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LAND ACQUISITION BILL: A LONG AWAITED REFORM TO SPEED UP 'MAKE IN INDIA' INITIATIVE

KAVITA KARAN INGALE ASST. PROFESSOR MIT SCHOOL OF BUSINESS PUNE

ABSTRACT

The study shows that while on one hand the Act has been criticised as anti-farmer and exploitative in nature by the opposition and a group of social activists, on the other hand the amendments made in the law stands to fast track the clearances required for the stalled projects. Besides, it intends to take care of the interest of the land owners. This new facet of Law appears to be a positive change against the backdrop of need for effective implementation of Make in India initiative. Yet, the possibility of weak administration and socio-environmental concerns cannot be ignored.

KEYWORDS

land acquisition bill, make in India, reforms.

INDIAN ECONOMY: AN OVERVIEW

here has been a substantial change in the sectoral contribution to GDP over last 60 years. From about 60 per cent during the independence era the share of agriculture and allied activities in nation's GDP dropped to 15 %. Yet more than 60 per cent of population is relying on this sector as a source of livelihood.

The Indian model of development is principally driven by rapid expansion of high -end knowledge intensive sectors. Its major revenue comes from sectors like IT, biotech, BPO/KPO and other similar services. It has so far neglected low-end labour intensive mass manufactures. From an agriculture-dominated economy, India straight away jumped to an economic structure, where, services and high-end manufacturing assumed the lead role. This type of development model is neither equitable nor sustainable in democracy.

MODIAN MODEL - MAKE IN INDIA INITIATIVE (MII)

In the face of lackluster performance by the manufacturing sector, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is focused on expanding the manufacturing sector's share of the economy in order to boost employment for India's young population. The government launched its flagship Make in India program on September 25, 2014, and it has identified 25 "thrust sectors" to be given special attention. But it has yet to outline concrete measures for promoting investment in these areas.

MII includes major new initiatives designed to facilitate investment, foster innovation, protect intellectual property, and build best-in-class manufacturing

The MII campaign also reemphasizes on the revival and up gradation of key sectors with the policies and processes. It shifts its focus to manufacturing sector which has greater employability of rural India major. MMI identifies some key sectors which include leather, textiles, construction, chemicals, food processing, mining, oil & gas to name a few.

This cannot necessarily be achieved through counter-productive policies of reservation and prolonged protection. There has to be a proactive policy framework to resolve infrastructure deficits. According to World Bank Survey, India ranks a dismal 142 among 189 countries in the area of "ease of doing business".

FACTORS OF PRODUCTION

As known by everyone, there are four major factors of production namely, land, labour, capital and entrepreneur. The very first factor in the list; availability of land has become as major bottleneck in the process of industrial activity.

Land is a key factor when one plans growth map, be it for erection of facilities of new highways, industrial corridor or industrial parks. Once the units start the acquisition process for the land they requires, they confront with numerous difficulties be it environmental issues, rehabilitation of the displaced people or compensation to be paid to land owners. The legislative machinery plays a pivotal role in shaping up the entire process. Ease of land acquisition is a precondition to the development which helps the industries to acquire land for their plants.

In the backdrop of implementation of Make in India programme, the study aims to review the various policy issues associated with land acquisition

COLONIAL LAND ACQUISITION ACT OF 1894

This law made the farmers to sacrifice their lands in public interest for meager compensation. It was meant to serve the British interests. It has failed to address some important issues associated with land acquisition particularly forcible acquisitions, definition of "public purpose", widespread misuse the of "urgency clause", compensation, lack of transparency in the acquisition process, participation of communities whose land is being acquired and virtually no rehabilitation and resettlement package. The concept of public purpose has very often being misused and land acquired was finally deployed for amusement parks, malls and luxury residential complexes.

THE LAND ACQUISITION, REHABILITATION AND RESETTLEMENT BILL, 2011

The land acquisition bill 2011 introduced a number of changes over and above the existing 1894 law on land acquisition. It mandates a Social Impact Assessment of the proposed acquisition by an independent body for all acquisitions. For projects undertaken by private companies or through public-private partnerships, the bill requires the consent of 80% of the affected people which will a long way in reducing forcible acquisitions. It guarantees higher compensation to the land losers and adopts the market value method to compute compensation

Despite the object and purpose of the bill stating that the definition of "public purpose" needs to be redefined so as to "restrict its scope", the definition presented in the bill has largely remained the same and leaves enough scope for its abuse. The major point of criticism from all corners has been the power of the Central Government vis-a-vis the state governments in relation to sale and purchase of land by private companies and the applicability of the R&R provisions. The provision for compensation on the basis of "market value" of land will remain elusive in the absence of a well functioning land market in India. Further, very few land transactions happen at the rural level which prevents the discovery of real value of land. The issue is further compounded by the underreporting of the transaction price to avoid stamp duty.

The same law continued to operate with minor changes till 2013 when UPA government came with 2013 legislation.

Right to Fair Compensation, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 replaced the 1894 Land Acquisition Act .The new legislation as it says favored farmers as it requires 80 % consent for the projects in private sector while 70 % consent of landowner for public private ventures. It also increased compensation paid to these landowners which was correlated to market rates. It made Social Impact Assessment study mandatory for all projects.

With so many stringent regulations the 2013 Legislation made it the process of land acquisition lengthy and cumbersome exercise. Besides the requisition of consent and social impact analysis was left to state agencies which had credibility issues. It followed the route of temporary ordinances.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

In a bid to ease the process of land acquisition in Dec 2014, Union cabinet recommended promulgation of ordinance to amend the original act. With the new bill- Right to Fair compensation and transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Amendment Bill 2015, NDA govt eased the process to some extent. It advocated to do away with-consent of 70% and 80% for five new categories of projects—defense, rural infrastructure, housing for poor, industrial corridors, infrastructure and social infrastructure projects & elimination of Mandatory social impact and Environmental study.

Further it made few amendments in the original ordinance-like -giving employment to at least one member of displaced family, ensuring that only bare minimum land required for the project will be acquired, restriction on acquisition of land within one km of railroads and highways. But investors were reluctant to put money in land based on temporary ordinances.

CRITICISM

Colin Gonsalves, lawer and founder of Human Rights Law Network says 2013 Act not only retained but sharpened some draconian features of 1894 law. The separation between public purpose acquisition by govt. and the acquisition for companies was given a public purpose flavor.

Defining public purpose as "the provision of land for infrastructure, industrialization and urbanization projects of appropriate government, where benefits largely accrue to the general public" can be interpreted differently by different stakeholders. In effect, the bill does not clarify how private and public purpose in a private sector-led project will be evaluated.

Again consent from farmers is a debatable issue. Sometimes it is taken through illegal means while in some cases after initial payment and possession residual amounts are not paid.

Market value of land concept reflects only the white money component which appears on papers. Besides, the compensation is decided after considering the present value. It ignores the opportunity cost of the land that is the revenue streams foregone amidst availability of ample investment opportunities.

The provision for lapsing of acquisition when physical possession is not taken and compensation not paid under 1894 Act for five years prior to the coming into force of the 2013 Acts, have been diluted. Similar is the case for return of unused land to the farmers.

These provisions are being called as anti-farmer policies. While govt is defending its new bill by saying it will foster industrial growth and thereby create widespread opportunities for unemployed unskilled rural youth. Further, there are several points raised by social activists which, includes undemocratic and anti-farmer nature, need of an ordinance and the ignorance of farmers about it.

The new bill freed social infrastructure like private hospitals and private educational institutions from the provisions of consent and SIA. It appears to favour corporate interests. This exemption was eventually dropped in the face of protests.

The process of land acquisition is going to be extremely lengthy and difficult. With the steps to be followed like social impact assessment, environmental clearance and several other clearances, R&R, litigation hurdles, etc, acquiring a sizeable piece of land is going to be a time consuming process. Such is the proposed law that a handful of motivated land-owners can block or jeopardize projects of strategic importance.5

While the bill promises transparency and certainty in acquisition process and after, by having several layers of bureaucracies for all land acquisition cases, it makes land acquisition a complicated exercise. This will act as a demotivating factor for many potential entrepreneurs.

SUGGESTIONS

The land acquisition policy requires relaxation in its rehabilitation norms to rationalize acquisition costs and timelines. Just as sector of national significance have been kept out of purview of consent and environmental assessment, segments of core organized real estate such as IT parks, commercial office and retail development can also come under the faster processing norms. There is also need to streamline the land records as said by *Anshuman Magazine* in his article Making India Attractive.

Experts have made suggestions like land pooling which means that lands of the farmers are pooled together and common infrastructure is built. A part of land is returned to farmers and its value increases substantially. The farmers may quit farming or retain the land.

Leasing of land from land owners for certain lease period. Energy projects such as oil, gas and wind power development have been following this model successfully.

Land auctions as better alternatives to acquisitions by state agencies. All landowners will submit ask prices for their plots and the cheapest one can be accepted. A recent NDTV investigation shows that the industrial development Corporation of Maharashtra, AP, UP, Rajasthan and Gujarat had together acquired 572793 acres of land. Out of this about 45 % of land has not been allotted to any industrial projects. This backlog needs the government attention.

Again the risk of deterioration of environment cannot be denied in the wake of phasing out approvals and environmental and social study as encountered by China.

As stated by Dheeraj Fartode in Hitavada in case of Multimodal International Hub and Airport at Nagpur (MIHAN) legal disputes continue to delay sorting out of land acquisition issues. Besides, the desired investment has not come to land acquired and allotted so far under the ambitious project. Maharashtra chief minister Mr. Fadnavis said not a single (affected) family will be excluded from rehabilitation. He has also instructed officials to start an industrial technical training institute so that local youth can get training and employment in the projects.

CONCLUSION

While on one hand the Act has been criticised as anti-farmer and exploitative in nature by the opposition and a group of social activists, on the other hand the amendments made in the law stands to fast track the clearances required for the stalled projects. Besides, it intends to take care of the interest of the land owners. This new facet of Law appears to be a positive change against the backdrop of need for effective implementation of Make in India initiative. Yet, the possibility of weak administration and socio-environmental concerns cannot be ignored.

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