

Court Flags Hasty Land Pooling Policy, Citing Missing Impact Studies



The Punjab and Haryana High Court has stayed the implementation of Punjab's new Land Pooling Policy, 2025, after observing that the policy was likely notified in "haste" and lacked mandatory social and environmental impact studies. The interim stay, issued during a hearing on a petition challenging the policy, halts all further action until the state government provides a comprehensive response to the court's concerns.

The High Court's division bench, comprising Justices Anupinder Singh Grewal and Deepak Manchanda, pointed out several critical flaws in the policy. The judges noted that the state intends to acquire tens of thousands of acres of fertile, multi-cropped land without first conducting a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) or an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The court emphasized that the Supreme Court has repeatedly held that such studies are a necessary prerequisite for urban development projects.

A key concern raised by the bench was the absence of a rehabilitation plan for landless laborers, artisans, and other individuals who depend on the land for their livelihood. While the policy provides a subsistence allowance for landowners, it makes no provision for the countless others whose livelihoods would be disrupted. The court called this a significant gap, stating that the acquisition could "impact the social milieu" of the region.

The court also questioned the government's claim that the policy is purely voluntary. It pointed to a clause that allows for compulsory acquisition of land not offered for pooling, which, according to the court, brings the policy under the purview of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013, and its mandatory safeguards. Furthermore, the court noted that the policy lacks fixed timelines for development and a clear mechanism for addressing the grievances of affected persons. The bench also raised concerns about the financial feasibility of the project, as the state's counsel could not provide a clear answer on budgetary provisions for the massive development costs.

This judicial intervention follows widespread protests from farmer bodies and opposition parties, who have criticized the policy as a land-grabbing scheme that jeopardizes the state's agricultural foundation. The court has given the Punjab government four weeks to file a detailed reply, with the next hearing scheduled for September 10. The interim stay remains in effect to prevent any rights from being created under the policy in the meantime.