions, Remedy

THE SYNOPSIS:

On Education System:

- There's a constant communication gap among the learners of different education systems of Bangladesh.

- ❑ For this the best lot is considered to receive chances in the University level. The rest goes to the private sector. Though the situation is not always so but generally this is the case.
- ❑ There are three different mentalities emerging in Bangladesh that is not at all organized or interlinked.
- ❑ All the systems have misconceptions about one another. For example, the Madrasa students are thought to be extremists. There is a certain stigma about this education.
- ❑ It is very unfortunate that the students of all systems can not participate in the public university admission test for they are designed only for the Bengali medium students.
- ❑ There should be a uniform curriculum until a certain level so that all of them have some common knowledge about different issues and do not face any difficulties for admission in the universities.

FUNDAMENTALISM, VIOLENCE AND EXTREMISM

- ❑ Though it is commonly believed that Madrasa students, especially Qawmi Madrasa students are vulnerable to violence and extremism/ fundamentalism, numerous college and university students are also involved in violence and extremism.
- ❑ As Madrasahs are mostly situated in the village areas, the influential people of the premises always have a tendency to set up new Madrasa for power exercise and use those for other unethical purposes.

IMPACT OF VIOLENCE

- ❑ In most cases the criminals or the extremists are known. But for political causes they always remain unharmed.
- ❑ Many of the political leaders themselves are abusers but yet people elect them without any choice when they are nominated as candidates in the election.
- ❑ The economy of our country is very poor. The GDP growth is lower than ever but the common people are not aware about it.

- ❑ We are living in uncertainty, insecurity and our routine life is hampered to the greatest level.
- ❑ Our youth dream for a better future, but they do not see any hope that their dream will come true. The future development is thus nipped in the bud.
- ❑ Youth are becoming more anti-democracy, anti-election and losing confidence in leadership

RELIGIOUS SUPERSTITION: HOW IS IT EFFECTING

- ❑ The urban educated youth are less concerned about the betterment of the political scenario and even lesser about the religious misconceptions. Rather they prefer to think about their career.
- ❑ The village people are very pious, simple and vulnerable. Therefore it's easier to manipulate them in the name of Islam.
- ❑ We are moving away from the democratic system. Political bias is uprising.
- ❑ Our development is hampered. Investments are decreasing day by day.
- ❑ The youth have no prospect to shine and show their brilliance.

GLOBAL CITIZEN'S PERSPECTIVE

- There is another imbalance of power and economy in today's globalized world. Therefore we are very much behind as global citizens.
- With the help of advanced media and technology, the different acts of extremism or anything negative is reaching to everyone before it's even investigated properly. So conclusions are very instantly drawn and the image crisis exists.
- We are failing to ensure quality as global citizens.

Human Rights violation

- ❑ We do not have any human rights existing in our country.
- ❑ We do not have any idea about human rights standards.
- ❑ Women rights are violated most and they are done in social circumstances.

- ❑ There is violation of human rights for religious misinterpretations. For example: Fatwa
- ❑ These violations happen due to the self-contradictory situation in Bangladesh where the problem and the solutions have no relevance.

Why are 'we' (mainstream youth) silent

- ❑ Because there's a gulf of communication and conceptual gap among us
- ❑ There is a negative social idea implanted within us. We do not take religion as something for education.
- ❑ We do not have a clear idea about Islam and do not consider it to be a matter of discussion.
- ❑ We are not taught the basic education and proper guidance of Islam.

What are the Ideas of Islam to us

- ❑ Islam is the religion of peace.
- ❑ Islam is virtually secular that says to the followers to respect all religions

How do we develop the present condition

- ❑ The family should play the major role to educate a child from the very beginning with the teachings of Islam
- ❑ We need to be aware about Islam
- ❑ We need more education on this matter
- ❑ We need to be more tolerant and learn to listen to others' point of view as well.
- ❑ We need to be more patriotic and care more about our country that we are losing now a days.

What should be done or what would be our role in developing human rights situation here and make a brighter Bangladesh

1. Create Self-awareness.
2. Raise voice through electronic and print media.
3. Be conscious about our own right as well as others.
4. Media can make people aware about rights as the majority are ignorant regarding rights.
5. Same attitude is needed for all.
6. Political leaders should concentrate on their views rather than party sentiment.
7. Political leaders should be properly educated.

8. Those who are students should be aware that human rights should not be violated for them.
9. We cannot do anything with all. But we can make ourselves aware and make others conscious.
10. Firstly, the rights of family members should be established.
11. To ensure that nobody can violate others right.
12. Mental development, mental development & only mental development nothing else.
13. Human rights development.
14. Creating awareness.
15. Scopes for social service in educational system
16. Ensure unbiased justice.
17. Freedom of speech, media etc.
18. To make understand of every people of every sector .
19. Strict laws should be formulated and enforced to punish the criminals. And people may think twice before committing any crime.
20. To ensure severe punishment.
21. Educate people about human rights. The only way to stop the violation of human rights is to educate the most vulnerable section about them. Those who are violating the human rights and whose rights are violated are not aware about this. Violation of human rights is being considered as well deserved punishment.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 3

Date: 29 December 2006

Venue: Gourmet Garden, Dhaka,

Participant Group: Young Professionals

Number of Participants:

Total Participants	Boy	Girl	Ratio(Boy & Girl)
8	6	2	75%: 25%

Age Group: 20- 25 yrs.

Represented Organizations: United Group, CSB News Channel, IOM, MRDI, People's

University Bangladesh, Beginning Productions Ltd., Bdcarz.com

Key Issues for Discussion: Education System, Madrasa system, Violence, Western Effect, Democracy, Human Rights, Religious Concept (extremism, terrorism, fundamentalism, secularism)

The Synopsis:

EDUCATION SYSTEM

- The very basis of our educational system, the foundation is wrong.
- There is no educational ethics.
- There is discrimination among the existing education system. All the students do not have equal opportunity or rights. There is economic discrimination for the more one spends the better student one can become.
- The existing system does not accommodate everyone to have education.
- All these problems gradually slow down the process of excellence in higher education where not many sustain in the long run.

OUR* IDEA ABOUT THE MADRASA SYSTEM:

- We* have very minimum ideas about the Madrasa system.
- We are reluctant regarding this system
- We tend to relate extremism and fundamentalism with Madrasa system.
- Generally people from the lower social strata and orphans go to Madrasa.
- It sometimes also depends on the family type/status whether to go to Madrasa or not.
- The teachers of the Madrasa system too are responsible for not being engaged in the mainstream thoughts.
- In the early times most of our scholars did pass from the community based Madrasa or Maktabas where they were taught about religion apart from other subjects. But when the British introduced this new system of education in the process of colonialism, it also destroyed the age-old concept of religious education.
- The quality education should be provided to the Madrasa students so that they can participate in the mainstream.
- The 9/11 incident also made the students from the religious educational background extremists or fundamentalist in a negative way.

* We, our = the mainstream Muslim youth

EXTREMISM & FUNDAMENTALISM

- Madrasa students are thought to be trained in the rural areas as extremists.
- But many universities and colleges of the country have students with extremist ideas.
- As the Madrasa students are not participating in the mainstream they are more vulnerable to extremism.
- Quality education system can create a positive impact on them.
- The University admission system should also be compatible to all the education systems in Bangladesh.

TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE: HOW ARE THEY AFFECTING US

- Violence is there in Bangladesh - that is an obstacle for the development of our country.
- The existing violence is causing image crisis for our country.
- Investments have decreased in a significant number.
- Our tourism is facing serious problems.
- Many of our local industries were shut down due to this cause.
- Our mentality has been changed. We are no longer tolerant and peace loving. We tend to protest and break in order to meet our demands.

THE WESTERN THOUGHT (ON THE PRESENT CONDITION)

- The west highlights Bangladesh as a terrorist nation. The flood affected image has been replaced by the terrorist/extremist image.
- Whenever the west thinks about Islam they relate it with fanatics

- The western media too have a misconception about us and Islam.

