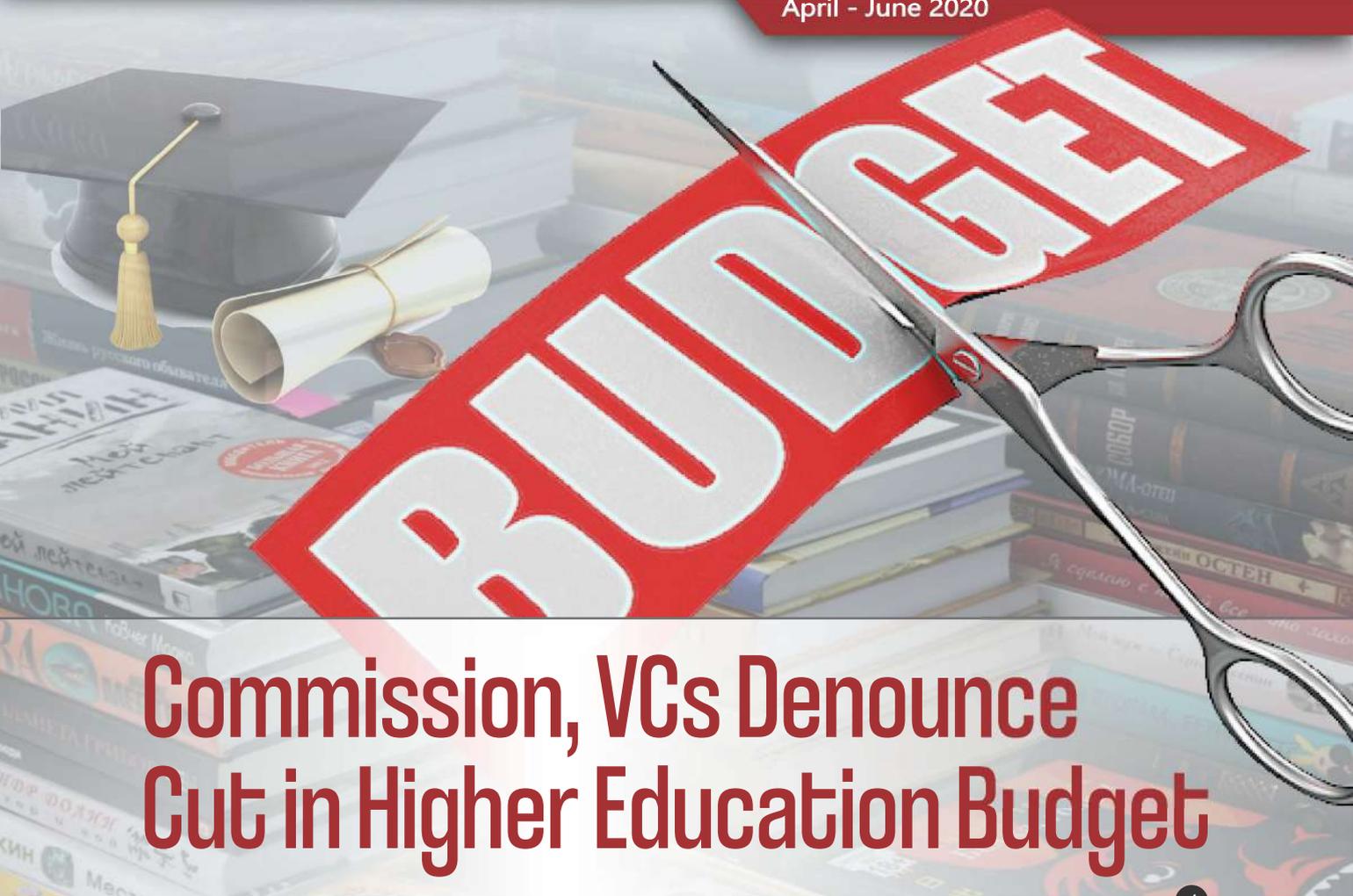


News & Views

Higher Education Commission - Pakistan

April - June 2020



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Higher Education Commission, Pakistan

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Revamping Undergraduate Education

S. Zulfiqar Gilani, PhD

The undergraduate degree is the flagship of any higher education system. However, in Pakistan very little attention was given in the past to the substance and quality of undergraduate education. To address that gap, HEC is revamping undergraduate education to ensure that students get a useful, meaningful, and practical education, which increases the likelihood of their success.

The HEC approach to revamping followed two broad trajectories. On the one hand it was inclusive and partnership-based, towards which end HEC organized and conducted two Dialogues, five Consultations, and 10 Workshops.

One hundred and forty three (143) universities from across the country and AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan were represented in these events, and over a thousand people participated, including Vice Chancellors/Rectors, University and College Faculty, College Principals, Secretaries and other officials of Higher Education Departments, and Heads and officials of Professional Councils. There was appreciation and acceptance of the HEC effort, as well as offers of support.

The other trajectory was academic in nature, for which HEC organised numerous focussed discussions with academics to benefit from their knowledge, experience and understanding, to interrogate and analyse inputs and feedback from the above-mentioned events, and to examine and learn from international best practices.

The grand objective of revamping is to provide Competence-Based Education (CBE), which comprises the following four observable and measurable aspects: Knowledge, which is the cognizance of facts, truths and principles of a particular field. Skills, which is the ability to perform physical or mental activities in a particular profession; as well as to think critically and creatively and to learn how to learn.

Behavioural attributes, which include characteristics like agency, adaptability, honesty, curiosity, and punctuality. Interpersonal qualities that include empathy, self-confidence, inclusiveness, leadership, and collaboration.

The revamping aims at preparing students to apply the acquired knowledge and skills to life's challenges, rather than merely acquiring theoretical knowledge. It emphasises exploration, curiosity, discovery, and creativity amongst students.

Finally, undergraduate degrees have been designed to be terminal degrees. That is, while some students may seek further education in order to become active researchers, or out of personal curiosity, or a desire to burnish their credentials, no one should feel compelled to do so because of the inadequacy of education.

The revamped curriculum has two learning pillars, academic and practical experience. Through courses of the academic programme students will gain in-depth knowledge and

The grand objective of revamping the undergraduate education is to provide Competence-Based Education (CBE), which comprises four observable and measurable aspects: Knowledge, which is the cognizance of facts, truths and principles of a particular field. Skills, which is the ability to perform physical or mental activities in a particular profession; as well as to think critically and creatively and to learn how to learn. Behavioural attributes, which include characteristics like agency, adaptability, honesty, curiosity, and punctuality. Interpersonal qualities that include empathy, self-confidence, inclusiveness, leadership, and collaboration.

understanding of a subject, develop skills, and earn credits towards their degree. Through internships and extra-curricular activities students will gain practical experience, but not earn credits.

