

NEWSCLIPPINGS

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EDUCATION



Urban Resource Centre

A-2, 2nd floor, Westland Trade Centre, Block 7&8, C-5, Shaheed-e-Millat Road, Karachi.
Tel: 021-4559317, Fax: 021-4387692, Email: urc@cyber.net.pk, Website: www.urckarachi.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/URCKHI Twitter: https://twitter.com/urc_karachi

Schools reopen in Sindh despite harsh weather

As several children attended school on a cold January morning, many also missed school due to the confusion amid parents about whether schools were open or closed on Wednesday due to the extreme weather conditions.

There were also those who despite knowing that their children's schools were open decided to not send them out in the harsh weather.

"I looked at my son's school uniform sweater and I knew it was not enough to shield him from the cold. I was feeling cold myself despite wearing a thick cardigan myself. I just didn't have the heart to send my child in such harsh weather so I let him stay back," said the mother of a student of class four in PECHS.

"I weighed both odds. If I sent me daughter to school in this weather, there are chances that she may catch a cold or worse. Then she will miss even more days so I thought to not send her to school till the weather improved," said the mother of a secondary school student.

The provincial government had earlier announced that all the public and private educational institutes across Sindh would observe winter holidays according to the already set schedule decided by the steering committee, which was from Dec 20 to Jan 1.

But in view of the persisting cold weather the various school associations had approached Ahsan Ali Mangi, the secretary of School Education and Literacy Department, seeking an extension to the winter vacations. They had before them the example of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the departments for schools education had extended winter vacations till Jan 7 owing to severe weather.

Syed Haider Ali, chairman of the All Sindh Private Schools and Colleges Association, said that he had requested for an extension till Jan 5. He also suggested starting morning school slightly later than usual as it is extra cold early in the morning. "Perhaps morning school could start at 8.30am to close at 1.30pm in the winter time, and the afternoon school shifts could be from 1pm to 4.30pm," he said.

Sharaf uz Zaman of the Private Schools Management Association said that the government should itself be sensitive to the weather issue which it is not, sadly. "It is not just Karachi that is freezing, Sukkur, Ghotki, Khairpur and Kashmore are also experiencing severe cold weather right now, and in many schools there children have to sit on the cold floor to study," he said.

"We kept our schools open on Wednesday according to the wishes of the Secretary Education. Meanwhile, there are certain elitist private schools that remained closed and we also know that the government will not take any action against them either. Had we done that, we would have been accused of challenging the writ of the government. So we just kept our students indoors with classroom doors and windows shut as attendance remained not more than two per cent," he said. "We also tolerated the anger of the parents and wish the government too would reconsider its decision."

The requests, however, were denied. That was when, in the absence of any favourable notification from the minister for education and literacy, many school associations announced an extension in school holidays till Jan 6.
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 15, 02/01/2019)

Streamlining the curriculum: Sindh Education Dept introduces new scheme of studies

In a bid to streamline the curriculum, Sindh's school education department has approved a new, province-wide scheme of studies for Grades 9 and 10th students. Based on the decision of the Sindh High Court (SHC), the new system will equally bifurcate all the science subjects into two years in line with the national scheme of studies.

Earlier, half of the science subjects were taught to students in class 9th and half of them in class 10th. As a result, most students opting for science groups in the first year of their intermediate would easily forget the topics that they were taught in grade 9th. The upcoming change will ensure that students are able to better grasp the subjects when they start their intermediate education and there is no unnecessary gap.

The new rule has been introduced for both the private and public schools across Sindh and will be implemented with the commencement of the new academic session on July 1, 2020. From then onwards, schools will be obliged to teach chemistry, computer science, biology, physics and mathematics to both Grades 9 and 10 students.

The educational boards in Sindh will conduct exams for the 9th grade in 2021 and the 10th grade in 2022, respectively, in accordance with the new rule. This means that unlike the past, students will have to appear in the exams for science subjects in both Grades 9 and 10.

With the issuance of the notification of the decision, the Sindh education department has already made the required changes to the current curriculum by dividing the chapters of all the science subjects into two parts, one for class 9th and the other for class 10th.

Akin to the other provinces of the country, from 2021, the total marks for matric exams in Sindh will be 1100, out of which exams carrying 550 marks will be conducted in the 9th grade while exams carrying the remaining 550 marks will be conducted in the 10th grade.

Per the information available with The Express Tribune, in accordance with the new scheme of studies, the examination marks for English in Grades 9 and 10th have been set at 100 as against the previous 75 marks. The examination marks for Urdu, Islamiyat and Pakistan Studies will remain 75 like the past. However, a 75-mark mathematics exam, which earlier carried 100 marks, will be conducted for grade 9th and grade 10th students, respectively.

Similarly, exams carrying 75 marks will be conducted for physics, chemistry, biology and computer science subjects for Grades 9 and 10th, respectively. The bifurcation will carry 85 marks for theory and 15 marks for practical. The distribution for computer science, however, will be 75 marks for theory and 25 marks for practical.

On being contacted, the Directorate of Curriculum, Assessment & Research (DCAR) Sindh Asghar Memon said that his department had sent the revised curriculum of Grades 9 and 10th to the Sindh Textbook Board (STB) back in June 2018.

"We had sent the curriculum for class 9th and 10th last year, and the revised curriculum of the intermediate part one has also been sent to the STB. However, only the board can make it clear whether the new curriculum would be published this year," he said.

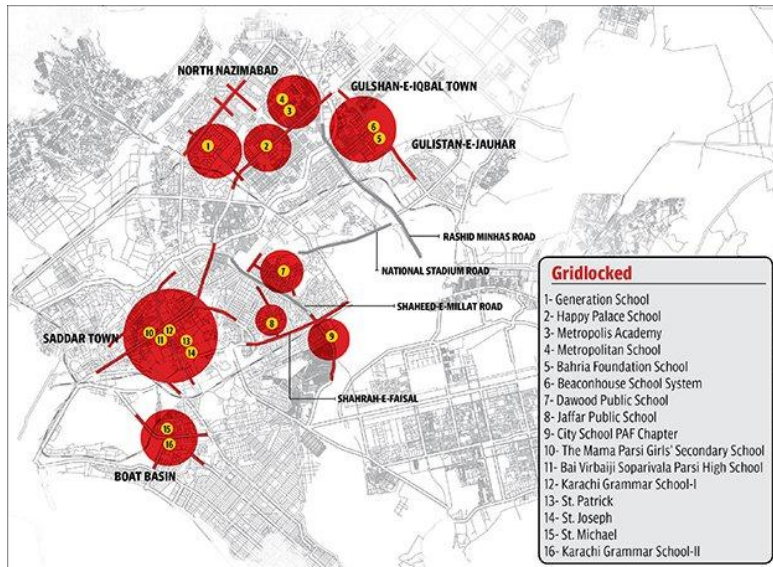
Speaking about the new scheme, the Chairman of the Sindh Textbook Board (STB) Agha Sohail Pathan assured that revised textbooks for Grades 9 and 10th will be available in the market for the new session commencing from July 2020 soon. He added that the textbooks for intermediate part one, however, will not be published this year as per the new curriculum.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 09/01/2020)

Daily drudgery: Can Karachi's school rush hour be cured?

For students and teachers, the winter break brings a much-anticipated respite from the weekly monotony of a regular school schedule. Some families plan trips to popular destinations for much-needed recreation while others use the opportunity to catch up with their relatives residing away from the cities. Entire family clans make the most of the break, strategically planning weddings to coincide with it to maximise attendance.

What goes somewhat less noticed, however, is the respite that the winter break brings to motorists. A feature as regular as the school schedule itself in big cities like Karachi is the morning and afternoon rush hour that coincides directly with when students come in and leave their respective institutions.



As parents scramble to drop and then pick their children on time, the ill-planned nature of most schools in the city leaves many of its most vital traffic arteries choked.

Needless to say, with the school session back in full swing, motorists may be feeling as nostalgic for a winter break as those returning from vacation to a regular school session.

A growing problem

Daily traffic jams outside of schools have become a nuisance for motorists across the city. To top it all off, the problem is not confined to traffic jams alone but the lack of road safety education, together with people's general negligence towards traffic laws, has worsened the situation.

Outside schools, motorists not only have to wait for hours for the traffic to clear but they also have to deal with minor accidents because of the lawlessness that is witnessed regularly.

Those going to offices in the morning are particularly affected due to the traffic jams outside of schools. Despite starting work at 9 AM, many have to leave their houses two to three hours before their normal timing to avoid getting stuck in traffic.

To provide pick and drop services to the students, thousands of private vans operate throughout the city, several dozens of which can be seen gathering outside of a single school building, that too in a disorganised manner, which naturally chokes the flow of traffic. Since most schools are constructed inside residential buildings, they do not have parking spaces to accommodate hundreds of vehicles that throng the school building at the same time, that too twice a day. As a result, these vehicles can be seen parked on the main road which makes it impossible for traffic to move.

The affected areas

A survey conducted by *The Express Tribune* revealed that over the years, different networks of private schools have branched out across the city without proper planning. Almost all private schools are situated on some of the busiest roads of Karachi,

including main Sharae Faisal, Rashid Minhas Road, Pakistan Employees Cooperative Housing Society, Clifton, Defence Housing Society, Shaheed-e-Millat Expressway, Saddar, MA Jinnah Road, Sher Shah Suri Road, Shahrah-e-Pakistan, Abul Hassan Ispahani Road, Garden, Gulberg, North Nazimabad, Nazimabad and Gulshan-e-Iqbal, among others.

The private schools most affected by traffic jams outside of their premises include BVS Parsi, Mama Parsi, St. Patrick's High School, St. Joseph's Convent, St. Michael's Convent, the City School (several branches, especially the PAF Chapter), Karachi Grammar School (both campuses), Jaffar Public School, Beacon House School System, Metropolitan School, Metropolis Academy, Bahria Foundation School, Dawood Public School, several branches of the Generation School and Happy Palace School, among several others.

Since the schools are usually situated in residential bungalows, the daily traffic jams not only create a problem for passersby but also cause trouble to the residents of the area who complain of undue traffic noise and their inability to easily drive to and from the area during peak traffic hours.

Passing the buck

Despite being an ongoing problem which equally and indiscriminately affects all motorists, no one is ready to take responsibility to resolve the issue. While parents of students and their van drivers shift the blame on school authorities to control the traffic situation outside of their premises, schools hold the traffic police responsible for maintaining a smooth flow of traffic.

Moreover, none of the stakeholders has ever thought of working together to formulate a comprehensive strategy to deal with the issue.

When approached, most private schools were of the view that their administration is solely responsible for matters within the campus and not for issues related to transportation and traffic jams in the surrounding areas of schools.

An officer of the Sindh Education Department, who requested anonymity, told *The Express Tribune* that schools are not responsible for taking care of the traffic situation outside of their premises as per the law.

"The responsibility of controlling the traffic situation outside of schools lies with the Sindh transport department as in the past, complaints regarding CNG and LPG cylinders in school buses were also managed by the department concerned," he said.

Shedding light on the matter, the director of Traffic Engineering Bureau Mohammad Iqbal said that the preferred solution to this long-standing problem is that schools should make some changes in their schedules.

"Frequent traffic jams during rush hours can be avoided if schools start their primary classes at 8 AM and end them at 2 PM, while secondary classes could be started at 7 AM and dismissed at 2:30 PM," he suggested.

"The other solution is to tell drivers to park their cars on a single lane while schools should urge parents to prefer school vans over private vehicles to pick and drop their children to school. The practice of bringing one vehicle to pick and drop a single child to schools should be banned because it's the biggest reason for traffic jams in the city."

Deputy Director Traffic Engineering Bureau Mohammad Azim said that schools should hold road-safety training sessions for their van drivers and arrange parking lots to solve the problem permanently.

(By Syed Ashraf Ali / Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 20/01/2020)

Fall from grace: A once famed college could turn into a ghost

There was once a time, not so long ago in fact, that the Adamjee Government Science College (AGSC) was renowned as one of Karachi's most prestigious public sector high schools.

Year after year, the college built its reputation by producing some of the best engineering and medical talent that would sweep admissions in the country's top universities. Its alumni count among themselves some of the best doctors and engineers in Pakistan.

As recently as 2018, AGSC students secured both the second and third positions in pre-engineering and third position in computer science in Karachi. The result followed a long trend, recorded all the way back to 2011, of producing position-holders on the regular. In 2017, a student from AGSC secured first position in pre-medical. In 2011, all top three performers in pre-engineering were AGSC alumni.

Inaugurated by then president Ayub Khan in 1961, renowned scientist Dr Iqbal Chaudhry lauded AGSC's long history of academic excellence in a message in the college's magazine two years ago.

Of late, however, the once prestigious public college is not even a shadow of its former self. In the absence of a permanent head, academic activities at the college have virtually come to standstill, complain students and school staff. The former complained that most teachers either show up to classes late or not at all, forcing them to look for alternate means to prepare for board exams. They also complained that the institute's cleanliness and hygiene are not being looked after.

In utter disarray

A visit to the school by The Express Tribune confirmed the students' gripes with AGSC. Where its timetable dictates that classes must begin at 8:30 AM, only three members of the college's 40-strong faculty were in premises till 10:30 AM. The departments of statistics, chemistry and mathematics were locked, as were the offices of the administration department and the principal. Many classrooms were deserted, and the ones that were not had students left completely unsupervised.

"We were very excited to enroll in this college," said one student from a group approached by The Express Tribune during the visit. "We thought Adamjee, given its reputation, would set us apart from other college students."

"We spoke to our seniors and they told us the situation was completely different last year," said another student. "Classes were punctual and they told us that teachers would also be available for extra help after hours. That was the promise that brought us here. But now that we are here, we find everything to be the opposite," he added.

"All of us were eager to come to college on time till last semester because classes started on time," said a second-year Inter student. "Now, most of us feel we are wasting our time if we come. Many just show up for practical classes, but even on those, teachers are often absent."

"A chemistry teacher actually told me to attend the tuition centre he was running on the side if I was keen on learning something," complained another.

Speaking to The Express Tribune on condition of anonymity, an AGSC teacher confessed that most of the faculty members spend their time sitting in their departments when they show up to college. However, he blamed the situation on college authorities' negligence. "There is no one to inquire after teachers. I agree that this is gross injustice towards some of Karachi's brightest and most talented students."

Where did the principal go?

The college's last permanent principal was Professor Moazzam Haider, who took over from Dr Nasir Insar following the latter's retirement in 2007. However, last September, just as a new academic year began, the provincial government appointed Moazzam as Director General Colleges Sindh.

The move had the unfortunate consequence of leaving AGSC 'headless'. In the absence of any Grade 19 or 20 associate professor to take up the vacant post, Urdu teacher Mohsin Sheikh was asked to step in as acting principal in the interim.

According to members of the school's staff, that is where AGSC's problems began. Mohsin, they complained, has habit of not coming in or coming in late. "We complained to him, that many teachers were taking advantage of his absence and neglecting their duties, and that maintenance was being ignored, but our concerns fell on deaf ears," said one staff member.

