

Proletarian Era

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Revolutionary tribute to great Lenin and Stalin on the occasion of 104th anniversary of epoch-making November Revolution



- Comrade Provas Ghosh, General Secretary, at Shibpur Party Centre, West Bengal (Photo at left)
- Comrade K Radhakrishna, Polit Bureau member, in Bangalore (Photo at middle)
- Comrade Saumen Basu, Polit Bureau member alongwith Comrades Swapan Ghosh, Polit Bureau member, (second from his left) and Manab Bera, Central Committee member, at Central Party Office, Kolkata. (Photo at right)
- Also Comrades Manik Mukherjee, Asit Bhattacharyya and Gopal Kundu, veteran Polit Bureau members, offered revolutionary tribute to these two giant Marxist authorities, at Salt Lake Party Centre, Kolkata.

In memory of Comrade Mubinul Haider Choudhury, Founder of BASAD (Marxist) Comrade Provas Ghosh

[Comrade Provas Ghosh, General Secretary, SUCI(C), delivered a valuable speech online in Bengali on 19 July 2021 in memory of Comrade Mubinul Haider Choudhury, Founder of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal--BASAD (Marxist) and a life-long revolutionary, who passed away on 6 July 2021 in Dhaka due to multiple diseases at an age of 87. The English translation of that speech is being published in instalments. The first instalment is given here. Responsibility of translation error and inadequate expression, if any, lies with the Editorial Board of Proletarian Era.]

We all have assembled at this memorial meeting of Comrade Mubinul Haider Choudhury, founder General Secretary of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (Marxist)-BASAD (M)- with deep pain and broken heart. It is very difficult for me to speak in such a meeting. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, our great teacher, had been the source of inspiration for both of us. Comrade Mubinul Haider Choudhury was a glowing creation of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh. My relationship with Comrade Mubinul Haider Choudhury had been for over 70 years. When both of us had entered youth after crossing adolescence, we were then driven out of our families because of our interest in politics. So, for many days, we had to spend nights at parks, railway platforms and Kolkata maidan. At that time, Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, our great leader, could just manage to get a

temporary place to stay. But till then he had no permanent means to arrange for his meal. The Party also then had no resources to secure some financial help or food.

I was very shy at that time and felt hesitant to ask for any help from anyone. If Comrade Haider could manage to collect some food, he used to search for me. We used to share that food. There was a Muslim restaurant behind our Party office in Kolkata. Sometimes, we went there to share a plate of beef and one to two rotis. Both of us used to dream of revolution while spending sleepless nights at the parks. We used to explain to each other the valuable discussions of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh in the study classes. In course of that, the sun used to peep in the east. Thus, a deep and close friendship developed between the two of us. This friendship not only remained intact

amidst various problems and crosscurrents of revolutionary movement but was further steered once we gained more experience and knowledge. His deep affection, close association and well-thought out suggestions had helped me very much. So long I would live, these reminiscences would make me grief-stricken, at the same time would give me strength as well.

Comrade Mubinul Haider Choudhury was highly respected by one to all

You have just heard how many intellectuals and professionals from different spheres of Bangladesh who are not connected with BASAD (Marxist) but at one or the other time came in contact with Comrade Haider, hold him in high esteem. They all have expressed their heart-felt respect for him. I told

comrades to read out some of such written homages because though the comrades and people of Bangladesh are aware of these, comrades and common masses of India even West Bengal are not acquainted with these aspects. A lot of other people have also expressed their deep respect. It can be presumed that those who have not sent written messages have also been profoundly grieved and are holding immense respect for him. Just think to what extent Comrade Haider could win over the masses of Bangladesh with his knowledge, character and life struggle. Those who have paid respect have not done so for media publicity or for the sake of formality. This respect has been voluntarily expressed from the core of their heart, from their conscience. What more can be a greater tribute for a departed struggling revolutionary! I

Contd. on page 2

Comrade Mubinul Haider Choudhury

Intellectuals and professionals of Bangladesh who came in contact with Comrade Haider, hold him in high esteem

Contd. from page 1

know had Comrade Haider listened to such revered expressions, he would have exclaimed: "Do I really possess such qualities"? He used to say: "I have given so much of pain to Comrade Shibdas Ghosh. I have questioned him repeatedly on so many issues for acquiring correct understanding about those. So many nights he went sleepless to discuss such questions with us. He even discussed while having food. Thus, he answered so many questions, resolved so many arguments. How much value could I, we and others give to such untiring efforts of his?" He had a lack of satiation in this regard till the end of his life. In another meeting at Mahajati Sadan in Kolkata, he said: "I was a street urchin. I did not get opportunity to study beyond class VIII. I used to play football on the streets and indulge in idle talks though I had never done anything immoral. Whatever you see in me today is the fruit of a dogged struggle of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh. Spurred on by immense attraction for association of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh and urge for listening to his valuable discussions, I used to walk down around 10 kms from Khidderpur in the extreme south fringe of Kolkata to Tallah in proper north Kolkata. I knew that food arrangement was limited in Tallah commune. So I preferred to go after lunch. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh had reared me with deep affection." So, to properly understand Comrade Mubinul Haider Choudhury, we must understand the noble struggle of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh.

Comrade Haider was one of the finest creations of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh

Based on Marxian science, we know that no competence, no ability, no talent is inborn. Neither is any of these endowed by any external force. At the same time, only honesty, dedication and struggle alone cannot beget such qualities. It requires conducting honest, relentless, dedicated struggle based on correct ideology, correct principle, correct path, correct understanding of life and higher standard of ethics-morality-culture. When social movement carrying the banner of progress and human welfare developed during different phases of history in recognition of

the then social necessities, the thinkers and guides of oppressed humanity of those particular phases had honesty, dedication, self-sacrifice and struggle. You know that at a particular juncture of history, religious thoughts and different religions had emerged in the slave-master society with the call of freeing the chained slaves. These religious thoughts had given rise to the concepts of right and wrong, justice and injustice, virtue and vice and social well-being in the then society. We had then witnessed many great characters who were preachers of religions. But, in course of social development, these very religious thoughts during feudal-monarchical society had reached moribund stage after passing through teenage and youth and became reactionary. Religion then became an instrument to exacerbate feudal oppression. At such a stage of history, dawn of a new era was emblazoned in the thoughts of renaissance and bourgeois democratic revolution for establishing bourgeois democracy by overthrowing feudal autocracy. The luminaries of that period espoused the ideal of humanism freed from the influence of religion. That ideal is known as secular humanism. Advent of renaissance brought in its wake scientific thinking, rational thoughts and concept of democratic relationship. Renaissance gave a call of equality-fraternity-liberty. Many great characters based on the teachings of the doyens of renaissance had then appeared in the society. Again, the bourgeois class which was torchbearer of bourgeois democratic revolution has now turned reactionary following inexorable course of history. It has reduced bourgeois humanism into an anti-humanity thought, turned bourgeois republic into an oppressive machine against the wretched toiling masses and subverted bourgeois democracy which we have been witnessing every day. Only the word 'parliament' is there in parliamentary democracy but not democracy. It has become a fascist autocracy. There is only tussle and scuffle over grabbing power in parliamentary democracy. There is no ethics, no morality, no ideology in bourgeois democracy throughout the world. In such a world situation, Soviet revolution under the leadership of

