

'90,000 farmers killed themselves in state so far'

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AS per estimate and study, there were 90,000 suicides in Punjab to date. This was stated by Inderjit Singh Jaijee, convener of Movement Against State Repression (MASR). "As told by the National Farmers' Commission, we have collected data and 1,408 affidavits through gram panchayats in Moonak sub-division alone. And we found 1,508 suicides in 90 villages of this sub-division," he said.

"Interestingly, as per the Punjab Police, only seven suicides have been reported in the last seven years across Punjab, while the state government status report of 2004 puts the number at 2,116. The Punjab Farmers' Commission's report of 2006 places the figure at 2,000 per year and the Punjab Revenue Department's report of 2007 says 132 suicides took place in the last seven years. But MASR puts the figure at 3,000 per year," he said.

Jaijee alleged that the state government does not want the true figure of suicide to come out, as it will have to give more money. In 2002, when the SAD-BJP was in power, they promised to give Rs 2.5 lakh per family and earmarked

Sangrur now live at the mercy of neighbours or contribution from various NGOs. When asked about their hobbies, none of them could come up with an answer. The struggle for survival



USA-based NRI Manmeet Singh addressing a press conference in Chandigarh on Sunday. Jasbir Malhi

Rs 2 crore, but nothing was done, he said. Then, the Congress came to power and did zilch for the farmers, he added.

Manmeet Singh and Harpreet Kaur from the USA, who are making a documentary on these children and the farmers' suicides, took the children to meet Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar.

Singh say, "He gave us an appointment for January 31, and did not meet. Then he asked us to meet the next day, but again refused us. But Harpreet man-

takes up all their time.

But 13-year-old Salma, who lost both her parents and lives with her brother and aunt, said, "I liked watching TV earlier. I used to watch serials. Then we

aged to throw some pamphlets in his car. After a few hours, he met us and gave the assurance that he will write to the Punjab Chief Minister to financially help these 12 children and also give them free education. However, he did not talk to the children."

"Pawar puts the figure of farmers' suicides at three. We will invite him to see for himself the condition of these children in their native villages," said Jaijee, who also announced to give Rs 1 lakh to Baba Nanak Educational Society.

had to sell it to return the loan. It was followed by our house. Now sometimes, we don't even have enough to eat." Ironically, *Woh rehne wali mehlon kii* was her favourite serial.