

# Farm leaders' political ambitions weighing heavy on common people

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The ongoing farmers' protest has dragged on now for close to eight months without any solution in sight. While apparently both sides seem to be locked in an inextricable contest, it should not lead us to apportion blame equally between both parties. The government has offered to discuss issues but when the other party lays down a non-negotiable pre-condition, there does not remain any scope for talks. The stalemate which has been causing untold misery to lakhs of people concerned must end with the removal of blockades without further delay.

The government has let the things go on in the case of this "peaceful" agitation for so long believing probably that it will peter out. Sure, the government's patience has paid off in the dwindling numbers of agitationists. More than that, the faultlines in the form of internal power tussles have also been revealed. Gurnam Singh Charuni, the former Haryana unit chief of B.K.U has been ostracized for the so-called anti-farmer stance.

What is now crystal clear to all is the political ambition of those involved in the farmers' protest. Rakesh Tikait has recently talked about being ready to continue the agitation till 2024, which means he is eyeing the parliamentary elections and wants to keep the pot boiling till then. Yogendra Yadav, the non-farmer leader of farmers, had tried his luck in elections in the past as an AAP candidate. He has recently in a newspaper article envisioned broadening the ambit of the agitation to seek to bring in structural changes in the polity. That indeed is a lofty goal but it is highly unlikely that this agitation which is confined to the farmers of Punjab and a small portion from Haryana can aspire to be the call of the entire nation under the leadership of Mr. Yadav.

While these leaders are using the farmers to achieve their political ends, a look at the farmers involved in these sit-ins at Delhi borders reveals that they are not poor farmers. Even a layman can understand that no poor farmer can afford to leave his land and sit for so long at these dharnas. They are well-to-do landlords who are assured of work back home by their tenant farmers, and so, they can be partners in the political game eyeing as they too are some kind of political reward in future. With the Mandi arhtiyas and market-

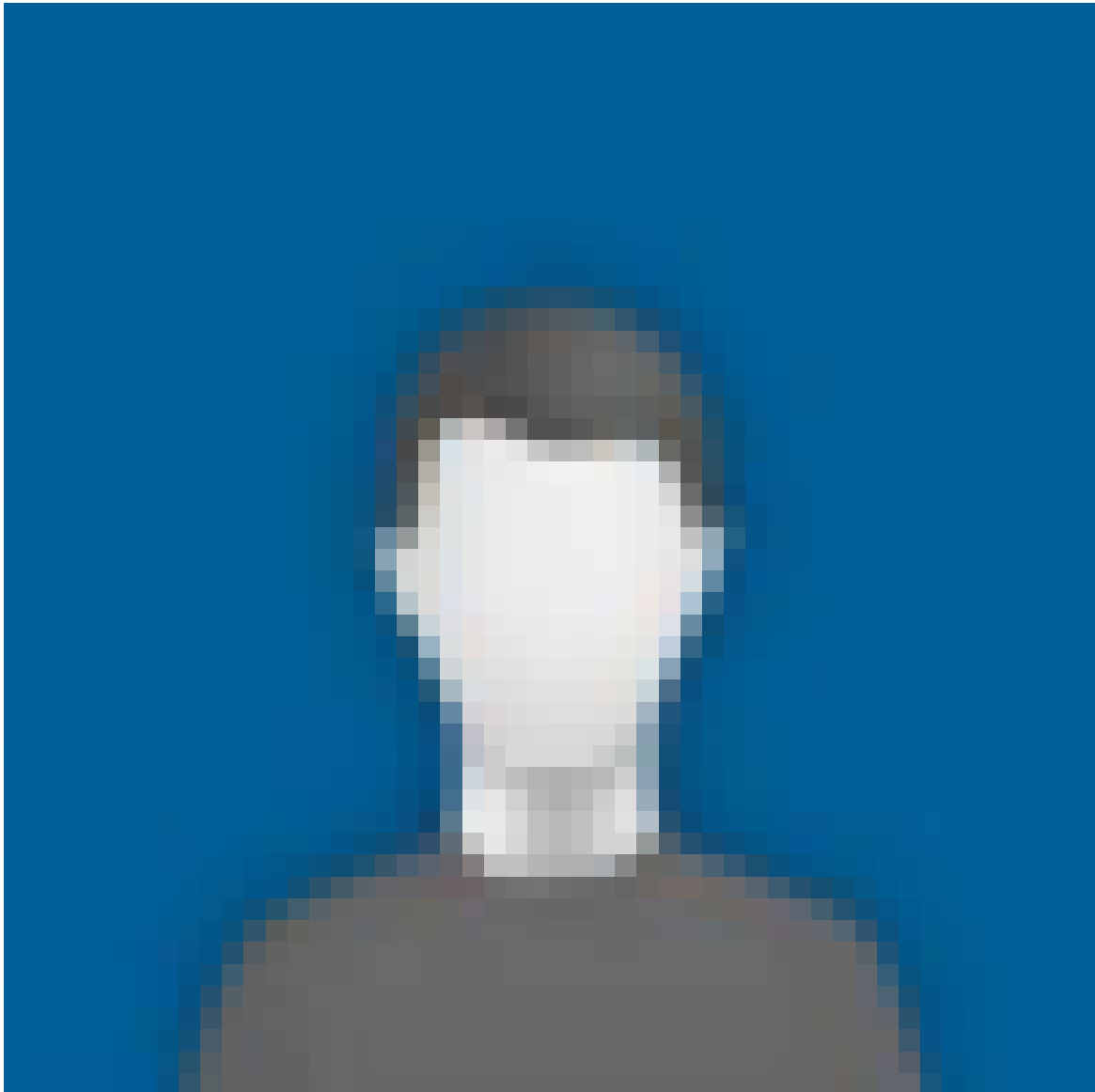
committees controlling politicians at their back, they are like political workers in any political party. The foreign agencies do have plenty of funds to keep the agitationists provided with all amenities.

The actual poor people are suffering because of their machinations. The areas around their sit-ins have a lot of factories which depend upon Delhi for procuring raw material and selling finished products. The roadblocks for them as also for other people travelling to and fro Delhi have meant taking detour through kacha village roads and uncultivated fields. Here again, there are reports of ruffians forcing travelers to part with a 'transit fee'. The loss of time and fuel is extra. Several factories have had to close down. Those functioning are losing on production and the report from Tikri places the loss at Rs. 20,000 crore till date – a whopping sum indeed. And there are many other entry/exit points too which have been blocked. Large numbers of labourers have been laid off swelling the number of victims of this agitation.

The neighbouring villages, which at the beginning helped the farmers with food and supplies have grown weary of these hassles. Law and order problem has been rising; even policemen have been attacked. Newspapers have been carrying reports of young women missing under mysterious circumstances from areas around these spots. Under the banner of Rashtravadi Parivartan Manch, the villagers have been taking out marches to demand opening of one side of the road so that they can travel freely to and fro Delhi to attend to their jobs there.

But the government, it seems, is not interested in addressing their grievances. It is hell bent on showing to the world its democratic credentials without realizing that in any democracy, norms are not entirely thrown to the wind. Within the country, it is definitely not the fear of loss of votes which, in any case, will be there for the BJP, because PM Modi has not refrained from taking bold steps even if these alienated voters elsewhere. Now that the people in the country have realized the real intentions of the farm leaders, there should be action to save the jobs of industrial labour and also to facilitate people travelling from all around Delhi for their needs.

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