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MAKE TUITION COMPULSORY

LETTERS TO EDITOR

SIR, — The results of the Madhyamik and Higher Secondary exams has been published by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education and the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education with attendant hype by the press and public about the top students.

No doubt the toppers deserve applause, but is their success due to their own effort or that of their private tutors? In practice, the role of the student has been reduced to reproducing the special notes given by private tutors. Notice that all the toppers had six to seven private tutors on an average, and that most of these teachers belonged to their respective schools. The economically backward students who cannot afford tuitions are thus condemned to remain away from the limelight.

If Karl Marx were alive, he would have sobbed at this brand of education perpetuating a sharp difference between the haves and have-nots in a so called socialist province!

Now the ministers are talking about banning private tuition by government schoolteachers which is practically impossible, because it is the mighty edifice on which our education stands.

I wish the government will make it mandatory for schoolteachers to provide free tuition to poor students once or twice a week in each subject, either through their schools or through voluntary organisations in this field.

I would most humbly suggest the government through your esteemed daily to legislate such a measure for the sake of the millions of students of West Bengal. — Yours, etc., SAIKAT BAKSHI.

Kolkata, 6 July.

POWER TARIFF

Sir, — This has reference to the article "Electric Shock" (24-25 June). The term commercial loss of distribution could well cover a variety of expenses which may not be clearly stated for reasons of discretion. Possibly the powers that be are aware of the true nature of these expenses and therefore would not dig too deeply into these, lest unpalatable truths surface.

Heat rate of power plants are predetermined by the design of the unit and can only deteriorate thereafter. The power plants of CESC, with the exception of Budge Budge are old and therefore are likely to be less efficient than the newer ones. I wonder why a comparison was sought only with Andhra Pradesh and not with, say, Singrauli.

In any case, heat rate must be compared with comparables. You do not compare the heat rate of a 60 MW plant with that of a 250 MW plant. This would be akin to comparing the electricity cost of a 1 ton window air conditioner with that of a 4 ton package unit on a per ton basis.

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As for the comment about the dropping calorific value of coal, every bulk consumer with linkage is required to lift his requirement from a particular zone of the mines, if not a particular pit head. As the seam of coal runs out, usually the calorific value goes down. The buyer has to keep lifting until he can convince the seller, another monopolist in this case, to shift him to another location. This too not always possible since the facility for bulk lifting of coal does not exist at all mine locations.

If indeed CESC is reporting coal purchase at Mulajore on the basis of "eye estimation", it ill-behoves a company of the stature of CESC to do so. However, Mulajore is one of the oldest units of CESC and may very well be due for closure in the near future. Thus the management may very prudently have decided not to make fresh investments there.

I am not trying to make out a case for CESC. I am a concerned consumer and would hate to pay more for the same quantum of electricity consumed. I am merely trying to show that things are not always black and white. There are several shades of grey in between.

If you recall the formula for the fertilizer industry, each unit was guaranteed a 12% return on capital employed. Investment in the power sector enjoys similar guarantees.

In the turbulent world of business, if there be any investment that guarantees a more than fair return, can you blame an industrialist for making maximum effort to ensure that the gravy train continues to deliver juicy gravy? As an ombudsman for the common cause, you of course have to keep on the good work. — Yours etc., PARTHO DATTA, Kolkata, 24 June.

Untold Tales

Sir, — First of all, Tirthankar Mitra, Aditi Roy Ghatak and a few conscientious readers deserve praise for their brave front against the unholy entente between the Goenkas of CESC and the Left Front government, CPI-M in particular. The Statesman too is to be thanked as unlike other dailies, it is not morally mortgaged to the Goenkas. I would like to add some points in the ethical criticism against the CESC-LF Government nexus.

First, Ganashakti, CPI-M's Bengali daily, known for its consistency in never criticising the CESC or the Goenkas, carried the reply of Power minister Mrinal Banerjee who stated that (a) State Electricity Regulatory Commission would increase the power tariff which, according to him, is overdue.

How does he know the SERC would certainly raise the rates? Why is the SERC chairman mum after this statement by the minister? Who is the chairman accountable to — the consumers or the ministers?

Secondly, Banerjee said that CESC had been defaulting occasionally, as if not frequently. Let me quote from a statement circulated by WBSEB chairman, Dr G D Gautama, on 30 June last at a meeting of Joint Management Committee in which unions too had representatives.

"While the energy bills for the consumption months from November 2000 to February 2001 (current bills) have since been paid by the CESC Ltd, an amount of Rs 87.30 lakhs against energy bill for the consumption month of March 2001 (payable by 18.5.2001) is still remaining outstanding. (after considering the payment of Rs 200.00 lakhs on 18.6.2001). Energy bill amounting to Rs 2292.98 lakhs for the consumption month of April 2001 which was supposed to be paid by CESC Ltd by 18.6.2001 still remains unpaid."

Whom should we believe: the minister or WBSEB chief? This statement was issued to the WBSEB Workmen's Union, CITU affiliate, but it was not published in Ganashakti.

Second, there is a legal provision that for shortage in weight and gap in gradation of coals, the power utility can have refund from Coal India Ltd or concerned subsidiaries. In 1996-97, Dr Sankar Sen, former Power minister who had to leave for LF government's bonhomie with the Goenkas, told his friends that in 1996-97, WBSEB got a refund of Rs 42 crores and the benefit was passed on to the consumers. SERC should



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look into the matter, asking both CESC and the CIL, whether CESC got such refund. The consumers, of course, have not received any relief. Third, Urban Development minister Ashok Bhattacharya is no less mendicant to the predatory CESC. Between the TV Centre at Golf Green and Sohini Guest House, there is an area, measuring more than 1.5 acre. Is it a CESC cable godown? In 1993, the DD director wrote to Dr Sen about the matter, reminding him that this was given to CESC for a sub-station, not a cable godown. Dr Sen drew the attention of the Urban Development Department. Nothing has been done. The sub-station was built at Golf Club. The godown is there, obviously at no cost to the Goenkas. Bhattacharya needs guts to ask the Goenkas to vacate. Will he do so?

There are many untold stories about CESC, but dailies — even Bartaman — do not carry those, thanks to the PR calisthenics of the Goenkas. The supremo, RP Goenka, is close to Sonia Gandhi and is a top functionary of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. That was why he became a Rajya Sabha member from Rajasthan.

But, Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot should ask him why he took up the case of colliery lease-out to the CESC as a member of the parliamentary committee on power? Is he an RS member from Rajasthan, but from CESC constituency?. — Yours, etc., SIDDHARTHA GHOSH
DASTIDAR.

Kolkata 6 July.

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