**Farmers agitation in India irks international Sikhs**

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The ongoing farmer riots in India have taken an ugly turn, with the powerful international Sikh Diaspora in Canada, UK and the USA urging their governments to express concern over the rapidly deteriorating grave situation, especially in the backdrop of COVID-19.

India is an agrarian country with around 70% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Yet, due to callousness and poor policies, farmers have been committing suicides due to various reasons but mainly due to being unable to pay back government loans. As per the Indian Government claims, despite a multi-pronged approach to improving income and social security of farmers, over 12,000 suicides have been reported in the agricultural sector every year since 2013. The list includes farmers-cultivators and agricultural labourers.

Seven states account for 87.5% of total suicides in the farming sector in the country. The states are Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu 606. Ironically, Punjab, which benefited most from the Green Revolution, also presents a depressing picture of farmer’s suicides in India. According to Indian statistics, in the period 1995-2015: 4687 farmers’ suicides were reported from the state of Punjab of which 1334 from one district, Mansa alone.

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Currently, the farmers from Punjab and Haryana have marched towards Delhi as part of a protest to demand a repeal of Modi&#39;s new farm laws, which deregulate the sale of agriculture produce. They say the laws will lead to the dismantling of the minimum support price (MSP) system. Modi&#39;s laws, enacted in September, let farmers sell their produce anywhere, including to big corporate buyers like Walmart Inc., not just at government-regulated wholesale markets where growers are assured of a minimum procurement price. But many small growers worry they will be left vulnerable to big business and could eventually lose the price support for key staples such as wheat and rice.

The farmers, who arrived in trucks, buses and tractors at Delhi&#39;s Singhu border with Haryana state, blocked the main northern highway into the capital. They chanted slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi&#39;s government and waved the red, yellow and green flags of farmer&#39;s unions. The government has deployed hundreds of police and paramilitary forces in response. Inevitably clashes resulted, while police carried out baton charges, fired tear gas and water cannons to disperse the protesters, but failed to stop them, resultantly they have arrested several farmer leaders.

Amit Shah, the Indian Home Minister appealed to the farmers, who appeared ready for a long sit-in, to hold their protest at an allocated site in north Delhi, with various amenities. On the one hand, Shah invited the Farmers’ Union for talks to resolve the issue—the first round of which failed—but has also unleashed a combination of harassment tactics to force the protestors into submission.

Haryana Police booked state Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) Chief Gurnam Singh Charuni and several farmers on attempt to murder, rioting, causing obstruction in government duty and other charges for violations during their &quot;Delhi Chalo&quot; march. The various offences cited were attempt to murder, rioting, unlawful assembly, obstructing any public servant in discharge of public functions and negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life. A case against some farmers from BKU (Charuni) and others from Punjab was also registered at Panipat for violations relating to breaking police barriers and other charges. Prohibitory orders under section 144 had been imposed in several parts of Haryana to prevent the assembly of people.

Simultaneously, to suppress the genuine protests of the Punjab and Haryana farmers, it was insinuated that the very people who had instigated Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) violence and the Anti-Hindu riots in Delhi early this year are now fanning the ‘farmer protests’. Readers may recall that the JNU protests were against the draconian Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019 which deprived thousands of Muslims of their citizenship.

Expectedly, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his ministers expressed his concerns over ongoing farmers’ protests in India. He reiterated that Canada will always be ready to defend the right to peaceful protest, impressing upon his government’s belief in the importance of dialogue which prompted it to reach out directly to Indian authorities to highlight its concerns.

New Delhi dismissed the Canadian Prime Minister’s concerns calling it an interference in India’s internal issues. Prime Minister Modi forgets that Canada has 18 Sikh MPs, while India has only 13 in Lok Sabha.

Over 600,000 Sikhs reside in Canada and many of them are very influential. Punjab’s Chief Minister Capt.

Amrinder Singh, himself a Sikh, dismisses the most vocal Canadian Sikh, Defence Minister of Canada, Harjit Sajjan, by accusing him of having Khalistani connections. After the 1984 Sikh massacre following Indira Gandhi’s assassination, most Sikhs were forced to migrate to Canada, the UK and USA, where they have done well in their new homes.

Unsurprisingly, 36 members of the British Parliament have expressed solidarity with the ongoing farmers’ agitation in India and have written to UK’s Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab to raise the matter with New Delhi.

Meanwhile, United Nations Secretary General António Guterres’s spokesperson Stephane Dujarric has stated that Farmers in India have the right to demonstrate peacefully and authorities should allow them.

Renowned US scholar Noam Chomsky has opined that Indian BJP government is heading towards fascism and total disruption of its secular values and its democracy is in danger. The expatriate Sikh community in different parts of the world is also supporting the farmers’ movement. From New York to London, from Toronto to San Francisco, from Auckland to Berlin – peasants are protesting in front of Indian embassies in various cities around the world. The protesters are even marching in support of the farmers. How long will Modi ignore international censure?