

# RGICS



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# RGICS BRIEF ANALYSIS

**(14 April 2015)**

## **LAND ACQUISITION ORDINANCE**

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## Land Acquisition Ordinance, 2014

### AMENDMENT OF LAND ACQUISITION ORDINANCE

#### Key Message

All restraints on taking land have been removed. As a result, a very large number of farmers and poor people will be thrown out of their land. The benefits they receive under the law will also be severely curtailed because of the exemption of the bulk of land acquisition from having to identify negative impacts on people through Social Impact Assessment. The overall impact of the Ordinance will be to increase social unrest arising from a massive increase in immediate displacement without careful consideration and mitigation of adverse impacts.

The BJP led NDA Government, in order to appease its allies, incorporated some amendments to the Land Bill before introducing it in the Lok Sabha. Thus, the Right to Fair Settlement and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Amendment) Bill, 2015 was introduced and passed in the Lok Sabha on March 10, 2015. However, it was never introduced in the Rajya Sabha. One day before the first Ordinance was to lapse, another Ordinance was re-promulgated on April 3, 2015 with President Pranab Mukherjee giving his assent to it.

**However, most of these amendments are merely superficial in nature. No effort has been made by the government to deal with the most substantial issues of Social Impact Assessment Survey, the consent clause, provisions regarding food security and the issue regarding returning the land to the farmer after 5 years. Thus the ordinance has nothing substantial to offer and is not a reason for farmers to rejoice as the most contentious issues in the Ordinance 2014 have not been touched upon. The Ordinance continues to remain anti farmer and draconian in nature.**

	2013 Act	2014 Ordinance	2015 Ordinance
	<b>The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013</b>	<b>The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Amendment) Ordinance, 2014</b>	<b>The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Amendment) Ordinance, 2015</b>
<b>I. EXEMPTING THE BULK OF LAND ACQUISITION FROM SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>			
1.	Chapter II of the 2013 Act 'Determination of Social Impact an Public Purpose' provides for:  (A) Preliminary investigation for determination of social impact and public purpose: which says that if the Government intends to acquire land for public purpose, it needs to <u>consult the concerned Panchavat, Municipality or</u>	1. The ordinance inserts Chapter III A <u>which allows the Government to exempt any of the following projects from the application of the provisions of Chapter II and Chapter III of the principal Act.</u>  • Such projects vital to national security or defence of India (including preparation for defence or defence production  • Rural infrastructure including	1. The Ordinance, 2014 exempted land acquisition for industrial corridor from chapter II and III. <u>The re-promulgated Ordinance, 2015 limits the land to be acquired to 1 km on both sides of railway lines or roads for such industrial corridor. This is limited to industrial corridors being set up by the government</u>

