Teacher evaluation by students

For the greater benefit of our students as future stakeholders of democracy and national development, it is important to introduce the proposed evaluation system. The outcomes will be positive and manifold.

S. M. Anwaruddin

THE relationship between teachers and students in our education system is similar to what Paulo Freire, a famous Brazilian educator and writer, calls "banking concept of education." In this type of education, a teacher is a depositor and students are the depositories. Students are considered empty accounts to be filled by their teachers. Freire suggests that the dichotomy between teacher and student be eliminated. Both teachers and students should be equal participants in classrooms. A teacher should teach and learn; a student should learn and teach. Thus, Freire's view on education and pedagogical practices is very democratic.

I do not think that our students at any level enjoy this democratic participation in their learning. Freire would tell us to have a "dialogue" between teachers and students, which must be based on "love, humility, and faith" if we wanted mutual trust between our students and teachers. Unfortunately, the existing student-teacher relationship does not seem to be founded upon love, humility, and faith.

In my experience of education through primary school to university, students' opinions matter very little or not at all. For many, one of the key criteria of academic success is whether or not your teachers like you. Students are afraid of sharing their opinions lest they should contradict their teachers. At university level, students in their freshman year vie with each other in order to become the teachers' favourite student. It is also a common practice among students to ask their senior students about what a particular teacher likes in students' tasks and assignments. It indicates that a student wants to work in a way that a particular teacher likes, and earns a better grade.

Moreover, students hardly receive an assessment of their academic performance. What they get for their assignments and exam scripts is a grade. This does not help students at all. They need to know how they can improve. A university student told me that she wanted to know why she received a grade lower than her expectation, and the teacher said: "It needs to be better." But the teacher never explained how the assignment could be better.

What I learned from another graduate student, who was having a hard time choosing her thesis topic, was alarming. Every time she went to her supervisor, he rejected the topic, saying "it is not a good topic." But, unfortunately, he neither suggested a topic nor guided the student through the process of selecting a research topic. These examples indicate a sort of rigidity in teachers' attitudes and carelessness towards students' learning and development.

This is, however, not entirely an individual teacher's fault. It is rather a generational practice. What I mean by generational practice is that today's teachers were students yesterday. They practice what they learned from their earlier generation. Like any generation, they are also handing this practice down to their next generation. This cyclical process of teachers' authoritarian practices, and separating students from the process of effective learning, has many negative effects on democracy and equality. One of them is transmission of authoritarian behaviour to students who will eventually assume crucial social or political roles.

To claim that all teachers are authoritarian will be a hasty generalisation, though some students are shocked by their teachers' behaviour. We have also seen that students have to demand publication of their results. Unnecessary delay in publishing the results has a negative impact on a student's career. Another example of teachers' irresponsible behaviour is teaching fewer classes than required for a course. Many of them are often found involved in political affairs, personal business, private tutoring, or other part-time jobs. If teachers are live models for students, then what do these activities teach their students?

It is not easy to change these practices overnight. Moreover, exclusion of students from the educational process has also become a part of academic culture. As a matter of fact, a young teacher who suffered from this problem a few years ago as a student is now with the teachers. Another obstacle is that human beings are generally reluctant to go out of their comfort zone. Who wants to share power with others? This power-sharing will also incur more work for the teachers because checks-and-balances will make them more responsible towards their duties. We need to change these views if we want to build a truly educated and democratic nation.

Changing any age-old tradition is easier said than done. First of all, we need to have love, humility, and faith. As the architects of this nation, our teachers need to include their students in the educational process. One of the first initiatives in this inclusion should be teacher evaluation by students.

If we believe in democracy, we should also believe that everybody has to be accountable. To whom, then, is a teacher accountable? At present, the answer seems to be the administration of an educational institution. But, how can the administration know about a teacher's performance? The administration is not the primary audience of a teacher!

Teachers' main responsibility is to effectively teach their students; therefore, they should be accountable to the students. The students should be the main evaluators of teachers' performance. Anonymous teacher evaluation by students at the end of each semester or academic year can no doubt help eliminate the vertical power relationship between teachers and students. A few universities have already introduced teacher evaluation by students. This is definitely a ray of hope for a democratic education system.

Now we need an obligatory implementation of teacher evaluation at all academic institutions. For the greater benefit of our students as future stakeholders of democracy and national development, it is important to introduce the proposed evaluation system. The outcomes will be positive and manifold.

