Demands of Adivasi Farmers in Maharashtra

Why in news?

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A predominant number of Adivasi farmers had protested outside Maharashtra state assembly claiming various demands.

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What were the demands of the farmers?

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- Farmers demanded a broader debt waiver program after some of them failed to qualify for any financial relief under the Maharashtra government's initiative in 2017.
- The demands were also extended in including a better prices for their crops, changes in a river-linking program in the state to ensure that tribal villages are not submerged.
- Farmers protested to halt the acquisition of farmers' lands for the bullet train and the super highway projects.
- They also demanded proper compensation for losses due to pest attacks and hailstorms.
- Apart from this farmers also demanded for the union government’s promise to ensure a 50 percent return over production costs before the national election in 2019.

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What are the reasons behind farmer distress?

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- Maharashtra is the country's second-biggest producer of cotton and sugar

cane and third-biggest grower of pulses.
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- Bumper harvests, boosted by good rain in 2016 and 2017 after back-to-back droughts, have hurt farmer incomes due to a supply glut.
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- In Maharashtra costs of farming have become unsustainable, and it’s no longer feasible for farmers to live in villages and sustain their families.
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- For this reason farmers wanted to draw the government's attention to their plight.
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What are the problems faced by Adivasi farmers?

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- The 50,000-odd peaceful yet determined men and women who protested were predominantly poor tribal farmers from the Adivasi pockets of northern Maharashtra.
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- These farmers have been seeking a legal title to forest land being occupied and cultivated by them for generations.
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- This problem is something that’s specific to Adivasi farmers people who are traditional forest dwellers, but whose rights over such land are not officially recognised.
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- In the absence of recorded titles their lands technically belong to the forest departments and due to this these farmers cannot access institutional credit.
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- Since such farmers rely on moneylenders, who typically extend credit for input purchases against delivery of the former’s harvested produce to them, they face severe consequence.
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What is the task lies before the government?

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- As of now the protests has been called off, Maharashtra government should honour its promise of resolving the issue of forest land transfer rights.
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- Proper implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, will allow Adivasi farmers who are today practically landless labourers or, at tenants at will to claim ownership over their traditionally cultivated lands, subject to verification by the Gram Sabhas concerned.
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- There is need to do away with such intermediariesin tracts already being farmed for generations by traditional forest dwellers.
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- It will, then, incentivise them to invest in land improvement, which contributes to its long-term productivity, and farm without fear of eviction or having to bribe forest department officials.
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Source: The Indian Express, Business Standard

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