

Balochistan Youth

Consultation on Promoting Narratives of Diversity, Inclusion, and Peace among Youth

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Figure 1. Balochistan Education Minister Naseebullah Marri, Senator Sanaullah Baloch, Ahmed Ali at PIPS Consultation in Quetta.

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Any attempt at stemming the rising tide of religious radicalism in Pakistan may benefit hugely from the spirit of Islamic modernism i.e., by stressing the significance of democracy, human rights, rationality, equality, and progress. And while formulating policy responses to the problem of extremism, the state may do best by keeping the youth as the principal audience in mind. Lately, there has been some debate on future scenarios in the context of youth bulge in Pakistan. While in the orthodox discourse the growing young population is often hailed for its potential to improve Pakistan's economic prospects, critics of the country's mass education system warn of socially turbulent times ahead if the youth continue to be discounted in policy and resource allocation. Currently, there is no comprehensive policy for educational and professional uplift of the youth. There is no formal and easily accessible counseling mechanism to cater to the educational, professional, social, and psychological needs of the adolescents and young adults. Decades of neglect and bad policy choices have produced a confused and rudderless generation.

The problems of the Pakistani youth are not unknown as numerous studies by local and international stakeholders have explored the issues and challenges facing the youth and identified potential solutions. In this regard, PIPS has undertaken over the years some highly valuable academic inquiries into youths' problems, dissecting them in detail in their social, economic, and psychological contexts. A major finding of these studies pointed at the educated youths' lack of sensitization about the fundamentals of democracy, human rights, equality and equity, and rationality etc. Educated youth lacking sensitization about the basics of things does sound paradoxical, but this is how the unfortunate actuality looks like. This long-running paradox is also an indictment of the obsolete and dysfunctional education system that fails to give even basic essential skills to students.

Therefore, PIPS initiated a countrywide educational and training program to sensitize university-enrolled youths about fundamental concepts and values of democracy, human rights, equity, critical thinking and reasoning, constitutionalism, and rule of law etc. Under the initiative, educational and training workshops were held in four provinces and the federal capital in which over 740 university students were engaged. In Balochistan, over 100 students were engaged in three two-day workshops in Quetta. During the workshops, surveys and interviews were also conducted to assess the youths' worldviews and opinions on diverse issues relating to interfaith relations and social peace and cohesion. The collected data provide useful insights into thinking patterns among the youth. The findings of the report were launched in Quetta with government ministers, lawmakers, academicians, media persons, and others in attendance. And based on these findings and PIPS' previous studies and observations, a two-day consultation was also held with political leaders, policymakers and practitioners, members of academia and legal fraternity, and senior journalists in Quetta.

The purpose of these consultative sessions was to discuss the prospects of youth policy in the province and seek inputs from experts to build a policy brief for youths' uplift and betterment in Balochistan. The brief contains policy options and recommendations for the policymakers and state institutions as well as

for educators and academicians, and civil society organizations working on youth uplift in Pakistan. The details of the consultations are given below:

CONSULTATION – DAY 1

Muhammad Amir Rana: The consultative session kicked off with welcome remarks from the PIPS Director Muhammad Amir Rana who recapped major components of the youth engagement program implemented in the previous year and shed light on key challenges facing the current generation of the Balochistan youth. Explaining the aims and objectives of the consultation, he said indigenous views from native stakeholders who have deeper knowledge and extensive experience of witnessing the youths' problems in Balochistan were invaluable in informing the discourse as well as policymaking around the problems of youth. Therefore, he said, the consultative process was initiated to gather local insights and perspectives to get richer understanding of the youth and their issues in Balochistan. According to him, the youth have emerged as an essential stakeholder in Balochistan's political and security landscape. Amir Rana hoped that the consultation would help build deeper understanding around the question of youths' problems.

Ahmed Ali: Program Manager Ahmed Ali further explained the chronological order of the youth engagement strategy, describing the educational and training workshops held in 2020 and 2021 around the country, youth-led activities such as social action projects on themes of social harmony and peace, and the study conducted on youth in four provinces and the federal capital. He also mentioned the challenges of the youth in Balochistan as identified in PIPS's study report on Balochistan, and briefly went through the recommendations offered in the report. He said the consultative process with the lawmakers, educators, and members of civil society organizations was meant to contribute to the knowledge necessary for the development of youth policy.

