

NEWSCLIPPINGS

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EDUCATION



Urban Resource Centre

A-2, 2nd floor, Westland Trade Centre, Block 7&8, C-5, Shaheed-e-Millat Road, Karachi.

Tel: 021-34387692, Email: urckhi@yahoo.com, Website: www.urckarachi.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/URCKHI Twitter: <https://twitter.com/urckhi>

Recruitment process for 93,000 govt schoolteachers across Sindh completed, minister announces

Sindh Education Minister Syed Sardar Ali Shah said on Tuesday that the education department had completed a large recruitment drive by hiring over 93,000 teachers, including 31,075 women, to ensure that no functional school remains closed due to a shortage of teachers.

Spokesperson for the Sindh education department Atif Vighio explained that the current phase of recruitment began after tests were conducted through the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Sukkur in September 2021.

"The process of issuing offer letters to successful candidates was then initiated, with appointments in the first phase made against existing vacancies. Subsequently, until Feb 28, 2025, the recruitment process continued through a waiting list to fill positions that became vacant due to retirements or deaths. This phase was later extended to June 30, 2025, and concluded yesterday," he told Dawn.

In a statement, Minister Shah said that appointment letters had been issued to 93,118 teachers, including 65,147 primary school teachers (PSTs) and 27,701 junior elementary school teachers (JESTs), who have all been hired purely on merit through third-party testing.

"The recruitment of 31,075 women teachers has strengthened the Sindh government's initiatives for women's empowerment, while 1,330 differently abled persons and 2,100 minority candidates were also appointed as teachers," he added.

The education minister said that the newly appointed teachers had become part of 41,129 government schools across the province, and the recruitment had activated over 5,000 previously non-functional schools.

"With the trust of [PPP] chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, we have now achieved the goal of providing capable and qualified teachers in Sindh's schools," he added.

He stated that the next phase after recruitment would be professional training for teachers to further improve the quality of education and expressed hope that the teachers joining the school education department would understand the responsibilities of this noble profession and perform their duties with honesty.

He said that in March 2021, job advertisements were issued under a third-party process through IBA Sukkur, ensuring merit and transparency, with tests conducted in September 2021. Mr Shah provided further division-wise details of the recruited teachers: Karachi Division: 7,444 PSTs and 5,643 JESTs; Hyderabad Division: 17,075 PSTs and 6,904 JESTs; Sukkur Division: 11,619 PSTs and 4,183 JESTs; Larkana Division: 11,145 PSTs and 4,034 JESTs; Mirpurkhas Division: 7,513 PSTs and 2,916 JESTs; Shaheed Benazirabad Division: 10,261 PSTs and 4,020 JESTs.

"After these recruitments, the student-teacher ratio in Sindh has improved to 34.59, which will be further enhanced in the next recruitment phase," he added.

"Due to transparent and merit-based processes, youth from underprivileged backgrounds have secured respectable employment, with four daughters from a single family successfully passing the test and setting an example," he further shared.

He also said that the rehabilitation of schools affected by rains and floods in the province was ongoing and acknowledged that some teachers were facing challenges regarding facilities in certain areas, which the department was striving to resolve. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 02/07/2025)

No education

WE just saw the release of the Pakistan Economic Survey 2024-25 and the presentation of the budget for 2025-26. There is a lot that can be said about the economy and the budget, but in this article I want to focus on education and what the Survey and the budget tell us about it and this government's priorities. All figures in this article are taken from the Economic Survey 2024-25.

Empty vessels make the most noise, and the Economic Survey section on education is a poorly written chapter, which is clearly meant to hide more than to reveal, as well as to glorify while having nothing to extol. It tells us that enrolments at the pre-primary level have declined over the last year or so while those at the primary, middle and high school level have increased a bit and that college/ university enrolments have come down somewhat.

Do these statistics tell a story? Yes, they do, and a very strong one. They tell us that despite the prime minister's declaration of an 'education emergency' and despite the fact that around 26 million five- to 16-year-olds are out of school, the government has neither a strategy for this category of children nor an actual plan that it is implementing. We are seeing trend movements in enrolments. If education was a priority, if there was a strategy, if a plan was being implemented, one would expect to see a strong movement — beyond the trend — in an upward direction. Instead, what we see is the usual drift. This is the story of education for the current government. In this regard, the story is no different from that for most governments of the past: education has not been a priority for any government.

The Economic Survey tells us that the national literacy rate stands at 60.5 per cent only: 68pc for men and 52.8pc for women. The urban literacy rate is 74.09pc — for urban men it is 78.13pc. For rural women, it is only 41.67pc. So, the gender and rural-urban gaps continue to persist. But there is a story hidden in geography as well. Where the literacy rate for Punjab is quoted at 66.25pc, it is 42pc for Balochistan whereas for rural women in Balochistan, it is only 26.59pc, ie, only one in four women in rural Balochistan is literate.

It is clear that governments — federal and provincial — do not want to spend more on education.

The net enrolment rate at matriculation for boys in Balochistan is only 18pc and just 9pc for the girls in the province. And this is supposed to be a federation!

Any government, all governments, any society, all societies, should feel ashamed at these numbers. But we don't. We are celebrating our 'achievements'.

This is a quote from the education chapter in the Economic Survey. "Cumulative education expenditures by federal and provincial governments in FY25 (July to March) were estimated at 0.8pc of GDP. Expenditures on education-related activities during FY25 decreased by 29.4pc...". They decreased from Rs1,251.06 billion to Rs899.6bn. Of course, there will be some spend from April to June but will it be 30pc? Unlikely. So, expenditure on education has gone down in nominal terms too. In real terms, given inflation, the drop would be much larger. And now we are spending only 0.8pc of our GDP on education, whereas UN agencies recommend spending a minimum of around 4pc of GDP on education. And the manifestoes of all major political parties promise that education expenditure will increase to 4pc of GDP.

The figure of 0.8pc includes all vanity projects such as the Daanish schools and the laptop schemes, especially in the federation and Punjab. I am sure it includes a portion of advertising spend of the provinces as well. But if you ask the ministers, the chief ministers or the prime minister, they will tell you, and emphatically so, that education is a top priority for their governments.

The Economic Survey headlines the news that the country now has 269 universities: 160 public sector and 109 private sector universities. But it does not dwell too much on the fact that the Higher Education Commission has not been given more resources for the new public sector universities. Some of the universities, even the older and bigger ones, are facing severe financial difficulties. Their budgets from the HEC have been more or less stagnant. Some cannot even make payrolls and have to cut pension payments. Some of the new universities in the public sector have not been given any support at all by the HEC. The government has done nothing to address these concerns. But launching new universities has been a priority.

The dialogue on education is quite broken. It is clear that governments — federal and provincial — do not want to spend more on education or on fixing the public sector education system. They believe they do not have the resources for it, nor do they have the patience and, possibly, the ability for medium- to long-term reforms. It is also clear that, given the thriving private sector in education, it is only the poor who depend on public sector provision of education and so, from a political point of view, there is no pressure on the government to fix education either: the poor are even more voiceless in this country than the middle- and upper-income classes.

And yet, in terms of rhetoric and public pronouncements, the government cannot be politically incorrect to admit all of the above. So, it will continue to pay lip service to the 'education emergency' and the 'right to education'. And this game is bound to continue. Who will suffer? The young of the country and, therefore, the future of the country. But, for those in power, hunooz dilli dur ast, reality has not set in and political horizons are too short.
(By Faisal Bari Dawn, 06, 04/07/2025)

New grading policy for matric, inter deferred

The implementation of the new grading policy at the matriculation and intermediate levels across Sindh and the rest of Pakistan has been postponed for one year.

As a result, the recently concluded 2025 annual examinations for Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and High School Certificate (HSC) will follow the old grading system.

The Sindh Universities and Boards Dept has issued a notification referencing its earlier notification dated October 15, 2024, and the Inter Board Committee of Chairmen notification dated June 18, 2025. The new policy will now be enforced from 2026. Per the earlier policy, passing marks in all subjects were to be increased from 33% to 40% starting 2025. Results were to be issued through Grade Point (GP) and later via Grade Point Average (GPA).

Under the new grading scale, an A++ grade will represent 95-100% marks and be termed Exceptional with a GPA of 5.0. An A+ (90-94%) will be Outstanding, A (85-89%) Excellent, B++ (80-84%) Very Good, and B+ (75-79%) Good. Grades B, C, D, and E will be labeled Fairly Good, Above Average, Average, and Below Average respectively. Students scoring below 40% will be considered as having failed, but the term used will be Unsatisfactory instead of Fail.
(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 12/07/2025)

Dr Noman Ahmed appointed pro-VC of NED University

Senior academic and researcher Prof Dr Noman Ahmed has been appointed as the Pro Vice Chancellor of NED University of Engineering and Technology.

A few weeks back, Prof Muhammad Tufail Jukhio has taken over the charge as the university's vice chancellor.

According to a notification issued by the universities and boards department, Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah has made the appointment till the date of Prof Ahmed's superannuation in 2027.

Prof Ahmed, author of several books and studies on development issues, had earlier served as the acting vice chancellor of the university and the dean faculty of architecture and management sciences.

He also received many awards and honours. Some of them include the 'Best Teacher Award' from the Higher Education Commission in 2009, Dr Akhter Hameed Khan Memorial Award from Pakistan Council of Social Sciences in 2010 and Best Writer Award from All Pakistan Newspaper Society in 2009.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 14, 17/07/2025)

NED test results reveal Sindh's education divide

The aptitude test results of NED University of Engineering and Technology have revealed a troubling academic performance among students from various educational boards across Sindh except for those in Karachi. Despite the fact that the test is typically attempted by high-achieving A-one and A-graders in their intermediate exams, a significant number failed to make the cut. Out of 9,388 students who appeared for the test, only 68.1 per cent passed, while 2,990 students were unsuccessful.

Students from boards outside Karachi performed poorly in comparison, with the overall passing rate from these boards falling below 46 per cent. The Hyderabad Board recorded a failure rate of 53.3 per cent, with 406 out of 764 students failing. Larkana Board saw 219 out of 322 students fail, resulting in a 68.1 per cent failure rate. Similarly, 308 out of 522 students from the Mirpurkhas Board failed, giving it a 59.1 per cent failure rate. The Nawabshah Board reported a 55.2 per cent failure rate with 144 out of 261 students failing, while Sukkur Board had a 66.2 per cent failure rate, with 176 out of 266 students failing the test.

In stark contrast, students from the Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK) performed significantly better. Only 1,387 out of 5,951 students failed, resulting in a relatively low failure rate of 23.4 per cent. Performance from other boards was also comparatively stronger. The Federal Board had 257 students appear for the test, of which 202 passed and 55 failed.

Meanwhile, students from the Cambridge system showed the highest success rate over 98 per cent; 455 out of 483 students passed and only 28 failed.

The dismal results from many districts in Sindh have raised concerns regarding students' academic preparedness for engineering and technology programmes.

Chairman of the Inter-Board Committee of Chairmen (IBCC) Karachi and Sindh Professor Faqir Muhammad Lakho expressed his concern over the performance. Speaking to The Express Tribune, he remarked, "The results surprised us too. Karachi has more resources, and students here often attend private tuition alongside regular college. The city's academic environment is very different from other districts."

He further noted that students from remote areas face additional challenges such as travelling long distances to Karachi to take the test. "The stress and fatigue from travel impact their performance," he explained. Professor Lakho suggested that NED should establish regional testing centres across Sindh, similar to the model used for the Medical and Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT), to alleviate the burden on students and potentially improve their results.

When asked about the low passing percentage in BIEK results, the chairman replied that this time they had set up 11 assessment centres and appointed a monitoring in charge at each centre. No teacher is allowed to take the exam papers home, and he himself visited the assessment centres.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 17/07/2025)

Education divide

Recent results from the NED University aptitude test have laid bare the academic inequalities that exist within Sindh. While Karachi-based students, particularly those from the Board of Intermediate Education Karachi, performed relatively well — with only 23.4% failing — the majority of students from boards outside Karachi struggled to clear the test. The failure rate for these boards exceeded 54%, despite the fact that most candidates were high-achieving A-graders in their intermediate examinations.

This glaring disparity is an indication of a deep-rooted educational divide between urban centres and the rest of the province. Karachi's students often benefit from access to well-resourced colleges and private tuition centres. In contrast, students from interior Sindh face poor teaching standards and limited facilities. Moreover, their long travel to the test centres in Karachi not only adds stress and fatigue but also symbolises the broader structural disadvantages they endure.

Even more troubling is what the results suggest about the credibility of the grading systems in different educational boards. If students scoring top marks in their intermediate exams fail to pass a university entrance test, it raises questions about the standards of assessment and the authenticity of those grades. Are students truly being taught, or merely passed through the system? This is a policy failure that needs urgent attention. Provincial education authorities must recognise that the current system is breeding inequality.

Reform should begin with revised evaluation systems across all boards to ensure academic rigour and comparability. Investment must also be directed toward improving school infrastructure and curriculum quality in rural and peri-urban districts.

A truly inclusive higher education system cannot be built on such uneven foundations. Without meaningful reforms, the education divide will continue to rob thousands of students of their potential simply because of where they were born.

(By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 18/07/2025)

BSEK puts off automated paper checking

The results of the 2025 annual matric examinations will be declared by July 31, said the chairman of the Board of Secondary Education Karachi (BSEK), Ghulam Hussain Soho, on Friday. However, he added that in case of any unforeseen technical or administrative delay, results will be announced in the first week of August.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, the BSEK chief said that nearly 180,000 students appeared in this year's matric exams, making result preparation a logistical challenge. To address concerns of transparency and efficiency, he said that both manual checking and Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) systems will be used for assessment this year.

Soho clarified that the previous software system, found to be both expensive and lacking transparency, has been scrapped after a review of its contract. A new, cost-effective system is being planned to streamline the process without compromising quality.

The chairman further stated that OMR sheets will be used for compiling award lists this year, while from next year, all Class X exams and selected Class IX papers will be conducted using the OMR system to enhance transparency and expedite result processing. The goal is to complete result preparation within one month in the future.

Chairman Soho also disclosed plans to revamp the existing mark-sheet, citing deficiencies in its design and quality. The BSEK will study mark-sheets from national and international educational boards to introduce a redesigned document that will feature improvements in weight, font size, colour scheme, security features, and overall design aesthetics, he added. The redesigned mark-sheet is expected to be introduced from next year to ensure both durability and protection against forgery.

The chairman said that the BSEK is moving towards full digitisation of its services. An online portal is being developed, through which students will be able to easily access their personal data, forms, roll number slips, and examination results. He added that efforts are underway to automate all board operations.

Chairman Soho revealed that the BSEK plans to make 70% of matric exam questions multiple-choice based in the coming years. This change aims to align students with the format of competitive entry tests such as ECAT and MCAT, enabling them to adjust to the testing pattern earlier and reducing reliance on expensive entry test preparation academies. This initiative, aimed at relieving financial pressure on parents and psychological stress on students, will be implemented after necessary approvals from the Inter Board Committee of Chairmen (IBCC).

The BSEK has also decided to raise the passing marks to 40% from the upcoming academic year to improve academic standards and motivate students to work harder. Chairman Soho affirmed that all these reforms are part of the BSEK's broader strategy to modernise examination systems and enhance transparency in line with contemporary educational standards.

(By The Express Tribune, 04, 19/07/2025)

NED gets new boys, girls' hostels

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah emphasised his government's dedication to higher education, digital empowerment, and youth development through pioneering initiatives such as the People's Information Technology Programme (PITP).

He said this while addressing inauguration ceremony of newly constructed buildings at NED University and distribution of Chromebooks for top performers of PITP on Friday. CM Shah announced that Sindh has allocated Rs42 billion for public sector universities in the current financial year — the highest among all provinces — to support operational needs, research, infrastructure, and innovation.

The CM also inaugurated two major infrastructure projects at NED University — the new building for the Department of Food Engineering, equipped with advanced laboratories for Rs96.48 million, and the International Boys Hostel, which accommodates 112 students and was funded with Rs67.11 million.

Additionally, a dedicated Girls Hostel block for 52 female students, funded with Rs98.52 million, was recognised as a step towards promoting gender inclusivity in engineering and technical education.

PITP

PITP has succeeded in partnership with NED University, Mehran University of Engineering & Technology (MUET), and Sukkur IBA. Notably, 13,565 students trained under PITP-I surpassed expectations, exceeding targets, the CM said. Of these, 4,353 graduates have secured employment, contributing Rs49 million in direct income to the provincial economy.

CM Murad appreciated the notable female participation, being 40 per cent at Sukkur IBA, 36 per cent at NED, and 33.6 per cent at MUET, with 62 per cent of MUET students coming from rural backgrounds, underscoring the programme's inclusive approach.

The CM distributed 300 Google Chromebooks / laptops to the top-performing PITP students through a transparent and merit-based selection criterion. He stressed that the selection process was completely merit-based, transparent, and tailored for each institution.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 05, 19/07/2025)

Sindh's allocation for universities higher than other provinces: CM

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said on Friday that the provincial government had allocated a record Rs42 billion for public-sector universities in the current financial year, the highest among all provinces, to support operational needs, research, infrastructure and innovation.

He said this while highlighting Sindh's commitment to higher education, digital empowerment and youth development through pioneering initiatives such as the Peoples Information Technology Programme-I (PITP-I).

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of newly constructed buildings at NED University and the distribution of Chromebooks to top-performing PITP-I students, he spoke about the initiative's success. He shared that 4,365 out of the 13,565 students trained under PITP-I had secured employment, which contributed Rs49 million in direct income to the provincial economy.

The CM reaffirmed the government's commitment to building an inclusive, digitally empowered and economically resilient Sindh. He described PITP-I as a shining example of what public-sector universities could achieve when trusted and empowered.

PITP-I, a model for digital inclusion, was conducted in partnership with NED University, Mehran University of Engineering & Technology (MUET) and Sukkur IBA.

He added that the 13,565 students trained under PITP-I had exceeded initial targets. "Of these, 4,353 graduates have secured employment, contributing Rs49m in direct income to the provincial economy," he said.

Mr Shah also appreciated the notable female participation in the programme—40 per cent at Sukkur IBA, 36pc at NED, and 33.6pc at MUET where 62pc of the participants also came from rural backgrounds.

The chief minister distributed 300 Google Chromebooks/laptops to top-performing PITP-I students through a transparent, merit-based selection process tailored to each institution.

He said the Sindh government, in collaboration with Google and Tech Valley Pakistan, has been distributing Chromebooks and launching initiatives to improve digital literacy and IT skills among students. These efforts include the provision of Chromebooks to top performers, Google Career Certificate scholarships and the integration of Google tools into the education system.

Training for Chromebook recipients will be conducted in April by Tech Valley, Google's partner in Pakistan, followed by award ceremonies in May, where certificates and Chromebooks will be distributed by the chief minister or the minister-in-charge.

The chief minister also formally announced the launch of PITP-II, with an expanded budget of Rs1.4bn.

The next phase aims to train 35,000 students in 12 high-demand IT fields, including matric, intermediate and graduate students (age limit: 28). A total of 1,750 Chromebooks will be awarded to the top five per cent of performers.

PITP-II is expected to generate a 40 per cent employment rate, with an estimated economic impact of up to Rs5.04bn over five years.

The CM praised the leadership of former NED Vice Chancellor Dr Sarosh Lodi, incumbent VC Dr Muhammad Tufail Johkio, Dr Tauha Hussain Ali and Dr Asif Shaikh, along with PITP focal persons and Tech Valley CEO Mr Umer Farooq.

He also acknowledged the tireless efforts of the science and information technology department, particularly Noor Ahmed Samoo, Dr Shahzeb Malik and Athar Baloch.

At NED University, the chief minister inaugurated two major infrastructure projects: a new building for the department of food engineering, equipped with advanced laboratories and built at a cost of Rs96.48m, and the international boys hostel, which accommodates 112 students and was constructed for Rs67.11m.

Additionally, a dedicated girls' hostel block for 52 female students, funded at Rs98.52m, was recognised as a step towards promoting gender inclusivity in engineering and technical education.

(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 19/07/2025)

Setback for students as KU doubles fees for postgraduate studies

The University of Karachi massively increased the fees for postgraduate and doctoral programmes last year and the 2025 admissions have again seen a further increase for all faculties on the campus.

Test, admission, and thesis evaluation/viva examination fees have also seen increases for both MPhil and PhD programmes.

Last year, the fees had seen a hike of up to 90 per cent across different departments. The increase was exceptional and massive given the previous fee structure being followed.

Up until 2023, as per the university prospectus, the per semester fee was Rs38,500 and Rs44,000 for MPhil and PhD programmes, respectively, across faculties such as arts, social sciences, Islamic studies, education, science, pharmacy, and management and administrative sciences.

VC defends decision, says there was a need for 'revision' in fee structure of MPhil, PhD programmes

In 2024, these fees rose significantly — MPhil fees ranged from Rs65,000 to Rs100,000 per semester depending on the department and PhD fees ranged from Rs80,000 to Rs120,000.

Now, in 2025, the fees have increased yet again by 10pc. Where the MPhil fee was Rs65,000, it has now been raised to Rs71,500. Similarly, programmes that charged Rs75,000 per semester now demand Rs82,500, with the highest MPhil fees reaching Rs132,000, depending on the department.

PhD programmes have also seen a sharp rise, with fees now ranging from Rs88,000 to Rs165,000 per semester, depending on the programme and department.

These back-to-back increases have brought KU's fee structure close to that of many private universities in the city, which, unlike the KU, offer modern infrastructure, air-conditioned classrooms and better research facilities.

When contacted in this regard, KU Vice Chancellor Dr Khalid Mahmood Iraqi told Dawn the university syndicate had passed a resolution which says that there would be a 10pc increase in fee every year, and that is what has been implemented this year.

About the massive increase of previous year, he said the university had not increased the fee but rather "revised" it. "That was done because our fee for many of the undergraduate programmes had increased and gone beyond the Mphil and PhD programmes. Besides that, the fee for the postgraduate degrees had remained quite low for many years and demanded a revision," Dr Iraqi maintained.

He further said that the fee had been increased depending on the "market value" of the degree programmes adding that there had been no "exceptional" hike for all departments.

"Another reason for revising the fee structure was that the HEC funding has not been increased. We also had to look for our self-sustainability," the VC added.

When told that there was criticism that the varsity had increased the fee but there had been no improvement in the quality of education and research as well the university infrastructure, Dr Iraqi said: "The teaching quality should improve. Over a 100 faculty members have been promoted to professorship."

However, he also put blame on the students who get enrolled at the KU, saying that there was a need to see "the kind of product" the university is getting from colleges. "Given the state of education and examination at matric and intermediate levels, what kind of students are we getting?" he asked, suggesting that the problem lied with the students as well, not just the teachers.

As for the poor infrastructure of the varsity, the vice chancellor admitted that "unfortunately there had not been any work on that side" and said that the university had written to the Sindh government for financial help in that regard.
(By Waqas Ali Ranjha Dawn, 13, 21/07/2025)

Computer Science top choice of XI students in Karachi

The admission process for the academic year 2025-26 in government intermediate colleges across Sindh has been completed.

A total of 169,923 students have secured admissions in various colleges across Sindh, including Karachi, which is approximately 30 per cent more than the previous year.

The automated online process is conducted via Sindh Electronic Centralized College Admission Programme (SECAP). Classes for the new academic session for the XI are set to begin on August 5. According to Dr. Naveed Rab Siddiqui, Director General of Colleges Sindh, the highest number of admissions this year was in Computer Science, which is proof that students are now prioritizing technology-related fields over traditional subjects.

The DG explained that for the first time, college principals have been given the authority to handle admission transfers, claims, and cancellations, allowing students to access these services directly at their colleges. This development is expected to save time and reduce travel expenses for students, making the admission process more efficient and convenient.

Karachi tops the list with 99,711 students securing admissions in colleges. In Karachi, the highest number of admissions was recorded in the Computer Science, with 31,692 students opting for this field. This was followed by Pre-Medical with 22,846 admissions, Commerce with 21,233, Pre-Engineering with 11,386, Humanities with 8,876, and Home Economics with 160 admissions.

In Hyderabad, 26,543 students secured admissions in colleges, while in Mirpurkhas, 10,618 students were admitted, followed by 10,183 in Shaheed Benazirabad, 9,889 in Larkana, and 10,979 in Sukkur.

The majority of students in Hyderabad opted for Pre-Medical, with 16,767 admissions, while other subjects also saw significant interest.

(By Ayesha Khan Ansari The Express Tribune, 04, 23/07/2025)

Dilapidated school buildings

In a province where dilapidated buildings have already caused too many deaths — mainly due to heavy rain causing infrastructural damage — over 3,000 school buildings in Punjab pose an urgent threat to the lives of students and teachers. Despite repeated warnings, Punjab School Education Department's failure to tend to this crisis reveals their abrasive apathy towards the safety of the people of Punjab, and especially towards tens of thousands of vulnerable children. After severe monsoon rains, these buildings have officially been declared 'structurally dangerous', with hundreds of government school buildings even harbouring waterlogged classrooms and exposed electrical wiring.

According to the PDMA Director General, 136 people have died, and 488 others have been injured as a direct result of these monsoon rains and the government's failure to protect its citizens. Now, a hair-raising number of students are going to return to buildings declared 'unfit for use' and risk meeting the same fate — all in the simple quest for education.

The PDMA has urged citizens to avoid staying in such decayed building structures in light of the high number of casualties, but how are children meant to avoid schools? Almost nearing their end, students' summer breaks have so far protected them against some roofs that have already collapsed. But the children are about to return, yet restoration work remains to be an untouched conversation.

While officials have revealed that the government has allocated special funds to rehabilitate flood-affected buildings, the practical implementation of those funds must be urgent and exhaustive. Waiting to watch school buildings crumble under the weight of rain must not be a risk the government should be willing to take.

(By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 27/07/2025)

Only 646 out of 4,000 clear teaching license test

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said that he respects his teachers just as much as he respects his parents because they shaped his future and enabled him to compete effectively in his field and emphasised that teachers must earn this kind of respect by providing proper education to their students.

This he said, while speaking at the ceremony of awarding teaching licenses to successful candidates organised by the Sindh Education department here at CM House on Tuesday.

The ceremony was attended by Education Minister Syed Sardar Shah, Minister for Livestock Mohammad Ali Malkan, Secretary (School Education) Zahid Abbasi, diplomats, MPAs, educationists, Shahzad Raoi of Zindagi Trust and members of civil society.

The Chief Minister urged all citizens to honour their teachers and to satiate their thirst for knowledge through reverence for these educators, emphasising that such respect must be earned by delivering quality education to students.

Shah recalled that three years ago, the idea of issuing teaching licenses was proposed by Sardar Shah.

He mentioned, "It was said that licenses should be given to those who are shaping our future," describing this initiative as a vital step toward ensuring competency and accountability within the teaching profession.

During the ceremony, Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah awarded teaching licenses to 646 successful candidates, including 297 JEST and 195 pre-service licenses.

He highlighted that only 646 out of 4,000 candidates passed the test, which reflects a low success rate of about 16 per cent. He remarked, "We have a lot of work to do to improve education standards."

Murad Ali Shah reaffirmed the government's commitment to introducing highly qualified educators through the Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (STEDA).

Moreover, he raised concerns over millions of children being out of school and stressed the need to assess the quality of education provided to those, who are enrolled.

He questioned, "How can we prepare children to live a good life in a competitive world?" In addressing the long-term decline in educational quality, Murad Shah pointed out, "The education system has gradually deteriorated over the past 40 or 50 years."

He reminisced about a time when primary schools provided excellent education and noted the disparity in teacher appointments based on merit.

Sindh Minister for Education Sardar Shah addressing the Teaching Licence] ceremony, said that today marks a joyful day for him, as a dream envisioned three years ago has now become a reality.

