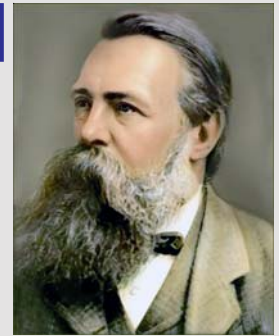


## LONG LIVE GREAT FREDERICK ENGELS

**“It is the essence of bourgeois socialism to want to maintain the basis of all the evils of present-day society and at the same time to want to abolish the evils themselves.... Whoever declares that the capitalist mode of production, the “iron laws” of present-day bourgeois society, are inviolable, and yet at the same time would like to abolish their unpleasant but necessary consequences, has no other recourse but to deliver moral sermons to the capitalists, moral sermons whose emotional effects immediately evaporate under the influence of private interest and, if necessary, of competition.”** *(The Housing Question)*



28-11-1820 — 05-08-1895

### FUEL PRICING

## Carries heartless foul play in its trail

The price of petrol has crossed Rs.80. On some days, the diesel price even overtakes the petrol price. As on 1 July 2020, in a span of 22 days, the price of petrol has increased by Rs 9.17 per litre while the diesel price has gone up by Rs 11.4 per litre. When Covid 19 pandemic is posing grave danger to health and life of the 95% of our

countrymen who are devastated because of the prolonged lockdown, any civilized government would have come forward to give them some relief in whatsoever way possible. But India's is a different story. Here the government is busy giving one after another stunt to hoodwink the immensely suffering people and divert their attention from the real issues. We have already exposed in the pages of Proletarian Era the treacherous hollowness of so called Rs 20 trillion rescue package. Even the recent declaration of providing free rice/wheat and pulses to 80 crore odd countrymen upto next November is another hoax. Is it that the government is doing something 'extraordinary', showing its magnanimity or distributing gratis? Or, it is incumbent on any

civilized government to take care of the distressed people at the hour of need or crisis? But while the government is pretending to dole out benefits with one hand, it is extracting much more from the misery-stricken citizens with the other hand. One classic example is monstrous fiscal savagery in the form of astronomical rise in the retail prices of petrol-diesel-LPG and even kerosene on a daily basis, cascading effect of which is destined to spark higher prices of every essential commodity and rise in transport cost. But, the BJP-led central government is vulgarly apathetic to the enormous suffering of the common people. Instead of taking immediate measure to stem this price spiral, the ruling party leaders, ministers as

*Contd on page 2*

### SUCI(C) vehemently protests steep rise in fuel prices including kerosene

*Comrade Provash Ghosh, General Secretary, SUCI (Communist), issued the following statement on 2 July 2020:*

When life of the common toiling people of the country is devastated by growing unemployment, mounting job loss, harrowing price rise and daily spike in Covid-19 cases as well as deaths, the BJP-led central government, taking advantage of the lockdown situation is on a spree to slay the slain in every sphere. Despite drastic fall in international crude price, it is progressively as well as steeply raising the retail tariff of petrol-diesel and cooking gas. Now even kerosene which is an essential item of poor rural and even urban households has been made dearer by a whopping 55%. On the one hand, the government is announcing free ration for 80 crore countrymen for 3 months to brighten electoral prospect of the ruling BJP in the ensuing assembly polls, while on the other hand, it is relentlessly squeezing the people in every possible way and also accelerating the process of large scale privatization of agricultural sector, mining, railways and such other key areas much to the detriment of people's interest.

We call upon the suffering people to rise up against such sinister moves and policies and raise a united voice of protest.

### Online Education

## Discriminates students, promotes unbridled corporate capital-inflow, relieves governments of their responsibility : spells doom for generations to come

The entire country of India is yet to recover from the disastrous Covid 19 pandemic lockdown. It is heart-wrenching to see millions losing their livelihood and increasingly facing starvation staring at their face. Economists opine that the economy will contract by minus 12.5%, which means some tens of million more jobs will be lost! Nobody knows how many years it may take for the Indian economy to recover! Words and deeds of the governments, the Union in particular as also those of the states, neither show to have a plan nor any will, to combat this deadly pandemic nor any plan to secure people's life and livelihood during and after lockdown. Like other sectors, even the education system of the country and the

academic calendar are in doldrums. When and how to start the academic session? How to conduct the classes or examinations by maintaining all safety precautions? – These are among the questions haunting people and academicians. It was the prerogative of various school boards, universities, educational institutions, and educational bodies to democratically discuss about it and evolve a scientific solution. It was expected that governments would oversee that such discussions take place.

It was shocking to see that the Union government including its MHRD, and the UGC

*Contd on page 5*

## FUEL PRICING

# Instead of passing on the benefits of dip in international crude price, the government is fleecing people by exorbitant hike in excise duties and cess

*Contd. from page 1*

well as a bunch of bourgeois economists-columnists on their pay-roll are busy providing 'economic logic' to this wanton fleecing and squeezing. Just before clamping Covid 19-induced lockdown on 24 March 2020, the BJP government amended the law to arrogate to itself arbitrary power to increase excise duty on petrol and diesel. That cleared the way, uncorked the demon! Following it, upward run of petrol diesel prices has been so mind-boggling that as on 29 June last, fuel prices were hiked 22 times in just over 3 weeks. Defending the unbridled hike in fuel prices amid nationwide protest, the Union BJP Petroleum Minister said that the nation and global economies were going through a challenging time and this crisis has impacted the demand and supply of fuel across the world. He then hastened to add that money being collected through taxes on fuel was being spent on health, employment and economic security in the country. Earlier, in July 2019, he justified raising fuel tariff by saying that funds were required for developmental activity in the country as if it was an 'economic compulsion' to squeeze the pauperized toiling masses more and more and shower avalanche of fiscal and other benefits including large scale tax waivers and concessions to the rich. All this makes it necessary to expose the secrets behind such harrowing price spiral of retail fuel tariff.

### **Deregulation of petrol diesel retail tariff**

It is pertinent to revisit history of fuel pricing mechanism in India. Petrol-prices were administratively monitored and decided by the government till 2010. But then, in June 2010, the erstwhile Congress-led UPA government deregulated petrol prices. It was argued that prices would henceforth be market-driven complying with the prescripts of globalization-liberalization. If international crude price goes up, retail price would also move upwards. Similarly, if price of crude plummets, retail tariff would also come down proportionately. Such was the promise. Then, immediately after ascending to power, the BJP government extended the same policy, deregulated diesel prices and increased natural gas prices in the name of "business-friendly" reforms. Subsequently, on the pretext of 'meeting the needs of market-driven economy', the BJP government announced that from 16 June 2017, petrol-diesel prices would be revised on daily basis. It ensured that benefit of even the smallest change in international oil prices accrued down the line to the dealers and the consumers. But, the people of India received no such benefits. Instead, the BJP government was reported to have added to the exchequer a sum of over Rs10 lakh crore earned from levies on petrol and diesel between 2014-15 and 2018-19 by way of increasing central excise duty on diesel and petrol by more than 380%, and 120% respectively over the last three years. Moreover, one of the longest global oil gluts in 2015-16 allowed the Indian government to save close to Rs 1.50 lakh crore. So, the promise of passing on the benefits of fall in international crude price to

common people has been proved to be damp squib.

