

ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH: SECOND YEAR REPORT

Mumtaz Ahmad

Executive Summary

1. *Islamic education in Bangladesh represents a wide variety of pedagogic approaches and institutional structures. First, there are private Quomi madrassas that are exclusively focused on traditional Islamic sciences. Then there are government-funded Alia madrassas that have added several modern subjects along with a condensed version of traditional Islamic education. Besides these two systems of madrassas, there is this phenomenon of the newly emerging English medium Islamic schools that offer an integrated curriculum combining both Islamic and modern, "secular" education. Finally, there are the public universities' programs in Islamic Studies and Islamic History and Culture that have introduced, without discarding the body of learned tradition, considerable changes over the years by adding a variety of new disciplines as well as relatively recent scholarship, including Western, in their programs.*
2. *Islamic education in public universities could have emerged as an alternative to the higher education offered in traditional madrassas, but having been modeled initially on the Delhi College and the Calcutta Madrassa, it has neither been able to offer a modern orientation and critical stance in Islamic Studies, nor it has achieved the legitimacy of traditional Islamic scholarship.*
3. *As for the madrassa education, there is more continuity than change. No serious reform effort is currently underway either in the Alia or the Quomi system. In a political context defined by (a) intense hostility between the two mainstream political parties and (b) the imposition of emergency and the postponement of elections by the Care Taker Government, the issues such as the political parties' reforms and the future of democracy in Bangladesh seem to have overshadowed whatever little enthusiasm was there for reforms in the Alia madrassas a couple of years ago in the government circles. In the Quomi sector wherein physical facilities have improved considerably in recent years, the traditional structure and orientation of the education system remains intact,*

notwithstanding some superficial changes. In other words, the primary stake holders in both the Alia and Quomi systems feel no urgent need for any fundamental reforms and would continue to support them as they are.

4. An important new development is the emergence of female madrassas, especially in the Quomi sector, both at secondary and tertiary levels. The interesting thing to note here is that, unlike the male madrassas, the female Quomi madrassas are attracting most of their students from the urban-based middle and lower middle class families. It is yet to be seen, however, how this development will affect the traditional, male-dominated authority structure in religious affairs.

5. Madrassas have rarely faced any real financial problems at any time since their inception. Alia system continues to receive generous grants from the state treasury and the Quomi system has shown considerable ingenuity in diversifying its sources of funding. The community at large, and especially the business class and the bazaaris, continue to support the Quomi madrassas through their Zakat and Sadaka contributions as well as through generous donations in kind. The Quomi madrassas are also tapping into billions of Dollars of remittances sent by the Bangladeshi expatriates in the Gulf states and the Western countries. Several Ahl-e-Hadith madrassas may be facing a temporary financial setback after the 2005 terrorist attacks in the wake of which the government placed some restrictions on the Saudi and Kuwaiti NGOs funding to these madrassas but, by the middle of 2007, they seem to have recovered by falling back on their traditional sources of support.

6. The ulama's political activism has been particularly informed by three major developments since the 1990s: the increasing electoral popularity of the Jamaat-e-Islami that they see as their religious rival; the civil society institutions' fervent campaign against "fatwabaji" that tended to malign the entire religious sector for the indiscretion of a few illiterate mullas; and the NGOs' overtly secular/liberal approach to development process. The madrassa ulama, as the "guardians" of orthodox Islam, consider it their Islamic obligation to raise their voice when and if they perceive "Islam in danger." They may not be active in party politics and in day-to-day political activities but they remain vigilant as far as "Islamic" religious issues are concerned. They are also very much aware of the socio-cultural and political developments that, in their view, tend to undermine their religious authority, social influence, material interests and status as community leaders.

7. The ulama are vehemently opposed to the incidence of violence and terrorism in the name of Islam in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the world and have categorically condemned such actions as un-Islamic.

8. In general, the ulama are supportive of globalization provided it brings economic growth and jobs and does not threaten national identity and interest. An extension of this idea is that globalization is welcome in its economic dimension, but not in its cultural consequences -- the onslaught of "Western sexual practices," Western fashions, Western movies and TV programs, and foreign NGOs with secular agendas. Interestingly, however, the ulama also gave an Islamic perspective on globalization: that given the new technologies of communication, it will bring opportunities to present Islamic teachings to the wider world, and that globalization will facilitate sharing of ideas and experiences within the World Islamic Ummah and thus would strengthen the prospects of unity among the Muslims across the world.

9. It appears that the ulama's position on democracy, status and role of women, pluralism, and the rights of religious minorities is more conservative in theory than in actual practice. They show considerable flexibility and pragmatism on most of these issues in their actual behavior but are not yet ready to concede any changes in the traditional juristic formulations.

10. Despite their opposition to some of the policies of the Western powers, and especially of the United States, and their moral critique of the Western social and cultural practices, the majority of the madrassa ulama do not seem to harbor any hostility toward, or hatred of, the West. They reject outright the "clash of civilizations" thesis and believe that the Muslim World and the West must cooperate in "good deeds" and work together for the good of the humanity.

Policy Implications

- 1. Traditional institutions of Islamic learning in Bangladesh, as in many other Muslim countries, constitute an integral part of the civil society, a fact that is often ignored in discussions about the madrassas, both by the modern educated elite at home and the scholars and policy makers in the West.*

2. *Changes and reforms in the private madrassas in the past have come about through a slow, gradual and often imperceptible process, not by a single policy decree by the government. These changes came about both as a result of the intellectual-doctrinal developments within the learned tradition and in response to the changes in socioeconomic and political environment. Any discussion of madrassa reform today must take this longstanding experience into consideration.*
3. *The ulama will certainly oppose any reform that they perceive either as threatening the integrity of the traditional Islamic learning or their own status in society. They are, however, willing to incorporate certain modern subjects, including technical subjects, if the resources for such changes are available and provided that these changes are made under their supervision.*
4. *The sociopolitical role that the madrassa ulama have historically played in Muslim societies, and the moral and religious needs of the Muslim masses that they have served, have not become extinct in modern times; in fact, not only that these traditional needs are still very much there but certain modern institutional developments – Islamic banking, for example – have created new avenues for their continued relevance.*
5. *Much has been written in recent years about the Salafi-Wahabi influence on the religious establishments of Muslim South Asia brought about by the Saudi money and power. What is striking about Bangladesh, however, is not the Arabization but the indigenization of Islam and the refusal of the overwhelming majority of the madrassas to be drawn into regional and sectarian conflicts.*
6. *The ulama will continue to play the role of an important political pressure group advocating the sanctity of Islamic values in public life but their role as direct contenders of political power will remain marginal.*
7. *Contrary to the conventional wisdom that seems to have influenced a great deal the policy circles in the West, the mainstream madrassa ulama remain an important bulwark against extremism and militancy in the name of*

Islam. With sensitivity, subtlety and goodwill, their moderating role in the context of recent rise of extremist ideologies needs to be both appreciated and strengthened.

A. Introduction

Islamic education in Bangladesh, with its rich and varied religio-intellectual heritage came to the scholarly and national and international media limelight only in the wake of terrorist bombing in August 2005 when a clandestine Islamic group, Jamaat-ul-Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB) staged a spectacular show of its militant prowess by blasting bombs in 63 of the 64 districts of Bangladesh. These bomb blasts were followed by series of attacks on judicial officials and threats of further violence if Islamic law was not enforced in the country. What brought the madrassas and the entire network of Islamic education in Bangladesh into sharp focus of policy makers and the media was the alleged linkage between terrorism and the madrassas. Hardly a day passed during 2005-2006 without any reports in the national media linking the rise of religiously-inspired violence with the madrassas. Hence, it is not surprising that the studies and debates on the madrassas in Bangladesh, particularly in policy circles, continue to be largely informed by an a priori apprehension that the madrassas in Bangladesh – and, for that matter, elsewhere in the Muslim World -- constitute a monolithic structure whose primary function is to produce, train, and mobilize Muslim fanatics and terrorists. Our first year report on the madrassa education in Bangladesh was intended to construct a profile of the network of traditional system of Islamic education, identify the patterns that endow the system with stability, and specify the trends that point out the change in the system. While we found that some madrassas were indeed being used as platforms for militant rhetoric, if not militant activities, and that some members of the clandestine militant Islamic groups might have some connections with the madrassas, the overwhelming majority of madrassas in Bangladesh were had no connection whatsoever with violence. Our findings described in detail the profound ways in which the madrassas have been embedded into the social structure, the public sphere and moral regime of Bangladesh society.

Our first-year report focused on three broad areas relating to the madrassa education in Bangladesh: First, it provided an overview of the Islamic educational institutions in Bangladesh; second, it examined the development and the patterns of continuity and change in madrassa education with particular focus on elementary and secondary level education; and third, it examined the role of madrassas in politics, and especially its alleged links with militancy. Continuing from the previous report, this second year report aims to cover the following areas: patterns, trends and religio-intellectual orientations of the madrassa curriculum (both 'Alia and Quomi madrassas) at tertiary levels; the question as to financial support-base of the madrassa system; the state of female Islamic education; the state of Islamic education in non-madrassa educational institutions, that is, in 'secular' and other 'modern' type Islamic institutions, including elementary, secondary and tertiary levels of education; trends and modes of engagement of the ulama, who are either products of, or associated with, the madrassas, in national politics; and, finally, an examination of the attitudes and perceptions of the madrassa-educated ulama with respect to a set of broader issues of contemporary relevance, such as globalization, gender, pluralism, toleration, and the role of Islam in the modern world.¹

B: Continuity and Changes in the Post-secondary Madrassa Curriculum

One of the major issues relating to the reform of the madrassa education system in Bangladesh remains its curriculum. This section examines the patterns of continuity and change in, and the present scenario of, the madrassa curriculum in both 'Aliya and Quomi systems.

¹ As in the case of our first-year report, this report is also an outcome of a combination of: visits to several madrassas, universities and schools; interviews with the administrators, teachers and students of madrassas in different cities of Bangladesh; interviews with prominent intellectuals and educationists; primary documents collected from several madrassas, government departments, non-government organizations, and think tanks; and secondary works and newspaper reports. A significant portion of our findings are based on the responses to the structured and open questionnaire as well as focus groups' discussions that were specifically organized for this research.

As in our first year report, Dr. Iftekhar Iqbal of the Department of History, Dhaka University, contributed significantly toward data collection and preliminary research that went into the writing of this report. Working on this project together, our friendship grew as much, if not more than, our understanding of the madrassas.

Aliya curriculum

It appears that since its inception in the Calcutta Madrassa in the 18th century, the ‘Alia system has not changed much as far as its Islamic subjects are concerned. The overall thrust remains on the study of traditional Islamic sciences, based primarily on the classical and medieval interpretive texts. There has been some change, however, in terms of an added emphasis on the study of the Qur’anic exegeses and the Hadith literature, the two areas that were relatively neglected in the original scheme of things in order to spend more time on the study of both fiqh and the classical humanities.²

Unlike the Quomi madrassas, ‘Alia madrassas are more open to contemporary Islamic scholarship, although their choice of authors remains confined to traditionally trained scholars of Deobandi persuasion. It is also interesting to note that the ‘Alia madrassas, because of their requirement of Bangla as a medium of instruction, primarily use textbooks written in the Bangla language, unlike the Quomi madrassas that still rely heavily on Arabic and Urdu. The ‘Alia system thus represents a significant attempt toward indigenization of Islamic discourse in Bangladesh as opposed to the Quomi system that continues to adhere to its Arabic and North Indian Islamic roots.

Also, since the 1980s, the ‘Alia madrassa system seems to have incorporated a considerable number of ‘secular’ subjects in order to both compete with the general education system, and to prepare its students to continue to pursue their education in the general stream at the college and university levels. The overall orientation of the curriculum, unlike the one in the Quomi system, is non-sectarian and, although not ‘modern’ as the term is usually understood, it is certainly more ‘contemporary’ and ‘relevant’ in terms of its coverage -- howsoever inadequate -- of natural and social sciences. They are also better informed about the Bangladesh politics, not only because of their formal course work but also as a result of the overly-politicized atmosphere in ‘Alia madrassas where both the secular and Islamic political parties compete for political influence. Alia madrassa students complain that their science laboratories, if they exist at all, lack proper equipments and, in some cases, qualified science teachers. Despite this, however, ‘Alia madrassa graduates evince a much better

² For a detailed description of the Aliya curriculum for different levels, see Appendix 1 “A Note on Aliya Madrassa Curriculum.”

understanding of the role of science and technology in the modern world as compared with their counterparts in the Quomi system.

The Quomi madrassa authorities usually look down upon the graduates of the 'Alia system for the lack of what they consider the latter's "in-depth knowledge" of the scriptural and classical Islamic texts as a result of the inordinate time they spend on 'secular' subjects. The evidence, however, does not substantiate any qualitative difference in Islamic scholarship between the graduates of these two rival Islamic education systems. In fact, the 'Alia madrassa graduates are more likely to be productive in Islamic scholarship than the graduates of the Quomi system.³

Quomi curriculum

Quomi madrassas in Bangladesh invariably follow the standard Deoband curriculum, first introduced in Hathazari Madrassa in Chittagong at the end of the 19th century. Since then, there have been few notable changes in their core subject areas, such as Tafsir, Hadith and Fiqh. Some madrassas made some changes, however, both in the relative emphasis that was accorded to some subjects and in the sequence in which certain texts were taught. Then there was also the case that different madrassas had their own promotion and graduation requirements. In order to resolve these anomalies and to facilitate inter-madrassa transfer of students, Wafaq-ul-Madaris-ul-Arabia Bangladesh (WMAB) [Bangladesh Quomi Madrassa Education Board] was established in 1978. Several hundred madrassas affiliated themselves with this and other regional Wafaqs (federations) that were organized in the 1980s. The WMAB has played an important role in bringing coherence in the curriculum of Quomi madrassas and in standardizing their examination, promotion and graduation criteria. Although regional Wafaqs hold their own examinations, they do generally follow the core curriculum approved by the WMAB.

The subjects studied in the Aliya and Quomi madrassas at graduate and postgraduate levels are summarized and compared in the following table:

³ With few exceptions, majority of the Quomi madrassa ulama do not write much; their Islamic scholarship is mostly expressed in their preaching and Friday khutbas (sermons). Whatever little writings there are by the Quomi madrassa ulama, they consist mostly of polemical or devotional tracts. The 'Alia madrassa ulama, on the other hand, have a better facility with writing on scholarly subjects. The list of the books published by the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh on various Islamic topics, for example, includes more than 250 titles written by the ulama trained in the 'Alia system.

Table 1
Comparison of 'Alia and Quomi Curricula at the Higher Levels

Concentration	'Alia Fazil	Quomi Marhala-tul-Fazilat
Language and literature	Bangla/Urdu/English	Arabic literature and Balaaghat (Rhetoric).
Core concentration	Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, Arabic, Shariah (for general stream) or Tajvid-wal-Qir'at (Mujavvid stream)	Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh and Fiqh, Kalam and Faraiz.
Arts and Social Sciences	Islamic History, Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Bangla, Muslim Philosophy, Political Science, Economics, English. (any one course to be taken)	Hikmat (Philosophy), History and Islamic Economics.
Concentration	Aliya Kamil	Quomi Marhalatut Takmil
Language and literature	Arabic literature	Arabic language and literature; Bangla language, literature and journalism; Urdu language and literature; Persian language and literature; English language and literature.
Core concentration	Hadith, Tafsir and Usulut Tafsir (Hadith Division); Hadith, Kalam, Fiqh, Usulul Fiqh (Fiqh Division); Tafsir, Usulut Tafsir, Tafsir-ul-Hadith, Fiqh-ul-Qur'an, 'Ijaz-ul-Quran and Ma'ani-ul-Quran (Tafsir Division); Hadith, Qir'at Ash'ara, Tafsir (Mujavvid Division).	Uloom-ul-Quran, Uloom-ul-Hadith, Fiqh, Ilm-ut-tajvid Da'wa and Irshad, Ilm-ul-Kalam-wal-Akaid, Dawah and Jihad.

Arts and Social Sciences	Islamic History, History of Arabic language and literature	Hikmat and Falsafa; History; Ilm-ul-Haiyat; Islamic Economics, Political science and Civics; Tijaarat.
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An examination of the curricula of both the streams would reveal that at the post-secondary levels, there is not much place for subjects within the broad field of liberal arts and social sciences. The overall emphasis of the Quomi curriculum remains on the study of (a) the Qur'an, Qur'anic exegeses from the classical exegetical texts (such as *Jalain*), and the Principles of exegeses (*Al Fauzul Kabir* by Shah Waliullah); (2) Hadith and its related science (with all the standard Hadith collections, along with the science of Hadith compilation and critique of sources); and (3) Fiqh (with all the standard Sunni texts such as *Hidayah*, *Nurul Anwaar*, *Kanzal Daqaiq*, *Shrah Waqaya* and *Asulul Shashi*). The rest of the course work consists of what is known as "aqli uloom" (rational sciences) such as rhetoric, Arabic language and literature and writing skills, and a little bit of logic and philosophy, that are taught in aid of the "naqli uloom" (transmitted sciences).⁴

If we look at the time spent by the students in Quomi madrassas – and to a large extent in Aliya madrassas as well -- on different subjects during their entire courses of studies up to the highest level of their Islamic education – Daura-e-Hadith --, it would appear that the Fiqh gets the top priority; Hadith comes at number two, and the Qur'an at number three. In the study of Fiqh too, according to our own observations and according to the students, almost 90% of the time is spent on discussion of issues pertaining to the fiqh of the proper performance of the four 'ibadaat (obligatory salat, fasting, zakat, and Hajj) and the rituals associated with them, and on matters pertaining to the rituals of personal purity (tahaarat), halal and haram (permissible and forbidden in Islamic law), and conditions of marriage and divorce in Islamic law. Even the study of Hadith remains focused on legal and ritualistic questions and proper beliefs, rather than on social ethics.

Also, it is in the study of Fiqh that the madrassa curriculum shows its strong polemical and sectarian colors, encouraging the students to marshal as many scriptural and polemical arguments in favor of their Sunni (Hanafi) positions and

⁴ The curriculum approved by Anjuman Ittehad-ul-Madaris (a Wafaq based in Putia) also prescribes two additional courses on Islamic economics and Islamic politics based on texts written by two Deobandi ulama.

to be able to refute the positions of other schools of law. But the “sectarian” element in the curriculum comes also from courses on ‘Aqai’d (beliefs): a course on “Firqa-e-batila” (misguided or false sects) teaches students how and why certain “deviationist” sects in Islam such as Shi’ism, “Perviaziyyat” (after the name of Ghulam Ahmad Pervaz, who denied the legal authority of Hadith), “Qadaniyyat” (the Ahmadi sect that believes in the continuity of revelation and regards Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as a prophet), and “Maududiyyat” (after the name of Sayyid Abul ‘Ala Maududi, the founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami) are all either outside the pale of Islam or are “dangerously misguided” and how their beliefs should be refuted.

In other words, the entire emphasis of the Quomi curriculum continues to remain on law and jurisprudence, that is, to prepare the ulama to guide the faithful in their everyday life in the light of Islamic ritual and legal practices. The madrassa authorities justify this inordinate emphasis on Fiqh by saying that an overwhelming majority of their graduates will be called upon to advise their congregations primarily on issues of ritual purity, marriage, divorce, and the “boundaries” of Islamic beliefs when they will act as imams and khatibs in the mosques and as religious leaders of their communities.⁵

The most remarkable characteristic of the Quomi madrassa curriculum is its fundamental structural and doctrinal unity from Akora Khatak (Pakistan) to Bangalore (India) to Cox’s Bazar (Bangladesh). A student or a teacher from a Deobandi madrassa in the Northeast of the subcontinent near Myanmar will feel quite at home in a madrassa in the Northwest of the subcontinent near Afghanistan – speaking the same language, adhering to the same doctrines, reading the same texts, and aspiring to follow the footprints of the same Deoband luminaries and akaabar (elders). Few institutions in the world can parallel this much ideological homogeneity and doctrinal unity.

