

NEWSCLIPPINGS

JULY TO DECEMBER 2021

EDUCATION



Urban Resource Centre

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Sindh govt fails in exam management

Amid mismanagement and late arrival of papers, grades IX and X examinations of the secondary school certificate examination started with inordinate delays across the province, including Karachi.

The grade X science students had come to the centres following the coronavirus prevention SOPs announced by the government to solve the paper devised as per the concised course in view of prolonged closure of schools.

However, they kept waiting for the question papers which did not come even after passage of one-and-a half hour. As per rule, students cannot go out once they enter the examination hall, they were stuck like passengers in a marooned aircraft. Many students showed their wrist watches to The Express Tribune photographer to confirm that it was 10:10 am whereas they were supposed to get question papers at 9:00am.

Sources claim that examination papers arrived half-an-hour-late at the examination hub set up by the Board of Secondary Education Karachi (BSEK) in Central district. Whereas in Government Girls Secondary School Sachal, Bahria Model 1 School and Dhoraji V M Public School as well as various other examination centers, the question papers couldn't be delivered till 12pm.

The exam commenced at 10:30am, 11:30 am, 12 pm and 1:30 pm at various examination centres. The teachers and parents faced problems due to the delay in the distribution of question papers.

Parents and students protested against the delays. Many of the parents said that they had reached the examination center prior to the specified timings, but the papers did not reach the centers on time.

Exams, which were scheduled to begin at 9:30 am, could not even commence till 12pm. The affected people demanded the board chairman to take an action against those responsible for the delay.

According to a statement issued by the BSEK, the question paper for physics arrived late at some of the 443 examination centres on the first annual exam 2021 due to the absence and irresponsibility of Centre Control Officer (CCO).

Besides, the cheating mafia remained active this year as well, reports suggested. The physics question paper, prior to reaching the examination centres, went viral on social media.

BSEK Chairperson Sharf Ali Shah, while speaking to the media during his visit to examination centers, said the papers commenced on Monday after a year. He said that two hours of time has been allocated for each paper. He added that authorities tried to deliver the question sheets in a timely fashion.

He claimed the vehicles were dispatched at 8am for the delivery of the examination papers to the examination hubs therefore the investigations will be conducted to identify why the examination papers could not reach the centres on time.

"BSEK will take stern legal action against the absent CCOs and a three-member committee, comprising senior officers Hur Mazhar, Khalid Ehsan and Syed Munir Hassan, has been set up for inquiring the matter," said Shah. The committee will submit its report to the BSEK chairperson within three days, he added.

Shah said that additional time was granted at the examination centers where the papers arrived late.

The BSEK chairperson declared that the leaked Grade X paper situation would be probed thoroughly through a committee.

Shah assured for a better arrangements for Tuesday, such as the provision of sanitizers and face masks.

A similar mismanagement was witnessed during the Grade X general group's Islamic Studies and Economics exam. These exams were scheduled to start at 2:30 pm in the evening shift but couldn't start by 5pm at some examination centres.

Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani, in his statement, said that information of examination papers arriving late has been received.

The minister assured that the matric and intermediate boards did not fall under his ministry, yet he is looking into the matters.

All the concerned chairpersons and examination controllers have been directed to ensure the timely arrival of examination papers on Tuesday, he added.

As many as 438 examination centers, comprising 185 government schools and 253 private schools, have been set up for annual examination 2021 for Grade IX and Grade X.

A total of 201 examination centers have been established for girls while 237 centers have been established for boys. In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, the students under one-time policy were promoted last year without exams.

(By Rija Fatima The Express Tribune, 04, 06/07/2021)

Sindh govt plans public library in each UC

The Sindh government has launched Library in Each Union Council Programme under the Local Government Department.

In this regard Sindh Minister for Local Government Syed Nasir Hussain Shah inaugurated the first library at UC Bilal Town, Orangi Town on Sunday. PPP MPA Liaqat Askani, PPP General Secretary West Ahmed Ali Jan, Secretary Local Government Board Zameer Abbasi, Regional Director Local Government Zakir Hussain Radhan and large number of local residents were present on the occasion.

Addressing the ceremony, Shah stated that Public Library in each UC was an initiative of LG Department to provide avenues and facilities to youth of Sindh to indulge in reading. Each UC shall establish one library within one month time adding that the facility would be fully equipped to meet highest standards, required as such and a wide range of books on various disciplines would attract vast readership.

The minister said that Library of KMC, DMC's and other local bodies were also being upgraded and added that Public Library in Each UC drive would be completed under union councils' funds and at least one library would be established in 1,526 UCs across the province.

He said that Pakistan Peoples Party have no any MPA, MNA from west district but, "we have started the library programme from UC 28 Bilal Town district West." He said that PPP believes in serving the people without any discrimination.

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and members of Sindh Cabinet are working day and night to fulfill the vision of Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

He said that development schemes worth billions of rupees have been earmarked in the current year budget for District West, while crores of rupees have also been allocated in the budget of KMC for the district.

He said that the infrastructure of district was being improved while water problem in the district would be resolved soon. He said that Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had warned him to solve the problems of sewerage and water.

Shah said that jobs would be given to the youth of the district on merit at the union council level.

No one would come from outside of the district. Replying to a question, he said that PPP was not afraid of any alliance.

These people have been tested, it is not a new phenomenon for us to face.

Politically, they have been fighting elections against PPP, they were in alliance in recent by-elections of Badin and defeated by PPP.

He claimed that PPP would perform even better and win more seats than past in the upcoming local body elections. highlight: LG Minister Nasir Hussain Shah claimed that PPP would achieve more success in the upcoming local body election.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 19/07/202)

Appointing VCs

THE appointments of several public-sector vice chancellors are being challenged in court. Recent examples include the Jinnah Sindh Medical University, Women University Swabi, the University of Karachi and the Federal Urdu University. Not too long ago, Dr Asim Hussain, chairman of the Sindh Higher Education Commission, said that unfit people were being appointed as VCs in Sindh's public universities. In a letter to the chief minister, he raised serious concern about the capacity and moral fitness of such academics to lead universities.



The competition to head universities is intense and ugly, with many senior faculty members aspiring to the post. The perks and privileges, social status, high visibility in ceremonial events, frequent interaction with public functionaries as well as foreign travel beckon academics in this direction. Whenever an advertisement for a VC post is announced, hundreds of applications are filed. While the Higher Education Commission and provincial governments — which administratively control higher education in their respective jurisdictions after the 18th Amendment — claim to have devised transparent criteria, many of our public-sector universities are led by submissive personalities or

cronies. They are not independent-minded academics as required. The meritorious VCs of yore were invited to lead varsities as a mission; it wasn't simply a job assignment.

Sir Ross Masood served as VC of Aligarh Muslim University during its formative phase. Being a capable academic, he revolutionised the university's status. Appointing experts to lead academic departments; using his personal contacts to bolster AMU's finances, evolving protocols for managing residential halls, creating enabling conditions for high achievers to be admitted to AMU and raising the social profile of the university through administrative and academic reforms were some major contributions by him.

While AMU was seen as the premier talent pool of young Muslims, it was often accused of promoting the Pakistan Movement. After 1947, it faced many challenges. At this point, the leadership of Dr Zakir Hussain, who promoted neutral and balanced academic activities in the post-independence period, kept AMU afloat. The varsity proudly celebrated its centennial a year ago.

For VCs of yore, it was more than a job assignment.

Professor Imdad Ali Imam Ali Kazi was among the early leaders of the University of Sindh. He transformed the institution into an active teaching and research-based university and invited outstanding men of letters to the campus. Prof Ghulam Mustafa Khan, an eminent researcher and teacher who supervised more than 50 doctoral dissertations in Urdu literature, joined Sindh University at Prof Kazi's persuasion.

Prof Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi led the University of Karachi during its formative phase, and worked hard to develop the campus. The university launched liberal ideas and struck a balance between right- and left-oriented viewpoints. Senior alumni recall that PPP chairman Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was invited by the students of the Political Science Society in the 1960s. Some thought that Prof Qureshi would not allow Mr Bhutto to address the students due to various controversies surrounding him at that time. But not only did Prof Qureshi grant permission, he also facilitated the event, despite possessing opposite political views. Those were the days when political discourse and ideological debates were common on campus and wise university leaders made it a point to promote them. Dr Mahmood Hussain, Dr Abdul Wahab, Dr Zafar Zaidi and many others were noted VCs in their own right.

Things have changed. An ideal VC in the eyes of the administration, faculty, students and government is one who can muster resources to run the varsity. He is required to resemble a corporate head and expected to maintain excellent relations with the business community, industrial leaders and the public sector to promote the future employment of graduates and to get grants and endowments. A contemporary VC has to have excellent

networking skills and be able to promote the university's achievements in the media, besides winning competitive funding and favours. Since the increase in private universities, public-sector VCs are appraised more on the basis of their business acumen than academic leadership credentials.

What should be the attributes of those who head universities? A VC must have a vision, and must know how to turn this vision into reality. He must persuade stakeholders to share his vision. The VC must be able to reach out to the student body and read its pulse and ensure an environment conducive for teaching, research and outreach. He must demonstrate high moral and ethical values and accept intellectual dissent. And above all, the VC must ensure that the university functions as an autonomous entity without any government tutelage. We still have plenty of people with such leadership qualities among us.

(By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 07, 27/07/2021)

Education crisis

WE are already into the fourth wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Delta variant has been declared by leading medical experts as the fastest, the fittest and the most formidable version of the coronavirus. What's next is yet to be seen. What's known is that far from being over, the pandemic is hitting us harder than before. One of the casualties is education, especially at the primary, middle and tertiary level.



With over 1.5 billion learners impacted worldwide due to school closures in 192 countries, the educational crisis caused by Covid-19 may worsen as the Delta variant spreads. The matter poses a greater challenge to low-income countries such as Pakistan, where, according to Unesco, 22.8 million children, aged five to 16 years, do not attend school. The staggering figure equals 41 per cent of this age group in Pakistan.

Fifteen months into the current crisis, what awaits the country's already dismal education milieu in the current as well as the post-pandemic era, depends a great deal on what kind of strategy our policymakers devise, and with what promptness its implementation is ensured. After all, one cannot live on the hope that the pandemic will end and normalcy will return to the education landscape.

Had the Covid-19 emergency been limited to Pakistan, internationally, there would be nothing to compare it to. However, the infection has disrupted studies and led to the closure of educational institutions in several countries. The latter can learn from each other's success stories, as well as their failures.

Online platforms must be developed to reach out to students.

Other than the developed Global North, there are also examples of determination and innovation in the rest of the world to learn from. Wuhan in China, where the coronavirus first surfaced, opted for conducting 'air classes' for its more than one million learners. It also supplemented teaching with extra classes on how to stop the spread of the virus. The city of São Paulo, Brazil's most populated city, sought strategies in addition to online instruction for learners. All over Bangladesh, the state-run Sangsad Television broadcast lessons for students. Kashan in Iran televised educational programmes for learners in the city; and Turin in Italy shifted to online teaching for students.

In March 2020, the calamity caught Pakistan not only unawares but also unprepared, exposing our lack of resources and insufficient infrastructure in the face of such a crisis. The more worrying question is, whether we are better equipped now, 15 months into the pandemic. What steps have been taken to resume educational activities for primary, middle and secondary school students, especially the ones who do not have the privilege of studying in privately run institutions?

What is the way forward? The Teleschool at the federal level and Taleem Ghar in Punjab air lectures for learners from Grades 1 to 12 and 1 to 8, respectively. Notwithstanding these welcome initial steps, the absence of a uniform curriculum has made it difficult to target students throughout the country. Providing feedback, achieving the relevant course learning outcomes and conducting assessments are issues that will still go unattended until they are given greater attention.

By taking their cue from the practices of most of the universities which resorted to online teaching in the country and collaborating with leading private schools that have developed their own online platforms, the educational authorities can run similar operations to reach out to the maximum number of learners in Pakistan. It is true that massive investment will be needed to ensure that no one is left out, even those who live in remote parts of the country. But the effort will be worth it at a time when the end of the pandemic is nowhere in sight.

Keeping in view the recommendations of the steering committee of Sustainable Development Goals-Education 2030, and understanding the fact that education is the primary responsibility of the state, it is imperative to avoid measures that could further dent an already weak and vulnerable school system. In our case, a strong sense of purpose is required to deliver what is needed: a well-thought-out strategy, generous funding to ensure that an alternative instructional system, in the form of online teaching platform, is established and made accessible to all learners. Spending on education is not a cost but an investment that builds sustainable, inclusive and more equal societies. Establishing a resilient and prepared education system is the need of the hour — in these times of Covid and beyond.

(By Inayat Ullah Khattak Dawn, 07, 04/08/2021)

Chaos in education

WHILE there is little doubt that Pakistan has fared better than many countries in terms of damage caused by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, quite a bit of this success appears to be down to luck. There is certainly no lack of chaos amongst the ranks of authority, and a tendency to work with little inter-provincial coordination. A case in point is the educational sector, where millions of students have suffered an unprecedented degree of uncertainty created by the absence of a coherent policy regarding attendance at educational institutes at both the centre and provincial levels.

It is essential to note that the same challenge is being faced by every country, to a greater or lesser degree depending on the extent to which that country has been impacted by successive waves of the virus and the ability of respective governments to recognise that this is an ongoing and difficult situation and to act accordingly. But to come down to specifics, in Pakistan each wave has been met with a piecemeal response, one that often works at cross purposes. On Wednesday, in Islamabad, the Inter-Provincial Education Ministers' Committee decided that except for badly hit Sindh, all educational institutions would run in-person classes, but that attendance would be staggered. However, it was decided that universities and colleges

will remain open without restrictions. If the logic is that older students (the minimum age for vaccination in Pakistan is 18) will presumably have been vaccinated, are we to understand that it will be ensured that each and every individual on campus will have proof thereof? Through the 18th Amendment, education is a provincial matter; but surely the very existence of the IPERC is to ensure some degree of uniformity in responses, even though Covid-19-related data on each province and city fluctuates on a daily basis. What we have at stake here is the future of an entire generation of students in a country with already abysmal literacy rates. Surely more forward-looking mechanisms can be devised.
(By Editorial, Dawn, 06, 08/08/2021)

Curriculum debate

BACK to school this August was a momentous occasion for primary school students in Punjab. The province became the first to implement the Single National Curriculum in madressahs and from grades one to five in both public and private schools within its jurisdiction. Aside from Sindh, which has refused to adopt it citing the 18th Amendment according to which education is a provincial subject, the other provinces and the ICT also plan to introduce it as soon as possible. The SNC for grades six to eight will be introduced next year, and up to Matric in 2023.

