

# NEWSCLIPPINGS

*JULY TO DECEMBER 2020*

## EDUCATION



## Urban Resource Centre

---

A-2, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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](mailto:urc@cyber.net.pk), Website: [www.urckarachi.org](http://www.urckarachi.org)  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/URCKHI](https://www.facebook.com/URCKHI) Twitter: <https://twitter.com/urckhi>

## Sindh to adopt only core curriculum subjects, not entire federal syllabus

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Thursday sought a clarification from the Federal Ministry of Education and Professional Training on the implementation of the Single National Curriculum, saying that the provincial government might adopt only core curriculum subjects with minimum standards that could be further enriched by the province.

Presiding over a meeting to discuss the 'Single National Curriculum Plan' of the federal government, the chief minister asked the federal government to provide necessary clarification whether the province was to adopt the entire national curriculum or only core subjects of the Single National Curriculum.

"The Sindh government may adopt Single National Curriculum containing only core curriculum subjects with the minimum standards and further enrich it followed by the development of provincial curriculum of the remaining subjects such as languages, social studies, etc," he added.

The meeting was attended by Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani, CM's Adviser on Law Murtaza Wahab and other officers and experts.

Briefing the CM, the education minister said that a meeting was held on the Single National Curriculum (SNC) by the National Curriculum Council (NCC) with the federal education minister in chair in Sept 2019.

He said in order to implement the SNC, it was decided that the SNC developed by the federal ministry of education should be taken into consideration by provinces through holding review workshops at provincial level. "Once approved by the provinces, this SNC will be implemented nationally," Saeed Ghani told the CM.

*Provinces are empowered to design their own curricula after 18th Amendment, meeting told*

The chief minister said that in view of 18th Amendment, the education portfolio was delegated as a provincial subject and since then the Sindh government had been working on curriculum as part of its provincial mandate and adopted the national curriculum 2006 and revised the curriculum on international models.

Mr Ghani said that in 2015, the Sindh government enacted The Sindh School Education Standards and Curriculum Act passed by the Sindh Assembly. He added that under the law, the Sindh Curriculum Council was established and the Bureau of Curriculum was reconstituted as Directorate of Curriculum Assessment and Research.

He said that the provincial education department had designed a curriculum for social studies for class VI to VIII using an integrated approach for all four aspects — history, civics, economics and geography.

The education minister said that he had held 9th meeting of the Sindh Curriculum Council (SCC) in March 2020 in which a detailed discussion regarding implementation of Single National Curriculum was made.

He said that the meeting observed that after the 18th Amendment, development of curriculum and syllabus had become the responsibility of provinces.

The chief minister said that the federal education ministry may be asked to provide necessary clarification whether it was an adoption of the whole national curriculum or only core subjects of SNC.

He directed the education department to study and compare the curriculum of the federal government with the curriculum of the Sindh government which was designed under the guidelines of '21st Century Learning Skills' and send him the recommendations.

### **2,430 coronavirus case found**

CM Shah on Thursday said that 2,430 new cases of coronavirus were detected when 9,436 tests were conducted raising the tally to 89,225 cases while 31 more patients died lifting the death toll to 1,437.

In a statement issued here from CM House, he said that 9,436 samples were tested against which 2,430 new cases of coronavirus emerged constituting 26 per cent detection rate.

He said that so far 471,023 tests had been conducted which diagnosed 89,225 cases all over Sindh, of them 49,926 were cured, including 1,399 overnight. "The recovery rate in the province stands at 56 per cent," he said.

He said 31 more patients died lifting the death toll to 1,437 that constituted 1.6pc death rate. He added that currently 37,893 patients of Covid-19 were under treatment.

He said that currently 754 were in critical condition, of them 101 were shifted to ventilators.

He said out of 2,430 new cases, 1,177 were detected in all six districts of Karachi division. They include 389 in South, 296 in East, 168 in Central, 117 in Korangi, 111 in Malir and 96 in West.

He said Hyderabad had 89 new cases, Dadu 58, Ghotki 55, Thatta 51, Shaheed Benazirabad 48, Tando Allahyar 47, Larkana 47, Naushahro Feroze 41, Sukkur 38, Khairpur 37, Tando Mohammad Khan 37, Shikarpur 35, Sujawal 30, Matiari 21, Jamshoro 19, Badin 17, Jacobabad 16, Sanghar 15, Umerkot 13, Mirpurkhas 11, Qambar and Kashmore one each.

(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 03/07/2020)

### **In Sindh, schools confused about 'new scheme of studies'**

After the disruption of the academic session due of the spread of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown in the province, Sindh's School Education and Literacy Department is facing immense challenges in implementing the proposed 'new scheme of studies' for Class 9 and 10.

Per court orders issued earlier in this regard, Class 9 and 10 students from all public and private schools across Sindh must undertake their annual exams following the new scheme of studies.

Under the scheme, science subjects earlier taught by dividing them are now to be taught in both Class 9 and 10, while the total marks for matriculation are to be increased from 850 to 1,100. Despite a clear notification regarding the implementation of the new rule, however, no practical measures have been taken so far.

The Sindh Textbook Board (STBB), which is administered under the School Education and Literacy Department, has also failed to print and distribute textbooks under the new scheme of studies in a timely fashion, while the process of distributing free textbooks to government schools has not even started.

In a recent letter written to school directors, STBB secretary Hafeezullah Mahar sought details of the existing stock of textbooks for these classes in the district warehouses - a move which has further complicated the matter. The letter further stated that old textbooks can still be used in this academic session, adding that per the orders of the Sindh High Court, the textbooks will be changed in the next academic year.

Due to the unclear status of the scheme of studies, some private schools have started conducting online classes at the matriculation level under the new scheme, while others are conducting online classes under the old scheme.

The Express Tribune tried to contact Mahar several times but he did not respond. Meanwhile, the board's technical director, Yousuf Sheikh, claimed that the new scheme of studies for Class 9 would be implemented this year and books would be printed as soon as possible. When questioned about Mahar's letter to school directors, he maintained was unaware of any such decisions.

According to All Sindh Private Schools and Colleges Association chief Haider Ali, books under the new scheme are not available in the market, and teachers were therefore compelled to give biology and chemistry lessons to Class 9 students per the old school scheme. Meanwhile, the lessons for physics and mathematics as proposed under the new scheme are not being taught as of now.

"We are not implementing the new scheme as the situation is not clear. We have asked the education board whether the exams will be taken under the new scheme or the old one but the board could not furnish a straightforward answer," said Ali.

On the other hand, All Private Schools Association's chairperson Tariq Shah said that schools have been imparting lessons to Class 9 students in accordance with the new scheme of studies.

"Even though books under the new scheme are not available in the market, schools have started implementing the department's order and teachers are imparting lessons for the related subjects online," Shah explained.

Despite the confusion, the School Education and Literacy Department has remained silent. The department's secretary, Khalid Haider Shah, is on annual leave, while STBB chairperson Ahmed Bakhsh Narejo has assumed additional charge as the secretary.

When The Express Tribune contacted the head of the curriculum wing, Dr Fauzia, for comment on the matter, she said the curriculum wing had done its part as per the court order by preparing the new scheme of studies. "We have done our job. Now it is up to the Sindh Textbook Board to take further action."

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 05/07/2020)

### **Anti-student action**

IN a move that will be a blow to foreign students, American Immigration and Customs Enforcement announced on Monday that international students attending schools in the US may not take a full online course load and remain in the US. The law-enforcement agency said those students whose universities are operating fully online must leave the country, transfer to in-person schools or face deportation. The announcement came just weeks after US President Donald Trump suspended the entry of certain foreign workers to the US — a decision taken on the pretext that it would help the coronavirus-battered economy but one which betrays Mr Trump's anti-immigration motives. The fresh decision that orders foreign students to leave if they aren't attending school in person will have hugely negative consequences for the international student body of about 1.2m in the US. Not only will it add to the already uncertain situation they are facing as universities shut down and go online in a Covid-battered country, it will unfairly force them to leave accommodations they have paid for out of fear that they will be deported.

The American government's decision seems to be senseless, unfair and unjustifiable. It flies in the face of the hopes of so many foreigners who pay thousands of dollars to gain an education and experience university life which is so prized in the US. Ahead of

the election, Mr Trump appears to have pulled many a shocking trick out of his hat, yet the recent move targeting foreign students is a new low and perhaps among the most cruel and illogical. Not surprisingly, even as the United States becomes the country with the highest Covid-19 death toll at 133,000 and 3m cases, Mr Trump tweeted this week to say that universities should open this fall. It appears that ICE's announcement will exert pressure on universities to reopen even if they are not ready, therefore exposing students to health risks. This narrow-minded and unjust decision must be rethought.  
(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 09/07/2020)

### Educational activities

It is a sign of the improving coronavirus situation in the country that the government has decided to reopen schools and colleges in the first week of September. The decision was taken in an online meeting on Wednesday presided over by Federal Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood and attended by the education ministers of all the four provinces, Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and the Chairman of the Higher Education Commission. A final decision, however, rests with the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), which is the implementation arm of the National Coordination Committee chaired by the PM.

Educational institutions were closed in the country in mid-March as part of efforts to control the spread of the deadly virus. The education ministers' meeting agreed that classes would resume in schools and colleges from the first week of September under strict SOPs. Universities would reopen from Sept 25. The reopening of institutions will depend on the Covid-19 situation. The education ministers' moot has decided to arrange another two meetings to review the situation before finally deciding to reopen educational institutions.

In the meeting, the federal health secretary stressed that wearing of face masks and maintaining social distance should be ensured inside classrooms and on the campus. It was decided to call a meeting of all administrators and teachers of educational institutions after July 20 for the preparation of SOPs. A national SOP will be prepared in consultation with all the provinces and regions. Madrassas will send their own SOPs, which will be approved by the NCOC. The All-Pakistan Private Schools Association has demanded relief in utility bills saying most private schools in Punjab are housed in rented buildings. Let us be optimistic about the revival of educational activities in the country.  
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 10/07/2020)

### Educationists discuss challenges of teaching rural students amid pandemic

'Is access to education during the Covid-19 pandemic a privilege or a right?' This was the topic of an online session organised by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) through Zoom on Thursday.



The speakers were Sadiqa Salahuddin, founder and executive director of the Indus Resource Centre, and Rahila Fatima, head of strategic development, The Citizens Foundation (TCF), with Kausar S. Khan, adviser, community engagement with the Indus Health Network, as the moderator.

"These days we find people talk of theory while being behind on practice. So we thought of listening to our two educationists today to understand their way of practice in continuing with the education of students during the Covid-19 situation to develop theory from there," said Kausar Khan.

Talking about their method of teaching before the pandemic and how they are continuing with their work under the present circumstances, Ms Salahuddin said that with most of their schools, including those which they are running in partnership with the government, located in Sindh's interior, they could not really run them sitting in Karachi without getting the people there involved. "For this, we have village education committees where our teachers, who are also local, keep in touch with the students in their localities in order to keep them engaged in their education. Having local teachers is an advantage that way," she said.

*'We have village education committees where our teachers keep in touch with the students'*

She also explained about their project where there are certain people already looking after the affairs of their teachers and staff while monitoring their progress. "Teachers are encouraged to focus on an education that doesn't overlook co-curricular activities and local culture."

Coming to the Covid-19 period, she said there is no need to feel inferiority complex when looking at online classes being organised by elite schools. "We have equipment issues, budget issues, so we can't be like them," she said.

She continued that the lockdown happened in late February when their school students were preparing for their final exams that were to take place in March. "When we realised that the students were going to miss their exams, we got in touch with our project staff to connect with their head teachers and prepare and deliver worksheets to students for them to be able to solve at home. But it was not easy when we realised that photocopying 20 sheets each for 3,000 children cost a lot. Still, the students who were being given the work happily did it. Their enthusiasm made us prepare more worksheets for them," she said.

She pointed out that even though only 13 per cent of the students had access to smartphones in villages, their teachers had them and they all remained in touch regarding their students' progress. It formed useful clusters of teacher networks. Some teachers also recorded teaching videos and uploaded them on YouTube for their students. They were teaching in Sindhi, English and they were also holding mathematics classes. And in doing all this, their own confidence was also building as was capacity among them.

"The village children were kept involved in their studies this way. But they have also been asking when the schools will reopen because the five hours they spend in school allows them to enjoy their childhood, as the rest of the time they are involved in doing domestic chores," she said.

Rahila Fatima then explained how they kept the students in their over 1,600 schools all over the country, not lose touch with their education. "During the initial days of Covid-19 we were confused ourselves as we thought that things would normalise soon," she said.

"But when that didn't happen, we initiated desk research to look at how other countries were able to carry out the schooling of their students during other pandemics such as Ebola or SARS. In doing so we also reached out to organisations in those countries to understand how they went about things.

"One thing was clear. We needed to keep the children motivated so that they come back to school when schools reopen," she said. "We did this through airing our programme *Ilm ka Angan* on PTV's *Taaleem Ghar* channel along with other channels. For older students of classes five to eight, we came out with an educational and entertainment magazine with several stories and activities for which they could also send in stuff. The magazine, which first came out in May as a pilot publication is now fortnightly and our students can lay their hands on it during the brief two-hour weekly sessions with their local teachers that focus on revision, recall and practice," she said.

For older students of classes nine and 10, she said the TCF set timetables to connect with students through smartphones. "We found someone in their family or neighbourhood with a smartphone that they could borrow for two to three hours three or four times a week for studying purposes," she said.

Finally, Kaleem Durrani, regional coordinator for the HRCP, thanked the participants and those who joined them for their valuable input.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 10/07/2020)

### Back to school?

AFTER a nearly five-month closure due to Covid-19, schools and universities in Pakistan are scheduled to reopen on Sept 15. Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood made the announcement at a press conference, saying that educational institutes will reopen with SOPs in place. Mr Mahmood also said that authorities are mulling several options: scheduling classes on alternate days, conducting classes outdoors, training teachers, recalling students to hostels with maximum 30pc occupancy and enforcing mask wearing and social distancing. All this, however, is contingent upon the lowering of the coronavirus infection rate. If the crisis is not curbed, Mr Mahmood said, schools and universities will not open.

There is no doubt that the closure of educational institutions has been a huge setback for students all over the world. In Pakistan especially, where internet access in many areas is limited, virtual classes have been tremendously difficult to hold if not impossible. For young children, too, the disruption in learning has had consequences for their emotional well-being. Therefore, the authorities' concerns regarding school closure are legitimate. However, taking any decision before the Eidul Azha holiday, which is a couple of weeks away, and Muharram, may not be feasible as there is a fear that infection rates will rise during this time. These fears are evidenced by the government's repeated statements that Eid gatherings and flouting of SOPs will undo the lower reported figures. The prime minister has appealed to the public to mark Eid with simplicity and take precautionary measures. Unfortunately, no SOPs are being enforced at gatherings in animal markets. As a result, one infectious disease expert has predicted a frightening scenario of 5,000 new infections per day. If these violations continue and infections rise, the government should, as it has already indicated, reconsider its decision. Even when the time comes for schools to open — whenever that may be — the planning needs to be meticulous. Temperature checks, distancing, mask wearing and rigorous training of teachers on SOPs will be essential. A safe system will have to be chalked out for those using public transport to get to school. Children who are immuno-compromised or who live with a vulnerable family member may have to be offered an alternative to physical attendance. Teaching staff should be given paid sick leave, adequate PPE and quick testing. This is an uncertain time and uncharted territory for all educational institutions. However, authorities must support students and faculty by providing and enforcing clear guidelines.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 11/07/2020)

### Education and Covid

I HAD just delivered two lectures to my history of economic thought class at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics when the universities were closed because of Covid-19. The only guideline from the PIDE was to continue online, if I could. For the next two weeks, I tried using a digital link, only to give up after two attempts for three reasons.

First, students from remote areas — Gilgit-Baltistan, AJK, KP's merged districts and Balochistan — had poor connectivity. Second, poorer students had no access to smart devices. Third, others lacked a corner of their own to participate undisturbed. The pandemic is no equaliser: there is a great digital divide across regions as well as income groups. The divide across the globe is even more glaring. Checking with the two universities abroad that I had attended, University of Colorado [UC] at Boulder and University of Cambridge, I found out that the switchover to distance learning was almost instant.

On March 24, Cambridge moved all face-to-face teaching online. Colleges offered accommodation to health staff and departments offered assistance in testing. Faculty epidemiologists, pathologists, immunologists, mathematicians and veterinary scientists supplemented public services. Other academics advised companies on challenges faced by manufacturing and mapped the virus's genetic evolution. A novel idea was the early graduation of the medical students to join the public health services. The VC

messaging that teaching and research online was not the same but it was working. Actually, it worked so well that Cambridge has decided to remain online for the next academic year, whatever the position of the curve.

*The students went home and the universities were closed.*

By moving to remote teaching and working on March 11, UC Boulder was the first public university in the state of Colorado to do so. Students were provided some flexibility by beefing up pass/fail options. Medical faculty and researchers were placed at the disposal of the governor. Researchers began testing antibodies and therapies for Covid-19. Students, faculty, staff, parents, community members were consulted to prioritise health and safety measures and formulate an on-campus academic model to accommodate both in-person and remote learning. The result was A Road Map to Fall 2020 plan. Classes will begin on Aug 24 and finish online after Thanksgiving. The Road Map was billed as “the beginning of a return to campus,” with an iterative implementation process to enable continuous adjustment in the light of new information. The university also started webinars on Covid-19-related issues of public interest.

In the words of the UC president: “Life didn’t stop when we moved to remote teaching in mid-March in response to Covid-19, but our campuses became different places almost overnight, with the normal hustle and bustle replaced by a strange quiet. Yet our faculty quickly pivoted to remote teaching and learning.” The university had been working on an Online Learning Project and Transformation and Innovation Programme. Covid-19 provided the opportunity to accelerate them.

Out here, the students just went home and the universities were closed. The latter were not seen to be thinking ahead. Somewhat late for the ongoing semester, the lead had to be taken by the regulator, the Higher Education Commission, more because of its dynamic chairman than any institutional inclination. The chairman laid out his plans in an excellent article in this paper.

Noting the poor starting point and where he would like to go, he wrote: “At this point, only the best universities and the most committed and dynamic vice chancellors will be able to launch a few high-quality online courses. But if preparations are taken in hand right away, others will be able to catch up by June. HEC is assisting universities in a number of ways, including arranging software and connectivity packages, curating online materials and training programmes, building a data repository, providing guidance on quality enhancement, and setting up and adapting monitoring and evaluation systems.”

Coinciding with the closure of the universities by the government on March 26, the HEC’s Technology Support Committee issued a working paper on how to transition to virtual instruction. In a series of online conferences with the stakeholders, the chairman attempted to build a consensus on online readiness, assessments, examinations and thesis defence. Remote education leaves remote areas remoter.

The announcement of a special package of Rs285 million for universities of Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan, and tripling of Fata University funding, should help. The launch of the Rapid Research and Innovation Fund to support university research on Covid-19 is timely. These are, however, only small steps to help universities help themselves. It remains to be seen which ones would reflect Robert Frost: “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — / I took the one less travelled by, / And that has made all the difference.” (By Pervez Tahir Dawn, 07, 13/07/2020)

### **Retired employees illegally occupy houses in KU**

The illegal occupancy of about 40 government houses in the residential area of the University of Karachi (KU) has turned into a complicated matter.

Per source, at least three types of illegal occupants have come to the fore, including retired teachers, officers, and employees who have completed their legal tenures; on-service employees; and bank officers having no connection with the varsity.

Despite being questioned about the illegal status of their occupancy, many occupants are not willing to vacate the houses.

After repeatedly failing to remove illegal occupants from government bungalows and quarters, the management of the university, for the very first time, has decided to take the matter before the syndicate - the strongest authority in the university.

The approval regarding the removal of illegal occupants will be taken by the university’s syndicate during a meeting, scheduled to be held on July 18, under the chairmanship of the university’s vice-chancellor Dr Khalid Mehmood Iraqi.

The matter has been added to the agenda of the syndicate, and a detailed report, prepared by the state office of the varsity about the illegal occupancy of government houses, is set to be presented at the meeting.

Per the report, a few illegal occupants broke into locked houses and settled there, while some on-service employees -- despite the annulment of the allotment - refused to vacate the houses.

The report mentioned the case of Professor Ghazala Rizwani who had retired in December 2015 and was granted a legal extension to vacate the house by December 19, 2016. She, however, continued to live in the house for three more years.

Likewise, the university’s former director of finance Masood Abbas, who was posted in the University of Karachi for three years, starting from June 20, 2012, is still residing in the same bungalow and has refused to vacate it.

“Moreover, several retired professors, who retired at the same time, were given extensions to vacate the houses. These included Professor Arif Kamal who was given an extension until May 21 2017, Professor Zulqarnain Shadab who was given time until



August 28, 2018, Professor Surayya Khatoon was told to vacate the house by January 19, 2018, Dr Rasheeda Qari on February 16, 2019, Professor Shahid Ali on July 24, 2019, Professor Qamar Ameen in September 2019, Professor Ahmed Qari on December 23, 2019, Professor Anwar Zaidi on October 5, 2019, and Professor Moonis Ahmer was told to vacate the house by April 2, 2020. All these individuals have spent over a year residing in the government houses after their tenures came to an end."

The houses allotted to officer Akram Sharif, Syed Khalid, and several lower-grade employees and officers who have joined the Sindh Medical University, retired teachers and the former director of finance who has retired from KU, have been annulled.

According to the report, a few on-service employees allegedly broke into locked houses in October and December 2018, including lab assistant Masood Bin Fareed, store-keeper Saud Bin Fareed, and computer operator, Obaidullah.

One of the syndicate members, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, told The Express Tribune that he contacted a few of his fellow members after receiving the agenda of the syndicate.

"I have spoken to a few of my fellow syndicate members and they are of the opinion that if the syndicate fails to take some important and immediate decision regarding the evacuation of the houses, illegal occupants will feel encouraged and this corrupt practice will continue like the past," he said.

He added that the lukewarm attitude of the management regarding illegal occupancy of government houses show the prevalent corruption amid government institutions. The matter was raised in the past too and several former administrations brushed the matter under the rug.

"The present management has also failed to do anything except for wasting time and showing progress on paper. Now, that the matter is going to be put before the syndicate so some sort of action must be taken."

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 15/07/2020)

### **In a first, university holds online convocation**

As educational institutions remain closed amid the coronavirus pandemic, universities across the country have shifted their classes online. But in a first on Saturday, Habib University went virtual for its convocation ceremony too, awarding degrees to 185 students.

The event was streamed online on Youtube and Facebook, with faculty, parents of graduating students, alumni, staff and others logging in to witness it.

The online convocation was part of the varsity's approach to continue all academic and other activities in the face of the pandemic and marked the awarding of degree to 39 electrical engineering graduates, 44 computer science graduates, 45 communication studies and design graduates and 57 social development and policy graduates.

