

The Times of India, Mumbai, 23 Sep 2008

SC accepts PIL on faulty farm policies

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New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday rejected a PIL seeking ban on acquisition of agricultural land for SEZs and public purposes.

"If the government wants to establish a hospital or a post office and is allowed the acquisition of barren land 100 km away from the locality, will it serve a public purpose," the Supreme Court asked.

In other words, the apex court refused to put any fetters on the government for acquiring agricultural land provided all other preconditions for such acquisition were met.

However, a bench comprising Chief Justice K G Balakrishnan and Justices P Sathasivam and J M Panchal refused to dispose of a PIL filed by advocate Sanjeev Bhatnagar who argued that the faulty agricultural policies of the government had led to a spate of suicides by farmers, especially in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

The bench said the Centre appeared to have taken adequate measures to stem the number of suicides and cited the latest policy decision to waive loans worth Rs 60,000 crore to farmers.

Appearing for the Centre, additional solicitor general Amarendra Saran said the government had already filed a detailed affidavit on the issue and it would serve no purpose to keep the petition pending. Moreover, the PIL sought changes in the agricultural policy, which the courts could not direct, as this rested squarely in the government's policy-making domain.

Undeterred, Bhatnagar said the relief packages announced for farmers were not being implemented properly, leading to the needy being shortchanged due to bureaucratic red-tape. Responding to a notice from the court on the PIL blaming faulty agricultural policy for farmers' deaths, the agriculture ministry admitted that natural calamities had decelerated the rate of agricultural growth.