From the outset, the merits or otherwise of introducing the SNC have been hotly debated. One thing is certain, this may be the most revolutionary step taken in the education arena since Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's nationalisation of schools and colleges in 1972. That measure had far-reaching repercussions, and general consensus holds that it proved extremely detrimental to educational standards. Pakistan cannot afford another ill-thought-out experiment in this sector.

The PTI government projects the SNC as a silver bullet that will magically resolve Pakistan's educational woes, or at least the bulk of them. Unfortunately, the problem is far too complex and the SNC is unlikely to address the more important aspects of it. It may even make matters worse, bringing down standards across the board.

To be fair, the PTI during its electoral campaign also spoke of putting all out-of-school children in classrooms, improving the quality of education, and emphasising technical and vocational education. However, it has only made progress in introducing the SNC. It has billed the SNC as a way to end the 'education apartheid' in the country — which, on the face of it sounds commendable.

However, the educational apartheid is not only on account of different curricula pursued by different strains of education linked with socioeconomic status. In fact, it has far more to do with access and quality. But to put some 23m out-of-school children in school requires twice as many schools as we have at present, along with the associated human resource and funding requirements. Improving education quality means investing far more in teachers' training than we do. Then there's the issue of missing essential facilities. All this requires a massive infusion of funds. The cheapest option was the SNC.

Nevertheless this was at least a golden opportunity to improve the existing curriculum. However, the SNC remains content heavy, which encourages rote learning rather than critical thinking. The subliminal messaging is problematic and non-inclusive. More religious material has been included in subjects other than Islamiat, which is unfair to non-Muslim students. Girls and women are always dressed conservatively, and families are invariably stereotypical two-parent households. Single parents do not exist in these depictions of 'respectability' that are completely out of touch with contemporary Pakistani society. There is, in short, little to commend the SNC.

(By Editorial, Dawn, 06, 09/08/2021)

Sindh schools to remain closed

Educational institutions in Sindh will remain closed till August 19 in light of increasing coronavirus infections, announced Sindh Education Minister Syed Sardar Ali Shah on Sunday. However, intermediate exams across the province will resume from August 10 (tomorrow), he added.

Addressing a press conference, Shah, who took charge of the department last week replacing now Information, Labour and Human Resources Minister Saeed Ghani, said that schools and colleges in the province may potentially reopen on August 20.

But, he added, a meeting will be held then to review the situation on ground post Ashura and the guidelines issued by the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) before a final decision is made. The provincial government had notified the closure of school on July 24 as coronavirus infections spiked across Sindh.

It had, however, stated that examinations would be held as scheduled. Shah's press conference came on the heels of a meeting held by him and Sindh Universities and Board Minister Ismail Rahu with the chairpersons of all district education boards in the province.

The chairpersons of Karachi, Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas, Larkana, Sukkur and Shaheed Benazirabad educational boards assured the ministers of their preparedness to resume examinations from tomorrow. The meeting was apprised that two to three exams of Grade XII were yet pending in various districts while Grade XI exams would be held after Ashura.

SOPs, cheating curbs

At the meeting Shah directed the boards' chairpersons to ensure strict implementation of Covid-mandates standard operating procedures (SOPs), including the use of face masks and sanitisers, at examination halls. Moreover, he instructed that measures be taken to curb cheating. Neither students nor invigilators should be permitted mobile phones at the centres, he said.

"The seats of students should be placed keeping in view Covid-SOPs and social distancing," added Rahu, seconding the education minister. The universities and boards minister, who was formerly the irrigation minister and now since the recent cabinet reshuffle also holds the portfolio of the climate change and coastal development department, added that no student should be withheld from giving their exams.

At the subsequent press conference both the ministers asserted that Section 144 of the Pakistan Penal Code would be enforced in the vicinity of the examination centres and action would be taken if anyone is found cheating.

Covid on the rise

Shah pointed out that the positivity ratio in the metropolis had not yet decreased and remained at 23 per cent. He said that the pandemic situation would be monitored, especially in light of the upcoming Muharram holidays.

He voiced concern that if precautions are not taken, the positivity ratio may increase further. Shah added that his department's challenge was two-fold - to not let educational activities be impacted and to protect the people from the virus.

With regards to vaccinations, Shah said that a notification will be issued today (Monday) by his department directing school and college administrations to ensure only inoculated teachers are allowed on the premises. The salaries of government teachers would be withheld if they fail to get the mandatory jabs, he reiterated.

Enhancing educational facilities

Moreover, Shah, who had held the portfolio of the education department prior to Saeed Ghani's tenure and served as the culture, tourism and antiquities minister prior to the Sindh cabinet reshuffle last week, also outlined his approach towards reforms in the education sector.

He regretted that the current curriculum was outdated and said that an overhaul was on the cards. Besides, he acknowledged that the infrastructure of schools needed to be improved and vowed to carry out inspections and due diligence himself. He further assured that teachers would be hired solely on merit.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 09/08/2021)

WB grants \$130m for primary education in Sindh

The World Bank handed a grant worth US\$129.99 million to the federal government on Wednesday for the uplift of Sindh's primary education system under the 'Sindh Early Learning Enhancement through Classroom Transformation Project'.

The project financing includes concessional loan of \$100m by the World Bank and Education Sector Plan Implementation Grant of \$29.99m by Global Partnership for Education (GPE), according to a statement issued by the federal ministry of economic affairs. Besides, an additional GPE Multiplier Grant of \$24.78m would shortly be made available to enhance geographical coverage of the project, it added.

The financial agreement was signed between World Bank Country Director Najy Benhassine and Economic Affairs Division Additional Secretary Zulfiqar Haider in the presence of Federal Economic Affairs Minister Omar Ayub Khan and Sindh government chief economist Dr Naeem Zafar.

Khan thanked the World Bank for its support during increasing health and socio-economic challenges the country is facing. He claimed that the provision of quality education was among the top priorities of the government as it was essential for the socioeconomic development and prosperity of a nation.

The minister stressed that equal opportunities in education, for both girls and boys, must be ensured at all levels.

The objective of this project is to improve reading skills of early grade primary students and increase student retention in primary schools in selected 10 districts of Sindh.

The project claims to improve five core elements of learning - prepared learners, effective teaching, learning focused inputs, safe and inclusive school space, and a well-managed education system to end learning poverty. None of these elements can be left out when seeking to make schools functional and ensuring that students learn and stay in school. Using a school-based approach that focuses on quality, redresses support for drop-outs, improved teacher capacity and infrastructure catering to safety and learning needs, will help address the demand and supply side challenges to narrow the gap of girls' access, transition, and retention rates. The project will pilot a school-based behavioral intervention that will help students recognise that their abilities and skills can change and grow and will focus on key skills such as student efficacy and self-management.

Khan claimed that despite the pandemic, the government of Pakistan kept its focus on social sectors, including health, education and social protection, so that basic necessities are ensured and that the economy regains its strength.

He reiterated his government's commitment to further strengthen implementation of reforms, including reform actions aim to develop key elements of core foundations for Human Capital Accumulation.

The World Bank team reiterated its commitment to continue technical and financial support to the Government of Pakistan for priority.
(By APP The Express Tribune, 04, 12/08/2021)

Cheating in exams

ONE of the defining features of a sound education system is the integrity of its examination system. Unfortunately, Pakistan fails the test: there are far too many reported instances of both students and teachers/invigilators resorting to unfair means during tests and exams. The issue often comes under the spotlight during the Matric and Intermediate examinations that are a reminder of how decrepit our education system is and how ethics are lost at a very early age. This year too, despite strict instructions from the authorities, more than 200 students were caught cheating during Intermediate examinations in Sindh. Out of these, 46 were impersonators who were taking the exam for the actual candidate. Earlier in the year, question papers for math and physics were leaked from the office of the Board of Secondary Education in Karachi just before the Matric exams were about to start. The matter is of concern and needs deeper introspection. Cheating in exams is wrong and should be unequivocally condemned as not only a dishonest representation of one's academic abilities but also as an act that robs a deserving student of the reward — perhaps a coveted spot at a higher educational institution or a scholarship — of his or her hard work.

In broader terms, such unethical practice reflects the inadequacy of the public education system itself. On the one hand, it exposes the incompetence of the examination boards that are unable to conduct a routine academic exercise in a fair manner — how can they then be trusted to take responsible and informed decisions regarding other academic matters? On the other hand, cheating is indicative of the students' own sense of insecurity with a system that does not encourage criticism and thinking minds and where children's natural curiosity is often crushed by the teachers who are

themselves a product of a system where rote learning and unimaginative textbooks take precedence over inspired teaching. The authorities need to think beyond registering cases against students and work to fix the larger structural issues in education.
(By Editorial, Dawn, 08, 14/08/2021)

Dr Jameel Jalibi research library established

A library was established on the premises of the University of Karachi in memory of Dr Jameel Jalibi, a former vice chancellor of the university and head of the National Language Promotion Department, Pakistan, according to a statement issued here on Tuesday.

It said that the 'Dr Jameel Jalibi Research Library' was established by his son, Dr Khawar Jameel, by bringing together his father's personal collection of valuable and rare books. It stands on a plot adjacent to KU's Mahmood-ul-Hassan Library, which is a fine piece of architecture designed by his young nephew, Nabeel Akbar (architect).

According to the statement, the library was opened at a ceremony held on August 14. The first part of the ceremony was held under the chairmanship of Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and the second one by Mazhar-ul-Haq Siddiqui, a former vice chancellor of Sindh University, Jamshoro.

Speaking at the ceremony, Prof Noshaba shed light on the scholarly and literary services of Dr Jameel Jalibi and his relentless efforts for the promotion of Urdu language and literature.

Prominent among those who attended the programme included KU vice chancellor Dr Khalid Iraqi, Justice Athar Saeed, Dr Moin Uddin Aqeel, Dr Jafar Ahmed, Meraj Jami, Mobin Mirza and Nabeel Akbar. The ceremony was moderated by Prof Noshaba Siddiqui.

Prof Dr Younis Hassani, Mehmood Sham, Niazmandan-i-Karachi chairperson Ronaq Hayat, Prof Sehar Ansari, Dr Hafiz Muhammad Sohail Shafiq, Zaheen Alam, Dr Naseem Fatima, Anis Zubair, Advocate Sajid Mubashir, Rizwan Siddiqui, Sadaqat Ali Usmani, Shamim Bazil, Huma Azmi, Syed Saleem Shah, Muzammil Tanveer, Tanveer Sukhan and other known figures from academia, literature, journalism, politics, law and judiciary as well as social circles were present.

The presidential address was delivered by Mazhar-ul-Haq Siddiqui. The ceremony came to an end with the distribution of shields.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 14, 18/08/2021)

Bookshops, stationery stores see frenzied 'back to school' rush

Droves of people rushed to the bookshops, stationery stores, and uniform shops over the weekend ahead of reopening of schools after a one-and-a-half month Covid-related break today (Monday).

A large number of parents and children flocked to the markets to buy uniforms, stationery, shoes, and other items. Various shops were crowded as a large number of people were gathering in-side the shops while there were long queues of children including parents outside the shops.

Parents waiting in queues for hours said they only had one day to purchase uniforms and other articles.

The Sindh government had notified the reopening of schools on Friday and markets typically remain shut on Fridays and Sundays as 'safe days' in a bid to curb the spread of the coronavirus. This Sunday, however, many shops remained open to facilitate parents and students.

The parents complained that the schools were re-opening after one and a half months but the government's decisions were haphazard. The 'now open now closed policy' was beyond comprehension, said one harried parent, standing outside a bookshop to buy his child's syllabus books.

Price hikes

Over the weekend, many parents and students were left shaken after listening to the prices of stationery items and course material during their visits to the markets for back-to-school shopping. The rates of stationery and school supplies have surged they found to their dismay.

Besides uniforms, bags, and other items, the rates of new course books have increased by 30 per cent, it was observed during a survey by The Express Tribune.

Shopkeepers, on the other hand, attributed the price hike for essential stationery items to the rise in US dollar rates. The prices of all imported goods, especially school bags and pencil boxes, have shot up in line with the dollar rates, they explained. As for school uniforms, they claimed that the rise in cost of production for cloth had led to an increase in prices for uniforms.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 30/08/2021)

Sindh to give Covid jabs to students as schools reopen

As students across Sindh headed back to schools and colleges on Monday after a month-long hiatus, the provincial government finalised a week-long immunisation campaign aiming to inoculate 1.4 million students against the coronavirus.

The campaign to vaccinate students of grade IX and above will begin next week on September 9, decided the Sindh health and education departments at a meeting held on the day.

The students will most likely be administered doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, said Sindh Health Director General Dr Irshad Ahmed Memon, speaking to The Express Tribune. "We have enough stock - at least for the first dose."

Officials of the provincial education department claim that in public schools nearly 90 per cent and in private schools more than 85 per cent of the teaching and non-teaching staff has already been vaccinated.

The meeting, chaired by Sindh Health Minister Dr Azra Pechuho and Sindh Education Minister Sardar Shah, decided that school administrations' would reach out to parents and obtain their consent for their child's vaccination.

Replying to a question, Dr Memon confirmed that the parents will be taken into confidence so they cooperate with the health department to protect students against the deadly virus.

The campaign, aiming to vaccinate 1.4m students of grades IX to XII, is to be launched at the district level at first and then extended to the sub-division level. The health department has formed 2,527 teams for this purpose.