Speaking on the occasion, Sindh Governor Imran Ismail encouraged the graduating class to continue to come forth with new ideas to benefit the nation. Habib University president Wasif Rizvi said that what the graduating batch had experienced over the past five months should be an inspiration for them to imagine a different world. "Cure your cynicism with passion and sincerity, challenge the ugliness and destruction with grace and beauty. Address laziness, indifference and incompetence with... vigor and excellence and tackle exploitation and avarice with... goodness and service," he said.

"Make sure that from this day forth you live life to the full. Make every attempt to keep learning [and] adding to your knowledge," renowned oncologist and researcher Dr Azra Raza told the students.

Meanwhile, Habib University chancellor Rafiq M Habib told the students, "You have shown you are ready to face the new world by your commitment and the will adopt to these uncertain circumstances."

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 19/07/2020)

### **71 schools handed over to private sector for 10 years in Sindh**

The Sindh government signed on Wednesday an agreement with education management organisations (EMOs) to manage 71 schools, constructed under the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Sindh Basic Education Programme (SBEP), for the next 10 years.

The ceremony took place at the Chief Minister House, and was attended by Sindh CM Syed Murad Ali Shah, USAID mission director Julie Koenen and Sindh Education and Literacy Minister Saeed Ghani. The provincial education secretary, Ahmed Bakhsh Narejo and representatives from the two selected EMOs – Charter for Compassion (CFC) and Health and Nutrition Development Society (HANDS) – signed the agreements.

CFC and HANDS signed one and four agreements respectively. Under these agreements, both organisations would manage 71 government schools, including 25 newly constructed USAID schools, to improve the quality of education in four districts of Sindh – Dadu, Qambar-Shahdadkot, Karachi and Larkana.

The CM appreciated USAID-SBEP and the US government's strong support in modernising education in the province.

He added that the Sindh government was a pioneer in launching public-private partnership reforms by outsourcing operations and the management of public sector schools to reputed EMOs for a period of 10 years under these agreements

"We are proud to partner with the Sindh government in this important initiative," added Koenen. "The SBEP is improving the quality of teaching and increasing equitable access to safe learning opportunities for children, especially girls."

Koenen emphasised the US government's commitment towards supporting Pakistan's efforts in education.

The US government is contributing \$159.2 million through USAID, whereas the Sindh government is providing \$10 million cost-share for the SBEP.

The project aims to increase and sustain student enrolment in primary, middle and secondary public schools in selected areas of Sindh, with a special focus on bringing back girls who have dropped out of schools.

In addition to constructing schools, the SBEP also supports the provincial government's reforms in education, school consolidation, merging and upgrading, community mobilisation, public-private partnerships and improving reading competencies of students in schools.

The SBEP is constructing up to 106 modern school buildings in 10 districts – Dadu, Jacobabad, Qambar-Shahdadkot, Kashmore, Khairpur, Larkana and Sukkur, as well as Karachi's West, Malir and South districts.

The CM added that 70 schools have been constructed under the programme so far, out of which 43 were previously handed over to seven EMOs. The construction of the remaining schools, meanwhile, is at various stages of completion.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 23/07/2020)

### **Sindh amends education law**

With matriculation and intermediate students left wondering about their futures for months amid the coronavirus-induced lockdown, the Sindh Assembly finally passed a bill on Thursday to allow provincial education boards to issue certificates and diplomas without conducting examinations in emergency situations.

Amid protest by the opposition parties, the provincial assembly also passed a bill to allow the Sindh government to take over most of the teaching hospitals in the province.

As the session began under speaker Agha Siraj Durrani, the assembly hall had a particularly colourful look on the day, with the majority of MPAs, both from the treasury and the opposition benches, donning ajrak. The move came in response to comments made by Shahbaz Gill, the special assistant to the Prime Minister on political communication, mocking the ajrak face mask worn by Pakistan Peoples Party chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

There was commotion in the house when opposition members protested the absence of bills on the agenda, even as Sindh Parliamentary Minister Mukesh Kumar Chawla presented two bills for legislation.

"We have not been given the bills. The majority of our MPAs have not read them. How can you make the law like this?" argued opposition leader Firdous Shamim Naqvi, adding that legislation could not be passed in haste.

Chawla responded that the Sindh Teaching Hospitals (Establishment and Management Board) Bill, 2020, had come from the standing committee, where all the committee's members had reviewed its clauses and provided their feedback.

Naqvi, however, pointed out that no opposition members were part of the standing committee. "Every member of the house must get the bill with the copy of the agenda. We cannot sit here and take part in legislation until we understand it," he contended.

As Chawla moved the bills for voting, opposition members from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Muttahida Qaumi Movement and Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) walked out of the session in protest.

#### **Relief for students**

A bill was moved to make an amendment to the Sindh Technical Education, Secondary and Intermediate Boards Bill, to grant permission for certification even in the absence of examinations in situations such as that of the coronavirus pandemic. The bill was earlier approved by the Sindh cabinet on Wednesday.

While the government had earlier announced that matric and inter students would be able to pass without examination, the matter had been in limbo until the amendment had passed, leaving students worried about their future.

#### **Teaching hospitals**

According to Chawla, meanwhile, under the Sindh Teaching Hospitals (Establishment and Management Board) Bill, 2020, almost all teaching hospitals in the province would be brought under the domain of the provincial government.

"Under this law, we have decided to establish management boards comprising health officials, finance officials, senior doctors, deputy commissioners of the relevant districts, and representatives of civil society," he stated.



**The state of education**

Earlier, Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani informed the house that around 5,000 "non-viable" schools had been unnecessarily established to appease certain people in the past, in order to provide jobs and other benefits.

"We are going to shut down these schools because they are a burden on the provincial exchequer," he stated.

Responding to the queries of opposition members, he said that around 6.2 million children were out of schools in the province, adding that the government had started a campaign to enrol them in educational institutions. "We are giving stipends to them, especially to girls, in order to encourage them," he claimed.

When asked if the government had drafted a policy for enrolling such children by PTI lawmaker Rabia Azfar, however, he was unable to give a concrete answer, saying only that the provincial government was making efforts in this regard.

"We have been hearing for the last 12 years, from all the education ministers of Sindh, that they will do this and do that. We want to know what you have done. Please tell us about your progress," chimed in GDA legislator Nusrat Seher Abbasi.

Ghani stated that around 4,170 projects for the rehabilitation of schools were under way. "We are also working on the upgradation of schools," he said, adding that there was a dire need to establish middle and secondary schools. (By Hafeez Tunio The Express Tribune, 04, 24/07/2020)

**'Teachers' training is based on inculcating knowledge and skills'**

As the second part of its 36th anniversary celebrations, the Society of Pakistan English Language Teachers (SPELT) organised a panel discussion on the 'Role of experience in teachers' professional development', which was moderated by SPELT's honorary executive director Prof Zakia Sarwar and streamed live on Zoom and Facebook here on Friday.

Sharing a bit about his experience, director of Teachers Development Centre Abbas Husain said that he brings the experience of whatever he is doing to his classroom. "My experiences outside the classroom and my classroom experience morph. And that's how our own teaching shapes us from year to year," he said.

Teacher trainer and author from the UK Alan Maley said that teachers first need to be independent teachers. "Our attitudes, feelings, relationships all matter when teaching, and teachers' training is based on inculcating our knowledge and skills. It's like an algorithm. We do something, observe what we have done and act on our thinking," he said.

Dean of Ziauddin University Dr Fauzia Shamim said it is always liberating to be part of a teacher's association. "As I got opportunities to learn, I learned. Actually, an association does not do anything for you. You should have the capacity to look around and see how you can improve yourself. Groom yourself, go as far as your motivation takes you. And that is how from the teachers' agency, you move to the professional agency. Synergies, learning partnerships grow us," she said.

Professor emeritus USA/Japan John Fanselow said the classroom, teacher, student and the environment all contribute to a good learning experience. He also said that small changes can lead to big results and for the teacher to know exactly what he or she wants the students to learn is important.

Chairperson of the Humanities Department, NED University, Dr Sajida Zaki said that routines in teaching need to be broken because routines can never guarantee credentials. "Creativity can break routine behaviours. You also need to update disciplinary knowledge, technological knowledge and experiential knowledge and elevate oneself by reflecting on what you have learned," she said.

English as a Foreign Language teacher trainer from Brazil Malu Sciamarelli said that reflecting on their experiences helps teachers grow. "Our beliefs, our values also matter and add value to the learning of each of our students," she said.

Answering a question about what teachers can do to help parents who want to assist their children's learning during the Covid-19 pandemic school closure, Mr Maley suggested that they read to them. "They can also encourage them to pen their feelings of loneliness and missing their friends during the lockdown," he said.

Abbas Husain then said that there are schools here whose teachers keep providing ideas to the parents about how to keep their children occupied. "The teachers also provide them ideas about keeping them fit through yoga, what to feed them, etc. When parents realise that the teachers take them seriously, that is a good thing," he said. (By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 16, 26/07/2020)

**Matric, inter students still awaiting results**

The Sindh government has miserably failed to tackle the educational challenges that it confronted amid the coronavirus pandemic. Despite introducing new legislation to cope with the situation, the provincial matric and intermediate boards have still not received permission to award grades without conducting exams.

As a result, the preparation of matric and intermediate results for seven education boards in Sindh, including the Board of Intermediate & Secondary Education, Karachi, has not commenced, leaving hundreds of thousands of students in limbo.

The Sindh College Education Department has not started the process of enrolment for over 100,000 matric students from Karachi in the first year of intermediate, nor has any policy for the process been drafted.

What's more, in violation of the education department steering committee's decision, the decision to award admissions based on matric results has been taken, which would further delay the commencement of college sessions.

On the other hand, the Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) has issued the O and A Level results across the globe, two days before its deadline.

The timely issuance of CAIE results has opened opportunities for these students to pursue higher education and enrol themselves in different colleges and universities, while students from the local boards remain uncertain about their future.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, the chairman of an education board in Sindh, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said all the education boards are facing unique challenges in terms of promotion and direct grading without conducting the examinations.

"Despite the challenges, however, the government's attitude and its callousness is the major hurdle in tackling the issue and preparing the results," he said.

When contacted, the universities and boards secretary, Riazuddin, refrained from commenting on the issue.

The Sindh Assembly drafted legislation on July 23 to permit promotion without exams in the face of an emergency such as the Covid-19 pandemic. But 20 days on, the province's education boards have still not received permission from the education department to issue the results.

The Sindh College Education Department is not ready to grant admissions to students in the first year of intermediate without obtaining their matric results even though the education steering committee had granted approval to award first-year intermediate admissions based on the results of Grade 9.

Private colleges in Karachi have already commenced online classes after enrolling students in the first year of intermediate. However, nearly 100,000 students belonging to different government colleges are sitting idle at home, awaiting results and admissions.

Despite repeated attempts, Sindh college education secretary Baqar Abbas, who is also in charge of the Sindh Treasury Department, was unavailable for comment.

Sindh Colleges Director-General Professor Abdul Hameed Channar, meanwhile, said the department had decided to grant first-year intermediate admissions based on matric results, yet the matric results have not been issued.

When reminded that the steering committee had approved the granting of admissions for the first year of intermediate based on Grade 9 results in March, he said that the latest decision was taken by Abbas.

Sharing the reasoning behind the decision, Channar said granting admissions based on Grade 9 results would create issues, and injustice may prevail, hence the admissions would be granted based on Grade 10 results.

"As far as legislation is concerned, Abbas is in a better position to answer the question," the colleges director-general said. (By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 13/08/2020)

### **SHC instructs govt to enforce law on school fees' concession**

The Sindh High Court has instructed the director general inspection and registration of private schools Sindh to implement a law about concession in fees during the Covid-19 pandemic in all educational institutions in the province.

While disposing of two petitions moved by an NGO and All Sindh Parents' Association, the two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar also directed the DG to file first compliance report within 20 days.

The bench in its order said that basically the petitioners have approached the court for enforcement of relevant sections of Sindh Covid-19 Emergency Relief Ordinance, 2020 regarding 20 per cent concession to students in fees of the educational institutions in Sindh during the pandemic.

The petitioners contended that various educational institutions were not implementing the law and charging 100pc fee from the students.

The bench further said that during an earlier hearing, advocate general Sindh had given clear statement that the law was in the field and in case of any violation the competent authority should take action in accordance with the law.

An additional advocate general reiterated the statement of the AG and submitted that DG inspection and registration of private schools was responsible to implement the law. The AAG further said that he has no objection if this petition was allowed and added that the ordinance in question has now become an act which will be notified in official gazette.

The DG undertook to take necessary action across the board against the violation and assured the bench that he will strictly implement the law.

The bench in its order said that by consent, the petitions were disposed of with the directions to the DG inspection and registration of private schools to implement the law in all educational institutions in Sindh and file first compliance report within 20 days.

Though it is the responsibility of the DG who is the competent authority to implement the law in its letter and spirit, the parents may also lodge their individual complaints in the office of DG and immediately after receiving their complaints the DG shall take action strictly in accordance with law, it concluded.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 14/08/2020)

### **CAIE students demand review of 'unjust grading'**

Dozens of Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) students and their parents staged a protest against A and O Levels results on Saturday, demanding a review of what they termed "unjust grading."

The disgruntled protesters shouted slogans such as 'grade ko izzat do' (respect the grades) and 'we want fair grades' and held banners.

CAIE announced its results on August 11, using an evidence-based grading system in the absence of exams amid the coronavirus pandemic. A total of 950,000 students from 139 countries opted to obtain their results through CAIE's grade prediction method for the May/June session.

However, students - both in Pakistan and abroad - have been unsatisfied with their results, claiming their grades did not match what their teachers had submitted to the board.

Claiming they had been downgraded, the protesters said they were raising their voices against CAIE's "unjust" grading system.

"The grades this year have left us devastated," said one of the protesters. "The expected A grades have been changed into C and D grades, which is like dropping from 90 per cent to below 50 per cent. This has sabotaged our future as our chances of getting into a good university have shrunk."

Others added that the A Level results of pre-medical students had dropped to such an extent that they could not even attempt a test through the National Testing Service.

The students demanded that their grades be reviewed, adding that if their grades could not be changed then universities should revisit their admission policies. They further said the federal government should intervene to resolve the issue, warning that they would otherwise extend the protest.

Meanwhile, Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan MPA Aslam Khursheed and MNA Usama Qadri attended the protest and assured they would highlight the issue in the Sindh Assembly.

When the results had initially been announced, students and parents had taken to Twitter, complaining about the grades and demanding CAIE and the government take action.

Following the outcry, Federal Education Minister Shafqat Mehmood had stated the CAIE had agreed to review its grading procedure. "It will announce its final verdict after a review on Tuesday [August 18]," he tweeted on Friday.

According to a CAIE statement, meanwhile, it was hearing the feedback and suggestions from schools and students, and was considering the best course of action.

\*With additional information from DNA  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter 04, 16/08/2020)

### **Students in anguish**

The recent announcement of the Cambridge O/A level results on Thursday had left students so devastated that hundreds of them including their families decided to protest outside the National Press Club and D-chowk in Islamabad. The claim put forward by them was that the Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) had unjustly downgraded their results after promising to ensure a fair assessment mechanism in the wake of exam cancellations owing to the pandemic.

CAIE had previously explained that the four-step assessment would include the teachers' predicted grade for the student, the students' ranking order, and school reviews in order to come up with a "predicted grade" which would serve as their final result. However, many students believe their predicted results do not reflect such an assessment, instead they were downgraded. They have expressed their outrage on social media over CAIEs "discriminatory" treatment to Pakistani students as compared to students from England and Scotland, only to find out that international students from 160 countries, mostly from Africa and South Asia, had been a victim of the same. For some the situation was so severe that they had received an F in response to their expected grade of A\* submitted by the school. Others have asserted that the CAIE is taking advantage of the situation by creating conditions which may force many students to retake their expensive exams.

Thankfully though, the Federal Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood's plea to CAIE has not gone unnoticed as the exam board has decided to review its grading procedure — the final verdict of which will be announced on Tuesday. While there is a need for the Cambridge International to re-examine many of their policies, it is essential that they provide the students with the opportunity to appeal individually against unfair grading. On the other hand, it is vital that Pakistan work steadfast towards forming its own unified national education system in order to promote fairness and equality, instead of relying on an international curriculum.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 16/08/2020)

### **Karachi's second street library launched**

Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani inaugurated on Saturday the city's second street library - established with the support of the South District Municipal Corporation (DMC) - in Lyari and pledged to expand the initiative to other areas as well.

Addressing the inauguration ceremony, the commissioner said efforts for establishing more street libraries in the Karachi would continue by the city administration, so that common citizens could more easily access books and the trend of reading was revived.

He further stated that he had laid the foundation stone for another street library in North Nazimabad recently, while arrangements for establishing similar facilities in Garden and Malir were also underway.

Underlining the significance of establishing street libraries, Shallwani remarked, "Books still have great value, despite the widespread prevalence of the internet." He reasoned, "[This is because] the internet is no replacement for books. We can acquire information via the internet, but knowledge can only be acquired through books."

Particularly speaking in relevance to the street library in Lyari, the commissioner observed that the area residents' appreciation of the initiative reflected their fondness for books. He expressed hope that they would maintain and look after the library, which, comprising books on history, literature and other subjects, would be of most benefit to children.

The commissioner thanked the Rotary Club for gifting 500 books for the library, adding that the South DMC had been assigned the facility's upkeep.

Also speaking on the occasion, South DMC chairperson Malik Mohammad Fayyaz Awan termed the library's establishment "a positive step," adding that the initiative would give rise to interest in reading among students.

In December, 2019, Karachi's first street library - also the first of its kind in Pakistan - was inaugurated with 600 books at the Commissioner's Corner near Metropole Hotel.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 16/08/2020)

### **Minister orders action against open schools**

The registration of private schools that had reopened across the province in defiance of government orders should be cancelled immediately and the relevant deputy commissioners should take strict action against their management, stated Sindh Education and Labour Minister Saeed Ghani on Monday.

Presiding over a Sindh Education Department meeting, Ghani said the final decision to reopen educational institutions would be taken at the National Command Operation Centre meeting on September 15.

"We want the federal education minister and all the provincial education ministers to meet on September 7 so that we have all preparations [to reopen schools] in place," he stated, adding, "The decision to close educational institutions was a difficult one, but time has proved that this was the correct decision."

The minister further said that all resources should be utilised to ensure the complete implementation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) to curb any resurgence of Covid-19 in all educational institutions.

"We have to focus on reopening educational institutions on September 15 and ensure the completion of all precautionary measures, including disinfectant spraying, before that date," he insisted.

Discussing the reopening of some schools in the province, he stated that nobody would be allowed to play with the lives of children, adding that stern action would be taken against those who challenged the writ of the government. He told the education secretary and private schools director-general to cancel the registration of any private school that had opened.

Later, meeting United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Sindh chief Cristina Brugiolo, Ghani said the Sindh government had issued SOPs to all private and public educational institutions, directing them to ensure their implementation.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 18/08/2020)

### To reopen schools or not

While the coronavirus pandemic still reigns in the country — albeit in a much weaker position — schools might be allowed to reopen from September 15 as announced by Federal Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood. To reopen the schools or not is the debate nowadays. Some believe that the safety and wellbeing of children, teachers and staff members are more important and schools should stay closed till the time an anti-virus is available. There are others who insist that the Covid-related situation is now good enough to reopen schools under certain SOPs and resume the process of learning which has been at a standstill for nearly half a year, to a huge loss to the students all over the country.

Sindh Health Minister Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho is among the proponents of keeping the schools closed, especially those at the primary and middle level. She insists that until the country is rid of the coronavirus, children should be taught at home, especially the younger ones who are “not mature ... and cannot maintain social distancing”. The minister says that teachers could be helpful to a large extent, but they would not be able to strictly watch the children for the entirety of the school day or ask them to strictly follow instructions. Thus “corona can spread in schools”.

To take Dr Pechuho’s concern forward, even the best of the schools in the country cannot ensure implementation on precautions being suggested, like: holding classes on alternate days so as to reduce the number of students in a school on any given day; increasing distances between desks; organising classes in the open air; avoiding morning assembly and activities requiring large gatherings; and carrying out regular disinfection in schools.

Reopening of schools thus carries a substantial risk for children and teachers; and most parents are unlikely to favour it. We may have to swallow the bitter pill of keeping the schools closed for an indefinite period.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 21/08/2020)

### Turfed out : Illegal occupants to be removed from KU houses

The University of Karachi’s (KU) syndicate has ordered the evacuation of 40 bungalows in the varsity’s residential area, which had been illegally occupied by retired teachers and other staffers, saying that strict action will be taken in case of non-compliance.

Sources said that illegal occupants will be given a month’s notice to vacate the houses, and would otherwise be forcefully removed and legal proceedings initiated against them.

As The Express Tribune had earlier reported, around 40 houses had been illegally occupied for more than a decade by at least three types of employees: retired teachers, officers, and employees who had completed their legal tenures; on-service employees; and bank officers having no connection with the varsity.

Despite being questioned about the illegal status of their occupancy, many residents had refused to vacate the houses. What is more, after repeatedly failing to remove illegal occupants from government bungalows and quarters, the management of the university, for the very first time, had decided to take the matter before the syndicate - the strongest authority in the university.

To discuss the matter, the syndicate held a meeting under the chairmanship of KU vice chancellor Professor Khalid M Iraqi. After careful deliberation, it was decided that the occupants currently employed by the university would be given 30 days to vacate their houses, while non-compliance would lead to termination from their jobs on disciplinary grounds.

On the other hand, retired employees, who have completed their one-year vacancy period granted by the administration, will have to leave the houses immediately. Otherwise, utility services will be suspended from the houses and residents will be forcefully removed with the help of law enforcement agencies.

When approached, Prof Iraqi confirmed the syndicate’s decision.

Shedding light on the matter, syndicate member Dr SM Taha said that at present, the KU House Allocation Committee included employees, officers, and teachers as members.

“Owing to pressure from some committee members, some employees were illegally allotted houses in 2016 on the basis of their seniority,” he said. “As a result, I dismissed the presidents of the relevant associations, along with cancelling their committee membership, and recommended to reconstitute the House Allocation Committee.”

Apart from discussing housing issues in the meeting, syndicate member Shahida Rahmani, who is also a member of the Sindh Assembly, talked about the unfortunate incident of a student’s recent suicide.

The student, identified as Nadia Ashraf, was a research student at the varsity’s International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS). Upon hearing about the incident, the syndicate decided to form a harassment committee that would further probe the matter.

The VC also offered Rahmani the opportunity to join the investigation committee, which she accepted, while another member of the syndicate, Dr Mohsin, was included in the committee on the recommendation of Dr Ataur Rehman. The five-member committee will now look into the matter.

However, when voting was carried out, Rahmani could not succeed in gaining the selection board's membership. Pakistan Peoples Party leader Waqar Mehdi was also nominated as a member of the selection board, but he too could not obtain enough votes to be successful.