As indicated earlier, the primary emphasis of the Quomi curriculum remains on the study of the Quran (through classical exegeses), the six standard Hadith texts, and medieval juristic formulations along with the principles of jurisprudence. Everything else is auxiliary – and will remain so. Islamic History, Islamic Economics, Bangla and English have been introduced at some levels in many Quomi madrassas but they remain peripheral to the core of their

⁵ “An ‘alim’s knowledge of Islam in the community is measured by his quick and ready answers to the questions of Fiqh,” a madrassa Mufti from a Rajshahi madrassa told us, “not by his mastery over theology.”

curriculum. The only changes that have been made in recent times are that three subjects, Hikmat (Philosophy), History and Economics, have been added.⁶ Bangla has been added primarily to placate the nationalist sentiments of the society in the post-liberation era, and English has been introduced at the elementary level to fulfill the general education requirement.⁷

The textbooks used for core concentration in both the Aliya and Quomi systems are not much different; only that the Aliya madrassas teach a condensed version of Dars-e-Nizami and use more of the Bangla language texts. The overall orientation of both education systems, however, remains conservative, literalist, legalistic, and apprehensive of ideas that are even slightly different from the Ash'arite orthodoxy. Neither of them dares to cross the boundaries set by the classical and medieval mainstream Sunni theologians and jurists. More so in the Quomi system than in Aliya, the curriculum remains totally barren of the socio-economic and political teachings of the Quran and Sunnah: economic issues are discussed only in the context of legal formulations on halal and haram and the rules governing inheritance, and political controversies of early Islam are seen as "too hot ('aag sey khailney wali baat hai'), too sensitive ('nazuk') and too divisive ('ykhtylafi') to be brought up before the students."⁸ Hence, for most Quomi madrassa students, Islamic history remains a sacred narrative of the piety of the companions of the Prophet and the first four rightly-guided caliphs (Khulafa-e-Raashedin), the military conquests of early Islam, the heroic fights of famous Muslim generals against non-Muslims, and the services of the great theologians and jurists in the cause of Islam.

Some non-Deobandi Quomi madrassas, however, have been experimenting with curriculum changes in order to broaden the religious and intellectual horizons of their students and also to prepare them specifically for teaching and research in Islamic studies, rather than anticipating that that most of their graduates will become religious functionaries, that is, prayer imams and khatibs in the mosques.

⁶ AKM Golam Rabbabi, 'Bangla Sahityer Pathocrom and our War of Liberation: Madrasah', in Muntasir Mamoon ed. *Bangladesh Charcha*, (Dhaka: Bangladesh Charcha, 2003), pp. 90.

⁷ For detailed description of the Quomi curriculum, see Appendix 2 "A Note on Quomi Madrassa Curriculum."

⁸ Interview with a senior teacher of Hadith, a graduate of Deoband (India) Jamil Madrassa, Bogra, 10 June 2007.

One of the pioneers in this effort has been Darul Ma'arif-ul-Islamiya in Chittagong founded by Maulana Sultan Muhammad Zauq Nadvi. Patterned on the model of Darul Uloom Nadva in U.P. (India), Darul Ma'arif came to symbolize the first serious attempt to modernize the traditional Quomi madrassa curriculum in Bangladesh. While retaining the basic structural features of Dars-e-Nizami of the Quomi madrassas, Darul Ma'arif added all the 'secular' subjects taught in the government schools in its elementary to secondary levels. Unlike other Quomi madrassas, the teaching of English was made an integral part of the curriculum from the elementary to the highest level.⁹ What was most innovative in Darul Ma'arif's curriculum was the introduction of such courses as: General History (3 courses); Islamic History (6 courses); Islamic Intellectual Thought (2 courses); Islamic Culture and Civilization (2 courses); Arabic Language, Literature and Criticism (10 courses); Bangla Language and Literature (8 courses); English Language and Literature (8 courses); Urdu and Persian language (6 courses); Comparative Religion (3 courses); History of Islamic Sectarian Development (1 course); Math (4 courses); Social Sciences (3 courses); and Islam in the Contemporary World (1 course).¹⁰ True to its Nadva tradition, Darul Ma'arif curriculum is heavily oriented to the study of Islamic history and Arabic language and literature. It takes great deal of pride in producing graduates who "speak and write Arabic like native speakers."¹¹ Many of its teachers have advanced degrees in Arabic language and literature from the universities in Saudi Arabia, Libya, Egypt and Pakistan. The madrassa publishes its own journal in Arabic in which most of the articles are contributed by its teachers, senior students and alumni. The journal covers all kinds of Islamic religious issues in a non-sectarian manner, with some articles on contemporary Muslim World problems such as Palestine, plight of Muslim minorities in India and Myanmar, and Muslim unity. The journal has its readership in the larger madrassa community as well as in the major Islamic research and educational institutions in the Arab World.

To assess the significance of the curriculum changes at Darul Ma'arif in terms of their doctrinal relevance, theological justifications, and socio-political implications, the author of this report invited a group of senior students and teachers of the madrassa to join him in a focus group discussion that soon came

⁹ Interestingly, the English language at the elementary level was taught through D.H. Howe's *Active English Book* series, published by the Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ Both Urdu and Bangla are used as medium of instruction for these courses.

¹¹ Interview with Sultan Muhammad Zauq Nadvi, Chittagong, June 2000

to focus primarily on the current debates on the relationship between Islam and violence. All participants in the discussion agreed that Islam was opposed to violence against civilians, no matter what the cause is. They were also of the view that Islam can play an important role in the public life of Bangladesh, as well as in other Muslim societies, only if “Islam is presented before the people as a religion of mercy, compassion, and justice for all, and not merely as a code of punishments and restrictions.” The challenge before Muslims today, according to a teacher of Hadith in the focus group, is “ilmī (intellectual), and not economic or political; only a knowledge-based society can achieve economic growth and political development. And knowledge means the knowledge of Islam and the knowledge of the world we live in.” Most participants were of the view that it was the “false image of Islam” created by some “half-literate” religious people that has caused most harm to Islam in Bangladesh and has alienated the educated people from their religion. The participants were unanimous in their emphasis on the need for fundamental changes in Islamic education in order that the graduates of Islamic schools of higher learning can play a more effective role in the uplift of society. What was needed, in their view, was “a much deeper understanding” (diqqat nazri kay saath) of modern social sciences and modern intellectual thought, both Islamic and Western. They regretted, however, that there were neither any good textbooks nor many Muslim scholars available to teach such courses.

As for science education, there is no place at all for natural and biological sciences in the Quomi system. Quomi madrassa administrators and teachers do not deny the importance of science education for nation building but believe that the madrassas are not the proper place for the teaching of science.¹² Their main argument is that the madrassas are there to produce religious scholars, not the scientists.¹³ The ulama also believe that science and other ‘worldly’ subjects would distract the students from concentrating on what should be their primary focus: Islamic learning. But then there was another, a more pragmatic reason given quite candidly by a madrassa administrator in Sylhet: “People give us donations for our madrassas from their zakat and sadaqa as a religious obligation. They give us money for “swab” (reward in the hereafter) because we

¹² The madrassa ulama are of the view that basic science taught at the elementary level is enough for those who are specializing in religious studies. “Our students are training to become Islamic scholars, not scientists,” a madrassa administrator in Chittagong said in an interview.

¹³ As a madrassa administrator put it, “Why don’t we ask the engineering and chemistry students to study Fiqh and Kalam if we ask the madrassa students to study science?” Isn’t this an age of specialization, he asked.

teach our students the Qur'an and Sunnah. Do you believe they will give us money to teach physics, chemistry or computer science to our students? Though unstated in most cases, this seems to be a major consideration for the madrassas not to "pollute" their purely religious curriculum with 'secular' subjects like science.

Some ulama did express interest in introducing science subjects at secondary level but they were not sure if their madrassas could marshal the additional resources required for the teaching of science. However, a large number of Quomi madrassa administrators expressed considerable interest in introducing training programs in technical skills for their students in order that they could earn their living in professions other than teaching and preaching.¹⁴ In the Aliya system, whatever interest in sciences is there in the first place seems to exhaust at the Dakhil and Alim levels; no science subjects are taught at the higher levels. Even at the lower secondary and secondary levels, science education remains the weakest part in the 'Alia system as a result of the shortage of trained science teachers and the lack of well-equipped laboratories.

Since the previous BNP government's decision to award Fazil and Kamil degree of the 'Alia system the status of BA and MA respectively, efforts have been made to revise the curriculum of the same. Initially, the BNP government's Cabinet committee on upgrading madrassa education had asked the National University to prepare a year-wise work plan to upgrade the syllabus of Fazil and Kamil madrassas to make their degrees equivalent to Bachelor's and Master's. As part of the program of overall reform of the post-secondary madrassa education, it was decided that the new curriculum would have to conform to the existing curriculum for Bachelor's and Master's in general education, that is, three years for Fazil Honors, two years for Fazil pass, and one-year for Kamil (Master's) programs. The project to upgrade the curriculum of Fazil and Kamil levels has now been transferred to the Bangladesh Islami University, Kushtia which is reported to be working on it in consultation with relevant institutions and educationists. According to a prominent educationist involved in the revision process, however, there would be "no substantial or radical changes", except that the two-year Fazil degree will now require three years for completion with some new courses to be added for the third year. Students who have entered as first year Fazil student in the existing system may be eligible to switch to the new

¹⁴ Putia madrassa near Chittagong is one of the few large madrassas in Bangladesh that offers technical training to its students in various areas and trades such as woodwork, mettle work, electrical repair, air-conditioning repair, poultry farming, medical and pharmacy technicians, etc. Many Putia madrassa graduates have found employment in the Gulf states as skilled technicians.

three-year Fazil program. This institutional reform is part of the program which will allow the Fazil and Kamil students to have broader career opportunities, including the eligibility to compete for the civil service exam which was only available to the graduates of colleges and universities. If these measures are retained by the present care taker government and are formalized in an executive decree, they are likely to open new and relatively more productive opportunities for the graduates of 'Alia madrassas both in the public and private sectors.

C: Female education in the madrassas

Female education, both in secular schools and more so in religious schools, has generally lagged behind the male education in many Muslim societies, including the Muslim societies of South Asia. This is despite the fact that the Islamic scriptural texts – the Qur'an and Hadith – give equal emphasis to the education of men and women.¹⁵ The gap between the ideal and the reality has often been explained by certain historical and cultural factors, rather than any inherent Islamic disparagement of female education.¹⁶ Until recently, there was not much interest in female education from either the ulama themselves or the scholars of education.¹⁷ During the past two decades, the discourse on female education, first taken up by the modern-educated women academics, now seems to have caught up with the ulama as well.¹⁸ While the issue of female education in the context of gender equality in the market place has been thoroughly discussed and explored by Bangladeshi writers,¹⁹ it is the female education in the madrassas of Bangladesh that has remained almost completely neglected. This section examines the present state of the female education in the madrassas of Bangladesh.

Female education at the 'Alia madrassas

Female madrassa at the tertiary level began to emerge in Bangladesh in the early 1990s. Presently, of the 1,063 Fazil madrassas, 24 are for girls. At Kamil level,

¹⁵ For short description of the gap, see Shah Abdul Hannan,

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi's classic work, *Bihishti Zewar* (translated into English by Barbara Metcalf) that was published in ---- remains one important exception to this observation.

¹⁸ Sonia Nishat Amin,

¹⁹ See for example writings of Dina F. Siddiqui, Elora Shahabuddin and Tajul Islam Hashmi, among others, on education, gender equality, and women's empowerment in Bangladesh.

there was no madrassa for girls until 1994 and there was only one madrassa in the country until 2003. At present, of the 178 Kamil madrassas there are six madrassas for girls. And of the 727, 268 students enrolled in 'Alia madrassas at Fazil level, 197,316 are girls. At the Kamil level the number of female students stands at 27,903 out of 133,693. In terms of the teaching staff, out 24,666 teachers at Alia level, 1,324 are women. At Kamil level, of 4,967 teachers, 175 are female. It may be mentioned that there is no female madrassa under direct government control.²⁰

In terms of allocation of subjects, male and female students study generally the same subjects in 'Alia madrassas. Very few "special" subjects are offered only for female students. Although reliable data is not available anywhere, it is generally believed that about 50% of the female graduates of 'Alia madrassas join the teaching profession at elementary, middle and secondary levels, either in the madrassas or in general education schools. A good number of them continue their education in the general stream. And some, as expected, become 'housewives' after marriage.

The socio-economic class background of the female students in the 'Alia system is not much different from their male counterparts: lower middle class, mostly small town based, families with scarce resources and moral considerations of providing their daughters with a "safe" and Islamic educational environment. Recent trends show, however, that the class background of those who send their daughters to madrassas – both Alia and Quomi -- is changing; more middle class, urban-based families are sending their children, both male and female, to madrassas as well as to the new, English-medium, expensive private Islamic schools that represent a synthesis of 'secular' and Islamic curriculum. Three female madrassas in Bogra in the Quomi sector are charging close to TK. 1,000 per month from their students for room and board and are never short of their desired quota for the new students. This increasing interest in Islamic education on the part of the lower echelons of the middle classes is not only a sign of their growing conservatism but is also indicative of their upward social mobility to a new middle class status that entails, *inter alia*, a form of urban and urbane religiosity.

Case Study: Madina-tul-Ulum Model Institute Mohila Kamil Madrassa

²⁰ See Appendix 3 for tables on numbers of female madrassas, students and teachers in the Aliya system.

Located in Tejgaon, an industrial area in central Dhaka, this is the first Kamil level women's madrassa in Bangladesh. The madrassa was given Dakhil, Alim and Fazil status in 1977, 1979, and 1982, respectively. The madrassa received Kamil status in 1992 and remained the lone such institution until 2003. It was established by Rahmat-e-Alam Islam Mission, a charitable trust established in 1961. The madrassa started in 1961 with one student named Jamil Khatun; the number of students currently stands at about 1,600. Of them, 100 are Kamil students and 98 are Fazil students. The school is officially a tuition-free instruction, but the more affluent parents offer donations to the Trust from which the institution receives its funding. According to the madrassa administrator, about 60 per cent students come from poor families and the rest are from relatively affluent background – businessmen, professionals and mid-level executives in the private sector. There are about 30 teachers, one has a PhD and another is a doctoral candidate. About ninety per cent of the teachers have MA/MSS degrees in subjects such as Bangla, Political Science and Economics. Two have degrees in Daura-e-Hadith (Kamil) from Quomi madrassas.

A majority of the students in the madrassa live in a residential building. Strict rules are followed within the premises in terms of hijab and the students are not allowed to go out without their guardians. The building in which the students and the teachers reside and have their classes is not a planned, modern building. The passages are narrow and sense of hygiene is generally lacking. Despite strict discipline that the students are required to observe, however, what is remarkable is the spontaneity of the students in their conversations with a visitor and their communication with their teachers. The author, for example, met some younger students who demonstrated considerable ability to engage in a well-informed discussion on national and international issues. They were willing to express their opinions freely, and without any inhibitions, on national political developments and also on international affairs, especially as they relate to the Islamic world. It was, indeed, amazing to witness that much degree of articulation when compared with the male students of the Quomi madrassas. It is no wonder that the madrassa has been acknowledged as one of the best institutions for women's Islamic education in the country. It received the award of best institution thrice in 1989, 1991 and 1997. Its Principal, Alhaaj Maulana Tajul Alam, received the award of the best Principal in the country in 1997. In the combined merit list of the girls, the madrassa secured first place five times at Dakhil level, two times at 'Alim level, three times at Fazil level, and three times at Kamil level.

What is significant about the madrassa is that the current president of Rahmat-e-Alam Islam Mission and the madrassa, Mosaddek Ali, an MP from Dhaka was one of the closest aides of the former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. Abdul Mannan, an advisor to the Trust and the madrassa served as a Minister in Khaleda Zia's cabinet. The political affiliation of the madrassa officials is clearly reflected in the pro-BNP bias among the madrassa teachers and students. The madrassa management was not associated with any political personality until the early 1990s, when, according to the Vice-Principal of the madrassa, some policies of the Awami League appeared 'hostile' to the madrassa. The madrassa officials claim that they keep the madrassa separate from their own political affiliation and discourage the students and teachers to participate in partisan politics. The signpost of the Trust that runs the madrassa reads: "This is a non-political, non-communal, non-violent and merely religious institution."

Female education at the Quomi madrassas

Contrary to the general perception that the Quomi madrassas have not paid as much attention to female Islamic education as have the 'Alia madrassas, this research found that Quomi madrassas were not far behind, if not, in some cases, ahead, of the 'Alia madrassas in female education. The first Quomi madrassa for women was established in 1965 in Chittagong. However, tertiary level women's madrassas in the Quomi stream seem to have emerged in the 1990s. There is no data on the number of Quomi madrassas for women and the number of students in such madrassas. From the statistics of the number of madrassas participating in the annual central exams held under the Wafaq-ul-Madaris-ul-Arabia, it is known that there are 28 female madrassas affiliated with the Wafaq at the Takmil level and 5 at the Fazilat level.²¹ What is important to note is that the number of students is increasing in these madrassas.

Table 2

Number of Female Examinees in the Wafaq-ul-Madaris-ul-Arabia, 1980-2004

Year	No of examinees (Takmil)	No of examinees (Fazilat)
1980	165	53
1985	393	259

²¹ Wafaq-ul- Madaris-ul-Arabia, Bangladesh, Report on the results of the 27th central examinations [for 2004], p. 60.

1990	680	407
1995	883	632
2000	1,320	1,136
2004	2,344	1,748

Source: Wafaq- ul-Madaris-ul-Arabia, Dhaka

Apart from the Wafaq-Madaris-ul-Arabia, Mohila Quomi Madrassa Shikkha (Education) Board also acts as an apex body of women's madrassas. According to the Secretary General of the Board, there are about 140 women's madrassas affiliated with it with about 10,000 students. According to the same source, about 3,500 students appeared for the Board exam in 2006 which means that there may be more female students under this Board than under the Wafaq. It may be assumed that there are many madrassas which are registered with the Wafaq but their students do not appear in any of its examinations. Also, there are certainly many more madrassas which are not yet affiliated with any of the regional or national boards and operate independently. Their numbers, according to one source, run into thousands at the elementary to middle levels, and into hundreds at the higher levels.²²

Although the number of female students appears to be increasing, the rate of increment of female students is much lower than that of the male students. We have already referred to slightly different curricula for the women in the tertiary level madrassas. There are differences in other areas as well in male-female madrassa education in the Quomi stream. For instance, there are only a few female madrassa which are headed by women. Secondly, the physical facilities in female madrassas in the Quomi sector are relatively poor. It is also apparent that there is relatively lesser degree of encouragement for promoting higher level scholarship among female students.²³

²² Interview with Maulana Abu Tahir, Putia Madrassa, 4 January 2007.

