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Govt removes restrictions on farmland purchase

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In a big policy change, the state government on Thursday decided to amend the Karnataka Land Reforms Act to allow non-agriculturists to own agricultural land, saying the move will bring in investments and end litigation.

The Cabinet also decided to tweak the law to increase the cap on how much agricultural land a person can own.

Till now, non-agriculturists were barred from buying agricultural property in the state. And those with an agricultural background could purchase farmland only if their annual non-agricultural income did not exceed Rs 25 lakh.

Apart from that, only educational, religious institutions, companies, cooperative societies among others could purchase agricultural land.

The Cabinet has decided to repeal Sections 79 (a), (b), (c) and 80 of the Land Reforms Act, Law Minister J C Madhuswamy said, briefing reporters.

"There are many techies,

for instance, who have earned well and are keen on investing in agriculture," Madhuswamy explained.

"On one hand, owing to the existing restrictions, many of those interested are unable to buy land. On the other hand, even agriculturists are unable to get the right price for their land. Repealing these sections will ensure good price for land. It will also make the documentation process simpler."

The government will not promulgate an ordinance for this. An amendment Bill will be introduced in the next session of the legislature, the Law Minister said.

Revenue Minister R Ashoka said the existing provisions worked against the interests of the public.

"These restrictions have only enabled people to harass buyers, ending up in litigation," said Ashoka, adding that in the "last 45 years, about 83,171 cases have been registered for violation of provisions under Sections 79 (a) and (b)". The Revenue Minister said about "12,231 cases are still pending in court".

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Non-agriculturists will soon...

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"Moreover, even in cases where the verdict was in favour of the government, we've not been able to recover more than 1%

of the land," he said.

As of now, transfer of agricultural land to non-agriculturists is prohibited, save for certain exceptions. This paved way for misuse and fraud, the government said. Now, even this provision will be repealed. "Anyone can buy land in Telangana. We want to create the same atmosphere here. This will also help investments," Madhuswamy said, adding that many Indian states had done away such provisions.

The Cabinet decided to amend Section 63 of the Act to increase the ceiling on land holding from 10 to 20 units for an individual without family or a family up to four people and from 20 to 40 units for large families above five people. One unit is 5.4 acres. The decision was based on the recommendations of a sub-committee.