



INTERNATIONAL

A MASSIVE STRIKE IN INDIA

– INDIA'S FARMERS TAKE ON THE GOVERNMENT



Tens of thousands of farmers in India have been protesting. They disagree with new laws the government introduced in September. They are outraged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) didn't consult them before passing the legislation.

Their anger has **galvanized** the entire nation. On November 25, some 250 million protestors backed the farmers. They held a 24-hour **general strike** centred on the capital of New Delhi. The massive demonstration was the largest in history. It brought the nation to a near-halt.

During the strike, scores of elderly farmers were tear-gassed and doused with water cannons. That earned them sympathy from all of India and from farmers around the world.

THE MANDI SYSTEM

Why are farmers so angry? Their unions say it's very difficult for India's farmers to earn a living, and the new rules will create even more challenges.

At present, most Indian farmers sell their produce at government-controlled **wholesale** markets called **mandis**. Mandis are committees made up of farmers, large land-owners, and traders. **Brokers** are also involved. They hammer out sales details, organize storage, and arrange transport.

This complex system tends to benefit the brokers. However, mandis do guarantee the farmers a set amount, called **Minimum Price Support (MSP)**, for their goods. That keeps farmers' incomes steady.

ABOUT INDIA

India is the seventh-largest country in the world. With 1.36 billion people, it is the second-most populous country after China. That makes it the world's biggest democracy.

The nation is mainly agricultural, but it does have a large iron and steel industry. It produces many manufactured goods and it is the world's fifth-largest economy.

Yet the Indian subcontinent is one of the world's poorest regions. Two-thirds of the population lives in poverty – 69 percent on less than \$2 a day. One-third of this group exists on less than \$1.25 per day.

A REFORM ON PAPER?

So what's in the new law? It lets farmers sell their goods at fair **market value** outside the mandi

DEFINITIONS

BROKER: a person who helps other people to reach agreements, to make deals, or to buy and sell property

GALVANIZE: to cause (people) to become so concerned about an issue, idea, etc., that they want to do something about it

GENERAL STRIKE: a strike by workers in all or most industries

MARKET VALUE: the price at which something can be sold: the price that buyers are willing to pay for something

WHOLESALE: the business of selling things in large amounts to other businesses rather than to individual customers



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system. They can now negotiate directly with supermarkets and other companies. In theory, they will get higher prices when there is high demand for their crops.

The problem? Farmers say the new provisions will eventually bring an end to mandis and guaranteed prices. They believe that private buyers could then set prices so low, farmers will make even less than the **subsistence** living they now earn.

“First, farmers will feel attracted towards these private players, who will offer a better price for the produce,” Multan Singh Rana, a farmer in the northern state of Punjab, said. “[Soon] government mandis will pack up. And after a few years, these players will start exploiting the farmers. That’s what we fear.”

LAND-GRAB WORRIES

Another major concern? Before the new laws were passed, strict rules prevented corporations from buying land from small farmers. The new law eliminates these restrictions. Now farmers worry that big companies will buy up lots of land to gain even more control of their market.

“Our land is our mother,” said Mewa Singh, a farmer. “It was passed on to us from our parents, who got it from their parents, and now Modi wants to acquire it and give it away to his rich friends.”

MR. MODI’S POSITION

For its part, the government says the farmers’ fears are overblown.

Mr. Modi maintains that farmers’ lands will remain in their hands. He says his party’s reforms will boost farmers’ incomes. He argues they will attract investment and technology, and increase **productivity**. And he insists that MSPs and the mandi system will stay in place.

“Opposition leaders are misleading farmers for narrow political gains,” he said.

But at least 15 of India’s political parties have shown support for the protestors. And some say Mr. Modi is using strong-arm tactics, such as house arrest, to silence them.

NO END IN SIGHT

Meanwhile, the protests show no signs of stopping. On January 7, farmers blocked access to New

A HARD LIFE

Tens of millions of Indian farmers own less than one hectare of land. They barely make enough to survive.

There are several reasons these farmers face such hardship. They use outdated and inefficient practices. Productivity is poor.

Now, COVID-19, extreme weather, and locusts have left them with even fewer crops and more debt. And Indian farmers have no **social safety net** to protect them.

Delhi with 3500 tractors and trolleys.

