



GROWING FARMERS PROTEST IN INDIA: YET ANOTHER POLITICAL BLUNDER BY MODI

By
Dost Muhammad Barrech
Research Associate
India Study Centre (ISC), ISSI

Edited by
Najam Rafique

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Farmers in the Indian states of Punjab and Haryana have been up in protest against the promulgation of three farm acts passed by the Parliament of India in September 2020. The situation exacerbated when frustrated farmers marched towards New Delhi and the incident caught the attention of the world when they clashed with police and set up protest camps.¹

The enactment of the three agricultural reforms laws in September have increased the woes of already marginalized farmers. Though the government claims that promulgation of the laws will bring more efficiency in the agricultural sector, giving ample opportunities to farmers to boost production via private investment, the farmers view the new laws will deregulate crop prices resulting in reduction of their earnings.²

One of the agricultural laws grants permission to the growers to directly sell their products to institutional buyers such as big retailers and traders. However, farmers have genuine reservation over this law and maintain that this will leave small growers with little bargaining power. In India, 85% farmers possess approximately less than 5 acres of land and the new law will increase the hardships of small farmers to negotiate with large buyers of farm goods.³ Farmers in Punjab and

¹ "What's behind the farmers' protests that are blocking highways in India", *CBC news*, December 10, 2020. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/farmers-protests-india-1.5836313>

² *Ibid.*

³ "Why many Indian farmers and politicians oppose PM Narendra Modi's farm laws", *The Economic Times*, September 21, 2020. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/agriculture/why-many->

Haryana are also concerned about the big institutional buyers if they start buying directly from the them, the government will not be able to collect tax from, these buyers will have to pay at wholesale markets.⁴ Farmers also fear that the new enacted law will embolden corporate buyers to pressure them to sell their crops at lower prices fixed by big institutional buyers.

The second law determines predetermined prices arrangement with buyers to be accepted by the farmers that by all means bring them at disadvantageous position. The third law clearly reduces the role of government in regulating the quantity of goods that the purchaser can purchase.⁵

According to Reuters, farmers face two more dilemmas. On one hand, prices of fertilizers, seeds and equipment are skyrocketing, on the other, the cost of crops are declining, resulting in less earnings. They are also trapped in debt conundrum by the exploitative class of moneylenders who charge them with high interest rates. The prevailing Covid-19 has further been increasing worries of destitute farmers.⁶ One of the farmers while expressing his views with Reuters says that, "Most of the profit goes to paying interest to a private moneylender."⁷

Climate change has further played havoc, bringing more drought and extreme weather paving the way for destruction of the crops. According to one of the farmers, "We will lose our lands; we will lose our income if you let big business decide prices and buy crops. We don't trust big business. Free markets work in countries with less corruption and more regulation. It can't work for us here."⁸

Fragile farming sector of India has compelled farmers to commit suicide. Since 1990s, more than 300,000 farmers in India committed suicide. According to the latest official figures, in 2019 approximately 10,300 farmers committed suicide.⁹ Water scarcity in the foreseeable future will further multiply farmers' agonies. The report of Punjab government in 2017 maintained that by 2039, the northern states will use up all their groundwater resources.¹⁰

indian-farmers-and-politicians-oppose-pm-narendra-modis-farm-laws/articleshow/78237635.cms?from=mdr

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Joe McCarthy, "Why Indian farmers are protesting for their 'Very survival' in New Delhi" *Global Citizen*, December 3, 2020. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/farmers-protest-in-india-over-new-laws/>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Biswas, S. What has brought India's farmers to the streets? *BBC News*, December 03, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-55157574>

⁹ AFP, "Why are Indian farmers protesting, and what can Modi do?" *DAWN.COM*, December 12, 2020. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1595357>,

¹⁰ Ibid.

The current protest of the farmers has also received an overwhelming support from Sikh and Punjabi Diaspora living in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia and Canada, and who have been protesting outside Indian embassies to draw the world's attention to the plight of the farmers in India. One of the protesters in Melbourne, Australia argued that, "The new laws will bring economic devastation to our motherland, and we can't simply close our eyes and pretend that everything is alright back home,"¹¹ Meanwhile, Amanpreet Singh Grewal, in Ontario, Canada articulated that, "We are committed to supporting our farmers in India." Sikh community and Indian Punjabis living abroad are estimated at 12 million having a tight-knit community and support the growing concerns of Indian farmers globally.¹²

Modi's international and domestic policies appear to be plunging India into a quagmire. His demonetization of the Indian rupee in 2016 played havoc with the Indian markets. Similarly, abrogation of J&K's special status in 2019 surprised the entire world. Announcement of one of the strictest lockdowns during Covid-19 put Indian migrants in jeopardy and they had to travel on foot from their homes to cities.¹³ Modi also missed the bus by pulling India out of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership RCEP, the world's largest free-trade bloc in terms of Gross Domestic Product, thus isolating the country in terms of regional integration and giving a clear message to the investors that India is an unfriendly country for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).¹⁴

Modi's hasty decision of enacting the agricultural bill without a broad-based social consultation and overlooking the parliamentary process has now sparked the latest discontent in the shape of the farmers' demonstrations. Modi, it seems, is least concerned about the democratic norms and farmers' grievances; he is more interested in securing interests of the capitalist class and ignoring the fact that India was a food-hungry country in 1947, but with the toils of its farmer class became a food surplus country. The Indian farming sector provides bread and butter to approximately 70% of the country's 1.3 billion population, accounting for nearly 15% of the \$2.7 trillion economy.¹⁵ The agricultural laws could turn out to be yet another one of the political blunders by the Modi government.

¹¹ Reuters. "How the Sikh Diaspora is Drumming Up Global Support for Farmers' Protest in India." *DAWN.COM*. December 18, 2020. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1596451>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Agrawal, R. "Why India's farmers are protesting," *Foreign Policy* "December 10, 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/12/10/india-witnessing-biggest-protests-history-modi-farm-reform/>,

¹⁴ Dost Muhammad Barrech, "Modi's self-destructive policy of not joining RCEP", *Pakistan Observer*, November 25, 2020. <https://pakobserver.net/modis-self-destructive-policy-of-not-joining-rcep/>,

¹⁵ AFP. "Why Are Indian Farmers Protesting, and What Can Modi Do?" *DAWN.COM*. December 12, 2020. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1595357/why-are-indian-farmers-protesting-and-what-can-modi-do>.