OUR THOUGHT ABOUT ISLAM

- We only understand that religion means faith. But we do not have much faith and even do not know properly on which to keep the faith.
- We do not know the real meaning and the real interpretation of Islam in our daily lives.
- 90% of those Muslims who know how to read Qur'an properly do not know exactly what it means
- Even the teachers who teach us in our childhood to read the Holy Book lack proper knowledge
- We are afraid to discuss about Islam because from the very beginning we are taught that Islam is a very strict religion.
- We are always confused for we hear and believe all the interpretations and never try to sort them out.
- There is a tendency of the family as well to forcefully involve the children to believe what they believe
- Though we have a separate course on religion in our primary and secondary education, we do not read it as importantly as we study rest of the courses
- We are moving away from Islam for when we logically think how Islam is interpreted we see our religious leaders do not respect other religious communities.
- We seek for the blessings of Allah only when we are in crisis.

CONTRIBUTION TO DEMOCRACY

- Islam is abused and misused in the name of democracy in Bangladesh
- Religion is used as a political instrument.

- As religion is very sensitive and very personal it can trigger many crisis as it is happening in Bangladesh and therefore it is very easy to divert any issue in the name of using the religion of the majority.
- Islam is secular but our country having the majority of Muslim population is not secular.

HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AND VIOLATION

- The main victims of human rights violation are the women and children.
- The economic discrimination also causes human rights violation.
- The ethnic community people are also victims of major human rights violation for we being a nation to fight for our language and identity do not take any measures to establish their rights to practice their culture and language. Even their lands and security are at stake because of us.
- There are religious misconceptions and illiteracy which are also causing human rights violation

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION ABOUT ISLAM

- The youth who are involved in extremism are brain washed with the misconception of Jihad whereas Islam never considered this type of Jihad as a priority. Rather the Jihad-e-Akbar, the biggest Jihad is to fight with one's internal vices and wrongdoing. And the Jihad-e-Asgar is the less important Jihad, which is to attack with weapons on the enemies only when being attacked and the third one is the one that speaks of to fight to keep the motherland safe and for own survival only for self-defense.
- Islam says very clearly 'Lakum deenukum walia deen' that is to respect and show tolerance to the people of other religions.
- Bangladesh will never be Afghanistan. There will be possibilities but we the mainstream and most of the citizens will never ever allow it to become such.

What steps should be taken or what would be our role for the development of Bangladesh.

1. One week of declaring Martial law will hopefully fix (political unrest) this up.
2. Bring adjustment in educational policy

3. The different educational systems should be linked somehow. There should be some kind of universal policy among them.
4. Student exchange programs may be started by the government among the different streams of education. And monosyllabic system should be introduced.
5. All the different systems should be monitored centrally at the top level.
6. Individual responsibility developing.
7. Good leadership required.
8. Cooperation and respect for others.
9. Political stability.
10. The reason behind all the terrorist activities is power and misuse of power. First of all we need to define power properly, the specialists need to come forward. People involved in these kind of task need to be efficient and scholar in their field.
11. People must get proper opportunity. They don't have the scope of developing their career. And this major portion can be easily misguided. And in this way total system collapsed.
12. Similarity in attitudes.
13. There cannot be secularism.
14. Everybody must be regarded as equal point of view.
15. Our mentality should develop.
16. Discrimination in education should be removed.
17. Everybody should get equal opportunity.
18. Equal opportunity in employment have to be given to all.
19. Freedom of speech and participation have to be ensured.
20. We first have to reject the negative attitude about Islam.
21. Madrasa students should be accepted among other mainstream students.
22. The positive issues of the state must get more coverage in media. And it will enhance foreign investment.
23. Everybody should be aware about terrorist act.
24. One system of education should be introduced.

25. To some extent ignore the situations created by extremists and start an opposite flow.
26. Media can play a great role, it must provide informative news.
27. The urge for patriotism should be initiated.
28. Effective foreign policy should be implemented.
29. Practicing internal democracy and fellow feeling should be developed among political parties.
30. We have to think POSITIVELY.
31. And we have to believe that the people of Bangladesh can play a great role in developing the nation.
32. Some efficient people should be appointed and those people will represent their country positively in different conference and meetings. They will not be from any political parties. They will play a great role in implementing any agreement.
33. Respect is important among different political parties.
34. All should think for the betterment of this country.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 4

29 December 2006

Venue: Gourmet Garden, Dhaka,

Participant Group: Teenager/ College Students

Number of Participants:

Total participants	Boy	Girl	Ratio (Boys & Girls)
10	7	3	70%:30%

Age Group: 16-19 yrs.

Represented Organizations: Viqarunnisa Noon School & College, Holy Cross College,

BUET, Scholastica, Notre Dame College, Saint Joseph College, University of Texas

Key Issues for Discussion: Education System, Its Advantage and Disadvantage, Obstacles for Development, Violence, Western Effect, Global Citizen, Democracy, Human Rights, Religious Concept & Misconception (extremism, terrorism, fundamentalism, and secularism), The Positive Bangladesh

The Synopsis:

EDUCATION SYSTEM (ADVANTAGE/ DISADVANTAGE):

- There are too many systems in our country.
- There is a communication gap in the existing education system.
- All of the students are not open to all subjects.
- We do not have any concept about other systems especially the Madrasa system.
- The other systems or the mainstream do not accept the Madrasa students everywhere.
- The Madrasa Students cannot participate in the general way of living for they are trained to develop their skills for a specific course that is religious education.
- We think Madrasa students are being diverted and brain washed in the name of education as extremists.
- We need to have a system as well as individual development.
- Government should take measures to change or decide the basic curriculum for the Qawmi Madrasa along with others.

HOW IS OUR DEVELOPMENT HINDERED DUE TO THIS

- We are going through an Image crisis
- There has been a significant amount of arms and human trafficking going around.
- People generally go for Madrasa because of financial weakness and they are being brain washed in this process.
- We do not think there is much of militancy in Bangladesh. Because more people pass out each year than the number of attacks and not all of them are involved in extremist acts.
- Religion is more used as a power weapon to exercise influence in our country.
- We are very vulnerable and sensitive and for this it is very easy to manipulate the common people in the name of religion.

RELIGION AND US (MISCONCEPTIONS AND THE REALITY)

- We do not know much about religion.
- We never talk about religion
- Jihad is meant only to attack the other religious groups or those who do not believe in Islam but this is not right. The original teaching says to fight within oneself in order to stop the self from wrongdoing and then comes the one when it says not to attack unless we are attacked.
- Fatwa is thought to be Islamic Law or order from the religious leader. But in reality it means to have a clear interpretation.
- Hilla marriage is another misconception that is misinterpreted by our so-called religious leaders.
- Many say Islam does not permit women to work outside. But Islam never says so. In fact, Islam shows respect to women more than any other religion.
- It is said that Jihad is mandatory in Islam, which is not true. In reality it is one's own choice.
- Another thing that is often said to the wives that heaven lies under the feet of the husband; this is just a creation of the patriarchal society.

HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES:

- Human rights violation is taking place all over the country in many forms. Women are the first victims of human rights violation. Then there is minority abuse during elections and other times. Abuses and oppressions on ethnic communities also take place. People, specially are victimized by the misinterpretations and religious oppressions in our country.
- Economic condition or poverty is also a cause for human rights violation.
- We are not respectful towards other religious groups.

HOW DO WE OVERCOME

- We need to create mass awareness.
- We need to have proper education.
- We need to develop our mentality positively.

IS THERE ANY CHANCE FOR BANGLADESH TO BECOME AN EXTREMIST NATION

- Never.
- There are a few risks but those can be terminated if the citizens are well aware.
- The present peace and security structure needs to be renovated.
- There are a few explicit example of extremism but those are not the majority representation.

