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Editorial

Farmers' Agitation!

If the next round of talks between the Central Government and farmers' representatives scheduled for 30th December proves a damp squib once again like previous five rounds of talks, then by the time of going to press, farmers' agitation would have entered 40 days since it began on 26 November 2020 surrounding Delhi's Singhu border, Tikri border and Ghazipur border along with many other places that are not fully reported by the mainstream media for reasons best known to them. Undeniably, farmers have been agitating against the three farm Acts - The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020; and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 – that were first promulgated in the form of three ordinances in early June when the entire country was under nationwide lockdown in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently hurriedly got passed by the ruling dispensation from both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha sans appropriate parliamentary procedures that are essential for passage of laws.

While the Central NDA Government led by BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi claim that these farm acts for the progress of farmers, whereas farmers 'bodies from Punjab and Haryana have been protesting against these farm acts since the very days of their promulgation in the form of ordinances in June past year and their subsequent passage from the Parliament in September last year. Initially, farmers' protests were confined to Punjab and gradually they started spreading to Haryana and no serious attention was paid to the demands of the farmers, thereafter farmers unions shifted their focus to Delhi in the last week of November last year. In the initial days of the farmers' protests at Singhu border and Tikri border where a few thousand farmers had started camping from 26th November onwards, the Central Government took protest movement lightly; nevertheless, when the number of agitating farmers started swelling, the Government made offer of talks to the protesting farmers.

First round of talks held on first December between the representatives of farmers and representatives of Central Government led by the Union Agriculture Minister failed to reach any amicable solution on account of differing positions of the negotiating parties. Farmers called for the repeal of three farm laws and guaranteed minimum support price (MSP) through an enactment of law on the same, whereas Government insisted on its previous stand that those laws were enacted for the development and welfare of the farmers and refused to repeal them. Thus, the first round ended in a fiasco. Subsequent round of talks saw Central Government adopting a slight flexible attitude by agreeing to make certain amendments in these laws, while the farmers' representatives insisted on the total withdrawal of 'draconian' anti-farmer laws.

Despite five rounds of talks held prior to 30th December, the stalemate continues to prevail with both sides sticking to their guns and showing no signs of let-up in their respective stand. In the meanwhile, the propaganda machinery of the BJP has embarked on a blitzkrieg against the protesting farmers branding them 'Khalistanis', Tukde Tukde gang, 'Recipients of funds from abroad', 'being prompted by Opposition parties' and 'being patronized by Pakistan and China' etc. Such allegations that are strongly detested by the farmers have further alienated the farmers and vitiated the atmosphere of fruitful negotiations. At the same time, a large number of farmers are pouring in from different parts of UP, Uttarakhand, MP, Kamataka, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and other states. Reports in social media make it discernible that despite the use of local police to prevent farmers, especially from BJP-ruled states like UP, MP and Gujarat, from going to Delhi to join the protesting farmers, there is growing number of farmers pouring into the capital from these states. There seems on gainsaying the fact that it has become a pan-India movement that has been eliciting the support from other sections of the society as well. Many firsts have been established by this protest movement. Unlike other protest movements like on CAA/NCR, Article 370 etc., this movement has garnered support from various sections inside the country and abroad. Non-violent, disciplined and self-reliant character of this movement is lifetime challenge for the current leadership and we hope for its early solution. -BK