

Win hearts and minds to curb militancy

By induswaters

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PESHAWAR: Experts from different countries on Tuesday put their heads together to suggest Pakistan how to rehabilitate the militants and extremists fighting its security forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the adjoining tribal belt.

A two-day strategic workshop on rehabilitation and de-radicalisation of militants and extremists which started here on Tuesday appeared to be the first attempt at official level for reintegrating such elements in the society.

Organised by the Fata Capacity Building Project, a US funded initiative being implemented in tribal areas, the workshop is aimed at assisting the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and Fata Secretariat in developing policy recommendations for rehabilitation of militants.

This activity has been designed to enhance the knowledge of government officials and assist them in preparing policy recommendations for federal government.

Experts from International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), Singapore, covering rehabilitation programmes in different countries are acting as resource persons for the two-day activities, where senior military and civilian officials were taking part.

Governor Owais Ahmed Ghani, who presided over the first session of the workshop, told the participants that use of force was not the solution to curbing militancy. "It is only a mean to create space for other interventions to take place," he added.

He said that increasing social fragmentation in Pakistan society because of sectarian, ethnic divides and socio-economic inequalities was causing intolerance, violence, uncertainty and lack of confidence among the people.

Mr Ghani said the government had so far tackled militancy through military means. "The ideological aspects of the issue have not been addressed so far. It has to be done for winning hearts and minds. Time has come now to do this," he said.

He stressed the need for reconciliation process in the region. "The Pakhtun society has many noble and good traditions of reconciliation that need to be activated in the due course of time," he added.

Earlier, former provincial chief secretary Khalid Aziz underlined the urgency of a policy that prescribed a process to transform and release the individuals, who were currently

under detention, on the assurance of their relatives that they would not be a threat to the country.

Feisal Mohammad Hassan, Salim Mohammad Nasir of ICPVTR, Malkanthi Hettiarachchi and Shehzadi Baig presented case studies of rehabilitation programmes being run in Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Sri Lanka and Yemen respectively.