
WHY MAHARASHTRA'S FARMERS ARE PROTESTING AND WHY MUMBAIKARS ARE SUPPORTING THEM: 10 POINTS

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After covering 180km on foot over five days, protesting farmers from across Maharashtra reached Mumbai yesterday and converged at Azad Maidan in south Mumbai by 7am this morning, so that rush hour commuters, especially students headed for Board exams, are not inconvenienced.

This graceful gesture has won people's hearts, even as they try to understand what the farmers are protesting and what their demand are. Here's a 10-point guide that helps make clear who are the people who are protesting, which political parties are supporting them, what the Maharashtra government's response is and what people in the city are saying about the protests:

- 1) Members of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), the farmers' wing of Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM), along with other farmers unions are the ones holding the protest march, which launched from Nashik last Tuesday. While police sources pegged the number of protesters at 15,000, unions claimed it was nearly 50,000; the actual number is likely 34,000. The farmers are scheduled to gherao the Maharashtra Assembly later today.
- 2) Their demands include an unconditional waiver of loans as well as electricity bills; implementation of the Swaminathan Commission recommendations, including an announcement of minimum support price for agriculture produce + ; and a pension scheme for farmers.
- 3) The reason for these demands is that crops have been destroyed on a large scale due to unpredictable weather and poor rainfall. While the state had announced a [loan waiver](#) scheme, the implementation has been patchy.
- 4) Vishwanath Bagare (77) and Mirabai Mohan Badade (60) are among the thousands of farmers protesting. They said that they will not go home until their demands are met. Bagares 38-year-old son Somnath had committed suicide by consuming poison in 2011, as he was unable to repay the Rs 1.5 lakh loan taken in 2008.
- 5) Maharashtra chief minister [Devendra Fadnavis](#) held a high-level meeting yesterday to review the situation. We are positive on the demands of the farmers. We have set up a six-member cabinet committee to discuss their demands, he said after the meeting.
- 6) NCP president Sharad Pawar, state Congress president Ashok Chavan, Shiv Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray and MNS chief Raj Thackeray have extended their support to the agitating farmers. We will not only support from the outside but if needed, will participate in the protest, said Aaditya to the farmers yesterday.
- 7) Distressed farmers seem to have earned the empathy of urban residents. As thousands of

farmers, waving red flags, strode into Thane on Saturday night, residents flocked to the streets to interact with them, some eagerly clicking selfies with them and others offering food grains and footwear.

8) The Thane Matadata Jagran Manch provided nearly 500kg of food grains to the farmers who camped for the night at BMC octroi ground. We had been in touch with the protestors since the rally started from Nashik on Tuesday. The organizers had refused to accept donation, but we were determined to help them as we are aware how they struggle to ensure food on our plate, said Unmesh Bagawe from the group.

9) Another group, through a social messaging app, mobilized footwear for the farmers after reading about their blistered feet. We were shocked to see the farmers walk barefoot on the highway. Some of us removed our footwear and offered it to the women, while others decided to donate shoes the following day, said Nita Karnik, a resident of Flower Valley who volunteered to deliver 100 pairs of shoes.

10) A few residents from Mulund showered flowers on the marchers as they started leaving Thane city limits yesterday morning. We are humbled by the love showered on us by Thane residents...We are happy that those living in the city have understood the plight of poor farmers living in villages, said AIKS state secretary Ajit Navale. We hope the government accepts our demands too.

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