

DAWN 31-03-16

Hate material in school books decried

By Shazia Hasan

KARACHI: "Hate material in school textbooks is shaking the foundations of the land while your chosen leaders bask in their own glory. Who cares about what is happening in our schools and madressahs? They don't realise that when their country burns, the fire will also engulf their homes," said Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf lawmaker Syed Hafeezuddin at a conference held here on Wednesday.

He added: "Trying to control hate and religious intolerance in our society today is like putting out a big blaze with a small lawn hose."

The PTI's MPA was sharing his views on the biases and hate material in textbooks as well as the situation and role of minorities in Pakistan at a conference about 'Uprooting religious intolerance through formal education in Pakistan', organised by the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) in collaboration with Pakistan Institute of Labour Education & Research (Piler) at a hotel.

Other speakers and panellists at the conference included Shafi Mohammad Jamote of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, Piler's director Karamat Ali, director of research on social and human science and politics, the University of Chicago, the US, Dr Charles Amjad-Ali, dean of social sciences faculty at Szabist Dr Riaz Shaikh, PPP legislator Dr Shahida Rehmani, Kashif Aslam of NCJP, Piler's Zulfiqar Shah and Father Saleh Diego.

"The problem started when we burdened our children with heavy school bags and stopped checking what the teachers were doing. Curricula should be short and precise and teachers should be good at their jobs so that we don't confuse our children with unnecessary stuff," said Mr Jamote.

"Looking at our educational material and the distorted history in them along with the biased messages, the day isn't far when our children will say that this country was the realisation of Maulana Maudoodi's dream instead of Allama Iqbal's dream," said Karamat Ali while expressing his fears.

"The sit-ins by religious groups are tolerated by the government and treated with leniency. But if you see poor labourers organising a protest demonstration or sit-in, they are baton-charged and chased away," he observed.

Dr Amjad-Ali said since Gen Ziaul Haq's time, all minority communities had been seen as agents like Hindus being Indian agents and Christians as Western agents. "Any country incapable of looking after its minorities is not complete system-wise or policy-wise. It is a dysfunctional country," he said.

"Quite frankly, I see Punjabis, Sindhis, Pakhtuns, Balochs, Seraikis, etc, but who is Pakistani here? Is it the army? Pakistan was created for the minorities of India. If we don't set aside our differences and unite as Pakistanis, this country will soon be taken over by another minority — orthodox Muslims," he said.

Dr Shaikh said a concept of 'us' and 'them' was being developed as a result of generating hate material in school books, as the paranoia and fear took root. "Education gives you the art of socialisation, cultural innovation, social integration and social placement but here our education is spreading anti-socialisation. And when you teach hate there is no cultural innovation or social integration," he explained.

Dr Rehmani said the madressahs, if they had to remain, should then be registered and given proper teachers who along with Quranic education should also be able to teach other subjects. "Islam doesn't teach one to point fingers at others rather it builds character. If we don't do something about the education being imparted at madressahs, their graduates won't get jobs and will become disillusioned and angry, as is happening right now, and turn into suicide bombers," said the PPP lawmaker.

NCJP project coordinator Kashif Aslam discussed the commission's latest report based on an analysis of some 70 school textbooks. He said the report only carried 25pc of their findings. "So if we came across 100 lines which were objectionable in a book, we only shared 25 of those lines in the report because sharing the remaining portion may just anger some people so much that they may want to eliminate us," he said.

"Books are made a part of the curriculum simply through inviting bids in newspaper ads. No one really checks their narrative, which distorts religious beliefs and history," he added.

Conference calls for removal of hate material from curriculum

■ Speakers stress uprooting religious intolerance through formal education in Pakistan

Staff Report

KARACHI: Speakers at a conference 'Uprooting religious intolerance through formal education in Pakistan' on Wednesday underlined the need for removing hate-based content from the textbooks in the public schools.

The conference was jointly organised by Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) and National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP).