In his defence

When contacted, Mohsin said despite commitments with higher ups in education authorities, he was doing his level best to improve things at the college and ensure smooth running.

"Sometimes, there are pressing meetings I have to attend. The secretary or the director general calls me. Other times, it's some other official commitment, like an event at the Khatoon-e-Pakistan College a few days back that prevents me from coming in on time," he responded when asked about allegations of being late. "But even so, I come to the office every day and we do our level best to improve things at Adamjee," he insisted.

Asked about teachers' absences, Mohsin said the college faculty is currently understaffed. "There are a few teachers who are leaving the college due to promotions, which has thrown academic activities here into disarray. We are working on bringing in permanent replacements," he said. Other teachers, he claimed, were on leave for various reasons.

At the same time, Mohsin also claimed the students themselves were responsible for some of the 'disruption'. "Many of them leave mid-session to take tuitions. We have issued a circular calling them back. A similar circular has also been issued to teachers," he said.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 22/01/2020)

Six senior academics cast doubts over selection process for KU VC

Raising serious objections over a recent scrutiny process carried out by a government-notified search committee for the post of Karachi University vice chancellor, six senior professors have urged the chancellor (Sindh governor) and the chief minister to intervene into the matter and declare the process null and void.

The post of KU vice chancellor had fallen vacant over eight months ago following the death of Prof Mohammad Ajmal Khan. Later, the CM — being the controlling authority of public sector universities under the Sindh Universities and Institutes Laws (Amendment) Act 2018 — appointed Prof Khalid Mahmood Iraqi, a junior KU professor, as the varsity's acting vice chancellor.

Though teachers preferred not to raise objection over Prof Iraqi's appointment at that time, sources said that the appointment was very much against the principles of merit and court rulings under which the senior most university professor should be given the top slot in the interim period till the government made a regular appointment.

The governor and CM are requested to declare search committee's scrutiny process void

Change in selection criteria

The sources said the government initially advertised the vacant posts of a vice chancellor at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad and Shaikh Ayaz University, Shikarpur in February last year and later in June advertised for the same vacant position at KU.

What made the process of filling these regular posts at the three public sector universities questionable was the government's decision to change the selection criteria.

The same point was highlighted in a Jan 23 letter signed by Prof Mohammad Ahmed Qadri, former KU's dean faculty of arts and social sciences; Prof Bilquees Gul, director of KU's Institute of Sustainable Halophyte and Utilization; Prof Moonis Ahmar, former dean faculty of arts and social sciences at KU; Prof Jamil H. Kazmi, former chairman of geography department at KU; Prof Pirzada Jamal Siddiqui, former director of Centre of Excellence in Marine Biology at KU and Prof Arif Kamal, former dean faculty of science and engineering at KU.

They were all candidates for the post of KU vice chancellor and have not been shortlisted for an interview after the scrutiny process. Those shortlisted are: Prof Fateh Mohammad Burfat, currently serving as the vice chancellor of Sindh University; Dr Khalil Ahmed Ibpoto of Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam; Dr Rukhsar Ahmed of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Law University; Prof Abid Hasnain of KU; acting KU VC Prof Khalid Iraqi; Dr Mehdi Hasan Kazmi of KU and Dr Mohammad Yousuf Khushk of Shah Abdul Latif Khairpur University.

The Jan 23 letter says: "The initial advertisement for the said post [KU vice chancellor] was published on June 29, 2019, which required that the candidate should have at least 25 quality research publications in national and international Higher Education Commission-recognised research journals and that he/she should have at least 20 years' experience in teaching/academic position with a substantial experience of working at senior administrative positions."

This was followed by a corrigendum 'after the expiry of the first advertisement' in October in which the criteria relating to experience and research work was downgraded, requiring that the applicant have at least 15 quality publications in national and international HEC-recognised research journals and 20 years of experience in academic positions, of which a minimum of 10 years in senior administrative positions.

Demand to declare scrutiny process void

In their letter, the teachers argued that some of them had earlier been declared eligible for the post of VC at KU and Federal Urdu University as per existing HEC criteria and that exclusion of their names in the recent scrutiny was questionable.

They also objected to some members of the search committee who "have remained directly associated with KU", which showed "signs of nepotism and conflict of interests" in the scrutiny process.

They demanded that the scrutiny process be declared null and void in the far-reaching interests of KU and for justice.

The search committee is headed by Prof Abdul Qadeer Rajput as chairman with Prof A.Q. Mughal, Prof Nilofer Shaikh and secretary of boards and universities as its member.

Sources said Prof Mohammad Qaiser, a former KU VC, was part of the search committee which conducted the scrutiny process while Prof Pirzada Qasim Raza Siddiqui, also a former KU vice chancellor, declined to be part of the process after knowing that his nephew was among the candidates.

Reportedly, the government had again invited Prof Siddiqui to join the Search Committee for the remaining selection process as his nephew was not shortlisted.

Prof Iraqi ranked 27th on seniority list

Prof Qadri, a retired KU teacher, said it was a mistake not to challenge the appointment of acting vice chancellor earlier and the changes made in the selection criteria.

"We are not desperate for a position but want that the government upholds the principles of merit and transparency. Prof Iraqi ranks 27th in the list of seniority [and don't deserve to be appointed as the acting vice chancellor or vice chancellor]," he said, contending that senior professors should have been called for an interview.

In this respect, he referred to a 2016 decision of the Lahore High Court which called for handing over the acting charge of vice chancellor to the most senior professor at a university till the time regular appointment was made.

Prof Moonis Ahmer, another senior KU teacher, said: "What happened was a grave injustice and violation of the basic principles of merit. We believe that it's the last chance to save KU from total destruction."

Sindh govt rejects criticism

Describing the whole process of selecting vice chancellors as highly flawed, a senior Sindh University professor, Dr Arfana Mallah, said the fact that the search committee solely relied on candidates' claims and there was no investigation and inquiry into his or her credentials discredited the whole process.

"Presently, all candidates are judged and shortlisted on the basis of their CVs. There should be an inquiry into the past academic and administrative records of the candidates," she said, raising concerns that any person with a criminal record could be shortlisted and appointed vice chancellor in the current system.

When contacted, Universities and Boards Secretary Mohammad Riazuddin rejected criticism on the selection process and said: "Those who have a problem can go to the court. The government has the right to do what it pleases."
(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 27/01/2020)

Teachers, staff threaten protest over selection of VC for KU today

As the chief minister is set to appoint a vice chancellor at Karachi University (KU), the Federation of All Pakistan Universities Academic Staff Association (Fapuasa), Sindh chapter, announced on Wednesday that a 'black day' would be observed at public sector universities on Thursday (today) to register their protest against the government for "making a mockery of the selection process for the post of vice chancellor".

The announcement, sources said, had come in reaction to reports in a section of the media that the government-notified search committee tasked to recommend three names for the post of vice chancellor at the KU had suggested two candidates: acting Vice Chancellor of KU Prof Khalid Mahmood Iraqi and Vice Chancellor of Sindh University (SU) Prof Fateh Mohammad Burfat.

Both candidates, the sources claimed, did not qualify to head a university. Prof Iraqi currently ranks 27th in the list of seniority at KU whereas Prof Burfat's professional record is marred by multiple inquiries. The incumbent SU vice chancellor was suspended by the chief minister last year to facilitate an investigation by the Anti-Corruption Establishment. He, however, resumed the charge on court orders.

"The entire process from the publication of advertisements to recommendation of candidates to the chief minister lacked transparency and violated the basic principles of merit," said Fapuasa Sindh president Dr Nek Mohammad.

"Nepotism being encouraged by the government is ruining universities. At least educational institutions should be left alone as these places are meant to groom future generations," he added.

Dr Arfana Mallah, representing the Sindh University Teachers Association, said that changing the selection criteria after four months clearly indicated that the government had already decided about a candidate.

"Has this province become so deprived of professional and academic excellence that no individual of undisputed integrity is left to assume this office?" she said.

Notwithstanding the widely circulated reports and speculations about the two suggested names of the search committee (for the post of KU vice chancellor), sources said the body also recommended the name of Prof Abid Hasnain who, unlike the two other candidates, had a sound academic and administrative experience at KU.

The committee included Prof Pirzada Qasim Raza Siddiqui and Prof Mohammad Qaiser, both having served as VCs of KU.

Earlier six academics whose names were not shortlisted for an interview had written a letter to the chief minister and the governor, asking for their intervention to declare the process of vice chancellor's selection void.

Sources said the government initially advertised the vacant posts of a vice chancellor at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad, and Shaikh Ayaz University, Shikarpur, in February last year and later in June advertised the same vacant position at the KU.

What made the process of filling these regular posts at the three public sector universities questionable was the government's decision to change the selection criteria.

The post of KU vice chancellor had fallen vacant over eight months ago after the death of Prof Mohammad Ajmal Khan. Later, the chief minister appointed Prof Iraqi as the varsity's acting vice chancellor.
(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 15, 30/01/2020)

Sindh's schools to follow last year's academic calendar

While school students across Pakistan will be starting their new academic session with their customary enthusiasm, the upcoming term seems to be particularly challenging for those in Sindh, especially ninth graders.

Owing to the absence of the education minister in Sindh for a period of six months, because of which the education department's annual steering committee meeting could not take place, the new academic session for schools across Sindh will be based on last year's calendar.

According to a recently-issued notification in this regard, the new session will start in all the government and private educational schools in the province from July 1, 2020, whereas summer and winter breaks will also take place following the academic calendar of 2019.

Talking to The Express Tribune, Sindh school education and literacy secretary Ahsan Mangi explained that the decision to follow the old academic calendar was taken because the current session was coming to an end and many private educational institutions had been repeatedly contacting the department to send them the details of the new academic session.

In the absence of any major changes in the schedule of the matriculation examinations, around 500,000 ninth-grade students from Sindh will have to appear in their board exams after taking their classes for only seven months. The new schedule will be tougher for students because, unlike in the past, they will be required to take seven exams instead of five.

The previous steering committee had changed the schedule of summer holidays in Sindh, according to which students will now take a break in May and June instead of June and July. The winter break, on the other hand, will take place from December 22 to December 31, and schools will resume the session from January 1.

“I have discussed the matter with the new minister, Saeed Ghani, and a meeting of the new steering committee is on the cards,” Mangi said. “Once the meeting is conducted, we are expecting a slight change in the dates of the matric and intermediate annual examinations. However, everything else will take place as per the previous year’s calendar.”

It is pertinent to recall that a few years ago, the Sindh education department was separated into two sections – one for colleges and the other for schools. Owing to that, the secretary of only one section could not call a meeting of the steering committee.

Moreover, after the Sindh chief minister took back the portfolio of education from Syed Sardar Ali Shah in August last year, there was no minister to head the department for six months. Under the circumstances, the school education department was left with no choice but to follow last year’s academic calendar.

In response to the decision, the All Private Schools Management Association of Sindh (PSMA) has raised several objections regarding the commencement of the session from July.

“We have an objection against the implementation of last year’s calendar because if it is followed, the current academic session will be stretched to 14 months instead of 12,” the chairperson of the PSMA Sharaf uz Zaman said. “We were present at the steering committee meeting in 2019 and urged the school education department to refrain from taking such a decision.”

Sharaf uz Zaman also pointed out that children who are in the eighth grade will be promoted to the ninth grade in July 2020 and they will have to sit in their board exams in March 2021.

“From July to March, students will also have their winter break along with other holidays, according to which they will attend classes for a total of seven months and 10 days. Is it enough to complete the syllabi of seven subjects within this time?” he questioned.

“Across Pakistan, ninth-grade students study for 12 months before appearing in their board exams and our students in Sindh will have to finish their academic year within seven months, which is very difficult. The government should consider this as soon as possible.”

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 06/02/2020)

Minister makes morning assembly in colleges compulsory

Sindh Minister for Education, Labour and Human Resources Saeed Ghani has said that he alone cannot do anything for education as minister as he needs officers, teachers and students to support him in his work.

He expressed these views while addressing students of the Government College of Commerce and Economics during their assembly on Monday morning. Later, he also chaired a high-level meeting of the Directorate of Colleges.

Like in schools, the minister has declared assembly compulsory in all colleges across the province at 8.30am. He has also said that he will himself be making surprise visits at any assembly in any college daily at random.

He said that if he had an option today about which stage of life he would like to relive, he would like to go back to college. “This I say because the four years one spends in college are supposed to be the best years of any person’s life,” he said.

‘If any department needs to be changed, they give it to me’

About the Government College of Commerce and Economics, the provincial minister said that it was his own college and he felt like his soul belonged there. “My habit is such that whoever joins the department starts work from the first day, but education is the first department where I took a week to start work because I wanted to come to this college first,” he said.

The minister said he wanted to start his work from where he had studied himself and that he was glad he could come here with some of his old college friends. He met some senior teachers at the college, who had also taught him. He said that it was his promise to the students of the college that he would turn it into an ideal college in a short period of time.

He shared glimpses of his own life with the students, telling them how he hailed from an ordinary family and that his father was a poor man and grandparents illiterate, who had never even held a pen in their hands and worked as labourers. “Still, my grandfather

educated my father enough to enable him to get a job in a bank. Even though my father's education fee was low, my grandmother had to sell her clothes and household utensils in order to pay his fees," he said.

Mr Ghani said that all colleges are to have a proper assembly in the morning. Replying to a question, he said that Syed Sardar Shah has done a fine job as the education department is a challenging area. "If any department needs to change, they give it to me," he remarked.

In response to another question, he said that the problem of infrastructure in schools and colleges is being solved. He said that in the first phase, these schools are being made model schools where enrolment is brought up to more than 80 per cent so that the students can get maximum facilities. He also expressed his concern over the lack of enrolment of students in colleges across the province and directed the secretary colleges to utilise all resources to increase enrolment in the colleges in the province.

"I have visited various schools and will attend their assemblies by going to one of the schools or colleges daily. I have also instructed all the senior officers, including secretary colleges and DG colleges to participate in school or college assemblies," he said.

While answering another question, Saeed Ghani said he supports curriculum change over time. "I will work on the curriculum with the help of experts," he said, adding that sports activities should be promoted in all public colleges.

Presiding over a high-level meeting of the Directorate of Colleges later the minister discussed the situation of the colleges across the province, including the number of students, principals, professors, assistant professors etc.

While the maintenance and refurbishment fund for the 327 government colleges in the province is only Rs225 million, there may be an increase needed. The minister also ordered a report be prepared as soon as possible in the department regarding promotion and other issues of the teachers so that their problems can be solved on a priority basis.

Saeed Ghani also ordered the starting of special evening classes in colleges where needed as many people are unable to continue their educational activities due to employment.

