

P. SAINATH

Journalist

To

Shri Uddhav Thackeray

Chief Minister of Maharashtra

September 22, 2020

Dear Chief Minister,

I write to you in appeal – and in considerable alarm – about two developments very detrimental to the farmers, labourers and general public of Maharashtra.

My appeal is that your government oppose the three bills just rammed through Parliament – despite agriculture being a state subject – which seriously erode India's federal structure. These will devastate the interests of Maharashtra's farmers – already tormented by a two-decade long agrarian crisis. The result will be a deepening of the debt crisis, depressed prices for farmers, poorer wages for labourers.

I have a suggestion which I appeal to the state government to endorse and adopt: Prime Minister Modi has repeatedly and firmly stated that a) Minimum Support Price (MSP) is here to stay and b) he will see to it that farmers' incomes are doubled by 2022.

In that case, why not introduce a simple 5 paragraph bill guaranteeing both those assurances in Parliament? It would be welcomed and cheered by every party and MP.

Let us have a bill saying: MSP (as under the Swaminathan formula – which the BJP promised in 2014) stands guaranteed – and no big traders or corporations, or other 'new buyers' can lift produce from the farmer at less than the MSP price. Secondly: **guaranteed procurement** to ensure the MSP is not reduced to a mockery. And lastly: announce cancellation of farmer and farm labourer debt. There is no way their incomes will double – either by 2022 or by 2032 – while they are drowning in debt.

Which party would oppose this bill drafted in a few, clear paragraphs? It would be passed unanimously. The prime minister would not have to suppress criticism in parliament – there would be none.

My second appeal to the state government: there are growing rumours that the Centre plans to privatise the Bank of Maharashtra, a profit-making bank that can rightly be seen as an asset belonging to the people of this state. This is a lead bank, a bank that serves farmers, labourers, retirees, pensioners, government employees including teachers and nurses. Privatisation means they will lose access to their own bank. This bank has returned to profits, despite being looted by the likes of Vijay Mallya.

Chief Minister, I appeal to you to oppose any change in the status of this bank which, in so many ways, belongs to the ordinary people of Maharashtra.

With best regards



(P. Sainath)