In fact, the Indian Crude basket is used as an indicator of the price of crude imports in India. It is one of the elements supposed to be taken into account while deciding retail fuel tariff. Some like to call it a benchmark. But, it has been found that when the international crude price goes up, the government cites that factor for increasing retail fuel price. But if the international crude price dips, that factor is simply ignored so that the corresponding due reduction in retail price does not take place to pass on the benefits to the consumers.

### **Current saga of unprecedented hike**

This is further attested by the latest upswing of fuel prices on an unprecedented scale. By repeating the time-tested formula of not passing on gains arising from a slump in global oil prices, the BJP government further hiked excise duty on petrol and diesel by a record margin of Rs 10 and Rs 13 per litre respectively in May last amidst lockdown. Special additional excise duty on petrol was increased by Rs 2 per litre and road cess was hiked by Rs 8 a litre. In case of diesel, special additional excise duty was hiked by Rs 5 per litre and road cess raised by Rs 8 per litre. With this, the total incidence of excise duty on petrol rose to Rs 32.98 per litre and that on diesel to Rs 31.83. Alongside, as many as 13 states announced a hike in their own fuel taxes as this is an easy route to augment revenue collection. It is reported that the central government is poised to garner an additional revenue of Rs 1.6 lakh crore by this additional taxation.

Official quarters claimed that retail prices of petrol and diesel would not be impacted by the tax changes as state-owned oil firms would adjust them against the recent fall in oil prices. Once again, it was a bluff. When the former Congress government deregulated petrol price, it argued that such was urgently needed to stem the bleeding losses incurred by the public sector oil companies because of rise in the international crude price. Even the loss figure was put at about Rs.2,45,000 crore which the government stated it could not compensate by way of subsidy. As we had explained earlier in Proletarian Era, 'under-recovery' was being highlighted as outright loss and hence it was a distortion of truth. 'Under-recovery' is no real a term but just a notional sum. Just to present simply: India imports crude oil from outside and gets it refined in the country. Let us suppose that the sale price of refined oil in the international market is Rs 100 per litre. But since refining cost in India is much lower, even after keeping the same margin of profit as in the international market, the refined oil is sold at Rs 70 per litre in the domestic market. So, the opportunity to earn Rs 30 (100-70) represents 'under-recovery'. Why should such an imaginary loss be compensated by extracting higher price from the wretched countrymen? But the BJP also has been traversing the same way allowing the oil companies to gain during fall in international crude price and then raise the retail tariff disproportionately, if not arbitrarily, when

the international crude recovers a bit from the dip. Moreover, though, theoretically, oil pricing is decentralized, the invisible hand of the government is not hidden. That is why, after maintaining silence for 82 days, the oil companies suddenly began raising petrol-diesel prices from 7 June last so much so that the government could mop up Rs 44,000 crores in just 8 days as additional revenue from raised excise duty and cess. It meant that holding onto the price for 82 days was a politically calculated move which showed how farcical is the show of deregulation. In fact the government continues to pull the strings from behind. It is worth recalling that fuel prices were frozen for 19 days in the run-up to the Karnataka polls in May 2018 despite fluctuations in the international crude market. It was because "political interest" of the ruling BJP dwarfed the so called "economic compulsion". Once the elections were over, steep rise in petrol-diesel prices corroborated this truth in no uncertain a term. Besides public sector oil marketing companies, Reliance group which reportedly increased its marketshare of fuel retailing to 12% in 2019 also stood to gain. Same is the case now. So whether it is Congress or BJP, policy directive is the same—rob the poor to swell the coffers of the state wedded to serve bourgeoisie class interest and the monopoly houses.

### **Arithmetic of oil pricing**

Let us have a quick glance at the arithmetic of fuel pricing. At present, one barrel (159.3 litres) of crude oil costs around Rs 2,905 (assuming crude price being \$40 and \$1=Rs 72.62). So per litre it is Rs.18.23. The refining cost comes to Rs.6.10. Including transportation, the actual cost of 1 litre of petrol would be around Rs.28. If dealers' commission of Rs 3.50 is added, it becomes Rs 31.50. But then why has the retail price of petrol exceeded Rs 80? Because the balance amount represents taxes and cess imposed by the central and state governments. This means that people are paying almost 269% as tax, VAT, cess etc. to the central and state governments. Moreover, 5 to 6% of Ethanol is mixed with petrol as part of government policy. We are buying this Ethanol also at petroleum price. Incidentally, while all other sectors are covered by GST, petrol-diesel are kept out of its purview and are still subject to excise duty. So, the boastful announcement of "one nation, one tax" by the BJP government to justify GST is a travesty of truth. Why is petrol-diesel left out of GST? Because, as per the 'experts' belonging to the establishment, 40% of central revenue comes from oil which accounts for 60% of our imports. So, if duty is cut, not only would revenue collection be lower but domestic consumption would also be boosted entailing increase in oil imports and thus causing trade imbalance. What could be a better 'impeccable argument' from the stable of the ruling circles! It does not matter if people are pushed to the precipice of total ruination. But taxes cannot be reduced. Compared to India, current retail petrol prices in neighbouring Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal,

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# Comrade Sudhanshu Jana's gruesome murder in Kultali by TMC-backed criminals



Comrade Sudhanshu Jana

Coastal area of Moipith in Kultali constituency of South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal is again soaked with blood. Comrade Sudhanshu Jana, a veteran comrade and district secretariat member who was in the forefront of the people's protest against rampant corruption and nepotism in distribution of relief material to the Aamphan-hit abjectly poor people further distressed by Covid-19-induced lockdown, was brutally murdered in broad day light on 4 July last by

Body of Comrade Sudhanshu Jana was brought to the Party's central office in Kolkata on 5 July and then taken to South 24 Parganas district office where floral tributes were offered by central and state leadership. Though Party wished to take the body of Comrade Jana back to Moipith for cremation, but the police did not permit. So his mortal remains were consigned to flames in nearby Bishnupur crematorium. People's wrath had been glaringly manifested in



Comrade Debaprasad Sarkar, veteran Polit Bureau member, offering revolutionary tribute at South 24 Parganas Party Office, Jaynagar.



Comrade Manab Bera, Central Committee member, placing floral wreath on behalf of Comrade Provash Ghosh, beloved General Secretary, at the Party's central office in Kolkata.

armed criminals who once were in the fold of the CPI (M) but switched to Trinamool Congress(TMC) once the power switched from the former to the latter. Comrade Jana was strangled to death and then hanged from the ceiling. From 3 July, armed TMC gangsters riding on motor-bikes and four wheelers pounced upon our Party leaders, workers, supporters, sympathisers and panchayat members, hurled bombs at them and set their houses and shops ablaze. As a result, 200 houses and 80 shops were burnt into ashes, many including women sustained grievous injuries. Forty people were so brutally battered that they needed hospitalization. The whole area is surcharged with tension and the beastly savagery of the ruling party goons has been condemned and resented by one to all except the bootlickers of the ruling dispensation and the corrupt nexus embezzling relief money and material flexing muscle.



