Trust Deficit - Changes to Farm Laws

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What is the issue?

- Heeding to the demands of the farmers, after the talks, the Centre has offered to make some changes to the farm laws.
- However, some long-standing demands and the changes much needed remain unaddressed.

What is the recent development?

- After dismissing the protests as ill-informed and motivated initially, the Centre has offered to make some changes to the laws.
- But the farmers have now called for a Bharat Bandh.
- Farmers who are protesting are sceptical of the government's claim that these laws would make agriculture more lucrative and secure by allowing market forces to play.
- There is a fear that the new regime will dismantle the system of procurement under MSP and leave farmers at the mercy of corporations.

What commitments has the Centre made now?

- Responding to the concerns, the Centre has suggested -
    i. safeguards to prevent land alienation via contract farming
    ii. strengthening the State-run mandi system
    iii. ensuring mandi system's equal footing with private buyers through equalising taxes
    iv. allowing grievance redress in civil courts rather than just in the offices of Sub-Divisional Magistrates
    v. ensuring proper verification of private traders

What are the unaddressed concerns?

- The Centre has not offered a legal guarantee of MSP.
- The question of power subsidies remains contentious.
- The present government has a declared policy of ensuring farm prices that are at least 50% more than the input costs.
- But this has remained more an intent than reality.

- The discussion has also been disturbed by the government's refusal to include rental value of the land in input costs.

Why are farmers concerned?

- India had ensured substantial food stock and a robust distribution mechanism that covers the entire country.
- But agriculture has to remain environmentally sustainable and remunerative for farmers.
- Significant challenges have now emerged with regard to these benchmarks.
- There have been changes in land acquisition laws and there is general thrust towards industrialisation.
- These, together with the pressure on agriculture subsidies, have increased the feeling of vulnerability of farmers in recent years.
- The abrupt changes in the sector brought in through the three laws have aggravated the trust deficit of the government.

What is the way forward?

- Food security is considered a component of national security by all countries.
- Apart from the fresh amendments, the Centre must consider a legal guarantee for MSP.
- The incentive structures and cropping pattern has to be reworked in order to account for changes in water availability and changing dietary requirements.
- The Centre must strive for reaching an agreement with the farmers that addresses their concerns.

Source: The Hindu

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