"Change is welcomed, but it is essential that it is effective," the minister emphasised. The minister highlighted that the implementation of teaching licences would bring significant improvements to the education system.

Referring to misconceptions, he noted that some individuals believed the licences were akin to weapon permits for teachers.

"Initially, we recruited teachers without licences as running schools was our priority," he explained.

Moving forward, all newly recruited teachers will undergo training before being issued licences. Only licensed teachers will be appointed in future recruitments, he confirmed.

"Teaching should be viewed not merely as a job but as a service and a responsibility," stressed Minister Sardar Shah.

Those, who spoke on the occasion were Secretary Education Zahid Abbasi, Dr Sajid Ali of Aga Khan University, Shahzad Raoi, STEDA Executive Director Rasool Bux Shah.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 05, 30/07/2026)

Sindh grants teaching licences to over 600 educators

Awarding teaching licences to over 600 successful candidates, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has reaffirmed his government's commitment to introducing highly qualified educators through the Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority (STEDA), saying quality education begins with quality teachers.

He said this while speaking at the licence awarding ceremony organised by the Education Department at CM House on Tuesday.

During the occasion, the chief minister awarded teaching licences to 646 successful candidates, including 297 JEST and 195 pre-service licences. He highlighted that only 646 out of 4,000 candidates passed the test, reflecting a low success rate of about 16 per cent.

The ceremony was attended by Education Minister Syed Sardar Shah, Minister for Livestock Mohammad Ali Malkani, Secretary School Education Zahid Abbasi, diplomats, MPAs, educationists and members of civil society.

CM Shah expressed profound gratitude to all stakeholders, including teachers, officials and development partners, for their unwavering commitment to educational excellence in the region.

CM Murad vows to expand licensing to private, early childhood education sectors

He recalled that three years ago, the idea of issuing teaching licences was proposed by Sardar Shah. He mentioned, "It was said that licences should be given to those who are shaping our future," describing this initiative as a vital step towards ensuring competency and accountability within the teaching profession.

He said, "We have a lot of work to do to improve education standards."

Moreover, he raised concerns over millions of children being out of school and stressed the need to assess the quality of education provided to those who are enrolled.

He also addressed local grievances regarding the hiring process, illustrating the need for fairness in educational opportunities.

Looking ahead, CM Shah expressed aspirations to expand the teaching licence initiative to private institutions and early childhood education sectors.

He reassured stakeholders of the government's commitment to overcoming logistical hurdles and extending the policy's reach.

The chief minister celebrated this milestone as a proud moment for Sindh, encouraging all education stakeholders to view this not as an endpoint but the beginning of a new era in teaching professionalism. He concluded with a hopeful vision that licensed teachers will inspire the next generation and contribute to a bright future for Sindh.

Speaking on the occasion, the education minister said that today marked a joyful day for him, as a dream envisioned three years ago had now become a reality.

"Change is welcomed, but it is essential that it is effective," the minister emphasised.

The education minister highlighted that the implementation of teaching licences would bring significant improvements to the education system. Referring to misconceptions, he noted that some individuals believed the licences were akin to weapon permits for teachers.

"Initially, we recruited teachers without licences as running schools was our priority," he explained.

Moving forward, all newly recruited teachers will undergo training before being issued licences. Only licensed teachers will be appointed in future recruitments, he confirmed.

"Teaching should be viewed not merely as a job but as a service and a responsibility," stressed the education minister. He further remarked that trained teachers are crucial for preparing the next generation.

"I see myself not just as the Minister of Education, but as an administrator of education, making decisions under the guidance of educational experts," concluded the minister.

Those who spoke on the occasion included Secretary Education Zahid Abbasi, Dr Sajid Ali of Aga Khan University, Shehzad Roy and STEDA Executive Director Rasool Bux Shah.
(By Dawn Reporter, 13, 30/07/2025)

Friends, colleagues remember Zubeida Mustafa at CEJ-IBA event

Friends and colleagues gathered at the Centre for Excellence in Journalism at the Institute of Business Administration (CEJ-IBA) on Thursday to remember veteran journalist and former assistant editor at Dawn newspaper Zubeida Mustafa.

On the occasion, director of CEJ Shahzeb Jillani said that it was senior journalist Umber Khairi's idea to organise such a programme for Mrs Zubeida. He was of the opinion that warrior classes honour their heroes as do so many other professions but journalists hardly ever pay tribute to one another. He said it would be interesting to hear about how newspapers used to be run back in 1975 when Mrs Mustafa joined Dawn. He observed that Mrs Mustafa belonged to that breed of journalists who kept a low profile themselves as they let their writings speak for themselves.

Senior journalist Ghazi Salahuddin, who was already working in Dawn as assistant editor when Mrs Mustafa joined said that she also joined the writing side for penning daily editorials and with her background of an academic researcher, she brought a new dimension to journalism. "Journalism is also known as literature in haste. But because of her we took care to double check facts. The Dawn reference library was also developed and expanded by her as research mattered," he said.

Journalist and academic Muna Khan said that she has Mrs Mustafa to thank for breaking her in.

"I was made in-charge of Dawn's weekly magazine The Review and Mrs Mustafa would come over and ask me things as I wondered why as I didn't report to her, Muna laughed. "But after passing her tests we became buddies. She was my ally," she said.

Sumera Naqvi who worked with Mrs Mustafa in Dawn's literary magazine Books & Authors said that she was larger than life. "Working with her also meant experiencing tough love but she was also very caring. She bettered life for her colleagues and subordinates and fought for their rights, too. She was an agent of change," she said.

Artist and writer Rumana Husain said that Mrs Mustafa was amazing as even with failing eyesight she would not let it come in the way of her work. "She saw everything from the heart's eye," she said.

Journalist Rizwana Naqvi, another of Mrs Mustafa's colleagues from Dawn, said that she used to contribute book reviews for Books & Authors, which Mrs Mustafa would edit. "I would study the changes she made in my reviews, which made me a better sub-editor myself."

Feminist writer and poet Attiya Dawood said that she knew Mrs Mustafa through her husband K.B. Abro, who was Dawn's artist, illustrator and visualiser, and also through her own writings as Mrs Mustafa would get her books reviewed.

Journalist Zofeen T. Ebrahim recalled that she used to write in longhand initially as her thought process worked better that way. "But Mrs Mustafa insisted I learn to type. Now my thought process works better when I type," she shared.

Journalist Khursheed Hyder said that there are very few people in the world who push others ahead and Mrs Mustafa was one of them. "She always made time for us and always encouraged us," she said.

Academic Tahira Abid said that she had spent two or three days with Mrs Mustafa when she was volunteering with Indus Resource Centre during the 2010 floods and Mrs Mustafa was writing about the calamity. "She told me then that she was learning braille because her eyesight was failing rapidly," she said.

Architect Mukhtar Husain said that Mrs Mustafa's caring nature made him feel like family. "Whenever we met, she would inquire about my work and my family. I value and cherish her friendship," he said.

A heartfelt note by one of Mrs Mustafa's mentees and young friends, Deneb Sumbul, who could not be there, but who had also helped her with the proofing of some of her books, was also read out on the occasion.

Finally Mrs Mustafa's eldest sister Dr Fatema Jawad spoke about their upbringing. She said that their father was the Director General of Pakistan Railways and their mother a homemaker, who instilled in their four children good habits and values. "They also instilled in us honesty and punctuality," she said.
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 14, 01/08/2025)

In a first, students develop wuzu water recycling system

In a first for Pakistan, students of the Aligarh Institute of Technology (AIT) have developed an ablution water recycling system aimed at conserving water and addressing the growing environmental challenges facing the country.

The project, titled Nahr Al Khair (River of Goodness), has been installed at Jamia Masjid Ali in the Buffer Zone area of the metropolis. It seeks to prevent the wastage of water used for ablution (wuzu) by recycling it through a scientifically designed, three-stage filtration process.

The system has been developed by a group of students, named Omar Ayan Abbas, Muhammad Tabrez, Muhammad Khizr, Muhammad Shayan, Muhammad Naseem, Abu Bakr, Syed Hassan, Muhammad Huzaifa, Owais Qureshi, Muhammad Zubair, Sheikh Shahzad, Syed Ammar, Muhammad Alian, Abdullah Faisal, Ali Abbas Rizvi, Syed Zulfiqar Ali, Syed Zain Ali, Syed Hamza, and Ayan, under the guidance of Engineer Syed Muhammad Saad.

The filtration plant comprises three tanks. The first tank contains natural filtering materials, including coarse and fine stones, gravel, and charcoal, to remove solid waste and larger particles. The second tank helps filter out smaller pollutants and impurities, while the final tank enables the cleaned water to seep into the ground through soil absorption and existing boreholes, thereby contributing to groundwater recharge.

Experts believe the system offers a sustainable solution to the country's worsening water crisis. The students say the project is a small step towards promoting water conservation and environmental awareness at the community level.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 07/08/2025)

83.93 per cent clear matric science exam

The Board of Secondary Education Karachi (BSEK) has declared the results for the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Science Group examinations held in 2025.

According to BSEK Chairman, the results are available on the board's official website www.bsek.edu.pk and can be accessed by students after 3am on Friday.

Per the statement released by the board, the pass percentage for this year's exams stands at 83.93 per cent. A total of 173,738 candidates were registered for the exams, out of which 172,391 appeared, while 1,347 were absent and as many as 27,244 students failed.

Aina Farooqi from Montessori Complex High School secured the first position with 94.73% marks. Wania Noor from Pioneer Grammar Secondary School clinched the second position with 94.09% marks. The third position was shared by Syed Azkaar Hussain from Civil Aviation Model School and Umaima Zafar from The Smart School, both scoring 94% marks.

The results also reveal that out of the total candidates who passed, 30,154 students secured an A-One grade.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 14/08/2025)

Over 30,000 students pass matric science exams with A-1 grade

The Board of Secondary Education Karachi (BSEK) announced the results of the annual Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Part II Science Group examinations for 2025 very late on Wednesday evening.

According to the results, Aina Farooqi of Montessori Complex High School in Gulshan-i-Iqbal secured first position with 94.73 per cent marks. Waniya Noor of Pioneer Grammar Secondary School in Islam Nagar, Orangi Town, took second position with 94.09pc. There was a tie for third place between Syed Azkar Hussain Rizvi of Civil Aviation Model School, Airport, and Umaima Zafar of the Smart School Rafa-i-Aam Campus, Malir Halt, both of whom achieved 94pc.

Among the successful candidates, 30,154 obtained an 'A-1' grade, 50,346 secured an 'A' grade, 39,691 earned a 'B' grade, 20,614 obtained a 'C' grade, 3,841 received a 'D' grade, and 35 achieved an 'E' grade.

Girls outshine boys by securing top positions

The success rate in this year's examination was 83.93, with 144,681 candidates clearing all papers. Of the 173,738 candidates registered for the Science Group exams, 172,391 actually appeared, while 1,347 were absent and 27,244 failed.

There were 90,740 male candidates and 82,998 female candidates.

While congratulating the successful students, BSEK Chairman Ghulam Hussain Sohoo said that ensuring transparency in the results remained one of the board's top priorities.

The results are available on the board's website.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 14, 14/08/2025)

Girls lead the way in HSC Part II exams

Female candidates have secured all top three positions in the HSC Part II (Pre-Engineering Group) annual examinations 2025 conducted by the Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK), according to the results announced on Saturday. The first position was shared by two candidates: Laiba Ansari of Osman Public School Campus-I and Syeda Anzila Haider Zaidi of BAMB PECHS Government College for Women as both obtained 1,019 marks out of 1,100, securing A-One grades, said BIEK Chairman Prof Faqir Muhammad Lakho.

The second position was clinched by Aizal Marha, also from BAMB PECHS Government College for Women, with 1,014 marks, while Hafsa Imran of Hamdard Intermediate College for Science and Commerce stood third with 1,010 marks. Both secured A-One grades.

Official figures show that a total of 11,547 candidates were declared successful, setting the overall pass percentage at 54.94.

In terms of grades, 1,035 candidates secured an A-One, 1,762 an A, 2,351 a B, 2,938 a C, 3,124 a D, and 296 an E grade. Forty-one candidates cleared their exams under special categories.

The results have been uploaded to the BIEK website, www.biek.edu.pk.

Prof Lakho congratulated the successful candidates and announced that an award ceremony would be held after the results of all Intermediate groups are declared, where position-holders would be honoured in the presence of their parents and teachers. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 17/08/2025)

Dr Pervez Hoodbhoy slams Pakistan's obsolete education system

"Every department of every big US university has got 20 to 30 per cent Indian faculty. Slightly more than that are a Chinese faculty and in most cases zero per cent Pakistani faculty, or Pakistani-origin faculty. In fact, there is not one single professor of mathematics that is Pakistani in any university in the United States, Britain, the rest of Europe or Australia," said academic and nuclear physicist Dr Pervez Hoodbhoy.

He was speaking at the launch ceremony of the STEM Talent Search portal Lok Sahaita, a project of the Asma M. Hashmi Stem Centre at the NED University of Engineering and Technology, which was held at a local hotel here on Friday.

The Lok Sahaita STEM Talent Search Program is an initiative led by NEDUET where the country's brightest university students will have the chance to submit their science projects for review followed by a period of mentorship to turn their ideas into breakthrough innovations.

They can work in the field of health, agriculture, urban planning, digital solutions, climate readiness, artificial intelligence, etc. The best projects will earn national recognition along with receiving awards of up to one million rupees.

"We shot down five or six Indian Rafale fighter aircraft from the J-10 fighter jets which unleashed the PL-15 missiles through satellite technology, with training provided by China. So okay we can be happy, but now let's get realistic," Dr Hoodbhoy said.

Says rote learning will take us backwards; STEM talent search portal launched

"It is an excellent thing to look for talent but let's not forget that it is a very difficult upward struggle. It is difficult for many different reasons but let me start with why it is going to be very difficult at the international level.

"Physics teachers and professors all over the world today are grappling with this issue when giving assignments to their students as they are faced with this problem of the students accessing artificial intelligence to actually get the problems solved," he said.

"Today I accessed ChatGPT, too, to know the position of Pakistani students competing in international physics Olympiads and was given a factual list. According to the AI source, we have had zero gold medals in the last 20 years, one silver medal and five bronze medals. Then I asked the same question about Indian students and was informed that of every Indian team that has gone to the Olympiads in the last 30 years, 42 per cent have received gold medals, 42 per cent have also received silver medals and no student has returned to India without at least a bronze medal," Dr Hoodbhoy shared.

"So we are in a very difficult situation. Why has this situation come about and how might we possibly go about improving things? This is one way, by holding science competitions, making the students aware of what is out there so they make a run for it. Beyond that it is the education system which, basically, has to be reformed," he said, adding that our exams only test our memory and nothing else. But memorising blindly will make us move in reverse.

Finally, Dr Hoodbhoy reminded that all talk about progress and its importance in building up a viable society entirely depended upon one's vision for society and how one honoured or dishonoured those who excelled in the sciences or in any area of intellectual endeavour.

"There is only one person in all of Pakistan's history, who has won a Nobel Prize in science, well, in physics. It was an achievement which was not simply of getting a Nobel Prize but which also has such importance in the world of physics that you no longer call it the Glashow-Weinberg-Salam theory but the Standard Model of particle physics that unifies the electromagnetic force and the weak nuclear force into a single electroweak interaction," he said.

"The idea of textbooks is being phased out across the world. The best education system is in Finland where there are no textbooks anymore. Unlike what we have here where textbooks are written by incompetent people who make huge profits. Instead, have it all online. This is how the rest of the world such as China, Korea, Japan, much of Europe and the United States are growing," he said.

"But here we can't even utter Dr Abdus Salam's name because he happened to be an Ahmadi. Here you study Einstein, who was Jewish, C.V. Raman Spectroscopy doesn't get to you even though he was a Hindu but Dr Abdus Salam offends you so much? If your society is so intolerant that its foundations start to shake with just the mention of his name, then how is your society going to move forward?"

Project PI and Director Stem Centre, NEDUET, Dr Majida Kazmi; Chairman Lok Sahaita Syed Pir Mohammad Shah; Pro Vice Chancellor, NEDUET, Dr Noman Ahmed and Vice Chancellor, NEDUET, Dr Muhammad Tufail, also spoke. (By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 23/08/2025)

Fireworks warehouse blast damaged school

An explosion at a fireworks warehouse located in Al-Amna Plaza on MA Jinnah Road Breeze Plaza on Wednesday night caused severe damage to the Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Jacob Lines No 1.

Principal of the school, Samina Naimat, told The Express Tribune that two school blocks, including the staff room, hall and science laboratory, were extensively damaged in the blast. Furniture, ceiling fans and cupboards were destroyed while debris from the structure was strewn across the premises. She said the classrooms, however, remained largely safe.

"The incident has left me shocked and distressed. Had this blast occurred during school hours, it would have turned into a major tragedy," the principal said, urging the government to ensure that fireworks warehouses are not allowed to operate in close proximity to educational institutions.

The school has an enrolment of nearly 1,000 students, with about 75 teachers and 10 non-teaching staff. Samina said officials from the Education Department had already visited the site, while the provincial education secretary's visit was due. The Education Works Department has been directed to carry out emergency repair works. "The building was already in a dilapidated condition. Now we demand its proper reconstruction and improvement," she added. Investigators have not determined the exact cause of the explosion.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 23/08/2025)

Sindh governor refuses assent to education boards' bill

Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori has refused to give his assent to the recently passed Sindh Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) (Second Amendment) Bill 2025 and sent it back to the provincial assembly for reconsideration.

The governor has objected to an amendment which allowed government officers in grade 19/20 to become chairman of any educational board in the province.

Section 15, Sub-clause (1) of the Sindh BISE Bill replaced the condition of "BPS-20/21" with "BPS-19/20" officers.

"The governor emphasised that the clause should remain in its original form in order to maintain administrative standards and experience within educational boards," said a press release issued on Sunday.

It said that the governor returned the bill under Article 116(2)(b) of the Constitution, asking the Sindh Assembly to review the proposed changes.

On Aug 8, the Sindh Assembly had passed the BISE bill allowing officers of grades 19 and 20 to be appointed as chairmen of boards. The house was informed that the bill was aimed at paving the way for more officers to be appointed in the education boards.

Meeting with businessmen

A delegation of business man comprising Zubair Motiwala, Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Javed Balwani and others called on the governor.

During the discussion, the delegation expressed serious concerns over the deteriorating city infrastructure following recent rains, persistent sewerage problems and prolonged power outages in industrial zones. They appealed to the governor for urgent action to resolve these issues.

The meeting was also attended by Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan's leaders Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Dr Farooq Sattar and Aminul Haque.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 25/08/2025)

Inter exam pass rate at 55.59%

The Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK) has announced the results of the Intermediate Part-II (Science General Group) annual examinations 2025.

The first position was jointly secured by Maira Khan, daughter of Raja Khan, a student of Government Degree Science and Commerce College and Muhammad Haroon, son of Muhammad Aslam, a student of Bahria College Karsaz. Both obtained 988 marks out of 1100.

The second position was secured by Muhammad Anas, son of Muhammad Furqan, of Bahria College Karsaz, who obtained 986 marks with an A-1 grade. The third position went to Ayesha Yasin, daughter of Muhammad Yasin from the same college, who scored 982 marks with an A-1 grade. Controller of examinations said that a total of 16,842 candidates were registered, of which 16,549 appeared in the exams. Among them, 9,199 were declared successful, putting the overall pass percentage at 55.59 per cent.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 26/08/2025)

Bid to grab KU land sparks backlash

A tense standoff unfolded at the University of Karachi (KU) on Friday when officials from the Karachi Development Authority (KDA), accompanied by police personnel, allegedly attempted to occupy a piece of land within the university's premises. The move, described by the KU administration as an "illegal land grab," was thwarted after university officials, faculty members, and students confronted the team and demanded legal documentation, which the KDA reportedly failed to produce.

According to university sources, the KDA team arrived at Gate No. 1 of the KU campus, accompanied by police vehicles and a group of officials carrying construction materials. They began placing wooden stakes, marking boundaries, and putting up signboards on a vacant plot of land located adjacent to the main entrance of the campus the Jubilee Gate.

Upon receiving reports of the activity, KU Registrar Dr Imran Ahmed Siddiqui and Campus Security Officer Muhammad Salman rushed to the site. The KU officials questioned the KDA team about the legality of their actions and asked them to show official documents, court orders, or written directives that authorized them to take possession of the land. However, KDA officers were unable to provide any documentation.

Instead, tensions escalated when members of the KU Watch and Ward staff attempted to resist the encroachment. University staff alleged that the KDA officials used abusive language, manhandled guards, and issued threats of arrest. The confrontation attracted the attention of students, who gathered at the scene, chanting slogans against what they called an attempt to "usurp public education land." The KDA team eventually withdrew.

University's response

The KU administration condemned the incident describing it as a blatant violation of the institution's autonomy and property rights. Registrar Dr. Siddiqui stated: "The University of Karachi is a federal chartered academic institution, and its land is dedicated solely to educational purposes. No external body has the authority to seize or encroach upon university land without legal basis. The attempted takeover by KDA officials is unacceptable, unlawful, and will be resisted at every level."

The Karachi University Teachers' Society (KUTS) expressed outrage, issuing a statement that accused the KDA of "institutional bullying." The society said that such encroachments not only threatened the integrity of the university but also challenged higher education in Sindh.

KUTS President Prof. Dr. Shahid Rasool said: "The land of KU is not for commercial exploitation. It is a national asset for research, teaching, and knowledge production. If the KDA or any other department attempts to dispossess the university of its rightful property, the academic community will launch a strong movement and will not hesitate to protest on the streets."

Land disputes

Land around the University of Karachi has long been a subject of contention. Established in 1951, the university occupies one of the largest campuses in Pakistan, spanning over 1,200 acres in Gulshan-i-Iqbal. Over the decades, multiple attempts have been reported by different state and private actors to occupy parts of the university's property.

In the past, portions of land on the periphery of KU were encroached upon by housing societies and commercial projects, prompting repeated protests by the administration. University officials argue that these attempts are fueled by the high real-estate value of the land, given its central location and vast size.

The latest incident comes amid growing concerns about urban land disputes in Karachi, where state agencies, housing authorities, and private developers frequently clash over property ownership.

Students' Involvement

Friday's confrontation also saw the participation of students, who rushed to the spot after learning of the alleged encroachment. Videos circulated on social media showed students raising slogans in support of the KU administration, demanding that the land remain reserved for academic purposes.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 30/08/2025)

KU vows to resist every bid to grab university's land

A day after the administration, aided by a large number of students, foiled an attempt to grab Karachi University land in front of its Silver Jubilee Gate, the varsity's vice chancellor (VC) has declared his firm opposition to the "illegal attempt by the Karachi Development Authority (KDA) to seize the land" and warned of legal consequences if such actions continue.

The incident drew widespread condemnation not only from KU teachers, officers and employees' bodies but also from political parties.

However, the KDA insisted that the land in question belonged to the authority and the varsity allegedly constructed a nursery there.

Talking to Dawn, KU VC Dr Khalid Mahmood Iraqi said that any future encroachment efforts by the KDA or other entities would be met with strong resistance.

"We have already issued several court notices to KDA and others who have tried to grab varsity land," the VC said, adding that, if necessary, the university would take the matter to the Anti-Corruption Department and pursue action at the highest levels.

Move to occupy piece of land in front of Karachi University's Silver Jubilee Gate condemned

As per university officials, on Aug 29 a team from the KDA, accompanied by police vehicles and several officials carrying construction supplies, arrived unannounced in front of the the Silver Jubilee Gate. The group began marking boundaries, placing wooden stakes, and installing signboards on a vacant plot adjacent to the gate.

Soon after hearing about the activity, varsity officials arrived at the scene to intervene. They confronted the KDA team and demanded legal documentation or official authorisation permitting them to take control of the land. The KDA representatives, however, failed to produce any such documents.

The KDA officers allegedly used threatening language, physically pushed security staff, and even issued warnings of arrest. The altercation drew the attention of students on campus, many of whom gathered at the site in protest, chanting slogans condemning what they described as an "assault" on public education property.

Following resistance from KU staff and the growing presence of protesting students, the KDA team ultimately withdrew from the scene.

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the KDA said that the authority was engaged in large-scale operations against encroachments across the city. He said KDA DG Asif Jan Siddiqui visited Gulistan-i-Jauhar Block 1 where a nursery was constructed by the KU on the KDA land adjacent to its Silver Jubilee Gate.

He said that during the visit of the KDA team on the encroached land, students illegally interfered in the matter and tried to create law and order situation.

The spokesman claimed that the land in question originally belonged to the KDA.
(By Waqas Ali Ranjha Dawn, 13, 31/08/2025)

One week on, blast-hit school awaits repairs

More than a week after a fireworks warehouse explosion on MA Jinnah Road, repair and restoration work at the adjoining Government Girls Secondary School Jacob Lines No 1 has yet to begin, leaving over 1,000 students deprived of classes.

Teachers and staff, who continue to report daily, say academic activities remain suspended as they struggle with cleaning and minor repairs on a self-help basis. They accuse the Education Works Department of negligence, pointing out that no official reconstruction work has started despite repeated visits by government officials.

The August 21 blast had severely damaged the school's boundary walls, staff rooms, laboratories, library, auditorium, and washrooms. Classrooms were also destroyed, while doors, windows, fans, furniture, and electrical systems were left unusable. Large cracks appeared in roofs, and debris and shattered glass still litter the premises. Electricity and water supplies remain disconnected, making the campus unsafe and unfit for teaching.

School Principal Samina Naimat told The Express Tribune that while education officers, the deputy commissioner, rescue officials, and representatives of the education works department visited the site and assessed the damage, no practical steps were taken.

"Two buildings, staff rooms, and the security guard's room are completely destroyed. The school is unsafe, teaching has been suspended, and teachers are raising donations themselves to restore it," she added.

Teachers reported that the absence of water and power has rendered washrooms unusable, forcing female staff to go to nearby places such as Taj Complex. Drinking water is unavailable, and the extent of damage to fans and lights remains unverified.

Teachers urged the government to urgently restore facilities and ensure schools are not exposed to hazardous warehouses in the future.

The school serves more than 1,000 students with 75 teaching and non-teaching staff. While attendance continues, classes remain suspended.

District East XEN Muhammad Sheikh told The Express Tribune that a detailed engineering survey had been conducted and an estimate of Rs100 million prepared for large-scale repairs.

Planned works include structural rehabilitation, provision of solar power, installation of water filters, electric water chillers and motors, rebuilding of eight washrooms, construction of two new halls and three rooms, roof repairs, and levelling of depressed ground portions.

The report has been forwarded to Assistant Commissioner Sajjad Ali Abro, Chief Engineer Askari, and Education Secretary Zahid Ali Abbasi, who has referred the matter to the Sindh Finance Department for release of funds.

"As soon as funds are released, reconstruction will begin," Sheikh said, adding that classrooms with minor damage may be temporarily used in the meantime.
(By Ayesha Khan Ansari The Express Tribune, 04, 31/08/2025)

Progress or price — green belts make way for Education City

The Sindh Land Utilisation Department has moved forward with plans to allocate an additional 2,817 acres of land in Malir district for the controversial Karachi Education City project. The new allocation includes large swathes of farmland, triggering fears that the metropolitan city's largest green belt could vanish and disrupt the critical supply of fresh produce from Malir.

Official documents reveal that the land earmarked for the project spans Deh Chuhar, along with parts of Deh Amilano and Deh Abdar. Earlier phases of the project had already claimed 9,000 acres of Malir land, resulting in the displacement of around 30 villages and the incorporation of 779 acres of farmland.

Originally, the Sindh government had projected that the first phase of the project would be completed by 2010, with the second phase set to begin by 2012. However, persistent delays have left the project incomplete. The estimated cost of the project, which was initially pegged at Rs13 billion, continues to rise.

Local residents affected by the expansion of the project have formed the "Education City Action Committee," which has vowed to challenge the government's decision in court.