Total bandh in Kultali on 6 July

their observance of a total bandh in Kultali on 6 July at the call of our Party.

It bears recall that a solid mass base of the Party in a vast stretch of Sunderbans including Kultali was created following protracted militant class and mass struggles right from the early 1950s. The people of this area had witnessed many memorable battles conducted under the leadership of the Party upholding the rights of the poor peasants and other sections of the toiling masses. Earlier, the jotedars (rural kulaks) and the anti-socials were in the fold of the Congress, then in power. In such struggles, many leaders, activists and supporters of our Party had to shed blood, face torture and imprisonment and became martyrs. But, despite all efforts, the Congress could not break our organization. Later, when the CPI (M) was saddled in power, all the erstwhile Congress kulaks and anti-socials shifted allegiance to the CPI (M) which, they found, had abandoned leftist line and was more inclined to stick to power riding on the backing of the vested interest. The CPI (M) too nakedly used police and notorious criminals to weaken our mass base in the entire South 24 parganas district including Kultali. They murdered 161 leading Party comrades, implicated as many as 51 leaders including Comrade Prabodh Purkait, elected nine times to state assembly from Kultali in false charges and sent them to jail. Most of them were sentenced to life imprisonment. Now with TMC in power, the same onslaught is continuing. Because mounting attack including physical assault on a revolutionary party is a class conspiracy and anyone wedded to serve the class interest of the ruling bourgeoisie has to be a part of that conspiracy.

Moreover, despite repeated brutal blood-spattered whiplashes including murderous assaults

by first the Congress, then the CPI (M) and now the TMC, the Moipith Panchayat has been under the control of our Party for so many years. Even in the last Panchayat election held in 2018, our Party, overcoming all hurdles and hassles



Gutted house of Comrade Sudhanshu Jana in Moipith

including large scale manipulation, threat and intimidation, secured majority while the TMC fared very badly. From then on, the TMC has started attacking our elected members, harassing them in every way and also dangling carrot of pelf and power before them to grab the panchayat. This gruesome murder of Comrade Sudhanshu Jana and the reign of terror unleashed by the TMC goons is a part of that ongoing assault.

But no amount of attacks and intrigues would be able to demoralize the struggling peasants and the oppressed masses who are imbued with the thoughts of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, the great leader of the proletariat, organized under the Party founded, reared and steered by him, and roused to ring about anti-capitalist socialist revolution. It is only the people who have always pronounced the last word and not the autocratic rulers and their repressive machine.

## FUEL PRICING

# If the ruling bourgeoisie and its servitor governments have unbridled right to squeeze oppressed people by giving cooked up reasons, right to protest against the unjust moves is justified

*Contd. from page 2*

Myanmar and Sri Lanka are hovering around 26, 22, 34, 30 and 34 respectively in terms of Indian rupees. All these countries import oil. Is it then to be believed that the capitalist rulers of these countries are so foolish as to forego such an easy way to shore up revenue? Or, are they not that ruthless and heartless to burden their respective countrymen to the extent their Indian counterparts are doing? The answer would go abegging.

### **Why does India need to import oil so heavily?**

Today our country has reached a situation where it has to import about 85% of its petroleum needs. But, why? Is it out of compulsion or by design? In the seventies, about 70% of the domestic need used to be produced within the country. But today, the country is in so deplorable condition as to import 85% of its oil needs through multinational companies including Reliance. This means with respect to domestic demand, percentage of domestic production is getting reduced in direct proportion to the increasing percentage of import-dependence. And this trend is increasing day by day. Long back the oil exploration and mining was carried out under the leadership of Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC), a public sector undertaking, and it made big gains till 1991. India was in a position to produce up to 40% of its oil needs. But with the globalization-liberalization on roll, this system was dismantled. Instead, 23 oil producing blocks were handed over to national and foreign multinationals by 1996. If it were, otherwise, India could have attained self-sufficiency through ONGC. Alongside went on a skillful exercise to weaken ONGC and Oil India. As a result, domestic exploration and refining of oil under the aegis of the government had slowed down. In 1996, the budgetary allocation towards new oil field exploration was drastically reduced by Rs 1100 crores. The same policy continued notwithstanding periodic change of ruling party in the central government. The combined effect of all such measures caused a significant decline in domestic oil production and increased import-dependence. The scenario remains the same even during the BJP's full-throat 'Make in India' campaign! So, the logic of helplessness before fluctuation of international crude market holds no ground. The position India is in today is no handiwork of the international market but outcome of a deliberate policy — the policy of allowing the oil companies and oil barons to net huge profit by bringing down domestic production.

### **Handing over of oil sector to private monopolists would further push up prices**

Further note is to be taken of the fact that out of the total installed refining capacity of 249 Million metric tonnes per year (MMTPA) in India, monopoly giants like Reliance and Essar groups owns 60 MMTPA at Jamnagar Refinery and Nayara Energy Refinery, respectively. Now, the

BJP government has announced privatization of state-owned BPCL as well as HPCL. Once that happens, retail fuel tariff will be controlled by the oil barons and multinational companies (MNCs). Right at this moment, Mukesh Ambani-owned Reliance petroleum own the largest refineries in India. Of late, BP (former British Petroleum Company), a giant oil and gas MNC has floated a joint venture with Reliance to make foray into Indian domestic retail fuel market. At present, Reliance has 1400 petrol pumps. The new joint venture proposes to augment the number to 5500 in five years. Also they want to extend supply from 30 airports at present to 45. So, the policy directive of more and more privatization is going to benefit Reliance in a big way. And more the oil sector is in the grip of the monopoly sharks and MNCs, more escalated will be prices of petrol-diesel to serve their objective of profit maximization.

### **Where is the specially constituted 'oil fund'?**

It is pertinent to mention that way back in 1975 the government set up the mechanism of oil pool account. This was to safeguard the price in the national market from the fluctuations in the international market and supply oil and oil products throughout the country at a uniform price Till 1989, this account always ran in surplus to the tune of Rs 8,900 crores. If accrued interest is taken into account, the fund could have been somewhere around Rs 85 to 90 thousand crores. But, instead of using this fund for the declared objective, successive governments from 1989 onwards indulged in a slew of manipulations to use it for financing budget deficits. Secondly, right from 1975, the central government in the name of developing oil industry began imposing a special cess on domestic oil production. The resource raised by the central government on this account reportedly stood at around Rs 1 lakh crore of rupees including interest way back in 2008. What happened to that fund? Is it that the successive central governments have usurped the money violating all norms and regulations?

