



DAY AFTER VISIT TO SINGHU

Not allowed to leave residence to support farmers, says Kejriwal; police deny claim

ABHINAV RAJPUT & MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL  
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 8

DELHI Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal Tuesday said he was not allowed to leave his house to support the farmers and the call for Bharat bandh while his party alleged he was placed under house arrest — a claim denied by the Delhi Police.

“I am very happy that the entire country is one in support of demands made by farmers. I had also planned to go to the border for 30–40 minutes and express support, not as a Chief Minister but as a normal man. I think they found out what my plans were. They did not let me go, but I prayed for the *andolan*’s success,” Kejriwal said after his party members, including Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, entered his residence in the evening after sitting outside for over two hours.

AAP alleged even Kejriwal’s personal staff was not allowed to enter his home in the morning. The party’s and CM’s allega-



Sisodia entered the CM’s residence in the evening after sitting outside for two hours; (right) police at the spot. Praveen Khanna



tions drew an almost instant reaction from Delhi Police. “It is claimed in certain sections on social media that there have been restrictions on the movement of the Chief Minister. I would like to clarify these claims are totally baseless. There are absolutely no restrictions. The CM is doing his normal engagements, there is normal movement. Further, he is going out of his residence for his engagements,” said Special Commissioner of Police (Law and Order, North Zone) Satish Golcha. DCP (North) Anto Alphonse

said: “No one has been denied entry. We have only asked them not to allow so many people in at once as BJP councillors are also protesting right outside the gate and there could have been a law and order problem.”

Alphonse also tweeted a photograph of the entrance to Kejriwal’s residence: “This claim of CM Delhi being put on house arrest is incorrect. He exercises his right to free movement within the law of the land. A picture of the house entrance says it all.”

Mayors of the three civic bodies have been on a dharna outside the CM’s house on Flagstaff Road, Civil Lines, since Monday, demanding Rs 1,300 crore that they claim the government owes the corporations.

Earlier in the day, AAP national spokesperson Saurabh Bharadwaj alleged the CM had been placed under house arrest since he returned home after visiting farmers at Singhu Monday. Bharadwaj claimed Delhi Police was doing this on the instruction of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

“Right now, no one can meet the Delhi Chief Minister, neither can he come out of his residence,” he claimed.

Since morning, AAP supporters and members gathered outside the lane a few metres away from the CM’s residence, where Delhi Police had put up barricades, and shouted slogans against the police. In the afternoon, Sisodia, AAP MP Bhagwant Mann, several MLAs including Somnath Bharti and Rakhi Birla, and municipal councillors joined the protest.

Outside the CM house in the evening, Sisodia asked the police: “I am the Deputy CM and I am speaking to the CM. Who has given such orders? CM house is here since past six years, then why such orders today?”

Police said that everyone would be allowed to go — but in batches. They also claimed they were waiting for orders from the CM house to allow them entry.

Speaking to party workers after they were granted entry, Kejriwal said: “A few days ago, the Centre sent a proposal to convert nine stadiums into jails... It reminded me of Anna *andolan*... I knew the *kisan andolan* would be weakened if we allowed this. I was under pressure, received many calls, but decided that we stood with the farmers... the Centre is very angry.”

Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor, meanwhile, said the claims of CM being under house arrest since Monday afternoon were untrue and that he was not stepping out intentionally since Tuesday morning. “He attended a function at a hotel last night — this exposes his claim,” he claimed.

Capital open on Bharat bandh but footfall low



At Azadpur mandi, Tuesday. Most traders here were on strike after a decision to join the bandh. Gajendra Yadav

ANANYA TIWARI  
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 8

THE IMPACT of the Bharat bandh in the capital Tuesday was minimal, with police keeping a watch at key areas to ensure law and order is maintained. Mandis and markets also remained open but some reported low footfall.