He said that the report should be made on filling up of vacant posts in the education department and separately for the employees of grades one to four and ordered tests at IBA Karachi and Sukkur for the employees of grades five to 15. For posts above grade 17, he said that they should be sent to the Public Service Commission.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 16, 11/02/2020)

Education concerns

EDUCATION may be the constitutional right of every individual between the ages of five and 16, but actually getting children to school has proven to be a consistent challenge for the state. Millions of children never see the inside of a classroom or are forced to drop out early for a host of reasons. These include: the sheer scarcity of public schools in the country, particularly secondary and tertiary-level institutions; having to travel long distances to reach their destination; inadequate infrastructure within the schools such as bathrooms and running water; the lingering problem of 'ghost teachers' who do not show up to perform their duties but still collect their salaries; corporal punishment, bullying and the abuse of power that those in authority abet or turn a blind eye to; and an array of added expenses ranging from uniforms to stationery and transport which can prove to be a burden for many parents, especially those with several children. Given all these issues, a less frequently asked question is, once at school, what are the children learning?

In the Annual Status of Education Report, researchers found that 41pc of the fifth-grade schoolchildren they surveyed in the rural districts could not read a second-grade-level story in Urdu, while 45pc were unable to read English sentences. The perceived poor quality of education in government schools is also one of the major reasons parents across the country dream of sending their children to private schools, which have popped up across the country on a significant scale to facilitate the demand for quality education that the state is not providing. And yet, despite this desire for private school education, many parents cannot afford the tuition fees of such institutions, let alone all the other expenses that add up. It is imperative then that the government not abdicate its responsibility of providing free, quality education to the children of this country. The effects of doing so are already very visible and will be severely compounded in the years to come.
(By Editorial Dawn, 08, 12/02/2020)

Sindh govt to appoint 37000 schoolteachers in phases

Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani on Friday said some 37,000 teachers were required for government-run schools in the province and the government would make recruitment in phases on merit.

"We have already taken measures to recruit competent teachers on merit to make our schools efficient," he said while speaking to reporters after visiting government schools in Rehri Goth and Lath Basti.

Mr Ghani said his department was facing a huge demand to provide the required number of teachers in more than 40,000 schools in the province.

"We'll fill in such gaps in phases," he said, adding, "in the first phase, we are recruiting some 12,000 teachers while the remaining teachers would be hired in another two phases in future."

Saeed Ghani pays a visit to a govt school where the roof of a room caved in a day before

Minister Ghani said some 9,000 government schools in the province had recorded 80 per cent enrolment and "it is our priority to make them model schools".

He conceded that his department had received complaints about absence of required furniture in many schools while the number of those schools where furniture had become worn out was also disturbing.

He said a committee that surveyed the government schools had made certain recommendations, which included provision of furniture to such schools.

"We are trying our level best and we have planned to overcome this problem in the coming six months," said the minister.

However, he added, the schools showing 80pc enrolment would be top on the education department's priorities. "We'll first remove all sorts of problems of the 9,000 schools, which show 80pc enrolment in Sindh."

Earlier, Mr Ghani visited the Government Primary School Mohammad Amin Jat in Rehri Goth where the roof of a room had collapsed a day earlier.

The minister visited the school and thanked the Almighty for no loss of life in the incident.

He immediately issued instructions to the district education officer concerned for inspection of the said school through works and services department.

He visited all rooms of the school and thoroughly inspected the building.

Mr Ghani said the number of children in the school required provision of more rooms, which would be built along with repairs and maintenance of the roof.

The minister also visited other primary and secondary schools in Rehri Goth. Besides, he visited a number of public schools located in the neighbouring Lath Basti and saw teachers taking classes.

The minister sat down with children in a school and asked questions concerning the curriculum being taught to them.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 15/02/2020)

Sindh to finally publish new computer science textbook

The Sindh school education and literacy department has finally decided to change its obsolete computer science curriculum for Classes 9 and 10 and publish a new textbook for the subject.

In a press release, the Sindh Textbook Board announced that a new edition of the textbook would be published as per the new curriculum, adding that it would be available for the new academic session, which is scheduled to begin from July 2020.

Last year, when the Sindh textbook board published the latest edition of the Computer Science textbook for Class 9, it appeared that the students were still expected to learn about MS DOS, Windows 98, CD ROMs and floppy disks – outdated things that few of them would ever even see.

When *The Express Tribune* reached out to the education authorities at the time, the director of the Sindh Bureau of Curriculum stated that the syllabus was next in line to be revised. The syllabus in use at the time had been devised in 2002.

However, *The Express Tribune* reported on Saturday, although the scheme of studies at the matriculation level was revised and brought more in line with modern requirements, the authorities curiously decided to stick to the same outdated textbook, dividing the chapters between Class 9 and Class 10. The development came to light when Board of Secondary Education Karachi chairperson Professor Saeeduddin complained about the matter to the Sindh education department.

Taking notice of the report in *The Express Tribune*, the Sindh Textbook Board issued a press release the same day, informing all stakeholders, including students and teachers, that the new edition of the textbook was in the process of publication.

Board chairperson Agha Sohail, when contacted for confirmation, said that the notice had been issued for clarification in light of the report, adding that *The Express Tribune's* efforts had been a guideline for the department.
(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 27/02/2020)

Government grants scholarships to NGO-administered school

The Sindh Education Foundation (SEF), a government subsidiary, has now started bearing the expenses of schools administered by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). To this end, the SEF has recently announced that it would grant scholarships to fund the boarding expenses of the historic Narayan Jagannath Vaidya (NJV) Higher Secondary School, which is run by the Akhuwat Foundation, a non-profit company.

In an unprecedented move, the funding will be provided by the SEF under the Sindh School Education Scholarship Programme (SSESP), while the Akhuwat Foundation will conduct the screening of scholarship applications. In the past, no private institution or NGO has been allowed to select applications for government-funded scholarships.

For the qualification test, students in need of financial assistance will be required to submit a pay order worth Rs500, which will be deposited in the foundation's bank account. What's more, while the scholarship opportunity is offered to students from all over Sindh, those from Karachi have been declared ineligible to apply, a move which has drawn criticism from both students and parents.

Sources working for the Department of School Education told The Express Tribune that an agreement was signed between the SEF and the Akhuwat Foundation in 2015, after which the latter adopted the state-owned school. There was no mention in the agreement of any condition under which the boarding costs of students would be borne by the Sindh government or any other public institution.

When approached, SEF chairperson Qazi Abdul Kabeer also confirmed the information.

"The agreement did not mention that the government would bear any expenses related to the NJV School once it is adopted by the NGO," he said. Kabeer, however, defended the announcement of the scholarships and said that the boarding facility's administration at the NJV School was only handed over to the Akhuwat Foundation a while ago. At the time of the announcement of the scholarships, he claimed, the NJV's boarding was still being run by the SEF.

When asked about the collection of Rs500 from the students, Kabeer said that the money would be used to cover the school's expenditure.

As for excluding students from Karachi and its suburbs, he added that students in Karachi do not need boarding facilities as they already have homes in the city. However, he added that the foundation would announce boarding scholarships for Karachi students in the near future too.

"The boarding scholarship is only for students from grade 9 to grade 12," Kabeer explained. "The boarding facility at the NJV school costs Rs15,000 per student, which includes tracksuits, school shoes, uniforms and other essentials, in addition to other miscellaneous monthly expenses. However, the exact amount of the stipend that would be granted to the students has not been confirmed yet."

The building of the NGV School, given to the Akhuwat Foundation, holds a historical status in Sindh. It was built in 1852, and has had the honour of hosting a meeting of the Sindh Assembly. Offices of public schools and the education department have also been set up in the building. In 2015, the former education secretary for school and colleges, Fazlullah Pechuho, handed the building over to the Akhuwat Foundation under an agreement.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 29/02/2020)

'Over 49,000 schools not functioning in Sindh'

More than one-fourth of some 49,000 government schools in the province are closed mainly due to lack of teachers. Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani made this revelation on Thursday while talking to media persons after attending the hearings of two petitions, pertaining to closed schools and regularisation of the contractual head teachers, filed in the Sindh High Court.

"There is a shortage of 37,000 teachers at public schools," said Ghani, however, he adding that the "lengthy process" of filling the vacancies on the basis of merit had been started.

According to him, most schools that were closed down were actually established without proper planning. He implied that those schools were not even required in the areas where they were constructed.

When asked about the appointment of head teachers through a test conducted by the Institute of Business Administration, Sukkur, he said the provincial government was reviewing the appointments to determine whether they were made in accordance with the rules.

Meanwhile, a two-member SHC bench, comprising Justice Muhammad Shafi Siddiqui and Justice Muhammad Faisal Kamal Alam, gave two weeks to the minister to submit a detailed list of the functioning and non-functioning government schools as well as the posts of teachers that have been lying vacant. The court asked the minister to explain why 150 schools were closed in Tando Allahyar District alone.

"The children are ready to sit on the floor under the open sky to acquire education but you ought to at least appoint the teachers to teach them," Justice Siddiqui remarked. The bench observed that the education department had been receiving billions of rupees of loans from international institutions but the required reforms in the education department were not carried out.

The court also noted that the education department may be making good policies but the implementation was where the department was lagging behind. It asked the government to appoint teachers for public schools at the union council level so that the issue of the shortage may not crop up.

Ghani acknowledged before the court that the shortage of teachers existed due to certain misplaced policies of his department. He added that the policies in question were being reviewed to address issues like the shortage of the teachers.

The education minister also said that the temporary closure of schools in the province to prevent the spread of coronavirus. He said that 13,000 Pakistanis recently travelled to Iran and a majority of them belonged to Sindh.

Ghani said some elements were spreading false information through social media to scare the people and claimed that the provincial government was not hiding any information relevant to coronavirus.

(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 06, 06/03/2020)

Confusion looms as Saeed Ghani changes Sindh's academic calendar

The abrupt change of the 2020-2021 academic calendar and the decision to shift the new session from July to April 15 has left educational institutions scrambling to figure out their plans.

Last year, the former provincial education minister, Sardar Shah, had decided that the academic session would begin in July. Now, though, the newly appointed Sindh Education Minister, Saeed Ghani, has changed the dates, propelling the educational system towards some major issues, while students and teachers are left to deal with the impact.

The first of the problems is the provision of textbooks. The change in the calendar has not simply meant that the school year starts earlier – it comes with the fact that it is practically impossible for the market to provide textbooks to students more than a month and half before their previously scheduled supply.

If the decision of the education steering committee is implemented, students of grades 1 to 10 would be forced to go to schools without the learning materials they need. These children will have to spend their entire summer break as well as three months of their academic session without their books, if the session commences according to the new schedule.

Prior to the start of the academic session, the Sindh Textbook Board (STBB) has to publish and provide over 30 million books for both private and public schools. This process is made even more difficult by court orders that have resulted in a change in the scheme of studies for grades 9 and 10, with students having to study all the science subjects in both years. As a result, some books are being published in line with the new syllabus while others are being published in accordance with the old syllabus for both classes.

The STBB has been making its preparations for the publication of the textbooks with July 1 in mind as the commencement date for the new academic session. The change in date has thrown their plans into upheaval.

The matter is further complicated by the fact that the school education department offers free textbooks to millions of public school students – and it requires two months to distribute them in each public school on the basis of enrollment.

It is pertinent to mention here that when a decision is made regarding a change in the curriculum, calendar or textbooks, it is normally to be implemented in the next academic year. However, in Sindh, the change in the educational calendar has been implemented mid-way through the ongoing year, resulting in massive confusion amongst the students due to the shortage of books.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, STBB chairperson Agha Sohail explained that the board could not provide books to the schools or the market within a month under any condition. “The scheme of studies has already been changed in Sindh, and because of this, the textbooks of a few subjects have been printed in two different versions,” he added.

He maintained that the board had made its preparations before the abrupt change of the academic calendar and would only receive the books from the publishers in May, after which they would be distributed to schools.

Sohail further claimed that despite alerting the education minister about the unavailability of textbooks if the session began in April, little heed was paid to the problem, with Ghani simply instructing them to try to deal with the matter. “How would it be possible?” he questioned.

Mixed-up exam schedules

Another problem that has arisen as a result of the shift is the confusion about examinations for grades 6 to 8. With schools shut down across the province for over two weeks in a bid to control the spread of coronavirus, these examinations could not be conducted on time.

They cannot be held when schools reopen after the closure either, since hundreds of secondary schools have been designated as examination centres for students of grades 9 and 10 – where the testing is to begin on March 16, the very day that schools are to resume their operations, and will not end until April 2.

If the younger students have their exams after the matric exams, they will not be able to obtain their results until after the new session begins, leaving the question of their promotion to the next grade hanging in the balance.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 10/03/2020)

SHC bars schools from charging extra fees

The Sindh High Court (SHC) restricted private educational institutes on Thursday from collecting any amount other than the tuition fees on account of additional charges.

A two-member bench, comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Yousuf Ali Sayeed, remarked that private schools had commercialised the pursuit of knowledge.

Addressing Sindh private institutions director Dr Mansoob Siddiqui, the court inquired, "Do you know what is happening in schools across the province?"

At this, Siddiqui informed the court that the schools had been instructed not to take even a rupee more than the tuition fees, adding that charging additional fees from students was "unfair."

The court ordered private educational institutes to not to collect any additional amounts from students other than the tuition fees, directing the private schools director to negotiate with all the stakeholders and settle the matter in accordance with the previous court orders. The court also ordered the director of public schools to submit a follow-up report on the matter.

Final warning

The court also issued final warning to the Sindh government to submit its reply on a petition challenging the transfer of the governor's authority to appoint the provincial ombudsman to the chief minister (CM).

Hearing the plea, the court inquired whether the bill passed to transfer the governor's powers violated any law.

At this, the petitioner stated that the authority was in fact "snatched from the governor," which was "unlawful."

Later, the court gave final warning to the Sindh government to submit its reply on the petition, stating that if it did not do so, the court would announce the verdict without waiting for the reply.

Plea seeks transfer of cases

Meanwhile, a two-member bench of SHC, headed by Justice Ahmed Ali Shaikh and comprising Justice Omar Sial, sought arguments from the parties on petitions pertaining to tax fraud.

During the hearing, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) submitted a written reply on a plea seeking the transfer of tax fraud cases from it to other departments, under the NAB Amendment Ordinance, 2019.

The anti-graft watchdog maintained in its statement that some people from Hyderabad, Sukkur and Larkana too had filed similar petitions.

Basing his argument on this ground, the NAB prosecutor requested the court to combine all pleas seeking the transfer of tax fraud cases from NAB to other departments.

The court ordered to combine the pleas and sought arguments from the parties at the next hearing on March 27.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, , 05, 13/03/2020)

Demand for uniform education system in country

Members of the Shura Hamdard Karachi raised a number of education-related issues and presented their suggestions in a monthly meeting held at the Hamdard head office recently on the topic 'Our education system and ever-changing global horizons', presided over by retired Justice Haziq-ul-Khairi.

Prominent journalist and education expert Zubeida Mustafa, as a chief guest, said educational issues should have the highest priorities and there should be a greater emphasis on girls' education because only an educated woman could have a deeper, positive impact on society.

She said the ground reality is very alarming as there are approximately 23 million children who are not attending school. Moreover the statistics are not accurate given the fact that the data-collecting mechanism has not been modernised.

