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LHC Halts Land Acquisition for Industrial Estate in Gujrat

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The Lahore High Court on Wednesday issued a stay order restraining the Punjab Small Industries Corporation (PSIC) and other respondents from acquiring cultivated land in Mauza Sarai Dhing, Gujrat, for the development of a new Small Industries Estate.

Justice Khalid Ishaq presided over the hearing of a petition filed by 50 local landowners, including lead petitioner Badarud Din. The petition challenges the move to convert agricultural land into an industrial zone, calling it a threat to both food security and constitutional rights.

The court ordered the PSIC to present full records related to its existing industrial estates across Punjab. This includes details on how many estates have been established, how many are currently operational, the number of industries functioning within them, how many plots remain unused, and whether any land originally designated for industry has been diverted to real estate ventures.

Legal counsel for the petitioners, Advocate Mubeenud Din Qazi and Advocate Rohail Rehman Qazi, argued that the compulsory acquisition of productive agricultural land violates Article 9 of the Constitution, which safeguards the right to life. They further referenced the 26th Constitutional Amendment and Article 9-A, asserting that the right to a clean and sustainable environment has now been enshrined as a fundamental right.

The bench acknowledged the seriousness of the issue, emphasizing the broader environmental and food security consequences of losing fertile land to industrialization. The court pointed out the need to balance development with constitutional protections and questioned the necessity of acquiring new land while industrial plots elsewhere remain vacant or underutilized.

In light of these concerns, the court placed a temporary halt on the acquisition process and instructed PSIC to submit a comprehensive report before the next hearing.

The matter has been adjourned pending further review of the records and legal arguments. The case highlights growing tensions between development initiatives and the preservation of agricultural resources in Punjab.