

# NEWSCLIPPINGS

JANUARY TO JUNE 2021

## EDUCATION



## Urban Resource Centre

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## Reopening schools

THE government has made the difficult decision to reopen schools in phases in the coming weeks, a development which comes after educational institutions across Pakistan took an extended winter break due to rising Covid-19 cases in the country. The coronavirus incidence here is still worrying, with the number of critically ill patients in hospitals rising and daily deaths clocking in at between 50 to 80. However, neither the decision to close or to reopen schools is an easy one to make. The pandemic has disrupted the education system across the world, and many countries, such as the United Kingdom, have been forced to close schools even in the second wave. But while developed countries adapt to online learning and can continue the learning process with some modifications, in developing countries where access to computers and the internet not to mention a constant supply of electricity is a huge challenge, digital lessons are a luxury that millions of children cannot afford. Already, Pakistan has suffered immensely as a result of school closures. Although these were necessary to slow down the spread of the virus, the long-term effects of the shutting down of schools are equally if not more devastating. A few months ago, a World Bank report on Pakistan's education poverty predicted that nearly one million children would drop out of school as a result of closures and logistical issues triggered by the pandemic. Such a scenario is a blow to the young people of this country, 44pc of whom are already out of school. A spike in the dropout rate would rob young people of the opportunity to learn, grow and eventually be absorbed by the workforce — an eventuality that will have far-reaching economic and psychological effects on society.

Given these harsh realities, the government's decision to reopen schools and simultaneously keep an eye on the Covid-19 trajectory appears to be the practical way forward. The key is to mitigate transmission as much as possible in all spheres of life in order to give priority to education, so schools can remain open and the damage to learning outcomes is limited. The coming days require a careful balancing act with effective cooperation and coordination between governments, schools and the public to keep the virus to a manageable level and prevent another closure of educational institutions. Here, mass testing, training of teachers and school staff, and an effective communication system are critical.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 06/01/2021)

## 1,000 new schools to be set up in Sindh

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah granted permission on Wednesday to the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) for establishing 1,000 school on the public-private partnership model.

The CM gave the approval for setting up new schools while presiding over a meeting of the SEF board of governors, where he was informed that the initiative was aimed at bringing 200,000 out-of-school children back to classrooms.

### Subsidy

Besides, SEF managing director Kazi Kabir told the board of governors that a five percent increase in the subsidy on children enrolled in schools had been approved and yet, no subsidy was given for the past five years. He further said currently, a subsidy of Rs700 was to be given for all primary grades, but it failed to give any incentive to partners to progress.

In its place, Kabir proposed increasing the subsidy for grades katchi to two by Rs100 and for grades three to five by Rs300 to ensure that partners were given an incentive to progress. And higher subsidy rates for higher grades will motivate partners to recruit specialist teachers, he added.

On the recommendation of a SEF committee, the board approved a subsidy of Rs800 for grades katchi to two, of Rs1,000 for grades three to five, Rs1,500 for grades six to eight, Rs2,000 for grades nine and 10 and Rs2,200 for grades 11 and 12.

### Scholarships

The board also agreed to offer scholarships to high achievers who studied at government schools and got admissions in cadet colleges on merit. Students who are to be offered scholarships will be selected by the SEF's academic council.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 14/01/2021)

## Schools bound to call in students on alternate days

All public and private educational institutions are bound to call students to campus on alternate days - half the student population on one day and the other half on the next, said [Sindh](#) Education Minister Saeed Ghani on Friday.

Ghani was briefing the media outside the Sindh Assembly building after the education department's steering committee's meeting on the day. Examinations will be conducted after 60 per cent of the syllabus is complete, said the minister, reiterating that no student will be promoted this year without sitting for exams. Even if the examinations have to be delayed by two or three months, he added.

Schools across the province are set to resume on campus classes from February 1 for Grades I to VIII, as decided earlier by the National Command and Operating Centre.

But, said Ghani, every child will be on school premises only three days a week as educational institutes are to call students in two groups, on alternate days.

All educational institutes are also bound to follow the coronavirus-related standard operating procedures (SOPs) mandated by the steering committee, he added.

Ghani reiterated that coronavirus screenings will continue at all public and private educational institutes.

The minister further apprised that a sub-committee of the steering committee, which comprises the secretaries, members and chairpersons of schools, colleges and universities and boards, will present a report regarding the current and next educational years, examination schedule, holidays and admissions in the next week.

Matters will be finalised after consultation with all stakeholders at another meeting of the steering committee to be held on January 30, he said.

The academic plan made last year had to be revised again due to the pandemic, said the minister, adding that although the curriculum was reduced by up to 40 per cent, schools were shut for another two months during the second wave of the contagion.

The 20 per cent discount in fees announced during the lockdown will be revoked now as the lockdown is over now, he said.

The difficulties of private educational institutes were also deliberated upon during the meeting and the demand to provide loans to private, especially small, educational institutions will be put before the Centre, he added.

According to the minister, a census will be conducted of all private educational institutions and the number of students in the province enrolled in these institutes will be counted as well. Besides, the literacy rate at private institutions will be tabulated, he said.

Replying to a question, Ghani said that the problems plaguing his department could not be resolved in a day or two. But steps are being taken to address the issues, he insisted. The process to appoint good officials in the department has been initiated, he added.

In response to another question, the provincial minister maintained that the Sindh Assembly had passed a resolution to revoke the ban on student unions back in 2019, but the Pakistan People's Party-led Sindh government wants all political parties to agree that they will not use students for their own political purposes.

The steering committee's meeting was attended by the education department secretary, chairpersons of all Sindh's boards, the colleges and boards chairperson, experts, and others.

Earlier this month, on campus classes resumed across the province for students of Grade IX to XII after a nearly two-month long suspension due to the second wave of the pandemic. The NCOC is set to resume physical classes for the primary grades as well on February 1 after a review of the situation.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 23/01/2021)

### **New PhD policy**

EARLIER in the week, the HEC chairman announced several changes for undergraduate and PhD degrees in the country. Under the new policies, the two-year BA/BSc and MA/MSc programmes would stop being optional and be phased out, while a four-year BS programme would be offered in their stead. The more significant policy change, however, affects the admission criteria of the PhD programmes offered in the country. The minimum requirement for years of study for admission to a PhD programme has been reduced from 18 to 16. Through this, the requirement for obtaining an MPhil degree to pursue a doctorate degree has also been waived; students can now apply for a PhD programme directly after completing a four-year BS degree. However, students who obtain admission to a PhD programme after completing their BS degree will have to put in more credit hours of work as compared to those holding an MPhil degree.

Not everyone has welcomed these changes which have drawn criticism from teachers' and lecturers' associations. The Federation of All Pakistan Universities Academic Staff Association has voiced its concerns, pointing out that the new policies would reduce the quality of research, which an MPhil degree focuses on, and also imperil students' prospects of admission to PhD programmes in foreign universities where a Bachelor's degree from Pakistani educational institutes is often not accepted. What has also been underscored is the failure of the government to take the viewpoint of academic circles into consideration. It is an open secret that the existing higher education and research culture in the country is nowhere near where it should be. According to the HEC chairman, the new changes have been introduced to address the disparity between the country's higher education system and industry where an average graduate has few marketable skills. However, for any new policy to work, a much larger debate is needed on the issue, along with efforts to address the many deep-rooted structural problems of higher education in the country.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 23/01/2021)

### **Classes to be held in Sindh from Feb 1 on alternate days**

Even though educational institutions have been allowed to open from February 1, they have been asked to hold classes on alternate days. Hence one class will come on one day and another on the second day bringing up 50 per cent attendance.

This was said by Sindh Minister for Education Saeed Ghani following the department of education's steering committee meeting held on Thursday to decide the academic calendar for the current year.

Saeed Ghani said that universities across Sindh would reopen on Feb 1, but all government and private educational institutions will be bound to call 50pc students on one day and the remaining 50pc on the second day. He also said that without examinations, no one would be promoted this year.

Meanwhile, the steering committee will present its report regarding the current and next year's calendar, including examination dates, admission date, holiday schedule, etc, after another meeting to finalise everything on January 30.

Saeed Ghani said that last year the academic plan was compiled keeping in view the Covid-19 pandemic, and the curriculum was disturbed, too. "But the stakeholders have agreed that this year no one will be promoted without exams even if 60pc of the curriculum is covered during the year," he said.

He further added that the educational institutions will be bound to observe all standard operating procedures (SOPs) also approved by the steering committee. "Covid-19 tests in all private and government educational institutions will continue," he said. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 23/01/2021)

### **217 govt teachers entered plea bargain with NAB, SHC told**

Out of 435 Sindh government officials who were restored on their posts after they entered a plea bargain and voluntary return scheme with the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), 217 are teachers, stated a report submitted to the Sindh High Court on Saturday.

The report was submitted by the Sindh chief secretary on a plea filed by Muttahia Qaumi Movement-Pakistan leader Kanwar Naveed Jameel.

According to the plea, over 500 officials who had embezzled funds had been reposted in different departments of the Sindh government after they voluntarily returned misappropriated funds to the NAB.

The plea contends that the return of embezzled funds by government officials was akin to them admitting that they had committed corruption and hence, all such reinstated officials must be removed from their posts.

In his report submitted on the plea, the provincial chief secretary pointed out that most of such officials were primary and secondary school teachers and dismissing them all at once could create a crisis in the education department.

He further stated that of the officials who had returned embezzled funds, 55 had been meted out strict punishments, 10 had been forced to take retirement, 12 had been demoted and 29 terminated, the annual increments of 73 were held back and action was being taken against 238.

The chief secretary again raised concern that if 217 primary and secondary school teachers, who had entered a plea bargain with the NAB, were terminated at once, a "void" would be created.

He informed the court that the secretaries of all provincial government departments had been directed to finalise disciplinary proceedings against officials who had entered a plea bargain and voluntary return scheme with the NAB within 30 days.

The chief secretary prayed the court to give him 60 days for taking action against the officials.

#### **Transgender rights**

Separately, a two-member bench comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Amjad Ali Sahito disposed of a plea after rules for the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2020, as approved by the federal cabinet, were submitted to the court. The plea sought the implementation of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2020.

The rules state that all government offices are to allocate separate spaces for transgender queues, initiatives should be taken to facilitate transgender persons intending to go for Hajj and Umrah and that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will pay for their pilgrimage, and separate shelter homes should be set up for them. The rules also bound all government departments to formulate policies for providing guidance to transgender persons on various matters.

Furthermore, the rules bar male policemen from arresting transgender persons, stating that only a transgender cop can arrest a transgender person. As per the rules, separate cells and washrooms should be reserved for transgender persons in prisons and transgender prisoners are to be transported to and from the courts in separate vans.

Plus, the rules state that transgender persons should be provided free legal assistance and education. They also underline the need devising a policy for employing transgender persons in government departments and institutions.

To add to this, the rules state that separate commissioners and federal ombudsmen should be appointed for hearing the complaints of transgender persons.

The rules also call for having separate queues of transgender persons at polling booths and appointing officials at the National Database and Registration Authority, passport office and driving licence offices to assist transgender persons.

All documents and identity cards are to specify the gender of transgender persons as 'X', as per the rules approved by the cabinet. The court was told that the Ministry of Human Right has issued a notification for the approval of the rules.

At this, the court disposed of the plea. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 24/01/2021)

### Annual matric, intermediate exams to begin in July in Sindh

The sub-committee formed by the Sindh Education Department's steering committee has finalised the academic calendar for the current academic session 2021 and the next academic session of 2022, and proposed that annual examinations should begin in July with a delay of two months.

These two academic calendars will be presented in the steering committee's meeting slated for January 30 for approval.

A meeting of the sub-committee, headed by Secretary School Education Ahmed Bakhsh Narejo, was held at the Scouts Headquarters, Karachi on Monday.

The meeting agreed to start the annual examinations of matric and intermediate across Sindh in July with a delay of two months.

Earlier, it was decided to start the examination after Eid-ul-Fitr, for matric from May and for intermediate in June. However, it has now been decided to give more time to students to study, while summer vacations for students of Grades I to VIII students of private and public schools across the province will be given only a month off, in July.

It was also suggested in the meeting that the duration of examination of matric and intermediate students should be limited to a maximum of two hours and practical examination should be terminated. Instead of conducting practical examination, the share of its marks should be split in two and 50 per cent of them should be included in the theory examination while the remaining 50 per cent in Constructed Response Questions.

Last week, after a meeting of the education department's steering committee, Sindh Education Minister had stated that no student will be promoted this year without sitting for the examinations. He had further said that the annual examinations would be conducted after 60 per cent of the syllabus is complete. Schools across the province are set to resume on campus classes from February 1 for Grades I to VIII, as decided earlier by the National Command and Operating Centre. But, said Ghani, every child will be on school premises only three days a week as educational institutes are to call students in two groups, on alternate days.

The meeting also agreed that the new academic session of 2021-22 should start from August 2, 2021 while admissions in colleges should start from October, 2021 after matric results. In addition to this, the schools should be closed for 6 days in the current academic session, which will continue in the next session. It was suggested that the winter vacations this year should last for only eight days, that is from December 25, 2021 to January 1, 2022 and the schools should be reopened from January 2, 2022. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 26/01/2021)

### Intern experience

THE Higher Education Commission (HEC) recently launched a new competency-based undergraduate system for Pakistani universities and degree-awarding institutions. Summer internships are an essential component of the framework. Internships have been made an integral part of the educational experience. But the test of this latest addition can only be assessed through its implementation.



Even before the HEC's latest move, student internships were an integral part of professional and higher education for many degree programmes. Almost all well-known institutions of higher learning arrange to send their students to firms, industries, organisations etc. where they can get the relevant experience. Students spend one or two months in the organisation. Their experiences are varied and should be analysed in order to make improvements.

The exercise begins with the dispatch of correspondence to prospective firms and establishments. Negotiations on the number of internship positions, terms and conditions of tasks, duration and reporting protocols are part of the routine followed worldwide. It is a moment of excitement for the young folk, who compete for internship slots, when they are selected to experience a work environment first-hand.

*Even earlier, internships were integral to student life.*

In firms and organisations that routinely accept student interns, the programmes are well organised and students are facilitated in a meticulous manner. Students are handed a complete description of their assignment and milestones to be achieved, details of contact persons or departments which can guide them in drawing up or structuring schedules, and so on. The students gain a lot in terms of understanding the field of work and the organisational culture as well as professional values. Some organisations pre-test the students to assess their capabilities and interest during the first few days of work. Thereafter, they are placed in departments where their input can be effectively utilised.

The objective is to provide students an opportunity to observe the practice and applications of theoretical concepts. For instance, many students are able to obtain hands-on experience with state-of-the-art software packages. Engineering students work with machinery they learn about in classrooms. Students of architecture get to work on designs that are already in the process of being executed.

