

INDIAN COORDINATION COMMITTEE OF FARMERS' MOVEMENTS

Farmers unions warn government and political parties to reject the anti-farmer RCEP free trade agreement

14 March, New Delhi: Over forty farmers unions met in New Delhi to unanimously reject the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) free trade agreement which India is currently negotiating with 16 countries- which include major economies like China, Australia, and ten ASEAN countries. The RCEP will remove tariffs on 92% of traded commodities and open the floodgates to cheap imports, destroying India's already stressed farm sector, they said.

The RCEP agreement will be the largest in the world in terms of population (3.4 billion or 49 per cent of world population), with a combined GDP of around \$22 trillion and a trade share of 30 per cent. RCEP goes beyond the WTO in terms of restrictions to Indian sovereignty in its ability to protect its farmers, workers livelihoods. Even though India has been resisting and requesting to restrict the percent of tariff cuts to only 80% of traded goods and not 92 % as is being demanded, RCEP will not allow India to raise duties at a later date – a provision that even the WTO did not impose.

“Countries like Australia are looking to dump their surplus produce like sugar, wheat, and dairy, and permanently conquering India's massive markets through RCEP is a huge aim for them,” said Biswajeet Dhar, during an informational workshop for farmers attended by trade analysts in Delhi.

“Although India has traditionally played a fairly protectionist stance towards our farm sector, RCEP will completely reverse this trend and fundamentally shift policy design towards corporate profits rather than livelihoods of Indians,” he said.

“RCEP will manipulate our seed laws; it will strengthen the power of seed companies and their patents while restricting farmers freedom to save and exchange as they have done for centuries,” said B Nagendra, State President KRRS, Karnataka.

India's dairy sector is particularly vulnerable, with the majority being unorganized and providing livelihoods to over 150 million, especially women. Corporations like Danone, Fonterra and others receive massive subsidies in their countries and are looking to conquer India, which is the highest dairy consumer in the world. Indian cooperatives like Amul and Karnataka Milk Federation have joined India's farmers in resisting the RCEP.

“RCEP will destroy Indian milk- we have excellent dairy cooperatives like Amul which provide jobs to millions, it will benefit foreign corporations,” said Sellamuthu.

“The Indian government has taken a cautionary step as elections are near, and we warn them that any attack on our food sovereignty and farmers rights will be met with huge resistance,” said Yudhvir Singh, coordinator of the All India Coordination Committee of Farmers Movements. Besides agriculture, India's manufacturing sector is under serious threat from Chinese imports.

Contact

S Kannaiyan, – 9444989543 Nawaz Heggere, - 8880547126, Dharmendra, BKU – 9219691168