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Pakistan: Need to Proclaim Emergency on Education

Pakistan is a nuclear capable state in possession of two types of atom bombs. One is aimed at thwarting external dangers

One-fifth of the public schools have neither electricity nor drinking water. One-quarter of the public schools do not have furniture and every 7th school does not have a toilet.

and is used as a strategic deterrence while the other is internally destructive as it promotes ignorance, crime, violence and extremism. The second of the two bombs is far more dangerous - and the situation is deteriorating not improving.

Dismal State of Education:

Of the 192 member-states of the United Nations there are only handfuls where primary school enrollment is receding in comparison with the growth of the national population. Pakistan is one of them. In the developing world, Pakistan is one of the least spending 200 countries and ranked 132 according to a World Bank report. This report also cites that three out of five people in Pakistan are illiterate. Nearly 46 percent people of Pakistan's most populated province, Punjab, are illiterate. There are almost 8 million children ranging between 5-8 years of age who have no access to the educational facilities. Almost 40 percent of Punjab's population comprises of youth less than 14 years of age and half of them cannot get education because of either their poverty or lack of public institutions. All over Pakistan, nearly 70 million people are under the age of 18 including 20.6 million children of the age of 5 years. Almost 23 million of these 70 million are between the age group of 16-18 years and do not have any skill or education. This is the group that can be detrimental in either the destruction or development of Pakistan in years to come.

Pakistan has nearly 2.8 million educational institutions and the number of public sector educational institutions is less than 0.5 million.

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Out of this "less than 0.5 million," the total number of the primary schools is nearly 125,000 with the least of facilities, poorly trained or no teachers. Some 45 percent Pakistani children have to quit education before reaching the 5th grade and according to the government's own survey in the beginning of 2008, at least one in every 40 public schools did not have a boundary wall. One-fifth of the public schools have neither electricity nor drinking water. One-quarter of the public schools do not have furniture and every 7th school does not have a toilet. Thousands are "ghost schools" where the local influential people do not let the government staff into the buildings and use school buildings as stables for their animals.

In such a situation, where would the poor man go to get his children educated?

Situation and Expert's Opinion:

Madrassahs are their natural choice where the students are provided food, shelter and clothing. At these Madrassahs, almost the entire enrollment comes from the poor class where standards of these basic amenities do not matter; their availability does. The Pakistani government at the moment needs to realize and put right the priorities of the state. Pakistan was never conceived as a national security state but as a social welfare state and there are numerous references from Jinnah's speeches to this account. It never was to become a theocracy but a Westminster Democracy. The present government claims to represent the poor people of Pakistan but the amount reserved for the education during the fiscal year

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2008-09 is only an "optical illusion," in words of renowned educationalist, Professor Dr. Abid Hussnain at Karachi University. The amount reserved for education during the year is Rs. 24.6 billion which is Rs. 100 million more than the previous year's allocation. Dr. Hussnain estimated that this amount would be used not to improve the condition of the education but this

amount is allocated to meet the promises of salary increments. “State of education would not remain as it is; it would further deteriorate,” he observed.

An amount of Rs. 6.3 billion is reserved for “development projects” under the Education Division (ED). This allocation is less than

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previous year’s allocation of Rs. 6.5 billion. Instead of registering an increase, this crucial social sector has seen a decrease in the

financial allocations. The net impact of this allocation is further reduced if the hike in inflation is considered in Pakistan in the recent past.

Colleges for Cadets and Women:

The ED plans to establish 42 colleges & institutions and there are only 8 for women while 34 are for men. A total of Rs. 250 million will be spent on the construction of these institutions for females and interestingly, out of these six will be constructed in or around Islamabad, the Federal Capital, while the remaining two will be developed in Balochistan. One college will be constructed in Kohlu while the other, a polytechnic institute, in Turbat.

An astonishing factor is the focus of the ED to establish or develop the Cadet Colleges in Pakistan. A total of 25 Cadent Colleges will either be constructed or developed in Pakistan. All of these colleges are meant for boys and act as the primary source of recruitment in Pakistan’s armed forces. A total of Rs. 910 million will be spent on these colleges as compared to Rs. 772 million in the last year. This amount is expected to further go up as there are six Cadet Colleges which the government would support but has not been allocated any money thus far in the Federal Budget document.

The total number of development projects is 118 and 33 out of this number are mentioned in the budget document without any allocation. In the

last year budget document, government failed to spend a single rupee on nearly 40 projects out of the total identified 104. This year, the performance is expected not to be much different as many civil society and educational activists are skeptical

The higher education sector has been given only Rs. 15 billion and the public universities will suffer because of lack of resources.

Nations are not built on arsenals of destruction. Nations are built on the capacities to develop and education plays the most crucial role in it. With such an allocation by the “people’s government” on education, state and future of education in Pakistan looks extremely bleak.