The committee's convener, Mujahid Ahmed Jokhio, expressed his concerns, stating that the project was more commercial in nature than beneficial to the local community. "Most of the institutions within the Education City are commercially run and provide no tangible benefits to the local population," he added. Jokhio further stated that a huge portion of the land being acquired is used for agriculture, which contributes to the supply of vegetables to various parts of Karachi. Once the land is converted for commercial use, he warned, this vital agricultural supply would be jeopardised.

In response to local concerns, PPP Malir President MPA Razaq pledged his support for the community, stating that he would stand by them in their fight against the displacement caused by the project.

(By Razzak Abro The Express Tribune, 04, 31/08/2025)

FUUAST officials conceal key letters on VC's pay

Serious questions have surfaced over the upcoming Senate meeting of the Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science & Technology (FUUAST), after it emerged that two crucial letters from the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and the Federal Ministry of Education regarding the Vice Chancellor's salary were deliberately excluded from the agenda issued by the university administration for the September 3 session.

According to sources, both government bodies had explicitly advised against the continuation of the current salary being drawn by Vice Chancellor Dr. Zabta Khan Shinwari. However, contrary to these directives, the university administration - on the basis of a last pay certificate from 2019 when he retired as a TTS Professor - has been paying him a monthly salary of nearly Rs. 800,000 under the "pay protection" principle, since his appointment as VC in March 2024.

This arrangement, sources claim, not only disregards HEC and Ministry guidelines but also bypasses the authority of the Chancellor (the President of Pakistan), who alone is empowered to fix the terms and remuneration of the university's permanent Vice Chancellor. Despite these clear instructions, the matter was neither rectified nor referred to the Chancellor Secretariat.

HEC, in a formal communication, underlined that Dr. Shinwari had retired in March 2019 and thus did not qualify as a serving TTS faculty member at the time of his 2024 appointment as Vice Chancellor. The Commission stressed that any salary determination must therefore be referred to the Chancellor's office for approval.

What makes the situation more controversial is that, while the VC continues to draw an inflated salary, the teaching and non-teaching staff of the university have not been paid house ceiling allowances for nearly a year, and regular salaries and pensions are reportedly being disbursed after delays of two to three months.

Sources told The Express Tribune that the draft agenda circulated for the Senate session seeks approval for the Vice Chancellor's pay without disclosing these official objections - a move seen as an attempt to secure Senate approval by concealing facts. It is noteworthy that previously, an acting Vice Chancellor was removed from office for drawing salary without Senate approval, and the Registrar at that time received a formal notice from the Chancellor.

Meanwhile, in view of these developments, HEC has formally constituted an investigative committee to probe financial and administrative irregularities at FUUAST's Islamabad and Karachi campuses. The committee has been tasked with examining instances of misuse of authority, harassment, discrimination, and alleged victimization of faculty and staff.

The inquiry body is convened by Engineer Raza Chauhan, HEC Adviser HRD, with members including Aftab Rasheed (Senior Joint Secretary, Federal Ministry of Education), Nazir Hussain (Director General HEC Karachi), and Hammad bin Saif (Assistant Director Coordination, HEC). The committee has begun its work under a notification titled: "Constitution of a Committee on Multiple Complaints of Financial and Administrative Irregularities at Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science & Technology (Islamabad & Karachi Campuses)."

When approached for comment, University Treasurer Danish Ehsan was repeatedly contacted via calls and messages by The Express Tribune, but no response was received.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 01/09/2025)

Fresh land grab attempt at KU sparks protests

Karachi University (KU), one of Pakistan's largest higher education institutions, is once again at the centre of a land dispute as attempts to encroach upon its property have triggered student protests, faculty outrage, and heightened security measures. Within the span of a single week, two incidents have raised fears that organised land grabbers are targeting the university's valuable real estate.

Students block University Road after encroachment attempt. The first incident occurred on August 29 near the Silver Jubilee Gate of KU, where an attempt was made to occupy a piece of land adjacent to the main entrance. University staff intervened to prevent the takeover, after which hundreds of students staged a demonstration. Carrying placards and chanting slogans against the land mafia, they blocked University Road, one of Karachi's busiest arteries, causing significant traffic disruption.

The protest was led by Jamaat-e-Islami's MPA Farooq Farhan and KU's student leader Kamran Sultan. Farhan alleged that elements within the KDA, including former officials, were directly involved in the attempted land grab.

"The same people who grabbed public parks and housing plots in the past have now turned their eyes on educational institutions," he charged.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 02/09/2025)

Row over FUUast VC's salary surfaces

The Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science and Technology (FUUast) is facing a controversy over the alleged irregular salary of its vice chancellor, Dr Zabta Khan Shinwari.

Official documents suggested that Dr Shinwari's salary as the VC was fixed in 2024 and his current salary of Rs728,676 (net amount) was based on a 2019 payslip when he retired as a tenured professor and the FUUast administration is issuing this salary under the "pay protection" principle.

University sources say the decision to approve this amount bypassed the official procedure that requires approval from the chancellor, the president of Pakistan in this case.

The fixation, they say, was signed internally by the assistant registrar, audit officer, and registrar on March 4, 2024, with a note that it was subject to approval by the competent authority. However, no such approval was ever sought.

The matter has also been highlighted by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), which, in a letter dated June 10, 2024, pointed out anomalies in the pay fixation.

The HEC said that Dr Shinwari's salary should have been fixed at the starting pay of a tenure track system (TTS) professor, which is Rs394,875.

It described the use of his old, post-retirement payslip as an incorrect basis for determining his new salary. "Foregoing in view, it is recommended that the case may be forwarded to the Hon'ble Chancellor for appropriate decision....," an HEC letter says.

When Dawn approached the varsity administration on this matter, FUUast Registrar Dr Sadia Khalil said the allegations of inflated salary were "not true".

She added that the vice chancellor is getting the "minimum possible salary" as per the university's established laws.

(By Waqas Ali Ranjha Dawn, 14, 02/09/2025)

Second phase of English teaching initiative for teachers launched

In a bid to enhance the quality of education in the province by strengthening teachers' capacity, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has launched the second phase of the English as a Subject for Teachers and Educators (EaSTE-II) programme.

Launched in collaboration with the British Council, the initiative was described as a landmark effort to embed continuous professional development within the education system, ensuring that every child in Sindh has access to quality teachers, quality learning and quality opportunities.

The launch ceremony, held at CM House, was attended by Sindh Education Minister Syed Sardar Ali Shah, Deputy British High Commissioner in Karachi Lance Domm, British Council Pakistan (BCP) Country Director James Hampson, Regional Director Sarah Rogerson, as well as numerous educators and experts in the field of education.

Addressing the ceremony, the chief minister said EaSTE-II builds upon the achievements of the first phase and is set to benefit 30,000 newly inducted primary and early childhood teachers, 1,000 trained mentors and 35 course leaders across the province.

The programme aims to equip teachers with essential professional skills and confidence from the outset of their careers, establishing a sustainable model for continuous learning.

"Education is the cornerstone of progress in any society, and in Sindh, we are committed to empowering the very individuals who shape the future — our educators," said the chief minister.

The chief minister underscored the importance of English language proficiency, describing it as a global skill that facilitates access to knowledge, technology, research and international opportunities. "By empowering our teachers, we are enabling countless students to compete globally while remaining proud of their cultural and linguistic identity," he added. He reaffirmed his commitment to collaborating closely with the British Council and the British government.

He commended the innovative training model under EaSTE-II, which incorporates digital self-learning modules, hybrid and online sessions, and communities of practice for peer learning. He noted that Unesco had recently recognised Sindh's teachers as "Creative Teachers" for their innovative use of artificial intelligence alongside traditional folk wisdom in classrooms.

The education minister also spoke at the event, emphasising the role of language skills in enhancing learning outcomes. "A child who learns a language well learns every other subject better. Language is not just a subject; it is the bridge to knowledge, to thinking, to expression," he said.

BCP country director stated that the EaSTE programme is an online CPD initiative designed to enhance the English language teaching skills of educators.

(By Dawn Reporter, 14, 04/09/2025)

Unpacking campus scandals

NO one denies that outrageous incidents occur within our universities, sometimes making national news.

Examples include professors demanding sexual favours for better grades, male students creating fake, explicit AI images of female students, and administrators or low-level employees using hidden cameras for blackmail. Social media magnifies all this by a thousand, maybe a million. My internet search shows that some salacious on-sale videos can be viewed for only Rs100. Each scandal inevitably triggers public outrage that peaks and then fades.

Rightly speaking, university administrators should swiftly investigate and appropriately punish teachers or students. Unfortunately, this is rare. However, officials cannot always be held responsible because female students are usually too afraid to testify, fearing damage to their reputations even if they had been trapped and were guiltless. In a heavily patriarchal society with skewed power relationships, what can they do?

Media lynching — such as the recent [sting operation](#) at Bahawalpur University — is therefore seen as an alternative. Carried out by a popular TV channel, its viewership must have skyrocketed. The university's authorities had, as expected, waffled. But is justice truly served by cameras chasing some bad-guy professor? One can be doubtful.

True injustice occurs, however, when these instances are weaponised by reactionary voices. They rush to seize a megaphone, multiply fears, ignite lurid sexual fantasies and declare the coed university as a den of sin and temptation disallowed by religious and cultural mores. See, they say, let the sexes intermingle and *bay-hayae* (immorality) is what you get.

Reports of sexual misconduct are weaponised to enforce segregation and oppose coeducation.

The impact of such propaganda in a conservative society can only be imagined. In the aftermath of even a single incident, we cannot ever know how many hundreds of daughters were disallowed by their fathers or brothers from enrolling at some coed campus or being withdrawn from one.

A frequently proposed solution is to have more women-only universities. This is a dead end. I've guest lectured at several and to call them universities is a travesty. Perhaps they could be better described as female safe houses or custodial centres where minds must be sheltered and dulled, not challenged and sharpened.

What about going the Taliban way, and banning female education altogether? Even with the explosive growth of Pakistani conservatism, the near parity of male-female enrolment (100-96) in tertiary education suggests that urbanites do not want this extreme. Universities — whose revenues depend on enrolment — tread cautiously.

As a way out, worried officials aim to reassure fathers and brothers (mothers rarely matter) by increasing segregation through strict moral policing. Official circulars are periodically issued that threaten violators with fines, denial of entry on campus, withholding of semester results, or expulsion. But how do they define morality?

Official websites do not list as 'immoral' crimes like theft, academic cheating, plagiarism or vandalism. Similarly, harassment and violence against different ethnic and religious groups, or disrupting cultural and music festivals, are not classified as immoral. Depending on who's in charge, some officials disallow such actions while others secretly or openly endorse them.

Immorality, however, revolves around female attire. While none can deny that clothing should be 'modest', its meaning varies from city to city and campus to campus. Back in the early 1970s, when I started my university teaching career, the number of female students at Quaid-e-Azam University in burqa were fewer than the fingers on one hand. Today they are the majority, followed by the less restrictive hijab, while those without head cover are outliers.

Morality also comes under threat when a female walks by herself (hence becomes vulnerable), engages in casual conversations with male students, or makes friends across the divide. This is less emphasised at institutions like Lums whose official policy merely forbids PDA (public display of affection) such as the holding of hands. But within that same city is Punjab University (PU), a once-decent relic from British times.

Now better known for hyperactive moral squads than for scholarly accomplishments, PU is the headquarters of the Islami Jamiat-i-Talaba. IJT denounces coeducation and has physically attacked couples found sitting together on the university's lawn or benches. Some teachers and officials make no secret of their support for such actions.

Modernity is impacting every country's values and eliciting different responses. Turkiye, Morocco and Bangladesh have liberal campuses, much more so than ours. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are now outpacing even them. Whether or not de-segregation has full popular support, this is what their autocratic rulers have decided. On the other hand, even under Iran's strict clerical rule, the cruel death in custody of 22-year-old anti-hijab activist Mahsa Amini led to countrywide protests, suggesting that change is inevitable.

Modernity is also changing Pakistan but far slower than elsewhere. Our conservatives still don't want wives and daughters to work, but their opposition has diminished now that females in one out of five families have outside jobs. Despite all efforts to minimise contact between genders, full segregation is proving impossible.

The Pakistani diaspora in Britain, now into its third generation, remains backward and stuck in a quandary. Many parents, fearing corruption, resist sending their children to British coed schools. This makes for awkwardness in a society that treasures equality of men and women. Even more seriously, this puts many Pak-Brits at the bottom of the social heap for lack of skills and knowledge. Attitudes towards females, derived from enforcing school segregation, can show up late in life.

Islamophobic forces in Britain have long derived strength from grooming gang sex scandals that, much more than other immigrants, implicate British-Pakistani men. While the far right's claims are exaggerated to suit its political agenda, Pakistanis familiar with male attitudes towards females in general, and white girls in particular, say: where there's smoke there's fire.

Gender-related crimes on campus — or elsewhere for that matter — have no easy solution. Would restricting women to female-only workplaces restore purity and virtuousness? Would banning all contact between males and females eliminate sexual misconduct on our coed campuses?

Very likely, this would — just as banning all cars and motorbikes would eliminate traffic accidents. However, travelling on horses and camels is not a price that many, including conservatives, are willing to pay.
(By Pervez Hoodbhoy Dawn, 06, 06/09/2025)

What's cooking at Napa?

The National Academy of Performing Arts (Napa) seems to be in a spot of bother. News is that it's chief operating officer (COO) Sameeta Ahmed, who had replaced chief executive officer (CEO) Junaid Zuberi not long ago, has resigned. But it seems that the story of Napa's — for want of a better phrase — unsteady performance didn't begin in 2025.

Mr Zuberi had joined the academy in 2021 after a great deal of consideration once those who had helped build the institution (music composer Arshad Mahmud and sitar maestro Nafees Ahmad) left it on their own volition (or otherwise) and the legendary Zia Mohyeddin, the founder of Napa, was promoted to the post of President Emeritus.

It was a move that confused theatre and music lovers who wondered why the above-mentioned two popular individuals were not integral to Napa anymore.

The change in faculty wasn't smooth either. Those who had served under Mr Mohyeddin — theatre person Khalid Ahmed, for example — too gradually bid farewell to the academy.

Napa chairman Jawaid Iqbal says COO Sameeta Ahmed resigned due to health issues

One is reminded of eminent journalist Wusatullah Khan, who is a diploma holder in theatre arts from Napa, asking a question last year on Facebook about how the academy was doing. It was a note of concern. Talking to Dawn, he said, "After Zia Mohyeddin, Napa has been on a decline. There's an issue with teachers. Obviously, it's not that lot which had joined Napa early on and were trained here.

Most of the old ones have left in dismay. Now we see new makhloq (creatures) who obviously don't have the kind of commitment that founding members had."

Shedding light on the incident that had prompted him to use social media, he mentioned head of the theatre department. "She had misbehaved with a competent actress Noreen Gulwani and asked the guards to show her the door. It didn't go down well with some students and they got flared up. This is the reason I wrote on Facebook."

A few days back, two groups of boys (students) at Napa fought over something because of which one boy was badly hurt and began to bleed. The incident also involved the teacher that Wusatullah Khan has talked about.

Body formed to oversee Napa's affairs

Napa's Board of Directors (BoD) Chairman Syed Jawaid Iqbal gave his point of view in the following words, "Sameeta Ahmed has resigned due to health issues. I have formed a committee comprising Javed Jabbar, Mehtab Rashdi and Shahrukh Hassan to look into Napa affairs. They are dealing with it. You can't please everyone."

He continued: "To my knowledge, the issue is the semester system. I think we're going back to the early system. Eighty per cent students want the old system which was changed by head of the theatre department. Earlier, there used to be a four-month course with no gaps. In the new system, there's a break for two months. Musicians need constant riyaz. They can't have a break."

Mr Iqbal said he has heard about the brawl between students that took place recently resulting in a boy getting injured. He agreed with the assumption that the behaviour of a particular person has caused problems.

“Zia Mohyeddin was a man of stature. He was a giant. Now there is no one like him in the country. What can we do? I have asked Moniza Hashmi to help us with things. She is helping us now,” he added.

Later in the evening on Thursday, a press release stated that the Napa’s BoD had accepted the resignation of the head of the Department of Theatre Arts, Afreen Seher.

“Till such time as a permanent replacement is found, the Head of the Music Department will officiate as acting Head of Theatre Arts Department,” the board announced.

(By Peerzada Salman Dawn, 13, 06/09/2025)

Karachi University to hire law firm to get varsity’s ‘occupied’ land vacated

Against the backdrop of a recent “attempt” to violate its property rights, the syndicate of Karachi University (KU) at a special session on Monday passed a unanimous resolution on getting the “occupied/encroached” land of the varsity vacated.

The members of the syndicate also decided that the university would seek assistance from concerned government departments in this regard and hire an “experienced” legal firm to pursue cases in the court of law.

The meeting, chaired by Vice Chancellor Dr Khalid Iraqi, decided to set up a five-member committee comprising syndicate members — former KU VC Prof Mohammad Qaiser, former Karachi Commissioner Shoaib Ahmed Siddiqui, Prof Solaha Rehman, KU financial officer Syed Jahanzeb and director legal Asif Mukhtar — to assist the legal firm.

Other decisions taken in the meeting include the posting of patrolling staff.

No precise data about encroached land was presented before special syndicate meeting, sources say

In his remarks, VC Iraqi stated that it’s the first university syndicate meeting ever on the land issue, while vowing to protect “every inch of the university land”.

However, sources regretted that neither precise data on encroachment and land occupation was presented in the meeting nor members questioned the “administrative wisdom” to hire a legal firm, given the fragile financial situation of the university.

The decision, they said, indicated failure of the university’s legal department in protecting its land in the court of law.

Dawn contacted multiple administrative officials and senior teachers about the encroached land data. While no response was received on the specific information, they all agreed that “a significant portion of the university land is either occupied or encroached upon”.

They also shared that successive university administrations had dealt with this problem, but without much success.

The sources said official documents showed that the university was allotted 1,279.04 acres spread over Deh Safooran, Dozen, Songal and Gujhro, under Scheme No. 33.

According to these documents, the land was handed over to the KU Registrar on Nov 13, 1954. Three years later, the collector of Karachi confirmed the acquisition of land for the construction of the university.

In 2009, the record’s verification was again carried out by revenue officials.

The sources said many of these sites had been under litigation for a long time. This included the site where the Karachi Development Authority laid its claim and recently attempted to take it over. It had been under litigation since 1999.

The sources said the encroachments/occupied areas mentioned in documents included the encroachments near Khatm-i-Nubawat Chowk (opposite Kaneez Fatima Society) and in front of the Sheikh Zayed centre and the Silver Jubilee Gate.

A sports pavilion in front of the Staff Gate was also built on the university land.

“For decades, the university has been struggling to protect its land. One major reason for its failure is the absence of trained and equipped security staff, apart from rampant malpractices within the ranks of university officials,” shared a senior teacher.

The KU vice chancellor was not available for comments.

(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 13, 09/09/2025)

Need stressed for promoting informal modes of learning for out-of-school children

The country must promote informal modes of learning alongside the traditional education system, which would enable out-of-school children to play an effective role in social and community development.

This was stated by education experts at a programme in connection with International Literacy Day, which is observed on Sept 8 every year.

The event, which was organised by the Directorate of Literacy and Non-Formal Education, Sindh school education department, at the Scouts Auditorium here on Monday, began with the launch of the non-formal education curriculum in the Sindhi language. Introduced earlier this year, the curriculum has been designed for children up to the eighth grade.

Speaking as the chief guest, Sindh Education Minister Syed Sardar Ali Shah said that the purpose of education is not merely to teach but to prepare children as productive members of society. Failure to achieve this, he cautioned, would be worrisome for the future.

He added that education should be linked to collective interests such as coexistence and environmental protection. The minister also noted that Sindh has already initiated work in informal and technical education alongside the conventional school system. Currently, 500 non-formal education centers are operating under public-private partnerships, with plans to expand this number to 1,500.

School Education Secretary Zahid Ali Abbasi stated that the shortage of teachers in Sindh's schools has been addressed, and with teachers now present even in remote areas, student enrollment has significantly increased.

Unicef Education Manager Abeir Maqbool highlighted the need to reform teaching methodologies to foster critical thinking among children. She added that the expansion of non-formal education initiatives could substantially reduce the number of out-of-school children in Sindh.

Dr Tasneem Anwar, assistant professor at the Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development, stressed that the issue of out-of-school children cannot be solved by the traditional school system alone. Instead, it requires joint efforts from legislation, economy, society, parents, teachers and the government. She emphasised that community participation and the use of digital tools can help bring more children into the fold of literacy.

Sindh Education Foundation Managing Director Ghanhur Laghari informed the audience that the foundation's schools currently have one million children enrolled, most of them located in slum areas and rural regions. He said the SEF has played a significant role in reducing the number of out-of-school children across the province.

The ceremony concluded with the distribution of shields, medals and certificates among organisations and individuals working for the promotion of education and literacy.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 09/09/2025)

School closures

WHEN schools are closed, especially at times when they are expected to be open, the loss in terms of educational and learning outcomes can be substantial. Out of the 365 days that make up the year, we get only 160 days or so for teaching and learning time, thanks to the weekends and a number of scheduled national and religious holidays. When schools are shut for a longer period, it makes it difficult for teachers to complete the syllabus, to revise or make time for deeper learning. They may not even have time for the repetition of lessons that may be needed when young people are learning new things.

On the other hand, take a look at the trends in the context of curricula reviews, including of the infamous Single National Curriculum. We have added a) more subjects to the curriculum, b) more material and learning objectives to all subjects, c) more requirements for what teachers need to do in class to explain things, and d) more expectations of how teachers should assess the students.

Reducing the time and the number of days spent on teaching and adding more to the curriculum of each grade cannot go together, of course. The ultimate cost is borne by the children whose education is compromised as a result. As it is, the quality of education is quite poor in most schools in the country. Learning poverty figures are already high: 77 per cent for 10-year-olds by one estimate. How do further school closures make sense then?

The most recent example of this sort of policy action was seen when the Punjab education minister announced in early August that schools would remain closed in the province until the end of the month, instead of opening, as initially announced, on Aug 15. No real reason was given for the closure, and we just heard some vague references to the weather and so on. The weather, even if inclement, cannot be the same across a province as big as Punjab. So how can it be a reason for the blanket closure of schools across the province for approximately 15 days? And did the minister know that the weather would be better from the beginning of September? As I write this, we are still facing heavy rains and floods.

We should talk about decentralising school closure beyond regular holidays to the district level.

There are two issues that should be debated here. One, shouldn't there be a policy for school closures? Of course, we cannot predict all the events that could lead to such closures, but, given our experience over time, we have a good idea of the reasons behind school closures.

In recent times, schools have been closed due to smog, fog, cold weather, heat, rain and floods — as well as the anticipation of these climatic events. Schools have also been closed at times of protests or in anticipation of public demonstrations. At times, they have been closed when foreign or other dignitaries are visiting a city or a certain area. In addition, schools have been closed to prevent students from joining protests in an organised way. Maybe, there should be a policy that looks at a) the circumstances

under which schools can be closed, b) who should have the power to make the decision, and c) what the post-facto accountability process should be for ensuring policy compliance.

Two, the issue of procedure should also be looked at in detail. Who should decide if schools should close? We are not talking of individual school closures as that power should obviously reside with those at the school level. We are talking about the power to shut down approximately 50,000 public/ government schools across Punjab (as well as thousands of public schools in the other provinces) and some 150,000 private schools across the country. Since education is a devolved subject, policy decisions have to be made at the province level, though it may be determined that the decision to close schools should be taken at the district or even sub-district level by specified educational authorities.

Within the procedural domain, there are two things to keep in mind: is it, or is it not, an emergency situation? If it is an emergency situation, we have to ensure that some official has the power to decide things, according to the policy parameters already in place, but the decision should be subject to a post-facto review to ensure not just accountability but also optimal learning and precedent-setting.

If we can foresee something coming up, the decision should not only be made according to policy — there should be a role for consultation with the relevant stakeholders, especially school officials and teachers, so that the best ways to deal with an anticipated situation can be determined. If there is a fair warning of what to expect, schools might be able to adjust their teaching in advance, and come up with options such as online learning, supplementary classes and so on. Prior warning and consultation will allow for smoother and better responses.

At the policy level, we should seriously think about decentralising school closure issues beyond yearly and regular holidays to the district level. The education minister, sitting in Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar or Quetta should not really have this power. Our provinces are just too big to allow for that. Most issues related to the weather, protests and other emergencies tend to be local and they should be met with local responses. This will take away some of the arbitrariness from the process and force provincial officials to conduct better, more thoughtful and careful policymaking to set the parameters for local actions as well.

Closing down schools may appear to be the easy option in any perceived or real emergency as the cost of this measure is not immediate and clear to most people. But, in light of the impact on the learning of millions of students in the country, the cost to children and their families — in fact, to society as a whole — is quite substantial. The action should not be arbitrary or based on convenience. It should be based on a well-thought-out policy that sets the parameters for closure, allows for due consultation if there is time, and post-facto accountability.

(By Faisal Bari Dawn, 06, 12/09/2025)

Education disrupted

A MIX of natural calamities, terrorism and bureaucratic ineptitude has resulted in difficulties for students in KP's Khyber tribal district. In fact, the situation in Khyber reminds us of the disruptions in education that tens of thousands of school-age children face across Pakistan because of floods and militancy. As reported, some prefabricated schools in Khyber, which were built to replace educational facilities damaged by militants, are lying unused, mainly because of bottlenecks created by the provincial education department, while some structures were damaged during last month's torrential rains. It should be remembered that during several militant insurgencies over the last few decades, terrorists closed, damaged or destroyed thousands of schools in KP and erstwhile Fata. Today, as the floodwaters rage through Punjab, and enter Sindh, the educational future of countless children continues to hang in the balance. As per reports, over 400 schools have been damaged during the floods and heavy rainfall in KP this year, while the number for Punjab has crossed 2,000.

As it is, Pakistan faces an education emergency, with around 26m children out of school. The ongoing TTP insurgency in parts of KP, which has caused the displacement of thousands of families in some areas, as well as destruction and displacement resulting from harsh weather, will only add to the emergency. The provinces, therefore, with the centre's help, must ensure that displaced families have access to education for their children. Once areas are cleared of militants, and the waters subside, educational infrastructure must be rebuilt without delay. Pakistan cannot afford to add millions of children to the already abysmal total of out-of-school youngsters. While rebuilding schools will indeed take time, informal methods can be used to ensure uninterrupted education for affected children. Without basic education, the miseries of the children affected by terrorism and climate disasters will only be compounded.

(By Editorial, Dawn, 06, 14/09/2025)

Girls clinch top three positions in inter commerce exams

Tabani's College has clinched the all three top positions in the annual examinations of Intermediate Part II, Commerce Regular Group.

According to the results announced by the Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK) on Monday, the first position was secured by Kinza Sikander with 987 marks out of a total of 1,100 to take 'A-1' grade. The second position was clinched by Abeer Kamal with 974 marks with 'A-1' grade while the third position was secured by Sana Ashraf with 968 marks.

BIEK's Chairman Fakir Mohammad Lakho announced the results.

Providing the details, BIEK's Examinations Controller Zarina Rashid said that 28,651 candidates registered for the exams, whereas 27,707 took the papers out of which 11,974 candidates were declared successful. Thus, the success ratio remained 43.22 per cent.

In the exams, 243 candidates were declared successful with 'A-1' grades, 1,202 got 'A' grades, 2,262 got 'B' grades, 3,879 got 'C', 4,071 got 'D' and 317 got 'E' grades.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 14, 16/09/2025)

'Intolerance towards minorities stems from biased content in textbooks'

Educationists and rights activists have raised concerns over "biased content in school textbooks" across Pakistan and warned that religious discrimination, gender stereotyping and distortion of historical facts in the curriculum are promoting intolerance and undermining inclusive education in the country.