Among other matters, the syndicate rejected the proposal to provide a separate, larger land for setting up the Sardar Yasin Malik Professional Development Centre, stating that the centre should be established on the land temporarily allotted to Sardar Yasin Malik.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 24/08/2020)

### **Sindh madrassas to be registered under education dept**

All madrassas in Sindh will now be registered as educational institutions under the provincial education department, decided the Sindh apex committee on Monday.

The meeting, chaired by Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah and attended by Karachi Corps Commander Lt Gen Humayun Aziz, Rangers director-general Gen Omar Bukhari, Sindh IGP Mushtaq Mahar and others, also discussed the Safe City Project, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and safety measures in the province in light of terrorism and street crime.

On being informed that around 8,195 madrassas and Imambargahs were located on main roads, the committee decided that no more no-objection certificates would be issued for establishing such institutions on main arteries in the future.

Taking another policy decision, they decided to register madrassas as educational institutions under the Sindh Education Department rather than the Sindh Auqaf Department, which previously dealt with their registration.

#### **Safe City Project**

The meeting was informed that work on the Karachi Safe City Project had been initiated and surveys by the law enforcement agencies and National Radio Telecommunication Corporation have been completed.

The project encompasses the installation of a facial recognition system, intelligent traffic management system (ITMS), big data analysis system, e-patrolling and model police stations, smart policing and Sindh police automation-decision support system. The meeting discussed that work remains pending with regards to the safe city authority, a feasibility study for 10,000 cameras and funding for the project, FRID number plates - which have been approved by the cabinet - and weapons registrations.

Shah directed that legislation pertaining to the authority be completed and said that efforts are being made to arrange funds for the project.

The committee was told that 2,500 CCTV cameras were currently being monitored by the police, and decided to install hi-definition CCTV at all exit and entry points in order to monitor the movement of vehicles and people.

#### **Security and crime**

Mahar also briefed the meeting on the implementation of the National Action Plan thus far.

He informed the committee that 16 police stations had been established along the Sindh's borders with Punjab and Balochistan, while 1,072 police personnel had been deployed as well. The provincial police chief added that around 202 suspects had been arrested at the provincial border in the past three months, as well as 357 persons with prior criminal records.

The meeting was apprised that around 344 prime locations had been identified in Sindh for which security arrangements have been made, while around 819 law enforcement personnel had been deployed at roughly 560 shrines and mausoleums in the province. Safety provisions for shrines and mausoleums were also discussed, with SOPs finalised for both law enforcement agencies and private security teams.

Meanwhile, the provincial law secretary stated that legislation pertaining to street crime was ongoing in consultation with the Sindh High Court (SHC).

The CM noted that ensuring implementation of the new laws and regulations was as necessary as the legislation itself.

Cases against street crime should be strengthened so that the apprehended suspect was not able to wriggle their way out, he opined, recalling that an earlier meeting had decided to request the SHC to appoint a separate judge for cases pertaining to street crime.

The committee decided to request the SHC to designate session courts exclusively for trying street crimes, pointing out that trials by session courts were more effective than those by magistrates.

#### **CPEC**

The meeting further discussed the security of projects under the CPEC in Sindh, being told that 12 such projects were currently underway in the province with around 1,028 Chinese staff. Maximum security was being provided to the foreign staff and officials, with 4,372 law enforcers deployed for their security, the meeting was told.

Besides, there were 136 non-CPEC projects ongoing in the province as well, employing roughly 1,052 foreign staffers, it was said. Directives were also issued for standard operating procedures to be laid out for these projects' security.



The committee also decided to make the Mai Bakhtawar Airport near Islamkot, Tharparkar district, made operational.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 25/08/2020)

## Online teaching

THE pandemic has forced many teachers to learn more about online teaching, learning and pedagogy. I am one of them. And though all of us are still learning, and the field is still evolving, quite rapidly, it is opening up new ways of thinking about learning and teaching for many of us.



Online teaching has many challenges. Unequal access to devices and to the internet, summarised under the notion of the digital divide, has already been talked about a lot. I am not going to focus on that here, other than to say that if not addressed, the digital divide will increase already significant educational inequalities, and so these problems need to be tackled on an urgent basis.

Besides challenges, however, online teaching is also opening up new opportunities. In a recent course I took on online teaching, the instructors asked us, the students, to create a small lesson and deliver it to other participants. Then they asked the participants to provide feedback to the presenter. The sessions were also videotaped so that the presenters could later review the lessons themselves.

The exercise was extremely enlightening. Seeing myself in the act of teaching allowed me to learn a lot about some of the small and large mistakes that I was making. From simple things, like word repetition, to more complex ones, from patterns of thought to managing technology while trying to focus on delivering content, and so on.

*What was once confined to a room can now be opened up to the world.*

But the real gains came when peers gave me feedback. Their own experiences enriched the discussion and allowed me to reflect more deeply on the more embedded structures of my thought patterns as well.

When we do research, the standard practice is to present research to peers. Peer feedback is an important way of not only improving research but of getting it accepted as well. Journals run double-blind reviews (in which the reviewer does not know the author and vice versa) to get feedback on research, and only when peers consider the research to be of good enough quality is it accepted for publication. Quality, of course, might vary, but all reputable research journals will have a solid peer review process.

Teaching did not and still does not have the same level of peer review. Most schools/universities had some level of student feedback, and student results are usually tracked to gauge teacher performance, but these are post-fact and they do not provide a peer review. The act of teaching, in a room with a faculty member and students, was more or less closed to outside scrutiny and possibilities of peer review.

Online teaching has opened tremendous opportunities here. What was once confined to a room can now, at no cost, be opened up to the world. A lecture or discussion session can have as many participants, and from anywhere, as one wants. Lectures can also be recorded at no additional cost. Live lectures as well as recordings make it possible to open up teaching, restricted to enclosed space in a classroom, to a much larger group. And the possibilities for peer feedback, again at little or no additional cost, open up significantly. So, online teaching can make teaching, an act once thought of as confined to a physical space, an open, accessible and more easily available activity too.

The possibilities that this opens up, for teaching and learning, are tremendous. Quality of instruction is considered, rightly, to be a very important aspect of education that needs attention. Curriculum, syllabus and books are important, but — and most people concede this — the role of the teacher in determining the quality of education is considered crucial. How do we ensure quality teaching when we do not have good ways of monitoring what a teacher does, and do not have effective ways of supporting them in their role? Online teaching and learning can help a lot in this area.

Imagine how our continuous professional development programmes could be redesigned and/or supplemented with new possibilities. If teachers had peers occasionally attending their lectures, feedback would be very quick. If sessions are recorded and a teaching and learning centre provides peer feedback, the teacher in question would get significant continuous support. The cost of doing this online would be much less, and the impact — given where bulk of teachers currently are and where we need them to be, in terms of what they are delivering — could be significant.

But the impact of opening up teaching to make it more public could be much larger as well. We would be able to develop a public and broader dialogue on teaching practices. This could also lead to academic work on pedagogy and practice as well. It could, potentially, assist in the development of best practices. Technology also makes it easier to make the student more of a peer and partner in the learning enterprise. The peer bit is more important at the college and university level, while the partner bit is important throughout the education system.

There has been significant pushback against online learning in Pakistan over the last six months, and this is continuing. Given the digital divide and the variation in home environments of students, this is not surprising. But the pushback should not blind us to the opportunities that online teaching and learning offer. And in many ways, we have just started to explore these possibilities. One example is mentioned above: the opening up of teaching to the public and for peer feedback. This could, potentially, have large impacts for teacher training, teacher support and continuous professional development, as well as on starting a larger, public debate

on teaching quality and thus on quality of education. Given the importance of the issues involved, how can we not be open to exploring such opportunities?

(By Faisal Bari Dawn, 06, 04/09/2020)

### Education mafia

ALTHOUGH the 18th Constitutional Amendment devolved the department of education to the provinces, the centre has an education ministry to monitor and look after educational institutions under the federal government. Besides the ministry, there is also the Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (Peira) to regulate private educational institutions in the Islamabad Capital Territory. With its interest and resources, one would have thought that the education department under the federal government would soon provide a model system of education for the provinces to emulate. But this has not happened and does not seem likely in the future either, because all we are doing is moving in circles.



The first thing that needs to be regulated is the fee that private institutions charge their students. Since education is a fundamental right of citizens, the government would be justified in regulating the fees. What sort of profit private educational institutions should make must be decided by the government. In fact, the same model should be applied to private hospitals, although in the latter case one can argue that charges can vary depending on the illness being treated. But the expenditure on a child's education is straightforward.

Furthermore, these private educational institutions have been allowed to monopolise everything from books to uniforms. Parents are forced to buy all school gear from the school itself and at prices that are usually much higher than in the market. The result of this neglect on the government's part is that some schools charge as much as Rs30,000 to Rs40,000 for kindergarten students, while paying peanuts to the teachers.

Other issues that must be addressed include sexual harassment and drug abuse. A well-known private school in Lahore was recently reported to have covered up cases of sexual harassment within its precincts. Drugs are a norm in most elite private schools but as long as the school keeps the students happy, parents keep the flow of money going, and that is all these schools care about.

*Private schools have been allowed to monopolise everything.*

If such are the ethics of elite schools, what education are they imparting to the children? As if we are not already plagued enough by the corruption endemic within our ranks, we are now ready to raise future generations on the same staple, teaching them that money is the only parameter of success and that one is free to get it by hook or by crook.

There is a very simple solution to this mess, and the federal government, through the education ministry and Peira, can come with a pilot project. Education should be designated as an essential service so that institutions cannot blackmail the government by going on strike or getting a stay order from the court against any action. Then the government should regulate the fee and classify institutions on the basis of the facilities they provide and the salaries they pay their staff. There is no rocket science to it; it is just simple mathematics.

But we cannot expect this government or any other to do all this because there is a conflict of interest. Like, for example, a relation of the owner of one of the biggest private school chains in the country is in the PTI. He was previously a part of the PML and Gen Musharraf's cabinet.

There are cases where the owners of many such private institutions can buy political influence by giving hefty donations to political parties. They are then in a position to recover the costs many times over by fleecing the parents. Political parties are always in need of sponsors to fund their so-called political struggle, and in Pakistan they find them in the form of the sugar mafia, the education mafia, the land mafia and others. No one has the capacity to fight them. In fact, our political government as well as the judicial system has always been inclined to give them relief and protection. It seems that money — no matter how you obtain it — paves the way to hiring the best politicians and lawyers to fight cases in the courts as well as in parliament. The general public, on the other hand, is too occupied in its struggle to make ends meet. Not every father has the 'business' acumen to ensure an education for his kids in America.

Lastly, I have lost all hope in this political system to redeem itself because politics has essentially become a business in this country. An apt comment on the government which caters to its precious mafias only and pays no heed to the general public would be by Nasir Kazmi: "Aap zulf-i-janan ke khum sawanriye sahib/ Zindagi ke zulfon ko aap kya sanwarein gai" (Untangle the locks of your darling/ you have neither the capacity nor will to straighten out this entangled life). Such leaders are the lot of the general public.

(By Syed Saadat Dawn, 07, 10/09/2020)

### Schools to reopen in phases from Sept 15

The Sindh government has decided to reopen educational institutions in phases from September 15, announced Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani on Friday.

He said this during a press conference, after presiding over an education department meeting, where the decision was taken.

Elaborating further, the education minister said that on-campus classes for grade-nine to varsity students would be commenced in the first phase from September 15, for grade-eight to grade-six students from September 22 in the second phase and lower grades from September 28, in the third phase.

Ghani said that in order to ensure the completion of syllabi, school classes would also be held on Saturdays in the coming academic year, starting from September 15, 2020 and ending on May 3, 2021, no winter holidays would be given and summer vacations in 2021 would extend to just a month, as opposed to normally two-month-long holidays.

Moreover, the curricula of all classes have been cut short, he added.

The minister said that following the completion of the academic year, annual examination for grade nine and grade 10 would be held from April 7, 2021 to April 17, 2021, and for grade 11 and grade 12 from May 18, 2021 to May 29, 2021.

Responding to a question, he said a report had been prepared regarding schools that had been converted into relief camps after rains and floods, and would not be reopened immediately.

#### **Tuition fee**

According to Ghani, in the coming academic year, private schools would only be allowed to increase tuition fees by five per cent, in line with Supreme Court orders.

"No private school will be allowed to charge any additional fee on the pretext of Covid-19," he clarified.

#### **Compliance with SOPs**

He further stated that committees had been formed at district and provincial levels to monitor the implementation of pandemic-related standard operating procedures (SOPs) at public and private schools.

All relevant officials have been instructed to ensure the proper implementation of SOPs at educational institutions and monitor the arrangements made in this regard before September 15, the education minister said.

"Any student not wearing a mask is not to be allowed entry in the school," he stated, adding, "We must remember that Covid-19 has not been eradicated and there is a possibility of its resurgence."

Keeping in view this concern, taking precautions is necessary, Ghani went on, urging parents and teachers to play their role in ensuring that there was not another outbreak.

"I want to make it clear that any parent not satisfied with precautionary arrangements at schools may not send their children for in-class sessions and the students may then take classes online," he said.

According to him, the education department, in collaboration with Microsoft, has created the IDs of 500,000 students of class six to 12 for the purpose, besides registering 2,262 schools and training 20,997 teachers for conducting online classes.

The provincial minister also announced the launch of a campaign to raise awareness about precautionary measures through electronic and print media.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 12/09/2020)

### **Textbooks run out ahead of new school year**

Even with educational institutions set to reopen from September 15 in Sindh, there is a shortage of course books for classes 9 and 10, mostly for private school students, as well as intermediate textbooks, The Express Tribune learnt on Saturday.

According to vendors in Urdu Bazaar, no intermediate textbooks are available in the market. "We are now mulling putting up notices announcing the non-availability of course books," said one among them.

"And, for classes 9 and 10, textbooks for only Pakistan Studies and Sindhi are available," Urdu Bazaar Association president Suleman Jiwani told The Express Tribune. Confirming the unavailability of any intermediate textbooks, he said Urdu textbooks for classes 6 and 7 had also not been supplied.

The responsibility to ensure the timely publishing and availability of textbooks in markets before the academic year's onset lies with the Sindh Textbook Board (STBB), a subsidiary of the school education department.

"This time around, the STBB had three additional months to complete the publishing and supply of textbooks, since schools remained closed for six months due to Covid-19 [pandemic]. But it still failed," complained Jiwani.

Apart from schools following the Cambridge Assessment International Education board, class 9 and 10 students in over 80 per cent of private schools in Sindh - over 10,000 schools - are taught the STBB syllabi.

However, when these students and their parents are visiting markets to buy books for the new academic session after a half-year closure of schools, they are forced to return disappointed and empty-handed.

"First we were told of a change in the scheme of studies [for grades 9 and 10] due to which we will have to study all [science] subjects in ninth grade as well, then they introduced a new syllabus for computer science and now, no books are available to us," said an exasperated student, Batool Fatima, complaining of multiple academic changes made this year.

According to a teacher, who asked not to be named, only a 163-page draft for the new computer science textbook has been prepared by relevant authorities, a PDF copy of which is available on the internet. The same is the case for the biology textbook, he said, adding that teachers had asked students to get themselves printed copies of the PDF files if the textbooks remained unavailable.

In a bid to streamline the curriculum, Sindh's school education department had approved a new, province-wide scheme of studies for grade 9 and 10 students in January. Based on the Sindh High Court's decision, 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 nine and half of them in class 10.

Hence, new science textbooks for grade 9 need to be composed and published. The task, however, remains in limbo.

Besides, the free distribution of textbooks in government schools has reportedly not been completed. According to sources in the education department, who requested anonymity, public schools in at least three districts of Karachi alone are yet to receive free course material.

As per sources in the school education department, textbooks for students in classes 6 to 10 had not been provided to government-run public schools in East, West and Malir districts until Friday morning, while campus schools - housing both primary and secondary classes - had not been supplied course books for classes 1 to 10 in the said districts. It was also reported that new computer science textbooks, the syllabus for which was upgraded, had not been supplied to any schools in Karachi.

On the other hand, when The Express Tribune approached acting school education (secondary) director Syed Rasool Bux Shah on the matter, he claimed that according to the report available to him, the process of free distribution of textbooks in schools had been completed.

It has been reported that though dispatched, the textbooks remain in district education offices and were not supplied to schools in the said districts.

This is despite STBB chairperson Ahmed Bux Narejo also serving as the Sindh school education secretary. He remained unavailable to comment on the matter.

There are 110 government-run secondary schools in West district, 100 in East district and 80 in Malir district. Moreover, around 200,000 students are enrolled in government secondary schools in Karachi, all of whom are now facing the unavailability of textbooks.

In-class sessions for class 9 and higher grades will be commencing across Sindh from Tuesday.  
(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 13/09/2020)

### Schools in Sindh ill-prepared for Covid-19 SOPs

Health and safety risks loom in most public schools of Karachi, with school administrations and relevant officials failing to make arrangements for the implementation of necessary pandemic-related standard operating procedures (SOPs) ahead of the start of the new academic year, starting on September 15.



Garbage piles plague most public school buildings, some of which are in derelict condition, it emerged on Sunday. The lack of cleanliness, if not addressed urgently, poses the threat of spread of the coronavirus pandemic, imperilling students' health and safety.

Besides, fumigation and disinfecting initiatives on public schools' premises remain in abeyance, even as educational institutions are set to reopen tomorrow after a six-month-long closure. The problem seems to become graver in the light of reports of the absence of sweepers and other cleaning staff at a majority of schools.

In Federal B Area, Moonlight Government Boys Secondary School is a prime example of relevant authorities' negligence. The school's building is in bad shape, with plaster crumbling from the ceilings of classrooms. Garbage piles aplenty litter the corridors and, to make matters worse, filth-ridden washrooms are being used as a chicken coop, with roosters strutting around.

With little chance of these problems being set right before the commencement of on-campus classes tomorrow (Tuesday), students will not just be exposed to the possibility of contracting the coronavirus, but also suffering due to structural damages.

According to principal Saeed, he had made arrangements for cleaning the school but when he visited it the next day, he found paint and plaster covering the floors and desks once again, having fallen in chunks from the ceiling overnight.

He claimed he had informed relevant authorities, including the works and services department, but no action was taken to rectify the situation.

Meanwhile, the woes of the newly-constructed Allama Iqbal Government Boys Higher Secondary School in Gulberg Town are of a slightly different nature.

According to sources in the school, who requested anonymity, no sweeper or other cleaning staff have been hired. They said around 700 students were enrolled in the school and among them, matric and intermediate students would begin attending on-campus classes from tomorrow, yet no proper arrangements for the implementation of SOPs and cleaning had been made.

It's all on paper, they said, adding that no practical measures had been taken.

The Express Tribune has learnt that, reportedly, neither of these schools have been provided the funds allocated for school management committees for the past two years.

The Sindh School Education and Literacy Department's steering committee had earlier approved pandemic-related guidelines to be observed at educational institutions as they reopen.

In a notification issued in this regard, educational institutions' managements were instructed to ensure the regular cleaning and disinfecting of school buildings, as well as round-the-clock availability of water and sanitation facilities. As per their instructions, classrooms, washrooms, other areas, and furniture were all to be disinfected regularly, with hand sanitisers and covered trash-cans placed at different spots on school premises.

However, the present condition of numerous public school buildings suggests that relevant authorities, as well as schools' management paid little heed to these instructions.

In fact, it seems that the Sindh government and the school education department are generally not bothered about administrative issues posing hurdles in the way of running government schools - to the point that the post of the Karachi primary schools director has been lying vacant for the last 15 days and there is no authority to monitor schools' organisational affairs.

Similarly, no permanent appointment has been made for the post of Karachi secondary schools director for the past two months.

Currently, Hyderabad schools director Rasool Bux Shah is serving as the interim Karachi secondary schools director, and is only able to visit the city for a couple of days a week.

Admitting to the lack of sweepers in many schools under his authority, he acknowledged that it was a major problem.

"We are trying to deal with it," was all he had to say when asked about the dire condition of public schools ahead of the new academic year, adding that he would be attending a meeting with Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani to discuss the arrangements for reopening schools.

While he did not say when this would happen, he assured The Express Tribune that the plan chalked out would be shared with the media by Ghani himself.

However, it appears the plan will be of little help in keeping Covid-19 at bay in schools across the province tomorrow, when they reopen after a hiatus of six months.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 14/09/2020)

## Back to school

With concerns persisting over the safety of students, teachers and staff as well as their families and associates, educational activities across the country have resumed. The first ones to get back to school from today, i.e. September 15, are the students studying in higher educational institutions — including universities, professional colleges and vocational institutes — as well as in class 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>. And in the second phase, from September 23, students in classes six, seven and eight will be allowed to return to schools following a review, while primary schools will be reopened on September 30, in the third and final phase.

The reopening of schools in three phases comes in line with a unanimous decision taken at a meeting of the inter-provincial education ministers held last week in the wake of a research carried out by the National Command and Operation Centre — the Covid nerve centre — and a “wide consultative process” involving experts and think-tanks, according to an official statement. Earlier though, Sindh was a little skeptical about sending primary students, in particular, back to school, with provincial health minister Azra Fazal Pechuho, herself a doctor, insisting that children should be taught at home until the country is rid of the coronavirus, “especially the younger ones who are not mature and cannot maintain social distancing”.

To the contrary, many infectious disease specialists and other experts have, of late, sided with the government in their decision to reopen schools, saying that since the coronavirus infection in Pakistani children has been relatively mild, as compared to adult patients, they are not believed to be major drivers of the spread of the virus. Experts are thus supporting the reopening of educational institutions in the country with strict adherence to the prescribed SOPs. But this is where the problem actually lies. There is a big question mark on the capacity of the authorities to enforce the coronavirus SOPs.



While schools in the public sector — which are devoid of basic facilities like drinking water and toilets — are highly unlikely to follow the SOPs even for the sake of it, a large number of more than two hundred thousand private schools in the country — those not belonging to reputable groups — will find it difficult to abide by them because of limited space and resources. Maintaining physical distance in schools vans is the most difficult of the do's. For the SOPs to be followed in their true sense, schools need to be equipped with adequate number of classrooms or ample outdoor space to ensure physical distancing. Besides, running water, soap and sanitiser is also needed in the required quantity. Disinfection is also to be carried out regularly. So the enforcement of SOPs is going to come at a cost, and this is where the government will have to play a role. While in the case of public schools, the government will have to bear the full financial responsibility, it will also have to lend a helping hand to smaller schools in the private sector. In contrast though, Federal Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood has been quoted as saying that headmasters and teachers in public schools should ensure availability of water through their personal resources — something that would add to their financial and administrative burden. Besides, teachers are also supposed to ensure implementation of SOPs which is only possible to some extent as they cannot keep a strict watch on students for the entirety of the school day.

So in order to ensure a safe return to schools of our students, the government will have to play the lead role.  
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 15/09/2020)

### Schools to reopen today after six months

Educational institutions are set to reopen today (Tuesday) after a closure of over six months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Students of Grade 9 and above will resume physical classes in the first phase of the reopening. In the second phase, classes will resume for the secondary grades from September 22, while primary students are to begin attending classes in the third and last phase by the month's end.