²³ For instance, whereas the number of merit scholarships offered by the Wafaq to male students at Takmil and Fazilat levels is 10, the number is only 3 for female students. This is also evident from the results of the 27th central examination held by the Wafaq: among the students who secured top ten positions at both Takmil and Fazil levels, none of them was women. The madrassa administrators maintain that these differences are not the result of their lack of concern

One interesting thing to note here is that in terms of the allocation of subjects in 'Alia madrassas, male and female students study generally the same subjects. But the curriculum prepared by the Wafaq-ul-Madaris-ul-Arabia for the Quomi madrassas under its auspices makes some important differentiations between what is to be taught to the male and female students. The difference is more obvious at Fazilat (graduate level) of the Quomi madrassas wherein not only subjects such as history are excluded from the female students' curriculum but Uloom-ul-Hadith is also considered not necessary for them.²⁴ Invariably, however, Quomi madrassas for women include the study of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi's classic work *Bihishti Zewar* as a standard text for a rounded education of Muslim woman.

Although female madrassas in the Quomi sector is a relatively recent phenomenon, it seems to be picking up fast not only in major cities but in small towns as well. Most female madrassas are either attached to a mosque or to an already established male madrassas, with their own separate buildings and class rooms. Co-education is only permitted at the elementary level. In most cases, the teaching staff in female Quomi madrassas is male that is allowed to teach from behind a curtain and physical contacts between teachers and students are discouraged unless the teacher is very old.²⁵ According to the teachers themselves, the standard and quality of education in female madrassas are not "as good as they are in male madrassas, and this is not because there is something inferior about the girls, but because girls have few opportunities to interact with the teachers and to make use of the library facilities." We were told that the quality of education in female madrassas registers considerable improvement with the number of female teachers.²⁶ In one female madrassa on the Putia-Chittagong Road, where the number of female teachers was 50%, we found senior level female students much better trained in several subjects, especially in Hadith and Fiqh.²⁷

for the quality of Islamic education for women, but because of the lack of qualified women teachers and the limited resources that are available to the madrassas.

²⁴ See Appendix 4 for the table showing differences in male-female curriculum at Fazilat level.

²⁵ Interview with Maulana Bukhari, Kashaful Uloom Madrassa, Chittagong, June 2005.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Maulana Bukhari of Kashaful Uloom told us that although his daughter, who is a teacher of Fiqh in a female madrassa "cannot issue a fatwa," she is a better scholar of Fiqh than many teachers he knows in his

We were also told by the madrassa ulama that the community seemed to be much more supportive of female Islamic education now than only a decade ago. One female madrassa administrator said that he faced considerable difficulty in raising funds when he opened the madrassa in 1998; "today, local people – peasants, shopkeepers, businessmen and even college professor – are regular donors because they know how important it is to educate young girls."

Interestingly, although the number of female Quomi madrassas is increasing, there is still lingering skepticism among some senior ulama about the usefulness of female religious education beyond the elementary level. Maulana Mufti Abdur Rahman, who is most highly regarded in the Deobandi circles in Bangladesh and sits on the boards of several prominent madrassas of Chittagong, Putia, Bogra and Dhaka, is vehemently opposed to the idea of "allowing young girls to go out of the four-walls of their homes -- even for religious education – where they are out of the sight of their guardians."²⁸ Mufti Abdur Rahman is of the opinion that that the "same anti-Islamic forces that first drove the elite classes to send their daughters to colleges and universities and then lured the lower classes to send their daughters to the garment industry are now conspiring to subvert the moral values of the religiously-oriented middle and lower middle classes, using the bait of religious education for their daughters. The idea behind all three cases is the same: to destroy the traditional Islamic family system."²⁹ Maulana Yusuf Nizami, the Administrator of Jamil Madrassa in Bogra, acknowledged that some prominent ulama do not approve of the female Islamic education beyond the elementary level but also said that the trend was "most probably not reversible; there is a great demand for [Islamic education] from the parents and many ulama also believe that we cannot ignore fifty per cent of our population or keep them ignorant of their religion."³⁰

Case Study: Mahmudia Mohila Madrassa, Basabo, Dhaka

Mahmudia Mohila Madrassa was established in 1992 at the eastern edge of the Dhaka city with five students at primary level. The madrassa currently has about 250 students including about 10 at the Takmil level -- Takmil status was achieved

male madrassa. When I asked him about the "rumor" that his fatwas were actually drafted by his daughter, he only smiled in response but did not deny.

²⁸ Interview with Maulana Mufti Abdur Rahman, Dhaka, 2 June 2007.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Interview with Maulana Yusuf Nizami of Jamil Madrassa, Bogra, 10 June 2007.

in 2007. The madrassa was established by Muhammad Ataur Rahman Kashemi, a mufti and currently the Secretary General of the Bangladesh Mohila Madrassa Shikkha Board. The age group of the students is between 7 to 20 (residential) and 4 to 20 (non-residential). There are currently 10 teachers of which 8 are women. Most teachers have degrees of either at Fazilat or Takmil levels from Quomi madrassas. The madrassa is primarily run by tuition fees of the students who come from different parts of the Bangladesh, in particular Chittagong area. The socio-economic background of the parents varies from the lower middle to upper-middle class.

The madrassa is one of the about 140 madrassas which are under the institutional leadership of Bangladesh Mohila Madrassa Shikkha Board. Therefore, the curriculum that this madrassa follows is a bit different from that of the Wafaq-ul-Madaris-ul-Arabia, particularly in its relative emphasis on subjects such as English, Science and Math at the secondary levels, and on Islamic economics at the graduate level. There are two computers in the madrassa, but without internet connection. This is a residential madrassa and students are provided with some opportunities to indulge in simple indoor entertainments, but there is no TV. The Principal of the madrassa told us, however, that "we collect many Islamic, relevant, decent, and useful TV or other programs on CDs and videos and show them to our students. Most of these CDs and videos were based on recorded sermons and speeches shown on QTV, an Islamic religious channel popular among South Asian Muslims. The Principal was of the firm opinion that much of what is shown on TV these days was neither good for men nor for women.³¹

According to the Principal of the madrassa, the main objective of the institution is to educate a girl to play a positive role in the family, and not to train her for the market place. The knowledge that a female student would acquire in the madrassa should be formative enough for the wellbeing of the family, but the primary responsibility for providing financial wherewithal is of the husband. The idea of the wellbeing of the family includes: taking care of the needs of the husband; managing the family budget; fulfilling social responsibilities within the extended family; and, most importantly, the rearing of the children in an Islamic way. It is interesting to note that the tagging of women to the home was not seen by the Principal as a permanent exile into lifeless domesticity. Although the

³¹ Although the 'moral censorship' that the Quomi madrassas impose on their students seems quite stringent, the notion that TV is an anti-social and morally disruptive force is generally prevalent in all walks of the Bangladesh society. For instance, the present Caretaker government, which is considered to have a relatively secular-liberal face, has recently banned ten satellite foreign channels in Bangladesh.

Principal of the madrassa thought that time has not come yet for Muslim women to participate in every walk of public sphere, he suggested, nevertheless, that if and when needed a Muslim woman can work in those public places which are either exclusively reserved for women or at least where the visitors constitute at least 50% women, for instance, a bank. However, when asked if the curriculum the students are taught in this madrassa was good enough to equip them to engage in skilled jobs or professions, the Principal was not quite sure.

D: State of Islamic Studies in non-Madrassa Educational Institutions

Islamic education in Bangladesh is mainly provided through traditional 'Alia and Quomi madrassas; hence most discussion and debates are focused on these institutions. Nevertheless, any attempt to study Islamic education in Bangladesh in a more comprehensive manner would be incomplete without looking at Islamic education provided in non-madrassa institutions. Islamic studies programs in some form have been included in major secular public institutions for decades and recently many private institutions, at different levels, are showing increasing interest in Islam. We will discuss issues relating to Islamic education in such institutions in the following two sections.

Islamic Education in Non-Madrassa Lower-Secondary and Secondary Institutions

In terms of the degree of emphasis on Islam, non-Madrassa institutions at primary and secondary levels may be categorized into three types. Under type A we can place those schools which impart completely secular education and pay peripheral attention to Islam. In general, Islamic etiquettes and morality are taught from Play Group but textbook-based teaching is offered from Standard I onward but usually only up to Standard 6. In these schools Islam is not considered an integral part of their pedagogic philosophy, but is viewed as a detached domain of knowledge which is allowed in the curriculum in view the demand of the community in which such schools operate. Although Islam remains peripheral to the core subject areas in such schools, the textbooks used are well-written and incorporate almost all basic teachings of Islam. A number of schools follow a series of books entitled 'An Introduction to Islam' written by Yasmin Murshed, Chairman of Scholastica School, and a former advisor to the

caretaker government of Bangladesh. This series has been written as a set of graded textbooks, and each one of them can be used as an independent course on the ‘Beliefs, Teachings and Practices of Islam’ at the appropriate level. For instance, “An Introduction to Islam” for level 2 discusses in brief chapters the Islamic concept of, and belief in, God, the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad, the holy Quran, basic principles of Islam, and Islamic festivals. At the same time, the students have to learn and memorize several short Suras (chapters) of the Quran which are recited during the ritual prayers five times a day.

In general, Islam receives lesser importance in these schools as the students advance towards upper classes. Terminal exams (O level) are held on the international syllabuses offered by Cambridge and London universities. These syllabi do include Islamic Studies, generally known as Islamiyat. However, this subject is rarely opted by the students who prepare for O level examinations. This is neither encouraged by the school authorities. According to the Ministry of Education, there are about 625 English medium schools in Bangladesh.³² A majority of the English medium schools in Dhaka and in Chittagong belong to type A category. Scholastica, one of the largest and most prestigious English medium schools in Dhaka that is usually the first choice of the elite families, is a good representative of category A schools.

Schools belonging to category B can be considered the extreme opposite to that of Type C. Although the primary focus of these schools is Islam and their approach toward secular subjects is similar toward the approach of secular schools to Islam, they are different from the madrassas in that they do not teach the traditional Dars-e-Nizami curriculum and also that they prepare their students for general education examinations. These schools pay special attention to the study of the Quran, the Arabic language and related Islamic subjects. Modern subjects such as English, science and math are also taught, but these subjects are not considered an integral part of their curriculum; at best, they are taught as a technical formality either to qualify for some government funds, or to be able to ‘compete’ with other schools. We will have a clearer sense of this type of schools in the case study below.

Schools under category C represent the ‘hybrid’ or ‘third generation’ schools as far as Islamic education is concerned. What differentiates these schools from the ones in category B is, that instead of teaching the ‘secular’ subjects as given they attempt to Islamize the ‘secular’ subjects. The English language, Bangla,

³² Daily New Age, 7 April 2005

civics, geography and history textbooks emphasize Islamic approach and contents, and in case the desired textbooks are not available, teachers are asked to make sure that the students are made aware of "the Islamic perspective" on the issues being discussed. The authorities in these schools do not feel that modern education is antithetical to Islam; they believe that both Islamic and secular subjects can form harmonious synthesis in an integrated curriculum which has not so far been adequately entertained in either the Quomi or the 'Aliya system. In general, these schools are emerging in the context of what is generally perceived as the inability of the Quomi madrassas to introduce substantial reforms. The 'Aliya madrassas that are regulated by the government, are equally seen as incapable of initiating change, given the official bureaucracy's reluctance to experiment with new approaches. These schools differ from their Quomi and 'Aliya counterparts in pedagogic approach, curricula, teachers' qualifications, socio-economic background of the students, and even in the dress code for students and their locale. Language of instruction is strictly English, although Bangla and Arabic receive equal attention. Spatially, these schools are mostly based in Dhaka, in particular in the three relatively prosperous areas of north, central and southwestern Dhaka. There are also a number of such schools emerging in the port city Chittagong and in Sylhet, a city awash in remittances from Britain. . While wealthy families, especially those with business and senior level professional background, tend to be an important source of students for these schools, students from middle class background are also increasing. Tuition fees in most of these schools are much higher than what they are in the government 'Alia madrassas but are certainly much lower than those of elite, secular English medium schools. However, some well-known and well-equipped schools in this category in Dhaka are as expensive as the elite English medium private schools. In most cases, such schools are established by wealthy and Islamically-committed persons or NGOs such as Manarat Foundation. Both because of private donations and relatively higher tuition fees, these schools are generally not only self-sufficient but profitable also.

The emergence and growth of the schools in this category is indicative of the fact that a section of the Muslim community in Bangladesh is dissatisfied with the slow-to-reform or 'non-performing' traditional madrassas in the country. The need for such schools is felt by people of all social backgrounds. In particular, families from the middle class and the upper middle class – both from the modern professions and the business sector -- are sending their children to such institutions. The equation is simple: to prepare their children to meet the challenge of obtaining a decent employment in a competitive and globalized modern market place, but also in way which will help them to reclaim their

religious and cultural heritage. While this development means that the sacred and the secular are finding a space for harmonious coexistence at the level of pedagogy, it also indicates that Islamic consciousness is arising from within the society, and not from without and above.

It seems that not all schools in C category are able to deliver what they are claiming they can. Except five or six such schools which started in the 1980s, most schools are new and many of them have just started with primary level in a view to expand to secondary level or beyond. Nevertheless, we can see immense possibilities in these schools as they thrive to overcome the difficulties of the Alia and Quomi madrassas and it may be anticipated that these new breed of Islamic institutions would compete with the traditional madrassas in the future.

Case Study of Type A Schools: The Aga Khan School Dhaka (AKSD)

Founded in 1988, the Aga Khan School Dhaka is located in the northern Dhaka suburb of Uttara. The school is run by Bangladesh branch of the Aga Khan Education Service, which manages 300 schools with more than 50, 000 students in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Uganda, Tanzania and Tajikistan. The AKSD currently has 1,183 students and 107 teaching staff. The educational philosophy of the school aims “to create a harmonious balance between academic demands, sporting and cultural activities and community life.” The School challenges its pupils to be intellectually inquisitive and socially conscious.

The AKSD applies an integrated learning approach at the primary level with a gradual focus on individual subjects at the secondary level. In line with the British “public” schools curriculum requirements, the AKSD, at the secondary level, prepares students for O and A levels examinations. The school is now moving to the International Baccalaureate (IB) Curriculum. To graduate, students must study a minimum of seven O level subjects. All of the Class 12 graduates pursue higher education, and, in majority of cases, in the elite Western universities.

In addition to its central focus on the English language and computer literacy skills at all levels, the AKSD encourages the students to engage in a wide range of intellectual, sporting and social activities. The school excels not only in academics and sports but also in extra-curricular activities such as debates,

public speaking, drama, charity and cultural programs. One interesting annual event of the school is the Switch Day when Grade 12 students exchange roles with their teachers.

In keeping with the general trends in this type of schools, as we have already mentioned, Islam enters into the curriculum at class One and exits at the mid-secondary level. Apparently, Islam is considered important for formative years of a student's life. The reason why Islamic studies receives lesser attention at senior levels is that many students plan to go to the US or UK after their schooling here and in that context, the secular subjects help them better to compete for admission.

What follows is an analysis of the two textbooks used in the elementary section. These books, entitled "An Introduction to Islam," are written by Yasmeen Murshed, the founder-principal of the Scholistica School. In both the books the first page begins with the following verses from the Quran: "Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error; whoever rejects Evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy Hand-hold. That never breaks. And Allah heareth and knows all things."

The first chapter of the textbook for class Two introduces the students to the manifestations of Allah who is the creator of everything, Who is most powerful, omnipresent, and Who revealed the religion of Islam to the Prophet. The second and Third chapters are about a poem by National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam) on the Prophet and his early life as the most truthful person. In the Chapter Four, seven brief *suras* (chapters) of the Quran are transliterated and translated in English in order to enable students to say their ritual prayers. Chapter Five briefly narrates the Qur'anic story of creation. Chapter Six describes the "Arkanul Islam" or Five Pillars of Islam. It is noteworthy that Arabic words for all these terms are also simultaneously used. The last chapter of the book is about Islamic festivals. The questions in the worksheet for the students may be indicative of what the textbook would have liked the students to learn:

- a. Make a list of all the things you can do to be a good Muslim and a good child.
- b. Make a list of all the things you should not do in order to be a good Muslim and a good child.
- c. What kind of a person the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was?

Once the students have been introduced to the fundamental beliefs and rituals of Islam, the emphasis of Islamic curriculum shifts to character building and ethical behavior, both in personal life and social relations, as prescribed in the Quran and exemplified in the life of the Prophet. What is interesting to note here is that despite the fact that the school is run by the Agha Khan Foundation, the Islamic curriculum represents mainstream Islamic teachings and does not show any Isma'ili sectarian bias. The overall objective of the curriculum is to present Islam as a universal message of brotherhood, compassion and tolerance.

Case Study for Type B schools: Al-Arafah English Medium Madrassa

This school, established in 1999 as a both residential and non-residential institution, is located in Dhanmondi, the central-western area of Dhaka city. The word "madrassa" in its name should not be confused with either Alia or Quomi madrassas; unlike these traditional institutions of Islamic learning, Al-Arafah English Medium Madrassa does not teach Dars-e-Nizami. The school operates from play group to Standard VIII and is planning to go up to standard X in order for the students to prepare for the international examinations of the terminal secondary degree of O level. There are about 300 students at the moment. In spite of the increasing number of applicants for admissions, the school cannot take more students due to the shortage of space. There are a total of 22 teachers of which 9 are male and 13 are female. The number of female teachers is more in lower classes whereas in the upper classes male teachers predominate. Except a few teachers who teach Arabic, all teachers have college and university degrees. The Principal himself has degrees in Electrical Engineering and an MBA in Finance.

Over the years, this school seems to have developed curricula which make it a leading representative of the 'third generation' Islamic schools. Unlike the Al-Islah International Cadet Madrassa, the intention of the school is not to get its students learn the Quran by heart, although the importance of learning the Quranic teachings is emphasized at every level of schooling. In the Play Group and Nursery (Noorani Maktab Level 2), in addition to teaching skills of drawing, Bangla, Arabic and English, students are given elementary lesson on Quran, appropriate English language skills, math and rhymes. At KG 1 (Noorani Maktab Level 3) and KG 2 (Noorani Maktab Level 4), students continue to be taught a combination of subjects mentioned above as well as new subjects like Islamic studies. The following list of the subjects and textbooks for Standard VI may shed light on the patterns of curriculum at the mid-secondary level:

Table 3
Subjects and Textbooks Taught at Alarafah English Medium Madrassa, Dhaka

Subjects	Books
Arabic/English/Islamic concentration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Esho Arbi Sikhi (Arabic language, in Bangla & Arabic) • Qasasun Nabiyyin (Stories of the prophets; Arabic literature) • Religious Teaching Book (in English)) • Islam for Children (in English)) • Mizan Sarf (Arabic Language)
Bangla/Islamic concentration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sahitya Charupath (Literature, in Bangla)) • Rapid Readers: Children's Aqida (Islamic beliefs, in English) • Authentic Bangla Grammar (in Bangla)
English Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nelson English • Grammar Lab Book • Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary
English Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selected Poems • Treasure Island • Tales from Shakespeare
Math	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Syllabus Mathematics (in English) • A School Geometry (in English)
Science and Computer Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World of Science (in English) • Exploring Information Technology (in English)
Geography and Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding Geography (in English)

Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jahan (World) Atlas (in English & Bangla) • Social Studies and Bangladesh (in English)
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History Book (in English)

Most of the books used in science and math are the same used in other elite English medium schools. Books prescribed for English language and literature are local reprints of the books originally published in England. Interestingly, most English poems selected in the reader are by the 19th century English romantic poets. Many students have memorized lines from the popular poems of Shelley and Wordsworth. According to one English teacher, his students immensely enjoy reading Robert L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*.