At least 600 police personnel were deployed in New Delhi district, at key points where mobilisation was expected such as India Gate, Jantar Mantar, Krishi Bhawan, Nirman Bhawan, the Agriculture Minister’s house and offices of political parties. “The area was patrolled and no untoward incident was reported. No gatherings were held without permission,” said DCP (New Delhi) Dr Eish Singhal.

In the East district, where farmers are protesting at the Ghazipur border that connects the capital with Ghaziabad, a few protesters blocked a portion of NH-24 in the afternoon. DCP (East) Jasmeet Singh said it was opened to the public after police personnel spoke to them.

He said no complaints regarding forcible closure of shops were received from the district: “All markets were open, and no untoward incident was reported.”

In Southwest Delhi, too, markets remained open. DCP (Southwest) Ingit Pratap Singh said, “No complaints were received. Apart from district police, outside force too was present. The highway that connects Dhaula Kuan to Rajokri was not blocked.”

A senior police officer said a case has been registered against Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee president Anil Chaudhary and his supporters for protesting at ITO, at IP Estate police station under IPC sections 188 (disobedience to order), 269 (negligent act), 270 (malignant act).

Markets, mandis report few customers

At Azadpur mandi, while most traders were on strike following a decision by the administration to join the bandh in support of farmers’ demands, some traders arrived, hoping to make sales from their previous days’ produce.

Sheshe Rao (53), a trader of guavas said, “There are no customers today. We are trying to sell older guavas.” Vijay Aggrawal (61), who was selling oranges, said, “Hardly any customers came today. We have not even unloaded the trucks.”

Similar scenes were wit-

Rajya Sabha MP among 100 detained

Gurgaon: Around 100 people, including a Rajya Sabha MP from CPI(M) were detained by Gurgaon Police after they started a demonstration near Bilaspur Chowk on NH-48. DCP (Manesar) Nitika Gahlaut said, “We had to eventually detain them around 1 pm as they started to get agitated and began to move towards the highway with the intention of blocking it.” Gahlaut confirmed that Rajya Sabha MP KK Ragesh was among those detained. The others included workers of CITU, All India Kisan Sabha, and anganwadi workers. ENS

nessed at Ghazipur and Okhla mandis, which also saw a few traders set up shop. Azadpur mandi chairperson Adil Ahmed Khan told *The Indian Express*, “Trade at Azadpur, Okhla and Ghazipur mandis was largely shut. Some traders tried to sell their produce which arrived at night, but even they shut by noon.”

Since the protests began, the number of vegetables and fruits at Azadpur, Asia’s largest produce market has nearly fallen by half — from around 12,000 metric tonnes to 6,000–7,000 metric tonnes on an average — leading to some fluctuation in prices.

At markets across the city, associations said sales were hit.

Ashwani Marwah, general secretary of the Traders’ Association Lajpat Nagar, said, “Footfall was less compared to last Tuesday, probably due to the protests happening in various parts of Delhi like ITO, CM House. Moreover, customers from NCR did not come at all due to issues at the border.” Sanjay Bhargava, president of the Chandni Chowk Sarv Vyapar Mandal, said: “There were no customers, zero footfall.”

Atul Bhargava, president of the New Delhi Traders’ Association of Connaught Place, said, “Maybe people did not wish to get stuck in traffic jams due to the protests. Sales were down by around 50–60%.” K K Balli, president of Gandhi Nagar market traders’ association, said: “Transporters are not booking goods and are waiting and watching how the situation unfolds.”

(Bahadurgarh) Pawan Kumar.

Singh had arrived at Tikri border on December 1 with farmers from Khote village. According to his companions, he came from a landless family and worked as a tailor. “He was from a family of landless labourers. He has a son, a 20-year-old, who works at a photo studio. He came to this site in solidarity with protesting farmers. This is why they say ‘mazdoor-kisan ekta zindabad’,” said Paramjeet Singh, a farmer from the village.