great Lenin and Stalin, victory of struggle for emancipation in China led by great Mao Zedong and the victory march of communist movement had also produced many revered struggling characters based on the teachings of great Marx-Engels. Accepting these great leaders as teachers, Comrade Shibdas Ghosh had concretized Marxism in the concrete contemporary situation of India by his creative talent and in course of that brought the understanding of Marxism-Leninism to a new height as well as provided the guideline of emancipation of the proletariat and delineated the process of acquiring higher revolutionary character, ethics and morality. Based on that, he created a number of revolutionaries of high standard. Comrade Mubinul Haider Choudhury was one of them.

Comrade Haider brought a different current of militant leftism in Bangladesh

One observation has correctly been reflected in the homages received from Bangladesh that Comrade Haider had brought there a new current of leftist movement. I have also heard some leftist leaders and eminent persons of Bangladesh expressing the same opinion. I do not know out of what understanding they have said so. But, according to me, what they have said is correct. If I have to explain this, I would need to enter to some extent into a long discussion. In order to understand what that new current of left movement is, one would need to comprehend the correct communist movement initiated by Comrade Shibdas Ghosh in India. The appeal of communism and Marxism had reached this land before Comrade Shibdas Ghosh. Some movements were developed in the name of communism also. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh had paid respect to those who started this movement, acknowledged their sacrifice and struggle.

Yet a question had arisen in his mind why correct communist movement did not grow in India. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh had shown that those who initiated movement in the name of communism in India did not follow great Lenin's teachings about building up a genuine communist party. Why did he say so? I shall read out some portions

from the works of the great Marxist leaders to corroborate that. At the time Lenin had joined Marxist movement, the communist party of Russia was called Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP). As regards formation of a communist party, Lenin had said: "*To establish and consolidate the Party means establishing and consolidating unity among all Russian Social Democrats and for the reasons indicated above, such unity cannot be brought about by a decree. It cannot be brought about by, let us say, a meeting of representatives, passing a resolution.*" (Declaration of the Editorial Board of Iskra, CW Vol IV) Lenin further said: "*Before we can unite and in order that you may unite, we must first of all firmly and definitely draw the lines of demarcation. Otherwise our unity will be a merely fictitious unity which will conceal the prevailing confusion and prevent its complete elimination.*" (Ibid) In another pamphlet, Lenin observed: "*We think that an independent elaboration of the Marxist theory is especially essential for Russian Socialist-for this theory provides only general guiding principles, which in particular are applied in England differently from France, in France, differently from Germany. In Germany, differently from Russia.*" ('Our Programme', SW, Vol. II) This guideline of great Lenin was not followed by those who formed the Communist Party of India (CPI). They formed the CPI overnight by assembling a few communist-minded persons and groups and based on a political resolution adopted in their meeting. But they never bothered to study how the international Marxist line would be adopted in the then concrete economic-political-social-cultural situation of India. Lenin had further taught that "*Without a revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement.*" ('What is to be done') Elaborating further this teaching, Comrade Shibdas Ghosh in his booklet titled 'Why SUCI(C) is the only genuine communist party in India' had said: "*...by revolutionary theory Lenin did not mean just the political programme and policies of a party, he actually meant a complete epistemological category*

Contd. on page 4

Ruinous Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2021 must be thwarted

Alongside repeal of three brazenly anti-peasant pro-corporate Black Farm Laws, the historic ongoing peasants' movement has also demanded scrapping of proposed Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2021 which is a blueprint of total privatization of a crucial sector like power. Once this Bill is passed by the BJP government, working overtime to serve the ruling monopolists, common consumers would be in severe peril as power tariff would soar sky-high to meet the thirst of profit maximization of the corporate sharks. So, it has been incumbent on the countrymen to simultaneously launch a countrywide united powerful movement to resist enactment of this menacing Bill. In view of this, a brief discussion on the various sinister aspects of the Bill would unravel how the interest of the monopolist tycoons is slated to be fulfilled by this at the cost of the suffering millions.

Scenario of power sector in pre-independence and post-independence periods

It is known to one and all that electricity is a key driver of modern civilization and hence falls under the category of public utility service which is bound to be shouldered by the government if it calls itself a civilized one having minimal concern for people's well-being. Before independence, common people had hardly any access to electricity whose production was too meagre to meet the need of domestic and commercial consumption, let alone agriculture. During the freedom struggle, total generating capacity of electricity was 1382 MW. Private owners were then engaged in generation, operation and maintenance in power sector. To provide legal protection to the power producers, the British imperialist government passed an Electricity Act 1910. In fact, the power sector before that was not viewed as an industry. So, the workers were also not organized.

After independence, the Indian national bourgeoisie which assumed state power was reluctant to invest in this core sector because it thought the cost of production was prohibitive and profit accrual was delayed. But electricity was indispensable for building modern India. While common people had urge for quick availability of electricity for a better life, the aspirant Indian bourgeoisie also needed it for speediest growth and consolidation of capital. So, the Indian capitalist state took up the responsibility of power generation and building up nationwide grid network through mutual understanding between the central government and the then private owners. As a sequence to that, the various State Electricity Boards were formed in public sector with a declaration of running on "no profit no loss" basis. This very declaration acknowledged the fact that power is an essential public service to be provided either free or at minimal affordable cost. Electricity assumed the character of an industry after formation of State Electricity Boards following the enactment of Electricity (Supply) Act-1948 which brought Electricity under the control of Government repealing the erstwhile Act of 1910. After five decades, to meet the increasing demand of Electricity and a nationwide grid network for domestic,

commercial, industrial set up, Railways Electrification, Communication Network and Agricultural field, Central Public Sector Organizations like DVC, NTPC, NHPC, Nuclear Power Corporation, SJVN, Neyveli Lignite Corporation Ltd., PGCL etc. emerged and a nationwide grid network was set up at with public money.

