

Decision of Sindh High Court on Agriculture related tax collection

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Dear Friends,

Regards and thanks to all those encouraging and appreciating for the success that will benefit to all farmers especially small farmers all over Sindh and also can be a precedent for farmer community in other provinces. Now it is possible for farmers to refuse paying the agricultural taxes in cash and insist the revenue officials concerned to issue bills like other utility bill e.g. telephone, electricity, gas etc and to opt paying the bills in scheduled banks. Because in cash recovery of agriculture related taxes from farmers were causing corruption and more than five-fold over collection from the farmers since decades. The honourable court has ordered to give option to the tax payers to pay the amount to scheduled banks. However issue of wrong bill - over billing like other utilities is comparatively easy to address.

On this occasion I would appreciate and acknowledge the villagers of Union Council Layari District Khairpur Mirs' refusing to pay the tax without issuance of bill in 2006 and started a campaign that was joined by farmer community all the Province especially in Shikarpur, Sukkur, Sanghar, Hyderabad, Tando Allahyar, Dadu, Badin, Shahdadkot and other districts. The matter was made easier to understand for every one through a comprehensive study in Khairpur district by interviewing 800 farmers (100 farmers in each Taluka / Tahsil) and got a signed statement from each farmer that how much they paid without issuance of bills and when the paid amount was compared with actual schedule of taxes available with revenue department but not circulated usually - found five fold over collection. The study report was prepared voluntarily by a group of social, political and youth activists led by Jabbar Khaskheli and study circulated widely in the province.

Following the study farmers from Khairpur, Shikarpur, Tando Allahyar and Sanghar filed a petition through seasoned and prominent legal practitioner Barrister Zamir Ghumro in Sindh High Court Hyderabad Bench. Veteran and seasoned activist Taj Marri was given attorney powers by a number of farmers to file the petition on their behalf.

Here I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Khadim Mirani, Haji Latif Dino Buriro, Dr Irshad Mahar, Punahl Sario, comrade Ramzan Memon, Muhammad Ali Lashari, Khadim Ansari, Akbar Lashari, Ghaffar Pandrani, Comrade Qadir Bux Seelro, Fateh Marri, Munawar Hassan Memon, Azhar Lashari (Islamabad), Khadim Hussain (Islamabad) and many many other friends to contribute in mobilizing the farmers and other stakeholders so that this cruel practice was recognized by concerned civil society actors and led the mobilization process towards conclusion.

I think the issue is not resolved so far all friends must congratulate each other however we all need to be vigilant for mobilizing farmers for demanding the bills from revenue officials. Although honourable court has directed to circulate the bill through newspapers especially Sindhi newspapers having circulation among farmer community however all civil society actors including political parties should come forward to ensure the implementation of the decision that is only possible when farmers will be demanding the bills and insisting to pay taxes through scheduled banks instead cash to revenue officials.

This aims to explain the context of decision and also to share.

High regards

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P.S.

* From SPN email list.