HOW IS WESTERN CONCEPT

- After 9/11 all the Muslim countries, specially the eastern Muslims are looked upon as fanatics and extremists.
- There are fanatics everywhere in the world. But yet this part of the world is always being accused.
- The western media is also creating a diasporic identity, as Islam is equal to extremism, which is extremely wrong.
- Before accusing the Muslim countries being extremists and makers of warfare, one needs to think from whom the weapons for mass destructions are reaching this part of the world. And who are creating this Frankenstein.
- There is a vivid tendency of dominance over these countries and bureaucratic policy involved.

WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT US AND WHAT WAITS IN FUTURE

- The Nobel peace prize
- We could stop system loss if corruption is reduced.
- There will be a leadership, governance and democratic crisis in the near future if the current situation lingers
- We are not patriot enough to think about our nation. We are more self-centered and think of self-development only.

What role we can play or what is to be done for the development of overall condition of our country?

1. Proper planning (as the total change of socio-economic structure is not possible in a few days) is essential to change our educational, economical and social system and gradually change it.
2. Monitoring activities strictly.
3. To change our mentality, and outlook and seriously work for a better condition.
4. To make our society aware about all kind of suppression and it should be started from the root level.
5. To explore good qualities through all.
6. Individual consciousness is essential and all should try to avoid any kind of action that causes violation. And always try to protest this kind of act.
7. All should be committed to protest any kind of violated act.
8. We should provide equal job opportunity to all irrespective of religion, race, cast.
9. Tribal people should get better education facilities. So it is needed to set up schools for them.
10. Strict criminal laws needed.
11. We have to create awareness among the people about Islam & its effects.
12. We need to take steps for making promotion of human rights.
13. We should create similar syllabus for the students who are in different motivated institutions.

14. We can play an important role for promoting the positive sides of Islam in our individual institutions.
15. Changing mentality
16. Consciousness among family members.
17. Mentality to protest.
18. An organization is essential which can make people aware about their rights and express their views against violation.
19. To enact laws as well as implementing them
20. Awareness building among government level and grass root level.
21. Ensuring women participation in education.
22. To aware the people around us.
23. We should help those who are the victims of poverty.
24. Self-development
25. Social welfare activities.
26. Awareness building in school, college and university level.
27. Proper utilization of media.
28. Dialogue.
29. To work with the rural boys and girls.
30. Employing rural grass root level workers in lieu of city workers and implementing it.
31. To engage with human rights organization.
32. Common platform needed.
33. Politician's assistance is needed.
34. Organize training on rights of women and children.
35. To beat those who are the suppressor.
36. To hold the belief in one's mind that I am the citizen of 21st century. So I can make my family, relatives and my neighbors aware.
37. We can make people understand through dialogue not just giving speech.
38. We can protect others from violation.

39. The word violation is made by us. So it is not easy to eradicate it by education. So expanding awareness is essential.
40. The tendency to recognize women as weak (obola) would not be avoided without self awareness.
41. Social and religious ideology should be developed among us.
42. True ideology will protect us from violation. And for this consciousness, liberal mind, education and a proper society is needed.
43. Increasing awareness in every sector.
44. Realizing the true meaning of education.
45. To protect the oppressed class we need vast education that would be realistic

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 5

Date: 12 January 2007

Venue: Gourmet Garden, Dhaka,

Focused Group: Suburban youths studying in Dhaka

Number of Participants:

Total participants	Boy	Girl	Ratio (Boys & Girls)
7	6	1	85.7%: 14.2%

Age Group: 20- 22 yrs.




Represented Shaheed Sohrawardi College, Kazi Azimuddin College, Obidul

Organizations: Haque College, Mukti Jodhha Degree College, Stamford College, Dhaka College

Key Issues for Discussion: Education System, Madrasa system, Development, Image (Branding), Violence, Youths today, Democracy, Human Rights, Democracy, Religious Concept (extremism, terrorism, fundamentalism, secularism)

The Synopsis:

EDUCATION SYSTEM

-  Bangladesh has more than a number of educational systems which is not appropriate.
-  We should have a unified education system connecting all.
-  There is discrimination among the existing education system.

- There is a huge communication gap amongst the students following separate curriculum and systems.

Our* idea about The Madrasa System:




















- The youth do not have a very good idea regarding the Madrasa system. So do the Madrasa students. But this should not be the case.
- Madrasa system is basically religion oriented.
- Madrasa is classified as *Aliah* and *Qawmi* madrasa.
- We tend to relate extremism and fundamentalism with Madrasa system.
- Generally the underprivileged groups go for Madrasa.
- These section's students are often brain washed.
- There are (according to one participant) almost 75,000 madrasa in 64,000 villages of the country. Often there are places where students are less than the institutions.
- The madrasa students do not follow a modernistic approach to life and their careers.





* We, our = the mainstream Muslim youth

DEVELOPMENT






- Bangladesh is facing sever problems regarding development.
- Bangladesh is falling behind for the contemporary political scenario.
- We, the people are also responsible to a certain extent for this situation.
- We cannot have development unless we create a skilled human resource.
- Corruption is another root cause for lack of development in Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh is having less development for the youths possess a self centric ideology and thus is brain drained. Another cause for brain drain is that there is no proper environment that can increase the possibility of contribution.

ROLE OF YOUTH FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE COUNTRY




-  To spread the light of education to all.
-  By making people conscious about the basic rights of people.
-  By initiating a social movement.
-  A voluntary organization can be set up country wide.
-  By making people conscious about the existing laws and regulations in the country.
-  To give a clear and proper knowledge about religion.
-  Young people can organize a community for the development of poor children.
-  Young people can help individually if required for the helpless people.
-  Not neglecting any work.
-  By working together for the rights of all.
-  To protest any unfair means, and to resist any kind of crime.
-  To uphold human rights situation a young person must be conscious about his or her community. This is their main responsibility to make people conscious about human rights issue in their own areas and if they can do this work in an organized way then development would be much easier.
-  To make people aware about human rights issues.
-  Free movement.
-  To consider skill and aptitudes.
-  To build up consciousness in their own communities.
-  To be aware whether human rights is properly implemented in family or not. And abstain from doing things which violate/hamper human rights situation.
-  To specify the reasons and places that are violating human rights situation and try to make people aware about those things.
-  Young people can educate the poor peer group.

-  A productive/ well devised organization can be set up with the suppressed women from different parts.
-  Circulation/advertisement on human rights.
-  Young people can make their juniors understand about their positions and situations.
-  Advertisement on all kind of law and have to be conscious regarding that.





IMAGE

-  The instability of the youth is making way for manipulation of the image.
-  There has been a severe image crisis prevailing in our country.
-  Due to this crisis, the investments of the country as whole are decreased.
-  The labor market is breaking up for lack of proper wages
-  Many of the labors are revolting and becoming more violent everywhere.





FUNDAMENTALISM & TERRORISM

-  We only understand that religion means faith. But we do not have much faith and even do not know properly on which to keep the faith.
-  We do not know the real meaning and the real interpretation of Islam in our daily lives.
-  90% of those Muslims who know how to read Quran properly do not know exactly what it means


















CONTRIBUTION TO DEMOCRACY










-  Islam is abused and misused in the name of democracy in Bangladesh
-  Religion is used as a political instrument.
-  As religion is very sensitive and very personal it can trigger many crisis as it is happening in Bangladesh and therefore it is very easy to divert any issue in the name using the religion of the majority.
-  Islam is secular but our country having the majority of the population Muslim is not secular.

HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AND VIOLATION

-  The main victims of human rights violation are the women and children.
-  The economic discrimination also causes human rights violation.
-  The ethnic community is also victims of major human rights violation for we though being a nation to fight for our language and identity do not take any measures to establish their rights to practice their culture and language. Even their lands and security is at stake because of us.
-  There is the religious misconceptions and illiteracy of the teaching that is also causing human rights violation

RELIGIOUS CONCEPTION OR MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ISLAM

-  People are made to understand the religious thoughts and ideas that they become ignorant about other subjects.
-  Sometimes people know the right thing as wrong or vice versa.
-  People only know the surface or the border line of Islam.
-  People believe that nearness to God is possible through religious education.
-  Islam is not properly maintained if women do not use *Burkha*.
-  Islam is not properly maintained if girls do not go to Madrasa for education.
-  Religion is full of superstition.
-  Religion is used for interest.
-  Status is identifiable through the practice of religious education.
-  Norms and practices are not clear.
-  There are a lot of words used but people do not know their meanings.
-  To be unknown about different religion.
-  Knowing religion means knowing Allah and devoid from knowing other things.
-  To consider Arabic language as a holy thing.
-  All sin disappeared once people go in Hajj.
-  There is no clear idea on divorce and marriage.
-  People consider the words of the Imam or Moulavis as holy something.

