

Political consensus reached over land acquisition Bill

The government on Thursday achieved a consensus with Opposition parties on the land acquisition Bill, at an all-party meet here. This would enable it to introduce the revised Bill in Parliament during the ongoing session, which resumes on Monday.

It would also mean scrutiny of all private purchase of land between 2011 and 2013, besides a provision to enable state legislation on leasing in place of acquisition of land.

The Bill, which places resettlement and rehabilitation on the same footing as acquisition for the first time, is to replace the Land Acquisition Act, 1894.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Thursday agreed on tabling of the Bill, saying 12 of the amendments proposed by it had been accepted by the government. One of these is, instead of acquisition, land should be leased to developers, so that the ownership remains with farmers and provides them a regular income. The government has agreed to amend the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2011, to provide for an enabling provision to states for enacting laws in this regard; leasing of land is a state subject under the Constitution.

Another concern raised by BJP leader Sushma Swaraj was about the acquisition of 1,000 acres of land between 2011 and 2013, during the drafting of the Bill and its revisions. She said land mafias were trying to acquire land cheaply before the Bill came into operation.

The government has agreed to scrutinise all sale of land after September 5, 2011, and ensure payment of 50 per cent of compensation to farmers in all cases till May 2013.

However, Left parties like CPI(M) maintained they still had differences with the government and insisted the revised Bill be sent to a standing committee or select committee of Parliament. It was, they said, very different from what the recommendations of the earlier standing committee report had said. It is a totally new Bill, said CPI(M) head, Basudeb Acharia.

"There was a secret agreement between the Congress and BJP," he said. "While BJP had been vocal in demanding the Bill be referred to a standing committee at the previous all-party meet, it was silent on this today."

Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh said the Left parties should table amendments to the Bill, which Parliament could vote on.

On Thursday's meeting was also attended by Opposition leader in the Rajya Sabha, Arun Jaitley; Ramgopal Yadav (SP), D Raja (CPI), B Mahtab (BJD), Sharad Yadav (JD-U) and M Thambidurai and V Maitreyan (AIADMK). Ramesh had been constantly meeting Opposition leaders to build a consensus. Last week, he had met BJP's Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley, besides some Left leaders.

(Business Standard)