

FARMERS' PROTEST DAY 17: MORE VEHICLES FROM PUNJAB ROLL IN

'For each person who goes back home, 10 arrive'



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& JIGNASA SINHA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 12

AT SINGHU border on Saturday, a new truck or trolley kept arriving every few minutes — hundreds of vehicles have been making their way from several Punjab districts, via different routes, so they are not stopped at state borders. By Sunday, over 1,500 vehicles are expected to make their way to the Delhi border.

A trolley ferrying 20 farmers from Tajpur in Ludhiana reached the protest site at 6 am on Saturday. The vehicle left Ludhiana at 9.30 pm and drove all night through the rain.

Amandeep Singh (25), who was among the farmers, said, "Some people have gone back to their village to tend to their farms. So we collectively decided to come to represent the village. If we go back, a number of other trucks will replace us. There are many others from our village who



Joshi Tohgyal

At Singhu border, Saturday. By Sunday, over 1,500 vehicles are expected to make their way to the Delhi border; (above) Police at the Delhi-Jaipur highway, Shahjahanpur

ment at pickets and steep toll prices outside Punjab.

Nasib Singh (45), a farmer from Rohtak, called his brother and his family to Tiki border. "We will call everyone here unless the government repeals the laws. My wife and children are already here. I also called my younger

Said Ramzan Chaudhary, head of the Nuh unit of Jai Kisan Andolan, "Protesters from Haryana and Alwar will congregate at the Shahjahanpur border in Rajasthan by tonight. On Sunday, we will join people coming from Kotputli at 10 am and march with them towards Delhi."

Stir going strong, transport firms and factories from Tikri say business is down

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NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 12

FREIGHT CARRIER firms as well as factory owners from Tikri-Bahadurgarh say the ongoing farmers' stir has had a significant impact on business. Owing to traffic jams, freight carriers or trucks transporting goods via Delhi-NCR to other states have been taking alternative routes, leading to delays.

Said Varun Sharma (31), director of Speed Wings Logistics Pvt Ltd, "The NH-8, UP-Haryana borders are closed too, so trucks have had to re-route through the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) or Western Peripheral Expressway around Delhi. There was a truck that was stuck on the KMP for three days."

Sandeep (32), a traffic operations manager at Caravan Roadways Ltd, which transports PVC from the Kandla and Mundra ports of Gujarat, said, "It is taking a long time for trucks to reach their destination because of traffic on the KMP expressway."

Many transporters have stopped operations in the area altogether. Umesh Pandey (50), general manager of Vijay Lakshmi Transolutions Pvt Ltd, said, "We have stopped operations in the Punjab-Haryana side where routes are blocked, and are transporting only emergency goods (food and pharmaceuticals), for which we take alternative routes."

Rampal Singh (42), manager at the ATC Logistical Solutions Pvt Ltd, said, "Our customers from Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and J&K are not coming at all, and we are not sending any trucks due to the uncertainty."

However, Pradeep Singhal, chairperson of the All-India Transporters' Welfare Association, said, "The supply chain has not broken down and there is no shortage Delhi is facing as many trucks are taking detours due to which some delay is inevitable. There has been not much impact."

Industrialists in the Tikri-Bahadurgarh region, where farmers are protesting on the Delhi-Rohtak road, say they are facing losses as neither raw material or finished goods are getting transported in and out of the area.

Nikhil Lalit (38), who manufactures shoes, said, "Raw material — cloth, rubber, packaging — has stopped coming from Delhi and is steadily getting over."

While finished products normally leave the factory for the capital daily, this has not been possible since the protest started. "Delhi is the first stop and from there our products go to various areas. Business is down to half and we may need to close the factory if the protest goes on for another week," he said.

Lalit said he supports the farmers protesting peacefully. "I have not read the farm bills so I cannot comment on it. However, they have been protesting quietly — no damage to property or

anything. I am not against that; I am with the farmers."

Amar Verma (59), owner of a packaging factory, said, "We used to send finished products to Delhi daily; now we are only sending it to local areas here. Raw material is not arriving from UP."

Verma said he is against such a form of agitation: "This is not a protest, it is blackmail. A protest is not supposed to interfere with someone else's work."

Subhash Jagga (65), general secretary of the Bahadurgarh Chamber of Commerce & Industry, said, "This is the peak season for footwear, but raw material is not coming in, nor are finished goods able to go out of the area. Production has reduced by around 60%. Transporters are not sending trucks due to the fear and uncertainty of a clear passage." He added that labourers are also finding it difficult to arrive from Mundka, and that many hailing from UP and Bihar are leaving, sensing the uncertainty. "I support the farmers but I wish this issue gets resolved soon," he said.

Arvind Kumar (18), working as a labourer at a shoe factory and hailing from UP's Shahjahanpur district, was among those heading home: "Since the protests, work here has reduced, that's why I am going back." Ram Kishore (22), who works at a factory in the area and is from UP's Farrukhabad, said, "I got here a few days ago and I am heading back again. There is a *hartal* every time — what is the point of staying back?"

Massive boiler is new star at Singhu border



The 15-foot-tall steam boiler at Singhu border. Proveen Khanna

JIGNASA SINHA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 12

AT SINGHU border, amid dozens of langars set up to feed the farmers, an unusual sight has come up: A 15-foot-tall steam boiler that helps prepare meals in no time. Donated by a gurdwara in Punjab, the boiler is kept over burning wood and placed on a trolley. Farmers say it helps prepare food for more than 10,000 people every day.

Surjit Singh (50), who brought the boiler two days ago from Gurdaspur, said more than 30 people work at this langar and cook food in batches. "We felt it was taking too long to cook rice, dal and sabzi. On Wednesday, we took the boiler from the gurdwara and got it here," he said.

The boiler has been in use since Thursday and takes at least three people to look after it at a time, including feeding wood to keep it running. Pipes coming out of the boiler are then put into

large vessels filled with raw food. Singh said they put 40 kg of dal and 100 litres of water in a single vessel. The pipe is then placed inside and the vessel covered with a steel plate. The dal takes around 25-30 minutes to cook and can feed around 2,500 people, he said.

For lunch, 50 kg of rice is put in a vessel, which is then filled with the same amount of water. The rice takes 25 minutes to cook.

Prabjit (24), a farmer from Punjab, who helps serve the food, said, "We get vegetables, rice and dal from different farmers. Hundreds of people donate. More than 30,000 disposable plates are used every day and we serve food to farmers as well as locals."

Singh said they have enough ration for four months — at the moment, the langar has 25 quintal rice, 20 quintal dal and 10 quintal salt, with more donated every day. Cooks said they also make *aloo gobi* or *aloo matar sabzi* every day.