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## As troubles mount, Modi touts farm bills as 'protection shield'

AHAND MISHRA  
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The Modi government has swung into damage control mode after massive protests by the Opposition over farm bills and disgruntlement by some allies culminated in the resignation of Union Minister and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Harsimrat Kaur Badal.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi projected the contentious legislation as a "protection shield" for farmers while the BJP insisted that its ally SAD is still part of the NDA.

Though the government could pass the bills in the Lok Sabha, the issue is snowballing into a major political row, with farmer organisations up

### DH DECIPHERS

Why are farmers angry with agricultural reform bills?

Page 7

in arms and another NDA ally — the Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) in Haryana — coming under pressure.

The JJP had on Thursday apologised for the lathi-charge on farmers in the state. On Friday, the Congress pressed for a special Assembly session in the BJP-ruled state to discuss the bills. Meanwhile, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder

Singh upped the ante, saying the legislations are part of a 'Kisan maaru, Punjab maaru' (destroy farmers, destroy Punjab) "conspiracy" of the Modi government.

The farmer issue has given the BJP headaches in the past too. Political analyst Rasheed Kidwai recalls that the Modi government was made to do a somersault by the Congress in 2015, when it tried to change the 2013 Land Acquisition Act passed by the UPA.

"A year after the killing of six farmers in Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh in June 2017, the BJP lost its government in the state as the Congress campaigned massively on farm issues, also promising a loan waiver," he said.

► Farm bill, Page 7

## Modi touts farm bills as 'shield'

FARM BILL, FROM PAGE 1

This time, wary of a wrong message that could go to farmers ahead of polls in another agrarian state Bihar, the BJP has decided to take the bull by the horns. Modi slammed the Congress for resorting to "false campaigns and lies to mislead farmers".

"These were the promises made by them in their election manifesto, but when the BJP is implementing it now, they are trying to create confusion in the minds of farmers," Modi said while inaugurating a railway river overbridge and announcing a slew of rail projects for the poll-bound Bihar.

Bhartiya Kisan Union president Rattan Mann has a different take. "Farmers are living in fear that these laws will make them captives to companies and corporates. Marketing, storage and import-export, when out of the legal purview, can never be in the interest of farmers," he said.

Farmers are vocal in both the agrarian states of Haryana — where the BJP has barely managed to repeat its government after court-riding the JJP in last year's Assembly polls — and the Congress-ruled Punjab, where elections are 18 months away.

While the BJP downplayed Badal's resignation, the second-oldest ally walking out of the Modi dispensation does indicate a floundering in the alliance even as it does not affect the stability of the government.