First, teachers will be mindful of their job responsibilities. For example, they will teach the required number of classes for each course. Second, they will receive feedback from students regarding their teaching procedures. They may need to change their teaching methods and do further study for effective teaching. Third, the feedback received from students' comments will help them reflect on their
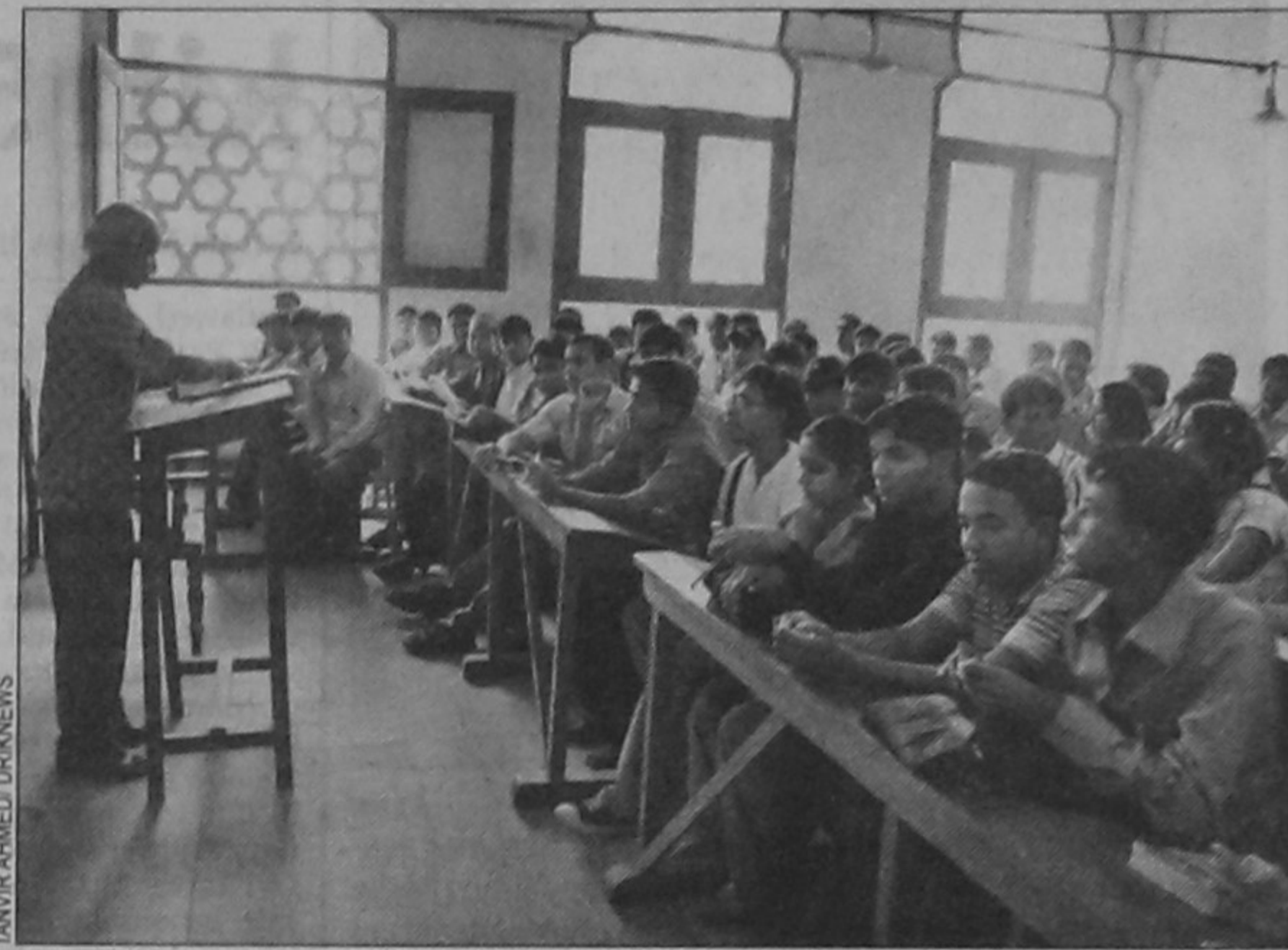
Teachers, too, should be graded.

performance. And this reflection is the main key to teachers' professional development. Finally, the evaluation by the students will work as a check on discrimination, negligence, and favouritism. Thus, the proposed evaluation system will encourage the authoritarian teachers to change their behaviour.