Youth Policy and State's Responses to Youths' Problems

Sanaullah Baloch (MPA and Ex-Senator):

Sanaullah Baloch said that since the public sector lacked both the capacity and will to undertake research into socio-political as well as economic issues, the intellectual void was filled by development sector agencies like the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS). Research and development (R&D) are absent in public institutions, he said. He hailed PIPS' efforts for intellectual capacity building of the youth in Balochistan, saying that such endeavors by PIPS needed to be supported. According to Sana Baloch, engaging with the Baloch youth was essential if one was to gain an in-depth understanding of the problems in Balochistan. Youth hold the key to the long running security instability in the province. The traditional sardars and Islamabad-backed local politicians are no longer capable of addressing the challenges, he added.

Sana said that Balochistan is suffering for long due to wrong policies. He asked who was to be blamed, Islamabad or the politicians installed by Islamabad? He said that he had submitted a resolution to the Balochistan Assembly two years back for a holistic youth development policy, targeting key areas like

education, health, professional skills, and employment etc. However, he lamented that politicians were lethargic and did not care much for the youth. “Our politicians are mostly preoccupied with constituency-level everyday issues like drainage repair or supply of drinking water”, he said.

Sana Baloch was also critical of what he considered a passive attitude of the youth in Balochistan. The youth have been putting up with immense challenges in the province including chronic unemployment and enforced disappearances, yet they shy away from taking the lead in highlighting their plight. They have grown the habit of shunning their responsibilities and putting their burden on the shoulders of indifferent politicians, he said, adding that had youth organizations been vocal and active in protecting their rights, many of the problems could have been avoided.

In view of the challenges faced by the youth, Sana Baloch proposed a set of short-, mid-, and long-term goals to be pursued by the government. In the immediate term, the youth needed essential modern equipment and facilities like computer and access to internet to connect to the world around them. Side by side, they need skills development to enhance their employability, he said. Secondly, in the mid-term, there must be an open and critical debate on all the wrongs committed in the province in the past. The wrongs must be rectified and the future course corrected. This includes the educational curricula that is imposed on the students with no regard to their utility. The curricula are obsolete with virtually zero value in the fast-changing modern world, he said. Considering Balochistan’s geography and its long coast, there must be marine universities in the province. The textbooks taught in schools are militancy-oriented, he said, adding that glorifying wars through textbooks would push the youth towards militancy.

Furthermore, Sana Baloch said that in the long-term the state must understand the agonies of Balochistan and address the grievances. He warned that the status quo would lead to yet another period of extreme instability and bloodshed in future. There would be more militancy which in turn would aggravate the issue of missing persons. And the situation would pave way for sectarian bloodshed as well. There is a whole cycle of violence with one event triggering the other and causing a chain reaction. He said that long before the insurgency in Balochistan started, he had warned about the pending crisis. “I had closely observed the resentment and anger in Baloch youth including Dr. Allah Nazar. And I had warned of the upcoming bloodshed, but I was told that everything was fine and that the security forces were fully prepared to take down any disturbance”, he said.

Dr. Gulab Khilji (Director, Bureau of Curriculum, Balochistan):

The 18th Constitutional Amendment delegated the subject of education to the provinces. Since, at the time, the provinces were not adequately prepared to take up the new responsibility, it was decided the provinces would develop their professional capacity within eight years i.e., by 2018 to manage the subject of education. In 2018, the Balochistan Bureau of Curriculum started redesigning the educational curricula only to realize soon that education was being re-centralized as things were being dictated by the center. It was in clear contravention of the 18th Constitutional Amendment. The Balochistan Bureau registered a complaint against the center’s encroachment by writing a letter to the provincial chief secretary, but the bureaucracy has been unresponsive. And when the matter was taken up in Islamabad, the provincial

Bureau was told that the center-initiated SNC had already been approved by the Balochistan cabinet and bureaucracy, Dr. Khilji said. *"In short, we were told to sit down and keep quiet"*, he added.