The speakers noted the structure of school education needs to be changed and curriculum has to be replaced if Pakistani society has to progress and assure the rest of the world that it is a peaceful and believes in co-existence. The NCJP also

launched a booklet they have compiled on the hate content in the textbooks of the courses of History, Social Sciences, Pakistan Studies, Urdu and other languages.

Speaking on the occasion, PPP lawmaker Dr Shahida Rahmani said that teachings of Islam are wrongly preached and wrongly transmitted through curriculum. "Islam is a religion, which upholds equal rights of people, it asks followers to get education and explore the universe, which will come through modern education." She said Islam tells exclusively for character building of the people in society. "We need to improve the curriculum of madrassas and bring them in the fold of public schools system," she maintained.

Meanwhile, PIT lawmak-

er Syed Hafeezuddin said the problem of religious intolerance is very serious in Pakistan, which cannot be handled and tackled with little efforts like research or these seminars. He observed that the number of madrassas is more than the government schools in Pakistan.

"The mindset coming out of these seminaries is very dangerous," he remarked. He said political opportunists have used these elements to extend their power over the years. "We need to seriously think and go ahead with the right course of actions," he asserted.

PML-N MNA Shafi Muhammad Jamote observed that teachers and books are very important in changing the mind of children. He lamented that teachers are appointed on

political basis or through nepotism, which has been one of the main reasons behind the current problems in the society. Old syllabus could be brought back, which did have respect for people belong to all religions.

PILER Executive Director Karamat Ali said religious intolerance is extremely serious issue. Use of religion in politics and society should be curtailed; otherwise future of this country will be bleak, the way it is heading forward, he added. The participants of conference also observed one-minute silence in solidarity with the victims of Lahore bomb attack.

Kashif Aslam of NCJP mentioned the commission has been collecting and bringing in mainstream the

hate content in the textbooks in public schools for the last five years.

He noted that the material which has been published is 25 percent of total research material collected from the textbooks which contain hate content against other religions, countries, and sects. "Some of the changes have been made in the textbooks by the Punjab and Sindh governments; however, it is far from being sufficient. The two other provinces, KP and Baluchistan have not made any progress towards decreasing the hate content from their textbooks due to political compromises," he maintained.

Professor Dr Charles Amjad Ali stressed the need to amend and change the curriculum which actually

generates hate for other religions and fellow Muslims. Dr Riaz Sheikh of SZABIST maintained that the society changes from the schools.

"In our country social construction of the society has been very much based on religion and religious hatred against fellow religious people and people of other religions has increased, where majority has sway over the minority and space for their practice has shrunk."

Zulfiqar Shah of PILER said, "For peaceful society we need to take this struggle at multiple fronts. He said intolerance and violence are becoming part of the culture, while Shehla of UNICEF said, "Pakistan needs a comprehensive social protection net and other benefits for poor and unemployed."

IN UNIQUE STATE OF AFFAIRS

Pakistan is the only country where businesses are closing shop and madrassas are opening up

By the Express Tribune, Islamabad

Distorted history

Researchers share only 25% of findings for fear of their lives

Hate material continues to plague textbooks, finds group studying 70 public school textbooks

OUR CORRESPONDENT
KARACHI

Widespread presence of hate material in government textbooks can be gauged from the fact that an activist, while sharing details of a study conducted on the subject, admitted they shared only 25% of their findings for fear of their lives.

"If we had put in all the samples of hate material found in public school textbooks, we would have been killed," said Kashif Aslam, an official of the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP).

NCJP, along with Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER), organised a seminar titled 'Uprooting Religious Intolerance through Formal Education' at the Marriott hotel on Wednesday. Aslam said in their latest study of 2012-2016, NCJP analysed 70 textbooks, including those of Urdu, Islamiat and optional subjects, such as ethics, from all four provinces.

The study reveals the presence of hate material in the form of distortion of history, material promoting gender bias, extremists and violence, and hate speech. The study has highlighted the controversial material with the name of the book, lesson, and page number. "In our textbooks, Hindus are our enemies and are only from India, while Christians are portrayed as agents and promoters of West," said Aslam.

Giving examples, he said textbooks have also distorted the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Similarly, when textbooks narrate the Partition, they only give a picture of Pakistan's side, and exclude details of atrocities committed on the other side.