In addition to learning Islamic subjects students are also required to conform to Islamic moral teachings, offer ritual prayers, and to wear Islamic dress: headscarf for girls and *topi* (cap) for boys. It appears that the curriculum in this school accommodates appropriate secular and modern subjects while the primary focus remains on the essential teachings of Islam. It was not surprising that the Principal of the school took a great deal of pride in the fact that several of his students of grade 4 got admission in the upper grades, e.g., grade 6, at other, highly reputable and competitive English medium schools in Dhaka.

The financial aspects of the school are managed by Al-Arafah Islamic Bank, one of the premier Islamic banks in Bangladesh. In fact, it was the Chairman of the Al-Arafah Bank, Mr. A.Z.M. Shamsul Alam, former Director-General of the government-controlled Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh and an ardent supporter of the Tablighi Jamaat, who was one of the founders of this school and who provided the initial funding for its establishment from his bank. All expenses, developmental, current, and salaries of the teachers and staff, are paid by the Bank and, therefore, the teaching faculty and the staff can concentrate on the academic wellbeing of the school without the usual worries about the fund raising. The school has a plan to open several branches in other areas as well.

Case Study of type C school: Al-Islah International Cadet Madrassa.

This Madrassa is located on the northern outskirt of Dhaka City. It was founded in 2004 by five young entrepreneurs having background in business and education. The institution started with 12 students and in three years time the number of students have reached 70. The administrators are expecting more students in the years to come. The founders had two objectives in their mind

when they mooted the idea of establishing the school: serving the community's educational needs and to make it financially viable so that they can earn some profit. It appears that they have been able to reach both their objectives. The initial capital investment of about \$5,000 has reached about \$11,000 in three years time. The administration is now planning to establish a university.

The administration's understanding of the educational need of the community is, however, different from those of the Quomi and 'Aliya madrassas. According to the Principal, who is also one of the original founders, secular schools may equip the students to deal with the material world, but their syllabi do not rear them to become 'complete' or 'morally sound' human being. On the other hand, traditional madrassas prepare 'morally superior' human being, but leave them unable to respond to the challenges of the modern age. In terms of curriculum, this school primarily focuses on *hifz* (learning the Quran by heart, a traditional pedagogic practice which is given much importance by the community). The students are expected to memorize the Quran in three year's time. In addition to continuing this tradition, the school also provides courses in Bangla, English, Math, Science, Computer and General knowledge at all levels. The idea is to equip the *hifz* students with some secular knowledge so that they are not left behind their counterparts either in the traditional madrassas or in general schools. In other words, when a student has spent three to five years in learning Quran by heart in a Quomi madrassa, he finds himself lagging behind the students of regular stream, although he is of similar age group. In this process, if a student from Quomi madrassa want to get into general or even 'Alia system, he will have to start from a lower grade. The management in this school has this particular problem in mind and offer proportionate education in secular subjects in order to enable the students to keep pace with their counterparts in general stream in addition to having the advantage of being a *hafiz* (one who has memorized the Quran). According to the school Principal, the school will train a group of students who will, in due course of time, become a "Hafiz-engineer," a "Hafiz-doctor," or a "Hafiz-scientist." In their quest for realizing this goals the school has hired teachers from diverse backgrounds, including graduates of Arabic medium madrassas as well as graduates of Dhaka University. One of the teachers has a Masters degree in Management Science from Dhaka University.

A small number of female students are also enrolled in the school. It is learnt that the school authorities are planning to set up a separate girls' school on the same lines, but the lack of availability of female teachers is preventing them to initiate the undertaking.

In general, it was the impression of this writer that the school authorities are more ambitious than their present infrastructure and resources would permit them. The idea of integrating Islam with 'secular' subjects and presenting an alternative, Islamic perspective on issues related to modern disciplines is greatly highlighted by the school administrators in their discussions with a visitor but the exact modality of such integration remain ambivalent. The only visible evidence is the predominantly Islamic contents in the readers used to teach Bangla and English language. Besides, the school is currently operating only up to Standard VI, and it doesn't seem possible that they can keep their promise of high quality education at the secondary level or realize their dream of establishing a university in the near future. Nonetheless, both the business and pedagogic success made during the last three years is no less significant. This has been largely possible because of the emerging interest of the community in an education that combines modern and Islamic subjects. One unique feature of the school is the differentiated fees structure. Richer guardians, including those who live abroad, pay higher tuition and hostel fees, whereas the students from poor background can pay a substantially lower fees, both for tuition and accommodation. We were told however, that an overwhelming majority of the students in the school come from relatively affluent families who can afford full tuition and room and board.

State of Islamic Studies in non-Madrassa Tertiary level Institutions

Tertiary level education in Bangladesh is provided through both graduate and post-graduate colleges and universities. There are currently 1,337 colleges, all of which are affiliated with the National University of Bangladesh.³³ In many large colleges, especially those colleges which offer Honors Degree, there is a separate department of Islamic Studies, but in most cases Islamic Studies is taught as a single optional course. Of about 1,106,000 students of colleges under the National University at least 300,000 students are either student of Islamic Studies Departments or take Islamic Studies as an optional course. The optional Islamic Studies course consists of basic knowledge about Islamic beliefs and practices, life of the Prophet, Islamic ethical teachings, and selected short suras from the Quran. At the university level, there are 26 public universities and 56 private universities. Most public universities' primary focus is secular subjects in the areas of liberal arts and humanities, social sciences, natural and biological

³³ http://www.banbeis.gov.bd/db_bb/college_education_1.htm

sciences, business, and engineering and technology. Three leading public universities, Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi, have full-fledged departments related to Islamic subjects, which generally include Islamic Studies, Islamic History and Culture, and Arabic. There is, however, one university in the public sector, Bangladesh Islamic University, situated in the western district of Kushtia, which is primarily an Islamic University.

In the private sector most universities are geared toward preparing students for jobs in business sector, engineering, finance and information technology. There are a number of private universities, however, that have considerable focus on Islamic teachings through compulsory university requirement courses as well as a few courses within core courses, although they do not offer a degree in Islamic Studies. For instance, Manarat International University, established in 2001, does not offer a degree in any Islamic subject, but requires the completion of 30 credit hours for 10 General Education Courses which are compulsory for every undergraduate student enrolled for BBA, MBA, Computer Science, Engineering, Electronics and Communication Engineering, Pharmacy and English. Of the 30 credits of General Education Requirement, 9 credits are directly related to Islamic subjects, including Basic Concepts of Islam, Life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (SM), and Qur'anic Science and Humanity. In addition, there is a separate course on the Arabic language, and also a "Comparative Social Systems" course with a considerable emphasis on Islam. Even in other core subject areas and students' majors, relevant Islamic teachings are discussed. For instance, in the BBA and MBA courses, courses are offered on Islamic Banking, Finance and Insurance.

There are at least seven private universities that operate within an overall Islamic pedagogic framework and offer full-fledged degrees in Islamic Studies. The emergence of such universities can be traced to the international movement for the "Islamization of Knowledge" spearheaded by the well-known Bangladeshi scholar and educationist, Professor Seyyed Ali Ashraf and the Palestinian-American Islamic scholar Professor Ismail Faruqi. The movement was initiated by the First World Conference on Islamic Education held in Makkah in 1977. Later, similar conference took place in several other countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan and Malaysia. These conferences helped to a great extent in crystallizing and conceptualizing what should be the future shape and structure of the Islamic education. The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), based in Herndon, VA, has been an institutional sponsor and champion of this movement for the Islamization of knowledge since the early 1980s. In the wake of such intellectual efforts and international fervor, the first postcolonial modern Islamic university was established in Malaysia known as the International

Islamic University, Malaysia IIU-M). The Malaysian model was followed by the International Islamic University in Islamabad (IIU-I) and in Uganda. In Bangladesh the government-sponsored Islamic University in Kushtia emerged in the wake of these developments.³⁴ In the private sector, Darul Ihsan University in Dhaka (1993) and International Islamic University Chittagong (1995) were largely shaped in the light of the recommendations of above mentioned series of international conferences in Islamic education. Darul Ihsan was the brainchild of Dr. Seyyed Ali Ashraf and the International Islamic University of Chittagong was established by the Jamaat-e-Islami affiliated educationists with some funding provided by private Saudi donors. Other private universities that are also responding to this renewed interest in Islam at the higher education level include Asian University of Bangladesh (1996), People's University of Bangladesh (1996), Southeast University (2002), Bangladesh Islami University (2002), and Uttara University (2002).

These universities generally offer BA and MA degrees in Islamic Studies, Arabic Language and Literature or Islamic History and Culture. The primary emphasis, however, remains on secular disciplines such as Business Administration, Applied Sciences, Information Technology and Computer Science, Pharmacy, Law, etc. That at these universities the Islamic subjects are also attracting large number of students is reflected in the fact that some of these universities offer MA and BA degree programs in the evening in addition to regular day classes. At least two universities offer Islamic Studies through their off-campus distance learning programs. Islamic Studies programs are generally attended by young post-secondary students who want to become teachers of Islamic Studies in schools and colleges or want to pursue graduate programs in Islamic subjects. Despite their hefty tuition fees – some universities charge as much as TK 500,000 for an undergraduate degree – private universities are competing very well with their counterparts in the public sector in terms of enrollment. Most probably, it is not necessarily the quality of education that attracts the students to private universities – in most cases, private universities rely heavily on part-time teachers from the public universities – but the assurance that they will get their degrees in prescribed time and will not face the usual “session jam” in public universities where, because of the continuous political troubles and strikes, students have to often wait for four years to complete a two-year program.

³⁴ Shah Abdul Hannan, ‘Islamic Education Movement: Recent History and Objectives’, *Guardian*, Dhaka December 2003.

Interestingly, however, there are some students in such programs who are not pursuing the study of Islam for career purposes but for “self-enrichment” and for becoming more knowledgeable about Islam. For instance, at the Uttara University, a successful lawyer with a Bachelor Degree in English, and a Deputy Director of the Ministry of Environment, has enrolled in the Masters Degree program in Islamic Studies simply “to know more about Islam.” Another reason why these programs are attracting more students could be that compared to other subjects, Islamic Studies programs cost less. At the same time, it must be noted that while the number of students who complete secondary level education is increasing every year, there are not enough tertiary level institutions to accommodate all of them. Therefore, there are many students who would enroll in any subject, especially in subjects that are less competitive and less expensive, instead of just sitting idle. It is estimated that between 2,000 and 2,500 students graduate every year in Islamic Studies (broadly defined) from both public and private universities.

There have been many changes in the Islamic Studies curriculum in the public universities over the years but the fundamental structure of the curriculum remains more or less the same as was adopted by all the major public universities of the subcontinent during the latter years of British India. The primary emphasis remains on traditional Islamic disciplines such as the study of classical exegeses of the Quran (Tafsir), Hadith texts, and theology. Rajshahi University, for example, has 16 required courses for its two-year Master’s program in Islamic Studies. Out of these 16 courses, five courses are on Hadith, four courses on Tafsir, two courses on research methodology, one course each on theology, Islamic political theory, Islamic criminal law, trade and commerce in Islam, and scientific indications in the Quran. Interestingly, among the 120 recommended books for the entire program, only five books are by non-Muslim writers: four of them are introductory texts on comparative religion and the fifth is Kate L. Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers*. No work by a Western scholar of Islam has been included in the list of either prescribed or recommended books.³⁵

The Department of Islamic History and Culture at Rajshahi, however, prescribes a wide variety of courses besides the standard courses on the political history of different Islamic societies and regions. These courses include: History of Political Theory, Introduction to Economics, History of Modern Europe, Political Organizations and Government, Political Economy, Sociological Theory,

³⁵ See, University of Rajshahi, Department of Islamic Studies, *Syllabus of M.A., Session 2005-2006*, pp. 2-13.

Development of Religious and Philosophical Thought in Islam, Development of Muslim Administration, Literary and Scientific Developments in Islam, Economic and Cultural History of Bengal, Islam and World Religions, Islamic Architecture, Islamic Paintings, Calligraphy and Epigraphy, Archaeology, Numismatics and Paleography, and several courses on contemporary Islamic societies. The list of prescribed and recommended books also include those written by many well-known Western historians and orientalists such as Philip K. Hitti, Bernard Lewis, W. Montgomery Watt, H.A.R. Gibb, George A. Barton, Alfred Guillaume, T.W. Arnold, J. Wellhausen, G.E. Von Grunebaum, E.I.J. Rosenthal, and Albert Hourani. It should also be noted, however, that most of the books prescribed for B.A. (Honors) and M.A. courses were published in the 1950s and 1960s; all prescribed books for the course on "The History of Political Theory" were published in the 1950s. The most recent Western publication included in the list was *The Cambridge History of Islam*, published in 1967.³⁶

Despite all the negative publicity that the public universities have received in recent years, programs in Islamic Studies, Islamic History and Culture and Arabic at Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi universities do provide some "fresh air" to the students of Islamic disciplines. If not the textbooks, at least some teachers do raise some critical and unconventional issues for discussion in the class room.³⁷ Dhaka University was especially highly regarded in Islamic Studies and Arabic during the united Pakistan period and still remains one of the best in the subcontinent. Both Dhaka and Chittagong produced eminent Islamic historians and scholars of Islamic studies and Arabic language.

The private universities that have emerged only within the last one or two decades represent considerable innovations in secular disciplines but do not seem to have broken new grounds in the humanities. Most of them include a course on religion as a part of general education requirement but both the texts and the quality of teaching remain relatively substandard. A few private universities that especially advertise their Islamic credentials offer considerably wider variety of courses on Islam but, again, show no sign of any major break with the traditional mode of Islamic learning.

³⁶ University of Rajshahi, Department of Islamic History & Culture, *Syllabus for B.A. (Honours), Session 2006-2007 and M.A., Session 2005-2006, Including M.Phil/Ph.D. Courses*, July 2006.

³⁷ Interview with the faculty members of the departments of Islamic Studies and Islamic History & Culture, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi, 9 June 2007.

Below are two case studies, one on public and one on private university, which will help to understand the state and trends of Islamic education in non-madrassa institutions in Bangladesh at the tertiary level.

Case Study 1: University of Dhaka

Established in 1921, University of Dhaka is the oldest and the premier university in the country with about 30,000 students and 1,300 teaching staff. Under 10 faculties, there are 51 departments covering all major disciplines in the Science, Business, Humanities and the Social sciences. Within the subject areas of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, which is under the Faculty of Arts, Islamic subjects are taught in the departments of Islamic Studies, Islamic History and Culture, Arabic, Urdu and Persian. The Department of Islamic Studies offers the most comprehensive coverage of Islamic subjects. When the decision to establish the university was taken in 1912 by the British Government, it was also decided that the university will have a separate Faculty of Islamic Studies. However, when the university actually came into being, Islamic Studies program was introduced as a department rather than a Faculty with possibilities of expanded disciplinary focus relating to Islam. The first head of the new department was Shamsul Ulama Abu Nasr Muhammad Wahid, the author of the New Scheme Madrassa. Until 1979, Arabic and Islamic Studies were combined under the same department called "Arabic and Islamic Studies," when Arabic became a separate department.

In terms of curriculum, there have been several changes since the establishment of the Department. Like other universities, Dhaka University initially followed the basic model of Dars-e-Nizami of traditional madrassas (dividing Islamic Studies into subjects such as Qur'anic exegesis, Hadith, fiqh, and Arabic language and grammar) with a few additions such as Islamic philosophy, Islamic mysticism, Islamic history Islamic ethics, and Islamic social and political thought. A comparison of the syllabi for 1980 and 2005 will allow us to grasp the continuity and changes in the more recent times.

Syllabus for BA (Honors) courses in Islamic Studies, 1988

First Year:

Selected chapters of Al-Quran

Second year:

Arabic language and literature; Muslim Philosophy and At-Tasawwuf;
Life of the Prophet.

Third Year:

Al-Fiqh and Usul ul Fiqh; Kitabuz-zakat, Ijma and Q'ias; Al-Hadith and Usul ul Hadith; Tafsir and Usul-ul-Tafsir; Al-Kalam and Tariqul Adian including discussions on Taboos and Totems; Islamic Ideology, including Islamic social system and Islamic political system; Tariqul Uloomul Islamia, including history of Tafsir and Fiqh and History of Hadith traditions; History of Islam from the early days to the Abbasid era and the History of Muslim rule in Bangladesh.³⁸

Until 1990 there have been no changes in this three-year Honors program. The current syllabus for 2002-2005, however, reflect some changes. It may also be mentioned that previous three-year Honors program has now been replaced by a four-year Honors program. The revised syllabus carries total marks of 2,000. The examination consisted of 36 courses including two foundation courses on Bangla and English. The foundation courses are of 100 marks each, while all other courses carry 50 marks each.

Syllabus for B.A. (Honors) Courses in Islamic Studies, 2005

First Year:

- Introduction to Islam: The purpose of human life in Islam; Islamic ethics; Role of Islam in human society;
- Social, political, economic and religious aspects of Islam;³⁹
- Islamic Da'wa;
- Introduction to the Quran: method of revelation; classification of verses of the Quran in accordance with scientific, mystical, historical, social, political and religious aspects; Impact of the Quran on human life;
- Sirat (biography of the Prophet) until Hijrah;
- Economy, Banking and Finance in Islam ⁴⁰

³⁸ Abu Taher Muhammad Monzur, Bangladeshe Islami Shikkah O Prashongik Bhabna, MPhil thesis, Department of Islamic Studies, University of Dhaka, 2003.

³⁹ This course covers such topics as basic teachings of Islam; the conceptual foundations of Islamic political theory – state, society and ummah; bases of Islamic state – sovereignty of God, Caliphate, justice, welfare of community, human rights; development of Muslim political thought and selected Muslim political thinkers; Islamic economic principles and institutions – Zakat, agrarian and trade policies, business and Islamic banking. The books prescribed for the course include some classical texts such as Al-Mawardi's Ahkam al-Sultaniyah and Abu Yusuf's Kitab al-Kharaj, several English and Bangla language books by 20th century Muslim writers such as Sayed Ameer Ali, Khuda Bakhsh, I.H. Qureshi and A. Rahim, and some works by Western scholars such as W.Montgomery Watt and E.I.J. Rosenthal.

Second year:

- Qur'anic Studies I and II : selected Suras of the Quran with explanations and legal, social and other significance;
- Sirat of the Prophet after Hijrah;
- Introduction to Islamic Law: basic concepts and development and classification of Islamic laws; place of Islamic law in the legal systems of the Muslim countries; Influence and introduction of foreign laws in the Muslim world; contemporary Islamic legal thought and attempts of Muslim scholars to find possible solutions for contemporary issues facing the Muslim Ummah.;⁴¹
- Sayings of the Holy Prophet about everyday life;
- Social System and Family Welfare in Islam: Islamic approach to social welfare and contemporary social crises; family life including relationship between spouses and parents and children; status of women in Islam; family planning;
- Political system of Islam: Ideas of Khilafat, political education, Majlis-i-Shura, Sovereignty, Democracy, internal and foreign policies of an Islamic state; Islamic and comparative forms of government—their characteristics and challenges such as capitalism, secularism, rationalism, Marxism, nationalism, etc;
- Political Science I: Discussion of the basic concepts of political science;
- Political Science II: Principles of Political Organizations;⁴²
- Political Science III: Government and Politics of Bangladesh; development of nationalism and national identity; Bangladesh constitution; major trends of political development since 1972; political parties, bureaucracy and armed forces; Islamic Law and Law of Inheritance

⁴⁰ This course is intended to introduce the principles and institutions of Islamic economic, finance and banking systems. The textbooks used are those written by the pioneers of Islamic economics and banking in recent years.

