

Demo calls for climate emergency, end to real estate on agri land

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LAHORE: Many farmers and members of civil society demonstrated near Charing Cross on The Mall to call on the government to declare a climate emergency in order to address the climate crisis.

Locals of Khuda ki Basti, and students from various city-based educational institutions were also among the demonstrators.

The protesters carried signs and banners with inscriptions condemning unlawful land grabs and the destruction of their homes and farmland for agriculture. The protesters also presented a charter of demands that the government declare a climate emergency to deal with the impending crisis, launch a flood relief package for the flood victims, and carry out a comprehensive project of reconstruction and rehabilitation.

According to the charter, the government must stop expanding real estate trends that are consuming tens of thousands of hectares of agricultural land. If these real estate practices—which are supported by financiers associated with political parties and governmental agencies—go unchecked, they will not only drive millions of farmers out of business but also result in a severe food shortage.

It also includes putting an end to encroachment along the River Ravi, where farmers are being pushed off their land as part of a state project to build a housing society for the rich; and holding factories accountable for polluting the air, soil, and water in Sharifpura, Chungi Amer Sidhu, and dozens of other working-class neighbourhoods in Lahore and elsewhere.

The protesters sought safe drinking water free of lead and other hazardous chemical components, which is a fundamental right of every person, as well as the establishment of a well-connected and reasonably priced public transit network to make Lahore's air breathable.

It includes putting in place effective pre-disaster management and planning measures for rural and urban settlements, forging a South Asia-wide and Global South-wide alliance to demand reparations for Third World countries for the historical as well as climatic injustices carried out by countries in the Global North; and the full cancellation of debt in order to allow Pakistan to deal with its trade deficit.

One of the speakers, Ammar Ali Jan, said Pakistan was suffering from the pollution of other countries, including America and the European Union, due to industrial global warming.

He demanded that all these industrial countries causing pollution should suspend collection of debt from Pakistan and resources should be used to help flood-affected people of the country.

He said the government should also terminate RUDA-type projects and should also stop demolishing

agricultural land.

He said the residents of Chungi Amar Sidhu were suffering from diseases after using toxic water and air and the government should take measures to provide safe drinking water to the people of the city.

Farooq Tariq said that they were raising their voice for climate justice in the country and that the government should abolish all anti-climate projects.

He said the people of the country were suffering from floods, especially farmers, and their agriculture and fish farms were damaged during the flood.

He demanded that the government pay Rs500,000 per farmer for damages to their agriculture, fruit and fish farms and the farmers should also be provided subsidies to build their houses.

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