"We have found that 200 lines of hate speech which were present five years ago in a book are still present. Things have been included in the textbook but the hate material has not been excluded," he explained.

Silver lining

However, in Punjab and Sindh, there have been some positive changes brought on by the provincial governments.

In Punjab, following the National Action Plan, the government, in a bid to promote tolerance, distributed small booklets with stories of a Hindu, Muslim and Christian speaking of religious tolerance; and another on equality of men and women.

In textbooks, the government has also added two-three lines of verses of other faiths, and lines about festivals of religions other than Islam.

In Sindh, the August 11, 1947 speech of Mohammad Ali Jinnah [promoting rights of minorities] has been included, though as a small reference and not a chapter. Information about education activist Malala Yousafzai, Benazir Bhutto, and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto have also been added in textbooks.

PTI MPA Syed Hafeezuddin said the fabric of society was destroyed by Ziaul Haq and other politicians who used religion for political gains.

However, in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) and Balochistan, there has been no progress. In K-P, during the previous provincial government's tenure, positive changes were made into the textbooks which were unfortunately reversed by the present government. "A

political ally of the ruling party in K-P had reservations why 'good morning' was written instead of 'assalam', and why information about other religious festivals was provided," said Aslam.

"In our textbooks, Hindus are our enemies and are only from India, while Christians are portrayed as agents and promoters of West.

NCJP's Kashif Aslam

Balochistan's textbooks are the same as those used in Punjab, with the material being the same but books having different covers, he indicated.

Speaking on extremists, Piler executive director Karamat Ali said Jamaat-e-Dawa chief Hafiz Saeed is an international terrorist but slogans in his favour are posted everywhere in Sindh and Tharparkar.

Professor Charles Anjad Ali from the US said Pakistan was created for minorities of India, and is a minority state, adding that Pakistan was a state in the making, and any state incapable of protecting and providing rights to its people is not a state in the proper sense.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) MPA Syed Hafeezuddin said the fabric of society was destroyed by General (ret'd) Ziaul Haq and other politicians who used religion for political gains.

He pointed out that in his constituency, there is a madrasa which provides accommodation to 10,000 students. "This cannot be matched by any public or private educational institution, which is why the poor are exploited to go towards religious seminaries for schooling their children," he said.

'To remove hate material from curriculum, us-vs-them philosophy needs to go'

Recent changes made by Sindh government are far from sufficient, say speakers

By Ebad Ahmed
Karachi

The National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) in its annual report has underlined the need for removing hate-based content from school textbooks being used in schools across the country.

The report titled "Habs-Zada Taleem Se Rehai" was launched on Wednesday in a conference organised with help of Pakistan Institute of Labour, Education and Research (PILER).