They were speaking at the launching ceremony of a report, "A Dive into the Education Landscape of Pakistan: Trends, Challenges and Solutions," at the Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (Szabist), here on Tuesday.

The report has been published by the Cecil & Iris Chaudhry Foundation (CICF) in collaboration with the Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW).

Speaking on the occasion, CICF programme manager Kashif Aslam said that as part of the research, 150 textbooks from all four provinces and other areas were analysed. Textbooks on mathematics, science, and other technical subjects were excluded and the focus was placed on Pakistan studies, social studies, history and general knowledge, he added.

Report highlights problems with curricula after analysing 150 schoolbooks from across country

The study raised "concerns regarding the treatment of religious minorities, gender representation, and social harmony", Mr Aslam said, adding that there were historical distortions in the textbooks, particularly in relation to the partition of the Indian subcontinent.

He said that Hindus were maligned in the context of partition while in discussions of the Crusades and British colonisation, Christian communities were portrayed negatively.

Such content in schoolbooks, he maintained, "promotes hate and violence, which leads to extremism and narrow-mindedness among Pakistani youth and undermines human rights in general".

Mr Aslam also said that lessons on civic sense, citizenship ethics, and personality development focus largely on the majority religion, Islam, while figures from religious minorities were excluded.

About gender issues, he highlighted that most of the heroes and personalities in the textbooks across different fields were men, while women were represented far less.

He said Sindh was doing well in terms of a biased syllabus as compared to other provinces, especially Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where discrimination in their curricula was relatively higher.

Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Szabist Dr Riaz Shaikh said that the issue of education and problematic syllabus was a collective crisis and must be addressed collectively.

He said that minorities had long been discriminated against in the country and practices such as mob justice and lynching had damaged Pakistan's international image.

According to him, students from other countries used to come to Pakistan to study, but now very few choose to do so. At the same time, Pakistani students face challenges going abroad because they are often perceived as intolerant.

"With such discriminatory and intolerant teachings, Pakistan is isolating itself from the international community and creating hurdles in developing global citizenship," said Dr Shaikh.

He also emphasised the importance of teacher training. He said teachers shape and represent the teachings of the textbooks and are central to promoting inclusivity.

He stressed the need for their training of the highest quality.

Dr Shaikh concluded by saying that there was a serious need for revising all problematic things in the syllabi and to discuss such issues openly.

Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan MPA Mahesh Kumar Hasija said that the root cause of these problems in school textbooks lay in the ideology and agenda promoted by those in power, which were reflected in the curriculum. He emphasised that the absence of minority figures and personalities from textbooks affected relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

"When people do not read about non-Muslims, their notable figures, and their history, how would they relate to them, connect with them, and communicate with them better," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, journalist Mazhar Abbas said that extremism had taken root in Pakistan, and this outcome was inevitable considering how the country had been run since 1947.

He said that although Pakistan was born out of a democratic struggle, "true democracy" had never been practiced in the country, nor had there ever been genuine rule of law.

"Conservative and hard-line ideologies have consistently been promoted by those in power, who have deliberately prevented Pakistan from becoming an enlightened state," argued Mr Abbas and added that even the country's constitution also needed improvements and amendments.

He criticised the judiciary as well as lawmakers along with other "pillars of the state".

He said that education, especially science, had never been a priority for the state, which had failed to take ownership of education.

"In such an environment, there can never be an inclusive and balanced education system in the country" he argued.

Pakistan Peoples' Party MPA Maleeha Manzoor said that it was time to move beyond basic issues and begin discussing subjects that are being researched globally.

However, she regretted that Pakistan was still stuck on basic human rights and setting minimum standards for the quality of education.

Spokesperson for the Sindh government Sukhdev Hemnani said the provincial authorities were taking initiatives to address the issues in the curriculum and said that committees should be formed to affectively address the matter.

Mehnaz Rehman of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Director Sindh Teachers Education Development Authority Zainul Abidin Laghari, Deputy Lead South Asia CSW Cecil S. Chaudhry and Deputy Leader Teacher Training and Assessment Firm-Sindh Secondary Education Aamir Latif Siddiqui also spoke on the occasion.

(By Waqas Ali Ranjha Dawn, 13, 17/09/2025)

CM restructures BIEK BoG

Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, as the controlling authority of the province's education boards, has initiated a long-awaited reshuffle of the Boards of Governors (BoG) of education boards after several decades.

In this connection, the BoG of the Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK) has been reconstituted through a notification issued by Abbas Baloch, Secretary Universities and Boards Department.

According to the notification, all chairpersons of education boards have been removed from Karachi Inter Board's BoG, with the exception of Mirpurkhas Board Chairman Colonel (retd) Alimdar Raza, who will remain a member for the next two years. Previously, each board chairman was automatically included in the governing body of other boards.

The notification further states that Chief Minister's new nominations will also serve for two years. Professor Saima Faheem has been appointed on the Principal/Head of College seat; however, she hails from a higher secondary school rather than among principals of Karachi's 150-plus government colleges, none of whom have been given representation.

For technical expertise, Asad Al-Arifeen, IT Director at NED University, has been inducted, while Shakil Ahmed, former Commissioner at the Federal Board of Revenue, has been nominated as the civil society representative. Additionally, two members have been appointed on the Chief Minister's recommendation: MPA Khairunnisa and Mazhar Ali Siddiqui, former DG (P&D) Education.

Unlike previous practice, no professor from the University of Karachi has been included in the new BoG, though the varsity traditionally had representation in the body.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 22/09/2025)

Books in sewage

About a decade or so ago, I got to know a bookseller in Urdu bazar Karachi. This bookseller was introduced to me by a friend who runs a small Urdu magazine that focuses on literary criticism, essays and travel writing. The bookseller's shop is pretty much in the centre of Urdu bazar, and is surrounded by other booksellers. He had inherited this shop from his father, and over the years grew the business and developed a name for himself as someone who not only sells books, but is deeply familiar with the culture of Urdu bazar, connected to other booksellers and when possible convenes meetings of other authors interested in Urdu literature. I try to visit him every time I am in Karachi, and when I am with him I lose track of time, mesmerised by his knowledge. In the last decade, I have benefitted tremendously from him. Anytime I want to inquire about an Urdu book, or am looking for something that is out of print, he is my go-to person. He responds to my WhatsApp texts within minutes, and taps his large network for accurate information immediately. Every few months, I order a bunch of books from him that are packed with care, and delivered with a reliable courier at my door seven thousand miles away.



Last week, as I was placing another order of books, my bookseller friend sent me some really disturbing pictures of the neighborhood of his shop. There was water, up to several feet, in the street. But this was no ordinary rainwater. It was wastewater – sewage from nearby drains and nallas that had inundated the streets and entered the bookstores. This, as I learned from my friend, was not the first time. His shop had two openings, each facing a parallel street. Both streets were now flooded. Over the

last several years, he had to place a barrier to avoid sewage coming into his front door. But the architecture of the backstreet is more complicated, a simple barrier is insufficient to stop water. As a result, he has had to reorganise his entire shop to protect his precious books. He was among the luckier ones, other sellers were facing much worse. When I spoke to him, it had been days since it had rained in Karachi, yet the stagnant wastewater, with its suffocating smell, was still there.

The fact that sewage is incubator of disease is not news. Infectious agents thrive in this environment and in some cases wastewater carries particularly deadly pathogens within it. Researchers in infectious diseases and epidemiology routinely analyse wastewater to predict outbreak of diseases in a community. Researchers who study this will tell you that you should not be near wastewater unless you are adequately protected and have minimal risk of it coming in contact with it. But protection is a luxury for those who are surrounded by it in Urdu bazar and elsewhere. They do not have an option because the government (local, provincial and federal) has failed them, repeatedly.

As the problem continued for days, local communities have started calling out on both the ineptness of the local authorities and the hypocrisy of institutions that claim to be both pro-health and pro-business. In addition to the extraordinary risks to health, welfare and business of those who live in the area, I am also troubled by something else. I want to believe that there is something sacred about books and the written word, something special about knowledge that is worth protecting for generations. Books give me a sense of hope for a better future, a light of knowledge in an otherwise dark time. Libraries play an important role in preserving and celebrating that knowledge, but so do booksellers, especially in places like Urdu bazar that have storied history and rich traditions. The image of sewage entering a bookstore is something really dark and disturbing for me. I cannot help but imagine that those in power, or with authority, who have lost sanctity of books, have probably lost a whole lot more.
(By Muhammad Hamid Zaman The Express Tribune, 14, 23/09/2025)

Plan to introduce O/A-level in Sindh's public schools

The Sindh government is considering a plan to introduce O and A Level programmes in public schools across the province, with at least one institution in each district to offer the courses.

Sindh Education Minister Syed Sardar Ali Shah met the Country Director of Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) in Pakistan Uzma Yousuf, who was accompanied by her delegation. Secretary School Education Zahid Ali Abbasi and other senior officials also attended the meeting.

The discussions focused on strengthening Sindh's education framework, particularly in the areas of curriculum development, teacher training, foundational learning and assessment reforms.

Both sides agreed to establish a joint working group to devise actionable strategies and recommendations.

Mr Shah said the Sindh government was committed to introducing Cambridge programmes in public schools.

Under the initiative, at least one school in each district will offer O and A Level subjects, providing students from disadvantaged backgrounds with access to international-standard education, he added.

He mentioned that the government would support students with registration and examination costs, and aimed to subsidise the programme to maximise participation.

"We do not want talented children to be held back due to lack of resources. Our goal is to ensure equal opportunities for all," the minister said.

Ms Yousuf underscored the importance of teacher training and early educational reforms, noting that preparing students for O Levels requires structured improvements from early childhood through grade eight.

She assured Cambridge's full cooperation in supporting reforms, capacity-building and advisory services, describing teacher development as a "sustainable goal with long-term impact".

(By Dawn Reporter, 13, 26/09/2025)

Undergraduate education quality

WE already have 270-odd universities in the country. And many new ones are being set up every year.

The government has also elevated many colleges to university status. But if we were to earnestly inquire about how many universities are offering quality undergraduate education in both the public and private sectors, we would not be able to name more than a handful of universities.

All of them together do not offer more than approximately 20,000 admissions every year. The bulk of students enrolling in undergraduate programmes end up at institutions that offer lower-quality education.

It was, thus, not a surprise to see many universities struggling to fill admission slots this year. Top schools, again across the public-private spectrum, did not have this issue. They had a record number of applicants in most departments. But places with a poorer quality of education, or education that does not guarantee adequate returns to students, struggled. These struggles are only going to increase as we move forward.

The importance of quality undergraduate education cannot be overemphasised. Students start maturing at around 18-22 years. They start understanding themselves and the world a lot better. Their personalities start evolving. They fully enter public life. This is the age where individuals and citizens are created, shaped, and refined as they learn more about the world as well as themselves.

In countries like the US, almost 50 per cent of young people around 18 enter college programmes; in Pakistan, only 7-8pc of the relevant cohort reach that level. The difference is stark. My conjecture is that we will not be able to address human capital issues in Pakistan, which are keeping our growth limited, unless we are able to educate a lot more of our children, and are able to focus on providing better quality undergraduate education to a lot more of these young people.

What does quality education at the undergraduate level entail?

Undergraduate education is mostly about learning how to learn. If we do that well, the student is set for life. Students completing undergraduate studies should definitely have some knowledge and skills pertaining to their area of study (their major). But what is more important is that they should have good communication and language skills and the ability to think deeply and critically about issues; they should have argumentation skills and the ability to present themselves well; they should know how they learn and be able to engage deeply with the subjects they are curious about. If they have and do the above, they will definitely have the confidence needed to step into new things. This confidence, based on deep knowledge and skills, is a crucial outcome of a good undergraduate education.

The economic and social background of some of our young people, as well as family support, can facilitate them in acquiring some of the skills and knowledge they need, and shape their attitudes. But for many, this is not the case, and their college or university has to step up to take care of this. Sadly, most universities in Pakistan are failing in this task quite drastically.

Universities do not have language and writing centres, and lack mentoring and co-curricular programmes that could strengthen the focus on developing the needed skills. Too many of our university managers/ administrators, and too many of our university faculty, feel that imparting subject-specific knowledge is what undergraduate education is about, and that this is what they have been hired for.

Confidence based on knowledge and skills is a crucial outcome of a good undergraduate education.

Being an economics major at the undergraduate level is not just about understanding the basics of economics and being aware of where the field stands currently. It is a lot more. One should be aware not only of the foundations of economics and its historical development, but also of the context in which the subject is being taught. It requires some knowledge of other social sciences, the sciences, and the humanities.

One should know how the subject relates to challenges that people deal with in their daily lives and be able to apply the theoretical framework of the subject to not only understand but also to look for ways of addressing them. The subject and ways of thinking should be internalised to the point they become a part of who one is. And one should be able to communicate all of this to others as well. This is what a graduate coming out of a decent-quality undergraduate programme should be able to do.

How many of our universities and undergraduate programmes are able to claim that they are in a position to achieve all this for their students? Or that the students are progressing in this direction?

I have been teaching for some 30 years now. During this period, I have interacted with and taught thousands of students, written hundreds of letters of recommendation, and interviewed thousands of candidates for recruitment as research/ teaching assistants, faculty, administrators, and many other positions. I have found that the quality of an undergraduate education, though not exclusively, is a very good predictor of the suitability of a candidate for the post. Of course, there are always exceptions — unimpressive people who have studied in good undergraduate programmes and impressive people who did not get the opportunity. But, in general, the correlation has been a strong one. And, as explained here, there is a good reason for that.

In Pakistan, we have neglected, especially since the birth of the Higher Education Commission, undergraduate education and teaching, and focused too much on graduate education and research. This is not what Pakistan needs. My plea to existing as well as upcoming universities is to focus on the quality of undergraduate teaching and learning. This will help us address many of the quality issues we are witnessing in our education system.

(By Faisal Bari Dawn, 06, 26/09/2025)

Cambridge lets Pakistani students peek at their exam scripts for free

Unlike the country's official educational boards, Cambridge International Examinations has, for the first time, started the process of showing answer scripts to Pakistani students.



In a step taken in accordance with principles of transparency, O and A Level students will now be able to view their answer scripts online and, after reviewing them, decide whether to apply for scrutiny of their copies. Notably, the process of viewing the answer scripts will be completely free of charge.

This move was announced by the Country Manager for Cambridge International in Pakistan, Uzma Yousuf, during her visit to Karachi while speaking to media representatives. Cambridge's Marketing Communication Manager, Arsalan Rabbani, was also present on the occasion.

It is worth noting that the rules of educational boards across all provinces, including Sindh, do not allow students to view their answer sheets at matriculation or intermediate levels. Providing more details, Yousuf said that all Cambridge-affiliated schools have been given access to exam copies for every subject of their enrolled students.

Now, any student who wishes to see their scripts may visit their school and view them. If they deem it necessary, they can apply for scrutiny. Yousuf noted that this process will be entirely free of charge for students, and Cambridge will not charge any fees from schools either.

In response to a question, the country manager stated that Pakistan has the highest number of Cambridge students enrolled worldwide at the O and A Level, with the number reaching up to 130,000. She revealed that the United States of America ranks second in the number of enrolled students, followed by China, India, and Dubai.

Further, Yousuf noted that there are about 800 schools affiliated with Cambridge in Pakistan. Regarding the affiliation of specific government schools in Sindh with Cambridge, she mentioned that discussions have taken place with Sindh's Education Minister, Sardar Shah.

It has reportedly been decided that the first step will be to move forward with teacher training. In this regard, the education minister reportedly noted that there is an institution for teacher training in Sindh, which is a positive development for the progression of affiliation and integration with Cambridge.

(By Sadaf Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 27/09/2025)

Ruckus in DUET over expulsion of students

The vice chancellor of the Dawood University of Engineering and Technology (DUET) and some other varsity staff members were manhandled by a group of miscreants when the VC tried to engage with protesting students outside the campus on Tuesday, officials confirmed on Wednesday.

The DUET has become the centre of protests after the administration expelled some students, who were said to be associated with the Islami Jamiat Talaba (IJT). The IJT has been staging protest demonstrations outside the varsity and in other parts of the city demanding immediate reinstatement of the students.

On Tuesday, when DUET VC Dr Samreen Hussain tried to talk to protesters to resolve the matter, she was caught in an unruly situation.

Footage that went viral on social media showed an irate Dr Samreen coming outside the university's gate only to be besieged by angry protesters who were heard shouting slogans against the university administration.

Varsity vice chancellor, administration officials jostled

When contacted, Dr Hussain told Dawn that the protesters created a violent environment, misbehaved with the university officials as well as with her and pushed her when she tried to engage with them.

According to the VC, the individuals involved in the protest did not "appear to be students of the DUET".

"They were not my students. I barely saw anyone from the DUET among them. It looked more like a mob that had come with some other intention," she told Dawn.

The VC explained that the university had taken disciplinary action by suspending the students while an inquiry was ongoing. "We are obligated to investigate incidents such as those where students are engaged in misconduct. What is the reason to stage such a violent protest," she questioned.

She said an FIR had been registered against unknown persons on Monday as around 30/40 people had tried to create a similar situation and prevented university points from running.

"When the FIR had been registered on Monday, why didn't the police prevent these protesters from creating such a violent environment outside the university. The road outside is the jurisdiction of the police, not the university.

"Even if we suppose that the university's stance is wrong somewhere, it cannot be justified to prevent points from running and resorting to violence," she added.

The VC said that the incident could have been avoided if the police had taken proper measures.

IJT president at DUET Ashhad Siddiqui said the university management had been unable to control internal issues and was unjust in dealing with students.

"They rusticated three final-year students and suspended another for six months. That was done unjustly. And when we protested, the management itself created an environment of clash. They could have prevented students from getting violent, but they did not because they wanted to target and malign the protesters," he said.

He said the IJT demands that the university administration withdraw its decision to cancel the students' admissions.

He said that the IJT would resume its citywide protests from Friday if their demands were not met.

Meanwhile, the All Pakistan Muttahida Students Organisation on Wednesday condemned the attack on the VC and called it an assault on the sanctity of educational institutions and educators.
(By Waqas Ali Ranjha Dawn, 13, 02/10/2025)

Beyond myths

THE past few weeks have been eventful for Karachi residents. The August rains plunged the city into total paralysis. Stranded vehicles on major roads and lanes in neighbourhoods established the unpreparedness of the metropolis to cope with bouts of even moderate rainfall. Road deaths due to avoidable accidents continue. Some of these tragedies are caused by recklessly driven heavy vehicles, while poorly driven motorcycles have led to similar outcomes. We also saw a building collapse in Lyari. Meanwhile, with the tacit support of the provincial regime, our talented mayor has constantly been spewing vitriol against his opponents in a bid to retain media attention. Confusion surrounds the present state of affairs and there is no clear direction.

There are at least seven myths regarding Karachi's affairs. One, it is believed that the mayor calls the shots in managing urban affairs, when the truth is that the mayor and KMC only deal with peripheral city matters, given the reduced status of the municipality under the prevailing Sindh Local Government Act. Under the ruling clique at the helm, the mayor is a mere figurehead for media consumption.

He wields less power than his predecessor did; the latter could at least choose or write his own script. Karachi is firmly under the grip of the provincial government and the institutions governing various sectors of municipal performance. The Sindh Building Control Authority, the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board and the Karachi Water and Sewerage Corporation (KWSC) are some examples of the bodies that manage Karachi under the overall control of the provincial government.

Two, it is assumed that once the large ongoing development projects are completed, Karachi's nightmares will be over. This is incorrect. Most of these projects are standalone undertakings that will have little cumulative effect on the sectors for which they have been initiated. Take the K-IV project slated to provide some 260 million gallons of water daily when its first phase is completed. The truth is that it will only be of use to consumers when street and lane water supply lines are revamped in neighbourhoods. Besides, there is a strong possibility that much of this water will be siphoned off for newer real estate developments in the city.

Three, IFIs co-financing the projects are painted as saviours. It is believed that the developments with which these institutions are associated are technically valid and economically and socially sustainable. The reverse is true. Efforts to restructure the city's water utility (KWSC) have been undertaken for years. A major IFI has extended a loan to transform the utility, but little success has been achieved on this front. There have been only a few cosmetic changes — including the creation of a board chaired by the mayor. Water supply and sewerage management remains deplorable. One finds official tankers of the law-enforcement agencies queuing up to access water from hydrants for their own installations. Ordinary consumers end up paying hefty amounts for water tankers.

Confusion clouds the state of affairs in Karachi.

Four, opposing political voices — especially in municipal bodies — are seen to be on the right path regarding urban management options for Karachi, whereas the religio-political party that dominates this narrative is only exploiting urban affairs to regain lost ground. It has resorted to rabble-rousing but failed to come up with a city manifesto with input from citizens, which include diverse social, religious and ethnic stakeholders.

Five, it is lamented that due to overlapping jurisdictions of the land management agencies, Karachi has become unmanageable. The actual boundaries, service delivery areas and territories are clearly demarcated in official records. The concerned staff of the local authorities understand these boundaries reasonably well. There are a few conflict points but these do not pose a serious challenge to streamlining city management.

Six, encroachments are blamed squarely on katchi abadi dwellers, the dispossessed and urban poor, when, in fact, the public agencies, government departments and formal private enterprises themselves erect such illegal structures. A case in point — the parking lot of the top court in the city is built on a storm-water drain.

Lastly, it is argued that the absence of finance is behind all Karachi's woes. In actuality, it is the politics of keeping the provincial financial commission dormant, inefficient enforcement and collection of property tax and many other sources of revenue, and poor financial management that are responsible. It is time to take stock of these realities, evolve a common manifesto and rally around core governance issues to break free from these myths.

(By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 07, 07/10/2025)

IBCC plans automation, e-marking to modernise exams

Modernising the examination system, enhancing transparency, and improving paper evaluation standards through automation, Optical Mark Recognition (OMR), and e-marking technologies was discussed during a meeting held under the platform of the Inter Boards Coordination Commission (IBCC) on Wednesday.

Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK) Chairman Faqir Muhammad Lakho and Sindh Board of Technical Education Chairman Musharraf Ali Rajput met with Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE) Chairman Dr Ikram Ali Malik at his office.

During the discussion, it was agreed that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will soon be signed among the three boards. Under the agreement, the Federal Board will provide complete technical assistance, guidance, and training to the Karachi and Sindh Technical Boards for implementing automation, OMR, and e-marking systems.

In the first phase, two officers from each of the provincial boards will receive training at the Federal Board in Islamabad. Upon completion, the successfully running automation, OMR, and e-marking systems at the Federal Board will also be introduced at the Karachi and Sindh Technical Boards.

The initiative aims to strengthen transparency, efficiency, and quality in examination processes.

Chairman Faqir Muhammad Lakho noted that the Karachi Board had already successfully conducted the Mathematics paper of the Intermediate Part-I Annual Examinations 2025 under the e-marking system as a pilot project, which yielded highly positive results.

The meeting was also attended by FBISE Director IT Dr Bashir Khan and Controller of Examinations Aqeel Imran.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 09/10/2025)

KU student run over by point bus

A second-year student from the Karachi University's Social Work Department was run over by a university point bus on campus Friday morning, triggering protests and "calls for justice" from fellow students.

The victim, Aniqah Saeed, daughter of Saeed Ahmed and a resident of Natha Khan Khosa Goth, was critically injured after being hit near the Dr Mehmood Hussain Library. Witnesses said she had disembarked from the same bus moments earlier and was walking towards her department when the vehicle's rear tyres ran over her.

Bystanders rushed the injured student to a nearby hospital, where she succumbed to her injuries.

SHO Mobina Town confirmed that the KU shuttle bus involved in the incident was impounded and the driver, identified as Iqbal, taken into custody. However, he added that the victim's family declined to pursue legal proceedings and Aniqah's body was handed over to them. The incident sparked outrage among students, who staged a protest on the campus demanding justice and accountability.

KU Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Khalid Mahmood Iraqi visited the bereaved family, and suspended the bus driver, forming a four-member inquiry committee to investigate the incident and submit a detailed report to ensure preventive measures are implemented.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 11/10/2025)

47,000 Students, 30 Buses: Karachi University transport system in crisis

The University of Karachi (KU) is facing a severe transport crisis as its decades-old point bus service fails to meet the needs of its ever-growing student population. With more than 47,000 students enrolled and only 30 buses operating, thousands of students from far-flung areas struggle daily to reach campus.

KU is the only university to offer transport service for Rs10 for a trip. According to the University Transport Department, no new buses have been added to the fleet in 14 years. The existing vehicles are old and in need of constant repair. "Even 100 buses would be insufficient now," said Transport In-charge Dildar Khan while talking to The Express Tribune. "The number of students increases every year, but the transport resources remain the same. The Sindh government must intervene and provide new buses."

Overcrowding and exhaustion

Students coming from Landhi, Keamari, Gulshan-e-Hadeed, Malir, Korangi, and other distant areas describe their daily commute as exhausting and dangerous. Each bus, meant to seat around 62 passengers, often carries up to 150 students, forcing many to hang by the doors or stand on the steps throughout the journey.

A student from the Department of Mass Communication, who travels from Landhi, shared: "Most of the time, I have to stand on the last step of the bus. Some students sit on the floor, others stand, and those lucky enough grab a seat. It's so crowded that even breathing becomes difficult."

Another student from the Pharmacy Department described her modus operandi to secure her seat: "I keep my bag inside the bus early in the morning to reserve a place. Then I wait with my friends or grab something from the canteen until it's time to leave. On the way back, the buses stop at three terminals - near the Pharmacy, Silver Jubilee Gate, and the main terminal - so that more students can get in."

Students from Applied Chemistry also voiced concerns about overcrowding and the lack of gender segregation in the buses. "Boys and girls travel together in packed buses, which is inappropriate," said one student. "Some even faint due to the heat and suffocation, yet the drivers still try to accommodate everyone. Despite all this, they only charge Rs10 for a trip to Gulshan-e-Hadeed - which is admirable. But we urgently need more buses."

Limited access, growing pressure

Only about 4,500 students - less than seven per cent of the university's population - can use the point service. The remaining depends on expensive private vans, motorbikes, or public transport. The problem is even worse for evening program students, for whom no university buses are available.

The university, which houses 55 departments and 27 research institutes, is struggling to maintain its aging fleet. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) provided a few buses in 2022, but even with those, the total number remains around 30. KU is the only university, public or private, that offers transport service almost free of cost at Rs10 only. Founded in 1951, it was located far from the city at that time and the government had provided a fleet of buses to pick and drop students from designated points, hence the name "Point" was coined.

In the rest of the educational institutions charge heavy sums for transport, for example, NED University students pay Rs30,000 per month for the university's bus service or use personal or public transport.

Fatal accident highlights negligence

Recently, the crisis turned tragic when a female student from the Social Work Department lost her life after slipping from a moving university bus. The incident sparked outrage among students, who demanded better safety and traffic management within the campus.

Vice Chancellor Dr. Khalid Mahmood Iraqi announced financial assistance for the victim's family and said the case would be presented in the upcoming Syndicate meeting. A four-member inquiry committee has been formed to investigate the incident, and the driver involved has been suspended. The victim's family has declined to pursue police action, but the university administration is conducting an internal probe.

Before 2019, the university operated 18 transport points for students. After receiving new buses from the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in 2018, the transport fleet was expanded.

In 2021, with additional funding from the federal government through the HEC, several more buses were made operational free of cost, while some non-functional ones were repaired and brought back into service. This increased the total number of functional buses to 30 for 47000 students.

According to university officials, the number of students continues to rise each year, reaching approximately 47,000 at present. Daily maintenance is carried out on the buses, especially since many of them are older models from 1984, 1986, and 1992.

Maintenance costs can reach up to Rs300,000 per month, which the transportation department initially covers and later seeks reimbursement from the University.

