Indian Capital Invaded by Tractors on Republic Day

So, the question posed earlier by the NEO regarding the prospect of farm tractors participating in the parade on the occasion of India’s national holiday of Republic Day has been answered. However, this answer has proven rather contradictory.

In one sense, it could be a “yes,” that is, the “tractor drivers” were allowed to come to the capital of their country on its major holiday. However, the manner in which they appeared deviated sharply, to put it mildly, from that previously agreed upon by the parties to the conflict between farmers and Central Government of India. Judging by the data coming in at the time of this writing, instead of festive celebrations, there is something more akin to street fighting going on in Delhi.

Note, by the way, that the gut feeling of the (former) metropole of the (then) “pearl of the British crown” did not fail this time, either. The author is referring to the cancellation of the visit of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Boris Johnson to India as a guest of honor of his colleague Narendra Modi on the occasion of the planned festivities.

Apparently, three weeks before them, London had already picked up the peculiar scent of another mess on the territory of the former colony. Whitehall seems to have decided to save their prime minister from the prospect of getting into something unpleasant (as the leader of “our useless overseas brothers” managed to do a year ago) by
leaving him (out of harm’s way) at home. - Indeed, he better be fighting the “British” coronavirus. This suddenly escalated problem as the “reason” for the cancellation of Johnson’s visit to India was reported to the latter’s Prime Minister.

Let us briefly consider the final stage of the series of events that preceded all that happened in Delhi on January 26. Permission for farmers to hold a “tractor parade” in the capital of the country on the occasion of the main national holiday was obtained at the very last moment and under the pressure of (almost) unavoidable consequences.

In this case, the Central Government of India followed the well-known wisdom that if it is not worthwhile to overcome some unpleasant circumstances, one should at least try to use them to one’s advantage. Such “circumstances,” it should be recalled, are the protests of some farmers against the three laws adopted on September 27 of last year to ensure the radical modernization of the entire agricultural industry.

The Modi government was clearly unprepared for the scale and duration of the protests, as well as the stubbornness and reluctance of their participants. The announcement by representatives of protesting farmers of their intention to enter the capital on tractors on the day of scheduled Republic Day celebrations was made in early January of this year, when another round of negotiations with a number of ministers to resolve the emerging social conflict ended in failure.

On January 22, the 11th round of negotiations was held to no avail. Farmers refused to consider the government’s proposal to give the laws a kind of “test period” (for a year and a half) and then return to discuss them on the basis of acquired practice. Earlier, they rejected the services of the Supreme Court, which proposed suspending the same laws and creating a kind of mediation platform to resolve the conflict. The farmers stand firm and unchanged, asking only for the immediate and complete repeal of all three laws.

Incidentally, the very appearance of these sentences is assessed as a signal that the “Centre blinks”. An unpleasant line for it. But, on the other hand, you can’t shoot at your own feeders, who have been raging for three months in several states and, above all, in Haryana and Punjab, adjacent to the capital. In a number of cities there have already been a sort of rehearsal of the “tractor parade,” accompanied by clashes with the police. The nation’s capital was also repeatedly besieged by many (tens or hundreds) thousands of farmers, moving both on tractors and “dismounted”.

How does one respond to a statement from someone who is by no means a stranger about wanting to take part in events of the next Republic Day? No other way than the quite sane leadership of a great country, which India is today. On its behalf, the capital police finally told the farmers something along the lines of “come after the parade, drive down such and such streets, behave yourselves, that is, avoid drinking alcoholic beverages and smashing storefronts.”

The envisioned scenario probably looked like this: the gallant Gurkhas and Sikhs in their parade uniforms, followed by their cannons, tanks and missiles, paraded down the main avenue of the capital for the eyes of the country’s leadership. A little later, unwashed farmers in rattling tractors will ride through the streets allocated to them. And the paths of the two convoys will not cross. Certainly not a cheerful symbolism behind this scenario, but at least it was a solution. However, it seems that even this was not meant to be.

Note the sharp difference in expert assessments of the legislation, which has provoked internal conflict in India on an unprecedented scale. It all depends on the initial position from which one starts an evaluation. If these laws are referred to as a tool to dramatically increase the productivity of the country’s agricultural industry, then the assessment is positive. If, however, the expert is concerned about the (already obvious) costs of implementing these laws in the form of, for example, ruining some of the small individual farms, then they are claiming that the “spirit of the Constitution”, which provides broad rights for individual states in some important social matters, has been ignored.

An extreme variation of the second approach is the position of the leader of the leading opposition Indian National Congress party, Rahul Gandhi, who refused to acknowledge as a mistake the initiation of the issues discussed by the government and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. The latter are suspected of having very bad intentions.

The author also finds the above-mentioned proposal by the Central Government to farmers to be not without positive implications: in the next 12-18 months, let’s see how the laws work in the adopted format. Then, we will reconvene, review what happened, and work together to come up with amendments. If at all necessary that is, since it is quite possible that none of the current fears will be confirmed.
To reiterate, farmers so far refuse to agree to such proposals and continue to insist on the unconditional and immediate repeal of all three laws. The “people of the earth” in general have their own perception of reality, often sharply different from that which is characteristic of the “consumers” of their products.

Today it is impossible to predict how events will develop further. But one thing is beyond doubt: India finds itself facing one of the most dangerous conflicts of an internal nature in the entire period of independence. All external challenges pale in comparison, such as the conflict with the PRC in Ladakh, in which there seems to be a (still weak, but nevertheless) breakthrough.

One can only wish that India would once again emerge from the ordeal it has undergone. At least without particularly grave consequences.

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