⁴¹ Again, although works by a few Western authors like J.Schacht are included in the list of the texts, majority of works are by Muslim authors, both medieval and modern.

⁴² Texts on Islamic political System are mostly based on the writings of classical and medieval Muslim jurists and political thinkers, although a few modern thinkers like Muhammad Iqbal are also included. The texts on comparing Islam with other political ideologies are based primarily on secondary sources and are rather polemical in style and tone. The texts for the courses on Political Science 11 and 111 are all by Western authors, although quite dated and represent pre-behavioral political science, that is, mostly lego-constitutional and institutional aspects of political systems. Books suggested for the study of Bangladesh politics, however, are all written by Bangladeshi political scientists and represent trends in modern political analysis.

Third Year:

- Principles and History of Tafsir literature; Study of Tafsir: Textual study of Surah Al-Anfal;
- Study of Al-Kalam;
- Study of Comparative Religions: comparative studies of Hinduism, Buddhism; Judaism; Christianity and Islam;⁴³
- Arabic literature part I
- Outlines of the history of Islamic civilization⁴⁴
- Arabic Literature Part II
- Cultural and theological developments in Islamic civilization
- History of the Caliphate
- Sufism
- Human rights in Islam
- Computer Literacy
- Principles of Economics;

Fourth Year:

- The principles, history and study of Hadith
- Principles and history of Islamic jurisprudence
- Principles of Sociology
- Computer Literacy 11
- Muslim contributions to Science and Technology
- Prominent Sufis of Bangladesh
- International Relations in Islam⁴⁵
- Modern history of the Muslim world⁴⁶
- The Economy of Bangladesh

Masters Program in Islamic Studies at Dhaka University

⁴³ Comparative Religions course textbooks are all written by well-known Western and non-Western scholars of major religions. Texts on Hinduism and Buddhism are authored by Hindu and Buddhist scholars of religion.

⁴⁴ Most textbooks, both in Bangla and English, are by Muslim authors, although Philip K. Hitti's work is included in the recommended list. More than two-third of the course is based on political history of various Islamic regions; the rest deals with the literary, scientific and cultural attainments of Islam in history.

⁴⁵ Besides some readings from the classical and medieval Muslim jurists, the course also includes such well-known modern works as Dr. Hamidullah's *Muslim Conduct of State* and Majid Khaduri's *Law of War and Peace in Islam*.

⁴⁶ This course covers developments in the Muslim World in the modern period – from colonialism to the post-World War II developments in the Middle East, North Africa, South, Southeast, and Central Asia. The suggested reading list includes some standard (but dated) texts by Western authors.

The MA degree is offered in two different streams: (A) Islamic Studies; and (B) Comparative Religion. Each of these streams requires completion of nine courses, including a computer related course. More than two third of the courses under stream A concentrate on the studies in the history and interpretation of the Quran and Hadith. The rest of the courses are on Muslim philosophy, Sufism, Islamic economic system, Muslim contributions to science and technology and computer literary. Stream B requires the students to study the same number of courses, thus the title ‘Comparative Religion’ does not seem to be justified given a very small number of courses on other religions. Economic system of Islam, Sufism, Muslim contributions to science and technology and a course on Quran and Hadith (Sources of Islam) are retained in this stream. In addition, three new I courses entitled “Islamic Political Thought,⁴⁷” “History of Muslim Spain”⁴⁸ and “Ijma and Qiyas” are added. The comparative nature of the program is drawn from the two courses on “Evolution of Religion” and “Major Religions of the World.” The lack of other relevant courses on the comparative study of religion in the Department is, however, compensated by the Department of World Religions, established in 1999, the first ever in Muslim South Asia.

It appears that significant changes have been made recently in the Islamic Studies syllabus at the University of Dhaka. These changes reflect not only an emphasis on core Islamic knowledge as transmitted by the classical scriptural and interpretive texts but also on the contributions of, and debates among, relatively recent Islamic scholars such as Muhammad Abdu, Rashid Radha, Sir Seyyed Ahmad Khan, Seyyed Ameer Ali and Muhammad Iqbal. – an approach that remains alien to the traditional madrassa education, both in the ‘Alia and Quomi systems. In addition, an important structural feature of the Islamic Studies program at Dhaka University is the emphasis on the way how Islamic teachings can have relevance for, and applications to, contemporary situations. Again, this should be seen as an important “deviation” from the madrassa model of Islamic education. The emphases on Islamic history, culture and civilization and on the socio-economic and political teachings of Islam also set the Dhaka University curriculum apart from the madrassa education. What is equally

⁴⁷ The course on Islamic Political Thought consists mainly of readings from, and discussion of, selected classical and medieval Muslim jurists and political thinkers with little attention to the modern Muslim political thought as it problematises issues such as democracy, pluralism, human rights, etc.

⁴⁸ History of Muslim Spain resonates with a great deal of romanticism and pride in Muslim consciousness all over the Islamic World, especially in the modern period when Muslim communities are finding a new niche in the Western societies. For most Muslims, Islamic Spain (Andulus) does not only represent the first Muslim conquest of Europe, but, more importantly, symbolizes a moment in their history when they were able to build a tolerant and enlightened society, with Jews and Christians as their partners in creating a civilization that is credited with great achievements in philosophy, science, literature, art and architecture.

important is the incorporation of the study of modern social sciences (political science, sociology, anthropology and economics) within the Islamic Studies programs. Similarly, courses on the history, economy, politics and political institutions of Bangladesh contribute significantly in grounding the study of Islam in local realities – an element that is completely missing in the traditional madrassa education that tends to locate the study of Islam at scriptural, textual, and meta-historical levels.

Most teachers in Islamic Studies, Islamic Culture and Islamic History programs in Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi universities are modern educated, with Masters' and Ph.D. degrees in relevant disciplines from local or foreign universities, although many of them have 'Alia madrassa background as well. Unlike their counterparts in 'Alia and Quomi madrassas, they are well-versed in contemporary Islamic scholarship, especially the one produced by South Asian Muslim scholars. Again, unlike the madrassa teachers, the teachers in public universities are well-read in the Western orientalist literature on Islam and quote frequently in their writings the works of Joseph Schacht, T. W. Arnold, Montgomery Watt, Von Grunebaum, H.A.R. Gibb, and Bernard Lewis. Their engagement with most of the Western scholars on Islam, however, remains mostly apologetic and polemical, and not necessarily "critical."

An overwhelming majority of the students who enroll in the BA Honors and MA programs in Islamic Studies come from the 'Alia madrassa background after completing their college degrees, although the number of students with general education background is also not insignificant. About two hundred students graduate each year from BA and MA programs from Dhaka University. A number of the students continue to do further research for their MPhil and PhD at this University or elsewhere, but a majority of the graduates fill many college and "Alia madrassa teaching positions as well as government positions through civil service examinations. The Islamic Studies programs in public universities, thus, play a significant role in the reproduction of both the traditional and contemporary Islamic knowledge as well as knowledge of modern social sciences.

Case Study 2: Islamic University Chittagong (IIUC):

The Islamic University Chittagong (IIUC) started in 1995 in its main campus in Chittagong, the second largest city in the country. Later, the university opened another campus in Dhaka. The vision of the IIUC reads as follows: "The University shall expound the cultural background of the nation and, side-by-side

inculcate the Islamic values about life and nature and the universe with a view to opening the minds of the future generation towards better ways of thinking and living." The University aims at providing trained manpower, endowed with "qualities of honesty and efficiency, capable of contributing towards the socio-economic and moral upliftment of the country." In addition to this, the university aims follow a policy of "continued Islamization of academic curricula" in different branches of knowledge so that its students can imbibe "the true spirit of Islam as an effective guiding principle in their work and daily life."

The university was established by International Islamic University Chittagong Trust, a non-political and non-profit organization. Currently the university is run by an executive committee whose chairman is Dr Abdullah Omar Naseef, Deputy Speaker of the Majlis-e-Shura of Saudi Arabia and a former Vice Chancellor of King Abdul Aziz University and the Secretary General of the World Muslim League. Although the university today is reported to be financially self-sufficient for its current expenses, it did receive considerable funds from private Saudi donors through the good offices of Dr. Naseef.

The IIUC is housed in about 32, 4000 square feet of space which includes class rooms, offices, hostels, labs and libraries located in both Chittagong and Dhaka. The university started with 47 students and in eleven years the number of students has reached to about 6,000 (of which about 2000 attend the Dhaka Campus). The officials of the university describe the growth of student enrollment as 'geometric'. The ratio of the male and female students is 10:3. There are about 285 teachers of which 200 are full time and the rest are adjunct, recruited on part time basis from different public universities.

The IIUC is largely modeled on International Islamic University Malaysia (IIU-M). In fact, some of its founding faculty members were earlier teaching at the IIU-M. It has five faculties including that of Modern Sciences; Administrative Science; Arts and Humanities; Law; and Shariah. Under the Faculty of Modern Sciences, the following programs are offered: B.Sc in Computer Science and Engineering; B.Sc in Computer and Communication Engineering; and Diploma in Computer Science. Under the Faculty of Administrative Science, courses offered are as follows: BBA, MBA (both executive and regular) and Diploma in Bank Management. Faculty of Arts and Humanities offer the following degrees: BA (Honors) in English Language and Literature; BA (Honors) in Arabic Language and Literature; and Certificate Course in English. Faculty of Law offers LL.B. degree. The Arabic Language Institute offers various short-term and regular courses for those who want to learn Arabic as a second language. The

Department of Pharmacy has also recently been established and the university has plans to introduce course on Environmental Sciences, Aqua-culture and Media & Information Science, etc. It appears that among the emerging Islamic universities in the private sector, the IIUC has clear bias in favor of Applied Sciences. This is reflected in the presence of modern, well-equipped Hardware Lab, Software Library and Physics, Electronics and Microprocessor Labs.

The university has designed its program of studies in a way that students acquire a basic grounding in Islam along with the modern, secular disciplines. This is done through the university's "University Requirement Courses." In the Faculty of Law, traditional courses constitute 35% of the whole syllabus, whereas Islamic and Comparative Law contents are 65%. In all other faculties of modern sciences, administrative science, and arts and the humanities, about 10 per cent courses are on ethical and Islamic values. "These courses aim at expanding the cultural horizon of the nation and creating awareness about the glorious heritage of Muslim Ummah and cultivating Islamic values about life, nature and the universe."⁴⁹

The mainstream Islamic Studies courses are taught in the Faculty of Shariah which offers BA (Honors) degree in Qur'anic Sciences and Islamic Studies; BA (Honors) degree in Hadith and Islamic Studies; BA (Honors) degree in Da'wa and Islamic Studies; and MA degree in Da'wa and Islamic Studies. According to the Vice-Chancellor of the IIUC, the courses on Islamic Studies do not usually draw a large number of students. But it is interesting to note that a large number of foreign students – that currently total 70 -- study for degrees under the Faculty of Shariah. For instance, about 20 Chinese students, of which two are female, are currently studying in this faculty. The Vice Chancellor of IIUC informed that before the Chinese students were admitted, a delegation of Chinese academics had visited the campus to look at the quality of education provided there. In addition to Chinese students, there are students from Somalia, India and Nepal.

The IIUC is among the first generation private universities in Bangladesh, and the first one with an avowedly Islamic pedagogic agenda. Since some of its founding faculty members had come from the IIU-M, they duplicated many of the Islamic Studies and Islamic law courses from their Malaysian counterpart. The overall thrust of these courses, therefore, has a clear imprint of the "Islamization of knowledge" approach. Traditional Islamic disciplines were supplemented with courses on Islamic economics, Islamic politics, Islamic ethics

⁴⁹ Interview with the Vice-Chancellor of the IIUC, 20 June 2007.

and world-view, Islamic movements and Islamic thought, and Islam in the modern world. The themes covered in the Islam-related courses and the textbooks assigned also represent a clear 'Islamist' bias since many of the founders of the university have been associated with the Jamaat-e-Islami in one way or the other. This is perhaps the only public or private university in Bangladesh where books by Maulana Abul Ala Maududi (d. 1979), the founder of the JI, are used extensively in different courses on Islam. Although the faculty is recruited on strictly academic merit, the management of the university remains firmly in the hands of those who have close connections with the JI. The classes for male and female students are held separately and students are expected to observe Islamic dress code on the campus.

E: Islamic Education: Who is funding it?

The issue of funding remains central to the discussion of madrassa education not only because its alleged links to Islamic militancy, terrorism, and some international organizations which are suspected of using charitable funds for terrorism, but also, and perhaps more importantly, because of the ways it embeds Islamic education within the social structure of Bangladesh society. It is through its financial support that the community expresses its endorsement and confidence in the madrassa system and demonstrates its approval of the ways the system operates and educates the students.

In general, there are different sources of funding for different streams of education. Non-madrassa private, English medium Islamic institutions at both primary-secondary and tertiary levels are funded by private donations and tuition fees. Schools are often funded by a person or a group of like-minded persons with professional or business backgrounds. The private universities are established with an initial capital investment by a single individual or a group of individuals, and are then expected to become self-supporting from the hefty tuition fees charged from the students. Most private universities operate as commercial enterprises, including those that described themselves as Islamic universities.

At the Aliya stream, funding is primarily provided by the government that pays teachers' salaries as well as for certain development costs. The following table

shows comparative government expenditure on different streams of education including Aliya madrassas in recent years.

Table 4
Government Funding of Different Types of Education

Type of education	Budget 2005-6	Percentage	Budget 2006-7	Percentage
Primary	20714.2	34.00	22782.5	33.71
Secondary	11970.5	23.26	15437.9	23.44
College (general)	7259.5	13.69	9141.6	13.82
Madrasa	5916.7	11.45	7754.6	11.59
Technical	445.3	0.85	700.7	0.88
University	4043.5	7.98	4919.0	8.24
Teachers training	256.2	0.46	300.5	0.45
Other administrative and subsidiary services	12865.5	8.31	10168.0	7.87
Total (Education)	63471.4	100	71204.8	100

Source: BANBEIS, http://www.banbeis.gov.bd/db_bb/education_finance1.htm.

Quomi madrassas do not receive any funds from the government; it is this financial autonomy of the Quomi madrassas that makes it extremely difficult for the government to force them to accept the type of curriculum reforms it believes are necessary for their modernization. Several governments, even from the united Pakistan days, tried to lure the Quomi madrassas into accepting government funds in exchange for certain reforms, but the madrassas refused to take the bait. Today, as always, Quomi madrassas depend on the charitable contributions from the community as well as on a small amount of tuition fees that some of them charge from the families who can afford to pay. Some Quomi madrassas also possess real estate and agricultural land of their own that provides them with regular rental income.

Thus, unlike the 'Aliya madrassas, the Quomi madrassas have more diverse sources of funding that they can count on. We have already noted in our first-year report that there are about 13 different local sources of funding for Quomi madrassas. These include lump sum grants; monthly or annual regular donations from individual and business donors; *musti chal* (collection of handful of rice everyday before cooking by housewives); seasonal contributions of agricultural produce, such as paddy, vegetables, jute, etc; special contributions raised for the annual convocations (*dastarbandi*); rent of real estate owned by the

madrassas; income from crops or lease-money on the landed property owned by the madrassas; admission fees; tuition fees; *mannat* or donation in lieu of a wish to be fulfilled; zakat, sadaqa, fitra—mandatory and voluntary religious charitable contributions ; skins of animals sacrificed during Id ul Adha; fruits or crops from privately owned graveyards; and fish from the tanks and ponds of the madrassas.⁵⁰

What is interesting to note is that some owners of black money earned through smuggling, especially in the Indo-Bangladesh border areas, also donate huge amounts of money to madrassas.⁵¹ Although many madrassa administrators told us that they were very particular about the sources of donated funds, there are also cases in which Quomi madrassas have accepted free land and considerable cash donations from real estate developers with suspicious business practices.⁵² In particular, as one leftwing writer notes, the Myanmar-Bangladesh border is a heaven for smugglers and black marketers who, in the wake of their professional activities, grow guilt-feeling and try to attain some mental peace and social respectability by donating money to the madrassas. He cites an example of a locality in Teknaf on Myanmar-Bangladesh border where a government secondary school has an annual budget of about 1100,000 taka while a neighboring madrassa has a budget of about 100,00,000.⁵³

Comment [A1]: Fascinating. I particularly enjoyed your footnote comment about the WTO ☺

In most cases, no reference to the madrassas in the Western media is complete without the prefix “Saudi-funded.” The general impression created by the media reports suggests that the madrassas in Bangladesh, and, for that matter, in all Muslim societies, depend on Saudi or Middle Eastern financial support and that if these foreign funds were not available the madrassas simply couldn’t exist. The truth of the matter is that the madrassas have existed and prospered in Muslim South Asia long before the Arab oil boom, and will continue to exist and prosper long after the Arab oil wells dry up. As we have noted above – and have

⁵⁰ *Madrassar Hisabh Nikash nirdeshika* [Guide to Accounts Keeping in the Madrassas], (Dhaka: Al-Wafaq Publications, 2003).

⁵¹ There is an interesting debate among the legal scholars of Islam on the legal status of smuggling. Some scholars maintain that Islam believes in “free trade” and that tariffs have no place in Islamic law. WTO should be quite happy with this endorsement of its free trade policies.

⁵² The most well-known case is that of Bishandhara group; the Bishandhara Group is being investigated by the current Care Taker Government for tax evasions and other financial frauds amounting to hundreds of millions of Takas.

⁵³ Ahmed Sofa, *Madrasa Shikkhar Kotha* (Thoughts on Madrassa education), in *Bangladesh Shikkha Babastha* (Education System of Bangladesh), Dhaka: Shuchipatra, 2002), p. 146

discussed in detail in our first year report, Quomi madrassas in Bangladesh are funded primarily by the community through religiously-inspired charitable contributions.

There are cases, however, when Quomi madrassas did receive funds from the Saudi government sponsored organizations, from certain Islamic NGOs based in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirate (UAE), and from individual philanthropists from the Gulf Sheikdoms and South Africa. It is difficult to give any definitive figures of the total amount received by the madrassas in Bangladesh from these sources since most of these funds were not transferred through official channels. We do know, however, that none of the largest madrassas in Bangladesh (for example, Hathkhazari, Putia and Lal Bagh) received any cash funds from the Middle East, although many of them routinely receive free books published by the Saudi and Kuwaiti governments.⁵⁴

Rabita al-'Alam al-Islami (World Muslim League), a Saudi government controlled Islamic organization is widely known to have provided generous funds for building of mosques, especially in the areas adjacent to the Bangladesh-Myanmar border for the Arakan refugees. Many of these mosques have been operating furqania level madrassas attached to them. Rabita and the Saudi-based Al-Harmain Foundation also provided generous funds to the Ahl-e-Hadith madrassas in the northern districts of Bangladesh, ostensibly for the welfare of the orphan students. Similarly, a Kuwaiti Islamic NGO, Society for the Revival of the Sunnah (of the Prophet), has donated millions of Takas from the early 1990s to 2005 for the building of mosques and madrassas in the wake of devastations caused by the frequent floods and cyclones. Most of these funds were categorized as "relief activities" in the official publications of the Society.⁵⁵ According to our research and inquiries from various sources, including the madrassa authorities and the NGO Division of the Prime Minister's Secretariat, the largest beneficiary of the Saudi funds have been the Ahl-e-Hadith madrassas, obviously because of the doctrinal affinity between the Wahhabi ideology and the Ahl-e-Hadith school. Deobandi and the JI-affiliated madrassas also received some funds, but mainly from private Saudi philanthropists and that too for the welfare of the orphan students.

