

## PART 7: SEMINARIES

### SEMINARIES

**NAP POINT 10:** Registration and regulation of religious seminaries.

#### 7.1 Introduction

Our seventh theme looks at the controversial topic of seminaries or madrassas, as addressed by the 10<sup>th</sup> point in the National Action Plan (NAP).

A full 13 months into the NAP, and the government has yet to decide on an agreed-upon process for data collection and registration of seminaries. Regulation and reform can only happen further down the line once the initial registration is streamlined and Pakistani authorities have a better sense of the number and scope of seminaries operating in the country. A total of 182 seminaries have also been closed during this period.<sup>1</sup>

#### 7.2 Seminaries in Pakistan

##### 7.2.1 Number of Seminaries

NACTA's former National Coordinator's statement about Pakistan's inability to determine the exact number of seminaries is not without merit. Therein exists one of the biggest issues with seminary regulation, because the authorities are unclear as to how many madrassas operate in the country. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, which happens to work in close coordination with Ittehad-e-Tanzeemat-e-Madaris Pakistan (ITMP)<sup>2</sup>, claims there are 26,131 madrassas in its record. The breakdown is 14,768 madrassas in Punjab, 7,118 in Sindh, 2,704 in Balochistan, 1,354 in KP and 187 in Islamabad. Unregistered madrassas are a different story altogether, as the Ministry of Religious Affairs claims there are 4,135 unregistered madrassas in KP, 2,411 in Punjab, 1,406 in Sindh, 266 in Balochistan, and 31 in Islamabad.<sup>3</sup> The primary reason for lack of registration compliance of these madrassas is differences with the government over curriculum and beliefs.

<sup>1</sup> Questions and Oral Answers, 28th session of the National Assembly. (2016, January 15). Retrieved March 15, 2016, from [http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/questions/1452850149\\_459.pdf](http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/questions/1452850149_459.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> ITMP is an umbrella organization of madrassas or seminaries. This is one of the two bodies that keeps tracks of the number of seminaries, the other being the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

<sup>3</sup> Ghiskori, Z. (2015, January 25). Reforming madrassas: The revolution within - The Express Tribune. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from <http://tribune.com.pk/story/825216/the-revolution-within/>

However, ITMP itself counts 35,377 registered seminaries alone, schooling some 3.5 million children. This number is broken down into 13,000 registered madrasahs operating in Balochistan, 16,000 in Punjab, 3,136 in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP), 2,800 in Sindh and 401 in Islamabad.<sup>5</sup>

This confusion was only exacerbated in October 2015, when the National Internal Security Policy (NISP) 2014-2018 was instituted. Subsequently 26,000 madrasahs were found registered and 15,000 left to be registered. In KP 26% of seminaries are allegedly not registered. Punjab has 6,000 registered seminaries out of 12,000, Sindh has 6,503 registered seminaries over 9,590 in total. Islamabad has 446 registered seminaries over 633 in total. The rounded nature of these figures is especially curious.

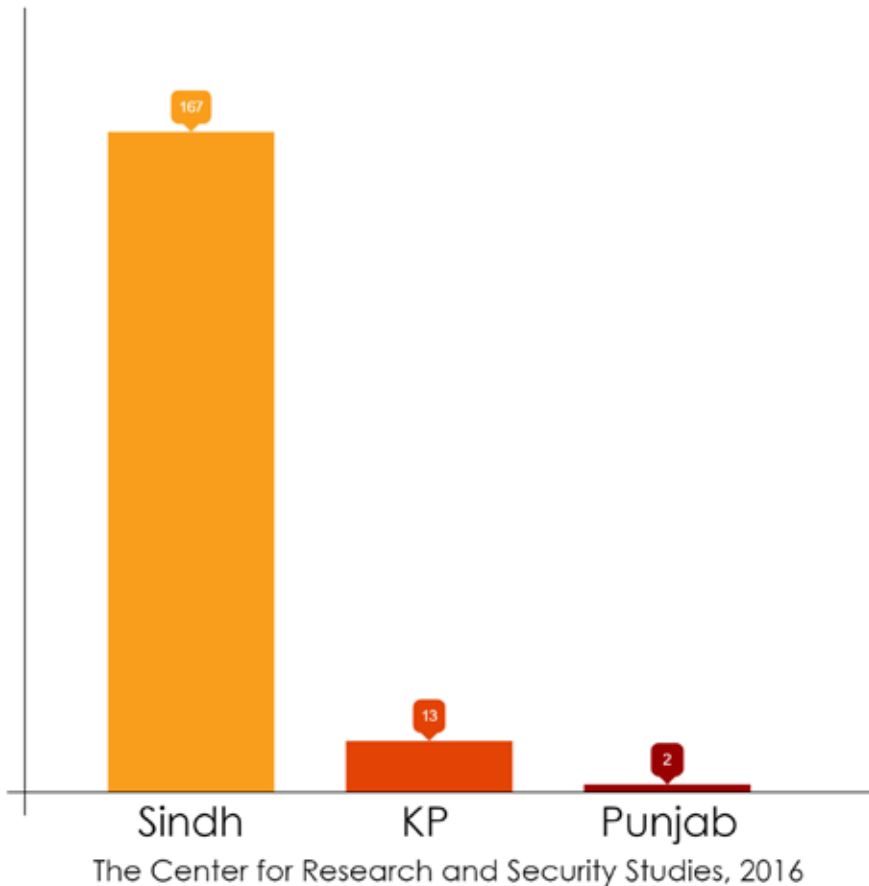
To state the obvious, the mechanism for the registration and documentation of seminaries is the first step. Regulation and reform of these institutions comes at a later stage. It is also important to understand why 3.5 million children in Pakistan attend seminaries, and the history of seminary reform.

