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**Social Activists and Economists Layout Vision for a Post Covid Economy**

New Delhi: “Thinking about a *Ameere Rehka* (wealth line) and not a *Gareebi Rekha* (poverty line) is the need of the hour”, noted social activist Medha Patkar said. She was speaking at the Webinar **Towards A Transformative Political Economy** today. Senior activist of Narmada Bachao Andolan and National Alliance of People’s Movements also said “self-reliant India will remain a mere slogan until and unless we have self-reliant villages”.

The webinar was addressed by former civil servant M.G. Devasahayam, economist Aseem Shrivastava, Ashish Kothari, Vikalp Sangam and Kalpavriksh and was moderated by Shalmali Guttal, Focus on the Global South.

This webinar is a part of a series titled **Re-Imagining The Future: Peoples Agenda For A Post Covid Economy** organised by various people’s movements, trade unions and civil society organisations.

Envisioning a future economy, Medha Patkar said that we need not just decentralisation, we want acentralisation or localisation as well. Taking on the rampant privatisation she asserted that universalisation of basic rights rather than corporatisation should be the focus at this point of time and that one is not against industrialisation but against corporatization, which is making everything a business. Responding to the hurry in which laws are being amended by the Union Government, she demanded that the changes in the labour legislation and environmental laws should be stopped immediately.

Coming down heavily on the current government, M.G. Devasahayam said “the political system and economic system today has deviated from the original conception. The financial package announced by the Finance Minister is predatory and governance has collapsed”. He lamented that liberty and dignity are built into the preamble of the country. But today all fundamental concepts of governance are being ignored. Explaining the deep disparity in the society he said 60% of the population are the wealth creators, while 40% are the wealth enjoyers. The wealth creators constitute of women i.e. care economy, the informal sector, the peasant farmers.

Capturing the current state of affairs in India well Aseem Shrivastava said “there are only two kinds of people in India today- those who are locked down and those who are locked out”. Arguing in favour of a *Prakritik Swaraj* as an alternative future, he said anthropo-responsiveness and not anthropo-centrism should be at the centre of that *Prakritik Swaraj*. “We need to speak of *Pratarik Swaraj*, it’s the only alternative to the globalised autocracy”, he added. Aseem asserted that a fearless political challenge to the current regime is the call of the hour.

Laying down the fundamentals for an alternative future, Ashish Kothari said “we need to resist the current ‘developmental projects’ and bring in alternatives. For a more humane future we need to re-insert ourselves into the nature, and respect not just ourselves, but also everything around us, he said. Looking at the challenges he noted that we shifted from livelihoods to deadlihoods. How do we shift away from deadlihoods to livelihoods again? He emphasised that envisioning an alternative future would entail asking some fundamental questions, like What is economy? Who takes decision about the economy? What is the relation between ecology and economy? Should economy not be within the sphere of ecology? Who owns nature? What is the notion of progress?

**Inaugural session**

The inaugural session on May 15 was attended by Finance Minister of Kerala, TM Thomas Isaac, noted economist Prabhat Patnaik, senior social activist Aruna Roy and prominent environmentalist Vandana Shiva.

Speaking at the inaugural, Thomas Isaac said, “the ideal post pandemic economy in India should be such that it is reshaped to have strong State Governments, strong Local Governance and improved Centre-State fiscal relations”. Sharing lessons from Kerla, he called upon the governments to use the COVID pandemic is an opportunity to improve and enhance the quality of the public health system, and ensure that it is inclusive and easily available to all.

Asserting that reclaiming democracy is an important process in breaking down crude democracies that will protect the farmers, diversity of our communities and the diversity of nature, Vandana Shiva exhorted that “The pandemic is the, moment to defend humanity, freedom, everything good and the best of the world.”

**Background**

The unprecedented health, economic and livelihoods crises resulting from the lockdown imposed to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare structural failures in the nature of governance of India and its economic planning. In particular it has exposed that neo-liberal economic planning that has been practiced for two decades now, aggressively relying on private corporations to deliver public services, and withdrawing public sector role in critical and obligatory State functions such as health, education, rural development, addressing needs of urban poor, environmental conservation, etc., has left India in a dangerous position in dealing with a crisis such as this pandemic poses.

Despite a nation-wide lockdown, now in its 4th round, COVID-19 cases continue to rise exponentially. Millions of migrant workers stranded from the very first day of the lockdown, have suffered immensely and are trying desperately to go home, braving inhumane push backs from State agencies. Tens have perished in this arduous journey and in terrible accidents. Millions of job losses, in the industrial, infrastructure, farming and urban sectors, has resulted in hunger and starvation, and could worsen chronic persistent hunger, malnutrition, and adverse health impacts, especially amongst children, women and elders.

Rather than respond to this compounding crises with measures that reach out to people, the Prime Minister of India and the Finance Minister have issued a slew of financial measures which every pundit or common person realises provides the common person nothing at all. This also when the number claimed to COVID relief ‘package’ is as massive as Rs. 20 lakh crores. Most analysts consider this as re-packaging of earlier commitments, and also returning to the citizenry what anyway is theirs – such as tax returns. Dangerously, the Centre has used the pandemic to de-regulate labour and environmental laws at the behest of corporate India.

This pandemic could just as well be an opportunity to get things right. For there are other imminent challenges to deal with, such as the climate crisis. Because the Centre is in no way interested in responding to peoples’ needs, and is clearly only working to serve the demands of the elite, it has become necessary for people across India to serious engage with economic planning and ensure the government works for the people.

**For more details about future webinars, recordings and registration:** [www.cenfa.org/rtf](http://www.cenfa.org/rtf)

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