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Indo-Pak relation

Historical perspective and latest reconciliatory move

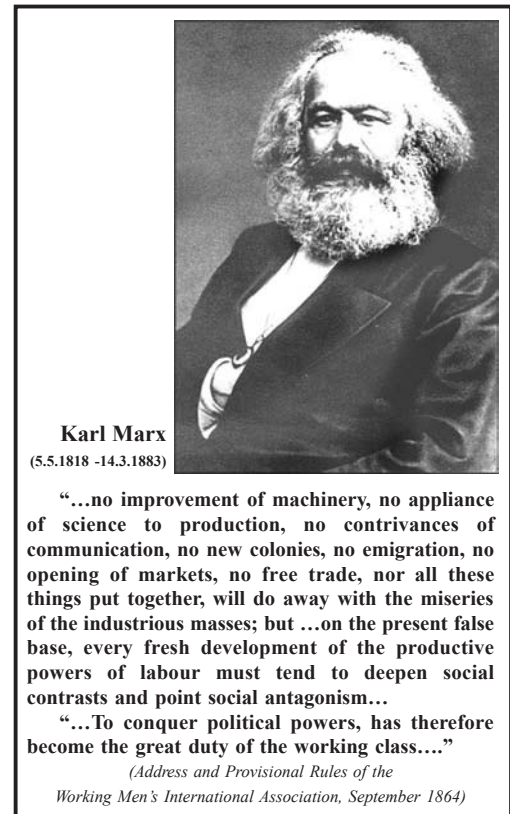
[In context of the present round of talks between India and Pakistan, we publish this article as a broad overview of how this Indo-Pak relation has developed through twists and turns particularly on critical issues like Kashmir, Bangladesh and others. The article will come out in two instalments, the first of which is included in the present issue. — Ed. Board, Proletarian Era]

The fifty seven year long relation between India and Pakistan, the two big neighbouring states of South Asia has been marred with virtually perpetual stress and strain, mutual bickerings, turbulence tending to war-

like situation, once and often that became extremely volatile and even gave way to war. During this period, the two countries have fought three major wars in 1947, 1965 and 1971 respectively and a number of

skirmishes of which everybody may have thirteen- day long Kargil War between May 26 and June 7 1999 still fresh in memory. Interludes of these were seldom free from cross-border firings or from war of words and attrition. To keep this enmity alive, both the countries kept on spending ever-increasing huge sums of money for their military budget to keep their respective war machineries well fueled, armed to the teeth and adequate to fill the ambience with hot venoms of mutual distrust and hatred, even though they ranked among the lower rung of developing countries in regard to education, public health and such other issues. Their arms race goes to the extent of developing nuclear weapons, with India successfully performing its latest nuclear explosion in 1998 in the deserts of Rajasthan, while responding short while afterwards Pakistan carried out its nuclear tests at Chaghai in their soil.

It is the people of both the countries, who have been the worst victim of all this. Tormented by their respective exploitative system of capitalism, they have constantly desired the end of this strife-ridden relationship between their countries bringing in additional woes to their life; they have always looked



ahead for a peaceful, friendly and truly neighbourly relation between their homelands. Leaders of the two countries, too, have often clamoured for peace or been often engaged in talks to find peace. In spite of these, there have been wars to end in peace only to be followed again by another war. Naturally it evokes the question: Why has this situation continued in spite that people do not want it to, nor their leaders have, at least verbally, desired so. Of late, an effort has been initiated by the governments of two countries, apparently

to break the ice. Dialogue has been resumed. It is all welcome; every right-thinking, peace-loving person would like to see it meet success and the two countries reach accord. But it should also be taken note of that starting a dialogue is something entirely different from successfully culminating it to the desired end, conducting it, may be step by step, in the proper direction in right spirit. That itself demands a thorough, impassionate and critical evaluation of the whole gamut of the problem: where lies the roots of all this

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J. V. Stalin
(9.12.1879-5.3.1953)

“To a reformist, reforms are everything, while revolutionary work is something incidental, something just to talk about, an eyewash. That is why, with reformist tactics under the bourgeois regime, reforms are inevitably transformed into an instrument for strengthening that regime, an instrument for disintegrating the revolution...”

“To a revolutionary, on the contrary, the main thing is revolutionary work and not reforms; to him reforms are by-products of the revolution. That is why with revolutionary tactics under the bourgeois regime, reforms are naturally transformed into instruments for disintegrating this regime, into a base for further development of the revolutionary movement.”

(Problems of Leninism)

Indo-Pak relation

Weakness in nation-building process led to birth of Pakistan*Contd. from page 1*

conflict and enmity between the two states; what role the ruling classes of the two countries are actually playing; whatever be their words, what really is the approach and outlook of those in charge of governance of either country. Only with proper answers to these questions can we find out the way to the really peaceful solution of the problems between the two neighbours that once belonged to one single country. To that end, toiling people of the two countries also have a conscious, critical role to play. We present this discussion with a view to helping them in that. To begin with we should go back down the history, to even the days before the independent existence of the two countries.

Background history of how Pakistan was born

It is well known that Pakistan was born in 1947 out of the then undivided India at the end of a long freedom struggle. That struggle against British imperialist rulers raged over the country, with majority of countrymen dreaming of and, actively or passively, striving for freedom. Hence the first question we must face is that even within such an ambience of freedom movement, how could the despicable theory of dividing a nation on religion make ground, how could communalists and separatists carry through their design, and could thus lead the undivided country to partition. It was true that the British imperialist rulers always tried to weaken the freedom movement through their divide and rule policy, by fomenting communal hatred between the two major communities, the Hindus and the Muslims. But they would not have been successful, had this struggle for independence been carried out in our country on the basis and strength of secularism. A little soul-searching would reveal that here lay the inherent weakness of the independence struggle itself, weakness that developed right from its inception and helped the British rulers carry through their design.