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<p><b><u>Municipal Corporation, in the affected area and carry out a Social Impact Assessment Study in consultation with them.</u></b> The study must take into consideration the impact of the project on various components such as livelihood of affected families, public and community properties, assets and infrastructure like roads, public transport, drainage, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, food storage godowns, land for traditional tribal institutions, schools, and also conduct a public hearing at the affected area; and</p> <p>(B) Appraisal of social impact assessment report by an Expert Group, which says that the Government shall <b><u>ensure that the Social Impact Assessment report is evaluated by an independent multi-disciplinary expert group. The Expert Group is supposed to determine (a) whether the project serves any ‘public purpose’ and (b) whether the potential benefits outweigh the social costs and adverse social impacts.</u></b></p> <p><b><u>The Act states that the appropriate Government must ensure that there is a ‘legitimate and bona fide public purpose’ for the proposed acquisition; and the potential benefits and public purposes must outweigh the social costs and adverse social impact as determined by the Social Impact Assessment.</u></b></p> <p>2. Section 105 (1) states that the provision of this Act shall not apply to the enactments relating to land acquisition specified in the</p>	<p>electrification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable housing and housing for the poor people</li> <li>• Industrial corridors</li> <li>• <b>Infrastructure and social infrastructure projects</b> including projects under PPP, where the ownership of land continues to vest with the Government.</li> </ul> <p>2. In respect of Section 105, the Ordinance states that <b><u>the provisions of this Act relating to the determination of compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement and infrastructure amenities shall apply to the enactments relating to land acquisition mentioned in the Fourth Schedule, with effect from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015. Sub section (4) of Section 105 has been omitted.</u></b></p> <p><b>ANALYSIS:</b> Exempting the above projects will exclude the bulk of land acquisition from the requirement of being subjected to Social Impact Assessment and independent verification of the public purpose for which land is being acquired, including explicit quantification of the benefits to the public. This is a vast loophole for reversing the 2013 Act and restoring the British era law on land acquisition where land could be acquired without any social impact assessment and without any requirement for identifying and evaluating the public purpose for which land is acquired.</p>	<p><b><u>only.</u></b></p> <p>2. <b><u>Under the re-promulgated Ordinance, 2015, the phrase “social infrastructure” has been dropped. But the word “infrastructure” remains and the exclusion remains.</u></b></p>
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<p>Fourth Schedule which contains Acts relating to Railways, Electricity, Coal Bearing Areas, Metro Railways, National Highways, Land Acquisition (Mines), Indian Transways, Atomic Energy, Damodar Valley Corporation, Petroleum and Minerals Pipelines, Ancient Monuments &amp; Archaeological Sites, the Resettlement of Displaced Persons.</p> <p>However, Section 105 (2) states that the Central government may, by notification, omit or add any of the enactments specified in the Fourth schedule.</p> <p>Section 105 (3) states that the Central Government may, by notification, within one year from the date of the commencement of the Act, direct that any provisions of this Act relating to compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement shall apply to land acquisition under the enactments specified in the Fourth Schedule. Section 105 (4) states that a copy of every notification shall be laid, in draft, before each House of the Parliament while it is in session for a total period of 30 days. If both the Houses agree in disapproving the issue of the notification or agree in making any modification in the notification, the notification shall not be issued or shall be issued only in such modified form which has been agreed upon by both the Houses of Parliament.</p>		
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**II. RESTORATION OF THE POWER TO ACQUIRE IRRIGATED LAND AND EXEMPTION OF LAND ACQUISITION FROM FOOD SECURITY PROVISIONS**

<p>Chapter III of the principal act also deals with <b><u>'Special Provision to Safeguard Food Security'</u></b>. <b><u>It states that no irrigated multi-crop land</u></b></p>	<p>The Ordinance states the following categories of projects, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Such projects vital to national</li> </ul>	<p>The re-promulgated ordinance states <b><u>that the appropriate Government shall ensure the extent of land for the proposed acquisition keeping in</u></b></p>
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<p><b><u>shall be acquired under this Act (unless under exceptional circumstances and when it is demonstrably a last resort).</u></b></p> <p>When a multi-crop irrigated land has been acquired, then an equivalent area of culturable wasteland shall be developed for agricultural purposes, or an amount equivalent to the value of land acquired shall be deposited with the Government for investment in agriculture for enhancing food security.</p> <p><b><u>The provisions of this Section were not applicable in the case of linear projects such as major district roads, railways, highways, irrigation canals, power lines and the like.</u></b></p>	<p>security or defence of India (including preparation for defence or defence production</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural infrastructure including electrification</li> <li>• Affordable housing and housing for the poor people</li> <li>• Industrial corridors</li> <li>• Infrastructure and social infrastructure projects including projects under PPP, where the ownership of land continues to vest with the Government.</li> </ul> <p>shall be exempted from the provisions of Chapter III of the 2013 Act.</p> <p><b><u>ANALYSIS:</u></b> This deletes the prohibition against acquiring irrigated and multi-cropland. The provision results in the restoration of the power to acquire irrigated land and exempting land acquisition from the safeguards in Chapter III.</p>	<p><b><u>view the bare minimum land required for such project.</u></b></p> <p>The appropriate <b><u>Government shall undertake a survey of its wasteland including arid land and maintain a record containing details of such land.</u></b></p>
<p><b>III. CUTTING DOWN RETROACTIVE APPLICATION OF BENEFITS UNDER THE ACT</b></p>		
<p>The Act states that, in case of land acquisition proceedings initiated under the Land Acquisition, 1984, where an Award has been made <b><u>five or more years prior to the commencement of the 2013 Act,</u></b> but the possession of the land has not been taken or the compensation has not been made, the Government, if it so chooses, shall deem the earlier proceedings void and initiate the proceedings afresh in accordance with the 2013 Act and all the beneficiaries shall be entitled to compensation in accordance with the provisions of the 2013</p>	<p>The ordinance says that <b><u>the computation of the period of five years shall exclude</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• any period(s) during which the proceedings were held up on account of any stay or injunction issued by any court, or</li> <li>• the period specified in the Award of a Tribunal for taking possession, or</li> <li>• any such period where possession has been taken but</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Ordinance, 2014</p>