Dr Memon said that his department has enough staff to be posted at all vaccination centres set up for students.

"Registration should also be ensured once the vaccine is completed," Dr Pechuho had directed the meeting, which decided that students could get the jabs separately as well if they were not vaccinated during the drive.

The meeting decided that the health department would be responsible for making arrangements regarding the vaccines in educational institutes and the district officials of both the departments were directed to coordinate and devise the plan for their respective districts accordingly.

"Arrangements for cold chain storage facilities should be done," directed Dr Pechuho. She reiterated that immunisation against the deadly virus was crucial for the continuation of education activities, which have been repeatedly disrupted since the pandemic broke out.

Intermittent closures of schools in efforts to curb the spread of the virus have hampered the teaching process, left parents and students distressed, teachers flustered and school administrations dismayed.

More recently, the Sindh government had notified closures of schools from July 25 as the fourth wave of the pandemic swept across the province. Intermediate examinations were held as scheduled, however, beginning on August 10. The provincial government had announced the reopening of schools by August 19 and then delayed it by another week citing insufficient immunisation of teachers and staff. The chief minister had said the week-long delay was for private schools to increase inoculation among their teachers and staff and to give parents the time to complete their vaccination.

Educational institutes across Sindh reopened campuses on Monday subject to a 50 per cent attendance policy, implementation of Covid-related SOPs and vaccination certificates of parents, staff and teachers.

According to public schools' records, 95 per cent of the teaching staff and 89 per cent of the non-teaching staff have been vaccinated. "Not a single person was seen without the vaccination card [when the education minister inspected four schools and colleges on the first day back]," a senior education department official told The Express Tribune.

Meanwhile, Sindh Education Department Private Schools Registrar Rafia Javed said that over 85 per cent teaching staff and 87 per cent of the non-teaching staff at private schools have received the jabs. "The remaining target will be achieved this week."

She added that private schools' managements and parents have welcomed the decision to inoculate older students. "They wanted us to start from private schools. They are health conscious and want their children's safety."

Replying to a question, Javed said that she had observed resistance during polio and anti-measles drives in the past. "The Covid-19 vaccination is a different thing and from what I know, everybody is willing to say yes to it," she said.
(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 31/08/2021)

KU's academic council takes U-turn, abolishes two-year bachelor programmes

Taking a U-turn on its earlier decision within two months, the academic council of Karachi University (KU) recently abolished its two-year bachelor programmes in arts, science and commerce (BA, BSc and BCom) for affiliated public and private colleges, without consulting stakeholders and creating awareness of the new programmes, sources told *Dawn*.

Acting in haste, they said, the university also announced admission to the two-year associate degree programmes starting on Sept 6. KU's academic council had unanimously approved the continuation of its conventional graduate degree programmes (BA, BSc and BCom) and decided to defer the two-year associate degree programme till June 2022 in a meeting held in July.

According to a statement issued by the university on Sept 3, the "academic council after approving the policy has changed the nomenclature of the two-year BA, BSc and BCom degree programmes to Associate Degree in Arts, Associate Degree in Science, and Associate Degree in Commerce, respectively, for regular and private students".

'The implementation of the associate degree programme would end the option of private education'

It cites a resolution (adopted in the same meeting) of the academic council according to which "there will be no change in the course outline/syllabi, rules, and regulations as of now. The course outlines/syllabi which have already been offered in BA, BSc, and BCom will be offered in the Associate Degree Programme and the system of the examination for the Associate Degree Programme will be the same as the previous one.

"The academic council has constituted a committee that will discuss and deliberate the changes in the curriculum, including the examination system for the associate degree in the light of the guidelines given by the Higher Education Commission after getting approval of KU's academic council."

Students to suffer

Speaking to *Dawn*, senior college teachers slammed the KU decision, describing it as an anti-education step.

“The university can’t mislead people by saying that they are only changing the programme’s nomenclature. What they are not saying is that they have changed the programme’s status. It’s no longer a graduate degree programme,” said Prof Zafar Yar Khan, a senior teacher at Malir Govt Degree College and member of the Sindh Professors and Lecturers Association.

This decision would have far-reaching implications, especially on underprivileged students who earlier had an option to obtain a bachelor’s degree in two years, he added.

Explaining his point, he said students who got admitted to universities in Karachi every year were around 16,000, but more than 100,000 students graduated from colleges yearly. Many of them opted for private education.

“Several of these educational institutions are located in underprivileged areas such as Korangi, Nazimabad, Malir, North Karachi and New Karachi and students who sought admissions to these colleges are poor and can’t afford university education. They just need a bachelor’s degree to enter the job market.”

He said the implementation of the associate degree programme (a semester-based programme according to the Higher Education Commission criteria) would end the option of private education and a student with an associate degree would need admission to a university for a bachelor’s degree.

Seconding his opinion, Prof Muneer Alam of DJ Govt Science College questioned the immediate need for changing the ‘nomenclature of the degree’ since the university was making no change in the curriculum and other things.

“There should have been thorough consultation on the matter besides creating awareness of the new programme,” he said, terming the situation confusing, especially for students.

Court orders

In this respect, the college teachers referred to the Sindh High Court’s orders under which colleges were required to end two-year bachelor degree programmes and start four-year bachelor programmes.

“The hearing of this case still continues and we believe that till the time colleges upgrade their infrastructure and teaching capacity to start four-year bachelor degree programmes, Karachi University and other universities in Sindh with affiliated colleges should continue with the two-year bachelor programmes,” said Prof Alam, emphasising that students needed a bachelor’s degree and not a certificate for the associate degree to enter the job market.

A section of government officials, he pointed out, was misinterpreting these orders and the court had never suggested starting of the associate degree programme.

Upon contact, KU acting Vice Chancellor Prof Khalid Mahmood Iraqi reasoned that the secretary of boards and universities in a meeting held last month had directed vice chancellors of KU, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University, Lyari, Sindh University Jamshoro, and Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, to implement the associate degree programme.

“The government has also published advertisements in newspapers warning parents not to get their children enrolled in unauthorised BA, BSc and BCom programmes as these programmes have been discontinued under court orders and HEC’s directives. Besides, all universities in the country have adopted the associate degree programme,” he said.
(By Newspaper’s Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 06/09/2021)

Sindh ombudsman wants action against private institute for jeopardising students’ career

The Sindh ombudsman on Monday directed the provincial government to launch an inquiry and take action against a private educational institution for “jeopardising the career of students” by deciding to discontinue its four-year degree course of BSc in food sciences just after two years on grounds of “falling revenue”.

The decision from the Sindh ombudsman, many believe, would serve as a precedent in protecting rights of students and their parents mainly at private educational institutions where unilateral decisions by the respective managements often bring multiple challenges, including financial, for them.

“Ajaz Ali Khan, Ombudsman Sindh has directed the Secretary, Sindh Higher Education Commission and Chairman, Chartered Inspection & Evaluation Committee, HEC, to hold enquiry, take appropriate legal action against Dadabhoj Institute of Higher Education for jeopardising the career of students on the ground of financial losses and take immediate steps so that no private institution / university in future should arbitrarily decide the fate of students,” said a statement issued after the decision.

“The orders were passed on the complaint filed by Ms Rida Nazeer and other students in April 2021 alleging that management of Dadabhoj Institute of Higher Education arbitrarily decided to discontinue the four-year degree course of BSc Program in Food & Sciences Technology, after two years, after compelling them to sign the consent forms for transfer to other institutions though they were allowed admissions for a degree program of four years. They, therefore, solicited intervention for securing their academic career.”

The educational institution abandoned a four-year course after two years citing financial losses

The complaint, it said, was admitted and taken up with the authorities concerned. In response, Dadabhoj Institute of Higher Education in its reports while admitting the facts stated that due to a low number of admissions and falling revenue on account of not achieving the target of admission of at least 50 students, it was decided by the committee to close the programme, however, efforts were being made to transfer or accommodate the students in other universities, it added.

“The Sindh HEC was also of the view that though the Institute was facing difficulties in continuing the program due to falling revenue proceeds, it was required to serve the interest of the students and education, so that they did not suffer and that Dadabhoj Institute was also bound to ensure either to continue teaching remaining courses or get these students properly transferred or admitted in any of the other universities offering the said course.”

The investigation, the statement added, established that the institute discontinued the offered programme after two years, on the ground of falling revenue, without considering the interest of the students and thus violated the provisions of law.

The Sindh ombudsman directed the secretary, Sindh Higher Education Commission, and the chairman, Chartered Inspection & Evaluation Committee, HEC to hold an inquiry and take appropriate legal action against the institute for jeopardising the career of students on account of financial losses and also take immediate steps so that no private institution or university should arbitrarily decide the fate of students just on the basis of monetary losses. (By Imran Ayub Dawn, 13, 07/09/2021)

Classes restart at IBA after 18 months

Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi has restarted classes after a period of 18 months.

The students were welcomed on the campus after a period of online learning.

IBA Karachi's executive director Dr S. Akbar Zaidi, on this occasion, said that the first day of the IBA reopening after such a long time had been one of the most fantastic experiences, not just for him but for the entire IBA faculty, said an IBA press release issued here on Tuesday.

Speaking about innovations made on the digital front and the transition that was required to avoid any interruptions in learning, he said: "We set the tone in online learning in Pakistan by making use of new technologies. Many universities in Pakistan looked up to us as an example and tried to emulate us, following the measures we took in shifting from physical to remote learning."

The IBA with its quick measures in place ensured that the academic calendar was followed without any fail, making it one of the few institutes of higher learning in Pakistan which were able to wrap up its semesters on time, he said.

The IBA facilitated learning process of students during these ever-changing times in the form of upgraded IT infrastructure so that if any student faced network connectivity issues or power disruptions at home, they could take classes from campus during the Spring and Summer 2021 semesters.

For the outstation students, who had genuine concerns on returning home, the IBA hostels team assisted them by following all SOPs issued by the government.

About the challenges in virtual learning, Dr Zaidi said IBA reopening was not just about physical classes, but it was also about the vibe that one can never get online.

IBA registrar Dr Mohammad Asad Ilyas shed light on thought process of the IBA leadership on the campus reopening for students.

Measures should be in place to ensure SOPs are followed, but educational institutes should not be shut down, as already there has been a big loss of education in the country, he mentioned.

Among many measures taken by the institute, the IBA made it mandatory for its entire student body, staff and faculty members to get vaccinated.

Students could not enrol for the Fall 2021 semester without providing proof of vaccination to ensure that no one misses out on the vaccination. (By APP Dawn, 14, 08/09/2021)

Students' ingenuity finds way to beat fuel costs

The rising costs of petrol are a major headache for most consumers, but a certain group of students may have just the solution.

For a reasonable Rs300,000, your gas guzzler can be converted into an electric car. This is thanks to the ingenuity of students from the Usman Institute of Technology.

The Institute's Bachelor of Electrical (Major in Electronics) students have transformed an ordinary small 800cc car into an electric vehicle; a revolutionary development in Pakistan's automotive sector.

Ghulam Muhammad Lohar, Ahmed Zaheer Hussain, Syed Muhammad Hasnain Rizvi, Mubashir Hussain Shirazi, Muhammad Ata Mustafa, Shaheer Arif, and Sameer Basit Shah have developed battery packs and motor systems for electric cars under the aegis of their supervisor Dr Abid Karim.

The Suzuki Mehran car, a popular choice among the country's motorists, has been chosen to test this system. The little hatchback has been successfully converted and developed with the financial support of Syed Asif Hassan, a Pakistani living in the United States. Ghulam Mohammad Lohar, a member of the team that developed the electric car, told *The Express Tribune* that any small vehicle can be converted into an electric car.

What is unique about the system developed by the students is that the driver can still choose to run their combustion engine if he or she so desires, Lohar adds.

Ghulam Mohammad says that usually, electric cars do not drive on petrol and this limits their ability to travel long distances, such as between cities.

On the other hand, it is difficult for the common man to buy a new electric car from a mainstream manufacturer as the prices are astronomical.

"Considering the difficulties of people, we have developed a method to convert ordinary cars into electric ones and these can also be driven on petrol when needed," Ghulam Mohammed explains.

Elaborating on the details of the electric car and its batteries, he says the most important part of this invention is the battery pack which is made from imported lithium iron phosphate cells.

"Taking into account the average distance and the number of passengers, a 7kW battery pack has been developed, the capacity of which can be reduced or increased as required."

He claims that the minimum life of this battery is four to five years and it can complete its charging cycle four thousand times. "The cost of replacing the battery is about half the total cost of conversion," the inventor continues.

Ghulam Mohammad explains that it takes four to five hours for the battery to be fully charged - and that too by using just seven units of electricity.

It can be charged at a minimum of Rs40, depending on the domestic rate of electricity, and Rs140 depending on the higher tariff.

With an average tariff, the battery will charge Rs.100 and cover a distance of up to 80 km. He says that in a city like Karachi, commuting from home to office and returning is less than that.

The maximum speed of the car is 50 kilometres per hour, depending on the number of passengers and the weight of the vehicle.

Ordinary cars, which are widely used by local motorists, can also be converted to electric vehicles by using this technology.

"The motor installed in the car is waterproof. On the other hand, in case of continuous charging, an automatic system cuts in once the battery reaches full capacity," Ghulam Mohammed says.

He adds that the electric system is equipped with special sensors that block the power supply from the battery at a temperature of 60 degrees Celsius to stop it from overheating and, therefore, averts any safety hazards.

A prototype of the car is available at the UIT and can be inspected or tested by any citizen. The project has been completed in a period of six months.

The team of UIT is confident that this project will play an important role in the development of electric cars in Pakistan and the existing cars will easily be converted.

The creators of the vehicle believe that there are possibilities to partner with car manufacturers or new investors to commercialise the project. Plans are afoot to add more advanced features to the electric car.

(By Kashif Hussain The Express Tribune, 05, 12/09/2021)

Acting VCs yet to be removed as per court orders

The Sindh government is yet to implement its directives and cancel postings/transfers of all officials either holding an acting charge or working on the basis of Own Pay Scale (OPS), sources told Dawn.

