

The colour of coal

Dear Friends,
How can a political murder, committed at the spur of the moment during an election campaign push an entire industry to the brink? Apparently unrelated, this is exactly what is happening in West Bengal these days. The sordid saga started with CPM activist Dinu Bauri running over and killing TMC supporter Rabin Kazi following an electoral altercation. Only, Dinu Bauri was also known as the local face of the dreaded Coal Mafia.

The timing was perfect for the police top brass who seizing the political vacuum clamped down, effectively plugging all routes of the illegal coal trade. The commendable fact is that this has continued even after the new government took oath, ostensibly under the direct stricture of the new CM. In the process, making illegally mined coal, which was abundantly available at under Rs 1000 a ton a commodity that is scarce to put things mildly.

The Mamata Banerjee led rally protesting the death of Rabin Kazi was the first of its kind for more reasons than one. While it marked the entry of the opposition in an erstwhile red bastion, it also marked the beginning of opposition to the free run that the coal mafia had, nestled in political patronage spinning their web of deceit.

Naturally, the sponge iron industry which enjoyed the patronage of the same business-political nexus is the hardest hit. While the honest industrialists (no pun intended) struggled with coal purchased from CIL at the official rates, a certain class went about with coal at a tenth of the market price with bonded labour from Bhagalpur and a controlled PCB on whose eyes the Government had put stilts. This is the generation that has transformed from being scrap traders to industrialists over the last three decades thanks to a system that had everyone "covered" with a sizeable amount of the loot going to the political coffers.

Digging deeper we have tried to string together the story of illegal coal trade in its entirety and hope you will partake of this fascinating journey.

We also have for you the story of DVC, how the dream that was to transform the economic horizons of states is gasping for air today in a desperate struggle for survival.

With Best Regards,

Suvabrata Ganguly




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Editor