

4. Border Fence Issue – Internal Security

The Union government has agreed in principle to shift the border security fence in Punjab closer to the International Border

Present status

Border context – Punjab shares a ~532 km International Border (IB) with Pakistan. The border fence is not always on the zero line; in several stretches it is placed inside Indian territory, and the gap between the fence and IB can be substantial in some locations.

The fence exists (security rationale) – The barbed-wire/electrified fencing was put in place to curb infiltration, militancy and cross-border smuggling; historically, Punjab's militancy phase was a key trigger for intensifying the fencing and security architecture.

What is changing now ("latest move") – As of mid-late January 2026, reports indicate the Centre has given an "in-principle" nod / is considering realigning the fence closer to the IB, which the state leadership has projected as relief for farmers.

Issues and concerns (ground-level impact)

Land trapped between fence and IB – A large belt of cultivated and government land falls between the fence and the IB, creating a "restricted agriculture zone" where normal farming is not possible.

Restricted access regime – Farmers typically must cross gates/checkpoints, show IDs, and cultivate only for limited hours under tight security protocols and daily supervision/escort arrangements in many areas.

Operational constraints that raise costs and reduce productivity – Limited time windows mean

1. delayed sowing/harvesting,
2. inability to respond quickly to pest/disease/weather shocks,
3. higher labour uncertainty and machine underutilisation,
4. higher post-harvest losses (due to timing mismatch).

The overall effect is economic vulnerability for border farmers despite holding legally owned land.

Governance deficit perception – Farmers often highlight that compensation/relief has been episodic, and the administrative solution has remained ad hoc rather than rules-based.

Committee recommendations and institutional history

Kapoor Committee (1986) – Constituted to examine hardships of farmers whose land lay beyond the fence and recommend remedies. Recommended compensation/inconvenience allowance for affected cultivators.

Inconvenience allowance (1988) – The first compensation tranche of about ₹2,500 per acre was released, but farmers report it was not regular/annual.

Border Area Sangharsh Committee (1992) – Formed to mobilise and negotiate for farmers' rights, compensation regularisation, and freer access—yet a durable settlement has remained elusive.

Farmers want the fence shifted now (logic of the demand)

Access + dignity of cultivation – Realignment closer to the IB would bring more land on the "safe side" of the fence, reducing the daily dependency on gate timings and escorts.

Surveillance technology argument – Farmers argue that improved surveillance and monitoring capacities make it feasible to secure the border even if the fence is closer than earlier layouts.

But farmers also flag "residual land" problem – Even after shifting, some parcels may still remain beyond the fence in certain geometries; hence demands for acquisition at market rate or contracted compensation for the residual trapped land.

Impacts of the latest move (benefits and risks)

Likely benefits (farmers and local economy)

Unhindered cultivation – More acres would become accessible without the same restrictive regime, reducing delays in key operations and improving yields/income stability.

Lower transaction costs – Fewer stoppages, less time lost at gates, reduced need for repeated permissions/escorts, and more predictable farm scheduling.

Administrative simplification – Less daily micro-management by security forces for routine farming movement; BSF can redeploy effort toward core surveillance and interdiction. (Inference from reported current escort-heavy regime.)

Key security concerns (must be addressed upfront)

Smuggling facilitation risk – Some farmer leaders and reports caution that moving the fence closer could make certain types of contraband transfer easier in some stretches (e.g., shorter throws/quick handoffs), requiring compensatory tech and policing.

Border management complexity – Fence realignment is not just “moving wire” – it requires redesign of-

1. patrol tracks,
2. lighting,
3. sensor grids/CCTV,
4. gate and access protocols,
5. response time architecture.

Conclusion and way forward

Strategic conclusion – Shifting the Punjab border fence nearer to the IB can be a high-impact livelihood relief measure, but it must be executed as a border-security modernization project, not as a standalone farmer-relief step.

Way forward

1. Technology-led hardening- expand integrated surveillance (CCTV + thermal/IR + ground sensors + anti-drone measures where needed) to offset any reduced depth.
2. Codified farmer access protocol- transparent timings, digitised passes, grievance redress, and predictable gate operations to avoid arbitrariness (especially for any land that remains beyond).
3. Compensation/acquisition for residual land- implement a rule-based framework—either market-linked acquisition or annual indexed inconvenience compensation for land that still falls beyond the fence post-realignment.
4. Centre-State-BSF coordination cell- time-bound project management for civil works, security redesign, and local consultations to prevent unrest and ensure compliance.

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