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Opposition decries adoption of report on farm law

MPs say they were not consulted, Chairman of the Standing Committee was not present at the final meeting of the panel

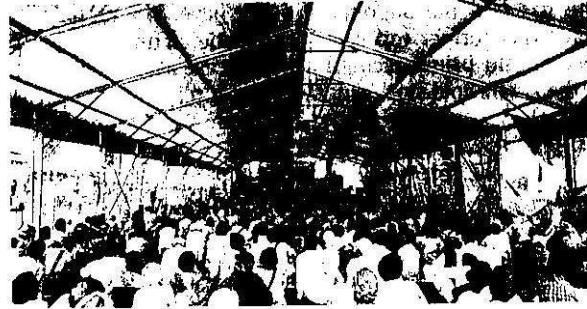
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NEW DELHI

Opposition members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Food, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution say they were not consulted before the adoption of a report calling for the implementation of the Essential Commodities Amendment (ECA) Act. Protesting farm unions calling for the repeal of the law have slammed parties who were part of the committee for "betraying farmers".

The committee is chaired by Trinamool Congress MP Sudip Bandyopadhyay and

includes members of the Congress, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Samajwadi Party, Nationalist Congress Party and Shiv Sena, all of whom have previously called for the repeal of three farm laws, including the ECA Act.

However, the report adopted by the committee says the law "will become a catalyst for unlocking vast untapped resources in the agriculture sector" and recommends that the government implements the law "in letter and spirit, and without let or hindrances". The report on price rise of essential commodities was submitted to the Lok Sabha on Friday.



Fight continues: Farmers protesting at the Singhu border in New Delhi on Friday. •SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Mr. Bandyopadhyay was not present for the final meeting of the committee on Thursday, March 18, when the report was adopted. Instead, that last meeting was

chaired by Bharatiya Janata Party MP Ajay Misra.

"This is the BJP's cheap and dirty tricks department in action," tweeted Trinamool MP Derek O'Brien.

"Con job was done when Chairman of Parliament Committee was not at meeting," he said.

Congress MP Saptagiri Ulaka says he was not present at the meeting either, although his name is on the list of attendees in the minutes appended to the report.

"The 18th meeting was called at a very short notice. I got a call at around 9 p.m. [on 17th] informing about it. The draft report, running into 100 pages, also landed around that time. I couldn't attend the 18th meeting because I had to be in the Lok Sabha for the demand for

grants discussion," he told *The Hindu*.

Fellow Congress MP Rajmohan Unnithan also missed the meeting on March 18 as he was in his constituency in Kerala in the run-up to State polls.

"It is unprecedented that a report is adopted in the absence of the Chairman. It has never happened in my 17 years as an MP," said Jairam Ramesh, who is the Congress' chief whip in the Rajya Sabha.

AAP MP Bhagwant Mann was present at the meeting on March 18, but told *The Hindu* that his opposition was not taken into account.