**Lost in Science**

**What truly matters is the interest—do our people have an interest in space, science, and technology?**

[Usama Asghar](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/usama-asghar)

March 22, 2024

On March 14, the world celebrat­ed the birthday of the brilliant physicist Einstein. The day could have been just another in the year, but it wasn’t. There were people in our history, or not-so-distant past, whose days we celebrate, and the reason behind remember­ing them even after centuries is their work and their lifetime dedication to a passion that has pushed the world forward; through their discoveries, inventions, ideas, and sometimes resistance. Anoth­er reason to remember them is to draw inspiration from their works and to let the new generation know about them so that they can carry on their legacy and take it to another level, where it will be passed on to the next generation. That’s the whole idea of remembering them. Hence, since we are discussing Ein­stein’s day, let’s stick to science.

Do you know who the current Minister of Science and Technology of our dear country is? Well, it really doesn’t mat­ter who it is, and it seems like the reason behind the creation of this ministry was to please those individuals who helped the treasury benches of the country to be called treasury benches. It was a gift to the individual whose one vote helped to elect the premier of our country. In­terestingly, according to the last budget report, this ministry cost us 8000 mil­lion rupees for nothing. The only memo­ries we have of this ministry are a mem­orable clash against the Ruait-E-Halal committee over deciding a date for Eid. Does that trigger any nostalgia? Be­cause, frankly, apart from that, I can’t recall any significant achievements of this ministry. Well, there is another one when the throne of this ministry was held by Fawad Chaudhary, he boldly pro­claimed that by the year 2022, we would have our first astronaut in space. It was an ambitious goal, but sadly, PTI didn’t survive that year. If it had, Fawad’s claim might have come true, and one of our own could have been exploring space by now. However, the only space available currently is within the confines of Twit­ter, or rather, it would have been, had it not been banned for a month now.

[BBC admits possible 'mistake' in coverage of genocide case against Israel](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Mar-2024/bbc-admits-possible-mistake-in-coverage-of-genocide-case-against-israel)

It seems like we’re lost in the realm of science, struggling to find our footing, and it’s evident in how we continuous­ly circle around the same issues with­out making much progress. The only time we truly intervened was to resolve the debate over EID, shedding light on where our scientific and technological priorities lie. Ironically, amidst all this, India quietly launched its rocket to the moon, facing setbacks in its initial at­tempt, yet the failure didn’t deter them. What truly mattered was the attempt it­self. Just recently, after two years, they successfully landed their space rock­et on the moon, earning praise from around the world, even from their sup­posed competitor, Pakistan. Though Pakistan may see itself as India’s com­petitor, the reality is India is far ahead of us to even be considered a true contend­er. It’s not merely about the budget allo­cated to these ministries in both coun­tries. India invests billions and achieves milestones like landing on the moon, while our country allocates only 8000 million, seemingly just to fill some arbi­trary achievement slot on the ministry’s website. Check it out; random numbers devoid of any real meaning are proud­ly displayed. So, clearly, money isn’t the crux of the issue here. What truly mat­ters is the interest—do our people have an interest in space, science, and tech­nology? I believe we do, otherwise, why would you be reading this piece, and why would I be writing it? We share a mutual interest in these topics.

[Police continue crackdown on profiteers](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Mar-2024/police-continue-crackdown-on-profiteers)

However, what truly counts is not just our interest but the state’s interest. In­dia’s government has a keen interest in these fields, demonstrated by their steadfast support for ISRO despite ini­tial failures, which ultimately led to suc­cess. Beyond mere interest, India has managed to grasp the essence of sci­ence and technology accurately. Unfor­tunately, and somewhat ironically, our state lacks interest in this domain, which is disheartening. The irony deepens as our state’s understanding of science and technology seems misguided. To them, real science involves uranium, and genu­ine technology must have wings capable of performing acrobatics in the sky, as will be showcased on March 23rd. This misinterpretation arises from the illu­sionary bubble of ultimate power, spe­cifically, hard power—the one they can control and comprehend. It’s the pow­er relevant only on battlefields, the only realm that matters to them. Everything else is secondary. What lies in space or how the moon’s surface feels wouldn’t protect them from their adversaries. This peculiar sentiment may be a blend of fear and insecurity: fear of being vul­nerable to enemies during rare instances and insecurity or uncertainty about pur­suing genuine science—what if it fails? Rather than taking risks, they choose to remain passive, watching others car­ry on the legacies of scientific minds like Einstein. But it’s not just about Einstein; it’s about every rational scientific mind and their legacies. We opt to sit back, al­lowing the illusionary bubble to swell until we’re at a bottleneck where it real­ly doesn’t matter what others are accom­plishing in science and tech.

[Health minister reviews projects of hospitals](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Mar-2024/health-minister-reviews-projects-of-hospitals)

The dilemma of our existence is that as the world progresses day by day, we regress. Every day the world achieves something, and we lose something. The countries achieving daily breakthroughs in the scientific world didn’t wait for the perfect time. Take Japan, for instance. De­spite enduring two consecutive atom­ic bombs, its morale plummeted. Did it wait for the chaos to settle before diving into science? No, it didn’t wait for perfect conditions or a thriving economy. Japan persevered amidst chaos, and the rest is history. Its resilience led it to become one of the scientifically rich countries in the world. The same applies to other na­tions like South Africa, China, Russia, In­dia, and South Korea. They too didn’t wait for their chaos to dissipate. However, it’s only us in this vast world who are actually wasting our chaos and hoping that when things will be perfect, when the econ­omy will be running like a bullet train, when there will be no external or inter­nal threat to the country, then we will di­vert our attention to this thing called ‘Sci­ence and technology.’ Well, at that point, there will be no chaos and definitely not the outcomes that we would be expect­ing. We are just wasting our chaos. We need to understand that this is the actu­al world and it has no perfect timing for anything. It’s just like that if you want something, you have to do it no matter what the circumstances are.

[E-Pay Punjab collects Rs400b revenue](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Mar-2024/e-pay-punjab-collects-rs400b-revenue)

Anyway, Happy belated birthday to Einstein! At the very least, this is one contribution we can make to the world of science: wishing birthdays.

**Usama Asghar**  
The writer holds a degree in International Relations. He tweets @usama\_1599 and can be reached at usama.maverick @gmail.com