The administration should quantify and score the evaluation for each teacher and keep the records for future uses such as promotion, tenure, and so forth. Then the evaluation results should be given to the teachers after they submit the students' final grades. Now the teachers will have an opportunity to reflect on their own teaching during the previous semester or year. Thus, every semester/year, teachers will get a chance to work on their professional development.

If we believe that education should be democratic and all of us can learn from others, then, as teachers, we should not have any problem in accepting the students' opinions and judgments. One thing that deserves to be restated is that the anonymity of this evaluation process has to be strictly maintained.

I, therefore, propose that our government make it obligatory for each academic institution to have students evaluate their teachers at the end of each semester or academic year. And by respecting students' views and involving them in an active learning process, we as teachers can serve as live models for students through our words and behaviour.

S.M. Anwaruddin Khan is a Lecturer of English (on study leave) at Brac University Centre for Languages.

Progress and challenges

Overall, improvement in physical facilities, teachers' education and training, and learning provisions for the primary education system was noticed during the past decade; however, the improvement was uneven. Madrasas and the non-government primary schools often lack basic minimum standards.

Samir Ranjan Nath

PRIMARY education in Bangladesh is compulsory by law and, according to the constitution, the government is responsible for providing such education to all. Bangladesh is committed to achieving the second MDG by providing quality primary education. Both the government and the non-government agencies initiated programs to achieve this.

Distribution of free textbooks to all students and stipend (upabritti) for the poorer are two significant state initiatives. In addition, non-formal schools offer a second chance to the poor and disadvantaged. The latest Education Watch report captured the primary education development in Bangladesh during the past decade (1998-2008). This article provides some observations from the report.

Overall, improvement in physical facilities, teachers' education and training, and learning provisions for the primary education system was noticed during the past decade; however, the improvement was uneven. Madrasas and the non-government primary schools often lack basic minimum standards. Shortcomings were found in the teachers' subject-based training, management training of the heads and effective functioning of the school managing committees. Dependence on private tutoring has increased over time.

Net primary enrolment had increased at a rate of 1.4% during 1990-2005 (from 60% in 1990 to 87% in 2008) but became stagnant afterwards due to significant fall in some areas among children aged six years. Multiple causes were found behind dropping out of eligible children. Parental unwillingness, refusal of admission by schools, lack of interest in the children, poverty, disability, and distance between home and school are major reasons for dropping out. A huge wastage takes place in the system. Half of the enrolled children drop out before completing the full course. Such high dropout indicates lack of quality provisions, loss of secure
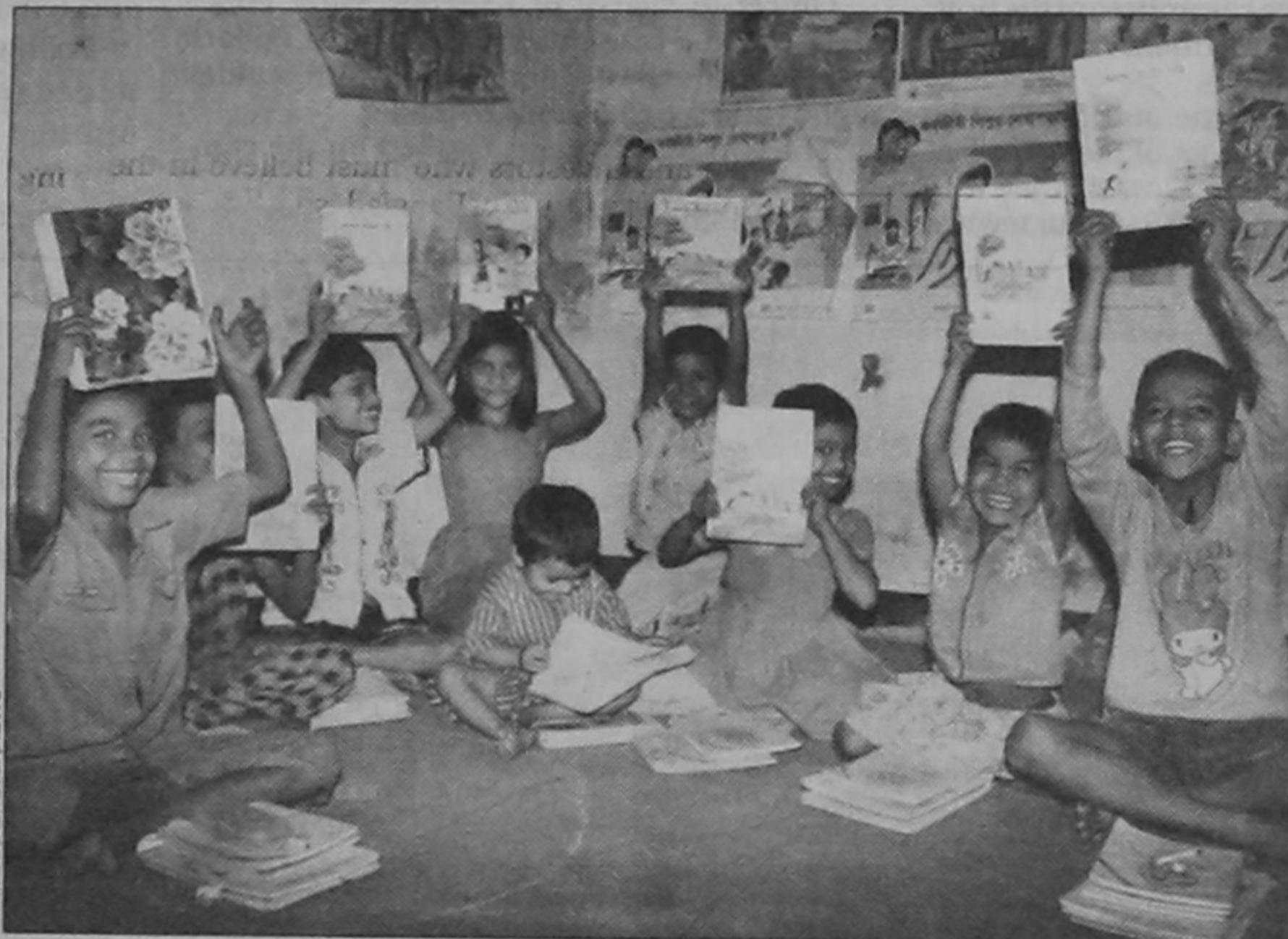
Nurture this desire to learn.

