

# The world

*Edu - Cheating*

By Humair

**S** EARCH the internet for "cheating in exam" and your computer would return 10.6 million entries. Yes, that many. If you twist the query to "why students cheat in exam" you still get close to half that many responses. The phenomenon is as global as it possibly can be. If you filter down your search to Pakistani students and local exams, you end up with around two million entries. This is one of the rare areas where we are on a par with the rest of the world.

From school tests to university exams to professional certifications, cheating reigns supreme across the globe. Interestingly, a study done in 2006 involving 5,331 students at 32 graduate schools in the United States and Canada found an alarming amount of cheating across disciplines, but more among the future business leaders. Fifty-six per cent of graduate business students admitted they had cheated at least once in the preceding year, compared with 47 per cent of non-business students.

The "more important and more discouraging" explanation the researchers heard from the students was that "they were just emulating the behaviour they see out in the business world." There, they said, "it does not matter how you get it done. The key thing is to get it done."

This leads us to the rather philosophical dimension of the equation; students cheat because success in exams, not knowledge, happens to be their target. This is the way the education system — regardless of its various orientations and manifestations — is designed and conducted in today's cut-throat world. It was not without reason that Mark Twain made his famed comment, "Never let school interfere with your education."

Pakistani students have certainly not led the nation down on this count, matching their counterparts elsewhere cheat for cheat. And this is so despite the fact that they are not as technically advanced as the others are. The Pakistani education system, in fact, is one up on most mechanisms and structures around the globe. In majority of such cases, students hoodwink the system on their own and at their own risk. At our end, the system facilitates those who are out to beat it.

Take, for instance, the recently conducted exams for classes IX and X. The number of issues it raised was bad enough for the higher authorities to take notice of which resulted in disciplinary action and even sackings midway through the exam itself.

Certain papers got leaked out ahead of the schedule, unauthorized examination centres were detected and there were "special rooms" reported in authorised centres where students could fill their answer sheets with the help of not just course books and other material, but, in certain cases, mothers as well who were allowed to give company to their sons and daughters lest they struggle to find relevant answers even in the stuff that was at their disposal. All that was needed to be able to make use of such facilities was a few bucks and, indeed, what are a few bucks when it is a matter of a child's future?

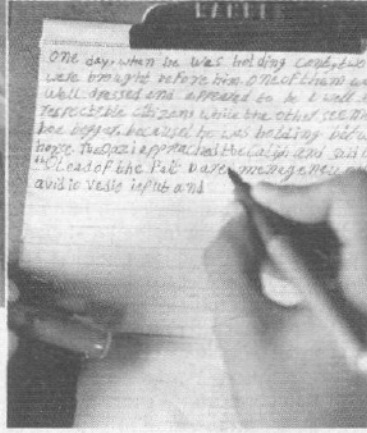
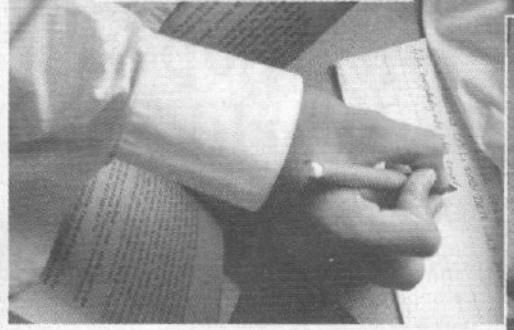
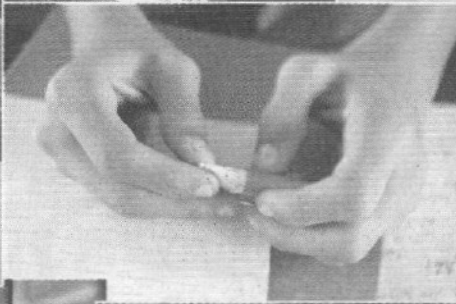
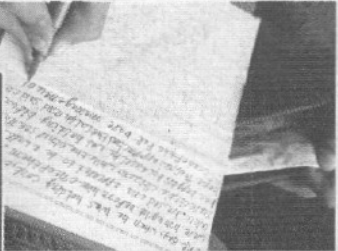
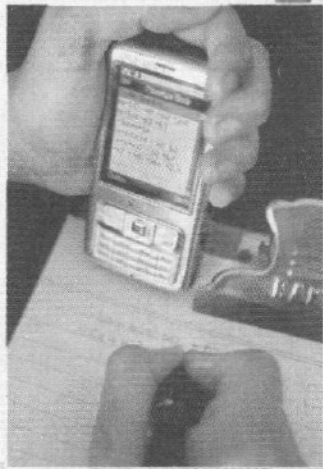
Other news reports cited incidents where students were officially assigned to take exams in

the very institutions where they had studied, and under the very supervision of the individual who had taught them. There was not even an external invigilator appointed for such centres. What more can the system be expected to do to facilitate the students?

The officials quoted by these reports conceded

amination centres; students of school 'A' taking their exam at school 'B' and vice versa?