Dr Riswana Ansari said: Majority of government schools in Sindh are in deplorable state. Incapable teachers are the biggest hurdle in educating children; they instil fear in child thus hurting his/her learning abilities greatly. She said there should be military-style training for teachers in order to discipline them. Schools should be strictly monitored to raise standard of education as well as teachers' behaviour. Moreover government should have one uniform educational system for whole country.

Anwar-ul-Haq Siddiqui said basic education should be the top agenda for reforms in educational sector. According to him around 91pc of government schools in Sindh are primary that is why there is major dropout ratio in the province. Children have no other option but to give up education as there are no middle or higher educational schools available for them, he said. He added that the quality of education was falling due to lack of monitoring and if such trend continued there might be a time when the international community would discredit all of the country's degrees and certificates.

Prof Muhammad Rafi said: We have to be transparent before formulating basic education policy. Character-building and creativity should be main focus along with education. He highlighted the importance of information technology and said that technologies were upgrading with rapid pace. In order to create an efficient technologically advanced workforce, we have to have greater technology use in education and technical education should be given to children at a young age so that they can evaluate the practical application of their studies, he suggested.

Retired Commodore Sadeed Anwar Malik said uniform single curriculum all over Pakistan would reduce the prevailing ethnic, religious and social discrimination, bias and prejudice. While speaking on the marginalised children of madressahs he said these children do not have enough opportunities to explore therefore they should be part of the mainstream and a single curriculum would help boost their potential and competitiveness. He said cheating in education is disturbingly high.

Retired Col Mukhtar Ahmed Butt highlighted different issues and said education is a service not a business. Government should discourage this corporate shape of education. Corruption is rampant in education sector. Institutes are involved in selling degrees. Ghost teacher is a common phenomenon all over Sindh. He said government spending on education was 2pc of the GDP which was lowest in the region. Major portion of this 2pc goes as salary expense of teachers and department is left with little funds to establish new schools and increase facilities in all schools, he said.

Ibn-ul-Hassan Rizvi, Usman Damohi, Dr Khalida Ghous, Dr Amjad Ali Jafri, retired Brig Riaz-ul-Haq, Dr Tanvir Khalid and Shamim Kazmi also spoke.

(By PPI Dawn, 16, 17/03/2020)

Education lockdown

“ROTI, kapra, makaan — aur internet,” is how former Google executive Tania Aidrus underscored her vision for Digital Pakistan: a tech-driven society in which all citizens are connected. However, it will take many years for that dream to become a reality. The internet continues to remain a luxury accessible to a relatively small percentage of the total population, with even fewer able to access good-quality connections, particularly in the periphery regions of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, and former Fata as well as Balochistan. According to a report in this paper, in recent weeks, hundreds of university students and instructors have registered complaints regarding the problems they have had with internet connectivity, along with other technical issues, during their online classes. Others criticised the quality of lectures, which they felt were deteriorating, with less interaction and fewer chances to ask questions. In light of the coronavirus pandemic, with much of the country under lockdown, the online teaching system — particularly in use in developed parts of the world — has been encouraged by the authorities here. But it is also presenting its own sets of challenges and difficulties, and is exposing and creating inequalities which will be felt beyond the classroom.

Of course, no one could have foreseen the pandemic, and both students and teachers are trying their best to do what they can under difficult circumstances, but authorities will need to chalk out a long-term plan if the current situation continues beyond the summer months. Otherwise, the health emergency may just turn into an education emergency, which will bring its own host of problems, from a higher number of early marriages to more children working to support their families. Pakistan already has a high dropout rate from both primary and secondary schools, while millions of others have never even stepped inside a classroom. Prolonged breaks and disruptions in education may lead to even more dropouts. And how many Pakistanis can even afford to make it to higher education in the first place?

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 01/04/2020)

The school fees issue

There is a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens. Obviously, the reference is to the raging coronavirus pandemic sweeping throughout the world. There are reports from Punjab and Sindh that owners of private schools are asking for tuition fees for the months of April and May though schools will stay closed in these two months to protect students, teachers and other school staff from Covid-19. Curiously, owners are demanding fees for the two months when schools are normally closed for summer vacation. It is unclear what rules govern fee collection for vacation periods.

The Punjab government had asked schools to cut fees by 20% because of the emergency situation. Representatives of private schools in Punjab held a meeting with relevant provincial ministers and officials recently in Lahore to resolve the issue. The representatives of schools requested for 48 hours to decide their response, which was granted. Parents in Punjab claim schools have persistently been asking them for tuition fees for April and May, and some of the schools are not issuing results cards because of the delay in submitting the fees. They claim that some school administrations have even gone on to say students will not be promoted to the next class or they will be struck off from the school roll, if fees are not paid. Parents also claim private schools are not implementing the court order on fee reduction.

Private schools in Sindh too are asking for fees for all months, expressing fears that in the absence of fees, schools could close down rendering teachers and other staff jobless. They say they have to depend on fees collected from students to pay salaries and to meet other expenses. They have offered some relaxation in payment of fees. All stakeholders should try to find a workable solution to the issue.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 02/04/2020)

Schools permitted to open for only fee collection, salary payment

The education department of Sindh issued a notification to private schools on Thursday allowing them to open their administration offices for collection of school fees and distribution of salaries.

After several appeals to the government of Sindh by the private school management associations, it was finally allowed by the government to open school administration offices only if they observe strict standard operating procedures.

According to the SOPs handed out to private school administrations by Dr Mansoob Hussain Siddiqui, director general, Inspection and Registration of Private Institutions, Sindh School Education and Literacy Department, the schools can open their admin offices, but they could call only the skeleton staff to manage them.

The administration staff is asked to take precautions by using hand sanitizers. Wearing of protective masks is also mandatory.

Social distancing measures must also be adopted with minimum presence of people in the office at one time. No student will be allowed within the school premises, not even to deposit their fee.

Concession in tuition fee

Another important directive to schools is to grant concession in tuition fee of students in order to ultimately provide financial relief to parents hit by the lockdown.

The decision was welcomed by all the private school managements of the province.

They thanked the chief minister and the education minister for understanding their problem.

Syed Tariq Shah, central chairman of the All Private Schools Management Association Sindh, said they would also not charge any late fee from students because schools were closed and there was no way for them to deposit school fees on time.

Chairman, Private Schools Management Association, Sharaf-uz-Zaman also added that by issuing the directive, the provincial government had saved many schools from complete closure and many teachers and school staff from losing their jobs.

"We are also cognizant of the load on parents at this time of lockdown too and will only be taking monthly fees and not be charging any advance fees from them," he said.

The admin offices will open on Friday.

The various timings of different schools' offices will be conveyed to parents by the schools.

Police directives for educational institutes

Sindh Inspector General of Police Mushtaq Ahmed Mahar on Thursday issued directives to educational institutions for collection of fees and payment of salaries amid precautionary measures.

The provincial police chief directed field commanders of the police to ensure, in collaboration with Rangers, that the educational institutes call only one person for submitting of fees and students should not be called in this regard.

Mr Mahar instructed the law enforcers to implement this directive in a civilised way.

Disinfection should be carried out at counters, tables, doors, drawers, computer board, etc, inside institutes from time to time.
(By Dawn reporter 14, 03/04/2020)

SHC orders increased funds for 'dangerous' school buildings

With nearly 8,000 government school buildings in Sindh classified as dangerous, the Sindh High Court (SHC) has ordered the provincial government to enhance budgetary allocation and honest utilisation of maintenance and repair funds.

The Hyderabad Circuit Bench on Monday issued its detailed judgment in two identical petitions filed by residents of Badin and Matiari districts with regard to 'dangerous' schools buildings. The last hearing of the case was held on December 10, 2019.

"[An allocation of] 25 percent each from the District Development Fund, Bonus Production Fund and Social Welfare Fund in every district in the province shall be allocated and utilised ... for maintenance and repair of the government school buildings," the court ordered.

The provincial government has also been directed to conduct quarterly auditing of these funds through the Sindh chief secretary and accountant general. The audit reports are to be submitted to the SHC in Karachi on a quarterly basis.

"... the utilisation and disbursement of funds must be absolutely free from whimsical or arbitrary exercise of political influence or personal projection," the order reads.

The SHC also cautioned the government to assign only honest, reliable and competent officers with good reputations and unblemished records to manage the funds and to oversee the works.

The court observed that despite the severity of issue and the fact that the lives of the students, teachers and the staff at the schools were endangered, the provincial government had so far acted with indifference. "As the situation is extremely alarming and sensitive, the Sindh government will certainly have to do better than before by taking urgent, sincere, aggressive and extraordinary measures."

In a report submitted by Sindh school education and literacy secretary Ahsan Ali Mangi, the court was apprised that 7,956 school buildings in the province had been classified as dangerous. As many as 527 of these buildings are in Badin, while 150 are in Matiari district.

According to Mangi, the provincial government allocated Rs3 billion for the repair and maintenance works of schools in the fiscal year 2019-20. However, he added, 90 per cent of that budget is spent on regular maintenance and repair while only 10 per cent is used on the dangerous school buildings.

In his proposals for enhancing the funding, Mangi suggested that 25 per cent of the Rs20 billion allocation for the District Development Budget should be spent on the schools. Currently, he revealed, between 80 per cent to 85 per cent of that budget was being consumed by road projects alone.

"If 25 percent is fixed for schools' maintenance and repair, it will resolve this issue substantially," he asserted.

Similarly, he said, 25 per cent of the funds collected from the oil and gas companies under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes should also be allocated and used for the schools.

The SHC disposed of both the petitions with directives for compliance by the provincial government.
(By Z Ali The Express Tribune, 05, 07/04/2020)

Private schools in Sindh ignoring govt order for fee relief sent another letter

Despite a notification issued by the Directorate of Inspection/Registration of Private Institutions, Sindh School Education and Literacy Department on April 1 for schools to provide relief in the form of concession of at least 20 per cent in April and May's fees, many schools, especially the expensive elite ones, have chosen to ignore the order.

As a consequence of their reluctance, and taking strict notice of it, the directorate of inspection issued a second letter regarding the matter on Tuesday.

The second letter reminds schools that it is mandatory for every school to grant the concession to provide financial relief to the parents and guardians of students affected by the coronavirus lockdown. "This may strictly be complied in letter and spirit," the notification said.

It also said that in case the parents still had any complaint regarding the non-compliance of the directives, they may lodge their complaints with the complaint cell established in the directorate. The teaching and non-teaching staff employed in private schools have also been encouraged in the letter to register their complaints with the directorate in case they are not being paid their salaries for the days of closure of the schools during the coronavirus outbreak.

Govt seeks 20pc concession in April, May fees

They have also been provided with phone numbers, including the directorate's number: 021-99217490. The other numbers for registering complaints are: Riaz Ahmed (03332343148), Muhib Ali (03333932441) and Waqar (03337036425).

Speaking to Dawn about the schools' issue with non-compliance of the orders, Syed Tariq Shah, chairman, Private Schools Management Association Sindh, who is also general secretary of the National Education Council Pakistan, said that it is very difficult for them to obey these directives in these challenging times.

"The schools are being told that they must have saved a lot of money on electricity bills because they have been closed, but K-Electric is sending us bills on average. Therefore there is going to be no saving there. Then we have other fixed costs such as taxes that we have to pay through our nose," he said.

"The government is giving relief to parents, to school staff but not to private schools. The price of flour, rice or sugar and other commodities has not gone down. But the government doesn't see that. They are giving relief to the poor people by distributing free ration bags, but there is no relief for private schools in these times of inflation and lockdown," he said.

"I want to ask the government that when private hospitals are charging the same fees from patients, what have the private schools done?" he said, adding that the second letter by the directorate had been issued rather late on Tuesday and they were calling a meeting of all the private schools associations to discuss their next point of action.
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 08/04/2020)

Private schools in Sindh ordered to give 20% fee concession for April, May

The Sindh government directed on Tuesday the private schools in Sindh to give a concession of at least 20 per cent in the tuition fees for the months of April and May.

In a notification issued by the Sindh Directorate of Private institutions, a subordinate body of the provincial education department, the officials said the orders will be enforced strictly in "letter and spirit".

According to the notification, the directives have been issued to give relief to parents amid the ongoing lockdown. It states that in case an educational institute fails to comply with government's orders, parents may report the delinquency at a complaint cell, specifically set up for the purpose. The telephone numbers for the complaint cell are 021-99217490, 0333-3243148 and 0333-7036425.

The notification further mentions that teaching and non-teaching staff can also register their complaints at the cell if they are not being paid the salaries for April and May.

Speaking on the matter, Sindh Directorate of Private Institutions Registrar Rafia Mallah said that the possibility of giving concession in tuition fees was also considered earlier and schools had been advised to do so but it the reduction in fees had to be made mandatory as the schools seemed unwilling to provide any relief to the parents.

The development came a day after Punjab government, in a similar decision, directed all private schools to give 20 per cent concession in tuition fees in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak. However, the private schools association rejected the government's directives.

Last month, the federal government had extended the closure of all educational institutions across the country till May 31 with the consensus of all provincial authorities in a bid to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

However, earlier this month, the Directorate of Inspection and Registration of Private Institutions Sindh (DIRPIS) had given private schools the permission to open their offices to collect fees and pay salaries amid the ongoing lockdown.

A notification issued by DIRPIS Director-General Dr Mansoob Siddiqui permitted schools to open their offices for administrative operations such as the collection of fees and payment of salaries, while other activities were to remain suspended.

School administrations were instructed to pay special attention to maintaining hygiene and social distancing to avoid the spread of the coronavirus. They were also asked to make sanitisers and surgical masks available for their staff called for paying salaries and fees collection.

Furthermore, it was also instructed that not more than three people were to gather in an administration office, while schools were barred from calling any student to the premises, according to the notification.

Any schools violating these guidelines were to face the cancellation of their registration.

The schools were allowed to open for fees collection and salary payments after Sindh Private Schools Management Association had expressed fear of private schools closing down if they were not paid the fees for all months.

The body had also appealed to the Centre to provide interest-free loans to private educational institutes in Sindh so that they could bear their expenses during the lockdown and had urged the parents to pay fees on time to help schools avoid a financial crunch.

Besides, Sindh Private Schools Management Association chairperson had warned that there was a possibility of teachers and other staff members losing jobs. He had suggested that parents may even pay the fees in installments.

The chairperson had claimed that private schools had an important role to play in improving the standard of education and literacy rate, saying that they also provided employment to thousands of people. These institutes also paid large sums in taxes to the government and the impact of them closing down would have a resounding effect on the country's economy, he had warned.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 08/04/2020)

SHC suspends notification of 20pc concession in school fees

The Sindh High Court on Thursday suspended a notification issued by the provincial authorities to provide 20 per cent concession to parents in school fees till April 22.

The two-judge bench headed by Justice Nadeem Akhtar issued notices to the respondents as well as the advocate general of Sindh for next hearing and ruled that the operation of the impugned notification would remain suspended till next hearing.