resources and thus, inefficiency in the system.

Students' learning achievement improved, but far from expectations. Inequities in gender, school type and residence are some related issues linked to the quality of the system. Learning achievement depended more on background characteristics of the students and on private tutoring than on school-related factors.

Girls are ahead of boys in terms of enrolment, attendance, survival and completion, but are significantly behind in learning achievement. Female participation in the teaching profession increased significantly but their numbers are still low in leadership of the institutions and participation in school managing committees.

Madrasas are lagging behind in most quality indicators. Poor educational provisions in these institutions are partly to blame for this. These institutions use separate textbooks and a majority do not have basic minimum infrastructure and learning facilities. Lack of trained teachers is a serious problem in the madrasas. Women's participation in teaching, school leadership and SMC is the lowest in madrasas.

Non-formal primary schools have been contributing significantly to achieving EFA. As a supplementary to the mainstream education provision, it caters to 9.6% of the total primary enrolments. Although these schools do not have enough physical facilities, like mainstream schools, they are sometimes better endowed than other types in terms of educational software, such as teacher training, teaching-learning provisions, child-friendly environment, teacher attendance and parental participation, leading to better outcomes, such as student attendance, cycle completion and learning achievements.

To face the challenges, the government should lead in coordinating primary education in the country through decentralisation at the upazila level. A minimum standard of quality should be maintained among various types of primary schools. The state should provide necessary financial support to have basic minimum facilities in all schools.

Pre-primary education should be confined only to children below age six. To ensure admission of children of age six in class I, campaigns of various forms should be considered. Non-formal schools should be established on an urgent basis where there is no school. Collaboration between the government and agencies implementing non-formal programs through a task force could be considered as a public-private partnership (PPP) being promoted by the government.

We have reasons to be happy about the achievement of gender parity at the participation level, but there is no need to be complacent about it. More policy action is needed through affirmative actions to place more females as heads of educational institutions, including madrasas and school managing committees.

It is well understood that the "business as usual" approach will not work much. To come out of such an approach, strong political commitment for a major overhaul in the education sector is required. Vision 2021 or Digital Bangladesh or any other developmental goal cannot be achieved without proper development of our human resources. A regular education budget will not be able to do much.

