

DAWN

Islamabad, Monday 22 June 2015, 4 Ramazan 1436

Logic of the real estate business

Parc spokesperson Sardar Ghulam Mustafa claims that the CDA is planning to develop 6,000 plots on Narc's land to earn Rs100bn in one year, apart from Rs30-50bn from the auction of commercial plots

By Amin Ahmed

AGRICULTURAL research — essential for food security — will receive a setback due to Islamabad's development authority's decision to convert 1,250 acres of land, which is being used for such research, into a housing scheme.

The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has decided not to extend the lease to the National Agricultural Research Centre (Narc), which was established in 1984 at Chakshahzad in Islamabad. Many donor institutions providing financial and technical support are located at the Narc's premises.

Under the master plan for Islamabad, Chakshahzad had been designated for farm production. The Narc, administered by the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (Parc), was set up to promote agricultural research.

The CDA plans to demolish the apex centre, including the premises of its 18 allied institutes doing research in various

disciplines of agriculture. In a summary sent to the prime minister, the CDA has attempted to convince the chief executive that it would make tremendous financial gains if a mammoth housing society is created in the land presently occupied by the Narc.

It has stated that the housing scheme on the 1,250 acres of Narc land will be more lucrative than the 'Park Enclave,' from which the CDA earned Rs175m from auctioning 154 plots.

When the authority's official version was sought, its spokesperson came out with a simple answer: the lease for the land occupied by the Narc had expired several years ago, and that the CDA can retrieve its land.

However, Parc Chairman Dr Iftikhar Ahmed said the council has been regularly paying the lease money to the CDA, and payments have been made up to the year 2015.

The CDA's decision has attracted strong reactions from farmers and agri-

cultural scientists.

Parc's founding chairman, Dr Amir Muhammad, was quite upset after learning about the CDA's plans. He described the move as an attempt to ruin the agriculture sector. He referred to the Indian agricultural research centre, which is located in the centre of New Delhi, and is being expanded by the Indian government.

"We have to save this national asset and will do our utmost," said Malik Shakir Bashir Awan, chairman of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research. The issue would be taken up with the prime minister, he added.

The Parc believes that the land mafia has been eyeing Narc's valuable land for a long time, and when the 'Park Enclave' scheme gained popularity, the real estate mafia and the CDA worked out their plan to take over the land.

In the view of the Parc scientists, any move to remove the Narc from Chakshahzad will send a negative signal

across the world. It is feared that Pakistan will be deprived of technical and financial assistance from world bodies and foreign collaboration in the field of agricultural research would face a great setback. Moreover, international institutions, which operate from the Narc, may suspend their assistance.

Parc spokesperson Sardar Ghulam Mustafa claims that the CDA is planning to develop 6,000 plots on Narc's land to earn Rs100bn in one year, apart from Rs30-50bn from the auction of commercial plots.

The CDA believes that the Narc land is no longer suitable for agricultural research since the area would become a commercial and housing centre in the years to come, Sardar Mustafa said.

The Pakistan Agricultural Research Council Scientists Association, the representative body of agricultural scientists, and the employees' body EPARC have appealed to the prime minister to reject the CDA's proposal. ■