There is a downside though. Some students complain about the lack of prior planning in host firms. Mundane work is assigned to them. Tasks such as sifting through redundant office records, making cumbersome inventories, doing data-entry operations etc. are practically invented to keep the students 'busy'. Due to reasons of confidentiality, they are not allowed to enter spaces where commercially important operations are underway. In some cases, the students are asked to leave early; they are not allowed to benefit from their association with the organisation. Students also bring back tales of substandard work. Such experiences can leave students utterly disillusioned.

Besides, in many cases, interns do not receive orientation material or a task list, rendering them directionless. Many firms don't advertise or liaise with university managements. Similarly, some placement offices in universities are slow to respond to the queries of prospective employers.

Issues related to gender sensitisation are also crucial. About half of the student body in institutions of higher learning comprises young women, who, like their male counterparts, apply to and are accepted by various organisations for internships in their respective areas of interest. However, incidents of harassment of various kinds have been reported by some of these students. Undesirable gestures, indecent remarks and uncouth conduct on the part of some staff members appear to be quite common. The women students have tended not to report such situations to the management of the organisation where they are interning. Such events shatter their image of the business world and there is apprehension on their part when it comes to stepping into the job market after graduating. Besides, their self-confidence can suffer enormously.

These issues must be addressed to make all internships a rewarding experience. Teaching institutions can assign course credits for completing an internship, as done in many universities globally. Many times, an effective internship can lead to employment in the same establishment.

Universities located in less-developed regions require enormous support from the HEC and other stakeholders. One way to deal with this challenge is to link them up with more established institutions for capacity building. Besides, in this clime of Covid-19, many firms and establishments are working either completely online or with thin resident staff. This will impact internship programmes and must be looked into.

(By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 07, 26/01/2021)

### **Experts discuss ways to educate 23m out-of-school children in Pakistan**

There are some 23 million children in Pakistan, who are out of school. Who are these children and what can be done for them?

The Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) on Wednesday hosted an online discussion with educational experts titled 'Out-of-school children: Who are they? What are their rights? What should we do?' to examine root causes of the issue of out-of-school children and ways forward.

Trustee, Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability, Sadiqa Salahuddin, who has designed and implemented many educational programmes for out-of-school children and founded the Indus Resource Centre, explained that there were basically two nuances of out-of-school children.

"Those who never enrolled in a school and those who dropped out. But in government schools, you see a third group, too. There you find students who have not attended school for months though their names are still there in the school registers. Are they in school or out of school? There is a huge number of such out-of-school children in urban as well as rural government schools," she pointed out.

*'Children whose mothers are not educated are the most affected'*

"In 1990, a total of 155 countries signed a declaration followed by the Millennium Development Goals that promised education for all. We have seen declarations and commitments that have followed, too. The number of ... out-of-school children comes from surveys based on enrolment and attendance," Ms Salahuddin added.

Sharing her own experience, she said that in the 1990s, when she was visiting schools in villages as part of her research, she found out that most girls there were not going to school beyond class five. There were no female teachers in villages and most children's parents, especially parents of girls, wanted them to be taught by female teachers.

"We also noticed that children whose mothers were not educated are the most affected as after they worked in agriculture lands during summer vacations, they had forgotten everything they had learned in school and returned blank. So we hired all local female teachers in our schools. They were all matriculated teachers at the time because that was the highest that they had been educated. Thus it was a compromise on our part. But now they have all done their masters," she said.

**'Money cannot solve everything'**

"We are running 330 non-formal centres for girls and young women who missed out on their education. Unicef is bringing the financing here. But money cannot solve everything. As far as girls' education in rural areas is concerned, political will is important, too. In 2014, an opportunity came when the government started a local education group for policymaking. We raised questions about mainstreaming problems, curriculum problems, etc. You see, one education model or design does not suit all as these students in the villages hailing from different backgrounds and religions, so innovation and flexibility in addressing their educational requirements is needed, too," she said.

Among some suggestions that she made in educating the masses was controlling the dropout rate.



"Otherwise all that we do will be an unending exercise," she said, also adding that around 18,000 children are born every day, and with such kind of population growth, you cannot educate all. "We need to control the population growth as more and more children will be demanding schools, which we cannot provide them so fast. So there is an issue of demand and supply that will also need to be taken care of," she concluded.

Deputy chief adviser, Advancing Quality Alternative Learning (AQAL) Project, Abid Gill, who has diverse experiences of working with Unicef, Unesco, JICA and Federal Ministry of Education and Professional Training in various capacities, made a presentation in which he shared some broader reasons for students being out of school, one of which was many students being overage.

"Most schools are not willing to admit them. Then the students themselves are also hesitant to sit with younger children. Also, in poor homes, parents are looking for incentives to send their children to school. Disability and child labour also keeps children away from schools as our system is not flexible in addressing the needs of all and accepting all," he said.

"There is an infrastructure, too, that needs to be in place in order to accommodate all students. The system should recognise the needs of all students," he said. "A training system for teachers, a monitoring system, an assessment system, etc, is also very much needed," he added.

As comparison, he talked about far more accommodating learning systems of countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines that have alternative learning systems and need-based options for students.

Associate professor and head, Graduate Programmes, AKU-IED, Dr Dilshad Ashraf, whose areas of research are curriculum, gender and non-formal education with a critical optic of equity, equality, and quality, shared a video A second chance at school, about her team's experience of teaching while using alternative learning programmes in some of the most disadvantaged areas. It was heartening to watch the example of reaching out to 460 learners in 16 centres that they had set up in Korangi.

"We had various age students in a single classroom but the teachers divided personal spaces, creating a learning environments for all those children in a world so away from the amenities that we are so used to because these urban slums had issues such as no electricity, no access to clean water, flooding, disease, etc," she said.  
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 28/01/2021)

### **Varsity students protest on-campus exams**

The students of Bahria University staged a protest outside the varsity on Thursday, demanding that exams be conducted online. Holding placards and shouting slogans, the protesting students questioned that if classes could be conducted online, then why not exams.

They blocked Stadium Road, following which the university administration closed the varsity's gates and called the police.

The students, however, were adamant that they would continue to stage the protest until a notification for holding online exams was issued.

They were of the view that if the varsity was to conduct on-campus exams, it may do so only after conducting on-campus classes for at least a month.

"We are not against digitisation, but we have not been able to prepare for exams properly given that classes were conducted online.

The administration is holding on-campus exams just so that it can collect huge sums in fee," a student alleged.

The students told The Express Tribune that when they had raised the matter with the university administration, they were told that online exams could only be held after a notification was issued by Bahria University's Islamabad campus.

#### **HEC's statement**

A day prior to the protest, the Higher Education Commission had disregarded the objections raised by students on on-campus exams, stating that it was at universities' discretion whether to hold exams online or on campus.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the HEC said the vice-chancellors of universities were consulted on the matter.

The HEC said in the statement that it was not up to universities to decide whether to conduct exams online or on campus, however, adding that in either case, the performance of students in exams should be assessed in a "transparent" manner.

#### **Hybrid model**

Meanwhile, in light of students' concerns, the University of Karachi and Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari introduced a hybrid model of exams.

Under this system, the varsities will be conducting online exams for subjects the classes for which were held online, and on-campus exams for subjects the classes for which were held on campus.

Multiple attempts were made to contact HEC chairperson Dr Tariq Banuri, but he remained unavailable to comment on the matter.  
(By Sadar Rizvi/ Rija Fatima The Express Tribune, 04, 29/01/2021)

## Education emergency

RECENTLY, on the International Day of Education, UN Secretary General António Guterres commended students and teachers for their resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has disrupted education and learning for countless students around the world. However, an estimated 44pc of all Pakistani children between the ages of five and 16 were not even going to school in the first place, and the figure is noticeably higher for girls than boys. On Wednesday, the Aga Khan University's Institute for Educational Development conducted an online discussion on out-of-school children in Pakistan, looking into some of the reasons why such a large percentage of the population has never stepped foot inside a classroom, or has dropped out before completing their studies. Even though Article 25-A of the Constitution directs that the state provide free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of five and 16, an estimated 22.8m children are not in school — the second highest figure in the world for that age bracket, according to Unicef. Furthermore, as noted in the IED discussion, Pakistan's population rate is rising at an alarming rate, and the number of out-of-school children will only grow in the near future, as the distance between demand and supply increases.

The reasons behind low attendance and high dropout rates is manifold, but primarily connected to poverty and accessibility issues. There are simply not enough schools in the country — particularly for secondary and higher studies, and especially in rural areas — and transport expenses remain a major concern for parents, along with all the other expenses. Children have to walk long distances, often with heavy schoolbags, and if there is no one to accompany them, parents may opt to take them out and put them to work — inside the home or outside. Additionally, if there is a gap in their studies, as there will be with the pandemic, children or their families are often reluctant to return to class. The state must wake up to this aspect of the challenge.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 01/02/2021)

## Educating Pakistan

IN the old days of print journalism, some of us were trained to keep the self out of what we wrote. But as all rules are meant to be broken here and there, here goes.



I did my 'O' Levels from a private school in Lahore in the late 1980s. Back then, only Aitchison College — a male-only preserve — offered 'A' Levels in the city. But by chance (or good luck) the winter I finished my exams, a few adventurous souls decided to open a co-ed place in dusty old Lahore to offer 'A' Levels to those on whom Aitchison's doors were closed forever due to gender or grades.

My decision was made. 'A' Levels it was to be, despite having secured admission in Kinnaird College. Thanks to a supportive grandfather, I was able to but great was the consternation at my decision. In those days, no female worth her salt said no to Kinnaird College — it was finishing school and Radcliffe rolled into one. Whether one aimed at further education, a job or marriage, Kinnaird helped one reached one's destination. It completed us the way Aitchison and/or Government College completed young men in Lahore.

One just wasn't supposed to say no to Kinnaird. The disgrace and horror I was subjected to by extended family and friends lasted for the two years of 'A' Levels.

A mere 10 years later, most of my female cousins opted to do their 'A' Levels and then continue their education at either a private university in the country or abroad. No eyebrows were raised and no questions asked, for by then, public-sector colleges, Kinnaird included, were not the first choice.

This personal account is indicative of some of the changes in the education sector in Pakistan. By the time I was of school-going age, the elite had more or less disinvested from the public-sector education system. Private schools were coming up and the seeds of the biggest chains at present were laid back in the 1980s — probably as the impact of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's nationalisation was becoming evident. But the public-sector higher education system was still accepted.

However, by the 1990s, this too began to change and greener pastures — private colleges and going abroad — became the preferred choice. Now, for those who cannot afford the US or UK, obscure places or destinations such as Turkey or China are preferred. Gone are the days when ambitious parents would say that if their child didn't get into a prestigious place, it would be better to save money and try again later. The disinvestment from higher public-sector education is complete.

*Few have asked how the standards of education will improve for ordinary children.*

Around the time my cousins were deciding, Musharraf took over and considerable money was poured into higher education, research and scholarships, and nationalised colleges were given autonomy. The policies had their critics and supporters. I do not know enough to pronounce judgement but the trend described earlier did not reverse. Public-sector institutions never regained their past prestige.

This is not just about perception. In the 20 or so years that I have spent in English print journalism, when hiring for an editing position, it was easier to not look at the degree and institute but whether or not the applicants had done their 'O' and 'A' levels. It's not about language skills only; a colleague with a Master's degree could not do percentages.

Now the PTI government promises to fix the education system. It began by working on a uniform education system, which would include madrasahs. It has since come up with the Single National Curriculum.



First, we were told the aim was to ensure that every child in any part of the country would have the same learning objectives. This was followed by the decision to switch to the mother tongue in the early years — this is what experts (writing in English-language papers after having studied from Western institutes) say is the most effective. There was outrage from a few — because these few may have a mother tongue but their children are equally comfortable with English, which provides them an edge in school and life.

(Or is it that the edge allows them and their children to be comfortable with English even before school begins?) Little was heard from those who go to public-sector schools because they are used to random, abrupt decisions affecting their children's 'education'. And little is taught to them, as they move from class to class.

There was also considerable outrage over the curriculum for Islamic studies because of what it may mean for students of a few private schools.

But in all this debate — important as it may be and quite above the understanding of a subeditor — few have asked and few have explained how the standards of education will improve for the ordinary children who have no choice but to go to public-sector schools or the cheaper private-sector schools which flourish because they do a little better than what the state offers.

If I may venture a guess, the PTI government is obsessing with curriculum because it's easier to tinker with it than fix the education standards.

And its latest decision, in this regard, is to insist that only government approved textbooks be used by all and sundry (Ayesha Razzaque did a good article on this in *The News* recently). Anything extra will have to be approved by the government at a cost — who will do this and how is unclear.

People are upset — the few, who can still afford to get a good education. As a bureaucrat at the education ministry pointed out, the 40,000 or so sitting for 'O' and 'A' Levels in Pakistan are kicking up a fuss.

Eventually, they will find a way out also, as we all did when the standards at public-sector schools slipped and then at the colleges. I am sure of that. But for the rest, whatever outcome these decisions may bring, no one seems to think it will bring any improvement. A good public-sector education is not even a dream we aspire to anymore.  
(By Arifa Noor Dawn, 06, 02/02/2021)

### **Sindh rejects HEC's four-year graduation policy**

Adviser Universities and Boards Nisar Ahmed Khuhro at a presser held on Wednesday in the Sindh Assembly committee room announced that the province would continue with the two-year graduation degree programmes, describing the four-year graduation policy of the federal Higher Education Commission (HEC) as an "attack" on provincial autonomy.

"The process of abolishing the two-year degree programmes is an attack on provincial sovereignty. Sindh rejects these federal HEC policies and universities in Sindh will continue with the two-year programme under the Universities Act," he said.

Mr Khuhro noted that the historic 18th Amendment to the Constitution was never accepted by the people opposing provincial autonomy from day one. The education sector in Pakistan, he said, now came under the provincial jurisdiction after the 18th Amendment on the basis of which the Sindh Higher Education Commission had been established.

"The Sindh Assembly had passed the Sindh Universities Amendment Act in 2018 which accorded autonomy to universities so they could function according to their statutes."

Criticising the federal HEC, Mr Khuhro said the commission was not only violating provincial autonomy, but also the autonomy of universities by interfering in their matters.

He was of the opinion that the recent HEC initiatives, including its associate degree programme and PhD programme, would deprive the middle and lower-middle classes of their right to education.

Referring to the HEC's policy, he said it would close down two-year bachelor's programme in arts, commerce, two-year master's programme and the opportunity to have private graduation.

"We reject all these policies of the federal HEC and all universities of Sindh will continue all their programmes under the autonomy given in the Universities Act."

He further said the Sindh government would not allow the federal HEC to verify the certificates and degrees issued by Sindh educational institutions and only Sindh's institutions would verify the degrees and certificates.

"The Sindh government will also take up this issue in the Council of Common Interests. We want to make it clear that the Sindh government will not compromise on the 18th Amendment."

He said after the abolition of the Concurrent List, the federal government could have only four departments while the rest needed to be transferred to provinces.

"But, the federal government is not ready to accept provincial autonomy. It's unable to understand that if provinces are strong the country will be strong."

Mr Khuhro said the establishment of a federal HEC was also against provincial autonomy.