A large portion of the provision of "block allocation" in the national budget 2009-10 can be utilised for education, in addition to its usual allocation. Massive changes in teacher education capable of impacting classroom culture and school discipline, subvention to the schools and madrasas to create a minimum standard for educational facilities to reduce inequities among the educational institutions and establishing a strong monitoring mechanism should be priority activities with this allocation.

Samir Ranjan Nath is a Research Coordinator at Brac and Principal Researcher, Education Watch. Email: nath.sr@brac.net

Fighting bigotry

It is a hideous sin to promote violence and exclusion in the name of Islam since it contradicts the Quran's and the Prophet's teachings.

Mubashar Hasan

ISLAM is a religion of peace. By no mean does it promote violence or hatred, rather it promotes pluralism, human rights and peaceful co- existence in a society. Moreover, Islam promotes democratic values in governing systems since establishing Adl (justice) in a society by engaging in dialogue is a very important part of Quranic teaching.

It is sad to see that various groups of extremist and radicals in Bangladesh are promoting exclusion and violence in the name of Islam through activities that are against the beautiful values of Islam.

What is more alarming is that, according to various reports, these organisations have successfully managed to recruit some educated young people through their propaganda campaign. As a result, a number of university students have turned into activists, whom I call "Islamists" here, of such parties.

They are, unfortunately, acting against our democracy by demanding the establishment of Sharia law (without any proper outline or understanding of what they really mean by this) or a Caliphate system, which was a system installed by Muslims rulers before the concept of nation states had evolved (who were not exclusive or violent towards the citizens, including non-Muslims) and dissolved after the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate in the 1920s.

The government was right in banning such parties, and should promote an information dissemination campaign that can counter the intellectual corruption of the bigots. The government must curb the recruitment of the youth in the banned Islamist parties since many young educated Bangladeshis are sympathetic to Islam without having proper understanding of the religion. This is because of the cultural orientation in the family and society, which developed the Muslim identity within them.

The siege of Kaba Sharif by young Muslim gunmen who stormed into the Muslims' holiest shrine on November 20, 1979 is an example of how "Islamists" can use propaganda for a wrong cause in the name of Islam. They had propagated for years before the bloody siege that the world was coming to an end and they found the Mahadi who could save it.

Based on this, they claimed that the regime of Saudi King Khaled was illegal and un-Islamic. That long siege of the Kaba Sharif resulted in hundreds of deaths, and also prompted an international diplomatic crisis.

Therefore, in this globalised world, where the role of mass media is critical in promoting democracy, the government as well as civil society members who believe that development of Bangladesh lies in the successful establishment of a democratic government must engage in information warfare against these bigots.

The democratic views of Islam should be promoted through TV and radio channels, as well websites and newspaper editorials.

For example, concerned authorities can explain that shura is the source of democratic values in Islam, and is mentioned in at least nine Qur'ānic verses -- 21 : 23; 2:256; 42: 38;22:41;3:104,110;2:233;31:17 and 3:159. Shura, in general, refers to mutual consultation. The Qur'an makes shura -- participation with others in making decisions that concern them -- subsequent to faith in God, and next to prayer.

Therefore, it should be made clear that those who do not want to engage in consultation or in dialogue by participating in appropriate political culture, but prefer to blow up fellow countrymen, can by no mean be seen as ambassadors of Islam.

Moreover, to refute the claim of extremists or radicals when they say that every non-Muslim is the enemy of Islam, the example of Prophet Muhammad (sm), who established the first Islamic state of Medina in the seventh century, should be cited. Through Articles 16 and 17 of the Medina Charter, Prophet Muhammad made it clear that non-Muslims residing in Medina were to be treated equally. According to the Quranic verse 10:19, the whole of humankind was not but one community (ummatun wahidatan) since God created the whole earth.

Islam promotes peaceful coexistence.

Therefore, it should be mentioned clearly in the proposed information war against violent "Islamists" that it is a hideous sin to promote violence and exclusion in the name of Islam since it contradicts the Quran's and the Prophet's teachings. In that way perhaps the young and educated Muslim minds in the country will stop being sympathisers of these bigots.

Mubashar Hasan is Manager, Administration & Communications Secretariat, South Asia Network of Economic Research Institutes (SANEI), Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies. His views by no mean reflect the views of SANEI or BIDS.