For elaboration, we would like to bring in here invaluable teachings of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, the great Marxist thinker and the founder General Secretary of our party, his brilliant analysis of the growth and development of Indian capitalism, the nation-building process of the country and the Indian freedom

movement. He showed it on different occasions that for the emerging Indian nation it was essential that the then society be democratized totally and different nationalities or ethnic varieties with different culture and habits and speaking different languages, as also different communities professing different religions, be united and merged economically -politically and culturally into the single whole of one nation. This, in turn, demanded that the nation-building process be led and guided by a secular leadership in the truest sense of the term. As Comrade Ghosh pointed out, secularism entails 'non-recognition of any supernatural entity' in life. In a secular state 'both the believers and the non-believers enjoy equal rights and opportunities. It is one thing not to interfere in one's faith and injure one's religious feelings, while it is altogether a different thing to encourage and indulge in one's religious susceptibility'. So, the attitude of a secular state remains that it neither encourages religious faith nor obstructs it. The nation-building process in India could not, however, be founded and built on this concept of secularism. And so, 'democratization of the society against feudalism, feudal disunity and religious bondage' was left half-way, 'half-baked' and 'truncated'. The Indian people politically and economically united into a nation, remained 'socially and culturally divided into different communities disunited by religion, caste, language, race etc'. The British rulers or the fundamentalists-communalists-separatists could only have the fertile ground to play upon.

The question then is 'why could not this nation-building process be founded and developed on secularism in India? Here also, we recall Comrade Ghosh's teachings. He showed that capitalism grew in our country during a time, when the world capitalism had become utterly reactionary; when 'capitalism, as a world force, had not only lost its revolutionary character, but also become definitely anti-revolution'. Secondly it developed here compromising and combining with imperialism and feudalism. So the Indian national bourgeoisie which was building up capitalism in this soil, and thus was also leading the nation -building process shunned the path of uncompromising armed struggle against the imperialists,

even opposed the then anti- British armed revolutionaries. At the same time, instead of developing the struggle on secularism, it rather fell upon promoting religious thoughts, religious obscurantist trends. The trend was evident right from the start of the independence movement. Thus, initial efforts towards anti-British struggle found expression through bodies like Hindu Mela, a congregation of the Hindus, and such others. The freedom fighters, even the revolutionaries, drew inspiration, for example, from the *Bande Mataram* slogan in Bankimchandra's novel *Anandamath*, which conceived the motherland in the form of Hindu goddesses; they worshipped Kali, the goddess of the Hindus, before they set out for any mission: all this were tinted with Hindu-religion orientation of the emerging Indian nationalism. Though Indian National Congress which led the movement, developed as a common platform for people of different communities and spoke of secularism and was gradually transformed and shaped into the class party of the rising Indian bourgeoisie, as the movement crystallized particularly with Gandhi at the helm, its movement was never freed of this religion-orientation. Gandhi, among a handful others, might have tried personally to bring about Hindu-Muslim amity and unity with a view to getting over the weakness of the independence movement. But his own religiousness, his far-from-secular thoughts, outlook and approach, his *Ramdhun* or prayers of *Rama*, as also support to *Khilafat* movement of the Muslims, and such others were all reflective of influence of religion-orientation. The section of enlightened Hindus, who had come in touch with the modern education and through it with the concepts of democracy and freedom, developed the urge for freedom in them. But they failed to accept secularism in the truest sense of the term. A few stalwarts like Netaji Subhaschandra Bose in the political field, or Saratchandra-Nazrul in the social- cultural arena did oppose this approach of bringing in religion in the field of political-social questions being practiced by the Indian Congress and the national bourgeoisie. But their efforts went in vain. Indian nationalism came out to be basically religion-oriented manifesting itself in the form of Hindu religious revivalism. On the other hand, the Muslims as a

community, antagonized by the end of the Muslim rule at the hands of the British imperialists, continued to bear the antagonism for quite a long period of time, even to the extent of avoiding English education that kept them away from modern thoughts and ideas. At the same time in the psychological reaction to the Hindu revivalist Indian nationalism, the non-Hindu masses especially the Muslim masses, kept themselves away from the national liberation movement in our country. The section of the Muslims which had received modern education and had also joined the freedom movement, was also left injured at the Hindu-religion orientation of the Indian national bourgeoisie and its movement.

'Why talk of the Muslims alone? What about the so-called lower caste Hindus?' As Comrade Ghosh put the questions succinctly: 'Since the tasks of social and cultural revolutions were not carried out, the people belonging to the socially backward strata of the Hindu community remained not only in religious bondage but also under the social and cultural suppression by the so-called upper castes among the Hindus. And, in this regard, Indian nationalism could not even express itself as a broad Hindu revivalism.' In spite of the attempts by some leaders to the contrary, 'it identified itself rather with the revivalism of the Brahminic cult dominated by the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Kayasthas* and *Baidyas* .. and other so-called higher castes'.

Under these circumstances, even amidst the ambience of independence movement, there arose the Hindu fundamentalists as well as Muslim fundamentalist-separatist forces. Power-greedy leaders of the Muslim community, using people of their community as pawns in their gamble for power, gave birth to the movement for Pakistan. The cunning British imperialist rulers did not fail, right from the beginning, to conspiratorially take advantage of this weakness and to play upon this cleavage among people to generate and foment bitter communal hatred and enmity. It simply helped fulfill their grand design of maintaining their divide and rule policy and ultimately weakening the independence movement itself and the emerging Indian nation. It also had the motive that has come out in

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Introduction of VAT

How it is fraught with grave danger

VAT or Value Added Tax is slated to be effective from, April 1, 2005. Though it was on the anvil for quite some time now, it was deferred a number of times because of reservations expressed by various quarters particularly the traders. State-level VAT was recommended by the erstwhile BJP-led NDA government following receipt of the report of a Panel constituted for the purpose. The Panel was headed by Asim Dasgupta, the CPI(M) finance minister of West Bengal. The Congress-led CPI(M) backed UPA government, immediately on assuming power, vowed to implement VAT within its term. In fact, Asim Dasgupta and his party CPI(M) also have been too insistent on earliest implementation of VAT. Though the proposal has been welcomed by the big industrialists and all leading chambers of commerce, the trading community handling retail and wholesale distribution is totally opposed to it. There has been a successful 24-hour countrywide Bandh on February 21, 2005 at the call of the merchants and retail traders to protest against government's decision to make VAT effective from next month. So it is important to examine the issue in depth based on facts available so far, claims and counter-claims by the contending camps and see if this would add further woe to the people reeling under soaring prices of all essential commodities.