Electricity Act-2003 opened flood gate of privatization of power sector

After the ruinous policy of capitalist globalization was adopted in India in the 1990s by the then Congress government to serve the class interest of the ruling monopolists, Electricity Act-2003 was passed by the then BJP government, repealing the Electricity (supply)-Act 1948. The Act prescribed that setting up of a power plant would be a de-licensed activity. As per section 7 of the 2003 Act, any generating company could establish, operate and generate power without obtaining license/ permission if it complied with the technical standard relating to connectivity with the grid. Following that, power generating sector became the hunting ground for the Private Enterprises called Independent Power Producer (IPP), and the State Electricity Boards were dismantled.

To what extent the Electricity Act-2003 came as a bonanza to the crisis-ridden capitalist class desperately seeking newer avenues for profit maximization by taking over the sectors hitherto under government ownership, will be revealed from the fact within the following 17 years, private sector generation as on 31-03-2020 reached 47% (1,73,039 MW) while public sector output dipped to 53% (1,97,009 MW) including both central plus state generations. So, giant monopoly houses like Tata, Adani, Goenka and Essar have been queuing up for making decisive inroad in power sector.

How the Private Power Generators are exploiting the common people will be attested by the report of the 37th Parliamentary Standing Committee on energy which noticed inter alia rampant over invoicing of Power Plant equipments and coal imports by IPPs i.e. private owners. Such over invoicing, as known to all, lead to higher electricity tariff for the consumers and more profits to the private owners. Tariff, it is pertinent to mention, is the per unit value of electricity up to the door of consumer.

Also, Paranjay Guha Thakurata, an eminent columnist and analyst, showed in an article that the CERC (Central Electricity Regulatory Commission) has not initiated any action suo motu or otherwise, to analyse the tariff structures in the context of allegations of over invoicing of imported coal and power generating equipments, though, as the law officer quoted earlier pointed out "The CERC has the power to take suo motu cognizance to initiate necessary action, which it has not done", he wrote. [Economic and Political Weekly, 16.08.2018]. Apart from over invoicing, the existing Power Purchasing Agreement (PPA) between the Generating Companies and the Distribution Companies is also responsible for higher tariff. 80% of the cost of electricity also includes a costly Power Purchasing Agreement

(mainly with IPPs) and 20 % is regulated by the Regulatory Commission.

Moreover, in the middle of 2016, it emerged that Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) was facing hurdles in investigating the allegations related to coal import. In a media report, it was revealed that officials in public sector Banks like State Bank of India and Bank of Baroda had refused to submit to the DRI the documents from their overseas branches in Singapore and Dubai, citing banking secrecy laws in the respective countries, despite direct request from the then Revenue Secretary. In a subsequent report, a DRI official was quoted as saying that 'it looks like an "invisible outside hand" is interfering in the investigation' [source: Private Thermal Generation in India - Boon or Bane. K Ashok Rao]. Independent Power Producers (IPPs) were stated to have defaulted huge bank loans which are making the lending banks sick.

So it is clear that prescriptions of privatization in the Electricity Act-2003 have failed miserably to fulfil the declared objectives such as supply of power to all at affordable rate, reduction of T&D losses (Presently average 21.4%) and development of plant load factor. It is also a matter of shame after 73 years of Independence 34 crore of people have no access to electricity facilities as per official record.

Experience of privatization of power sector

There are further evidences of disastrous effect of privatization of electricity in India. Everyone is aware of the debacle of Dhabol power plant in Maharashtra with the main promoter, Enron, an US company, going bankrupt. In Odisha, 100% privatization in power distribution completed in the year 1995 caused worst sufferings to the employees and consumers. AESC (American Electric Supply Co.), the world's largest private power company abandoned Odisha power distribution system of the state midway on the ground of inefficiency and corruption. Still the employees and consumers of Odisha are in trouble, as without taking any lesson from the past the Odisha Government has again been taking steps to privatize the distribution system. It is reported that Tata Power Management(TPM) is creating miseries for the common consumers after taking charge of Electric Supply Company in Odisha. Serviceable liabilities related to pension, other terminal benefits, existing employees service conditions which were already accepted by Tata Power Company Ltd. But now TPM has denied and challenged in court by Tata. Also the private producers are showing inflated cost of production (Rs 8 as against Rs 2 per unit) to fix higher tariff for profit maximization. Moreover, they have adopted another foul means to keep power tariff high. Instead of domestically mined coal, they are opting for importing coal so that they could, as stated above, inflate procurement price through over invoicing as such purchases which are not under the purview of CAG (Comptroller of Audit General).

Privatization of power sector in distribution wing was attempted in Gaya, Samastipur and Bhagalpur in Bihar, Agra, Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh, Nagpur, Aurangabad and Jalgaon in Maharashtra, Ranchi and Jamshedpur in Jharkhand and Gwalior, Sagar, Ujjain in MP. But everywhere the regulatory commissions were

Contd. on page 5

Comrade Mubinul Haider Choudhury

Comrade Shibdas Ghosh had concretized Marxism-Leninism in the concrete situation of India and brought its understanding to a new height

Contd. from page 2
developed by the central leadership of the party by dialectically coordinating the understanding and experiences of different branches of knowledge including science and covering all aspects of life." Then he went on explaining that our outlook about personal life, family life, social life, economic aspects, philosophy of life, love-affection-feelings is acquired from the existing bourgeois society. We have grown with that mindset. So those of us who would fight for communism would need to determine how Marxism which is a comprehensive life philosophy, would be applied in all these spheres.

Failure of the founders of CPI to grasp Marxism-Leninism

Here lies the failure of the founders of the CPI. As already stated above, without following Leninist teachings, they formed the party by hurriedly arranging a meeting of some communist-minded persons and groups. They did not conduct ideological struggle in accordance with the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism to develop required unity of thought covering all aspects of life. They also did not go for concretizing Marxism-Leninism on the concrete economic-political-social-cultural situation of this soil. So, right from inception, the CPI grew as a petty-bourgeois party with a signboard of communism.

