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Issue Brief

De-radicalisation of Youth through Education

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The Pakistani state and society have been affected immensely by the menace of terrorism and one of its concomitant is radicalisation. The country's tolerant culture and religious ethos have been severely damaged by it. Pakistan faces an existential threat at the hands of growing radicalisation. The deaths of more than 130 school children in the terrorist attacks in Peshawar on the Army Public School in December 2014, and the recent terror attack in Lahore on 27 March, 2016 are sobering reminders of that threat. With over-whelming revolution in communications and technology, Pakistan, as a state and society, needs to ask the question: why is Pakistan under constant threat of violence and radical elements?

Unsettling socio-political and economic structures, out-dated education system and weak governance system provides a perfect breeding ground for radical ideas to grow. The roots of radicalisation in Pakistan can be traced back to the Afghan war of the 1980s when Pakistan's strategic engagement in Afghanistan introduced radical elements in Pakistan. Later on, the Iranian revolution of 1979 triggered yet another ideological war in the region. As a result, radicalisation was further fanned in Pakistan. Beginning of the 21st century saw the onset of Global War on Terrorism. This war intensified the thrust of radicalism in Pakistan and, as a consequence, the cumulative effects of religious sectarian violence increased.

The image of Pakistan's society in the world is extremely negative which is far from the reality. The radicalised segment does not represent or reflect the thinking and preferences of the mainstream Pakistani society. The middle class in Pakistan is growing rapidly, and the youth, which form the bulk of the Pakistani population (65% as of 2015), is going to universities and colleges acquiring education. The youth belonging to lower classes who cannot afford higher education needs to be provided with training and mentoring for skill development and to turn them into productive labour. The number of radicalised youth is extremely low in Pakistan as compared to states facing the menace of radicalisation in rest of the world.

Following the military operations in South and North Waziristan, the Government of Pakistan initiated steps for establishing de-radicalization camps and initiating madrassa reforms across the country under its National Action Plan (NAP) in January 2015. These steps and programmes were launched to bring the militants and radicalised individuals into mainstream. The de-radicalisation camps are being run by the provincial governments along with the assistance of psychologists, psychiatrists and other experts from the military and intelligence agencies. The federal government of Pakistan has termed the de-

radicalisation as the most important step in the National Action Plan (NAP). The Swat de-radicalisation camps namely Sabaoon (morning light), Mishal (light/radiance), Sparley (spring), Rastoon (Place of the Right Path), Pythom and Heila (hope), were established in 2009 for the rehabilitation of militant detainees, after they were arrested during the military operation. Another de-radicalisation camp was established in 2015 by the efforts of Punjab Police. Technical education, motivation and imparting of real teachings of Islam are also included in the curriculum taught in these de-radicalisation camps. The government of Pakistan introduced the madrassa reforms as a part of NAP. These reforms require the madrassas to be properly registered with the government, and equip the faculty and staff of the madrassas to give quality mental and physical education. This needs to be done in order for the madrassas to be in sync with the national curriculum, standards and fulfill the requirements of modern international educational values. The results of these programmes have been really positive and encouraging. An over-whelming number of madrassas operating under the radar before (15,000 to 20,000 according to official statements) have now registered with the government. They have also been subjected to periodic auditing of their finances and sources of income. Efforts have been made to re-induct numerous radicalised individuals into the society as productive and law-abiding citizens. The proof of this change can be seen in the interviews given by the graduating members of these de-radicalisation camps who admit to the fact that these camps have helped them turn their lives around for the better and changed them for good.

To overcome the challenge of radicalisation among the youth, Pakistan has introduced a comprehensive de-radicalisation policy. Pakistan is fighting both the reality and the ideality of the challenge through an extensive grass-root community approach. It is determined to deal with restructuring and maintenance of check and balance system of madrassas all over the country on priority basis, and try to establish a dynamic education system for the madrassas which is in line with popular religious consensus and promotes inter-faith harmony. The Government of Pakistan gives high priority to implement such measures because a cohesive, focused and well-planned education system produces responsible citizenry.

At present, the madrassas lack the proper means to provide holistic education and adequate skills to their students to become productive citizens of the country. This ultimately results in unemployment, progression of extremism and increase in the criminality which is also a form of radicalisation. It is necessary to clarify that all madrassas do not radicalise or encourage extremism. Pakistan government is now making sure that all the madrassas in the country are adequately equipped to deal with the

educational, physical and psychological needs of their students by giving them special funds, incentives and a consolidated system for registering their institutions in an easy manner.

Pakistan is constantly striving to curb radicalisation in a robust manner. However, it still needs to come up with a state-society response against the hazards of radicalisation. It can start with harmonising the curriculum of madrassas with that of the national curriculum. Apart from religious education, the madrassas should also deliver education of natural and social sciences to their students as well. De-radicalisation camps and programmes conducted across the country should further be strengthened to have a deeper impact. The radicalised people and their ideas do not speak for Pakistan and Islam. Their twisted ideology needs to be countered through Pakistan's own narratives. And finally, Pakistan should give a clear message to all states, be they friendly or hostile, that Pakistan will never allow its soil to be used by others to carry out their own perverted foreign policy agendas at any cost.