

# Corporate

*by Muhammad Ramzan*

**A**fter the introduction and induction of International Power Plants (IPP's) corporate farming is being introduced in the country with still graver and more serious implications. The IPP's in the form of thermal power generating international companies found their way into Pakistan during the regime and with the blessings of Benazir Bhutto. The concept under which they were accommodated was the same as the present government is drumming for corporate farming. That is inviting the foreign investment. The economists, intellectuals, writers, journalists and knowledgeable people are well aware of the way these MNC's (IPP's) are sucking our blood and impairing our economy but now there is no way out to get rid of them. The present government is helpless. Lt. General Zulfikar Ali, chairman WAPDA, in spite of expressing his grave concern, has to tolerate them because of the legal complications, compulsions and pressure of the international agencies and financial institutions. The position is that, "what cannot be cured must be endured."

However, corporate farming, as is being envisaged, is likely to cause still graver repercussions than IPP's and has the potential to prove more harmful than East India Company, because of which the Mughal rulers lost their kingdom and the people of the sub-continent lost their freedom. We must view the concept of corporate farming in the present international scenario, when America is trying to establish its foot-hold in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asian states for several strategic reasons, including

besieging China, planning to tap oil reserves in the area of Caspian sea and solidifying and strengthening its hegemony in this region, besides curbing the Islamic world. In this situation, if the programme of corporate farming is implemented in accordance with the terms and conditions as set out by our decision makers, we will be just fulfilling the foreign agenda—the agenda of America, Israel and India. No sensible man would deem it a rhetoric. That is how the ground realities are speaking loud and clear.

Feudalism in our country and in our culture is well entrenched, deeply routed and dominating. Poor tenants and peasants are always at their mercy. Instead of protecting the overwhelming majority of small land owners, tenants and peasants, the government is readily doing away with the land ceilings as specified in the former land reforms to pave the way for corporate farming. This will bring further greater boom to feudalism.

The condition of minimum investment of \$ 430,000 has altogether been relaxed. Investors have been authorised to remit dividends and profits abroad, without any restriction. They would be authorised to fix the rates of agricultural products keeping in view the national and international market factors. They will also be expected to construct storages for grains and cold storages for vegetables and fruit. They will be expected to export these commodities to earn valuable foreign exchange. Thus they will be in a position to resort to black-marketing, by creating artificial shortage and by shooting up the prices. Creating famine-like situation will not be difficult for them. In the past, we have experienced that stockists used to create artificial shortage as in the case of sugar. They used to

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export sugar to India and when there was shortage of sugar in the market, they would import it from India at still higher cost to earn double profits, first by exporting and then by importing sugar. That's what our own stockists and traders have been doing and what can't we expect from the alien multi-national companies, which will be enjoying so many relaxations, reliefs and concessions.

According to the data collected by the revenue department, the

like from their dividends and profits. It means there will be no check valve to retain a share of the profits for utilisation in the country. They will thus be capable of giving a setback to our economy. People genuinely think that corporate farming is another trap laid by the great powers, international financial institutions and the states hostile to Pakistan to further impoverish Pakistan.

The most important and pertinent point on which there are no two

took on lease and by outright purchase some areas of Palestine and now the Palestinian have been turned into a virtually landless race. They are being massacred, humiliated ruthlessly and inhumanly by Israel. Their own land seems to be skipping and sliding from under their feet because of their blunders. We must, therefore, avail possibility of any such eventuality.

Allotting 36 million acres of Pakistan's land or a major part thereof to foreign multi-nationals

need to be more careful and cautious to safeguard our strategic spots and nuclear installations and that is only possible if we do not run the risk of inviting the MNC's to work in Pakistan under the guise of corporate farming.

It will be a gesture of goodwill and act of prudence if the government distributes its surplus lands on long lease/ptta or sell it out at affordable process (in easy instalments) to our agriculture graduated and post graduates, who are professionally qualified in different disciplines of agriculture like agronomy, horticulture, soil sciences, live-stock management, fish farming, poultry farming, cattle breeding, forestry, food technology, etc. This will stand them in good stead as the government is unable to provide them with suitable job opportunities commensurate with their skills and qualification. Of course, they deserve to earn their livelihood respectably by using their know-how, technologies and skills on the lands allotted to them. Similarly, the tenants and farm labour, who have rehabilitated the government's land for cultivation by toiling ceaselessly for years and years deserve to be allotted such areas of government land much more than others for their subsistence as per the commitments of the government for poverty alleviation in the country, as it has appreciably done for haris in Kachha area so the Sindh. Then there is a good number of educated and semi-educated young people with rural and agricultural background. They may also be helped out by allotting lands at subsistence level, measuring 12 acres each on easy terms to end their economic difficulties and let them stand on their feet. A large number of Pakistanis working abroad, with rural background, will surely be interested to make

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government's land measuring 36 million acres have been reserved for this scheme, obviously for leasing to the multi-national companies. These MNC's will enjoy tax holiday on the agricultural production and land holding for certain period. No tax will be levied on the agricultural machinery that they will import for corporate farming. No labour law will be applicable upon the farm labour to be hired by them. Moreover, they will be authorised to remit any amount of money that they will

opinions amongst the patriotic elements of Pakistan is that the land of Pakistan must belong to Pakistanis and not to foreigners. Recalling the historical facts, East India Company when stepped on the soil of India, it took on lease the Calicut seaport and later on it engulfed the entire sub-continent of Indo-Pak, which became a colony of the British empire. Similarly, Jews from all over the world started thronging into Palestine after World War II. They

cannot be a risk free venture by any stretch of imagination. Most of the land reserved for the purpose is stretched along Pakistan-India borders starting from Bahawalpur/ Rahimyar Khan division. It also falls along highways, roads, rail tracks and banks of our canals and rivers as well as in the coastal areas of Pakistan. From the security point of view, these are most sensitive spots and it will be hazardous to lease these areas to aliens. We must also

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investment in this sector. They may also be invited and considered for allotment of lands on easy terms with suitable incentives to enable them to participate in the country's economic development and also to benefit by making investment for this purpose.

Another well founded fear is that foreign MNC's involved in corporate farming will not only be having a complete hold over agricultural products in raw material form but they will also be able to earn a lot by food processing and by preparing value added food products using their advanced technology and managerial skills while the local farmers and entrepreneurs will be losers in all respects.

If the government is really interested in revolutionising agriculture, it should consider the suggestions offered herein and must also resolve to solve the problems being faced by the small land-owners and farmers in Pakistan. India has set a good example in this regard. Farmers in East Punjab are being provided with many facilities, including free electricity, fertilisers at competitive rates, soft agricultural loans and marketing facilities of their harvested crops. The result is naturally most encouraging and East Punjab is serving as food basket for the whole of India. On the other hand, it is very sad and agonising that in Pakistan while the government fixes the fate of wheat at Rs 300, the poor farmers has to sell it at Rs 240-260 per 40 KGs. There are many such problems being faced by our land owners and farmers which need to be addressed with right earnest, vigilance and sense of responsibility. What they need is not media projection by the government functionaries but a real, sincere and practical solution of their problems. ■