### 7.2.2 Government Progress

In June 2015, the former National Coordinator of NACTA Hamid Ali Khan declared that the government failed to determine the exact number of religious seminaries in country.<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control presented a report in the National Assembly in January, 2016. According to that report a uniform registration and data form had been developed jointly by NACTA and the ITMP and has been dispatched to the concerned provincial and federal security institutions for seeking their opinion. Further, the report asserts that 182 madrasahs have been shut down, 167 in Sindh, 13 in the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa and 2 in Punjab.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Khan, A. (2015, June 02). Fresh revelations: Anti-terror plan fails to achieve goals - The Express Tribune. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from <http://tribune.com.pk/story/895997/fresh-revelations-anti-terror-plan-fails-to-achieve-goals/>.

**Graph 7.1 Number of Seminaries closed by the Government**

In order to expand learning system in seminaries, an Islamic Education Commission was set up by the Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony in August 2015.<sup>5</sup> For the appropriate execution of the NAP, the government also conducted a meeting with the leaders of religious madrassas of different sects in September 2015. The highlights of the meeting are as follows:

- Prime Minister requested officials to support the registration and regulation of seminaries.
- A consensus among the governments and clergy was maintained over seminaries reform.

<sup>5</sup> Ali, K. (2015, August 13). Education commission proposed to reform seminaries. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1200180>.

- Interior minister articulated that the government will formulate some strategic plans for the funding coming from overseas.
- The presence of Chief of army staff (COAS) in meeting was appreciated.
- Religious scholars criticized government for its scrutiny system of madrassas and declared that there is no difference between madrassas and formal education institutes.<sup>6</sup>

The government and delegates of seminaries mutually decided that the seminaries would maintain their financial dealings via banks. The seminaries decided to include modern subjects in their syllabus comprising of O/A level. A committee was established under the control of interior minister. The committee comprise of education ministries of federal and provincial level and ITMP for registration of seminaries.<sup>7</sup>

In order to control the financial transactions of seminaries, the government of Punjab has decided to propagate an ordinance. A draft of the Proposed Charities Act 2015 was set up in this regard,<sup>8</sup> which requires all transactions to be conducted through a bank.<sup>9</sup>

Geo-tagging of madrassas was carried out in September 2015 under the umbrella of the NAP. Mapping of madrassas has been completed in Punjab, Islamabad Capital Territory, and Azad Kashmir.<sup>10</sup> Sindh Home Secretary stated that a total of 3,662 madrassas were included from Sindh in geo-tagging. 6,503 seminaries have been found registered out of 9,590. The number of students enrolled in unregistered seminaries in Sindh alone is 517,695.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Abrar, M. (2015, September 08). With army chief on table, PM brings clergy on board. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from <http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/09/08/national/with-army-chief-on-table-pm-brings-clergy-on-board/>.

<sup>7</sup> Mukhtar, I. (2015, September 08). Madrassas agree on funds through banks. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from <http://nation.com.pk/editors-picks/08-Sep-2015/madrassas-agree-on-funds-thru-banks>.

<sup>8</sup> The News. (2015, September 18). Punjab to bring law for regulating funding of seminaries, NGOs. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-39733-Punjab-to-bring-law-for-regulating-funding-of-seminaries-NGOs>.

<sup>9</sup> Hanif, I. (2015, September 09). Punjab drafts bill on charities surveillance. Retrieved May 06, 2016, from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1205820>.

<sup>10</sup> Ghumman, K. (2015, April 10). 30 seminaries closed, says minister. Retrieved February 23, 2016, from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1199516>.

<sup>11</sup> Staff Report. (2015, September 10). Country's one-third madrassas now under radar. Retrieved February 23, 2016, from <http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/09/10/national/countrys-one-third-madrassas-now-under-radar/>.