On January 12, India’s highest court ruled the government could not implement the new laws. It ordered experts to try to work out a solution with officials and farmers. Yet farmers vowed to keep protesting until the laws are completely **repealed**.

“Leaving farmers to the tyranny of the markets would be akin to putting the sheep before the wolf,” expert Devendra Sharma said. “The current system... needs to be reformed, but replacing one failed model with another is not the solution.” ★

DEFINITIONS

PRODUCTIVITY: the rate at which goods are produced or work is completed

REPEAL: to do away with or cancel officially

SOCIAL SAFETY NET: programs that protect people from the impact of economic shocks, natural disasters, and other crises

SUBSISTENCE: the minimum amount of food, money, etc., that is needed to stay alive



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the population of India?

2. Describe the economic standing of many Indian farmers.

3. List at least three other important facts about India.

4. Which party is currently in power in India? Who is the leader of this country?

5. What are government-controlled markets where farmers have traditionally sold their products called?

6. How are these markets organized?

7. How do these markets support Indian farmers?

8. What controversial changes did the government impose last September?

9. Why are farmers concerned about these changes?

10. How did many Indian farmers react to these changes over the past few months? Explain.



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QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

1. If you were a member of Prime Minister Modi's government, what advice would you give to him to ensure a peaceful resolution to this conflict? Explain.

2. When questioned during a press conference about his reaction to the farmers' strike in India, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated that the strike was "concerning". Some in India interpreted Prime Minister Trudeau's comment as meddling in the affairs of their country.

As you see it, how should foreign leaders respond to controversial events in other countries, particularly when their own citizens are demonstrating and calling for them to intervene on the foreign nation's behalf? Explain.



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QUESTIONS FOR ONLINE EXPLORATION

Note: The links below are listed at www.lesplan.com/en/links for easy access.

1. Many countries have citizens of Indian heritage with strong connections to India. Visit two of the links below, one from each group, to learn how Indian communities in Canada and the United States are reacting to this strike:

Canada:

<https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=KHjIwZfBKjA>

<https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=mxnusNTf34E>

https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=e8CbOTqS_cI&t=46s

United States:

<https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=kg74yhY8aVA>

https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=4I8n7wBoG_s

<https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=xMcBDrEfK1c&t=8s>

What new details did you learn from these reports?

What questions do you still have?

2. In 2015, world leaders agreed to 17 Global Goals (officially known as the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs). These goals have the power to create a better world by 2030, by ending poverty, fighting inequality, and addressing the urgency of climate change. Guided by the goals, it is now up to all of us – governments, businesses, civil society and the general public – to work together to build a better future for everyone.

Find out more about the Global Goals at <https://www.globalgoals.org/> Then, consider: Which goal(s) does this article relate to? Why? Explain?



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MAP ANALYSIS

Examine the accompanying map. Then, answer the following questions.