"A conspiracy is being hatched to control the universities of the provinces by setting up a federal HEC. We will not allow the federation to control the sovereignty of provinces."

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 04/02/2021)

### **Lyari street library in need of upkeep**

In August last year, the Sindh government helped set up Karachi's second street library at Lyari's Baloch Chowk. The project was undertaken in collaboration with the District Municipal Corporation (DMC) South with proper projection as one of its officials posted a video on social media of the library.

At the time, Iftikhar Shallwani was commissioner of the city who inaugurated the facility. The first such library in the city near Metropole roundabout was also his brainchild, and widely appreciated.

These days Street Library Lyari cuts a not-so-enlightening picture. It is a little disconcerting because a big number of book-loving people live in the area. Although it doesn't come across as deserted and is still a pretty catchy sight if you happen to be around it, the empty bookshelves and unclean benches leave quite a bit to be desired.

One understands that the government and administrative units in Sindh care a great deal about Lyari. One way of showing concern and care for a particular neighbourhood is to make efforts for the improvement of its education system. And there is no better way to do that than to build reservoirs of books, and make them presentable for men, women and children.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 07/02/2021)

### **Sindh cabinet lifts ban on teachers' transfers**

The Sindh government has introduced a portal where only 'electronic' transfer and postings applications of teachers will be accepted in the province. At the same time the ban on the transfer and posting of teachers has also been lifted. This was decided on Tuesday at a cabinet meeting that was chaired by Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah.

An official privy to the development told The Express Tribune that there would be no physical need for the teachers to approach the district education officer (DEO) for transfer. Now they could access the web portal to process the online application. "Codes are already allotted to teachers who can enter the code and process their application," the cabinet was informed.

"The teachers will be required to submit E-transfer applications for their transfer during two weeks of January every year. The scrutiny of transfer applications will be done by the DEO office during the third and fourth week of January. Thereafter, the orders will be uploaded on the education department website in the third week of March every year," said Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani while briefing the meeting about the system.

Ghani said these timelines would not be applicable in some cases such as reopening of single-room schools, wedlock cases, death of spouse cases and teachers suffering from debilitating, chronic disease.

The cabinet approved the transfer and posting policy for the schoolteachers which will come into effect from new academic year. Secretary School Education Ahmed Bux Narejo said the new policy is meant to open all viable closed schools. He added that his department would ensure availability of teachers in schools and maintain student-teacher ratio.

During the meeting, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah directed all departments, particularly local bodies authorities and semi-government organisations to resolve the pension issues of their employees.

The CM said: "An employee who retires from service must receive their pension and dues in time." He pointed out that local bodies such as KMC, DMCs, Sukkur municipal corporation and some others had failed to develop a modern and efficient pension payment mechanism. As a result, retired employees have run from pillar to post for their right. "This is unfair and should be addressed on priority," he ordered. The CM directed the chief secretary to personally resolve the issue.

### **Land for oil palm trees**

In order to meet the demand for edible oil, Sindh cabinet provided 3,000 acres of forest land to Sindh Coastal and Development Department for palm plantation. The idea was floated by Barrister Murtaza Wahab, the CM's advisor on law and coastal development department.

The Coastal Development Authority officials told the cabinet that Pakistan had a big demand for edible oil. It imported edible oil worth \$3.15 billion annually to meet domestic requirement which constitutes the highest import bill after petroleum products.

Murtaza Wahab said that the Sindh Coastal Development Authority (SCDA) has a success story of oil palm plantation and installation of oil palm extraction mini mill in the coastal belt.

He requested the cabinet to provide SCDA 3,000 acres of forest land at two connected forests, Kathore and Hayat Gaho, taluka Ghorabari for planting oil palm trees to produce oil.

#### **Subsidy for farming community**

The agriculture department told the cabinet that they intend to launch three initiatives to provide relief to farmers to address food security issues. They include provision of agriculture implements at subsidised cost; subsidy for installation of solar tube wells and subsidy for the installation of controlled atmospheric stores on turnkey basis.

The chief minister said that the cold storages should be established at divisional headquarter level preferably in private sector or public-private partnership basis. The government would encourage the private sector in this respect, he added. The cabinet agreed with the chief minister and said that because of the persisting power shortage the growers were not inclined to install solar tube wells, therefore the government should launch this scheme.

#### **Land for SEZ grid station**

The land utilisation department presented a case of allotment of seven acres to NTDC for installation of 220 KV grid station for Dhabeji Special Economic Zone (SEZ). A Rs4.25 billion project has been approved under CPEC to provide electricity to the SEZ.

The cabinet approved land for installation of a grid station and directed LU department to complete the legal formalities.

(By Hafeez Tunio The Express Tribune, 04, 24/02/2021)

### **Schools back to regular classes from March 1**

With the number of Covid-19 cases declining across the country, federal Minister for Education Shafqat Mahmood on Thursday announced that the restrictions imposed on schools in some major cities to conduct three-day classes in a week had been removed. During the ongoing second wave of the pandemic, the country saw over 3,000 cases daily — the number has now come down to around 1,300.

The federal and provincial governments had in a meeting at the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) last month allowed educational institutions to reopen as per their routine, but schools in four urban centres — Karachi, Hyderabad, Lahore and Peshawar — were allowed to open schools only three days a week.

However, the federal education minister on Thursday announced that such restrictions in these cities had been lifted and they were now allowed to hold regular classes. "Important announcement. All schools will go back to regular 5 day classes from Monday March 1. Restrictions imposed in some major cities on schools to conduct staggered classes was only till Feb 28," Mr Mahmood tweeted.

"This announcement applies to every educational institutions in the designated cities where restrictions had been imposed. Allah SWTs infinite mercy that we are returning to normal," he said, adding that all educational institutions would continue to observe normal Covid-19 standards operating procedures (SOPs) such as physical distancing, mask wearing and ensuring hand washing facilities.

The federal education minister, while speaking to *Dawn*, said the NCOC had already decided to lift the ban in the four cities from February 28. "Today, in my tweet I just elaborated," he said, adding that from March 1 all schools of the country will hold regular classes under the SOPs. "We [schools] are back to business with SOPs."

The minister said that now it was incumbent upon the heads of schools to ensure implementation of the SOPs.

"All educational institutions will continue to observe normal coronavirus SOPs such as physical distancing, mask wearing and ensuring hand washing facilities," said a press release issued by education ministry hours after Mr Mahmood's announcement on Twitter.

It said: "In continuation of the announcement by Shafqat Mahmood...on resumption of a regular school week for urban centers of Karachi, Hyderabad, Lahore and Peshawar. It is further clarified that these urban centres had been restricted to a three-day school week by NCOC because of a high spike in Covid-19 cases."

It added that after review of the Covid-19 cases in these centers, this restriction was being removed. The ministry, however, reiterated that the SOPs were still fully applicable on schools with a special emphasis on use of masks, physical distancing and hand washing.

It is relevant to note here that the government had already extended the ongoing academic session because from March 2019 till date the schools saw opening-closure scenario due to Covid-19 cases. Earlier, this session was supposed to end in March-April, but education ministers of the country had last month decided to extend the session till May-June and the next session will start in August. (By Kashif Abbasi Dawn, 01, 26/02/2021)

### **Only 50pc students allowed to attend classes at a time, says Ghani**

Sindh Minister for Education and Labour Saeed Ghani has said that as per the standard operating procedures (SOPs) educational institutions in the province are still bound to call only 50 per cent of students in Sindh as the Covid-19 pandemic is still very much there. He was speaking at a press conference called by him at his camp office on Sunday.

"On one hand, the Federal Minister for Education is announcing that there is to be 100 per cent attendance in educational institutions from March 1 and, on the other, he is also asking for the implementation of SOPs. It is not possible to call 100 per cent students," he said.

He said that in the last meeting of the steering committee of the Sindh education department, it was decided that both public and private educational institutions across the province would be opened with full SOPs. It was also decided then that educational institutions would call only 50 per cent of students and those schools which have extra classrooms would divide the class into two portions.

*Questions federal minister's announcement of 100pc attendance from March 1*

"How to maintain distance among the students when the classroom is full seems beyond the comprehension of the federal minister for education. But we have to take care of these things," he said. "The number of Covid-19 cases have definitely come down in the province, thank God, but we still cannot ignore the fact that there is a pandemic that has not been completely eradicated and until that happens, educational institutions here will continue to follow SOPs and call 50 per cent students to classes," he said.

Saeed Ghani also said that there is a shortage of teachers in Sindh for which they have advertised. "There are 37,000 vacant posts for teachers in the province," he said, adding that the cabinet had approved recruitment of teachers for which they have also signed an MoU with IBA Sukkur. The recruitment will be for primary school teachers (PST) and junior school teachers (JST).

"This time the policy has been changed before the recruitment of teachers and a PST teacher who used to have grade 9 will now be given grade 14 and the educational qualification for this is of a graduate at least. Additional marks will be given to BEd and MEd holders from Sindh," he said. "Recruitment will be done on full merit and at the union council level. He also said that female teachers would be eligible on their husband's domicile and PRC so that difficulties in their transfer and posting could be resolved later. He further said that there is a category known as 'Red', which includes schools where there are more teachers than students and so teachers coming in that category can apply for transfers throughout the year.

The second category is 'Yellow', in which the number of teachers is more than the number of students, while the third category is 'Green', in which the number of teachers is less than the number of students.

Saeed Ghani said that the second and third category teachers would not be able to transfer to red category schools while teachers of these two categories are to submit their application directly through the e-portal for the next academic year to start in August 2021.

The Sindh education minister also said that there were 7,000 such schools in the province, which were closed due to restrictions on recruitment and transfer of teachers. "So teachers will be posted here to start these schools immediately.

Saeed Ghani also said that he had also given six out of 29 teachers' training institutes of the province under public-private partnership for the training of teachers and work is also being done for their on-the-job training.-  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 01/03/2021)

### **Restoration of students' unions demanded**

On Monday morning a group of students representing the Sindh Students Council (SSC) began a 100-hour hunger strike (to conclude on March 4) outside the Karachi Press Club (KPC) demanding restoration of students' unions and hostels at educational institutions. It is not a large bunch, as one would have expected it to be, but the enthusiasm with which they have set up the camp outside the club has garnered attention of the media. This is despite the fact that the spot where the protest is being held is often visited by larger groups which drown out voices of smaller gatherings.

The SSC is led by a young International Relations student at the University of Karachi, Ali Saqlain Chandio.

Talking to Dawn he said, "It's a 100-hour hunger strike which is being undertaken with reference to March 4, 1967, known as the day of Sindh's students' struggle. Our basic demands are the restoration of unions at educational institutions, removal of security forces from the institutions, check on fake students' domiciles in Sindh and provision of hostels [among others]. This is our Karachi protest. A similar protest is being held in Hyderabad."

The young man who is in his final year at the university's IR department said 10 to 12 of his fellow students were taking part in the token hunger strike outside the KPC and a slightly bigger number, 15 to 20, was doing the same in Hyderabad. On Wednesday they're going for a protest march and many more will join hands with them.

Although the idea of restoration of unions has a national resonance, Chandio said it's just the SSC which was pressing for it. However, he added, all student associations had expressed their support for their act of demonstration by coming to the club to meet with them. The 100-hour mark, the young man pointed out, is symbolic.  
(By Peerzada Salman Dawn, 13, 03/03/2021)

### **School principals demand regularisation**

The principals of government schools who had qualified for appointment on their posts after sitting a test by the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Sukkur staged a protest outside the Karachi Press Club on Tuesday for the second consecutive day.

Shouting slogans, they demanded regularisation and denounced the requirement to again sit an exam again to retain their jobs.

"We have not been regularized even after four years of passing the IBA test," said one of the protesters, terming the requirement to appear for a test while not being regularized "absolute injustice."

According to the protesters, the Sindh Public Service Commission getting an advertisement published to announce that they will have to sit the test again is a violation of court orders issued in connection with the matter.

"Around 5,000 positions of principals are lying vacant in Sindh's government schools, yet they have taken measures directed towards terminating us for no reason," complained a disgruntled protester.

The protesters dubbed the condition to give the test again an act of "discrimination" by the Sindh government against them.

According to them, they have the support of Sindh education department officials, as well as that of associations in the department on the matter.

Sindh Professors and Lecturers Association (SPLA) Karachi chapter president Professor Munawwar Abbasi and SPLA central president Professor Karim Ahmed Narejo maintained on the occasion headmaster and headmistresses appointed on the basis of merit had transformed government schools for the better.

Narejo called for a bill to be introduced in the Sindh Assembly at the earliest for regularising school principals.

They appealed to Pakistan Peoples Party chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and the school education secretary to withdraw the condition of testing them again and address the issue of non-regularisation.

The protesters warned of staging a protest outside the Chief Minister's House otherwise.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 03/03/2021)

### **'Biometric attendance to be introduced for school students'**

[Sindh](#) Education Minister Saeed Ghani announced on Friday that a biometric system would be introduced in schools to record the attendance of students and biometric attendance would be made mandatory for students at later stages.

Speaking at a session organised to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the All Pakistan Private School Management (APSM), Ghani also elaborated on the renewed recruitment and transfer policy for government teachers, assuring that no one, including him, would be interfering in the appointment of teachers.

#### **Biometric system**

Ghani said a biometric system for the attendance of teachers in schools had already been introduced and now steps were being taken to mark students' attendance through the same technology.

The minister said the government was working towards making biometric attendance mandatory for students at schools.

#### **Recruitment and transfer policy**

The provincial education minister acknowledged that there was a shortage of teaching and non-teaching staff in schools and attributed it to the ban on the recruitment of teachers brought in place in 2018 by the then education minister and a later restriction imposed by the cabinet in 2019.

He maintained that the restrictions were enforced because teachers refused postings in areas where they were needed and instead opted for postings in places of their choice.

Then turning his attention to the new recruitment and transfer policy for teachers, he assured that appointments would be made purely on the basis of merit and only candidates passing the test organized by the Institute of Business Administration, Sukkur would be hired.

He elaborated that the tests would be organised for vacancies at the union-council level and teachers would be appointed accordingly. Ghani further stated that under the renewed recruitment and transfer policy, schools had been classified into three categories, namely red, yellow and green.

Ghani added that no teachers could be transferred to school in the red category; however, teachers employed in schools in the said category could apply for transfers elsewhere, provided that there was a vacancy in the applicants' choice of institutions for posting.

#### **Teacher training**

On the matter of teachers' training, Ghani said the government had finalized the plan for running five of its 20 teachers' training institutes on the public-private partnership model.

He added that admissions to those institutions would be made on the basis of merit and tuition fees would be paid by the Sindh government for the four-year programme as a loan.

The provincial minister also announced that teachers trained at the said institutions would be given government jobs right after they completed their training and the expense of their fees would then be deducted from their salaries, on account of the repayment of the loan sans interest.

**Clusters of schools**

According to Ghani, 49,000 schools were set up in Sindh in the past, which was way beyond its need.