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		<p>the compensation is lying deposited in a court, or in any account maintained for this purpose.</p> <p><b>ANALYSIS:</b> This amendment may disqualify a majority of beneficiaries as the retroactive application of benefits under the Act has been cut down. Farmers are very agitated by these amendments which will significantly limit the ability of land owners whose land has been expropriated 5 or more years prior to the 2013 Act from benefitting from the enhanced compensation under this Act. In particular, farmers are unhappy that where compensation has not been received by the farmer compensation lying deposited in a court or any other account, they will be paid compensation according to the old Act.</p>	
<b>IV. DILUTION OF FARMER’S RIGHT TO REVERSION OF UNUTILIZED ACQUIRED LAND</b>			
	<p>Under the 2013 Act, <u>if any land acquired remains unutilized for a period of 5 years from the date of taking over the possession, the same shall be returned to the original owner/legal heirs or to the Land Bank of the Government.</u></p>	<p>The ordinance <u>substitutes the time frame of “a period of five years” with “a period specified for setting up of any project or for five years, whichever is later.”</u></p> <p><b>ANALYSIS:</b> The right given to farmers under 2013 Act to get back the acquired land, if it was not used for five years from the date of possession has been significantly diluted. The acquirer can specify an extremely lengthy period for the completion of any project without any accountability.</p>	<p>Same as Ordinance, 2014</p>
<b>V. EXPANSION OF GOVERNMENT DISCRETION UNDER TEMPORARY PROVISIONS</b>			
	<p>The Act states that in the event of any difficulty arising in giving effect to the provisions of Part II, the Central Government may make provisions, not inconsistent with the provisions of the Act necessary to remove the difficulty.</p> <p>The Act mentioned that <u>such power shall not be exercised after the expiry of a period of 2 years from the commencement</u></p>	<p>The ordinance substitutes the words “the provisions of this Part” with the words “the provisions of this Act”.</p> <p>It <u>replaces “a period of two years” as mentioned in the Act with the words “a period of five years”.</u></p> <p><b>ANALYSIS:</b> The time period specified under the 2013 Act was an important limitation on potential</p>	<p>Same as Ordinance, 2014</p>

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<p><u>of the Act.</u></p>	<p>abuse. Extending the time period to five years allows the Government sweeping residual powers to take any action necessary to support their interpretation of the Act. This is a violation of the spirit of the Act which focused on empowering the common man and not the State machinery.</p>	
<b>VI. EXPANSION OF THE SCOPE FOR USE OF SOVERIGN EMINENT DOMAIN POWER</b>		
<p>The provisions of the Act relating to land acquisition, compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement, shall apply, when the Government acquires land for its own use, hold and control, including for PSUs and for public purpose. One of the purposes mentioned was “infrastructure projects”, which included all activities or items listed in the notification of the Government of India in the Department of Economic Affairs (Infrastructure Section). <b><u>However, it was mentioned that private hospitals, private educational institutions and private hotels were to be excluded from these purposes.</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>The ordinance omits the exclusion of private hospitals and private educational institutions mentioned in the principal Act of 2013.</u></b></p> <p><b><u>ANALYSIS:</u></b> More private players are allowed to enter. <b><u>The amendment expands the scope for use of sovereign eminent domain power to include more private players.</u></b></p>	<p>The Ordinance, 2014 legitimized the acquisition of land for private hospitals and private educational institutions. <b><u>This has been dropped under the re-promulgated Ordinance, 2015.</u></b></p>
<b>VII. UNRESTRICTED ENTRY OF PRIVATE PLAYERS</b>		
<p>The Act made the use of the term “private company” throughout, when “company” is defined as in section 3 of Companies Act, 2013, other than a government company.</p> <p>*Private company means a company having a minimum paid-up share capital of one lakh rupees or such higher paid-up share capital.</p>	<p><b><u>The words “private company” have been replaced with the words “private entity” throughout the principal Act.</u></b> “Private entity” means any entity other than a Government entity or undertaking and includes a proprietorship, partnership, company, corporation, non-profit organization or other entity under any law for the time being in force.</p> <p><b><u>ANALYSIS:</u></b> The government could not make its motive clear by replacing private company by private entity. It may lead to unrestricted entry of private players. The amendment vastly increases the types of private entities for whom land can be acquired under the Act, without any limit or control.</p>	<p>The Ordinance, 2014 legitimized the acquisition of land for private hospitals and private educational institutions. <b><u>This has been dropped under the re-promulgated Ordinance, 2015.</u></b></p>
<b>VIII. DILUTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS</b>		
<p>The 2013 Act says that where an offence has been committed by any department of the government, the <b><u>head of the department shall be deemed guilty and shall be liable</u></b></p>	<p>The ordinance says that when an offence has been committed by any person who is or was employed in the central government or the state</p>	<p>Same as the Ordinance, 2014</p>

