

Himachal introduces amendment Bill to stop misuse, sale of tea estate land

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Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur, along with other legislators, arrives to attend the monsoon assembly session, Shimla, on Tuesday. (Express photo by Pradeep Kumar)

The Himachal government on Tuesday introduced an amendment in The Himachal Pradesh Ceiling on Land Holdings Act, 1972, which will aim at curbing misuse of transfer and use of land that is meant for tea estates.

State Revenue Minister, Mahender Singh Thakur, introduced the Bill for the amendment in the House on Tuesday after the question hour. In the Bill, it was stated that at present Sections 6-a and 7-a of the Act provide for the change of land use and transfer of land under a tea estate, respectively, with the prior permission of the government.

The Revenue Minister said in the bill, “It has been observed that the land under tea estates has been invariably used for purposes other than tea plantation or have been transferred by way of sale by resorting to these provisions, which is against the spirit and intentions of the legislation. In order to address the issue, a high-powered committee was constituted, which included members of the Legislative Assembly from all political parties.”

The Bill adds, “The high-powered committee has given its recommendations. Thus, in order to promote the tea industry in the state, there is a need to make suitable amendments in Section 6-a and 7-a, so as to discourage the change of land use and transfer of land under tea estates thereof by way of sale. In case of such violations, the provisions of the Act, with regard to the vesting of land with the government, free from all encumbrance, shall come into operation.”

Tea garden owners were allowed to retain the excess land over and above the permissible limit under Land Ceiling Act and legally they can not sell this land. But under the previous governments — in 2010, 2015, and 2016 — the land use of tea estates was changed with the permission of the administration.

The new amendment bill by the Jai Ram Thakur government, Revenue Minister, Mahendar Singh Thakur said, was introduced with the aim of stopping this practice.