"Around 50 to 60 schools were established in areas where just one school was needed," he said, adding that in some areas there were no elementary and secondary schools, which barred children from continuing education after primary classes.

He said the government had now constituted 6,000 clusters of schools, with each cluster comprising schools within a radius of two kilometres and including at least one elementary and secondary school.

Ghani further stated that all school in the province had been located on Google Maps with GPS and the data of each school was available online, including information about the condition of the school and the number of students and teachers.

"I now request all private schools organisations to work towards listing all unregistered private institutions so that complete data of children in schools can be compiled," he added.

Through this data, steps can be taken to improve the education sector, he explained.

Moreover, he said, the government had been giving endowment funds to students in 47 colleges and universities and it now wanted to extend the financial support on that account to students in schools as well, steps for which were being taken.

The minister urged teachers, students and parents to play their roles and work with the government to make "revolutionary" improvements in the education sector.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 06/03/2021)

**No interference in teachers' recruitment, says minister**

Sindh Minister for Education and Labour Saeed Ghani has said that the Sindh government is taking "revolutionary" steps in the field of education to ensure quality education to every child in the province.

He was speaking at a function organised by the All Pakistan Private Schools Management Association on their 30th anniversary here on Friday.

He said there was no interference by the government in the recruitment of teachers. "The teachers, who have been recruited during the last seven to eight years have been recruited on merit basis, and they are doing their job honestly. This time, too, no one, including myself, will be able to interfere in teachers' recruitment policy. All candidates will be able to get the job only after appearing for tests and interviews according to their qualification," he said.

He said they had made the transfer and appointment policy for teachers completely transparent and the teachers now would be able to apply for their transfer online through the e-portal when needed.

"Only those candidates who pass the test from IBA on merit will be recruited and this test will be conducted at the UC level."

He also added that they were moving towards biometric attendance of teachers and children and work had been started in this regard.

"Private schools associations are requested to register their schools, which are not yet registered, so that we can get complete data of the children studying in our province," he said.

Mr Ghani also added that they have completed a plan to run five out of 29 teachers' training institutes under the public-private partnership, where teachers would be trained and admissions to these training institutes would also be on merit.

"We will guarantee government jobs to the successful teachers from these institutes," he said.

He also explained that all expenses of their four-year education will be taken care of by the Sindh government, but in the form of loan. "These loans will be deducted from their salaries in easy monthly instalments and no interest will be applicable on this loan," he pointed out.

"I received the education portfolio in the first week of February 2020, but unfortunately in the last week of February that year, educational institutions had to close due to Covid-19. Since then, educational activities here have not been fully restored due to the pandemic."

He said that there was a shortage of teachers and non-teaching staff in government educational institutions and the reason behind this was the ban on their recruitment and transfer and appointment of teachers in 2018 and 2019.

"We have also introduced a system of online classes and will expand it further so that difficulties that have befallen us during the pandemic no longer come in the way of our children's education," he concluded.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 06/03/2021)

**6,866 closed schools to be reopened after teachers' recruitment, SHC told**



The provincial education authorities on Wednesday informed the Sindh High Court that 6,866 schools were closed across the province for lack of teachers but they would be reopened after new recruitment of the teaching staff within four months.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar directed the education and literacy department to file a compliance report.

When the bench took up a set of petitions mainly seeking implementation of the Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2013 for hearing, an assistant advocate general submitted a statement on behalf of the secretary of the school education and literacy department.

It has showed a district-wise summary of the 'viable' closed schools and vacant posts of teaching staff.

*Education authorities claim the appointment of PSTs and JESTs will be completed in four months*

It also said that 7,974 government schools in the province were 'non-viable', because of similar facilities nearby.

The statement said that the viable closed schools would be opened through new recruitment of teachers as a policy had been notified and published for recruitment of Primary School Teachers (PSTs) and Junior Elementary School Teachers (JESTs).

The chief programme manager of the education and literacy department undertook that the entire process would be completed within four months.

While taking the statement on record, the bench directed the department to submit a compliance report accordingly.

The bench observed that in totality various compliance reports had been submitted from time to time and asked the counsel for petitioners to go through all the reports and point out if the timeline given in the reports had been complied with for further direction of the bench.

#### **Show-cause notices**

The same bench on Wednesday issued show-cause notices to the senior director, Karachi Zoo, and a representative of the wildlife conservator over their absence during the hearing of a petition against functioning of Karachi Zoological Gardens.

On the last hearing, both the officials were directed to be in attendance on March 10.

On Wednesday, they did not turn up and the bench issued show-cause notices to them for March 18 to explain why they failed to appear before it.

The petitioners moved the SHC stating that the condition of animals being kept at the zoo was alarming and the lives of the creatures were at risk.

They argued that animals' hygiene, food requirements and health conditions were severely neglected and they were being kept in very small cages. The condition of captivity at the zoo amounted to criminal treatment of living beings.

#### **Food secretary summoned**

The bench on Wednesday also expressed dissatisfaction over a reply of the provincial food secretary filed on a petition about shortage of wheat in the province and summoned him for April 29.

An entomologist of the national food security ministry requested for further time to file a reply.

The petitioner had submitted that the flour crisis in the province had resulted because of the smuggling of wheat and flour from Sindh to Afghanistan.

He said the people continued to be forced to purchase flour at a much inflated rate.  
(by Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 11/03/2021)

### **Out-of-school children**

HOW can a country hope to become economically self-sufficient when at least a quarter of its child population has never seen the inside of a classroom? According to the government's own figures, one in every four children in Pakistan has never stepped inside a school and learning poverty — the percentage of children unable to read an age-appropriate paragraph by the age of 10 — is 75pc in the country. The incumbent government seems to have a fair idea of the challenge and the federal education department has come up with a framework to re-enrol out-of-school children. There are at least 18.7m children who do not go to school — a figure that is equal to the total population of a small European country. According to the framework, a summary of which was presented to parliament, the government plans a phase-wise reopening of classrooms from the most to least disadvantaged areas of the country. The plan calls for providing dedicated — and cheap — transport services to female students and teachers of secondary schools, training support for teachers and bridge programmes for students resuming school.

All this may look good on paper but how effectively will the plan be implemented, especially since education is a provincial subject? Though the federal education ministry has vowed to work in collaboration with the provincial and district tiers of government, it is easier

said than done because ground realities differ from one area to another while district administrations are non-existent. Secondly, data has also shown that those children who are in school are not learning well. The plan makes hardly any mention of the existing education infrastructure and how it can be improved. The government needs to further develop this plan to identify problem areas and chalk out clear short- and long-term targets and then devise a mechanism of collaboration for their implementation. Getting 18m children to school is a mammoth task that will require consistent and backbreaking efforts for many years by all levels of government. (By Editorial Dawn, 06, 11/03/2021)

### Humanising school-based education

EVERY year, a few million wide-eyed five-year-olds across the country eagerly or begrudgingly take their first steps in the institution in which they are expected to spend a large part of the next decade. An institution that is fundamentally designed to help them learn. But does the education system consider the question of whether what and how they learn is centred on fulfilling their basic human needs?

While local and international assessments indicate that a large part of Pakistan's young population is struggling, policy interventions have traditionally focused on raising academic achievement through increasingly rigorous standards and assessment measures. They have given impetus to the argument for preparing students to pass exams instead of focusing on learning and well-being, perhaps paradoxically contributing to our stagnated academic outcomes.

And yet, the status quo continues to prevail. Sitting through a lesson in a public school classroom, it is not hard to surmise that not much of significance is happening. Five hours a day, year after year, children sit in one place from one gruelling period to another, passively listening to or dutifully parroting their teacher, wearily bent over their textbooks, and for the most part, rehearsing for a fate-determining exam.

Not many will disagree with the proposition that the purpose of school-based education should not be to produce a conveyor belt of students who score well on their exams based on memorised knowledge of isolated facts. Education should not aim to create yes-men trained to go through the regimented norms of standing or sitting in military line formations showing unquestioning deference, or produce conformists unprepared for life after school. Or create spaces where children are made to collectively leap up and sing out a protracted greeting in front of an authority figure, recite rote-memorised text on demand, or be verbally or physically assailed for failure — all seemingly part of an antiquated view of schooling, centred on archaic ways of exhibiting respect, order and discipline.

*Instead of a vehement focus on academic achievement, parents, schools and policy experts can prioritise child welfare.*

In 2019, when I asked parents across rural Punjab and Sindh about their hopes and aspirations for their school-going children, most said one of two things: 'parha likha ho' (be literate) and 'acha insaan baney' (become a good human being). The former is understandable. One needs literacy skills and intellectual knowledge, coupled with the ability to think, reflect and reason in order to advance in life. The latter is critical for a more humane world and a more content life — but is conspicuous by its absence in our schools.

Both can be connected and embedded in instruction, assessment and school structures — to help children become kind, capable, conscientious human beings, who are civic-minded and socially adept, and able to solve problems, persevere in the face of challenges, thrive in a rapidly changing, polarised world and lead happy, healthy, self-fulfilled lives. And an essential first step towards this goal is to redesign and humanise schooling. A human-centred approach sees children not as passive beings to be transfused with knowledge but individuals with unique needs, interests and experiences valuable for knowledge creation; human beings to be guided with care, respect and encouragement and not be subjected to fear of authority.

Humanising or student-centred instruction, backed by decades of research, sees the child as an active member of the learning process that entails a range of skills and knowledge indispensable to future adults in their personal and professional lives, and meaningful in their childhood. Teachers must engage children in 'hands-on' experiential, inquiry-based and interdisciplinary learning, reflection and dialogue; and children must experience joy and derive meaning and real-world relevance from the content they are taught.

To support this pedagogy (empirically proven to boost learning outcomes and retention), learning spaces must be flexible and allow for cooperative learning, where students can move, see and interact with each other instead of being stationed at their desks all in one direction. And for learning to be meaningful, we must engage the child in the language they are most comfortable speaking in, while incorporating additional languages gradually.

A 10-minute drive away from the Kartarpur Corridor, in a small two-room public school adopted by the education non-profit, The Citizens Foundation, teachers begin the day with an informal sit-down with their students. This is an opportunity for them to discuss how they feel and have a face-to-face conversation on what's on their mind, what challenges they have been experiencing and how they can help each other through them. This is an acknowledgement from the teacher that the children she teaches are human beings with social and emotional needs and deserve to be treated as such. A wealth of global evidence indicates that to improve teacher-student relationships, well-being and academic achievement, it is critical to incorporate interventions targeted at fostering socio-emotional competence including skills such as empathy, self-regulation and communication) during the school day.

And finally, we must reconsider our visceral attachment to high-stakes assessments. These are demonstrably anxiety-inducing and demotivating, and force schools to adopt a solely mechanical focus on test preparation. And, based on evidence, as educationist Alfie Kohn says, these have "approximately the same effect on learning that a noose has on breathing". A more humane approach would insist on assessments being predominantly diagnostic — to tell us where the child needs support and meaningful feedback, and help us adapt instruction to better assist them. And instead of testing mere recall and a superficial understanding of facts, it is imperative to focus more on skills such as critical and reflective thinking through year-round measures including projects and work portfolios.

Ultimately, if we want to see children succeed in and outside school, ensure their well-being, help instil good values, and help build a more humane world, we must acknowledge, support and respect them as real human beings. In this way, instead of a vehement focus on academic achievement, parents, schools and policy experts can prioritise child welfare, both current and future, and help bring play, meaning, joy and laughter into our schools where they belong.  
(By Ayesha Mehkeri Dawn, 06, 12/03/2021)

### **Students challenge PMC's 60% requirement**

The Sindh High Court issued notices on Monday to the Pakistan Medical Commission over a set of pleas challenging the 60 percent marks condition for eligibility in written bachelors of dental surgery (BDS) admission test.

The petitioners contend that the PMC initiated its admission process but restricted students with below 60 percent marks in their intermediate exams from sitting for the entrance test.

The petition mentions that there are 690 BDS seats in the province and 515 of them are vacant.

During the hearing, the petitioners' counsel, Haider Waheed, argued that the minimum 60 percent mark requirement was unjust with students.

He moved the court to issue a stay on the restriction. Upon inquiry, the court was informed that the petition has been filed by students, medical colleges, and a non-governmental organisation.

PMC representatives, however, stated that they had not received any notices yet. The court sought the entire BDS admission records and a reply from the PMC by the next hearing slated for March 22.

#### **Sales tax refund scam**

Separately, the SHC rejected an appeal filed by a former Federal Board of Revenue officer and others convicted in a sales tax refund scam against the sentence awarded to them.

The court rejected the appeal filed by former FBR inspector Mumtaz Nizami and other convicts, Muhammad Asif and Adil Ashraf.

The court considered the time spent by the convicts in jail thus far as a sentence and upheld the Rs100,000,00 fine imposed on them. The court also upheld the order disqualifying the convicts from holding public office and government posts.

According to the National Accountability Bureau prosecutor RD Kalhoro, the convicts connived with the FBR inspector and formed fake companies to acquire a tax refund.

The national anti-graft watchdog maintained that the convicts caused a loss of over Rs110 million to the national exchequer.

An accountability court had sentenced Nizami to five years in prison and awarded 10 years of imprisonment each to Asif and Adil Ashraf. The convicts have spent seven years and five months in jail thus far.

#### **Contempt plea**

Meanwhile, a two-member bench, comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Amjad Ali Sahito, sought replies from the Sindh irrigation department secretary and other parties over a contempt plea pertaining to regularisation of contract employees in the department.

The petitioner has contended that the court had ordered the regularisation of employees in 2018 but the judicial order is not being implemented.

The bench issued notices to the parties seeking their replies.

#### **Missing persons case**

Another bench, comprising Justice Naimatullah Phulpoto and Justice Abdul Mobin Lakho, sought a report from the home department secretary over a set of pleas seeking the recoveries of missing persons.

Hearing the case of the missing citizen, Muhammad Umar Farooq, the court expressed annoyance at the relevant authorities for their failure to recover him thus far.

The police performance is dissatisfactory, remarked the court, adding that the police did not seem to be making any efforts to recover Farooq, who has been missing for years.

Seeking a report from the home secretary, the bench adjourned the hearing till April 21.

#### **Sentence upheld**

The same bench upheld the death sentence awarded to a prisoner named, Shahid Ali, rejecting his appeal against the sentence awarded him to in a murder case.

Announcing the verdict, the court remarked that the trial court awarded the death penalty to Ali on the basis of concrete evidence against him.

According to police, a district and sessions court had sentenced Ali to death in 2018 for killing a citizen, Waseem. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 16/03/2021)

### **20 held as police stop head teachers from marching on CM House**

Several teachers including females seeking regularisation of their services were detained and manhandled by police for trying to stage a protest demonstration near Chief Minister House on Monday evening.

Witnesses and police said around 957 head teachers belonging to 29 districts had staged a sit-in first outside the Karachi Press Club and later on outside the Sindh Assembly building for the past 23 days.

The headmasters said they passed the required test conducted by IBA-Sukkur but the provincial government was not regularising their jobs.

On Monday, the head teachers marched towards CM House from the Sindh Assembly.

