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Punjab: Internet shut down at borders after detention of farmer leaders

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Late in the night, the Haryana Police removed preventive barricades. However, the highway on both the border points is still shut.

The police, who faced mild resistance, detained over 300 protesters, including the 28-member delegation, hours after the third round of talks with the central government panel ended in Chandigarh.

At the meeting, Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan reiterated the Centre's commitment to the welfare of farmers.

The national highways had been blocked since 13 February 2024, for traffic. After whisking away the protesters, the police have been removing tractor-trailers parked both at the Shambhu and Khanauri borders.

Senior superintendent of police Nanak Singh told the media on Wednesday that farmers had been protesting at Shambhu for a long time. "Today (19 March), in the presence of duty magistrates, the police cleared the area after they were given proper warning. A few people showed a

willingness to go home. In addition, the structures and vehicles here are being moved. The entire road will be cleared and opened for traffic.”

BJP leader and Union minister Ravneet Bittu spoke to Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini about clearing the route as the Punjab government removed farmers from the borders.

Justifying the government action, Punjab finance minister Harpal Cheema said the step was necessitated for the economic growth of the state.

“It is important that we fight against unemployment too,” he added.

Also, before the police action, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MP Malvinder Singh Kang called for a collaborative and constructive approach to resolve the ongoing issues faced by farmers.

He highlighted that Punjab's borders have been blocked for over a year, leading to significant economic losses, reduced investments, and a decline in tourism.

“The closure of Punjab’s borders, particularly at Shambhu, has not only created economic hardships but also affected religious tourism. The number of devotees visiting sacred places like Darbar Sahib has declined. Furthermore, the biggest challenge is the lack of investment, which is directly tied to industrial growth and employment generation. This is a pressing issue as unemployment is one of the root causes of drug abuse in Punjab,” he said.