The academic component of the curriculum strikes a balance between breadth and focus. Breadth will be addressed in the earlier semesters by requiring every student to complete General Education (GE) courses in Arts & Humanities, Science, Social Science, Quantitative Reasoning, English Expository Writing, Pakistan Studies, and Islamic/Religious Studies. The GE courses will ensure that every student is acquainted with the broad variety of fields of enquiry and approaches to knowledge in the 21st century. These courses will not be subject-focused, but of a survey or skills development nature, and related to everyday life. Focus will be catered by taking departmentally required courses in the area of specialisation.

environment and working with others, which are essential real-world life skills. This will be achieved by completing an internship and participating in extracurricular activities like entrepreneurship, or clubs/associations, or sports. Although the practical work will be evaluated and included in the students' record, it will not have letter grades.

The above framework and objectives will apply to all undergraduate degrees, including the four-year Bachelor Studies degree (BS), degrees in any of the professions (MBBS, B.E., LLB, and the like), and the two-year Associate Degree (AD). However, for the different types of degrees some details may vary, but the structure will be the same.

As designed, the undergraduate programme makes it possible for students to switch between degree programmes. So, AD holders may apply for admission to a BS programme and get

HEC recognises that the quality of undergraduate education cannot be improved solely by revamping the curriculum. To improve quality, at least the two closely associated areas of pedagogy and quality assurance also need to be revamped, on which work has started in parallel with the curriculum reform initiative.

The recommended academic programme stresses breadth and diversity in the earlier semesters, and moves towards increasing concentration in the later semesters. This sequencing will familiarise students with a variety of knowledge domains in the earlier semesters and in the third semester students will make an informed choice of the area of specialisation or Major in which they want to acquire in-depth knowledge and understanding.

Key to this sequencing is providing the students flexibility (in the choice of a Major). The curriculum is so designed that a student can graduate with a single Major, or a double Major, or a Major and one or two Minors.

Practical experience is being made mandatory so that students get experience of the work

transfer of credits from their AD to the BS programme. Similarly a student admitted to the BS programme may exit with an AD. Further, a student admitted to a professional degree programme may apply for transfer to a general degree programme, or vice versa. However, switching between programmes will be based on the admission policy of the admitting institution, which will also determine how many of the earned course credits and completed practical experience hours can be transferred.

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Dr. Zulfiqar Gilani is former VC of the University of Peshawar and Rector Foundation University, and leads the HEC revamping effort.

Commission Denounces Cut in Higher Education Budget

Approves Funding policy for FY 2020-21, Revises Tenure Track Statutes, Appoints Chairperson ETC, Introduces New Policy against Sexual Harassment, and Regulations for Installation and Use of Security Cameras in Universities.

The two-day 36th Meeting of the Commission, the governing body of Higher Education Commission, was held from June 12-13, 2020. Chairman HEC Tariq Banuri chaired the meeting, which was conducted online.

The Commission unanimously deplored the sudden cut in the higher education budget by another Rs.5.90 billion from the committed Indicative Budget Ceiling of Rs.70.00 billion for FY 2020-21, and emphasized that the move will dismantle the country's higher education systems by forcing the shutdown of universities, which are already suffering from historically unprecedented budgetary shortfalls and the impact of the Covid crisis. The Members stressed upon the Government to reconsider its decision, and take immediate steps to appropriately fund the universities in order to protect access to and quality of higher education. The Commission stressed that without adequate investment on higher education, the youth of Pakistan will never acquire the needed competencies.

Funding Formula for Universities

Meanwhile, the Commission thoroughly reviewed HEC funding formula for universities, took into account various proposals, and decided that for FY 2020-21, the actual total allocation of FY 2019-20 will be treated as base plus need grants, accounting for 85 percent of the total allocation, while the remaining 15 percent will be treated as a performance grant, allocated on the basis of the number of publications, the number and amount of research grants received, as well as number of PhD faculty and students. It was also agreed that for FY 2021-22 and beyond, a new funding methodology will be developed on the principles of equity, needs, and credit for performance.

Revision of Tenure Track Statutes

The Commission amended the Tenure Track Statutes by indexing TTS salaries to the comparable BPS scale plus a 35% TTS Premium, thus introducing automatic adjustments of future TTS salaries in line with increases in BPS salary scales. Consistent with the international practice, the Commission increased the maximum time limit for the tenure decision from the current 6 years to 9 years, and endorsed collection of granular data of TTS faculty separately in HEMIS (Higher Education Management Information System) to help universities and HEC maintain proper oversight over the progress of TTS faculty, and improve transparency and fairness of recruitment, promotion and tenure.

Covid-19 Pandemic

The Commission appreciated the comprehensive work done by the HEC in wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, to minimize academic disruption, develop and guide universities to acquire online readiness, provide supplementary resources of Rs.1.20 billion, deploy live dashboard to monitor quality of online delivery, build free online academic content and resources, and motivate students to continue learning. The Commission impressed upon the Government to support HEC initiatives viz. Taleem Bundle, University Support Package, etc., and advised HEC to resolve connectivity issues faced by students, and use platforms such as virtual think tanks to carve out imaginative solutions.

Policy on Protection against Sexual Harassment

The Commission also approved revised HEC Policy on Protection against Sexual Harassment in Higher Education Institutions 2020, which

reflects significant improvement from its 2011 anti-sexual harassment guidelines in terms of enforcement, simplicity, scope, definition of prohibited conduct, consistency with national act for Protection of Women against harassment as work place, and appellate process. The Commission also adopted the "Safe Campus Acceptable Usage Policy 2020" to protect the privacy of students and avoid possibilities of harassment because of the installation,

placement or use of security cameras within the universities and campuses.

Chairperson ETC

The Commission appointed Mr. Kamran Rasool, former Interior Secretary and former Chief Secretary Punjab in an honorary capacity as the Chairperson of the Board of Governors of the Education Testing Council (ETC) considering his professional eminence and implacable integrity.

VCs Appeal to the PM to Enhance Universities' Budget

If the funding cuts are not reversed, some universities will not be able to survive. It will force some universities to raise tuition fees at a time when students are unable or unwilling to pay regular tuition because of the virus pandemic.

Vice Chancellors of all public sector universities have expressed their strong criticism of the recent cuts imposed by the Finance Ministry on the budget for higher education.

A resolution passed by the university heads, after the Vice Chancellors Committee meeting held online on June 16, 2020, stated that Pakistani universities are already under enormous financial stress because of the squeezing of their budgets since last three years. The COVID crisis has further exacerbated the situation, both by increasing costs, and by reducing the inflows of tuition fees.

The Vice Chancellors appealed to the Prime Minister, the

Education Minister, and the SAPM for Finance to immediately reverse the cuts, and enhance the higher education budget to the levels needed by universities.