Around 100 of them reached PIDC traffic intersection, located a few yards from CM House, when they were manhandled by the police in a bid to disperse them.

The protesters claimed that the police detained their 20 colleagues including nine headmistresses.

They alleged that the police subjected them to "executive high-handedness".

They said that the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party always talked about democratic rights but they had them tortured by police.

The protesters vowed to continue their protest till the regularisation of their services.

Later, the detained nine headmistresses were released by the police, said Faiza Fatima, one of the detained teachers.

She told Dawn that the police baton-charged their colleagues and some of them were reportedly hurt.

Ms Fatima said total 957 headmasters were recruited in the education department through tests conducted by the IBA-Sukkur, but the Sindh government was not regularising their services.

She said that it was their demand that their services be regularised through legislation from the Sindh Assembly on the pattern of the regularisation of the services of employees in other provincial departments.

A police officer, who wished not to be named, said that police only "pushed" the protesting teachers and they were not subjected to baton-charge.

He confirmed that all detained headmistresses had been released by the police, while around 11 headmasters were still in police custody.

Meanwhile, DIG-South Javed Akbar Riaz told Dawn that the police had not taken any action against the protesting teachers. (By Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 13, 23/03/2021)

### **'Court restrains govt from regularising 957 protesting headmasters'**

Sindh Education and Labour Minister Saeed Ghani has said that the education department cannot make jobs of protesting headmasters permanent because of court orders despite the fact that the government would like to regularise them.

"In these circumstances, I would urge the protesters to end their protest and return to their respective schools and do their duty while following their pending cases in courts," he said.

"Meanwhile, the Sindh government has requested the Chief Justice of the Sindh High Court to form a bench to look into the rulings of the High Court benches of Karachi and Hyderabad in order to come up with one decision. Since the headmasters have also approached the Supreme Court, if any decision were to come from there, we assure full implementation of it," he added.

The education minister expressed these views through a video statement released on Tuesday.

Saeed Ghani also said that the Sindh government was willing to make all these headmasters permanent after their passing the IBA test, but due to the court decisions neither the Sindh cabinet nor the Sindh government can do so. He also said that the protesters were already well aware of this fact that the government's hands were tied.

For several days now, 957 headmasters who passed the IBA test have been protesting outside the Sindh Assembly building demanding to be made permanent.

Saeed Ghani also said that they had also requested all the 957 headmasters to appear for the Sindh Public Service Commission examinations as well. "We recognise that all these headmasters are capable and the schools where they are performing their duties have an improved quality of education and we want to regulate all of them."  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 24/03/2021)

### **All educational institutions to remain open in Sindh**

Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani announced on Wednesday that all educational institutions across Sindh would remain open as usual.

He made this announcement while talking to the media after the meeting of the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC).

About what is going on regarding education as per the NCOC, the minister said that it was agreed in the meeting that no one would be promoted to any level without examinations this year.

That said, Mr Ghani added that the coronavirus situation was deteriorating day by day across the country and the number of infected people was increasing rapidly.

*Saeed Ghani says all examinations in the province will be held on time*

He said that the number of Covid-19 patients was increasing in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and in view of this, the educational institutions in some districts of the country had been closed until April 11.

But, he said, that the situation was still under control in Sindh with the number of patients here far less compared to Punjab and KP. "Given the situation, we have decided that all educational institutions across Sindh will remain open as usual, but only 50 per cent students will be called in as per the standard operating procedures (SOPs)," he said.

He also said that all private and public educational institutions would be bound to fully implement the safety guidelines and if any case of coronavirus was found in any educational institution, the school or college would be closed.

He further said that if any educational institution violates the SOPs, it would not only be closed but action will also be taken against those responsible.

Regarding the schedule of examinations in the province, Mr Ghani, who also holds the portfolio of labour, said that all examinations in Sindh would be held on time as per the decision and schedule of the steering committee of the education department.

"The situation regarding Covid-19 is still under control in Sindh but only when the SOPs are implemented. Problems may arise, otherwise," he said.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 25/03/2021)

### **IBA mulls alternative route from Maskan to main campus**

The Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi will be holding a meeting today (Saturday) to discuss the possibility of constructing an alternative route from the University of Karachi's (KU's) Maskan Gate to its main campus, built on the KU's premises. The move came following an altercation between an IBA student and a KU teacher.

During the meeting of the board of governors today, chaired by IBA executive director Dr Akbar Zaidi, an agenda under the heading of 'Relations between the IBA and KU and the way forward' will be discussed among other things.

The meeting will ponder on a roadmap to construct an alternative route.

The proposed route will require those visiting the IBA main campus to take a detour from the KU examination complex towards the campus' backside, from where they would be able to enter the IBA campus. For the purpose, a road needed to be built, the approval for which is to be given by the KU syndicate.

Sources in the KU privy to the development told *The Express Tribune* on the condition of anonymity that no request for the construction of the proposed road had been sent by the IBA yet.

This was confirmed by the KU administration.

The IBA does not have the ownership of its main campus at the KU and the route connecting Maskan Gate to the campus' entrance. In the past, attempts have been made for the transfer of ownership rights to the IBA.

#### **Probe into fight**

An IBA student had a dispute with a KU teacher, Mustafa Haider, in February. A disciplinary committee was constituted by the IBA to look into the matter and the student's alleged misconduct.

According to sources in the IBA, who asked not to be named, the student in question hadn't appeared before the disciplinary committee, but had submitted a written apology stating that he was unaware that the person he was having a fight with was a KU teacher.

The sources said CCTV footage of the incident showed Haider and KU guards beating the student.

On the other hand, sources in the KU maintained that Haider's act was in reaction to the student's misconduct. The matter was aggravated due to verbal abuse by student present at the spot, KU sources said.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 27/03/2021)

### **Uplift projects at public universities suffer from slow pace of work**

Several public sector universities, including Karachi University (KU), are executing their development projects at a snail's pace and so far have utilised only 25 per cent of their available funds for the current fiscal year, and the remaining money is set to lapse after June 30.

This information was shared during a meeting chaired by Adviser to Chief Minister on Universities and Higher Education Nisar Ahmed Khuhro on Monday.

The meeting focusing on development works being carried out in universities was attended by vice chancellors and pro-vice chancellors, among others.

Sources said representatives of universities — Jinnah Sindh Medical University, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto University of Law and KU — could not offer a satisfactory explanation when inquired about the slow pace of development projects despite the availability of funds.

*Up to 75pc of released funds likely to lapse after June 30 for non-utilisation*

This attitude, they said, attracted the ire of Mr Khuhro who made it clear to the attendees that funds' lapse would not be tolerated, and each university must ensure that development works were completed in time.

He directed the establishment of a project management unit to address the issue, telling the attendees that he would personally visit universities and inspect development sites.

"Despite receiving Rs30 million out of the allocated Rs130m in the current financial year, the JSMU couldn't open a separate bank account for the construction and upgrade of girls' hostel and an academic block planned in 2015. The project was estimated to cost Rs791m.

"The law university could make use of only Rs51m out of the Rs104m released for the construction of an auditorium, classrooms, and other facilities estimated to cost Rs200m," says an official press release.

It also states that the KU had failed to get the services of a consultant to complete the construction of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Chair and Convention Centre estimated to cost Rs442m.

The university had used Rs164m of the released Rs177m till 2016. The project envisaged in 2014 has been pending since 2017.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 30/03/2021)

### **HEC in focus**

THE federal government has removed Dr Tariq Banuri as chairman of the Higher Education Commission. A presidential ordinance reduced the tenure of the HEC chairman's office to bring about this administrative change.



The HEC's role along with other matters related to higher education is the subject of much debate. Some quarters see the HEC as a redundant entity after the passage of the 18th Amendment. Others see the option of its disbandment as disastrous. At present, the provinces are the custodians of public universities and degree-awarding institutions. On many occasions, lawmakers have been irked by the HEC's actions. Some years ago, the process of degree verification by the HEC caused consternation when certain lawmakers were disqualified for holding fake degrees.

Conversely, many arguments are cited to retain the HEC for all the contributions it has made to higher education. Quality control mechanisms, uniformity of core values in curriculum, the continuous revision of baseline curricula, continuing with projects, prospective grants and funding from international bodies, support to faculty in research, collaborations and seminar/conference grants etc are part of the argument to retain the HEC as it is now.

Provincial autonomy is probably the only rationale proffered to counter the argument of HEC supporters.

*Some initiatives need to be expanded, not discontinued.*



The issue has been greatly politicised. The replacement of two-year degree programmes with the Associate Degree and the recently introduced undergraduate and PhD policy frameworks are examples. The outgoing chairperson has tried to justify these policies with effective arguments but the opposition continues as many among students and faculty have protested. However, sacking the HEC chairman is not the answer.

Successive governments have mishandled transition management. Whether it was the devolution of development authorities in 2001 or the privatisation of utility corporations, poor decision-making attempts, lethargic responses and a lack of clarity about the goal itself have been in evidence. Moves to devolve the HEC can cause similar setbacks, unless there is informed decision-making, under the auspices of the Council of Common Interests, to settle the fate of higher education management.

The HEC has been far more effective than the erstwhile University Grants Commission. Development grants for universities, new campuses in the public sector, assistance to private-sector institutions, research and travel grants to faculty, scholarships for doctoral studies, allocations for peer-reviewed journals and development of knowledge resources during the past eight years are some feats that have earned the HEC laurels at home and abroad.

The creation of programmes and procedures with open access and competition for resources are worthwhile achievements, and credit must be given to the past and present leadership of the HEC which has also been instrumental in expanding higher education opportunities in less-developed provinces such as Balochistan and in former Fata. These initiatives need to be expanded, not discontinued or reduced in scale.

In fact, there exists enough room for the provincial commissions — if this institutional nomenclature is agreed upon — to contribute to higher education. The legal and administrative framework of universities is already under the control of provincial legislatures. They can devise a formula for extending financial support to universities after examining the releases from the centre/HEC, self-generation of funds by universities and annual budgetary requirements. Alternate sources of finances also need to be explored.

Many philanthropic organisations are willing to fund education if a credible utilisation framework, monitoring mechanism, transparency and prudent financial management are guaranteed. The provincial bodies can incorporate an efficient management structure to fulfil the demands of modern philanthropists. Choice of human resource for leading and running such bodies can make the difference. Provincial commissions can also explore the possibility of joint ventures and collaborative efforts with corporate, international financial agencies and bilateral financial institutions.

Assistance to universities that are in need of management and administrative help is another area where provincial commissions can play a greater role. They can be entrusted with the task of scaling up administrative and academic structures of new universities and be given the resources to deal with crises that new universities may be experiencing. Sharing of information, experience and infrastructure are some of the core areas where such input could prove most significant.

In recruiting academics and officers for provincial bodies, merit and competence must be the criteria. Higher education should not become the dumping ground for mediocre bureaucrats, retired armed forces personnel and political cronies.  
(By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 07, 30/03/2021)

### **Sindh schools to suspend physical attendance till class 8 for 15 days**

All private and government schools across Sindh have been directed to suspend regular classes from nursery to eighth due to the Covid-19 situation in the province for two weeks (15 days), beginning on April 6. However, the students of these classes and their parents, too, are encouraged to not miss out on learning activities and keep in touch with teachers on WhatsApp, through email, or through once a week visit to the school to collect homework.

This was said in a formal notification issued by the Department of School Education and Literacy here on the instructions of the Sindh Coronavirus Task Force on Sunday.

Just on Saturday, Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani had presided over a meeting of the Steering Committee of the Education Department in which all the stakeholders were briefed on the situation.

Saeed Ghani has said that the entire situation was later reviewed at a meeting of the Sindh Coronavirus Task Force held under the chairmanship of the Sindh chief minister on Saturday evening. The decision was taken then. The education minister also said that all these measures have been taken to protect children from the third wave of the coronavirus.

*'A teacher cannot give his or her full attention to students through online teaching'*

Still, the decision has not gone down well with the private school associations. Many called the education department "an enemy of education".

One school owner, Mohammad Ali, asked if the steering committee meeting before the CM's meeting had been called to play a joke on them.

Nida Aizaz, another school owner, wondered how they are going to pay for the salaries of teachers and staff with rent of their premises.

"Because, the moment we switch to online or virtual classes, the parents stop paying school fees. They only believe in physical classes," she said.

Syed Haider Ali, chairman of the All Private Schools and Colleges Association, has outrightly rejected the government notification. "Why close schools when there is not even a complete lockdown? And online classes have failed all over the world. A teacher cannot give his or her full attention to students through online teaching," he said.

"And such a decision during the final days of the academic year is devastating. Already there are 20 million out-of-school children here and we will be adding another million to that number with this wonderful decision of ours!"  
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 05/04/2021)

### Questioning education

ON our national stage, where only the PDM's survival and the government's economic policies seem to be worth obsessing over, there is another story which has a small group of people interested. As it concerns the education sector, one should be grateful that even a handful are paying attention.



The government's decision to remove the Higher Education Commission's chairman, Tariq Banuri, has provoked a round of allegations and counter-allegations, mostly in the English press.

A spate of opinion pieces have appeared in the English-language papers defending the chairman whose 'thankless' fight to improve the standards in higher education hurt the interests of various groups who 'ganged up' to push him out. It appeared that he wanted to ensure quality before doling out funds for scholarships, research centres and universities. And as is routine in Pakistan, anyone who wants to stem the flow (regardless of the reasons for it) of money from the government, the reaction is severe. It was a story one had heard so many times, with a few variations here and there.

But then came the counter view. Former chairmen of the commission entered the fray to defend the decision of removal — arguing that scholarships had not been given, poor decisions had been made such as allowing students to proceed on a PhD programme after a Bachelor's degree and consultants had been hired at heavy salaries. All of this led to a 'disaster'. (A number of these opinion pieces, covering both sides of the debate, appeared in *The News*.)

*Those with power don't care too much for the public-sector education system.*

But it attracted less attention than any of the other controversies raging in the political domain. On Sunday evening, however, the issue miraculously made it to television in a *Hum News* show. Tariq Banuri was giving his point of view; he is not averse to publicly admitting that opposition to him came from a former chairman Atta-ur-Rahman who was also present for part of the show to answer the allegations. Banuri argues that he tried to hold accountable research centres dependent on HEC grants including those linked to Dr Rahman and was told by the Prime Minister's Office itself to let the matter be. Dr Rahman denies the allegations and says the centres simply asked to be judged by relevant experts. (Mohammad Malick's show, in which both appeared, can be viewed online.)

Ayesha Razzaque, who was also present in the show, and writes extensively on education matters, is perhaps better qualified to speak on the merits of the debate. She mentioned the earlier years of the HEC and how perhaps at that point, it made sense to focus on quantity over quality — which was the focus of the HEC under Dr Rahman, and others, as it encouraged more and more to acquire doctorates, here at home and abroad. But, she added, with the passage of time, it was necessary to prioritise quality.

