

Why Punjab farmers want security fence moved closer to border with Pakistan

The shift, if it does take place, would be a major relief for farmers in the state's border belt — it would clear the way for unhindered cultivation of thousands of acres of farmland currently beyond the fence.

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Farmers stand facing the border with Pakistan at Kakar village in Amritsar sector. (Express Photo by Man Aman Singh Chhina)

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Saturday said the Union government had agreed, in principle, to **shift the security fence in the state closer to the International Border (IB) with Pakistan.**

The shift, if it does take place, would be a major **relief for farmers in the state's border belt** — it would clear the way for unhindered cultivation of thousands of acres of farmland currently beyond the fence.

But this is hardly the first time such a proposal has come up. *The [Indian Express](#)* looks at the circumstances in which the fence was first put up, whether pushing it forward would have any security implications, and why such a move has not materialised yet.

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What's the border fence issue?

Punjab shares a 532-km border with Pakistan which is secured by a barbed wire fence. Due to the uneven terrain, the distance between the fence and the IB varies from a few feet at some places to nearly 2 km at others. Between the fence and the border lie 21,500 acres belonging to Punjab's farmers and around 10,000 acres belonging to the government. The farmers who till that land have had to face restrictions for years.

Gates that currently grant access to the restricted land are opened for farmers for a few hours on designated days of the week. However, there are restrictions on the number of people who can work close to the border and the number of tractors they can take to till their land.



BSF protocol also requires two Kisan Guards to accompany each tractor crossing the fence. This, too, limits how many farmers can access their fields daily.

These border farmers have long been demanding that the fence be pushed closer to the IB. They say the move will also alleviate the problem of restricted access to their land.

Mann, who met with Union Home Minister [Amit Shah](#), said the minister told him that the plan was under consideration.

The origin of the fence

The electrified barbed wire fence was first installed at the border in three districts — Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Ferozepur — in 1988, during the peak of militancy in Punjab. Its key objectives were curbing infiltration, militancy and drug smuggling.

“That time, the farmers did not protest. Those were difficult times. Anyone protesting would have been taken in as a supporter of militancy. We then set up a Border Area Sangharsh

Committee in 1992. We have been fighting for farmers rights since then. There has been no solution,” said Rattan Singh Randhawa of the committee.

Later, three more districts were carved out of the original three — Tarn Taran, Fazilka and Pathankot. This means the fence affects border communities in six Punjab districts now.

The Kapoor Committee

The Kapoor Committee, led by the then Punjab Chief Secretary S L Kapoor, was set up in 1986 to address the hardships faced by the agrarian border communities owing to the fence. It recommended compensation for farmers whose land fell beyond the fence. In 1988, the first inconvenience compensation of Rs 2,500 per acre was released based on its recommendations. “We got the compensation only sparingly. It has not come every year,” said Randhawa.

What farmers say

With drones being increasingly deployed, the nature of arms and drugs smuggling has changed. Border patrolling and surveillance too has evolved. Farmers, therefore, argue that pushing the fence closer to the border makes more sense in such a scenario.

“There are some villages where 500-700 acres are right behind the fence. The farmers go across after going through tiring checks. It is an everyday story. When machinery has to be taken to these fields, there are a lot of security checks. It takes time. The crop is then taken out of the fields. That becomes a long process,” said Charanjit Singh, a farmer of Khasa village.

“From a security and surveillance point of view, the fence is a necessity. It should, however, be pushed back. The Centre has a big [budget](#) for defence,” he said.

Why fence has not been moved

The issue of moving the fence has come up repeatedly over the years, most recently in 2023 when the BSF and the Ministry of Home Affairs were “actively considering” such a proposal. Such a move is easier said than done.

A BSF officer, requesting anonymity, said that that fence, now almost 40 years old, was in bad shape. “If it is to be removed and pushed back, then it would not work. The government will also have to procure barbed wire afresh,” said this officer.

The officer added: “We do not put mines in the area now. Earlier, the farmers used to suffer injuries due to mines in the fields. Now, there are no mines. No accidents take place now.”

According to Randhawa, farmers raised the issue with Mann when he was campaigning for the Tarn Taran Assembly by-election in November. He said: “We have little hope. Each time there are elections, this issue is back in the spotlight. Nothing happens once the election is over. In 2023, too, it was announced that the fence was being pushed back. What happened then? Nothing.”

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