**All this Plunder to Reform the Education**

[M Alam Brohi](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/m-alam-brohi/%22%20%5Co%20%22More%20Articles%20by%20M%20Alam%20Brohi)

March 15, 2022

The local print media has carried out a phenomenal report about massive corruption in the funds taken as loans from various international banks and countries for the Secondary Education Reform Support Programme from 2012 to 2018 by the Government of Sindh (GoS). The funds were squandered or swindled over this period without any verifiable improvement in the education department.

The Daily Kawish, in its issue of Monday, March 7, 2021, reports that the loans taken from the foreign banks and countries for different projects in the education department come to a fabulous aggregate of Rs.1.35 trillion. The World Bank and the European Union extended loans of $450 million and $90 million for various projects in the secondary education sector, Joint Partnership and the Reform Support Programmes, respectively. Over this period, the US and Japan extended additional small loans of $355 million (US $155 and Japan $150 million). Money was also borrowed from the Asian Development Bank.

These loans were taken for nine projects being the brainchild of the then Secretary Education – a close relative of the supreme leaders of the Pakistan People’s Party. He was so powerful that Late Hazar Khan Bijarani refused to take the charge of the portfolio of education in his presence at the helm in the Secretariat. He was not shifted from his position. Instead, Late Hazar Khan was given a new Ministry, and the unelected Nisar Khuhro was appointed as Advisor of Education.

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These projects were carried half through or abandoned leaving the huge bureaucratic paraphernalia intact created for the so-called Education Reform Programmes with special salary packages and other privileges. The 73 officers of this special cadre reportedly consume Rs.1.65 billion in salary, incentive and project allowances every year besides their huge claims in terms of repair of furniture, equipment and machinery, medical and travel allowances, which also go into hundreds of millions.

This is unbelievable, rather shocking and utterly disgusting, and needs to be thoroughly investigated by a broad-based Commission, headed by a serving High Sindh Court Judge, and comprising financial experts and auditors to be appointed by the Auditor General of Pakistan to know how the loans were taken; how the Federal Government extended guarantee therefor; where and on which projects the money was spent; what is the present status of those projects and what improvement was brought about in the education department etc.

This, prima facie, is a scandal of unprecedented magnitude just unheard of in the annals of this province; reflecting the callousness of bureaucrats and the political leaders of the province towards the precious public resources. These huge loans were taken despite a huge increase in the provincial shares from the central divisible pool of funds under the seventh National Financial Commission Award. The province will be stuck in an exacting process of debt retirement for decades without having any improvement in the vital education department.

Nations cannot drag on in this corrupt and callous way squandering public resources and undermining institutional structures including education. We have to build the society both by legislation and conscientious leadership. The state institutions have to come out of their delusional stupor to take the bull by the horn. We cannot afford to compromise on rule of law, good governance and constitutional obligations. We have to evolve a holistic approach in an earnest way to rebuild our self-indulgent governing bodies and inertia and corruption-ridden national and provincial administrations.

I have tried to give inclusive suggestions for the amelioration of primary and secondary education. The administrative paraphernalia has overgrown without any veritable performance. It needs to be pruned, ridden of black sheep and set on the right path through an effective system of merit-based promotion and demotion, reward and punishment. This accountability should equally be enforced in all hierarchical positions of political and administrative nature without any exception from the chief executive of the province to the Minister, Secretary and other regional, district and Tehsil officers.

The system of evaluation of students through the matriculation and Intermediate Examinations by the Boards is outdated. This system tends to favour rote memorization of the course, which kills the natural talent of the students to read, think and understand the course contents. The system, corrupt to the core, has become the main cause for cheating in the examination halls, inflated marking of the answer sheets and leaking of question papers for pecuniary considerations. This ominous scandal involves invigilators, paper setters, examiners and Board officials among others, which is shameful for a nation and society.

The developed countries have adopted new technology-based systems to evaluate students for higher classes. The huge administrative structures of these Boards are an unnecessary drag on the meagre resources of the Ministry and should be done away with after adopting a new method in conformity with the contemporary world systems of evaluation of students – being cheaper, fairer, more efficient and objective.

Our schools, colleges and higher educational institutions don’t benefit from online teaching, artificial intelligence; video links, distant learning etc. These are the modern tools of learning and should henceforth form the essential part of our teaching system at all levels to get rid of the rote memorization and catch up with the most technically advanced nations and above all.

*The author was a member of the Foreign Service of Pakistan and he has authored two books.*