The TYMS Education Private Limited and others petitioned the SHC and challenged the notification issued by the Directorate of Inspection/Registration of Private Institutions, Sindh School Education and Literacy Department, on April 1 for private schools to provide relief in the form of concession of at least 20pc in the April and May fees.

The lawyer for the petitioners argued that the respondents had no authority or jurisdiction to issue such a notification and it was also not mentioned in the notification whether such a decision was taken in any meeting held by the competent authority or by the cabinet.

He further submitted that the decision was taken without hearing the privately managed schools and their association.

Seeks details of rations distribution by the provincial government

The lawyer further maintained that the decision was arbitrary and against the settled principles of natural justice, adding that the question of an increase in the tuition fee had already been decided by the Supreme Court.

Ration distribution

Another bench of the SHC on Thursday directed the provincial authorities and the local administration to submit details of distribution of rations among needy families during the ongoing lockdown in the province.

While hearing a petition against alleged unjust distribution of rations by the provincial government, the two-judge SHC bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar directed the Sindh government and deputy commissioners to file a comprehensive report about rations' distribution by April 24.

The lawyer for the petitioner contended that the distribution was being made in an unfair manner and the rations were also substandard, adding that the people were facing severe hardship during the lockdown for want of basic necessities.

An additional advocate general argued that the government had distributed around 250,000 bags of rations among deserving families.

He further contended that in this regard committees had been constituted at the divisional level and deputy commissioners and chairmen of union councils were looking after the distribution process.

The bench observed that the government must have the record and details of such distributions and the same be placed before the court by next hearing, adding that the apex court had also sought such details from the provincial authorities.

Dr Aafia Siddiqui case

The same bench on Thursday granted more time to the federal authorities to file comments on a petition seeking directives to the government for making efforts for the release of Dr Aafia Siddiqui and other prisoners held in overseas prisons.

In a previous hearing, the bench had issued notices to the secretaries of foreign affairs, interior and human rights and the principal secretary to the prime minister secretariat as well as the deputy attorney general to file comments.

However, when the matter was taken up for hearing on Thursday, a deputy attorney general contended that as per the ministry of foreign affairs, Dr Aafia was in good health. He sought more time to file written comments.

The bench issued directives to the respondents and deputy attorney general to file comments by April 24.

Fauzia Siddiqui, a sister of the detainee, moved the SHC and submitted that Dr Aafia was currently confined to Carswell Prison in Texas, US.

The petitioner contended that according to the international media, there were reports of an outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in American prisons and the petitioner sent a letter to the secretary of foreign affairs in which she complained that she had had no telephone contact with her imprisoned sister for the last three years.

Dr Aafia was convicted by a US court in 2010 on multiple charges.
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 17/04/2020)

New academic year to begin on June 1 in Sindh

The Sindh government issued on Tuesday a notification detailing steering committee's decision on the policy for academic year 2020-21.

The notification states that the new academic year in all public and private schools and colleges in Sindh will commence from June 1 while the academic year for educational institutes following the Cambridge system will start on August 1.

According to the admission policy for 2020-21, the admissions for grade nine and 10 will take place from June 1 to June 10 and the admissions for Intermediate will take place in June. Admissions to intermediate will be given on the basis of grade nine results and after the announcement of grade 10 results.

Moreover, students of grade one to three will be promoted on the basis of the results of written examinations and annual exams of students studying in grade four to eight will be conducted from June 1. The results for the exams will be announced on June 15.

In addition to this, the annual exams for grade nine and 10 will start on June 15, while the exams for Intermediate's first and second year will start from July 6 and will be taken in evening shifts also.

All educational boards will be bound to announce grade 10 results by August 15 and for Intermediate's second year results by September 15.

Grade nine results and Intermediate first year results will be announced 60 days after the announcement of grade 10 and Intermediate second year results, respectively.

According to the notification, duration of summer vacations will be adjusted on account of the break given from March 16, 2020 till May 30, 2020, while the winter vacations will start from December 20, 2020 and will last till December 31, 2020.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 22/04/2020)

Plea against 20pc reduction in pvt schools' fee disposed of for being infractures

Provincial authorities on Wednesday informed the Sindh High Court that a new notification had been issued to provide 20 per cent concession to parents in school fees for the months of April and May after amending the rules.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Nadeem Akhtar disposed of a petition against the fee concession notification issued on April 1 as infructuous.

On Wednesday, Additional Advocate General-Sindh (AAG) Ghulam Shabbir Shah filed statements along with copies of two notifications issued by the Sindh School Education and Literacy Department and the Directorate of Inspection/Registration of Private Institutions on April 27 and April 28, respectively.

According to the notifications, the Sindh Private Educational Institutions (Regulations & Control) Rules 2005 have been amended by inserting Rules 19-A and 19-E, giving powers to the registering authority (the Directorate of Inspection/Registration of Private Institutions) to issue a special order in extraordinary circumstances including enhancement or reduction in fee and remuneration of teachers and other staff.

After this amendment, an appeal against a special order can be filed before the school education and literacy secretary in case of schools and before the chief secretary in case of colleges.

SHC says Malir and Korangi DCs had done nothing to stop use of sewage in cultivation of vegetables

The AAG submitted that by exercising power under the new rules, the director general of the Directorate of Inspection/Registration of Private Institutions had issued a special order on April 28 regarding 20pc mandatory concession in the fee of students for the months of April and May in respect of privately managed schools.

He further argued that the special order had superseded the earlier directives that had been impugned in the present petition and therefore, the petition had now become infructuous.

The lawyer for petitioners agreed to the extent that the petition had become infructuous, but insisted that such amendments and the special order were discriminatory and illegal and the petitioners reserved the right to challenge the same.

The TYMS Education Private Limited and others had petitioned the SHC and challenged the notification arguing that the respondents had no authority or jurisdiction to issue such a notification and it was also not mentioned in the notification whether such a decision was taken in any meeting held by the competent authority or by the cabinet.

The petitioners further submitted that the decision was taken without hearing the privately managed schools and their association and maintained that the decision was arbitrary and against the settled principles of natural justice. They added that the question of an increase in the tuition fee had already been decided by the Supreme Court.

It may be recalled that the Directorate of Inspection/Registration of Private Institutions had issued a notification on April 1 for private schools to provide relief in the form of concession of at least 20pc in the April and May fees in view of the Covid-19 outbreak.

DCs of Malir, Korangi summoned

The SHC on Wednesday expressed dissatisfaction over the reports of deputy commissioners of Malir and Korangi districts regarding cultivation of vegetables through sewage and directed them to appear in court along with progress reports on May 6.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar observed that both the DCs had sufficient powers and authority to remove the illegal cultivation on government lands, but they did nothing so far.

The bench observed that the cultivation of vegetables through sewage was highly injurious to the health of public and instead of controlling this menace, the DCs were shifting the burden on others.

When the petition came up for hearing, the DCs through their mukhtiarkars submitted replies.

The bench observed that a letter was also attached with the reply of DC-Malir which showed that mukhtiarkar Ibrahim Haideri sent a request to him. It was verified in the letter that vegetables and grass were being cultivated at around 290 acres of government land in the Malir River of Deh Sharabi, Taluka Ibrahim Haideri, it added.

The bench noticed in the replies of both the DCs that they were asking for help and assistance of their respective district municipal corporations and secretary of the agriculture, supply and prices department.

“This is a matter of illegal cultivation and encroachment on the government land as pointed out by the mukhtiarkar present in court that the land is owned by the government on which some illegal activities are being done including cultivation of vegetables through sewerage water”, the bench observed.

“In our view, both the deputy commissioners in their respective territorial jurisdiction have ample powers and authority to remove the same but they have done nothing so far and shifted the burden on others,” it added.

The bench said that it was not satisfied with the replies of the DCs and directed them to appear in person before it along with progress reports on May 6 and also asked the mukhtiarkars to ensure their attendance on the next hearing as well.

On the last hearing, the bench had directed the DCs of Malir and Korangi to make a task force in their territorial jurisdictions for proper vigilance and survey and to stop farming for agriculture through sewage.

The petitioner said that vegetables were being grown through sewage and industrial waste in Korangi, Malir, Landhi, Surjani Town and other areas located on the outskirts of the city and these vegetables were not fit for human consumption.

11 thermal guns for courts sought

The same bench on Wednesday directed the health secretary to provide 11 thermal guns in five days to high court and district judiciary of the city for checking temperature of lawyers, litigants and staff before they enter court premises.

The bench was hearing a set of petitions filed against inadequate safety arrangements in courts particularly in the lower judiciary of the province in view of Covid-19 outbreak.

At the outset, the lawyer for the Sindh Bar Council (SBC) filed comments while health secretary also submitted a reply through a representative.

In his comments, the health secretary also attached the opinion of the Medical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases Society of Pakistan which stated that there was no scientific evidence that spraying of bleach or chlorine-based solution blocked transmission of Covid-19.

A health official assured the bench that arrangements would be made at the SHC clinic for proper examination and collecting samples.

The SHC registrar also informed the bench that only three thermal guns were provided to the high court and some of them were not working, adding that total requirement for the SHC was five thermal guns.

He said that no such arrangement had been made in the city courts where lawyers and litigants were continuously attending the courts.

The bench directed the health secretary to provide 11 thermal guns to the registrar of the SHC within five days and defective guns would be returned to the Sindh government.

It also asked the registrar to distribute thermal guns to district judges of Karachi and also directed him to submit a report with requirement of thermal guns at the SHC bench at Sukkur and circuit benches at Larkana and Hyderabad as well as the district courts of Sindh.

The petitioners submitted that the government of Punjab had approved some amount for lawyers in the present pandemic situation and the Lahore High Court had granted time to the federal government for allocation of funds in this regard as well.

The SBC lawyers submitted that it had received 7,000 applications of lawyers seeking financial support and the SBC had already requested the Sindh and federal governments for allocation of funds.

The bench directed the AAG and the deputy attorney general to seek progress reports from respective governments in this regard.
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 30/04/2020)

A pipe-dream for Karachi University

While several universities are trying to convert into smart campuses amid the Covid-19 crisis, the option seems to be a far cry from reality for Sindh's biggest public varsity. It appears that after 13 years of announcement and owing to the negligence of former administrations, the University of Karachi (KU) has remained unable to provide an effective learning management system to its pupils, the need for which today appears greater than ever.

Although prolonged closure and possible extensions in the wake of the pandemic have prompted the varsity to start planning for some sort of an e-learning system, the programme is yet again faced with opposition from several faculty and staff members.

Interestingly, the same teachers who oppose the adoption of an e-learning programme by KU seem to be conducting online classes for private universities without any objection.

Projects for distance learning and Campus Learning Management System were introduced in KU during the tenure of former vice chancellor (VC) Dr Pirzada Qasim over a decade ago. He was followed by two other VCs until Dr Khalid Iraqi, the present VC, took charge last May. However, during these 13 years, no system for online classes or distance learning could be established at the university.

“I have been working on initiating efforts for establishing an effective e-learning system since assuming charge. Prof Waheed Baloch, a faculty member in the economics department, has been assigned charge of this project and has begun working on it. Lectures delivered to masters and graduate students are being recorded and the system will hopefully be ready soon,” said Dr Iraqi.

Part of the problem lies in the varying curricula being taught to the regular and private students enrolled at the university.

“Although no thought was being given to this issue previously, we are now working towards introducing a uniform curriculum while also updating the system technically. We are serious about conducting online classes and are also calling the academic council to resolve teachers’ reservations so that approval for commencing online classes can be sought,” shared the VC.

On the other hand, according to an interesting revelation, the university’s distance learning project, initiated over a decade ago, had garnered significant funds from the Higher Education Commission. However, 13 years down the line and with nothing to show, serious concerns have been raised about where the money has gone.

No progress

As per documentation, the university management had initially selected its economics department as the first to be reformed under the distance learning project. Dean of Arts Dr Zafar Iqbal was appointed as project convener while Quality Enhancement Cell director Prof Sajideen was appointed as the focal person.

A committee was set up and a meeting called on February 2011 was informed that the KU syndicate had granted approval for the distance learning programme. The meeting further decided to register and conduct examinations of economic MA students under the new system after a preparation course in the form of CDs.

However, a letter written three months later revealed that apart from the procurement of seven computers and three UPS, no work on the project had been done despite the HEC funds. The letter stated that the VC should direct Dr Iqbal to present a report at the HEC meeting.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a senior KU professor said that former VC Dr Muhammad Qaiser had handed over the charge of the project to a female teacher. Meanwhile, Dr Iqbal, Dr Qaiser and his finance director, who had already spent the money, continued avoiding the topic whenever asked for the HEC funds.

“Hence, the project was left hanging because the VC was not ready to spend the income generated by the varsity on the project. The only time they remembered it was when the HEC put pressure on them,” the professor told The Express Tribune. (By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 03/05/2020)

Right to education

EDUCATION is a child’s basic right. Even in times of conflict, war or disaster, temporary learning opportunities are set up as part of emergency relief to provide continued learning support.

Pakistan has an estimated 22.8 million children from five to 16 outside school. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and consequent school closures have resulted in millions more deprived of learning opportunities.

The disparity in education in Pakistan rears its ugly head again as millions of students face learning losses. Major barriers like the digital divide and the weakness of education systems threaten to increase further the vastly unequal learning opportunities available to the economically, geographically or politically disadvantaged.

According to data from the PTA website, 31.19 per cent of Pakistanis have access to the internet. For children belonging to the 68.8pc population without internet access, this pandemic means losing not just the only thing that provides routine — school — but also being deprived of their right to learn.

Low-income households in Pakistan do not have computer hardware. Out of the 78pc population that has mobile subscriptions, 35.9pc is online. Children from families that make up the 42pc not using 3G/4G — or the 22pc that do not have mobile subscriptions — have limited learning opportunities.

While we may have budding tech start-ups with millions of dollars of funding directed towards them, technology access, affordability and internet penetration are still out of the reach of millions.

Who will be held responsible for the students’ losses?

There are also areas where the digital divide is essentially caused in the name of political gains or matters of ‘national security’. These areas, even in today’s ‘digital Pakistan’, are not connected to the rest of this country or the global world because they lack basic internet connections and at times even mobile networks. Schoolchildren in these regions are deprived of every learning opportunity right now. University students suffer the same fate. Lockdowns forced students to return to their hometowns but then

classes were shifted online with mandatory attendance requirements. Students of Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir are frustrated because they do not have the internet access required to attend online classes. Who will take responsibility for the losses incurred by these students? Will the telecom network that has monopolised internet provision in the region be held responsible?

Most schoolchildren facing this digital divide come from marginalised households and are enrolled in public schools. They are already a part of the learning crisis. Not all school-going children learn, struggling with weak reading and writing skills, insufficient teachers and sub-par quality of teaching. With a dropout rate of 73pc for middle school, one of the world's highest, Pakistan faces the risk of an increase in the rate. This sudden disengagement in learning will result in many students never returning to school.

