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# In a thaw, Centre offers to put off farm reforms for 18 months

Unions to study proposal, return for talks tomorrow

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ  
NEW DELHI

Farm union leaders will consider a proposal from the Centre to suspend the implementation of the three contentious farm reform laws for the next year-and-a-half while a committee is formed to look into their demands.

Union leaders said the Centre had also offered to submit an affidavit to the Supreme Court to this effect.

They will discuss the proposal internally on Thursday, and respond at the next round of discussions on Friday. The proposal was made during the 10th round of talks on Wednesday, and is the first serious sign of movement in the negotiations since tens of thousands of farmers began their protest on the borders of Delhi almost two months ago. Their major demands have been a repeal of the three laws on agricultural marketing, and a new legal guarantee for minimum support prices.

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Joining the parade: Farmers arriving to participate in the protest against the farm laws, on the Delhi-Meerut expressway near the Ghazipur border on Wednesday. •R.V. MOORTHY

## Let police decide on parade: CJI

'Improper, irregular' for us to stop rally, says court

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde on Wednesday told the government that it was both "improper and irregular" for the Supreme Court to disallow any rally by protesting farmers on Republic Day.

"It is for the police to decide. We will allow you to withdraw. You are the execu-

tive of the country. You decide," Chief Justice Bobde, heading a three-judge Bench, addressed Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal and Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta.

The CJI's remarks was in response to a submission by Mr. Mehta to adjourn the hearing on a government plea to bar farmers from holding rallies to "disrupt"

the Republic Day celebration. Mr. Mehta submitted, "Consider hearing it on January 25... Let us see how the situation develops".

But the CJI allowed the government to withdraw its plea. "You [government] decide what has to be done," he said.

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## Centre offers to put off reforms for 18 months

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The government was keen on reaching a final decision at the meeting on Gurgurab. The Centre thus said it was ready to keep the three farm laws suspended for one to one-and-a-half years, during which a solution can be reached through mutual dialogue, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar told journalists after the meeting. "If the agitation is ended, and the farmers can go home, then that will be a victory for Indian democracy, not for any individual," he added.

"In order to increase the farmer unions' belief and trust in the fact that they are very serious and sincere about the suspension idea, the government said it is willing to do this through an undertaking in the Supreme Court," said Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch leader Kavitha Kuruganti, who was one of the farmers' delegation members.

"We wanted a repeal of the three laws. The unions will discuss this new proposal at a joint meeting of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha to-

morrow [Thursday] afternoon and then take a decision," said Krantikari Kisan Union leader Darshan Pal. The Punjab unions will hold their own meeting to decide their stance on Thursday morning before the SKM meeting. When the negotiations began on Wednesday, the unions raised the issue of National Intelligence Agency issuing notices to supporters of the agitation, as well as FIRs filed against protesting farmers in Haryana. "On the one hand, the government is talking about finding solutions, but on the other hand, the NIA and State police are harassing and pressuring the protesters and those providing moral support," said Rakesh Tikait, who heads one faction of the Bharatiya Kisan Union. Mr. Tomar promised to take up the issue with the Home Ministry, added Mr. Tikait. Before the talks began, the unions welcomed the Supreme Court's refusal to stop the proposed tractor parade on Republic Day, leaving it to the police to decide on whether to grant permission.