The federal and provincial governments finalised the decision to reopen schools on September 7.

The standard operating procedures (SOPs) devised for all educational institutes include distancing between seats and the use of face masks, hand sanitiser and disinfectants.

The authorities claim that all staff and faculty at schools has been trained to implement the SOPs.

#### Preventive closure

Sindh initially announced the closure of schools for two days - February 27 and 28 - after the country's first Covid-19 case was reported in Karachi on February 26.

This was soon followed by a notification informing of the provincial government's decision to extend the closure of educational institutes by 15 days.

Later, as infections surfaced across the country, educational institutes nationwide were shut from March 16 to May 31, and as the pandemic spread, the closure was extended by another three months.

In April, the Cambridge board cancelled O and A Level exams across the globe and decided to issue grades based on past performance.

The federal government in Pakistan also decided to suspend examinations for matric and intermediate students nationwide, and to promote students to next grade. Subsequently, a formula for grading for the suspended academic year was devised.

During the shutdown, some private universities commenced online classes. Public varsities and private schools followed soon after.

#### As it stands

The spread of the coronavirus appears to have been curtailed nationwide with the number of reported infections declining.

Sindh has reported 575 new coronavirus cases in the past three days, while the cumulative nationwide tally stands at 302,195 of which 289,983 patients have reportedly recovered. As many as 6,383 fatalities due to the virus have been recorded in Pakistan as of Monday.

Globally, children are stated to be less susceptible to the coronavirus and fatalities in children have been rare. However, health experts have warned of asymptomatic infections and the authorities have laid stress on the implementation of SOPs.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 15/09/2020)

### Back to school

YESTERDAY, after a six-month hiatus, many schools, colleges and universities across the country opened their doors to cautiously welcome a new term. This was in compliance with the government's decision to reopen educational institutions in phases across the country, beginning with higher education institutions, vocational training centres, and classes 9 to 12. Next week, classes 6 to 8 will resume; while primary schools will reopen a week after that. It is true that Pakistan has had relatively fewer cases of the novel coronavirus compared to other countries, and some of the initial fears surrounding the virus have dissipated. But the threat remains



intact, and there can be a resurgence of Covid-19 cases if care is not taken. As the classes resumed, Sindh reported over 340 new cases of the virus, and three deaths. Meanwhile, Punjab reported 57 new Covid-19 cases and three fatalities in the span of 24 hours. Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Health Faisal Sultan tweeted a reminder to parents, teachers, school administrators and students to practise three steps in order to curtail the threat: “[m]asks, reduced density in classes, [and] hand hygiene”. Earlier, at a press conference, Dr Sultan had recommended that the number of students in a classroom be reduced, and that lessons be taught in shifts, so that social distancing could be maintained. It is absolutely vital that all SOPs are followed to the tee, including avoiding crowds, regularly disinfecting surfaces, not sharing belongings, taking handwashing breaks, and ensuring thermal gun screenings at entrance points. If possible, some classes could be conducted outdoors.

While it may be a challenge to enforce the SOPs, the provincial governments must ensure compliance at both state and private levels, and teachers and administrators must remain vigilant. But while children have suffered and missed out on their education — lack of internet access and poor connectivity being major constraints — virus symptoms are mainly seen in older age groups, and it is the teachers and staff that are perhaps at greater risk. The All Pakistan Private Schools Federation has already voiced its concerns, citing the financial burden of ensuring all SOPs are followed. And one college and hostel in Islamabad was sealed after 16 Covid-19 cases were reported on the first day back; in Toba Tek Singh, seven government school teachers tested positive for the virus. However, if a resurgence in cases is recorded, then the government will need to reconsider or modify its position.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 16/09/2020)

### **Sindh govt lifts restriction on marriage halls**

The Sindh government has lifted the restriction on marriage halls, allowing the owners to resume operations after a hiatus of almost six months.

In a notification issued by the home department on Monday, marriage halls owners were notified of the provincial government lifting the restriction, keeping in view the decline in coronavirus pandemic.

Marriage hall owners, however, have been asked to ensure that all precautionary standard operating procedures, issued in connection with Covid-19, were followed during a ceremony. These include observing social distance and wearing masks, among other measures.

According to the notification, restaurants, too, have been allowed to resume complete services, including dine-in operations, seven days a week. Besides, trade and business activities can be carried from 6am to 8pm Mondays through Fridays, and from 6am to 9pm on Saturdays. They will remain suspended on Sundays. Plus, recreational spots have also been allowed to open and sports activities allowed to resume.

As per the notification, the relaxation will remain applicable until October 15, but the district administration can reinforce restrictions in case it observes a spike in coronavirus cases in its jurisdiction.

The restriction on marriage halls, which extended over six months, was placed following the coronavirus outbreak. During this period, many individuals associated with the sector went out of jobs.

(By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 16/09/2020)

### **KU students protest against semester exams**

Perturbed over the “poorly conducted online classes” over the past two months, a large number of Karachi University (KU) students on Tuesday protested the administration’s decision to hold in-person semester exams next week, forcing the vice chancellor to call a deans’ meeting on Wednesday on the subject.

According to sources, the issue will also be taken up by the Karachi University Teachers’ Society (Kuts) in its general body session being held on Wednesday.

The students, who had gathered in the administrative block, were demanding “justice” and a “fair right to education” and complained against “poor quality online teaching”.

The university, they said, had no justification to hold semester exams when they were hardly taught anything.

*VC, teachers call meetings to discuss the issue*

The online classes, some of the students pointed out, constituted some recorded lectures and theoretical assignments and their performance should only be gauged on the basis of that work.

There were some students who were asking for online exams as was announced by the university administration last month.

The demonstration continued for over an hour and drew attention of university officials, including the vice chancellor, who held talks with a group of students and tried to allay their concerns.

It may be recalled that the university’s plan to hold online classes announced against the backdrop of Covid-19 pandemic has seen strong criticism from teachers since it got ‘approval’ in a controversial online meeting of the academic council in June.

"How serious the administration is in quality teaching can be gauged from the fact that no meeting of the academic council has been held since then while the alternative teaching plan developed by us through consensus was given no consideration," said a senior KU teacher.

He agreed with students' reservations that online teaching was mainly comprised of some recorded lectures that he described as "offline teaching" and theoretical assignments that students had to do on their own.

"They hardly got an opportunity to interact with teachers and this happened due to multiple reasons, including poor internet connection and frequent power outages," he explained.

Speaking to Dawn, student adviser Dr Salman Zubair said protesting students were confused and divided on their demands.

"The university had already held in-person classes for two months when the lockdown began. The online classes were meant to conduct teaching for the 50 per cent remaining courses," he said, adding that a KU semester was of four months.

According to him, science students are now being helped as per their lab requirements.

Meanwhile, several departments have started holding in-person classes reportedly without following any standard operating procedures set by the government, including adequate provision of sanitisers for students and teachers.

(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 14, 16/09/2020)

### **Schools' reopening goes awry**

Two colleges were sealed in Matiari on Thursday after eight staff members tested positive for Covid-19, while four schools were sealed in Karachi for violating pandemic-related standard operating procedures (SOPs).

Besides, eight staff members of Government Boys Degree College, Sehwan, have also been found infected and have quarantined themselves for 15 days, according to a letter written by the college's principal, Mustafa Kamal, to Hyderabad college education director. The infected staff members were tested on September 12.

#### **Colleges sealed**

The news of eight college staff members in Matiari being found infected with the coronavirus just two days after educational institutes reopened on September 15 was confirmed by Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani on Twitter.

Later, the minister directed the Sindh education secretary to ensure that all teaching and non-teaching staff across province were tested for the coronavirus and those found infected were not allowed entry to educational institutes.

In a video statement, Ghani said the provincial education secretary had been instructed to have all staff at public and private educational institutes in the province screened for the coronavirus in collaboration with the health department.

The testing of grade-six to grade-eight teachers is to be completed before September 21, when the on-campus sessions for the said classes will commence, and that of lower grades, before September 28, the date fixed for the starting in-class session for primary and pre-primary students, the provincial minister elaborated.

He said Covid-19 screening of all teaching and non-teaching staff of the province's educational institutes was initiated on September 12, just days ahead of the first phase of the reopening of schools, colleges and varsities on September 15.

Back then, Ghani added, 16 teachers from educational institutes in Sehwan Sharif and Bhan Saeedabad had tested positive and were barred from conducting on-campus sessions.

Now, eight teachers from two colleges in Matiari have tested positive, following which both the institutes have been closed and instructions have been issued for spraying disinfectants there, he stated.

#### **SOPs violation**

Earlier, during surprise visits to schools and colleges in Karachi, Ghani ordered the West deputy commissioner (DC) and private schools director general to seal four schools and take strict action against them for conducting on-campus classes for primary and pre-primary students before September 28.

The schools include Faiz Public Academy, Way Grammar School, Allied School and Hajra Memorial High School, all located in Orangi Town, where primary students were called for in-session classes.

Additionally, the minister instructed the West DC to visit all educational institutes in his district and take stern action against those violating government orders.

Urging parents to not to send their children to school before the dates announced by the government, he said they may lodge a complaint against schools forcing them to send children for on-campus sessions before September 28 with the relevant DC or at the relevant police station.

"We will not allow anyone to play with children's health at any cost," he remarked.

Ghani also issued a show-cause notice to Orangi Town education officer Metha Khan after he failed to respond to the minister's inquiry about the situation at educational institutes in the area.

### **Seeking parents' support**

Meanwhile, Sindh Health Minister Dr Azra Fazl Pechuho highlighted the role of parents in ensuring compliance with SOPs at educational institutes.

In a video statement, while advising students and schools' administrations to strictly follow SOPs, Pechuho stated, "Parental support is needed to revive the [on-campus] teaching classes in the province."

They need to educate their children about SOPs, she went on, adding that it was imperative for students to wear masks and wash hands regularly.

"Anyone showing any symptoms of Covid-19 should stay at home as we need to make sure that the virus is not transmitted under any circumstances," she said, adding, however, that keeping children from attending on-campus classes was no longer feasible.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 18/09/2020)

### **Several schools, colleges in Sindh sealed for SOPs' violation**

Four private schools in Orangi Town were sealed on Thursday after Sindh Education and Labour Minister Saeed Ghani on a surprise visit to them found pre-primary classes under way there while only students of class nine to 12 have been allowed to return to school for now.

The little children attending classes were also found to be sitting close to each other and none of them were found to be wearing protective masks either. A case of violation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) has also been registered against the schools, namely, Faiz Public Academy, Way Grammar School, Allied School Campus No. 11 and Hajira Memorial High School.

There were also reports of a school in the Kharadar area and several colleges in Hyderabad being sealed for the same reason. Meanwhile, the Institute of Business Administration Karachi said it had "suspended academic activities" for two days at both campuses in the city starting from Thursday.

The provincial education minister directed deputy commissioner West and DG private schools Mansoob Siddiqui to seal the schools immediately. He also issued a show-cause notice to the relevant education officer of Orangi Town for negligence. He directed the Sindh education secretary to ensure that the coronavirus test of teachers and staff of all public and private schools be conducted before Sept 21 and Sept 28 and to not allow those who test positive to enter the schools.

Mr Ghani said that before the reopening of schools on Sept 15, 16 teachers of different colleges of Sindh had confirmed contracting Covid-19. Therefore they have not been allowed to come to the colleges, while after Sept 15, as many as eight teachers of two colleges in Sindh were confirmed to be suffering from coronavirus. Both the colleges have been closed for disinfection.

"When it comes to children, we will not tolerate any negligence," the education minister said. "I also urge parents to send their children to educational institutions under full SOPs," he added.

"It was not yet time to open pre-primary and primary schools. If any school urges the parents to send their children before the set dates, the parents should lodge a complaint with the concerned Deputy Commissioner or Police Station about them," he said. Meanwhile, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah directed the Karachi commissioner to take strict action against the management of schools found guilty of violating SOPs, adds APP.

If any school violates the SOPs, such school should be sealed at first stage and later, FIR should be registered against the management of schools, Mr Shah was quoted as saying.

In this regard, the Karachi commissioner issued directions to all deputy commissioners of Karachi division to ensure the implementation of SOPs in the schools.

(By Dawn Reporter 13, 18/09/2020)

### **Sindh delays classes for Grades VI to VIII**

The Sindh education department has decided to delay the resumption of physical classes for Grades VI to VIII after violations of standard operating procedures (SOPS) were flagged. Coronavirus infections have also been detected in educational institutes since on-campus classes resumed for the higher grades on September 15.

Addressing a press conference on Friday, Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani announced the decision to push the resumption of physical classes for grades six to eight by a week. Initially slated to resume on September 22, after a six-month closure, they will now resume on September 28 along with primary school classes.

"Despite our efforts, we are seeing a lot of flaws and violations. Unfortunately, educational institutions, both private and public, are not fully implementing SOPs," said Ghani.

Institutes will be allowed to continue physical classes for Grades IX and above for now but the minister said his department was concerned about the current situation and would inform the federal education minister and all provincial education ministers of the Sindh government's decision to delay classes.

The situation will be reevaluated before resuming classes on September 28, said the minister, adding that the decision to resume classes in phases was taken so that there would be fewer students on campus at a time. "And so that we would have a practical experience regarding implementation of the formulated SOPs," he added.

According to the minister, the provincial government was cognisant of the economic situation of private educational institutes and was also concerned about children's education but could not compromise on their health.

Assuring that every effort would be made to ensure the implementation of SOPs, he apprised that his department had also begun free Covid-19 testing at public and private schools and thus far, a 2.4 per cent positivity rate had been detected.

He stressed the need for parents to also cooperate and ensure implementation of the guidelines issued for schools' reopening.

Referring to his inspection of primary and public schools, Ghani said that while many private schools had made excellent arrangements for the implementation of SOPs, violations were observed in other public and private schools and colleges.

Although government schools only allowed the older students back on campus, some private schools had resumed physical classes for the primary grades as well and four such schools were sealed because of this on Thursday, he added.

#### 'Cause for concern'

The Sindh education department has begun conducting random tests at private and public schools of teaching and non-teaching staff, said Ghani.

Between September 12 to 17, 14,544 tests were conducted, said Ghani. Out of these, the results of 3,636 tests have been received and 89 Covid-19 infections were detected while 3,547 tests came back negative, according to the minister. The results of the remaining tests are yet to be received.

Assuming the current 2.4 per cent positivity rate, there could be 360 positive cases among 15,000 tests, said Ghani, dubbing this a cause of concern because younger classes were yet to return to schools.

He maintained that for now, classes for the junior grades had been delayed till September 28, but if the situation did not improve, the provincial government may revisit its decision and further changes may be announced.

From the positive cases, 33 were detected in Karachi - nine at Jinnah Sindh Medical University, nine at the Institute of Business Administration, three at the Narayan Jagannath Vaidya Government Higher Secondary School (NJV School), three at World Academy School, three at ARP School, two at Public Health School, two at GGST School, and one case each at Sacred Heart School and the Government Boys and Girls Secondary School.

Besides, the report adds, 34 coronavirus cases were detected at educational institutes in Jamshoro, eight in Matiari district, six each in Khairpur and Tharparkar, and two in Hyderabad.

Coronavirus cases appear to be on the rise in Pakistan again, with its highest single-day tally in a month recorded on Thursday as the country reported 700 cases. The federal government has thus far indicated no change in the schedule announced earlier for reopening of educational institutes.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 19/09/2020)

### Sealing schools

REOPENING educational institutes during the coronavirus pandemic was never going to be easy. Of late, the challenge for the authorities and school teachers has become even more difficult as some schools and colleges have reported active Covid-19 cases or have been found violating SOPs.

Some schools were sealed in Karachi this week after a surprise visit by the Sindh education minister revealed that pre-primary classes were going on although only students of classes 9 to 12 have been allowed to go back to school. In fact, in view of SOP violations, the minister on Friday announced a week's delay in the resumption of classes 6 to 8 in the province. In Peshawar, the health department recommended the sealing of some schools and classrooms in the city as well as in other areas of KP after Covid-19 cases were detected among students and staff. Several private schools were also sealed for violating SOPs. In Islamabad, too, some students and staff tested positive.

With research indicating low risk to children, it was important for schools to be reopened after prolonged disruption. Students have suffered tremendously during the lockdown and the government's decision to reopen educational institutes as the national tally of overall cases lowered was a pragmatic step towards normalcy.

But the threat from Covid-19 at these institutes is ever-present. Schools can be super-spreading venues, and, although the risk to young people is comparatively low, students can transmit Covid-19 to vulnerable people in their communities and households. If the government wishes to control the spread of the virus with the success it demonstrated in recent months, it must tackle the presence of Covid-19 cases in schools proactively. This can only be possible if testing is increased.

At present, we have just about crossed a daily testing total of 33,000 — a figure which is far too low when we consider that around the same number of tests were carried out during the peak of the pandemic when the country was in lockdown. For the first time in a month, 700 new Covid-19 cases were reported in a single day on Sept 17. To protect vulnerable citizens and healthcare workers who have made tremendous sacrifices in this crisis, testing must be increased and random sampling conducted in schools so that the chances of a second wave can be minimised. Unless that is done, all efforts would have been of no use.  
(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 19/09/2020)

### **Sindh delays reopening of middle schools for one week**

Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani announced on Friday that classes six to eight would not resume in schools from Sept 22 as planned earlier.

The Sindh education department has postponed the second phase of reopening of schools in the province by another week due to the rise of Covid-19 cases among the non-teaching staff in schools.

Speaking at a press conference here, Mr Ghani said that if the situation improved the second and third phase would commence together on Sept 28. However, classes nine to 12 will carry on.

He said that even though they understand the economic situation of private educational institutions and damage to children's education, they could not compromise on their health.

He said that he had been going around visiting different educational institutions in various districts since Tuesday when schools reopened as per the first phase. "Unfortunately, both the public and private educational institutions here are not fully implementing SOPs [standard operating procedures]," he said.

*Decision taken in view of rise in Covid-19 cases among schools' non-teaching staff; private school owners slam move*

He said that he had also seen private educational institutions calling back young children to school and that, too, without any protective gear, not even masks.

#### **89 test positive in five days**

Mr Ghani provided the example of four schools they had to seal a day earlier due to this issue. "Even today, the situation did not improve in private educational institutions. And I am talking about the 'good educational institutions' where there was no social distancing as well," he said.

He said that they had started a series of coronavirus tests of the teaching and non-teaching staff in all private and government educational institutions.

Between Sept 12 and Sept 17, they conducted 14,544 tests and out of them so far they received the results of 3,636 tests of which 89 have been found to be Covid-19 positive.

Mr Ghani said that keeping in view these circumstances, the education department decided to postpone the second phase in which classes six to eight were to be reopened. They will keep monitoring the situation.

If the rest of the results of the coronavirus tests show improvement, the classes will be reopened in the third phase with the pre-primary and primary classes. But in case the situation is not satisfactory, they will see what is to be done. "But there will be no compromise on the health of our children," he stressed.

"From day one, we have appealed to parents to implement SOPs for their children, but unfortunately we do not see any positive progress from the parents either," he said. "The parents can help us reopen educational institutions by making sure the SOPs are implemented," he said.

#### **Centre asked to give loans to pvt schools**

Responding to a question, he said that if they see the situation in Sindh deteriorating, they cannot wait for the National Command Operation Centre (NCOC) meeting.

Replying to another question, Mr Ghani said that in order to solve the economic problems of private educational institutions, they have twice requested the federal government and the NCOC to provide them interest-free loans. "Only the federal government can do it," he pointed out.

To a query regarding online classes, the education minister said that they, with the help of Microsoft, completed the registration of more than 500,000 students in online classes and created their IDs and that the process was continuing.

He also reminded that no part of the country had 100 per cent internet facility but up to 60pc students would benefit from this initiative.

#### **School owners unhappy over decision**

The decision to postpone the second phase of opening of schools elicited a negative reaction from private school owners, who are worried that the government might even decide to not open the lower classes altogether.

Amjad Siddiqi, a private school owner, said that the class six to eight children had not even started coming back to school as yet and the government decided that the SOPs were not being implemented.

"First let them make the violation and then punish them accordingly. Meanwhile, children of all ages are roaming about in shopping centres and picnic spots," he said.

Shahab Khan, another school owner, reminded that by prolonging school closure the government was not just hurting children's education, they were also pushing school owners towards financial ruin.

Izhar Soomro, yet another owner of a private school, said that schools were the only places where there was a constant supervision and SOPs could be implemented easily. "And the education minister wants to keep schools closed. I think there is more to this than meets the eye. I think it is all being done because government schools don't have the capability or responsible staff to implement the SOPs," he said.

Another school owner said that the education minister made his decision in haste. He questioned: "If they are seeing an increase in Covid-19 cases, who don't they close down everything else and impose another lockdown?"

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 19/09/2020)

### **Schools may be closed again, warns Sindh minister**

The government may have to order the closure of educational institutions again if a rise is observed in Covid-19 cases and pandemic-related standard operating procedures (SOPs) are not followed, warned Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani on Saturday.

Ghani further stated that 14,000 persons were tested for Covid-19 at educational institutions and 5,000 results had arrived so far, with 91 people found infected.

He said this during a press conference after visiting public and private schools and colleges in Hyderabad, where he observed disregard for the SOPs at a government college in Qasimabad and students' low attendance.

The decision to reopen secondary schools had been put off for a week to ensure compliance with SOPs in high schools, colleges and universities, he said, speaking to media persons in Shahbaz Hall. The new date for resumption of the on-campus classes for grade-six to grade-eight students is September 28, he added.

On Friday, he had announced the decision to push the resumption of physical classes for grades six to eight by a week.

"Despite our efforts, we are seeing a lot of flaws and violations. Unfortunately, educational institutions, both private and public, are not fully implementing SOPs," he had said. "The situation will be reevaluated before resuming classes on September 28."

However, taking exception to this announcement, Federal Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood warned that further delaying the reopening of schools and colleges would destroy education.

He tweeted, "90 per cent of our government and low-fee paying private schools do not have online teaching facilities. When these institutions close down, most students get no education at all. Learning loss is immense and can take years to recover. While health is a priority, this factor must b[e] kept in mind."

In another tweet, the federal minister stated, "[The] health of students is our first priority and any decision we make will be guided by the advice of [the Ministry of] Health. Having said that, [a] six-month closure deeply affected students. Decision to open was taken with great care [and] any hasty decision to close [them again] will destroy education."

Addressing this, Ghani contended on Saturday that the provincial government had the authority to decide a suitable time for the resumption of academic activities. "Each province is entitled to make the decision in view of the situation," he remarked.

Acknowledging that the private education sector had suffered financial losses, he added, however, that the safety of human health and saving lives would always be given precedence over any other consideration.

#### **On sealing institutions**

The minister also pointed out that despite a drop in Covid-19 cases, the virus still existed and a resurgence could necessitate the closure of educational institutions as well as other sectors of the economy again.

He said that four schools had already been sealed in Karachi after they called the students of class eight and lower grades for on-campus sessions before the dates set by the government.

