

Renewed Farmer Agitation in India Amid Brutal Crackdown on Press Freedom

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The BJP-led government in India is seeking to extract revenge for the humiliating defeat it suffered at the hands of farmers whose one-year agitation led to the repeal of three farm laws in late 2021.

This claim was made during a recent press conference in Delhi held by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) (United Farmers Front).

The SKM was formed in November 2020 as a coalition of more than 40 Indian farmers' unions to coordinate non-violent resistance against three farm acts initiated two months before.

Asserting that the laws violated the constitution and were anti-farmer and pro big business, the SKM announced renewed agitation and expressed grave concern about a crackdown by the government against the online media platform NewsClick, which supported the farmers throughout their one-year struggle.

Those present heard that there has been "baseless dishonest and false allegations in the NewsClick FIR against the historic farmers' struggle" and that the "FIR accuses the farmers' movement as anti-national, funded by foreign and terrorist forces".

An FIR is a 'first information report': a document prepared by police in India when they receive information about the commission of a "cognisable" (serious) offence.

Delhi Police issued an FIR against NewsClick founder Prabir Purkayastha and the human resources head Amit Chakravarty, which infers that the farmers' movement was aimed at stopping the supply of essential goods for citizens and creating law and order issues.

An article on The Hindu newspaper's Frontline portal describes the nature of the FIR, which

goes far beyond the farmers' issue, and concludes police actions along with the FIR marks a major low point for media freedom in India.

[According to Frontline](#), the police raids on the offices of NewsClick and the residences of virtually anyone associated with it; the indiscriminate seizure of the electronic devices of journalists and other employees; the sealing of the news portal's main office; the arrest of its founder-editor and its administrative officer on terrorism-related charges; and the searches conducted at the premises of NewsClick and the home of its founder-editor mark the lowest point for media freedom in India since the Emergency of 1975-1977.

The withdrawal of the FIR against NewsClick was called for during the press conference. There was also a demand for the immediate release of NewsClick journalists.

The SKM said that farmers across the country will burn copies of the FIR on 6 November after a sustained campaign at village level against the government's pro-corporate policies from 1-5 November.

The farmers' coalition also pledged to campaign in five poll-going states with the slogan "Oppose Corporate, Punish BJP, Save Country."

And a 72-hour sit-in will take place in front of the Raj Bhawans (official residences of state governors) in state capitals between 26 and 28 November.

The SKM states that the farmers' movement was committed and patriotic and saw through the "nefarious plan" of the three farm laws to withdraw government support from agriculture and hand over farming, mandis (state-run wholesale agricultural markets) and public food distribution to corporations led by Adani, Ambani, Tata, Cargill, Pepsi, Walmart, Bayer, Amazon and others.

It added that the farmers exposed the corporate-backed plan of depriving the people of India of food security, pauperising farmers, changing cropping patterns to suit corporations and allowing the free penetration of foreign corporations into India's food processing market.

Those in attendance also heard about the hardships experienced by farmers during the one-year agitation:

"In the process, the farmers braved water cannons, teargas shelling, roadblocks with huge containers, deep road cuts, lathi charge, cold and hot weather. Over 13 months, they sacrificed 732 martyrs ... This was a patriotic movement of the highest quality in the face of repression by a fascist government serving interests of Imperialist exploiters."

State investment in agriculture infrastructure was called for, along with the promotion of profitable farming, the facilitation and securing of modern food processing, marketing and consumer networks under the collective ownership and control of peasant-worker cooperatives.

Accusing the government of acting on behalf of corporate interests, one speaker said that it had targeted NewsClick because it only did what a genuine news media should have been doing — reporting on the truth, the problems of farmers and the nature of the

struggle.

It was claimed that:

“The BJP Government is using the farcical FIR to spread a canard that the farmers’ movement was anti-people, anti-national and backed by terrorist funding routed through Newsclick. This is factually wrong and mischievously inserted to portray the movement in bad light and seeking to extract revenge for the humiliating defeat they suffered at the hands of the farmers of our country.”

The farmers’ coalition argued that the government is moving to falsely charge the farmers movement of being foreign funded and sponsored by terrorist forces, while it is “promoting FDI, Foreign MNCs, big corporations into agriculture”.

The coalition says it remains committed to saving the rural economy, preventing foreign looting and rejuvenating the village economy in order to build a strong India.

The author’s e-book includes insight into the farm laws and farmers’ struggle mentioned above and can be accessed below.

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Featured image: Trade unions protest in Delhi’s Shaheedi Park. Several trade unions and workers’ organisations have joined the ongoing farmers’ protest against three recently enacted farm laws.
SHAHID TANTRAY FOR THE CARAVAN



Read Colin Todhunter's e-Book entitled

Food, Dispossession and Dependency. Resisting the New World Order

We are currently seeing an acceleration of the corporate consolidation of the entire global agri-food chain. The high-tech/big data conglomerates, including Amazon, Microsoft, Facebook and Google, [have joined traditional agribusiness giants](#), such as Corteva, Bayer, Cargill and Syngenta, in a quest to impose their model of food and agriculture on the world.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is also involved (documented in '[Gates to a Global Empire](#)' by Navdanya International), whether through [buying up huge tracts of farmland](#), promoting a much-heralded [\(but failed\) 'green revolution' for Africa](#), pushing [biosynthetic food](#) and [genetic engineering technologies](#) or more generally [facilitating the aims of the mega agri-food corporations](#).

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