The resolution emphasized that the future of the country depends critically on the future of education, especially higher education. If the funding cuts are not reversed, some universities will not be able to survive.

It will force some universities to raise tuition fees at a time when students are unable or unwilling to pay regular tuition because of the virus pandemic.

The VCs asked Chairman HEC to arrange a meeting of a delegation of Vice Chancellors

to call upon the honorable Prime Minister to apprise him of the difficulties faced by universities because of the repeated budget cuts over the last three years.

The VCs also expressed their unequivocal opposition to the actions of some elements to change legal provisions and undermine the autonomy of universities, especially draft changes in the Public Sector Universities (Amendment) Act 2020.

Nowhere in the world has the quality of education improved without full autonomy of universities. The efforts to undermine the universities is not only against universities, it is also against Pakistan, the resolution stated.

HEC Inspects Varsities' Capacity to Manage Online Classes

To avoid system problems from a single "big bang launch", HEC allowed digitally advanced universities to start offering online courses as soon as they were ready. However, clear instructions were given that the quality of education should not suffer at any cost.

In response to a number of complaints regarding online classes in some universities as soon as higher education institutions shifted to online mode of education, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) asked for detailed information on these courses in order to inspect the quality of the content, delivery, and connectivity.

HEC has been monitoring the situation arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic, and is in contact with university leadership to identify areas where support would be needed to minimise academic disruption. Contingency plans have been drawn for various scenarios.

To avoid system problems from a single "big bang launch", HEC allowed digitally advanced universities to start offering online courses as soon as they were ready. However, clear instructions were given that the quality of education should not suffer at any cost.

It is pertinent to mention here that HEC has been working with universities to minimise the impact of the lockdown of universities on academic activities. To this end, three specialised committees have been working to help arrange IT facilities, software, tech support, and curate

substantive online content. In the meantime, all public sector universities have been provided free access to Microsoft Teams software in order to facilitate online meetings and discussions. HEC and Microsoft have been working together to ensure smooth introduction of this platform.

HEC has also collected information with regard to the concerns raised in the social media. On the Internet access issues, consultations are in place with Internet service providers, Telcos, and software experts in order to identify solutions. Similarly, universities have been asked to arrange training for their faculty members on the best practices in online instruction.

HEC's COVID-19 Technology Support Committee has prepared a guidance paper to assist the senior leadership of Universities in easing the transition to virtual instruction. The paper provides the minimum technology requirements and recommendations on the choice of digital platforms for the University.

Universities have been asked to ensure that the individual faculty members share their course outline/s and required reading materials with their students through the online learning management systems.



Chairman HEC Discuss Online Education with Accreditation Councils

The Accreditation Councils have a great role to play in improving the efficiency of laboratories amidst the speedy transmission of Covid-19. The Councils also need to keep in view the commitment to international obligations, particularly international certifications and opportunities. As we all are adjusting to the challenges of distance learning, our Councils need to be more vigilant in their accreditation visits.

Chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC) Tariq Banuri held a meeting with the heads and members of all the 14 professional accreditation councils. The purpose was to assess the quality standards in distance learning mode, virtual verification of accreditation, and exemption or subsidy in accreditation fee charged by the professional councils.

The Chairman said that preparedness to meet all kinds of eventualities of COVID-19 spread is need of the hour, and transition to online education is a step towards readiness.

He underlined the crisis has created three major concerns. First, the world is exposed to the worst health crisis of historic memory and the threat is larger than the number of fatalities due to COVID-19. Second, there is a continuing uncertainty about timeline for an end to this crisis. And third, the scale of this crisis is gigantic and it, God forbid, may divert the directions of economies worldwide. "We have to be prepared for all eventualities," he stated.

The Chairman asserted that offering online courses will help mitigate the negative impacts of all these issues, as this is the only way out to prevent educational loss of students. He said there is surely some resistance to online teaching, yet it is the only way out to save the students' precious time. There are some legitimate reasons behind the resistance, while it also reflects a level of discomfort with technology itself. He said HEC is cognisant of the technical problems facing the students and is actively working with universities and internet

service providers to help resolve them. He said that the professional Accreditation Councils have a great role to play in improving the efficiency of laboratories amidst the speedy transmission of COVID-19. He added that the Councils also need to keep in view the commitment to international obligations, particularly international certifications and opportunities. HEC Covid-19 Policy Guidance lays down a broad framework for continuing e-learning/hybrid education during the summer break announced by the Government without compromising the quality of education.

The heads of Accreditation Councils also expressed their views regarding virtual verification of accreditation, and exemption or subsidy in accreditation fee charged by the professional councils. They assured the Chairman HEC of their full support in the transition to online education mode amidst the prevailing COVID-19 crisis.

The meeting was attended by representatives of Pakistan Engineering Council, Pakistan Medical and Dental Council, Pakistan Bar Council, Pakistan Council for Architects and Town Planners, Pakistan Nursing Council, Pakistan Pharmacy Council, Pakistan Council for Homeopathy, National Council for Tibb, Pakistan Veterinary Medical Council, National Accreditation Council for Teachers Education, National Agricultural Education Accreditation Council, National Computing Education Accreditation Council, National Business Education Accreditation Council, and National Technology Council.

Condolence Reference held for Prof. Nisar Ahmed Siddiqui

Participants emphasize that his legacy at Sukkur IBA must continue

A special online condolence reference was held for late Prof. Nisar Ahmed Siddiqui, a renowned educationist and founder Vice Chancellor of Sukkur Institute of Business Administration (IBA) who passed away on June 22, 2020. He was a former senior civil servant with Master's from Boston USA.

Dr. Fateh Marri, Executive Director HEC, conducted the session. Among many other scholars, it was also attended by Dr. Ishrat Husain, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Institutional Reforms and Austerity, Tariq Banuri, Chairman HEC, Ms. Naheed Durrani, Federal Secretary Climate Change, Mr. Fazalullah Qureshi, former Federal Secretary, Dr. A. Q. Mughal, former Chairman UGC, ED HEC and others.

Prof. Nisar Siddiqui, who was also a Member of the HEC's governing body as representative of the Government of Sindh, became the Director of Sukkur IBA in 2004, after gaining wide experience in management, administration and academia at national and international levels. Later he became, founder VC of Sukkur IBA University which is now considered among leading institutions of higher learning in Pakistan.



