

After the grand alliance, grand promises from Mamata

Subhamoy Chatterjee
Marotala (Panskura), June 1

RAILWAY MINISTER and Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee descended on Panskura today with a bagful of goodies for the electorate. Her only condition: the voters will have to ensure the victory of her party's candidate, Bikram Sarkar, in the June 5 by-poll.

Launching her party's campaign at this sleepy village in the Debra Assembly segment, Banerjee promised to look after the development of Panskura personally if the people returned Sarkar to the Lok Sabha. She assured voters full protection in exercising their franchise. "I shall be here from today till the election results are out and if the CPI(M) tries to rig the poll, I shall be in the forefront of the resistance," she thundered.

Marotala village, incidentally, is less than 10 kms from the spot where Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, former Prime Minister V P Singh and other Left leaders addressed a rally in support of CPI candidate

Gurudas Dasgupta yesterday. Predictably, Banerjee devoted parts of her speech to the Left Front meeting, for which she alleged, the CPI(M) had brought cadres from outside. "I am holding this meeting with local people and so will be the case with 14 other meetings I intend to address before the election," she said.

Holding out the development carrot, Banerjee said: "I shall per-

Campaign Trail

sonally see to it that each Assembly segment gets what it needs. I urge Jyoti Basu to give me this opportunity. He got 24 years and failed to deliver." She then asked the people if they got medicine from the Debra primary health centre or had good roads. "I will change all these. The Digha-Tamluk railway line was cleared in a year after Nitish Sengupta was elected from Contai."

Banerjee charged that to win the

by-poll, Basu was relying on the police. "Police help is being taken to open CPI(M) offices and close down Trinamool ones. You have to protest and drive the CPI(M) away. It's a people's fight."

She came down heavily on Basu for calling the Trinamool all sorts of names. "The Chief Minister said Trinamool people had no character. It seems only he and his son have spotless character and not our people who are being oppressed and tortured," she said.

She also dismissed the charge that the Trinamool was encouraging communalism. She said people from all caste and creed were in her party and 37 out of 39 Trinamool supporters killed in Keshpur belonged to the minority community.

Reacting to criticism that the Trinamool had fared badly in the municipal polls, Banerjee asserted that a majority of the 18 hung boards would come to her party. "The CPI(M) has been reduced to a minority despite all their tall claims," she added.

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2 JUN 2000

FRIDAY, JUNE 2, 2000

THE CIVIC POLLS IN WEST BENGAL

THE OUTCOME OF the civic polls in West Bengal must have come as a shot in the arm for the ruling Left Front in the State. The elections, taking place as they did hardly nine months before the State Assembly's term gets over in March 2001, had a special significance. The results indicate very clearly that the Left Front's base has not eroded in any big way. That the parties in the combine could manage this after having been in power in the State for so long now is significant; where parties in power are getting thrown out and disillusionment is setting in — the incumbency factor as the leaders call it — the Left Front's performance does reflect a certain entrenchment. Apart from this is the fact that the Left Front could do well this time after having made it known that Mr. Jyoti Basu will not be there to lead the State Government after March 2001. Whether the CPI(M) in particular and the Left parties in general derive their mass support on the basis of Mr. Basu's personality or for their political platform will become clear only in the Assembly elections.

Another significant message that the civic poll results have is that the Congress(I) is still a force to reckon with across the State; the poll results have, indeed, pricked the bubble floated by sections within the Congress(I) and their friends in Ms. Mamata Banerjee's camp to the contrary. That the Congress(I) as a party had managed to stay ahead of the Trinamool Congress-BJP combine in terms of the number of municipalities under its control and has emerged as the runner-up in several places should cheer all those at the helm of the party's State unit — Mr. Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi in particular — who had to move from pillar to post (both in New Delhi and across West Bengal) in the past couple of months to scuttle

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moves to forge a Congress(I)-Trinamool-BJP combination. It may be true that the civic poll results do not reflect the actual strength (or weakness) of the Trinamool Congress; after all Ms. Mamata Banerjee's area of influence was concentrated in and around the metropolis and not so much in the districts. But then, the fact that her party could not supplant the Congress (I) in the districts — something that appeared would take place given the low morale of the Congress(I) organisation after the last general elections — suggests very clearly that the Trinamool Congress has a long way to go.