The directives, they said, were issued recently to show compliance with the Sept 1 order of the Sindh High Court under which the government was required to remove all officials appointed on these terms and conditions within 10 days.

These government officials, they said, included eight (acting) vice chancellors of public sector universities.

According to a recent government notification, seven public sector universities out of 28 are currently headed by acting vice chancellors. These institutions include Sindh University, Jamshoro; Peoples University of Medical and Health Sciences for Women, Shaheed Benazirabad; Sukkur IBA University; Begum Nusrat Bhutto Women's University, Sukkur; Jinnah Sindh Medical University, Karachi; Dawood University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi; Government College University, Hyderabad and Shaheed Allah Buksh Soomro University of Art, Design and Heritage, Jamshoro.

Surprisingly, the notification marked as 'court orders' and 'most immediate' doesn't mention Karachi University's vice chancellor as 'acting' in the list.

Prof Khalid Mahmood Iraqi has been holding the acting charge of the university's vice chancellor since May, 2019.

"In pursuance of order dated 01.09.2021 passed by the honourable High Court of Sindh Karachi in CP No. D4434/2021 along with CP No. 2686/2021, D-2281, D-5812/2020 and CP No. 2573/2021, all postings on OPS basis and acting charge basis in all departments have been cancelled/withdrawn," says the Sept 13 notification by the department of universities and boards.

It further asks vice chancellors to ensure "compliance to the order of Honourable High Court of Sindh in letter and spirit" and cancel all such postings and transfers within their jurisdiction immediately.

The sources said the total number of officials either working on acting/additional charge or on OPS basis at government departments and public sector universities ran in hundreds.

"The government notification only exists on paper and none of the officials working on acting charge have been removed yet in public sector universities," said Prof Liaquat Ali Tunio, president of the Federation of All Pakistan Universities Academic Staff Association, Sindh chapter.

The director finance and the registrar at Quaid-i-Awam University of Engineering, Science and Technology in Shaheed Benazirabad district had been appointed on acting charge by the universities and boards department, he added.

University teachers, he said, had been demanding appointment of regular vice chancellors and sacking of retired officials for a long time, but the government had shown no interest in the matter.

"It suits the government to ignore merit and bring in officials on an acting charge as such officials are ready to do whatever officially instructed. But, this practice continuing for a long time has destroyed institutions and created a lot of frustration among staffers who want to apply for key posts through the legal selection process."

It is pertinent to recall here that the SHC, hearing a set of identical petitions early this month, had directed provincial secretaries to ensure that all officials working on an OPS basis and holding acting charge be removed within 10 days.

It also questioned the award of additional charge to junior officers.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 14/09/2021)

Sindh education minister rejects Single National Curriculum

Provincial Education Minister Syed Sardar Shah on Monday rejected the Single National Curriculum (SNC) telling the Sindh Assembly that education and curriculum were provincial subjects and the provinces had a right to teach the students in their respective mother tongue.

He was replying to a point of order raised by Leader of the Opposition Haleem Adil Shaikh, who wanted to know if the provincial government was closing down over 10,000 schools across the province.

Describing the SNC as 'curriculum martial law', Mr Shah said that the federal government had not taken the Sindh government on board while preparing the curriculum and wanted to give published books to the province.

"In the new curriculum, they [federal government] are also asking the students about their three-year performance," he added.

Opposition leader asks why govt is closing down schools when 6.9m kids are already out of school

He said that the federal government showed 'hastiness' to impose the SNC.

"The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf in its manifesto promised to impose the SNC without having a look at the Constitution according to which education is purely a provincial subject. This not a matter of *manshoor* [manifesto] but *dastoor* [constitution]," the minister remarked.

He said that the provincial government supported the federal government in enforcing the SNC for science subjects only, making it clear that Urdu and Sindhi were compulsory in the province.

"Punjab has every right to communicate its students teachings of Baba Bulleh Shah and other intellectuals so as we [Sindh] have the right to include Hoshu Sheedi and others in our curriculum," he said.

In his point of order, Opposition Leader Sheikh said that the PTI-led federal government aimed at implementing a uniform education system for rich and poor in the country. "Why it is not being implemented in Sindh?" he asked.

'19,000 schools are without toilet'

The opposition leader said that it was reported in the media that the provincial government had decided to close down 10,000 schools across the province.

Coming down heavily on the provincial government, he said that over 6.9 million children were out of school in the province. "Why are these schools being closed when such a large number of children are already out of school and what action was taken against the responsible if these institutes were established unnecessarily?" he questioned.

He said that the condition of schools was very poor as 26,000 schools did not have the facility of drinking water and 19,000 were without toilets, adding that there was no electricity in over 31,000 schools.

The opposition leader also alleged that desks for schools were being purchased on exorbitant price of Rs29,000 each.

In reply to the opposition leaders' point of order, the minister said that the education department was going to close down at least 7,000 non-viable schools across the province as they could not be termed as schools.

"Numerous schools were established unnecessarily during the regime of President Pervez Musharraf and Chief Minister Arbab Ghulam Rahim," he said and disclosed that a village had 64 schools and most of them were being used as autaq or cattle pens.

Minister Shah said that there were even one-room schools in the province, adding that all non-viable institutes would be closed down. He said that out of total 47,000 schools in the province 39,000 were primary and only 4,000 were post-primary schools. "Around 5,000 schools do not have even infrastructure," he added.

He said that around 11,000 schools had been listed to be closed down but 7,000 of them were entirely non-viable.

Low enrolment in colleges

While replying to lawmakers' written and verbal queries during Question Hour, the education minister admitted that enrolment in colleges was low as per population and said that facilities should be expanded to increase the enrolment.

To a question asked by Nusrat Sehar Abbasi of the Grand Democratic Alliance, he said that 62,336 girls were enrolled in 46 colleges of Hyderabad, Larkana, Mirpurkhas and Sukkur.

The minister said that there were 335 government colleges in Sindh and most of them were located in urban areas, making it very difficult for the students of rural areas.

"We are taking measures to establish hostel and to increase number of colleges especially for girls," he added.

Mohammad Hussain of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan pointed out several discrepancies in the written replies and annexure forwarded by the education department.

The education minister assured the opposition member that action would be taken against the responsible officials.

250 buses being procured for Karachi

Parliamentary secretary for transport department, Ghanwer Khan Isran, said that the work on the Red Line bus rapid transit project was going to be started later this year or in the beginning of 2022.

Responding to a calling-attention notice given by Sarwat Fatima of the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan, he said that 250 buses along with electric buses were being procured for Karachi.

The TLP lawmaker said that there was no mass transit in the city, adding that private buses were also in a dilapidated condition. "It is difficult for people to travel in Karachi. There are two million private vehicles which cause thousands of problems including pollution," she added.

She said that the federal government had also promised but failed to inaugurate Green Line on Aug 14.

Later, Speaker Agha Siraj Durrani adjourned the house to Tuesday.

(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 14/09/2021)

Education in crisis

An education crisis exists in various provinces of the country, particularly in Sindh. It has multiple dimensions like the large number of school drop-outs, shortage of teachers in government schools, absentee teachers, primary and secondary schools functioning in one room, schools without buildings where students are taught in all seasons in the open, inadequate number of colleges in rural areas and even these have few lecturers.

Now the provincial education minister has said in the Sindh Assembly that lecturers are unwilling to serve in rural colleges and they use political connections to get transfer to colleges in urban areas. He also hinted at appointment of well-connected people in the provincial education department in various capacities. Such bungling is common knowledge. The minister has only brought on record some of the malpractices in the education department. He said there were 39,000 primary schools and only 4,000 secondary schools in the province. This gives an idea of the importance that the government attaches to basic education. He said the government planned to increase the number of colleges. However, experience shows it is the quality of education that matters, not the number of educational institutions.

The minister further said there were around 10,000 non-functional schools in Sindh, and these schools would be closed down in phases. He said many one-room schools had been established during the Musharraf reign. He did not explain why money continued to be spent on these schools over the past 13 years of the PPP rule in the province. He made it clear that the government did not intend to merge these schools with other schools when he said buildings of these schools would be handed over to the health department. The poor state of education in the province contradicts the tall claims being made by the authorities. The educational footprint in the province is shallow.

(By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 15/09/2021)

Grace marks

THE decision to promote all students awaiting the results of their board exams by awarding grace marks is likely to raise doubts. Though the move may appear fair to many in light of the current situation in which frequent school closures have disrupted studies, there is also the issue of how well the students — or at least a number of them — can cope in a higher grade. The Inter-Provincial Education Ministers Conference decided on Monday to award students who had appeared in their board exams for Matric or Intermediate but who scored below the pass mark, 33pc to make them eligible for the next stage. It was also decided that students would be awarded 50pc grace marks in practical examinations. This was a decision taken by education ministers in all the provinces. There is no doubt that students, teachers and the education authorities have faced unprecedented challenges in the outgoing academic year, but there is now a greater challenge to face as unprepared students are thrust into the next academic session which will obviously require a more advanced understanding of their subjects than they had in the previous grade. Besides, it will be seen as unfair by those students who, despite the difficulties, worked hard to earn their grade.

Surely this state of affairs should lead our education departments to think deeply about how to deal with a challenge that is likely to recur if the Covid situation does not improve and school closures remain frequent. In addition to devising a marking scheme that is more reflective of students' true capabilities, it might want to take lessons from other countries whose solid educational infrastructure has made access to remote learning via laptops, smartphones and high-speed internet easy for secondary students. This will not be easy in our context and new, innovative ways of teaching large numbers of students will also have to be found. The awarding of grace marks must be a one-time concession. Education departments know the challenges of Covid by now and should plan accordingly.

(By Editorial, Dawn, 06, 15/09/2021)

In a first, NED to retest candidates after majority fail

Intermittent school closures that spanned over the course of the past one and a half years of the pandemic have now started to reflect in the bleak outcome, as examination results show slumping grades.

This is particularly true for the entrance test conducted by NED University of Engineering and Technology, which suffered a further 10 per cent decrease in success rate as compared to last year.

Owing to which, the engineering university has made the unprecedented decision to re-conduct its entrance examinations, in a bid to offer aspiring students a second chance.

Out of the 14,337 candidates appearing for the Bachelor of Engineering test for about 2,600 seats, only 42 per cent passed the test and the majority 58 per cent failed.

Comparatively, last year, over 52 per cent of candidates managed to pass the test, out of the total of 9,200 candidates who appeared for it. Many of them cleared the test without sitting for board examinations. However, this year the number has increased to more than 14,000, which is a record in the history of NED.

Among the candidates who took part in the test this year were 9,964 boys and 4,373 girls, and the successful candidates included 3,731 boys and 2,299 girls.

"Last year, 100 self-financing seats remained vacant, and this year the results have dropped further," said NED Vice Chancellor Dr Muhammad Tufail. "Being given another chance, students who have failed the test can re-participate by depositing less than 50 per cent admission fee of only Rs1,500," he added.

According to Tufail, this is also an opportunity for candidates who have passed the first test to improve their results. If the result in the second test does not improve, then the student's merit for admission will be counted on the basis of the first result. "Students who for some reason could not participate in the first test or did not submit the B form can also take advantage of this opportunity. The tests will be conducted from September 25 to 27."

In addition to that, according to test data obtained from NED University, the highest number of students to pass entrance exam in the Sindh Board of Education have been those from the Karachi Boards. Out of the total 10,290 candidates who appeared for the entrance exams from the board, 4,384 passed the test. 42.6 per cent students of Karachi Board passed the NED test while the result of any other board of Sindh did not exceed 31 per cent, including the Hyderabad board which was only second to Karachi.

Out of 905 students from Hyderabad Board, 285 passed the test and the result was 31 per cent, while from Sukkur Board, 115 out of 486 students passed the test and the result was 23.6 per cent. From Larkana Board of Education, 125 out of 501 students passed and the result was 25 per cent. Similarly, 547 students from Mirpur Khas Board participated in the entrance test and out of them 137 students passed and the result was 25 per cent. While out of 263 students from Nawabshah Board 56 passed and the result was 29 per cent. On the other hand, the number of candidates from Federal Board, Cambridge and Aga Khan Board was limited. However, their results were better. From Cambridge Board, 641 students appeared in the entrance test and 551 passed. Similarly, 98 out of 128 passed from Aga Khan Board while 331 out of 331 participating students passed from Federal Board.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 18/09/2021)

Sindh has rejected 'unilateral' imposition of Single National Curriculum: Murad

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said under the 18th Amendment the formation of curriculum is a provincial subject but the federal government wants to impose it unilaterally.

"That's why my government declined to adopt it," he said while referring to the federal government's Single National Curriculum plan.

He was talking to a 29-member delegation of the Punjab Assembly comprising 18 MPAs of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, six of Pakistan Muslim League-N and four of Pakistan Peoples Party here at the CM House.

To a question, the chief minister said that a majority of students in Sindh were receiving education in Sindhi medium.

Tells a visiting Punjab Assembly delegation that Karachi's population was not fairly counted in 2017 census

"Education in mother tongue is considered to be the most effective tool of teaching, therefore, our preference is to make curriculum accordingly," he said and added his government had already worked hard on overhauling the curriculum.

The CM said that the federal government was trying to impose its curriculum unilaterally and the provincial government had already framed its own curriculum and would be improving it further with the passage of time.

Donors agree to finance desalination plants

To another question, Mr Shah said that in the last census held in 2017 the population of Karachi was shown at 16 million, which was wrong. Therefore, he said, he had been fighting the case of the metropolis so that its original population could be counted to get its due share in the national resources.

Replying to a question, Mr Shah said that water shortage in the city was a genuine issue.

"Karachi gets water from two sources — the Indus and the Hub dam. Our rivers were facing water shortage so reliance on the Indus has become unreliable and Hub dam has a limited source of water. We have decided to tap seawater source by installing desalination plants," he said.

He added that the donor agencies had agreed to finance the projects.

