

# Farmers crisis? Only 50 MPs stay to discuss it

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Farmer suicides and the agrarian crisis have been the reason for many disruptions in Parliament, but when the time comes to discuss the issue, hardly anyone bothers to attend, as happened in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday when not even 60 MPs were present. In fact, there were probably just 50 of them.

A short-duration discussion on the agrarian crisis, led by BJP's Venkaiah Naidu and Congress's Mani Shankar Aiyar, turned into a routine debate with a majority of members from both the ruling party and Opposition benches absent.

Even among those who spoke, on both sides, many left immediately after their speech. There were exceptions like Rudranarayan Pany of BJP, D Bandyopadhyay of Trinamool Congress, agriculture minister Sharad Pawar and a few others who sat through the proceedings. BJP's S S Ahluwalia got into a verbal duel with P J Kurien,



**LEFT IN THE LURCH?**

who was officiating as the deputy chairperson.

A heated exchange between the duo started when S SDhindsa of Shiromani Akali Dal protested to Kurien that he was not being given the chance to speak, while Congress members kept on speaking one after the other. Eventually, the matter got shorted out.

Initiating the discussion, Naidu accused the government of ignoring 60% of the country's population engaged in agriculture and demanded an overhaul of policy measures affecting farmers to arrest the crisis.

Demanding a seven-day special session of Parliament on agriculture as a short-duration discussion wasn't

enough, Naidu asked for structural changes to stop farmer suicides. Naidu demanded that the government implement the recommendations of the Swaminathan committee, along with suspension of rural job guarantee scheme under MNREGA during the peak agriculture season, arguing that the programme has led to labour shortage in the farm sector.

Mani Shankar Aiyar supported Naidu's call for a special session. He called for educating farmers about uncertainty in cash crops, especially cotton. Arguing that the failure of cash crops was the cause for farmer suicides, Aiyar stressed on urgent need for more focus on agriculture extension services.