The hardest hit will be young girls who take the burden of economic losses and are obliged to take care of household chores and younger siblings at the cost of learning. A recent data study by Malala Fund using data from the 2014-15 Ebola epidemic in several African countries, projects that around 10m secondary schoolgirls will not return to school after the pandemic.

While maximising access through alternative learning options is essential during the crisis, the quality of content and diversity of mediums will be the deciding factor for learning outcomes or engagement. Another important factor is support at home. In economically disadvantaged segments, most parents lack basic skills, time or interest to help their children learn at home. Our education systems often do not equip a child with skills like time management or independent learning. Mass parent awareness campaigns may improve the outcome of alternate learning options by providing support at home.

However, we have to admit that millions of children in this country will not have access to any learning in this period. To prevent these children from greater learning losses we must prepare for the challenges when schools resume. We must take help from those with expertise to design accelerated learning programmes to support students left behind and create strategies to reintegrate dropouts. We must design training programmes for teachers to give them the confidence to meet the needs of learners.

To come out of this pandemic stronger we must engage in discussions that go beyond the educational budget and school enrollment numbers. We must take into account the disparities that rob young children from marginalised communities of their right to education. It is time to open our eyes and understand that without quality education for all, we as a nation will always lag behind, regardless of the 'potential' we may have.

(By Marvi Soomro Dawn, 07, 12/05/2020)

Private schools' bodies denounce extension in holidays till July 15

Private schools' associations in Sindh have aired their grievances regarding the government's decision of extending educational institutions' closure due to the coronavirus pandemic till July 15.

Denouncing the decision, All Sindh Private Schools and Colleges Association chairman Haider Ali, Sindh Private Schools Management Association chairman Syed Tariq Shah and Private Schools Management Association chairman Sharafuz Zaman, along with several other bodies managing private educational institutions in the province, have asked the government to grant them permission to reopen their schools and colleges after putting in place the standard operating procedures (SOPs) prescribed by the government.

They said they could no longer afford to play with the future of their students' academic careers by keeping on extending school closures, and postponing and cancelling examinations. They suggested that all educational institutions should be opened by June 15.

They said they could call in their staff for training of SOPs from June 1 to June 13.

They also said they could have thermal temperature screening arrangements at school entrances along with sanitising walk-through gates. Thereafter the schools could reopen from June 15.

They suggested that they could reduce the academic week to four days from five or six. They could also have two shifts in place in order to accommodate all their pupils with one student sitting on each desk instead of two while taking care of social distancing. The examinations, too, could be carried out after taking proper care of SOPs, they said.

Meanwhile, Sindh Minister for Education, Labour and Human Resources Saeed Ghani is scheduled to attend a meeting of the Sindh government's steering committee on education to discuss all these issues on Tuesday.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 12/05/2020)

SHC restrains private schools from acting against students for non-payment of fee

The Sindh High Court on Tuesday restrained the private schools from taking any coercive action against students over non-payment of full tuition fee.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Nadeem Akhtar issued the restraining order till May 14 after the provincial law officer approached the court seeking modification in its earlier ad-interim order in which the bench had also suspended the second notification of provincial authorities regarding the 20 per cent concession to parents in school fees of April and May.

Sindh Advocate General Salman Talibuddin moved an application on behalf of the education authorities, who are made respondents in the petition, and sought the modification in the court's May 5 order to the effect that no coercive action should be taken by the petitioners in case of non-payment of full tuition fee by the students.

He further submitted that a similar order was also passed by the same bench on April 22 in an identical matter.

CNG dealers ask the court to order Ogra to review CNG prices in view of unprecedented fall in crude oil prices

"The request made by him appears to be reasonable. Issue notice to the petitioners. Till the next date of hearing, no coercive action shall be taken against any of the students in case of non-payment of full tuition fee," the bench ruled.

It directed both the sides to come up on May 14 when the matter would be taken up again for hearing.

Earlier on May 5, the bench had also suspended the second notification of the provincial education authorities to provide 20pc fee concession to parents till May 14 after privately managed schools had again approached the SHC against the concession in tuition fee after their first petition was disposed of for being infructuous.

The earlier petition of the private schools against the first notification about fee concession had become infructuous since the provincial authorities had issued a new notification/special order superseding the previous one to provide concession in school fees of April and May after making amendments in the rules.

However, the petitioners again approached the SHC and challenged the special order/notification issued by the director general of the directorate of inspection/registration of private institutions on April 28 notifying the 20pc mandatory concession in tuition fee again.

They also confronted the notification issued by the school education and literacy department on April 27 to amend the Sindh Private Educational Institutions (Regulations & Control) Rules 2005 and empowered the directorate of inspection/registration of private institutions to issue a special order in extraordinary circumstances including enhancement or reduction in fee and remuneration of teachers and other staff.

CNG price

Another division bench of the SHC on Tuesday issued notices to the ministry of petroleum and natural resources, the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) and gas companies on a petition seeking review of the tariff for CNG sector.

The bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar observed that the point raised by the lawyer for petitioners required consideration and issued notices to the ministry, Ogra, Sui Southern Gas Company Ltd and Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Ltd as well as the deputy attorney general for May 21.

The Sindh petroleum and CNG dealers associations and others approached the SHC and sought directives for respondents to review the gas tariff for the CNG sector in view of the unprecedented fall in the price of crude oil in international market.

The counsel for petitioners, Mohsin Shahwani, argued that the gas companies had approached Ogra for determination of the CNG tariff by taking the plea that the cost of gas purchased was based on projected wellhead gas prices effective July 2019 worked out on estimated average C&F price for crude oil at US\$61 per barrel and HSFO US\$351.30 per metric ton.

However, the lawyer contended that now the price of crude oil was about \$20 to \$25 per barrel and the respondent may reduce the CNG price and sought directives for Ogra to initiate the review proceedings.
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 13/05/2020)

Minister says schools in Sindh not reopening soon despite pressure from associations

Sindh Minister for Education, Labour and Human Resources Saeed Ghani has said that the education department cannot risk reopening educational institutions in the province by June 1 or June 15 as he is being pressured to do so by several private school associations.

He also said that they had thought over the decision of promoting all students to the next level without taking exams because there were issues they had overlooked earlier, especially when it comes to board exams. Therefore, only students up to class eight would be promoted.

The minister was speaking to members of the media following a two-hour meeting of the Sindh government's steering committee on education at the Sindh Assembly here on Tuesday.

It was being said for several days that nothing regarding education, be it the decision of reopening of schools, examinations, fees, etc, was final and inconclusive until the steering committee meets again to take up all these matters with the stakeholders.

Students from class one to eight will be promoted to next level

The education minister said that Federal Minister for Education Shafqat Mahmood's announcement that the closure of schools would be extended till July 15 and all students of classes one to 12 were to be promoted without having to sit for exams was given in haste without looking at the problems from all angles. "But to all the private schools saying that schools should reopen from June 1

or June 15, I will also say that we are also not prepared for that. We will have to extend the closure,” he said, adding that the steering committee on education had already announced the entire academic plan in March, but after Shafqat Mahmood’s announcement last week, he called him to inform that he did not have the Sindh education department’s consent and they would like to review his decisions by calling their steering committee’s meeting again.

“But now the federal minister for education is also saying that promoting students of classes nine, 10, 11 and 12 is not so simple,” he said.

“Yes, students of classes one to eight can be promoted to the next level on the basis of their last year’s performance and results,” he said. “But there, too, it won’t be right to promote students who just barely passed last year. We think it would be good to make some students who are very weak in certain subjects to take their exams in those particular subjects. But this decision we leave to the discretion of the schools,” he added.

“As for classes nine, 10, 11 and 12, they come under the various boards, which have their own rules. And changing those rules will require making amendments to their ordinances. We have called all the respective board chairmen and the secretary school and secretary colleges to review the issues that we face in making things work there and also to come up with their suggestions and solutions. After all the students passing out of colleges are to go to professional colleges and universities and we cannot allow them to do that with the eyes closed,” he said.

Saeed Ghani said he had formed another committee to look into these matters during the steering committee’s meeting. He said they would also discuss the issues related to the reopening of schools. “Then we will put before the federal government our findings and suggestions,” he said, adding that they quite frankly had no idea about how long the coronavirus pandemic would last and for how long they would have to keep educational institutions closed.

Pouring globs of sanitiser on his hands during the press conference, the education minister said that life had changed due to the global pandemic “and we will also need to change our ways of living. But that does not mean that we will discriminate [against] students from getting education. They may not be able to attend schools in person but there is the option of studying online. We also understand that all students don’t have the facilities to study online and our government schools also don’t have the capacity to teach them that way. We are looking into all these things and we will announce a system that should work for all in a few days,” he said.

He said that to teach students online they also had to train teachers. Then there are internet issues; signals don’t reach in certain areas for which they have also been talking to cellular companies. He said they are also working on coming up with some phone apps. “It will be fine for teachers to come to schools to receive their training,” he said, adding that they were examining various models and educating systems. “Different areas of the province have different circumstances which we have to keep in mind,” he said, adding that the most desirable thing was to have a uniform education system for all of Pakistan. “But while the Sindh government is quick with coming up with solutions the other provinces lag behind.”

Answering a question about school fees, he said that there are thousands of private schools and teachers who number in hundreds of thousands. “We have told all schools to pay their staff their salaries in full, and this many of them did even after giving parents relief of 20 per cent monthly in school fees. But one must also understand that the schools need fees to pay their teachers and staff. It won’t help anyone if the schools start throwing out students over non-payment of fees and firing teachers too because they are unable to pay them their salaries. Then the students will be the ultimate losers,” he said.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 13/05/2020)

University exams

COVID-19 is pushing tech-based innovation to new levels. As all areas of life prepare to put into practice a new workable system, the model is experiencing a baptism by fire in the most basic of sectors — education. Like the rest of the world, Pakistan is trying to find a way to handle the tough challenge the virus has thrown up. There are no easy answers and the solutions that have so far been offered for junior classes, in which millions of young Pakistanis are enrolled, have been controversial in many instances. Even where they have been accepted, approval has been accompanied by sighs of despondency. As primary and secondary levels are crossed, things become more difficult, and experts are calling for new ideas so that university students can emerge from this mess without their future prospects being harmed. The HEC has asked universities for exam and admission policies by the start of next week. “Examinations and assessments are an integral part of the teaching process. Attempts to eliminate exams will have severe repercussions.”

Quite clearly, the message is that the policy of promoting students to the next grade, which is being practised at levels up to Intermediate, cannot be applied to those pursuing higher education in the country. At a crucial videoconference the other day, institutes for higher levels promised to come up with strategies in accordance with the needs of their students. They will surely be looking at how other education systems around the world are tackling the coronavirus menace when it is time for exams. They are dealing with large numbers here and while it is impossible to hold online exams and assessments for primary and secondary schools, this could prove more practical at advanced levels. Postponement of exams for a few months could also be considered while the HEC and universities hammer out a strategy that allows students to be assessed in a manner that does not constitute a risk to themselves or their fellow students.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 15/05/2020)

Students of classes nine to 12 in Sindh will also be promoted, given 3pc extra marks

Sindh Education and Labour Minister Saeed Ghani has said that after promoting children from classes one to eight they will also do the same for the students of classes nine, 10, 11 and 12. He was speaking at a follow-up press conference after the first one following the Sindh government's steering committee on education meeting of two days ago.

Flanked by Sindh Education Secretary Syed Khalid Haider Shah and Secretary for Colleges Baqir Naqvi at the Sindh Assembly auditorium on Thursday, the education minister said that the students of classes nine, 10, 11 and 12 would also be promoted without exams to the next level and their marks would be increased by three per cent under a formula system.

"It has been agreed in the National Curriculum Council meeting of the Federal Minister of Education Shafqat Mahmood and the ministers of education of other provinces that in the present circumstances, it is not possible to conduct examinations. However, to improve the position of the students and if they are also willing, exams can also be taken," he said.

Saeed Ghani said that two days ago in the steering committee meeting it was said that they will promote students of classes one to eight but a sub-committee had to be formed to review the case of classes nine to 12. He said that the committee had submitted its report a day prior, which also proposed amendments in the law regarding promotion of students of these classes without examinations. Saeed Ghani said that in that regard it was agreed in the meeting chaired by the federal minister of education in the NCC on Thursday bringing together the education ministers of all the provinces through video link. "The students will be promoted to the next classes without examinations and will be given three per cent extra marks. If one's marks in the ninth class is 60 per cent, then he or she will now be counted as 63 per cent in the matriculation result making him or her able to get admission to the 11th in the same proportion. Similarly, one's success rate in the 11th will be calculated by adding three per cent to it," he said.

Minister says if students want to improve their positions, exams will also be held

Replying to a question, Mr Ghani said that the current situation was not normal and he agreed that the move would definitely lead to some problems, so the sub-committee would hold regular meetings to resolve the issues. While replying to another question, the minister said that they were also in touch with the universities and higher secondary boards in that regard. "Similarly, we are also in touch with the medical and engineering admissions and technical boards," he said. Answering another question, he said that students who had failed in one or two subjects or had not taken the exam for any reason would be declared successful by giving them passing marks. Asked about the teachers who passed their test, he said: "We want to regularise all of them but we do not want them to be regularised in such a way that they will face difficulties going forward."

Reopening and sealing of markets

Replying to a question on opening of business and commercial centres in Karachi and subsequent sealing of some markets, the minister for education, who is also the labour minister, said that they had several meetings with the business community and their demand was the same. "They had agreed to open their business and for this they will follow whatever SOPs the government will create. A few days ago, all the business leaders met the Sindh chief minister in this very auditorium of the Sindh Assembly and assured him that if the SOPs were not implemented, the responsible traders would be held accountable. After that the business and trade centres were opened but the SOPs were not implemented on the first day. We called the business leaders and gave them two days to do that, but it did not happen even after that, and now we are forced to seal their shops and markets," he said. Answering another question, he said: "We have made it clear before and now we are making it clear again that if the attitude of the business community is better and SOPs are followed, we can give more concessions, but if the attitudes are not serious, we can also not help much."

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 15/05/2020)

Teaching online is much more taxing and difficult, says

It is important how to think critically and rationally at a time when we are bombarded with nonsense, fake science, propaganda, lies and conspiracies.

This was the point eloquently made by eminent scholar Dr Reza Aslan at a webinar on 'Preserving Legacies and Protecting Futures' organised by Habib University on Friday evening.

Dr Aslan, who was one of the two main speakers for the event, said these days universities all over the world are confronted with the issue of having to figure out how to teach online (distance learning). Earlier, a lot of professors began to think this was easy. "I could do it in my pajamas, from home." [But], Dr Aslan lamented, it has been a nightmare. Teaching online has been much more taxing and difficult; it's a wake-up call to the fundamental difficulties that liberal arts education has been having across the globe. In the US, where he is based and teaches at a liberal arts school, it is hard to teach students who are facing death and destruction and filled with anxiety. It's not easy to tell them, "Let's read some literature, let's talk about culture and art."

