

# Lahore seminar on “Food Crisis: Sovereignty in Food”

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**For the preparation of this seminar, see: [Seminar on Food Crisis and Food Sovereignty planed in Lahore](#)**

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The Pakistan Kissan (peasant) Rabita Committee in collaboration with South Asia Alliance for Poverty Alleviation and Action Aid Pakistan organized a one-day seminar on “Food Crisis: Sovereignty in Food” at a local hotel in Lahore. It was chaired by Anjuman Mozareen (tenants association) Punjab vice-president and Lahore Bengali Farms tenants leader Mian Muhammad Ashraf, while noted agriculturist and adviser to Punjab chief minister Asif Ashraf, Sindh Hari Tehrik (tenant movement) leader Anwar Ali Rind, Anjuman Mozareen general secretary and union council nazim Mehr Abdul Sattar and Labour Party Pakistan women secretary Nazli Javed were other speakers. Labour Party spokesperson Farooq Tariq was the moderator.

The seminar was originally to be held on October 16 to mark the world food day. Mr Tariq told the audience that it had to be postponed because of the problems the delegates from outside Lahore might have faced in the wake of extraordinary security measures taken after October 15 terrorists hits at three sensitive places in the city. Welcoming the participants coming from other cities like Faisalabad and Okara, he said although only farmers leaders had been invited to the event, representatives of some social organizations were also joining it and they were welcomed too. He invited Ms Javed to open the discussion by introducing the topic.

Ms Javed said the proposition pointed to two issues-crisis and sovereignty. Referring to the first issue, she talked of the problems, humiliation and torture the masses had to face in the wake of ongoing wheat flour and sugar crises. When the people were made to line up in long queues and suffer police baton charge for obtaining a small quantity of the commodities. She lamented at the power crisis that was causing closure of all businesses and subsequent retrenchments adding to the miseries of the poor workers. Terming it a result of government’s wrong policies, she said parliamentarians, who also happened to be industrialists, never materialized the promises they made with their voters and looked after only their vested interest-licences for more mills, getting new bank loans while getting written off the earlier ones.

She said the neo-colonialism was now raising the ownership issue in that lands would be cultivated by poor farmers but their produce would be lifted by big multi-national companies in the name of corporate farming. Thus, large tracts of poor states would be used for producing crops for the people of rich countries, leaving the poor high and dry. She said that besides Saudi Arab, a country considered to be a reliable friend of Pakistan, Abu Dhabi and UAE were seeking vast tracts of land in Pakistan.

She held governments responsible for global warming as official authorities were conniving with multinational corporations in providing legal covers to the latter's activities disastrous for environment.

Ms Javed also referred to the problems facing women folk, 51 percent of the total population, and the vital role they were playing in agriculture sector-from sowing of seeds up to packing of the produce.

Demanding a review of the incumbent agriculture policy, she said the farmers should be provided interest-free loans for farm inputs and machinery. She also sought tax-free oil supplies, provision of uninterrupted electricity supply for tube-wells, giving farmers rights at their resources, effective agriculture reforms, and ownership rights to women. She urged farmers' representatives to forge unity among their ranks for effectively pressing the government for their rights. She strongly condemned the terrorist incidents and stressed that it is high time to raise a voice against the perpetrators of these heinous crimes.

Then Mian Asif Sharif was invited to speak his mind. A progressive farmer and researcher who takes credit for introducing new varieties of rice as well as inventing farm machinery, he was speaking at a public forum for the first time. He said the main problem facing the farmers was lack of knowledge related with crop production techniques. He lamented that there was not a single agriculture school operating in the country where 70 percent population was related with agriculture. He said growth in production could solve even the terrorism problem as none with financial resources would be ready to become a suicide bomber.

He held poor planning and unchecked use of resources as responsible for the crises facing the country. He said political leadership was not allowing poor peasants use available resources for fear of seeing the poor getting out of their control. Accepting the blame for introducing the term of corporate farming in the present set-up, he clarified that he did not mean what was being projected by the government under the term. "What I mean by corporate farming is doing planned farming and not leasing thousands of acres of lands to individuals."

Consoling the audience, he said under the law not more than 12-1/2 acres of state land could be leased out to any individual while the allottee should also be a Pakistan national. He, however, urged to peasants' leaders to continue raising their voice against corporate farming to avert any eventuality.

He called for introducing collective farming concept under which several small land holders would contribute in purchase of farm machinery but its use would rest with one person who would also take the maintenance responsibility.

With the help of a projector, Mian Sharif also explained his latest research in paddy crop. He said with the techniques and machines invested by him, water and fertilize use could be reduced by 60 percent while the output could be increased by three-fold.

Mr Rind appreciated the idea of gathering peasants' leaders from across the country and providing them an opportunity to share their experiences. He said the food crisis was severe in the countries where governance system was flawed and leadership was corrupt. He regretted that in Pakistan he who would get a license from the US would rule Islamabad. Referring to the infamous National Reconciliation Ordinance, he said heinous cases like of murders were withdrawn while those blamed to be involved in theft of goats were serving prison terms.

Criticizing the feudalism prevalent especially in Sindh province, he said there were hundreds of

thousands of landless peasants while there were feudal lords holding 30,000 and more acres of land. He said food scarcity would end on the day when feudal system would be abolished.

Mr Sattar, who is also secretary of the Kissan Committee, lamented that two percent population was consuming 90 percent of the national resources since the creation of the country. He expressed his concern that grip of the feudal lords was increasing day by day because the tenants were disunited and lacked trusted leadership. The government under influence of the feudal lords was framing policies that were the most damaging for small farmers.

He regretted that the rulers were obtaining foreign loans for their luxuries while the conditions attached with these loans were hitting the common people. He lauded the collective farming idea of Mr Sahrif as positive but said that the poor farmer could avail benefits of the new technology only if they would have resources.

Referring to the gains made by tenants of military farms, he said if unity and sacrifices could bring a change to a certain area then the same was possible in the whole country.

Demanding agriculture reforms, he said land ownership should be transferred from army to tenants, agriculture schools should be opened at tehsil level while the concept of collective farming should be introduced.

Labour Party's Seraiki Wasaib general secretary Suhail Javed said a silent tsunami of food scarcity is encircling the world and its impact would be the severest in the developing nations. The basic reason behind this crisis, he said, was that multinationals were occupying food sources and agriculture sectors of the developing world.

He regretted that under pressure from world donor agencies farm subsidies were being withdrawn while the menace of corporate farming was on the rise. Its solution, he said, was organizing a movement of tenants like the one being organized in Sindh province.

Mr Tariq tabled four resolutions which were unanimously approved by the house. These were:

- This house demands an end to corporate farming and doling out of lands to foreign countries;
- It seeks distribution of state land among tenants and landless peasants;
- It also demands abolition of the feudal system;
- The house condemns withdrawal of murder cases against ethnic outfit MQM's activists and opposes this group's alleged plans of bloodshed in Sindh;

It also expresses solidarity with the 800-km long march of the Sindh Hari Tehrik launched from Kundhkot.

Summing up the discussion, Mian Ashraf stressed that the peasants would be unable to solve their problems until they did not come out on roads.