Talking about state of peace, Mr Shah said that Karachi stood at number six on the list of most dangerous cities when the Pakistan Peoples Party came into power. A vigorous clean-up operation was launched and the writ of the state was established and now the same city of Karachi is at 136th in the crime index of the world, he added.

"We restored peace in the city first and then started reconstruction of dilapidated infrastructure," Mr Shah said, adding: "We have reconstructed and widened Sharea Faisal and Tariq Road for the first time after the tenure of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. We have constructed a number of other roads, flyovers and underpasses and still have to do a lot of work," he said.

Free heart, cancer treatment

Mr Shah told the lawmakers that his government had made the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD), National Institute of Child Health (NICH) and Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC) as the “best” health facilities.

“Our NICVD and JPMC’s CyberKnife hospitals are providing free-of-cost best services. The NICVD is the only hospital in the region which performs angiographies, angioplasties and bypasses free of cost and CyberKnife providing treatment of cancer free of cost,” he said.

The chief minister invited the delegation to visit Thar and get a personal experience to witness the work done by the Sindh government.

“Now, Thar has become a power producing [area] of the country and its credit goes to Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, who had initiated coal mining and coal-fired power projects which could not take place in those days, but initial work was done,” he said.

Mr Shah appreciated the MPAs of Punjab and said that such visits would help to develop political coordination and strengthen democracy.
(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 23/09/2021)

SC directs city managers to take NED’s help

The Supreme Court (SC) directed the *Karachi* Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) on Thursday to submit a feasibility report pertaining to the widening of Mehmoodabad Nullah in PECHS Block-VI, after consulting with NED University of Engineering and Technology.

A three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed and comprising Justice Ijazul Ahsan and Justice Qazi Muhammad Amin Ahmed was hearing the KMC’s petition at the SC Karachi Registry.

The KMC’s counsel Advocate Omar Lakhani contended that the PECHS had built a whole market on the nullah’s land. “Due to the presence of 69 shops, the KMC is unable to widen the nullah,” argued the counsel. He added that the KMC wanted to widen the Mehmoodabad Nullah, but the PECHS was not allowing it to do so.

The counsel requested the court that the case may be heard along with the Gujjar Nullah case.

The court denied the KMC’s request to club this petition with the Gujjar Nullah case and sought

CJP Gulzar Ahmed remarked that the case would be heard separately. The court sought a report on the widening of the Mehmoodabad Nullah. The court directed the KMC to submit NED University’s feasibility report on the matter.

Gujjar Nullah Case

The Gujjar Nullah case also echoed during Thursday’s hearing. The KMC’s counsel said that the apex court had ordered the widening of nullahs but the SHC was issuing restraining orders. “Not only restraining orders but also contempt of court is being imposed on our officers.”

The KMC’s counsel prayed the court to restrict the SHC from issuing restraining orders and initiating contempt action over demolitions. The CJP asked the counsel to file a petition in this regard and said the apex court would look into the matter.

Separately, in its written order on the Gujjar and Orangi nullah cases the bench reiterated that the Sindh government’s position of insufficient funds for rehabilitation of affectees was not acceptable. The court directed the Sindh government to ensure rehabilitation and resettlement of affectees within one year.

Meanwhile, the bench has issued its written orders on the construction of two private hospitals on welfare plots in Clifton and encroachment on government lands in Jacobabad.

The top court sought a list of welfare plots in the city on which unauthorised buildings have been erected and issued notices to the KDA DG, the Karachi commissioner, city administrator and heads of all the cantonment boards. In its written order pertaining to the occupation of government lands in Jacobabad, the court sought replies from the parties accused of setting up a school, house and a hotel on land of a veterinary hospital.

(By Nasir Butt The Express Tribune, 04, 24/09/2021)

Sindh govt outsources 32 schools to private parties

The Sindh government signed agreements on Monday to outsource 32 schools to private sector education management organisations (EMOs) in the province.

According to the agreements, 32 schools, including 13 USAID schools, will be outsourced to EMOs formed under USAID’s Sindh Basic Education Programme (SBEP).

The pacts were signed at a ceremony held at the CM House. School Education Secretary Akbar Laghari and office-bearers from three successful EMOs — Sindh Madressatul Islam Board (SMB), Dare-i-Arqam Schools (Pvt.) Ltd. and MDZed (Pvt) Ltd — signed the agreements to manage the schools for 10 years.

The SMB will manage four newly-constructed schools through USAID support and 10 other Sindh government schools in Malir and West districts of Karachi.

The Dare-i-Arqam Schools will run four newly-constructed schools and four grouped schools in district Qambar-Shahdaddot, while MDZed (Pvt) Ltd will manage five newly-constructed schools and five other Sindh government schools in the districts of Kashmore and Jacobabad.

The US government through USAID is contributing \$159.2 million for the SBEP whereas the Sindh government is also providing \$10m as cost-sharing for the same.

The event was also attended by Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, Education Minister Syed Sardar Shah, United States Consul General Mark Stroh and other officials from the USAID.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 28/09/2021)

A much-needed addition to city's lacklustre science landscape

Once you do find this wonder of science hidden in the concrete jungle, you wouldn't want to leave it. Chances are that you'll have to be dragged out if they notice you still looming around at closing time. But there is also a good chance that no one will even find you for there are several nice and comfy places to hide in The Dawood Foundation (TDF) Magnificience Centre (MSC).

There is the tree house, the witch house, the mazes and so many play areas for you to lose yourself in on the premises.

The Dawood Foundation (TDF) Magnificience Centre (MSC) is the country's first modern and interactive science centre housing hundreds of interactive science exhibits, demonstrations and educational programmes.

It has been built at a place behind I.I. Chundrigar Road in Railway Quarters where there used to be several railway warehouses owned by the Rally Brothers. Earlier, this place was used for storing industrial raw material to be sent out to the rest of the country through the railway tracks nearby.

TDF interactive museum houses hundreds of interactive science exhibits, demonstrations and educational programmes

The fortress-like brick wall around the warehouse has been restored. Its original teak wood windows and doors have been cleaned and polished. Of course the warehouse — which also had plenty of asbestos, a health hazard — was torn down. In its place now stands a custom design state-of-the-art ground-plus-three floor building. Stepping inside, you also become a part of TDF CEO Sabrina Dawood's vision and mission of empowering visitors with a better understanding of scientific thinking. "It is our contribution towards making science accessible for everyone, elevating science literacy in the country, and inspiring the spirit of inquiry among our younger generation," she says.

Her journey in this direction started with the science exhibitions at the Dawood Public School, which also grew into the Magnificience Studio at Dawood Centre near the PIDC Bridge. And now that studio that has grown into an entire building. It is a museum, gallery, theatre, park all rolled into one.

Just like the wall, the old trees at the place have also been preserved. "We built around them," says Sabrina as you notice all the labels and information about the trees and shrubs growing in their 'Science Garden'. It's about to rain and you see swarms of dragon flies. "They'll gobble up all the mosquitoes," she says. A pretty green and white butterfly flutters about the greenery before settling upon a blossom by a pond as the CEO claps her hands with glee. She encourages you to venture inside the green maze created amid bushes and you feel lost the moment you enter it. "Go on, it can also teach you about making the right decisions in life," she says as she chases you inside. There is also a hamster wheel for humans in one corner besides the swings, ladders, slides and tree house.

Heaven for experiential learners

Inside, there are more inclusive, informal learning spaces. Each floor of MSC is dedicated to different science topics and themes, including the human body, sound, light, optical illusions, transportation, forces and motion, and renewable energy. A wetland mangrove ecosystem is installed right in the central court or the atrium.

Around it there is the theme of a Karachi neighbourhood or mohalla with roadside restaurant models, there is an area for the youngest of learners, an area showing how construction is done, another corner dedicated to health, another that introduces you to the water world and yet another teaching about transportation. An entire truck decorated in truck art has lots of magnetic letters and words lying beside it for you to come up with your own catchy phrase or verse to put on it. The rickshaw has a seat that vibrates for you to learn about this not so smooth means of transport. It's a heaven for experiential learners.

The first floor has a huge beating human heart and lots more to teach about the human body such as its functions, senses, etc. There is also the illusion section, a section dedicated to light, an auditorium for science shows, and much more. The second floor is about energy, forces, motion and mathematics. Meanwhile, the third floor, planned to teach about the environment, is still under construction.

It's a labour of love with attention and care given to every little detail. Even the cafeteria downstairs has cups and saucers screwed to the walls and spoons and forks strung together to look like wind chimes and big silver cauldrons being used as planters.

Ms Dawood is of the opinion that one should be able to take one's family out to other places too for recreation besides shopping malls and restaurants. "But here the museums keep closing. The aquarium and planetarium was also closed down. But places such as these and stadiums and libraries are places where children get to learn etiquette and manners. They can learn together as a family. I want students, teachers and parents to come here. I want this place to be used for holding meetings, workshops and lectures. Learning should be fun and should be ongoing.

Not-for-profit

"As a not-for-profit organisation, we rely on our fellow citizens to help us in making this a successful and sustainable endeavour by offering their time, effort and resources to it. We hope that the people of Karachi and beyond can play an active role in making MSC a hub of learning and a catalyst in developing the country's science capital," she concluded.

The centre is open on weekdays (Monday to Thursday) from 8am to 4.30pm. It is closed on Fridays and the timing for Saturday and Sunday are 10am to 7.30pm. The price per ticket is Rs700 per person on weekdays and Rs800 per person on weekends.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 04/10/2021)

KU dean removed on court order gets charge again

Despite a Sindh High Court order directing the government to remove all officials working on an acting charge, the Karachi University (KU) recently saw another controversial appointment on a key administrative post, it emerged on Monday.

Sources said KU Vice Chancellor Prof Khalid Mahmood Iraqi, who himself is on acting charge since May 2019, chose to allow a professor “to look after the dean science office” after first removing her as the dean-science the same day.

This strategy, the sources said, was adopted in an attempt to show compliance to a Sept 16 SHC order under which the government was required to hold fresh interviews for the post of dean-science within two weeks.

A Sept 27 university order, signed by the registrar, reads: “The High Court of Sindh vide its order dated 16-9-2021 in CP N0.D-162 of 2021 was pleased to set aside the notification SO(U)U&B/UoK/2-35/2018/273 dated 4th June, 2020 of the Secretary, Universities, and Boards Department approved by the competent authority i.e. the Chief Minister of Sindh regarding appointment of Dean, Faculty of Science, University of Karachi.

“Consequently, Office Order No.B/Estt. (T) (Dean Faculty of Science) 2020-902 dated 03-11-2020 pertaining to the appointment of Prof Dr Nasira Khatoon as Dean, Faculty of Science, University of Karachi, is hereby withdrawn.”

The same day (Sept 27), the university issued another office order according to which “the competent authority is pleased to allow Prof Dr Nasira Khatoon, Department of Zoology, to look after the routine affairs of the office of the Dean, Faculty of Science, with effect from the date of joining till the appointment of a permanent Dean, Faculty of Science, by the competent authority.”

According to the sources, the university currently has an acting registrar, an acting controller examination, an acting dean of arts and social sciences, who is also looking after the faculties of law and management, besides an acting vice chancellor.

The director of KU's Office of Research Innovation and Commercialisation has an additional charge.

Last year in May, the sources said, Prof Tabassum Mahboob completed her term as dean-science following which KU VC sent universities and boards secretary a list of three names (Prof M. Arshad Azmi, Prof M. Abid Hasnain and Prof Nasira Khatoon) for the post.

His letter suggested that Prof Azmi being “the senior most professor is a suitable candidate to be considered for appointment as dean faculty of science for the period with effect from May 3, 2020 till his retirement on June, 9, 2020.”

In response, the sources said, what was communicated to the university took most teachers by surprise.

The notification stated that the chief minister exercising his powers under the Sindh Universities, Institutes, Laws (Amendment) Act, 2018, appointed Prof M. Abid Hasnain as the dean-science up to his date of superannuation (03-11-2020) and Prof Nasira Khatoon, dean faculty of science with effect from 04-11-2020 up to her date of superannuation, i.e. 06-12-2022.

“This has never happened in KU's history. Even if a teacher serves as a dean for a few days and gets retired, the university is required under rules to send names of three senior most professors again to make the process fair and transparent, allowing other teachers in the seniority list to participate in it,” said a KU teacher, adding that this showed malafide intentions.

Prof S. Jamil Hasan Kazmi, a senior KU teacher, challenged the appointment of Prof Nasira as dean-science in the SHC and won the case last month.

The court in its order dated Sep 16, 2021, stated “appointments are to be made by the government in statutory bodies, autonomous bodies, semi-autonomous bodies, regulatory authorities etc through the transparent and competitive manner and not otherwise.”

It directed the government to hold fresh interviews for dean-science's appointment at KU “on merit under the law within two weeks from the date of this order”.

VC defends decision

The KU VC defended his decision of allowing the same professor to look after the dean-science office whose appointment on the same position had been cancelled on court orders, arguing that an acting charge was different from that of a “look-after charge”.

“We withdrew her appointment notification as dean-science on court's order and later allowed her to look after the day-to-day affairs of the dean, science faculty's office because she (Prof Nasira) was the senior most professor in the science faculty under KU 1999 rules.”

An acting official could attend meetings of statutory bodies but an official “looking after” office affairs couldn't, he said.

About the government notification that was later challenged in court, he said: “I don't exactly remember the year but we do have a precedent wherein appointments of two professors for administrative positions were notified in one letter.”

The secretary, universities and boards had sought a list of senior most professors in the science faculty from KU and the same had been sent to him. Nothing more had been communicated to the university yet, he said.

(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 05/10/2021)

Schools to open with 100pc attendance from tomorrow

The Sindh school education and literacy department has allowed all public and private educational institutions to operate with 100 per cent attendance from Monday (tomorrow).

A notification issued on Saturday in pursuance of the decision of the National Command Operation Centre's meeting held on Oct 7 said that vaccination of students of age 12 and above had been made obligatory, therefore, all the directors of school education, district education officers, taluka education officers, headmasters/headmistresses and Director General of Inspection and Registration of private educational institutions were asked to make necessary efforts for 100pc vaccination of student till Oct 31.