Dr Aslan said it is also a reminder about the significance of all those things: how liberal arts education at a time of existential crisis like this is even more important than we think it is. The notion to teach how to think critically and rationally in a period when we are bombarded with nonsense, fake science, propaganda, lies and conspiracies is important. The idea that we think historically when we are looking at the immediate present and the uncertainty that it brings, and to expand our horizon with a historical perspective to understand what this moment means... those are the kinds of things that can be fostered. "So, as a professor of liberal arts, I realise that there is in the sense nothing more important than to teach kids, young people, how to have broader perspectives, to understand culture, to foster rational thinking and to cultivate the young minds who one day will rid us of these kinds of pandemics."

Webinar underscores importance of liberal arts

Dr Azra Raza was the second speaker. She peppered her talk with piece of Urdu and English poetry. She said she's an oncologist who sees 40 patients a week. "The only good news that we can give to cancer patients is that if it can detected early." She raised the question: can't we reach that first cell? And argued we should monitor the human body constantly. In the decade of 2020-2030, she claimed, we are going to see a complete change in the way we do healthcare.

She showed the webinar participants a chip which can detect, sitting at home, if anyone has prostate cancer. She called it the ultimately biotechnology. Quoting the economist Adam Smith, she said humans want to be loved and also want to be lovely. It means they want to be loved for the right reasons. And you get to those right reasons through liberal arts. This point led her to stress the importance of history, philosophy and literature.

Dr Raza added through [her favourite] poetry we can learn to become concise while being brave. It is closer to molecular biology. She quoted a couplet to drive her point home:

Arz o sama kahan teri wusat ko pa sakey
Mera hi dil hai woh ke jahan tu sama sakey

[Earth and sky can't capture your vastness Only my heart can encapsulate it]

Both speakers also shared some fond memories of the late Ali Suleman Habib, who served on the Board of Governors of the Habib University.

Bashir Ali Mohammad and Nargis Soorty from the Resource Development Committee of Habib University also spoke about their late friend and colleague. Joined by his mother Munizae, Imran Habib, Ali Suleman's eldest son, spoke about his father and his legacy.

Founding Chancellor and patriarch of the Habib family Rafiq M. Habib said that he had known Ali Suleman since his birth and they had worked together for some 40 years. "I have lost my son and my right hand," he said before offering Fateha for the departed soul.

Wasif Rizvi, president of Habib University, hosted the webinar.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 17/05/2020)

Stay granted on private schools' plea against 20pc fee reduction lifted

The Sindh High Court on Wednesday vacated the stay order it granted earlier against a 20 per cent concession to parents in school fees for the months of April and May after provincial authorities informed it that the Sindh Covid-19 Emergency Relief Ordinance had been promulgated.

Earlier, the SHC had suspended a special order issued by the directorate of inspection/registration of private institutions on April 28 asking the private schools to provide the 20pc mandatory concession in the tuition fee of students for the two months after the privately managed schools challenged the same.

When the matter came up for hearing before a two-judge bench headed by Justice Nadeem Akhtar on Wednesday, Advocate General Salman Talibuddin filed a statement along with the copy of the Sindh Covid-19 Emergency Relief Ordinance, 2020 gazetted on May 18, which was taken on record.

The chief law officer submitted that the ordinance had superseded the three clauses of the April 28 special order, which was challenged by the petitioners.

Opposition leader approaches SHC seeking directive for Speaker Agha Siraj to convene PA session

The lawyer for the petitioners argued that besides some other clauses of the special order, they had also impugned another notification issued by the school education and literacy department on April 27 to add rules 19-A to 19-E in the Sindh Private Educational Institutions (Regulations & Control) Rules 2005 empowering the directorate of inspection/registration of private institutions to issue a special order in extraordinary circumstances including enhancement or reduction in fee and remuneration of teachers and other staff. He requested to hear the petition in these points.

"The interim orders passed earlier need not be extended as clauses (ii), (iii) and (iv) of the impugned special order dated 28.04.2020 have now lost the field in the view of promulgation of the above ordinance," the bench said in its order.

The TYMS Education Private Limited and others had petitioned the SHC again after their first petition was disposed of for being infructuous on a similar matter challenging the special order issued on April 28 about 20pc concession and April 27 notification regarding amendments in relevant rules by giving powers to the registering authority to issue a special order.

It may be recalled that initially, the directorate of inspection/registration of private institutions had issued a notification on April 1 for private schools to provide relief in the form of concession of at least 20pc in the April and May fees in view of Covid-19 outbreak. The same was challenged in the SHC and April 28 special order superseded it.

Opposition leader approaches SHC

Leader of the Opposition in the Sindh Assembly Firdous Shamim Naqvi on Wednesday filed an application in the SHC seeking a directive for the speaker to convene the session of assembly as required under the Constitution.

In a two-page application, Mr Naqvi submitted that the speaker had called the assembly session for May 20, but for reasons not stated in a subsequent notice the session was adjourned till June 3 without being held.

He further maintained that members of all the opposition parties in the Sindh Assembly had requisitioned the session on May 7 under Article 54 of the Constitution and the requisitioned sessions had to be held within 14 days of requisitioning.

He submitted that the session was requisitioned especially to discuss the situation evolving due to Covid-19 pandemic in the province.

The opposition leader was of the view that this was a gross violation of the Constitution and requested the SHC chief justice to issue a direction to Speaker Agha Siraj Durrani to convene the session as per the requirements of Constitution.

Bail granted in anchor murder case

The SHC has granted bail to a suspect in a case pertaining to the murder of TV anchorperson Mureed Abbas and another, observing that it was a case of further inquiry.

Justice Aftab Ahmed Gorar granted bail to Adil Zaman, the brother of main suspect Atif Zaman, against a surety bond of Rs200,000. The bench further said perusal of the record revealed that a prosecution witness had only levelled an allegation that the applicant was present along with the main suspect at the time of firing. It added that the witness in question had relations with the complainant party and thus a false implication could not be ruled out.

The bench said that prima facie the case against the applicant was doubtful and he could not be denied concession of bail.

Atif Zaman was booked and arrested for allegedly killing his two business partners Mureed Abbas and Khizar Hayat in Khayaban-i-Bukhari, Defence Housing Authority, in July last year. Later, police also arrested his brother Adil.
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 21/05/2020)

Schools violating fee cut law will face action, SHC told

A top provincial law officer has informed the Sindh High Court that the law about 20 per cent concession to parents in school fees was in the field and in case of any violation the authorities will take action against offenders.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar directed the directorate of inspection/registration of private schools to file comments by June 3 in a petition moved by the parents of some students seeking implementation of the concession in tuition fee as provided in the Sindh Covid-19 Emergency Relief Ordinance, 2020.

The same bench also directed the provincial authorities to file comments in another petition moved by some private schools and associations challenging some provisions of the ordinance regarding 20pc concession in tuition fees of April and May.

The parents of students through their lawyer Mohammad Vawda moved the SHC for the enforcement and implementation of some provisions related to payment of school fees and reduction accorded by the provincial government during the Covid-19 pandemic under the emergency relief ordinance.

The petitioner requested the bench that during the pendency of their petition, directives be issued to the provincial education authorities to take action against those private schools violating the law.

Some private schools and associations have challenged ordinance calling for fee cut

Advocate general of Sindh Salman Talibuddin made a clear statement before the bench that the ordinance was in the field and in case of any violation the authorities concerned would take action in accordance with the law.

The bench issued a notice to the directorate of inspection/ registration of private schools to file comments till June 3.

The private schools and their associations had moved the SHC for the third time against the 20pc concession in tuition fees.

Counsel for the petitioners Arshad Tayebaly argued that they challenged the ordinance on the ground that the imposition of mandatory concession to even those parents not affected by the pandemic was unjust and in clear violation of the fundamental rights and right to trade and property.

The petitioners contended that they were willing to provide more than 20pc concession to those parents directly affected by the pandemic.

Initially, the directorate of inspection/ registration of private institutions had issued a notification on April 1 for private schools to provide relief in the form of concession of at least 20pc in the April and May fees in view of the Covid-19 outbreak. However, the private schools and their associations had challenged the same in the SHC, but the petition was disposed of for being infructuous since the directorate issued a special order about fee concession superseding the April 1 notification.

The private schools again petitioned the SHC against the special order and also obtained an interim stay order. However, the SHC vacated the stay order after it was informed that the Sindh Covid-19 Emergency Relief Ordinance was promulgated and it had superseded the April 28 special order.
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 24/05/2020)

No concrete plans for intermediate admissions

While the provincial government has been lauded for its efforts in dealing with the coronavirus crisis, the Sindh education department has still been unable to come up with a concrete plan of action to facilitate students.

Two months ago, the steering committee of the education department for both schools and colleges decided to grant first-year intermediate admissions to students based on the results of the 9th grade. The move was made in keeping with the postponement of matriculation examinations, waiting for which would deprive almost 200,000 students of starting college.

However, the irresponsible attitude of the Sindh college education department has ruined the efforts and the decision of the steering committee of the department, and despite a span of two months, no progress has been made regarding the matter.

Sources said that so far, no planning has been carried out regarding the admission process. A meeting was called but neither were any concrete actions taken nor were any committees set up for the purpose.

Additionally, the department has also failed to fix the merit for admission in the first year, which has created confusion among students and colleges alike because the academic session for colleges is expected to begin in August this year.

As per the centralised admission policy, nearly 100,000 admissions will be granted in over 150 government colleges across Karachi. As against previous years, students will be able to submit their admission forms online due to the pandemic.

Sources also revealed that per the existing procedure, the centralised admission committee - established under the Sindh colleges director-general - is responsible for contacting the matriculation board to obtain the results of the students and define the merit accordingly. Despite the recent announcement, the results of 9th grade students have not been obtained so far.

On being contacted, acting colleges director-general Professor Abdul Hameed Chandar said the offices are presently closed because of the lockdown, hence no work could be done. When questioned about obtaining the results of 9th grade students, Prof Chandar did not seem to be aware of the recent announcement and said that admissions could not be granted without matriculation results.

When reminded of the decision taken on March 16 during a meeting presided over by Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani, a notification for which was issued on April 21, Prof Chandar said that all progress had to be halted due to the pandemic.

"Once the colleges reopen, we will look into the matter," he said.

It is pertinent to mention that even though all the educational boards, educational administrative institutions and educational institutions along with the college education department are closed, the chairpersons of Sindh's educational boards, after holding several meetings, have put forth their recommendations to cancel or postpone the matric and inter exams.

Despite the lockdown, the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Karachi and the NED University of Engineering and Technology, for instance, issued their admission policies and have also commenced the enrollment process.

The college education department, however, has so far been inactive regarding admissions.

The Express Tribune tried contacting college education secretary Baqar Abbas, but he refused to comment on the matter.
(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 29/05/2020)

No school can resume teaching without govt permission, says minister

While imposing a ban on teaching in all education institutions of the province, Sindh Minister for Education Saeed Ghani has allowed all private schools that wanted to reopen from June 1 to go ahead and do so.

"We have not stopped private educational institutions from opening from Monday if they want, but we have stopped the teaching process and no school can start teaching without the government's permission," said the minister during a press conference called at his camp office in Clifton on Sunday.

On the occasion he also explained that this year all students from classes one to eight will be promoted to the next level without exams and those who were failing will also be given passing marks.

"There will be no special exams this year and the students who want to improve their grades in various subjects will be given the opportunity to sit for the exam next year," he said.

Failing students will also be promoted to next class

He also said that he had already announced promotion of students of classes one to eight and later students of classes nine to 12 after getting it clarified by a sub-committee of the steering committee of the education department. "The steering committee formulated its recommendations during two to three of its meetings and we will convene another meeting soon. According to the recommendations, as we have no record of the ninth and 11th graders, they will be promoted to the next level without any marks and when they sit for the exams of 10th, 11th and 12th the marks obtained there will be considered as the marks for the classes they didn't take exams for. These students will be promoted to the next classes based on their results of class nine and 11 with 3 per cent extra marks also added to the marks obtained by them," the minister explained again.

Saeed Ghani said that the same rules would also apply to private students. Asked about the announcement of opening of educational institutions on June 1 or 15 by the associations of private educational institutions, he said they may do so if they want but there can be no teaching there. He added that the Sindh government as yet doesn't have a set date for the reopening of institutions for teaching and the decision for it will be taken after reviewing the situation and formulating an education policy in the steering committee. "In the current situation, I don't think any parents would want to send their children to school," he said.

Sugar scandal

The minister, who also holds the portfolio for labour, said that for the last several days the PTI has started a propaganda against the PPP and the PML-N in the name of sugar scandal. He said that all the things in the Sugar Scandal Commission should be subsidised. "The tax was collected, a JIT was set up and all inquiries were completed and references were made. If all this has happened in the past, we ask the prime minister and his cronies why was this commission formed?" he said.

"According to the TORs of this commission, there was an increase in sugar prices in 2018-19 and 2019-20. As a result of this more than Rs300 billion was to be taken out of the pockets of the people," he said, adding that the main reason for the increase in sugar prices in the report of this commission was to import one million tonnes of sugar and later to allow another 100,000 tonnes. And this was the responsibility of the cabinet headed by the prime minister.

"There were decisions made in the commission and it is because of this permission that the price of sugar has gone up," he said. Mr Ghani said that the prime minister had constituted the commission on Feb 20 and submitted its report on March 9. After that, it should have been acted upon, but since the report included all the 'ATMs' in the report of this commission, the drama has started.

"I ask NAB why it does not see this Rs300 billion corruption and why it did not take action against Imran Niazi and his ATM after the commission's report?" Mr Ghani said.

He said that the "nexus between NAB and Niazi" was not to eradicate corruption but to eradicate the opposition and it has now been proved that to save these 'ATMs' they must go against PPP and PML-N.

Saeed Ghani said that whether it is a matter of increase in prices of medicines, increase in gas prices, permission to import medicines from India, permission to import sugar, all these decisions were taken in the cabinet meeting chaired by the prime minister. "They approve and then pretend to investigate," he said, adding that this "incompetent" elected government had taken as many loans during the last one year as the PPP had not taken during its five-year tenure.

Responding to a question, he said that all the decisions of the prime minister are for his own investors.

In reply to another question, he said that if NAB had to show its neutrality, it would have to immediately take Rs300 billion against those who robbed the people by making sugar expensive.

Answering another question, he said that at present overseas Pakistanis are also suffering due to the policies of the present "incompetent" government and the PIA is charging them three times more for bringing them back.

On a question about the PIA plane crash, he said that there is kind of dictatorial system prevalent in PIA and the pilot of the plane was being made to stay on duty for 22 to 23 hours contrary to international rules, and at present under the SOPs during the coronavirus pandemic.

"A person over 50 years of age has to be most careful. PIA has contracted pilots of over 60 years of age. They are hiring them and if anyone raises a voice against it, the agency will take action. Therefore, restrictions have been imposed on associations in PIA so that no one can raise their voice," he said.