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The civic poll results have also revealed that the 'mahajot' rhetoric and the sense of desperation displayed by a section in the State Congress(I) unit, making it appear that the Congress(I) will be wiped out of the State's political scene if it did not play second fiddle to the Trinamool-BJP combine, were only a knee-jerk reaction on the part of the rootless leaders in the party. One would expect the Congress(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, to see the opportunist lot in her party for what they are; it is true that the Ghani Khan Choudhury-Somen Mitra brigade might, even now, push their line that only a united opposition to the ruling Left Front — the 'mahajot' project — will help remove the ruling combine in March 2001. But then, the imperative for the Congress(I) is to keep the larger political context — the communal and sectarian challenge — in mind rather than allow its line to be determined by short-term ends involving capturing power in one State. It is time now for the Congress(I) high command to set its face firmly against any compromise with communal forces in any part of the country.

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PANSKURA:

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unhappiness among some Congress workers over Mr Shubhankar Sarkar's nomination as their candidate. This is why the Trinamul candidate has concentrated on the Sabang belt to wean away Congress voters.

Mr Omar Ali, former Left Front minister and sitting CPI-M MLA from Nandanpur, another Assembly segment, said in the eight elections held for the seat, the Left got 58 per cent of the votes on an average, while the anti-Left votes hovered around 42 per cent. In this by-election too, there wouldn't be any reversal of this voting pattern. In fact, Left votes could increase as Mr Dasgupta has been a high-profile and distinguished CPI parliamentarian, he said.

Mr Santosh Rana, the chief election agent of Mr Dasgupta, said the latter was getting wide acceptance among the voters as a host of reputed artistes, singers, poets, writers, film and yatra personalities, sportsmen and intellectuals had appealed to elect him.

But the Red bastion appears to have been considerably eroded, particularly in Kespur, Pingla and parts of Sabang and Daspur Assembly segments which had provided a leading edge to the Left till 1998. This is mainly because of the CPI-M's high-handedness. The lifestyle of district CPI-M bosses and their arrogance have also made Mr Dasgupta's task difficult.

But the CPI-M is not willing to give up without a fight. Mr Biman Bose is camping in the area as chief election manager, while Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya and Mr Anil Biswas have made hectic campaign tours.

More than just a by-election

ALL EYES ON PANSKURA

SHYAM SUNDAR ROY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PANSKURA, June 2. — Never before has a by-election to a Lok Sabha seat attracted spotlight the way this constituency has done this time.

All eyes are on this by-poll not simply because of the stature of the key contestants — Mr Gurudas Dasgupta (Left Front), the intrepid crusader and former Rajya Sabha MP, and Mr Bikram Sarkar, a seasoned bureaucrat and former MP (Trinamul Congress) — but also for the political implication of its outcome.

The run-up to the poll has not only generated the usual heat and dust, but spilled blood on an unprecedented scale. The stakes are too high and polling is being held in the backdrop of political murders, arson and looting in the Kespur-Pingla-

despite being one of the most high-profile woman MPs in the country. On the other hand, the Congress got about 59,000 votes. If the Trinamul can swing the Congress votes, its candidate could pull off a victory, calculated Miss Banerjee and the mahajot proponents in the state Congress.

The PCC faction supporting the mahajot plan even urged the high command not to field a candidate for the seat. But this suggestion was shot down and an insignificant candidate put up. But Miss Banerjee hasn't given up and has been trying to capitalise on the unhappiness among a section of Congress workers over Mr Shubhankar Sarkar's nomination as their candidate. This is why the Trinamul candidate has concentrated on the

■ See PANSKURA: page 3

passed away in February, which necessitated the by-election.

In 1977, Miss Abha Maity won the seat as a Bharatiya Lok Dal candidate supported by the Left.

This time, campaigning in the area has picked up after a pause in the bloodbath in Kespur — an Assembly segment under the constituency. Police and paramilitary forces have been deployed in large numbers.

Keen to wrest the seat from the Left, the Trinamul chief mooted the mahajot plan to prevent a split in anti-Left votes. She was working on a simple arithmetic. Last time, Gita Mukherjee had won the seat by a heavily slashed margin of about 46,000 votes,

Debra belt in this constituency. It's a virtual do-or-die for both sides as the verdict will go a long way in determining how the state's political contours are redrawn in the Assembly elections next year.

No wonder then that both the Left and the Trinamul are deploying all their resources to win the seat. If star campaigners like Mr Jyoti Basu and Mr VP Singh have rallied behind Mr Dasgupta, Miss Mamata Banerjee has mobilised all party MPs and MLAs for her candidate and has herself camped in the area.