A. Reading the map:

1. What is the title of this map?

2. What is the purpose of this map?

3. How are the cities, countries, and water bodies labelled?

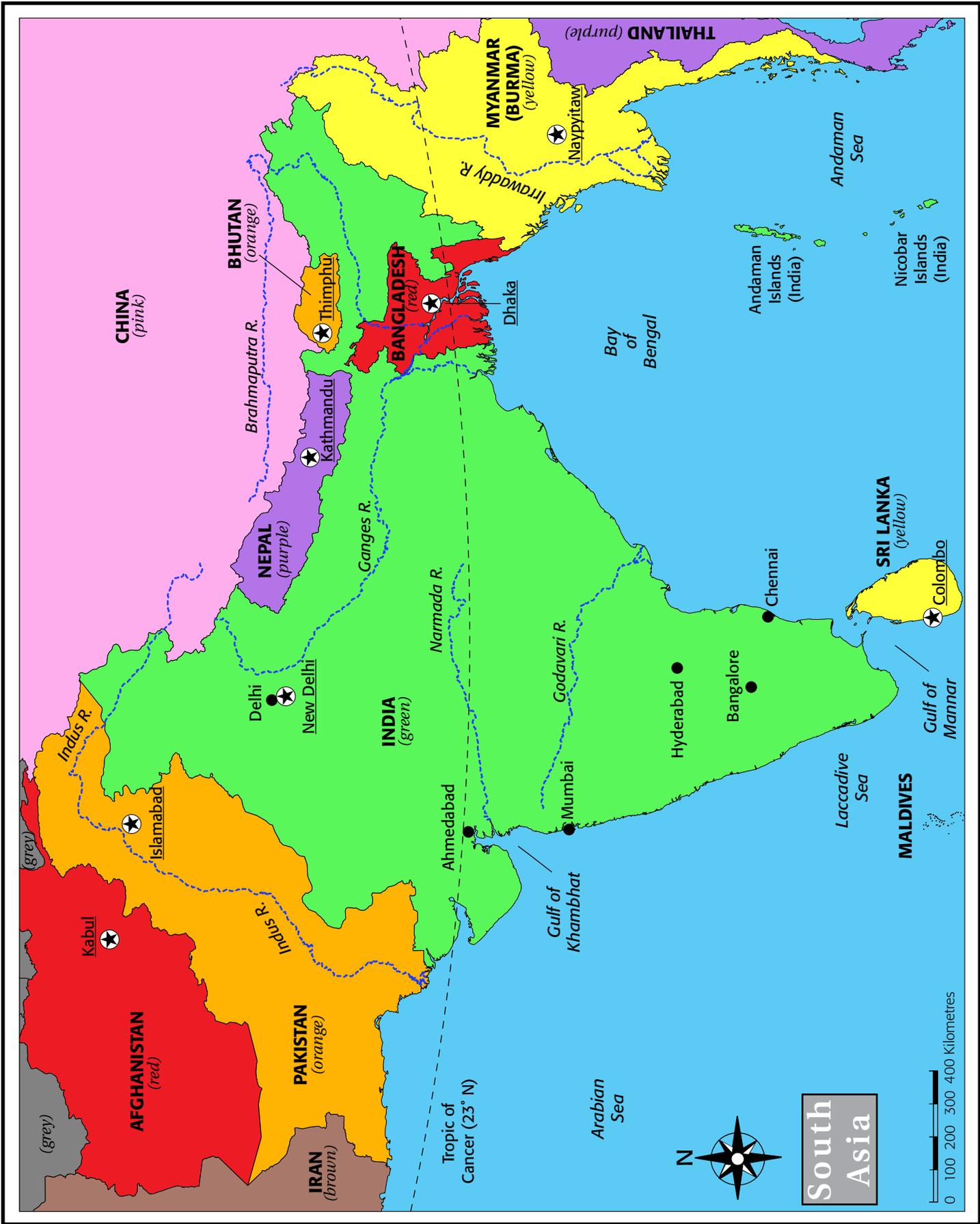
4. How are directions represented on the map? Give an example.

5. How is distance communicated on the map? Give an example.

B. Analyzing the map:

1. Describe the location of India relative to other features on the map. Aim for 5-10 descriptors. (E.g., *India is located to the north of Sri Lanka.*)

2. In what ways does this map help you to better understand the farmers' protests taking place in India? Explain.





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NEWS PHOTO

Investigative reporters are journalists who thoroughly investigate, interpret and communicate news through a variety of media, such as TV and newspaper. They uncover secrets people would rather keep quiet and dig deep into cases to uncover all the facts. They investigate leads and news tips, read documents, interview people, and observe events taking place at a scene. Their pieces often generate a variety of reactions – both positive and negative – from their readers.

Put your investigative skills to work. Use the article *A Massive Strike in India* and the **What's Missing?** organizer to figure out what details are missing from the photo below and should be included to tell the whole story.

Directions:

1. Look carefully at the photograph. Notice what details are included. Record these details in the 'What I See' column.
2. Now think about what you already know about this topic from reading the article *A Massive Strike in India*. Add any additional facts in the appropriate boxes of the 'What I Read' column.
3. Finally, speculate about what evidence is missing. What other information or details would the viewer need to know to understand the whole story? Write your speculations in the final column. Your ideas should be **plausible** (likely to be true given the evidence in the photograph and the article) and **probing** (show that you have thoroughly considered all aspects of the story).



Farmers shout slogans as they take part in a tractor rally to protest against new farm laws at Ghaziabad, on the outskirts of New Delhi, India, on January 7, 2021. (AP Photo/Altaf Qadri)

Prepared with assistance from TC², The Critical Thinking Consortium. © 2021



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ORGANIZER

	What I See	What I Read	What's Missing?
Who is in the image?			
What is happening?			
Where is this taking place?			
When is this taking place?			
Why is this happening?			