-  People believe that the Moulavis have super natural power.
-  And people who go against those Moulavis have known as the enemies of Islam.
-  Using flowers in *Victory day* and in *Independence day* is considered as similar to image worshipping.
-  Common people have some feelings that are superstitious. Little educated people are guided much with superstition. Generally people are hypnotized by Islamic values. And these values are misused by political leaders. Political parties of Bangladesh whatever be the party they use religion before vote.
-  Religion is more used negatively than positively. So the bottom line is whoever for their own interest use religion in their own way.
-  People from one religion cannot tolerate the people from other religion or they neglect their norms and rituals.
-  Islam is misused in different sector.
-  The idea that if people's life is terminated by Jihad then he or she will be a martyr.
-  Women are deprived from education and outside work in excuse of *parda* system.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 6

Date: 20 January 2007

Venue: the British Council, Dhaka,

Focused Group: *Aliah* Madrasa Students

Number of Participants:

Total participants	Boy	Girl	Ratio (Boys & Girls)
8	4	4	50%: 50%

Age Group: 16-18 yrs.



Represented Chandra (Rah) Fazil Madrasa, Gazipur, Mirashpara Ha.







Organizations: Dakhil Madrasa, Tangi and Rahmania Fazil Madrasa Gazipur

Key Issues for Discussion: Education System, Madrasa system (their future plan), Teachings of Islam, Development, About Bangladesh (Branding), Image Crisis, Religious Misconceptions, Youths today, Democracy, Human Rights, Extremism/ Terrorism/ Fundamentalism & Secularism, Globalization, Politics, Information




The Synopsis:

EDUCATION SYSTEM



-  There are two types of educational system in Bangladesh. One is religion based that is the Madrasa the other is less religious that is the general school system.
-  We could try to have some more common subjects amongst the systems connecting all.



-  We can also go for a unified curriculum where other streams of educational systems will emphasis more on religion and the madrasa system will do that over English and Science.
-  There is a great communication gap amongst the students of all systems. Even between the *Kawmi* and *Aliah* madrasa system as well.
-  The students belonging to general system of education in Bangladesh can't read and understand Arabic.
-  The authorities should take steps for initiating a sustainable communication between groups of different educational backgrounds.
-  The madrasas should focus on English very strongly. Because in today's world there is no option but to learn this language.
-  The madrasa students though considered to be negative and weak are in reality more taught for they have the privilege to speak in three languages- Bengali, English and Arabic.

FUTURE PLAN OF THE MADRASA STUDENTS





-  The *Aliah* Madrasa students study other courses apart from Islamic studies. So they have no problem in competing with the students of other sects for becoming a doctor, engineer or any other professionals.
-  But the *Kawmi* Madrasa students do not have any option for their future career as such for they do not have any orientation regarding other subjects.
-  There is discrimination faced by the Madrasa students when applying for a job. Even if they have good results and experiences the madrasa students fall behind for the stereotypical misconceptions about Madrasa systems.

BANGLADESH (BRANDING)

-  Bangladesh is a Muslim country.
-  But we must not forget the other minority groups and show their religion some respects too.

-  We need to work together (all the educational systems) for branding Bangladesh specially the youths.
-  70% consider themselves Bangladeshi first then Muslim while the 30% prefer Muslim first then Bangladeshi.

Secularism

-  Islam always emphasis on respecting other religion as well.
-  'Lakum Deenukum Walia Deen'
-  There are several verses of Quran that clearly speaks of religious harmony and tolerance.
-  Bangladesh has a majority that is secular but there are few incidents that shows some disturbance but the majority is not so.

Human Rights





















-  Islam is the religion of peace and it shows highest respect towards human rights
-  Women are given special priority in Islam which states clearly that they can have rights.
-  Women are also encouraged to work outside keeping their rights attached.
-  Bangladesh does not protect human rights and they are often violated.
-  All should be treated equally in Bangladesh with all the rights provided.

Image Crisis: Role of Youth to overcome it





-  Acquiring Islamic education properly and then spread it among all.
-  To be conscious about Bangladesh's image.
-  Madrasa students can play great role, they can learn different subjects, they can be doctors or engineers and can make Bangladesh as an educated country. Being educated they can build Bangladesh as a developed nation.
-  Madrasa students should come forward to spread mass consciousness for the better image of Bangladesh.
-  Madrasa students are not weak or strong compared to others, so every body should work together.
-  We should know ourselves from Islamic point of view then try to develop country.
-  (Inshallah) Madrasa students will be able to hold Bangladesh as an ideal country in the world in future in respect of caste, religion and color.

-  For better image of Bangladesh Madrasa students can rule their life through Islamic values to build their life and try to rule the country by Islamic values.
-  To protect Bangladesh's image the Madrasa students can acquire all kind of knowledge and establish Bangladesh as a peaceful country.
-  Madrasa students by properly taking education can spread the light of education.





Religious Misconceptions


-  There is a tendency to think that all the Imams are extremists and the madrasa students are terrorists.
-  Many have the misconception that women are not liberated in Islam which is in reality not true for Islam encourages women to gain knowledge.
-  Dowry is a common custom in Bangladesh but it is Haram in Islam.
-  It is believed that only men can divorce in Islam but Islam also gives the power to the women to call off marriage.
-  Hilla marriage is important after divorce which many think is not mentioned in Islam.

Globalization






-  Globalization is not very clear to all. But from the look of it, it seems very competitive and demand high skills
-  Bangladesh has lack of educational and economic development to participate well in the process of globalization.
-  But the noble peace prize did create a greater impact around the world with the help of globalization.
-  Corruption, poverty, over population and terrorism are the main causes for Bangladesh that is pulling us back.

Politics and Democracy





-  Bangladeshi political situation is not at all ensuring democratic rights of the citizens.
-  There should be some sort of dialogue and understanding among the political parties as well.
-  Religion (here Islam) can be included with politics.
-  There's a need for fatwa though there are many frauds who pretend to be the scholars with the rights to do it.

-  The law and order of the country is compatible for all citizens of the country therefore we do not need to have Islamic laws if all the laws are implemented properly.

Extremism in Bangladesh

-  The people who are converted as extremists are either oppressed or victimized.
-  The JMB people are brainwashed to establish Islamic Law.
-  The JMB leaders do not share a madrasa background but all the madrasa systems are blamed for this rise of extremism.
-  The madrasa students often face verbal abuse or suspicion from the mainstream.
-  Religion is used as a political weapon to abuse and violate the entire system and served as individual interests.

Access to Information

-  Most of the Madrasas do not have access to libraries, internet or newspaper. The residential madrasas do not have television.
-  But the first source of information to the madrasa system was mentioned to be the internet
-  Print media is the second option
-  Electronic media (TV and Radio) is the other source of information.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 7

Date: 24 January 2007

Venue: Candle Light Restaurant, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Focused Group: Boys' Scout and Girls' Guide

Number of Participants:

Total participants	Boy	Girl	Ratio (Boys & Girls)
10	5	5	50%: 50%

Age Group: 20-24 yrs.

Represented Rover Scout, Girls' Guides from Dhaka University

Organizations:

Key Issues for Discussion: Education System, Madrasa system, Teachings of Islam, Development, About Bangladesh (Branding), Image Crisis, Religious Misconceptions, Youths today, Democracy, Human Rights, Extremism/ Terrorism/ Fundamentalism & Secularism, Globalization, Politics, Information

The Synopsis:

Education System

- There are 3 separate educational systems in Bangladesh.
- These systems share no communication among each other. So there is a big communication gap within the systems.
- There is lack of co-ordination in these systems.
- We need to develop such a system where all of the educational backgrounds will receive universal acceptance.