### **False argument that petrol diesel price rise only affects the rich**

Not feeling any qualm in offering weird justification of a wrongful act, the Union BJP Petroleum Minister has said that "the rising prices of petrol and diesel have not impacted the common man". Who does not know that fuel being a critical input for any economy, any rise in its price has a cascading effect, which means it triggers increase in prices of a host of other goods and services — thus leading to greater inflation across the economy? If prices of essential commodities, transportation cost, cost of running of diesel-based shallow pumps for irrigation etc. go up, how can common people remain unscathed? Moreover, alongside petrol-diesel, price of cooking gas has also shot up. Most importantly, the government has, of late, raised

price of kerosene by 55%. Are these steps taken out of 'empathy for the suffering million' or 'meeting the challenge of rescuing a sinking national economy'? The petroleum minister also claimed in the same breath that they have provided Rs. 1,70,000 crore under several schemes for poor and farmers under the 'Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Scheme'. But what he has not said is that his government has foregone a revenue of Rs.1,46,000 crores in 2019 because of drastic cut in corporate tax. When a group of Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officers suggested in a report to raise the highest tax rate to 40 per cent for people with annual income above 10 million rupees or to impose a wealth tax on those with net worth of Rs 5 crore or more and one-time Covid relief tax of 4 per cent for individuals with taxable income of more than 10 lakh rupees. to increase revenues amid the coronavirus pandemic, they were served show cause notice by the Central Board of Direct taxes (CBDT). The government also brushed off the proposal exposing its anti-poor pro-rich character.

And when people are thus made subject to fiscal savagery at a time their life and livelihood is under threat, both from Covid 19 infection as well as prolonged economic recession further aggravated by sudden clamping of lockdown, the economists-columnists on the pay roll of the ruling monopolists are shamelessly supporting monstrous rise in fuel prices and cuts in subsidy. "The Covid crisis is a good time to enact painful reforms. More rational and politically courageous is the abolition of once-sacred subsidies plus higher taxation of petroleum products..... The bulk of subsidised kerosene was diverted to adulterate diesel and petrol... (so) kerosene subsidy has also been quietly ended... Kudos to the government." (S A Aiyer in Times of India 05-07-20) How would these self-styled pedants be viewed by the suffering common people? Ignorant or motivated or sickening sycophants?

### **People's rise in conscious protest— only deterrent**

The above discussion clearly reveals that there is no cogent reason whatsoever to increase price of petrol-diesel in the domestic market as none of the arguments put forth in support of the hike price is based on fact or logic. If the capitalists, corporate bigwigs, their servitor governments and political agents have unbridled right to fleece and squeeze the oppressed common people by giving cooked up reasons, the latter also have every right to protest against the unjust moves and policies wreaking havoc in their lives. The bootlickers of the ruling class masquerading themselves as experts, columnists and commentators should also know that when the people rise in rebellion, those who are shamelessly holding brief for the ruthless exploiters today do not escape unscathed. It is only a conscious concerted move on the part of the people that can expose this vile conspiracy of the vested interest and their lackeys.

## Online Education

# Minus live teacher — student interaction, man-making ethics of education is demolished

*Contd from page 1*

acted to the contrary. Unilaterally, they clamoured of stepping up online teaching- learning based on digital technology as a potential 'new normal' mode, as 'every child craves for technology' to earn skill and competence for global market. They issued guidelines to universities and recommended implementation of 'Online Classes and Examinations' as a regular policy. (Source: UGC Guidelines on Examinations and Academic Calendar for the Universities in View of COVID-19 Pandemic and Subsequent Lockdown). In short, the Union and state governments have started trumpeting 'Online Education' or 'Online Examination' to be the only panacea during this lockdown, even afterwards and onwards! In this background it is pertinent to deliberate on this issue.

There are two aspects in the issue of online education vis-a-vis formal classroom teaching and related system of examination. One is, how far *feasible or practicable* online education is, in our country. The second is the *ethical* aspect of the issue which is associated with a related question: Between the two, practicability or feasibility and acceptability on ethical grounds, *which one* should we consider *prior*, prime and thus inalienable from teaching-learning process. To find the answer, we must also find an answer to: even if it becomes possible to provide adequate facilities for online education to overwhelming majority of students, if not all, can online education be considered to replace the time-tested formal classroom teaching and associated system of evaluation? The answer is an emphatic NO, considering all important role played by technology to modernize education. And precisely because of this, the ethical aspect of the issue wins the prior position to practicability or feasibility. To explain, we may need details. First the practicability.

### How far practicable is online education in India?

Use of technology is always a welcome proposal, but the issue involves a number of questions. On 10 April last, senior officials in MHRD said 'various e-learning platforms of the HRD Ministry have seen an unprecedented combined

access of over 1.4 crore users since 23 March.' Does it not prove the apprehension right that the Union government, in particular, was taking the cover of pandemic-induced lockdown to push through their agenda of e-learning or online education? On 30 May 2020, the Union Finance Minister announced that the country's 'top100 universities' would be allowed to conduct online courses "without having to get approvals from the UGC or the MHRD....." "There was also a proposal to launch a digital learning platform, DIKSHA (one digital platform for one nation goes its slogan), and the DTH channel *Swayam Prabha* as a platform for students who are unable to attend school....." (Source: *Frontline: 19 June 2020; 'Online illusion' article*). The questions are: Are these technological innovations accessible to all? What is the picture of 'digital India'? In our country the internet penetration is mere 36% and in the rural households it is a pathetic 14.9%. Let us not forget, 66% of our population resides in villages. A whopping 75% of our people do not have access to smartphone; mere 8% of households with members aged between 5 and 24 years have both computer and internet; 50% of villages do not have electricity for half of the day (Sources: *Numbers from Key Indicators of Household Social Consumption on Education in India report, based on the 2017-18 National Sample Survey and Survey by Ministry of Rural Development*). If we take the quality and voltage fluctuations, practically for major part of the day, electricity is a luxury for people in rural areas!

Is it very different in cities? Be it in cities or in villages, over and above usual school/ college fees, online classes bring in associated expenses, one time (e.g., buying a computer etc.) or recurring ( for example, internet and electricity charges) and some new charges for doctors, also recurring that have cropped up with alarmingly

increasing medical hazards to students particularly with eyes and psychological strains. All these sum up to a fairly hefty additional amount in the family budget that becomes prohibitive even for middle class parents. It is thus not unnatural that a daily wage earner father from a village in Tripura with no work during the lockdown could not make a way out to help his daughter with a smartphone and so ended his own life on 1 July 2020.

In the capital itself, in a recent survey conducted by DUTA (Delhi University Teachers' Association) during this lockdown to which more than 50,000 students responded, close to 50% of them reported that they could not access the study materials supplied by teachers because of their inability to access and other technical reasons. In the same survey, only 28% of the students reported to have been able to attend more than 50% of online

girls and 1 boy so far, from all over the country (e.g., Kerala, Punjab, West Bengal, Gujarat and Assam) where the hapless student could not avail of online classes for want of proper smartphones or other requisites due to the pecuniary difficulties in their families. As mentioned, even a parent committed suicide for having failed in providing his daughter of Class X, with the all-important smartphone. The series is likely to extend if and when online becomes the so-called new normal. And this is what even the high-ups in official levels also apprehend. A distinguished fellow at the Research and Information System (RIS), a foreign ministry think tank, thus held that the online mode makes education unequal, given the inequalities in households' access to electronic gadgets. Even the agencies like UNESCO or UNICEF, which are basically appendages of the imperialist



**AIDSO protests on-line education in front of Presidency University , Kolkata**

classes. In a report prepared by two former JNU teachers' association (JNUTA) presidents, it was revealed that over 70% of 131 teachers who participated in a survey at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) said online education cannot replicate classroom learning. Virtually similar is the condition in most prestigious universities or colleges of India. Then one can easily imagine the difficulties faced by the millions of students residing in towns and villages. When such is the 'digital disparity' with socio-economic conditions depriving millions from access to technology, to proclaim 'one nation, one online education', is out and out anti-people and inhuman!

