



Uneasy fields

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Uneasy fields-In order to address farmers' distress, the entire agricultural chain needs a reboot

- Last week, tens of thousands of farmers reached Delhi for a two-day Kisan Mukti Morcha and held the country's attention.
- They sought a special 21-day Parliament session to discuss the crisis in India's agrarian economy.
- Their key demands included an unqualified loan waiver to mitigate indebtedness levels in farm households and better remuneration for their produce instead of promises on paper of high minimum support prices.
- These broad demands sum up the precarious livelihood of a majority of farmers who work on small, fragmented land holdings.
- With rural distress palpable, elections for five State Assemblies under way, and the Lok Sabha election just about six months later, farmers' issues are bound to further dominate politics.
- Official data released show that the agriculture sector clocked a growth of just 3.8% (on a gross value added basis) in the second quarter of this fiscal, compared to the 5.3% recorded in the preceding quarter.
- To put that in perspective, farm sector output was growing strongly in the first three quarters of 2016-17, before imploding in the aftermath of the demonetisation exercise.
- Farmers are not just vote banks, but also critical economic actors who aspire to live without handouts.
- Till that is clearly recognised, paying lip service to the humble farmer will continue to distort the discourse.

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