At the protest site, Mewa Singh had been living in a trolley along with other residents from Khote. Naib Singh, also from his village and a member of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ugrahan), said the union has made a demand of Rs 10 lakh for Mewa Singh’s family from the Punjab government, as well as a government job for his son.

Income and insecurity: Why farmers across economic spectrum are at border protests

SOURAV ROY BARMAN  
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 8

“WE ARE trapped.”

In three words, Sarabjit Singh captures the crisis that has come to grip farmers in Punjab, an otherwise frontrunner state in terms of farm productivity and income. And with the promulgation of the three farm ordinances, anguish has morphed into fear, drawing thousands of farmers, largely the Jat Sikh peasantry, to the capital’s borders.

“We don’t grow rice and paddy out of any special love for these crops. We grow these as they bring a semblance of security that we will not be short-changed,” Sarabjit, who co-owns seven acres of land with his brother in the Fatehgarh Sahib district, said.

The socio-economic composition of the farmers railing against the legislations is in line with Punjab’s land holding patterns. According to agriculture census 2015–16 data, 33.1 per cent land holdings in Punjab are small and marginal (less than 1 hectare to 2 hectares), while 33.6 per cent are classified as semi-medium (2–4 hectares). One hectare equals about 2.5 acres. And so, the capital finds at its doorstep farmers who are not in complete penury or demanding loan waivers. These are instead farmers largely managing break even, but fearful of changes in the prevailing arrangements owing to past experiences.

“A multinational chips company signed a contract promising to procure potato at Rs 10 per kilo. The promise was broken within a year, with the company paying Rs 4 per kilo. And a year later, as potato prices crashed, they chose to buy potato from the market at much lower prices. Today I am in debt. Farmers don’t break their agreements, the cor-



At Singhu border, Tuesday. Gajendra Yadav

porates do,” said Gurmil Singh, also a resident of Fatehgarh Sahib district, indicating the apprehension that contract farming, which the new laws aims to encourage, bring.

The 65-year-old, whose two sons are also into farming, said rice produce per acre stands at around 20–25 quintals, while the MSP was fixed at Rs 1,888 per quintal. He owns four acres of land. “After taking into account the finishing cost at the mandi, the payment per quintal comes to around Rs 1,850,” he said, pointing out that the rise in MSP can help farmers break-even, not make any profit.

The stagnant income of Punjab farmers has also been attributed to the absence of a diversified crop pattern and overdependence on paddy and wheat production.

Farmers point out that they hesitate to shift to other forms of cultivation due to a number of factors: Assured income that paddy and rice bring; the uncertainty attached to other crops and the lack of MSP cover

on them; the past record of corporates often going back on their word.

“The mandi system in Punjab is very robust. That helps the farmers stay afloat. There is MSP on *makki* as well but no one gets that. Promise MSP on other crops and farmers will grow that as well. The entire system is such that we find ourselves trapped,” said Sarabjit Singh, his words seconded by Jasbir Kaur from Patiala, part of a contingent of women farmers who have started trickling in steadily.

The sentiment against corporates and multinationals runs across farmers both affiliated and unaffiliated to unions, largely owing to their lived experiences.

Said Karnail Singh from Patiala, “Take full cream milk for example. We sell it to companies much below the market rate of Rs 55 per kilo. This implies that the companies are spending a large sum in processing that milk. Check their records and see if that is true. We are being cheated at every step.”

Gurvinder Singh, who’s pursuing a PhD in Punjabi literature from Patiala University, underlined how the state has families without any source of income other than farming. “From whatever they earn, families also need to cover the cost of employing labourers, educating children, marrying off daughters, health-care. In some cases, they need to pay for diesel as well. What about our own labour value? Farming is also sheer physical labour that people, who complain that we do not pay income tax, cannot even imagine,” he said.