KU Transport In-Charge, Dildar, also noted that two buses were provided long ago by the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) during Mustafa Kamal's tenure. However, no new vehicles have been received from the KMC since then.

KU vice chancellor said that although an annual budget is allocated to the university, not a single rupee is specifically designated for transport services.

(By Ayesha Khan Ansari The Express Tribune, 04, 16/10/2025)

CSS success rate

For years, the Central Superior Services examination has been known for its alarmingly low success rate - a trend that continued this year with only 229 candidates passing out of over 15,000 aspirants. While some may argue that such stringent selection ensures that only the cream rises to the top, this recurring pattern also exposes the widening cracks in Pakistan's socio-economic disparities.

On one hand the 2.48% success rate reflects the small number of qualifiers, signifying the rigour of the process. On the other, it reveals the poor preparedness and uneven quality of applicants entering the examination each year. A country of over 240 million people should not have so few individuals capable of meeting the demands of its highest public service exam, unless the system itself is failing to produce capable candidates. The provincial breakdown of the results paints a clear picture of inequality. Punjab continues to dominate with an overwhelming share of successful candidates, while Balochistan, Sindh, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir remain grossly underrepresented. This unevenness mirrors the educational and developmental divide across provinces, where access to quality schooling and mentorship remains heavily skewed towards urban and economically privileged areas. Equally concerning is the trend in service preferences. Nineteen out of the top twenty qualifiers chose the Pakistan Administrative Service, while not a single candidate among the top thirty opted for the Foreign Service. Once considered a coveted avenue for representing the country abroad, the Foreign Service's declining appeal hints at growing disillusionment.

The FPSC must take these signals seriously. Pakistan cannot afford an elite bureaucracy that draws from a narrow pool of privilege while neglecting talent from its peripheries. Nor can it allow its once-prestigious services to lose their allure. It is time to reform both the CSS examination structure and the education system feeding into it.

(By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 17/10/2025)

PPP in education

WITH 26.2 million children out of school, the state may have to revive its model of public-private partnership (PPP) to widen the net of access and equity in education. Pakistan has had a history of NGOs filling the access gap with low-fee or no-cost schooling, health and security for citizens where the government system has failed to absorb the demand. Countless others — eager and intelligent children — are in classrooms not delivering quality education. It's time to focus on building opportunity, rather than looking towards quick fixes. If we don't wish to see generations fall prey to poverty, malnourishment, economic regression, this is the time to reverse the trend.

Much of the work of building opportunity is left to NGOs that are funded externally by overseas development organisations. While they have done a fantastic job reporting growth in literacy, the ultimate responsibility for education does not lie with them. However, working in tandem is always an option and a public-private commitment to education may be the way forward. Private education is not a panacea, but it can be a critical partner in working towards a solution.

Back in the 1980s, Sweden introduced a voucher system whereby parents could use government funds to send their children to private schools. This government 'subsidy' meant that many families could top up the voucher with their own resources and avail private sector education. In Colombia, in the 1990s, the government increased access to quality education by contracting public schools to private operators. In the US, charter schools have seen much success. Built on the model of government-funded and independently managed education providers, these schools have seen results that have outperformed the public education system in many cities. In Pakistan, we haven't seen many successful PPP models other than the Punjab Education Foundation, which paid private schools to educate children from very low-income families. It was extended to become the Public School Support Programme in 2015 when government schools were handed over to private players to manage.

This model is wrought with challenges of inequity in environments that are not always equipped to help public school students assimilate into private school life. However, such systems can yield results through years of structured planning and sustained effort. In 2008, the New School Programme encouraged the private sector to establish new schools with support from the PEF. After a decade-long growth trajectory that saw increased literacy rates in all districts of Punjab, retention of students remained the single biggest challenge for these schools. Besides, there's very little data on student learning outcomes from PEF partner schools and many public schools in the country. Another reason for PPP in education is the accountability and transparency brought in by private schools where monitoring and evaluation are part of an ongoing process and the results are benchmarked against required standards.

Shared responsibility can help reduce dropout rates.

PPP in school education in Pakistan would reflect shared responsibility, with the aim of raising standards across the board. It would reduce dropout rates, bridge gender gaps, and increase opportunity for a larger percentage of children from disadvantaged communities. Private partners often bring in modern teaching methods, technology integration, and performance-based accountability, which can enhance learning outcomes. This will ensure greater equity, inclusiveness, and alignment with national education goals. This synergy can lead to access to better-trained teachers, improved school facilities, and more relevant curricula. A couple of decades from now, when these students enter the workforce, they will have greater opportunities through the springboard that private education provides. Investment in our school-going children today is a critical catalyst for a growing workforce and productivity.

In some countries, private schools have been given incentives to 'adopt' public schools. In Sweden's 'free school' programme, private schools have received funding from the government to take in a percentage of public school children. Portugal and Belgium operate a merit-based system that funds public school children who are taken into the net of private schools. Long-term merit-based loans to high-achieving public school children can provide opportunity and access to private education. Incentives for private schools to take in public school children, such as subsidies and tax-breaks, might build a sustainable model to subvert our education crisis. The time for fragmented efforts has passed.
(By Neda Mulji Dawn, 07, 22/10/2025)

Teaching as profession

SHEHLA completed her Master's degree in economics last year and started teaching at a private school in her neighbourhood. She feels she will not be staying in the job for long. Her salary is only Rs20,000 per month. She thinks she will be married soon and might not work afterwards. Or if she has to work, she will look for a job that pays better. Low- to medium-fee private schools, which constitute the overwhelming majority of private schools operating across Pakistan, mostly pay teachers around Rs18,000 to Rs24,000 per month. Keep in mind that the minimum wage for unskilled work in Pakistan is now around Rs40,000 per month.

Durdana is a teacher at a high-fee private school. Her salary is around Rs60,000. She feels this is not enough. But both her children are enrolled in the same school at half the tuition fee (employee discount). She is likely to stay in teaching till her children have moved beyond school level.

Salaries for teachers in the public sector are better than they are in the private sector. Primary school teachers make more than the minimum wage, and those in grade 17 or above take home over Rs100,000 a month. But, for a teacher to treat teaching as a long-term prospect, even this amount may not be enticing for a lot of young people. Though teachers are covered under the minimum wage legislation across almost all provinces, or should be, most of the private sector does not pay them the requisite minimum. Punjab's education minister has said a number of times that teachers in the private sector are paid in accordance with the law. His interpretation is that since teachers work fewer hours than other workers, their salaries are determined accordingly. Clearly, the minister is just covering for the fact that the government does not want to or is unable to ensure the minimum wage for teachers.

School timings are from 8am to 2.30pm these days. Schools require teachers to be present at school from 7.30am to 3pm. This makes it a 7.5-hour workday. The regular workday is eight hours. How is teachers' worktime shorter? In addition, most teachers take grading and class preparation home. They have to as they do not have time to do it during their teaching hours. In fact, most school teachers I know, put in 10-odd hours. The minister is plainly wrong or is just pretending.

Why would the best minds in the country want to turn to teaching?

But leaving the hours issue aside, if teachers are to be paid so little, what should they do to supplement their income? Clearly Rs20,000 to Rs40,000 is not enough for a household. Should teachers take on another job in the many 'free' hours, à la the minister, that they have on their hands. Teachers know how to teach, but if they start coaching or giving tuitions in the evening, people aren't happy with that either. They don't want the 'coaching' or 'tuition' culture for their children.

Even the government discourages that for public sector teachers. So, what should teachers do? Get a non-teaching job in the evenings? We have about two million teachers working in Pakistan currently. What sort of evening jobs should they look for? Youth unemployment for Pakistan is at its highest level historically. The economy is not and has not been growing by much in recent years. Are there enough (second) job opportunities out there?

There is a strong gender angle to this discussion as well. Women are, probably, a majority in the teaching profession in Pakistan. It is, likely, the only profession that has a female majority. Pakistan has one of the lowest female labour force participation rates internationally and even in the region. Teaching is one profession a lot of women are able to join and which is more 'acceptable' in our context. How do women who work as teachers — and it is one of the few professions that is acceptable for women to work in — find jobs in sectors other than teaching to make a decent level of income? This cannot and will not happen.

Currently, it seems, the state, the governments in power and the people, are quite comfortable 'exploiting' the labour of educated women in Pakistan for the education sector. We have (created) a context in which most women are not able to work, by design or default, in many other sectors. Teaching seems to be an acceptable option for many females and their families. This creates a supply level that allows the private sector to pay market clearing wages but these wages are below the minimum wage level. We do not allow this to happen in other areas irrespective of the conditions of supply and demand. But here we are happy to do that and some even try to justify it.

What is not thought through is that if teaching does not even give minimum wage returns, why would the best minds want to become teachers. They do not. But if we do not get the best minds to be teachers, how will we prepare the next generation of Pakistanis? How will teaching become a profession if returns are so low? On the one hand, governments do not want to ensure even minimum wages, while on the other, some provinces are talking about licensing teachers. Licensing is supposed to control and improve quality, but if teachers cannot even get the minimum wage, how can licensing help create quality?

Monetary returns in teaching are low. Most private sector teachers do not make the minimum wage level and the government seems to be happy with it, not wanting to disturb the current equilibrium in the market. The equilibrium works for schools and the government but does not work for teachers, for improving the quality of education or making teaching an attractive profession. But governments seem to be happy trading off short-term calm at the cost of medium- to long-term benefits of decent opportunities in teaching. The teachers, mostly women, are the ones paying the cost and will continue to be 'exploited', it seems, for the foreseeable future.

(By Faisal Bari Dawn, 06, 24/10/2025)

Girls outnumber boys threefold in MDCAT 2025

Female candidates overwhelmingly dominated this year's Medical and Dental Colleges Admission Test (MDCAT 2025), with three times more girls than boys appearing from Karachi. Out of 10,296 registered candidates, 7,767 were female and 2,529 male.

Education experts said the trend reflected a growing passion among young women for the medical profession and their consistent academic excellence in intermediate examinations.

The exam was held on Sunday at only two centres in Karachi — Dow University's Ojha Campus and NED University — a decision that drew criticism from parents and students who complained of inadequate arrangements.

Candidates were asked to report at 6:30am, but the three-hour paper began at 10am, forcing thousands to stand in long queues for hours under the open sky.

Parents described the situation as disorganised and distressing, especially as traffic congestion caused by the ongoing BRT project near NED University worsened access to the centres. "We left home before dawn but waited for hours just to enter," said a student from Gulshan-e-Hadeed. Parents urged authorities to suspend traffic or designate alternative routes during such major examinations.

Across the country, the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) reported that 140,125 candidates appeared in MDCAT 2025 for 22,000 seats in public and private colleges.

In Sindh, 32,917 candidates registered — including 22,098 females and 10,819 males — reaffirming the continued dominance of women in medical education. At NED University, 4,003 girls and 1,197 boys appeared, while Dow University hosted 3,764 girls and 1,332 boys.

The test paper comprised 15% easy, 70% moderate, and 15% difficult questions. There was no negative marking, and candidates were allowed to take question papers home.

Strict security and surveillance were maintained at both centres, including biometric verification, metal detectors, and CCTV monitoring. The question papers were unsealed under a five-step security protocol, with even transport vehicles fitted with cameras.

Medical camps were also set up to assist students suffering from stress, fatigue, or low blood pressure.

According to DHO District East Dr Abeera, 147 candidates — mostly female — were treated for headaches, nausea, and weakness during the exam. Health Secretary Rehan Baloch also visited to review arrangements. Despite these measures, parents and students said that mismanagement overshadowed the entire exercise. Only one entry gate was opened at Dow's Ojha Campus, creating chaos and crowding. Many parents, unfamiliar with the location of the gate, struggled to reach it in time.

Students complained that only two centres for a city of Karachi's size was unreasonable. Those coming from distant localities such as Lyari, Keamari, and Landhi said they faced high transport fares and long waits. "We paid Rs9,000 for the exam but were made to wait for hours," said Fizza from Korangi, who appeared for MDCAT for the second time.

At NED, ongoing construction and the absence of pedestrian bridges made it difficult for candidates to cross roads safely. "Students were seen walking through construction sheds just to reach the centre," said another parent.

Despite the logistical issues, many students described the paper as fair and well-balanced. Others, however, said some chemistry questions were tough and the heat inside halls made concentration difficult.

The Sukkur IBA Testing Service provided all stationery and supervised logistics. Mobile phones, smartwatches, and electronic devices were strictly banned. Police, traffic wardens, and emergency teams were deployed outside both centres, but parents said crowd management remained poor.

The PMDC announced that the MDCAT 2025 results will be declared within a week, with a rechecking facility available within three days of result publication. A detailed analytical report will be submitted within 10 days.

The council also clarified that it would not oversee admissions, which will be handled by provincial universities and authorities, assuring that the entire process will remain transparent and merit-based.

(By Ayesha Khan Ansari The Express Tribune, 04, 27/10/2025)

Over 32,500 students take MDCAT in Sindh

A total of 32,531 candidates appeared in the Medical and Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT) conducted at nine examination centres across Sindh and one in Islamabad.

The test was conducted by the Sukkur IBA Testing Service.

Besides the federal capital where an examination centre was set up for candidates of Sindh, the nine other examination centres were set up in Karachi (Ojha campus of Dow University of Health Sciences and NED University of Engineering and Technology); Hyderabad (Public School, Latifabad); Jamshoro (Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences); Shaheed Benazirabad (Quaid-i-Awam University of Engineering, Science and Technology); Mirpurkhas (Mir Sher Muhammad Talpur Public School); Larkana (PTS Ground, Wagan Road), Jacobabad (Public School, Circuit House Road) and Sukkur (IBA Public School).

Candidates were not allowed to carry mobile phones, smartwatches, calculators, books, notes, bags, or Bluetooth devices into the exam centres.

'Three-tier vigilance system'

Sindh Chief Secretary expressed satisfaction over the successful and transparent conduct of the MDCAT 2025 and said that a three-tier vigilance system was established to ensure complete transparency during the examination process.

Separate teams comprising Sukkur IBA, the health department and the respective district administrations were formed for each examination centre.

The CS appreciated the efforts of Sukkur IBA, the district administrations, health and all relevant departments for their dedication and teamwork in ensuring the smooth and transparent conduct of the test.

He said that transparency and merit remained the top priorities of the Sindh government throughout the examination process.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 13, 27/10/2025)

MDCAT results announced

The SIBA Testing Services (STS) on Friday announced the provisional results of the Medical and Dental Colleges Admission Test (MDCAT) 2025.

The test was conducted on Oct 26 in Karachi, Hyderabad, Jamshoro, Mirpurkhas, Shaheed Benazirabad, Larkana, Jacobabad, Sukkur and the federal capital.

The provisional results, along with the list of qualified candidates based on the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council's (PMDC) minimum passing criteria of 55 per cent for medical college admission and 50 per cent for dental college admission, is posted on the STS website, <https://www.iba-suk.edu.pk/sts/announcements>.

The candidates may forward any complaint by emailing sts@jba-suk.edu.pk with the subject line "Result Grievances-MDCAT-2025" by Saturday, 5:00pm. STS will verify and respond to valid queries via email.
(By APP Dawn, 13, 01/11/2025)

Girls' school 'sealed by land mafia' reopened

A government girls' school in Soldier Bazaar that was mysteriously sealed late Friday night was reopened on Saturday following the intervention of the Town Nazim, after both police and Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) denied any knowledge of the closure order.

The building of Jufelhurst Girls Higher Secondary School - located in Jamshed Town's Soldier Bazaar No. 3 - was suddenly declared "dangerous" at around 8pm on Friday and sealed with SBCA notices pasted on its gates. When students and teachers arrived the next morning, they were shocked to see padlocks on the main entrance and a closure notification warning against entry.

School administration said they were given no prior notice. "We received absolutely no intimation from any government department. We only saw a paper pasted on the wall when we arrived for duty," said the school's headmistress.

Jufelhurst Girls Higher Secondary School was built in 1931 by Sybil D'Abreo over a sprawling estate of 5,000 yards. The school was nationalised in 1974, however its land is on the target of builder mafia.

According to the notice, two plots - Nos. 325/1 and 356 GRE Garden East Quarters - were sealed for being in a dangerous condition. It also warned that entry into the premises would be treated as a violation of law.

With hundreds of students gathered outside, teachers held a brief assembly on the road before sending the children back home.

However, when the administration contacted Soldier Bazaar Police Station and the SBCA offices, both institutions denied issuing any such order.

"We told them no official notice was issued from SBCA regarding closure of the school," an SBCA official reportedly informed the school.

Parents and staff alleged that a powerful land mafia was behind the move - citing previous attempts to grab the prime property.

"This is not the first time," said a senior teacher. "There have already been three attempts to occupy the school land. They even once brought a bulldozer to demolish a part of the structure, but residents and police stopped them."

Town Nazim, accompanied by area police, broke the locks on Saturday afternoon after confirming the seal was fake.

"No one will be allowed to occupy public land meant for girls' education," the Nazim told reporters. "We will protect this school and ensure students continue their studies without fear."

Students expressed fear that their education could be derailed if such attempts continue.

"Our parents are daily-wage workers. We cannot afford private schools where fees are in thousands of rupees," said a Class 9 student. "If they close our school, they will shut the doors to our future."

School operations resumed as normal on Monday, but teachers worry more attempts may follow.

"The mafia is influential, but we believe the prayers of these children will defeat them," said the watchman who witnessed previous intrusion attempts.

Students have appealed to the authorities to ensure their school remains protected.

"Please don't seal our school again," they said. "If our school is locked, our education will also be locked."
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 04/11/2025)

Sindh launches digital platform to monitor attendance in schools

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Thursday launched the Student Attendance Monitoring and Redress System (SAMRS), describing it as a "pioneering, transformative, and nationally replicable model" that puts technology and evidence-based planning at the core of education reform.

Speaking at the provincial launch ceremony held at a local hotel, the chief minister said SAMRS marked the first time that Sindh—or any province in Pakistan—had introduced an integrated digital platform linking student attendance, school infrastructure, teacher performance, and learning outcomes.

"This is not just a monitoring tool. It is a system that allows us to make decisions grounded in data rather than assumptions. It provides the clarity to identify the challenges our children face and the ability to respond quickly and effectively," he said.

CM Murad says system will help reduce absenteeism; calls it 'nationally replicable model' to identify challenges facing students

The ceremony was attended by Education Minister Syed Sardar Shah, the World Bank Country Director Bolormaa Amgaabazar, senior representatives of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (Unicef), the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Asian Development Bank (ADB), British Council, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica), officials of the School Education and Literacy Department (SELD), education experts and development partners.

'A model for Pakistan'

The chief minister emphasised that SAMRS had already gone live in 600 schools across 12 districts, with expansion in progress in four more districts through a Unicef-supported initiative. He stated that the system was designed not only to track absenteeism but also to predict dropout risks, suggest interventions, and enhance overall school management.

"SAMRS is a model that Pakistan can follow," he said. "We are institutionalising it through a new policy that ensures long-term sustainability, ownership, and integration with Sindh's education governance framework."

He expressed gratitude to the World Bank, GPE, and all development partners for their "trust, technical guidance, and unwavering support" in strengthening public education in Sindh. The CM also praised the School Education Department, the Reform Support Unit (RSU), and the Sindh Early Learning Enhancement through Classroom Transformation (SELECT) project team for their "innovation, dedication, and perseverance."

Multi-sector vision for child well-being

CM Shah highlighted the importance of linking education with health, nutrition, and child protection, urging partners to explore the integration of SAMRS with child immunisation programs, health screenings, and social safety systems.

"Schools must be more than classrooms," he said. "They must become centres of child well-being and community trust."

Minister praises 'landmark achievement'

In his address, Education Minister Syed Sardar Shah called SAMRS a "game-changer," constructing a digital ecosystem where attendance, performance, and school infrastructure data come together to guide decisions.

"With support from the National Database and Registration Authority, student identities are now shifting from system-generated IDs to verified B-Form numbers, ensuring every child in Sindh is counted and supported," he said.

He noted that 99 per cent of schools using SAMRS reported attendance, and 92pc implemented redress procedures, a significant step toward reducing dropouts.

World Bank Country Director Bolormaa Amgaabazar, on the occasion, stated that SAMRS was not a donor-driven project but was planned by the Sindh government. "It is not a student's attendance system, but it is a commitment of the provincial government to improve education."

SELECT project

The chief minister also highlighted the broader SELECT Project, funded by the World Bank and GPE, focusing on improving early-grade literacy, transforming teaching practices, developing climate-resilient school infrastructure, and increasing student retention through SAMRS and capacity-building initiatives.

The \$154.7 million programme covers 12 districts and aims to reduce learning poverty and promote school attendance, especially among girls.

The government announced plans to expand SAMRS province-wide via a structured training cascade beginning with master trainers and extending to cluster heads and all satellite schools.

"This is how we turn innovation into a legacy," the CM said.

Mr Shah reaffirmed that every reform undertaken by the Sindh government, from technological systems to infrastructure projects, is aimed at "ensuring no child is left behind."

"Our commitment to the children of Sindh is unwavering," he said. "Every child deserves to be present, engaged, and thriving. This is the future we are building together."

The launch ceremony concluded with a renewed pledge by the provincial government, development partners, and education stakeholders to strengthen education governance and deliver a modern, equitable, and technology-driven school system across Sindh.

Earlier, the chief minister, accompanied by the education minister, and Ms Amgaabazar, officially launched the SAMRS by clicking the computer button.

(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 07/11/2025)

Students' attendance goes high-tech in Sindh

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Thursday inaugurated the Student Attendance Monitoring and Redress System (SAMRS), describing it as a "revolutionary and transformative model" that places technology and evidence-based decision-making at the heart of education reforms.

Speaking at the provincial-level launch ceremony held at a local hotel, the chief minister said SAMRS is the first comprehensive digital system introduced in any province of Pakistan, linking student attendance with school infrastructure, teacher performance and learning outcomes.

"This is not just a monitoring tool," Murad Ali Shah said. "It empowers us to make decisions based on data rather than assumptions, enabling clearer identification of challenges faced by our children and ensuring timely and effective responses."

The ceremony was attended by Education Minister Syed Sardar Shah, World Bank Country Director Bolormaa Amgaabazar, representatives of UNICEF, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the Asian Development Bank, British Council, JICA, officials from the School Education and Literacy Department (SELD), education experts and development partners.

The chief minister said SAMRS is already operational in 600 schools across 12 districts, with expansion underway in four more districts through UNICEF support. He noted that the system is designed not only to track absenteeism but also to predict dropout risks, suggest interventions and improve overall school governance.

Calling SAMRS a model for the entire country, Shah said the government is institutionalizing the system through a new policy to ensure sustainability and full integration into Sindh's education governance framework.

He thanked the World Bank, GPE and other development partners for their "trust, technical guidance and unwavering cooperation" to strengthen public education, and appreciated the reform support teams for their innovation and commitment.

Holistic approach

The chief minister stressed the need to connect education with health, nutrition and child protection services. He urged partners to explore integrating SAMRS with systems for vaccination, health screenings and social protection. "Schools should not just be classrooms; they must be centers of child well-being and community trust," he said.

Education Minister Sardar Shah termed SAMRS a "game changer," establishing a unified digital platform combining attendance, performance and infrastructure indicators for informed decision-making.

With NADRA's support, he said, student identities are shifting from system-generated IDs to verified B-Form numbers, ensuring every child in Sindh is accurately identified and supported.

He noted that 99% of schools using SAMRS submitted attendance reports, and 92% implemented corrective measures — a key step toward reducing student dropout rates.

World Bank's Bolormaa Amgaabazar said SAMRS is not a donor-driven initiative but Sindh's own plan to improve education quality, demonstrating the government's commitment to reform.

SELECT project support

The chief minister also highlighted the \$154.7 million SELECT Project, funded by the World Bank and GPE, which focuses on improving literacy in early grades, modernizing teaching methods, designing climate-resilient school infrastructure and strengthening SAMRS for better student retention, particularly among girls, across 12 districts.

The government announced a structured training rollout to scale SAMRS across Sindh, beginning with master trainers and extending to cluster heads and satellite schools. "This is how we turn innovation into legacy," Shah remarked.

Reaffirming his commitment, he said: "Our dedication to every child in Sindh is unwavering. Every child deserves to attend school, to engage and to progress. This is the future we are building together."

The ceremony concluded with a joint pledge by the provincial government and development partners to strengthen governance and deliver a modern, equitable and technology-driven education system across Sindh. The CM, accompanied by Education Minister Sardar Shah and the World Bank Country Director, formally launched SAMRS by pressing a digital activation button.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 07/11/2025)

SHC orders restoration of PMDC portal for private varsities

The Sindh High Court has issued an order for the immediate restoration of the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council portal access for Baqai Medical University and Mohammad Dental College, Mirpurkhas, following a petition filed against the suspension of access for these private medical institutions.

The court on Friday heard the petition, challenging the blockage of the PMDC portal for private medical universities. Advocate Shahab Imam, the counsel for the petitioners, argued that the PMDC had unjustly suspended its portal for both universities, causing difficulties and agony to countless students as well as threatening their future.

Advocate Imam explained that the reasons for the suspension were not related to academic concerns but stemmed from issues involving land matters and other unrelated inquiries. He pointed out that students should not be penalised for the administrative actions of the institutions.

Furthermore, the petitioners' counsel emphasised that both Baqai Medical University and Mohammad Dental College had fulfilled all the necessary academic requirements and that the PMDC's decision was adversely affecting the students, many of whom were now unable to proceed with their academic registration and examinations.

After hearing the arguments presented by both the petitioners and the defence, the Sindh High Court ruled in favour of the petitioners, directing the PMDC to immediately restore the portal for Baqai Medical University and Mohammad Dental College.

This will enable students from both institutions to continue their registration and examination processes without any further disruption or hindrance.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 09/11/2025)

KU moves final-year exams by one week after law students' protest over outstanding dues

The students of University of Karachi's School of Law on Tuesday staged a protest demanding permission to appear in semester examinations without paying outstanding fees. The protest disrupted the traffic in the campus.

A large number of students gathered at Pharmacy Chowk, blocking it from all sides for several hours. The demonstration, which began in the afternoon, continued till late into the evening, causing traffic congestion at the Maskan Gate and Kaneez Fatima Society Gate.

Students and all those entering the campus from Kaneez Fatima Society, along with their vehicles, were diverted through a rough track running between tall bushes near the Computer Science Department, leading towards Biotechnology department. Similarly, vehicles exiting from the Kaneez Fatima Gate were also forced to use the same unpaved route. Traffic from Maskan was rerouted through the Semester Cell before reaching the IBA area.

The protesting students of the School of Law also blocked the road outside the university on Monday night over the same issue. During Tuesday's protest, students demanded of the administration to allow them to appear in exams while deferring fee payment.

"We've requested the administration to let us take our exams. If someone hasn't paid the fee, the university can withhold the results. But this is our final semester - two papers have already been held and we couldn't sit for them. Our academic year will be wasted, and our Bar Council membership delayed," a student, Hammad Ali, said while speaking to *The Express Tribune*.

Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Khalid Iraqi said that, following a proposal by the School of Law's in-charge Prof Tauheed, the university had agreed to give students a one-time concession. "The final semester exams have been postponed by one week to allow students to pay their dues," he added.

He, however, clarified that the protesting students had outstanding dues for multiple semesters, adding that the university was already facing a serious financial deficit. "The University of Karachi had earlier allowed such students to attend semester classes, but now no department will be permitted to let students sit in examinations without paying fees," he added.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 12/11/2025)

Murad says govt investing heavily in schools, colleges to expand access to education

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah has said education remains the foundation of the province's future and his government is investing heavily in schools and colleges so that every child, boy or girl, has access to a safe, modern and inclusive learning environment.

He said this while chairing a meeting held to review the progress of the Education Department's development portfolio, covering both the School Education and Literacy Department (SELD) and College Education Department (CED) projects under the Annual Development Programme (ADP) 2025-26.