The conversation (and for once it was a conversation and not a shouting match) brought up vague memories of a discussion with a journalist we lost to the development sector years ago. He was working on education when I met him some time ago when the HEC was a much-favoured institution during the Musharraf years.

Even back then, it seems, a similar debate was going on. He explained that some wondered if it was possible to improve the education sector by pouring money into higher education when the foundation — the school system — was so poor. If poorly trained students were entering the higher educational system, they would end up with questionable PhDs. But then he added that the counter view was that we needed better teachers to improve the schooling and they would come from investing in higher education. It was the classic chicken-and-egg debate.

For myself at least, the present debate over quantity and quality sounds similar.

But more importantly, I wonder what it means when the question hasn't changed over nearly two decades. Why does it come up only periodically, if that, at moments of crisis?

And the attention is given to the larger policy only when individuals are affected.

Some years ago, the reappointment of Sohail Naqvi, the executive director at HEC, also led to a similar period of debate and discussion in the press. Back then, it was argued by some that his presence was deemed unacceptable because some in the bureaucracy wanted greater control over the funds at HEC's disposal. And there were also stories about how his reappointment was challenged by the permanent staff at the commission who were against his decision to 'regularise' contractual employees. Money mattered back then too.

Once he left, the HEC's policies rarely got any attention. (Perhaps the only exception is Dr Pervez Hoodbhoy who has continued to criticise the poor quality of research and PhDs candidates being produced under HEC supervision.)

Perhaps a reason for this is the larger apathy with which the education sector is treated; those with power don't care too much for the public-sector education system and those who do, don't get to be heard on policy matters. And the political system encourages quantity too — for every constituency politician wants to build public-sector educational institutions without a thought for standards.

And hence, one heard so little of the 'drastic' changes made by Dr Banuri at the HEC till the government decided to remove him. In fact, even now one can say that the Single National Curriculum generated more controversy than the higher education sector. For the former threatened to affect the private school system.

This time around, too, something similar is at work. The story will remain in the limelight till there are individuals who can be played against each other. But once they go quiet, the larger issue of whether bigger numbers will eventually lead to better standards, or what standards will have to be ensured, will be forgotten. But it's the policy debate we need to continue if the education sector is to be fixed.

(By Arifa Noor Dawn, 06, 06/04/2021)

### **Private schools' associations demand restoration of physical classes in Sindh**

Many private schools' associations of Sindh called a joint press conference to discuss the prevailing situation regarding the closure of schools here at the Karachi Press Club on Wednesday.

They said that everything and everyone had been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, but the biggest drawbacks and losses were being suffered by the education sector.

"The closing of schools again and again has been a big blow to us," said Tariq Shah, central chairman, All Private Schools Management Association-Sindh.

Quoting World Bank estimates, he said one million of the total schoolchildren whose education was disturbed due to Covid-19 last year didn't return to their schools even after they reopened.

*School owners ask govt to check social and political events and give priority to education*

"And those children who did come back eventually are still trying to catch up. Then the thousands of closed schools over the extended period also resulted in joblessness of millions of teachers," he said.

"Parents and students suffered, too, along with all those who work in the education sector or are doing any education-related work. The past four days have had us hearing about what the government wants to do in these trying times. You should also hear from us the school owners what we think should be done," he said.

"We also said this during the steering committee's meeting on Saturday that the closing of schools was no solution. And also that when transport, parks, malls, restaurants, movie theatres are carrying on as usual, then why can't schools also be allowed to function? We are also seeing social and political gatherings taking place," he said.

"Then why close schools? In fact, closing schools should be the last thing on anyone's mind. If the coronavirus situation worsens then we suggest considering the school closures as early summer vacations," he suggested.

"All over the world, online education has been unable to match physical classes. It is just not the same thing. And in our country we are also lacking in facilities to make online classes available for all," he said before making certain demands.

#### **Vaccination for schoolteachers demanded**

"The two-week closure of schools for classes eight and under should end immediately as the pandemic situation in Sindh is far better than the rest of the country. But here we were now hearing that the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) wants to close schools till April 28," he said.

The private schools' associations also demanded that the government and private schoolteachers be inoculated with the coronavirus vaccine.

They also demanded that the Cambridge International Board in Pakistan be asked to push ahead their exam schedules.

They asked also for checks on social and political events and for priority to be given to education.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 08/04/2021)

### **Reading trends**

RECENTLY I received a call from Ali Mohammad Goth (in Jahoo Tehsil, population 40,033) in Awaran, Balochistan. Jahoo Tehsil has only two high schools for girls. Scores of students from one of these schools had demanded books to read. This message was conveyed to me by their headmistress Ms Sabar-un-Nisa, courtesy Shabir Rakhshani, the education activist of Awaran. This made me jump up.



Ever since I started writing about book publishing in Pakistan 40 years ago, I have been told by representatives that Pakistanis do not like to read. This has been confirmed by my own sources. That has conventionally been advanced as the reason for the underdevelopment of the publishing industry. In 2019, a survey conducted by Gallup and Gilani, an affiliate of Gallup International, released the report of their survey on reading habits. It claimed that 75 per cent of respondents said they do not read books at all. The 25pc who read included

those reading course books, religious literature and magazines. This should not have surprised me, considering our appalling literacy rate (59pc) and abysmal state of education that produces 'uneducated educated'.

But I have begun changing my mind about our poor reading habits of children. It was a little girl from Mubarak Village, Sindh, who forced me to rethink the issue. I met her at the 'Incredible Libraries' session at the Pakistan Learning Festival in February. The Idara-i-Taaleem-o-Agahi has set up the Digi Kutubkhana in this village which has no phone or internet connectivity. Yet the library that stocks its books and a tablet in a steel trunk attracts the children though conventional wisdom holds that our children hate books. The Kutubkhana has triggered the process of transformation in their lives as I witnessed in the little girl who narrated before the audience the story she had read and then chatted with me confidently.

Now I believe that children with their innate curiosity and urge to explore take to books like a fish to water, provided the appropriate books — in terms of language, illustrations and graded text — are made available to them. Books stir their imagination and it has been proved they are the best teaching accessories.

*We do not know the link between education and book-reading.*

Adults are the culprits. Most schools don't even have a library and their stress is on course books — generally dull and insipid. Above all, the teachers are so focused on exams and results that the wealth of knowledge that books contain is denied to students. The biggest deprivation is that most librarians, if a school has one, do not engage with children in book-related activities.

In this context Ms Sabar-un-Nisa is remarkable. She chose to respond to her students' demands. Women like her will take the Baloch far.

Since we generally do no research on education we do not know the relationship between education and book-reading habits apart from making sensible assumptions. How do children who are avid readers fare academically? How do books affect their personality and temperament?

It would be worthwhile conducting such research. We, however, do learn from the book infographics released by the Australia-based Global English Editing recently that countries where books are read are faring better than us education-wise.

Here are some interesting highlights from the infographic. In 2020, the year of the pandemic, when the whole world was under lockdown, many people picked up a book to relieve their boredom. As a result, book sales worldwide went up by 35pc, though the sale of 'physical books' dropped uncharacteristically. The total revenues mounted and the global publishing industry was worth \$119 billion, with China in the lead in book publishing and the Indians in reading. Children preferred to read printed books and the most popular genres were fiction (romance and mystery), children's books, cookery and nature.

Where did Pakistan figure in this scenario? Let me make it clear that in this country it is impossible to obtain accurate data on book publishing. We have a repository — the National Library of Pakistan in Islamabad — that is supposed to issue the ISBN for every book published in the country. But most publishers, especially those publishing in indigenous languages, do not even bother to apply for the number and there's no question of submitting two copies of their publications to the NLP as required under the law. There is no machinery to enforce the law.

My random checking by telephoning major booksellers in Karachi yielded mixed results. Many said that in 2020 more books were sold than in 2019. For the importers business was down. Booksellers tell me that children's book sales have been on the rise in recent years. Schools are requiring their students to buy books for supplementary reading. As more books are published in indigenous languages for children our hopes also rise. The fact is that when given a choice children read with relish books in a language they understand.

(By Zubeida Mustafa Dawn, 07, 09/04/2021)

### **Academic year of thousands of students wasted**

The academic year of thousands of students willing to pass intermediate in various subjects from Karachi has been wasted and their journey for higher studies has suspended due to the alleged incompetence of the government of Sindh.

Last year, neither did the government allow these students to pass intermediate under the promotion policy and nor did it conduct their examinations.

Children who had switched faculties from science to commerce or arts, those who had migrated from other boards and Cambridge system, and the ones who had sought permission for last chance to sit in the exams were over looked in the promotion policy.

The Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK) has been seeking permission for months to promote these students like thousands of other students were promoted under the previous promotion policy but the government of Sindh and the relevant department, Sindh Universities and Boards Department, are not taking any action in this regard.

This situation has created a risk that more time of these students may be wasted.

According to the sources affiliated with the BIEK, the number of these students from four different categories is around 7,000. These categories include TP combined 12 papers of Intermediate part I and II, advance and short subjects like A-levels students and others who pass exams from different institutions, special and last chance students, besides those having benefit of passed compulsory subjects.

Officials told The Express Tribune that last year, when the Department of School and College Education and the Department of Universities and Boards jointly worked with the chairpersons of different educational boards to formulate a promotion policy for matric and intermediate students, the students in these four categories were ignored.

This draft became a law after being approved by the Sindh Assembly and thousands of students at matriculation and intermediate level were promoted to the next classes on its basis. However, the students of the above mentioned categories could not benefit from this policy and their precious year was wasted.

A notification was issued, clearly stating that special examinations will be held for the students who could not appear in the examination or were not satisfied with their results and the students of four categories were assured that they would be able to participate in the special examination, to be held in few days.

BIEK collected the examination forms and fees from thousands of these students, but the examination could not be held due to the second wave of coronavirus.

It was revealed that the BIEK administration took the matter to its Board of Governors a few months ago, where it was decided to put the matter before the relevant authority and request it to conduct examinations for these students or promote them by awarding 3% additional marks in their previous academic results, like the thousands of other students.

Following this, BIEK wrote a letter to Department of Boards and Universities Secretary Ilmuddin Balo on February 9, demanding a guideline for conducting examination or implementing the promotion policy. However, the letter wasn't responded.

The sources affiliated with Department of Universities and Boards say that Balo never comes to the office but the files and cases are sent to his house. They claimed that the file of this case had been sent to Balo's house about one and a half month ago but instead of looking into it, he forwarded the matter to Sindh Chief Minister's advisor for Universities and Boards Nisar Khuhro.

Given that Khuhro is out of country for a visit in the USA, the case may await a decision further more.

The students who had been promoted under the promotion policies have joined colleges and universities by now while these 7000 students are still waiting for examination or promotions.

When contacted, Balo avoided responding phone calls and messages sent to know his stance on the matter.

According to an affected student who had submitted an application of change of faculty from science to commerce, her file was ready for signing, but could not move from room 52 to 10A due to announcement of Covid lockdown. "Me and my mother had to run from pole to post to get it signed and submitted a day before the deadline of filing enrolment forms," she told The Express Tribune. (By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 22/04/2021)

### **'No chance of school-assessed grades'**

The counsel for Cambridge ruled out on Thursday the possibility of allowing school-assessed grades to O/A Level students, as he presented his arguments before the Sindh High Court (SHC), in pleas pertaining to Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) exams.

A two-member bench, comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Amjad Ali Sahito, was hearing the pleas filed by students.

Cambridge's counsel also submitted documents containing the details of CAIE examination procedure at the hearing.

Following that, the additional attorney general contended that decisions on similar petitions were pending in the Lahore, Islamabad and Peshawar High Courts.

"The Lahore High Court (LHC) has reserved its verdict on the plea and before issuing a ruling on the matter, the SHC may wait until the former issues a judgment," he said, pointing out that the pandemic situation in Punjab was worse than that in Sindh.

In this situation, it will be better to wait for the LHC's verdict and the ruling it issues could be implemented across the country, he added.

"If exams are held, they would be held across the country."

The counsel for the Sindh government had the same stance, at which the court directed the counsel for the petitioners to present his arguments.

Contending that holding physical exams were not a feasible option amid a pandemic, the counsel stated that exams had been postponed across the world.

"Students and parents have reservations over physical exams," he said, giving the examples of other countries where exams had been deferred.

O/A Level exams have been postponed in Saudi Arabia and Oman, where the pandemic situation is similar to that in Pakistan, the counsel said, adding that exams had also been deferred in Bangladesh and Kuwait.

"Pakistan is the only country where exams are not postponed, even when it is reporting more Covid-19 cases than other countries." He added that even the federal health minister had warned of Covid-19 cases peaking in June and during the third wave, children too were more susceptible than before to contracting the virus.

Referring to Federal Planning and Development Minister Asad Umar's statement of lockdown being inevitable if the spread of the virus was not controlled, the counsel remarked, "On one hand, they [authorities] warn of closing down cities, on the other, they announce exams."

After the completion of his arguments, the counsel for Cambridge claimed that when school-assessed grades were awarded to students last year during a coronavirus emergency, teachers had marked the students with grades higher than they deserved.

"It cannot be repeated this year," he asserted. "Students being more marks than they deserved had created problems last year."

The counsel further contended that CAIE exams were scheduled to begin on April 17 worldwide and the Pakistani government had approached Cambridge on the matter of physical exams on April 6, implying that it was too late to opt for school-assessed grades.

"The due date has passed," he stated.

He went on to assure that pandemic-related standard operating procedures would be observed during the exams.

Following that, the court adjourned the hearing till Friday (today).

#### **Dilapidated roads, flyovers**

Meanwhile, a two-member bench comprising Justice Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Rashida Asad issued notices to the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC), Sindh government and other parties in a plea pertaining to the dilapidated condition of roads and flyovers.

The petitioner pointed out the poor condition of the flyovers across the city.

"The extension joints of bridges on various road have been damaged and those installed by the KMC on the flyover at Shaheed-e-Millat Road and Jam Sadiq flyover are also in disrepair," he said, moving the court to direct the relevant authorities to repair roads and flyovers across the city.

At that, the court issued notices to the respondents, seeking details about the construction and lining of flyovers and roads in Karachi.

#### **Verdict reserved**

Separately, a two-member bench comprising Justice Adnanul Karim Memon and Justice Adnan Iqbal Chaudhry reserved the verdict on a plea seeking the dismissal of culture and tourism department officials involved in corruption.

At the hearing, the court inquired why the officials included in National Accountability Bureau (NAB) inquiries had not been sacked.

"Has former Sindh Tourism Development Authority managing director Roshan Ali Kanasro, against whom a NAB reference has been filed, not been sacked?" the court remarked.

The counsel for the government informed the court that Kanasro had only been issued a call-up notice and not inquiry was launched against him.

"But a call-up notice signifies that an inquiry is under way against him," the court noted.

Besides, the defence lawyer informed the court that Kanasro had acquired bail from the SHC.

Moreover, the petitioner's counsel stated that Kanasro, along with Manzoor Kanasro, was accused of awarding contracts to blacklisted contracts in exchange for billions of rupees.

