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# Up to 40pc children c

By Our Staff

ISLAMABAD, May 27: An estimated 35 to 40 per cent children of school going age are out in streets or cannot access education. At the same time, economic crunch, ongoing war on terror and education under attack are likely to cause increase in child labour that already stands at up to 12 million mark.

These facts were listed on the top of a report entitled "The State of Pakistan's Children 2008" launched here Wednesday. Spread on 270 pages, the report was prepared by the Society for Protection of the Rights of the Child (Sparc).

Highlighting the plight of children, the report said almost 30 per cent children under five years of age were malnourished. Pakistan had one of the highest rates of infant mortality at 73

per 1,000 births in South Asia, while as much as 9,000 to 10,000 child offenders were in criminal litigation.

Among other problems, quality education became focus of deliberations. Pervaiz Hoodbhoy was less concerned with billions not being pumped into education than the little spent on mis-education. "It's a damning failure of our system," he said, criticising authorities for manipulating children for specific ends that no civilised society should allow.

"In last 25 years we have poisoned the minds of children, teaching them to acknowledge and identify forces working against Pakistan, demonstrating by actions and belief in fear of Allah, understanding differences between Hindus and Muslims, comprehending India's evil designs against Pakistan

and collecting pictures of soldiers and policemen," Mr Hoodbhoy said.

The report quoted World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness 2008-09 that ranked Pakistan 117 out of 134 countries in terms of quality of primary education.

It also said 20 per cent of Pakistan lacked educational facilities and Rs6.5 billion Public Sector Development Programme 2007-08 did not address the problem. The report also quoted United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) that listed Pakistan among countries where education was under attack.

Referring to sorry tales from Swat, the report highlighted that education was most under threat in two major provinces - NWFP and Balochistan -

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both riddled with internal conflicts.

The seven chapters revealed that situation of children and child rights continued to receive low priority by the government and the civil society.

Giving highlights, Sparc Manager Media Fazila Gulrez disclosed that the state of Pakistan's children continued to be sad. She said Pakistan had legislated laws both at the national and provincial level to protect children such as juveniles from child labour, child marriages; to guarantee education to ensure every child enjoyed the right to education at least at primary level; and protect children on streets.

Yet children were being denied their fundamental rights to education, safety and security, quality and proper health care and recreation among

many other basic rights. This is a result of poor or no enforcement of laws and poverty of will on the part of the government and the civil society to take children and their life and future seriously, she said.

Ms Gulrez added that going by the situational analysis of the state of Pakistan's children, the war on terror in many ways mirrored consequences of denial of human and child rights for the last 60 years. Swiss Embassy's Charge d'Affaires Konstantin Obolensky hoped that more child rights activists and defenders would come forward to address vulnerable children.

Norwegian Embassy Minister Counsellor Development Dr Sissel Volan stressed that "Education is an underlying priority if Pakistan wants to

accord priority to its children." National Programme Manager (Juvenile Justice) Rafiq Khan said: "There are serious offences committed against children and not covered under the provisions of penal laws of Pakistan - corporal punishment, child sexual abuse, child pornography, and sale and trafficking of children with impunity.

"The traffickers, exploiters, abusers and molesters of children enjoy impunity. There is an urgent need to bring such offences under the ambit of law. To safeguard the safety and security of children's lives, body and soul the government must introduce a comprehensive child protection law in Pakistan."

Federal Minister for Human Rights Syed Mumtaz Alam Ghani was the chief guest on the occasion.