Massive Farmer Rally in Mumbai

What is the issue?

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- The “long march of the farmers” (protest) in Maharashtra has brought back the attention on the crisis that beholds the Indian agriculture.
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- It is important to recognize that the issues raised aren’t merely superficial and they question the very socio-economic framework of our society.
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What were the broader contours of the protest?

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- A series of long-standing demands like - Loan waivers increased MSP, wider diffusion of effective property rights, improvements in irrigation.
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- The rally was a deeply emotional reminder of how much the farmer has become an invisible entity in our larger political mesh.
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- While most farmer movements were pressure tactics against governments and is dominated by the landed and well off castes, the current is very different.
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- This seems largely like a march of the most marginalised in dire desperation to liberate themselves from the fringes of the economic spectrum.
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- Hence, it would be a mistake to see the current voices as mere screams that could be shunted with unsustainable populist handouts.
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What are the nuances that need special attention?

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- **MSP -** The farmers have asserted the need to reform the way “Minimum Support Price” (MSP) is fixed, which is a prudent economic demand.
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- The demand is to assess the true estimate of costs, and commission a cost plus model to secure farmer earnings after months of hard labour.
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- While farmers are thought to be pampered with waivers, this debate highlights how consumers have been subsidised in invisible ways by farmers for long.
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- **Loans -** While loan waivers in a well-functional system won’t be necessary, considering the extent of distress in the sector, it is in fact not all that bad.
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- There is a moral hazard in disputing desperate financial waivers as this would mean dismissing distributive justice that forms the core of our democracy.
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- **Irrigation -** Part of the crisis has been induced by failures of irrigation projects, which calls for a rethink on our approach in this regard.
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- Additionally, with increased focus on - roads, ports, power capacity etc, irrigation network up gradation has taken a backseat.
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- **Marketing -** Agriculture is not a business in the conventional sense and faces production and price risks and a great deal of market regulations.
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- The interventionist role of the state in farming and random subsidisation policies are some serious issues that need streamlining.
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- **Rural Neglect -** The urban bias of public policy, media’s incapacity to capture and highlight rural distress work congruently to worsen farmer woes.
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- Rural India also faces a double social disadvantage due to our failures in health and education sectors, which envelops farmers almost completely.
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What is the way ahead?

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- It would be morally obtuse and analytically misleading to see this long march

as simply a demand for palliatives, subsidies, waivers.
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- Those constructions are often used to disguise the questions of distributive justice at play, and they reinforce the stereotype of the farmer as a mere victim.
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- The long march is instead a claim for economic agency and rationality, human dignity, political representation, and cultural visibility.
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Source: Indian Express

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