In his remarks, Dr. Ishrat Husain said that the best way to remember Prof. Siddiqui is to sustain and improve his institution. "His personality was all about leadership, integrity, compassion and commitment, so his successor will have to keep these things in mind and to be strictly followed if the institution has to move forward as Prof. Siddiqui envisioned." Dr. Ishrat said that if the team at Sukkur IBA is not motivated, it will disperse. He emphasized that this is not a 9 to 5 job, it needs commitment and real leadership. He said

"His personality was all about leadership, integrity, compassion and commitment, so his successor will have to keep these things in mind and to be strictly followed if the institution has to move forward as Prof. Siddiqui envisioned," said Dr. Ishrat Husain.

that now employers, while hiring, do not differentiate between IBA Karachi and Sukkur.

Chairman HEC Tariq Banuri said that Mr. Siddiqui was one of the most respected academic leaders in the country who had developed and introduced new approaches into education, enhanced the standard of service to society, and transformed a nascent institute to a leading national university. He assured that every possible effort will be made to continue Prof. Siddiqui's legacy.

Ms. Naheed Shah Durrani, Federal Secretary, Climate Change Division said that filling the void created by departure of Prof. Siddiqui was a big challenge. While praying for his family, faculty, staff and students, she said that Prof. Siddiqui was Sir Syed of his time. "He was an amazing human being, a teacher, an effective team manager, a doer and a visionary leader. He has left priceless contributions."

Mr. Nazar Mehar, former Federal Secretary said that Prof. Nisar Siddiqui proved how milestones are achieved through commitment and hard work. "He literally started from zero and took Sukkur IBA to such great heights. He had the perfect vision for every aspect

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of the institution. His thinking was that any student with talent should be able to continue his studies, funds should not be an issue."

Dr. A. Q. Mughal, former Chairman, University Grants Commission and former ED HEC shared an old memory with Prof. Siddiqui when during a visit to US institutions, the latter was focusing on the functioning of community colleges in US. "He not only observed their system keenly but, through his commitment, implemented the same in his area. Nobody could believe that such an institution can be built and run in Sukkur."

Mr. Zahid Hussain Khand, Registrar, Sukkur IBA said that Prof. Siddiqui was their spiritual father. He gave a brief history of how a small institute affiliated with IBA Karachi became an independent and leading institution. "It was his dream to uplift the students who were not good in studies

or could not afford education. He has created a team, who are not only highly qualified but also highly motivated to serve their community."

Dr. Raza Bhatti, Vice Chancellor, Shaikh Ayaz University, Shikarpur and former Member (Operations) HEC said that Sukkur IBA has three big distinctions from other universities in Pakistan. These are community colleges, a joint programme with OGDCL to bring poor students from all over Pakistan and the energy conservation at Sukkur IBA. Dr. Madad Ali Shah, a senior faculty member from Sukkur IBA and VC Skills University Khairpur, said that Prof. Siddiqui urged him to come back from UK and serve his own people. Dr. Shah said that Sukkur is famous in the world due to IBA, which speaks volumes of the effort done by Prof. Siddiqui. Mr. Mumtaz Bukhari, a Sukkur based journalist, said that the work done by Prof. Siddiqui has a long-lasting impact. He wanted to bring a silent revolution. He had a clear vision and that was "no compromise on merit".

Dr. Manzoor Soomro, former Chairman, Pakistan Science Foundation, said that Prof. Nisar Siddiqui was a man with a vision and strategy. "In addition to university education, he gave due importance to school education as well as university-industry linkages." Mr. Fayyaz Siddiqui, son of Prof. Siddiqui, shared various incidents from his father's life as a bureaucrat proving that he never

Ms. Naheed Shah Durrani, Federal Secretary, Climate Change Division said that filling the void created by departure of Prof. Siddiqui was a big challenge. He was an amazing human being, a teacher, an effective team manager, a doer and a visionary leader. He has left priceless contributions.

compromised on merit and always thought for welfare of the people. He said that Prof. Siddiqui was buried in the premises of Sukkur IBA, only after several requests from his team though his father wanted to get buried in their ancestral village. He hoped the legacy of his father will continue and Sukkur IBA will prosper.

Dr. Fateh Marri thanked all participants for taking out time on Sunday, discussing upcoming challenges of Sukkur IBA and how these can be collectively addressed. He said that Prof. Nisar Ahmed Siddiqui's commitment, foresight and leadership led Sukkur IBA to deliver high quality teaching, applied research, and focused training and capacity development. Imtiaz Solangi, Commissioner, Income Tax, Ehsan Laghari, former MD SIDA, Naseer Memon, MD, Thar Foundation, Dr. Juanid Alam Memon, PIDE, Islamabad and others spoke on the occasion.

Over 700 Applications Received for GCF Grant

In Phase-I, 25 proposals will be selected. Maximum duration of each grant project is three years and the maximum grant amount is Rs. 150 million. Thematic areas include Food Security; Water Management and Sustainability; Sustainable Energy; Sociology and Philosophy; Development Economics; Urban Planning; Climate Change and Environment; Information Technology and Telecom; and Innovative Governance and Reforms.

More than 700 applications have been received in the Grand Challenge Fund (GCF) launched by HEC in February 2020. GCF is a unique research programme. Its aim is to encourage university professors to help solve the pressing problems facing the country.

“For too long HEC funded research projects without asking whether they had any impact. GCF is different; its very ethos is to assess the quality of research on how it will contribute to socio-economic development in Pakistan, how it will help solve the problems that confront us, and how it will support our communities, our businesses, our farmers, and our government agencies in making decisions that improve the lives of ordinary citizens. GCF is a very competitive grant. The success rate is no more than 3 or 4 per cent. Grants will go through a peer-reviewed evaluation by high-level committees. We do expect papers to be published in the best journals. But we also expect to see results on the ground,” said Chairman HEC Tariq Banuri.

In Phase-I (year 20-21), 25 proposals will be selected out of over 700 submissions. The maximum duration of each grant project is three years, and the maximum grant amount is Rs. 150 million. In this phase, the challenge statements (i.e., problems to be solved) have been kept relatively broad. These are in nine thematic areas, namely Food Security; Water Management and Sustainability; Sustainable Energy; Sociology and Philosophy; Development Economics; Urban Planning; Climate Change and Environment; Information Technology and Telecom; and

Innovative Governance and Reforms. To ensure high quality of research, 32 research intensive universities from across the Pakistan are identified by HEC, who will be the key partners in GCF. Faculty members from these universities have been asked to collaborate with faculty members from other universities, both within and outside Pakistan, as needed.

The proposals will go through a rigorous cycle of evaluation and review by specialized panels of experts. To ensure the transparency of the evaluation process, the reviewers have been asked to declare any potential conflict of interest. Anyone who has a potential conflict of interest has to recuse themselves from the panel.

HEC has funded thousands of research projects in the past, and this has led to a 15-fold number of research articles published in recognized journals every year, in addition to some industry agreements and new startups. However, the impact on the ground is very limited. With GCF, a new system of selection as well as monitoring and evaluation has been introduced to orient researchers towards achieving more concrete outcomes, such as higher productivity and efficiency, more equitable allocation systems, better health systems, and more exports.

