

**Record: 1**

A way to wage war on ignorance and poverty. By: Krauss, Lawrence. New Scientist. 3/14/2009, Vol. 201 Issue 2699, p23-23. 1p. Reading Level (Lexile): 1400.

**Database:** MAS Ultra - School Edition

**Section:** Opinion

**Commentary****A way to wage war on ignorance and poverty**

At last there's some good news to celebrate from the world of science, says Lawrence Krauss

THIS month will see my last two World lines columns for New Scientist which, judging by some of the email I have received, will be a source of celebration in some quarters. While I have sometimes used the opportunity afforded by this column to criticise developments that I perceive as dangerous - from governments cutting back on support for basic research, to creationists' meddling in school boards - this week I want to discuss a development I just learned about which is truly worth celebrating.

Over recent years there has been much violence reported from the war in Afghanistan against the fundamentalist Taliban, which has spilled over into Pakistan. But despite the military might we throw at the Taliban, winning the hearts and minds of the next generation in these regions may depend less on using bullets than books, and less on waging war than creating jobs. Educated minds are hopefully more open to the free exchange of ideas than minds that are closed in childhood. And gainful employment is often a cure for unrest and hatred.

As many people in developing countries have realised, the hope for economic progress in the 21st century lies in becoming technologically competitive - and such competitiveness depends on producing scientists and engineers. India is the poster child here. Anyone who has visited any of the Indian Institutes of Technology - where admission is harder than at Harvard University and graduation virtually guarantees a job in the growing technology sector- has seen how effective first-rate schools can be in contributing to raising a nation's standard of living.

This is why I was so heartened recently when I met my friend Bob Jaffe, a theoretical physicist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He told me about a remarkable experiment in Pakistan that he is a part of, in which a unique combination of private money, government support and intellectual leadership is helping to build the first private research school for science and engineering in that country, the School of Science and Engineering (SSE), part of the Lahore University of Management Sciences.

Developments so far have been encouraging. More than \$53 million in support has come in from individuals, government and industry - and world-class faculty are returning to Pakistan to participate in the new institution. Admission is merit-based and open to all, independent of gender and social or religious background, providing opportunities to outstanding students who need financial aid to make a new life.

As Jaffe says in a brochure about the new institution: "Access to world-class education opens the door to economic prosperity and personal creativity. Our vision is to bring transformational science and engineering education to Pakistan. Our goal is to ignite development at a fundamental level by educating the most promising young people of all backgrounds. We hope to end Pakistan's disastrous "brain drain" by expanding the national market for superbly trained scientists and engineers. SSE will seek out the best-prepared, most motivated students from all social and economic backgrounds. We will educate them and provide them the

skills and experience to succeed in the world... We believe that this is the most effective and positive way we can impact Pakistan's economic future."

It is developments like this that provide hope for the future. I wish all those at the SSE, and those who might be inspired to emulate this kind of institution elsewhere, the best of luck in using science and engineering to wage the war that really needs to be fought- the war on ignorance and poverty.

Lawrence Krauss is director of the Origins Initiative at Arizona State University in Phoenix

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By Lawrence Krauss

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