Concretely elaborating further the Leninist concept of forming a revolutionary party, Comrade Shibdas Ghosh had pointed out: "First, those who have taken the lead in forming the party would have to lay the foundation of ideological centralism among themselves through a socialist movement based on dialectical materialism covering all aspects of thinking, even including the minutest details of their personal lives. Secondly, it is always to be borne in mind that the struggle for developing a concrete concept of collective leadership is, in essence, the primary struggle to build up a communist party. For this, unless ideological centralism covering all aspects of life, that is to say, one process of thinking, uniformity of thinking, oneness in approach, singleness of purpose has been developed the concrete

conception and personified expression of collective leadership within the party cannot be made possible at all. And so long this concrete concept of collective leadership is not developed among those leaders and workers who come forward to undertake the responsibility to build up the party, it is to be understood, the time has not yet come to give a final organizational shape to the party.

For, if finalisation of the formal structure of the party is attempted before that, the party will invariably be mechanically centralised instead of being democratically centralised and, in course of its development, will surely give birth to formal and bureaucratic leadership in place of collective leadership. Thirdly, through a relentless and painstaking struggle a band of professional revolutionaries is to be developed from among the leaders and cadres who have taken up the cause of formation of a revolutionary working class party. And you should clearly understand that, in the Marxist terminology, a 'professional revolutionary' does never mean a paid whole-time worker. Professional revolutionaries are those who constitute the most advanced section of the militant and conscious proletariat who, through a socialist movement, not merely in economic-political fields but in all aspects of life, have been able to embrace Marxism-Leninism, that is the revolutionary ideology of the proletariat, in such a manner that they are capable of engaging themselves constantly in the very many complex battles of the revolutionary life – gladly, unwaveringly and without any reservation – rising above all their personal considerations, needs and difficulties and who can unhesitatingly and happily submit everything personal to the party in the interest of revolution. If the leadership of the party, at different levels, is constituted from among such professional revolutionaries, then only can a party acquire the character of a real communist party. And without fulfilling these three primary conditions, a formal constitutional shape to a real working class

party should never be given." (ibid)

He further said: "...in the present era, by eliminating individualism and individual leadership from the internal democratic life of the party, collective leadership can be established only when the collective knowledge of the leaders and members of the whole party derived through struggles and interaction of ideas, knowledge and experiences has been personified and concretised in the best manner in a leader of the party. Hence the concept of collective leadership or the sense of authority can never be abstract. And, for this reason, when we say that collective leadership has emerged in a party we mean that the collective knowledge of the party has been personified in the best way in an individual of the party." (ibid)

Role of individualism in Russian and Chinese revolutions as well as our freedom movement

Comrade Shibdas Ghosh has given much importance on another aspect. When revolution was accomplished in Russia, capitalism there was not much developed. Rather there was considerable influence of feudalism in agriculture and in the realm of culture. Russia then was virtually in the stage of bourgeois democratic revolution. That is why, Lenin in his 'April Thesis' had shown that after February revolution in 1917, the bourgeoisie was saddled in state power. But since the people were still ready for struggle and industrialization as well as modernization of agriculture in the era of imperialism and proletarian revolution cannot be undertaken by the bourgeoisie as before, the bourgeoisie was to be overthrown from power. And for that, Russia would have to go for anti-capitalist socialist revolution. This very socialist revolution would fulfil the unfulfilled tasks of bourgeois democratic revolution. On the other hand, Chinese revolution was an anti-imperialist anti-feudal democratic revolution under the leadership of the working class. So, Comrade Shibdas Ghosh had shown that bourgeois individualism had relatively progressive role in both

Russian and Chinese revolutions.

Similar was the situation during our freedom movement. "The country is mine; the country is our mother; we are all for our country; we are all for each other"—such appeals had worked then. That means morality then was to subordinate personal interest to the interest of the country. In 'Pather Dabi' novel by Saratchandra Chatterjee, Apurba, one of the pivotal characters, had asked Ramdas Talwarkar, a revolutionary character: "You are married. You have wife and children. Why have you then joined the revolutionary movement?" Talwarkar answered: "Babuji, marriage is a virtuous duty, but working for the country is a greater virtuous duty. Had I known that the former would come in the way of discharging the latter duty, I would not have married." This morality which had worked in our freedom movement had also equally worked in Russian and Chinese revolutions—individual interest is secondary, interest of revolution is primary. If one goes through the Russian and Chinese literatures of that period, one would find evidence of this morality.

Comrade Shibdas Ghosh showed why individualism is now an obstacle before revolution

In this regard, Comrade Shibdas Ghosh has a special contribution to the treasurehouse of Marxism. He showed that in the present era of decadent moribund capitalism, not only in the advanced imperialist-capitalist countries but even in the relatively underdeveloped capitalist countries, bourgeois individualism is no more having a positive role like in the bygone days. Individualism is now reactionary, devoid of social obligation, ideologically degenerated and self-centric. So man has to be freed from individualistic thoughts. In order to attain a proper communist character, one would not only have to be freed from private property in the economic sphere but would also have to be unfettered from the private property mental complex. It means one has to find ways to ensure that one's outlook, mental set up, cultural mentality, sense of familial relationships and social relationships, understanding of marital life, love, affection, ethics-

Contd. on page 6

Electricity Bill

Sinister move to privatize and commercialize electricity would make common consumers back-broken

Contd. from page 3

compelled to cancel the license of the franchises. Power distribution in Delhi already has been privatized. But the standard of service is not only poor but poor beyond any description. The private distribution company of Delhi is a major defaulter to the state owned Power Generating Company (GENCO) to the tune of Rs. 19,000 crore. In other words, the private company availed power from the Government-owned generating company and sold it to the consumers at higher tariff withholding the due payment to the seller GENCO. Experience of many countries studied by the World Bank has shown that "Overall, ...no major differences between the efficiency and quality of services which commercial end users receive from private or public utilities companies" [Source: 'Private Thermal Generation in India: Boon or Bane'-K Ashok Rao.]

Attempt of all out privatization of power sector

Thus it can be seen that privatization of the power sector has been a disaster in case of the consumers and employees while coffers of the private owners have swelled. To slay the slain further, the BJP government after assuming power for a second term in 2019, has been on a spree to privatize all key public sector units including Railways and electricity. It is reported that amongst eleven Central Power Sector Organizations including NTPC, NHPC, SJVN a handful can be either privatized or sold to stronger ones. The glaring example of which is NTPC, the largest public sector power generating company (present capacity 55,000 MW) which earned a profit of Rs 12,633 crore in the year 2018-2019, is going to be privatized. The government has already diluted its stake in NTPC from 56.9% to 46.9%. Dismantling of Power Grid Corporation Ltd. (PGCL), another PSU, is just a matter of time

A scheme titled 'Aditya' (Atal Distribution Improvement Yojana) floated by the BJP government is stated to be aiming at ensuring continuous supply of power adopting models such as privatizing state run distribution companies. In terms of this scheme, distribution sector of all Union Territories would be privatized. Despite all out opposition,

privatization of distribution system in J&K, Ladakh and Puducherry has already been initiated.