The court adjourned the hearing after reserving the verdict on the plea.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 23/04/2021)



## Cancel these exams

As Pakistan grapples with the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, thousands of students are expected to appear for the O and A-Level exams in person — which goes against the SOPs announced earlier this week by the government itself.



These students have asked that the Cambridge Board cancel the upcoming May-June 2021 exams which seems like a reasonable demand given the extraordinary times we live in.

But their pleas have fallen on deaf ears. Four different high courts have turned down the petitions to cancel physical examinations or switch to predicted grades.

As things stand, the Cambridge O and A-Level exams in Pakistan this year will begin on April 26 and end on June 11.

While the government decided to close down schools in Punjab, Islamabad, and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa this month, Federal Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood insists that Intermediate, Matric, and Cambridge exams will be held as per schedule. This does not make any sense.

In comparison to Pakistan, we are told the Cambridge International board has cancelled exams in over 10 countries across the world. Cambridge International is opting for teacher assessments for its IGCSE qualifications in the UK. The board said that it will go for teachers' assessments in a "very small" number of countries and regions where it will be "impossible" for the exams to go ahead. One wonders why Pakistan does not fall in that category.

This week, #cancelcieexams2021 emerged as one of the top Twitter trends in the country as students tried to get across their point of view. The issue goes beyond the fact that in most schools, the prescribed syllabi has not been taught fully or that online classes have left a lot to be desired. The question is — why expose these young men and women to risk that can be avoided?

Some students have complained that the real disruption caused by the pandemic was the constant switching between online and on-campus classes. They say that the CIE was unmoved by the plight of the students and did nothing to help them.

Students have raised a number of points to argue their case. Schools struggled with delivering curriculum due to on/off schedules. Also, students and their parents who contracted the virus found it difficult to cope up with their studies. We can also not forget hostel students who were forced back home didn't have a proper environment to study. In comparison, most countries have promoted students based on predicted grades. Local boards also reduced the exam syllabus or delayed assessments.

Many students fear that if they end up with bad grades, which happened with a lot of them last year, it will make it difficult for them to get into universities of their choice.

It seems that the government's different ministries are not on one page. While the NCOC issues its set of SOPs, the education ministry does not seem to abide by them. If outdoor activities are banned, then why are in-person examinations allowed?

The bigger question is — why do we allow CIEs in the first place? Why does Pakistan have this smorgasbord of examination bodies assessing our students? Why can't we fix this problem so that we have one national examination system in place without having to resort to foreign boards. Granted that the CIEs exist in different countries across the world but not as an alternate to the national exam system. Instead they cater to a small minority of students. Not so in Pakistan where millions of dollars are spent in this exercise.

When the CIEs issue surfaced last year, I asked some colleagues from South Asia to tell me how their countries were coping with the issue. They were at a loss to explain. It seems all the other countries in South Asia — be it India, Bangladesh, Nepal or Sri Lanka — have their local exam boards which are responsible for testing and grading the students. India has two central boards and every state has its own board. Central boards emphasise on English while state boards prefer the state language. This is exactly the system that should be in place in Pakistan.

I recall that the Aga Khan Board tried to introduce something like this but it did not take off as expected. What's surprising is why the government continues to sleep on this. Where is our national pride now?  
(By Kamal Siddiqi The Express Tribune, 15, 26/04/2021)

## Registering madressahs

DURING the past two decades, several attempts by successive governments to standardise and regularise madressahs have met with little success. Religious leaders in the country have staunchly resisted any government attempt to oversee their institutes. The present government too is making an effort to do so, but it remains to be seen whether it is able to achieve this monumental feat. However, it has recently emerged that since late 2019, around 5,000 seminaries have registered with the federal education ministry's Directorate General of Religious Education. The directorate has 16 regional offices that coordinate and plan the registration process of the seminaries in their jurisdictions to help them set up bank accounts, admit foreign students, introduce vocational training and make the transition to mainstream education. The authorities hope that 5,000 more seminaries will be registered with the DGRE by the end of the year.

The education authorities believe there are 35,000 seminaries in the country. However, according to some estimates, their numbers could be as high as 60,000, which we would mean thousands of madressahs would not be under any kind of scrutiny. Over 25,000 of the 35,000 known seminaries are said to be affiliated with five designated madressah boards of different sects. A number of madressahs are reportedly registered with the provincial governments, but as cooperative societies under colonial-era legislation. Though the DGRE chief has claimed that all factions of the religious leadership and the five designated madressah boards were on board, the relatively slow pace of registration of madressahs since 2019 indicates there is resistance to government regulations. It is noteworthy that Maulana Fazlur Rahman, who heads a large network of madressahs in the country, and representatives of Minhajul Quran, which is headed by Dr Tahirul Qadri, were not part of the consultation process with the DGRE. But, if matters progress smoothly, the reforms would enable monetary regulation by the government, curb terrorism financing and discourage connections with extremist outfits. Though not all madressahs harbour extremists, it takes only a handful to undermine state authority and inflict violence on society, drawing concern both from within the country and internationally. Secondly, madressah students would be able to avail mainstream education benefits and be more prepared for the professional world. However, for this exercise to be effective, consistency is needed in pursuing the required changes but in a manner that does not alienate the religious leadership whose cooperation is crucial to madressah reforms.  
(By Editorial, Dawn, 06, 17/05/2021)

### Universities: financial crunch

Most public universities are facing hard times in the country, and Sindh is the worst hit where as many as 17 universities are finding it difficult to carry on academic and administrative affairs for want of funds. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan reduced the budget for education for the current fiscal to Rs64 billion from previous year's Rs65 billion. The federal government has increased pay and pensions by 10% in the last two years. This is adding to the financial burden of the 17 universities of Sindh. The government intends to increase salaries and pensions by another 10-15%. This is when Sindh's universities are suffering up to 30% financial deficit, which might increase to 50% soon.

If seen in the backdrop of the increasing financial crunch facing universities, the announcement of further rise in pay and pensions can only be seen as a step to be taken without application of mind. The magnitude of the crisis can be gauged from the fact that it is for the first time that vice-chancellors of 17 universities of Sindh have sent a joint letter to the federal finance minister and the Sindh Chief Minister drawing their attention to their increasing financial crunch requesting them get the needful done. The communication has given the following break-up of Sindh's universities financial resources: the HEC has provided the province's universities with a meagre amount of Rs7.83 billion as against the HEC's own assessment of the universities' need of R31 billion; universities generate Rs12 billion on their own; and the provincial government provides Rs5 billion. The vice-chancellors have asked for increasing the HEC budget for Sindh to Rs15 billion from the current Rs7.83 billion. In line with the pattern of the NFC Award the grant for universities in the province should be Rs16 billion, the letter says.

When disaffection is rife among teachers, we should not expect quality instruction. Where do we go without education, and imagining education without teachers is impossible. Teachers carrying chalk and duster remove darkness from our lives.  
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 22/05/2021)

### Educating all children

THAT basic (10-odd years) education has been declared a fundamental right of children and the fact that it is also considered a basic right in many countries and jurisdictions is not enough to convince a number of people here that all children should be educated.



All children irrespective of their family income, gender, religion, geography, ability, etc have the right to education. Not only that, in most countries, education is considered mandatory. Even if a child or her family do not desire that the child be educated, she can be 'forced' to be educated. The public good element and positive externalities have made education in most jurisdictions obligatory. An educated child contributes more to society at large than an uneducated child. It is as simple as that.

In the case of Pakistan, here is how the 'right' to education is worded in our Constitution. "Article 25-A: Right to Education: The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law." Article 25-A was inserted in the Constitution as part of the 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010. It is in the fundamental rights section of the Constitution. It is important to highlight how the Article is worded, ie "free and compulsory". The 'compulsory' part articulates that it is obligatory.

And yet there are people in Pakistan who feel that we should not or cannot afford to educate all our children. They clearly do not understand what the notion of a 'right' is. Fundamental rights are supposed to be trump cards: their provision has to trump all other considerations. If you are calling for 10 years of education to be a fundamental right for all children, this provision has to trump all other considerations that do not invoke other fundamental rights. This should be enough reason to provide education to all children. But, it seems, rights mean little in our country. So, let us look at further considerations.

*When developed nations decided to invest in education they weren't as rich as they are today.*

Unemployment, amongst the educated youth, is high. It tends to be high in countries where the economic growth rate and job creation rate are not high enough. In these countries, the rate at which jobs are created, compared to the rate of entry of young people into the labour force, is lower and this creates a situation of excess supply. But, how can this be a reason for denying the right to education?

Growth rates change a lot even over the short to medium run while the provision of education takes place over decades, that is, you cannot start/stop education systems on the basis of short- to medium-term considerations.

Educated people drive both innovation and growth; they come up with new ideas and new ways of organising and delivering services. Education has large positive externalities on the sociopolitical front as well — in terms of reduction in fertility and population growth, health and education benefits for families of educated mothers, female empowerment and labour force participation, age of marriage, and the working of democracy in a country. Even if the rights argument is not considered strong enough, how can all of these benefits be sacrificed at the altar of growth rate and unemployment rate fluctuations?

View this problem from the other side as well. Imagine we do not educate our young. Pakistan is a young country that is still going through a demographic transition. Can we afford to have millions of uneducated youth to look after? Education opens up avenues for people for individual and family transformations. Can we afford to not offer this opportunity to all of our children? What will Pakistan's future be if we have millions of uneducated youth who we need to cater for? Daron Acemoglu, professor of economics at MIT, in a recent lecture pointed out that the way the labour markets are changing, due to technology change, countries with large populations of uneducated youth are going to face very difficult economic, and consequently social and political, circumstances. Does that look more promising than trying to educate all children and the challenge of unemployment for the educated?

Another major argument for denying the right to education to all is based on the idea of limited financial resources. It is argued that Pakistan does not have the financial resources to educate every child. We only raise 10-odd per cent of our GDP as taxes and given the needs in other areas, we cannot afford to spend 5pc to 6pc of GDP on education alone. Even the current 2pc of GDP that we spend on education is with great difficulty and hardship.

It is true that financial resources are tight. Do bear in mind, though, that they are and have been tight for all countries across time. But others have made different choices. When the developed countries of today decided to invest in the education of their citizens, they were not as rich as they are today. Look at the history of mass education in the UK or Europe, the US and even Japan. All of them decided to go for mass education, for a variety of reasons, at a time when they were also struggling financially. But education, for all, was considered important to a) produce better labour, b) not fall behind other nations, c) craft a notion of citizenship, etc.

Even over the last few decades we have seen developing countries make choices for education that have been different from the choices made by Pakistan. India, China, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka provide interesting examples even from our region. Are these not resource-constrained countries?

It is hard to believe that even today we are still debating whether or not the right to education should be extended to all children in Pakistan and there are still people who think that we should not and that we cannot afford to. I guess this reflects quite vividly the country's political economy issues. The rights of all are trumped by the needs of the elites — a pattern that is also reflected in many other decisions of the state.

(By Faisal Bari Dawn, 06, 28/05/2021)

### Covid-19 & education

EDUCATION and learning have suffered substantial, and in some ways permanent, setbacks in Pakistan during the pandemic. Schools were intermittently closed due to rising cases and ensuing restrictions, and though private, high fee-paying schools managed to take teaching online so students were not totally left behind, public and low fee-paying schools missed out in a huge way. For these schools, digital learning was and is simply not an option. For millions of students, not only did learning and teaching not take place during the closure period, there was also the serious problem of lost learning that occurs when students disengage from school. When students return to schools after each closure, teachers confront lower levels of retention and have to reassess their expectations of how much a student can catch up given how badly schooling was affected.

Compounding the problem, a World Bank estimate suggests that around 1m children will drop out of school as a result of income losses during the pandemic. Given that 22m children in Pakistan are already out of school, the additional dropout figure represents an increase of almost 4.2pc. A study conducted on the disruption of schooling during the 2005 earthquake in the northern areas showed that an entire cohort of students from three to 15 years of age at the time of the disaster had lower academic scores four years later, despite substantial remediation efforts. The pandemic-induced school closures — which have coincided with the three waves of Covid-19 — have brought similar, if not worse, disruptions.

When it comes to decisions on education, the role of the government leaves much to be desired. Aside from the hue and cry over university and college examinations, there has been no conversation about or support extended to the millions of children who have been pushed out of the education process during the pandemic. Reopening schools when cases are low is simply not enough, given how high the dropout rate is. What efforts are being made to re-engage students who have permanently left school? With households reporting a fall in income during the past year, what is the government doing to persuade poverty and hunger-stricken families that education is a priority?

The government has some serious work to do. As schools reopen, officials must acknowledge the terrible setbacks to education and devise a long-term plan. This strategy must address the digital divide as well as the huge blow to girls' education, already regarded as being of secondary importance in families where incomes are strained. Interventions must be planned around these challenges, given that with new variants and low vaccine coverage, a fourth and fifth wave are very real possibilities. As the government mulls its next steps for the educational sector, mass vaccinations and testing must be rolled out to ensure that future disruptions do not push learning towards an irrecoverable collapse.

(By Editorial, Dawn, 06, 04/06/2021)

## Examinations for grade 10 to be held in July: Ghani

Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani on Wednesday said that examinations for grade nine would be held in July immediately after the examinations of grade 10.

A meeting of the steering committee of the education department was held under the chairmanship of the provincial education minister in which the dates for the examinations were discussed.

During the meeting, it was also decided that examinations of grade 11 would be held in August, immediately after examinations of grade 12.

“Exams would be held for only optional subjects,” according to Ghani. “Examinations from grade one to eight will be held in schools which can announce the dates on their own.”

“If any student fails in optional subjects then he or she would be given passing marks and marks of compulsory subjects will be given on the basis of marks attained in optional subjects. Practical examination will be held in students’ respective schools and colleges and can be conducted after theory papers,” the provincial minister added.

Earlier it was reported that the examinations for classes 10 and 12 will begin from July 5 and 26 respectively in Sindh.

According to a notification shared by the provincial education minister on his official Twitter handle, the exams of class 11 will be held after class 12.

Sindh education minister said the exams will be conducted from 60 per cent reduced syllabus consisting of only elective subjects. (By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 11/06/2021)

## State of higher education

Despite the learning deficit that has come about due to the raging Covid-19 pandemic, 10 universities in Pakistan have managed to retain their position in the QS World University Rankings 2022, with slight improvements. However, this is by no means an accolade considering the fact that all 10 of them have ranked below the 355 band ranges. Such international rankings can only truly matter if the condition of higher education, and education in general, across the country is admirable.

Considering the lackluster performance of higher educational institutions as a whole, the only thing that the ranking indicates is that research output has been maintained. In order to better regulate this, a research committee should be set up that overlooks, encourages and diversifies the research being generated. Apart from this, higher education remains dysfunctional with dilapidated facilities and underqualified teachers. The whole system, which is tied in with the overall socio-economic condition of the country, is a catastrophe in the making.