Dr. Khilji said it was the responsibility of the politicians to defend the province's right to managing the subject of education. The SNC is a violation of the Constitution. Besides, the SNC curricula is worse than the one imposed by the dictatorial regime of General Zia ul Haq, he said. The SNC is retrogressive in nature. It claims to promote critical thinking, but the fact is it would indoctrinate the young generations with radical ideologies. Dr. Khilji said that in addition to taking over the subject of education, the center was also disregarding the inputs from Balochistan Bureau. *"The Balochistan Bureau of Curriculum was sent drafts of SNC syllabus for review and input. We reviewed the contents and shared out feedback and inputs, but they were never incorporated"*, he said. Contrary to the popular belief that Balochistan lacks expertise in education, the provincial Bureau has made immense contribution to the development of the SNC. But those contributions have disappeared, he protested. *"I hold a PhD in curriculum from the United States, and I am competent enough to perform my job"*, Dr Khilji said, further adding that the province has been disregarded in the SNC development.

He also claimed that the SNC was initially developed for the Islamabad capital territory (ICT). It is reflective of the dynamics and environment of the ICT. With modifications, it is now being extended countrywide. The SNC contents are specific to a particular social context. The literacy rates and educational levels are hugely different in the ICT and Balochistan. What suits ICT does not necessarily fit in Balochistan, he said.

Qadir Nayal: (MPA Balochistan):

The 18th Constitutional Amendment was a monumental step towards de-centralization. However, it is unfortunate that many institutions could not be operationalized under provincial governments. He agreed that mega projects like the SNC must reflect local cultural dynamics and aspirations of the people. The SNC should have reflected the Balochistan's history, culture, and languages, he said, adding that as a legislator he would investigate the matter of SNC in the standing committee's meeting. Efforts have been made by the provincial assembly to secure Balochistan's rights, but more needs to be done, he said. According to Nayal, Balochistan had drafted a youth policy in consultation with stakeholders including civil society organizations which was still in approval process. The delay was caused by the change of government in Balochistan. The draft policy is lying in the CM Secretariat, but it would be approved soon, he promised.

Sham Lal (MPA Balochistan):

Sham Lal said there was no substantial development about youth empowerment following the 18th Amendment. Many departments continue to remain dormant due to lack of capacity and resources. *"We are in the opposition benches, yet we have always raised voice for improving the provincial capacity to handle the delegated subjects"*, Lal claimed. He underlined the necessity of discussion and debate on critical issues. The provincial assembly should promote debate and discussion on issues to build consensus for the way forward, he said.

Ali Baba Taj: (Assistant Professor):

Ali Baba expressed serious concerns about the educational future of the youth in the context of the SNC. While acknowledging that the SNC had considered some local factors like incorporating local languages, he said he was doubtful of the quality of the SNC curricula. The curricula have been developed in a haphazard manner, he said, giving the instance of Persian language. Underlining the bureaucratic incompetence and non-seriousness, Taj said that he was sent a Google-translated draft of Persian text to proofread. One can imagine the absurdity of proofreading and editing a Google-translated literature, he said. *“What’s worse, a junior clerical staff would sit beside me, and dictate me words to include in the draft”*, Taj said, adding that he ultimately quit working with the SNC. He further said that there was a lack of clarity about curricula, syllabi, and textbooks among the SNC developers, even though these were different things.

Agha Raza (Former Balochistan Minister):

The former minister said education had never been a priority for successive governments in the center or province. The literacy rate was so pathetically low in Balochistan that district Musakhel was below 2% in literacy, he claimed. Even the national figures are questionable, he said, adding that the literacy rate claimed by the center has been brought into question by several studies. He said that lack of resources was only a secondary factor behind the educational degradation. It is the question of priorities. The country can afford to spend thousands of billions on defense, but when it comes to the fundamentals like education and health, lack of resources is cited as an excuse, he said.

As per his assessment, the downfall of the youth was linked to substandard education. Institutions are churning out degrees without producing educated and productive members in the society, he said. Education must develop and refine the person of a student in a way to make him or her fit and suitable for a civilized society. He warned that any initiative for youth development was destined to fail if it was imposed from Islamabad. Policies are meant to reflect local socio-cultural dynamics if they are to succeed. He also blamed the local political leaders for the plight of Balochistan’s youth, saying that the legislators including ministers and MPAs were primarily focused on getting development funds for their constituencies. They have virtually shunned lawmaking, he said.

Agha Raza said it was military dictator General Zia who destroyed the institution of legislature by introducing the development budget for lawmakers. That turned lawmakers into councilors, he said. Today, a lawmaker is primarily fixated on getting budgets for micro developments in his area. The contemporary lawmaker has no time for lawmaking. They have no interest in debating issues on the floor of the house. In such a scenario, there is little hope that they would focus on the issues of youth, he said.

