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15

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## Land reforms Bill passed in Council with JD(S) support

It seeks to remove sale restrictions

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
BENGALURU

Amid intense protests by farmers, the controversial Karnataka Land Reforms (Second Amendment) Bill, 2020 that seeks to remove restrictions on agricultural land purchase in the State was passed in the Legislative Council on Tuesday, with the Janata Dal (Secular), which had earlier opposed the Bill, supporting it.

The support of the JD(S) was crucial as the BJP, with 31 members, does not enjoy

majority in the 75-member Council. While the Congress and the JD(S) together had successfully stalled the Bill in the monsoon session after it had been passed in the Legislative Assembly, voting had not been possible as the Council had been adjourned *sine die*. The passage of the amended Bill came on a day when farmers had called for a nationwide bandh to oppose change to farm laws.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

FROM PAGE ONE

## Land reforms Bill passed in Council with help from JD(S)

5.18.16 2/12/16  
Soon after Revenue Minister R. Ashok offered clarification to the concerns expressed over the amendments, the BJP sought passage of the Bill through voice vote while the Congress sought division of votes.

Eventually, the Bill was passed with 37 members voting in favour of it and 21 voting against it. Senior member and JD(S) leader Marithibbe Gowda voted against the Bill even as other members of his party voted in favour. The Congress and the JD(S) have 28 and 14 members, respectively.

"The party had given us discretion to vote and accordingly we voted," a JD(S) legislator claimed, while insisting that it did not mean allying with the BJP. The changed stance of the party drew criticism later by farmers' groups and Congress leaders.

Earlier, Chief Minister B.S.

Yediurappa said States such as Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu did not have limitations on land ownership like Karnataka. "We have studied the ground situation in these States before proposing this amendment. This will not affect land under irrigation," he said.

### Over five-decade-old Act

Mr. Ashok said the amendments were being brought to the over five-decade-old Act to enable modernisation of agricultural practices by allowing those from non-farming community to come in. He pointed out that about 11.79 lakh hectares where agriculture was possible has been left fallow. "Over the last decades, just about 0.87 % of total 190 lakh hectares in the State has been given to industries," he argued.

Pointing to "failures" of the current Act, he claimed that

section 79-A and 79-B, that impose certain restrictions on land purchase, inserted through an amendment in 1974, have not had the desired effects. "Though more than 83,000 cases of violation of these provisions with an extent of 1.76 lakh acres exist, not a single acre has been taken back so far," he said. The Revenue Minister said that other provisions, such as ceiling on land holding and protection to land owned by SC/ST community, would continue.

### Land-grabbing

Congress members during the debate earlier expressed concerns about land-grabbing and loss of livelihood for farmers in the State as restrictions imposed by section 79-A and 79-B were being removed. They also pointed out agricultural land could now be converted for other purposes