



Minister to raise NARC land issue with PM

Published in Dawn, July 2nd, 2015

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research, Sikander Hayat Khan Bosan will implore Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to reject the Capital Development Authority's (CDA) summary seeking conversion of National Agriculture Research Council (NARC) land into a residential sector.

The decision to empower the minister to seek prime minister's intervention was taken at the meeting of board of governors of Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) on Wednesday.

In a unanimous resolution, the board of governors opposed the authority's summary sent to the prime minister.

The summary has sought conversion of 1250 acres being used for agricultural research by NARC, into a residential sector.

The board asked Mr Bosan, who serves as president of the board, to get the prime minister's approval to transfer of the land in the name of the PARC and the NARC.

The research infrastructure developed at the NARC over the past 40 years involved an expenditure of Rs108 billion from the national exchequer, and its replication at another location will not only be a Herculean task but unthinkable in the current financial crunch, PARC Chairman, Dr Iftikhar Ahmad informed the board of governors.

Dr Iftikhar said the justification provided by the CDA for shifting NARC from its present location had no sound grounds and even the master plan of Islamabad was against such moves.

The meeting deliberated on the achievements of NARC, and it was noted that the country would lose the gene bank and mother block of fruit orchards in case NARC was thrown out of the present location.

Presiding over the meeting, Mr Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan fully supported the existence of NARC at its present location, and acknowledged the contributions made by the centre in research and development of agriculture in the country.

Bosan said billions of rupees had been saved due to introduction of various technologies by NARC.

The minister pointed out that the development of rust-resistant wheat varieties had generated benefits of around Rs2,000 billion since 1989, while the centre contributed Rs273.54 billion towards controlling, managing and eradicating various animal diseases.

The displacement of NARC would be an imprudent measure and drastically affect the agricultural growth, he said.

Bosan termed the gene bank facility, preservation of insect and plant specimen for reference, as national assets.

The founding chairman of PARC, Dr Amir Mohammad, who is currently rector of a private sector university, termed the CDA's proposal as 'economic suicide'.

It was just because of research contributions by PARC that despite shrinkage of agricultural land in the past few decades, the country never witnessed food shortage, he emphasized while asking the government to out-rightly reject the CDA's proposal.

Secretary National Food Security and Research, Seerat Asghar telephonically participated in the meeting and said that NARC was a national asset and like all other institutions including hospitals, universities, NARC has great justification to be in the federal capital.

Abdul Majeed Nizamani, a member of the board, while taking part in the deliberations, said it seemed that anti-national actors were behind the move. "Such a decision could only be taken by traitors and not by patriots," he said.

The meeting was also attended by a number of former chairmen of PARC and member (agriculture) of the planning commission.