

Govt warned of protests on NARC issue

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan Kisan Ittehad has warned the government against shifting the agriculture research body to any other place, or else they will be left with no other option but to stage protests.

The representative body of farmers also cautioned the government to resolve their longstanding issues of imposition of GST and income tax as well as National Agricultural Research Council (NARC) issue till the end of this month or else they would start a protest campaign from the first week of August.

The farmers will be forced to block the roads and resort to sit-in in front of Parliament House, warned Khalid Mehmood Khokhar, President Pakistan Kisan Ittehad, at a press briefing. "It is our unanimous decision that in the larger national interest, we will not let NARC be destroyed, because the destruction of NARC will be the end of agriculture which will ultimately destroy the country's economy and lead to untold misery and feminine." The representatives of the farmers appealed to the Prime Minister to turn down the summary in the best interests of the nation, requesting him to direct the Capital Development Authority (CDA) for permanently transferring this land to NARC. The CDA has moved a summary for generating funds (Rs 150 billion) by converting the NARC land into a housing society through a private developer. The reason stated by the CDA is that with the passage of time, this area has become a hub of residential and commercial activities and agriculture research does not appear to be the foremost appropriate activity on this site.

There is no research and future planning in this sector and if any organisation is doing some good work for this sector the government is hell bent to destroy it, remarked Khokhar. "The world is busy in future marketing to sell and purchase agricultural yields that are yet to harvest while we have not been able to sell the rice crops of the past two years." He complained that India is giving 75 percent subsidy on agricultural inputs while Pakistan has imposed 17 percent GST on agri inputs and income tax on agricultural yields. Calling the imposition of income tax as extortion, he said unjust and bad policies have made the agri products expensive as compared to the neighbouring countries making it impossible for the farmers to export.

Instead of supporting the local farmers, the government is importing cheap products to further ruin this sector, he said. The land is fixed and limited while there is a continuous

growth in population but still food is not short even some food items and meat etc have been exported to more than a dozen countries of the world. It is due to the painstaking efforts of NARC, its competent agricultural scientists and hard work of our farmers, maintained Muhammad Altaf Sher, Director (International Cooperation)/ President of PARSA, at PARC/NARC. Since its establishment, NARC had contributed immensely in averting many national crises as well as bringing new knowledge and innovation in the country, he added. "The NARC is a national asset and in last 40 years this institution has earned repute at national and international levels. If unfortunately, it is shifted to any other place, it will not be able to revive its position for at least 100 years, but will rather die away." During the last 40 years, an estimated amount of Rs 50 billion has been spent on infrastructure development, laboratories and equipment, which nowadays values more than Rs 100 billion, he informed.

NARC has contributed billions of rupees to the country's economy, whereas CDA failed to develop a single sector in the last 25 years, he alleged. "CDA has been in collusion with land mafia. If CDA controls its own corruption from within, it can save more money than it could earn by selling NARC's precious research oriented land." "The chairman CDA has submitted a shameful proposal to the prime minister that by launching housing scheme in place of educational & research institutions, Rs 150 billion can be earned. If money is everything then by selling President, Prime Minister and Governor Houses, a lot more can be earned. F-9 Park and empty grounds can be sold to generate more money as can be earned in case of NARC," he opined. Do not make Islamabad like Karachi, they appealed. "Why people have died in Karachi? Because the temperature rose up. Temperature rose, because in Karachi land mafia illegally occupied and grabbed the parks and green areas and constructed lofty plazas, reducing flow of oxygen and polluted the environment," he said. Meanwhile, inspired by historical recommendations of the 1965 meeting of eminent scientists of that time in Swat, chaired by then President Ayub Khan, Pakistan Academy of Sciences convened a meeting of top scientists of the country recently here at the Academy's headquarter.

The meeting in Swat, organised jointly by Pakistan Academy of Sciences and National Science Council, had made 20 recommendations for the development of science & technology including a salient recommendation of allocating 2% of GDP for science & technology in the federal budget. After a lapse of 50 years, in 2015 it was noted with a serious concern that most of those recommendations were not heeded to till today, resulting in deplorable state of science & technology and, hence, of the national economy. The

leading experts believed that investing up to 3.5% of GDP in science, technology and innovation can be “the game changer” to help alleviate poverty, reduce inequalities, increase income and improve health. Therefore, the top scientists of the country observed with serious concern that a meagre allocation of 0.2% of GDP for science & technology in the federal budget has resulted in deplorable state of science & technology. To improve upon this situation, it was unanimously urged that the budget allocation for science & technology must be enhanced to 1% of GDP immediately.

The top scientists also resolved to launch an effective media campaign to educate the public and decision-makers about salient achievements of scientific organisations and thus about the crucial need and benefits for allocating 2% of GDP for science & technology in the federal budget. The meeting also urged the government to always appoint an eminent scientist as federal secretary of ministry of science & technology, instead of a bureaucrat, to appoint an eminent scientist as advisor on science to prime minister with the status of minister for easy access to the decision-makers; and reviving the National Science Council which has got redundant since the past 50 years. A resolution was adopted unanimously to save NARC Islamabad from the land mafia. The prime minister was asked to turn down the CDA summary for conversion of NARC's 1400 acres of research farm into a housing scheme at the cost of national food security; rather CDA must be directed to immediately extend the NARC land lease for 90 years.

The meeting was participated by President of Pakistan Academy of Sciences (PAS), Dr Anwar Nasim, Secretary General PAS, Prof Dr Zabta K Shinwari, Vice President of Islamic World Academy of Sciences, Prof Dr MD Shami, Coordinator General of COMSTECH, Dr Shaukat Hameed Khan, Advisor (Science) COMSTECH, Prof Dr Qasim Jan; Executive Director of COMSATS, Dr Imtihan Qureshi; Chairman of Pakistan Science Foundation, Prof Dr Muhammad Ashraf; Chairman of Pakistan Council for Science & Technology, Prof Dr Anwar-ul-Hassan Gilani; Chairman PARC, Dr Iftikhar Ahmad; and President of ECO Science Foundation, Dr Manzoor H Soomro.

The scientists resolved to work tirelessly under the umbrella of National Science Complex. It was decided to meet once every three months to review the situation and formulate future line of action.