Viewpoint of the government

In the preface to the White Paper issued on January 17, 2005 by the Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers constituted by the ministry of finance, Government of India, Asim Dasgupta, who incidentally is the convenor of the said committee as well has claimed that "VAT will not only provide full set-off for input tax as well as tax on previous purchases, but will also abolish the burden of several of the existing taxes, such as turnover tax, surcharge on sales tax, additional surcharge, special additional tax, etc. ... VAT will improve tax-compliance...augment revenue growth ... and therefore help common people, traders, industrialists and also the government." So, according to him, this will prove to be beneficial to all — from the exploited common people to the exploiting industrialists as well as the governments subserving bourgeois class interest. But the traders and retail merchants counter this claim by saying that this proposed multi-point tax system is cumbersome, harassing and will ultimately trigger price rise as tax load is bound to be more. Before we proceed to see how would VAT operate, it is necessary to discuss in brief the current system of taxation.

Present tax system

We know that at present commercial goods attract excise and sales tax at rates prescribed by the governments. Besides there are entry taxes for inter-state movement of goods, municipality and octroi taxes, etc. Suppose, one trader buys an item manufactured in Tamil Nadu for

selling in UP. The buyer pays central sales tax at Tamil Nadu, the state of origin. Then during shipment of the item through the states of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, the inspectors at each state border check papers to ascertain if any tax is payable. Since central sales tax paid in Tamil Nadu also attracts state sales tax in UP, it is viewed as a double taxation or 'cascading of tax'. As the states fix the state-level sales tax and other tax rates as per their whims, votaries of VAT argue that there is an unhealthy "tax rate war" inhibiting inter-state commerce. Accumulated effect of all these taxes paid is on the common people who buy the item. Because from the manufacturers to the traders and retail merchants, all pass on their tax burden to the consumers by loading the end price or sale price. This is what we call the indirect taxation of the people.

What is VAT

VAT, it is claimed, will free the system from all these aberrations, reform the tax structure, improve the financial health of the states many of which are now reportedly chronically short of money and will not lead to price-rise as there will be no tax on tax. Moreover, as tax will not be collected at single point, incidence of tax-avoidance will be less. Moreover, evasion at a particular point, if any, will not cost the government dearly.

We quote once again from the White Paper to show what is VAT. "VAT is based on value addition to the goods and the related VAT liability of the dealer is calculated by deducting input tax credit from tax collected on sales." Let us assume

that input (raw material or finished goods procured) is worth Rs.1,00,000 and the output (sale proceeds of the goods manufactured or procured readymade) is Rs.2,00,000/. The tax fixed on input is 4% and on output 10%. So VAT payable on input is Rs.4000/- and on output is Rs.20,000/-. But the liability on the seller will not be Rs.20,000/- but 16,000/- as input-tax credit will accrue to him. Similarly, if one manufacturer requires several stages of procurement, VAT will be levied on each stage with subsequent stage receiving set-off benefit. A plastic bucket manufacturing is a case in point. First, one buys plastic sheets, then the sheets are given a particular shape, the shaped material is then bought for being finished and designed followed by colouring; then aluminium handles are purchased separately and fitted to it. So VAT paid on the sheets gets set off against VAT on the shaped material. Then the designed and coloured material attracts a VAT duly adjusted for the previous payment. This VAT and the VAT paid on buying aluminium handles are available as credit to the seller when he pays VAT on final sale. This input tax credit may be either in the form of set-off or refund.

This state-level VAT will be levied at a uniform rate across the states. Not that all items would come under VAT. Around 550 items will be covered with a 2-tier slab of 4% and 12.5% respectively. A special rate of 1% will be for gold and silver ornaments. Some of the items which attract sales tax between 4 to 5% at present, will be under VAT rate of 12.5%. Petrol, diesel, aviation turbine fuel, liquor, lottery tickets and motor spirit will not be covered under VAT as, according to the authors of the new system, "their prices are not fully market determined". States would have option to either levy 4% or totally exempt foodgrains but this could be reviewed after one year. Sugar, textiles and tobacco covered under additional excise duties will not be under VAT for one year and continue to be under existing arrangement. For all exports made out of the country, tax paid within the state will be refunded in full. Units located in Special Economic Zones and EOU will either be granted exemption from paying input tax or refund of the input tax paid within three

months. Tax paid on inputs procured from other states through inter-state sale and stock transfers will not be eligible for credit. Every dealer with gross annual turnover above Rs.5 lakhs will come under VAT-net and shall have to mandatorily register themselves and keep all necessary documents in proper order. Taxpayers will have 100% self-assessment. But as per the White paper "correctness of self assessment will be checked through a system of department audit... This audit wing will remain delinked from tax collection wing to remove any bias... Simultaneously, a cross-checking computerised system is being worked out on the basis of co-ordination system between the tax authorities of the state governments and Income Tax to compare constantly the tax returns and set-off documents of VAT system of the states and those of central excise and Income Tax. This comprehensive cross-checking system will help reduce tax evasion and also lead to significant growth of tax revenue... protecting transparently the interests of tax-complying dealers against the unfair practices of tax-evaders."

It is thus clear that all items will not immediately come under VAT. Exempted category includes goods like petrol-diesel distribution of which is under monopoly control. States will still have some discretion on certain issues. Alongside VAT, the present system of taxation will continue in respect of certain items. Export will enjoy substantial exemptions, so will the special economic zones where many other concessions are granted to the capitalist owners including non-applicability of labour laws. On the administrative side, in keeping with the multi-point tax system, there will be multi-agency monitoring each separate from the other. One wing will audit, another will cross-check while a third wing will collect money. Apparently, it looks like just another system of taxation replacing the present one with attempts to correct the systemic anomalies like double taxation, widen the tax net and enforce a stringent transparent management.

