

Julian Assange

'Banned extremist groups cont'

The International Crisis Group (ICG) in its report titled 'Pakistan: Karachi's Madrasas and Violent Extremism' says the government has yet to take any of the overdue and necessary steps to control religious extremism in Karachi and elsewhere. Here is the executive summary and recommendations:

MORE than five years after President Pervez Musharraf declared his intention to crack down on violent sectarian and jihadi groups and to regulate the network of madrasas (religious schools) on which they depend, his government's reform programme is in shambles. Banned sectarian and jihadi groups, supported by networks of mosques and madrasas, continue to operate openly in Pakistan's largest city, Karachi, and elsewhere. The international community needs to press President Musharraf to fulfil his commitments, in particular to enforce genuine controls on the madrasas and allow free and fair national elections in 2007. It should also shift the focus of its donor aid from helping the government's ineffectual efforts to reform the religious schools to improving the very weak public school sector.

Karachi's madrasas, which have trained and dispatched jihadi fighters to Afghanistan and Indian-administered Kashmir, offer a valuable case study of government failures and consequences for internal stability and regional and international security. In 2006, the city was rocked by high-profile acts of political violence. In three separate attacks, suicide bombers killed a US diplomat, assassinated the head of the most prominent Shia political group and wiped out the entire leadership of a Sunni militant group locked in a struggle for control over mosques with its Sunni rivals.

Not all madrasas in the city are active centres of jihadi militancy but even those without direct links to violence promote an ideology that provides religious justification for such attacks. Exploiting Karachi's rapid, unplanned and unregulated urbanisation and its masses of young, disaffected and impover-

ished citizens, the madrasa sector has grown at an explosive rate over the past two decades. Given the government's half-hearted reform efforts, these unregulated madrasas contribute to Karachi's climate of lawlessness in numerous ways - from illegal land encroachment and criminality to violent clashes between rival militant groups and use of the pulpit to spread calls for sectarian and jihadi violence.

The Pakistan government has yet to take any of the overdue and necessary steps to control religious extremism in Karachi and the rest of the country. Musharraf's periodic declarations of tough action, given in response to international events and pressure, are invariably followed by retreat. Primarily responsible for the half-hearted efforts is his dependence on the religious right, particularly his coalition partner in the Balochistan government, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), which runs the largest network of Deobandi madrasas. He needs these allies to counter his civilian opposition, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), which dominated politics during the democratic interlude of the 1990s.

Plans are announced with much fanfare and then abandoned. As a result, madrasas remain either unregistered or registered under laws that have no effective implementation. The sectarian, jihadi content of the madrasa curriculum is untouched, and there is no meaningful control over money flows into and through madrasas and other religious institutions. The absence of a single agency, under parliamentary control and with the requisite authority to regulate the madrasa sector, has empowered opponents of reform. Powers are scattered among multiple ministries and levels of government. Attempts to "mainstream" madrasa curricula through introduction of a range of non-religious classes have also proved futile, with most madrasas refusing to cooperate with very modest government reforms. In any case, the introduction of secular courses would only be of slight value unless there were also deep changes in the religious curriculum to end the

promotion of violent sectarianism and jihad.

Government efforts, and donors' money, should instead go towards increased support and reform of the public school system, including removal of the sectarian, pro-jihad, and anti-minority portions of its curriculum. Donors must monitor the reform of that public school curriculum closely and make sure that it is implemented with the requisite long-term commitment.

Exploiting the military government's weakness, the religious parties and madrasa unions have countered all attempts to regulate the madrasa sector. By backtracking, the government has further emboldened sectarian and extremist forces, resulting in a significant contribution to the violence that plagues Karachi and indeed the rest of the country. The

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prospects for breaking the links between the madrasa sector and violent extremism would increase if the national elections this year are democratic, free and fair. If they are, it is likely that the religious parties will be marginalised and the national-level moderate parties - with much greater political will to enact meaningful reforms — returned to power.

Recommendations:

To the Government of Pakistan:

1. Adopt an effective, mandatory and madrasa-specific registration law that, in conformity with international conventions on terrorism and extremism:
 - (a) bars jihadi and violent sectarian teachings from madrasa syllabi;

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- (b) requires the disclosure and documentation of income and expenditure based on an annual, independent and external financial audit;
- (c) requires the documentation of students and their areas of origin and monitors living conditions of students in madrasas; and
- (d) establishes controls over financing from domestic and foreign sources, accompanied by regular and proactive monitoring.

2. Establish a single Madrasa Regulatory Authority, headed by the interior minister, operating under parliamentary oversight and with the necessary resources and powers to:

- (a) suspend registration of madrasas until such

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a new law is in force that also includes a new, mandatory registration regime and contains meaningful financial and curricular regulations; and

- (b) commission an independent, comprehensive survey to obtain authentic data on the number of madrasas and the size of the student body.
- 3. Do not treat madrasa certificates as the equivalent of degrees issued by recognised boards of education and universities.
- 4. Take effective action against all extremist groups and parties, in particular by:

 - (a) disbanding, pursuant to Article 256 of the constitution, all private militias, including those organised for sectarian

and jihadi causes;

- (b) dismantling the infrastructure of groups banned under the Anti-Terrorism Law by making public the evidence for which the groups were proscribed, prosecuting their leaders and preventing members from regrouping and re-organising under new identities;
- (c) closing all madrasas affiliated with banned organisations or with other sectarian and jihadi organisations;
- (d) taking legal action against the administration of any mosque or madrasa whose leader calls for internal or external jihad;
- (e) taking legal action against the administration of any mosque or madrasa or religious leader responsible for issuing an apostasy fatwa, whether verbal or written;
- (f) cancelling the print declarations (licences) of jihadi and sectarian publications and prosecuting publishers;
- (g) blocking the circulation of audio/video cassettes and CDs propagating jihad and sectarian ideologies by prosecuting those responsible for producing and/or selling them;
- (h) enforcing existing laws against hate-speech and incitement of communal violence; and
- (i) signing immediately the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism.

5. Improve the quality of life for urban residents and prevent the misuse of mosques and madrasas by:

- (a) clearing mosques and madrasas encroaching on state land and dismantling

those occupying public parks in Karachi and other cities;

- (b) establishing zoning regulations that restrict establishment of madrasas with hostels in residential neighbourhoods; and
- (c) enforcing strictly the ban on loudspeakers used in mosques for anything other than permitted religious activities.

6. Reform the public education system by purging material that promotes religious hatred, sectarian bias or historical accounts that justify jihad.

To the International Community:

- 7. Demand that the Pakistan government honour its commitments to madrasa reform, and in particular urge it to:

 - (a) close immediately all madrasas linked to banned extremist organisations and all other jihadi and sectarian groups;
 - (b) establish a Madrasa Regulatory Authority under the ministry of interior and parliamentary oversight and with sufficient powers to enforce meaningful madrasa regulation; and
 - (c) institute curriculum reform and financial control mechanisms.

- 8. Give financial support solely for reform of the public school system instead of aiding government attempts to "mainstream" madrasa curricula.
- 9. Monitor strictly evangelical preachers who work with expatriate Muslim communities in European Union countries and North America.
- 10. Make diplomatic and financial support to the Pakistan government contingent on the holding of free, fair and democratic national elections. ■