Adani Power has already signed a Power Purchase Agreement with MP for sale of 1230 MW electricity. BJP government of MP already paid more than 8000 crores in last two years to private power producers without purchasing a single unit of electricity. In Uttar Pradesh BJP Government has also decided to privatize the largest State Owned Distribution Company "Purvanchal Bidyut Bitaran Nigam" though, in the face of stiff resistance movement, the move is temporarily stalled.

Electricity (Amendment) Bill- 2021

It is in this backdrop that the new Electricity (Amendment) Bill-2021 is on the anvil with a view to facilitating total privatization of the power sector. The essential features of the Bill can be summarized as below:

1. Electricity which is an essential public utility service will be converted into a commercial commodity for minting super profit.
2. A quasi-judicial Central Authority titled Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority (ECEA) will be constituted by the Central Government with the absolute power of power purchase agreement between the generation and distribution companies, both of which eventually would end up in private hands. This central agency would enjoy power equivalent to a High Court, taking away the hitherto existing opportunity of the consumers to seek redressal of disputes through 'ombudsman' system.
3. Electricity would no more be in the concurrent list but will be controlled centrally.
4. Existing cross subsidy system will be gradually abolished except in few areas causing serious hardship to the consumers.
5. The so called promise of direct subsidy transfer cannot be relied upon given the experience in other cases like LPG.
6. In the event of shortfall of guaranteed return, there would be uncertainty of power supply.
7. Distribution business will be divided into three segments viz. Distribution licensee, Sub-distribution

Contd. on page 8

Factsheet of poll bound UP and false claims of BJP top brass

"In 2017, the BJP promised that we will make UP a developed state and also revamp its law and order. Today in 2021, I can say with pride that Yogi Adityanath and his team have taken UP to the top spot in terms of law and order," commented Amit Shah, BJP Home Minister in August last when he was touring the state. Uttar Pradesh has become a shining example of "the double-engine government's double benefits", BJP Prime Minister Modi said in September last as he was effusive in praise for State BJP chief minister Yogi Adityanath. Elaborating further, the BJP Prime Minister further said: "Uttar Pradesh is increasingly emerging as a favourable destination for national and international investors. This happens when a conducive environment is nurtured ... and necessary resources are provided." So while the Home Minister talked of improved law and order, the Prime Minister emphasises on investment criterion. But none of them cared to say anything about the condition of the toiling people of the state. Because, in that event, cat would have come out of the bag.

And the cat has indeed come out. According to the latest Public Affairs Index, a measure of states' governance prepared by the Bengaluru-based think-tank Public Affairs Centre, Uttar Pradesh has scored the last rank (18) for the quality of its governance. The index is a composite score for three broad factors-growth, equity and sustainability-which are based on 43 indicators. Equity scores for the states were based on five themes - voice and accountability (social protection, malnutrition, women representation in power, real wages and slum population); effectiveness of government (infant mortality rate, rural indebtedness, deprivation); rule of law (prevalence of homicides, unsentenced detainees in prisons, crimes against SCs, STs, children and women); regulatory quality and control over corruption. "Apart from these SDGs, Uttar Pradesh also ranks last in terms of dowry deaths per 10 lakh population (2,410 cases reported against the national average of 244 cases) as per the statistics released by National Crime Records Bureau in 2019," the report added. "Rate of crimes against Scheduled Tribe community is registered at 63.6% in the state. Infant mortality is as high as 64% in the state; this is also attributed to the state's high stunting (46.3%), wasting (17.9%) and underweight (39.5%) in children below five years of age."

Earlier, it came out in the media that unemployment had almost

doubled in UP according to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data. 62% of households report incomes lower than pre-lockdown period. In Uttar Pradesh, the condition of vulnerable communities like Musahari became precarious. The community has been collecting chicken feathers for consumption in order to survive. Over 200 alleged cases of hate crimes were reported in 2018 against people from marginalised groups, especially Dalits, with Uttar Pradesh recording the highest number of such incidents for the third consecutive year, Amnesty India had reported. Uttar Pradesh continues to be the hub of harassment of minorities and Dalits. Between 2016 and 2019, National Human Rights Commission registered 2,008 cases where minorities/Dalits were harassed, including cases of lynchings. Of these, Uttar Pradesh alone accounted for 869 cases i.e. 43%. In regard to Dalits, the number of harassment cases registered by NHRC in Uttar Pradesh saw an increase of nearly 41 per cent (from 221 cases in 2016-17 to 311 in 2018-19). This information was revealed in a written reply by the Union home ministry in Parliament on 16 July 2020. In just four years, crimes against women increased in Uttar Pradesh by over 66% increasing by 20% from 2016 to 2019, as per report of National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), which works under the Ministry of Home Affairs, has marked Uttar Pradesh as the most unsafe state for women. report. 11 rape cases are reported every day in UP. In 2018 UP recorded 21711 cases of kidnapping, 8908 of rioting and 3218 of robbery. Uttar Pradesh has seen a spike in encounter killings by police since the advent of the Yogi Adityanath government in 2017. The most deaths in judicial custody, 400, were reported from Uttar Pradesh (UP). UP's 72 jails have the highest number of inmates at 1,01,297, while the capacity is 60,340.