Ghani said that as per the decision of the National Coordination Committee, educational institutions were supposed to reopen in three phases. Initially, only high schools, colleges and the tertiary education institutions were allowed to resume on-campus classes and secondary and primary students were to be called for in-class session in the second and the third phase, respectively, he explained.



Two colleges were sealed in Matiari on Thursday after eight staff members tested positive for Covid-19, while four schools were sealed in Karachi for violating pandemic-related standard operating procedures (SOPs).

Besides, eight staff members of Government Boys Degree College, Sehwan, have also been found infected and have quarantined themselves for 15 days. The infected staff members were tested on September 12.

"[But] the overall situation in reopened schools is satisfactory. We want all staff and students to wear masks and maintain social distance while school and college canteens will remain closed," Ghani said.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 20/09/2020)

### 99.8% of students succeed in matric exams

Over 99 per cent students in the science group passed their matric exams, according to Board of Secondary Education Karachi (BSEK) Acting Controller Abdul Razzaq Depar, who announced the results on Monday.

The examination process was halted given the coronavirus but students who had submitted their examination forms last year were promoted to the intermediate level, said Depar.

Those who had cleared all five subjects in their Class IX examinations were given a three per cent increase in their results for Class X, whereas students who had scored above 60 per cent overall but failed one or two subjects, were awarded average marks in the subjects they failed, according to Depar.

Meanwhile, students who had scored less than 60 per cent overall in their Class IX exams, were given passing marks for Class X.

The ratio of students of who have matriculated stands at 99.8 per cent this year, said Depar, adding that 17, 156 students scored A+ grade overall, 30, 746 A, 35,855 B, 39,159 C, and 425 students were graded for supplementary examinations. A total of 169, 325 students were registered and the remaining scored D or E grades while 445 students failed their Class X examinations.

Only 445 students, who were absent for all of their Class IX examinations were not promoted to the intermediate level, said Depar.

He further stated that the students who could not submit enrollment, registration or any other document due to any reason, would have to submit the remaining documents before collecting their marks sheets.

Moreover, the annual results of the year 2020-21 for the science pre-medical, pre-engineering, science general, commerce regular and commerce private groups of intermediate part I and II has been finalised by the Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK), therefore no more examination forms would be collected.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 22/09/2020)

### Edu dept moved to take action over SOPs violation

Sindh Directorate of Private Institutions sent on Monday the details of educational institutes found violating pandemic-related standard operating procedures (SOPs) to the provincial education department and recommended action against them.

According to sources in the education department, officials from the directorate of private institutions visited close to 1,000 schools in Karachi, Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas, and over that over 200 were violating SOPs.

According to Sindh Directorate of Private Institutions director-general Mansoob Siddqui, action against 11 private school over SOPs' violation has been taken thus far.

Meanwhile, All Private Schools Management Association representatives addressed a press conference, demanding of the Sindh government to review its decision of again ordering schools' closure in case the pandemic escalated.

Speaking on the occasion, APSMA chairperson Syed Tariq Shah said that the policies of government of Sindh and federal government were different and that was the reason students and parents had been anxious.

Shah claimed that only the private schools had been implementing SOPs.

Referring to the reports of surge in Covid-19 cases, he said, "How was it that coronavirus cases increased within a day?" He added, "Why didn't the cases increased after the reopening of malls, parks and picnic spots?"

"Everyone, except schools is being preference in the country," he remarked.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 22/09/2020)

### Adhoc VC's, dean's posting disappoints faculty

The appointment of junior professors as the acting vice-chancellor (VC) and dean of Sindh Agriculture University (SAU), Tandojam seems to be leaving a dispiriting effect on the varsity's senior faculty.

The provincial government, through Sindh Boards and Universities secretary Muhammad Riazuddin, notified the appointment of Dr Zaheeruddin Mirani as the university's acting VC, bypassing six professors ranking above him in terms of seniority. Likewise, another senior professor, ranked fourth on the seniority list and possessing a doctor of philosophy degree from a foreign university, as well as two foreign post doctorates, was disregarded for the post of dean of faculty of agriculture engineering in the same university. Instead, a professor ranked 18th in terms of seniority and holding a PhD from a local university was appointed as the dean two months ago.

"The tenure of [outgoing VC Dr Mujeebuddin] Sahrai has already despaired many teachers dedicated to their work. And now, these administrative changes aren't instilling any fresh hope," commented a professor, who is even senior than Dr Mirani, requesting anonymity. "I find it strange watching [Pakistan Peoples Party's chairperson] Bilawal [Bhutto Zardari] warning the federal government against ignoring the agriculture sector, which he says is the backbone of the economy, when his government's policies have been sapping the agriculture varsity's potential," the professor added.

Another senior professor, who also requested not to be named, did not dispute the credentials of Dr Mirani, but expressed dismay over his appointment as the VC.

"He is among the few star teachers in our institution but there are at least two other senior professors who are equally, if not more, meritorious than him," he said.

The post of SAU's VC has not been advertised yet. It became vacant when Sahrai joined Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi, as the VC over a month ago. Since then, SAU has been governed without a VC.

#### **Dean's appointment**

Moreover, Dr Altaf Siyal from the faculty of agricultural engineering had expressed grievances of the varsity's senior faculty over the appointment of Dr Naimatullah Laghari as the dean in a letter written to the CM. He stated, "Merit hasn't been followed in the appointment."

Dr Siyal is the fourth most senior professor at SAU while Dr Laghari ranks 18th. The former has as a professor for ten years and the latter for around three years.

Dr Siyal's letter juxtaposed his qualifications, research work, publications and administrative experience with that of Dr Laghari. The former completed his PhD from the UK and two post doctorates from the USA and Australia. The latter has PhD from SAU. Dr Siyal has held administrative posts for six years and eight months and Dr Laghari for five years. Besides, Dr Siyal worked at the Mehran University of Engineering and Technology on a United States Agency for International Development -funded project, dubbed center for excellence on water, for four years.

The aggrieved professor also claims that he has written far more research articles than his junior and headed six research projects besides contributing to two books and receiving six fellowship awards. Some 28 Master of Science students have graduated under Dr Siyal, who requested the CM in his letter to cancel Dr Laghari's appointment as the dean.

#### **'Discretionary powers'**

The Sindh Universities Laws (Amendment) Act, 2018 and the amendments which preceded it in 2013 and 2014 have given Sindh chief minister discretionary powers, which, some academicians argue, are being exercised arbitrarily for making such appointments.

According to Prof Akhtiar Ghumro of the Federation of All Pakistan Universities Academic Staff Association (FAPUASA), though, on the moral grounds, the senior faculty deserved the acting charge of the VC, the law allows the CM to select anyone for the post from among senior professors.

He, however, added, "But the FAPUASA's position has been that only an incumbent dean of a faculty should be considered for the post."

Dr Mirani, though, has held the charge of the dean but he is currently not serving as one.

Dr Ghumro also tacitly acknowledged that merit did not seem to be the only consideration when appointing administrative officials in varsities.

(By Z Ali The Express Tribune, 05, 23/09/2020)

### **Cambridge students seek cancellation or delay in exams**

Cambridge students in Pakistan who have to appear for the October/November 2020 session want the Cambridge International board to delay or cancel the exams as both regular and private candidates do not want to risk their lives at examination centres.

The students have been protesting in different cities, outside press clubs, outside the British High Commission and Deputy High Commissions as well as outside their respective educational institutions for someone to hear them out.

Recently they also came out with a detailed charter of demands with facts and figures to support their demands.

While agreeing that the situation is better than May 2020 and the seating arrangement in examination halls is quite organised and a reasonable distance is maintained between candidates, they have said that the authorities still ignored the fact that the world is dealing with a deadly pandemic that has high chances of spreading, specially when hundreds of students gather outside the waiting areas where it is nearly impossible for anyone to ensure social distancing.

*Cite Covid-19 concerns, lack of proper preparations during lockdown*

They also pointed towards increase in Covid-19 cases in Pakistan after Sept 15 and that the number is expected to increase after the reopening of primary schools.

Advanced Subsidiary or AS-Level and A-Level students have been completely helpless as AS students have to manage their O-Levels exams and AS classes together while being home, and A-Level students are given no help from schools, while many are unable to afford the online class system due to lack of devices.

Without any preparation, the exam session will only worsen their mental health.

It was also explained that in these uncertain times, many students are trying their best to prepare for their exams under mental stress as several among them have either lost their family members or they are suffering from the coronavirus. Many students, too, are themselves currently suffering from Covid-19 and are in complete isolation.

The students also said that considering the worst-case scenario for the October session, they wanted a change in syllabus. They added that they must be given a reasonable decrease in the syllabus that will be assessed and there must be leniency in the paper checking, too.

The students said that there was no decision made for private Cambridge students earlier but they demand for them the policy used in the UK and Scotland as they must be treated the same as regular students.

Their academic years and time is as precious as that of the others.

The May/June candidates were given good grades from schools and shown leniency and the regular students said that they expect the same from Cambridge and the government of Pakistan for the private candidates, too.

Hajrah, a student questioned that if they awarded expected grades for the May/June session then why not the same for the Oct/Nov session. "We are all affected by the same pandemic so why are the students of this session being treated differently?"

Raheem, a private candidate, said that he hasn't prepared for his exams because no institutions were open and Cambridge had not given private candidates the option to withdraw as well. "Kindly cancel these exams and give us predicted grades like you did before," he said.

Roshni, a student of A2, said that her entry was deferred by her school without her consent just because her school fee was paid a little late. "I came to know about this around mid-August when the May/June results were announced. Now I don't have much time to prepare for the upcoming exams as there are no physical classes in college and the online classes, which have just started, are of no help as the syllabus cannot be covered in such a short span of time, nor was it covered before the lockdown started around the end of February. How are we now supposed to get good grades? And if I don't score well now, I won't be able to get admission in my desired universities," she said.

Hamna, a student of AS-Level, said that schools were closed for over six months and students couldn't do practicals, which make up about 30 per cent of A-Level grades. "We had to do self-study without any help because online classes were only being conducted for the new classes and not for the exam course we were preparing for," she pointed out.  
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 23/09/2020)

### **Sindh govt seals private school, issues notice to absent faculty**

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah directed relevant authorities on Wednesday to take stringent actions against schools not following pandemic-related standard operating procedures (SOPs).

He issued the directive while presiding over a meeting called to review the coronavirus situation in the province.

Addressing the meeting, the CM instructed education department officials to ensure the implementation of SOPs in all educational institutes so that children could be protected against pandemic.

"And institutes, public and private, violating the SOPs must be brought to book," he said.

Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani told the CM that he had visited many schools in the provinces after September 15, which marked the commencement of the first phase of reopening of schools, and found that most of them failed to follow the SOPs.

"Therefore, I decided to defer the commencement of in-class sessions for grade-six to grade-eight students until September 28," he explained.

The minister assured that the time during which the on-campus classes for grades lower than nine would remain suspended, the education department would work on devising a mechanism for ensuring the effective implementation of the SOPs.

Expressing displeasure over schools violating the SOPs, the CM directed Ghani issues instructions for all educational institutes to abide by government orders in the larger interest of children.

"And take strict action against those those who fail to implement the SOPs," he said.

#### **Pandemic update**

The CM told the meeting that two more coronavirus-related deaths were reported in the province on the day, lifting the death toll to 2,471, and 408 more Covid-19 cases had emerged, following which the cumulative infection tally rose to 134,845.

Besides, he added, 154 more patients have recovered overnight and the number of total recovered patients in Sindh has reached 128,964.

This leave 3,410 patients under treatment, among whom 3,210 are in home isolation, five in quarantine centres and 285 in different hospitals.

#### **School sealed**

Separately, Ghani sealed a private school on the day for not complying with the standard operating procedures (SOPs), as defined by the Sindh government in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. He also issued show cause notices to the principal and faculty of a public school who were absent while SOPs were being ignored.

Ghani paid a surprise visit to more than a dozen private and public schools and colleges in the East district, including Gulistan-e-Johar and Gulshan-e-Iqbal block 7, to inspect the implementation of the SOPs and teaching standards.

While visiting a private school, the provincial minister expressed indignation at education activities continuing without the use of face masks and other SOPs. He directed the Directorate of Inspection and Registration of Private Institutions Sindh Director-General, Dr Mansoob Siddiqui, to take action against the school immediately.

#### **Notices issues**

The minister also visited Government Degree Science and Commerce College for Boys and Girls, where he saw that there were no measures in place to control the spread of coronavirus on the main gates, while SOPs were also being ignored in classes. Moreover, the principal of the public educational institute was also absent. Ghani asked the relevant officials to issue a show-cause notice to the principal and the faculty members who were absent on the day.

He directed the college secretary to visit colleges and inspect the hygiene situation and make the required arrangements there. Meanwhile, the provincial minister appreciated the government and private educational institutes that were complying with the guidelines issued by the authorities to curb the spread of the contagious disease.

"We will take necessary action against those who play with the health of [our] children," he said. "We are well aware of the obstacles in the way of children's education and the challenges faced by the private educational institutions, but we cannot compromise on our children's health at any cost."

He asserted that they were not against the reopening of educational institutions, but they wanted to be sure about the complete compliance of SOPs

"Some private schools are calling primary class students against the orders of the Sindh government and the education department, which is a serious violation and we will not shy away from taking strict action against such schools," he maintained. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 24/09/2020)

### **Schools: prepared for reopening?**

GLOBALLY, the two childhood activities affected most by Covid-19 have been routine immunisation and schooling, which may have a lasting impact on children's development. Prior to the pandemic, an estimated 22.8 million children aged five to 16 were already out of school in Pakistan. Then government-mandated lockdowns disrupted the education of even those children who were enrolled in school. With schools across Pakistan now reopening, it is extremely important to ensure they remain open.

The governments have issued SOPs to ensure the safety and well-being of students as well as to limit the spread of Covid-19 through community infection, but schools may still struggle with the additional burden of having to develop strategies to manage infrastructure, logistics and protocols.

Preparedness for reopening education institutions can be a challenging task, since there are no comparable events in recent history to draw lessons from. Stark comparisons have been made to the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 that took millions of lives. While mask-wearing, handwashing and social distancing are cornerstones of the battle against Covid-19, it is important to address these additional challenges and chalk out mitigation strategies.

To ensure the well-being of all stakeholders — including students, teachers and staff members and parents — the primary task of all schools will be to ensure that everyone practises regular handwashing and cough etiquette, uses face masks as per WHO

guidelines, maintains a physical distance of at least three to six feet from others, and isolates at home in case they develop fever and/or flu-like symptoms.

*Training, awareness and communication will be key to ensuring school-wide safety.*

Training, awareness and communication will be key to ensuring school-wide safety. Schools will have to educate communities through active communication channels to effectively practise SOPs. These can include instant messaging groups and other forms of social media to communicate and coordinate effectively, as well as printed media such as brochures, flyers on bulletin boards and banners to spread awareness and advocate for universal compliance with safety measures.

Schools must immediately start designing communications and use such communication channels to brief parents about school routines, safety measures, access to school, and how teaching and learning will continue in the wake of the pandemic. Classes shouldn't be longer than four hours and must be conducted over two shifts. There should be at least a one-hour gap between shifts to ensure that schools, especially classrooms, are properly cleaned and that teachers have the time to take extra hygiene measures between meeting different groups of students.

Teachers must be trained to be ambassadors of health and hygiene, modelling appropriate behaviour to ensure that students and parents adhere to the SOPs and other protocols. Teachers have to advocate for safety and prevention measures and be able to explain their necessity and importance. In addition to carefully designing — rather redesigning — the taught and experienced curriculum, teachers will have to integrate the importance of healthcare and attitudes to care and responsibility. Classroom teaching time will have to connect with recent themes of stress and anxiety in their students' lives, awareness about the spread of infection and necessary precautions, and the reasons behind casual or dismissive attitudes towards disease prevention.

The role that parents must play is as important as that of schools. Parents must not only responsibly follow all SOPs to ensure the safety of their children, but also ensure that their children follow and understand the importance of these safety measures, and regularly discuss the importance of being careful for their own as well as others' safety.

Keeping in mind Pakistan's diverse educational ecosystem — which ranges from schools in the public and private sector, community-based as well as madressahs, all with their own context, uniqueness and diversity in infrastructure, staffing and administration practices — it is difficult to propose universal recommendations. Yet, besides the basic safety guidelines, there are a few essential recommendations for planning classes that can be adapted to various contexts.

- (i) Adopt a blended learning model, where half the classes are covered on campus (such as primary) and the rest are conducted remotely (such as secondary and above);
- (ii) Stagger timings and scheduling shifts so that all students do not come to school at the same time;
- (iii) Reorganise classrooms to ensure a minimum distance of three to six feet (approximately one to two metres) between students;
- (iv) Visibly display signs, markings and notices to serve as behavioural cues for all stakeholders;
- (v) Consider visitation and group activities, both indoors and outdoors, only if they can be conducted in a safe environment;
- (vi) Keep canteens closed (or if they are open, maintain physical distance);
- (vii) Regularly clean water tanks and filters, but encourage students and staff to bring their own drinking water;
- (viii) Limit parental visitations, and have parent-teacher meetings remotely;
- (ix) Ensure diligent housekeeping and sanitation; disinfect surfaces with either hypochlorite or alcohol-based solutions as per WHO recommendations;
- (x) Designate isolation rooms in case anyone develops fever and/or flu-like symptoms at school;
- (xi) Ensure transporters also follow SOPs, including limited number of students in one vehicle;
- (xii) Minimise the sharing of stationery and other school resources between students.

There is no doubt that responsibly managing the reopening of schools is a Herculean task for educational institutions. But it is one that we must undertake diligently to ensure the least possible negative impact on the education, safety and well-being of Pakistan's children.

(By Shelina Bhamani & Ali Faisal Saleem Dawn, 06, 25/09/2020)

### **Private schools announce fee waivers**

Private schools announced tuition fee concessions for certain students on Saturday as well as allowing parents to pay their children's fees in installments, two days before on-campus classes for all grades are to commence across the province.

The announcement was made during a joint press conference by the All Private Schools Association Sindh, Pak Private Schools Association Sindh and All Sindh Private Schools and Colleges Association at the Karachi Press Club.

Elaborating on the announcement, the speakers said they had decided to charge no fees from students whose fathers had died due to the coronavirus and offer waivers to others to their fullest extent.

They said they regarded the standard operating procedures (SOPs) issued by the sub-committee of the education department steering committee in connection with the coronavirus pandemic and would follow the guidelines with complete responsibility.

Outlining the SOPs, the speakers said all teaching and non-teaching staff as well as students were to wear face masks in schools, their temperature would be checked and they would be asked to sanitise their hands before entering schools' premises. Besides, they said, everybody in schools was to observe social distancing and school buildings were to be disinfected regularly.

In case any staff or students fell sick, they would be sent back home, they added.

Citing the SOPs, they further said that parents had been instructed to send children with their own water bottles, lunch boxes, stationary items, face masks and hand sanitisers.

Saying that it was the schools' responsibility to inform parents about the SOPs, the speakers added that the staff had been receiving training for the effective implementation of SOPs.

They requested parents to cooperate with them in ensuring the implementation of SOPs.

Later, Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani headed a meeting with leaders of private schools' associations.

At the meeting, Ghani warned of strict action against educational institutes violating the SOPs and stressed that all private schools should ensure properly following the government's instructions after the commencement of on-campus classes on September 28.

He said that earlier, some schools had resumed in-class sessions for middle, primary and grades lower than those despite the government's orders prohibiting it. Hence, authorities had to take action against them, he added.

Ghani urged private schools' associations to cooperate with the authorities in ensuring the implementation of SOPs in educational institutes and take action against those violating government orders.

"Our main purpose is to keep children safe against Covid-19. Their health is as important as their education and we will not compromise on it," he asserted.

At this, the representatives of the associations informed the minister they had issued notifications for SOP implementation to their member institutes and all of them had been taking measures to apply the instructions. Besides, they added, a system for monitoring schools has been devised.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 27/09/2020)

### **Court orders college to conduct exams with SOPs**

The Sindh High Court (SHC) directed on Thursday the management of Jinnah Medical and Dental College to conduct examinations with pandemic-related standard operating procedures (SOPs).

A two-member bench, comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Yousuf Ali Sayeed, was hearing the plea filed by students, who asked why they were being told to appear for physical exams when they had taken online classes.

The petitioners stated that due to technical issues, they were unable to attend all their classes, adding that several students were living in areas that were under lockdown. They further complained that the college was asking them to appear for exams without being tested for Covid-19.

The court ordered the college management to conduct separate exams for students residing in areas under lockdown.

The bench further stated that if a student could not take the exams due to coronavirus, their exams should be conducted later. Justice Mazhar remarked that students who could not attend online classes must be shown leniency as well.

Justice Mazhar further stated that while the college was not responsible for testing each student for the virus, it must comply with the defined SOPs.

The college management assured the bench it would implement the SOPs, upon which the court disposed of the petition.

#### **Removal of billboards**

Separately, the SHC directed relevant authorities to comply with the Supreme Court's orders regarding the removal of billboards in Karachi as it disposed of the plea.

The court remarked that all billboards should be removed from public sector buildings in line with the SC orders, directing all cantonment boards and the private sector to comply with the verdict as well.



The petitioner's counsel maintained that billboards were still present at several places in the city, upon which the court remarked that the administration was bound to implement the apex court's orders.

Authorities would inspect the relevant sites before removing the billboards, the court added.

#### **Bear cub at Karachi Zoo**

The SHC also ordered relevant authorities to provide Rano, a bear cub kept in a small cage without its mother at the Karachi Zoological Gardens, with its natural habitat within eight hours.

The court was hearing a petition against keeping Rano in such a condition, where the petitioner's counsel, Barrister Mohsin Qadir Shahwani claimed the cub was not being fed in a timely manner while zoo authorities were not looking after its health.

The zoo was in a dismal condition, putting animals' lives at risk, he asserted, adding that the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation had neither the resources nor the capability to care for the animals properly.

"Treating animals in such a manner is not permitted in Islam or under Pakistan law," Shahwani insisted.

He moved the court to direct the relevant authorities to provide a natural habitat to the animals and shift Rano to its mother in Skardu immediately.

He also requested the court to order the zoo management to take proper care of the animals and establish an expert committee that could survey the zoo and give suggestions for its improvement.

The court ordered that the bear cub be provided a natural habitat within eight hours, seeking a report in this regard in two days. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 02/10/2020)

### **Space for student politics**

ONCE again, this time in a meeting of the subcommittee of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Federal Education held on Wednesday, the question of restoring student unions has been raised. Federal Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood reiterated the stance expressed by Prime Minister Imran Khan last December in support of reviving these representative bodies, following student solidarity marches organised in cities across the country, with the caveat that care must be taken to draft a "comprehensive and enforceable code of conduct" under which they should operate. The pace at which the issue has so far been deliberated on, however, has not indicated much enthusiasm judging by the mixed responses of the MNAs as well as earlier statements by other policymakers — such as the HEC, which in January expressed its opposition to such a move. Nonetheless, it appears that a consensus may finally be forming.