Farman Ali Shah (Policy Planning and Implementation Unit):

For youth development, the PPIU has chalked out a comprehensive five-year ‘Sector Plan’ from 2020 to 2025. It is a comprehensive pathway for the development of education sector in Balochistan, Shah said. The sector plan is overarching as it includes matters like curricula and educational infrastructure etc. The

plan seeks to address infrastructural lacunas in schools. Building new infrastructures and improving the existing ones are included in the plan.

Dr. Nazir Ahmed Jomezai (Subject Specialist, Bureau of Curriculum):

Dr. Jomezai said the education in Balochistan is quality-compromised and the blame for the decline lay on the politicians. Every politician wants to build a school of his own in his area so as to employ members of his family or clan at the school. Education is not their goal, he said. According to him, access to education is not the main problem for youth in Balochistan because there are more MPhil degree holders in Balochistan than in New York. While degrees were abundant, intellectual capital was absent in the province, he said, adding that without intellectual abilities the youth were vulnerable. On the question of SNC, he said the way the center was dominating the development of the SNC, it would be no surprise if future generations of Balochistan would be more informed about Punjab than their own province.

Dr. Jomezai dismissed the popular perception that Balochistan needed more universities, claiming that more universities would only hasten the intellectual decline in youth. For instance, a generation of youth who receive education at a local university in their area would lack the necessary exposure that comes from attending a university where there is ethnic and cultural diversity. Adding more universities would only damage the overall intellectual capital, he said. Citing another downside of more universities, he said that due to lack of qualified teachers, ill-educated and incompetent teachers have been employed to teach students at university levels. If the current trend of seeking more universities continues, then the degrees would become trash in not-so-distant future. Jomezai warned that many of the disciplines in vogue today would become totally irrelevant by 2035. This was seconded by Sanaullah Baloch who said that the disciplines taught at Balochistan universities were obsolete to the point that they could be learned through the Allam Iqbal Open University. There was no need to physically attend classes for those courses, he said.

Atif Baloch (a student who requested to make the following comment):

“I have been listening to all the discussion on youth development. As a young student and political activist, I see darkness and no light in our lives. We are getting degrees, but there are little opportunities for a decent livelihood for a youth. In addition, the fear of getting abducted in the name of security causes a constant mental agony. In such an environment of fear and frustration, how could anyone expect that youth development can take place”.

Mir Naseebullah Marri (Minister Secondary and Higher Education, Balochistan):

The minister said there was a huge gap between the intellectual capacities of the youth in Balochistan and Islamabad. The first glaring difference is in their English language skills. The students in Islamabad begin learning English right from day one, while in Balochistan students start the basics at later stages. As the official language, English holds significance in determining the employability of youth. He said the Mekran region was doing relatively well in education including English language skills. *“Even though I am the education minister, my English is very poor”*, he said. The minister revealed that there were 70,000 full-

time teachers in Balochistan. Even if an individual teacher produces a well-educated student, that will mean producing 70,000 educated youth in the province every year. But teachers lack the necessary abilities and skills, he said. The teachers receive salaries and other perks, but their output is below average.

Likewise, he said the teachers in Balochistan were not competent enough to teach the SNC effectively. They need training and capacity building. The Balochistan government does not have the financial capacity to train thousands of teachers. Therefore, the center must help the province in that regard. He said he had already discussed the matter of teachers' training with Islamabad. Unless they are properly trained and equipped with the essential skills, the SNC should not be rolled out in Balochistan, the minister said.

He also mentioned that youth often complained about the militarization of the University of Balochistan, but the blame is on the youth themselves. Had the youth focused on their studies instead of politics, there would have been no boots on the university premises, he said. He asked why there was no military in a Punjab university? He said he did not oppose student politics because he himself was a product of student politics but added that the youth must primarily focus on getting education and not indulge in activities that invite problems.

Zubeida (MPA Balochistan):

The state of girls' education in Balochistan is comparatively in worse condition. Many girls are sitting idle at their homes, and not getting education due to various factors including lack of access to educational institutions as well as conservative norms. She said she was personally making efforts to promote girls' education in the province especially in the more peripheral areas where educational problems are worse.