Surely these facts as well as latest lowest ranking as per Public Affairs Index eloquently testify how fraudulent is the attempt of the BJP top brass to portray that Uttar Pradesh has transformed under the Yogi Adityanath government. (Source: First Post 06-03-19, 12-07-20, Down to Earth 06-06-19, India Today-20-07-19, Times of India 23-10-19, The Week 06-12-19, Newslick 10-01-20, Hindustan Times 10-01-20, 17-09-20, 03-10-20, Outlook 01-011-20, Business Today 27-03-20, Zee News- 07-10-20, scroll.in 11-10-20, Counterview 10-12-20, NDTV-14-09-21, India Today 01-08-21, The Print-04-11-21, ABP 06-11-21)

Comrade Mubinul Haider Choudhury

Comrade Haider roused youths of Bangladesh by a different current of militant leftism based on Comrade Shibdas Ghosh Thought

Contd. from page 4

morality, wants and gains-all are free from private property mental complex. Often, individualism pushes one towards lure for posts and popularity. So it is imperative that one gets rid of all such individualistic tendencies and identify oneself completely with the interest of revolution, society and revolutionary party. So, he said : *"...the principal struggle to become a revolutionary proletariat, or a communist, is the struggle to acquire the cultural and ethical standard which enables one to submit one's individual interest most happily, voluntarily and unhesitatingly to the cause of the class, revolution and party by participating, first of all, directly and actively in the revolutionary movements of the toiling people, and thereby grasping the revolutionary politics of the proletariat. But remember, this surrender of individual interest to the cause of revolution is qualitatively different from the bourgeois concept of sacrificing one's wealth, properties and everything in life for the sake of the country. But if this spirit of surrender is influenced by the bourgeois outlook then self-conceit, individualism and ego will surely get inflated creating thereby serious impediment in the path of becoming a communist. Remember, setting out correctly in this struggle marks just the beginning of acquiring communist consciousness, and it is through the success of this struggle only that one can acquire the ability to become a communist one day."* (ibid)

The weakness of the so called communist movement in our country, he pointed out, was that its leaders had never thought of such serious things. They had read a lot of books. But they had not cared to examine what ought to be proletarian culture or what should be the ethical-moral base in the life of a communist. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh had said Plekhanov, Kautsky and Bernstein-all had read the works of Marx. They did not read less than Lenin. But why could they not become Lenin? Because they studied Marxism with a scholastic outlook. In our country also, M N Roy and the founders of the CPI

were like that. They never cultivated what should be the communist ethics and morality in their family life, social life as well as other walks of life. Here lies their failure. I want to refer to one more important point. Lenin had said: *"We do not regard Marx's theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists must develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life."* (Our Programme, Articles for 'Rabochaya Gazeta') Stalin also said the same thing in 1950: *"As a science, Marxism cannot stand still, it develops and is perfected. In its development, Marxism does not recognize invariable conclusions and formulas, obligatory for all epochs and periods."* ('Marxism and Problems of Linguistics')

Undivided CPI leaders failed to apply Marxism on Indian soil

The founders of the CPI never understood the significance of these teachings. They also did not think about resolving the questions and problems that arose in the post-Lenin period in the ideological sphere following advancement in science and epistemology as well as in developing political organization in the revolutionary movement. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh discharged that responsibility. Not only that. They made no attempt to determine what ought to be the correct Marxist outlook about life in India where influence of idealism, Vivekananda's thoughts, Gandhite philosophy, humanist thoughts of Rabindranath and others as also Hindu and Islamic religions was immense. They also did not care to point out what have been the characteristics of Indian renaissance, denote which trend in the freedom struggle was decadent and compromising and which one was uncompromising and revolutionary. They also failed to provide the analysis why the bourgeois then had become compromising in its class interest, why the petty bourgeoisie represented the trend of uncompromising revolutionism. Hence, they could not determine the correct revolutionary line of bringing about the desired social change. Lenin had shown how one has to view and take lessons from the

various international experiences and events. In his language: *"...the Social-Democratic movement is in its very essence an international movement. ...movement ...can be successful only if it implements the experience of other countries. And in order to implement this experience, it is not enough merely to be acquainted with it, or simply to transcribe the latest resolutions. What it requires is the ability to treat this experience critically and to test it independently."* ('What is to be Done') You can see that Lenin had clearly stated that by copying others, one cannot become internationalist. But, the CPI had done the same thing here. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh had said: *"...obligation to the communist leadership can never, under no circumstances, mean blind obedience to it; rather it means a dialectical relationship among the communist parties on the principle of unity-struggle-unity, having the common object of revolution, emancipation and social progress."* [Why SUCI(C)] A discussion between Stalin and Romain Rolland had been published in the book 'Voyage to Moscow'. Rolland said: *"...You are quite in the know of how the millions of the Western people regard the Soviet Union. They envisage the incarnation of their hopes and ideals in the Soviet Union. But sometimes their thoughts and ideas are very self-contradictory and confused. At this time of economic and ethical crisis they expect necessary instructions of struggles and slogans of battles from the Soviet Union. They expect that the Soviet Union will sort out all of their misgivings."* Stalin replied: *"You said, we should chart out the path for our Western friends. I can't help saying that we hesitate to take up this responsibility. We cannot do that as it is very difficult to ascertain the duties and responsibilities of those who live in a completely different milieu and circumstances. Conditions of each country are completely different. It amounts to an audacity on the part of Moscow to suggest ways for the people of other countries. We restrict ourselves to general discussion."* There is a false propaganda by the quarters of vested interest that Stalin used to

decide strategies of revolution and political programmes of other countries. In our country, united CPI had supported the British imperialist rulers even when a massive people's upsurge against British rule took place in 1942. They thought that since Soviet Union was an ally of Britain against fascist axis of Germany-Italy-Japan in the Second World War, they needed to stand by the British regime. Many thought that the CPI had done so at the behest of Moscow. Dr Ranen Sen, a veteran leader of the then CPI had written that when they went to meet Stalin after the War, Stalin asked them what did they do during the war. They informed him that they had helped the British government. Extremely annoyed at this reply, Stalin said that 'what did the British imperialism do in this war that you had helped them'?

Blunders of the undivided CPI

In his booklet titled 'Self-criticism of the Communist Camp', Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, way back in 1948, had observed: *"...the Soviet foreign policy conducted from the state level and the Soviet party policy of accelerating the international revolutionary proletarian movement are distinctly separate,"* Stalin during his aforesaid discussion with Romain Rolland said: *"That is why considering the possible attack against the aggressive fascist states we are interested in the arms build-up of France... But should the communist party of France take the same stand on the question of war? I think no. There, the party is not in power. The capitalists-imperialists are in power. The Communist party is only a small group in opposition. Is there any guarantee that there the French bourgeoisie will not use its army against the working class? Certainly not!"* The blunder of the CPI only reconfirms correctness of this observation of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh.