⁵⁴ Most well-established, large Quomi madrassas maintain detailed, and duly audited, accounts of their incomes and expenditures and many of them publish these accounts as part of their annual reports. These financial reports provide complete details of all donations and incomes with their sources clearly identified.

⁵⁵ The information given here was provided by a former Bangladeshi employee of the Kuwaiti embassy in Dhaka.

The other source of “foreign” funding of the madrassa education in Bangladesh has been the spectacular rise in recent years in the flow of remittances by the Bangladeshi expatriates in the Gulf States, Southeast Asia, and the Western countries. These remittances have contributed considerably toward expanding the financial support base of the madrassa education in the country. In the 2002-3 fiscal years, the total remittance stood at \$3 billion. Saudi Arabia, USA, Kuwait and UAE provide the first, second, third and fourth largest chunk of the total remittance, respectively. Remittances from the Bangladeshi nationals abroad are twice that of foreign aid that the country receives from all sources. It is estimated that remittances from Bangladeshis abroad will reach \$ 5 billion in 2007-2008. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that a portion of these remittances go to the construction of mosques and the maintenance of the madrassas.

A study on Bangladeshis in the UK and USA shows that almost all the respondents send a sizeable amount of money to their home country as zakat. These zakat contributions are spent on community development projects, helping poor relatives and the destitute, and for the education of madrassa students.⁵⁶ Madrassas in Sylhet and Noakhali, the two cities in Bangladesh that are awash with remittances from the United Kingdom, receive almost 50% of their development and current expenditure either from the remittances or through the efforts of the “safirs” (“ambassadors”) that are sent to UK every year during the month of Ramadan for direct fund raising. Some madrassas in these two cities maintain a permanent office address in UK to facilitate regular flow of funds from their Bangladeshi brethren. Another interesting recent development is the emergence in Dhaka city of a large number of travel and labor recruiting agencies for Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries which are either owned or run by those who are associated with, or graduates of, Quomi madrassas. They use their skills in the Arabic language to develop contacts with the labor importing countries in the Gulf and share a portion of their commission they earn by sending manpower abroad with their alma maters.

As pointed out earlier, most large madrassas publish their budgets as part of their annual reports as well as for fund raising purposes. Since most madrassas have been granted tax-exempt status by the Bangladesh government, they are required to have their annual accounts audited by a chartered accountant. Some madrassas publish the names of every single donor -- even if the donation

⁵⁶ For a detailed study of remittance flow into Bangladesh, see Tasnim Siddiqui, Efficiency of Migrant Workers Remittance: The Bangladesh Case, 2004 (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2004).

Comment [A2]: Very interesting dimension of the ‘globalization’ of labor forces.

amounts to a few Takas -- for transparency purposes. A close examination of the list of donors indicates that, besides zakat and sadaka, the small and medium size madrassas still rely heavily on either small but regular donations from local shopkeepers, or on donations in kind rather than in cash. Most large madrassas, however, especially in Chittagong and Dhaka, receive considerable support from the business community, and in relatively larger amounts. In the case of Jamil Madrassa which is the largest madrassa in North Bengal, for example, close to 30% of their annual budget of about TK 110 million comes from four big business families.⁵⁷

One of the reasons why Quomi madrassas attract donation is that madrassas are tax-exempted.⁵⁸ Current drive for corruption free society and systematic taxing system introduced recently might also lead richer people to donate more to such Islamic institutions. The madrassas are aware of this and that is why in their drive for securing donations, they refer to the government order in regard to the exemption of tax. It may be assumed that the Quomi madrassas are not interested in getting government funding not only because they want to preserve their own identity, but also because they feel that once they are under government fold, the scope for private funding might get limited.

F: Ulama and Madrassas in Politics: Patterns and Trends

The political activism of the ulama in Muslim Bengal dates back to the anti-colonial movements by Titumir and Haji Shariatullah in the nineteenth-century that signified the growing concern of the ulama about the British encroachment into the economic and political arena of the Muslim community. During the first 'War of Liberation' against the British in 1857, the ulama played prominent role in organizing pockets of resistance. It is estimated that about 14,000 ulama of India, including many from Bengal, were executed by the colonial government for their involvement in the war of 1857.⁵⁹ The tragic experience of the ulama in the first war of independence led them to be more inward-looking and conservative, but at the same time this also made them realize the need of establishing a strong pedagogic base to continue recreating the tradition of

⁵⁷ For a sample budget of two Quomi madrassas, see Appendix 5

⁵⁸ Vide the 1990 order of the National Board of Revenue, all donations to the madrassas are tax-exempt.

⁵⁹ Shahid Ziaur Rahman Faruqui, *The Ulama-e-Deoband in the Independence Movement*, Bangla translation published by Dhaka: Thanvi Library, 1990, 4th ed. 1998, 28.

Islamic learning in India. The creation of the Deoband Madrassa in 1866 helped the “guardians of the tradition” to strengthen the hold of the orthodoxy on the one hand, and to offer a powerful ideological and political resistance to the British rule, on the other.⁶⁰ Deoband thus emerged as an important Muslim institutional response both to the intellectual challenge of Islamic modernism of the Aligarh School, and to the political threat from the British rule. Ulama were, therefore, active along with nationalists in their anti-colonial stand during the last decades of the British Raj. The Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Hind (HUH), the first political party of the ulama, was formed by the Deoband ulama in 1919 in Delhi in the wake of the Khilafat Movement. On the question of the creation of Pakistan, however, the JUH was divided: while the then President of the party, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, supported the All India Congress platform of an undivided India, a faction of the party led by Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani and Mufti Muhammad Shafi, supported the ‘two-nation’ theory of the Muslim League and opted for an independent Pakistan.⁶¹ Both Maulana Usmani and Maulana Bhashani, along with several prominent ulama of Sylhet, played a critical role in the Assam referendum in favor of Pakistan. This faction became the first political forum of the ulama in Pakistan and came to be known as Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam (JUI).

The Pakistan Period

During the Pakistan period, ulama remained politically active, if not successful enough to make a significant impact on national political scene. In 1953, the ulama of East Pakistan – along with their counterparts in the Western wing -- launched the Khatm-e-Nubuwat Andolan (Movement of the Finality of the Prophethood) against the Ahmadi community with the demand that they be declared as non-Muslims. This was their first major foray in Pakistan politics after independence. In 1954 some ulama under the leadership of Maulana Athar Ali of the JUI played an important role in promoting the United Front Movement against the Muslim League government. Maulana Athar Ali and Maulvi Farid Ahmad later formed another Islamic party, the Nizam-e-Islam Party (NIP) that drew most of its following from the ‘Alia madrassas. The NIP continued to win several seats in the provincial legislature and national parliament up until the late 1960s. The madrassa students’ first foray in politics took place in January 1963 when more than 500,000 ‘Alia madrassa students took to the streets of

⁶⁰ For a path breaking and most perceptive study of the Deoband School see, Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982.

⁶¹ Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *Ulema in Politics*, Karachi: Dar-ul-Ma’arif, 1978.

Dhaka to press their demands of the official recognition of their madrassa diplomas and degrees, and to improve the physical facilities of the madrassas with government funds.

Ulama and the State in Bangladesh

In the early years of independent Bangladesh, Islamic political activities were restricted particularly in the context of anti-liberation stand and activities of a section of Islamic groups, especially the Jamaat-e-Islami. It is interesting to note, however, that the ban on religious politics was largely formal: both the ulama groups based in Quomi madrassas and the JI followers in 'Alia madrassas continued with their activities using popular religious platforms and festivals. Many of the ulama and the JI activists took shelter in the non-political fold of the Tablighi Jamaat in order to escape the government ban.

When a military coup ended the first Awami League regime in 1975, the issues of democracy and Islamic polity came simultaneously to the forefront of national politics. The new ruler General Ziaur Rahman, in order to consolidate his constituency among the religious groups, lifted the legal ban on Islamic political parties. In the process, the ulama and the JI got back their breathing ground and, in exchange, Zia found a veritable support base among the ulama. Inspired by Zia's success, General H.M. Ershad, who came to power in 1982, also appeased the Islamic groups by various activities, including amending the constitution to declare Bangladesh as an Islamic State. It was Ershad who gave official recognition to the thousands of Maktab schools spread throughout the country and increased subsidies for the 'Alia madrassas.⁶²

Ulama's Political Goals, Alliances and Factions

In the 1980s while the 'Alia madrassas-based Nizam-e-Islam Party failed to make its mark, many other religious parties emerged to take its place. During the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, most ulama and madrassa students had worked primarily as vote-banks for the quasi-Islamist and nationalist rulers like Zia and Ershad. Some ulama from the Quomi madrassas associated with the Deoband School decided to organize their own political party, however. The first significant political move of the madrassa ulama was to launch the Khilafat Andolan (the Khilafat Movement) headed by Maulana Muhammad Hafez Ji Huzur in early 1980s who able to secure third position in the 1981 presidential elections. A majority of the Quomi madrassa ulama supported him – and many

⁶² Mumtaz Ahmad, "State, society, politics and Islam: The Case of Bangladesh" in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Islam in Asia* (Oxford, forthcoming).

of them formally joined the party as well.⁶³ The party later split into factions: both the factions called themselves Bangladesh Khilafat Andolan until 1989 when the faction under Sheikh-ul-Hadith was joined by Bangladesh Islami Jubo Shibir to form Bangladesh Khilafat Majlis.⁶⁴ In 1987, another political forum of the ulama, Islami Shashontantra Andolan (Islamic Constitution Movement), was formed under the leadership of Charmonai Pir Maulana Syed Muhammad Fazlul Karim. In the changing political scenario of the 1990s, political ulama came together once again and both factions of Amini and Haq, along with other ulama, formed an electoral alliance known as Islami Oikyo Jote (IOJ). Charmonai Pir Syed Fazlul Karim became the Chairman of the IOJ.

Since the 1990s, Amini and Azizul Haq have been the forerunners of political activism among Deobandi ulama. In the 2001 general elections the IOJ secured three parliamentary seats and joined the BNP-led government which also included the Jamaat-i-Islami. However, the three elected ulama failed to secure a cabinet post in the government, a fact that contributed, once again, to the emergence of two rival factions within the IOJ: one faction was led by Amini and the other by Haq. After the end of Khalida Zia regime in October 2006, the alliance finally fell apart. Haq's bid to engage with the secular Awami League by signing an electoral pact and forming a political alliance with the latter was seen as his strategy to secure some safe seats within the larger alliance led by the Awami League. The enthusiasm with which the Awami League, which proclaims secularism as one of its defining features, signed the pact with the ulama only shows how much it was concerned to establish its Islamic credentials among the electorate before the elections.⁶⁵

⁶³ Mufti Fazlul Haq Amini, Maulana Azizul Haq Sheikh-ul-Hadith, Maulana Muhiyuddin Khan, and Syed Fazlul Karim (Pir of Charmonai) were among the more prominent madrassa-based ulama who joined the Khilafat Andolan.

⁶⁴ The split came about following the visit to Iran by Hafez Ji Huzur in 1984. Some of his prominent supporters among the ulama believed that Huzur's visit to Iran was tantamount to a betrayal of Sunni Islam. The longstanding Deoband's hostility toward Shia Muslims and the intense sectarian orientation of Quomi madrassas dominated by the Deoband tradition could not approve of conferring Islamic legitimacy to the Iranian revolutionary regime. Then there were also the allegations that the key positions in the Khilafat Andolan were occupied by close relatives of Hafez Ji Huzur. Thus, both the doctrinal differences and personal rivalries led to the break up of the movement in 1986 when Sheikh-ul-Hadith Maulana Azizul Haq and Maulana Abdul Ghaffar left to form their own faction.

⁶⁵ The treaty, now annulled by the Awami League under pressure from its leftwing allies, included the following points: 1) Certified ulama will have the right to issue fatwas (Islamic religious edicts) if the grand electoral alliance comes to power; 2) No law shall be passed against the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah; 3) A law will be passed to punish disrespect acts against Prophet Muhammad; and 4) Those who do

Although there has been considerable ideological chasm between the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Quomi madrassa-based ulama, there have also been some attempts in the past to form a grand alliance of all Islamic groups of Bangladesh to assert their joint power and influence in political arena.⁶⁶ Another attempt was made in the late-1980s when eight Islamic political parties and several prominent madrassa ulama in their individual capacity met in Dhaka to form an alliance of all religious groups.⁶⁷ But the new alliance too failed to generate either any enthusiasm among the ulama or make any waves in the political arena.⁶⁸ In more recent times, it appears that the ideologically-induced political gap between the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Deobandi ulama-politicians has widened more than ever.

Many observers of the role of Islam in Bangladesh politics seem to have taken an easy route of explaining the ulama politics as a function of the manipulation by different military regimes and their bid to establish their Islamic credentials for the purposes of political legitimacy. This line of thinking denies ulama's agency and their capacity to act autonomously for the protection of what they perceive as their ideal, material, and status interests. First of all, ulama, as the "guardians" of orthodox Islam, consider it their Islamic obligation to raise their voice when and if they perceive "Islam in danger." They may not be active in party politics and in day-to-day political activities but they remain vigilant as far as "Islamic" religious issues are concerned. Second, they are also very much aware of the socio-cultural and political developments that, in their view, tend to undermine their religious authority, social influence, material interests and status as community leaders. It is in this context that one can understand their criticism of the Western-inspired cultural influences in society, their opposition to the High Court's decision to bar them from issuing fatwas, and their condemnation of certain activities of the NGOs that they see as both undermining traditional

not believe that Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet of God would forfeit their right to be known as Muslims, an oblique reference to the Ahmadiya community.

⁶⁶ The new group included Professor Ghulam Azam and Delawar Hossain Saydee of the Jamaat-e-Islamic, Pir of Charmonai Maulana Syed Fazlul Karim, Maulana Kamaluddin Jafri, and Baitush Sharf Pir Maulana Abdul Jabbar.

⁶⁷ Leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Islamic Constitutional Movement, Khilafat Majlis, Nizam-e-Islam Party, Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam, Islami Oikyo Andolan, Tomaddan Majlis (Civic Party), and Pir Sahib of Sarsina were among those who attended the gathering.

⁶⁸ Jewel, p. 55-60

social practices and threatening their religious authority. The ulama's political activism has been particularly informed by three major developments since the 1990s: the increasing electoral popularity of the Jamaat-e-Islami that they see as their religious rival; the civil society institutions' fervent campaign against "fatwabaji" that tended to malign the entire religious sector for the indiscretion of a few illiterate mullas; and the NGOs' overtly secular/liberal approach to development process, which included a high interest-based micro-credit programs and women empowerment projects.

The Jamaat-e-Islami was seen by the madrassa ulama both as an adversary and a model for political activism and organizational outreach. While the modernists and liberals threatened the ulama with their secular policies and pronouncements, the Jamaat-e-Islami undermined their monopoly over Islam by treading dangerously on their turf. It seems that the ulama's foray in politics was less prompted by the rise of secular forces than by the increasing popularity of rival Islamist forces in society. For many ulama of the Deoband School, not being religious is one thing, but being religious with wrong '*Aqai'd* (beliefs) is unpardonable and has to be challenged. As a Deobandi 'alim put it, "The worst we can expect from the Awami League is that it won't implement Islamic laws; but what if the Jamaat-e-Islami captures power and starts enforcing wrong beliefs (*ghalat 'aqaid*) and practices?" A similar explanation was given by the Ahl-e-Hadith ulama to organize themselves politically in the 1990s: "They [the Jamaat-e-Islami people] were stealing and misleading (*gumrah*) our Ahl-e-Hadith youth in the name of Islam. We had to organize ourselves to bring our youth back to the right path."⁶⁹

In more recent times, it appears that the ideologically-induced political gap between the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Deobandi ulama-politicians has widened more than ever. The Quomi madrassa ulama seem to be much more interested in issues such as Khatm-e-Nubuwat, family laws, Taslima Nasreen, and autonomy of the madrassas, while the Jamaat-e-Islami wants to consolidate its democratic and pluralist credentials in order to be known, both at home and abroad, as a moderate, mainstream political party. The Jamaat leaders believe that some Deobandi ulama launched the anti-Ahmadi movement during 2005-2006 in order to embarrass them and to force them to take a clear stand on declaring the Ahmadi community as non-Muslims.⁷⁰ The JI chief, Maulana

⁶⁹ Interview with Dr. Muslehuddin, Acting President of Ahl-e-Hadith Andolan, Rajshahi.

⁷⁰ Interview with a senior JI leader, Dhaka, 12 June 2007.

Motiur Rahman Nizami took the position that while Muslims in general regard the Ahmadis as non-Muslims, the state has no business in excommunicating anyone.⁷¹

The Ulama and the NGOs and "Fatwabaji"

The ulama's hostility toward the NGOs, especially foreign-based NGOs and those affiliated with the Christian missionary organizations, has been in the news for quite some time. A few years ago, some NGOs brought a case against Sheikhul Hadith in a court of law for obstructing their work. As always with such cases, it didn't go anywhere and is still awaiting decision after several years. One argument advanced by the ulama against the NGOs is that they tend to subvert the traditional Islamic norms, values and practices.⁷² The ulama also believe that the foreign-based NGOs have some "hidden" agenda to Westernize Muslim society and to promote un-Islamic practices. They are particularly suspicious of the activities of the NGOs sponsored by the foreign Christian missions and accuse them of trying to convert poor Bangladeshi Muslims to Christianity by offering them material incentives – the so-called "Rice Christians Syndrome."⁷³

The relationship between the ulama and many local NGOs are also marred by the latter's assault on the ulama by branding them 'anti-liberation' forces, or even 'terrorists'. In reaction, many ulama also came out on the streets publicly demanding punishment of prominent NGO/Civil Society personalities.⁷⁴ In the 1990s the NGOs also found themselves on the wrong side of the ulama by launching a campaign against the madrassa ulama on the issue of "fatwabaji" and by siding with Taslima Nasreen, a dissident Bangladesh writer who created a stir by publishing novels and giving statements on the suppression of women in Islam and the inadequacy of the Qur'an that were naturally seen by the ulama and many in the general public as highly provocative. Nasreen also proposed to

⁷¹ Interview with Maulana Motiur Rahman Nizami, Dhaka, 12 June 2007.

⁷² Interview with Sheikh ul Hadith Maulana Azizul Haq, Dhaka,

⁷³ As always, the reports of conversions are highly exaggerated to sensationalize the issue and to mobilize the people against the threat of apostasy. A professor in the department of sociology at Rajshahi University told the author of this report that the research by one of his students in the department showed little evidence of conversions to Christianity. A local (Muslim) aid workers employed by a Christian NGO also corroborated this and said that in the entire period of her four years work with this organization, she did not see any Muslim converting to Christianity, although she did notice some subtle forms of 'invitations' by some newly-arrived zealots but they were discouraged by their seniors.

⁷⁴ For a detailed discussions of the patterns of conflicts between the mullahs and the secular liberal NGOs and intellectuals, see Tajul Islam Hashmi..

'rewrite' the Qur'an, advocated free sex and Bangladesh's merger with India—the ammunition sufficient enough to bring the ulama to the streets in large processions to condemn her and to demand a legal action against her. Some little known 'alim, not affiliated with any of the religious parties, declared in his Friday prayer sermon that Taslima Nasreen deserved to be killed for insulting Islam and the Prophet. (That solitary statement came to be known in the local and international media as "death fatwa" a la Imam Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie in 1989). A "Sammilito Sangram Parishad" (Council for United Movement) emerged in order to press the government to take actions against her. The movement died down after Taslima Nasreen went into exile.