“If any student is found unvaccinated during a random visit of any institution by the administrative team, the panel action will be initiated against the school administration,” the notification said.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 10/10/2021)

Delayed results: Minister's call jeopardises Sindh's academic calendar

It has been alleged that the start of the new academic session at colleges across Sindh has been delayed owing to certain decisions made by Minister of Universities and Boards Ismail Rahu.

It was per his directives that Secretary Universities and Boards Mansoor Abbas was made to give temporary charge of Larkana Board of Education in Karachi, to a Deputy Controller of grade-18.

The new appointee however, failed to release results of science and arts group timely, causing matriculation scores to be delayed by 18 days compared to last year and two-and-a-half months per the decision of this year's steering committee.

Owing to which, colleges in the province have been unable to schedule their first-year intermediate intakes, putting the entire academic calendar in jeopardy.

Last year, results of Matriculation Science Group were released on September 21, while results of the Matriculation General Group were released on September 9.

However, steering committee of education department had bound Matriculation Board Karachi to release results within 45 days this year after the completion of the examinations.

Matriculation examinations in Karachi started from July 8, 2021 this year and only Physics and Mathematics papers were conducted in the light of the decision for optional subjects. Practical examinations were also taken a few days after the theoretical papers.

Despite the passing of more than 2.5 months since, the delayed results for matriculation science and general groups have resulted in an extraordinary delay for intermediate first year admissions in colleges across Sindh including Karachi.

It is unprecedented for Sindh's students to remain unadmitted in colleges despite passing of first ten days of October. It may be recalled that admissions for first-year intermediate started from September 25 last year.

Moreover, the students who graduate matriculation from the Aga Khan Board of Education also apply for inter-first year admissions which are already subject to matriculation results. The Aga Khan Board of Education announced the results of matriculation about a month ago.

However, students aspiring for admission in government colleges who have matriculated from the Aga Khan Board are also deprived of these admissions.

Thus, millions of students in Sindh, including Karachi, are being affected by what appears to be a misguided decision by the Minister for Universities and Boards Ismail Rahu, which is also in violation of the court order.

At the intermediate level, the academic future of these students has been put in jeopardy. Due to delay in matriculation results, intermediate first-year admissions will now likely start in November, pushing the start of the academic session to December.

Only a few months after which students will also be expected to appear in their first-year exams; making conclusion of the syllabus a race against time. Addressing the unusual delay, Matriculation Board's Acting Director of Examinations Zaheer-ud-Din Bhutto, who has been posted on OPS basis, said that many formulas are being applied simultaneously for preparation, which has led to repeated revision of results.

The acting director added that he himself has also been examining the results of each subject under the formula, which is taking time. He further said that only the results of Matric General Group can be announced before October 20, but it will take more time to release the results of Matriculation Sciences.

It is significant mentioning here that according to a verdict of the Sindh High Court issued early in September, all self-appointed OPS officers were to be removed from the posts which they had appointed themselves on.

While officers who had been posted on the OPS by the Universities and Boards Department were the only ones saved from dismissal. The said Deputy Controller however, was posted from Larkana to Karachi OPS after the Sindh High Court's orders, by the Secretary Universities and Board Mansoor Abbas on September 7.

In this regard, The Express Tribune tried to reach out to the Secretary many a times of his comments on the matter. He eventually responded via a WhatsApp message, claiming the situation to be a hindrance in the way of meeting court orders regarding removal of OPS officers.

"This why the department is not dismissing the officers posted on OPS in the education boards who were appointed by the Universities and Boards Department itself," he added.

However, Abbas did not respond to or address the questions pertaining the department's substandard performance, or how the transfer of secretaries of universities and boards is also expected to happen soon; pushing the card for Zubair Pervez take control of the department.

On the other hand, an attempt was also made to contact the Minister for Universities and Boards Ismail Rahu and the same questions were delivered to him, but the minister chose not to establish any contact with the media.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 11/10/2021)

SHC orders setting up of girls medical college at Mohatta Palace

The Sindh High Court on Wednesday ruled that Qasr-e-Fatima, commonly known as Mohatta Palace, would be used to set up a medical and dental college for girls.

The order came on a long-standing dispute over the heritage property of late Fatima Jinnah in Clifton.

A single-judge bench of SHC headed by Justice Zulfiqar Ahmad Khan ordered that the college would also have a hostel as both the plaintiffs and defendants agreed to amicably settle the dispute and accorded their consent to establish the medical and dental college.

The matter was adjourned till Nov 1 as both sides also recommended the names of some retired judges and prominent doctors and relatives of late Miss Jinnah to be part of a trust to run the affair of the proposed medical college.

However, the fate of the Mohatta Palace Museum, which is funded by the government, remains unclear.

A suit was filed in 1971 by Hussain Waliji, a relative of Miss Jinnah about the administration of her moveable and immovable properties including Qasr-e-Fatima.

After the death of Mr Waliji, his son Amir Ali became the plaintiff, but he had also passed away during the pendency of the suit and then his legal heirs had become the part of proceedings.

The litigation was initiated after the award of a succession certificate of such properties to Shireen Jinnah, the only surviving sister of Fatima Jinnah after her death on July 10, 1967. The Shireen Jinnah Charitable Trust was made as one of the defendants in the lawsuit.

On the last hearing, lawyers for both sides — relatives of Fatima Jinnah (plaintiffs) and the Shireen Jinnah Charitable Trust (defendants) — had informed the bench that they had considered the matter and progressed to amicably settle the long-standing dispute with regard to the property left by Miss Jinnah, and had exchanged certain proposals.

A provincial law officer also submitted that now both sides were moving towards implementation of the wishes of late Miss Jinnah as translated through the trust deed where it was desired that the premises of Qasr-e-Fatima will be used for the establishment of a modern medical college exclusively for girls and an attached hospital for free treatment of underprivileged persons/patients.

Thereafter, the bench had asked the provincial law officer to go through the various orders of the court and file a statement as to what assistance could be provided to achieve the ends of using the property in question as per the desires of its owners Fatima Jinnah and Shireen Jinnah.

Earlier, a counsel had drawn the attention of the bench to an order of the SHC passed in 1996 to dig out other assets left by Miss Jinnah which were allegedly handed out to the trustees through the declaration instrument on which a report was filed by the official assignee in the same year listing certain personal properties of Quaid-i-Azam and Miss Jinnah.

They sought an updated report from the official assignee in this regard, thus the bench had directed the official assignee to provide an updated list in this matter to reach to a just conclusion.

One of the counsel had also referred to an earlier order of the SHC issued in 1993 in terms of which it was ordered that the provincial government would deposit a sum of Rs61,188,000 with the official assignee as tentative sale price of Qasr-e-Fatima and asserted that upon the request of the Sindh government the property was handed over to it for repair and maintenance only.

The lawyer further referring to various earlier orders, pointed out that initial sum of Rs61 million through a cheque was deposited with the court nazir in 1994 by the provincial government that undertook to deposit the balance amount of Rs188,000 within a week, but it had deposited the remaining amount in 1996. Using such amount, the nazir had purchased Defence Savings Certificates (DSC) and Special Savings Certificates (SSC) which were still lying with him.

The nazir had informed the court that the principle profit accrued on DSC was Rs608,500 till Nov 2, 2004, and SSC was Rs399,959,500 till Jan 16, 2013.

He further submitted in a report filed in September 2015 that the profit on the DSC for the period of 10 years and on the SSC for the period of two and half years was due.

It may be recalled that on a previous order, the bench had granted a request of the plaintiff's counsel with regard to calling the property as Qasr-e-Fatima instead of Mohatta Palace in government documents.

It had ordered the provincial government and other defendants to ensure that the said property continued to be named, tagged, labelled and described as Qasr-e-Fatima only and all the documents wherein any other name was used to describe the said property should be corrected.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 14/10/2021)

Children's education badly affected due to pandemic: survey

A report on losses students suffered because of the Covid-19 pandemic — Measuring Learning Losses due to Covid-19 — prepared by the Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) with the support of United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) was launched, virtually via Zoom, on Wednesday.

The study is the first step towards collecting gender disaggregated and focused evidence to assist the government as it grapples with impacts of the pandemic.

The estimates reported are from a survey conducted across 16 rural districts of Pakistan — four in each province — using the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan tools.

The survey covers a total of 9,392 households, 25,448 children aged 3-16 and 21,589 children aged 5-16 (43 per cent girls and 57pc boys), 457 government schools and 198 private schools.

According to the report, enrolment for the 6-16 age group has dropped by two per cent in 2021 as compared to enrolment for the same age group in 2019.

During the launch, Unicef Pakistan Education Chief Ellen Kalmthout said that the report was a big step forward to think upon what could be done to bring children back to school, especially post Covid-19 while also creating alternative learning pathways for children. "At the end, children do need schools. They can't learn on their own."

During school closures, parents/caregivers stepped up to support their children's learning. Support from household members is reported at 63pc by children as a very positive response.

About 32pc children reported that their schools provided them with learning materials during the closure periods, while 58pc reported that their school management/teachers/head-teachers never reached out to them.

About 32pc reported that they took some learning support from Pakistan Television (PTV) TeleSchool programmes and 40pc of children who had smartphones available in their households reported that they used them for continuing learning.

Speaking about this, M Ali Kemal, the economic policy adviser at the SDG support unit, ministry of planning and development and reform, added that 63pc of the children were getting support from their families and over 22 million children were not going to school.

"The education of mothers is very important as they can teach their children in early years. The overall situation is bleak, but we are looking for solutions for out-of-school children that should also include communities," he said.

The learning losses for children in grade three were significant. Class three children who can read an Urdu story dropped from 19pc in 2019 to 15pc in 2021, who can read English sentences from 21pc in 2019 to eight per cent in 2021 and who can solve two-digit division from 17pc to 10pc.

Kim Bradford Smith from Education Team Leader at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) said: "While the report demonstrates the need to reorient the education system, we need to focus on getting foundational learning rights, address inequalities by focusing on the most marginalised and the poorest.

Similarly, Senior Research Fellow at IDEAS Pakistan and the Interim Dean of School of Education, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Dr Faisal Bari said that the study rightly reports people with no access to technology but there is a need to do more research on family support as parents who are engaged in jobs are not able to support their children.

It was concluded that while the study reveals a gloomy picture of learning losses, programmes must be devised to support the learning of all children specially focusing on young children and girls, especially grade three for foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN).

Education and digital inequities must be tackled through targeted social protection programmes (Ehsaas) for all children, especially girls. Parents are active stakeholders in children's education and households demonstrate resilience. Ed-Tech (education technology) should be expanded for its potential to provide solutions for improved interactive learning. Facilities in schools need urgent maintenance incorporating new standards for safe schools with non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) to tackle such unforeseen pandemic in future.

Federal Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood was the chief guest on the occasion. He said that Covid-19 had exacerbated the already existing challenge of learning poverty. "The learning losses study will help the government work towards improving the learning levels of children in coordination with provincial governments," he said.

He added that initiatives such as PTV TeleSchool would continue besides providing distance, Ed-tech and remedial learning solutions to bridge the digital divide.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 14, 21/10/2021)

Back to normal education

The reigning coronavirus pandemic has taken a toll on all walks of life, and education is one of its prime victims. The way syllabus and the process of examinations were tailor-made during the turbulent times of infection were exceptional. This has adversely impacted the learning skills of students, especially those who were gearing up to appear in public examinations. Curtailing of school hours, scrapping of compulsory subjects and the state getting benevolent to provide grace marks and promotion to next classes are a tale to be told! This should come to an end now, and the process of judging the skills and academic talent of students should reverse to normal. It will not only usher in confidence among hard working pupils, but also enable the competence of our otherwise compromised education system to at least get back on the track.

The federal education minister's synopsis to roll back the discretion and get real is on the spot. It is a good omen that academicians and provincial educational peers are on board too. The education system after a process of trial and error during the pandemic needs reorientation, and it is a must that all stakeholders usher in their professional input. Students, too, should shrug off the lenient blanket that they adored during the peak of infection, and come back strongly into academics.

It is, however, a positive aspect too that the tough days underscored the need for learning digital tools, and millions of backward students managed to glimpse through what technology is all about. The national television's special transmission and the out-of-way efforts of many of the schools to disseminate online classes are highly appreciated. A special thanks also goes out to teachers who not only pooled in extra hours to be online with their pupils, but also took the pain to report compulsory attendance during the pandemic.

With the infectious syndrome getting normal, and universal vaccination underway, it's time to restore the balance. Ensuring SOPs during travel and in classes, students and teachers should come forward to overcome the deficiencies that had set in during the last two years in the learning process.

(By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 22/10/2021)

Govt to seal schools paying less than Rs25k to teachers: minister

The Sindh government will seal private schools paying less than minimum wage of Rs25,000 to teachers, said Education Minister Sardar Ali Shah on Wednesday.

Speaking at an event in a girls college in Sukkur district Shah said the provincial government has fixed the minimum wage at Rs25,000 per month and any school found flouting the law will face the action.

He reiterated that out of around 47,000 schools functioning under his ministry some 11,000 schools are such which were not built to serve the purpose of educating the children. He claimed that the Pakistan Peoples Party's government had inherited such schools.

"Every year the budget is allocated for repair and maintenance of these schools. This is why we are removing such schools from our system." According to him, the final survey of 7,000 of these schools has been done so far and out of this, total around 5,000 schools have emerged as non-viable.

"We want to save this wasteful expenditure so that we can channel our resources over the functional schools."

The education minister informed that a new policy is also being introduced for the government colleges under which the budget allocation for the colleges will be based on enrollment.

Shah said the female candidates vying for the government teaching jobs have been offered the facility of qualifying the test by scoring 5% lesser marks in comparison to the male candidates.