Madrasa System

- Madrasa system is very different from the rest of the two systems.
- Fewer students go to madrasa.
- Generally the lower income strata and orphans go for this system.
- Madrasa students are very weak in English.
- It is often difficult and at times impossible to have friends from the madrasa background for they share a certain mentality that is very different from the mainstream.
- The madrasa students share certain ideology separate from the mainstream.
- But there are times when the madrasa students face discrimination due to their outlooks and education by the mainstreams.

Youth Today

- The mainstream youths have much less ideas about the real teachings of Islam.
- The mainstream youths do not wish to discuss on Islam among themselves when they are in groups or gossiping.
- The youths are aware of the real meaning of Jihad.

Extremism, Secularism & Terrorism

- Secularism do not mean absence of religion, rather it demonstrates neutrality of religion.
- In case of Bangladesh there is secularism in terms of rituals of Islam. For example during *eid* or *poojas* it is evident to all that Muslims and Hindus visit each other becoming a part of that festival.
- There had been a few undesired incidents but they are not very great in number.
- We think there's an international network working behind terrorist acts.

Image Crisis

- The incidents of terrorism and acts have resulted an image crisis for Bangladesh.
- Islam has now been often referring to extremism and fanatic.
- For this we are having fewer investments from international and national bodies.
- For this reason also most of the development plans have come to an abrupt end and many in the pipeline were closed before they started.

Globalization

■ Positive effect:

- there has been a well developed universal communication
- Information sharing has become faster and easier.
- It is because of this that our own inventions such as micro credit have reached to the developed countries and they have adopted this system as well.
- We are getting more acquainted about other cultures.

■ Negative effect:

- We are being culturally affected
- Our youth are forgetting their own identity.
- The cyber café are becoming a part of demoralized culture
- Youths are being de-socialized and drifting away from the families.

What Islam says:

- Islam forbids exercising it in a way that inflects the natural unity of life. Reference: verses from Kafirun & Bakara.
- Islam is a complete code of life.
- It is the interpretations that vary from one another not Quran.
- Religion is not properly explained in terms of performance and understanding to all of our country.

Branding/ identity:

- First Muslim then Bengali/ Bangladeshi: this is by 40% of the participants
- First Bengali/ Bangladeshi then Muslim: this is by 30% of the participants

Democracy and Islam:

- There are incidents when Allah has kept examples that refer to a democratic process for example the creation of human being. Allah did ask the angles about his creation.
- In most cases Islam does not go with democracy. Because democracy says that people has all the power but in Islam only Allah possesses the ultimate power.
- We do not have Islam in our lives so it is not easy to say whether democracy can go with Islam or not.
- There should have been a universal appeal of both the subjects that can confirm the adaptation but it is not so.

Misconception regarding Islam:

- Fotowa
- Marriage system
- Woman's position

- Those who wear *hijab* are back dated.
- Islam is backdated, and contradictory with modern science.
- Women are oppressed in Islam.
- Islam has no political system like other religion.
- To regard other religion as bad.
- Saying badly to those who take part in religious activities not very often.
- There's an Islamic dress up.
- Jihad is needed to establish religion.
- Islam means Extremism.
- Over emphasizing religion.
- Some people without knowing religion properly try to teach others about religion.
- Religion is for peace but some ignorant people don't try to understand that.
- Islam is as similar as doing a terrorist act; it tries to obstruct woman's way. There is limited scope for rights in Islam.
- Illiteracy, poverty.
- Limited knowledge about Islam.
- Allah has given mouth so he will manage food for us but practically the thing is not so. For getting food he or she has to work.
- To use bad comment on those who are maintaining Islamic rules and regulations.

Role of Youth towards development:

- Being conscious and make others conscious.
- To make others aware about legal rights.
- Nourishing ethics and values that will not cause harm to others.
- Spread consciousness to all.
- Spreading the extent of Education.

- Changing so-called mind set up.
- Development of ultra poor.
- Consciousness building along with education.
- To make others conscious.
- To maintain rules and regulations.
- To work in an organized way.
- Young people should step forward.
- Religious activity builds up.
- Religious discussion among the friend circle.
- Write up in newspapers or journals.
- Organizing programme in club or any other way.
- Today's youth is tomorrow's future. To be educated for their own interest and for others too.
- Consciousness.
- Religious tolerance.
- Discussing problems and solutions in groups.
- Mass consciousness builds up.
- More and more discussion.
- Being honest in their own place.
- Maintaining laws.
- Organize people.
- We can think that the activities which are making problem for us we will not do such thing.
- Personal development.
- Discarding superstition.
- Organized initiative.
- First, we have to point out the cause and source of problems. Then the youth will try to stop it. They can also create mass awareness.

- Individual thinking is important without influenced by media.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 8

Date: 24 January 2007

Venue: Candle Light Restaurant, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Focused Group: English Medium Students

Number of Participants:

Total participants	Boy	Girl	Ratio (Boys & Girls)
9	8	1	88.1%: 11.1%










Age Group: 18-22 yrs.

Represented Organizations: Macquarie University, Nottingham University, North South University, A level (Private), Mastermind School, BUET.






Key Issues for Discussion: Education System, Madrasa system, Social Consequences, Teachings of Islam, Development, About Bangladesh (Branding), Image Crisis, Religious Misconceptions, Youths today, Democracy, Human Rights, Extremism/ Terrorism/ Fundamentalism & Secularism, Globalization, Politics, Information

The Synopsis:


Education System & Madrasa


-  Our education system is insufficient, flawed and text book based.
-  The government circulated syllabus is not adequate for a modern curriculum system.
-  There are 3 different streams of educational systems.
-  Each of the systems share separate point of views.
-  Though the English and Bengali mediums do share some relationship in terms of family or social events but the madrasa medium is totally separated from these two.
-  The madrasa students are far behind within that system.
-  Madrasa is only religion based.
-  They are isolated from the other two systems.
-  Mostly orphans, deprived and poor children go to madrasa

Social Consequences


-  Different sects and classes are emerging as a result of this different educational system
-  The madrasa students mostly are unable to build a successful career.
-  They go for very limited options
-  Madrasa students are often religiously brainwashed and eventually become extremists.
-  As most of them are very much emotionally attached to the religion they are prone to manipulation.


Branding


 First Muslim then Bangladeshi/Bengali: according to 60% of the present participants.

 First Bangladeshi/Bengali then Muslim: according to 40% of the present participants.

Secularism, Extremism & Terrorism

 Secularism is an issue that never came to them to be needed to address.

 Political unrest is prior crisis than extremism in Bangladesh.

 Extremism is not just an issue happening in Bangladesh alone. It is an international crisis.





 50% of the participants think that there is a high chance for Bangladesh to become an extremist country.


Image Crisis


 Due to the acts of extremism the communication gaps with the other countries of the world has been widened.


 After the attacks extremism has now become a reality and the attention is more on madrasa system as ever.


 Our international image has been to an extent affected.





Today's Youth

 The mainstream youths are less concerned about religion

 They do speak and discuss amongst their groups about religion.

 The youth often try to logically view religion now a days.

 The mainstream youth are more individualistic than patriot.

-  The socio economic conditions are such that people are compelled to think about their own security first.
-  The youth want to leave the country as soon as possible. Those who can't are too busy to think about their security. So patriotism has faded out.
-  The family always emphasis on reciting and memorizing verses from Quran not the interpretations.
-  So, the youth today know much less and in some cases absolutely none about interpretations.





Bangladesh to Them

-  Motherland
-  Under developed
-  Backdated
-  Politically biased
-  Unemployment 













Home

-  But whatever it is we need to come back






Human Rights

-  Human rights are always violated in Bangladesh
-  Women, poor, religious minority and journalists are the main victims of human rights violation in Bangladesh.
-  Islam however protects women rights.
-  The universal declaration of human rights can only be ensured in Bangladesh when the basic human rights are met.