Traders' point of view

But unfortunately the wholesalers and retail traders refuse to buy the arguments of the

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Introduction of VAT

Flawed corrupt machinery hindering revenue collection

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government and the high-powerful committee. We quote some interviews published in the Dainik Statesman on February 22, 2005. A cloth merchant says: "Look, we purchase cloth material at low price, stitch garments and sell in the market. We do not have a brand because we target the lower-end of the market looking for cheap staff. We procure cloth not from big factory or mill but from the wholesalers. Our capital is meagre. I employ a couple of tailors to produce the garments. Of course, I am told I would be refunded the tax I have already paid on cloth procurement. But I do not have infrastructure to keep accounts and papers for that. Creation of such infrastructure would add to my cost. We run business on minimum profit. When I would seek refund of input-tax as per new law, I would fall in the grip of the inspectors. It means the government through introduction of VAT is going to start once again the rule of inspectors. Traders like us would have to wind up business." Another wholesaler makes caustic remark, "the government is imposing 12.5% VAT on all essential items. Yet the government says prices will fall. Let the government people come and show us with calculation how would this happen." Reacts a retail shoe seller: "I sell cheap shoes. There was no sales tax on a shoe priced less than Rs.300/-. Do Tatas or Birlas wear such shoes priced below Rs.300/-? Owner of an electronic goods shop retorts, "Do you know the problem with VAT? Assume I start paying VAT at prescribed rate. Then if during recession, my sale goes down, then inspectors on perusal of my records of previous sale would start asking why has the sales been down this year. I must have been suppressing something. It means that they would harass as in the name of scrutinizing the old files and you understand very well, the inspectors will make two pieces".

Traders apprehend rough-hand from tax administration

So it is observed that the wrath is not that much over the method of computation but the administrative hassles that are being apprehended. And if reality is taken into account, their apprehension does not seem to be unfounded. Everyone is aware of the rampant corruption that plagues

the tax collecting machinery. But for the indulgence of the tax authorities, there could not have such a mega-scale tax-evasion and tax arrear. Without taking any genuine initiative to tone up the administration and bring in stringent additional punitive measures for the erring tax officials, if the procedural hazards are increased and multiple checkings by separate machineries are introduced, it is but natural to expect escalated harassment by the corrupt administration. More crisis-ridden is ruling capitalism, more corrupt will be the capitalist system. Secondly, compliance with additional procedural requirement would necessitate improved infrastructure entailing additional cost. Small traders with annual turnover of just above Rs.5 lakhs, i.e. daily turnover of around Rs.1500/- who are innumerable on count might find it extremely difficult to provide that. So they would have to fold up business rendering a huge number of people now engaged in retail trade, jobless. On the other hand, if, as apprehended by the traders and that too not without any basis, there is any additional expenditure which they might have to incur to handle the tax-authorities administering VAT, retail sale price will be loaded to that extent. So it will be the poor consumers pauperized everyday because of mounting economic assault, who will be the ultimate sufferers. With VAT, there might not be any stipulation of MRP (Maximum Retail Price) as any such pre-determination of end price might not be feasible in the multi-layered VAT structure. Thus, whatever little check is there on retail price today because of fixation of the outer limit, will in every likelihood be abolished. Surely that would encourage unethical and corrupt trade practices resulting in greater exploitation of the ordinary consumers. So in all probability prices would increase contrary to the tall talks the government and the authors of VAT are indulging in.

The White Paper, inter alia, says that "one state, namely Haryana, has already introduced VAT on its own with good results on revenue growth." While all relevant facts about the results of adoption of such a system by Haryana government are yet to be ascertained, one thing is known to all. It has not succeeded in arresting skyrocketing of prices. It may be added that a kind of VAT

mechanism had been introduced in respect of central excise duties ten years back. The White Paper also has a mention of it. Has that in anyway reined the phenomenal price rise of all essential items? What is the experience of the common people? To cull argument in their favour, the protagonists of VAT included in the White Paper that "VAT was initiated first in Brazil ... then in European countries ... and subsequently ... in about 130 countries." As if that is a strong point in favour of switching to VAT system in our country. Without taking into cognizance the specific conditions and peculiarities of various countries, it is totally unscientific to put forth such flat argument.

Crux of the problem as we have shown above, lies in the kind and nature of the tax-machinery. Everyone knows that in our country, there is an axis of corrupt tax-administration, ruling monopolists and the government that rules the roost. So the devil is in the system itself. Can any reform in tax-structure yield anything positive in this axis-driven system? Can such a machinery prevent tax-evasion or beget any improvement in tax collection?

Hoax of revenue generation

The advocates of VAT have made better revenue generation their main plank. Had the government been serious, it could not find necessary measures to eluding to them. As high as Rs.1.30 lakh crores of non-performing assets are lying with the banks and financial institutions. Pilferage from government exchequer, swindling of public funds, mega-stock scams, stamp paper scam, fodder scam, etc. are galore. Hoarding of black money runs into lakhs of crores of rupees. But there is no action against any of these. Here also the same axis of ruling monopolists-government-tax machinery is operative in full swing. All the defaulters, swindlers, hoarders, scam kings are either aided or abetted by the ruling monopolists and their servitor governments. So the government remains an indulgent onlooker to all these defaults and criminal acts, grants amnesty to the culprits and even spares moneyed owning class from paying tax. Rural kulaks, who over the years have amassed huge capital, are still out of tax-net. It is a vicious circle all

around. In such a milieu, is it not hypocritical to talk of better revenue generation through tax-structure modification?

Who is poised to gain

As stated earlier, the big industrialists and monopoly houses have welcomed VAT while the traders have opposed it tooth and nail. Many of the small traders fear that being unable to create necessary infrastructure to comply with the tedious cumbersome procedural requirements, they might be phased out of retail business. The monopolists know they have and can afford to have the required infrastructure and hence would be able to recoup the input-tax in the VAT environment. Is it then that the monopolists are finding this scheme coming handy to them in capturing retail trade by ousting the traders?

Already, there is marked indication towards that. Pursuant to the government policies, monopoly-owned mega-retail chains, big departmental stores, shopping malls have already captured a sizeable retail trade market in the urban areas. Not only national monopolists even foreign monopolists are showing increasing interest in Indian retail market. What is more, Government of India is also talking of allowing FDI in retail. Already, 100% FDI has been granted in real estate which includes construction of shopping malls also. Monopoly take over of retail trade would entail charging of monopolistic prices and thereby intensify capitalistic exploitation of the ordinary consumers, already wretched and devastated beyond limit.