The results are apparent in two ways. On one hand, there is a series of pathetic suicides of students, 4

controlled UN, issued warning in April 2020 against any large-scale shift towards online education, saying it would deepen socio-economic inequalities. UNESCO even released key recommendations from an independent Futures of Education Commission, which said: "It is an illusion to think that online learning is the way forward for all."

### Replacing classroom teaching by online education will be disastrous for the country

Notwithstanding all technological innovations enriching education system and process, the prime utility of education for mankind is in its man-making, character-building role. This is the ethics, which education defends, nurtures and enriches. And it is not the technological aspects of

*Contd on page 6*

## Online Education

# Discriminates students, promotes corporatization

*Contd. from page 5*

science, but genuine scientific education which establishes scientific methodology in thinking, in action, in social-individual interactions, which only can develop this kind of ethics of education to its desired height. Thus, the modern education system is built on the firm foundation of secular and scientific principles. And that is why a school is considered as a place wherein a teacher not only imparts knowledge; he/she scientifically prepares a child's mind to venture into the treasure of world knowledge and courageously face problems of real life! A teacher is a living character to be emulated; he not only moulds the thinking, but also nurtures finer culture in every pupil! That's why it is said "the destiny of a nation is decided in the classrooms of the country." Universities are considered as 'seats of universal learning.' It is a place where teachers and students from diverse backgrounds assemble and exchange their ideas and engage themselves in the pursuit and cultivation of knowledge and culture. So, a school, a college or a university is not a mere concrete building; the culture of cultivating knowledge and the educational ambience makes an educational institution.

It is precisely for these reasons, a vast section of academicians opine – 'online education' can never be called a comprehensive education model, it can at best become a "monologue or one-way online lecture model" without any effective interaction. Online lecture can only aid the formal education and can be a tool to engage the students, but if it replaces the time-tested formal classroom teaching, it will be disastrous. It is a foregone conclusion that 'online teaching' without formal counterpart seriously jeopardizes the very process of teaching, learning and cultivation of knowledge.

We end here with two quotes. Kasturirangan who was the chairman of the Committee which framed the widely discarded DNEP 2019 of the BJP-led Union government could not but admit himself, while opposing online education, "Fundamentally, the physical and mental connection with children directly is extremely important." And Rabindranath Tagore, the towering world-renowned poet-cum-litterateur of the yesteryears opined that 'only from a human being that a man can

learn...in the way life can be induced only by another living matter. It is through a wholesome kinship and interactive relationship, between a teacher and taught, a guru and his disciple, that educational activities can run like ever-flowing bloodstream of a living body (a free rendering of his words: *works, v.16, p154*).

### **Online education opens ruthless profiteering by corporate houses and private managements with governments washing their hands off**

When this is the reality and when online education can never substitute time-tested formal methods, it is deplorable that the men in power are using the situation created due to lockdown as an opportunity to 'thrust online education as unavoidable reforms in higher education. And their outlook is reflected in Union FM's announcement (17 May 2020; *Press Information Bureau, Govt*) which holds education as investment in human capital that helps investment in productivity and prosperity of the nation. However, this outlook and the present hype on 'online education', neither is any isolated phenomenon. While NPE'86 introduced by the Congress government came about to designate education as a 'unique investment' sure to give return, as people go beyond their limit to get their children educated, the present BJP-led Union government views education as investment in human capital to enhance productivity and prosperity of the nation, rather of the ruling monopolists and their corporate houses.

Besides, in the name of reforms in education, attacks in different forms are going on, upon the education system of the country since independence. In essence, these attacks are characterized by three prongs: One, *discrimination* against common students particularly belonging to the poorer section of the population, whereby education tends to go beyond reach of such students, irrefutably overwhelmingly majority in number. Two, *rampant privatization-commercialization* particularly following the prescriptions of imperialist globalization-liberalization which further curtails education from the majority students. Three, *curbing of autonomy* of education and education institutions and democratic rights of students-teachers-

employees. With this grand design of attacks on education going on since independence, the present hype of online education, however much it may be claimed as a 'new normal', is nothing but a part and parcel of this heinous design. It has already been indicated above how online discriminates against poorer students.

Now some relevant facts and figures which speak for themselves. In the name of bringing reforms in education, all that the governments are doing, headed by the Union government of India, are obeying the dictates of imperialist globalization dished out by the World Bank, WTO and the GATS only to make Indian education a 'global commodity.' 'The FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) inflow into India through the indirect route is Rs. 16,802.45 crores; and India is projected spending is Rs. 6.43 lakh crores. (*Source: Economic Survey 2019-20*). It is to be noted that the major amount of FDI is invested in 'e-learning, smart classes, etc.' According to IBEF (*India Brand Equity Foundation*, a Trust under Ministry of Commerce and Industry, *Report; April 2020*) Education sector in India is estimated to reach US\$ 101.1 billion in 2019; India's e-learning is second largest in the world, with 9.5 million users is projected to be US\$ 1.9 billion worth market by 2021. All this reiterates the fact that our education has virtually been made a 'commodity'; and thus ensure the loot and plunder our people. Lockdown is being effectively used by the governments to aggressively push people towards 'online classes', thus sending a favourable signal for global investors to invest in India. The private schools and colleges with an eye to collect donation and capitation fee are conducting 'online classes.' All exploiters are amassing profit on the misery of people; ruthless is capitalism! Education is simply tending to recede further from the poorer section of people, who make the overwhelming majority of population. When people are grappling with a breakdown of education system because of the lockdown, the governments have become facilitators of ruthless profiteering by corporate houses and private managements.

Lastly, as has been mentioned even by educationists that the online mode will not only be brought in teaching-learning-examination processes. It will also creep into administration. And once

administration takes help of online, it will help the authorities avoid facing masses of resentful students-teachers-employees and will thus definitely squeeze the democratic space for protest by students-teachers-employees, acting as the third prong of attacks mentioned above.

### **The Union government plays a treacherous role subservient to corporate houses**

But a discussion on online education cannot end without a few words on the role of the governments, particularly the Union government. It has been mentioned above that the reality is far from the rosy picture that the Union government caters about the digital India. Is not the government then lying and thus cheating people? Besides at each step, the government exposes its own hypocrisy. It speaks of promoting digital India. But the Union government itself has reduced MHRD budget for digital e-learning from Rs 604 crore in 2019-'20 to Rs 469 crore in 2020-'21. On one hand, its responsible ministers, including the HRDM or FM, speak for promoting India's traditional knowledge or Vedic education. Next moment they clamour for digital India. How do they tag the two together? Now the PM himself boastfully ask people to be *atmanirbhar* (self-reliant). At the same time from behind the curtain they allow the education sector to be flooded with unbridled FDI. Once and often the PM reminds his countrymen how mindful of people and their problems, his government is. At the next moment it trumpets for online education which means for the government, there will be no responsibility of founding schools and colleges, no allotment for budget funds, no question of bothering about student unrest, teacher-employees demands and so on. It will only gift away everything to the corporate houses, befooling people with the phrase that his government is for *sabka saath* (with all). Is it not hypocrisy to the extreme? And all these it is doing now, when it thinks that it has chained people into the lockdown so that they cannot protest.