Traditionally, Panskura has returned anti-Congress candidates since the seat's creation through delimitation in 1977. Since 1980, Gita Mukherjee had retained the seat till she

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all campaign to target Mamata

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Front's CMC po

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

ing of ponds within the CMC areas.

The LF will also tell the voters about its plans to set up citizens' committees in every ward to enable the councillors to take their suggestions for improving the civic amenities. The members of these committees will also suggest measures on how to check corruption within the CMC.

The party will highlight its plans for planting trees from Esplanade to Victoria Memorial in an attempt to beautify the city. It will also apprise the voters of its plans to use modern technology for better maintenance of the city roads and ensure faster movements of vehicles.

Significantly, the LF will

dodge the controversial issue of hawkers' eviction during its campaign.

Though some CPI leaders reportedly argued in favour of spelling out measures for hawkers' eviction, both the CPI-M and the Forward Bloc leaders of the Calcutta district committee of the LF did not want to make it an election plank, fearing adverse reaction from a section of the voters, insiders say.

The hue and cry over "Operation Sunshine", the hawker eviction drive initiated a few years back is still fresh in their memory.

Even a section of the CPI-M (Calcutta district members criticised the move at that point of time.

CALCUTTA, June 2. — The Left Front will highlight its plans for better civic facilities and expose Miss Mamata Banerjee and her party in its campaign for the CMC polls.

The LF's Calcutta district committee leaders said the campaign literature will mention the plan to restructure the CMC tax format without any additional burden on the poor and the middle-class.

In its campaign the LF will speak at length on the plans for improving the living conditions of the slum dwellers to win them over. It will also promise to initiate firm measures to stop the construction of illegal buildings and also fill-

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India ready to aid Lanka

EXTERNAL affairs minister Jaswant Singh said India was prepared to evacuate embattled Sri Lankan troops pinned down in the northern Jaffna peninsula but only at Colombo's request. "We cannot independently assume the role in Sri Lanka," he said after talk on security issues in Asia organised by the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies here.

Fiji army seizes power

FIJI'S army seized power and declared martial law ten days after gunmen first stormed parliament and overthrew the country's elected government of ethnic Indian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry in the name of indigenous Fijians. The move came just hours after the army took control of Suva and announced that troops had been given shoot to kill orders to enforce curfew across the capital.

Japan house dissolved

JAPANESE Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori declared the lower house of parliament be dissolved, paving the way for national elections later this month. Support for Mori has plummeted since his remark last month that Japan is a "divine nation" centered on the emperor - suggesting to many the kind of nationalistic rhetoric used by politicians before World War II.

Albright to visit W. Asia

US Secretary of state Madeleine Albright will visit the Middle East next week to measure progress in Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty talks and help President Bill Clinton decide whether he should get involved as a mediator. Albright's trip was announced by Clinton despite growing Israeli-Palestinian tensions and uncertainty over the resumption of the negotiations that were interrupted two weeks ago.

Award for Clinton

US President Bill Clinton received the Charlemagne prize for his commitment to a united Europe at a function in Germany's so-called "emperor city" of Aachen, about 500 kms south-west of Berlin. Clinton is the third American leader to be given this honour after George Marshall in 1959 and Henry Kissinger in 1987.

30 killed in Philippines

MORE than 30 Muslim rebels were killed in fierce clashes with Philippine troops Friday, a day after the conclusion of three days of peace talks, military officials said. One government soldier was also killed and five others wounded.

Cong does well in WB

THE good performance of the Congress in the West Bengal civic polls has given party president Sonia Gandhi some strength and has denied her detractors another handle to criticise her leadership. The results have also placed Congress on a higher bargaining ground vis-avis the Trinamool Congress if an alliance materialises for the Assembly elections next year.

Cong not to review reforms

THE Congress wound up all plans to set up a high-powered committee to review its stand on economic policies, a demand voiced by several leaders in the party, following senior leader Manmohan Singh's firm refusal to participate in it. Party president Ms Sonia Gandhi was unable to find an appropriate replacement for Dr Singh.

IMF raps India

INTERNATIONAL Monetary Fund (IMF) has criticised India for not adopting a "clearly defined" agenda for economic reforms, setting a modest target in reducing fiscal deficit and slow down of per capita growth.

SSI policy soon

THE Centre will announce a new policy in about three months to bring SSIs under a single comprehensive law and to give thrust to its growth, Union minister of state for small scale industries and agro rural industries

Fear leads in Panskura

SHYAM SUNDAR ROY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PANSKURA, June 4. — Leaders of contesting parties fear violence during polling for Panskura by-poll tomorrow despite the district authorities making elaborate security arrangements.