The Higher Education Development in Pakistan (HEDP) is a five-year project (2019/20 – 2023/24) being implemented by HEC, with support from the World Bank. It aims to support research excellence in strategic sectors of the economy, improve teaching and learning, and strengthening governance in higher education.

Pakistan Surpasses Leading Asian NRENs in Asi@Connect's 4th Call for Proposals

The results of the 4th call for proposals of Asi@Connect was announced on January 31, 2020. A total of 16 project proposals were selected during the final selection out of which Pakistan was awarded four project proposals worth Rs. 60 Million, the maximum number of project proposals awarded to any single country.

The participating countries include 23 Asia Pacific countries, leading global NREN consortiums like Internet2, GEANT and other affiliated entities like AAF (Australian Access Federation), Indiana University, JISC (UK based R&E solution provider) and others.

Pakistan Education and Research Network (PERN), a project of Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, is the only education and research network of Pakistan that has interlinked the universities of both public and private sector as well as research institutions to strengthen collaborative research and education activities in Pakistan.

PERN collaborates with international Research and

Education (R&E) networks through a high speed Trans Eurasia Information Network (TEIN), a project of the European Union.

TEIN provides a dedicated high-capacity data-communications network for research and education communities across Asia-Pacific at speeds up to 10Gbps.

The link further provides access to the global NREN consortiums like Internet2 (USA), CANARIE (Canada), CERNET (China), GEANT (Europe) and others.

The connectivity of TEIN is not just physical, it also provides funding opportunities for trainings, workshops and research applications to all participating countries through a yearly Asi@Connect call for proposals.

Pakistan Education and Research Network is participating in the Asi@Connect since its start in September 2016, the project has more outreach through the local launch by HEC in Islamabad in July 2019.

The launch event was attended by Ambassador European Union and a large number of Vice Chancellors, Professors and researchers from academia.

As an impact of the launch event, the universities from Pakistan aggressively participated in the 4th call for proposals of the Asi@Connect and out of 157 concept papers, 89 were submitted by PERN and its Partner universities.

In the round one, 13 concept notes submitted by Pakistani community were selected whereas four project proposals from Pakistan were declared successful out of a total of 16 awarded project proposals in the final evaluation.

The successful project proposals are from Lahore University of Management Sciences, University of Engineering and Technology Narowal Campus, Riphah International University Islamabad and PERN itself.

The project details and results are available at <https://www.tein.asia/>

The successful project proposals are from Lahore University of Management Sciences, University of Engineering and Technology Narowal Campus, Riphah International University Islamabad and Pakistan Education and Research Network. The project details and results are available at <https://www.tein.asia/>

HEC, Microsoft bring Certification from Home Platform across Pakistan

First 2000 Exams of Microsoft MOS and MTA Free for Students

Pakistan has joined the league of some of the top countries of the world by providing a "Certification from Home Platform" for Microsoft Certifications for the students. An agreement has been reached between the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan and Microsoft to provide this Certification free of cost to the first 2000 students who register for the opportunity.

It's a major step not only for bridging the gap between education and employability, but also for helping students acquire professional skills while they have more time during this Covid period. Microsoft and HEC have been working together in a strategic partnership over the last decade to promote the use of information technology in the higher education sector. Under this strategic partnership, a certification platform has been launched to provide students with a prescribed curriculum roadmap, a kind of a blueprint for technology skill development and certification. Specific areas of study include Productivity, Computer Science, Data Science, and IT Infrastructure.

The offered Certifications of MTA (Microsoft Technology Associate) and MOS (Microsoft Office Specialist) provide useful credentials for individuals seeking to validate their skills and advance their careers. The exams covered include all the productivity tools under Office 365, but also cover tech intensive certification paths, such as Cloud Fundamental courses covering Azure Fundamentals, Dynamics 365 Fundamentals and Microsoft 365 Fundamentals.

Many students have found that they have more time at hand during the long COVID-19 break, which can give them the space to focus on

developing marketable skills in addition to theoretical knowledge. To support such students, HEC plans to introduce the Certification from Home Platform initiative for students across Pakistan. Under this initiative, the first 2,000 students who register for a certification would get a free certification offer on their choice of available MOS or MTA offerings. The students can conveniently select the technology area of their choice and not only learn at home with in-depth tutorials and self-study videos, and will also take the Exam online from the comfort of their home.

Commenting on the relationship between HEC & Microsoft, Chairman HEC Tariq Banuri said, "Digital transformation has been at the forefront of every industry in the last few years, and education is no different. Working with Microsoft, HEC has been able to bring in a set of tools and technology offerings that can help establish a technology-rich

culture in higher education. Enabling students to acquire more advanced skills not only helps them in their careers, it also strengthens the technical potential of Pakistani industry as well as academia."

Country Education Lead Microsoft-Pakistan, Mr Jibrán Jamshad said, "Today's workplace requires adaptability to frequent technology changes and problem-solving strategies. The variety of skills you can learn in the Microsoft Certification Programme allows you to display your flexibility to current and prospective employers. These credentials demonstrate that you can use a variety of strategies to solve problems and resolve the concerns of consumers as well as stakeholders more effectively".

The students can conveniently select the technology area of their choice and not only learn at home with in-depth tutorials and self-study videos, and will also take the Exam online from the comfort of their home.

41 IPFP Fellows Graduate from NAHE's Inaugural Training Course

The programme, led by a team of national and international experts, was delivered in accordance with the highest standards online readiness established by HEC in the wake of the Coronavirus crisis. The NFDP 2020 course is to be delivered till August 2020 in 12 cohorts of 40 participants each. This was the first cohort of the course.

The first cohort of 41 IPFP Fellows graduated from the inaugural National Faculty Development Programme (NFDP), a four-week intensive training course, which was conducted online through Microsoft Teams because of the Coronavirus.

The graduating scholars are fellows of the Interim Placement of Fresh PhDs (IPFP) programme funded by HEC. This programme supports universities in getting the services of fresh PhDs for a period of one year in anticipation of their recruitment to regular faculty positions.

The NFDP course was organized by the newly established National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE). It aims to provide new faculty with the practical skills and competencies they will need in order to become successful academics. These include courses in teaching effectiveness, including online teaching, research management, and professional practice. This is in keeping with the HEC's strategy that all higher education programs should be driven by the goal of future student success.

The programme, led by a team of national and international experts, was delivered in accordance with the highest standards online readiness established by HEC in the wake of the Coronavirus crisis. The NFDP 2020 course is to be delivered between now and August 2020 in 12 cohorts of 40 participants each. This is the first cohort of the course.

