**Shri Amit Shah Ji**

President

Bhartiya Janata Party

New Delhi.

Sub: Mobilising for Amendments in the Land Acquisition Act.

Respected Sir,

My best wishes to the central government in its battle against anti-development forces in the country. Recently, I had written for the daily *Pioneer* on the myopia afflicting the combined opposition to proposed amendments in the new land act. If these thoughts could be of use to you and your party workers, it would be a matter of satisfaction for me.

Looking forward to your kind response.

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**Article titled ‘Of Twenty First Century Luddites’ by Devesh Vijay in Pioneer dated 18th March, 2015.**

Heavy rain has again spoilt a ready harvest across much of northern and central India. Farmers in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh are reporting upto two third destruction of standing crop bringing them close to bankruptcy lest the state brings in a generous relief package urgently. No doubt, the Indian state offers subsidies on fertilisers, fuel and other inputs as well as support price for selected crops. Yet, even in the heartland of the green revolution of India, net earning from the average field of about **an acre** barely crosses Rs.50,000 per annum under normal weather and **with optimum** inputs due to massive leakages and mismanagement in state programs. On top of this, when nature strikes—and it strikes often—starvation stares hard in many a farmer’s face.

In this scenario, it is important to revisit our agricultural policy and land acquisition rules afresh. The increased subdivision of agricultural holdings over generations, the multiplication of marginal, sub-marginal and petty holdings of less than an acre in most parts of India, the pathetic state of power, roads and communitation infrastructure in general and increasing literacy leading to higher aspirations among rural youth--looking desperately for diversified incomes--indicates that the growth of the non-farm sector specially of coveted formal sector jobs in manufacturing and services--rural or rurban--is the need of the day. The state’s support to agriculturists should of course continue and be further beefed with more agricultural research and extention services, consolidation of land holdings and subsidies for poly-house farming, crop insurance and drip irrigation methods etc. At the same time, looking beyond agriculture within the rural sector is also extremely important now.

In this light, the opposition to the amendments proposed by the central government in the

*Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013* seems misplaced and misinformed. A dispassionate look at the rural economy and its challenges indicates that easing of land conversion procedures can be beneficial for both agriculturists and those seeking non-farm work increasingly.

An insistence on mandatory consent of up to 80% of residents for land conversion in villages through which a highway or a canal may pass would stall the long term, direct and indirect benefits of development as consent may not be easy to build in places plagued by contentious politics and possible litigation. In such a scenario, private capital would be extremely hesitant to invest while public projects may also remain on drawing boards even as existing roads, irrigation facilities and employment avenues remain choked.

Notably, many studies have established that farming is less remunerative in India today than even unskilled manual labour for small and marginal farmers who make up 80% of our agriculturists. The data published by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices in 2013, for example, shows that **per hectare** net earning from two harvests in India is less than Rs.50,000 per annum, **on average,** while two buffaloes yield about Rs.60,000 in a year and an unskilled laboring couple can earn upto Rs.50,000 per annum by working only for six months. Those who talk of the 'farmers' cause often ignore the fact that a very large number of 'farming households' are already combining cultivation with dairying, skilled and unskilled labor and even small businesses and services.

Interestingly, the market price of agricultural land even in remote villages of Chhattisgarh has crossed Rs. ten lakhs, per acre, whose minimum monthly interest return would be upto five times that of its agricultural yield. No doubt, farmers’ decisions regarding land are affected by non monetary considerations too. But, half of the rural youth that wishes to leave agriculture (as per the 2011-12, National Sample Survey) also has both pecuniary and other reasons for planning diversification of livelihoods.

It is also notable that the already subsidized farm incomes can rise today best by increasing the size of family farms along with the adoption of latest technology and farm practices. The average field in India today measures less than one hectare and yields less than one hundredth of the per worker income realised on mechanized farms in USA and Canada where single crop agriculture is common but farm size is more than 180 hectares on average. Clearly, a massive transfer of workers from agriculture to non-farm work is desirable in India too. Interestingly, the area under cultivation in India is about half of our total land while that under built up cover is less than nine per cent. Another point worth remembering is that flood irrigation techniques in agriculture are also adversely affecting the water table in many provinces. Conversion of one or two per cent of our agricultural land to non-agricultural use is not likely to harm food availability or rural employment in any way.

Lastly, twenty first century Luddites need to note that unintended consequences of states’ programs have often been profounder than their planned outcomes. Disruptions brought by economic liberalisation and technology have generally been small as compared to their long term gains for the rich as well as the poor. In the aggregate, neither linear projects nor high rise industrial hubs require a vast proportion of our agricultural land. Militant and populist law making can, however, hurt the interests of beneficiaries as well as the community as seen repeatedly in our legal history whether we think of our labour laws or rent laws which hurt the supposed beneficiaries too through reckless law making blurred by self righteousness.

Of course, no nation, democratic or otherwise, should leave even one citizen uncompensated for any material loss from displacement brought by public or private projects. Displaced landowners in India too need to be offered much more than the market price of acquired land along with an equivalent field elsewhere or a regular job under a watchful commission of eminent activists. But to make even linear projects hostage to consent building and legal battles would kill the very ‘hen’ whose ‘eggs’ even the poor need.

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