The meeting was attended by Education Minister Syed Sardar Shah, Irrigation Minister Jam Khan Shoro, Sindh Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah, Chairman Planning & Development Board Najam Shah, Secretary Finance Fayaz Jatoi, Secretary to the CM Raheem Shaikh, Secretary Colleges Nadeem Memon, Secretary School Education Shahzaman Khuhro, along with senior officials of the concerned departments.

During the briefing, the chief minister was informed that under the ADP 2025-26, a total of 130 schemes covering 1,280 units are targeted for completion during the fiscal year, with an estimated cost of Rs15.57 billion. All required funds have been allocated, and Rs1.88bn has already been released.

The Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for the reconstruction of flood-affected schools is being implemented across 30 districts of Sindh at a cost of Rs12.33bn, jointly financed by the federal and provincial governments. Out of 481 schools, 463 have been awarded, with 317 already at roof level or above, marking 44 per cent physical and 28pc financial progress.

Progress was also reported on foreign-assisted initiatives, including projects funded by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Under JICA's school upgradation scheme, 20 girls' schools in five districts are

being elevated from primary to elementary level, with four already completed. Another JICA-supported Flood Response Reconstruction Project in six districts has reached 45pc physical progress.

The Sindh Secondary Education Improvement Project (SSEIP), co-funded by the ADB, is constructing 117 new secondary schools and training 2,630 teachers in key subjects.

CM Shah also instructed the Finance and P&D departments to maintain a strict monitoring mechanism for both domestic and foreign-funded education projects, ensuring that public funds deliver maximum educational outcomes.

Meeting to review water schemes

Mr Shah also directed the local government department to accelerate the execution of ongoing schemes focusing on water supply drainage and sanitation in the city.

Reviewing the overall development portfolio of the local government department, he said that the provincial government was investing in sustainable urban solutions so Karachi and interior Sindh residents could live in cleaner, healthier and better-managed cities.

Presenting the department's annual progress, Minister Nasir Shah reported that the development portfolio for 2025–26 includes 756 schemes with a total allocation of Rs78.087bn under the ADP and Rs45.540bn via Foreign Project Assistance (FPA)

The CM was informed that Karachi Division's major development portfolio included nine mega projects worth Rs7.66bn, in addition to numerous agency-specific schemes such as Karachi Development Authority's Rs13.22bn for 76 schemes.

It was informed that Rs18.36bn was allocated for Karachi Metropolitan Corporation for 200 schemes, including 10 new ones focused on roads, drains, and municipal facilities.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 14, 14/11/2025)

SPELT Conference opens across Karachi with focus on future-ready English language teaching

The 41st Society of Pakistan English Language Teachers (SPELT) International Conference 2025, under the theme 'Future-Ready ELT: Innovation, Diversity and Sustainability', opened simultaneously at various venues in the metropolis on Saturday morning.

This year's theme invites teachers to reflect deeply on the transformative potential of English Language Teaching (ELT) practices that embrace innovation, honour diversity while committing to sustainable growth.

Now in its 41st year, SPELT has navigated over a focused vision of empowering teachers, students, educators and academics with the tools of training, learning and professional development, particularly in the field of ELT.

There will be discussions and presentations about integrating multilingual learning and artificial intelligence (AI) in teacher training.

Tribute paid to educationist Arfa Zehra and journalist Zubeida Mustafa at teaching conference

The opening ceremony of the conference at DHA Suffa University saw a befitting tribute to the renowned scholar and educationist Dr Arfa Sayeda Zehra, who passed away a few days ago, by Prof Abbas Husain.

A professor, public speaker and advocate of Urdu language and ethics in education, Dr Zehra believed that true learning must nurture both the mind and the soul.

Meanwhile, at another venue, the late senior journalist Zubeida Mustafa was remembered for her lifelong advocacy for education, literacy, women's rights, social equity, health and environment.

Earlier, while providing an overview of the conference, SPELT's President Mohsin Tejani said that the conference has been spread over multiple venues this year with a kaleidoscope of topics. While they will be looking at the 'Innovation of ELT: Navigating Digital and Technological Shifts at the DHA Suffa University, the Happy Home School System in PECHS will be concentrating on the 'Future of Language Learning and Assessment: Path Forward'.

Meanwhile, the IU School System will be delving into 'Teacher Development and Professional Learning in a Changing ELT Landscape' and at Government Elementary College of Education (GECE), Hussainabad they will be looking at 'Inclusive and Equitable ELT in Multilingual Pakistan'.

"As technology reshapes the educational landscape, our work, too, increases as we also move with the times," said Mr Tejani, while looking forward to inspiring, intellectual sessions over the two days of the conference.

The first plenary address at DHA Suffa University by Conan Kmiecik, who is the course lead for business English and an English lecturer at Qatar University in Doha, was about 'Innovating ELT with Everyday Tools: Google Keep, Canva and FlowCV'.

The talk was based on how digital tools can transform the way teachers and students learn, teach and prepare for the future.

The session explored the potential of these tools to enhance English language teaching in three dimensions such as student learning, classroom practice and teacher development.

The morning plenary address by Associate Professor at Universitas Tanjungpura, Indonesia, Dr Iksanudin at HHS School System was about 'Evaluating ELT Materials Effectively: A Teacher's Guide to Volley Time'.

The first plenary at the IU School System by teacher trainer Sylvie Dolakova from the Czech Republic was about 'The Power of Movement in Language Teaching'.

At GECE, the morning plenary address was about 'Specific Learning Difficulties and Inclusive Teaching in the AI Era' by Prof Bimali Indrarathne, a professor in English Language at the Kotelawala Defence University in Sri Lanka.

The entire first day of the conference included interesting workshops, talks and discussions and sessions about teaching and learning.

The SPELT Conference concludes on Sunday with all the sessions to be held at Habib University.

(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 16/11/2025)

What I Have Learnt In 50 Years

Planning and development expert Arif Hasan has spent more than five decades working with poor communities across Pakistan and development practitioners and institutes around the world.

Over the last 50-plus years, I have sat through numerous presentations on government, NGO, masters and PhD students' development projects, in various countries, both in what is now known as the global North and global South.

In addition, international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, have also sought my assistance. I have also been a member of various United Nations committees on physical and social development, and a consultant to them. As the chief adviser and the chairperson of the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) and the Urban Resource Centre (URC), I have challenged the structure of thinking of many such projects and documented my concerns regularly.

The most important thing I have learned in the process is that most of these projects have a very strong anti-poor bias and are primarily concerned with brick and mortar aspects of problems.

ANTI-POOR BIAS

As far as academia is concerned, almost all teachers and supervisors bring their class prejudices with them, and the literature search that students have to undertake strengthens these prejudices.

The poor are portrayed as helpless and incapable of taking decisions regarding their own lives. The students are asked to observe and pass judgements on their observations. The poor are almost never asked their own definition of poverty. Judgements are passed in surveys on the basis of very small numbers. And once these numbers are cited, they become the "truth" for other students and consultants to follow.

Planning and development expert Arif Hasan has spent more than five decades working with poor communities across Pakistan and development practitioners and institutes around the world. He reflects on the major lessons he has learnt from that experience and his personal observations on what is wrong with Pakistan's development paradigm...

In addition, studies by IFIs have an interest in portraying conditions to be much worse than they really are, so as to increase their loan packages for the project or policy under consideration. In addition, much of the loans Pakistan takes are for paying off previous loans, something that is seldom taken into consideration by the authors of the plans.

DOUBLE STANDARDS

The anti-poor bias expresses itself in other ways as well. Building standards developed for poor and rich settlements vary considerably.

The poor settlements have much lower standards, the contractor is badly supervised, and the element of corruption is much higher in percentage terms. Much of the roads, sewage trunks and water pipes constructed for them collapse in a short period of time and, in the absence of well-planned drainage, low-income settlements are completely flooded.

It is not of much satisfaction that middle-income settlements today suffer the same fate as well. Even the workmen employed for the low-income settlement projects are not skilled, paid less per day, and the savings that are generated are taken over for politicians, bureaucrats and the contractor himself.

Many decisions that are taken for low-income settlements are a violation of common sense. Much of the professionals employed on these projects are barely trained, and many do not possess a qualification and are seldom present on site.

HEALTH

Health is a major issue in low-income settlements. Disease deprives a family of income and, to get well, one has to spend money, which the family cannot afford. The location of hospitals or medical facilities are not where they are needed, but in locations where amenity plots had been located in formal and informal planning.

In addition, in academic training, a lot of emphasis is put on curative rather than preventive medicine. That determines the location and design of health-related infrastructure, and the relation between disease and architecture simply does not exist in planning concepts.

The cost of curative medicine has become so high that many families are now heavily in debt because of it. Surveys show that people have shifted to hakeems [traditional healers] and homeopathic systems, so as to make medicine affordable.

PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

If you look at the location of parks and playgrounds, the main municipal parks are eight to 10 km away from most low-income settlements. Amenity plots in low-income settlements have been encroached upon, and those that have not been encroached upon have not been developed. Many of them have become garbage dumps and sorting yards for solid waste, promoting disease and environmental degradation of the settlements around them.

There are other aspects as well. Surveys by my office and the URC show that the poor are clear in their view that the major cause of their poverty is the absence of a roof that they own. A roof gives them dignity, the possibility of upward mobility, better proposals for their daughters' marriages, the possibility of improving their home incrementally as and when they have money, freedom from insecurity, the possibility of their children — especially girls — receiving an education because of the savings made on rent and, subsequently, better jobs for their women, such as in malls and as supervisors in factories.

These very important issues seldom form part of the housing analysis. Perhaps this is because these intangible issues do not help in justifying a large loan.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE LOANS?

A study of loans taken by Pakistan for housing purposes shows that, while the brick and mortar part is utilised, the intangible aspects are normally not utilised. Much of this is because sociologists who can make the necessary studies for the IFIs are very short in supply, and are usually employed as consultants. It is also because it is not easy to save money for illegal benefits from social infrastructure projects.

Every loan has an element of capacity-building for the government staff and the special staff that is hired. This capacity-building usually consists of workshops and visits to foreign countries to see how projects in those countries were designed and how they function. They are usually independent projects, not necessarily a part of a larger policy.

This capacity-building component is normally 12 percent of the project cost. Over the years, millions of dollars have been invested in capacity-building. In spite of this, we keep building the same capacity again and again, and the departments for whom capacity is built revert back to their previous organisational culture and manner of functioning. We can see from the state in which the development agencies are, that no capacity has been built.

EVICCTIONS AND RESETTLEMENTS

In housing projects, one of the main problems is acquiring land for them. This is done by removing existing settlements and relocating them, sometimes on the same land and very often elsewhere, on land identified and provided by the state.

The new settlement, which was previously in the city centre, is relocated to the city's fringes. This impoverishes the people and destroys community ties. It adds transport costs to work and back, deprives women of jobs because of distances and the costs involved from home to work and back, and it puts households in debt (since the poor pay monthly for their groceries, which was possible previously because of community links). Poor households also borrow from each other in times of need, which becomes difficult with new neighbours.

The old manner of professionals and their support staff visiting settlements for long periods and spending time with the affectees of evictions is gone. And where it takes place it is like "development tourism."

As a result, there is little empathy between the different actors of development planning and the opinion of the affectees is usually missing, except for a paragraph or two summarised from a visit or survey.

In addition, previously people formed committees and stood up for themselves and negotiated or demonstrated with their representatives and other influential personalities. Today, there is no lack of NGOs to support them or to initiate their struggle. This weakens their position as compared to before, as NGOs' positions are more understanding and supportive of government decisions, as compared to people's committees.

Boys cross a makeshift 'bridge' at Karachi's Gujjar Nullah: much of the roads, sewage trunks and water pipes constructed in low-income settlements collapse in a short period of time and, in the absence of well-planned drainage, these localities become completely flooded | Amar Guriro

LAND AND HOUSING

There are other issues with land as well. Government agencies claim that they have no land for development for the poor. Yet they have no problem handing out large land parcels to formal sector developers. There are many reasons for this.

The state collects large revenues from the sale and or development of these land parcels. The fact that poor cooperatives can produce the same revenue over a longer period of time, with interest, is disregarded. Then there is another problem. Available land, which is next to expensive land and that can be considered for low-income groups, is not considered because the value of the expensive land will fall if it is next to low-income settlements. As a result, the poor can only live on peripheral or environmentally degraded land that no one wants.

The market, realising the demand for low-income housing near the city centre, has found ways to cater to this demand. Old katchi abadis [informal settlements] near the centre are being converted into multi-storey apartments, often four to seven floors high. They have no lifts and very narrow streets.

When they began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they provided cheap flats for the lower-middle class to purchase on cash, instalments or pagri [goodwill money]. Today, they are not affordable, even for the better-off poor. The result is that an increasing number of flat-owners are in debt, from purchasing and continuing to live in these highrises.

These new developments are not considered legal by state agencies, as they follow no by-laws and zoning regulations, simply because such regulations do not exist. The residents, therefore, live in a constant fear of eviction. But the informal sector has devised documents of sale and possession amongst themselves.

Their legality is decided on the basis of by-laws which are applied to formally constructed houses. This is very unfair because these houses have no lease and they have never applied for a building permit — this concept did not exist when they began construction.

In addition, government surveys of informal settlements for rehabilitation purposes are also faulty. These surveys usually count houses as they appear on a Google map. However, in informal settlements, many households often live on one plot of land or in one house.

So, government surveys are usually about houses and not about people. Thus, government figures are unreliable and the cause of considerable injustice.

COMPENSATIONS

Compensation given as money is usually more equitable, as the affectee can use it at their convenience. Yet it has to be sufficient to rent accommodation or purchase a plot. It never is, because the needs of the poor are always under-estimated because of the bias against them, in the name of transparency.

The manner in which money is given is complex. The affectee is viewed with suspicion by officialdom. So, something that could take a few hours gets lost in bureaucratic complexity, with many steps to take and many days in taking them. Because of this, affectees often lose day wages or have problems with their employers.

A major problem is encountered by senior residents who are invalid and cannot afford to purchase or hire a home. So, many of them end up living on the street or under bridges. At night, many parks are also full of them but, as government attempts to prevent them from sleeping in parks improve, the number of people sleeping on the street or under bridges also increases. An increasingly large number are also sleeping on the beach.

Conditions in the rural areas are also becoming increasingly difficult because of the need for cash, which daily wage labour can not manage to earn sufficiently. With climate change, the number of environmental refugees is also increasing rapidly. There are no plans to provide them jobs or spaces to live. They are also living on the streets, under bridges, or in under-construction buildings.

They manage to earn somewhat because another informal sector provides them with trinkets, such as balloons, to sell. A whole supply-chain of manufacturing exists, providing these items on credit. The women clean car windscreens at crossroads. I have never found out what exactly their men do or what the number of such a population is.

There are also street hotels on pavements that rent out a bed and breakfast for between Rs100 to 300 per night, along with some basic toilet facilities, which are often provided by the neighbouring mosque in lieu of a small donation by the user. These 'hotels' are also adjacent to transport terminals, where drinking water is publicly available. This is a whole unexplored world.

DENSITY

A serious issue that is evolving is related to density.

One-hundred-and-twenty square yard plots (which were owned by the father or grandfather) are divided among the children. Every child wants his/her part to have access to the road, which divides the plot, often into 3, making the divided plot no more than 30 feet at the roadside. This means that each person gets no more than a 10-foot frontage. A first floor is sometimes added to this.

So, where one family was living, now at least six families are living in a plot of very small frontage. This creates a situation of unbearable density and, as the population grows, there are further divisions and subdivisions and/ or high rises, which manage to create densities over 1,000 to 1,200 persons per hectare. This issue is seldom or never addressed.

GROWING INEQUALITY GAP

As a result of what has been discussed above, there is a growing gap between the rich and the poor.

That is why better-income young men and women stand a better chance in becoming members of national cultural and sports teams. The poor also complain of elite schools and colleges using their social and political influence in getting their members to become members of national teams.

It is for all these reasons that the upper echelons of the judiciary, bureaucracy, business and the military are drawn from the elite private schools and universities of Pakistan and support each other on a class basis. Their development decisions support their class interests, and they are not fully aware of the problems that their country and its less fortunate citizens face. Development for them means bringing the benefits they have to the people of Pakistan. But this is not possible.

IFIs have a major say in the development model of Pakistan. Their air-conditioned offices in the city centre, far away from the homes of low-income groups, their fleet of expensive cars, constant trips abroad, workshops in five-star hotels and huge salaries anger the people, and it is not uncommon to hear them say "they are becoming rich on our problems."

EDUCATION

Education is one of the priorities of poor families. However, the government schooling system is poor, and so poor families prefer to send their children to neighbourhood private schools, which are operated by local entrepreneurs.

These are expensive as a result, so families have to decide which child to send to school and which child to send to work. This is a very difficult decision and causes ruptures in the family. Unlike neighbourhood schools, colleges and universities are very far away from low-income settlements, and a trip to them (in the absence of efficient and cheap transportation) and back is very expensive in terms of money and time. This also results in many young people giving up on higher education.

This adversity affects the majority of women aspirants. All this is in addition to very high fees (often in tens of thousands), which low-income groups can seldom afford.

CULTURE

The Pakistan state is anti-culture and against students organising themselves. As a result, there is no student political activity. It is frowned upon, if not persecuted, and arts, music, dance and drama are discouraged.

But all this has become an exclusive part of elite culture and held in elite institutions, often supported by cultural institutions of foreign countries. However, there are signs that this is changing and that the lower-middle class is slowly becoming a part of this.

There was a time when student cards could subsidise travel, hostel charges, student canteens and library fees. All this has gone due to the neoliberal economic policies adopted by the state. Not only this, but every student who is admitted to a university signs a form saying he or she will not indulge in any form of discussion or debate regarding politics or religion. With this statement, dissent, which is a basic requirement of development and progress, is killed.

WOMEN AND FAMILY STRUCTURES

In the last 20 years, the family structure and the women of Karachi have changed. We have moved from joint to nuclear families. As a result, women have become comparatively independent and also dominate the fields of education and health.

Self-willed marriages are increasing rapidly, and so is divorce. The conservative segment of society feels this is because people do not follow their religion. But this cannot be stopped. There is now a women's football team, cricket team and hockey team, and women participate in athletics and martial arts and win. They participate in politics and participate in demonstrations, and often arrange them.

Their public presence has increased too, and many women are in important government and private sector jobs as heads of institutions as well. But in spite of fairly strong women's movements, women complain that they still have a long way to go before they can use their independence to achieve some form of equality with their men. They earn, but still they have to cook and clean.

These changes have had a major impact on the design, especially on the incremental development, of the home and the future culture of the younger generation. Most homes possess a smartphone and have access to the internet and Artificial Intelligence (AI). However, in spite of these developments, the city has almost no toilets for women, which restricts their working hours, and during their periods, they often have no option but to take the day off.

In addition, the pavements that are available to them to walk on have obstructions such as trees, advertisement signage and broken patches. Often there are no pavements at all. This results in accidents and difficulty in moving around, especially with children and with senior citizens.

There are many newly built roads that have no pavements at all and, when I have expressed this observation, I have been told "Arif Bhai, have you ever seen anyone walk on a pavement in Karachi?"

FINAL NOTE

There is much more that I have observed and written about and can safely conclude that, unless these and many other things are taken into account when trying to solve our problems and building a future, our problems will not be solved.

Streets will flood, additional katchi abadis will be created, transport will not improve because it will not be maintained and managed, traffic will become more unbearable in the absence of management and, worst of all, women's development will take place in an environment full of conflicts because the state will not support it.

Hopefully, a new generation that is now growing up will be able to change this.
(By Arif Hasan Dawn EOS, 01, 16/11/2025)

KU told to drop decades-old KSP quota, shift to full merit admissions

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has directed the University of Karachi (KU) to discontinue its decades-old Karachi-Sindh-Pakistan (KSP) admissions policy and immediately adopt an open-merit system based solely on Sindh domicile. The instruction came after it was revealed during a PAC meeting that KU continues to grant admissions under the KSP quota - in place since 1990 - instead of a uniform merit-based system.

The meeting, chaired by PAC Chairman Nisar Khuhro, reviewed KU audit paras for 2021-2023. Attendees included Secretary Sindh Higher Education Commission Moeen Siddiqui, KU acting vice chancellor Prof Dr Haris Shoaib, Registrar Dr Imran Siddiqui, and senior officials.

When asked if KU had switched to open merit, Registrar Dr Imran Ahmed said the university, with syndicate and academic council approval, had been following the KSP formula since 1990, with only "one or two faculties" now using open merit. Khuhro questioned whether separating Karachi from Sindh in admissions was justified, noting that institutions like NED University had long used test-based merit systems.

"Karachi is part of Sindh, and students holding Sindh domicile have the right to admission based purely on merit," Khuhro said, directing KU to review the KSP policy and ensure all future admissions follow an open-merit entry-test system. The PAC also requested a progress report at its next meeting.

Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Chair

The committee expressed strong displeasure over KU's failure to make the Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Chair functional despite Rs422 million already spent. Khuhro questioned why the chair, handed over 13 years ago, remained inactive.

KU administration said additional funds were required and a PC-I had been submitted for approval. The PAC instructed the university to operationalise the chair immediately without further delay.

Printing presses incur losses

The PAC was informed that the Sindh Government Printing Press at Governor House suffered Rs281 million in losses during 2022-2023, primarily because provincial departments outsourced printing despite having dedicated budgets.

The Director General Audit noted that the press spent Rs395 million against an allocated Rs114 million during the two years and had not maintained annual accounts since 1970. Officials said the press handles government budget books, gazette notifications, and other official material, but departments frequently outsourced printing without obtaining mandatory NOCs from the press.

The press management added that only Sindh Rangers and the provincial Ombudsman had received NOCs and that the press had sufficient manpower and a centralised system capable of handling all departmental printing.

It was also disclosed that the Sindh Government Printing Press in Khairpur incurred Rs40 million in losses. Directing the Chief Secretary to instruct all departments to route official printing through government presses, Khuhro stressed that this was essential to revive revenue and prevent recurring losses.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 20/11/2025)

Of 22.6m out-of-school children nationwide, 7m are in Sindh: CM

Nearly 22.6 million children in Pakistan are currently out of school, with seven million in Sindh alone, Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah revealed on Friday, underscoring the gravity of the education crisis in the province. "This staggering figure exceeds the total population of several countries," he said and stressed the need for innovative educational solutions.

CM Shah made these revelations at the launch of the second phase of the Accelerated Digital Learning Programme (ADLP), a flagship initiative of the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF), aimed at providing technology-based education to disadvantaged and out-of-school children across the province.

The second phase follows the success of the pilot phase, which was launched in June 2023 in collaboration with the Teach the World Foundation (TTWF).

Speaking at the ceremony, the chief minister highlighted Pakistan's position as the fourth largest economy in South Asia, ranking also fourth in literacy. However, he added that despite this economic standing, Pakistan faces an educational challenge that requires modern, tech-driven interventions.

"The need for modern educational solutions is more pressing than ever. We cannot afford to ignore the millions of children who remain out of school, especially when we know that the future of the country depends on the education of its youth," he stated.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 05, 22/11/2025)

'Degrees copying MBBS titles promote quackery'

The Joint Healthcare Regulators Forum (JHCRF) on Friday urged the Higher Education Commission (HEC) to immediately shut down or rename degree programmes whose titles resemble MBBS, warning that such qualifications are being misused by individuals impersonating medical graduates and contributing to the widespread problem of quackery in the country.

For example, Bachelor of Science in Medical Laboratory Technology (BSMLT) and Bachelor of Science in Medical Imaging Technology (BSMIT) may lead people to consider the graduate as a physician doctor.

The recommendation came during the third JHCRF meeting, convened by the Sindh Healthcare Commission (SHCC) in collaboration with the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (MNHSR&C) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The forum drew together senior officials from federal and provincial regulatory bodies to review healthcare governance challenges.

A communiqué issued after the meeting stated that degree titles misleadingly similar to MBBS were enabling graduates of unrelated programmes to present themselves as medical doctors-posing a direct threat to patient safety. Participants urged HEC to intervene by renaming or discontinuing such programmes and enforcing stricter accreditation protocols.

MPA Nida Khuhro, Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Population Welfare, Sindh, attended the session as chief guest. Addressing the forum, she said Sindh had built a "strong regulatory system" over years of reform and legislation, and was now positioning itself for the next phase: digitising healthcare oversight.

"With fast-changing technology, Sindh aims to create a comprehensive digital health framework covering telemedicine, e-prescriptions and online pharmacies so that patient safety remains uncompromised," she said.

Kuhro praised the SHCC for its work in the private sector, noting that regulatory gaps in public systems were being addressed through coordinated interventions. She announced that Sindh was establishing a Clinical Governance Academy to train healthcare workers in quality assurance, risk management and evidence-based policy.

"Sindh is also expanding its system to ensure that medicines and medical devices meet global standards, including minimum safety requirements, infection control protocols and emergency governance," she added. Mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements for healthcare professionals, she said, were being fully aligned with international norms.

WHO Representative in Pakistan, Dr Luo Dapeng, reaffirmed the organisation's support for strengthening regulatory coherence across the country's fragmented health sector. "This platform reflects a shared commitment to improving accountability and enhancing the resilience of Pakistan's health system," he said.

Joining the meeting via video link, Federal Secretary MNHSR&C Hamed Yaqoob Sheikh highlighted policy reforms undertaken by the ministry, including the introduction of the National Blood Transfusion Policy and a new policy framework for Thalassaemia Prevention and Genetic Disorders. He urged provincial and institutional regulators to ensure swift implementation.

Dr Ahson Qavi Siddiqi, CEO SHCC, said the past several decades had transformed healthcare dramatically, introducing new technologies and treatments not yet covered under existing regulations. This regulatory gap, he said, required urgent harmonisation across provinces-one of the core objectives of the JHCRF platform.

He reiterated the forum's demand that HEC act against degree programmes that imitate MBBS nomenclature and contribute to quackery.

SHCC Chairperson Dr Khalid Shaikh, in his concluding remarks, said the attendance of top regulatory officials from across the country demonstrated a shared national vision and institutional commitment. "Today's meeting underscored the urgent need for collective action. Issues such as patient safety, implementation of standards, curriculum reforms and the menace of quackery cannot be tackled in isolation," he said.

(By APP The Express Tribune, 05, 23/11/2025)

Romancing the books — Adab Festival ends

The second and concluding day of the 10th Adab Festival, which was under way at Habitt City turned out to be yet another day of nurturing minds with intellect. There was artificial intelligence, heritage sites, power women, sinful women, poetry, setting right of historic facts, art, film, drama and so much more to delve into on Sunday.

The festival's founder Ameena Saiyid is also the publisher and managing director of Lightstone Publishers. It goes to her credit that she always give equal space to books published by other publishers. The love of books remains at the heart of the festival.

One such example was the discussion with the authors of Designing Tomorrow with Artificial Intelligence and Pakistan's first AI Tools Dictionary, Dr Salman Ahmed Khatani and Sadaf Bhatti, respectively, with moderator Ahsan Siddiqui. "Change is the only constant. Pretty soon we will not be teaching our children 'A for Apple' but 'A for Artificial Intelligence'," pointed out the moderator.

"We are all futurists as we anticipate the future," said Dr Khatani. "But now as we move towards transhumanism, we can also design our future," he added.

Discussions on AI, heritage, 'sinful' women, art and history provoke thought

Meanwhile, Ms Bhatti, who is an educationist, has also compiled the first AI Tools Dictionary in Pakistan. "I was reading up on AI tools and thought that there was a need for a dictionary of such tools along with their links and QR codes. The book is rather thin now but with so many tools being introduced all the time, its thickness will grow," she said.