Sher Zaman (MD, Balochistan Education Foundation):

Sher Zaman said Pakistan was fortunate to have a majority youth population. As a majority in the country, the youth have emerged as the principal stakeholder in policymaking processes, but unfortunately the ruling elite are averse to taking them onboard while formulating policies. He said the current generation of youth in Balochistan are extremely frustrated and confused. They want to do something, but there are little avenues for them to realize their potential. The province is ridden with crises, yet there is no think tanks or research organizations to investigate the youths' problems and offer solutions.

Sher Zaman also highlighted the educational dilemma in Balochistan, saying that while degrees are being churned out among youth, there is no substantial intellectual contribution from the educated youth. How many educated people are contributing to international journals? How many are being employed as educators in foreign universities? These indicators tell the true story of our educated youth, he said. According to Zaman, the education system has been purposively designed in a way to produce specific mindsets in youth. Pre-determined lessons with little to no utility in the contemporary competitive age are forced down the throats of the youth. In such a situation, how could one expect the youth to do any better, he asked, adding that the ruling elite are immune to the educational degradation in the country

because they can afford to send their children abroad for quality education. Education has never been a priority for the power elite, he said.

He also seconded Sanaulah Baloch's viewpoint that educational institutions needed to modernize their disciplines to cope with the challenges of the intensely competitive times. Balochistan needs disciplines in fisheries and marine life, he said. The province is rich in minerals. Why not promote disciplines like mineralogy? According to him, the most burning issue for the Balochistan youth was employment. The youth need jobs to feed themselves and their families. He said many young people who had militant tendencies become normal persons after getting jobs under the Balochistan Package. This indicates that bread and butter are central to youths' problems. He censured the political leaders for their lack of empathy towards the plight of the youth, saying that those sitting in assemblies have little realization of the youths' problems.

CONSULTATION – DAY 2

Promoting Diversity, and Inclusion through Education

Prof. Dr Adil Zaman (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Balochistan):

Prof. Zaman said the character building of students begin in early stages of education when children are inquisitive about the world around them. Mental nourishing must start from primary levels of education because it is comparatively more difficult to change the thinking patterns among youth at higher stages of schooling. However, it is highly unfortunate that the primary education sector is in a state of decline in Balochistan, he said, adding that primary schools are manned by low-paid and underqualified teachers who lack the capacity and skills to do justice to their responsibilities. *"I have personally witnessed low-paid primary schoolteachers running shops or selling ice cream after school. They have no time to read books or improve their teaching skills. Resultantly, they go to classrooms in the morning unprepared for the day"*, he said.

Likewise, the question of critical learning and scientific research was also discussed. Dr. Zaman said the educational discourse was formulaic with little space for critical learning. For instance, textbooks contain questions like 'Who was the founder of logarithm?' *"What difference does it make to know who invented or discovered logarithm? The point is to teach the student logarithm, and not make him memorize its founder"*, he added. According to Dr. Zaman, rote learning has a serious social impact on the society. In Pakistan, this problem has contributed to religious radicalism. Intolerance has increased on campuses. There have been instances of students accusing their teachers of blasphemy and threatening them with violence. Today, many teachers fear the intolerant environment in educational institutions, and exercise self-censorship, he said. This is harming critical learning and intellectual grooming of the youth.

Prof. Dr Manzoor Iqbal Khattak (Dean Faculty of Basic Sciences, UoB):

Dr. Khattak said education was the most powerful factor driving the mindset and behaviors of the youth. He lamented the general lack of sensitization about the cultural diversity in Pakistan, saying that the

sensitivities of many indigenous cultures and religions have not been considered in the formulation of educational curricula. Pakistan is a land of diverse religions and cultures, and every religion or faith deserve respectful treatment in the textbooks. Those developing syllabus or writing textbooks must be careful not to include any contents that harm the sentiments of a particular ethnic, religious, or sectarian class.

According to Dr. Khattak, critical learning was important for the youth to develop the ability to tell right from wrong. Education must enable the youth intellectually to evaluate ideas and thoughts based on facts. *“To improve freedom of faith, we first need to give our youth critical thinking skills”*, Khattak said. He also discussed the gender disparity in education sector, mentioning the disadvantaged position of the females in Balochistan. Gender parity in education must be promoted as a strategy to promote acceptance for diversity, he added.

