



## Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi MP

The Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP  
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development,  
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office,  
King Charles St,  
London  
SW1A 2AH

3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020

Dear Dominic,

### **Developments in the Punjab on farmer rights in India and the wider political ramifications**

Over the last month, a number of MPs would have written to you and the Indian High Commission in London about the impact of three new Indian laws on exploiting farmers and those dependent on farming in India. The introduction of these new laws by the Indian government (Centre) have, despite the Coronavirus, triggered widespread farmers' protests across the country for failing to protect farmers from exploitation and to ensure fair prices for their produce.

This is an issue of particular concern to Sikhs in the UK and those linked to the Punjab, although it also heavily impacts on other Indian states. Many British Sikhs and Punjabis have taken this matter up with their MPs, as they are directly affected with family members and ancestral land in the Punjab. Being famous as "India's bread-basket", many Punjabis rely on farming for their existence. About three-quarters of the state's 30 million-strong population is involved in agriculture. Therefore, these new laws present the Punjabis with a huge problem, with some describing it as a "death warrant".

The Punjabi farming community is widely recognised as the backbone of the state's economic structure and the farmers' concerns are a powerful factor in national and state politics. It's therefore not surprising that it has resulted in a considerable fallout between the Centre and elected politicians from virtually all political parties in the Punjab. There have been resignations and amendment bills have been passed by the Punjab Vidhan Sabha (Assembly). The state's Chief Minister has sought time from the President, pursuant to the decisions taken in the Vidhan Sabha Session.

On Wednesday 28 October, I chaired an urgent virtual Zoom lobby, with many members of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for British Sikhs in attendance. 14 MPs participated, despite the recess, with over 60 MPs sending apologies, but wanting to be kept informed of developments and actions, which they could take on behalf of anxious constituents. Parliamentarians and constituents were addressed by speakers from India, the UK, Europe and North America about the impact of the controversial laws on the Sikh-majority Punjab state.

Labour Member of Parliament for Slough

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The two main guest speakers from the Punjab directly involved in leading the protests provided an excellent insight into the issue and the wider context. MPs were told of the human tragedy of farmer suicides due to debt, which had taken thousands of lives and the new laws have added to that tragedy.

Many expressed concern that based on past experiences, the situation could seriously deteriorate. The Sikh Council UK presented results from an ongoing survey, showing that 92% of UK Sikhs have ties to agricultural land in India and 84% are personally concerned about the impact of the new laws. Another stark statistic is that 93% of respondents felt that human rights violations will increase following the mass protests by Punjabi farmers.

This is a joint letter from the MPs listed below calling for:

- an urgent meeting with you to discuss the deteriorating situation in the Punjab and its relationship with the Centre;
- representations to be made by yourself to your Indian counterpart about the impact on British Sikhs and Punjabis, with longstanding links to land and farming in India;
- an update of any communications the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has had with the Indian Government on this issue, including with the Indian Foreign Secretary, Harsh Shringla, who visited the UK on 4 November.

Yours sincerely,

**Tan Dhesi MP**  
**Member of Parliament for Slough**

**Debbie Abrahams MP**  
**Apsana Begum MP**  
**Sir Peter Bottomley MP**  
**Sarah Champion MP**  
**Jeremy Corbyn MP**  
**Jon Cruddas MP**  
**John Cryer MP**  
**Geraint Davies MP**  
**Martin Docherty-Hughes MP**  
**Allan Dorans MP**  
**Andrew Gwynne MP**  
**Afzal Khan MP**  
**Ian Lavery MP**  
**Emma Lewell-Buck MP**

**Clive Lewis MP**  
**Tony Lloyd MP**  
**Khalid Mahmood MP**  
**Seema Malhotra MP**  
**Steve McCabe MP**  
**John McDonnell MP**  
**Pat McFadden MP**  
**Grahame Morris MP**  
**Caroline Nokes MP**  
**Kate Osborne MP**  
**Virendra Sharma MP**  
**John Spellar MP**  
**Zarah Sultana MP**  
**Sam Tarry MP**

**Alison Thewliss MP**  
**Stephen Timms MP**  
**Valerie Vaz MP**  
**Claudia Webbe MP**  
**Nadia Whittome MP**  
**Munira Wilson MP**  
**Mohammed Yasin MP**

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