

Punish Land-grabbers Without Mercy: Ramaswamy

The state government has stopped the controversial demolition of illegal structures on lakebeds following a public outcry. However, former JD(S) MLA A T Ramaswamy, who headed the joint house committee on encroachments of government land in and around Bengaluru, strongly feels that the government should take a firm decision on the issue even if it hurts some innocent people.

In an interview with Anil Gejji of *Express*, Ramaswamy admitted that it is a complex issue and suggested that the government differentiate between encroachers

and land-grabbers and punish the latter without any mercy. Excerpts:

The state government has stopped the demolition drive against illegal structures on lakebeds. What next?

We have always been saying that the indiscriminate demolition of illegal buildings is not a solution to the problem. It is an unprecedented problem and we need to tackle it carefully. This is the time the government should take a firm stand — either here or there. There cannot be a middle path.

But how?

First, we should differentiate between encroachers and

land-grabbers. Encroachers are just the unauthorised occupants of government land without having titles or government documents to claim their right on the land. They cannot sell it either. So such lands can be cleared any time.

Land-grabbing is a criminal offence as fictitious documents are created to claim rights, and the land is sold to innocent people. The connivance of government officials in such acts is certain. This is the more serious and dangerous issue and the government should punish them mercilessly.

But the government is not doing anything in

this direction

That is what is haunting the people. Because big and powerful people from inside and outside the government are involved in land grabbing. I cannot be wrong if I say some land-grabbers are so powerful that they can even control the government. The government must start initiating criminal cases against such people. There should be a top-down approach in punishing the land grabbers and not vice versa. **But the government is claiming to have filed cases against some land-grabbers**

Mere filing FIR will not do. Let the government tell how

many people have been sent to jail and how many chargesheets filed. We have seen police sending small time thieves behind bars immediately after filing an FIR. But no such action is being taken against land-grabbers. Had the government touched these powerful people first and punished them, it would have instilled faith in people's minds.

Now the government is mulling over bringing a bill to protect BDA layouts that have come up on lakebeds. Don't you think this would encourage private encroachers to seek a similar remedy?

Certainly. There cannot be two yardsticks for a single problem. If they want to regularise BDA layouts, then they have to regularise private layouts also. So, such an act will not help. Moreover, it is against the Supreme Court order. Instead of doing this, the government should evolve a holistic approach to the issue.

What about the strong opposition from the JD(S) and the BJP to the demolition drive?

I want both the parties, for that matter all parties, to clear their stand on the issue — whether they are in favour of the land-grabbers or against them. If we don't act

against the land-grabbers, the situation will go out of control in future and the city would become a hell. It is not right on the part of any political party to change their stand according to time and convenience.



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FIRST, WE SHOULD DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN ENCROACHERS AND LAND-GRABBERS. ENCROACHERS ARE JUST THE UNAUTHORISED OCCUPANTS OF GOVERNMENT LAND ... LAND-GRABBING IS A CRIMINAL OFFENCE AS FICTITIOUS DOCUMENTS ARE CREATED TO CLAIM RIGHTS, AND THE LAND IS SOLD TO INNOCENT PEOPLE. — A T Ramaswamy, former JD(S) MLA