Prof. Dr Muhammad Naeem Shahwani (Dean Faculty of Social Sciences, BUIEMS)

Dr. Shahwani pointed to a lacuna in curricula development, saying that the exercise must be undertaken by a group of experts from diverse professional backgrounds. It is not something to be relegated to the educators alone. The curricula must be informed by diverse ideas and perspectives. In this regard, the inclusion of social scientists, religious scholars, and above all, psychologists is essential. There must be inputs from psychologists because textbooks shape youths’ personalities, he said.

Ali Baba (Assistant Professor):

Ali Baba proposed that the process of promoting values of diversity and inclusion among the educated youth must start with some fundamental changes in the theme and narrative of the educational discourse. Currently, the educational curricula promote the discourse of war and militancy. The textbooks are filled with lessons of war, heroism, and bravery. The purpose of education system must not be to push state narratives to create soldiers and patriots. Education should aim to build the character of the youth in a way to make them law-abiding citizens and productive and empathetic members of the society. He also underlined the importance of teachers’ competence and intellectual capabilities, saying that teachers are not mere manpower of an educational institution. The thoughts and ideologies of a teacher impact the thinking and attitudes of the students, he said. Therefore, the teachers must also be properly trained in values of inclusion and diversity so that they disseminate those concepts to the students.

Social Influencers’ Role in Promoting Narratives of Peace and Harmony

Akbar Zahidi (Religious scholar):

Akbar Zahidi said the state had sacrificed the youth to serve the interests of the United States. During the Afghan war of 1980s, the educational curricula and textbooks were written in American universities with the objective to promote Islamist militancy. Those textbooks were taught to millions of children across Pakistan, turning the schools and universities into madrassas, he said. In the last 40 years, the educational curricula had been distorted beyond recognition in the service of foreign powers. Pakistan’s youth were

indoctrinated with those textbooks. Today, those indoctrinated lots have become politicians, bureaucrats, and scholars, Zahidi said. According to him, the education should be treated as a tool to achieve the goal of building good citizens.

In shaping the thinking and outlook of students, the role of teachers is critical. There are two main sources of learning for the youth: first, books; second, teachers. And it is the second source which is most important. He said the teachers not only teach the textbooks but also inculcate their own ideas in the minds of students. Teachers provide direction to the students and influence their future choices, he said. If the teacher is ineffective and incompetent, there is little hope for effective learning among students. And unfortunately, lack of capacity is a common issue among faculty. The overall tendency in the education system is to lean towards rote learning instead of independent and critical research. Both the teachers and students should have inquisitive minds to develop in-depth understanding of issues, he said.

Prof. Zaman said that diversity and inclusion can be promoted just by adding lessons on these issues. If a teacher is not capable enough to grasp the concept behind diversity and inclusion, he cannot teach these values to students. Therefore, teachers' training and capacity building and building of inclusive curricula must go parallel in order for them to succeed, he said. He also warned against state interference in curricula development, saying that educational curricula must be free from the narrowly defined state narratives. It has been observed that quite often state's interests conflict with values of diversity and inclusion. Therefore, the state must resist the temptation to dictate the curricula as per its interests.

Maulana Abdul Haq Hashmi (Emir Jamaat Islami, Balochistan Chapter):

Maulana Hashmi said the Pakistani education system was uniform in producing rudderless youth who lacked conceptual clarity about themselves and the larger society around them. The education system must help achieve national goals relating to social life and economy. It must give the youth a clear and concrete direction. The youth should know what they are supposed to achieve through education. In contrast, the public education in Pakistan is aimless, he said. The education system around the country is in a state of decline, yet the state is nowhere to be seen. Maulana Hashmi declared the 18th Amendment as the biggest hurdle for the implementation of the SNC. He said immense amounts of public funds have been spent on building the SNC, yet its success is in limbo. He said he had no idea whether the SNC would succeed or fail.

Saleem Shahid (Veteran Journalist, Quetta):

Saleem Shahid said that classroom culture and behaviors rooted in conservative social norms discourage critical learning and questioning among the students. He said it was a general practice in schools to not question the teacher out of respect. The practice of not raising questions is taken as a symbol of respect for teachers and elders. On the other hand, the teachers are also mentally conditioned to discourage students from asking questions beyond the syllabus. Sometimes restrictions on intellectual growth of the youth are imposed on the pretext of national interest. However, nobody can truly define in concrete terms what Pakistan's national interests are, he said, adding that the definition varies from institution to institution and from one political party to the other.

