

Sikh Assembly - farmer protests in India are an anguished cry of deep community concerns that need to be heard

The last decade has been marred by horrific depictions of the common man, woman and child experiencing the effect of government policies whether in democracies or autocratic regimes across the world. The Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, the Rwandan Genocide, Roving Crisis and so many more all carry the painful hallmark of suffering, persecution and indifference.

The last two months have seen the steady escalation of protests, initially by large numbers of farmers in the North Western Indian state of Panjab, commonly referred to as the 'breadbasket of India' due to it being responsible for a minimum 58% of the country's total agricultural product. The laws being protested are themselves claimed to be the answer to a slow decline over decades in farmer sustenance and their ability to even survive under crippling debts due to market failure and leading world record suicides by farmers unable to maintain a dignified life. Their voices have fallen on deaf ears in Government and the desperation of the farmer community in all of India has seen farmers from states as diverse as Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and the non agrarian related population of Delhi come together in a tidal wave of protest against the policy of central government to introduce three laws which, it is feared, will fundamentally take away the earning potential and heritage of individual farmers rights to be given to corporate ownership and pricing autonomy. There is a widespread fear that no guarantee of a minimum wage, no thought through jobs policy and the impact on 60% of the Indian economy and its poorest contributors will lead to abject poverty, loss of livelihoods and an increase still in the already high suicide rate for debt ridden farmers.

The Indian media's reaction to malign the movement with labels of terrorism, ignorance and misleading assertions of the true motivation of those demonstrating are a sad reflection of the lack of respect for hundreds of thousands of voices registering a protest. Whatever the intricate details of this dispute may be - the deliberate stalling, stifling of protests, government instigated barriers, utilising water canon and tear gas upon peaceful protestors does not reflect well on the intentions of the authorities. How else should the common man influence government policy? How can such a large uprising of fear and anger over livelihood be anything other than a need for a sensible mature and open dialogue between government and its people? The state government representatives have also failed to articulate the deep concerns of those they represent.

The global community at government and media level has again kept silent on one of the biggest ever human chains of protesting people converging on a capital city. Social media should allow affected communities a safe space to vent and release frustration, yet the targeted censorship and misrepresentation rearing its ugly head by social media platforms and those using them is yet another barrier to transparent and honest messaging.

Sikh Assembly as a voice for Sikh interests is deeply perturbed by the treatment of our brethren, suffering cold nights and miserable conditions to enact their right to protest - we are appalled by the

lack of international government outrage at this trampling of human rights. We echo and support the clear message MP Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi has written to Rt Honourable Dominic Raab. The U.K. has always stood proud of its stated position on human rights – and we expect the current silence to be broken with a bold statement that reflects the same.

Sikh Assembly trustee and CEO, Sdn Paramjit Kaur Matharu, said “Democracy behoves governments to respect the rights of their citizens to understand, clarify and seek to change laws that affect their lives without having to resort to such lengths.”

Sikh Assembly trustee and Sikh Relief Director of Operations, Sdr Gurmukh Singh Atwal, added, "Its a very serious situation, where the livelihoods and economy of the Panjab state itself is in the balance, we can only implore those protesting to remain peaceful and express complete awe at their resilience, whilst urging the government to engage them in consultation, a consultation that should've occurred before the legislation was passed without debate in Parliament."

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