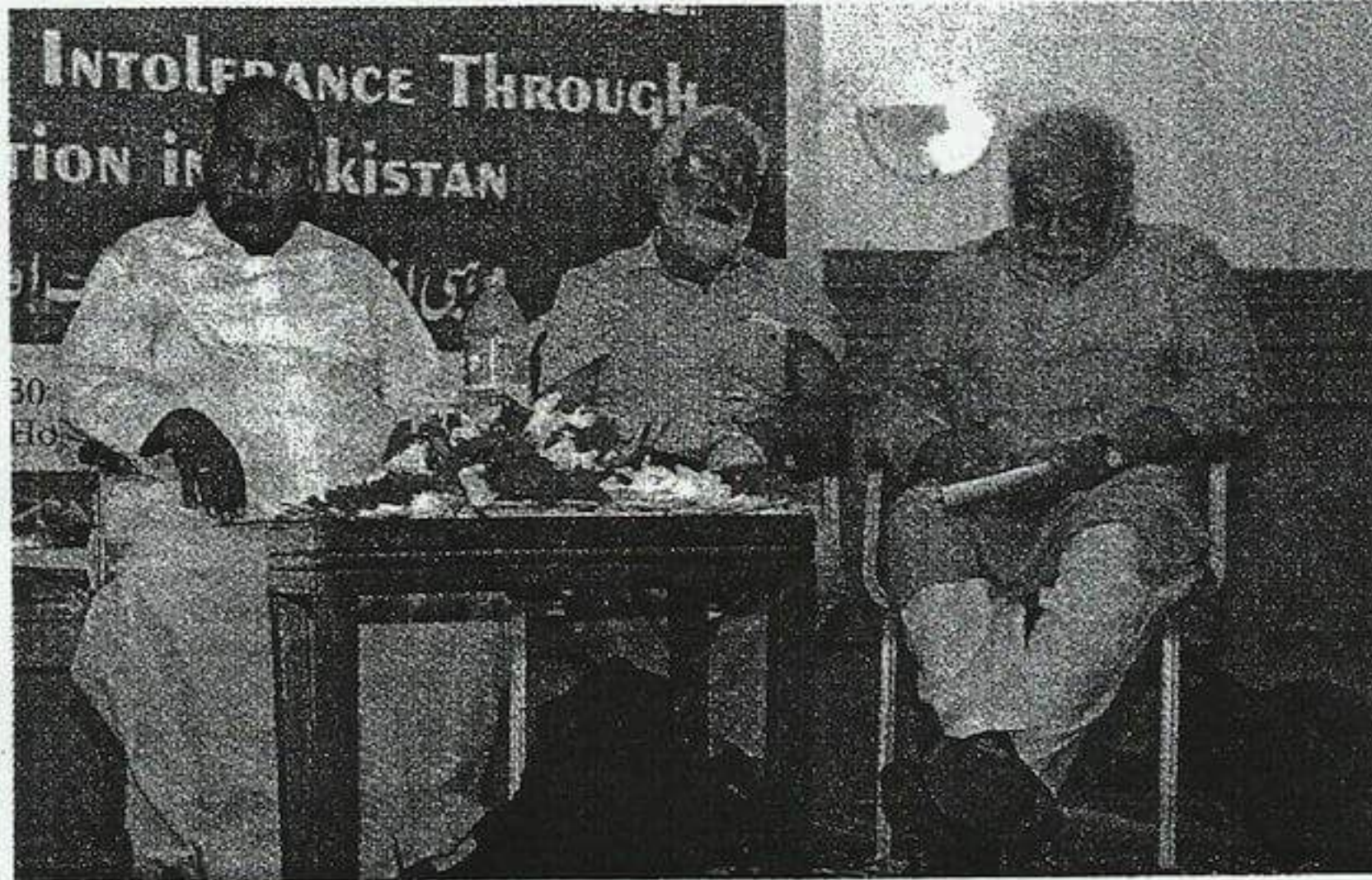
At the conference, titled "Up-rooting Religious Intolerance through Formal Education", speakers noted that if Pakistani society has to progress and assure the rest of the world that it is indeed peaceful, structure of school education needs to be changed and curriculum has to be amended.

Speaking on the occasion, Kashif Aslam of the NCJP said the commission for the past five years had been collecting and highlighting hate content in textbooks of public schools. As part of its research, he said, the commission had studied and analysed 70 textbooks.

Talking about the report, Aslam said the material published as part of report was only 25 percent of the total resource gathered from textbooks.

"Though some changes have been made by governments in textbooks of Punjab and Sindh, it is far from sufficient. The two other provinces, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, have not made any progress towards decreasing hate content from their textbooks due to political compromises," Aslam remarked.

Talking to The News, he said as compared to Punjab, textbooks in Sindh contained less prejudice and hate material against religious minorities. However, given that the hate content is less in Sindh, he said,



The launch ceremony of the National Commission for Justice and Peace's annual report was held. Progress in removing hate content from textbooks was still very slow — The News photo

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The education boards that call the shots lack pluralistic values. They hold on tightly to their far-right views which are toxic for the society and state. The subject writers too are part of the problem; when we ask them to review their writings on religious minorities, we are told they may be able to let Christians off the hook, but couldn't do the same for Hindus

it was still far from being satisfactory.

