

Farmer's Movement in India: Looking at the Larger Picture

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On 15 January, the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) met at Delhi's Singhu border, to review the progress made by the government on its promises made at the time of the repealing of the three agri laws. Following Parliamentary and written assurances, the farmers had suspended their movement and lifted their occupation of the Delhi borders.

At the review meeting, it may not have needed too much effort and discussion for SKM to conclude that the government had not only not fulfilled any of its assurances, but hadn't even started working towards them. Actually, that the government may not willingly and readily honour its word, should have been suspected from the outset itself – just weigh the words the Prime Minister used while announcing the repeal of the three laws to realize that his apology lacked sincerity and that he was largely buying time for the elections in the five states.

That apart, judging from the scarce reports in the media on the review meeting, the SKM has stayed the course, resolute in its stand and approach, and ready to broaden the Movement's base. This is heartening.

However, it is possible the discussions at the meeting may not have been exactly smooth, but that would not have been unexpected or surprising. At the same time, the meeting may have felt all but hampered by the forthcoming State elections. The decision of 22 farmers' organizations jumping into the political fray and consequently their dismissal from SKM too may have hung over this review meeting – enough for the Morcha to decide that it would further evaluate the situation and its relationship with those organizations in April, which would be well after new governments would have taken over in the election bound five states. This is appropriate for right now and may, in fact, prove to be better in the due course. It would, on the one hand, help SKM take a long view on the farmers' unity and, on the other, while wishing Rajewal and Chaduni well, the elections may help them realize, possibly to their sorrow, that the “event” that elections are (or have become), is an entirely

different ball-game. Already there are fissures in the Rajewal collective; so it may be only better for SKM to not become too rigid in the larger interests of farmers' unity and allow itself to evolve without comprising on its principles.

One can also presume that some of the acrimony may also have been around the quantum of ultimatum and the time frame given to the government. This is apparent in the further two weeks leeway given to the government, which actually is neither here nor there. With the BJP all but consumed by its election campaign not exactly going smoothly, one cannot hope for the government to even think of and, far less, do anything on the farmers' concerns in two weeks. If it does, it would only be in acute desperation.

Possibly the most significant and emphatic decision from the review meeting was regarding Ajay Mishra Teni, and with the Movement now deciding to base part of itself around Lakhimpur-Khiri. This one question symbolizes the decay that has consumed our polity and social character, and challenges our collective sanity. It cannot be left to fester.

SKM may certainly have also pondered over the larger organizational issues and future questions, as is apparent from its decision to support and join through rural strikes, the protests called by the Labour unions in the country next month. This was a definite step forward and would open more doors in the future, to give voice to all other struggles that the marginalized and the larger society – whether rural or urban – across the country are forced to undertake. SKM has a unique opportunity to make history count.

Only one SKM decision begs a question – Mission UP and Mission Uttarakhand. Currently these may be short-term, election related targets. And we can say that Mission Punjab has always been there! But then, why not include Mission Goa and Mission Manipur? If nothing, it will help the Farmers' Movement spread its wings, which will be needed for later struggles.

There are many other questions as well, which SKM and the Farmers' Movement need to raise and respond to. But there will be time for that. Will there be?

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