There is another phenomenon that lends credence to such apprehension. Of late, Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) are taking lot of exposure in mid-cap stocks or shares of medium-capital companies in the stock market. Retail company stocks fall under this category. FIIS, as has been observed, show interest in stocks which have wider scope for speculation. Unlike blue chip stocks comprising the sensitive index or Sensex of Bombay Stock Exchange or Nifty-Fifty of National Stock Exchange, there is no restriction on sale and purchase of mid-cap stocks on the bourses. Hence these shares are more volatile or provide better opportunity for widespread

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Indo-Pak relation**Kashmir becomes the hinge-point***Contd. from page 2*

later developments too, that the two warring states formed out of the partitioned India, will easily fall prey to imperialist designs. Had there been a truly secular force leading the independence movement, this debacle could be prevented. Instead, the two-nation theory of the communal fanatics could make ground; people who were destined to develop into one nation through the countrywide anti-imperialist struggle, broke down into two warring communities. Finally the country was partitioned on the frail ground of religion. Pakistan was born.

It was again a cruel touch of history, that the then undivided Communist Party of India, professing Marxism as its ideology, failed to give exposure to this design and acts of the British imperialist rulers, the Indian bourgeoisie and the fundamentalists. Instead they rendered support to this anti-Marxist two-nation theory that was discarded even by the liberal section of the bourgeois class itself. It may also be recalled here within the Congress Working Committee, the two members who stood firm against this partition on the basis of religion were Khan Abdul Gafur Khan and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the two most prominent Muslim leaders of the country. The Congress leaders as well as the CPI leaders created further confusion, to serve their misdeeds, by propagating the idea only a partition could prevent communal riots in the free India. Otherwise there would be more of them if the two communities lived in one and the same land.

Reality proved their folly and the result was disastrous for people of both the countries. Independence was accompanied by cruel fratricidal communal riots in different corners of both the lands. Those took toll in innocent human life in thousands and uprooted millions of hapless victims from their birthplace to be thrown across the border into a land that did not welcome them with any kind of warmth and sympathy. The impact shattered the social fabric, even brought ruination to family life; human values seemed to be lost; helpless poverty-stricken, illiterate, ill-fed, ill-clad populace of both the countries were pushed to the brink of a baseless, aimless, meaningless life. Economies were ruined; at one stroke, dreams of independence

faced black-out in front of unfathomable unemployment, abject poverty and chilling insecurity. Religious fundamentalists gained strength more and more and drove their roots into and disrupted unity of people in their respective soils. Communal riots continued as a regular event. Minority oppression continued. Such were the grounds that determined principally the embittered relationship between the two states of India and Pakistan.

The bourgeoisie of both the independent countries, used this ambience and the division within their masses just in the same way as did the British imperialist rulers. Rather, plunged into irrevocable crisis, the rulers of both India and Pakistan are fomenting further disunity, confusion and zingoism among their respective masses. Religious fundamentalism-obscurantism are overt or covertly encouraged. Forces like BJP or Jamat profess it openly, while other forces like Congress in India do it under the cloak of secularism. The purpose remains the same in both the countries. The rulers only desire to disunite the toiling people and divert their attention from the burning problems of life and the root of their crisis. The political parties serving the ruling class simply make themselves busy in creating vote-banks, minority or majority as the case may be. People must realize that a solution demands powerful left and democratic movement under a genuine leadership in each soil. This movement is also to incorporate the unaccomplished tasks of democratization of society. Only that can help develop scientific secular democratic bent of mind among the masses; only that can equip people to prevent and resist one and all attempts to fan up communal hatred and riots; only that can prevent the ruling classes of the two countries from using their own people as enemy of the other.

Kashmir added fuel to already embittered Indo-Pak relationship

The issue of Kashmir, centring round the accession of the native state of Jammu and Kashmir, developed into such a situation which added fresh fuel to this explosive complexion of the Indo-Pak relationship. It only contributed to the bitterness that continued through the years till to date.

Accession of Jammu and Kashmir was part of the same process as applied to other princely states (about 140 fully empowered in a total of 562 princely states in India under the British rule). But its strategic geographic position and its link with the pre-independence India earned it an added importance. It may be pertinent here to recall once again relevant historical facts in brief.

The "Memorandum on (princely) states' treaties and paramountcy" (Cabinet Mission memorandum of May 1946) ascribed full liberty to these states to decide on entering into federal relationship with India or Pakistan or failing it into "particular political arrangements" with the right to negotiate "on a basis of complete freedom" (Quoted from *The Story of Integration of the Indian States*, named *Integration of the Indian States* in later edition : V P Menon). Heads of several states including the Maharajah of Jammu and Kashmir were toying with the idea of making their states independent sovereign ones. To prevent that, the ruling classes of both India and Pakistan took recourse to standstill agreement with the states as they were integrated to the British India in the spheres of railways, roadways, posts and telegraphs, water and power supplies, food supplies and trade and commerce in general. They also adopted persuasion and coercion and even military action to make the states sign the instrument of accession to either India or Pakistan.

Jammu and Kashmir had a Hindu king but a Muslim majority. The king was contemplating independence. On the other hand, Pakistan had an eye to annex it. Sheikh Abdullah was the then undisputed leader of the Kashmiri people enjoying great prestige and image among them, irrespective of their religious identity. His party, the National Conference itself was 'the then accredited representative of the Kashmir people'. In Sheikh's words : "... on the question of accession, the Maharajah wanted an independent Kashmir. Before he was compelled to sign the Instrument of Accession, he had written to Lord Mountbatten stating that in view of Kashmir's location and composition of its population, he wanted independence,' and 'when Lord Louis Mountbatten visited Kashmir in June 1947, he advised the

Maharajah to accede to Pakistan.' Mood and opinion of the Kashmiri people were amply evident in Sheikh's words. In his opening address in the Constituent Assembly in 1951, while speaking about the then prevailing situation, he elaborated the course of events : "There were three alternative courses open to them (i.e., to the Princely States). They could accede to either of the two Dominions (i.e., India or Pakistan) or remain independent. This gave the Princes themselves the option to decide the fate of their States... The crucial date of Indian and Pakistani Independence, ... came when I and my colleagues were still, behind prison bars Maharajah's Government entered into a Standstill Agreement with Pakistan.. A similar arrangement was suggested to India, also, but ... the Government of India insisted that it could not consider any agreement ... valid until it had the approval of the people's representatives." Before any concrete measure could come up, "... the State was suddenly invaded from the side of Pakistan (in October 1947 : addition ours).... As these raiders advanced towards Srinagar, the last vestige of authority,... Maharajah, suddenly disappeared from the Capital. This ... would have certainly led to the occupation of the whole State by Pakistani troops and tribesmen, if, at this supreme hour of crisis, the entire people of Kashmir had not risen like a solid barrier against the aggressor... now, since the people's representatives themselves sought an alliance, the Government of India showed readiness .. Legally the Instrument of Accession had to be signed by the Ruler of the State. This the Maharajah did." (Opening Address at the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly, 1951: p.15-17; Document published by the Constituent Assembly Secretariat, J & K) He wrote a letter to Mountbatten and signed the Instrument of Accession on 26 October 1947.