Hence this hype on online education once more proves that with a totally subservient government in charge of the country, capitalism, which promotes it, is more deadly a virus than Covid 19! While Covid 19 affects the present generation, through online education, capitalism spells doom for education of generations to come!!

# People Across The World Are Craving For Socialism

— Needs Correct Leadership and Right Direction to achieve it

Decadent moribund reactionary world imperialism-capitalism has long been sunk in insurmountable unsolvable market crisis generated from ceaseless and ruthless exploitation of the workers and other sections of the toiling masses. The crisis became further deeper once the sub-prime crisis had unfolded in 2008. Despite all desperate efforts by the bourgeois politicians and economists to stave off crisis, it is accentuating with every passing day. Strike of Covid 19 pandemic and consequent lockdown has further accentuated the crisis. As the bourgeois rulers have been squarely passing the burden of the crisis on the oppressed people, income and wealth inequalities between 1% 'haves' and 99% percent 'have-nots' has been vulgarly increasing. At the same time, class and mass struggles against capitalism, its free market economy, prescripts of globalization-liberalization and neo-colonialism, the root causes of people's growing distress, are also intensifying. It is happening in course of the inevitable law of social development. Now further aggravation of ruthless exploitation in the Covid 19 period and no sign of immediate respite from the infection in view, people round the world are bursting forth against the exploitative capitalist system. It is estimated that nearly 200 crores out of global 330 crores workforce in the world will lose job in the post-corona world. Self-employed segment will be ruined. Income of crores of unorganised sector workers will go on shrinking. Tens of crores of distressed people will further go below poverty line. Global GDP would reduce by 8-10%. The tussle between USA and China for leadership of the imperialist-capitalist world would make the situation further worsened and apprehension of this tussle transgressing the precincts of trade war to engender armed conflict is also growing. It may change the scenario of international trade and commerce including global supply chain, may usher in a new trend of giving thrust on regional production and supply chain by dumping the much-clamoured doctrine of globalization. In that event, people's socio-economic-political life might also be impacted. But capitalist exploitation, people's distress and penury will go on increasing, nevertheless.

From history and the everyday

life experience, workers and toiling people in every corner of the globe - the emerging, developing and developed capitalist countries alike—are realizing that it is not capitalism but socialism only can guarantee fundamental needs of their life like job, food, shelter, clothing, education, health, hygiene, sanitation, a decent living condition, and eradicate unemployment generating jobs by uninterrupted industrialization and agricultural growth, as also eradicate poverty, hunger, malnutrition, beggary, prostitution, cultural degeneration, crime on women and such other malaises and abnormalities. Particularly, after devastation caused by Covid 19 in the unipolar world, working class is now raising the demand for socialism. Waves of democratic movements are surging forth against pro-capitalist, anti-people-working class policies and austerity measures being pursued by the capitalist-imperialist governments. People are demanding higher social security and emphasis on welfare measures, raising voice against anti-labour reforms and massive privatisation of public sectors in almost the entire capitalist-imperialist world—starting from USA, France, UK, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Germany to Greece, Australia and entire Latin America. People and workers of France, Greece, Spain, UK, Italy etc. have already taken to the streets demanding nationalisation of healthcare service making it universal, free and compulsory. Close on the heels of "Black Life Matters" movement that stirred entire USA, people of Greece, just a few days back, took out a massive protest demonstration in Athens waiving red flags against a new law enacted by the government with a vile motive of banning all public demonstrations on the pretext of public safety. While celebrating May Day amidst lockdown, the

European workers have vowed to defeat both COVID-19 and capitalism. In African and Asian countries including India also, people are rising up in protest.

Under the pressure of mass and workers movements the governments of many countries including the traditional and the richest capitalist-imperialist countries from USA, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Denmark, Australia, France, Italy, Belgium etc. who have so far been curtailing all welfare measures through austerity have now been compelled to extend free treatment of Covid 19 patients not covered under health insurance, provide cash subsidy, nutritious food to the poor, loans to small and middle industries on easy terms, grant paid sick leave to workers engaged in essential and healthcare service, ensure wage subsidy to workers as protective cover against retrenchment during lockdown, announce economic relief package to workers who lost jobs, increase allocation of fund towards social security, extend time for loan repaying and tax deposits and many such other steps. Some bourgeois rulers have also opted to adopt Keynesian prescription of boosting purchasing power of people by pumping cash into their hands.

It is true that such measures might temporarily give a breathing space to the common people back-broken by escalating capitalist onslaught. But so long imperialism-capitalism is in existence, exploitation of man by man would not cease. Some quarters are calling these relief measures as socialist programmes and mark of liberal face of capitalism. This is far from truth. Exploitation is rooted in the very capitalist system. In capitalism, gradual reduction of people's purchasing power is created by the profit maximization motive of capitalist mode of production and capital-labour relation of production.

Profit is nothing but appropriation of the surplus value of labour by the capitalist owners of the means of production. This accumulated profit by depriving the labour of its dues leads to accretion of more and more wealth to the capitalist class. A careful look at the measures would reveal that while doles are being given with one hand, fiscal and other economic steps to squeeze people are being undertaken with the other hand. India is a classic example of that. These miniscule relief measures have been triggered by the compulsion of the bourgeois rulers to diffuse people's growing anger, resentments and suppress possible outburst of grievances because, haunted by the fear-complex of anti-capitalist revolution, the ruling capitalists know that if the surging movements are led by genuine revolutionary leadership and led along correct revolutionary line, Post-Covid 19 period might indeed be augury of end of capitalism.

It is true that working class in all countries is desperately leaning towards and dreaming for socialism. But, it is to be borne in mind that sporadic and spontaneous outbursts of people's wrath would not automatically overthrow capitalism and establish socialism. To establish socialism, both subjective and objective conditions of revolution are to be fulfilled. As people round the country are raising voice against ruthless capitalist exploitation, objective condition is ripe for revolution. But fulfilment of subjective condition needs, among other things, a correct revolutionary party of the proletariat and a correct base political line. Unless the tides of movements dashing the shores are channelized along correct line under correct revolutionary leadership, they would not be transformed into long-drawn organized people's struggle to finally culminate into a struggle for seizure of power. Hence the oppressed protesting people round the globe should either consciously rally behind the correct revolutionary party, if already in existence, or struggle to build up such party on Leninist model to lead their just struggles into logical culmination. This is the need of the hour.

