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Weekly Wrap: Darth Vader, Debaltseve and the Kind Pineapple

By Unfair Observer

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Victory Day loomed large, but, meanwhile, a thousand small battles rage in Russia between the hosts of order and the forces of common sense. The latter appears to be losing, as usual.

Darth Vader's Salary

After a show of reluctance that would have impressed any 15-year-old maiden resisting courtship, state oil behemoth Rosneft posted the salary of its CEO, the humble Igor Sechin, once called "Darth Vader" by Forbes. A vague document on Rosneft CEO salaries (and bonuses, and other bonuses) indicates yearly incomes to the tune of $9 million to $12 million — about a third of what ExxonMobil's Rex Tillerson is making.

Russian anti-corruption fighters, including Alexei Navalny — Sechin's own personal Jedi nemesis — have hounded Rosneft with salary disclosure demands for months. Navalny even alleged Sechin is making $100,000 a day, more than any oil CEO in the world.

It is amazing how a convicted criminal offender (i.e. Navalny) can bend Rosneft to his will — this is like Luke Skywalker commanding the Imperial Stormtroopers to jump, and they say "how high?" But then again, nobody investigated Darth Vader for corruption during the construction of the Death Star, or gross misspending of money on it (Rosneft has a debt of $37 billion due to its cheeky acquisition of TNK-BP), or ruining the national imperial currency.

And even if they did, they apparently did not ask about the little loophole in his salary document saying that extra bonuses of any amount can be awarded on the board's decision. Checkmate, young Jedi.

Whatcha Laughin' At?

Without argument, the best thing to come out of post-Soviet Russia is Monstration. You know, that annual rally originating in Siberia where smiling, nice young people dress up like spacemen and Dr. Zoidberg from "Futurama" and carry slogans such as "please like me" and "donate your bra to the cult of the Kind Pineapple."

The Kind Pineapple had to go braless this year, at least in Novosibirsk, the source of all Monstrations since 2004. While a dozen cities nationwide were pleased to host their own Monstrations, Novosibirsk authorities banned the event and jailed the organizer, performance artist Artyom Loskutov, who was promptly declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International — though "prisoner of the subconscious" would be more fitting in his case.

Monstrations are more subversive than they seem: This year's main slogan was "Lord forgive us," and last year it was "Hell's ours" (like "Crimea's ours," only with hell). But we all know their main sin is not just satire — it is the grave crime of laughter. Serious Russia is serious, and laughing is a clear sign you're crossing the party line — so it's the slammer for you.

Which, by the way, means that if you're chortling while reading this, you might want to put down the paper. Try Kremlin.ru instead, there's a place not meant for sniggering.

Pavel, Come Back

A company in Kaluga — a city that, before the crisis, was better known for foreign investment than misguided patriotism — saw it fit to mark Victory Day with street posters listing Russia's most illustrious victories. The list includes battles against the Teutons, the Mongols, Napoleon, Hitler — and the Battle of Debaltseve on Feb. 19, 2015 — i.e. that bloody skirmish between separatists and the army three months ago.

Including Debaltseve on the list is like putting that cupboard that shook because your obese neighbor is dancing to Miley Cyrus upstairs on the roster of biggest earthquakes. This also goes a long way to show that Russia is really scraping the bottom of the barrel for victories scored in post-Soviet times (don't forget, aching pride is the real explanation for the Ukrainian rumble).

But the best thing, of course, is that battle of Debaltseve was fought between Ukrainians

on one side and Ukrainians on the other, no Russian army involved. Just ask Vladimir Putin. So do Kaluga advertisers spill some secrets there, or do they betray a lack of logical capacity? And do we even need to ask? Especially given that famous anti-governmental speech delivered in 1916 by the esteemed Russian democrat Pavel Milyukov, with the refrain, "What was is, stupidity or treason?"

Pavel, come back, you have a question to ask.

Unfair Observer is the pen name of a Russian journalist that The Moscow Times has invited to observe the most brain-dead weekly developments in Russia.

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