None of the madrassa ulama we talked to approved of "fatwabaji" or the authority of the village imams to issue fatwas pronouncing punishments on women for the violation of Islamic laws in matters of marriage or divorce. All of them agreed that only the duly constituted government courts were authorized to pronounce and implement such judgments. "The job of the mufti is to give his opinion when asked by some member of the public— and only his opinion, not the authoritative judgment," a mufti at the Putia madrassa said. "I also want to emphasize that every village imam or every 'alim is not a trained mufti. It is a very heavy responsibility and the ulama should not take it upon themselves to start issuing fatwas without having been trained thoroughly in fiqh."⁷⁵

On Taslima Nasreen, Maulana Muhammad Abu Tahir of Putia Madrassa said: "When someone approached us at the madrassa, we said that we haven't read her books and thus cannot give our opinion. Anyway, what was reported in the press clearly showed that she had nothing but hatred for Islam and deliberately wanted to hurt the feelings of Muslims. But none of us here -- and none among the established ulama elsewhere -- issued a death fatwa against her. We all said that the government should take action against her for insulting Islam and for hurting the feelings of Muslims."⁷⁶ However, when the two judges of the High Court in 2001 declared all fatwas as illegal, the ulama again took to the streets and protested against what they saw as an encroachment of their traditional function as the interpreters of Shariah. Their agitation gave birth to the "Islami Ain Bastobaon Committee" (Committee for the realization of Islamic Laws) that received widespread support from the ulama of all schools of thought. It is in this context that when, in January 2007, a faction of IOJ ulama signed an election

⁷⁵ Interview with Maulana Abdul Halim Bukhari of Putiya Madrassa, Putiya, 3 January 2006.

⁷⁶ Interview with Maulana Muhammad Abu Tahir, Putiya, 3 January 2006.

pact with the Awami League, the latter promised to uphold the right of the “properly certified” ulama to issue fatwas.

Politics of Reluctant Partisans

With the exception of the Dhaka-based ulama of the IOJ and its constituting groups – Khilafat Andolan and Khilafat Majlis --, majority of the madrassa ulama in Quomi madrassas shun partisan politics and take particular care to keep politics out of the precincts of their madrassas. Both the teachers and students in the Quomi madrassas are strictly forbidden to engage in political activities either inside or outside the madrassas. Having said that, however, the Quomi madrassa ulama’s relationship with politics remains ambivalent at best, as can be concluded from the discussion above. It is not that, like the Tablighi Jamaat followers, they detest politics as a morally inferior activity. They shun politics because, as we were told repeatedly by many ulama, it would distract the madrassa teachers and students from their primary goal of disseminating and seeking Islamic knowledge. Again, unlike the Tablighi Jamaat followers, they do read newspapers and follow, if not very keenly, the political events in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the Muslim World. Although an overwhelming majority of the Quomi madrassa ulama expressed the view that the madrassa teachers and students should not participate in political rallies, many of them were also of the view that they wouldn’t stay on the sidelines when it comes to some serious “Islamic issues,” such as the attacks on the madrassas, denial of Khatm-e-Nubuwat (finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad) or Taslima Nasreen type attacks on Islam. They are also ready to give their opinions about the main political contenders in Bangladesh when asked by an outsider. But the Quomi ulama rarely, if ever, discuss politics in the class room with their students or among themselves.⁷⁷ Many, if not most, vote in national elections, “not for a particular political party but for the candidate who is known to be a better practicing Muslim.”⁷⁸ The impressionistic evidence suggest, however, that most Quomi ulama vote for the IOJ candidates or for the centrist BNP, but only a very few vote for the Awami League, and probably none for the Jamaat-e-Islami – the former because it is seen as secular and the latter because its ‘aqaid are not properly Islamic.

⁷⁷ A senior student at the Kashif ul Uloom Madrassa in Chittagong who has been studying there for 6 years says he cannot remember if the names of Khaleda Zia or Sheikh Hasina were ever uttered by any of his teachers in his presence.

⁷⁸ Interview with Maulana Muhammad Abu Tahir, op. cit. Maulana Abu Tahir added, however, that “usually, it is a choice between a greater evil and a lesser evil... One thing is clear, however: we cannot vote for a *mulhid* (non-believer).”

Ahl-e-Hadith: Politics and Militancy

Among the Quomi madrassas, only those affiliated with a section of the Ahl-e-Hadith group are avowedly political, but that too is a relatively recent development. Most Ahl-e-Hadith madrassas, like their Deobandi counterparts, were apolitical until the early 1990s when Dr. Asadullah Ghalib, a professor of Arabic at Rajshahi University and a prominent Ahl-e-Hadith scholar, organized the Ahl-e-Hadith Andolan Bangladesh (AHAB), a religio-political outfit that sought to mobilize the Ahl-e-Hadith ulama and the youth through a single platform of their own. Dr. Ghalib launched this movement from his own madrassa, Al-Markaz-ul-Islami, near Rajshahi, and was successful in recruiting several other Ahl-e-Hadith madrassas and ulama in its fold. The movement was based primarily in about two dozen madrassas -- mostly in the northern districts of Bangladesh -- and had, therefore, ready (or captive) recruits among the young madrassa students. Although Dr. Ghalib maintained that AHAB was "a peaceful, purely religious, non-political movement",⁷⁹ his radical rhetoric, frequent calls for jihad, and his alleged links with the now-banned Jamaat-ul-Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB) of Sheikh Abdur Rahman – who was hanged, along with his fellow-traveler Siddiquul Islam alias Bangla Bhai, by a Supreme Court decision in March 2007 for his involvement in the August 2005 bombing and assassination of judges -- subsequently landed him in jail in 2005. In January 2007, Dr. Ghalib's successor as the Acting Amir of AHAB, Dr. Muslehuddin, announced the formation of a political party with the same name and declared that the party would contest next elections on its own platform of bringing about an Islamic change in society. It was not clear, however, whether this was a serious move on the part of the AHAB leadership or the announcement was only intended to bargain with the BNP on the release of Dr. Ghalib. It is a well-known fact that most of the Ahl-e-Hadith followers generally vote either for the BNP or for the Jamaat-e-Islami, a fact substantiated by the overwhelming support that these two parties receive in national elections from the northern districts.

Political Activism in the Alia Madrassas

The 'Alia madrassa teachers, and especially students, are unabashedly "political" and represent a very different picture from their Quomi madrassa counterparts. 'Alia madrassas, like most Bangladeshi colleges and universities, are hotbeds of partisan politics and their students are usually found in the forefront of political rallies organized on religious issues. Almost all major political parties have organized their students' wings in Alia madrassas. Majority of the 'Alia students are supporters of Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), the student wing of the Jamaat-e-

⁷⁹ Interview with Dr. Asadullah Ghalib, Rajshahi,

Islami, although the BNP also has also established its presence during its second stint in power. Among the religious groups besides the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Tablighi Jamaat has also made considerable headway in recent years in Alia madrassas. The ICS, however, dominates most campuses of the 'Alia madrassas throughout the country; in fact, majority of the ICS leadership at the regional and national levels is from 'Alia system. Many of the Jamaat-e-Islami leaders are also graduates of 'Alia madrassas.

Madrassas and the Question of Militancy

More serious debates in the local and international media on the politics of madrassa ulama have recently focused on the spell of terrorist activities in the country. The ideologues and leaders of the terrorist attacks of 2005 were arrested during the BNP government and were given death sentences by the Court. In March 2007, the Court's verdict was implemented and the perpetrators, including Sheikh Abdur Rahman of JMB and the so called Bangla Bhai of the JMJB were hanged. The question, however, remains as to what extent the madrassa educated students were involved in terrorist activities? Despite the media hype – and several sensational reports from the Indian intelligence sources – the evidence so far has failed to link the madrassas with terrorism.

The overwhelming majority of those arrested and convicted on charges of terrorism were operating independently of the madrassas, although a few of them had attended 'Alia madrassas in their student days. Although the initial recruitment of manpower came from among the veterans of the Afghan Jihad spread over most of the northern districts and Sylhet, the bulk of volunteers/activists who joined these two militant organizations since 2002-2003 came mostly from the Ahl-e-Hadith background and, especially, from the graduates of Ahl-e-Hadith affiliated 'Alia madrassas. Very few JMB/JMJB activists have come from the mainstream Ahl-e-Hadith Quomi madrassas, if at all. Most of the activists were recruited in neighborhood mosques after congregational prayers where initial contacts were made and, subsequently, relationships were consolidated by the local leaders/commanders of the JMB/JMJB. Another ready source for JMB manpower was the Jubo Sangha, the Ahl-e-Hadith Youth Movement, established by Dr. Ghalib as a part of his efforts to mobilize the Ahl-e-Hadith youth for religio-political activism. Abdur Rahman was able to lure many of the Jubo Sangha members to his activist and militant agenda by convincing them that "the Islamic revolution is just around the corner if only they are ready to act"

The most important thing to note about the JMB and the JMJB, however, is not their power but the lack thereof, despite their ability to stage a spectacular scene of terrorist violence in August 2005. Not only that these organizations lack any social embeddedness in the larger Bangladeshi society, but they have also been roundly condemned by an overwhelming majority of the ulama and religious political groups. The mainstream Ahl-e-Hadith organizations, and even the Ahl-e-Hadith Andolan of Dr. Asadullah Ghalib, have disassociated themselves from the terrorist violence perpetrated by the JMB and the JMJB. Hundreds of prominent ulama of Bangladesh of all schools of thought signed a fatwa condemning the August 2005 bombing and killing of judicial officials as "un-Islamic" and "deserving of the severest punishment".⁸⁰ In April 2007 again, Jamil madrassa of Bogra, the largest Quomi madrassa in North Bengal, held a national conference of the ulama for the specific purpose of "categorically denouncing violence and terrorism in the name of Islam, for any cause and any purpose" and asking the religious leaders to play their role in preventing such practices.⁸¹ In our own survey for this study, 46 out of 55 madrassa agreed that "no matter what the cause is, the killing of civilians is prohibited in Islam." The remaining nine ulama were of the view that civilians can be considered as legitimate targets only if they are known to be active participants in war efforts against Muslims.

Most observers of Bangladesh politics agree that religiously-inspired violence as witnessed in recent years may continue in some small measure as an irritant and a nuisance for the authorities, but it is doomed to extinction in a socio-political environment as inhospitable as that of Bangladesh. As Talukdar Maniruzzaman, arguably the most prominent political scientist of Bangladesh and an acute observer of his country's development, noted: "A fish, in order to survive, needs ocean, or at least a pond. The JMB fish has no water to swim ... no popular

⁸⁰ See, *The Dhaka Declaration*, published by The Misbah Foundation, Dhaka, December 2005. This is a joint statement of hundreds of ulama gathered in Dhaka, in the wake of the assassination of judges and other terrorist acts, to condemn violence in the name of Islam. Prominent ulama in Bangladesh have continued to condemn terrorist attacks. Recently, on 21 March 2007, Khatib of Baitul Mokarram Mosque, Maulana Obaidul Haque has called upon the imams of all mosques to form a musalli (regular visitors to mosques) committee at every mosque to watch and identify whether any individual or group spreads extremism in the area. The musalli committee comprising 10-12 prominent personalities of the area should find out the existence of extremist elements and try to uproot the terrorist by reporting them to the authorities, he said. *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 22 March 2007.

⁸¹ "Declaration of the Ulama Denouncing Violence and Terrorism," Jamil Madrassa, 17 May, 2007.

support. They have made a few splashes and that's it; they will have no impact on Bangladesh society.”⁸²

Neither the madrassa curriculum nor the “religious” environment of the madrassas in Bangladesh has anything that would encourage violence and terrorism. In fact, many madrassa ulama fear that, more than anything else, religious extremism is the most pernicious development that can hurt the madrassas in the long term. As one Quomi madrassa administrator told us, “We can sit down and talk to our secular critics. But how can you talk to those who are carrying guns and bombs, even though they quote the Qur'an?” It is true that there are a number of ulama who would publicly declare “jihad” and advocate “Talibanization of Bangladesh,” but, as Tajul Islam Hashmi has pointed out, “the rhetoric, wishful thinking and verbal attacks on secular law and institutions do not prove anything.”

Ulama and Politics: Limitations and Prospects

Although the ulama have been politically engaged for a long time, and have generated considerable controversies about their role in politics, they have, nevertheless, failed to find an independent political niche for themselves in Bangladesh. Interestingly, however, the ulama have been able to show their political prowess, for instance, against Taslima Nasreen or Salman Rushdie, but not so much on the frontiers of power politics, particularly if we keep in mind their performance in the elections. They have never been able to secure more than five seats in parliament. Neither have they shown any interest in municipal or local elections. It is apparent that while people listen to them on religious issues and accord them respect as religious scholars, they do not believe that the ulama can lead the nation in public policy making and foreign affairs.

At the same time, however, it is also evident that mainstream political parties can hardly ignore the ulama in their pursuit for power. This reality has been reflected in the attempts of the mainstream political parties, both secular and centrist, to form electoral alliances with traditional Islamic political groups. The strategy of bringing the ulama together under the banner of IOJ worked well for BNP in the general elections of 2001. Awami League surely had in mind the strategic usefulness of the ulama when it formed the now-scraped electoral

⁸² Interview with Talukdar Maniruzzaman, Professor of Political Science, Dhaka University, Dhaka, 31 December 2005.

alliance with Sheikhul Hadith Azizul Haq in 2006. What is interesting to note here is that although ulama and the mainstream political parties have occasionally come together for electoral purposes, their union has generally remained internally unstable, causing discomfort and suspicions on both sides.

Not surprisingly, the Awami League has been putting together its own Awami Ulama Party and BNP, in its turn, has recently formed Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Madrassa Chhatra Dal (Bangladesh Nationalist Madrassa Student Party). The country is currently under an emergency rule and all kinds of political activities are banned. The general elections originally scheduled for January 2007 are not likely to take place until the end of 2008. It is not clear what role the religious parties and the ulama will play in the new political dispensation, although it appears that they would prefer the eventual eclipse of both mainstream political parties, just in case this opens some more space for them.

F: Globalization, pluralism, gender and tolerance: The perspectives from the madrassas

This section examines the views of the students and teachers of the madrassas in Bangladesh on issues related to globalization, pluralism, gender and tolerance.⁸³

Globalization:

The concept of 'globalization', as articulated by the respondents from both Alia and Quomi streams can be summarized in the following statement that came from a respondent in Bogra: "Free flow of products, free flow of information and free flow of labor." A few respondents believed that globalization was about bringing the entire world under a single economic or business regime. Those respondents who see globalization in economic terms tend to be more supportive of it provided it brings economic growth and jobs and does not threaten national identity and interest. An extension of such idea is that globalization is welcome

⁸³ The discussion in this section is based on focus-group discussions and on responses to about 80 sets of questions sent out to different madrassas, both Alia and Quomi, in the three districts of Bogra, Jessore and Chittagong. The focus group was participated by 12 ulama and senior students associated with four madrassas, of which two were Quomi and two were Alia, in greater Dhaka. In preparing this section, we have also consulted some periodicals and publications issued by the madrassas, with contributions from teachers and students. Perspectives drawn from all the above sources on different aspects of the world-views of ulama and madrassa establishments are summarized under the following categories: globalization, education, gender, and issues relating to democracy, pluralism and toleration.

in its economic dimension, but not in its cultural consequences. Overall, our respondents saw economic globalization as a positive development, but expressed deep concern about the onslaught of Western fashions, Western movies and TV programs and foreign NGOs – all of which they identified with globalization. Some of them were also critical of the trade and aid practices of Western countries in the wake of globalization, a criticism not much different expressed in the rallies of World Social Forum.

The second largest group of respondents took an 'Islamic perspective' in explaining globalization. They saw globalization as a great opportunity for Muslims and urged the Muslim scholars, intellectuals and rulers to take advantage of the new avenues it has opened up for Islam. For instance, one respondent from an Alia madrassa in Jessore suggested that the concept of globalization came first from Islam through the annual Hajj in Makkah. Secondly, globalization, as another respondent from a Quomi madrassa put it, will bring opportunities to present Islamic values to the wider world, given the new technologies of communication available to Muslims. Thirdly, it was suggested by many respondents that globalization will facilitate sharing of ideas and experiences within the World Islamic Ummah and thus would strengthen the prospects of unity among the Muslims across the world.

A few respondents appeared to be very critical of globalization process. One respondent termed globalization as a "new version of the New World Order" that was advocated by the United States in the 1990s. There were also apprehensions that globalization may turn out to be another attempt by the Western powers to subjugate Muslim countries economically and culturally. One respondent suspected a "hidden agenda" behind the globalization movement to bring the world "under the control of Christians and Jews." In the view of a large majority of our respondents, however, Islam could not be averse to globalization because of its own universalistic and transnational orientation as well as the economic benefits that are likely to accrue from it, provided this process does not lead to the onslaught of Western cultural norms and practices.

Education:

In response to our questions relating to respondents' perception of education, there was hardly any one who was 'completely satisfied' about the quality of education, either in madrassas or in schools and colleges in Bangladesh. It was

clear that even those who are involved in madrassa education themselves feel the need for reform. Although many of them did not specify as to what type of reform was needed, but about 80 per cent of the respondents believed that it was necessary for the madrassa students to learn job-oriented technical and vocational skills so that they could earn their living outside the traditional religious sector. In response to the questions as to which 'secular' subject would they prefer to add to the madrassa curriculum, most respondents opted for Islamic History, English and Islamic Economics. A significant but relatively lesser number of respondents also put Business Studies on the top of their choice.

When we asked the respondents whether Western intellectual thought should be included in the madrassa curriculum, sixty out of the eighty respondents answered in the affirmative; 65% of them thought it was important "to successfully face the challenge of the West," 20% believed this would help them better "to know about the culture, beliefs, and ideas of the West," and 15% were of the view that this would help "create mutual understanding between Islam and the West."

Women:

On the role of women in the public sphere, the general perception is that a woman is entitled to work, earn and retain income for herself provided that she follows Islamic norms of dress. The ulama referred to the fact that the provision of Hijab is an indication that women are entitled to go out and play a role in social and economic life of society. However, almost all respondents in the focus group felt that they were not happy with the way women and female body are now used as "commercial objects", especially by the media and commercial organizations.

Relating to question of women's participation in electoral politics, while a majority (29 out of 54) believed that in an Islamic state a woman could become a member of the parliament, there were relatively few respondents (10 out of 54) who supported the idea of an Islamic state or government headed by a woman. Such response came from respondents of both Alia and Quomi streams.

It is interesting to note, however, that most of the ulama who, in principle, opposed the idea of having a woman as head of an Islamic state/government, had voted for the four-party alliance headed by Khaleda Zia in 2001. Many of them had voted for her in the earlier two elections as well. It appears that while the ulama are not prepared to concede any change in the classical

juristic formulations regarding the qualifications of a ruler of a Muslim state, they are, nevertheless, ready to make compromises in view of political exigencies. Maulana Yusuf Nizami of Jamil Madrassa told us: "Many ulama including myself supported Miss Fatima Jinnah against Field Marshall Ayub Khan in the 1964 presidential elections despite the fact that some pro-government ulama had issued a fatwa against voting for a woman candidate. Even today, I do not see any problem if people elect Khaleda Zia [of BNP] or Sheikh Hasina [of AL]. Anyone who opposes their election in the name of Islam is committing fitna (mischief)."⁸⁴The most important thing is to have a government that serves the people and does not violate Islamic principles.