(Source: PeoplesDispatch 17/06/2020 & 02/05/2020; Red fish post on facebook, Bartaman, Bengali daily, 24-06-20)

## AIUTUC congratulates coal workers for successful strike

In a statement issued on 2 July 2020, Comrade Shankar Dasgupta, General Secretary, AIUTUC, congratulated the coal workers for successfully organizing a nationwide strike from 2 July 2020 to achieve their five point Charter of Demands. He expected that giving due regard to the successful strike by 5.5 lakh coal workers, the central government should concede their demands immediately. He also called upon the coal workers to continue their movement further till the demands are achieved.

# Resist the attack of the BJP-led Central Government on peasants and agricultural workers

## Clarion call of AIKKMS to observe all India Protest Day on 23 July 2020

When Indian farmers are already struggling for their livelihood in this deadly Covid 19 pandemic situation, the BJP-led Central Government, taking undue advantage of the prolonged lockdown period, brought about certain anti-people amendments in the existing Essential Commodities Act, 1955, introduced Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance Act, 2020, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Prices and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020. These anti-people and anti-farmers moves are aimed at handing over the entire agricultural sector to the hands of big business and the corporate giants. Further, the recent Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2020, proposed by the same Modi led BJP Government, is only to further liberalize the power sector to make it a lucrative hunting ground for the private operators, another out and out anti-people and anti-farmer move.

In the name of economic development, the Central Government has amended the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 to remove rice, wheat, cereals, potatoes, onions and pulses from the list of essential commodities. This would definitely pave way for black

marketeers and big business houses to hoard these items, manipulate supply and demand and maximize profit. As a result, the prices of essential commodities will go up and the ultimate sufferers will be the toiling masses. The Central Government's promise that farmers will be benefitted most by this Act is a blatant lie. It is actually being brought in the interest of big business houses and corporates having large, modern storage facilities.

The new Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance Act, 2020, introduced in the name of creating 'One Nation and One Market', stipulates that agricultural products can be purchased by anybody, anywhere in India for which no formal license is required and the state governments will have no control over this. By this Act, the existing APMCs (Agricultural Products Marketing Committees) will cease to exist and the farmers' dream of selling their crops to nearby APMC outlets, getting relatively fair remunerative price and receiving immediate payment will remain unfulfilled. This new act would be beneficial to none other than the corporate houses who would now be legally empowered to have complete control on

agricultural produce selling market. Consequently, the peasants will lose whatever little benefits they have hitherto been getting through APMCs.

Another Act, namely the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Prices and Farm Services Ordinance, 2020, is introduced only to encourage contract farming by agri-giants and MNCs who would also be the probable buyers. No contracting company or MNC will offer protection for crop failure. It happened in the case of Bt. Cotton

market for the domestic and foreign monopoly houses. It proposes further division of earlier categories by way of introducing distribution of sub-licenses and franchise system. Obviously, this would reduce the charges to the monopoly houses who have made decisive forays into the power sector and they would impose more burden on the common consumers by way of increased tariffs. As of now, states like Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Haryana are getting free power for irrigation. Especially in Tamil Nadu, for domestic users, power consumption



Demonstration in Kanti, Bihar demanding job for all migrant workers



ASHA (ACCREDITED SOCIAL HEALTH ACTIVISTS) workers now among the 'Frontline warriors' in conducting survey of Covid 19 infection spread are at great risk to their own lives. They have been facing harassment and threat as well from a section of people who are ignorant of the reality and hence reluctant to cooperate. These ASHA workers are also very poorly paid. To press for their rightful demands of safety, adequate and timely payment of remuneration, special package for them, enhancement of remuneration to Rs 10,000 per month from March till the end of their deputation for this task, providence of proper and sufficient number of PPE and sanitizers etc., The Karnataka Rajya Samyukta ASHA Karyakarteyara Sangha affiliated to AIUTUC gave a call for 'PROTECT ASHA DAY' on 29 May as part of their state level movement. Photo (below) is of a demonstration on that 'Protest Day'. They also held a demonstration Bangalore on 30 June.

producers in Maharashtra where most of the peasants, unable to dispose of their harvest, eventually defaulted their loans. A good number of them committed suicide. Once entrapped in contract farming, there is hardly any way out. They might ultimately lose ownership of their land also.

The BJP-led Central Government has also proposed amendment in the form of Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2020 to further liberalize the provisions of the existing Act and make the power sector a lucrative

of first 100 units are not charged. Private operators will not allow such schemes and as a result crores of rural households, who are already in dire straits, will be burdened further.

The conspiracy of the government is solely to allow corporates to swallow the entire agricultural production and dictate terms. The need of the hour during this grave pandemic threat is for people to unite and fight this heinous backdoor attacks of the BJP-led government. Towards this end the AIKKMS has called for observing All India Protest Day on 23 July 2020, in demanding, inter alia, repeal of all these new acts, providence of minimum of Rs.10,000 per month per poor family, waiver of pending bank loans of the peasants, grant of adequate interest-free loans to all small and marginal peasants, guarantee of year-long work under MNRGA at adequate wage etc.



# Vizag Gas leak — Sheer negligence and utter disregard to safety norms

## Findings of National Green Tribunal and High Power Committee

The 7 May last was a nightmare for the people of port city Vizag. When the whole country, already reeling under the threat of deadly Corona pandemic, the poisonous gas leak disaster made the life of people all the more dreadful and panic stricken. In the early hours of that fateful day, Styrene gas leak from LG Polymers, a South Korean based multinational company, created havoc killing 12 people and make hundreds sick. The video footages telecasted by number of T.V. channels were horrific, creating shivers in the people of other areas. Even the nearby livestock and foliage got affected revealing the deadly nature of the gas. It was reported in the media that it would have been another gas tragedy like Bhopal, had not the people of nearby village R.R. Venkatapuram woken up only to discover a thick cloud of gas enveloping houses in the area and alerted others. Local youth and police rendered yeoman services in rescuing and hospitalizing the affected people in a war footing manner. Thousands of people roamed clueless from pillar to post carrying small kids in search of a safer place. They spent several fearful nights on foot path of the beach without any shelter. It is a matter of fact that even after two months of the incident, people are still experiencing one or other trouble to restore normalcy in the affected areas.

Immediately after the incident,

the Andhra Pradesh State SUCI (Communist) issued a press statement which, inter alia, criticized the successive central and state governments for allowing to continue such dangerous establishments in thickly populated residential areas and demanded stringent punishment of and heavy penalties on the management of LG Polymers as well as the concerned authorities who were responsible for the implementation of safety norms and oversee environmental clearances. The statement also demanded for immediate shifting of the said company and such several other highly toxic chemical factories in and around Vizag to isolated locations.

Meanwhile, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) took up the case *suo motu* and constituted a five-member committee, comprising a former High Court judge, a principal of a college, a professor of chemical engineering of Andhra University and two other scientists. The Committee investigated the incident and found several glaring lapses at the plant. The Committee found that the vapor leak occurred due to self-polymerization of styrene monomer which needs to be circulated constantly to keep its temperature under control. However, with operations at the plant coming to a grinding halt due to the nationwide lockdown, the stock of 1,800 tons of styrene monomer remained stagnant. As

there was no apparatus to record the change in temperature in the upper part of the tank, the styrene reached its onset temperature, which is 66°C, over a period of time, got transformed into vapour and leaked out of the gooseneck of the storage tank. The Committee also pointed out that the LG Polymers had also been operating without the requisite environmental clearances. In response to a query from the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority, the company itself admitted that it had been operating the plant from 1997 to 2019 without obtaining the necessary environmental clearances. The Company has been operating just based on consent given by the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board.

