

# PIOUS AND SANCTIMONIOUS: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO CRITICISM OVER FARMERS' PROTESTS

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Agriculture Issues and related constraints

India's [unusual response](#) to comments on the ongoing farmers' protests by [some international celebrities](#) comes across as highly sanctimonious. "The temptation of sensationalist social media hashtags and comments, especially when resorted to by celebrities and others, is neither accurate nor responsible," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement. It advised these celebrities to ascertain facts and properly understand the issues at hand "before rushing to comment on such matters". The response is somewhat supercilious in the immediate context of what singer and performer Rihanna had said in a single tweet. She had asked why the issue was not being talked about more, while drawing attention to a news report on the extraordinary measures taken by the government to put down the farmers' protests, including the laying of trenches and barricades and banning the Internet. Other international personages who had ventured to talk about the issue included some lawmakers from the U.S. and the U.K. too, but even that did not warrant a formal response from the government. If the MEA statement's claim that "some vested interest groups" were mobilising international support smacked of paranoia, the fact that a few isolated comments could send the Indian government into a tizzy, and lead to a lengthy riposte, reflects a siege mentality arising from deep insecurity. Whether it is organised dissent within the country, or informal criticism from elsewhere, it sees everything as a conspiracy against itself, a design on the country's unity and the stuff of propaganda.

The [registration of a police case](#) after [Greta Thunberg](#), the teenaged Swedish climate change activist, [shared a protesters' 'toolkit' on Twitter](#), has added another twist to this unedifying demonstration of touchiness. Many Indian celebrities, from the fields of cinema and sports, joined issue with Rihanna to state their case against what they saw as external interference. Many of them professed their desire to keep the country together and voiced their disapproval of 'propaganda'. The larger issue, of course, is something the government itself has drawn attention to. What is the limit to the claim that a problem is a country's internal matter and something those outside its borders are not entitled to comment upon? Given India's recent comment voicing concern over the military takeover in Myanmar or the attack on Capitol Hill in the U.S., and its oft-expressed views on developments in neighbouring countries, it requires no iteration that some issues that have a bearing on human rights, survival of democracy and international relations do tend to invite comment. It is not as if only the farmers' protests have got traction overseas. The best way for the government to avoid international criticism is not to allow more people to see it as authoritarian, disrespectful of rights, and given to attempts to undermine institutions of democracy.

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