Now, the subcommittee members have decided to hold meetings with university vice chancellors to glean their input. This indeed appears to be the next logical step if one is to get a clearer picture of the need for and expedience of campus politics. No less valuable, however, is the insight of those student organisers who have been advocating on lifting the ban on student unions. The reality is that practically every political party has a student or youth wing active on campus. But a common misconception is to equate these with genuine elected representative bodies — which can help the youth channel their civic and political impulses responsibly and productively — the absence of which has created a vacuum that has given rise to illegitimate activities, including violence. Given how the pandemic has upended so much of the education sector, it is even more urgent that students are able to effectively raise their voices and express demands through democratic forums. An inclusive framework for student unions, based on meaningful consultations with all stakeholders (including students), must be devised soon to allow room for healthy debate on issues important to our youth.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 02/10/2020)

### **Colleges dept turns to NGOs for help**

The Sindh Colleges Department has decided to run government colleges through public-private partnerships.

According to a notification issued by the department on Sunday, the regional directors of colleges in Karachi, Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas, Sukkur and Shaheed Benazirabad have been asked to provide a list of colleges that may be handed over to the administration of NGOs.

The Sindh education minister's spokesperson stated that the Public-Private Partnership Act was passed in 2010, following which educational institutions could be handed over to NGOs. He added that the decision had been taken in line with the act.

The notification added that documentation, including an explanation for the recommendation, must be prepared for each nominated college.

"The education department has taken this step to improve the standard of education in the province," claimed the spokesperson. He added that the public service commission examination for teachers could not be conducted due to the coronavirus pandemic, resulting in a shortage of staff at colleges located in remote areas of Sindh. "As a result, the department is finding it tough to run these educational institutions. We are making this decision in order to continue educational activities in these colleges," he explained.

It is pertinent to mention here that over 2,300 government schools and 324 government colleges are already being run under the public-private partnership model.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 05, 05/10/2020)

### **Education at a standstill for Mubarak Village's children**

As much as 80 per cent of Pakistan's population has access to modern communication facilities, according to data released by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority. None of these 80 per cent reside in Mubarak Village, a remote fishing village in the suburbs of Karachi.

Far from Karachi's hubbub, at a distance of 40 kilometres, the village lies along the shoreline to the city's west. One of the oldest coastal villages in the port city's suburbs, its 10,000 residents form an island - not in a literal sense - in the absence of modern communication infrastructure and facilities, having little contact with the metropolis.

Consequently, life in the village is the same as it was many years ago, in marked contrast to the development witnessed in most areas of Karachi.

In recent days, a six-month-long lockdown and closure of schools accentuated the polarity, when students in Mubarak Village were unable to continue taking classes due to the lack of internet and electricity.

Following the imposition of the lockdown, students across the country turned to online learning, but not those of Mubarak Village. Almost none of them had access to the internet and very few had the smartphones needed to attend online classes, let alone laptops or computers.

Eventually, when physical classes resumed, these students found themselves in a fix, being pushed to study the course for the next class, without completing that of the previous one.

"Though, like the rest of Sindh, the village's schools have reopened, students have been left standing exactly where they were when the schools closed," decried Sarfaraz Haroon, a social activist and former councillor.

He said around 350 students enrolled in Mubarak Village Government Boys Secondary School had resumed their education, but many of them had been unable to retain what they were taught the previous year.

With a wide gap yet to be filled, the future of students in Mubarak Village is sinking in the mire of uncertainty.

And according to Haroon, there are little chances of this gap being plugged.

Holding the Sindh government and the provincial education department responsible for the situation, he decried the already low standards of education in the village's schools.

There are just seven teachers who regularly attend classes to teach 350 students in two shifts, he said, further claiming that others, including the principal, didn't even bother to come to school.

Besides, the village lacks other basic facilities like potable water, electricity, healthcare services and gas.

And the lockdown, resulting in the closure of businesses, made matters worse, hitting the village's fishermen hard and depriving them of the meagre income on which they used to rely. There was a ban on selling fish, while all hotels and markets remained closed.

Having no other substantial means of earning, these fishermen and their families survived on little, living hand to mouth. Adding to the misery, businesses targeting tourists also suffered with no outsider visiting the scenic village for long months.

Apart from this, residents of the village have to travel at least seven to eight kilometres to access mobile phone network and call for help in case of medical emergencies such as childbirth, accidents and heart attacks.

The nearest ambulance service facility is located at a distance of 35km in Mauripur and the nearest civil hospital is situated 50km away.

This is how life is in Mubarak Village - difficult and trying amid a scenic landscape that remains untouched and nearly cut off from the rest of the city.

(By kashif Hussain The Express Tribune, 04, 05/10/2020)

### **Too many successful students?**

Matric and intermediate exams were suspended this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, and with students promoted on the basis of average marks or a percentage increase depending on past performance, the pass rate in Sindh was far higher than usual.

On surface, this appears to be a much-needed positive. But the higher success rate for matric students has highlighted the limited number of seats available at public colleges, as well as the lack of resources at their disposal.

Subsequently, thousands of students - even after passing - find their college plans in jeopardy.

Over 99 per cent of students in the science group passed their matric exams causing difficulty for the admission process for science programmes in public and private colleges.

According to data obtained by The Express Tribune from the Board of Secondary Education, Karachi, approximately 67,000 more students cleared their matric exams this year as compared to last year, as a result of the temporary promotion policy put in place amid the six-month closure of educational institutions.

Last year, the number of matriculating students in the science and general group matric exams was 123,813. But this year, a stupendous 191,191 students cleared their exams - most of them with only C, D and E grades.

A total of 100,280 students passed with C, D and E grades under the promotion policy this year, as opposed to only 39,498 students who matriculated with these grades the previous year.

This proportion of students with low passing grades - who appear to form the majority of the 'excess' graduates - has thrown a wrench into the admission process in colleges, particularly in the science subjects.

The number of seats available for first year students in over 250 government colleges and some secondary schools in Karachi is 116,000. Of the 123,813 students who matriculated last year, over 90,000 students enrolled in the said institutions.

Meanwhile, out of the remaining students, around 33,000 in number, some went to private colleges and some did not enrol in college at all.

This year, however, there are 116,000 seats in government colleges and 191,191 students qualified to apply.

If the majority of the students with the lower grades apply for admission in pre-engineering or pre-medical subjects, colleges will not have enough laboratories or enough equipment or faculty.

Meanwhile, one college professor raised questions at the qualifications of the students. "Do the students who passed under the promotion policy with C, D or E grades have the capacity to study science pre-engineering and pre-medical subjects at the intermediate level?" he asked, speaking to The Express Tribune.

There is no policy regarding this at the college level, he complained. According to him, the officials of the provincial college education department are indifferent to this.

As for the higher grades, the number of additional students, in comparison to last year, matriculating with A1, A or B grades this year was far lower than those passing with C, D or E grades. Only 1,405 'extra' students have passed with A1 grades, 469 with A grades and 2,675 with B grades.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 06/10/2020)

### Inclusive education

AS universities in the UK reopen for a new academic year, they find themselves embroiled in two distinct but equally important challenges. Whilst the first is related to the ongoing pandemic and poses the dilemma of delivering quality education while taking adequate protection against the spread of Covid-19, the second stems from the Black Lives Matter movement that erupted across universities this summer, and alerted them of the need of ensuring that the education they deliver is equal, inclusive and diverse in all respects.



The first challenge is urgent, and universities are responding to it by a range of measures, including monitoring government safety guidelines, formulating internal policies, developing blended face-to-face and online teaching models, investing in infrastructure, equipment and training, and communicating clearly with staff and students. Despite being overwhelmed by these efforts, universities are not losing sight of the second, more structural challenge and have accelerated the 'decolonising' of curricula and promotion of equality, inclusivity and diversity in university life.

Pakistani universities appear to be at par with their British counterparts with regard to the Covid challenge. Although the precise approach taken by them towards striking the necessary balance between teaching and safety may be different, and more suited to the Pakistani context and availability of resources, they appear to be mindful of the pandemic and its impact. However, there is little evidence of universities engaging with the second challenge and taking steps to discuss, let alone promote, the values of equality, inclusivity and diversity in their curricula or activities.

There are three possible reasons for the silence of Pakistani universities: first, they consider Black Lives Matter to be a Western construct with little relevance for Pakistan; second they believe that religion is sufficient to supply the values of equality, inclusivity and diversity and there is no need to take further steps in this regard, and finally, they are awaiting guidance on these matters from

the Ministry of Education or the Higher Education Commission that are entrusted with the task of formulating policy for and improving the quality of higher education and research in the country.

*Pakistani universities adhere to a single dominant narrative.*

To the extent that the Black Lives Matter movement protests the history of Western universities accepting funding derived from slave trade and valorising slave traders while ignoring their atrocities, Pakistan can comfortably distance itself from it. However, where the movement extends to registering outrage against discriminatory practices prevalent in Western universities, particularly their continued adherence to curricula that propagate the majority view while drowning out the perspective of historically marginalised minorities, its relevance for Pakistan cannot be ignored.

Even a cursory glance at recent events on Pakistani campuses suggests that universities in Pakistan also adhere to a single dominant narrative, albeit, one couched in nationalistic and religious rhetoric than in racial terms. It is further evident that this adherence to a dominant narrative leaves little room for alternative points of view, with the lack of tolerance manifesting itself in the absence of support for scholarship that questions the narrative; in the sidelining or ouster of faculty that dares to challenge it, and in the rejection, even murder of those who flout it.

The argument that Islam is sufficient to heal divisions, depends largely on whether academia adopts it as a pluralistic framework for social inquiry or clings to it as a proxy for credibility and even acumen. More importantly, it depends on whether the Islamic values of equality, inclusivity and diversity are translated into a comprehensible policy. Unfortunately, the 2018 National Educational Policy issued by the Ministry of Education is silent in this regard and HEC guidelines for establishing new universities, only stipulate that universities 'strictly comply' with Pakistan's constitutional and cultural values, without providing guidance on how this may be done.

The mutual indifference of universities and authorities is all the more tragic because of the considerable and manifold costs that it brings in its wake. Students suffer by not being able to develop critical thinking skills which only come from being exposed to a range of perspectives. This, in turn holds them back from competing in the international arena. Universities are disadvantaged, because in adhering to prescribed dogma they fail to be recognised as places of learning and are, therefore, attractive only to those who have no other options. Ultimately, however, it is Pakistan itself that pays the biggest price by remaining hopelessly mired in disputes that stem from lack of cohesion in its society.

(By Amber Darr Dawn, 07, 11/10/2020)

### **Our education system has unfairness in its roots: minister**

"In over 70 years, we could only create islands of standard education in our country. But we couldn't spread this education to our entire country. It is just scattered here and there," said Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Shafqat Mahmood. He was speaking at the Second Education Summit on 'Digital disruption: innovative pedagogies, redefining curriculum and leadership' organised by the Pakistan Academic Consortium (PAC) at a local hotel here on Wednesday.

"Education teaches one to understand the world but here you put a product of an elite school and a product of a government school before each other and they won't even get each other's viewpoints. We are seeing the impact of our education systems in our society," he said.

"There is English as our official language and our corporate language so it is seen as the language which gets you places. But only the elite schools are producing people who are comfortable with English. It is widening the cracks in our society. Our education system has unfairness in its roots. Changing our education system is not that simple therefore, but I am happy that at least we have started talking about it due to the Single National Curriculum," he said.

*Govt wants to introduce Single National Curriculum from April*

"Educationists agree to teach in the language which the child can decipher, especially from ages one to five. But here in our country we speak many languages. So the most common medium of instruction is to be the most common usage language, which is Urdu or English. Then our surveys show that private schools are shocked at our considering Urdu as the medium of instruction. They sell their education on the basis of this language because English in this country is not just a language, it is a class. Parents want their children to be successful in life by knowing this language. So we have resistance from the parents as well as private schools to let the medium of education be English," he pointed out.

#### **'Introducing Single National Curriculum not easy'**

"Another issue with the Single National Curriculum is how to roll it out," he said. "I don't see curriculum as a static thing. It will have continuous updates as knowledge builds and advances. It will continue to evolve. We want to roll out the curriculum in April but we are being told to first make it a pilot project. But we don't want to delay it," he said.

The federal minister also said that assessment was an instrument for judging the curriculum. "All in all, introducing the Single National Curriculum is not an easy thing to do. It is a very big thing and achieving big is not easy. So we look forward to feedback from educationists and other experts as it is after all a work in progress," he said.

Earlier, notable speakers, educationists and government representatives examined the notion of having a Single National Curriculum.

"A uniform education system is the need when equality for all makes sense," said PAC founder Nasir R. Zaidi during his welcome address.

During his keynote speech, Dr Shehzad Jeeva, chairman, Inter Board Committee of Chairmen (IBCC) and director of the Aga Khan University Examination Board, said that Covid-19 had deprived the plans, aspirations and hopes of educationists.

“Some 188 countries closed their schools while trying to cope with the pandemic putting 1.6 billion children out of school,” he said. “How to insure continuity of education is a challenge for us all. What it comes to is access, fairness, equity and inclusivity.”

“The aim is to build a consensus in the education landscape of Pakistan. We were able to get access to education to 15 million children while 23 million are still out of school,” he said.

Former vice chancellor of the Sindh Madressatul Islam University Dr Muhammad Ali Shaikh traced the history of the subcontinent till the time of the British rule when the Parsi community built their education institutions as did the Christians and the Muslims too founded a few schools.

“After the partition of 1947, we inherited all these education systems where quality was stressed upon more than quantity,” he said. “At that time, we only had two universities here but now we have more than 200 universities. And we have not been able to maintain the quality standard.

“We have a fragmented society with compartments. It has education at its base. We have four different education systems developing contradictory mindsets,” he said.

Teachers’ Development Centre director Abbas Hussain diverted attention to Zoom fatigue. “When a child is physically present in school for several hours he or she is not constantly studying. He or she is doing many things including dreaming and bunking class. But in online classes he or she is only considered present when taking an active part and concentrating,” he said.

#### Panel discussion

A panel discussion on ‘Transforming education in Pakistan through Single National Curriculum’, moderated by PAC’s Luna Panjwani had experts pondering over the outcome of intruding a uniform curriculum.

SZABIST president Shahnaz Wazir Ali said that the single curriculum was a question occupying the mind of all involved in education for a number of years now.

“At this time it responds to removing inequity, reducing disparity and making the ground level for all, and have equality of knowledge at every class level be [they] children at a public school, a private school or a madressah,” she said, adding that the assessment and exam system also be uniform.

Oxford University Press managing director Arshad Hussain said that the real challenge was of implementing the curriculum. “It involves teachers training, textbooks, etc, so it usually takes about two to three years to settle in. But here we are told that it will be brought in by April. And we still are not sure about the medium of instruction,” he said.

Dr Fatima Rehan Dar, Dr Fauzia Shameem and others also spoke.  
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 15/10/2020)

### Covid-19 and child education

Before the coronavirus outbreak, Pakistan’s education system was already suffering from structural weaknesses and learning crises. However, the unprecedented school closures have resulted in further denting the country’s efforts to build productive human capital. School closures have affected 55.3 million children in Pakistan aged between five and 16. Besides, 22.8 million children are already out of school. The pandemic is intensifying the risks and vulnerabilities of an already weak educational system.

Concerning the quality of learning, Pakistan is ranked 134 out of 157 countries on the Human Capital Index (HCI). Further, Pakistan’s education quality is bad enough that the Expected Years of Schooling (EYS) and Learning Adjusted Year of Schooling (LAYS) differ by about four years. For instance, children in Pakistan can expect to complete 8.8 years of pre-primary, primary, and secondary school by age 18. However, when adjusted for quality of learning, it is only equivalent to 4.8 years: a learning gap of 4 years. Additionally, a learning gap between girls and boys is also present.

The low performance could be due to school and household level factors. Currently, better-off students are in comfortable homes with good internet connections, can hire a tutor, and are better placed for home schooling by well-educated parents. The disparity in learning would widen as poor students do not have access to such amenities. In addition, these kids are also disproportionately vulnerable to dropout from school.

Our assessment, in this study, confirms that school closures can substantially increase dropouts and erode learning, which tends to adversely affect important outcomes in the long-term. Considering the effect of Covid-19 on LAYS, this decreases to 4.08 (a decrease of 14.64%) in case of school closure for five months. Further, the yearly earning loss to a student in school today is \$234, and the lifetime earning loss is about \$2,349. The aggregate economic cost to the current cohort of children amounts to about \$129 billion. Besides, nearly 15.5 million children are vulnerable to dropout due to workers’ layoff.

The economic cost in terms of reduced lifetime earnings is substantial. Therefore, the solution is to devise an effective online learning strategy. For this, the success of online learning strategies depends on the availability and equality in access to

computers and internet service. Therefore, in practice, what proportion of households in different regions have real-time access to such amenities needs to be evaluated.

Similarly, online learning strategy can be complemented with the adoption of an effective remote learning strategy. In this regard, proper Virtual Learning Environments can be helpful in giving access to students and educators to connect to a dedicated repository of educational resources. Education broadcasting also needs to be strengthened, so that regions and households without access to the internet are covered.

The income shock to households, whose children are in private schools, would increase their demand for public support as families cannot afford any fees and pressure on a cash-strapped public system will increase. Therefore, the government's priority should be to stimulate economic activities with effective social distancing SOPs in place.

Schools have (partially) re-opened since last month, but the situation is still evolving. The threat of a second outbreak of the virus still exists. Therefore, to create a resilient education system of futuristic orientation, the focus should be to strengthen our capacity in the long-term through consistent human capital policies with adequate budget allocation for child education.

(By Muhammad Jehangir Khan & Junaid Ahmed The Express Tribune, 14, 21/10/2020)

### **KU cancels medical examinations**

The University of Karachi (KU) has deferred all medical examinations, including those of Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) and Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS), following an outcry by students over "out-of-course" questions, it emerged on Wednesday.

Confirming this, KU acting examination controller Dr Zafar Hussain told The Express Tribune that exams for at least three courses of MBBS and all courses of BDS, which were to begin next week, had been cancelled.

The exam for the MBBS medicine course was cancelled last week, immediately after students complained about out-of-syllabus questions. Later, the exams for gynaecology and obstetrics, to be held on October 21 and October 23, were cancelled. Following this, all BDS exams, scheduled from October 26 to November 5, were also cancelled.

Elaborating on this, Dr Hussain said the teachers who devised question papers for MBBS courses had also prepared question papers for BDS courses.

"After complaints of the MBBS exams being out of syllabus, we didn't want to take any risk with the BDS exams," he said, explaining why all BDS papers had been cancelled.

Dr Shaista of the Karachi Medical and Dental College (KMDC) reportedly prepared the question paper for the courses of medicine, while Dr Ghazala, also from the KMDC, prepared that of the surgery course and the teacher who had prepared the questions for the gynaecology course was in Canada on vacation.

Furthermore, according to sources in the KU, who requested anonymity, the question paper for MBBS Final Professional exam this year was in fact a copy of the one devised for students wanting to pursue further studies in the United States after the completion of their MBBS in Pakistan.

According to the sources, the medicine department dean has been instructed to probe into the matter and identify the persons responsible for the fault.

Besides lodging complaints at the varsity regarding the inclusion of out-of-syllabus questions in examinations, students had staged protests outside the KU's examination cell.

According to the sources, the KU does not intend to hold MBBS and BDS examinations in the near future.

The only medical college affiliated with the KU in Karachi is KMDC, while the affiliation of all private colleges was transferred to Jinnah Sindh Medical University during the tenure of former KU vice-chancellor Dr Muhammad Qaiser.  
(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 22/10/2020)

### **All online : SZABIST shuts campus amid virus threat**

As concerns grow about a second wave of Covid-19 in Pakistan, the Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (SZABIST) management has decided to shut down its campus in Karachi for another month.

After resuming only a month ago, all physical classes have now been suspended entirely, while the ongoing academic session has been moved online.

As per the latest notification issued to students and faculty, the higher education institute is expected to remain closed until November 30.

However, the recommendation to reopen the university on December 1 is still up in the air and will only be finalised upon thorough assessment of the virus situation, closer to the tentative reopening date.



Earlier, when educational institutions across Pakistan, including Sindh, were mulling reopening on September 15 after more than six months of closure, SZABIST too had agreed to open doors to its students. Following strict SOPs, the university had chosen to adopt a hybrid model of learning, where the semester was split between online and on-campus lessons.

According to varsity sources, the brief reopening of campus on the basis of the country's much-extolled control of infections had resulted in several faculty members testing positive for Covid-19.

"After the first few cases emerged, there was much concern over the decision to keep SZABIST open. But the university chancellor is herself the provincial health minister, and it was her ultimate recommendation to shut down the campus to avoid further transmission," the source informed.

Expressing her disapproval of the university's hybrid model of learning, Rida, a social sciences student at SZABIST, said that the semester shifting entirely online is a welcome decision in her opinion.

"The thing is that our classes are quite cramped and stuffy, making it difficult to maintain SOPs on campus. We do sit with a person's gap in between, but I don't think that's enough to keep the virus at bay. Opposed to that, online classes are not only more flexible, but also safer than any time spent on campus," said Rida.

"I prefer in-person classes over online learning, which is too distracting for students with shorter attention spans, but the lack of social distancing I experienced on campus during the hybrid sessions was very callous," commented another student, on conditions of anonymity.

It is pertinent to note that SZABIST is so far the only university in Sindh to assume a month-long closure after its earlier reopening.

When virus cases emerged at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) in September, the campus was immediately shut down for two days. Upon sanitisation and disinfection, it was soon reopened for students, while the hybrid-learning system continues to be in place.

Speaking about the campus closure, SZABIST academics vice president Dr Altaf Mukati confirmed that two faculty members had tested positive for the virus after the university's reopening. "We did not want further transmissions among our faculty and students, which is why we have moved the term online. We will assess the situation on November 26 and then decide whether we are ready to reopen on December 1," he told The Express Tribune.

\*With additional reporting by  
Muhammad Phaseeh Ul Haque  
(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 09/11/2020)

### **Stalled for years: school for kids of KU staff hits more snags**

A long-delayed school aimed at providing the children of staff at the University of Karachi (KU) quality education on-campus may have narrowly missed controversy, The Express Tribune has learnt.

Unable to commence the school for seven long years, the trust responsible for the stalled project had been all set to bypass legal requirements in a bid to revive it, a top source has revealed. The decision to establish the 'Sardar Yasin School' to provide KU employees living in the KU Staff Town an in-varsity facility for their children's education was taken all the way back in 2013.

Sardar Yasin Malik, who offered his namesake to the proposed secondary school, told The Express Tribune that he offered to establish it after the university's then vice chancellor Dr Muhammad Qaiser expressed his desire for such an amenity. But years went by and many of the proposed school's prospective students matriculated, with the school no closer to seeing light of day.

