

What's Going On: Indian Farmers Protests

Vancouver-based lawyer spoke on the political implications of the protests

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For over **three months**, millions of farmers have been protesting in India over new agriculture laws. Three bills were passed by Indian parliament in September and signed into law by prime minister Narendra Modi. The government is being accused of defying parliamentary procedure by passing the bills and not allowing deliberation.

The bills **loosen regulations** concerned with sale pricing and storage of farm produce.

The first **bill**, Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, allows farmers to sell produce outside of government sanctioned markets. This means corporations can now directly buy from farmers at mutually agreed prices and there will no longer be any mandi tax — a fee for the purchase and sale of agricultural **produce**.

The second bill, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, reiterates farmers can now "do contract farming and market their produces freely."

The last bill, The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, is “an amendment to the existing Essential Commodities Act. This law now frees up [previously limited] items such as foodgrains, pulses, edible oils, and onions for trade.”

The government argues the bills provide more freedom and opportunity for farmers so they can earn more money for their produce. Modi claims the laws are necessary [reforms](#) for the country's agriculture industry. “We need to move forward, not backward. We need to give these reforms a [chance](#),” he said.

Farmers say by getting rid of the current regulated markets and consequently minimum support price (MSP), they will no longer have control over prices set by private buyers — leaving them vulnerable to [exploitation](#).

Across India, roads have been [barricaded](#) by police in an attempt to stop protesters who are against the bills.

Individuals who've attempted to advance past barricades have been met with tear gas shells and [water cannons](#). Protestors have been held on [criminal charges](#). Indian police continue to cut food and fresh [water supply](#) to protest sites.

While these events unfold in New Delhi, farmers are complaining pro-government media [fails](#) to fully report them.

Further, if the protests are covered, they are misconstrued, misinterpreted, and [politicized](#) against them, they say. In response to this, protest participants and supporters have turned to social media platforms to share their dissent by sharing footage of the events.

The government has ordered multiple [internet shutdowns](#) at protests sites, taken down activist social media accounts, attempted to censor trending hashtags, and arrested journalists and activists for sharing information and [news](#).

Raminder Hayre, a practicing lawyer in Vancouver and social media activist told *The Peak*, “The government and the Indian media [have] tried to focus on censorship, but [also] creating backlash on those in the west [. . .] creating that negativity so the energy shifts towards that rather than looking at the problem on hand.”

Hayre said when compared to the previous tactics used by police at the protests sites, “[censorship] is more dangerous because the goal in censorship is manipulating what can be in the media so they are not exposed.” As a result, citizens and protestors are unaware of the tactics being used against them.

"It's scary to see how their system is so subjective," Hayre said.

"What they're doing is not what you do in a democracy [. . .] they are tarnishing the reputation of a democracy by undergoing these acts, the right to a democracy means you have the right to a peaceful protest [and] freedom of expression.

"[They] have a right to be heard, and these farmers were not heard in the first place," she added.

Members of Indian diaspora have been holding protests worldwide.

According to *Global News*, dozens participated in a sleep out at the Vancouver Art Gallery Saturday night. Kisaan Sleep-Out organizer Navjot Mannan said, "We just feel like we owe it to our roots and our ancestors and our relatives [. . .] that are still in India to speak up for them, because they don't have a voice in their government right now."

"The fear of a genocide is real right now — we're at about eight out of ten steps of a genocide. The only that are left are the actual killing of individuals and the concealing of it. That's scary when you can see how they've already tried to classify and demonize the farmers," Hayre said.