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	<p><b><u>to be proceeded against unless such person proves that the offence was committed without his knowledge.</u></b> If an offence is committed with the consent of or is attributable to any neglect on the part of any officer, then he shall be liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.</p>	<p>government at the time of commission of such alleged offence no court shall take cognizance of it <b><u>except with the previous sanction of the appropriate government.</u></b></p> <p><b><u>ANALYSIS:</u></b> The 2013 Act had placed greater accountability on the officers working to implement the law by providing for provisions to penalise them in case of violations. However, the new Government has amended the relevant section (section 87) to allow for their prosecution only after taking sanction from the Government.</p>	
<b>IX. REHABILITATION AND RESETTLEMENT AWARD</b>			
	<p>In the 2013 Act, the Rehabilitation and Resettlement Award to be made included details of mandatory employment to be provided to the members of the affected families</p>		<p><b><u>The re-promulgated Ordinance specifies that this must include employment for at least one member of farm labour families</u></b> which are affected due to displacement and land acquisition.</p>

Additional comment:

**Compensation and rehabilitation provisions have been made applicable to all land acquisition.**

**ANALYSIS:** The 2013 Act had provided for initial exemption for land acquisition under stipulated special laws set in the fourth schedule. The 2013 Act envisaged that its beneficial provision may be extended by the government also to acquisition under these laws. The ordinance has implemented this approach and extends the beneficial provisions of the 2013 Act to land acquisition under the special laws listed in the Fourth Schedule.

However, it must be emphasized that in the absence of Social Impact Assessment, the full benefits of resettlement and rehabilitation will not be either calculated or provided to affected people. The adverse impact of land acquisition on people will consequently be exacerbated.

**Key Views and Criticisms of NDA Changes**

According to domain experts, the changes made by the government still leave the Bill draconian in nature.

*Three changes are purely cosmetic:*

- In the Section 10A, there was an exclusionary clause for “infrastructure and social infrastructure projects”. Now, the phrase “social infrastructure” has been dropped. But the word “infrastructure” remains and the exclusion remains.
- Secondly, in Section 24, the word “account” has been replaced by the words “designated account”.

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- Thirdly, the language of Section 87 has been recast, but the requirement of obtaining sanction before a court may take cognisance of an offence is intact.

*Certain changes are mildly positive:*

- The Government must ensure that only the bare minimum land required for an infrastructure project is acquired.
- The Government has also been **directed to prepare and maintain a record of the wasteland it owns**.
- The LARR Authority that will hear objections to the land acquisition or to the award of compensation has been required to hold its hearing in the district where the land is located.

*Substantive Changes*

- The amendment favouring “private hospitals and private educational institutions” has been dropped.
- In the case of land acquisition for industrial corridors, Social Impact Assessment and the ‘consent’ clause will be dispensed with only if land up to 1 km on either side of the corridor is acquired.
- Section 31 sub-section (2) clause (h) has been amended to require that the compensation award shall include particulars of mandatory employment to at least one member of each affected family. This is an improvement upon existing clause (h) and makes explicit what was earlier implicit.

### **Farmers’ Organizations:**

**A two-day rally, to create awareness about pitfalls in the ordinance amending the Land Reforms Act, was organised by the Raitha Krishikarmikara Sanghatane.** Dr Diwaker state secretary said that the amendment was anti-farmer and the right of the farmers over their land was being taken away and forcible acquisition of land would become the order of the day. The organization said that:

- The amendment to the Land Acquisition Act would only benefit the rich and industrialists to get the fertile lands at throwaway prices; and
- The after-effects of the amendment would have serious implications on the rural economy and farmers who lose their land would become unemployed.
- Self-sufficiency in the food grain production would be jeopardised and the country would once again be dependent on importing food grains.(The Hindu, 2015)

**Describing the bill as "anti-social", joint secretary of All-India Agricultural Workers' Union, Suneeet Chopra, raised questions regarding**

- the Centre's move to eliminate clauses like social impact assessment and farmers' consent for acquiring land.
- the amendment of the provision in the 2013 Land Acquisition Act which allows a farmer to get back his land if it is not used within five years of being acquired. The Ordinance states that a farmer will not get back land once acquired irrespective of whether it has been developed or not. (New Indian Express, 2015)

**The All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) has protested strongly against the amendments to the LARR Act. They are of the opinion that**

- The Government has in effect reinstated the most draconian provisions of the colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894 and removed the necessity to seek consent of farmers and other dependants on land as well as done away with the SIA altogether”.