## 7.3 Understanding Seminaries

### 7.3.1 Schools of Thought

In Pakistan, there are specifically five types of seminaries<sup>12</sup>:

Name	Sub-sect	Place	Date of establishment
Wafaq-ul-Madaris-al-Salafia	Ahl-e-Hadith	Faisalabad	1955
Wafaq-ul-Madans Pakistan	Shia	Lahore	1959
Wafaq-ul-Madaaris	Deobandi	Multan	1959
Tanzeem-ul-Madaaris	Barelvi	Lahore	1960
Rabta-tul-Madaaris-al-Islamia	Jamaat-e-Islami	Lahore	1983

Each of these offers a school of thought that varies along a few key parameters. i.e. they are not homogenous. However, data suggests that those that attend seminaries in Pakistan primarily do that for economic reasons, not religious ones.

### 7.3.2 A Brief History

Initially, madrassas were centers of education, both religious and secular. They earned the title of “trust institutions” over time, as they provided social services to poor families, such as food, shelter, clothing and free education. It must be stated that part of the reason for rise in seminary education and housing was the state’s failure to address basic needs for the population. Parents, who made less than two dollars per day, started seeing madrassas as a beacon of hope, a way to help the family survive, where their children could learn to read, write, and also be clothed, fed and have a roof over their heads.

This is the central argument upon which rests the severe backlash from the religious right, whenever the state of Pakistan attempts to regulate seminaries. However, as with everything else, the scope and scale of madrassas also morphed over time.

Over the course of time, funding became an issue, as madrassas expanded. There was overt involvement of various Muslim states in the financial backing of religious seminaries. A Wikileaks cable suggests that an estimated \$100 million made its way annually from Gulf States to seminaries in Pakistan. Ostensibly, this is to support continued religious education and social services. But analysts have long

<sup>12</sup> Shabir, G., Abbasi, S. M., & Khan, A. (2012). Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences, 32(1), 2012th ser., 147-156. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from [http://www.bzu.edu.pk/PJSS/Vol32No12012/Final\\_PJSS-32-1-11.pdf](http://www.bzu.edu.pk/PJSS/Vol32No12012/Final_PJSS-32-1-11.pdf).

suspected militancy ties.

### 7.3.3 Militant Connection?

The idea that madrassas are “incubators of violent extremism” took hold after 9/11, and the US also pressured General Pervaiz Musharraf to do something about the schools. While several reports, including the Annual Status of Education Report Pakistan, claim that there is no connection between seminaries and militancy, several facts work against this notion.

The most overt and public display of the strength of madrassas was the Red Mosque standoff in 2007, where armed students engaged in a hostile and bloody standoff with state authorities for several days. Further, both the NAP and the NISP call for registration, regulation and reform of madrassas, a tacit acceptance that there lies a problem.

Further a Brookings Institute research in 2010 claimed that 82% of students in Deobandi seminaries see the Taliban as role models. Another Brookings Institute report claims that the real problem lies in a handful of hardline seminaries.<sup>13</sup> Finally, the government has disclosed that nearly 80 working seminaries in Pakistan are getting foreign monetary aid up to rupees three hundred million.<sup>14</sup>

## 7.4 History of Seminary Reforms

Previously, many madrassas were registered under the Societies Act 1860. Later in 1994, the registration of madrasas was prohibited in the regime of Benazir Bhutto. “Model Deeni Madrassa Ordinance” was issued following the Musharraf regime in 2001, post 9/11, but it was rejected by the overarching body for the five schools of thought. “Madrassa Regulatory Ordinance” was issued by the government next and ban on madrassa’s registration was raised ultimately under the notification No # 40/30/99/P11-20.<sup>11</sup>

All things considered, this is not the first time Pakistan has attempted to register seminaries, and the backlash is nothing new.

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<sup>13</sup> Winthrop, R., & Graff, C. (2010, June). Beyond Madrasas: Assessing The Links Between Education And Militancy In Pakistan. Retrieved February 23, 2016, from [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2010/6/pakistan-education-winthrop/06\\_pakistan\\_education\\_winthrop.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2010/6/pakistan-education-winthrop/06_pakistan_education_winthrop.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Ghiskori, Z. (2015, January 29). Year 2013-14: 80 seminaries received Rs300m in foreign aid - The Express Tribune. Retrieved February 23, 2016, from <http://tribune.com.pk/story/829407/year-2013-14-80-seminaries-received-rs300m-in-foreign-aid/>.

## 7.5 Funding / Financing of Seminaries

A handful of Pakistan's madrassas have been exploited by internal and external actors for their own regional, religious or regulatory interests.

