

The Delhi Gridlock

Written by Administrator
Sunday, 14 February 2021 02:05

By Sidharth Mishra



Without getting into the debate of the new farm laws being good or bad, let's come straight to the point. The prolonged standoff between the government and the farmers has brought the National Capital Region (NCR) to a grinding halt.

The all-powerful government of India by deploying 50000 police and para-military personnel, putting spikes on the roads and creating three layers of reinforced cement concrete barriers may have 'saved' Delhi from a 'chakka jam' during those three hours on the last Saturday, little realizing that Delhi has been in a state of 'chakka jam' for the past two months.

The traffic gridlocks on the Ghazipur Delhi-Uttar Pradesh and Singhu and Tikri borders with Haryana every morning and evening are a testimony to the fact that the NCR has fallen victim to the standoff and the agitators succeeded in putting the government in a quagmire. Not that the congestions are there only at the borders but also in the heart of the city with layers of barricading to keep the seat of the government 'safe'.

The capital city and its vibrant satellite towns, which have been struggling to beat back the blues caused by the long period of lockdown due to the pandemic find themselves further brow-beaten by the government-imposed clampdown. The universities in the National Capital Region have been forced to reschedule examinations, being held online due to the pandemic, because there are extended internet shutdowns.

The academic sessions already running late due to the pandemic are being further pushed back with the government realizing little that in its inability to get over with the farm land issue, it's creating a tremendous backlog for the people who are neither farmer, nor government. An agitation which essentially was related to an issue limited to a few parts of north India has now started to spread tentacles not just pan-India but is also having international ramifications.

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Such unpredictable are the shutdowns and lockdowns in the city that several people are finding it difficult to reach railway stations and airports intime for their trips. The bus stands are wearing deserted looks. And the sound of blaring sirens of ambulances caught in traffic jams most painful.

On Saturday last despite the Kisans having called off 'chakka jam' in NCR, a much-pulverized Delhi Police expressing fears of 'sudden attacks' decided to bring the city to a halt. This puts focus on the faulty regulations indulged into by the city police. The January 26 mayhem was as much the doing of failed policing as of criminal activity on the part of a section of agitators.

Police actions should be preventive and not an afterthought. While allowing the tractor rally inside the city, didn't the Delhi Police weigh the pros and cons. Whose pressure did they have to allow the rally in the first place as the Supreme Court has refused to intervene.

The matter was in the hands of the Delhi Police, which in turn failed to act judiciously largely on account of either not having any intelligence on how things were to go wrong or ignoring the inputs, if they had any. That the leadership of the movement was being upstaged by a section was part of the discussion from January 24th evening itself but still the Delhi Police failed to evaluate threat perception correctly doesn't speak very highly either about its professionalism or competence.

To recover the lost grounds, the Delhi Police has now gone around putting a security blanket and in the process lost more ground to the agitators. With no end to the turmoil in sight, it would take sometime to unlock the gridlock on the roads leading to the national capital.

(The writer is Author and President, Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice)