

Cabinet Decides To Form Sub-Committee To Examine Punjab Land Leasing And Tenancy Bill 2019

The Punjab Cabinet has decided to set up a sub-committee to examine all aspects of the proposed Punjab Land Leasing and Tenancy Bill, 2019, and authorised Hon'ble Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh to set up the panel and decide on its terms and tenure etc. The Hon'ble Chief Minister has announced Hon'ble Finance Minister Shri Manpreet Badal as the committee head, with Hon'ble Social Security Minister Smt. Aruna Chaudhary and Hon'ble Revenue Minister Shri Gurpreet Singh Kangar as members.

The Bill aims to repeal the six existing tenancy laws to bring in major reforms in matters of leasing of agricultural land in the state. It seeks to balance the rights and responsibilities of landowners and tenants, besides providing a process of fast adjudication for resolution of disputes. The introduction of this transparent land leasing law is aimed at not only allowing the landowner to enter into a written contract with the potential tenant without the fear of losing his land to him but also at incentivizing the tenant to make long term investments in improvement of land and get access to credit and subsidies.

The existing laws set to be repealed with the new proposed legislation are: The Punjab Tenancy Act 1887; the Punjab Occupancy Tenants (Vesting of Proprietary Rights) Act, 1952; the Pepsu Occupancy Tenants (Vesting of Proprietary Rights) Act, 1953; the Punjab Colonisation of Government Lands Act 1912; the Punjab Security of Land Tenures Act, 1953 and the Pepsu Tenancy and Agriculture Lands Act, 1955.

The Bill has been necessitated by the changing agrarian relations in recent years, which has transformed the concept of traditional tenancy to a primarily commercial one. A booming land leasing market has emerged in Punjab, which covers a quarter of the total cultivated area. The lease of agriculture land at present is mostly oral, which indicates a lack of trust and confidence in the prevailing tenancy laws. The lessors, while leasing out their lands, generally do not show the lessees to be in occupation of the leased land due to the apprehension of losing their ownership rights or getting embroiled in avoidable protracted eviction proceedings as the laws governing tenancy in the State tend to favour the tenant. On the other hand, the presence of informal tenancy puts the lessees/tenants at the risk of exploitation by the lessors because of no legal security. In addition to these risks, the lessees/tenants do not get the benefits of various government initiatives, including credit, insurance, subsidies and calamity relief in case of damage to their crops.

The Bill envisages removing barriers against investment apart from helping adopt new technology on the leased land and introduce cultivation of high-value crop, so as to usher in higher productivity and prosperity for sustainable agriculture. This legislation would further encourage new forms of organisation in agriculture, such as corporate cultivation, cooperatives/group production, self-help groups, partnerships including limited liability partnerships, farmers' producer organizations and others to make agriculture a viable and sustainable occupation for small and marginal farmers as well.

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