

LAND REFORMS

Land reforms should be initiated not only for social justice to the oppressed poor peasants but to generate rural development, increase farm output and halt rural to urban migration. A substantial exportable surplus in agricultural is a good source of foreign exchange earnings

Land reforms efforts in this region began in 1930 when the oppressed *Haris* formed the *Sind Hari Committee* to agitate for their rights. The Indian Muslim League met in 1937 and resolved, "Radical and reforms were required to eliminate the existing socio-economic inequality cause by feudalism. The Muslim League government in Sind appointed a Tenancy Legislation Committee (TLC) in 1943, to consider tenancy rights for the *haris*. The TLC submitted its Report in 1945, granting conditional tenancy rights to *haris*. G. M. Syed opposed it and suggested unconditional tenancy rights to *haris* and resumption of all big estates by the State. The Government quietly filed the TLC Report.

An Agrarian Committee (AC) was appointed in April 1949, which submitted its Report in July 1949. It recommended liquidation of *jagirdaris* in toto and *zamindaris* above the ceiling of 150/300/450 acres irrigated / unirrigated / *barani*, and levying tax on farm incomes at par with non-farm incomes.

Feudalism in east Pakistan had been abolished in early 1951 and the balance of power had shifted from the feudal lord to the peasant class This had caused panic amongst the feudal lords of West Pakistan. The PML disintegrated and lost power around 1957 due mainly to its heavy dependence on the landlords. General Ayub, who took over in October 1958, appointed a "Land Reforms Commission" for West Pakistan. The Commission submitted its report in January 1959. It recommended abolition of *jagirdaris* without and *zamindaris* with compensation: proprietary rights to all tenants: resumption of *zamindars'* lands in excess of prescribed ceiling and its redistribution to landless tillers. It fixed the ceiling at 500/1000 acres of irrigated/unirrigated lands, plus orchards and *shikargahs* for each landlord. He/she was also allowed to gift a certain amount of land among family and friends.

After the sad debacle of East Pakistan in December 1971, Z. A. Bhutto took over the reins. He introduced land reforms in 1972. He set the ceiling of 150/300 acres of irrigated/unirrigated land for each landlord. He introduced another reform in January 1977 by reducing the ceiling to 100/200 acres and imposing income tax on big farmers. But in the meanwhile, General Zia-ul-Haq took over on July 5, 1977 and halted Bhutto's 1977 reforms.

According to a 1981 study by Dr. Mahmood H. Khan, the landlords illegally re-accumulated 2000-3000 acres irrigated land, in excess of the ceiling of 500 acres fixed in the 1959 reforms. They managed to raise the fixed ceiling of 100 acres up to 930-1120 acres in the 1972/77 reforms. As per Dr. Rahmab Sobhan's 1993 study, only three percent farm land was resumed and distributed to only 2 percent of the country's poor peasants in the three land reforms. The geopolitical position of Pakistan demands urgent abolition of feudalism. By doing so, we shall expand agriculture, revive industry and boost our collapsing economy. The present regime is in the best position to liquidate feudalism.

We must have a sound economic base and a genuine democracy in the country. Any delay or hesitation or lack of courage to liquidate feudalism would be disastrous.