

An improved National Narrative under consideration

Islamabad; December 18, 2017: The daily DUNYA of Faisalabad reported at some length the news of a fresh 'National Narrative' under consideration of the government of Pakistan, the Interior Ministry. The daily claimed that it has obtained a document, drafted by MACNA that is tasked to fight terrorism, now attached to the Ministry of Interior. This narrative is expected to be implemented after approval by the prime minister.

The draft of National Narrative includes the following provisions, *inter alia*:

- Only the state has the authority to declare Jihad or war.
- No person or group is allowed to declare Pakistan '*Darul Harb*' (Abode of war) or an unislamic state and declare the armed forces, security organizations or the people as *Kafir* (unbelievers) or *Murtad* (apostate).
- Private militias and armed groups are not allowed in the country.
- Protection of minorities is state responsibility.
- Official documents like passport, identity cards etc will not carry a mention of religion, in order to promote national cohesion.
- Fundamentalism is not restricted to only armed and extremist groups, it is widespread.
- No parallel institutions, in fighting nor in education, shall be permitted.
- Respect for others' views should be promoted and hate speech shall be stopped.
- Muslims are expected to be moderate and not extremist in mutual dealings and in dealing with others.
- Violence in the name of religion should be strongly condemned.
- Pakistan shall be made a modern, progressive and peaceful state, a model for the Ummah, where there shall be no room for violence on the basis of belief, sect, caste, colour or ethnicity.
- Some extremists misquote the Quran to declare other Muslims as *Kafir* and *Wajib-ul-Qatl...*; this shall not be allowed.
- Only a special committee will approve registration of blasphemy cases by the police; the committee shall comprise representatives of LEAs, MNAs, MPAs, reputed clerics, and minority representatives if the accused is a member of a minority group.
- None will be allowed to take law in his hand and those preaching violence and indulging in false accusation will be severely dealt with and fined.
- Madrassas promoting violence and hate will be shut down and the proprietors held accountable without discrimination.
- No madrassah shall be allowed to avail foreign funds, without permission, etc, etc.

We have two comments on the above Draft Narrative:

1. It is apparent that the authorities are now well aware of the nature and causes of terrorism and extremism. They know the remedial steps as well. But, is there enough will and strength in the various institutions of the state to undertake all that is required, in a selfless and committed manner?
2. Our past experience is not encouraging in this field; for instance:
 - a. A Supreme Court bench, headed by Chief Justice Jilani came up with similar conclusions and judgment on June 19, 2014 that was called landmark, game changer, historical, etc. It dealt extensively with the issue of minorities. Their lordships provided even a set of directives to implement their verdict. Almost nothing was undertaken on the ground thereafter.
 - b. Six months later, extremists attacked Army Public School in Peshawar and killed 134 school children. This outrage gave birth to National Action Plan (NAP that was produced by consensus of all the major state stake-holders). The 20 points of the plan were not honoured by most of the authorities. (On the other hand, the Govt of Punjab banned the entire written works of the founder of the Ahmadiyyat, and raided the only book shop in Rabwah.) Six months after the announcement of the NAP, a Supreme Court judge observed in court, “There is hardly any progress in implementation of the NAP.”

So, any forecast for the effectiveness of the National Narrative is a hazardous undertaking.