This was despite the fact that land for the project was allotted to the Sardar Yasin Malik Trust, which is responsible for commencing the school. Although a school building was built, according to sources, little effort had been put into preparing it for its first academic session. Now, the management board of the proposed school has been forced to stop the trust from opening it after it was learnt that the latter had decided to forego some crucial formalities in a bid to expedite it.

"The issue came to light during the first meeting of the board, which was held recently," a member of the board told The Express Tribune on condition of anonymity. "Briefing the board on the status of the school, representatives of the Sardar Yasin Malik Trust told participants that they were willing to open the school immediately." "When the VC and several other board members asked whether the school had been registered with the relevant wing of the Sindh government, it was learnt that no application for this purpose had been sent," the board member added.

"As such, the board members objected since the oversight would have rendered the school illegal." According to the board member, participants of the meeting also asked the trust whether a principal and teaching staff for the school had been hired. The trust's representatives were also questioned on what academic model and syllabus they planned to follow and whether a financial plan was finalised. "No satisfactory answers were provided on each of these counts," he said.

"Members were told an advertisement for the principal's position had been published, but when they asked to see it, the trust could not do so. The same was the case with the financial and academic plans," he added. "In light of this, the board decided to

halt commencement until staff was hired in a transparent manner and financial and academic plans were finalised." The board member, however, pointed out that the trust was not alone to blame for delays in operationalisation.

According to him, the board itself was complicit in this regard as well. "This board was established last January. It has taken 21 months for its first-ever meeting to be conducted," he said. "The board has taken no other concrete steps to establish the school either." Speaking to The Express Tribune, school board member Muzaffarul Hasan blamed some of the delays on the coronavirus pandemic. When asked about the school's financial plan and fee structure, he only said that fees would be 'very low' and would be used to pay all salaries.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 14/11/2020)

### **'Decision to keep schools open is wrong'**

The decision made by the education ministers to keep schools open for the time-being is 'absolutely wrong', said Students Parents Federation of Pakistan chairperson Nadeem Mirza, adding that the lives of students and teachers should not be put at risk.

In a video statement issued on Monday, he claimed the ministers had been put under pressure by private schools, which preferred to collect fees from the students. "The government is supporting private school owners despite a resurgence in coronavirus cases across the country," he added.

Mirza appealed to the National Command and Operation Centre to immediately announce the closure of educational institutions to keep teachers, students and their families safe from the contagion.

On the other hand, All Sindh Private Schools and Colleges Association chairperson Haider Ali backed the decision of keeping educational institutions open, stating that one academic year had already been affected and they could not afford to lose another year.

"Everyone agrees to the fact that schools are not the cause of the coronavirus outbreak. And standard operating procedures are being implemented at educational institutions," he claimed, adding that about 25 per cent of students had been unable to attend schools due to a seven-month-long lockdown, and so the decision of not giving winter vacations was also justified.

"Online teaching is of no use for 95 per cent of schools and colleges, which is why the academic process should continue," said Ali.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 17/11/2020)

### **SU to increase financial burden on students**

In order to escape the burden of growing financial debts, the management of the University of Sindh (SU), Jamshoro, has decided to dramatically hike its charges for various facilities.

Resultantly, fees for services like issuing mark-sheets, certificates, degrees and other documents have been increased by 40 per cent to over 400 per cent.

This decision, which not only affects the varsity's own cohort but also the thousands of public and private colleges affiliated with the institution, has left students in a state of concern.

The said increase was made by SU acting vice-chancellor Dr Siddique Kalhoro on the recommendation of the Finance and Planning Committee. However, the decision's notification was reportedly issued without the approval of the university syndicate. As per the notification, the recommended increase in fees will be made effective from January 12, 2021.

The document highlights that fees for the issuance of certain documents, amounting to a few hundred rupees, has undergone a 200 per cent increase, whereas charges previously worth four-digit figures have now gone up to five figures, resulting in an increase of several thousand rupees and financial burden on students.

Following the increase in charges, the fees for pass certificates and marks certificates has climbed from as little as Rs130 to Rs400. Similarly, the fees for the issuance of transcripts, appearance certificates and medium of instruction certificates have gone from Rs600 to Rs 1,000.

The fee for date of declaration of results certificate has been increased from Rs160 to Rs300, while convocation and gap certificate charges have been raised from Rs3,300 to Rs5,000 and Rs600 to Rs1,000, respectively.

In addition, the fee for degree issuance has been raised from Rs1,320 to Rs3,000, while BEd and MEd degrees' fees have gone up from Rs2,200 to Rs3,500 and BEd and MEd duplicate degree issuance charges have been raised from Rs2,700 to Rs6,000.

Degree charges for MPhil, MS and PhD programmes have been increased from Rs4,400 to Rs7,000 and Rs6,600 to Rs10,000, respectively. Moreover, charges for degree convocation for MPhil, MS and PhD programmes have been raised from Rs5,500 to Rs8,000 and Rs7,700 to Rs12,000, respectively.

Likewise, fees for retotaling of marks, change of centre and change of name have also increased from Rs500 to Rs1,000 and Rs2,000 to Rs10,000 and Rs2,000 to Rs3,000, respectively.

In the same vein, fees for MBBS degree and duplicate MBBS degree issuance have also been increased from Rs3,300 to Rs6,000 and Rs3,850 to Rs8,000, respectively, while charges for various other documents have also been increased manifold.

Justifying the sudden and unprecedented increase in charges without the syndicate's approval, the university's acting VC said the increase has been introduced after well over six years.

"Yet the university's fee is still much lower compared to institutions like the University of Karachi, Shah Abdul Latif University and Hyderabad Board of Education. We face a financial deficit of Rs45 million in the current financial year alone," stated Kalhoro. "We have over 1,800 pensioners and more than 3,000 employees, on whom Rs30 million is spent every month on account of salaries and pensions, while the Higher Education Commission grant adds up to just Rs1.77 billion in total."

According to Kalhoro, he has implemented various polices in a bid to cut down the department's expenditures.

"I have abolished the unlimited petrol allowance given to the VC, as a result of which they will get only 20 per cent of what was previously being spent on petrol. The petrol allowance of other officers has also been rationalised, while the contingency bill of the VC's office has been abolished. Now, if the VC wants to invite someone over for tea, they must be ready to foot the bill for it," he told The Express Tribune.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 19/11/2020)

### To close schools or not

Provincial governments in the country are hoping they can ride out the second wave of Covid-19 by keeping educational institutions open this winter so that students can make up for the time they lost by not being able to attend classes physically. However, this decision has met with scepticism from parents who are concerned about the health of their children amidst a resurgence in the pandemic. Last week, during an interprovincial meeting of education ministers, it was decided to keep educational institutions open for a while longer even though cases continue to rise, and several schools continue to be shut down after staff and students there were found to have been infected with the lethal virus. Another meeting of the education ministers is scheduled for coming week where the emerging situation will be reviewed, and proposals for an early and extended winter break and delay in exams will be considered.

Mounting pressure from private educational institutions was admitted not only by education officials but also by the Sindh education minister and is considered to be a factor in the decision of the province whether or not to close schools for two months. There is a cloud over re-examinations for intermediate students, admission tests for universities and their assessments as well. Quite clearly, the developing situation is not only alarming on its own, but a faster pace has everyone worried. However, it seems that the model of online classes has not been as successful as initially hoped. Many teachers have had to relearn how to deliver lectures, students had to change the way they learn, parents not only have helped keep their children synced with their classes but also to arrange for the necessary gadgets and connections.

Priority must be given to the preservation of life because alternatives are only available for everything else. This is the time to swallow a bitter pill because the second wave is here with a vengeance.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 22/11/2020)

### Violation of SOPs at schools, colleges worries parents

Despite an alarming surge in Covid-19 cases in the current second wave, the government is still mulling over whether to close educational institutions or not. It seems that it trusts schools and colleges to follow the required standard operating procedures (SOPs) to protect the staff and students from coronavirus, but students and faculty on ground have horror stories to tell.

There are a few parents as well who trust the institutions to follow the SOPs and want them to remain open.

"I caught Covid-19 and have infected my whole family," said ZS, a female student of a prestigious institution in Karachi. "Despite my protests, I was forced to attend a school event in October. SOPs were not followed."

ZS said when she complained to the teachers they were either helpless or thought she was being paranoid.

"I am so stressed out because of this. Before being infected I was going just for the attendance but now I think I was stupid for doing this. It wasn't worth it."

There are many students like ZS, who returned to school when they opened in mid-September after six months despite the government's assurance that SOPs will be followed.

But as expected many ignored these rules or enforced them very casually.

Government teams sealed some institutions while some others managed to satisfy them.

But Tanveer, an intermediate student at a college in Karachi, claimed no one in her college was following the SOPs.

She said a team of officials came shortly after her college opened and were shown only that was needed to satisfy them but in reality no one was following any SOPs.

Tanveer has stopped going to the college as her parents fear she will get infected. Her mother refuses to send her, despite assurances. "I can't trust the college to protect my daughter from the virus. There are too many students and no one is following SOPs; there is so much a few can do when the majority is not taking the virus seriously."

Things are not better at one state-run institution.

"You know what government schools are like," said SH, a teacher at a government school. "Do you think our students and staff will have any basic facilities like masks or sanitizers? Many of us are scared to go ... I have been taking days off recently. I have parents at home, who are vulnerable. I can't risk it."

Businessman Asim has three children, two are school-going and one is in college. He is quite worried about his children's health. "SOPs are blatantly ignored; the number of students and staff infected are concealed to avoid being sealed; students are threatened with consequences like withholding of results and other documents, while faculty and staff are threatened with termination from service."

He said he would rather keep his children home and 'miss out' than get infected. He said he can't risk the lives of his children. Rahim's sons are in college, and he says he does not expect them to follow SOPs. "Boys are adventure-loving and my sons follow SOPs generally but when they are with friends, it is difficult for them to do so."

He said there was so much a parent can do for elder children. "I have told my sons to be careful but you are not always with your children to ensure they follow the rules all the time. That worries me."

When her college opened in September, Shazia said students were told that inspection teams were going to pay a visit and "we were told to tell them that we were following SOPs carefully. This was not true — most of the students were not wearing masks and the classes were full."

She says the college also organised "two events, one for Independence Day and another for 12 Rabiul Awwal, and it was mandatory for all students to attend".

Students and staff have been infected at some institutions.

Adeel, a shopkeeper by profession, said he was not sending his children to school. He said that it was not like his children were learning something great at school; he refused to put their lives at risk.

"Missing a year won't be as harmful as an infection will be. I don't want that. I love my children and family and I can't send them to school so they bring back the virus and put everyone in danger."

Echoing similar sentiments, Rana, who works as a domestic help, said she could not afford treatment of her children if they get infected, not that she believed they will. "I am already swamped with expenditures, and I can't bear more expenses if my children fall ill. And anyway my children are learning better skills working than going to school."

But not everyone is lucky enough to escape the virus. Who will be responsible for those who get infected?

There is a misconception that the young, especially children, cannot get infected by coronavirus. But they are vulnerable as the virus can not only infect them but they can carry the virus back to their families and endanger the vulnerable. However, children have also been infected in developed countries like the US and UK.

It is time that real steps were made to work according to the new normal. If the authorities want to keep the process of education running smoothly for all students, from all backgrounds, it is time to put some plans in place.

However, we are still seeing a lot of issues in providing online classes and the government insisting on opening the intuitions. The government had ample time to come up with a strategy to cover the gaps in education to more students. However, the work is still in progress.

Providing some classes to keep students engaged in the process of education can be achieved if plans using the basic ideas are used. Since the mid-80s or so, some classes are being conducted over TV by the Allama Iqbal Open University. Apart from this, Islamic teachings including Quran classes have been conducted through this medium.

Now with the internet, these classes can be provided online. The government can use the existing telecom network to reach students outside the urban and semi-urban areas.

This can be done at lower cost and cater to a large audience.  
(By Lubna Jerar Naqvi Dawn, 13, 23/11/2020)

### Education institutions closed until Jan 10

The government on Monday ordered closure of all educational institutions across the country from November 26 till January 10 next year and directed for holding online classes until December 24 to reduce the chances of students being infected during the second wave of the coronavirus, which global as well as local experts fear, worsens during the winter season.

The decision was taken in a meeting of the Inter-Provincial Education Ministers Conference (IPEMC), chaired by Federal Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood. It was decided in the meeting that schools would be closed from Thursday until December 24 but classes would continue online.

The forum, however, allowed schools to call students for one or two days during the week but said the final policy in this regard would be at the discretion of the provincial education departments. It was also announced that the winter vacations would be from December 25 to January 10.

"These institutions will remain closed from November 26 to December 24 while from December 25 to January 10 the winter vacations will be observed. There will be no physical attendance of students in any class," Mahmood told a news conference after the meeting.

"The students of schools, colleges, universities and tuition centres will be free from attendance since they will continue studies from home. Students of vocational educational institutions would, however, continue their on-job training at vocational institutes," he added.

The minister, flanked by Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Health Dr Faisal Sultan at the press conference, told reporters that a special meeting would be convened to review the updated situation of the pandemic, prior to formal opening of the educational institutions on January 11.

According to the IPEMC decision, students with online option would continue their studies through this mode of education, while those with no online facility will be facilitated under a special policy, which will be introduced by the respective provincial governments.

The minister also announced the cancellation of the exams, which were scheduled in December, while the exams of assessment and recruitment would continue. "There will be no promotion of students to next class without exams," he added.

Mahmood directed the Chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC) to arrange online classes on urgent basis for students of higher education. The universities, he said, were allowed to permit PhD students and those from far-flung areas to stay at hostels so that their study might not be affected.

However, the minister stressed that the universities would ensure compliance of strict Covid-19 standard operating procedures (SOPs) for students residing at hostel. He added the decision regarding attendance of teachers in the schools would be taken by the schools management.

Mahmood said exams scheduled for March-April next years, would now be taken in May-June 2021. It was also recommended that the new academic year will commence in August, instead of April, while summer vacations would be curtailed to lessen the eventual loss of students, he added.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Faisal Sultan described the closure of the educational institutions as a timely decision to contain further spread of the coronavirus. "The prevailing coronavirus situation was kept in view [while taking the decision]," he said.

Dr Sultan added that all the entry tests for the medical field like MDCAT and various levels of senior medical care training would be held as per schedule, while ensuring all the SOPs related to the COVID-19.

Dr Sultan acknowledged the role of frontline health workers, including doctors and nurses in the fight against Covid-19. He said all possible measures would be adopted to control coronavirus to avoid overloading of the already burdened health system.

#### Sindh opposes decision

Sindh Education and Labour Minister Saeed Ghani opposed the federal government's decision to close all educational institutions. In an NCOC meeting, Ghani proposed that students should not be promoted to the next grade without examinations this year.

He suggested that only those educational institutions should be closed that have an enrolment of 73% at the primary level, while classes VI and above should continue. He further suggested that all non-teaching activities in educational institutions should be stopped completely for a year.

Meanwhile, people belonging to different walks of life in Khyber Pakhtunhwa appreciated the closure of educational institutions and termed it a wise decision in the wake of recent spike in Covid-19 in the province.

On the other hand, Balochistan Private Schools Association Chairman Bahadur Khan and President Dawood Shah Kakar have denounced the government's decision to close schools from November 26. Kakar said that he also met Education Minister Sardar Yar Mohammad Rind earlier and told him that the smart course for children has been completed but tests have yet to be taken

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter 01, 24/11/2020)

### **Minister says students in Sindh will not be promoted without prior exams**

Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani has assured all academia in the province that the students here will not be promoted without prior examinations this time around.

He said this during the meeting of education ministers chaired by Federal Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood on Monday.

Mr Ghani made it clear that he was against the closure of all educational institutions and recommended that only primary schools, with an enrolment percentage of 73 per cent should be shut down.

He added that students in class six and above should be allowed to attend classes in person while the younger ones may study at home.

The minister also suggested that the examination dates of classes nine, 10, 11 and 12 should be announced after reviewing the situation.

#### *Associations, owners reject schools' closure decision*

That said, he also suggested that those schools which want their pupils to attend classes online should also be allowed to do so. He said that schools should be directed not to take action against students whose parents don't want to send them to school during the pandemic.

The provincial education minister said that all non-teaching activities in educational institutions should be halted.

He also took the opportunity to say that under the circumstances small private schools, tuition and coaching centres should be considered for easy bank loans as financial relief.

#### **Private schools reject decision**

There were panic alarms going off in private school circles as what they all had feared the most came true on Monday with the announcement of the closure of all educational institutions, including tuition centres for students, from Nov 26 to Dec 24 followed by winter vacations from Dec 25 to Jan 10, 2021.

In view of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, it was explained that educational institutions throughout the country should opt for home learning and online classes to keep students out of harm's way.

As per the decision taken by the federal government, educational institutions would remain open for teachers and staff. Each province is also allowed to come up with its own policy regarding home learning. If they decide to call students to school one day a week to assign them homework between Nov 26 and Dec 24, that can be worked out.

"I think this is the start of yet another long school closure. First the government will close [schools] for a short span, then they will extend, extend and extend," said Shahab Khan, one sceptical private school owner.

"One-month closure sounds like a lollipop," said Amjad Ansari, another school owner.

#### **Closure up to April feared**

Yet another school owner, Amir Murtaza, said that they were being taken for a ride by politicians, be they from Islamabad or Karachi. "I believe the planning is for closure up to April. They are just not disclosing it as yet and want to give us slow poison," he said.

Irfan Muneer, a private school owner, said that the Sindh government took a U-turn on what it had been saying all along that schools won't be closed no matter what.

"Everything here remains open except for education institutions. We see children roaming around with their parents at shops and shopping malls without anyone observing any standard operating procedures but schools are said to be dangerous and breeding grounds for catching the coronavirus," said another.

Tariq Shah, the chairman of the All Private Schools Management Association, also said that while raising his voice about the matter during the recent meeting of the Sindh education department's steering committee, he had suggested the closure of other places instead of schools.

"We have requested for another steering committee meeting now to plan our next line of action in view of the federal government's directive," he added.

All Sindh Private Schools and Colleges Association chairman Haider Ali also rejected the announcement of closure of educational institutions.

He demanded that the Sindh education minister convene a meeting of the steering committee immediately so that a workable and acceptable policy could be formulated for the entire province in the light of the decisions of the steering committee.



Mohammad Mairaj Siddiqui, the chairman of the Organisation of Private Schools Management, said that private schools were the ones that had observed SOPs the most and yet they were punishing schools only.

On the other hand, Students-Parents Federation of Pakistan chairman Nadeem Mirza questioned: "Is this short duration closure being announced because the government is working in cahoots with private school associations? Is it being done to enable them to keep receiving school fees every month?"  
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 24/11/2020)

### **Irregularities stir hornet's nest in college education department**

The Sindh College Education Department recently came under fire for various financial irregularities within its charge, opening a new can of worms for the department and raising several concerns about the state of Karachi's education system.

It was alleged that in the past few months, the financial power of dozens of colleges had been transferred from principals to unconcerned officers, selected arbitrarily by the directors of the city's government colleges.

However, what drew the ire of several headmasters was the transference of drawing and disbursing charge from Grade-19 and Grade-20 principals to Grade-16 clerks and superintendents in certain colleges.

Resultantly, the principals in question had been left virtually powerless and unable to meet necessary expenses, including staff salaries as well as routine affairs.

It was alleged that the drawing and disbursing officers (DDOs) in question had also been involved in misappropriating college funds, to the degree where principals had no knowledge of the budget's mysterious expenditures.

According to Jam Mohammad Bohri Girls Government College Gulshan-e-Maymar principal Neelam Mushtaq, as a new appointee, she was surprised to learn from the provincial accountant general that her college's financial charge rested with a superintendent of the Islamia College.

"Due to lack of DDO-ship, my own salary and that of various other staff members have been withheld in the past. The conditions are such that the college doesn't even have money to buy sanitisers. When the relevant DDO came to visit our campus and was asked to release funds, he just shrugged off the request, saying the bills are yet to be passed," lamented Mushtaq.

Similarly, Government Science College Gulshan-e-Iqbal principal Zubaida Nasreen confirmed her college's DDO-ship was held by Jinnah Government College principal Manzoor Solangi. "The DDO has spent a quarterly budget of about Rs800,000, but the college has not received any of this amount," she revealed.

Nasreen further claimed that when the budget was sought from the said DDO, she was told that the first quarter's expenses had been handed to the regional director. "Our science labs had to be shut down after running out of chemicals and equipment, which we have no budget to restock. I informed the colleges secretary about this, but it appears my applications have fallen on deaf ears," she added.

On the other hand, a former principal, speaking on conditions of anonymity, revealed that a clerk, holding the DDO charge of a college in a Karachi suburb, once alleged that the Karachi colleges director had made him sign a bill worth Rs1 million.

When the principal asked the clerk where the colossal amount would go, the clerk said he didn't have the slightest idea. "All I have to do is sign the bill and hand it over to the vendor," the clerk added after a brief pause.

The college principal further highlighted that so far there has been no accountability for DDOs who have been misappropriating college funds or the colleges director, who gave them the authority in the first place.

"For instance, Hafiz Abdul Bari Andar, the colleges director who illegally gave the power of DDO to unrelated persons, has been neither removed nor investigated for his actions up till now," the principal claimed.

Sindh Professors and Lecturers Association (SPLA) Karachi president Professor Munawar Abbas said DDO-related problems had been raising several red-flags for corruption and fraudulent activities.

"It is beyond comprehension how and why a person can be handed the DDO charge of several colleges. SPLA believes that permanent principals should be appointed in all colleges and they should be the ones made DDOs as well. If not them for any reason, then it should be a senior professor of the same college taking the charge," he asserted.

#### **Amendments**

Per latest developments in the case, it appears that growing concerns about unscrupulous DDOs are finally stirring the hornet's nest, and the Sindh College Education Department has been moved to take charge of the situation.

In a notification dated November 23, the department explicitly attributed DDO charges to principals of all colleges operating within its administrative control.

According to the notification, there will be no additional orders for assigning DDOs, whereas henceforward, the postings of all new incoming and outgoing incumbents and their credentials to relevant accounting or auditing offices will also be handled by the colleges' administrative offices.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 27/11/2020)

### Failure of education

THE educational institutions are closed because of Covid-19. The process of learning has to continue but the tools to ensure this leave a lot to be desired. An emergency model of instruction must promise continuity of learning to students across class and income divide. It is all very well to see the increasing number of internet users as a sign of progress, even if this has been achieved because of lockdowns. But not everyone can access the cyberworld. More innovative methods are required. For instance, there are wide open spaces in rural areas and even towns that can be used for teaching students — if the elements permit. Examples from elsewhere also provide useful insight. Take teachers in India. Many of them record their lectures and then have mobile teams relay these in villages via speakers to learners who maintain a safe distance from each other. In Africa, the radio service has been put to good use; but in Pakistan, it is surprising that the 'medium' of paper hasn't been emphasised enough by those trying to educate youngsters in these times. Indeed, written or printed notes and lectures sent to students regularly by schools can go a long way in addressing their lack of accessibility to fancier gadgets. Paper can reach where the internet cannot. Similarly, radio and television still have a role to play.