He justified this relaxation citing shortage of female teachers in the government schools. The ministry will also take action against the private schools which excessively charge students in the name of extra curricular activities.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 28/10/2021)

Education losses

A NEW report on the education losses suffered by Pakistani children due to pandemic-induced school closures sheds light on some aspects of the shift to online learning and overall school enrolment. Prepared by the Idara-i-Taleem-o-Agahi and Unicef, the report elaborates on the students' support systems — or their lack thereof — both at home and in school, and the impact on learning outcomes. It was found that school enrolment for children in the age bracket of six to 16 years, dropped by 2pc when compared to 2019. Even before the pandemic struck, around 22m children in the country were not going to school. Learning outcomes were a major casualty of prolonged school closures. The report states that the percentage of children in Class 3 who could read an Urdu story dropped to 15pc in 2021 from 19pc in 2019. Meanwhile, English-learning outcomes, as a percentage of children who could read English sentences, went down from 21pc in 2019 to a pitiable 8pc in 2021. With many private and some public institutions shifting to online learning, 63pc of the children surveyed said their families tried to support their education. Out of more than 47,000 responders, 32pc said their schools provided learning materials while 58pc revealed that no one from the school administration bothered to reach out to them. The fact that a majority of children felt disconnected from the learning experience and schooling is reflective of the socioeconomic and technological disparities that exist in Pakistani society. Moreover, 32pc of the children reportedly found the state television's tele-school programmes helpful while another 40pc said they used the internet via smartphones.

The fact that learning outcomes regressed despite televised and online learning aides is revealing: not everyone has access to smartphones, a reliable internet connection or the finances to afford these, and a school environment enables better learning. These findings could be studied in greater detail to carry out targeted reforms in the education sector. The government should think of ways to have safe classrooms while also investing in better online structure for days when school is closed.

(By Editorial, Dawn, 06, 22/10/2021)

Hidden cameras found in school washrooms

The Directorate of Inspection, Registration of Private Institutions, Sindh School Education and Literacy Department, has suspended the registration of a private school for having installed hidden cameras in its female and male washrooms.

A day prior to the directorate's decision, Rehana Feroz, a teacher of the private school in Scheme 33, Safoora Goth, complained that there were hidden CCTV cameras installed behind a switchboard with holes in the area of the wash basins situated near the toilets of both girls and boys' washrooms to spy upon their movements.

Acting on the complaint, the director general of the private schools ordered an inquiry that found the school in fact guilty of the crime.

He issued the school a show-cause notice on Nov 3 directing the principal and administration to appear before him to explain their positions, failing which ex-parte decision would be initiated against them.

However, no one appeared before the director general on Thursday.

A notification issued on Nov 4 said that the school's registration was suspended under Section-8 (1) (Cancellation or suspension of certificate of registration) of the Sindh Private Educational Institutions (Regulation & Control) Ordinance 2001 (Amended) Act, 2003, with immediate effect.

Education Minister Syed Sardar Shah told Dawn that strict action would be taken against those responsible for installing cameras. He said the matter needed a thorough probe by the FIA cybercrime experts to ascertain whether any data was in possession of unscrupulous elements.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 06/11/2021)

College admission policy

The Sindh government's new policy on admission to intermediate class has elicited both positive and negative response. The encouraging thing in the policy is that it will help stop college admissions on the basis of fake domicile, as now students will have to submit his or her parent's domicile papers too. However, the condition to submit primary school certificate might make students and their guardians run around. Given the gap of so many years between primary school and secondary school, most students are unlikely to preserve primary school certificate for so long, and in several cases, primary schools in which they studied might not exist. Under the new admission policy, the production of primary school certificate is mandatory.

Provincial education officials argue that the idea behind new conditions is to get an estimate of the number of students from other provinces seeking admission to colleges in Sindh so that admission quotas for such students can be fixed. Obviously, fixing quotas might take one or several years. As a result, those from outside the province will lose at least one academic year. Studies have already suffered due to the coronavirus pandemic, even though most students have been enabled to pass secondary school examination under a lenient policy. The new admission policy will affect around 1.5 million students. Another condition is aimed at increasing attendance at colleges to prevent the trend of falling student attendance; those remaining absent from college for a week without notice will have their admissions cancelled. This is harsh. It is hoped that this provision will be applied sparingly.

The Sindh education department has increased the number of seats at the intermediate level by 20,000 bringing the total number of seats to 1,40,000 to accommodate new entrants. This occasions a big question mark. There is already a shortage of teachers in Sindh's colleges and they lack buildings, classrooms, labs, and basic facilities. How will then they accommodate large numbers of students? There are 327 functional colleges in the province. (By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 07/11/2021)

How a pandemic changed education

To promote the English language and encourage teachers' training, the Society of Pakistan English Language Teachers (SPELT) arranged its 37th edition this year. The two-day conference was in virtual format in 2021, consisting of the keynote presentation, panel discussions, and plenary sessions.

This year's idea was to discuss and learn from the experiences teachers have gained in the last two years during a pandemic as the education sector remained the most affected by the virus. The conference's first day ended with a keynote presentation from Dr Deborah Healey, a former president of TESOL International Association in the USA.

Dr Healey, in her presentation, shared four different ways to share stories in her lecture 'Telling our stories'. "We can give several names to the stories, but a few basics ways can be by setting the stage, inspiration, and action," she said while sharing her presentation during a zoom conference on which more than 150 participants were present.

Talking to participants from different backgrounds and schools of thought, she shared how teachers need to be aware of the diversity of their students. "It is very important to be aware of how our learners are doing as the background of each One is different and it can leave an overall impact on them," she said.

Dr Healey said this while sharing different story types and comparing a teacher's journey to that of a hero's. "Covid time feels like a hero's journey for teachers as they stepped into the cycle as an adventure," she said.

She explained how each aspect has a different impact on the teachers themselves. Dr Healey also shared different ways to interact and help students learn how social media can be used, how comics can help in teaching to formulate stories or how to simplify complex stories through scaffolding.

The conference also hosted a panel discussion to set up the stage and help teachers understand many ways that can help in the time of the pandemic. Seven speakers from all across the world, who are associated with different English language teachers associations, shared their experiences at the panel discussion titled 'Crossing Boundaries, Building Bridges: A Pandemic Opportunity'.

Fauzia Shamim moderated the panel whereas the speakers were from Canada, Bangladesh, Qatar, Korea, Japan, the USA, and Nepal. Every panelist shared steps they have taken to learn more on teaching techniques during a pandemic.

"We weren't ready for this change, but now, when we have shifted to webinars and online learning, we should continue the same even if the situation gets normal," said Dr Kilryoung Lee. Another panelist Dr Madhu Neupane was of the view that pandemic has re-invested education for the world and somehow the pandemic has been a game-changer for the education system. "Even countries which were not so good with technology also had to adapt to this change and this can help in the future of education in the world."

The other panelists included Dr James Papple, Dr Rubina Khan, Dr Dawn Jin Lucovich, Dr Aymen Elsheikh, and Dr Gabriel Maggioli. SPELT, in their previous editions, had always set up a bigger conference. Due to the pandemic, however, it was cut short to a few discussions and limited access. Regardless, the conference continued the efforts towards teacher training, research and educational development. They also continued to share different programmes and extend teachers association conference memberships during the virtual conference. Through the platform, teachers from Pakistan could join other countries' associations and learn from them. (By Yusra Salim The Express Tribune, 04, 07/11/2021)

11 share third position in inter pre-engineering exam

There were several students getting identical marks as the Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK) announced the results of the first phase of intermediate pre-engineering part-II examinations 2021 on Tuesday.

According to the merit list, two students stood first, four stood second while as many as 11 students stood third.

Both Mohammad Jazib Javed of the DJ Science College and Mohammad Ali of the Adamjee Science College stood first with 1,057 marks, out of 1,100 marks and an A-1 grade.

Zeeshan Abrar of the Bahria College Karsaz, Faiza Asfaq and Adina Sheikh of the St Laurence College and Mohammad Bilal Siddiqui of the Adamjee College were all got second position as they got 1,056 marks.

With 3,080 students getting 'A-1' grade, BIEK chairman says, unlike KP and Punjab, nobody here got cent per cent marks

The 11 students who got third position with all getting 1055 marks are: Mohammad Hamid of the Govt Degree Science and Commerce College Malir, Suhaib Khan and Sameed Ansar of the Adamjee College, Sabahat, Uzma Shafqat, Fatima Ali, Zainab Gaffar, Shiza Aslam of the PECHS Govt College for Women, Abdul Hadi of Bahria College Karsaz, Hadia Zulfiqar of Metropolis Intermediate College for Girls and Saeed Arsalan of Comecs College.

About these results, BIEK chairman Prof Saeeduddin told Dawn that it is not that strange if you look at the results coming from the intermediate boards in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab.

"In KP, some 300 students got full 1,100 marks and they are not that far behind in Punjab either," he said.

"It shows a 100 per cent result in both those provinces, whereas in the Karachi board even our best result brings up a result of 96 per cent," he pointed out. "It shows our teachers' justified marking," he added.

'Govt's leniency'

According to the BIEK, some 24,376 candidates were registered for the examination and 24,170 sat for the exams. Of them, 22,119 passed bringing up 91.51 per cent result.

Some 3,080 students passed with an 'A-1' grade and 2,123 got an 'A' grade. A total of 2,825 students got 'B' grade, 4,036 got 'C', 6,605 got 'D' and 3,450 got an 'E' grade.

The BIEK chairman also said that if one looked at Sindh, BIEK was the first to announce the intermediate results.

"We did it before Larkana and Sukkur too. We announced our Science General Group results last week and this week we announced pre-engineering result. Next week it will be pre-medical result," he said.

He also added that the many 'D' and 'E' grades that one sees in their results were actually failed students. "It is the government's leniency due to the Covid situation that has enabled these students to pass with a 'D' and 'E'," he said.

Meanwhile, the second phase for the same year comprised 12 papers for improvement of division, which is yet to be announced.
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 10/11/2021)

Mason's son tops MDCAT across Sindh

Parkash Kumar, son of a poor mason, secured first position in Medical and Dental Colleges Admission Test (MDCAT) in Sindh and stood fourth throughout the country.

Kumar, a student of a government school in the coastal district of Badin, stood first among the 7,797 students in Sindh and fourth among the record 194,133 students appearing in MDCAT held from August to October.

Born in a remote village Kharyo Ghulam Shah some 30 km from Islamkot city of sand-swept Tharparkar district, he migrated with his father, Chando Mal, and rest of the family to Ghulab Laghari, a small town of Badin district adjacent to Tharparkar district some 15 years ago.

He got all his primary and secondary education from Ghulab Laghari and was enrolled in Higher Secondary School Chambar in Tando Allah Yar district, eight kilometres away from Ghulab Laghari. "Traveling to Chambar was not so easy," Kumar commented.

His father hardly earns Rs1,200 per day but supports all his kids to get better education. "We moved to this town to get some good income," Kumar said. "We live in a rented house but my father wants me to get education," he added.

"This is just start of the journey," Kumar smiled. "I want to become a medical specialist," he added, saying that his family has assured to support him financially.

Being desperate to be the student of Dow Medical College, Kumar believes he will continue to grab positions during his next journey.

Partab Shivani, an activist and educationist from Tharparkar, commented that Kumar has inspired many poor students. "He has also proved that with hard work and commitment one can easily achieve such daunting task."

Shivani said that despite lack of science teachers and fully equipped science laboratories, students like Kumar beat many students who receive quality education from private and expensive schools.

Kumar is one the finest students from Tharparkar who topped the test. "Many students each year secure positions in different universities but cannot afford fees and other expenses," Shivani said. "The [provincial] government should announce scholarships for needy and intelligent students so they could easily continue their education," he suggested.

Kumar was awarded a gold medal and cash reward Rs200,000 during an award distribution ceremony held in Islamabad which was attended by education officers, including Minister for Federal Education Shafqat Mahmood.

According to the official social media account of Pakistan Medical Commission: "Parkash Kumar from Higher Secondary School Chamber District Tando Allahyar, Sindh scored 192 [out of 210], was awarded a gold medal and received a cash prize of 200,000 rupees."

The educationists from Tharparkar claimed that students from the region work hard and usually beat students from other parts of the province, including Karachi, Hyderabad and Larkano. "Just give them some opportunities and they will prove their potential," Shivani commented. (By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 10/11/2021)

Expensive education

According to a recent Unesco report, families in Pakistan spend 57% of their income on children's education. Pakistan ranks second in South Asia in terms of expenditure on education. Bangladesh occupies the top position in the region with 71% spending. The report primarily highlights the high cost of education in the country, though the high spending on education also implies that people in Pakistan are now realising the importance of education — which is a good sign.

One of the major reasons of the high cost of education in Pakistan is the poor standard of education in public sector schools which forces people to turn towards private schools for their children's education. This is also borne out by the figures mentioned in the report on enrolment in private schools — 30% of the students at the secondary and tertiary level, 40% at the pre-primary, and 20% at the primary level are studying in privately-run schools, and 8% are studying in seminaries.

According to the report, the weak state regulatory mechanism for private schools is responsible for high educational expenses in private schools in general. These expenses are unbearable even for middle-income families let alone those in poor and low-income bracket. Pointing out the same fact, the report says that the schooling of children coming from poor families constitutes as much as 80% of the total income of such families.

Unfortunately, our politicians have only used 'education for all' as a mere slogan to win votes — a slogan that they forget soon after assuming power. As a result, the standard of education in state schools is falling persistently. The government needs to raise education allocation in the budget and prioritise focusing on state schools in order to bring down educational expenses in the country and make education accessible for all. (By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 13/11/2021)

All exams under full syllabus this year, declares Shafqat

Federal Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood announced on Thursday that the upcoming examinations at all levels of educational institutions would be held under full syllabus and there would be no more relaxation for students as offered during the Covid-19 pandemic. He said that the exams, expected to be held in May-June, would be held under the full syllabus and the schedule of exams for Cambridge students would be followed.

He said the consensual decisions regarding future education system in the country was taken at a Inter-Provincial Education Ministers' Conference (IPEMC) held at a local hotel.

"Syllabus will be completed in this academic year," said Mr Mahmood while speaking to reports after chairing the IPEMC. "The coronavirus pandemic has affected every segment of life, but the way it has hit our education, it's too damaging. The government was forced to reduce the syllabus in the previous academic year due to the pandemic. But it is time for joint efforts to fully restore the educational activities across the country."

