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NARC scientists and employees protest against Capital Development Authority's proposal to convert the NARC campus into a housing society on Park Road in Islamabad. INP

CDA operation against slums

Rabbani directs body to probe officials' involvement in slum creation

By Ijaz Kakakhel

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Mian Raza Rabbani on Wednesday directed Senate Standing Committee on cabinet secretariat to hold a thorough probe into highhandedness of Capital Development Authority (CDA) officials, who allowed building houses on a land at Sector III that had already been sold out.

He issued the orders after a detailed debate on an adjournment motion moved by Awami National Party (ANP) Senator Sitara Ayaz against the eviction of slums dwellers at sector III of capital in a massive anti-encroachment drive by the civic body with the help of the Islamabad police over the weekend.

The chairman said that the 'baboo' involved in facilitating the slum dwellers should be taken to task, adding if a politician can be held responsible after 15 years, why not the baboo. He directed the body that the date on which land was sold out to 490

allottees, as claimed by the government, should also be dug out, as why the civic body failed to remove the encroachment despite passage of so many years.

"Why CDA did not take any action and kept on facilitating the slums and finally evicted the dwellers after the court ordered to demolish them when the allottees of the land approached the court", he questioned.

"The CDA seems at fault. Why the people were accommodated twice despite knowing the land belongs to 490 allottees. It also needs to be determined whether the civic body took any action against its officials, if not, why", he added.

Senator Sitara said the police did not allow her to meet the people arrested on the spot, which is an assault on her dignity. She claimed the people living in slums were Pashtuns and had been living there since 1985.

"There were 6,000 registered voters while hardly 10 percent people could be Afghan refugees the people

whose shelters were demolished had no other place to live in, as their houses were destroyed in the ongoing war against terrorism", she maintained. Sitara demanded to compensate the victims by giving them alternate lands in the capital, besides withdrawing the FIRs registered against them under anti-terrorism act.

Senator Taj Haider of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) said that the poor contribute 83 percent of the indirect tax, through which the country is being run, while the rich enjoys at the taxpayers money, while it itself evades tax. He said that the FIRs against the peaceful citizens were quite shameful, which must be withdrawn.

Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed of Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) said that applying the anti-terrorism act on political activists is not acceptable. He said that slums dwellers are part of the society, and their importance was highlighted in a British drama - Slumdog Millionaire - directed by Danny Boyle in 2009.

Senator Farhatullah Babar said that credibility of the government was bulldozed when it carried out the operation against the slum dwellers of III. He said that there existed two sets of laws in the country, one for the rich and the other for the poor, adding the law is always applied on the poor while for the handful elite rich might is right.

He said the CDA officials who helped in erecting the slums should be made accountable as without the help of the civic body, it would not have been possible.

Winding up the debate, Sheikh Aftab, the state minister for parliamentary affairs said that the slum was demolished on the orders of a local court. He said that the land-owners who had made all the payments had approached the court, and the civic body had no option but to comply with the orders. He said that the land grabbers occupied the land twice, as people who were living there earlier had sold out their mud houses to someone else while others rented out these 'hamlets'.