In his keynote address, Chairman HEC congratulated the graduating IPFP Fellows as

well as the organizers and instructors of the programme for their commitment and the success they achieved under difficult conditions, this being NAHE's first intensive programme, which was delivered online during Ramazan.

Mr. Banuri emphasized that the real success of this programme will come from the work of participants in the time to come. Lamenting the deterioration in the quality of higher education in Pakistan, he said that the current focus of HEC is to re-establish the value of our degrees and certifications. "Your success is not in getting this certificate. Your success, and our success, will happen when you provide excellent education to your students, when you do first class research, and when you help solve the problems that the country is facing. That will be the time to congratulate yourselves."

He said that while the four-week rigorous programme had introduced the participants to a number of tools and techniques, the larger purpose was to learn the habits and practices that will take them towards success. Taking a leaf from Stephen Covey's famous bestseller, the Chairman asked them to think about seven habits of successful academics, namely reading, writing, judging (or assessing), using scientific doubt, valuing time, pursuing excellence, and building a scholarly community.

Successful academics were avid readers and prolific writers, and it required sustained effort to acquire these habits. All academics are required to express their judgment, about ideas, about papers and books, about exam answers, about journal submissions, about students, and about

candidates for selection. It is their fundamental role in society. They have to learn how to do so through constant hard work and practice.

The fourth habit is scientific doubt, without which there can be no science. The role of the academic is to pursue the truth and to separate truth from myths and fairy tales. Do not take things on face value. Today, it is easy to fact-check assertions. Fifth, we must learn to value our own time and others' time. Make a calendar, fix a schedule, and stick to it. Respect the time that the students give to you, and make sure that they benefit from it. Respect the time of your colleagues.

The sixth trait that he highlighted was the pursuit of excellence. He underscored that excellence is not a destination but a commitment, a journey. We have to ask ourselves daily if we are doing quality work, and how we could further enhance the quality of this work. We must learn to recognize and appreciate excellence in others, and to let excellence be our reward. Finally, scholars have to find fellow scholars, others who are interested in similar

goals. All knowledge evolves in scholarly communities. Everyone has to try to find kindred spirits, stay in touch with them, exchange ideas and opinions with them, and develop collaborative programs with them.

Earlier, in her welcome speech, Rector NAHE, Dr. Shaheen Sardar Ali welcomed the session participants and gave a brief introduction of the NFD 2020. She congratulated the IPFP fellows and appreciated them for their hard work and commitment during all the sessions.

She emphasized that the programme aims to provide a virtual, immersive, and integrated world-class learning experience that will prepare the participants for their academic careers.

The resource persons of the programme, including Dr. Steve Burian, Dr. Shazia Awan, Dr. Hassaan Khan and Dr. Saima Sherazi, also shared their experiences of the four-week programme and hoped that it will go a long way for participants to enhance and develop skills needed to become a good teacher and a successful researcher.

HEC Condolences Demise of DG Bahria University, Karachi Campus

Chairman HEC Tariq Banuri has condoled the death of Rear Admiral Mukhtar Khan Jadoon, Director General, Bahria University, Karachi Campus. He passed away in Karachi on June 28, 2020.

Mr. Banuri, on behalf of the HEC and the higher education fraternity, sent heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, faculty and students, particularly of Bahria University Karachi Campus. He prayed for the departed soul and his family and said that "we would like to offer our deepest and most sincere sympathies to his family at this sorrowful time."

Rear Admiral Mukhtar Khan Jadoon had assumed responsibilities as the Director General, Bahria University's Karachi campus in November 2018. Since then, he actively promoted the cause

of university, broadened its national image and actively organized, and participated in a number of national and international conferences. He was particularly interested in promoting Blue Economy of Pakistan, and presented many papers on maritime related subjects.

A career naval officer, Mr. Jadoon was commissioned in Pakistan Navy in 1984. He served at various key positions during his service, including Director Naval Intelligence (Ops.), Naval Secretary and Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Operations) at Naval Headquarters. The Admiral was a graduate of Royal College of Defense Studies, UK, and had a number of professional courses from US, UK and Pakistan to his credit. In recognition of his meritorious service, he had been awarded Sitar-i-Imtiaz (Military).

Pakistan ranks 3rd for number of scholarships & 1st for number of scholarship applications

126 Pakistani Students Win Erasmus Mundus Scholarship for 2020-21

The number of Pakistani students selected for the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree (EMJMD) scholarship to study in Europe has gone up almost three fold in the last 3 years, from 46 in 2017, to 126 for the academic year 2020-21, including 64 men and 62 women.

With 126 scholarships out of a global total of 2,542, Pakistan now ranks third in world, having moved up one slot from its fourth position in 2019. A major reason is the awareness campaign launched jointly by the HEC and the EU mission in Pakistan. The total number of applications (2,919) from Pakistan are the highest in the world.

The selected students will pursue their studies in 18 leading European countries. The Erasmus Mundus programme aims to promote academic and cultural understanding between the European countries and partner countries. It supports the development of human resources, facilitates international mobility and cooperation, and helps build capacity of higher education institutions across the world.

EMJMD programmes encompasses a range of subjects of interest to Pakistan, including the

circular economy, microwave electronics and optics, international humanitarian action, vaccinology, children's literature, media and culture, and groundwater and global change, to name a few.

Notwithstanding the prevalent uncertainty due to COVID-19 pandemic, HEC is actively engaged in discussions with the EU Delegation to facilitate the start of academic activities by the scholarship

awardees, including their travel arrangements. Collaboration is also continuing on other programs in higher education and research, in order to bring the quality and standards of education at par with the global standards.

The Erasmus scholarships are an addition to the scholarships provided directly by the HEC to Pakistani students for study in the leading universities of the world.

HEC has cooperative agreements with universities and countries not only on scholarships but also on joint research programs, faculty exchange programs, transnational education programmes, excellence frameworks, and leadership development programmes.

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News Flash

Scholarships

The one-stop integrated information can assist you in finding a variety of scholarships and grants. HEC helps you find opportunities to undertake study, research or professional development in Pakistan and overseas.

Visit www.hec.gov.pk/english/scholarshipsgrants/pages/default.aspx and discover the terms and conditions and eligibility criteria.

Chairman HEC Condolences Death of Kashir Asghar



Chairman HEC Tariq Banuri expressed his profound grief at the passing away of Mr. Kashir Asghar, Assistant Professor and Head of Industrial Relations at NUST Business School. Kashir was tested positive for Covid-19 and succumbed to the virus on May 22, 2020.

He was son of Lt. Gen (Retd) Muhammad Asghar, Former Rector NUST. More recently Gen. Asghar has made a mark of himself as Commission Member HEC, Coordinator of CPEC engagement cell, and Acting Executive Director.

