

## **India: farmers protest converge in Mumbai**

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**Support pours in as close to 35,000 farmers from across Maharashtra prepare to gather outside the Vidhan Sabha on Monday, protesting BJP government's policies.**

**Mumbai:** After walking for about 180 km in the soaring temperature, about 35,000 farmers and agricultural workers entered the country's financial capital Mumbai on Sunday, demanded complete loan waiver and higher support prices for their crop among other things.

Marching under the banner of Left-affiliated All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), the farmers plan to protest in front of the Maharashtra Assembly on Monday, where the budget session is underway, to put pressure on the BJP-led government in the state to also transfer land to tribals who have been tilling it for many years

The massive march has also drawn support from BJP ally Shiv Sena, Raj Thackeray's Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, its organisers said. The Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party has also lent its support to the farmers, reports said.

Ajit Nawale of AIKS said senior Sena leader and PWD Minister Eknath Shinde met protesting long march leaders when it entered neighbouring.

Nawale said, "Shinde welcomed the protestors in Thane district and extended support to the demands of the farmers. He said he was conveying the message of Sena president Uddhav Thackeray. Similarly, Abhijit Jadhav, an emissary of MNS chief Raj Thackeray, also met us and got me in touch with the MNS chief over phone. The MNS too has extended support to our demands."

The march has been organised to protest the failures of the state BJP government on the farm front, including issues like farm loan waivers, remunerative prices for produce, non-implementation of the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission as well as the Forest Rights Act, he said.

Protesting farmers have demanded a change in the plan to link rivers in Nashik, Thane and Palghar to ensure that tribal lands are not submerged and water from the scheme be made available to these areas as well as other drought-prone districts, organisers said.

They said that farmers were also protesting against the state governments land acquisition for projects like high speed rail and super highways. "We are demanding an increase in pension schemes for poor peasants and farm workers, compensation for losses due to bollworm and pest attacks and rehauling of the public distribution system," he said.

On Monday, the march will be addressed by AIKS national president Ashok Dawale, CPI(M) MLA JP Gavit, state president Kisan Gujar and working president Arjun Ade among others.

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