High-quality study programmes remain a dream for most students trying to pursue a career in diversified subjects such as social sciences and liberal arts. There is a serious lack of available seats at the graduate level and those that are lucky enough to achieve doctoral degrees often seek immigration in other countries for better job opportunities, leading to a massive brain drain. Furthermore, the authorities need to understand that the primary education system of the country needs to be radically revamped before the higher education system is strengthened. At present, 22.7 million children remain out of school while a mere 13% of girls remain enrolled till grade 9.

The purpose of receiving an education is to become capable professionals who could contribute to society and national prosperity — this we have forgotten. Instead of focusing on ranking, imparting high-quality education to the burgeoning youth needs to be the top most priority.

(By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 11/06/2021)

## On-campus classes resume for class VI to VIII students

Amid a sharp decline in reported coronavirus cases across the province, the Sindh government announced on Monday the resumption of physical classes for Grades VI to VIII with 50 per cent attendance policy from today (Tuesday).

A meeting of the Provincial Task Force on the Coronavirus also decided that henceforth only one day of the week would be observed as ‘safe day’ - commercial activities will remain suspended only on Sundays as opposed to Fridays and Saturdays.

### Schools reopening

On-campus academic activities will resume for students of Grades VI to VIII across the province, said Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani, adding that physical classes for students of Grade V will also resume from June 21 if the coronavirus situation continues to improve.

He reiterated that the decision to resume on-campus educational activities is contingent upon strict adherence to coronavirus-mandated standard operating procedures (SOPs). These include the use of face masks and social distancing as well as a 50 per cent attendance policy in classes.

Moreover, it is mandatory for all teaching and non-teaching staff at educational institutes, he added.

In a statement issued on the day, he apprised that the provincial task force had approved the decision.

Although the positivity rate in Karachi and Hyderabad is still above five per cent, the overall situation in the province has improved due to increased vaccinations, said Ghani. He recalled that physical classes for students of Grades IX and above resumed last week and a decision will be taken regarding the resumption of on-campus activities after a week.

#### **Drop in positivity ratio**

Earlier, the meeting of the task force, led by Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, was informed that overall coronavirus detection ratio of the province has dropped to 4.5 per cent.

The meeting was told that Karachi's positivity ratio for the past week was recorded at 9.5 per cent, with the highest number of cases detected in Karachi East where the positivity ratio was at 12 per cent.

Meanwhile, a positivity ratio of 12 per cent was observed in South district, eight per cent in West and seven per cent in Central district. Officials were apprised that in Hyderabad the detection ratio of the past week was recorded at 5.65 per cent.

The number of coronavirus fatalities remained high, however, with 192 deaths reported in June thus far and 392 fatalities recorded in May alone.

The detection ratio has started declining and will hopefully decrease further if SOPs are implemented in true letter and spirit, said Shah.

The task force recommended that on-campus educational activities be permitted to resume.

Besides, the meeting was apprised that out of the 3,035,998 anti-Covid jabs received thus far, 2,466,458 doses have been administered.

The health department was directed to further expand vaccination drives and increase coverage.

#### **Safe days**

The Sindh government also decided to allow business activities to continue six days a week and observe a safe day only on Sundays. Earlier, commercial activities had been restricted on Fridays and Sundays in a bid to curb the spread of the contagion.

The CM observed that the National Command and Operation Centre has reduced safe days to a single-day in the week and hence Sundays would be observed as such in the province.

The task force is scheduled to meet again on Saturday to further review the situation.

Ghani, Sindh Health Minister Dr Azra Pechuho, Sindh Local Government Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, Sindh Industries and Commerce Minister Jam Ikramullah Dharejo, Sindh Chief Secretary Mumtaz Shah, Sindh IGP Mushtaq Maher, Sindh Home ACS Usman Chachar, Karach Additional IG Imran Minhas, Sindh Finance Secretary Hassan Naqvi, Jatoi, Sindh Industries Secretary Riazuddin, Dr Bari, Dr Faisal, Dr Sara Khan, Dr Qaiser Sajjad, representatives of Corps V and Sindh Rangers and other officials attended the meeting.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 15/06/2021)

### **Rs277.5bn set aside for education sector in Sindh**

Presenting Sindh's education budget for fiscal year 2021-22 on Tuesday, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah stressed the importance of education as the single most important factor in the development of a nation.



"The government of Sindh envisages providing quality education to all, enabling our children to realise their full potential. We must take a good look at the curriculum being followed in schools to ensure that they are free from outdated ideas and train our teachers so that they take a genuine interest in stimulating keenness and curiosity in our children from the outset so that our future generation comprises thinkers and innovators in every field of inquiry," he said.

With that aim in sight, he said that the government had allocated the highest percentage of resources towards education in 2021-22. "It will see an increase of 13.5 per cent over the allocation of the current financial year. So for the next financial year we propose to enhance the budget for education to Rs277.5 billion from the previous Rs244.5 billion.

"In the current fiscal year of 2020-21, the annual development programme allocation for the educator sector was Rs21.1 billion. It comprised school education, college education, universities, empowerment for persons with disabilities, and skill development. In 2021-22, the government has earmarked Rs26 billion for the sector," he announced.

#### **School education**

For 2021-22, the budget of the school education and literacy department has been increased to Rs222.102bn.



"The school education and literacy department has been allocated Rs14 billion for 117 ongoing schemes and 186 new schemes. Most schemes are for upgrading existing government schools from primary to secondary levels, rehabilitating and improving schools, providing furniture, basic and missing facilities, construction and reconstruction of existing dangerous school buildings," he said.

Rs1bn has been allocated as grant in aid for the Education Management Organisations (EMOs) for handing over management of various schools to EMOs. Moreover, the government has allocated Rs6.6bn for the purchase of furniture and fixtures, Rs6.1bn for new activities with the help of international donor agencies and Rs2.3bn for free textbooks, amongst other expenditures.

#### **College education**

For FY 2021-22, the budget of college education has been increased by 11.8 per cent to Rs22.8bn.

An allocation of Rs4bn has been proposed in the annual development programme 2021-22 for 43 ongoing and 64 new schemes.

The chief minister said that improvements to female education would provide a country with a more knowledgeable workforce, healthier families and ultimately prosperous societies.

A sum of Rs100 million has been allocated for Bakhtawar Cadet College for Girls Shaheed Benazirabad, being described as the first institution of its kind in Pakistan. Besides this, Rs292.55m has been earmarked for seven cadet colleges in Sindh.

There are also five new public colleges that have been approved for next fiscal year. "We have kept Rs1 billion of endowment fund in the next fiscal year. The fund aims to provide financial assistance to students," the CM said.

An amount of Rs120m has also been allocated for the Sindhi Adabi Board, Jamshoro.

There is also a grant for IBA Community Colleges in the next financial year. The grant is increased by 50pc from Rs80m to Rs120m.

Financial assistance of Rs46.2m has been provided to the heirs of civil servants who died during service in the current fiscal year.

Also the issue of librarians/directors physical education has been resolved by creating 68 new posts of BPS-18 and 19.

#### **17 new degree colleges**

Some 17 new degree colleges will also be established in districts of Hyderabad, Jamshoro, Sukkur, Shikarpur, Jacobabad, Sanghar, Umerkot and three districts of Karachi division — Korangi, Malir and West.

Calling the Sindh Education Foundation a major arm of the government of Sindh for public-private partnerships in the education sector, which currently holds a portfolio of around 475,000 students in 1,800 schools and centres across the province, the chief minister shared some of the plans for it in FY 2021-22.

"The foundation will be functionalising around 500-800 viable government school buildings under its public-private partnership model. It will be upgrading as many schools as viable in order to provide post-primary education [elementary and secondary] to the most deserving communities especially girl students across Sindh. Around 15,000 students are estimated to benefit from this intervention in the academic year of 2022-23," he said.

#### **Universities and boards**

In the current financial year, the grant for public sector universities was Rs11.07bn. For the next financial year, the grant has been increased to Rs13.314bn.

An amount of Rs2bn has been allocated for registration, enrolment and annual examination fees of classes nine to 12.

An amount of Rs1.2bn has been allocated for scholarships to students securing A1 grade in SSC and HSSC in the educational boards of Sindh.

An amount of Rs416.516m has been allocated for Sindh Higher Education Commission for FY 2021-22.

Other grants include Rs200m for Begum Nusrat Bhutto University for Women at Sukkur, Rs1,329.239m for Sukkur IBA University, Rs1,000m for Dawood University of Engineering, Science & Technology Karachi, Rs300m for Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur, Rs200m for NED University of Engineering, Science & Technology Thar Campus, Rs300m for NED University of Engineering, Science & Technology, Karachi's endowment fund, Rs100m for the Institute of Business Administration, Karachi, Rs1m for the International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences, Karachi, Rs6.853m for Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto University of Science & Technology, Karachi and Rs20m for the Applied Economics Research Centre, University of Karachi.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 14, 16/06/2021)

### **KU professor jailed for eight years in harassment case**

A district court has sentenced a professor to eight years in prison and imposed a fine of over Rs1 million for harassing a female teacher on the internet.



Dr Farhan Kamrani, the then assistant professor at the psychology department of the University of Karachi, was found guilty of creating a fake account on Facebook in the name of a female lecturer and posting her edited pictures with indecent material on the page of a private university in October 2016.

The judgement was pronounced by district and sessions' judge (East), Khalid Hussain Shahani.

The judge noted that the prosecution successfully proved the charges against the accused beyond a reasonable doubt.

The court awarded the convict three-year-imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs1m on him for committing an offence punishable under Section 21 (offences against modesty of a natural person and minor) of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016.

The court also awarded him three-year-imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs50,000 on him for the offence punishable under Section 419 (punishment for cheating by personation) of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC).

The court further handed down two-year-imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs50,000 on him for an offence punishable under Section 500 (punishment for defamation) of the PPC.

On default, the convict would undergo a collective additional imprisonment of eight months.

The convict, who was present in the court on bail, was arrested and sent to prison to serve out his sentences.

However, the court extended him the benefit of Section 382-B (period of detention to be considered while awarding sentence of imprisonment) of the criminal procedure code (CrPC) to him.

According to the prosecution, a female teacher lodged a complaint with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) alleging that somebody had posted/shared a link on the page of a private university containing pornographic pictures created by mixing her pictures and also used abusive language.

The investigators sent a request to the Facebook authorities requesting them to share details of the fake ID created in the name of the complainant, the prosecution said, adding that the management of the social networking website responded with required details.

The prosecution further mentioned that the accused was traced and arrested from his house, adding that during interrogation he had admitted to have created a fake Facebook ID in the name of the complainant, posting her pictures and making vulgar comments.

Special public prosecutor Zakir Hussain contended that a broadband modem, a computer and a mobile phone of the accused were seized and analysed for forensic examination and the evidence was successfully recovered from these devices.

He further contended that the evidence fully corroborated the allegations of the complainant and asked the court to punish the accused according to the law.

However, the accused denied these allegations in his statement, recorded before the court under Section 342 of the CrPC, and claimed innocence.

His defence counsel Ahsanullah Khan claimed that there were many loopholes in the case of the prosecution, which created doubts, as the investigating officer had not produced the computer allegedly recovered from the possession of his client and sent for forensic analysis.

He added that no indecent pictures of the complainant were shown, as alleged by her, therefore, the case did not fall within the ambit of Section 21 of the PECA, 2016.

He added that the IO failed to produce any information sought from the Facebook management and a private internet provider, while his extrajudicial confession before the police had no legal value.

Thus, he asked the court to acquit him of the alleged false allegations.

(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 14, 17/06/2021)

### **Planning ahead KU mulls 4-year BS instead of 2-year degree**

Karachi University (KU), after consultation with its legal team, is mulling the conversion of all 16-year master's programmes into 16-year bachelor's programmes. The implication was made in a report issued by a committee formed by the university's academic council, following the Higher Education Commission's decision to terminate two-year degree programmes.

The legal team, which was headed by Supreme Court lawyer Shoaib M Ashraf, presented its opinions to a five-member committee which was headed by Professor Jamil Kazmi, and included Professors Anila Akbar Malik, Nasiruddin Khan, Zaheer Qasmi and Naeem Khalid.

Per the Ashraf-led team, Higher Education Commission (HEC) will deny recognising degrees, if KU continued its two-year degree programmes despite termination of the same by HEC. "The concerned authority [HEC] has legal authority to do so under its act," the team clarified.

In addition to that, the legal team also maintained that Karachi University (KU) is not in the position to challenge the relevant court's decision to replace two-year graduations with four-year degree programmes in colleges. KU won't even be able to file a constitutional petition in the top courts, the team opined.

In light of the legal advice, the committee has submitted a report to the university's registrar office. Which, per sources close to KU Registrar Waheed Baloch, was signed by all members and college representatives and suggested converting all 16-year master's programmes into 16-year bachelor's programmes. The decision will come into effect upon approval of the affiliation committee in degree colleges.

The report further said that Karachi University should start a two-year associate degree programme in selected fields and affiliated colleges for new students, as an alternative option. However, this is only possible with the provision of the 'human and capital resources' by the government and the Higher Education Commission, the report stated.

In this regard, students should be persuaded and encouraged to enroll in the four-year degree programmes. While students who have completed the two-year associate degree from colleges should be admitted to the university with the completion of deficiency courses in the relevant field.

The report also said that departments should start separate discipline colleges for two-year associate degree programmes in consideration of market needs, which should also be approved by the statutory bodies.

The committee is of the view that the existing two-year traditional degree programmes should be continued parallel to the associate degree. According to report, teachers of the colleges are however, divided on the issue and have two different views.

Some college representatives are in favor of a four-year Bachelors of Studies (BS) programme, but want it to be applied in a few colleges on an experimental basis, while some college representatives advocate continuation of the traditional two-year graduation. Students on the other hand, appear to be more concerned about the recognition of their degree by the HEC, rather than the span of their programme. "I have been sitting at home, waiting for admission into college since last year. I do not care if graduation is in two years or in four years, I just want the admissions to be announced as soon as possible," she expressed.

Similarly, another student Akmal, also speaking on behalf of his friends and fellows, said that students primarily want their degree to be recognised on every forum. "We also want the same facilities that are provided to students in universities, for students studying in colleges. After all, we are also paying a fee for our education," he demanded.

Speaking to The Express Tribune KU Vice Chancellor (VC) Professor Dr Khalid Iraqi maintained that Karachi University and colleges have the capacity to move from annual examinations to the semester system, which is mandatory for associate degrees. "The semester cell of Karachi University already compiles the examination results of 52 departments and 17 research institutes. So if the Academic Council decides to do so, the associate degree can initially start with the annual examination system."

The vice chancellor further expressed that the affiliation committee of Karachi University has given affiliation to degree colleges for two-year graduation. But if 16-year master's programmes are to be converted into 16-year bachelor's programmes; a new affiliation process will have to take place, the VC informed. In such a case, he said, the colleges will need affiliation with a two-year associate degree and a four-year graduation programme, for which the affiliation committee will once again review the academic and physical infrastructure of the colleges. "However, it all depends on the decision of the Academic Council, a meeting of which I'm convening this week," Dr Iraqi told The Express Tribune.

(By Sadaf Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 21/06/2021)