In a condolence message to the bereaved family, Chairman HEC expressed his heartfelt anguish at the death of an accomplished and talented young man who was well respected in the academic circles and respected by his peers and students. He said that the HEC family is united in this time of terrible grief and he prayed that Allah Almighty may grant the family to bear the unbearable loss.

HEC Alerts Students & Faculty about Fake News

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has alerted students and faculty members about false information being circulated by anti-education groups through WhatsApp and social media forums.

Students and faculty members have been advised to verify HEC-related information from its website www.hec.gov.pk

The fake information usually consists of crude Photoshopped images designed by some persons pushing anti-education agendas and circulated by them through their WhatsApp and social media links.

Some of these images pretend to be screenshots of the HEC website, but are just manipulations of other downloaded content from the website. They pertain

to a variety of topics, but their common aim is to advocate a lowering of educational standards in Pakistan, e.g., by cancelling exams, canceling all educational activities including online education, or disrupting admissions or scholarship processes.

Students, academic and research community as well as public, availing or inquiring about HEC programmes and services, have been requested to exercise vigilance and trust no other resource except the HEC website, and authentic social media pages that are linked to it.

Should they need any confirmation, it is advised to reach out to the respective focal person of HEC.

All such activities are also reported to the cybercrime unit of the Federal Investigation Agency.



COVID-19 Crisis to Enable HEC Enhance Efficiency: Chairman

The COVID-19 crisis has affected many lives and disrupted all systems and institutions, including educational institutions, but the forced changes can be harnessed to bring about an increase in efficiency and quality of services at the Higher Education Commission (HEC).

This was stated by Chairman HEC Tariq Banuri while addressing HEC's all-staff meeting held recently. HEC is committed to using the crisis in order to automate its process and systems, simplifying application procedures for universities, faculty members, and students, and moving towards greater efficiency.

The Chairman directed all the HEC Divisions to take necessary steps for "re-engineering of all

ETC has been asked to develop a hybrid system of evaluation and assessment, with a more effective use of information technology.

Expressing satisfaction that the degree attestation system was able to continue to provide its services through online operations during the lockdown, he directed the Attestation Division to make its processes more effective in the future, and to save students from the hassle of traveling to HEC offices for attestation.

He congratulated NAHE for the successful design and operation of the National Faculty Development Programme 2020, which had to be conducted online due to the lock down. "The feedback of the programme from the

The Chairman directed all the HEC Divisions to take necessary steps for "re-engineering of all HEC operations and processes" as per the current requirements, ensuring transparency, clarity, and precision in them. He emphasised that all the lapses, in terms of quality in all HEC operations, must be identified and addressed.

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All HEC Divisions have been asked to ensure complete online readiness and online access, including by taking advantage of other HEC programmes, especially the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS), the National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE), and the Education Testing Council (ETC).

The HEMIS and Statistical Information Unit (SIU) have collected data on faculty members, and are compiling a complete database of staff and students.

participants is very good." He directed NAHE to organize short duration trainings for HEC staff and others in essential Software services and other valuable skills. "NAHE should start a programme to improve the gaps, help HEC standardise its 'Style Manual', and provide trainings to its staff about communication skills, IT skills, analytical skills, and legal skills etcetera."

The Chairman condoled the deaths of family members of HEC and universities staff due to COVID-19. He advised the HEC staff to follow precautionary measures strictly, including wearing masks in all public places, frequently washing hands and use sanitizer, and adopting social distancing. "We all must take all necessary precautions to protect ourselves, our families, neighbours, and colleagues."

NBEAC Moot Stresses Quality & Inclusivity in Business Education

NBEAC Deans and Directors Conference is held annually, assembling a large gathering of deans and business schools' faculty to discuss business prospects, challenges and opportunities, while highlighting unique themes of specialisations in business and management sciences disciplines for education in Pakistan.

The National Business Education Accreditation Council (NBEAC) organised the 7th Deans and Directors Conference entitled 'Enhancing Quality and Inclusivity in Business Education through Engagement'. Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue Mr. Abdul Hafeez Shaikh was chief guest on the occasion.

The conference focused on both businesses and business schools in Pakistan – small and large, urban and rural. The conference also brought under discussion the emerging trends in curricula design and contemporary learning pedagogies with a focus on their application and implementation in Pakistan.

The participants also got an opportunity to reflect upon the increasing role of digital technology at the workplace and how it has transformed the way work is done. They also shed light on the skillset required by graduates. The participants discussed balance between indigenous and international curriculum content for effective business education, sharing experiences of business enterprises and educational leaders at local and global levels.

Multiple sessions were conducted in which speakers from universities across Pakistan were invited. The plenary session on "Engaging Stakeholders to Achieve Inclusivity and Quality in Business Education" was moderated by Dr. Syed Zahoor Hassan from Lahore University of Management Sciences.

Adviser to Prime Minister for Institutional Reforms and Austerity Dr. Ishrat Husain, Chairman NBEAC, Dr. Farrukh Iqbal and other notable speakers shared their views.

Three other sessions were conducted on 'Role of NBEAC', 'Challenges Faced by Rural Business Schools' and 'Curriculum Designs and Learning Pedagogies'.

On second day, Associate Dean, SBE, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Dr. Naveeda Kitchlew presented an introduction to business education in Pakistan. Speakers shared their views regarding business education and its future. CEO, Telenor Pakistan, Mr. Irfan Wahab Khan talked about the importance of technology in achieving sustainable goals.



Speaking during the conference, Adviser to Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue Mr. Abdul Hafeez Shaikh said Pakistan has the opportunity to keep pace with the world in terms of promotion of business education in the current digital age with high global.

He stressed the need for maintaining a balance between demand and production of business education degree holders. He urged the conference participants to come up with workable solutions regarding inclusivity, government involvement and making education relevant.

Chairman HEC, Tariq Banuri shed light on importance of justice in a society. He noted that justice is not a linear concept and has many dimensions. First, 'justice in terms of equality' means inclusivity; people should not be denied certain things. Second, "justice in terms of quality" means putting something in the right place. It is against justice if something is not put on its right place. "Our job is the promotion of

justice in both dimensions." The third dimension is "justice as equality", which is about making sure that people have access. He said inclusivity is the synonym of equality. The statistics show a really sad picture which means we need to make progress in our education field.

Chairman NBEAC, Dr. Farrukh Iqbal highlighted various aspects of accreditation process, and broadly elaborated the standards of process to check quality of business institutions. He emphasised steps to develop high standards for enhancement of quality of business schools.

Vice Chairman NBEAC, Dr. Naukhez Sarwar highlighted three main aspects of the conference; quality, inclusivity, and engagement. Programme Director, NBEAC, Mr. Ahtesham Ali Raja paid tribute to former Chairman NBEAC, Dr. Hasan Sohaib Murad (Late) and thanked Dr. Farrukh Iqbal and the conference sponsors. He said the conference is an ideal platform for academia-industry linkages, shaping the future business education strategies.