It is often presumed that those without facilities such as the internet and the tools required to access it are doomed. In this sense, junior-level students are at a greater disadvantage as compared to those in the senior classes who are much closer to completing their studies. This is a reflection of our lopsided priorities — and shows how miserably the state has failed to lay a solid foundation for schooling at the primary and pre-primary level. Even as we try to overcome this most trying phase, there is an opportunity to identify our lapses and strategise collectively for a better, more equal education in the months ahead.

(By Editorial Dawn, 06, 28/11/2020)

### Notice issued on contempt plea in fees concession case

The Sindh High Court has issued a notice to the director general, inspection and registration of private schools, on an application seeking contempt proceedings against him for not complying with an earlier order regarding implementation of a law about concession in school fees during the coronavirus pandemic.

A two-judge bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar issued the notice to the alleged contemnor with direction to file comments after the counsel for petitioners informed it that the Aug 11 order of the bench had not been complied with.

On Aug 11, the bench had disposed of two petitions moved by a non-governmental organisation and All Sindh Parents' Association (ASPA) and directed DG Mansoob Siddiqui to implement the law about 20 per cent concession in fees during the pandemic in all educational institutions in the province and to file the first compliance report within 20 days.

*SHC is informed that funds for a children's hospital in North Karachi will be released in a week*

Basically, the petitioners had approached the court for enforcement of the relevant sections of the Sindh Covid-19 Emergency Relief Ordinance, 2020 — that was adopted by the Sindh Assembly as an act — regarding concession to students in fees of educational institutions during the pandemic stating that various educational institutions were not implementing the law and charging 100pc fee from their students.

Section 3 (2)(a) of the ordinance reads: "No educational institution shall charge more than eighty percent (80%) of the total monthly fees. The relief amount, reduced equivalent to twenty percent (20%), under this Ordinance, shall not be recovered as arrears under any circumstances or under any existing or new head of account."

Section 2 (a) of the ordinance says: "'Educational institution' means any preschool, elementary or secondary school, college, university, higher educational institute, madaris or any vocational, commercial, professional whether in public or private sector providing formal or non-formal education."

### Azadi Cards for senior citizens

The same bench has directed the social welfare secretary to inform it on Dec 15 that when will the Azadi Cards be issued to senior citizens for providing essential services and benefits.

The Legal Aid Society moved the SHC stating that all private hospitals and medical centres were bound to provide 25pc concession to senior citizens under the Sindh Senior Citizens Welfare Act, 2014, but the same had not been implemented yet.

When the matter came up for hearing before the bench, an assistant advocate general submitted that secretary of the social welfare department could not turn up due to the death of his relative.

The bench directed the secretary to appear in court on the next date and inform it as to when Azadi Cards would be distributed among senior citizen.

The petitioner took the plea that private hospitals were not providing such concession to senior citizens and pleaded for implementation of the law in letter and spirit.

However, the lawyers for some hospitals submitted that the concession could only be extended when the department concerned issued cards to the senior citizens as provided in the act.

#### **Funds for children's hospital**

The SHC was informed that funds for a children's hospital would be released within a week.

Last month, the bench had directed the provincial authorities to ensure that the funds for the Sindh Government Children Hospital North Karachi be released within a month on a petition about lack of funds for the hospital.

The additional health secretary submitted that a summary for grant of funds had been approved and a letter sent to the finance secretary for releasing the funds.

He undertook that the funds would be released within one week.

The bench directed him to submit a progress report on Dec 11.

Officials said that the summary regarding release of funds to the Poverty Eradication Initiative (PEI), a NGO which is running the facility, was approved by the chief minister on Nov 10.

(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 13, 30/11/2020)

### **Teachers' plight**

GIVEN the surge in Covid-19 infections, the provincial and federal governments want schoolchildren to stay at home. School managements have been directed to conduct academic activities online. Schools were already operating under SOPs. The present call has added to their challenge.



Private schools are the worst hit. Delays in receiving school fee, extra costs in the facilitation of online classes, salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff, rentals, utilities and incidental expenses are taking a financial toll. Most schools have partially passed on the financial burden to the most vulnerable in this set-up, ie the teachers who are asked to purchase their own hardware and internet resources for online classes. From being fired without notice, to being subjected to a 50 per cent (or more) reduction in their salaries, they are being treated ruthlessly.

With few exceptions, small- and medium-scale private schools in low- and middle-income neighbourhoods hire female teachers. Economic compulsions, locational advantages (in some cases) and the social acceptability of teaching as a profession are among the reasons they teach.

Usually, private schools aim to generate enough revenue to satisfy the expectations of investors and managers. Young women with average educational credentials are given the entire task of handling the pupils. As it is, they are overworked, moving from class to class without a break. During the pandemic, school managements have given their academic staff a heavier teaching load. They believe that sitting in one spot and instructing via a computer can achieve greater content delivery — a debatable idea.

*Educators are being forced to survive on half their pay.*

Imagine a teacher who gives eight online lessons to a corresponding number of classes with an average of 25 students in each class. Even if she has only to deal with homework, it would mean that she has to digitally assess 200 documents everyday. If classroom worksheets are to be digitally assessed, it means twice the number — a humanly impossible task. With this kind of work, the teacher is unable to do justice to her responsibility. Poorly assessed worksheets and not giving homework impacts the students' learning. In such a setting, the teacher finds it better to 'please' every stakeholder, and adopts the path of least confrontation. When pupils receive exaggerated praise for little or no effort, they and their parents feel satisfied. The school management also remains happy. The casualty is education which is downgraded further.

The salary and emolument structure for these teachers are below desirable levels. During the pandemic, citing financial challenges, the emoluments have been further downgraded. In one example, a full-time primary school teacher in a bungalow school of Karachi's North Nazimabad area was paid Rs15,000 per month — an illiterate employee in a government department is paid more than twice this amount!

Salary structures are not encouraging even in some of the better outfits. And many schools do not pay an extra sum to teachers for procuring digital resources for online classes. There is no provision for paying for extra work, such as conducting online parent-teacher meetings on behalf of the school. A frustrated and demotivated teaching cadre is the result.

Apart from the pandemic challenges, school teaching on its own is not the profession of choice for the brightest. Teachers do not possess a career path to pursue in their professional lives. If they develop their capacities and skills through self-drive and effort, they are able to acquire better prospects. Otherwise, the scenario remains static for a sizable number of them.

There are a few attempts by some school managements to invest in teachers' training and periodic capacity building. But when that happens, the teachers are either charged or the cost is adjusted against their salaries. Thus teachers lose interest in their upgradation and development.

As private-school teachers are not organised on an effective bargaining platform, they are unable to raise and negotiate common demands.

The scenario requires a drastic overhaul at several levels. School managements require facilitation and assistance in the delivery of essential work. Knowledge of proper management with regard to the academic, operational and financial aspects of running a school can bring about change.

While private schools are justified in functioning as profitable concerns, it is important to pay appropriate salaries to the teaching staff. Assistance can also be taken from well-established, trust-based schools and resource centres to devise programmes for capacity and skill development. It is essential to strike a balance among all stakeholders at all times, and especially in this phase of a world crisis.

(By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 07, 08/12/2020)

### **HEC asked to withdraw proposed associate degree programme**

Raising serious concerns over “flawed” policies of the Higher Education Commission, speakers at a seminar held at Karachi University on Tuesday demanded that the HEC withdraw its proposed associate degree programme and re-evaluate its policies that have largely been formulated without the consent of stakeholders.

They also vowed to launch a struggle for the restoration of educational institutions’ autonomy.

Titled ‘Associate Degree — Challenges to University Degree Programme and Future of College/External Education’, the event was attended by a large number of college and university teachers, examination experts and representatives of unions, human rights and student organisations and staff associations. It was organised by KU’s Forum for Policy Debate (FPD).

*Call to take all stakeholders on board before formulation of policies*

Starting off the discussion, Prof Syed Jaffar Ahmed, former director of the Pakistan Study Centre at KU, called for defining “the constitutional limits of HEC” and said its policies should be based on the consent of stakeholders concerned as it’s only through consultation and critical evaluation process that policies could be fairly implemented.

#### **HEC blamed for facilitating private varsities**

“It seems the commission is deliberately ignoring public sector universities and facilitating private sector institutions. Its associate degree programme targets poor segments of the society,” he said.

Dr Ahmed emphasized upon the need to make decisions that impact society based on our local ground realities rather under pressure from any foreign agency or force.

Institutions such as the World Bank (WB), the World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund, he said, had now taken control of even the agricultural output of countries and their markets.

Acting KU Vice Chancellor Prof Khalid M. Iraqi, who presided over the event, also endorsed the need to take stakeholders on board before formulation of policies and said this approach would not only ensure sustainability of policies but their effective implementation.

“[Administrative] decentralisation is the way to go. All over the world universities are free to prepare their own academic policies and, therefore, they formulate policies that respond to local problems and conditions,” he said, adding that Pakistan should adopt any decentralised academic system.

Karachi University Teachers’ Society (Kuts) president Prof Dr Shah Aliul Qadar recalled that around 28 vice chancellors of public sector universities had categorically rejected the HEC’s associate degree programme in 2018, expressing surprise over HEC’s insistence on the same programme despite resistance across Pakistan.

He paid tributes to KU’s academic council that deliberated upon the associate degree programme in 2017 and presented a comprehensive report that outlined its impact on the diversity of education and students, especially on those belonging to the lower middle class that would have to unnecessarily go through a four-year programme instead of two years under the old programme.

Dr Riaz Ahmed, a senior KU teacher, in his presentation discussed the WB reports of 2017 and 2019 that lay the basis of the \$400 million funding for higher education in Pakistan and noted that HEC’s associate degree programme was actually the agenda of the World Bank.

Citing a WB-funded project, he said it provided a detailed plan for eliminating degree programmes in Pakistan and replacing it “with a non-scientific approach to education that would deprive the graduates to acquire jobs or relate to the social conditions”.

#### **Universities to lose income**

“The associate degree programme is unacceptable as it will close the doors for higher education for the middle and lower middle classes. The universities will also lose a major source of income that [they] currently generate through the old programme,” he said, pointing out that if the new programme was implemented it would eliminate undergraduate programme at universities and also deprive students of the option to pursue a degree programme privately.

Prof S.M. Taha, the convenor of FPD and a member of the KU syndicate, said the Constitution and the University Act 1973 did not allow any other institution including the HEC to float a degree programme which was not approved by the academic council of a university.

"The KU academic council has always unanimously rejected this programme whenever it was placed for debate. This dialogue is the beginning of a debate that will turn into a national dialogue where all stakeholders will be free to express their views," he said.

Dr Asghar Dashti, a member of the syndicate of the Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science and Technology (Fuuast), in his paper alleged that the WB created the HEC and since its formation in 2003 "the HEC had been attacking higher education in Pakistan".

Dr Yaqoob Chandio, the president of the Sindh Professors and Lecturers Association (SPLA), demanded investigation against the HEC on charges of damaging the higher education sector and hoped that college and university teachers, staff and students would join hands to launch a movement to end the "hegemony" of HEC.

SPLA-Karachi president Dr Munawwar Abbas criticised what he described as the step-motherly treatment by universities towards their affiliated colleges that were considered as a source of income. He demanded greater autonomy for provincial colleges and pledged to resist attempts to undermine higher education.

Dr Intikhab Ulfat, a senior KU professor, observed that the examination system of universities handled a large number of colleges while the proposed associate degree programme entailed a semester system without considering the limited capacity of colleges.

Dr Osama Shafiq of KU criticised the WB-led policies of the HEC and demanded a commission to investigate billions of rupees "wasted by HEC in the past 17 years".

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 09/12/2020)

### **KU opposes end of two-year bachelor's degree**

The University of Karachi (KU) has decided to reject to the Higher Education Commission's (HEC's) decision of ending two-year undergraduate programmes, replacing them with a semester-based associate degree programme, and not recognise any two-year Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Bachelor of Science (BSc) degrees awarded after 2018.

Criticising the decision in a summary sent to the Sindh government's universities and boards department, the varsity has maintained that it will be continuing two-year bachelors and masters programmes and will be admitting students in the said programmes in the future.

The policy does not take into account the financial condition of universities, as well as the future of private students, the summary points out. It further elaborates that the KU has been facing an annual deficit of Rs2 billion and 27 per cent of the varsity's administrative expenses are paid using the fees collected from two-year degree programmes.

Besides, infrastructure is needed for introducing associate degree programmes at colleges and the institutions lack the staff needed for such programmes' implementation, the summary states.

Moreover, the KU has made it clear in the summary that it only exercised "academic control" over its affiliated colleges and administrative decisions such as the replacement of two-year degree programmes with associate degree programmes were taken by the director general of colleges. The change cannot be made without his approval, the summary states.

Explaining the clauses of HEC notification on the matter, the KU management stated in its summary that those who had enrolled in two-year programmes before December 31, 2018, were to be given until December 2020 to complete their BA and BSc degrees, but those who failed to complete the course in this time would be awarded the associate degree upon completion of their course. These students will then have to enroll in a four-year degree programme and study for four more semesters.

However, the summary states, these changes proposals made by the HEC are not immediately applicable and can potentially cause financial difficulties for public-sector universities.

The varsity's stance was reiterated by KU vice-chancellor (VC) Dr Khalid Iraqi during an interview he gave to The Express Tribune.

"The proposal had been presented to the KU's academic council in the past and it was rejected both times," said Dr Iraqi.

He went on to claim that the associate degree programme neither added to the academic strengths nor administrative resources of colleges and hence, he found it inapplicable at present.

"KU will continue its two-year degree programmes at its affiliated colleges and will not discontinue admissions for these programmes," the VC reaffirmed.

The KU intends to write a letter to HEC chairperson Dr Tariq Banuri on the matter, asking him to convene a meeting of the Vice-Chancellors Forum, including participation from 187 universities across the country, to discuss the issue.

Confirming this, KU's acting quality enhancement cell director Javed Akram told The Express Tribune that the letter's draft has been prepared.

According to Akram, currently, around 70,000 students, including private students, are enrolled in the two-year undergraduate and masters programmes offered by the KU.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 13/12/2020)

### **Karachi's colleges to be divided in 3 regions**

As government colleges in the province continue to grapple with the pandemic in its second wave, the Sindh college education department has decided to devolve the Karachi region into three separate administrative regions, based on the number of colleges in each.

Much to the distress of college faculty and staff, the department has forwarded a formal summary proposing the matter to the Sindh government for approval.

The summary recommends that the Karachi region should be abolished and replaced by three new regions. The first would comprise East and South districts, the second would entail Central and West districts, and Malir and Korangi districts would form the third region.

The colleges in the recently formed Keamari district would be merged with the second region comprising West and Central districts, proposes the summary. It further states that separate directors would be appointed for each of the three proposed regions.

As many as 145 of Sindh's 300 government colleges are located in Karachi. Faculty and staff members appointed in public colleges are uneasy with the proposed change as they fear this would affect transfers and postings.

A summary devised earlier had considered dividing the Karachi region on the basis of male and female colleges, whereby only a no-objection certificate (NOC) would be needed to transfer a teacher from one district to another, but the exchange from male to female colleges or vice versa would not be permitted.

Teachers and non-teaching staff are concerned that dividing the region on the basis of districts would mean that they would have to flit between government offices for transfers and postings from one college to another while living in their own city.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, one college principal implied that the proposed divisions would only increase bureaucratic red-tape. He would also need the NOC of the district-based regional director to transfer from one region to another in the same city, he said.

Another college principal dubbed the department's decision to break Karachi region into three as irrational when there are more pressing matters at hand. But the issues that need immediate attention are being ignored, he opined.

Out of the 145 BEd government colleges in Karachi, 71 are male, 71 female, and three are co-education. Meanwhile, there are 36 government colleges in Karachi's Central district and 16 in West district, East and South districts have 29 and 23 colleges, respectively, while Korangi has 24 colleges and Malir district has 17 government colleges.

It has been at least 20 days since educational institutes closed campuses for the second time since the pandemic broke out, given the second wave of the coronavirus. But the college education department has not been able to commence online classes in Sindh.

Consequently, thousands of students in Sindh's government colleges are forced to either put their education on hold or turn to tuition centres. Among the government colleges, only two in Karachi - the Government College of Commerce and Economics and the Jamia Millia Government College Evening - have managed to resume online classes through improvised systems.

Most other educational institutes, including schools and colleges in Karachi, had already adopted online modes of teaching when campuses first closed in the spring.

Besides, the college education department was to reduce the syllabus for intermediate students' temporary examinations as has been done for ninth and 10th grade students, but this is yet to be done. No circular has been issued in this regard either.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, Sindh Colleges acting director-general Abdul Hameed Chanar confirmed the decision to divide the city's college regions.

The summary was prepared on the directives of college education secretary Baqar Abbas Naqvi, said Chanar, adding that as far as he knew, the colleges secretary had approved it.

As for the pending tasks of reducing the syllabi and introducing online education models, Chanar claimed this was not assigned to any other officers in the absence of the colleges additional secretary, who had been given the task but was on sick leave.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 16/12/2020)



## Pandemic infects KU entry exam results

Given how much it has disrupted activities this year, it was inevitable that students would suffer one way or another due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. To what extent, however, is only just becoming apparent.

The results of Karachi University's recently held entrance examinations for Bachelors and Masters programmes paint an alarming picture. Less than a quarter of candidates were able to clear the exams, as education experts and officials pointed fingers at both a less than ideal student promotion policy and lack of educational support due to Covid-19.

A total of 8,983 candidates appeared for this year's entrance exams for the 20 different Bachelors programmes the Karachi University offers. To pass their respective exams, candidates had to obtain at least 50 out of 100 marks under Karachi University's policy. A staggering 6,378 candidates - nearly 71 per cent - failed to do so, the results published by the university on Thursday revealed.

Entrance exams for the Karachi University's Masters programmes fared even worse. Only 104 of the 503 candidates who appeared for the exams were able to clear them. As many as 396 candidates could not do so, revealing a failure rate of 89 per cent.

Even the results of successful candidates appeared far from ideal. A mere 14 candidates were able to score above 80 and no candidate could secure more than 90 marks. The bulk of candidates who passed - 2,697 to be exact - scored between 50 to 80 marks.

Among those who failed, less than half, 3,051, came close to a passing mark and scored above 40. Another 3,375 scored between 30 marks and 40, while 1,454 could only secure less than 30 marks.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, some officials suggested the result reflected the policy of promoting students directly that educational authorities were forced to implement. As Covid-19 cases surged, authorities were forced to postpone and subsequently call off annual matriculation and intermediate exams. O and A level exams were similarly called off as well. Instead, students from both streams were graded based on coursework they carried out during the regular school session.

The secretary of the Inter Board Committee of Chairmen (IBCC), however, blamed the result on the pandemic as a whole rather than any one particular policy aspect.

"This issue, of students being unable to clear the [Karachi University] entrance exam is reflective of the wide range of problems Covid-19 has created," Dr Ghulam Ali Mallah said. "Students were unable to prepare adequately due to the pandemic."

Between lockdowns and social-distancing measures, I don't think they could obtain access to necessary educational support," he told The Express Tribune. "As such, it is unfair to pin it solely on the student promotion policy."

Dr Mallah also raised questions over the level of difficulty in the Karachi University exam. "If it was too difficult, that would be a major reason for the results we've seen as well."

The Express Tribune tried to reach out to Karachi University Admissions Committee In-Charge Dr Saima Akhtar, but she chose not to comment on the matter.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 20/12/2020)

## Sindh ministers reject MDCAT results

After months' long controversy, and massive discrepancies in the medical entry tests conducted under the supervision of the Pakistan Medical Commission, the Sindh government rejected on Monday the results of the entry tests.

Addressing a joint press conference on the day, provincial ministers demanded of the federal government to hand over the authority of conducting the test to the provincial government. The demand came in the wake of the controversial Medical and Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT) conducted by the PMC.

The test was conducted without a national uniform syllabus, and massive discrepancies in questions emerged, with allegations that they were out of syllabus. Further issues were voiced regarding wrong roll numbers, names and locations of the candidates.

This created a quandary among students and parents in all four provinces. Many parents and students have also gone to the courts to challenge the results. At the press conference on Monday, provincial ministers, declaring the official response of the Pakistan Peoples Party-led Sindh government, said that there was no need for the federal government to have established the PMC to begin with.

The PMC, the provincial ministers claimed, is aimed at encroaching upon the powers of the provinces enshrined in the 18th Amendment. "There had been no issue in conducting medical tests while this authority was with Sindh," claimed the provincial health minister, Dr Azra Pechuho. "We conducted the tests at the divisional level through a transparent manner. No one had lodged such complaints [then]." Dr Pechuho, who has also previously criticised the formation of the PMC, said that around 150,000 candidates suffered all over Pakistan because of major errors in conducting the tests and the authority choosing irrelevant questions in the paper.

"Soon after the results were declared, candidates started crying because of the massive scale of mistakes in the data. Suddenly, the authorities undisclosed the result and even then did not provide an answer key for the candidates," said Dr Pechoho, flanked by Sindh Information Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah and Education Minister Saeed Ghani. The controversy surrounding the formation of the PMC has multiplied manifolds since the results of the MDCAT for admissions in Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) and Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) programmes appeared in all four provinces causing hue and cry among candidates because many of questions were out of their syllabus and some were ambiguous too.

Candidates in Sindh had already gone through months' long turmoil as the tussle continued between the Sindh and federal governments over the formation of the PMC. "The Sindh High Court has also bound the PMC to make a national uniform syllabus before conducting MDCAT at an all Pakistan level," said lawyer Jibran Nasir, who has been representing students before the plea under hearing at the Sindh High Court. "This never happened [though], and tests were conducted, including questions that had never been part of the syllabus in all the provinces," said Nasir, speaking to The Express Tribune. The lawyer representing students and parents who have challenged the results in the court of law said that, "During the court hearing even PMC officials confessed that out of a total 200 questions in the test, there were 14 ambiguous questions - around seven percent of the questions that is."

According to Nasir, no one appears to be serious about undoing the controversial results to provide relief to the candidates, however. The case is still pending in court with its next hearing fixed for January 4, 2021, told Nasir. Meanwhile, at the press conference, Sindh Information minister Nasir Hussain Shah had further said that the formation of the PMC, as a regulatory body, is not even complete, but it the tests have been conducted under its supervision. "The academic board is highly controversial," he said, adding that conducting these exams and devising a syllabus made on identical topics must be the prerogative of the provincial governments.

Earlier this year, the Sindh government had announced the establishment of a Sindh Medical and Dental Council (SMDC) and had drafted a bill in this regard. Dr Pechuho had also made a similar announcement in December last year. She had also criticised the formation of the PMC in October this year saying that it would be a 'disaster' for the smaller provinces as it allowed private medical colleges and universities to admit students irrespective of their domiciled province. She had also contended that the bill would hinder human resources in the smaller provinces.

(By Hafeez Tunio The Express Tribune, 04, 22/12/2020)