It should be reiterated here that, in absence of any other recognizable force fighting for people's democratic cause against feudal autocracy, it was Sheikh Abdullah who had already led a long struggle against feudal autocracy, embracing the valley people. His movement bore fraternity with the freedom movement of the mainland India; it helped develop a Kashmiri identity, something which came to be known as *Kashmiriyat*, that cut across

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Indo-Pak relation

Sheikh Abdullah stood firm for accession to India

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religious-mindedness. Thus Sheikh and his National Conference as well as Kashmiri people under his leadership refused to accept religion to be the primary criterion of accession. Kashmir movement also did not have any conflict with the Indian nationalist movement. Rather the two cooperated with each other; leaders of the two movements were in close touch and paid visits to either. So it was natural for India to seek for Sheikh's approval to accession. As stated in Sheikh's words, at the time of independence he was in prison for his "Quit Kashmir" movement against feudal autocracy. He was released from the prison and on receiving Sheikh's approval the accession was made complete. Thus popular sanction under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah made accession to India not only legal, but also moral. By the Proclamation of March 5, 1948, Sheikh as the leader of the largest party of the state, was entrusted with a Government, headed by a Cabinet to run the administration as an interim measure. This was succeeded by election of the state Constituent Assembly on the basis of adult franchise. The National Conference, the party led by Sheikh earned absolute majority; Sheikh himself was elected the Chief Minister (then called Prime Minister of Kashmir) and was thus placed in charge of administration of the state. Kashmiri people could thus have a man of their choice to lead them in the new set-up. Their democratic right to determine their own course of development was thus recognized and honoured.

Unfortunately, Sheikh and his people could not have the whole of Kashmir to start their new journey into independence. Pak invaders still occupied the so-called 'Azad Kashmir'. India's effort to drive them out completely was stalled by the imperialist-engineered UN intervention. A few seats of the Constituent Assembly were left vacant for that region, much to the displeasure of Sheikh and disapproval of his people.

In the same opening address at the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly, While discussing the choice before Kashmir, Sheikh emphasized: "I shall first speak on the merits and demerits of the State's accession to India. In the final analysis, .. it is the kinship of ideals

which determines the strength of ties between two States... The autocratic rule of the Princes has been done away with and representative government have been entrusted with the administration. ...if we accede to India there is no danger of a revival of feudalism and autocracy." He maintained that the "argument that Pakistan is a Muslim State, and, a big majority of our people.. Muslims" is, however, "only a camouflage.. to dupe the common man, so that he may not see clearly that Pakistan is a feudal State" Besides, Pakistan had hardly 25 million Muslims, "while the total number of Muslims resident in India is as many as 40 million." He reaffirmed that "religious affinities alone do not and should not normally determine the political alliances of States. These days economic interests and a community of political ideals more appropriately influence the policies of States." Neither can Pakistan "help us with our industrialization, being herself industrially backward." Sheikh also referred to the fact that the "right of self-determination for nationalities is being consistently denied" in Pakistan as was evident from the cases of North West Frontier Province or Baluchistan. In the former province a secular movement under the leadership of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan fought for united India. During the early days of independence, it, as well as their Baluch counterpart, put up strong resistance to their being included to the Muslim state of Pakistan. They were brutally suppressed, their leaders, including Gaffar Khan, popularly known as *Simanta Gandhi* were thrown into custody.

On the question of a third alternative, namely seeking independent existence of Kashmir, Sheikh opined "This might seem attractive in that it would appear to pave the way out of the present deadlock. To us, a tourist country, it could also have certain obvious advantages." At the same time, he raised warnings that "it is not easy to protect sovereignty and independence in a small country which has not sufficient strength to defend itself on our long and difficult frontiers bordering to many countries." Recalling the tribal invasion from Pakistan, he further pointed out that "from August 15 to October 22, 1947, our State was independent and the result was that

our weakness was exploited by the neighbour with whom we had a valid Standstill Agreement. The State was invaded. What is the guarantee that in future too we may not be victims of a similar aggression?" (See : Opening Address at the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly, 1951: p.20-22)

He acknowledged India with words like "We are proud to have our bonds with India. The Constitution of India has provided for a federal union and in the distribution of sovereign powers had treated us differently from other constituent units." Amplifying further, he submitted that "we have complete freedom to frame our Constitution in the manner we like" with "the exception of the items grouped under Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communication". Categorically he outlined his tasks "... while safeguarding our autonomy to the fullest extent so as to enable us to have the liberty to build our country according to the best traditions and genius of our people, we may also by suitable constitutional arrangements with the Union ... offer our fullest co-operation and assistance to the Union"; he emphasized that on the basis of these terms and understandings Article 370 was framed and the special status of Jammu and Kashmir within the Constitution was established, a status that was synonymous with full autonomy, the 'Azadi' expressing the dignity of the Kashmiri people as well as acting as their safeguard against being swamped into religious fanaticism being injected by Pakistan at that time (See : Opening Address at the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly, 1951: p.4). As far later as in 1972 he again pointed out in his autobiography *Flames of Chinar* : "I assured the Centre that we had no differences with them regarding accession. We only wanted Article 370 to be maintained in its original form".

On the other hand, it was also announced by Sardar Ballabhbai Patel, the then Home Minister of the India Government : " We do not want anything more from them than accession in these three subjects (Defence, Communications and External Affairs: addition ours), therein lies the good of the entire country. We respect their independence in all other matters."