NUST Takes Giant Leap in Global Varsity Rankings

Taking a gigantic leap forward, the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) has unlatched yet another achievement by getting ranked at number 355 amongst world universities, as per the World University Rankings 2021, released by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) on June 10, 2020.

NUST has ascended 45 positions from its last year's ranking of 400 and has steadily maintained its upward trajectory over the past four years by taking an astounding jump of 173 positions.

NUST has emerged amongst the top 30 percent global Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) considered for the 2021 world rankings. Also leading the ranking table in the country among Asian universities, NUST has the unprecedented

singular honour of being number one in Pakistan both in World and Asian Rankings, and the only Pakistani university in the top 360 global and 100 Asian universities.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) is the most prestigious and credible university ranking agency in the world. Their rankings are carried out based on academic reputation, employer reputation, faculty-student ratio, citations per faculty, and international faculty and students.

In the 2021 rankings, NUST has shown improvement in four out of the above five major ranking indicators, spearheading Pakistani universities in academic reputation, employer reputation, and international faculty and students. NUST now stands among the top 150 universities globally in "Employer Reputation."

UAF Approves Locust Research Cell and Organic Agriculture Cell

The Academic Council of the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (UAF) has approved Locust Research Cell and Organic Agriculture Cell that will help the country to address the agricultural challenges. The meeting was presided over by Dr. Muhammad Ashraf, Vice Chancellor UAF.

The Locust Cell is working under the auspices of the Department of Entomology and Organic Agriculture Cell will be established at the Department of Agronomy.

Dr. Ashraf said that locust had become dangerous for the food security. He stressed upon the need to work on war footing to fight the crisis to ensure the food security. He said after the 27 years, it had hit crops at the huge level and to search food, locusts travel in swarms in millions. He said that they had kicked off a

research work on locust life history, attacked areas, various stages with day, critical stage to hit for low pesticide, management techniques, potential threats, effect of climate changes, and mitigation strategies. He also directed the Director Research to come up with the proposal of establishment of Nano Fertilizer Cell.

Registrar UAF Mr. Umar Saeed Qadri said that under the ICT project, Enterprise Resource Planning and Campus Management System are being introduced as a step on campus on SAP cloud. He said that all possible measures are being taken to address problems of the campus community.

The meeting also approved BS Computer Sciences and BS Mathematics at sub-campus Okara- Depalpur and BS Animal Sciences at Toba Tek Singh campus.

Pak-Turk Conference on Emerging Technologies at GIKI

The two-day 3rd Pak-Turk International Conference on Emerging Technologies in the field of Sciences and Engineering was organised by Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute (GIKI) of Engineering, Sciences and Technology.

Turkish, Pakistani and German speakers talked about different topics related to engineering education and scientific developments. They encouraged young scientists to catch up with the new emerging trends in the field of science and technology as this was vital for progress and economic prosperity.

The conference was attended by 200 plus individuals through video link and viewed by over 3000 audience around the globe. Dr. Fazal Ahmad Khalid, Chairman Punjab Higher

Education Commission (PHEC) was chief guest in the inaugural ceremony. Prominent Turkish and Pakistani experts who spoke in the conference included Dr. Mahmut Boyukata, Dr. Nihal Buyukcizmeci, Dr. Necla Çakmak, Dr. Dogan Aydin, Dr. Bulent Yilmaz, Dr. Fouzia Jabeen, Dr. Asghar Qadir, Dr. AS Bhatti, Dr. Sabieh Anwar, Dr. Fida Yunus Khattak.

The Ambassador of Turkey to Pakistan, Mr. Ihsan Mustafa Yurdakul said that the whole world was transitioning and the emerging technologies will define the world. Engr Jehangir Bashir, Rector GIK Institute said that Pakistan and Turkey enjoyed good relations and the interaction between scholars and researchers of the two brotherly countries would further boost the mutual collaboration.

Urban Forest Inaugurated at University of Sindh

The Forest Department, Government of Sindh in collaboration with the University of Sindh, Jamshoro has inaugurated the Urban Forest at University's main campus premises under "Sarsabz Sindh -- Green Pakistan Programme".

As many as 12000 saplings have been planted on a specified space spanning 12 hectares. Minister for Forest and Wildlife Department, Government of Sindh, Syed Nasir Hussain Shah was chief guest at the inaugural ceremony.

Vice chancellor, University of Sindh, Dr. Fateh Muhammad Burfat and Secretary, Forest and Wildlife Department, Mr. Abdul Raheem Soomro were also present.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister underlined the need for more vigorous plantation campaigns in the country and appreciated Sindh University's role to this effect. "From the air people breathe to the wood they use, they seek from the belly of forests.

Besides providing habitats for animals and livelihoods for humans, forests also offer

watershed protection, prevent soil erosion and mitigate climate change." Explaining the relatively newer concept of Urban Forestry in the context of Sindh province, Dr. Burfat said that it is in fact a collection of trees that grow within a city, town or a suburb.

In a wider sense, it also includes any kind of woody plant vegetation growing in and around human settlements.

"In the last three and a half years, we have run over 100 successful tree-plantation campaigns, planting around 150,000 on the campus and suburbs. These campaigns also include a glorious project, Plant trees-Plant life, we collaborated with The Sketches led by famous environmental activist and folk singer Saif Samejo."

The Vice Chancellor lauded the services of Dr. Nabila Shah Jilani, In-Charge, Plantation and Beautification who, he said, had turned the campus in an enchanting orchard-like idyll as compared to its earlier predominantly arid status.



PARENT AND STUDENT ALERT

HEC Recognised Universities/Campuses

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) recognises degrees of chartered universities/institutions from public and private sector in Pakistan along with their approved campuses as mentioned at following website links.

List of Recognised Universities/Institutions

hec.gov.pk/site/HEIs

List of Recognised Campuses of Public and Private Sector Institutions

hec.gov.pk/site/recognizedcampuses

List of Illegal/Fake Institutions

hec.gov.pk/site/Illegal-DAIs

Any other university/institution which is not listed among HEC recognised universities or campuses available at HEC website will not be considered a recognised institution.

Students and their parents are advised to verify legal status of the university/institution or its campus from the above-mentioned links. Students are advised NOT to take admissions in those institutions which are not listed among HEC recognised universities/institutions/campuses. Degrees obtained from non-recognised institutions/campuses will not be recognised.

NOTE

Students and parents are cautioned not to get admission in the universities/DAIs wherein admissions are banned due to various irregularities as mentioned on HEC website.



www.hec.gov.pk



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