Role of Youth

-  Don't know
-  Make strict laws.
-  Get educated and join politics for the betterment of the country or join the media and speak up.
-  Set up human rights watch groups which are usually efficient not involved in politics.
-  Get the media involve more, get them to promote human rights issues more.
-  More human rights association.
-  More spread of knowledge about human rights.
-  More human rights information centers.
-  Create employment opportunities for under privileged.
-  Donate.
-  Accountability.
-  Update laws and change them if necessary.

Islam (conceptions and misconceptions)

-  There are two types of Jihad. The biggest one is to fight against the inner sins and next comes fighting with others only when attacked.
-  The scholars in Islam were suppose to guide and lead the people towards the real teaching of Islam but that is not happening.
-  We the general people have no authority to speak about the rules and implementations of Islam for we know very little.
-  Islam doesn't permit singing.
-  There are a lot of misconceptions regarding the teachings of Quran and Hadith.

Globalization





Positive

- We are getting a lot of consumer items and they are frequently available in our local markets due to the impact of globalization and free market economy.
- Technology has reached to almost all countries of the world.
- There has been a strong cultural integration.
- Education has been better.
- Our labor market has been further recognized by the west.

Negative

- But our own economy is getting weaker and failing to compete with others for survival.
- We are losing our own cultural identity.
- Media has been playing a negative role in the age of globalization.

Role of Development Partners

-  The role of the development partners is both positive and negative in Bangladesh.
-  There are a lot of loop holes and undercurrent intentions of the development partners behind the big loans.
-  The intention to dominate the less developed is another intention for the aids.
-  Once again there's a very thoughtful international network working behind the development partners.

Source of Information

 Television

 Newspaper

 Internet

 Radio

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 9

Date: 26 January 2007

Venue: FPAB, Ghorashal

Focused Group: Youth in the suburbs

Number of Participants:

Total Participant	Boy	Girl	Ratio(Boy& Girl)
8	6	2	75%:25%

Age Group: 15-23 yrs.

Represented Organizations: Youth organizers FPAB, Pubali Jute Mills High School and Local Young Businessman

Key Issues for Discussion: Education System, Madrasa system, Career, Teachings of Islam, Development, About Bangladesh (Branding), Image Crisis, Religious Misconceptions, Youths today, Democracy, Human Rights, Extremism/ Terrorism/ Fundamentalism & Secularism, Globalization, Information, Future Bangladesh

The Synopsis:

Education System & Madrasa

- There are numerous flaws within our different educational systems
- The mainstream education system is private tuition based.
- The current education systems do not provide real education.
- The syllabus of the different streams is not modern.
- There should be a unified curriculum where the streams could have some shared knowledge up to a mark.
- There is an existing communication gap and discrimination within the systems.
- The education is never accepted according to its standards in Bangladesh.

Madrasa System

- Generally children from the conservative and extremely religious families tend to go for madrasa education.
- Another reason is if a family has more than 2 children they often decide to send one to madrasa for Allah's blessings.

- At times the nearest schools are located farther than the local madrasa. So parents accept the nearest choice.
- The expenses of the madrasa system are much less that is why many poor parents send their children to madrasas.
- The madrasa students receive religious education and know more Arabic than the general students.
- The madrasa students do study other subjects as well in Aliah madrasa.

Careers of Madrasa Students

- Most of the madrasa students eventually become religious leaders, scholars or Imams.
- They also go for madrasa teaching.
- Many admit in the general college and universities after their completion of the madrasa education.
- But there are examples also where they choose to be doctors, engineers or any other general professionals.

Terrorism, Extremism and Secularism

- Madrasa is not always related to terrorism of which they are often branded.
- The people of Bangladesh are more peace loving and lives in harmony with other religious groups participating in their religious events.
- Islam is a religion of peace and there are no options to initiate conflicts within other religious groups.
- There are few examples of secularism in Islam. The speech of Mohammad (SM) during his last pilgrim is a vivid example of secularism and democracy.

Democracy

- Our democracy has been crippled by corruption and detached from the general people.
- Most of the political leaders are abusing Islam using it to serve only political interests.
- Religion and politics should be separated.
- The *Madina* declaration by Mohammad (SM) is an example of democratic practice in Islam.
- Islam does say that the representative of the people will run a country.

Image Crisis

- The fragmented acts of terrorism and extremism are branding Bangladesh as to be an extremist nation.
- Though extremism and terrorism happens everywhere else in the world but yet Islam has now become the religion of extremism by the other countries.
- For this outlook whoever wears cap or turbans in the so called 'Islamic dress up' are targeted to be suspicions and disbeliefs. They are many times harassed and disrespects by other people also.
- Our investments in the national sectors are decreasing.

Human Rights

- In Bangladesh most of the people are not aware of their own rights.
- Generally children, women and the under privileged are the victims of HR violation.
- All clauses of the universal declaration of human rights should be tried to be implemented even though they might not be successful in Bangladesh.
- Islam has given many rights to women but our systems are such that we fail to restore the rights of women.

Branding

- ➔ First Bangladeshi/Bengali then Muslim: according to 100% of the participants
- ➔ First Muslim then Bangladeshi/Bengali: none agreed.

Globalization

➔ Positive

- Export and import has become much easier
- Our labor force export became an important source of earning foreign currency.

➔ Negative

- Our cultural identity is now at stake.
- Our youths are being morally damaged.

Youth Today

- ➔ The mainstream youth today are not very keen and interested to discuss religion among their groups.
- ➔ The mainstreams are mostly occasional Muslims who perform in times of need.
- ➔ Many youth from the mainstream are brain drained.
- ➔ The reason for this is the lack of opportunity and less salary.

Role of Youth

- ➔ We need to be more aware.
- ➔ We have to practice and preserve our own culture.

- Parents from the family level and governments from the national level should take the initiatives in developing the youth's standard.
- The youth should return and contribute towards national development rather individual.
- The youth needs to be united.
- More community works should be done from the youth level.
- The youth should create a strong network of volunteers and stakeholders.
- The youth needs to identify the problems first then address the solutions.

Misconceptions on Islam

- No need of education for women.
- It is sin for women to do politics.
- No need of education other than Islamic education.
- Family planning initiative is not justified/ Religion is against family planning
- Women should not participate in social, political and economical activities.
- People become dependent on fate for religion.
- Women don't want to go in front of male doctors for treatment.
- Many religious superstitions degrade our religion.
- People worship/idolize in different Majar and Dorga Sharif, is haram in Islam.
- Different kind of stories is there that degrade the standard of Islam.
- Generally people think that it is religion that can make people free. So without trying for anything they just depend on religion and sat idle in excuse of God. But this is a misconception. All should make a try for freedom not for any excuse.
- The act of *Tablig*.
- Woman becomes bad if they go outside home.
- Those who practice tablig promote Borkha. It is a misconception that parida is not possible without borkha.

- Alems in time of waaj only talk about woman's parda and neglects man's attitudes.
- It is a misconception that heaven lays beneath the feet of the husband.
- Different superstitions regarding foods.
- Woman's education is not right.
- Discrimination in class.

What Islam says

- Islam encourages women to acquire knowledge and education.
- Islam does permit women to go out and earn a living remaining within the limits of Islam and keeping certain decency.
- Islam respects all religion.
-

Source of Information

- Newspaper
- Electronic media (TV)
- Peers
- They know about internet but do not have access to it.
-

Future Bangladesh

- Of course a developed country
- A scope for best education for all
- Neutral judiciary system
- Good governance provided

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 10

Date: 26 January 2007

Venue: FPAB, Ghorashal

Focused Group: Suburb Madrasa group (mixed)

Number of Participants:

Total Participant	Boy	Girl	Ratio (Boy: Girl)
7	5	2	71.4%: 28.5%

Age Group: 15-17 yrs.

