

New Land-Ordinance in Uttarakhand Serves Land-Mafia's Interest

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In May 2007, the BJP Govt. in Uttarakhand promulgated a new Land Ordinance. Its predecessor, the last Congress Govt. had brought two such ordinances in September 2003 and January 2004. Thus three land ordinances in just four years, a unique distinction for the state of Uttarakhand! Has the land question acquired such priority for governments in people's interest? Far from it. In fact this new found zeal of governments in the land question is to serve the interests of the land mafia and big builder lobby.

The land question is certainly a matter of grave concern in Uttarakhand today. In the whole of the state, agricultural land now remains only 10% of the total and in the hills it is only 6%, while more than 75% of the state population depends on agriculture. And if the present policy trend continues, the ratio of agricultural land will further diminish. However the latest Land Ordinance does not address the problem of transfer of this steadily diminishing agricultural land to the outsiders.

In fact the real culprit behind the present land crisis in the state are the colonial Land Ordinance of 1893 and the KUJA act of 1960 which are still in operation. The 1893 ordinance put all unaccounted, vacant, grazing land under the category of forest land and the 'Kumaon Uttarakhand Zamindari Abolition and Land Reform Act, 1960' brought all this land under the jurisdiction of the state, thus depriving Village Panchayats of the right of its management and distribution. In 1997, the then UP govt. re-implemented the 1893 government order, thus completely restricting the expansion of agricultural land. Also, scarce agricultural land is being diverted for various government schemes. This lies at the heart of the land crisis in the state. But even after the formation of a new state, the successive governments are not ready to scrap the old anti-people agricultural laws and legislate a new Land Reform Act empowering the Panchayats with the constitutional rights of management and distribution of all land. Then whose interest does the new Land Ordinance serve?

Uttarakhand today is an emerging attraction for real estate business, the big builders - all outsiders to the hill state - and they have a good hold over the state government and the ruling parties. These outsiders and the underworld which hitherto invested in real estate in Delhi and Bombay, is now making a huge investment here in collaboration with local builders.

The Khanduri government issued some new rules and regulations regarding land grab by outsiders and housing construction just before promulgating the new Land Ordinance. According to these rules, the government will now permit only big capital to enter the real estate business. But then comes the new Land Ordinance. It does not fix any limit for buying land in the residential areas of cities and adjoining villages and zones, and allows purchase of 250 sq. meters of land in agricultural area also. Thus the builders can purchase 5 acres of land in the name of 103 persons, construct a multi-storey building on it and sell it to at least 500 people!

Then how does the Khanduri government propose to restrict the land-mafia and builders through this land ordinance? Smaller builders are protesting it as the ordinance favours the big players and the underworld at the cost of smaller players. Given the thorough degeneration of the UKD (Uttarakhand Kranti Dal), it is no surprise that they also termed this ordinance as a 'great victory'.

At a time when the governments are busy corporatising agriculture and making land available to the MNCs and corporate houses for production, food-processing, wholesale and even retail trade, it will be certainly naïve to expect a BJP government to impose restrictions on land transfer to outsiders!

All-India 'Save Land, Save Nation' Campaign by AIKSS

In the wake of the SEZ Act 2005 and various SEZ Acts passed by state governments, corporate grab of thousands of acres of land has become the norm all over the country. At the same time, Kalinganagar, POSCO and Nandigram have shown the way - and every act of land grab is met with determined peasant resistance. In this backdrop, the All India Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (AIKSS) observed October 3 as a day of nation-wide protest, with the slogan of 'Zamin Bachao, Desh Bachao' (Save Land, Save the Nation) against the stranglehold of imperialist policies and MNCs on the Indian rural scene and also demanding scrapping of the Indo-US Nuke Deal.

In Jind (Haryana), a peasants' march was organised under the leadership of Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat, member of the AIKSS national committee. In 5 tehsils of Jhunjhunu and Udaipur districts of Rajasthan, Kisan dharnas were organized in which thousands of peasants participated. The campaign was led by Comrade Ramchandra Kulahari, member of the AIKSS national committee. In Mansa, (Punjab), a mass meeting of the peasants was addressed by Comrade Ruldu Singh, leader of the Punjab Kisan Union and others. In Raipur (Chhattisgarh), a dharna and mass meeting was organized. In Muradabad and Ghazipur (UP) dharnas and meetings were organized which were addressed by Comrade Ishwari Prasad Kushwaha and other leaders of the Kisan Sabha. A poster campaign was also held at Dindigul (Tamilnadu). Around 300 peasants staged a dharna at the collectorate in Bhagalpur (Bihar) and submitted a memorandum to the DC. In Jehanabad, a seminar was organized on 'Save land, Save the nation' in which many intellectuals participated. It was addressed by Comrades Raja Ram Singh, national convener, AIKSS, Kamlesh Sharma, General Secretary RYA, Dr. Ramadhar Singh and others. Peasants organized a protest march and meeting in Buxar. In Masauri, a protest march was held. In Maner also a procession marched through the town and converged at Bhagat Singh Chowk where a mass meeting was organized.

P.S.

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