(Quoted in Sheikh's letter to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Education Minister of India on July 16, 1953)

All this clearly vindicates that accession of Kashmir to India was not to create any problem to begin with. Subsequently, however, problems cropped up in two ways. In the face of Pakistan-backed tribal invasion and tricky move of Mountbatten, as the Governor General, to which the Indian administration fell prey, the issue was referred to and raised several times in the UN Security Council, first on 13 August 1948, whereby it came out to be the handy tools with the imperialists, the British and later the US imperialists and also with the communal fundamental forces in Jammu & Kashmir. Though ceasefire was agreed upon on January 1, 1949 under the supervision of the UN, imperialist hands to make use of the issue to their ends were evident at every stage. George Cunningham was the all-powerful governor of the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan from which the tribal invasion of the Afridis, Waziris, and Mahsudis was launched by Pakistan; it meant, at least, that he must have been aware of what was happening. The invaders were led by Russel K Heith, an agent of the American Office of Strategic Services shortly afterwards appointed a Brigadier General of the 'Free Kashmir' Army. (A Contemporary History of India: Ed. UV Balabushevich & AM Dyakov, Academy of Sciences of USSR, 1964, p. 489) Later he had to be recalled to the USA for fear of international scandal (The Hindu, February 14, 1950). Then again, the Anglo-US Bloc in the Security Council changed the issue tabled there from 'Kashmir Question' to 'India-Pakistan Dispute' and constantly needled India on this issue. To make the settled fact of accession of Kashmir to India unsettled, the Anglo-US Bloc made constant moves in the Security Council to organize a plebiscite in Kashmir 'under the UN supervision' and to send foreign troops to the state, moves that were rightly thwarted all through by the Government of India. However, in the face of the UN intervention, that clearly amounted to imperialist interference, the Indian government acted weak-kneed and failed to

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Resist introduction of VAT

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speculation. Scope for speculation in a particular category of stock widens if number of that category stock increases. Increase of more number of stocks means more number of companies coming in that sector. So proliferation of retail companies cannot be ruled out in view of the FIIS' growing preference for mid-cap stocks. And it obviates to say that only monopolists, national or foreign, possess the requisite financial muscle to float such companies in retail sector.

Is it for all these reasons that the monopolists are greeting VAT with thunderous applause? This is what merits serious pondering over. Moreover, VAT is not imposed on petrol, diesel, aviation fuel, etc. where monopoly control over retail distribution is established and monopolistic prices are charged. Then if because of VAT, traders being unable to survive in unequal competition with the monopoly do get ousted from retail business and the latter invades the retail sector, monopolistic pricing will be extended to all retail items of daily use as well making VAT redundant.

Casualty is common people

So from the above discussion, we find that there might be dangerous consequences of VAT implementation and the worst

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casualty will be the common people. Already a fiscal savagery is raving wild on them. Over and above that, if the retail traders are forced to defray more expenses to cope with the procedural and other complexities of VAT, the ordinary consumers will have to bear the brunt as this additional outgo will be loaded on the end-price. Similarly if monopoly grabs retail, poor consumers will have no other alternative but to buy essential items at monopolistic price in big shopping malls. So it looks like that a double-edged sword is hanging on the toiling people. That is of utmost concern to all discerning people.

Most shocking is that when VAT is posing such dangerous threat to the people and making the traders pass sleepless nights while the monopolists are rejoicing, the CPI(M) under the garb of left vocabulary has become its chief protagonist. Time alone will unfold how far in the name of providing relief to the consumers the CPI(M) leaders have been working in tandem with the monopolists. It may be mentioned that under people's pressure the CPI(M) leaders are now saying that VAT is being introduced for one year on an experimental basis and would be reviewed thereafter. It also shows that they themselves are not confident of its workability either. There is strong resentment about VAT in the CPI(M) circle as well. Ashok Mitra, former CPI(M) finance minister of West Bengal convened a press conference to express his strong disapproval of the VAT proposal which, according to him, is unconstitutional and would substantially reduce the revenue earning of the state government. The CPI(M) leaders instead of coming out with strong arguments to defend their position, simply avoided the points he raised.

When there are so many questions and apprehensions about VAT, how far is it correct to go ahead with it without convincing the various sections of the people like the traders, consumers, academicians and political parties about its utility and in the process removing all objections and deep apprehensions being raised from various responsible quarters. Hence introduction of VAT needs to be opposed. We call upon the people to resist the move and build up strong public opinion against the possible dangers it is fraught with.

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drive out the Pak invaders totally from the Pak-occupied-Kashmir. Parts of Kashmir remained in their hand and thus divided, the PoK lasting as a sore throat.

In addition to this, history of Jammu and Kashmir through the following years showed that it was the Article 370 and the special status of the state under provisions of this article, that became the bone of contention in the relation between Kashmir and India, and from that between India and Pakistan. The Indian ruling class, the Hindu zealots, along with a section of the bureaucracy and politicians, belonging not only to the Jan Sangh or the RSS, but Congress too, was against the continued special status of the state. It wanted Kashmir to surrender the status, on the argument that the Article was transitional and provisional. However, at the time of independence, there was nothing in the Indian Constitution to define the Article as transitional and provisional; on the contrary the Constituent Assembly of India or its successor parliament had no constitutional right to abrogate or modify the Article 370. The right belonged solely to the Constituent Assembly of the state. The special status was not granted by the Government of India, but was sanctioned by the relevant provisions of the Government of India Act of 1935, the Indian Independence Act of 1947, the Indian (Provisional) Constitution Order of 1947 and the Instrument of Accession. (See *Kashmir; Towards Insurgency* by Balraj Puri)

Nehru, the then Indian Prime Minister rose to work out the plans with which the ruling Indian bourgeoisie was moving. He removed and imprisoned Sheikh, replacing him by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad in the government through elections of 1957 and 1962. Sheikh had won the election in 1951 uncontested with overwhelming support of people. On the other hand, the uncontested win of Bakshi was marked by administrative measures to ensure victory. Even Sheikh was put behind bars only to be released in January 1958, but rearrested three months later. Side by side through repeated amendments of the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1950 regarding distribution of legislative powers and the three lists (State, Union

and Concurrent), the sphere of jurisdiction of the state of Jammu and Kashmir was curtailed and that of the Indian parliament was extended to make laws for it. The authority and jurisdiction of the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Election Commission and the Supreme Court was gradually extended one by one, the first taking place in 1953.

