

Pakistan: The Students' Herald — Magazine of students, by students, for students

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Welcome to the first edition of The Students' Herald, an endeavour by Progressive Students Collective to create an independent platform which represents voices of young people across the country, and beyond.

A dictatorial ban on student unions in Pakistan was instituted more than three decades ago. Since then, the social, economic and political life of students has been in a state of decline. Young people in colleges and universities – once at the forefront of social and political movements – have been stripped off their powerful legacy. Neoliberalism and the knowledge economy has turned students into subjugated bodies – only trained to obey and to become cogs in the giant machinery of this wretched socio-economic system.

Students are discouraged from questioning, thinking and criticising. Fear of repression on campuses prevents young people from giving voice to their genuine issues; whether it is the rising price of education, or harassment and discrimination on campuses, or the absence of adequate housing and campuses facilities, or the tragic dearth of scholarships and research opportunities. Over the decades, authoritarian tendencies in our educational institutions have strengthened. Securitization and militarization of universities is no secret; instead of serving as centres of learning, our universities resemble cantonments, where barbed wires and military personnel are deployed to police and surveil students. There is no systematic mechanism of accountability which ensures university administrations provide libraries, transport, hostels, canteens, internet facilities, safe drinking water and other basic necessities to their students.

The experience of private sector education is even worse. These institutions charge their students huge fees and bizarre additional charges. Yet, there is no guarantee that after paying such exorbitant amounts for their education, students will receive a valid degree. In 2018, there were 68,000 students in the Punjab alone who completed their four-year degree programmes after spending millions of rupees. In the end, they were given fake degrees. University administrations were serving, not to provide quality education, but to maximise their profits at the behest of their masters.

Pakistan's spending on education has been decreasing every year. Last year alone, the higher education budget was slashed by 45 percent, revealing the priorities of not only the ruling party – which came to power harnessing the energy and aspirations of young people – but also of the state itself. Collective voices of students remain absent from this woeful state of affairs, and thus it falls upon student themselves to not only build networks of solidarity, but also lasting representative platforms that further the cause of young people in this country.

The Students Solidarity March is a recent example of the power of organised, collective effort. The chorus of our voices echoed across the country on the day of the march. The thousands who marched opened the possibility for us to unite for our common struggles and build a fierce front

against the ruling order.

The Students' Herald is part of such efforts to build a collective platform for students of all backgrounds to document and share their experiences, concerns and issues. It is an attempt to learn from each other and grow together.

The Herald will function with the specific objective of uniting and advancing the burgeoning student movement in Pakistan. Although the weekly magazine will be centred on students and young people, we will bring other equally important local and global struggles on our pages. Since we are launching in the midst of a pandemic, our theme this week focuses on how education has been disrupted as a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns around the world. We hope you will enjoy the writings of our young contributors.

The Students' Herald

Editorial Notes, English

P.S.

- Posted in English on April 12, 2020:
<https://thestudentsherald.com/2020/04/12/editorial-notes/>