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- The government's claim of offering a job to one person of a family is like uprooting a family from their main source of livelihood and giving a token job to one person of the family.
- It does not address the problems of a wide section of dependants on land. (Frontline, 2015)

**Political Parties:** West Bengal Chief Minister took to the streets to protest against the land ordinance. "We are against this land ordinance. We have made our position clear and will stick to our stand that there should be no forcible land acquisition," she told a protest rally against the land ordinance. (Financial Express, 2015)

Stressing that the Government had not learnt lessons despite protests against the Land Acquisition Ordinance, CPI today accused the saffron party of being "hell-bent" on snatching lands of farmers over its plans to don the mask of being "pro-poor" and campaign in support of the "anti-farmer" ordinance

Dubbing the BJP-led NDA government's ordinance for amending Land Acquisition Act as anti-farmer and anti-tribal, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) today said it seeks to benefit big companies, harming the interest of the people. "In its bid to favour big corporate houses, the NDA government opted for ordinance route which seeks to bring anti-farmer and anti-tribal amendments in the land law, ignoring the Parliament," added AAP. (DNA, 2015)

### Legislative Options Available to the Government

- I. The government could have introduced the bill in the Rajya Sabha when the Houses met after the break. The government is in a minority in the Rajya Sabha and could have expected the Opposition to insist that the Bill be sent to a select committee.
- II. It could have also awaited the Opposition to defeat the Bill. This would have paved the way for convening a joint sitting of Parliament to increase chances of the passage of the bill. (Business Standard, 2015). The instrument of a joint session – where both Houses come together and pass a Bill arises only if one House has rejected a Bill that the other House has passed. This has happened only thrice in the history of independent India.
- III. The third option available would be to prorogue one of the Houses so that it can re-promulgate the Ordinance. In this case, the Rajya Sabha was 'prorogued' to facilitate the re-issuance of the land acquisition ordinance a day before the earlier ordinance lapsed on April 5, 2015. It may have been necessary under situations when the state budgets needed to be approved in time for states under President's rule. However, the Constitution does not specify the number of times an ordinance can be re-promulgated.

### Criticism on Re-promulgation of Ordinance

While quashing an ordinance that was re-promulgated by the Bihar government, eminent jurist P.N. Bhagwati stated that "The power to promulgate an ordinance is essentially a power to be used to meet an extra-ordinary situation and it cannot be allowed to be perverted to serve political ends. It is contrary to all democratic norms that the executive should have the power to make a law ..." "If the executive were permitted to continue the provisions of an ordinance in force by adopting the methodology of re-promulgation without submitting to the voice of the legislature, it would be nothing short of usurpation by the executive of the law-making function of the legislature". He added that this would be "clearly subverting the democratic process which lies at the core of our constitutional scheme". (Business Standard, 2015)

The farmers' organisations, in their plea, challenged the re-promulgated land ordinance, terming it as "unconstitutional" and ultra vires of the Constitution and as a "colourful exercise of power" by the executive. **The petition was filed by Bharatiya Kishan Union, Gram Sewa Samiti, Delhi Grameen Samaj and Chogama Vikas Avam**, seeking a direction to restrain the government from acting upon in furtherance of the Right to Fair Compensation & Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Amendment) Ordinance, 2015. The farmers' bodies said that the government's action in promulgating successive ordinances bypassing the legislative process of Parliament was not only "arbitrary and violative" of Article 14 but also a "fraud on the

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Constitution” itself. They said government’s action in re-promulgating the ordinance was “malafide” and thus open to challenge. (The Hindu, 2015)

The Supreme Court agreed on the basis of a PIL to examine the constitutionality of President's power to re-promulgate an ordinance on the ground that it subverted legislative process. The Supreme Court issued notice to Centre on the question of validity of the re-promulgation of the land acquisition ordinance by the President on April 3, 2015. (Hindu, 2015)

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