There is another dimension to this tale of official largesse; the option of getting oneself registered with late fee rather than submitting the documents within time. This is one major way



that it had been going on for several years because the institutions concerned were located at a certain distance from the city and it would have been inhuman to make the students travel a long distance back and forth for the exams. This is naturally human consideration at its very best, but don't you think it would have been infinitely better for the board to at least switch the students and their ex-

for the "late-comers" to get themselves assigned centres of choice instead of having to risk their future at centres that have a reputation of being strict with their procedures. Exams for classes XI and XII are beginning a couple of days

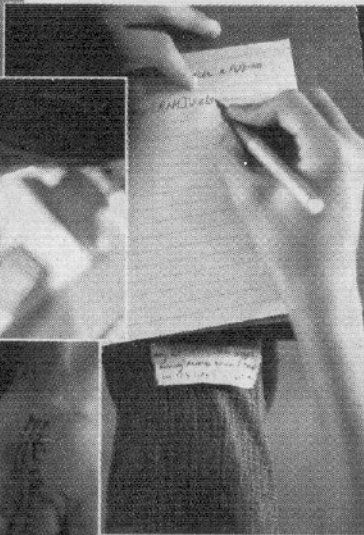
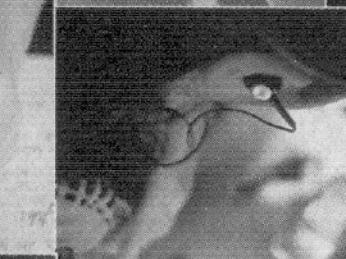
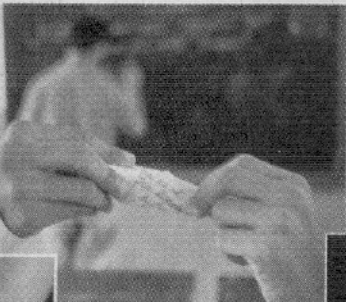
# of cheaters

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from now, but students were allowed to have their registration till a few days ago. Even funnier was the decision of the Board of Secondary Education which allowed candidates to file their registration just before or even during the examination schedule if they wanted to appear in some

year of students ... [and] to ensure that no student was deprived of a chance to appear in the exams."

When asked how the Board would proceed without due verification of the documents, the official concerned said results of such individuals would be withheld till the submission of verified documents that they may arrange in the intervening period. See, how much out of the way the officials go to accommodate those who are themselves careless enough to put away the registration till the last moment. Apparently, this is a very un-Pakistani attitude.



Photos by Arsalan

Students worldwide take to unfair means because success in exams, not knowledge, happens to be their target.

of the proceedings. Firstly, they argue, it is nothing but a way for the respective Board to raise funds by way of charging a hefty late fee. Closer to the exams one gets, the higher the fee one has to dish out. Secondly, the lifeline offers indifferent students a chance to take one or two papers at a time and clear a hurdle in as many attempts as they might take.

Lastly, and more importantly, it is a way of getting the desired

examination centre by way of "appeasing" the officials because anything can be done on the pretext of last-minute adjustments. There have been instances when candidates have appeared at centres without their roll numbers being on the official list. It is just a phone call from the Board that makes centre supervisors to grant such students their wish.

Let's now move on to the element of paper getting "leaked out" ahead of time. The general perception that it some times happens late in the night needs to be corrected. If the procedure for paper-setting, printing and distribution is kept in mind, there is no way it can happen as early as that.

The Board concerned asks three senior-most subject teachers to set the question paper in line with the prescribed pattern. After doing that, the teachers return the assignment in sealed envelopes to the secret branch of the Board which keeps it in the strong room till the last moment.

On the eve of the paper concerned — at around 10pm — a fourth teacher is handed over all the three envelopes on the premises of the Board, and asked to pick one. Beyond that he moderates that particular question paper and changes it by about 30 per cent. This becomes the final version that gets distributed among the students the next day. There are two other teachers on the premises — one specialising in English language, the other in Urdu — who check the final draft for linguistic adjustments. After it has been composed by the lone computer operator in the secret branch, the two teachers proofread the text and then it is handed over to the printing section, which is located on the premises itself, at around 3am.

A couple of hours later, the printing comes to an end, and it is time to put them into sealed

packets. At around 7am — two hours before the scheduled start of the paper — these packets are handed over by the Board to independent teachers who take them to different examination centres where the seal is broken just minutes before the start of the paper by the principal or headmaster concerned.

As can be seen, there is no way the contents of the paper can be disclosed before at least 3am. Beyond that it changes various hands within the premises of the Board till 7am. In the next couple of hours, the matter is in the hands of independent teachers and centre supervisors. Who crosses the line where is a matter of conjecture, but whoever he happens to be, there can be little doubt that he would be doing it for the sake of the future of the students because this is what the Board officials have been saying all through the process.

Once the paper does start at 9am, it is all up to the students who, as one senior college principal pointed out, come mentally prepared and physically equipped to cheat their way through. College lavatories are filled with crib sheets — *pharary* and *cartoos*, as they are called in the vernacular — at the end of each paper, he pointed out, adding that even the Islamiat paper is no exception on this score.

At the recent exams for classes IX and X, there was one incident at a local centre in Karachi which adds a new dimension to the debate on cheating. When caught red-handed, a student asked the invigilator to give him one more chance. When the teacher didn't budge and insisted on taking away his answer sheet, the student asked a pointed question: "Would you have done the same with Farah Dogar?" After a moment's silence, the teacher changed his mind and moved on. Is there a lesson somewhere here? ■

As could be expected of authorities who are too keen to spread knowledge one way or the other, the Board reached this wonderful decision, in the words of a senior official, "with a view to saving the academic