

Farmers march to fight hunger in UP



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More than 4000 small and marginal farmers from all over Uttar Pradesh are taking part in a march which started on 7 October and culminate on 16 October on the occasion of World Food Day.

This march is being organized by the Small and Marginal Farmers Union as part of a 'kisan hit adhikar yatra programme' to highlight the woes of the small and marginal farmers.

Agriculture is main livelihood option of about 80% of India's vast population while for U.P. the figure is 90%. A majority of these are small and marginal farmers. It is ironical that these 'bread growers' who work hard to feed millions never have enough to eat themselves and lead a life of abject poverty. During the last 15 years about 1.5 lakh farmers have committed suicide due to their miserable living conditions and the phenomenon continues unabated.

It is a telling commentary on our times that while India marches ahead as a rising global economy, its vast majority is still struggling to get two square meals a day.

Lack of feasible and /or misappropriate implementation of government policies have only added fuel to this fire burning in empty bellies. The so

called developmental and farmer friendly projects of the MNCs also seem to be aimed at filling their own coffers rather than resolve the basic problems.

During the last 60 years, most of the government efforts in the field of agriculture have benefitted the small number of big farmers only. The abolition of the Zamindari system brought in its wake more exploitative groups in the garb of public servants and corporations.

In U.P. alone, more than 4 lakh land consolidation cases are pending in various courts. Even where courts have decided in favour of the small farmers, a majority of them have not been given possession of the land which is rightfully theirs.

Now in the name of global economic development the government, in collusion with multinational companies, is acquiring agricultural land at throw away prices to create 'special economic zones'. This is totally destabilizing the already crumbling economy of the small farmer. There have been mass protests (Nandigram and Singrur, to mention the least), but these have been quelled ruthlessly. As a result of this 'land grabbing' by vested interests, there has been a massive exodus of these farmers to neighbouring cities, which in turn has created more problems for the city as well as the urban populace.

We are ready to grow less and borrow more, ready to make more destitutes to make a few more rich, ready to dazzle a few homes to snatch away even the embers of a dying fire from others.

"Globalization is indirectly leading our country towards dependency (not independency) and crores of marginal and small farmers are being deprived of their meagre livelihood" said Dr Shiraj A Wajih, a senior activist in Eastern UP working for Small and Marginal farmers since last

20 years now.

In view of the present grim scenario what is needed is a collective initiative of the small and marginal farmers for protection of their own interests and rights. New policies need to be formulated with their help which will uplift them economically and socially and at the same time not jeopardize the country's progress.

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