Democracy, pluralism and Relations with the West

One of the major thrusts of this second-year project on Islamic education in Bangladesh relates to the perceptions of the madrassa graduates and ulama about the contemporary debates and discourses on Islam's relationship with, and attitude towards, democracy, pluralism, inter-faith relationship, freedom of expression and relationship with the West. Most respondents affirmed that Islam approves of democracy but not God-less democracy. Almost all of them expressed great dissatisfaction with the way democracy functioned in Bangladesh and blamed the politicians for corrupting the system for personal greed. Many ulama believed that the "real democracy" can only be practiced in an Islamic environment wherein only honest, God-fearing persons will be elected "who will consider themselves as servants of the people, not their rulers."

We put a cluster of questions on the types of polity that the respondents would prefer. To the question whether they would accept a dictator who is a pious Muslim, 31 respondents answered in the negative, and 22 respondents answered in the affirmative. On the question regarding the most important qualification of a Muslim ruler, only 19 mentioned Islamic religious characteristics while 33 respondents were of the view that a good ruler is the one who is just and cares about the welfare of the people. Out of fifty respondents, 32 said that they will vote for an honest non-Muslim candidate rather than voting for a corrupt Muslim. Thirty-nine out of 50 agreed that non-Muslims should enjoy the same political rights that the Muslims have in an Islamic state, while 11 were of the view that non-Muslims cannot hold the position of the head of the state in a Muslim country. On the question of religious freedom, 49 out of 53 respondents agreed that non-Muslims should have "complete religious freedom" in

⁸⁴ "Fitna" is a very pregnant Qur'anic term that covers a broad range of meanings – mischief, turmoil, riot, Rebellion, transgression, and wrongdoing at a very large scale.

Bangladesh. In Muslim majority countries, it is the utmost responsibility of the government to “protect their lives and properties.” According to a prominent Quomi madrassa scholar, “all Muslims in an Islamic state will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment if their non-Muslim fellow citizens are subjected to injustice (zulm). In fact, I believe that we Muslims should be as much concerned about the injustices inflicted on non-Muslims anywhere in the world as we are about the plight of Palestinians or Kashmiris or Chechens.”

At the same time, however, a substantial majority of the ulama (40 out of 55) thought that Christians, Jews and Hindus cannot be friends of Muslims. When we tried to further explore the rationale behind their “agree/disagree” answers in the formal questionnaire during our focus group discussions, it became apparent that their views about the Christians, Jews and Hindus were informed primarily by certain current international developments, in particular by certain policies of the Western governments, Israel and India that they perceived as anti-Muslim, and not by any inherent hostility toward the followers of these religions. Maulana Yusuf Nizami of Jamil Madrassa was of the view that not only Muslims can but “should have good relations with non-Muslims.” The following quote from Maulana Nizami aptly sums up the views of many ulama in our focus groups:

“We Muslims should never harbor feeling of enmity and hostility against any nation, whether it is America or any other country. As Muslims, our duty is to wish them well (khair khawahi); if we have some disagreement with the policies of a particular government, we must express our disagreement firmly and openly, but it is against the teachings of Islam to consider all the people of that nation as our enemies.”

Most ulama agreed that “We should have good relations with the Western countries.” As one ‘alim said: “Our religions are different but for the common good of the humanity we must all {Muslim and non-Muslim} work together.” When the ulama were asked to give their views on Professor Samuel Huntington’s thesis of the clash of civilizations, not even one of the participants in our three focus groups agreed with him. Maulana Yusuf Nizami again sums up the views expressed by most ulama:

Why should there be a clash between Islam and the West? The clash will take place only if we invade each other or interfere in each other’s religions, or we become jealous of each other. Instead of the clash of civilizations, we should talk about what we can learn from each other. The

Western people can learn many things from Islamic ethics (ikhlaq); similarly, we can learn from the Westerners their passion for service (khidmat ka jazba). I have myself seen many Western people in Bangladesh how sincerely and passionately they serve our people during floods and other disasters. This is what Muslims can learn from them.

On the question of freedom of expression, most respondents in the focus-group discussion thought that every one has a right to express what he/she thought, provided that it does not dishonor Islam or the Prophet of Islam and other religions. On the specific question of Taslima Nasreen, a Bangladeshi writer who left the country in the wake of extremist threats on her life following her controversial remarks on the Qur'an and the Prophet, the ulama were of the view that any idea of killing her would be wrong. Instead, they suggested that she should not be considered as a Muslim and be treated as a non-Muslim.

G: Conclusions

- The scope and extent of Islamic education in Bangladesh is vast. This is because Islamic education is not only provided by traditional madrassas but also by the so called secular, mainstream institutions. However, both the government-controlled Alia madrassas and the private Quomi madrassas remain the main sites for the reproduction of Islamic tradition. While the Alia madrassas have added a number of modern, secular subjects in their curriculum in order to allow their students to continue their higher education in colleges and universities and compete with the graduates of general education in the job market, the curriculum of Quomi madrassas remains exclusively focused on the training of Islamic religious functionaries – imams and khatibs of mosques, religious guides and “ministers,” preachers, and teachers in madrassas. It is in this context that the Quomi madrassa authorities do not consider the incorporation of secular subjects such as science, math, social studies or economics as relevant to their primary role in society. An Islamic scholar, in their view, is a scholar of the Quran, Hadith, Akaid (Islamic beliefs), and Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and Shariah (Islamic law), and that's what the madrassa education is – and should be – all about. The madrassa ulama, however, do feel the need for introducing the English language and some technical subjects in their curriculum for “practical reasons,” but do not

believe that all the modern, secular subjects taught in general education belong in the madrassas.⁸⁵

- Higher Islamic education in public universities, although a considerable “improvement” on the madrassa education in terms of its contents, has failed to make its mark on the Islamic intellectual landscape: vacillating between the academic needs to modernize the courses of studies on the one hand, and the pressures from the conservative forces not to go too far from the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum on the other, the public universities seem to have failed on both counts. For their counterparts in social sciences and the humanities, the Islamic Studies programs are not “sufficiently modern” and lack a critical stance that should be the hallmark of a modern university education. On the other hand, in the eyes of the religious establishment the program of studies in Islamic Studies in the universities lack the religious legitimacy of traditional Islamic institutions.
- An interesting new development in Bangladesh, as in some other Muslim countries, is the emergence of the English medium Islamic schools that cater to the urban-based middle and upper-middle class families. These are neither Quomi, nor Aliya nor secular, but tend to incorporate elements of all streams. These institutions have apparently emerged in the context of both an expanding middle class as a result of the remittances from the Bangladeshi expatriates, and a growing religious awareness that also, perhaps, is part of the middle class paraphernalia. As elite, English medium schools that prepare their students for the UK- based O and A level exams and also teach a variety of Islamic courses that are not taught in general educational institutions, they are becoming increasingly popular in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet.
- Another important new development is the emergence and increasing popularity of female religious education in Bangladesh. This is reflected not only in the growth of female madrassas and female enrollment in the Alia sector but in the Quomi madrassas as well. What is equally important to note is that majority of the female madrassa students are drawn from the middle class families. It is yet to be seen how the entry of a large

⁸⁵ It is interesting to note here that many large Quomi madrassas, including Al-Markaz-ul-Islami, a post-graduate madrassa in Bashandara, Dhaka, have introduced courses and specialization in Islamic Economics in view of the job opportunities as “religious consultants” to the Islamic banks, and all the commercial banks that have introduced “Islamic banking.”

number of trained – and madrassa certified -- female Islamic scholars in the religious sector will affect the traditional, male-dominated Islamic religious authority structure.

- The sources of madrassa funding have been a major concern among the policy circles in the West. As we have shown in our earlier report also, madrassas have rarely faced any real financial problems at any time since their inception. The Alia system continues to receive generous grants from the state treasury and the Quomi system has shown considerable ingenuity in diversifying its sources of funding. The community at large, and especially the business class and the bazaaris, continue to support the Quomi madrassas through their charitable contributions. The Quomi madrassas are also tapping into billions of Dollars of remittances sent by the Bangladeshi expatriates in the Gulf states and the Western countries. The Saudi and Kuwaiti official, semi-official and private funding to some madrassas, especially those of the Ahl-e-Hadis School, was important for their expansion and the improvement in their physical facilities but was not critical for their continued existence.
- The madrassa ulama in Bangladesh, in general, have shied away from partisan politics. What prompted some of them, however, to be more proactive in politics was the increasing electoral popularity of the Jamaat-e-Islami that they see as their religious rival; the civil society institutions' fervent campaign against "fatwabaji" that tended to malign the entire religious sector for the indiscretion of a few illiterate mullahs; and the NGOs' overtly secular/liberal approach to several social issues. The madrassa ulama, as the "guardians" of orthodox Islam, consider it their Islamic obligation to raise their voice when and if they perceive "Islam in danger." They may not be active in party politics and in day-to-day political activities but they remain vigilant as far as "Islamic" religious issues are concerned. They are also very much aware of the socio-cultural and political developments that, in their view, tend to undermine their religious authority, social influence, material interests and status as community leaders.
- The madrassa ulama in Bangladesh, without any exception, are vehemently opposed to the incidence of violence and terrorism in the name of Islam in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the world. In several conferences and declarations, they have categorically condemned such actions as un-Islamic. A prominent Deobandi madrassa scholar said that "the spread of extremist ideas and militant acts in the name of Islam in

recent years is a fitna that is as dangerous as the fitna of the *Khawaraj* (Kharajites) that toppled the rightly-guided caliphate."

- In general, the ulama are supportive of globalization provided it brings economic growth and jobs and does not threaten the national identity and interests of Bangladesh and the Muslim Ummah. They believe that globalization is welcome in its economic dimension – clearly, they had the Bangladesh garment industry in mind -- but not in its cultural consequences that could result in the Westernization of Muslim societies. Interestingly, however, the ulama also gave an Islamic perspective on globalization: that given the new technologies of communication, it will bring opportunities to present Islamic teachings to the wider world, and that globalization will facilitate sharing of ideas and experiences within the World Islamic Ummah and thus would strengthen the prospects of unity among the Muslims across the world.
- It appears that the ulama's position on democracy, status and role of women, pluralism, and the rights of religious minorities is more conservative in theory than in actual practice. They show a great deal of flexibility and pragmatism on most of these issues in their actual behavior but are not yet ready to rethink or revise some of the traditional juristic formulations regarding these questions.
- Despite their opposition to some of the policies of the Western powers, and especially of the United States, and despite their moral critique of the Western social and cultural practices, the majority of the madrassa ulama do not seem to harbor any hostility toward, or hatred of, the West. They reject outright the "clash of civilizations" thesis and believe that the Muslim World and the West must cooperate in "good deeds" and work together for the good of the humanity.

Appendix 1

A Note on Aliya Madrassa Curriculum

There have been few changes in the Aliya curriculum as far as the traditional Islamic sciences are concerned. The system has undergone considerable transformation, however, in the coverage of secular subjects and in the distribution of time allocated for different field of studies.

Currently, the Aliya education system at is divided in four levels: Dakhil, that is equivalent to Secondary School Certificate (SSC) ; Alim, that is equivalent to Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC); Fazil, that is equivalent to B.A., and Kamil, that is equivalent to M.A. In the 1984 syllabus published by the Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board, the curriculum for two-year Fazil Degree was divided into two streams: General and Science education. In the General stream, the subject categories included Tafsir, Hadith, Arabic literature (two papers), Fiqh (two papers), 'Aqai'd (Islamic beliefs), Islamic History, Bangla, and English. In addition, students were required to take any one of the following subjects: Economics and Islamic Economics, Principles of Civics and Bangladesh Civics, Muslim Philosophy and Tasawwuf, Urdu, and Persian. For the Science stream at Fazil Level, the seven compulsory subjects included Tafsir and Hadith, Arabic

Literature, Bangla, English, Physics, Chemistry, Math or Biology. Students in the Science stream are also required to take one additional course from among the following subjects: Math, Biology, Islamic Philosophy, and Economics.

Another significant change came in 1989 when, in pursuance to the decision that 'Alim degree would be equivalent to the Higher Secondary School Certificate with effect from 1987, the Science stream at Fazil level ceased to exist. This change was necessitated by the fact that the science elements had already been incorporated in the Alim curriculum. In the context of this development, the new syllabus for the Fazil level was integrated to include compulsory subjects of Bangla (or Urdu or English), Introduction to the Quran and Hadith (3 papers with 300 marks), Arabic language and Shariah (for general stream) or Tajvid-wal-Qirat (Mujavvid stream, 3 papers with 300 marks). One 300-marks optional subject was to be chosen from the following set of subjects: Islamic History, Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Bangla, Muslim Philosophy, Political Science, Economics and English. The language of instruction remained both Arabic and Bangla.

At the Kamil level, which is a two year-course, there are five divisions of subject areas: Hadith, Fiqh, Tafsir, Adab (Arabic literature), and Tajvid. Until 1987, each of the five divisions carried 1000 marks. After this date, an additional 100 marks were added to each division on account of viva voice examination. In the Hadith Division, there are six courses on Hadith, two on Tafsir and Usulut Tafsir, and two on Islamic History. In the Fiqh Division, there are two courses under five subjects which include Hadith, Kalam, Fiqh, Usulul Fiqh, and Islamic History. In the Tafsir Division, there are four courses on Tafsir, one course each on Usulut Tafsir, Tafsir ul Hadith, Fiqh ul Quran, 'Ijaz-ul-Quran and Ma'ani-ul-Quran, and two courses on Islamic History. In the Adab Division, six courses are on Arabic literature (two on ancient prose, two on ancient poetry and one each on modern prose and poetry), and one course each on Balaaghat (rhetoric), Naqdul Adab (literary criticism), Al Kitaabat wal Khitaabat (Calligraphy and Oratory), and History of the Arabic language and literature. In the Mujavvid Division, students are to take two courses on Hadith, four courses on Qirat Ash'ara, two courses on Tafsir, and two courses on the History of Islam.

Appendix 2

A Note on Quomi Madrassa Curriculum

Until the establishment of Wafaq-ul-Madaris-ul-Arabia Bangladesh (Bangladesh Quomi Madrassa Education Board) in 1978, there were no attempts to deal with the problems of anomaly within the curriculum and syllabi at the Quomi madrassas. The Wafaq has made significant efforts to bring coherence in the curriculum at least for the madrassas under its auspices. However, changes in the Quomi curriculum at the higher levels have not been as significant as they are in the 'Alia system. For decades, at the two-year Marhala-tul-Fazilat degree, the students have been required to study three courses on Tafsir; three courses on Hadith; two courses on Fiqh and Uslul Fiqh; one course each on Arabic literature, Balaaghat (Rhetoric), Kalam and Faraiz (Obligations).

In the first year of Daura-e-Hadith of the two-year Marhala-tut-Takmil (postgraduate) degree, students are now required to study twelve courses on Hadith. In the second year, students have been traditionally required to select for research purposes one of the following areas: Ulumul Quran (Quranic sciences); Ulumul Hadith (Hadith sciences); Ulumush Shariah (Shariah sciences); Lugatul Arabia (Arabic language); Ulumul Din (Religious sciences); and Qir'at and Tajvid

(recitation of the Quran). These requirements in the curriculum are now generally followed in most Quomi madrassas. The madrassas under the Wafaq, however, have recently introduced a relatively wider variety of subjects than it was available to students in the past. These subjects include: Fiqh; Arabic language and literature; Bangla language, literature and journalism; Urdu language and literature; Persian language and literature; English language and literature; Ilmul Kalam wal Akaid (theology and beliefs); Ilmut tajvid (science of the recitation of the Quran); Da'wa and Irshad (Preaching of Islam); Hikmat and Falsafa (Intellect and Philosophy); History; Ilmul Haiyat (Geography); Islamic Economics, Political science and Civics; and Tijaarat (Business & Commerce). However, except Fiqh, Akaid, Tajvid and Arabic language, only a few larger madrassas have facilities to teach these subjects. Two regional boards reported that students rarely opt for Political Science and Civics, Islamic Economics, English language and literature, Persian language and literature or Philosophy.

Appendix 3 Distribution of Female Madrassas, Students and Teachers in the 'Alia System

Table 3-A: 'Alia Madrassas: Number of Madrassas by Gender

Type	Government		Non-government	
	Total	Female	Total	Female
Fazil	-	-	1,039	24
Kamil	3	-	172	6

Table 3-B: 'Alia Madrassas: Number of Teachers by Gender

Type	Government		Non-government	
	Total	Female	Total	Female
Fazil	-	-	23, 336	1, 324
Kamil	82	2	4, 792	175

Table 3-C: 'Alia Madrassas: Enrolment in Madrassa by Gender

Type	Government		Non-government	
	Total	Female	Total	Female
Fazil	-	-	529,952	197,316
Kamil	2,378	19	133,693	27,903

Source: BANBEIS, http://www.banbeis.gov.bd/db_bb/madrasarh_education_1.htm

Appendix 4

Curriculum for Male and Female Students at Fazilat Level in Quomi Madrassas

Subjects	Books for Male Students	Books for Female Students
1. Hadith	Mishkat Sharif vol. 1	Mishkat Sharif vol. 1
2. Hadith	Mishkat Sharif vol.2	Mishkat Sharif vol.2
3. Tafsir	Tafsir-ul-Baidhavi 1 st chapter	Tafsirul Jalalain
4. Fiqh	Hidaya vol. 3	Hidaya vol. 3
5. Fiqh	Hidaya vol. 4	Hidaya vol. 4
6. Akaid	Sharhul Akaid and Al Firaqul Batela	Akidatut Tahabi
7. Usule Hadith	Sharhu Nukhbatal Fiqr	None
8. History	Islamic History Tahrik-e-Deoband	None
9. Economics	Islami Orhtonitir Adhunik Rupayan (Modern Transformations to Islamic Economics)	None

Appendix 5

Sample Budgets of Two Quomi Madrassas

Following is a sample budget of a madrassa in Chittagong that shows income and expenditure for the year September 2005-September 2006 (in Bangladesh Taka)

Income

Subscription fund	10, 57,685
Zakat, Sadaqa, Fitra	13, 12,119
Tuition fees	6, 96,674
<u>Rent from real estate and shops</u>	<u>6, 26,390</u>
Total annual income	36, 90,390

Expenditure

Salary of teachers, officers and staff	15, 89,092
Boarding	7, 08,580
Electricity, gas, water	5, 82,100
Construction of new houses and maintenance	8, 14,150
Phone, fax	59,700
Audit	12,000
Transport	55,000

Entertaining guests	36,000
D'awa, publications, cultural activities and research	60,000
Nursery	4,500
Decoration	24,000
Transfer of fund to women's branch of the madrassa	70,000
<u>Miscellaneous</u>	<u>26,000</u>
Total expenditure	40, 41,622

Total Income 36, 90,860

Total expenditure 40, 41,622

Deficit/Debt 3, 50,762

Some madrassas do not report their income and expenditure data in detail. The Jamil Madrassa of Bogra, for example, only published this much detail in their annual report of 2005-2006:

Income (in Bangladeshi TK)

Donations for kitchen fund	35, 76,214
Donations for general fund	73, 44,233
Total income	1, 09, 20,447

Expenditure

Kitchen Fund	27, 70,457
Other expenses	76, 42,768
Total expenses	1, 07, 13,225

Surplus 2, 07,222