Another book, which is not a Lightstone publication, was Nadya Chishty-Mujahid's Perennial College Tales. Discussing the challenges of writing the book with author Taha Kehar, Nadya admitted that it was a challenge writing about the opposite gender as her focus in the book was on young college males. "I needed accurate knowledge of how they think," she said while revealing how boys approached her themselves hoping to be written in as one of her characters in the book.

Journalist, author and poet Peerzada Salman's recent independently published book Fever Log and Other Stories was also launched at the festival on Sunday. The session with the author was thoroughly enjoyed by the audience, who also loved listening to what Amber Romasa Nagori had to say about her new book Tales of Agnimitra and Tamanna, which is published by Lightstone as is Where Cicadas Sing by Athar Tahir where Christi Marie Lauder of Habib University and author and publisher Safinah Danish Elahi joined in the discussion with the author. A panel discussion 'Echoes of Mohenjodaro' with archaeologist Dr Asma Ibrahim, environmentalist Afia Salam, writer Nasreen Iqbal and Raheela Baqai, as the moderator, reached the conclusion that there is a need for spreading awareness about our heritage sites among our young as they are the custodians of the future.

A session about the 'Power Women of Pakistan' saw classical dancer and activist Sheema Kermani, President of TCS Group Saira Awan Malik and PPP MNA Sharmila Faruqi in conversation with journalist Zarrar Kuhro, who managed to get them to talk about the things they have faced in life that enraged them so much that they turned that anger into fuel for moving towards positive action.

The following session was called 'Hum Gunahgar Aurtein', where poets Kishwar Naheed and Zehra Nigah, writer Noorul Huda Shah and educationists Huma Baqai and Prof Uzma Farman Farooqui proudly related to the title of 'Gunahgar Aurtein' or sinful women as described in Kishwar Naheed's poem by the same title as all have dared to stand up and question the wrongs in society. But it was a little funny to see them joined on the stage by journalist Wusatullah Khan, who also admitted that he was just as sinful as them. Shayma Saiyid's beautiful singing of Hum Gunahgar Aurtein at the end of the session touched many hearts in the audience, who also wanted to join the rest on the stage and rebel.

The discussion about Senator Farhatullah Babar's book *The Zardari Presidency (2008-2013) Now It Must Be Told* was another interesting session where the author revealed that widowed President Zardari told him that he would never remarry as that would rob him of the honour of being Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's son-in-law.

The book talk about Shehzad Ghias' *Pakistan Lost* with the author, senior journalists Zahid Hussain and Nadeem F. Paracha, author Omar Shahid Hamid and moderator Amber Rahim Shamsi reached the conclusion that history should be taught truthfully to help the country progress.

Mian Raza Rabbani's book *The Smile Snatchers: A Timeless Tale of Children, Resistance and Hope in Gaza* found critique in DawnMedia CEO Hameed Haroon's comments. According to Haroon, the book is not to be taken at face value. He also said that the genocide and slaughter seen in Gaza is also relatable to Kashmir. And "Watch out", he warned, "it is also about Pakistan".

The launch of Amin Gulgee's *Gulgee Museum — The Handbook* was an arty affair with all his panellists, except Amin, hiding their faces in white veils. Later, the veils were removed though to reveal their identities as Niilofur Farrukh, Bina Shah, John McCarry and Adam Fahy-Majeed. It was a performance as well as discussion.

The 10th Adab Festival came to a close with a music concert by Saif Samejo.
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 24/11/2025)

Schools or brands

Private education has over the years steadily morphed into a profit-maximising business, overshadowing its core mission of learning and development. This shift has taken such precedence that many schools today consider themselves brands first and educational institutions second — complete with branded uniforms and study packs. It is this unchecked commercialisation that has now forced the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) to intervene and issue show-cause notices to seventeen major private schools.

Parents were allegedly compelled to buy expensive, logo-bearing supplies exclusively from authorised vendors, often at prices inflated by up to 280%. In many cases, students were not even allowed to use generic alternatives, effectively turning families into "captive consumers" with no meaningful choice. Such practices go beyond profiteering as they distort the very idea of schooling. When learning is tied to corporate-style branding, classrooms begin to resemble marketplaces rather than spaces of intellectual growth.

Worse, this model deepens systemic inequality. Quality education becomes available only to those who can pay for it. Children from lower-income households face social stigma for not "fitting in" while middle-class families stretch their budgets to breaking point simply to keep up. The fallout extends further. Exclusive vendor arrangements have choked off opportunities for thousands of small stationery shops and uniform sellers nationwide, reducing market competition and wiping out affordable options for parents.

Education cannot be treated as a business model built on margins and monopolies. The CCP's action is a necessary wake-up call. Private schools must re-examine their priorities and restore education to its rightful place - not as a branded commodity, but as a fundamental right and a pathway to equitable development. Schools must return to the basics of making quality education accessible to the masses for collective growth. Right now, all we see is a fractured youth.
(By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 24/11/2025)

KU teachers oppose autonomous status for scientific research centre

Teachers at the University of Karachi have strongly opposed the Sindh government's proposed bill seeking to grant autonomous status to the International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences. They warned that the move would put the future of students, faculty and researchers at risk.

Speaking to *The Express Tribune*, KU faculty members said, the plan would undermine decades of academic investment and turn a premier public-sector research facility into an inaccessible space for middle-class students. They demanded that the bill be withdrawn and that all stakeholders be taken into confidence. The KU Teachers' Society (KUTS) has also convened an emergency meeting to discuss its strategy.

KUTS President Ghufuran Alam said, the bill was presented in the Sindh cabinet without consulting the university syndicate, senate, academic council or teachers' bodies. "This non-transparent approach is deeply concerning. How can a government that claims to uphold democratic values try to separate an internationally recognised research centre based on the advice of only two individuals?" he asked.

He warned that separating ICCBS would affect students' degrees, ongoing research, and the university's long-term academic reputation. "ICCBS stands on KU land, resources and investment. Detaching it abruptly is unjust and unacceptable," he said.

Alam added that claims about ICCBS being run on private funding were misleading. "The centre has long been funded by the federal and provincial HECs and its own revenue streams. A few donor contributions do not give anyone proprietary rights," he said.

KUTS has urged the Sindh chief minister and PPP leadership to halt the move and prevent the institution from falling under donor-driven control. It has also called for the bill to be withdrawn in full.

Meanwhile, Sindh Higher Education Commission Chairperson Dr Tariq Rafi supported the proposal, saying it is common worldwide for large universities to spin off independent institutes. "ICCBS is a major research hub. Granting it autonomy is not a problem in itself, though the final decision rests with the government," he said. However, he added that any reservations should be heard and addressed.

ICCBS is considered one of Pakistan's leading scientific research institutions and enjoys global recognition for its work in chemical and biological sciences. It has twice been awarded the Islamic Development Bank's prize for excellence in science and technology.

More than 600 MPhil and PhD scholars have graduated from the centre, while 550 students are currently pursuing research degrees. ICCBS also provides scholarships—Rs30,000 per month for MPhil, and Rs70,000 per month for PhD scholars. Around 400 researchers are associated with the institute, including over 80 senior scientists. The facility houses a digital library, high-speed internet, online journals and extensive e-book collections.

(By Ayesha Khan Ansari The Express Tribune, 04, 25/11/2025)

Privatising education

As of July 2024, the acute problem in education that Punjab was facing was a shortage of government schools. A fact sheet revealed that in order to cater to a steady increase in its population, the government would have to construct 19,000 more schools on top of the pre-existing 47,500. But only four months later, the Department of Education had already completed the privatisation of 4,500 primary schools. Now, a little over a year later, it plans to commence the third phase of this project soon, which will bring the total up to 17,000 privatised schools.

This strategy might seem like a progressive approach to transforming the educational sector of the province, but in a region where 10 million children are already out of school, its only substantial outcome will be a widening of the class divide. These millions of out-of-school children lose their opportunity to build better lives, oftentimes due to rising inflation and unemployment. Now, with education only being accessible after a costly paywall of private-school fees, that dream is even further away. Moreover, the government plans on redeploying teachers or simply placing them in a 'surplus pool', which will inevitably disrupt their flow of income and will be done at a cost of disrupting the education of students studying under them. Not even mentioned in these issues is the matter of finding resources for newly privatised schools, including staff and facilities.

Education is not meant to be a luxury you have to 'afford'. It is the basic right of a child and should be provided free from social and financial restrictions - because hindering educational access directly equates to hindering social mobility.

(By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 25/11/2025)

Muttahida MPA urges CM not to separate ICCBS from KU

A Sindh Assembly lawmaker belonging to the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan has written a letter to the Sindh chief minister and urged him to reconsider a plan to separate the International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS) from Karachi University (KU).

Engr. Syed Adil Askari warned that the move could damage academic integrity and disrupt one of Pakistan's most respected research institutions.

"It is concerning that such a significant decision was made without consultation with key stakeholders. The University's Syndicate, Senate, faculty members, and employees were not taken into confidence, nor was any formal approval sought from the relevant academic bodies," Mr Askari said in the letter.

He said that such decisions taken in the past, such as the separation of IBA from KU, have shown that such structural changes can "create financial and administrative barriers for students and reduce public access."

He maintained that IBA's fee structure has moved "far beyond the reach of middle-class families," and the institution continues to face scrutiny from investigative bodies. The same concerns now arise regarding ICCBS, which has always served as a public, research-driven, and academically accessible institution, Mr Askari added.

"In the interest of protecting the integrity of higher education, preserving the University of Karachi's legacy, and ensuring transparency in policymaking, I respectfully urge you to kindly review and reconsider this decision.

(By Waqas Ali Ranjha Dawn, 13, 25/11/2025)

Scientists, teachers urge chief minister not to detach ICCBS from Karachi University

The Pakistan Academy of Sciences (PAS) and Karachi University Teachers' Society (Kuts) have sought the chief minister's intervention in the ongoing controversy over the proposed government bill seeking to grant autonomous status to the International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS).

In their separate letters, the bodies have urged the chief minister to reconsider the bill and keep the ICCBS part of Karachi University (KU).

"ICCBS is an essential component of University of Karachi and altering its status could expose it to risks such as diminished standards and potential corruption. Furthermore, the private sector currently lacks significant experience in managing R&D [Research and Development] institutions focused on education and training, particularly when these organisations are not profit-driven," writes PAS President Prof Kausar Abdulla Malik in his letter dated Nov 28th to the chief minister.

Highlighting ICCBS's significance, he says that the institution is widely regarded as one of Pakistan's leading scientific institutes, showcasing the nation's modern progress in science. Scientists affiliated with ICCBS have received many civil awards and are known internationally for their achievements.

PAS, Kuts and French scientist write to Murad

"The skilled professionals trained at ICCBS are now contributing to universities and R&D organisations throughout Pakistan, underscoring the centre's key role in advancing national science and technology."

On behalf of the PAS, he also extended support in addressing any concerns related to the current ICCBS management.

Expressing similar reservations over the government's move, Prof Jean-Marie Lehn, who is associated with the Institute of Supramolecular Science and Engineering Laboratory of Supramolecular Chemistry, University of Strasbourg, France, has also written a letter to the CM in this regard.

"I am deeply concerned to learn that there is an ongoing move to separate the institute from the University of Karachi and convert it into a separate institution in which the appointment of the Executive Director will be made by a three-member search committee comprising two donors and Your Excellency.

"I urge you not to change the present status of the institute as it has flourished as an integral part of University of Karachi. Prof Ata-ur-Rehman is presently Patron-in-Chief of the institute and his continued supervision is necessary to ensure its continued development."

Plea to reconsider the bill

In its letter, Kuts has also urged the chief minister to reconsider this proposal in the larger interest of the academic integrity, institutional stability, and the future of public-sector higher education in Sindh.

"Separating ICCBS would significantly weaken the university's academic structure, disrupt research and postgraduate programs, and set a precedent that could fragment public universities across Pakistan," writes Kuts President Syed Ghufuran Alam.

He further writes that globally, there is no example of a public university centre established, funded, and governed by a university being separated through executive legislation.

"Donor-funded institutes within major public-sector universities (e.g., University of California, Oxford, Cambridge, ETH Zürich) remain fully under university governance. Donors may contribute naming rights, but they do not receive executive authority, administrative control, or representation on statutory bodies.

"The proposed bill, however, appears to extend governance rights to donor foundations in a manner inconsistent with international norms and potentially harmful to academic independence," he writes.

The Kuts points out that donor contributions to Hussain Ebrahim Jamal (HEJ) and Dr Panjwani Centre for Molecular Medicine and Drug Research (PCMD) amounted to less than one per cent of total development and operational costs.

"All major infrastructure, laboratories, salaries, and research activities over the past 25–30 years were funded by the HEC Pakistan, Government of Sindh, Sindh HEC, federal agencies, international partners, and the University of Karachi itself on university-owned land. Therefore, all ICCBS assets legally and ethically belong to the University of Karachi and the public sector.

"The proposed separation may create multiple risks. This includes fragmentation of academic and research networks disrupting degree programmes and supervision for over 600 MPhil/PhD scholars; legal and administrative complications regarding ownership of land, buildings, equipment, and staff service structures; financial strain on both ICCBS and the wider university system due to duplication of administrative and academic functions."

(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 14, 30/11/2025)

PAC orders degree verification of all university staff in Sindh

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the Sindh Assembly on Wednesday directed all public universities in the province to have the educational degrees of their employees and officials verified by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) within three months.

The directive was issued after it was revealed in the PAC that 10 employees of the Dow University of Health Sciences (DUHS) had been hired with fake degrees.

While examining the audit papers of the DUHS from 2021 to 2023, the PAC learnt that the certificates of only 450 out of 3,500 employees had so far been verified by the HEC.

According to the audit reports of the university, while reviewing the personal files of contractual employees, it was noticed that their degrees and other character antecedents had not been verified by the relevant boards, universities or concerned agencies at the time of appointment.

The audit department, in its report, was of the view that in the absence of verification of educational documents, the appointment of contractual employees was irregular and the chances of bogus degrees and certificates could not be ruled out.

It was also stated that a sum of Rs2.33 billion is spent annually on employees' salaries.

The PAC was informed that the audit department had reported the matter to the DUHS in June last year, but no reply had been received so far.

The DUHS management told the PAC that the university had invited tenders for degree verification thrice in the past, but no bidder had participated in the process.

Consequently, the management engaged HRSG Outsourcing Company directly for the verification of degrees, and the firm has begun work and some degrees have already been verified.

DUHS Vice Chancellor (VC) Dr Nazli Hussain informed the PAC that eight out of the 10 employees whose degrees were found to be fake had been removed from service, while the remaining two had been served show-cause notices and would be terminated shortly.

She added that from July 2021 to June 2025, a total of 3,023 employees had been appointed on a contract basis, and of them, the services of 54 had been regularised.

(By Tahir Siddiqui Dawn, 13, 04/12/2025)

Despite stakeholders' criticism, Sindh govt pushes ahead with plan to detach ICCBS from KU

Despite serious reservations by teachers' bodies, political parties and other stakeholders, the Sindh government is moving ahead with its plan to separate the International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS) from Karachi University (KU) as Minister for Universities and Boards Ismail Rahu disclosed that a draft bill regarding the matter has been forwarded to the Charter Inspection Committee.

Sindh Higher Education Commission's Charter Inspection and Evaluation Committee advises the government on proposals for granting a charter to award degrees in both public and private sector institutions. However, the minister told reporters that teachers, staff, donors and all other stakeholders would be taken into confidence before any step is finalised.

He was speaking at a meeting of the Inter-Board Coordination Commission (IBCC) at a local hotel to inaugurate Sindh's new e-marking and digital examination system on Tuesday.

Mr Rahu said that the government is not planning to "split KU", adding on the contrary that a draft bill has been forwarded to the said inspection committee to grant ICCBS the powers to independently award degrees.

It may be mentioned that in recent weeks, teachers' bodies, political parties and other stakeholders have raised concerns over a government plan to detach ICCBS from KU. Teachers and other stakeholders had maintained that the move would prove harmful to the quality of research, besides hindering students' access to the ICCBS, as the institute could become very expensive if privatised.

E-marking system launched for Sindh boards

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Rahu also said that the federal government has handed over all e-marking softwares to the Sindh government's educational boards, marking the formal beginning of a new phase of examination digitalisation in the province.

The inauguration ceremony of the e-marking and digitalisation project was held under the IBCC. It was attended by Secretary for Universities and Educational Boards Muhammad Abbas Baloch, Faqeer Muhammad Lakho, as well as chairpersons of all educational boards across the province and representatives of federal boards.

Mr Rahu stated that annual examinations for grades IX and XI across Sindh will now be conducted through e-marking, ensuring transparency, quality, and timely results in the examination system.

He added that a system is being developed in which complete transparency will be maintained from the preparation of question papers to the conduct of examinations, making it possible to eliminate issues such as paper leaks.

He further said that under the current traditional system, there are delays in preparing results, whereas through e-marking this stage will not only become faster but also error-free. He shared that some boards in Sindh have already begun limited e-marking of certain papers.

(By Waqas Ali Ranjha Dawn, 13, 05/12/2025)

Teachers' body seeks president's help to overcome Federal Urdu University's financial crisis

The Teachers' Associations of the Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science & Technology (FUUAST) has expressed deep concern over the severe financial crisis facing the university.

According to a statement, the body's General Secretary Dr Iftikhar Ahmed Tahiri and Abdul Haq Campus General Secretary Dr Abdul Majeed have appealed to the President of Pakistan and Chancellor of FUUAST, as well as the Chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, to take urgent notice of the situation.

The teachers' representatives stated that FUUAST is one of the country's oldest and most important national educational institutions, currently grappling with alarming financial challenges. They added that President Asif Ali Zardari has always shown a soft corner for government employees and national institutions; therefore, they hope he will take effective measures to resolve the issues faced by the university's faculty and staff.

Dr Tahiri and Dr Majeed also made an appeal to Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and urged him to play an immediate role in the restoration and financial stabilisation of the university. The representatives highlighted that over 20,000 students are being enrolled at the university, supported by more than 350 faculty members and over 1,000 staff and officers. The ongoing financial crisis is causing distress among employees and affecting the university's ability to maintain quality education and research.

They added that despite repeated assurances that issues would be resolved after the appointment of a permanent vice chancellor, two years have passed since then but the university's condition remains critical.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, Dawn, 14, 05/12/2025)

KU institute

THE Sindh government's decision to separate the Institute for Chemical and Biological Sciences from Karachi University has elicited a strong reaction from the academic community in the province, while scholars of national repute and foreign experts have also expressed their concern. Yet it remains to be seen whether these protestations will make the provincial government change its mind. The Sindh minister for universities has said that the Sindh International Centre for Sciences Bill, 2025, has been sent to the relevant government committee for review. The minister, however, did add that the views of stakeholders would be taken into account before a final decision is made. At stake here is not just the question of one institute; the matter, in fact, raises questions about how much influence bureaucrats, politicians and donors should have over public educational institutions, particularly with regard to the autonomy of such institutes. The Sindh government has offered no cogent reason for separating the ICCBS, other than to "provide quality education and conduct research and training". Should we assume that the present arrangement within KU does not allow the ICCBS to meet these noble goals? The head of the Pakistan Academy of Sciences has said that separating the institute could lead to "diminished standards", while the KU teachers' body says the move would "weaken the university's academic structure".

It is hoped that the Sindh government does not bulldoze this bill just as it has done with earlier laws concerning higher education. The issues raised by the academic community need to be addressed transparently. The land and assets of the ICCBS are reportedly worth billions, and there must be a solid rationale for separating the institute. All sides must jettison political considerations and interests, and keep the welfare of the students paramount. For many low- and middle-income students, KU is the only option for a decent, affordable education. This option must not be taken away from them.

(By Editorial, Dawn, 06, 06/12/2025)

Dreaming Karachi

Last Sunday, a day-long festival was held at the recently renovated Khaliqdina Hall in the heart of the old city of Karachi.

While Karachi's public spaces are coming back to life — as seen with the attendances at the Arts Council's World Culture Festival, the performances at the National Academy of Performing Arts (Napa) and the All Pakistan Music Conference, and new fringe cultural spaces such as Nani Ghar, Mehr Ghar and Kitab Ghar — seeing an abandoned heritage building once again milling with people of all ages from across Karachi, was a moving experience. The handsome portals of the Palladium building, for many years dark and silent, were filled with light and life, as in the past.

Architect and urban planner Arif Hasan, in his article 'The Changing Face of Karachi', explains in great detail the circumstances that 'orphaned' the inner city. Karachi has awakened after three decades of fear. Much has changed in these decades. The culture of cinema, which started with Star Cinema on Bunder Road in 1917, has vanished as, one by one, the 136 cinema houses in Karachi have been converted to shopping malls or offices, and the once-bustling Irani tea shops have now dwindled to a mere handful.

The Municipal Commissioner, Afzal Zaidi, a historian of Karachi, suggested while speaking on a panel at Khaliqdina Hall that, when there is a surge of interest by citizens, change becomes possible. Is it so unthinkable that Karachi could once again bring cultural life back to its inner city?

From Sir Charles Napier's vision for Karachi to modern efforts to reclaim public spaces in the city's older quarters, evidence exists that the metropolis can still change its trajectory

After the Warsaw uprising against German occupation in 1944, 85 percent of the city was strategically destroyed. The brainchild of architect Professor Jan Zachwatowicz, an office for the reconstruction of the city was established from 1945-1951. The sole source of financing was the donations made by the people. Citizens stepped up with funds, labour and passion. The city's Old Town was reconstructed from data provided by old documents, memories and paintings, earning it a place on the Unesco World Cultural Heritage list.

Like so many heritage cities, Warsaw also faced resistance. To the communist regime, the old architecture represented bourgeois values. Modernist architects felt the need for modern infrastructure and, of course, developers only saw land value. This is true of many heritage cities, including Karachi.

Can developers be convinced of the economic and cultural value of historic buildings? Would planners engage with local communities to understand the economic and cultural dynamics of city precincts? In many cities, tax incentives encourage developers to restore older buildings rather than tear them down and build anew. Can the municipality spearhead this change?

The first person to dream of what Karachi could be was Sir Charles Napier, whom history remembers as the conqueror of Sindh. Despite finding "miserable mud villages with a population of robbers, all filth and poverty and misery", he visualised Karachi as the Star of the East.

On the advice of the British explorer and writer Richard Burton, Napier moved the capital of Sindh from Hyderabad to Karachi, becoming its first city planner. He wanted to "show government how very important a place it may become and how to make it so." Interestingly, all this was against the wishes of his employers, the East India Company (EIC). His sole supporter, Lord Ellensborough, advised him to work on his plans without alerting anyone in the cantonment.

Eventually, Karachi did become a gracious, clean, lively city, attracting people and businesses from across the world. Napier's successors, both British and native, implemented his vision. At the time of his departure in 1847, his love for Karachi was evident: "Thou shall be the glory of the East, would that I could come again in seeing you, Kurrachee, in your grandeur."

One hundred and eighty-two years later, Karachi is once again grappling with the indifference of government that Napier faced and common citizens are once more surrounded with "all filth and poverty and misery" — his dream all but undone. However, Karachi has a spirit that is difficult to subdue.

Jamshed Nusserwanjee Mehta, Karachi's first elected mayor, suggested a daily oath for citizens in 1942: "Each morning, every person should take an oath with himself that this is his city and, even if 50 people could honestly keep this oath, then everything would become all right."

(By Durriya Kazi Dawn EOS, 05, 07/12/2025)

Minister awarded honorary PhD at DUET convocation

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah on Saturday conferred the first-ever honorary PhD of Dawood University of Engineering and Technology (DUET) on senior provincial minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah during the university's 13th convocation, held at the PAF Community Hall.

The ceremony also marked a major academic milestone as DUET awarded its first three doctoral degrees to Engineer Dr Saddam Ali Khichi, Engineer Dr Imran Khan, and Engineer Dr Shiraz.

Vice Chancellor Engineer Prof Dr Samreen Hussain said the honorary doctorate recognised Minister Nasir Hussain Shah's "tireless contributions to education, public service, and the welfare of society." She thanked the chief minister for his continued support for the university, which she said had played a pivotal role in DUET's institutional development.

Provincial Minister for Universities and Boards Muhammad Ismail Rahoo, MNA Muhammad Qasim, HEC Sindh Chairman Dr Tariq Rafi, several VCs from public and private universities, and members of DUET's senate and syndicate attended the convocation.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 05, 07/12/2025)

World Culture Festival comes to an end after 39-day run

The second edition of the World Culture Festival organised by the Arts Council of Pakistan came to an end on Sunday evening after a 39-day run.

Speaking at the concluding ceremony that coincided with Sindhi Culture Day, Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said he was proud that Karachi had successfully hosted more than 1,000 artists from 142 countries during the festival.

He called the festival an "unprecedented cultural achievement" for Sindh and Pakistan.

The chief minister said it was 39 days back that he had inaugurated the event. "It is an honour for me to be at the closing ceremony. Karachi was once the capital of Pakistan. The capital was moved to Islamabad. But the cultural capital is still Karachi. The city is alive and vibrant. It is also unpredictable."

He said, "For the government of Sindh, culture is not our policy, it's our identity. The Culture Department has been working very hard. The number of events that have been happening far exceed the events happening before. For us, this is an answer to the violence and war happening around the world."

CM Murad says he's proud of Karachi hosting over 1,000 artists from 142 countries

He said that Arts Council President Ahmed Shah told him that the event had two main goals or mottos. First, to talk about peace, not wars, especially [it's] an homage to the several thousand people who died in Gaza. The second message that they wanted to put across is to use art to make the world aware of the disaster that happened due to climate change. "I believe during these 39 days, you had several performances that highlighted the issue of climate change."

The chief minister thanked all those who made the festival success and the more than 1,000 artists who had travelled from all over the world to Karachi for the event.

"The closing today coincides with our Sindhi Culture Day. From here you go out to celebrate Sindhi Culture Day. As I said, for us Sindhis, culture is not a policy, it's our identity. Our cultural history is so rich. Sindh is a land of peace. This is the only province in Pakistan where you'll find people speak all languages of not just Pakistan but all languages of the world... We are the only province which has directly elected non-Muslims in the assembly," he said.

He said we need to build bridges through art, and ensure that humanity is united through culture, music, theatre and visual arts, especially at a time when the world is full of conflicts, highly polarised.

He praised Mr Ahmed Shah for his energy, saying he must have been here at the council 18 hours a day for the last 40 days. "I'd especially like to congratulate the people of Karachi who were able to arrange such a mega event. Karachi is a happening place. We have our problems like all big cities. Three days ago, I was in Islamabad. At a meeting, one of the high officials [of another province] said that people of his province were leaving to reach Karachi because Karachi has many opportunities."

Before his address, the chief minister distributed shields and ajraks to the ambassadors, consuls-general, government officials and international artists who were present on the occasion.

Earlier, in his welcome speech, Ahmed Shah profusely thanked those who had supported the festival, particularly the artist community.

"We did it. And we will do it again. We have created a global community which is against violence. They are for peace. They believe in gender equality. They are against child abuse. We want peace all around the world. No more wars. Artists don't want war. Artists want equality," he said.

(By Peerzada Salman Dawn, 13, 08/12/2025)

A 2-day conference

"Those whom God wishes to destroy, they first make them arrange a two-day conference", is what the Greek tragedian, Euripides, would have said, had he been alive today. The Federal Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication, which has not been able to liberate our 200-year-old bureaucracy from the use of papyrus, files, photocopies, and affidavits, organised such a 2-day conference on 'Digital Foreign Direct Investment' on 29-30 April 2025.

Even amid our grinding poverty, the opulence of this publicly funded festivity evokes memories of the Shah of Iran's legendary 1971 extravaganza marking 2,500 years of the Persian Empire.