To review the implementation of the NAP, a meeting was organized in January, 2015. The object of discussion in meeting was the scrutiny of foreign funding for religious seminaries explicitly coming from Middle Eastern countries.<sup>15</sup> The government has disclosed that nearly 80 working seminaries in Pakistan are getting foreign monetary aid up to rupees three hundred million.<sup>13</sup>

Minister of State for Federal Education, Professional Training, Interior and Narcotics Control Baleeghur Rahman claimed that 12 madrassas in KP were getting foreign aid. Likewise, two madrassas in Sindh and nine in Balochistan received foreign funding. According to the information provided by the provincial governments by January 31, 2015, there are a total of 23 religious seminaries receiving foreign funding.<sup>16</sup>

Muslim countries had been providing financial support to nearly 234 madrassas in the province of Balochistan until February 2015.<sup>17</sup> In March, 147 seminaries of Punjab were reported involved in receiving foreign financial funding.<sup>18</sup>

Up until December 2015, only 23 religious seminaries were reported as receiving foreign funding in the provinces of KP, Sindh and Balochistan. The province of Punjab was excluded upon the denial of Inspector General of Punjab Police (IGP).<sup>19</sup>

The financing system of madrassas added to the troublesomeness of proposed reforms. The country has a large shadow economy, and the madrassas are just a part of it. They function through cash couriers, charity seeking initiatives, rather making transactions through banks. The Financial Monitoring Unit (FMU) is an entity authorized with the scrutiny of money laundering and terror financing.

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<sup>15</sup> Ghumman, K. (2015, January 14). Govt ponders over issue of madressah financing. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1156907>.

<sup>16</sup> Khan, I. A. (2015, January 31). Only 23 seminaries receiving foreign funding: Minister. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1160627>.

<sup>17</sup> Ghiskori, Z. (2015, February 20). 234 madrassas in Balochistan receive foreign cash: Official - The Express Tribune. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from <http://tribune.com.pk/story/841298/countering-extremism-in-balochistan-234-madrassas-receive-foreign-cash-official/>.

<sup>18</sup> Haider, I. (2015, March 04). IGP report reveals 147 foreign-funded seminaries in Punjab. Retrieved February 16, 2016, from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1167339>.

<sup>19</sup> Bhatti, M. W. (2015, December 09). Rangers have to seek Sindh CM's nod before political arrests. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from <http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/80719-Rangers-have-to-see-Sindh-CMs-nod-before-political-arrests>.

Please see section [3.3.7 Terror Financing – Steps](#).

### 7.6 Obstacles

The International Crisis Group (ICG) presented a report in this respect called *Unfulfilled Promises*. The report indicated that the intolerance and religious prejudice in Pakistan is because of the government's reluctance to act in contradiction of its political associates among the religious groups.<sup>20</sup> This politicization and political affiliation of seminaries is another reason why the state is often compelled to delay or suspend attempts at reforms.

The government of Pakistan failed to prohibit the admission of foreign students to the madrassas of Deobandi sect in February 2015.<sup>21</sup> It may also be difficult to take the matter seriously when prominent politicians from the most populated province housing the largest number of unregulated and unregistered seminaries believes wholeheartedly that there is zero connection between seminaries and militancy.<sup>22</sup>

In March 2015, former Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) chairman Dr. Khalid Masud found mistrust among religious seminaries and the government as the foremost problem to seminaries reforms.<sup>23</sup>

### 7.7 Conclusion

Government reluctance, pressure from the religious right, and internal blame gaming also delay and derail the process, which seems especially impeded since August 2015. The fact that Abdul Aziz, responsible for the Red Mosque standoff in 2007, heads 27 madrassas in Punjab with 5,000 students under his supervision is indicative of government ineptitude on this front. There also exists no timeline for the registration process, and the specific roles between the Interior and Religious

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<sup>20</sup> ICG. (2004, January 16). *Unfulfilled Promises: Pakistan's Failure to Tackle Extremism*. Retrieved February 23, 2016, from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/pakistan/073-unfulfilled-promises-pakistans-failure-to-tackle-extremism.aspx>.

<sup>21</sup> Ali, K. (2015, February 15). *Seminaries oppose govt move to ban foreign students*. Retrieved February 17, 2016, from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1163707>.

<sup>22</sup> APP. (2015, April 25). *No militancy in Punjab seminaries: RanaSanaullah*. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1202771>.

<sup>23</sup> News Desk. (2015, March 24). *Mainstreaming madrassas: Call for registration of seminaries with education departments - The Express Tribune*. Retrieved March 23, 2016, from <http://tribune.com.pk/story/858401/mainstreaming-madrassas-call-for-registration-of-seminaries-with-education-departments/>.



Affairs Ministry are unclear. Pakistan has not even begun to address the inclusion of sciences, English and other subjects in the seminary curriculum.

All things considered, the registration, regulation and reform of madrassas is treating the symptoms. The root cause is the inability for the Pakistani government to provide free education, access to basic social services, and employment opportunities upon graduation. The seminary problem is large enough now that it needs to be dealt with properly, but until the root cause is addressed, this problem will only continue to exacerbate.

