On November 19, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a very remarkable statement referring to the government’s decision to repeal three laws on the subject of reforming the country’s agriculture. The cancellation procedure, the Indian Prime Minister continued, will be launched as early as the next session of Parliament. He also urged farmers “to return home to their families and start afresh.”

This decision raises the most general point, suggesting that the Indian government has decided not to tempt fate anymore. Not even so much their own, but the country’s as a whole. This decision took into account the worsening of various aspects of the internal situation and the complexity of the surrounding external environment.

There is no definite answer to the question as to whether or not this solution is the right one. It has already been the subject of intensive discussions among Indian experts.

While the NEO more or less regularly refers to the topic of protest movements by some Indian farmers against the agriculture reform laws passed in late September 2020 (), it nevertheless seems appropriate to recall what it is all about. And also explain the contents of the messages in the said statement of Narendra Modi.

Thus, by signing three laws, initiated by the Central Government and adopted by the Parliament earlier the same day on September 27, the President launched a process of radical reforms in agriculture, which employs over half of the working-age population of India and produces less than 20% of national GDP. These two figures explain the relevance of the very issue of agricultural reform in India, its focus, and the most likely inevitable social costs. Given the sheer number of people involved in agriculture in a country of 1.3 billion people, it is not hard to imagine the
Criticism of the laws, immediately voiced by political opponents of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party represented since 2014 by the Narendra Modi government, accepted the need for agricultural reforms in the country and focused mainly on procedural issues of their adoption. It was pointed out that there was insufficiency or absence of any broad preliminary discussion of the draft laws and the accelerated format of their passage through Parliament.

The government’s response to these and other rebukes was, firstly, to deny the secrecy of the preparation of the laws, which had dragged on for two preceding decades. The discussion on this subject dates back to the Bharatiya Janata Party’s political predecessors when the government was inter alia formed by the Indian National Congress, the primary opponent of the now ruling party. Second, as the current government argued, the laws included measures to mitigate the adverse effects of their enactment.

Pointing to this second circumstance, back in January of this year, the Ministry of Agriculture claimed that the started farmers’ protests were local in nature. Generally speaking, this statement was and still is accurate to date. Farmers’ protest activity has been confined mainly to the two states of Haryana and Punjab. But again, one must consider that Punjab alone is home to some 30 million people, and one can imagine what a TV picture of protests by local farmers does to a common person's imagination.

Moreover, the multifactorial nature of the domestic politics of the highly complex country that is modern India has come to the forefront in this state. When one factor comes into play and is accompanied by another one, it is difficult to answer which one is first and second.

Punjab is one of those states where the problem of separatism is evident (or not so obvious), conditioned in this case by a long-standing aspiration of Sikhs (practicing a peculiar religion) for their statehood. During the famous tractor parade of farmers held on January 26 in the Indian capital Delhi on the occasion of Independence Day, it was the Sikhs who were the prominent participants in the assault of the Red Fort, over which the flag of Khalistan, the non-existent Sikh country, appeared.

And here we come to the question of the very turbulent background against which the brief history of adoption and repeal of the laws under discussion has passed. Once again, let us emphasize that the said background has internal and external components concerning India. From time to time, the Sikh community in Canada makes itself known, creating unnecessary problems in relations with one of the main participants of the current stage of the Great World Game, which India de facto is.

To the north, Punjab is adjoined by the now union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the former state until August 2019. Periodical aggravation of the situation due to the separatist-interreligious factor also contains a considerable external component. Which until recently was entirely due to the complexities between India and Pakistan, dating back to the period of British India and catastrophically manifested at the time of both countries’ independence in 1947.

However, the recent dramatic developments in Afghanistan have undoubtedly, albeit indirectly, reflected on the current stage of aggravation in the Kashmir Valley. The coming to power of the Taliban (banned in Russia) in that country has provoked, again, probably against the wishes of the Taliban, increased turmoil in Muslim communities throughout South Asia.

In particular, in neighboring Bangladesh, always friendly to India, there have been acts of violence directed against local Hindu communities, instigated by Muslim extremists. In the Indian state of Tripura, adjacent to the Bangladeshi province of Chittagong, where these clashes took place, the reaction was quite foreseeable.

Note that Tripura is one of the so-called seven sisters. It belongs to a group of states located in the far north-east of the country, separated from the main territory by a narrow corridor, about 50 km wide, called a chicken neck. Any amount of turbulence would prove here to be a source of severe problems for the Central Government.

Meanwhile, such potential sources in the area of the Seven Sisters are observed in excessive numbers. To name China’s claims on the territory of Arunachal Pradesh and separatist movements in Assam and Mizoram, adjacent to Myanmar. With which the separatists are somehow connected and where one of the world's most significant drug traffic routes begins.

This bunch of problems (whose list is far from being exhaustive) must have been lying on Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s desk as he and his colleagues tackled the increasingly urgent task of reducing the pressure of the
accumulating domestic political steam. It was assumed, based on some signals from the Central Government, the most appropriate action would be to restore Kashmir’s status as part of India at least partially. This status has undergone radical changes with the abolition of Article 370 of the National Constitution on August 5, 2019, provoking the same separatist-interreligious tensions here.

However, the government decided to sacrifice three anti-farm laws. Of course, the Indian government knows best, but this decision has already sparked a heated debate in which direct contradictory assessments are being made. Leaders of the oppositional Indian National Congress generally responded positively to Narendra Modi’s decision, advising him to draw lessons for the future.

The camp of Bharatiya Janata Party supporters was divided into two unequal, in every sense, parts. The Bharatiya Janata Party leadership adheres to the strategy of presenting defeat as a victory. At the same time, pessimism and feelings of betrayal seem to be spreading in the party's grassroots structures.

Finally, the urgency of the problem of reforming India’s agriculture, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in his statement on repealing the three anti-farm laws, won’t disappear. However, it will now be solved with the indispensable participation of the established farmer’s movement. Of course, taking into account the whole general political situation with its internal and external components, and that second one is looking challenging today, and, at times, just menacing. Not just for India, but in the world at large.

So let's wish all of us to overcome our respective new difficulties. And achieve that without the exceptionally high costs.

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