The biggest dilemma in Pakistan is that the educated lot remain on the backseat in every field, while the ill-educated or semi-literate ones take the steering wheel, Shahid said. An environment of religiosity has been created in which the religious divines are revered as experts on everything, while the educated lot are relegated to the margins. This has naturally led to intolerance among people, he said. When mullahs serve as the moral compass for the youth, there would surely be faith-based intolerance and violence. Saleem Shahid said General Zia ul Haq destroyed Pakistan's social fabric and religious diversity by empowering mullahs and installing them in positions of authority and influence. The religious extremism and violence as well as blasphemy laws are all legacies of Zia, he said.

According to Shahid, the educational curricula were distorted under Zia to build support for his power grab which was underpinned by religious overtones. In the process, the education system started producing generations of confused youth in the country. On the other hand, the political parties also have stopped educating their young followers politically, he said, further adding that the parties are mostly concerned with power grab.

Kazim Mengal (Senior journalist, BBC Urdu):

Kazim Mengal said the state had used the mass education system as a tool to manufacture anti-India narratives. For that purpose, lessons encouraging militarism were cherry-picked from religion and put together to fill the textbooks. The teachings of Muslim faith contain both lessons of war and peace. Social and religious values that promote peace, harmony, and coexistence of diverse faiths were deliberately ignored in the syllabi and textbooks, Mengal said. He, however, said that despite such policies anti-India sentiments had never taken roots in Balochistan. There is no grudge or hatred against Hindus in Baloch society, he said.

Kazim Mengal also called for retracting from the textbooks lessons that glorified warriors and invaders like Mehmud Ghaznavi, adding that such lessons served no purpose other than promoting religious bigotry and militarism. Similarly, he said that school textbooks also glorify military coups and dictatorships in Pakistan. Usurpers like General Ayub Khan are hailed for economic progress. There is also a narrative that General Musharraf was effective as a ruler because he improved the road infrastructure including in Balochistan. If building roads is a measure of legitimacy, then the most amazing physical infrastructures were built by the British colonizers. Why people stood up against the British? Mengal asked.

Discussing the role of media in educating youth, Mengal said that as social influencer and opinionmaker the media had miserably failed in educating the youth politically. Speaking of Balochistan, he said the media industry had collapsed in the province due to two key reasons. First, implicit restrictions imposed on journalists by the state have disabled journalism in the province. Secondly, ill-educated and low-paid journalists have further hastened the downfall, he said. According to him, the media's role in Balochistan had reduced to being the messenger of the government, politicians, and security institutions. The industry has morphed into a "*propaganda factory*", he said. Fear of insecurity among journalists force them to report only those contents dictated from the authorities. There is no investigative journalism to dig into issues or evaluate official claims against facts, he said.

Akbar Notezai (Journalist):

Notezai said the ongoing conflict in Balochistan was socially and politically transformative as it had redefined the socio-political landscape in Balochistan over the past years. Once reputed as a secular society, Balochistan had progressively embraced religious radicalism which was manifested in faith-based terrorism directed at minorities, Notezai noted. He said Balochistan was the epicenter of Pakistan's major crises and challenges such as ethnic separatism, sectarian bloodbath, enforced disappearances, as well as Reko Diq etc., yet the province had been wiped out from the national media. *"Journalism virtually does not exist in Balochistan"*, he said, adding that one could gauge the state of journalism by the fact that BBC had only a single staff in the entire province that makes up roughly about half of Pakistan geographically.

He said English journalism was comparatively safe as its had limited readership. On the other hand, journalists associated with Urdu press were under greater restrictions, he said. Besides, the journalists are paid meagre salaries due to which many of them are under debt. Their financial weaknesses are exploited by politicians, Notezai said. According to him, there had been a well-planned crackdown on freedom of expression and ideas. In the past, libraries had been raided and books confiscated by security agencies in Gwadar and Turbat. Youth reading works of independent authors was viewed as a threat. On the other hand, extremist literatures promoting religious and sectarian violence were sold openly in bazaars of Quetta especially under the Musharraf regime, Notezai said, further adding that later due to external pressures many of those shops were closed down.