Stalin had given an advice in 1925 in regard to Indian condition. He said : *"The fundamental and new feature of the conditions of life of colonies like India is not only that the national bourgeoisie has split up into a revolutionary party and a compromising party, but primarily that the*

Contd. on page 7

Comrade Mubinu Haider Choudhury

CPI never grew as a communist party in India

Contd. from page 6
compromising section of this bourgeoisie has already managed, in the main, to strike a deal with imperialism. Fearing revolution more than it fears imperialism, and concerned more about its money-bags than about the interests of its own country, this section of the bourgeoisie, the richest and most influential section, is going over entirely to the camp of the irreconcilable enemies of the revolution, it is forming a bloc with imperialism against the workers and peasants of its own country. ... In such countries, ...the Communist Party can and must enter into an open bloc with the revolutionary wing of the bourgeoisie in order, after isolating the compromising national bourgeoisie, to lead the vast masses of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie in the struggle against imperialism” (The Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the East, SW Vol VII)

But, when an ideological struggle ensued between Gandhiji, representative of the national bourgeoisie, and Netaji Subhash, representing petty-bourgeois revolutionism, the CPI had supported the Gandhites. When Netaji Subhash was forced to quit presidentship of the Congress, the CPI did not support him. Rather they took the side of the Gandhites. Even when Netaji Subhash organized Ramgarh conference with a view to forming a left consolidation against the Gandhite Congress, the CPI did not respond to his call. Although Subhash Bose said that if there were a left consolidation, communist movement would be strengthened. In spite of that, the CPI did not join the conference though among all nationalist freedom leaders, other than Bhagat Singh, Subhas Chandra was the only one who was a staunch supporter of Marxism and Soviet Union. He espoused secular humanism and preached for keeping politics free from religious influence. During the Second World war, the fight of the Indian National Army (INA), led by Subhash Bose, against British imperialism was maligned by the CPI as act of an agent of Japan. Whether this step of Subhash Bose to seek support of Japan against British imperialist rule was right or wrong as a tactics is a separate issue. But could a patriot like Subhash Bose be branded as an agent of Japan? But the CPI did exactly that. They even called him a quisling. Many would be surprised to know that the CPI had supported partition of the country by arguing in favour of the unhistorical notion that the Hindus and the Muslims constitute two separate nations. Such was their understanding of Marxism! More astonishing is the fact that the three factions of the erstwhile undivided CPI i.e. the present CPI, CPI (M) and CPI (ML), do not reckon capitalism as the main enemy in India. Their formulation is that India is in the stage of anti-imperialist anti-feudal people's democratic revolution in which the national bourgeoisie is an ally. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh had shown in 1948 that Indian national bourgeoisie had given birth to monopoly capital. Now, the Indian bourgeoisie has attained the stage of imperialism, exporting capital overseas to set up industries there and setting up

Multinationals. Yet, all the factions of undivided CPI believe that India is at the stage of people's democratic revolution. Such views of theirs is totally divorced from Marxism. From the very beginning, CPI was never a communist party in spite of their earlier leaders and workers having made sacrifices and conducted struggles. They were and are social democrats. In post-independent India, they had either united with the Congress in the name of fighting communalism of the BJP or joined the hands of the BJP raising the bogey of opposing autocratic rule of the Congress. Now, all the three factions of former CPI have become out and out vote-oriented parties.

CPI (M) maligned leftism in its 34 yearlong rule in West Bengal

The CPI (M) and its allies had run the government in West Bengal uninterruptedly for 34 years. West Bengal was the citadel of leftism. West Bengal, as well as the city of Kolkata once used to be in ferment carrying the legacy of Subhash Bose and the revolutionary organizations like the Anushilan Samity and Jugantar as also under the impact of progress of Soviet socialism. Exploiting that, the CPI-CPI (M) gathered strength. When they were in power, we had serious difference with them over the approach and policy of a true left government. We were constituents of the two United Front governments in 1967 and 1969. At that time, a question arose as to how the United Front government should be run. Would it be like the previous Congress governments and crush the movements of the workers and peasants on the pretext of maintaining law and order?

We said that would never be allowed. Lenin had not faced such question as no such possibility of a revolutionary party or leftist combination being voted to power arose anywhere during his time. By applying Marxist science, Comrade Shibdas Ghosh said: *‘We are revolutionaries. Our government would be steered in such a way that the police are not able to attack or suppress working class movements and mass struggles on the plea of maintaining law and order’*. On this question, we had serious difference with the CPI (M) and CPI. The CPI(M), CPI did not accept this revolutionary approach and crushed democratic movements ruthlessly like other bourgeois parties. Observing such anti-left activities of the CPI (M), Comrade Shibdas Ghosh had warned in 1968: *“Throwing to the wind the communist ideology and its quintessence, they [the CPI (M)] are going on misleading the people with tall talks and sweet words, just as the Congress did. They are thus pulling down the prestige of communism and maligning it... In this situation, the fissionary groups and religious fundamentalists like the Jana Sangh are waiting in the wings. As soon as whatever attraction the people still have towards left movement evaporates, they would come out in the open. The ruling CPI(M) leaders are not conscious of this danger.”* (Some Aspects of United Front Politics and Party Work, SW Vol III)

What has been the fallout of the CPI (M)'s 34 yearlong rule? The people of West Bengal turned anti-left by seeing the acts and deeds of the CPI (M). Taking advantage of that, the BJP gained strength. You will be surprised to know that during the last parliament election, when the CPI (M) could make out that they would not be able to defeat the Trinamool Congress (TMC), they raised a slogan-"first Ram, then Bam (left)". That meant that they asked for voting the BJP to defeat the TMC. They thought once the BJP was in power, the CPI (M) would overthrow it and return to power. It was indeed a queer tactics! As a result of that, a large section of CPI(M) votes switched from its fold to the BJP. Even today, the CPI (M) has not been able to recover most of that support base. In the last assembly election, the CPI (M) had united not only with the Congress but even with a party floated overnight by a Muslim cleric with a view to getting Muslim votes. The CPI (M) also conferred the title of 'secular' on this newly formed party. The CPI (M) has become so unpopular in West Bengal during its 34 years of rule that people have voted the BJP as an alternative to the TMC. This is the credential of success of their three decade long rule! This vote-based opportunistic parliamentary politics of the CPI (M) is no way in the interest of the class and mass struggles or revolutionary movement. It is only aimed at finding out which force they should combine with to get some MLAs or MPs and share power. This is no Marxism. This is outright revisionism. They could not apply Marxism on Indian soil and hence could never form a communist party.

Higher ideology is ingrained in its higher culture

Comrade Shibdas Ghosh had said in many of his speeches that *“the essence, the living soul of any great and revolutionary ideology of every age is ingrained in its higher cultural and ethical standard.”* Marxism-Leninism is the highest philosophy of the era. Hence its kernel also lies in its higher ethical-moral-cultural base. A party may be big. But if it does not reflect any morality or ethics in its conduct, it is like a lifeless body. That is why, based on Comrade Shibdas Ghosh Thought, our Party gives so much importance on culture and ethics-morality.

