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With a leadership like this, who needs enemies?

Farmers stole the thunder of the Republic Day from the man with the long beard



[Rahul Jayaram](#), JAN 30 2021, 23:59 IST | UPDATED: JAN 31 2021, 09:28 IST



Rahul Jayaram. Credit: DH.

With its unbending stance prolonging the fate of the farm laws, with its hauteur riling parts of its own voter base, with its making farmers suffer and brave one of the harshest winters (and the coronavirus) in Delhi, and with its muddled relaying of the route farmers were expected to take into Delhi on Republic Day, to this writer there was no doubt over who was more culpable for the mayhem in the capital. With the Centre, the Delhi Police, too, was made to look inept. The farmers are making arms of the government pay.

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of the Republic Day from the man with the long beard. In the seeming madness, there was method still. Yet, the questions to the government and Delhi Police linger. We must not forget that like the soldiers posted on our borders, sections of North India's police personnel belong to the protesting farming communities they were policing in Delhi. I've often wondered, in such circumstances, how does the police use force against its own people bearing a legitimate grievance. Under the Centre's command, India is becoming a country that doesn't need external enemies, for it is more at war with itself.

What will it take for the government to read two-month-old messages that couldn't be louder or clearer? Of course, the violence was condemnable, but protesters were made to arrive at it. Farmers were even restricted in their constitutional right to movement when local law enforcement halted them from leaving their villages to go to Delhi.

People will seek accountability for the Republic Day violence. People will say it has broken the credibility of the protests. But what about those farmers who died over these two long months? Who is to reckon for that? What needs more urgent reckoning? The visually captured drama of Republic Day or the unseen suffering of the protesters? How many rounds of talks will it take to get the message they have given many times over? Who will account for their loss of time in the fields? Will they be compensated?

Resistance, in North India, has been aplenty, and is usually intense. No government, of the Centre or state, should want to provoke or upset social relations that have simmered, even at the best of times. These regions are minefields of fault-lines, and land is a trigger. Even in the 21st century, North India retains its feudal character. It has a strong diaspora, professionals across a range of sectors, who are lauded for their industriousness and nous in different parts of India and the world they migrate to. And yet, home and land mean everything. Not everything can be gift-wrapped into a deal with big-corporate-influenced governments. And surely, not without substantive conversation between stakeholders. As it has done before, this government has set aside democratic norms like parleys and processes.

The agitations also show the idea of India as ever fragile. There's no need for external foes to create this feeling as our central leadership will do it. The khaps and the village councils that are battling now, also embody many of our social evils. The farming castes of western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana now on the borders of Delhi, have long been allies of Hindutva and lit sectarian fires in the past. As for the Sikhs, they've been angered with questions on their loyalty to the nation. So, they have been pushed to express themselves, which they did through their identity.

We've been here before. In polities with diverse communities, the leadership ought to be circumspect over wedge matters like land, and respect consultative norms. Else, it paves the way

didn't, and is caught. Big corporations may lose deals. One man's beard looks set to grow longer.

(Rahul Jayaram the Jindal Global University academic believes we are living through the apocalypse @RaJayaram)

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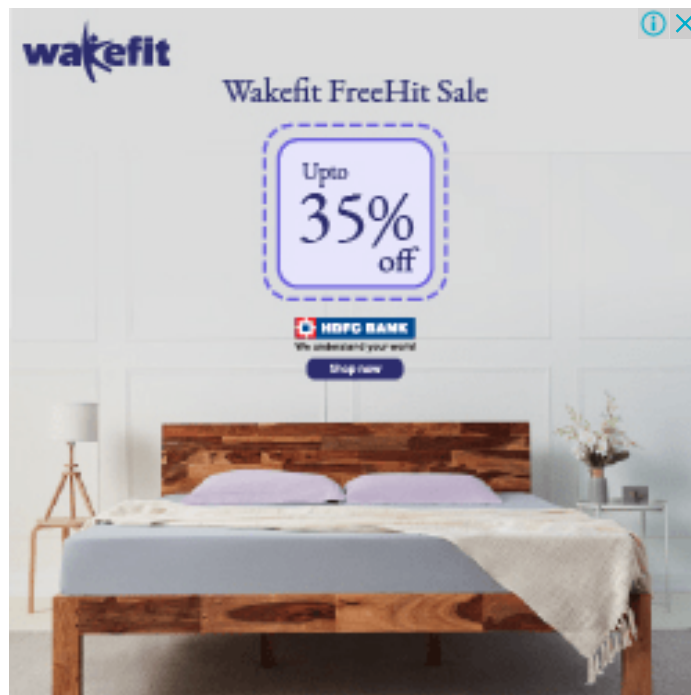
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