Jeet Singh, who travelled from Hasanpur Khurd to Singhu border, said outsiders are often dismissive of the *arthiyas*, unaware of the traditional ties that this community has been sharing with farmers. “This holds more significance in case of small and marginal farmers and landless labourers. In the zeal to push this narrative on exploitation, it is often overlooked how closely the lives of *arthiyas* and farmers are tied. To give just one example, generations of farmers have

been able to marry off their daughters due to timely financial assistance rendered by *arthiyas*. They readily pay in advance whenever required,” he said.

Jeevan Singh (72), also a resident of Gurdaspur district, said he finds the suggestion that an open market will allow farmers to sell their produce at a better price incredulous. “Do you expect small and marginal farmers to sell their produce in Gujarat? They will not be able to bear even the transportation cost. The new law will weaken the mandis, their biggest safety net. And lifting of the curbs on hoarding will jack up food prices and the poor and the vulnerable will be the worst hit,” he said.

Under one of three new laws — Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020 — the sale and purchase of farm produce outside mandis shall attract no market fee, cess or levy.

“A similar arrangement was implemented in Bihar back in 2006. Today, farmers in Bihar are selling their produce at half the rate as compared to Punjab. Make no mistake, Punjabis are not protesting just because only they will be affected by the new laws. *Ye Punjab sirf apna fayda nahi sochta*,” Jeevan Singh added.

The young men also take pains to underline how farming, for a vast majority of Punjab, is more than just a livelihood, a sentiment buttressed by the decision of influential Punjabi voices, from the world of entertainment to sports, to stand firmly behind the protesters.

“*Punjab ka har parivar kisan parivar hai* (every family in Punjab is a family of farmers). And we will unhesitatingly join farming. We take pride in farming. And our fears and apprehensions are rooted in this very pride,” said Harman Singh, a 22-year-old from Gurdaspur district.

At protest site, 300 volunteers line up to donate blood

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 8

THREE NEW vehicles appeared on Tuesday amidst the tractors and trolleys of protesting farmers at Delhi’s Tikri border on Rohtak road — vans serving as centres for a blood donation camp.

Throughout the day, volunteers among the protesting farmers lined up outside the vans to donate blood. Among them was 23-year-old Hasanpreet Singh from Thuliwal village in Barnala district. “The trolley in which we’re staying is quite far away from here but my friend had volunteered to donate blood and told me about it. I thought

I’ll also volunteer since it could help someone,” he said.

Between 11.30 am and 2.30 pm, the van which Hasanpreet had gone to had received 54 donations.

Harvinder Singh, chairman of Khalsa Mission Charitable Trust, Bhatinda, which is organising the camp, said there were around 300 donations across all three vans by 3 pm.

“In the beginning when protesters had broken through the barricades, there were quite a few who were injured. There are also many elderly protesters. We have been providing medical facilities for them. But as the protest is growing, we also thought this would be a produc-



3 vans served as centres for the blood donation camp at Tikri

tive way to help people and as well as counter statements like protesters are terrorists. We

want to show that our blood is for this country,” he said.

After the first day of the camp

at Tikri border, the organisers will be conducting the camp at Singhu border on Wednesday.

As farmers fall ill, medical aid at hand

At the Delhi-Ghaziabad border, several farmers, exposed to the winter, are down with cold, cough and slight fever. Haseep Ahmed (40), a farmer from Rampur said, “Because of the temperature change and the polluted air, I have a cough and chest pain.” He said some farmers have returned home as they were starting to feel unwell. He asked his relatives at home to get him paracetamol and antibiotics.

A group from the Sahibabad Vidhan Sabha also set up med-

ical facilities at the site, including a pulse oximeter so they could check if any of those feeling unwell have low oxygen levels. Vibha Singh, a representative of the Vidhan Sabha said, “We set up a stall here for a few hours every afternoon. Many farmers have consulted us for cough, cold and weakness and we give them basic medicines like paracetamol, D Cold total, Cetirizine and Vitamin tablets free of cost.”

She added that farmers are exposed to pollution and cold weather and their meals are not as regular.

The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee has also set up a pharmacy providing free medicines to farmers.