

By ZALI

### **Budget disappointment spans sectors**

HYDERABAD: Following the announcement of the national budget for the upcoming fiscal year, disappointment was evident among representatives of the education and agriculture sectors as well as businessmen and traders.

The Federation of All Pakistan Universities Academic Staff Association (FAPUASA) rejected the budget allocation for higher education institutes by the federal government.

In a statement issued on Saturday, FAPUASA vice president Dr Naimatullah Laghari said the amount for allocation proposed by the Higher Education Commission had been slashed by 33 per cent in the budget.

The federal government has proposed the allocation of Rs93 billion for HEC against the commission's demand of Rs146 billion. The budget set aside Rs64.1 billion for non-development expenditures and Rs29.4 billion for the development expenditures, whereas the HEC had asked the government to allocate Rs104.8 billion for non-development expenditures and Rs42.6 billion for the development.

Voicing opposition to the allocation, Dr Laghari said, "We reject this anti-education budget," and argued that leaving universities in financial straits for the second consecutive year was tantamount to destroying them.

Laghari further said that denying government employees an annual increment in salaries would affect them, including teachers, badly, given the state of inflation in Pakistan. He lamented that many development projects which should have been completed years ago were also delayed due to constrained allocation, adding that the FAPUASA would soon come up with a protest strategy against the budget.

Meanwhile, the Federation of All Pakistan Public Sector Universities Administrative Officers Association also deplored that the federal budget ignored unprecedented inflation while denying annual increment to the government employees.

"It came as a shock to all of us that no financial relief was provided to ordinary government employees in any way in this budget," the statement issued by the body read.

### **Agriculture**

The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture has also rejected the budget, terming the proposed allocation of Rs12 billion for the sector's development "grossly insufficient."

“The government has not shown any seriousness towards agriculture research for many decades, owing to which we have to import seeds for rice, cotton and other crops from foreign countries,” said the chamber’s general secretary Zahid Bhurgari.

Shedding light on the devastation being wreaked by locusts in the country, he said the budget also did not recommend any allocation for combating the menace. “This reflects the federal government’s complete disregard towards the destruction that the agriculture sector has been confronting,” he expressed dismay.

### **Business community**

Meanwhile, the Hyderabad Chamber of Small Trade and Small Industry (HCSTSI) maintained that the budget had failed to offer any provisions for improving the business climate in the country, especially at a time when the coronavirus-necessitated lockdown had sent the economy in freefall.

“The budget hasn’t provided any relief to the business community,” said HCSTSI president Doulat Ram Lohano on Saturday, adding, “Ignoring trade and industry will entail [unfavourable] repercussions for the economy.”

The chamber described the tax concessions for hotels, locally manufactured items like motorcycles, rickshaw and cement and relaxing the condition of providing NIC for transactions between Rs50,000 and Rs100,000 as “measures falling far behind the expectations of the business community.”

On the other hand, Hyderabad SITE Association of Trade and Industry chairperson Mazharul Haq Choudhry welcomed the budget and dubbed it “business-friendly,” especially in the wake of Covid-19 and its effects on the economy.

He, however, called for linking the pension of industrial workers with the minimum daily wage. “Pensioners will be badly affected by the reduction in pensions issued by the Employees Old-Age Benefits Institution from Rs8,000 to Rs6,500,” he said.