It was because of the pressure of strong public resentment and outburst of local residents against the incident, the state government led by Mr. Jaganmohan Reddy was forced to announce compensation and medical package to the victims and appoint a high-power committee to investigate into the gas leak incident. The report submitted by the Committee very recently clearly indicted the LG polymers management for its utter negligence and the lack of safety response preparedness at the plant. Similarly in lines with the NGT, the high-power Committee revealed that poor design of the storage tank, inadequate refrigeration and faulty cooling system, absence of circulation and mixing systems, inadequate measures and parameters, poor safety protocol, inadequate safety awareness were reasons that led to the accident. While submitting its report the Committee Chairman Mr. Neerabh Prasad also pointed fingers towards inadequate risk assessment response, poor process safety management system and insufficient knowledge among staff about the chemical properties of styrene during storage conditions. The protocols pertaining to emergency response and safety were not followed by the authorities during the lockdown period, he said. According to report the tank gave initial signs of polymerization on 24 April and had the plant management taken it seriously as a warning sign and had the corrective action taken at the right time, the accident could have been averted.

The report also mentioned that the company had failed in activating the emergency siren system, despite having 36 siren points including one at the entrance gate. It also pointed out that if the plant management sounded the siren at the crucial moment of time, it would have warned the people in the vicinity. In a word, the report is a testimony to utter disregard to all safety norms by the management and complacency of corrupt governmental authorities at the cost of people's lives. After the submission of the high-power committee report, the state government had to take action against the LG Polymers management by arresting its MD-CEO, Technical Director and 12 other officials. The government also suspended the Deputy Chief Inspector of Industries and the Regional Authority of Pollution Control Board.

In this context, a point may be mentioned about the pro-capitalist industrial policies of governments. By following the prescriptions of out and out anti-people globalization, all governments irrespective of hues are giving red carpet welcome to both foreign and domestic monopoly capitals to loot and plunder natural resources and cheap labor power of the country. In the name of 'ease of doing business', they simply remain blind-folded to reckless non-compliance of safety norms and environmental standards by the corporates. The authorities either have become passive onlookers or are hand in glove with the managements violating stipulated norms with impunity. While the capitalists are minting fabulous profits by reducing the production costs by avoiding adoption of due safety measures, the common people are paying the price even, on occasion, with their life. The memory of horrific LG polymers gas leak incident still afresh, another incident of Hydrogen Sulfide gas leak happened at Parwada pharma city of Vizag on 30 June, killing two workers and injuring four more. So it is a high time to realize the gravity of the situation and mount pressure by unitedly developing sustained struggle in demand for shifting of all toxic and pollutant units outside of residential areas in interest of safety and security of people's lives.

## AIUTUC denounces privatization of Railways

In another statement issued on 5 July 20, Comrade Shankar Dasgupta, General Secretary, AIUTUC, denounced the sinister move on the part of the BJP government to invite a request for qualification for private participation of passenger train services over 109 origin-destination pairs of routes. This is a step towards total privatisation of railway system. These private high speed trains whose fares would be out of reach of common people will be given top priority in running. The concessions available to the senior citizens, students and specially challenged people would also be withdrawn. All these would increase the misery of the common commuters who have already been immense hardship because of late running and horrible maintenance of normal passenger trains. In this process, ultimately the total government railways system will be privatised and it will meet the same fate as that of Air India, BSNL, Hindustan cables like government sectors. AIUTUC strongly opposed this move to privatize the railways, built on the sweat, blood, lives and money of the working people and urges all trade unions and common people to develop militant mass movement to thwart this heinous attempt of BJP government.

## SUCI(C) calls upon suffering people to rise up in vehement protest against reckless privatization spree of BJP government

Comrade Provash Ghosh, General Secretary, SUCI (Communist), issued the following statement on 4 July 2020:

The prolonged lockdown on the ground of containing Covid- 19 transmission seems to have unfolded a golden opportunity to the BJP-led central government to speedily implement its noxious agenda of privatization of crucial sectors including public utility services. Raising a bogey of so called ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ (Self-reliant India), the announced privatization of vital sectors of the economy — railways, coal, defence, banking and agriculture—is destined to strangle the ruthlessly oppressed toiling masses.

When the BJP government merged railway budget with general budget in 2017 and announced constitution of an independent railway regulator called Rail Development Authority (RDA) to determine tariffs and significantly enough, modify and suggest investment privatization of road transportation, aviation and shipping, the move was afoot to gradually privatize the entire railway service considered to be the artery of travel and transport network under the aegis of the government with a huge establishment providing substantial job and operating mainly on the principle of public welfare. With the government now declaring to have invited qualification proposals from private companies to operate more than 190 pairs of routes and will be introducing 151 modern trains, the process of eventual privatization of the railways is rolled out in future.

Needless to say that this privatization spree is purported to open up newer avenues in essential public utility services and other key areas for deployment of capital lying idle with the monopoly houses as productive investment in view of the accentuating market crisis endemic of capitalist system is ruled out by them. Surely, this pernicious policy would entail huge job loss, spurt in prices of essential commodities including railway fares, destroy food security and thereby push the people more and more to distress while coffers of the corporate tycoons and big business would swell further. How reckless privatization can wreak havoc in people’s life has been shockingly proved during the ongoing Covid- 19 pandemic in a largely privatized and commercialized healthcare system.

In no way, suffering people can support such disastrous moves aimed at shredding them into pieces. They must unite, rise up in vehement protest, organize sustained powerful movement.

## AIDSO strongly condemns exclusion of important chapters from school curricula citing lockdown reason

In a statement issued on 08-07-20, Comrade Sourav Ghosh, General Secretary, AIDSO, strongly condemned the heinous move of the CBSE to, as per the direction of the BJP -led central government, exclude important chapters on secularism, history of division of the country, economic challenges before the country, human rights, federal structure, citizenship, democratic rights, mass movement, food security, origin of thought, inspiration and emotion etc. from school curricula of class IX to XII on the pretext of curtailing 30% of the syllabi because of Covid 19-induced lockdown. Clearly, the central government has sinisterly used the lockdown situation to jettison from the curricula the subjects that pose problem in avid pursuit of arch communal doctrine of ‘Hindutva’ as well as eradication of whatever little of democracy and democratic values are existing in the society.

AIDSO demanded of the government immediately revoke the decision of removing above chapters from the curricula and convene an urgent meeting with the educationists, students, teachers, and parents to seek valued suggestions as to frame proper policy in regard to education with the current challenges due to Covid-19. AIDSO also appealed to the students, teachers, intellectuals and all education loving section of the society to strongly oppose this anti-student anti-education decision of the BJP government and CBSE.

## Countrywide protest against exorbitant hike in petrol-diesel prices



Jajjhar, Haryana



Guna, Madhya Pradesh



Durg, Chhattisgarh



Krishnanagar, West Bengal

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