He said that efforts were being made to further improve contacts between provinces and the centre for better quality education system. The federal authorities wanted the provinces to hold exams and offer admissions on time.

'Learning level of children not good'

He shared brief details about the debate held at the IPEMC where the new procedures of examination envisaged by the federal board were discussed.

"Efforts are on to design a combined academic calendar," said the federal minister. "The global institutions reviewed Pakistan's education system and found out that the learning level of our children is not good. The learning capacity of students has been badly affected due to the closure of schools following Covid-19. There are sincere efforts being made to revise the courses for increasing the learning level of Pakistani students."

Meanwhile, a statement earlier issued said that the federal minister lauded the role of IPEMC for playing an "instrumental role" in developing a way forward for dealing with the impact of Covid-19 pandemic. Addressing the 33rd IPEMC, he also appreciated the Sindh government for organising the IPEMC.

Sindh Minister for Education and Literacy Syed Sardar Ali Shah and, Sindh Minister for Universities & Board Muhammad Ismail Rahoo attended the meeting physically.

Sharam Khan Tarakai, Provincial Minister-Elementary and Secondary Education Department-KPK, Deewan Ali Khan, Minister of Elementary and Secondary Education Department-AJK, Dr Murad Rass, School Education Department-Punjab, Raja Yasir Humayun Sarfraz, Provincial Minister for Higher Education-Punjab attended the meeting virtually.

Senior officials of federal education ministry, provincial/regional education departments of Sindh, KPK, Balochistan, Punjab, AJK and Gilgit Baltistan also participated in the meeting.

A detailed presentation was given by the federal secretary, Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training (MOFEPT), Naheed S. Durrani, who shed light on the facilitation of provinces under emergency Actions to Strengthen Performance for Inclusive and Responsive Education (ASPIRE) Project. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 19/11/2021)

Full syllabus

THE recent announcement by the federal education authorities that all exams, based on the entire syllabus, would be held at the end of the current academic year might have come as an unpleasant surprise to several students. After at least a year and a half of online or missed classes or preparing at home by themselves, going back to the 'old normal' of attending classes in person must have felt like a big adjustment to make. Students all over the country have had a rough couple of years: with the spread of Covid-19, there have been frequent school closures and multiple last-minute announcements about the holding or cancellation of exams. However, the government compensated students — especially those waiting to take board exams — with grace marks while those in the lower classes were promoted on the basis of their year-round performance. This leniency was shown despite the fact that most schools and colleges taught an abridged syllabus due to various logistical and practical reasons.

Under these circumstances, the decision to test students on the full syllabus might not be easy. Every year, the syllabus becomes more demanding as students are expected to know the content of learning material taught the previous year. Hence, students in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12, who have studied from a shortened syllabus the preceding year and then awarded grace marks for passing the final board exam might find it difficult to cope. This would also raise the issue of merit. In the meantime, unprepared students are being hurled into the new academic year to face the onslaught of the full academic course, while even hardworking students, who have experienced constraints, such as poor access to laptops and smartphones, might not achieve the grades they deserve. If the authorities are going to assess students on the basis of the full syllabus then they should also ask schools to conduct make-up classes for the year lost to ensure a level playing field for all students.

(By Editorial, Dawn, 06, 23/11/2021)

All the students but not enough facilities

The Admissions Policy formulated by the Department of College Education for admission of first-year students in Karachi's government colleges without the involvement of college principals, has hinted at several irregularities and various cases of gross mismanagement.

It has been revealed that some of the city's most reputable government colleges have been actively reducing merit, in admissions granted for the Faculty of Computer Sciences. This merit has been reduced by 80 marks; representing a 200 to 400 per cent increase in seats in about two dozen government colleges, resulting in colleges with exhausted resources and feeble infrastructure to admit students in excess, many of whom will not have access to the most basic of facilities.

According to college sources speaking on conditions of anonymity, most of these institutions despite touting a qualification in computer sciences, do not have a dedicated computer lab for their students, while some don't even have teachers.

For instance, a government college in Scheme 33 area of Karachi does not have a single computer on its campus, but has admitted about 200 students who will all be pursuing computer sciences.

Similarly, a committee formed by Director General Colleges Sindh in Government Boys College Ghazi Goth Scheme 33, established in Karachi last year, admitted 250 students in the Faculty of Computer Sciences. The college does not have a single computer sciences teacher, while the college principal claims that the college has only six computers in its lab. College sources however refuted the principal's claims, stating that there is no computer lab in the college at all.

"Some 200 admissions were given in the merit list issued earlier, after which 50 more students were admitted on the basis of claim," said College Principal Professor Khaliq Rajpar, while confirming that there are no computer teachers in the college. However, the principal still maintained that the college has six computers, while they are hoping to get some more.

Another college principal speaking on conditions of anonymity, said that cut-off marks have been dropped in some government colleges to reduce merit. Citing the example of Khatun Pakistan College and Government College SRE Majeed Stadium Road, the college principal said that the merit in Khatun Pakistan has been brought down at 610 whereas last year it was at 688 marks.

Similarly, SRE Majeed College has brought merit up to 611. This merit closed at 690 marks last year. The college principal further said that it is surprising that this time the results of matric students have been higher due to holding papers with scoring marks only. "This shows that the cut off marks have been dropped and the recommended candidates have been adjusted in different colleges," he added.

Confirming the claim, SRE Majeed College's Principal Aqeel Ahmed also said that the cut off marks or merit has been reduced. "We have been sent merit list of 250 students with 611 cut off marks and so far 190 students have paid their fees" he told.

It is to be noted that the Centralised Admission Policy for first-year admissions in government colleges of Sindh began 21 years ago in the year 2000, so that admissions could take place on merit basis and without any pressure.

The policy was later made online. To implement this policy every year, a committee consisting of senior principals of Karachi colleges was formed, which was involved in the entire process from the beginning to the end of admissions to keep the whole process transparent. However, this time, so was not the case and the policy for admission of more than 0.1 million students was handed over to Rashid Khoso, an assistant director of grade 17.

The Express Tribune also contacted Assistant Director Rashid Khoso in this regard and inquired about the contents of the news, to which he replied: "At the same time, we have expanded colleges in Karachi. We have started four new colleges. These include Maryam Mukhta College and Ghazi Goth College and two other colleges."

Khoso however declined allegations of deteriorating merit and cut-off marks in colleges, stating that the cut off marks are decided by a computer programme. "Regarding the increase in the number of seats in colleges, it is the principals who are making claims. Ask them to show it in the dashboard of their system's portal. It remains to be seen how many confirmed admissions there are," he maintained.

Per Khoso, there are two categories of students who have passed matriculation: those who have secured A1 grade and A grades, and others who have passed in COD grades. "There is no middle ground. So we have to adjust these students. This is how the result is formed," he told The Express Tribune.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 05, 03/12/2021)

SC wants HEC to issue degrees to students of illegal campuses

A three-member bench of the Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Higher Education Commission (HEC) to formulate a procedure to make a special arrangement for issuance of degrees to the students who have passed out from 'illegal campuses' of some private universities.

The bench comprising Justice Umar Ata Bandial, Justice Sajjad Ali Shah and Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah also ordered the HEC to ensure closure of the illegal campuses and uniform implementation of its policies across the country.

The apex court was hearing the matter pertaining to non-issuance of degrees to the students who passed out from illegal campuses of the private universities.

Preston University and Al Khair University allegedly ran 'illegal' campuses in Karachi and Lahore. In their petition, students of these campuses urged the court to direct the HEC to issue degrees to them.

During the course of proceedings, the bench ordered the HEC to formulate a procedure and through some special arrangement issue degrees to the students who had passed out from the 'illegal' campuses.

Justice Bandial, however, said uniform implementation of the HEC's policies should be ensured across the country. He said no compromise could be made on the provision of higher education to the youth.

The SC directed the federal and provincial governments to fully cooperate with the HEC to maintain uniform standard.

The bench observed that the basic issue to ponder over was whether private universities could set up sub-campuses outside their territorial limits, while the HEC had already declared they could not do so before issuing many alerts in this regard.

The court noted that the HEC believed cooperation from the federal and provincial governments was essential to end such illegal activities, but the Centre and provincial governments had not cooperated with the commission.

When Advocate Ali Zafar, counsel for the students, said that the court had ordered the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to pursue action against such private varsities, Justice Bandial said the HEC had the powers, therefore, there was no need for the accountability bureau to investigate the matter.

If the HEC was a weak institution, the federal government could be ordered to amend the relevant laws, Justice Bandial remarked.

Advocate Zafar said the students had approached the Lahore High Court (LHC) for their degrees and the LHC had declared the sub-campuses of private universities 'illegal'.

Justice Bandial observed that the LHC verdict was based on facts. He then directed the HEC to ensure implementation of its policies.

In its order, the apex court noted that the HEC in its stance sought assistance from the authorities concerned to stop the illegal activities of the varsities, but the Centre and provincial governments had not helped the commission.

(By APP Dawn, 01, 16/12/2021)

Illegal university campuses

The Supreme Court has directed the HEC to shut down all sub-campuses established outside the jurisdiction of their subsequent private universities. The ruling came following a case filed by students who contended that HEC is not verifying their degrees because the campuses were illegally established. In its defence, the HEC claimed that it had repeatedly warned the universities but to no avail and that the situation requires the intervention of the provincial and federal governments.

But why wasn't the situation taken care of beforehand and why did it take a group of students to file a case in order to finally do what is necessary? While the court needs to be commended on directing the HEC to attest the degrees through a special arrangement, those that are bent upon jeopardising the future of students must be held accountable and punished accordingly. Currently, the HEC is a weak institution. It must be given enough resources and authority so that it can focus on providing quality higher education to the disgruntled youth of the country. Unfortunately, this seems to be a distant reality as the current higher education system is in a deplorable state. The federal government must amend the law so as to give HEC the power to take relevant action. In the meantime, NAB should be given responsibility to not only investigate the case but also look into any corrupt practices the HEC indulged in.

It is essential for the relevant quarters to realise that Pakistan's future depends upon the youth — which comprises almost 63% of the population — and on the strength of our education system. Considering the literacy and unemployment rate, the future of Pakistan seems bleak. It is up to the concerned authorities to take prudent measures to eliminate illegal practices and improve the quality of education in order to raise our national hope. The HEC must be sincere and lead with an iron hand.

(By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 18/12/2021)

PM on education

PRIME MINISTER Imran Khan's remarks about girls' education in tribal districts in Pakistan and Afghanistan have triggered a fiery debate with many criticising him for attempting to justify the Taliban viewpoint on women's education.

At the OIC meeting in Islamabad, Mr Khan made the unfortunate remarks as he earnestly beseeched the world — especially the US — to act fast and deliver financial aid to an Afghanistan firmly under Taliban rule and stressed that "human rights and women's rights are different in every society".

He went on to talk about Pakhtun culture and sensitivities regarding girls' education in predominantly Pakhtun districts, implying somehow that Pakhtuns were not in favour of women's education.

His statement was heavily criticised on social media, even prompting Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai to weigh in. Though she did not explicitly name Mr Khan, Ms Yousafzai, who nearly lost her life fighting against the TTP's ban on girls' education, said that scores of Pakhtun activists had lost their lives when they raised their voice against the horrors perpetrated by militants, underscoring how so many were displaced or killed in their fight for girls' right to education. "We represent Pashtoons — not the Taliban," she said.

Mr Khan's viewpoint on girls' education is ill-informed. It is also puzzling that although he has often rightly drawn attention to Islamophobia, and wants the West to differentiate between radical and moderate Muslims, he has painted the Pakhtun people with the same broad brush, implying that all of them are opposed to women's rights — an attitude that is reflected in some Western states who tend to see the Muslim world in black and white terms.

These areas that Mr Khan is painting as backward or regressive are mostly underdeveloped, ignored by governments or deprived of investment. The reality is that many girls want to go to school, but a lack of infrastructure coupled with resistance from certain forces such as the ultra-conservative Taliban, prevent them from doing so.

The premier should know better than to co-opt a Taliban viewpoint and present it as a justification for what is simply a violation of the basic right to education. In fact, his stance that human rights and women's rights should somehow change depending on society is extremely damaging. When it comes to women's rights, there have been too many instances when Mr Khan has taken a position that is controversial. He must correct his approach and weigh his words in future.

(By Editorial, Dawn, 06, 22/12/2021)

Corporal punishment

FOR a child born in our society, the cycle of violence begins early. The first taste of violence often comes at the hands of teachers who hit the child in 'good faith' hoping that the painful lesson will last a lifetime. And it does — in the form of emotional and psychological scars that can have serious repercussions on an individual's quality of life. The 2019 incident in Lahore in which a merciless beating left Grade 10 student Hunain Bilal dead is an extreme example. But there have been similar cases across the country. The recent passage of a National Assembly bill banning all forms of corporal punishment no matter how "light" is then a welcome step. The law will apply in several settings — formal, informal, private and public childcare institutions related to education, foster care, rehabilitation etc.

Though applicable only in the federal capital, the bill's passage is a milestone development because it revokes the application of Section 89 of the Pakistan Penal Code that allows the physical abuse of children in "good faith". The bill categorically and comprehensively defined all forms of physical, emotional and psychological methods of abuse as being punishable. It also acknowledged that corporal punishment contributes to the high school dropout rate. At present, Sindh is the only province with a law, passed in 2017, against corporal punishment. However, due to a number of flaws, the law has remained ineffective in penalising offenders, even though Pakistan is signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, while Article 14 of the Constitution guarantees the dignity of all citizens. A number of studies have noted the long-term impact of corporal punishment on young minds. Research suggests that affected children exhibit aggression and anxiety in their later years while there is also a greater chance of their resorting to violence. With this move, the provinces can follow suit by devising comprehensive laws against corporal punishment, and Sindh can plug the loopholes in its own law and put it into action.

(By Editorial, Dawn, 06, 28/12/2021)