Represented Organizations: Khilpara Alim Madrasa, and Bangladesh Jute Mills Hafejia Madrasa

Key Issues for Discussion: Education System, Madrasa system, Career, Teachings of Islam, Development, About Bangladesh (Branding), Image Crisis, Religious Misconceptions, Youths today, Democracy, Human Rights, Extremism/ Terrorism/ Fundamentalism & Secularism, Globalization, Information, Future Bangladesh

The Synopsis:

Education System & Madrasa

- Though there are a number of educational systems in Bangladesh but the madrasa system is better for they have more knowledge and learns English, Bengali and Arabic all together.
- The Hafizia madrasa students are specialized in Quran.
- The Hafizia madrasa students are far more religious than the other mediums.
- The other mediums do other mundane works more than to pray to Allah.
- The Hafizia madrasa students aim for working for this world and hereafter but the other mediums pray very little.
- Other mediums do not know much about religion and therefore they in most cases are diverted from the laws of Islam.
- The Aliah madrasa however is not very different regarding their curriculum than the Bengali medium or to some extent English medium but the Kawmi Madrasa is extremely different.
- They are happy with the existing curriculum system and emphasized the system remains so.
- Those who go to madrasa are fated and the chosen one by Allah to study in this line.
- That who cannot conceive the teaching goes to other systems of education.

Career Plan

- Most of the students of the *Hafizia* madrasa study to become renowned Imams.
- This section of the madrasa group also goes for madrasa teaching once they pass reciting the entire Quran.
- The *Hafizia* students did express their interest to be *Mufti* and perform *Waj* in the society.
- However the Aliah Madrasa students have the option to choose any profession they want but they want to remain in the religious side.

Role of Youth Towards Development

- All the religious institutions should hire and include people from similar background that is the madrasa background.
- Madrasa system too is needed for the society to develop as it is diversity that takes the nation forward.

Islam and Democracy

- Islam is sent by Allah.
- But from today's perspective democracy is a need.
- Islam do not conflict directly with democracy

Terrorism and Extremism

- Islam doesn't like unrest and chaos. Islam is a religion of peace
- Madrasa students are not terrorists.
- They do not go whimsically into politics it is their choice those who want to go or not.
- Establishing Islam is Jihad. But most cases people are being manipulated in the name of Jihad.

Secularism

- Secularism means respecting other religions
- Secularism means not to force anyone to believe in Islam,
- Rather it is said to show respect to all.

- *'Lakum deenukum Walia Deen'*

Human Rights

- Islam encourages women to work outside.
- It is the *Alems* who decides according to the needs of time to wear hijab.
- Islam too spoke about male's own decency.
- There is human rights violation in real life in Bangladesh.

Image Crisis

- Bangladesh has now been marked by other countries as extremists
- Bangladesh will never become Afghanistan for it's a democratic country.
- The west does not want the Muslims to survive.

Religious Misconceptions

- Go to Jihad and you'll be a martyr in the eyes of Islam
- All the *Huzurs* are extremists.
- Islam does not mind if you do not pray according to time.
- All the ideas about women leadership and working women are written on the walls to deceive the people.

Development Partners

- The development partners are working for the betterment of Bangladesh.

Source of Information

- Newspaper
- Posters
- Television
- Peers
- Different leaflets

Topics of Group Discussion

- Religion
- Sports
- Hadith
- Quran
- News
- Politics

Branding

- First Muslim then Bangladeshi/ Bangali: according to 100% of the participants.

ANNEX - 2

TWO SETS OF RAS QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RAPID ASSESSMENT SURVEY (RAS)

QUESTIONNAIRE - 1

1.1.	Do we need a common curriculum for all the different systems of education upto the secondary level?	Yes	No	Don't know
1.2.	Is poverty the only reason for sending children to madrasah	Yes	No	Don't know
1.2.1	If no, what are the reasons for sending children to madrasah? a. b. c.			
1.3.	Are the Madrasah students segregated from the mainstream youth?	Yes	No	Don't know
1.4.	Does the Madrasah education at all have any impact on career development?	Yes	No	Don't know
1.5.	Do you agree that only madrasah students are exploited by the extremists to carry out their activities?	Yes	No	Don't know
1.6.	Secularism and absence of religion are synonymous. Do you agree?	Yes	No	Don't know
1.7.	Is Fatwa necessary when a country is governed by constitution?	Yes	No	Don't know

1.8.	Islam is tolerant and respectful to other religions. Do you agree?	Yes	No	Don't know
1.9.	Are the developmental activities supported by other countries in Bangladesh truly helpful to our development?	Yes	No	Don't know
1.9.1	If not, why not a. b. c.			
1.10.	Are human rights a luxury or a necessity in a developing country like Bangladesh?	Luxury		Necessity
1.11.	Is democracy compatible with Islamic values?	Yes	No	Don't know
1.12.	Do you think mainstream Bangladeshis have clear conception about Islam (ideology, values, norms)?	Yes	No	Don't know
1.13.	Can violence be justified for religious reasons?	Yes	No	Val

Questionnaire - 2

2.1. Please grade in order of importance the barriers to our development (No. 1 for the most important and no. 5 for the least)

- A. Illiteracy / ignorance
- B. Terrorism
- C. Political instability
- D. Corruption
- E. Bureaucracy

2.2. Please point out three issues in order of importance responsible for tarnishing the image of Bangladesh

- A.
- B.
- C.

2.3. Which identity comes first to you?

- A. National identity
- B. Religious identity
- C. Ethnic identity

2.4. Which most applies as a description of Bangladesh?

- A. A secular country
- B. A Muslim country
- C. A democratic country

2.5. To what extent is connection with the global community helpful to our development?

- A. Very helpful
- B. Helpful to some extent
- C. Not helpful
- D. Harmful

2.6. Rank your most important sources of information and news? (You may tick more than one)

- A. Radio
- B. Television
- C. Newspaper
- D. Family / friends
- E. Internet
- F. Others (Please specify)

2.7. Do you think we have a congenial atmosphere to practice democracy?

Yes No

2.7.1. If not, list down in order of importance three main reasons you think are barriers to practice democracy.

A.

B.

C.

FULL TEXT OF DESK RESEARCH

Democracy & Islam

From the beginning, Islam has mandated democracy through a *shura* (elected council of leaders), a process through which people sit together, consult with one another, and select one person to represent them. This process was recently employed in Afghanistan where, according to a fifteen-century old tradition, the people choose representatives who then gathered to choose not only a leader, but a cabinet and national assembly. The recent *loya jirga* that confirmed Hamid Karzai as president of Afghanistan, demonstrated once again that Islamic rule is based on democratic choice.

A clear example of democracy's role in Islam is manifest in the Prophet's (peace be upon him) passing without appointing a successor to rule the Muslim state. He intentionally left it to the Muslims to come together to make this crucial decision based on what he had taught them.

The Azhar scholar Dr. Abu Zahra said:

“The Prophet never gave a single word or sign indicating who his successor would be... and in the meeting which took place to elect the calipha, the Companions were in utter disagreement as to who should succeed the Prophet, but in the end were able to choose Abu Bakr as-Siddiq by the consensus of the majority.”

Essentially, there were three groups who differed in who should succeed the Prophet:

- The *Ansar*, the Prophet's supporters in Madinah, who felt the leadership should fall to one among them as they supported the Prophet when he immigrated from Mecca.
- Another group, led by Abu Bakr and Umar, believed that the immigrants (*Muhajiroon*) who came with the Prophet to Madinah should lead, because they were the first to enter Islam.
- The third group called on Ali to lead, due to his familial relationship with the Prophet.

The disagreement did not last long, as through *shura* the three groups quickly reached the consensus that Abu Bakr had the highest credentials to take the reins of leadership. The majority voted for him, and the Islamic precedent for peaceful transition between rulers was introduced. Once the majority had

Had Allah willed He could have made you all one community? But He made you as you are (diverse) as a test. So vie one with another in good works. Unto Allah you will all return, and He will then inform you of the meaning of differences within you. [Quran 5:48].

Quran and Tolerance

One of the most common charges brought against Islam historically, and as a religion, by many Western writers and mainstream media is that it is intolerant. Islam, especially after the collapse of the communism and the disintegration of the communist block, is seen as a source for instigating terrorism and fanaticism. There is widespread propaganda presenting Muslims as being intolerant against other religions and cultures.

