



**GENE
CAMPAIGN**

&

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Press Release

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FARMERS PROTEST AGAINST WHEAT IMPORTS AND THE NEW INDO- US PACT ON AGRICULTURE

Thousands of farmers from across North India, chiefly Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh collected at the Jantar Mantar in Delhi today to protest against the proposal to import wheat and against the governments' new pact with USA, on agriculture.

The protest rally where thousands of farmers voiced their protest at the government's policies and actions, was addressed by former Prime minister Sri VP Singh, Sri Mahendra Singh Tikait , leader of the BKU, Sri Ajit Singh, Sri Yudhvir Singh and Sri Rakesh Tikait of the Indian Coordination Committee of Farmers Movements, Dr Suneelam , leader of the Madhya Pradesh Kissan Sangharsh Samiti and Dr Suman Sahai , Convenor of the Gene Campaign.

Sri Mahendra Singh Tikait, leader of the Bhartiya Kissan Union (BKU) , said there was no need to import any wheat since according to all reports, the wheat harvest in the country will be on target. Farmers oppose wheat imports saying that when India announces it will import grain, the world prices shoot up so that the grain import becomes prohibitively expensive. At the same time, prices for their wheat go down and uptake of their wheat crop is reduced, hurting their interests. Sri Tikait demanded that the idea to import wheat should be dropped and the wheat produced by farmers should be bought at decent prices. Otherwise the farmers could not make two ends meet.

Sri Yudhvir Singh of the Indian Coordination Committee of Farmers Movements said that the Farmers collected at the protest rally asked who was behind the decision to import wheat and who would benefit from wheat imports, adding that it would certainly not be farmers.

Former Prime Minister Sri VP Singh addressed the farmers gathering and said that when he was Prime Minister, he took all decisions regarding agriculture in consultation with farmers. He urged the government to provide relief to farmers the way his government had always done. Sri Ajit Singh former Agriculture Minister spoke about the general decline of agriculture in the country.

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Dr Suman Sahai of Gene Campaign targeted the new Agriculture Pact sealed between India and the US, and accused the government of sacrificing agriculture to gain concessions in the nuclear sector . To add insult to injury, the Indian government is footing the entire bill for this unequal agreement; the Americans have said they will not pay anything. Since the US corporations Wal- Mart and Monsanto are members of the official US team, it is feared that they will exercise undue influence to bend rules and regulations to suit their interest. The Agriculture Pact will provide the US corporations unhindered access to India's rich genetic wealth through their collaboration with Indian universities without their paying anything for it. Most importantly, the Indo- US deal throws open the doors to the import of the controversial genetically engineered seeds owned by the MNCs.

Farmers present at the rally raised their hands in support of a resolution proposed by Dr Sahai, demanding that the Anti- Farmer deal which had no benefits for Indian farmers and all the benefits for the Americans, be scrapped immediately. They said they will oppose any agriculture deal made without consulting them.

Dr Suneelam , MLA from Multai and leader of the Madhya Pradesh Kissan Sangharsh Samiti said that farmers are still victims of exorbitant interest rates. He demanded that credit be made available to them at 4% interest the way it is available to their city counterparts. Cooperative Banks still charge 12% to 18 % compound interest on loans taken by farmers. In addition, Dr Suneelam demanded a compensation package of Rs 2000 crores from the center to provide relief to farmers in 43 districts of MP, who had lost their crops this season. He said to make crop insurance accessible to farmers, the Panchayat, not the Tehsil should be made the unit dealing with insurance matters. Given the terrible economic distress in farm families, Dr Suneelam demanded that once the capital part of the loan has been repaid, the interest burden must be waived off.

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