Replying to another question, the minister said that if there is an economic emergency, it should be in the federation. "What the Sindh government is doing at the moment is better than all the other provincial governments and the federal government itself," he said.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 01/06/2020)

Promotion of students without exams approved

Participants in a meeting of the Sindh government steering committee on education chaired by Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani on Tuesday approved the recommendations of its sub-committee to promote students of class nine to class 12 to the next levels without examinations.

It was also said that the teaching process in public and private educational institutions across Sindh would only start after considering the Covid-19 pandemic situation in the province.

However, if private schools want, they can start online classes and call in teachers and non-teaching staff for the purpose. Still, they would have to fully comply with the standard operating procedures issued by the department of health and the World Health Organisation.

The sub-committee of the steering committee had been formed to look into the concerns raised by private schools over the promotion of students in grades one to eight, and formulating a plan for the next academic year.

It is going to compile and submit its proposals for comprehensive implementation of all SOPs within a week.

Parents asked to pay school fee to facilitate payment of teachers' salaries

The meeting was attended by Sindh education secretary Syed Khalid Haider Shah, secretary of colleges of Sindh Baqir Naqvi, secretary of universities Mohammad Riaz-ud-Din and steering committee members Tanzeela Umme Habiba, Rabia Azfar Nizami, educationist Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Dr Fauzia, the chairmen of all boards and all private schools associations and others.

The minutes of the last meeting were read out and its approval was sought because the recommendations of the sub-committee had been made by the steering committee in the last meeting alone.

On this occasion, the members of the steering committee expressed some reservations, after which it was decided that students who fail in two papers will be given 'grace marks' in view of their marks in other subjects. However, more subjects will be given only 33 per cent passing marks if the children have failed them.

It was explained that the students who wanted to take the exams for improvement in marks will be given two options: either accept three per cent extra marks or take an exam although no date has been set for it as it is not possible in the current coronavirus situation.

Another committee formed

Some private schools at the meeting also raised their concerns over the promotion of children of classes one to eight following which the provincial minister constituted another seven-member steering committee comprising members of these private schools. The committee will compile its report not only on the issue of promotions in private schools, but also on the new academic year as well as the reopening of schools.

The seven-member committee will also submit a report within a week of compiling it.

Still, it was decided in the meeting that all private schools may start online classes if they wanted to. However, regular teaching will not be allowed and they will not be able to call the children to school although they may call in their teachers and non-teaching staff if they wished to do so but in order to be able to do that they would have to fully implement the SOPs issued to them by the department of health and the WHO. These SOPs were said to be provided to them within a week.

The meeting also decided that the parents should also pay school fees so that teachers of these schools can be paid their salaries. The education minister said that they are trying their best to ensure that all the steps taken for education in the province are taken under the auspices of the steering committee so that the views of all stakeholders are included in it.

He said that they had taken steps to improve the quality of education in the province and work had also been started for training of teachers. "We have also launched a mobile application for online education for children, and more work is being done with Microsoft and others in this regard," he said.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 03/06/2020)

Private schools, parents may agree on 20pc fee reduction

The provincial law officer as well as lawyers for private schools and parents of students on Wednesday informed the Sindh High Court that they would try their best to reach a consensus till June 10 about 20 per cent concession in school fees.

A petition was moved by the parents of some students seeking implementation of the concession in tuition fees as provided in the Sindh Covid-19 Emergency Relief Ordinance, 2020. Another petition was filed by some private schools and their associations challenging some provisions of the ordinance regarding 20pc concession in tuition fees during the lockdown period.

When the petitions came up for hearing before a two-judge bench headed by Justice Omar Sial, counsel for schools Arshad Tayebaly insisted that they would charge 100pc fee and 20pc concession may be given to those students willing to avail it but subject to the final verdict in these petitions.

However, the lawyers for parents, Mohammad Vawda, opposed it and argued that it would be a violation of the Sindh Covid-19 Emergency Relief Ordinance, 2020.

Private schools say they can provide over 20pc concession to only those parents directly affected by pandemic

The counsel for private schools contended that the government might grant subsidies for school if it wanted to reduce the fee.

Mr Vawda argued that most of the parents could not pay the entire fee due to the ongoing lockdown.

Sindh Advocate General Salman Talibuddin suggested that schools might issue fee vouchers accordingly to those parents who were willing to pay 100pc, but he made it clear that the ordinance was still in the field.

The bench observed that the law enacted by the government had to be followed and said that since there were summer vacations in courts and as an interim arrangement the method of payment of concession fee may be evolved.

The bench in its order said, "Learned counsel for the parities as well as learned Advocate General, Sindh request for some time within which they will try their level best to reach a consensus on the line of action to be taken until August, 2020 when the regular hearing of cases will commence after the summer vacations."

Adjourning the matter till June 10, the bench said that the parities would apprise it about the consensus, if any, to be reached by them regarding payment of concession fee on the next date of hearing.

The private schools and their associations moved the SHC for a third time against 20pc concession in tuition fee stating that imposition of a mandatory concession to even those parents not affected by the pandemic was unjust and in clear violation of the fundamental rights and right to trade and property.

The petitioners contended that they were voluntarily willing to provide more than 20pc concession to those parents directly affected by the pandemic.

It may be recalled that initially, the directorate of inspection/registration of private institutions had issued a notification on April 1 for private schools to provide relief in the form of concession of at least 20pc in the April and May fees in the view of Covid-19 outbreak. However, the private schools had challenged the same in the SHC, but the petition was disposed of for being infructuous since the directorate issued a special order about fee concession superseding the April 1 notification.

The private schools again petitioned the SHC against the special order and also obtained an interim stay order. However, the SHC had vacated the stay order after it was informed that the Sindh Covid-19 Emergency Relief Ordinance was promulgated and it had superseded the April 28 special order. According to the ordinance, the 20pc concession in tuition fee will remain enforced during the lockdown and pandemic.

(By ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 04/06/2020)

KU academic council okays plan to hold online classes

The Karachi University (KU) administration held a controversial online meeting of its academic council on Friday and later announced that the forum 'approved' the launch of online classes as recommended by the Higher Education Commission (HEC).

Sources said a number of senior KU teachers, also members of the academic council, had opposed the online meeting of the council, describing it as a violation of the University Act which, they said, had no provision for an online meeting of the statutory body.

They alleged that the vice chancellor had held the online meeting 'in haste' on the directives of the HEC and questioned the minutes of meetings held by different boards of faculties on the proposal of online classes.

"Unless we study minutes of various boards of faculties, what will we approve in the controversial online meeting of the academic council?"

Some 86 members take part in 'online meeting' of academic council that some see as a violation of varsity act

"The obvious haste in calling the meeting and forceful implementation of online teaching clearly seems under duress of HEC directives. HEC is continuously interfering in the affairs of public sector universities and has completely ruined the intellectual environment of university campuses since its inception," said a note of dissent submitted by Prof S.M. Taha, a member of the academic council and vice president of the Karachi University Teachers Society.

Online classes to continue till July 15

Meanwhile, the KU administration in a press release stated that the academic council approved the conduct of online classes to continue the academic activities as part of the lockdown measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

"As many as 86 members participated in the online meeting, which was chaired by KU Vice Chancellor Prof Khalid Mahmood Iraqi," it said.

According to the approved plan, the university initially would facilitate three to five teachers from each faculty as master trainers, whose responsibility would be to train other members of their faculties.

The council also approved that the deans would be responsible for nominating the master trainers and would also monitor the training of other faculty members by the master trainers.

"The online classes/submission of assignments of various courses as per the approved course outline would be conducted till July 15, 2020. The online classes may also include the alternative to labs/practical sessions.

"The teachers would conduct online classes from their homes. However, in case of any difficulty, they could use their offices, classrooms, or meeting rooms of the Dean Offices of their faculties. Each department should constitute a departmental evaluation/student assessment committee before July 15, 2020."

The council also permitted that the university could conduct classes for students who would not attend the online classes on Saturdays and Sundays from July 16 to August 13.

The council also constituted a subcommittee regarding students' examination, assessment, and evaluation, which would be supervised by Prof Abdul Wahid Baloch. This subcommittee would submit its recommendations to the vice chancellor.
(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 06/06/2020)

World Bank may loan \$200m to lessen virus impact on Pakistan's education

The World Bank has initiated preparation of a programme to strengthen federal and provincial governments' institutions, policies and coordination for reducing the impact of external shocks on the education system, and increasing access to quality education in disadvantaged districts of the country, according to reliable sources.

It is likely that the bank will provide financing of \$200 million for the programme. It will focus on response, recovery and resilience for better coordination and innovative alternatives for out-of-school children.

A World Bank team has started working with the government to adjust national priorities as they currently do not account for the medium and long-term effects the Covid-19 virus will have on its ability to provide an equitable quality education.

Pandemic has badly affected a system that faced challenges even before the outbreak of coronavirus

A World Bank document on the project says the current government education strategies will require adjustments to respond to the pandemic, corrective measures to reduce the socio-economic impact on education, and increased preparedness for future emergencies.

The potential economic effects of Covid-19 will likely reduce available resources for the most disadvantaged districts in the country, exacerbating even further regional disparities in education expenditure and, hence, educational outcomes.

The document says that even before the pandemic, the education system in Pakistan faced substantial challenges in access, quality, and management. Before the pandemic, the country had the second highest number of out-of-school children in the world, estimated at 22.8 million children (or 44 per cent of all 51.5 million children) who are not receiving primary or secondary education. Learning poverty was high: 75 per cent of 10-year-olds cannot read and comprehend an age-appropriate text. In addition, the education system is highly inefficient with high repetition and retention rates.

Under the programme, a federal-to-province performance grant programme would be initiated to offer financial support and on-demand technical assistance to provinces to focus on the most disadvantaged areas in the country.

The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training will provide equal per-pupil financial and technical assistance to participating provinces who undertake to work with individual rural and remote areas to further the programme objectives.

The proposed programme will respond to the current Covid-19 crisis, building on the activities under the education component in pandemic response effectiveness in Pakistan project to set up distance learning and create platforms for collaboration with provinces and private sector.

It is expected to help with the recovery by supporting activities to get children, teachers, and administrators, back to school in a safe way, including initiatives to bring back to school those children who are likely to drop out from school given the socio-economic effects of Covid-19.

The programme will disrupt the pre-Covid-19 status quo by setting up a new system of incentives for provinces to invest in the most disadvantaged geographical areas for the country.

(By Amin Ahmed Dawn, 03, 07/06/2020)

25.2pc of revenue to be spent on education, says Murad

While presenting Sindh's education budget for the fiscal year 2020-21 on Wednesday, Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah said that the budget of education sector, in a macro perspective, had been increased to Rs244.5 billion when compared with Rs212.4bn for 2019-20.

"Despite resource constraints we have allocated funds which is 25.2 per cent of our current revenue budget," he said.

He said that education was one of the key priority areas for the government of Sindh. "We aim at improving access to equitable, inclusive and quality education for all to realise their fullest potential and contribute to the development of society and economy, thus creating a sense of nationhood, inculcating values of tolerance, social justice and democracy in students," he said.

He explained that in order to manage education-related functions in an efficient manner, enhance the quality of education and provide better facilities at educational institutions, the department of education was divided into two departments — the school education and literacy department (SELD) and the college education department (CED) back in 2016.

Budget for education sector has been increased to Rs244.5bn

“This bifurcation gave us an opportunity to micromanage the affairs with a better understanding of the needs and aspirations of stakeholders,” he said.

In the annual development programme (ADP) for FY 2020-21, the education sector has been allocated a total development budget of Rs21.1bn for 397 ongoing and 11 new, but unapproved schemes. An allocation of Rs3.1bn is provided under Foreign Projects Assistance (FPA) in addition to the provincial development budget resource allocation.

The SELD has been allocated Rs13.2bn for 265 ongoing schemes and four new schemes. Most of the 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.

The CED has been allocated Rs3.71bn in ADP 2020-21 for 67 ongoing and two new schemes.

Allocation for development priorities of universities and boards is Rs3.3bn for providing funds for the public sector universities for strengthening their educational infrastructure and for constructing new educational facilities.

The education sector, too, is divided into three broad categories — school education, college education and higher education (university and professional education).

Schools

It is explained that the government of Sindh provides funds for school education from its limited resources.

Moreover, international donors also chip in with their share towards improving the quality of education in Sindh. The provincial government has adopted various key indicators for need assessments and performance evaluation of schools to help understand the needs and accordingly assign resources where needed. For FY 2020-21, Rs1bn has been allocated as grant in aid for Education Management Organization (EMO) for handing over management of various schools to EMOs.

“Moreover, we have allocated Rs6.6 billion for purchase of furniture and fixture, Rs6.1 billion for new activities with the help of international donor agencies, Rs2.3 billion for free textbooks, Rs1.8 billion for school management committee to meet the requirements of schools, Rs5 billion for repair and maintenance of school buildings, Rs480 million for an Emergent Need Fund for meeting new initiatives under Covid-19 and Rs663.4 million for educational assets of proscribed organisations of Sindh taken over by the government of Sindh,” the chief minister said.

In school education, about the achievements in FY 2019-20, he said that they had profiled schools, provided essential facilities to 1,606 primary, elementary and high schools in 29 districts, carried out groundwork for making 15 English medium and six comprehensive schools operational under the PPP mode through EMOs.

In the next academic year, 10 more English medium and nine comprehensive high schools in nine districts are also going to be ungraded with all facilities of science/IT labs, libraries, etc. Also, there are plans for establishing 2,000 new early childhood care and education classrooms, training 2,500 early childhood education teachers and printing Rs4.93m sets of textbooks for all schools at taluka and district levels.

“In the next financial year 2020-21 we have set a number of targets under which we will provide requisite infrastructure, solar system, IT/science labs and auditoriums in 35 existing schools,” he added.

He also said that in the current FY 2019-20, Rs9.5bn was allocated for the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) and that there has been no change in that amount.

Collages

There are a total of 146 boys’ colleges, 131 girls’ colleges and 50 co-education colleges in Sindh running under the administration of the college education department, whereas the total student enrolment is 436,980.

In order to manage college education in a Covid-19 perspective, the college education department is planning to launch a programme of distance learning by establishing computer labs, centralised teaching and utilising web services. For enhancing technology-based interventions in the college education department, Rs451m has been allocated in FY 2020-21.

Moreover, Rs300m has been allocated as Endowment Fund for NED University of Engineering and Technology Karachi and Rs30m is kept as grant-in-aid for the Government College for Information Technology Guru Nagar, Hyderabad.

Universities and boards

In the current FY 2019-20, sufficient funds were disbursed to public-sector universities as grant-in-aid. Education boards were also provided funds to pay examination fee, which was required to be paid by students earlier. The establishment of the Benazir Bhutto Chair at Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur is expected to be completed in FY 2020-21.

In FY 2020-21 the allocation of Rs5bn is proposed for grant to universities, Rs2bn to educational boards and Rs1.2bn for scholarship to position holders/A1 graders in Sindh. Besides Rs392m is allocated for various cadet colleges while Rs259m is for various public schools. A further Rs50m is proposed for performance incentive under 'Programme for Results'.
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 18/06/2020)