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## Land grab: Panel chief quits over govt inaction

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BENGALURU, DHNS: In an embarrassment to the Congress-JD(S) coalition government, senior legislator A T Ramaswamy has resigned as chairperson of the Karnataka Legislature Committee on Government Assurances upset over the administration's inaction in a major land grabbing case in Bengaluru.

"My conscience is not allowing me to continue," Ramaswamy wrote in a six-page resignation letter to Karnataka Assembly Speaker K R Ramesh Kumar. "It has caused me much pain that the government did not act upon illegality raised by the chairperson of the government assurances committee," he stated.

Ramaswamy, a JD(S) legislator representing the Arkalgud constituency, was referring to a case in which the special deputy commissioner of the Bengaluru south subdivision, Bengaluru Urban district, ordered transfer of 285 acres of land on survey number 137 at BM Kaval village, Kengeri hobli in Bengaluru South taluk, to private parties who claimed ownership. The land was ordered in favour of two women, the family of late liquor baron K L Srihari Khoday and others.

By doing so, the special deputy commissioner had reversed his predecessor's ruling that the land belonged to the government.

In the December 2018 winter session of the legislature in Belagavi,

Ramaswamy raised the issue on the floor of the House. The government admitted wrongdoing. Speaker Kumar "requested" the government to place the officer under suspension.

On Friday, June 14, the Assurances Committee led by Ramaswamy found that the land had been fenced and a board stated it was owned by the Khoday family. Ramaswamy demanded criminal prosecution against those involved.



A T Ramaswamy

"Bengaluru is heaven for land grabbers. The powerful are grabbing public lands by creating fake documents. This (BM Kaval case) is just one example. There will be hundreds and thousands of such cases," Ramaswamy rued.

Ramaswamy is all too familiar with land grabbing as he headed a Joint Legislature Committee on encroachment of government lands in Bengaluru urban district.

"If the poor live on government land in huts or sheds, they are displaced without any notice. But if the Khoday family illegally fences a government land, no action is taken. This shows that the government punishes the poor and protects the powerful," he wrote. "That no action was taken despite the government having assured the legislature of doing so is unfortunate. It hurts the dignity of the legislature."