Following September 11, this propaganda has been on the increase. Especially by using a portion of the Koran and Hadiths as a source, incorrect presumptions are made about Islam and Muslims by taking what some believe is revealed from the Koran, out of context. Islam is presented indirectly as new enemy such as Communism or Fascism in the past.

Karen Armstrong, the author of many books about Islam pointed out as follows: Islam was a continuous challenge to the West until the eighteenth century. Now it seems that the Cold War against the Soviet Union is about to be replaced by a Cold War against Islam. According to John L. Esposito, Professor of Religion and International Affairs, Georgetown University, and Director of the Center for Muslim- Christian Understanding " The idea inculcated by the media in the post cold-war period that Islam supplanted the Soviet Union as the threat to its survival and the tendency to equate Islam with extremism and terrorism.."

Although majority of Muslims disagrees with fanatics and fanaticism, the acts or political ideas of these marginal groups have been presented as real Islam through out the world. In this environment, the image of Islam in the West, where knowledge of the faith and values of the more than one billion Muslims souls was almost non-existent, became simplified and often ominous.

The Quran has not ignored the world and has given due attention to worldly things. That humans have a role to play in this world is implicit in the Quran. However, as the religion was in danger, the Quran talks mostly about religion and belief only. However, the Quran does highlight the importance of worldly things to its readers in an Ayat of Surah Qasas Allah says:

"And seek by means of what Allah has given you the future abode, **and do not neglect your portion of this world**, and do good (to others) as Allah has done good to you, and do not seek to make mischief in the land, surely Allah does not love the mischief-makers." (Surah Qasas, 20:77)

There is a hadith which states "Prepare for the hereafter as if you have to leave today and prepare for the world as if you are to stay forever." (Meaning of hadith)

According to Quranic perspective, knowledge is a prerequisite for the creation of a just world in which authentic peace can prevail. In the case of country's disorder or war the Quran emphasizes the importance of the pursuit of learning, Allaah says (what means): "Nor should the believers all go forth together: if a contingent from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to studies in religion, and admonish the people when they return to them - that thus they (may learn) to guard themselves (against evil)." [Quran, 19:122]

Education makes man a right thinker and a correct decision-maker. It achieves this by bringing him knowledge from the external world, teaching him to reason, and acquainting him with past history, so that he may be a better judge of the present. Without education, man, as it were, is shut up in a windowless room. With education, he finds himself in a room with all its windows open to the outside world.

This is why Islam attaches such great importance to knowledge and education. The Qur'an, it should be noted repeatedly asks us to observe the earth and heavens. This instills in man the desire to learn natural science. When the Qur'an began to be revealed, the first word of its first verse was 'Iqra!' that is, 'Read.' Education is thus the starting point of every successful human activity.

All the books of hadith have a chapter on knowledge (ilm). In Sahih Bukhari, there is a chapter entitled, "The virtue of one who acquires ilm (learning) and imparts it to others." In the hadith, the scholar is accorded great respect. According to one tradition, the ink of a scholar's pen is more precious than the blood of a martyr, the reason being that while a martyr is engaged in the task of defense, an alim (scholar) builds individuals and nations along positive lines. In this way, he bestows upon the world a real life treasure.

The very great importance attached to learning in Islam is illustrated by an event in the life of the Prophet. At the battle of Badr, in which the Prophet was victorious, seventy of his enemies were taken prisoner. Now these captives were all literate people. So, in order to benefit from their erudition, the Prophet declared that if each prisoner taught ten Medinan children how to read and write, that would serve as his ransom and he would be set free. This was the first school in the history of Islam, established by the Prophet himself. It was of no matter to him that all its teachers were non-Muslims, all were prisoners of war, and all were likely to create problems again for Islam and Muslims once they were released. This Sunnah of the Prophet showed that whatever the risk involved, education was paramount.

Islam and religious freedom - Ibrahim Hooper

Islam advocates both freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. That position is supported by the Quran, Islam's revealed text, the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and the opinions of Islamic scholars both past and present.

Islam came to liberate mankind from all types of enslavement, whether political, social or religious. One of the first leaders of the Muslim community, Umar Ibn Al-Khattab, once told the governor of Egypt: 'How dare you enslave people when they were born free?' In the Quran, God states 'Let there be no compulsion in religion.' (2:256) This verse is the foundation for religious freedom in Islam. God also states that He does not compel belief, and warns all of us against the temptation to force faith on others: 'If it had been the will of your Lord that all the people of the world should be believers, all the people of the earth would have believed! Would you then compel mankind against their will to believe?' (10:99)

God tells the Prophet Muhammad that the message he is bringing to the people is the truth, but his duty is only to convey that message, not to force compliance: 'If they turn away from thee (O Muhammad) they should know that We have not sent you to be their keeper. Your only duty is to convey My message.' (42:48)

Neither the Prophet Muhammad nor any of his companions, the models for future Islamic behavior, ever forced anyone to embrace Islam. The Prophet did not treat apostasy as an offense to be punished in this life. He pardoned a number of people who embraced Islam, then left the faith, and then embraced it again. Islam has no need to compel belief in its divine truth. As the Quran states: 'Truth stands out clear from error. Therefore, whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks.' (2:256)

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) recently called on the government of Afghanistan to release Abdul Rahman, a man facing the death penalty for converting from Islam to Christianity. CAIR said Rahman's conversion was a personal matter that should not be subject to the intervention of the state. This conclusion was reached after consultation with Islamic scholars of the Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) Council of North America.

Islamic scholars say the original rulings on apostasy were similar to those for treasonous acts in legal systems worldwide and do not apply to an individual's choice of religion.

Muslims have always believed that faith is meaningless if forced and that a forced conversion is a sin. In his *Freedom of Expression in Islam* Mohammad Hashim Kamali notes that the Quran 'has explicitly declared freedom of religion a norm and principle of Islam' (see publications). He also notes that Islamic scholars support that conclusion by stating that no one may be compelled to embrace Islam, that Islam validates the freedom of the individual to propagate his or her faith through sound reasoning and argumentation and that true faith results from personal conviction, not from mere imitation.

Freedom from coercion also implies freedom to practice another faith.

Muslims are proud of the story of the Caliph Umar who received the keys to Jerusalem from the Christian patriarch Sophronius in the 7th century. When the Caliph was asked to pray in a Jerusalem church he refused, saying he did not want provide a pretext for Muslims to appropriate a Christian holy site.

Religious decisions should be matters of personal choice, not a cause for state intervention. Faith imposed by force is not true belief.

Quran and Human Rights

Quran's guidance in relation to the rights of people on earth is vast and multi-faceted. Justice is the negation of violence, oppression, homicide, abuse of power and tyranny. Here are the aspects of Human Rights as outlined in Quran.

Justice

Justice is the core of morality. Quran has strongly emphasized the significance and implementation of justice and equity. It is part of human virtue without which human rights can neither be safeguarded nor anyone can become socially productive. Quran says

“O ye who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty. Observe your duty to Allah”. (5:8)

“O Ye who believe! Be ye staunch in justice, witness of Allah, even though it be against yourself or your parents or your kindred, whether a rich or poor man, for Allah is nearer unto both (than ye are).” (4: 135)

In Islam, rights have been conferred by God – no power in the world has the authority to make an amendment or change the rights confirmed by the Almighty. To this end, Quran says,

“Those who do not judge by what God has sent down are the disbeliever.”
(5: 44)

Even the Caliph is bound to fulfil these rights given by Allah. The administration of justice during the tenure of the first four Caliphs in Islamic history set an example of equality by holding themselves amenable to the orders of a legally appointed judge. In Islam, the Caliph is accountable to Allah. He does not act on his free will nor does he enjoy any special status or privileges. He has to present himself like any ordinary man if the court summons him. **Caliph Umar** and **Caliph Ali**, in cases filed against them, appeared personally before the judge with the appellant.