Thus, Comrade Shibdas Ghosh had spearheaded a correct Marxist revolutionary movement in India. Comrade Mubinu Haider Choudhury carried the banner of this militant left movement in Bangladesh based on Comrade Shibdas Ghosh Thought. It is indeed a different current. To make this crucial aspect clear, I needed so much time to discuss the background in this memorial meeting. A torchbearer of Comrade Shibdas Ghosh Thought, Comrade Haider went to Bangladesh at a transitional phase. Bangladesh had then just gained independence. Many fervent youths had sacrificed their lives to liberate their motherland. These martyrs had dreamt of an exploitation-free society. Though attracted towards socialism, they were not clear about what that is and how would that come by. Comrade Haider roused the youths of Bangladesh by this very different current based on Comrade Shibdas Ghosh Thought.

(To be Continued.)

SUCI(C) to contest 5 seats in Agartala

Holding aloft the banner of Marxism-Leninism and militant leftism, Tripura SUCI(C) has decided to contest in five seats in the ensuing Agartala Municipality Election.

| Ward | Candidate | Ward | Candidate |
|------|-------------------------------------|------|---------------------------------|
| 24 | Comrade Bhabatosh De | 31 | Comrade Mithurani Bhaumik |
| 45 | Comrade Shukla Deb (Chakraborty) | 47 | Comrade Ashish Sarkar |
| | | 48 | Comrade Uma Debnath (Chowdhury) |

Electricity Bill

Resist the fiendish Bill

Contd. from page 5

licensee and Franchisee. The exemption from license of the franchisee will definitely aggravate the safety concern of this risk and make the industry accident prone.

8. There would be Standard Bidding Document (SBD) to accelerate the participation of private owners in power distribution. By this, the total assets of State Owned Distribution Companies will be purchased by the private owners at a value agreed by the State Electricity Regulatory Commission.

9. Land/buildings of distribution companies (DISCOM) will be given to the private owners on rental at nominal charges.

10. All the employees of DISCOM will be transferred to the successor companies which means the government employees will become staff of the private companies.

Over and above, as per the last budget announcement, the existing Meters would be replaced by Prepaid Meters (meaning an advance would be paid for the metre and would have to be recharged once the prepaid amount is exhausted just like prepaid cellphone connections) with which would eat the jobs of lakhs of Meter Readers adversely affecting the consumers as well.

Moreover, at present, average cost of electricity tariff in our country is Rs. 7.5 per unit. The new Bill proposes that regulators will not be allowed to fix the tariff below the cost of electricity. Naturally counting minimum 16% profit (rate of return) of the private operators, it is easy to understand that the cost of tariff of electricity will be pushed beyond the sky making common consumers bleed white.

Close rank to thwart this reckless privatization

So, this privatization spree is to open up newer avenues to the monopoly houses and Multinationals to maximize profit by maximum exploitation of the common consumers with the bourgeois

government as the agent. In this situation to resist the draconian Electricity (Amendment) Bill-2021 and all out attempt of privatization of power sector to build up sustained movement comprising the electricity employees-engineers-common consumers-small businesses and farmers is the need of the hour. Responding to the need, SUCI(C) has already taken initiative to spearhead such a massive movement by organizing people under the banner of a people's committee.

All India Powermen's Federation and AIUTUC have long been struggling to protect the interest of the electricity workers and employees. In West Bengal, All Bengal Electricity Consumers' Association (ABECA), a people's committee, has been struggling from 1992 to prevent fleecing and harassment of common consumers. On a number of occasions, it could realize some of the demands as well. Now, taking a cue from that success, an Electricity Consumers' Association has been formed to develop movement against privatization of power sector throughout the country. The Association has given a call for observing a protest fortnight from 10 to 25 November 2021 and demanded repeal of the Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2021. There is no way to thwart such a fiendish bill other than asserting people's power through united sustained movement.

Joint struggle of Workers and Peasants



National Convention of Workers in New Delhi on 11 November 2021. A delegation of Samyukt Kishan Morcha (SKM) comprising, among others, Comrade Shankar Ghosh, General Secretary, AIKKMS, (4th from right) joined the convention.

How digitized is India in monetary transaction

“Digital India has become a way of life”, exclaimed BJP Prime Minister Modi just a year back. Five years back, when he suddenly announced demonetization of high value notes, he claimed that it would, among others, curb black money and encourage people to go for digital transactions. With the entire amount of demonetized currency notes valued at Rs 15.44 lakh having been deposited in the banks, the very claim of unearthing black money held in clash through invalidating high value currencies proved to be a farce. Now, it is revealed that as on 29 October last, value of currency notes in circulation is Rs 29.17 lakh crores as against Rs 17.74 lakh crores on 4 November 2016, just before demonetization. We do not know how would our hon'ble Prime Minister explain this surge in cash transaction. (Source: Hindustan Times 19-11-20 and ABP 08-11-21)

Voice of Science against autocracy

Twenty-one scientists awarded one of Brazil's highest honours, the National Order of Scientific Merit, rejected their medals on 6 November last after President Jair Bolsonaro withdrew two colleagues whose work apparently discomfited his government from the list of honourees.

The Brazilian President named 25 people to receive the honour in recognition of the most important contributions to science and technology. However, two days later, he withdrew the names of two prominent scientists from the list. One was Dr. Marcus Lacerda, who published one of the first studies finding the drug chloroquine is ineffective against Covid-19 – rebutting Bolsonaro's pet strategy for fighting the pandemic. The other was Dr. Adele Benzaken, who was fired as director of the Brazilian health ministry's HIV/AIDS department when Bolsonaro took office in 2019 after her department published a pamphlet aimed at transgender men.

In protest, all 20 of the other scientists and one of the three 'national personalities' named by Bolsonaro to receive the honour rejected their medals in an open letter. “This is yet another clear demonstration of the persecution of scientists and the latest step in the current government's systematic attack on science and technology,” they said.

Benzaken, the director of leading public health institute Fiocruz in the Amazon region, said she was 'extremely honoured' by her colleagues' decision what she called the government's 'inelegant' treatment of her and Lacerda. “That was the greatest honour of all,” she told AFP, criticizing the Bolsonaro government's attitude toward science.

“There have been heavy cuts to funding for science in Brazil, a total disregard for statements based on scientific evidence, little value attributed to science,” she said. (Hindustan Times- 08-11-21)

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