

Stop harassing farmers on loans, says M.S. Gill

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"Stop the maltreatment and arrest of farmers and members of their families for their failure to repay their agricultural loans," says Dr Manohar Singh Gill, MP and former Financial Commissioner (Development), Punjab.

"This coercion of small farmers must stop immediately," he said maintaining that "never before have such coercive methods, including the use of the police, been used to effect recoveries."

Reacting to reports of arrests and subsequent protests by small farmers and their families in Abohar during the past few days, Dr Gill maintained that even the British did not resort to such coercive tactics. Dr Gill is the first Congress MP to come out in support of small farmers.

Talking to The Tribune, Dr Gill said that he could not resist

urging both the Centre and the Punjab Government to desist from using force against small farmers, who had been foolishly pushed into taking loans for tractors and other things.

"Failure to repay loans and apprehension of harassment at the hands of cooperative banks and the police are the factors responsible for the growing number of suicides among farmers. During the last session of Parliament, I had taken up this issue forcefully and advocated the need for setting aside Rs 20,000 crore for meeting the interest component on agricultural loans advanced to small farmers throughout the country.

"It is intriguing why in our country, where big industrial houses have been given Rs 2.5 lakh crore by various financial institutions of which Rs 45,000 crore has been written off, small farmers who are sustaining the economy of states like Punjab should be harassed," said Dr Gill.