"The education boards that call the shots, lack pluralistic values. They hold on tightly to their far-right views which are toxic for the society and state," he said. "The subject writers too are part of the problem; when we ask them

to review their writings on religious minorities, we are told they may be able to let Christians off the hook, but couldn't do the same for Hindus."

Talking about Sindh, Aslam said though there was progress in removing hate content from textbooks, it was very slow. "On the other hand, in Punjab we

see that the process of removing hate material from textbooks has been expedited under the National Action Plan, but little or no action in this regard has been seen in Sindh," he said. "This is because the progressive intelligentsia in Sindh is restricted to certain sectors. Their active presence is

directly needed in the educational sector."

Recommendations

In its report, the NCJP recommended that besides imparting empirical knowledge, textbooks and teaching resources in schools should also focus on educating young minds on universal humanity, dignity of human beings and responsible citizenship.

The report also called for reviewing the current curriculum and education policies to remove practices and material that were discriminatory and inflammatory in nature, especially towards minority communities.

Ideally, it was said, public education should be separated from religious education. However, if this was not possible, then under Article 22 of the constitution, students of other faiths than Islam should get equal opportunities to study their own religion(s). "This should be a substitute of Islamiyat. Instead of general Ethics, students should be able to study their own religion," he said. "Practical steps are required for students belonging to Hindu, Christian, Sikh and other religious groups to study their own religions as a substitute for Nazrah as well. Also, classes and subjects other than Religious Studies should not have lessons on any particular religion."

The report also called for including the role religious minorities played in the creation and development of Pakistan.

Who is a minority?

Dr Charles Amjad Ali, a Martin Luther King Jr Professor Emeritus for Justice and Christian Community, said Pakistan is a state in making. In sociological terms, he said, a minority was a group without power.

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— Kashif Aslam of the NCJP

To remove hate material from curriculum...

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He said any state that could not look after its minorities was fundamentally a dysfunctional state, since a state that could not protect the weak within it was not morally or systematically complete.

"Every state has its own ideology, but the problem with Pakistan is it does not have a definite ideology," he said. "Pakistan ka Matalab kiya, La Ilaha Illallah sounds beautiful, but what does it really mean?"

Dr Ali was of the view that the basic purpose of any curriculum was to instigate new thinking, imagination and innovation among its learners. However, he said, it appeared that the Pakistani educational system aspired for a society comprising only orthodox Muslims.

Speaking on the occasion, Pakistan People's Party MNA Dr Shahida Rahmani, lamented that the teachings of Islam were exclusively preached through the school curriculum.

"Islam is a religion that upholds equal rights of all people and asks its followers to attain education and explore the universe as an obligation. This will only come through modern education," she opined. "Islam focuses exclusively on character building of the society, and this is why there is a need to also improve the curriculum of seminaries and bring them in the fold of public school system," she said.

An MPA of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Syed Hafeezuddin, said the problem of religious intolerance was serious in Pakistan and could only be tackled with a multi-faceted ap-

proach, while observing that the number of seminaries were more than government schools.

He said religious intolerance had destroyed the entire fabric of the society and political opportunists had used these elements to extend their powers over the masses.

An MPA of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, Haji Shafi Jamote, observed that teachers and books played an important role in shaping the minds of children.

The executive director of Piler, Karamat Ali, stressed that the influence of religion in politics should be curtailed.

The dean of social sciences faculty at Szabist, Dr Riaz Sheikh, maintained that schools shaped societies. "But in our country, the social construction of society has been based on religion and hatred of people from other faiths. This is why societal marginality in Pakistan has increased where the majority has power over minority communities, whose space in the society has shrunk. Unlike progressive societies, education in Pakistan was an agent of 'anti-socialisation'," he said.

He talked about a senior educationist and a member of the government-appointed advisory committee for curriculum and textbooks reforms, Dr Bernadette L Dean, who left the country in 2015 fearing for her life after she received threatening calls and faced a hate propaganda campaign that he asserted was initiated by the Jamaat-e-Islami.

"To be able to move forward, we need to eliminate the binary of us-versus-them," he said.