

Poor state of law studies

By Nadeem Saeed

MULTAN, Feb 1: The state of law education in southern Punjab is a source of concern in legal circles. Standards in government law colleges have deteriorated and many private law colleges are run as purely business concerns.

The other day in the chamber of a lawyer at the Multan District Courts, two young men were talking in undertones with a lawyer. When they left, the lawyer told this reporter that the youth were students of a private law college and were requesting lenient marking by the examiner of their Part-II paper, a lawyer in the adjoining chamber.

When asked whether the examiner concerned would agree, the lawyer said: "The examiner has agreed to let the young men identify their answer-sheets and also to do the desired favour."

This reporter went with the lawyer, now accompanied by the two students, to the house of the examiner. His assistant, a junior advocate, and six others, who were later discovered to be students of law, were bending over a heap of answer-sheets. Four of them found their answer-sheets and the assistant gave them appropriate marks, which came to an aggregate of 50 per cent of the total marks. This pass percentage is mandatory to qualify a part of the LLB examinations.

This is not a lone incident. It is learnt that a

large number of law students manage to get a list of examiners of their papers and start examiner-hunting drive after every examination. Many examiners, most of them practising lawyers, are said to respond "positively" due to social pressures while a few refuse and subsequently earn a bad name among their colleagues.

All universities have separate boards of studies for each department. According to the Bahauddin Zakaria University Act, 1975, functions of the board are (1) to advise the authorities on all academic matters connected with instruction, publications, research and examination in the subject or subjects concerned; (2) to propose curricula and syllabi for all degrees, diplomas and certificate courses in the subject or subjects concerned; (3) to suggest a panel of names of paper-setters and examiners in the subject or subjects concerned; and (4) to perform such other functions as may be prescribed.

Each board consists of (1) chairman of the teaching department concerned; (2) all professors and associate professors in the university teaching department; (3) three teachers of the subject including heads of department of the affiliated colleges where post-graduate teaching in the subject is being done to be appointed by the vice-chancellor; and (4) one teacher of the subject from outside the

department or preferably from any other university to be appointed by the vice-chancellor.

The board suggests a panel of three nominees for every paper as paper-setters and examiners in each subject. It sends the list of nominees to the vice-chancellor for final selection of one paper-setter and an examiner (or a panel of examiners).

In the case of the BZU's board of studies for law education, it comprises the principal of the university's Gillani Law College, an associate professor and lecturer, principals of three private law colleges, two of Multan and one from Sahiwal, and the principal of the Punjab University Law College.

There are five colleges affiliated with the BZU — Multan Law College, Multan Law College, Sahiwal, Central Law College, Multan, Musa Pak Law College, Multan, and the Indus Law College, Dera Ghazi Khan. Two more law colleges, one each from Multan and Sahiwal, have also applied for affiliation recently.

As private concerns, the main objective of most law teaching institutes is to earn money, which relates to the number of enrolments. The higher the enrolment, the higher the profits.

Owners of private colleges, who are in cases themselves principals, seek to get a list

of examiners or indications of the expected questions through their "sources" in the university. Their presence on the board of studies makes their task easy where learning the names of probable examiners is concerned.

The principal of a law college of Sahiwal has been linked to the university administration. The principal reportedly represented the daughter of a top BZU official in a petition moved against her appointment as lecturer.

It is the constitution of the boards of studies which perhaps leads to the identity of examiners becoming known to students.

The BZU's controller of examinations, Mr Shafiq Chaudhry, says his responsibilities start after the approval of paper-setters and examiners. "The controller's office has nothing to do with the selection of examiners," he adds.

Lawyers say the university sends papers to senior lawyers for marking and they often leave the task to be done by their juniors. The best way to end malpractice would be not to run after big names but rather have medium-level professionals as examiners and paper-setters. One lawyer stressed the transparent formation of boards of studies besides coopting a serving high court judge and a senior lawyer.