It took a long 'right to information' struggle to discover how heartlessly the IT Ministry went overboard in misusing, wasting and squandering taxpayers' money — Rs447 million were blown up in venue setup, welcome dinner, cultural performance, digital tunnels (whatever that means), food and catering; Rs161 million were liquidated in advertising and marketing; Rs83 million were consumed in travel, accommodation, security and protocol; and Rs11 million went for a registration and B2B matchmaking portal. Ironically, the ministry miscalculated its own expenditure — listing it as Rs692,523,766 instead of Rs703,733,766 — a telling reflection of the diligence underpinning this entire spectacle.

The 2-day conference could have been held for a fraction of the cost — perhaps for Rs7 million instead of Rs703 million. What compels us to abandon sobriety, modesty, reason, and restraint? The world can see through our pretence. It knows the cruel numbers of our poverty. It knows that each year we consign over a hundred sanitation workers to death in the toxic depths of raw sewage, because we refuse to adopt mechanical alternatives. It knows we exploit a million security guards, forcing 12-hour shifts while stealing two-thirds of their wages. It knows that out of 80 million exploited workers, EOI contribution is made for less than 5 million workers every month.

Our obsession with optics, grandeur, and empty jargon is at best a smokescreen to feign our imaginary digital modernity. The harsh reality is that we have completely failed to use digital technology for improving either governance or providing efficient services to ordinary people.

Our digital backwardness can be gauged from the fact that even today, the government departments cannot communicate with each other (or citizens) by email. A senior citizen's letter to the editor in a leading daily aptly describes the torture of the paper-based system.

He writes, "The Social Welfare Department in Sindh has announced the issuance of a Senior Citizen Card. I am 70 years old and have been trying to get this card for many months. After four attempts to reach the designated official, I have obtained the Form.

However, it cannot be submitted without photocopies of CNIC having the current residential address, three passport-size photographs (with a blue background), and an attested domicile or residence certificate from municipal authorities.

I hope I can complete these cumbersome and entirely unnecessary formalities in my lifetime. No wonder that not a single card has been issued to any senior citizen so far. Does NADRA not know the age of every citizen? Why can a senior citizen card not be automatically uploaded on the day a citizen crosses the age of 60 years?"

Our digital inertia may well be reflected by the fact that we still print and circulate over 7,000 paper copies across government departments to announce every official holiday — a forest-depleting exercise which could be eliminated by simply displaying an annual holiday calendar on government websites.

It is time to look past the glittering façades of two-day conferences and seek a genuine digital path grounded in substance and not ceremonies or speeches. Begin by building integrated databases across all government departments that enable citizens to receive proactive information and services without stepping out of their homes, standing in endless queues, or resorting to financial laxatives.

(By Naeem Sadiq The Express Tribune, 14, 13/12/2025)

Education - opening doors

Pakistan's education system has long suffered from a chronic absence of structured career counselling, forcing students to make life-altering academic choices at the tender age of 14 or 15, often based on parental pressure, peer influence or sheer guesswork. Against this backdrop, the Inter Board Coordination Commission's decision to allow matriculation Arts students to transition into Pre-Medical and Pre-Engineering streams is, on the face of it, a progressive correction to an inflexible system that has penalised late bloomers for decades.

The move seeks to introduce much-needed academic mobility, similar to pathways available in international systems such as Cambridge. From 2026 onwards, students who realise belatedly that their aptitude lies in the sciences will no longer be permanently locked out because of an early, and often poorly guided, choice. However, policy intent alone cannot compensate for structural imbalances. Arts and science streams at the secondary level are not academically equivalent in rigour or assessment intensity.

Allowing lateral entry without addressing this disparity risks placing science-track students - who endure a far more demanding syllabus - at a relative disadvantage. It also raises the possibility of Arts being used as an easier route to eventually access professional degrees, undermining merit and diluting standards in already overstretched medical and engineering institutions. This is where the fine print matters. The IBCC has left room for boards and institutions to impose minimum marks and merit thresholds. These safeguards will act as a bridging mechanism and should be non-negotiable. Despite this, the deeper root cause of failing to institutionalise career guidance at the school level remains. And treating flexibility as a substitute for guidance is a stopgap, not a solution.

In the end, the IBCC's decision is neither inherently reckless nor unambiguously visionary. It is an opportunity, but only if implemented with intellectual honesty and academic discipline.

(By Editorial, The Express Tribune, 14, 16/12/2025)

Building research capacity

LITERATURE on teacher impact shows that good teaching provides a significant delta on student learning, compared to average or poor teaching. Simply put, teachers matter and good teaching is important for ensuring better learning outcomes.

However, recruiting, motivating, and keeping good teachers gainfully and efficiently employed is not easy. In Pakistan, a couple of decades back, teacher recruitment was seen as having too much discretion with not enough reliance on rules. Allegations of corruption and nepotism in teacher recruitment were common. Many of these charges were based on facts. Two decades ago, reforms were introduced to move to more rules-based (merit-based) recruitment. This has definitely reduced the allegations, and litigation on recruitment issues has also decreased. But has it improved teacher and/or teaching quality? Has it improved student learning? And what unintended consequences has it led to? These are important follow-ups for completing the loop for feedback and continuous improvement. 'Merit'-based recruitment might reduce corruption, but does it allow us to differentiate between good and bad teachers? If not, the reform might be of limited value.

Many places worldwide have significant requirements for specific courses, diplomas and even degrees before a person can become a teacher. When we moved towards merit-based recruitment, provincial governments removed the requirements for education degrees before joining as a teacher. This has increased the pool of candidates for teaching (a physics graduate can come into teaching directly) but many of these applicants did not choose to be teachers and have no understanding of what teaching is: you can be good at physics but teach it badly. How has this impacted learning outcomes?

Some jurisdictions even have teacher licensing. Teacher licensing has often been talked about in Pakistan but it was only recently that Sindh introduced it. But will licensing improve teaching and learning? We have 1.5 million or so teachers in Pakistan and still suffer a shortage. Will licensing help? Is it only for government schools or also private schools? Will teachers be required to have licences in low-fee private schools, where sometimes they teach Matriculation- or Intermediate-level students? Who will pay for the cost?

Recruiting, motivating, and keeping good teachers efficiently employed is not easy.

Once a teacher has been recruited, is she a teacher forever? Does she need any education, training or upgradation? Is there a role for continuous professional development and how is it to be structured? Punjab has some 450,000 teachers. How do you design effective professional development systems for such large numbers? Do we design devolved systems or centralised ones? How do we ensure quality and some level of uniformity across the system? We have had continuing professional development systems in place, but the general feeling is that they don't seem to work and haven't had the intended impact and definitely not the one needed.

Once deployed, how do we keep teachers motivated to teach effectively for the entire length of their careers — 30-35 years? What are effective career paths for teachers? If a teacher is a good Grade 1 teacher today, how do we ensure that she will be a good, motivated and effective Grade 1 teacher in 10, 20 or 30 years from now? What should happen to her financial returns and other 'incentives' so that she is able to have a rewarding career in Grade 1?

We do not have research on most of these important questions. Which means we do not have effective feedback loops on policies. Policies keep coming and getting implemented. But what consequences do they have? How can we improve if we don't have effective feedback loops that research consequences and impact?

What is heartening is that there is an increasing realisation — in government and academia and among development partners and research institutions — of the need to have these feedback loops and to do relevant policy research on important questions. Most education departments already have specific implementation and planning units to structure some of this work. Development partners have historically funded and encouraged some research, but this has recently become more structured and is being given due importance. Academic research output has also been steadily increasing in education in Pakistan.

The most recent and current impetus has come from a very innovative research support programme funded by FCDO and called the Data and Research in Education-Research Consortium. DARE-RC has funded some 35 studies in the education sector, five to six of them on teacher issues. These studies are in collaboration with education departments. The programme is of medium term (it just closed the fourth round of call for proposals).

The results of the studies will allow us to bring out relevant issues more clearly, and some of them will start answering some of the questions raised above. By focusing on local researchers, the programme is also developing the capacity for research in education in Pakistan and a community of practice in the area. The hope is that other programmes, following this one and funded by government and partners, will continue to build on this approach, so that we not only have answers to the questions but also the local capacity to do such work. We will always have more questions and we need communities and people who are able to answer them so that we can keep improving outcomes in education.

Pakistan must have around 1.5-2m teachers today. With millions of children still out of school, and with most in-school children getting a poor quality of education across the country, we need more teachers — more motivated and committed teachers — and a lot more teacher training to ensure better content knowledge as well as a sound understanding of optimal pedagogical strategies. We also need much better policies for management and regulation of teaching, and effective feedback loops to ensure things keep improving.

In this context, DARE-RC offers an interesting model for developing the capacity needed for such work. I hope education departments will not only look at the outcomes of the research studies being done under DARE-RC, but also at how the research capacity being built can be strengthened and deepened beyond the programme. This is important if we are to ensure our policies improve over time.

(By Faisal Bari Dawn, 06, 19/12/2025)

Karachi World Book Fair begins

It was heartening to see hundreds of schoolchildren having a good time, cheering and browsing books on the opening day of the five-day Karachi World Book Fair (KWBF) that began at Expo Centre on Thursday afternoon.

But it was Hall No 4 where the event, organised by the Pakistan Publishers and Booksellers Association (PPBA), was formally inaugurated and some thought-provoking speeches were delivered.

With a total of 329 stalls set up, publishers from 17 countries, including 140 from Pakistan are participating in the fair.

Speaking as the chief guest, Sindh Education Minister Syed Sardar Shah said he gets to visit many events but going to a book fair makes him the happiest. "A book is imperative for human society's evolution." The minister went down the history track, speaking about the first book that was published in the world. He then thanked China for giving us paper and Germany for coming up with the printing machine. "A book is not only a man's best friend, but also his biggest leader."

Mr Shah said he was recently in London for a conference at which it was said that AI (artificial intelligence) should be used for educational systems. "Our response was that if you introduced AI like that, books will vanish from a child's life and his creative ability will be destroyed."

Publishers from 17 countries participating in five-day show at Expo Centre; education minister calls on federal govt to reduce paper tax

He added, "We can't let books die. If books die, our dreams will die, we will die."

He said unjustified taxes imposed on paper are not only causing serious damage to the book publishing industry but are also rapidly affecting the culture of reading in society.

He urged the federal government to reduce taxes on book publishers so that more books can be printed and access to knowledge and information can be made easier and more affordable for the general public. He said that any reduction in paper tax would directly benefit the people.

Sardar Shah said that the Sindh government has introduced initiatives to promote reading at the school level and that book corners will be established in every school across Sindh to help keep children connected with books.

He assured the organisers that after Karachi, international book fairs would also be organised in Hyderabad, Sukkur, Larkana and Mirpurkhas with the full cooperation of the Sindh government.

Arts Council President Ahmed Shah delivered the keynote address. He started off by expressing his happiness at seeing a big number of schoolchildren at the fair. For the organisers, he assured that since they're doing a positive job, the Arts Council would support their effort.

PPBA Chairman Kamran Noorani in his speech said parents should buy books for their children. He told the audience that recently after noticing that his collection of books had burgeoned, he donated seven or eight cartons to the Sir Shahnawaz Bhutto Library.

Doing that, he chanced upon an old book. When he opened it, he read that his father had written 'for my son Kamran' on it; it was Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. He was just two years old at the time.

Apart from that, Mr Noorani said, schools should also encourage their students to read books.

KWBF convener Waqar Mateen, secretary of the National Book Foundation Murad Ali also spoke at the event.

The five-day book fair will continue from 10am to 9pm daily until Dec 22.
(By Peerzada Salman Dawn, 13, 19/12/2025)

Karachi's e-marking system fails, delays intermediate results by six months

The e-marking system introduced at the intermediate level in Karachi has effectively collapsed, leading to an unprecedented delay of over six months in the announcement of results for thousands of students. Due to the failure of electronic assessment, the Intermediate Part-I (Class XI) results for Computer Science students - specifically in the subject of Mathematics - have yet to be declared, leaving more than 19,000 students in academic limbo.

According to official correspondence issued by Regional Director Colleges Karachi Professor Qazi Arshad and the Controller of Examinations of the Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK), a large number of government college teachers assigned as examiners have failed to participate in the e-marking process. As a result, nearly 140,000 examination questions remain unchecked, bringing the entire result compilation process to a standstill.

Sources within the Regional Directorate revealed that a total of approximately 180,000 questions from the Mathematics Paper-I of the HSC Part-I (Science General Group) were required to be assessed electronically. However, so far, only around 40,000 questions have been marked, while the remaining 140,000 are still pending. These figures were officially communicated to the Regional Directorate Colleges Karachi by the Intermediate Board.

The situation has arisen primarily due to the reluctance of government college teachers to engage with the e-marking system. At least 44 teachers, assigned as examiners, have reportedly not marked even a single question to date.

Teachers argue that the board has failed to clearly communicate the remuneration structure for e-marking, including how much will be paid per question. They also contend that e-marking is more time-consuming than traditional manual checking.

According to examiners, a packet of 22 answer scripts can typically be manually assessed within an hour, whereas the digital assessment process requires significantly more time due to technical procedures and unfamiliarity with the system. This uncertainty and perceived inefficiency have discouraged teachers from actively participating in the e-marking process.

The issue has gained further significance in light of an announcement made on December 4 by Sindh's provincial minister for universities and boards, who declared that from the annual examinations of 2026 onwards, e-marking would be implemented for all science subjects across the province. However, given the current situation in Karachi, education officials fear that e-marking may once again fail next year or, if implemented, may lead to prolonged delays in result announcements.

In his letter to college principals, Director Arshad expressed deep regret over the "non-cooperation and inactivity" of examiners in the assessment and e-marking of the Mathematics Paper-I for the HSC Annual Examinations 2025 (Science General Group). He described the situation as extremely unfortunate and detrimental to the academic future of students.

Similarly, the Controller of Examinations of the Karachi Board, in an official letter, stated with "profound regret" that professors and examiners from government colleges in the Karachi region had shown a serious lack of cooperation in the e-marking process. Despite repeated reminders and attempts to contact the concerned teachers, responses were either minimal or completely absent.

The Controller noted that many examiners were either unavailable for paper checking or were not taking their responsibilities seriously.

(By Safdar Rizvi The Express Tribune, 04, 21/12/2025)

The Shapatar Boys Of Karachi

It's a situation most drivers on Karachi's major thoroughfares have experienced, especially on weekend nights and public holidays: a ghost motorcycle closing in at breakneck speed.

At first, it is little more than a blur in the rear-view mirror. Then, as it bears down, the driver finally registers the young man lying flat along the length of the motorcycle, his eyes peering forward just above the handlebar. The speedometer is missing. The rider's arms are tucked tight to the side — either holding the handle or, in some cases, clutching the suspension on the sides and using shoulders to steer the handlebar. His legs lie flat or are scissored tightly at the ankle, his body locked in an aerodynamic pose.

Most drivers know what to do when faced with such a motorcycle: hold your line without moving in either direction. Do not brake suddenly. Do not swerve. Almost without fail, the rider veers away at the very last second, zigzagging between vehicles and vanishing in the blink of an eye.

But it is rarely a lone escape. A swarm of similar motorcycles arrives next, streaking past from every direction, forcing drivers to grip the steering wheel and mutter silent prayers — for the rider's safety as much as their own. At these speeds, even a minor error — a sudden lane change, a startled brake, a moment's hesitation — can prove fatal: not just for the motorcyclist but anyone sharing the road.

Daredevil motorbike riders speeding through the busy roads of Karachi without any protective gear have built up a vibrant subculture around themselves that is sustained often as much through social media as word of mouth. Why does this perilous practice continue to attract thrill-seekers and can it be made less dangerous, not just for the riders but also for those they share the roads with?

These riders, mostly young and often underage, wear no protective gear beyond goggles to keep the dust from blurring their vision. Their motorcycles are stripped to the bare minimum, every unnecessary part removed in pursuit of speed and control.

WHAT MAKES A SHAPATAR?

The origins and the exact meaning of the term is unclear, though most experienced motorcycle racers in Karachi suggest it's a portmanteau of sharp and funter [a local version of the term punter] and refers to those who show street smarts and mastery on two wheels at a young age.

The term has circulated since the 1990s, sometimes loosely associated with political muscle and petty crime, though racers insist this is no longer representative.

"Most of us are simply hardworking people who are passionate about racing," says Muhammad Tariq, a stocky 24-year-old racer popularly known as Tariq 180. He is also a proficient mechanic and now runs a workshop. He left school early and started work as an apprentice in 2009.

Tariq's forays into racing started with wheelies on his motorcycle. "Around 2013-14, I bought a CB 180cc bike, which resulted in me getting the name 180," he says. But Tariq has one major advantage over a majority of his peers: he is not only a rider but also an ustaad, an expert mechanic who understands the ins and outs of a motorcycle and knows how to get the best out of it for any particular race.

But one young man, arguably the most well-known shapatar of Karachi, rose to the top of this illegal racing circuit based solely on his riding skills. His most famous race, also his last, remains shrouded in mystery and, seemingly, adds to his legend.

THE LEGEND OF BABU 70

Like Tariq, Uzaib Mustafa's love for daredevilry began with doing wheelies on his bicycle while growing up in Gazdarabad (aka Ranchore Lines) in downtown Karachi. Like most young men of his area, which has a large number of motorcycle parts and repair shops, he started hanging out at the workshop of one Rehan Ustaad, according to his brother Murtaza.

A slightly-built teen, around 5'6" in height, he was the ideal racer. His proficiency in doing wheelies, initially, on his bicycle and, later, on motorcycles, had already established his credentials. He became known as Babu 70, after his father — a former department-level footballer who drove a 70cc bike.

Babu 70 started racing before he had a license, as most shapatars do. His big break came in 2011, at 18, after beating champion racer Bali X. Over five years, he established dominance on Sharae Faisal — the city's main thoroughfare — and other tracks. By 2016, he was neck-and-neck with Saqib Sanki, Karachi's reigning shapatar. Their rivalry would culminate in one final, fatal race.

Murtaza, Babu's brother, says that there was a point when Sanki wanted to back out of the race due to some bad blood between Babu and him, over the verdict of an earlier race. But it went ahead after Babu insisted, citing his planned departure to Dubai two days later, where his friends were helping him set up a business.

The race was set for 4am in early November 2016. Initially, it was planned as a 12km race on Sharae Faisal, starting from near the airport and ending at the FTC Bridge. But oil on the road meant that the distance was adjusted, with the starting point moved up to the crossing on the Drigh Road Railway Station.

Once the race started, Babu quickly took the lead. It stayed that way well beyond the halfway mark. This is what everyone agrees on. What happened after is contested.

Babu's brother Murtaza, who was at the race, says that he was hit by a car, but is unsure if it was a sedan or a hatchback. Ali, a young man who is no longer involved in racing, claims it was Sanki's boys in the vehicle and that Sanki also kicked Babu's motorcycle.

Tariq 180 dismisses claims of foul play. "Babu's motorcycle's engine malfunctioned due to the race and was dripping oil, which fell on the wheel and led to him losing control," he asserts.

Murtaza says that Babu's accident took place while victory was just a short distance away. "He got dragged for almost a km and sustained multiple injuries," he tells Eos at his motorcycle parts shop.

Babu spent almost four weeks in the hospital before passing away. The family didn't file any police report over his death, lending credence to Tariq's assertion that there was no foul play.

Eos made several efforts to contact Saqib Sanki but was informed by his apprentices that he didn't want to speak to a journalist, even though they regularly upload his videos and races on social media. One reason could be his legal troubles: Saqib is currently on bail in a 2022 dacoity case, with the hearings ongoing.

Saqib's legal troubles means he often takes unscheduled breaks from racing. Despite that, he still enjoys a massive following, with his acolytes running multiple accounts dedicated to him on TikTok, Facebook and Instagram.

But there still remain those who think Babu was better than him. "Babu was clearly a better rider and his victory against Sanki would have established him as the undisputed champion shapatar of Karachi," says Ibrahim, another former racer who knew Babu well. "If you ask young boys who they want to be like, most will say Babu 70," he adds.

For a few years after his death, Babu's admirers took out commemorative rallies on his death anniversary. His race videos and exploits continue to dominate digital platforms. Any discussion about the best racers in Karachi or Pakistan invariably sees his name mentioned, with claims and counterclaims on who is the greatest shapatar to ride on the roads of Karachi.

THE RACE, THE RIDER AND THE RIDE

For a rider to achieve greatness, he needs an equally good ustaad, says Tariq. "Yes, it's the rider who is putting his life on the line, but it is the ustaad who will alter the motorcycle for the race," he explains.

Despite being mostly uneducated, these riders have an experiential, if not instinctive, grasp of select physics concepts, including aerodynamics and air pressure. The shapatar riding posture is aerodynamically optimal and riding in a vehicle's slipstream reduces air pressure and increases speed. Tariq even has a GPS meter downloaded in his phone, which he uses to assess the performance of his motorcycle before races.

But it is the ustaad who is likely to have the magical touch. Their understanding is developed over years of trial and error, taking apart motorcycles and putting them back together, tinkering and tailoring with various components. "That's how a 70cc bike reaches speeds of 150+ [km/h]," says Tariq. "An ustaad can ensure his rider stays unbeatable, but not the other way round," he adds, saying both the rider and the ustaad are equally important.

This is why when a rider wants to race against someone, he will mention his ustaad in the challenge — which are now posted on social media groups, primarily on Facebook. Once a challenge is accepted, the two parties decide on a munsif, a judge — mostly a veteran racer and, ideally, one with a fast motorcycle to tailgate the racers and record a video for the final verdict. The race wager — ranging from Rs15,000 to even Rs150,000 or more — is deposited with the munsif to be handed over to the winner.

Race conditions are negotiated in unique terminology: such as "apni hawa" (not entering another's slipstream) or "CS Alter" (carburetor and sprockets can be modified). The most dangerous format is "freestyle", where riders can hit, grab and kick rivals. "This has mostly been discontinued following consensus between ustaads," says Tariq.

Before racing, both parties inspect vehicles to ensure no violations. The munsif can disqualify either party if objections are upheld.

There are also "showroom-to-showroom" races, in which the two parties acquire motorcycles from a showroom and take them directly to the designated track for the race. This emerged, according to Tariq, because of the innovation in alterations.

"We have such funtergiri [cleverness] nowadays that even ustaads can't detect alterations," he says before adding that most such alterations are done by mechanics in Lahore. "Karachi has better riders, but Lahore has better ustaads."

THE COST OF DAREDEVILRY

For all the skill, bravado and mythology surrounding shapatars, the risks they take extend far beyond themselves.

Karachi's busy and poorly regulated roads are already a menace for commuters, with the city reporting at least 500 road traffic casualties (RTC) last year. The majority of these casualties tend to be motorcyclists. However, this data doesn't differentiate for motorcyclists.

The Road Traffic Injury Research and Prevention Programme (RTIRPP), initiated by neurosurgeon Dr Rashid Jooma, was the only programme through which data regarding road traffic accidents in Karachi was collected. The programme, which was shut down due to lack of support and funding in 2017, found that there were 9,129 road fatalities from 2007-2014. "Motorbikes as primary vehicles were responsible for 3,871 (44.7 percent) RTC fatalities out of the 8,654, for which this information was available," it observed in its November 2016 report.

A conversation with any motorcycle racer will see them list off a litany of names of friends killed while racing or practising for it. Tariq shows off the scar on his head which, he says, required two dozen stitches. He has another one on his back. "Around five, six boys of Mehmoodabad [in Karachi] have died in the last few years, including Ustaad Sohail S-1," he says.

Traffic police officials say enforcement remains difficult, as races are organised spontaneously and often take place in the early hours of the morning, when roads appear deceptively empty. "These motorcyclists often ride without number plates or safety gear and are difficult to intercept due to their riding skills," says Pir Muhammad Shah, the deputy inspector general of Traffic in Karachi. Shah tells Eos that they have recently introduced aerial surveillance and hope to crackdown on such elements.

Most motorcycle racers shrug off concerns over the latest e-challans or crackdown by traffic authorities. They are more concerned with law enforcement, particularly at the time of the start of the race. "When there is a race, even on the highway, riders congregate at the starting point and momentarily block the road, so the racers can have a clear, vehicle-free track," explains Tariq. "Cops showing up during that time can land the people who are blocking the road in trouble," he adds.

Nasrullah Khan, a seasoned police officer who served as the station house officer in various localities that were racing hotspots, says that such races are not only illegal, but those who alter motorcycles are also committing a crime. "You pay the government tax of a 70cc bike while your vehicle functions as 150cc," he points out.

Khan adds the popular "Devil's Point" on Sea View was a hotbed of all kinds of races, until the erection of barriers in the middle of the road. "I'd have entry and exit points blocked and conduct raids to apprehend racers, whether in cars or on bikes," he says, admitting they could only charge them with negligent driving and seize their vehicles over it.

Khan contends that a lot of motorcycles used in such races are stolen or fitted with stolen parts. Tariq, the racer and mechanic, says that, to avoid such an eventuality, he asks customers to bring their vehicles' documents with them.

Both the cop and the racer agree that bike racing will continue, regardless of restrictions or crackdowns.

The only solution, suggests Nasrullah, is to make racing less dangerous — not just for the shapatars but for others on the road. "One possible solution could be to provide them a dedicated area, so they can race there," says Khan, citing the example of jeep rallies and other races that take place.

Karachi's mayor Murtaza Wahab tells Eos that the city administration is open to the idea. "If we could find such a space, it would be on the outskirts of the city and most people don't want to go that far," he tells Eos.

Tariq would tell the mayor that most major races are already taking place on stretches of the highway, sometimes as far out as Nooriabad on the outskirts of the city.

But until they find a space of their own, shapatars will continue to appear in rear-view mirrors across Karachi — a blur closing in at impossible speed, forcing drivers to hold their line and hope.

On these roads, the distance between legend and tragedy is measured not in kilometres, but in split seconds. And for every Babu 70 who becomes a myth, there are dozens more willing to risk everything for that same fleeting immortality.
(By Hussain Dada Dawn EOS, 03, 21/12/2025)

TCF to run 21 municipal schools

The Sindh government on Tuesday decided to implement one of the most important laws of the motoring, the third-party motor insurance, which indemnifies the accident victims.

The cabinet meeting chaired by CM Murad Ali Shah also decided to put 21 schools of three town municipal corporations under the management of The Citizen Foundation for a period of 25 years to provide free quality education.

The meeting was attended by provincial ministers, advisers, special assistants, Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah and relevant secretaries.

The cabinet also reviewed mandatory Motor Third-Party Insurance. The third-party indemnity was strictly in force in the law-abiding countries across the world. However, like many other toothless laws, in Pakistan, it remained only a piece of paper to show to the traffic police to confirm that the documents were complete.

In this insurance, the first party is the policy holder, the second is the insurance company and the third party is the victim who gets the claim.

On CM's instructions, the Excise Department consulted the Insurance Association of Pakistan to simplify claims. Facilitation desks, standardized premium rates, a 24/7 helpline, and surveyor assistance will be introduced.

The CM announced enforcement from the next financial year, with reduced stamp duty (Rs500 to Rs50) and sales tax (15% to 5%). Motorcycles will be exempted through amendments to the Motor Vehicles Ordinance, 1965, and Motor Vehicles Act, 1939.

In education, the cabinet approved agreements between Town Municipal Corporations of Malir, Chanesar and Lyari with The Citizens Foundation (TCF) for management of 21 municipal schools. Under the Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2013, TCF will provide free quality education, including tuition, uniforms and materials, for a 25-year renewable term. Immediate renovation and operationalisation will benefit thousands of students.

Land record digitization

The cabinet approved amendments to the Sindh Land Revenue Act, 1967, enabling digitalisation of land records and introduction of an e-transfer system. The project, earlier sanctioned in July 2025, involves rewriting and authenticating Records of Rights, digitising land data through a blockchain-based database, and piloting in Matiari and Sukkur districts. New provisions, including Section 42-A, empower the government to frame rules for digitalisation and e-transfer. The CM termed the initiative vital for transparency and accuracy.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter, The Express Tribune, 04, 31/12/2025)