Resentment of Kashmiri people soared higher and higher and under that mounting pressure Nehru had ultimately to come down for an understanding with Sheikh. He released latter in April 1964 and sent him to Pakistan for a dialogue on May 24, 1964. Three days later, on May 27 Nehru breathed his last and with him vanished the budding effort, leading to further sea-change in the situation. Immediately afterwards, the situation reached a new low, with the second major war between India and Pakistan after that of 1947 breaking out in 1965. In April 1965 Pakistan invaded the Rann of Kutch, in August the same year it sent infiltrators into the Kashmir Valley and launched a massive attack in the Chhamb sector of southwest Jammu and Kashmir. However, ceasefire was reached on September 30, under a pressure from the UN Security Council. Sheikh Abdullah was deprived of his liberty in May 1965, with restrictions to be removed only in 1968. Remarkably enough, in spite of that, the Kashmiri people at large, under none but Sheikh's leadership, did again stood up joining hands with India against Pakistan. (To be continued)

An Appeal

The Central Committee, SUCI, ardently appeals to all its members, supporters, sympathizers as well as the members of the public to kindly intimate, at the earliest, to the Office Secretary, Central Office, SUCI, 48 Lenin Sarani, Calcutta 700013, if they have, by any chance, any copy of speeches or talks, made by Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, the founder General Secretary of the party, in written or recorded form. This will be required for publication of Complete Works of Comrade Ghosh.

Protest against royal coup in Nepal

Central Committee, SUCI issued a call to observe February 18, 2005 as a protest day against the autocratic usurpation of power by the King of Nepal and brutal suppression of the legitimate struggle of the Nepalese people for establishment of democracy. Accordingly, protest rallies and demonstrations were held at all important places round the country. We give below of brief reports of some of the demonstrations.

Calcutta, West Bengal

A well-decorated procession ending in a rally was organized by the SUCI, West Bengal State Committee on 16 February in Calcutta. The rally was addressed by leaders of Nepali Jan Adhikar Suraksha Samiti in India, as also by Comrade Provash Ghosh, member, Central Committee, SUCI and Secretary, West Bengal State Committee. The Nepalese leaders voiced strong opposition of the Nepalese people to the exploitation of imperialists, viz. US, UK and hegemonism of Indian rulers. Comrade Provash Ghosh expressed strong fraternity of Indian toiling people with the just movement of the Nepalese people for democracy. A delegation led by Comrade Manik Mukherjee, Central Staff and W.B. State Secretariat member of SUCI, met the Consul General of Nepal

and handed over a memorandum addressed to the King of Nepal. An effigy of the King of Nepal was also burnt.

Nagpur, Maharashtra

The Vidarbha unit of the Sangharshshil Bampanthi Partyonkar Samjukt Morcha held a demonstration at Nagpur in Maharashtra on February 18, voicing protest against the gagging of democracy in Nepal by the King and demanding stoppage of all help to the Nepalese regime by the Indian government and restoration of parliamentary democracy in Nepal. The rally held for the purpose was addressed by Comrade Madhab Bhonde of SUCI, Comrade Zafar Ali of Bolshevik Party, Comrade Pande of the Nepali Jan Adhikar Suraksha Samiti, Indian Branch and Bharat Thapa of Prabasi Nepali Sangha and leaders of different mass organizations like AIMSS, AIDS0 and AIDYO.

Guwahati & Silchar, Assam

Assam State Committee observed all-India Protest Day on 18 February. A rally in Guwahati in Assam, a rally was addressed by Chandralekha Das, member, Assam State Committee who urged upon the democratic minded people to come out in support of the

Nepalese people in their just struggle. An effigy of King Gyanendra was also put to flames.

A similar programme was also held at Silchar by the Kachhar district committee, on the same date.

Agartala, Tripura

At Agartala in Tripura, a protest demonstration on February 18 converged in a meeting to observe the all-India Protest Day against royal coup in Nepal. Comrades Sanjoy Chowdhury and Subrata Charaborty, in their addresses, strongly condemned the imperialist role of the US-UK and the expansionist acts of the Indian government in Nepal. The meeting demanded of the Government of India to immediately sever all diplomatic and trade relations with Nepal.

Rohtak, Haryana

Responding to the call of observing all-India Protest Day against butchery of democracy in Nepal, Rohtak unit of SUCI observed the Day holding protest rally at Rohtak in Haryana, on February 21, ending the programme with burning the effigy of King Gyanendra. Comrade Satyawan, Haryana State Organizing Secretary and leaders of Akkhill Bharatiya Nepali Ekta Samaj addressed the rally.

SUCI protests introduction of On-line lottery in Tripura by CPI(M) led Government

Under mounting public pressure, the CPI(M)- led Front Government of West Bengal made a show of police raids against defaulting on-line lottery owners in the state. On the contrary, the Tripura Government, led by the same party, CPI(M), has lately introduced on-line lottery from 11 February on the plea of earning revenue. It not only reveals the anti-people character of the Tripura government once more, it adds to the example of opportunism and duplicity the party itself is practising. A massive protest rally was organized by Tripura state SUCI, to protest this introduction of such gambling business. Comrade Shibani Das addressed the gathering and pointed out that the CPI(M) Front government is granting license in large scale for liquor, promoting obscenity and allowing obscene culture to spread. Thereby they are striking at the very roots of morality, ethics and character, particularly of the youth, in the same way as the rightist governments do. On-line lottery was introduced to the same end

Victory of AIDS0-led movement in Gulbarga

Movement of the students of the Gulbarga University, Karnataka, under the leadership of Gulbarga District AIDS0 scored a significant victory. Under pressure of the movement, the university authorities who had arbitrarily increased the fees for obtaining convocation certificate by 12.5% and also imposed an additional fee of Rs 480/- to be compulsorily realized along with annual examination fee, had to withdraw the proposal and agree to decide the fee structure in consultation with students' representatives.

AIDS0 has planned to form a Degree Course Students' Struggle Committee for building up sustained movement on various legitimate demands concerning education.



Comrade V. Venugopal addressing the massive highway picketing in Kolam district, Kerala on February 10, in protest against criminal callousness of the union and state governments towards tsunami affected people and in sequel to a sustained relief operation, as well as memorial meetings at the mass graveyard organized jointly by SUCI and Janakeeya Prathirodha Samiti

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