"Money, muscle and administrative powers are at work to make the by-election a farce," Miss Mamata Banerjee has said. The Trinamul chief claimed to have got a message from a partyman that thousands of armed CPI-M activists were moving towards Kespur via Garbeta.

She said: "I have fears about fair conduct of the poll but people shouldn't be afraid to exercise their franchise peacefully. The election machinery should act impartially and allow everybody to exercise their franchise in a free and fair

manner for restoration of democracy."

"We'll fight it out, come what may, and emerge victorious," she said.

Mr Mukul Ray, Trinamul general secretary, said he had submitted a list of trouble-prone areas in Chandrakona town, Chandrakona Road, Godapiasal, Salboni and Narayangarh to election officials. A copy of the list has been faxed to the chief election commissioner, Mr MS Gill.

Mr Pradyut Guha, Congress spokesman, said the district administration had collapsed. The deployment of about 8,000 securitymen is unlikely to ensure fair polling, for the Midnapore SP has been helping the CPI-M, he alleged.

In his opinion, the election will be a farce unless about 150 criminals, engaged by both the CPI-M and Trinamul to terrorise the voters during the

poll, are arrested tonight.

Mr Guha said Miss Banerjee had gone mad. She's leading a gang of hooligans who had already captured 86 of the 199 booths in Kespur. The CPI-M too has control over 67 booths there.

Trinamul hoodlums will terrorise voters and rig votes in Kespur, Pingla and Sabong, Mr Dipak Sarkar, CPI-M district secretary, alleged. Trinamul men have threatened to chop the hands of those who vote for Mr Gurudas Dasgupta in five booths in Anchal 8 of Pingla.

About 20 men on two-wheelers had threatened voters in Anchal 2, Mr Sarkar alleged. At Neradeul, Kespur, criminals were terrorising voters in gram panchayats 1 and 2. The situation was the same in Daspur Assembly segment, where hoodlums from Mechogram, Panskura, had terrorised vot-

ers.

Trinamul supporters had driven away CPI-M activists from Balpai and Bhemua in Sabong, Mr Prabod Panda of the CPI-M alleged. In Balpai, 300 people, "victims of Trinamul's loot and arson", living in a makeshift camp in the area, were threatened with dire consequences if they returned to cast their votes.

Besides, the CPI's polling agent in Anchal 9 and 10 of Sabong and Anchal 5, 9 and 10 of Pingla too had been warned against casting their votes, Mr Panda said.

Trinamul workers alleged that about 100 outsiders were camping in the CPI-M office in Pingla, and might create trouble tomorrow. The ADM and returning officer, Panskura, said two observers and the executive magistrate had visited Garbeta and Pingla to look into the allegations.

THE STATESMAN

- 5 JUN 2000

Mamata happy; Gurudas alleges rigging

SHYAM SUNDAR ROY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PANSKURA, June 5. — Briefing reporters after the election, Miss Mamata Banerjee said she was satisfied with how the polling was conducted.

However, she was critical of the police for allowing a large number of CPI-M cadres to sneak into Kespur through Bankura and Hooghly borders.

In some cases, the police also escorted about 2,500 CPI-M voters to cast their votes in different booths of the Kespur Assembly segment, while depriving the Trinamul supporters who were held up in some places, she alleged.

Police allowed a group of CPI-M cadres to get into Kespur through Khirpai. However, they were stalled by her party activists. Many Trinamul polling agents were prevented from entering their booths in the area, she alleged.

Moreover, the CPI candidate got an edge as some presiding officers kept the electronic voting machines upside down, while in other places her party symbol was made invisible to the voters by placing papers on it. Even then, the Trinamul chief said she would not demand repoll in those booths where polling was rigged, because "repoll means further bloodshed". Besides, that would give an opportunity to rig the poll again with the help of state police, the Trinamul chief said.

On the other hand, Mr Gurudas Dasgupta, the CPI candidate, alleged that polling was not free and fair in many places. Polls were rigged by musclepower "in collusion with a section of police". He said Trinamul hoodlums had rigged the polls in 65 booths. Repolling has been demanded in 30 booths as no polling agents were allowed to get in, nor were voters allowed to enter.

Mr Dasgupta, in a faxed message to the Chief Election Commissioner, stated that there was "large-scale intimidation, coercion, and violence".

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(Continued from page 1)

Presiding officers in booth number 162, at Brahmanchak in Kespur, allowed voters without EC identity cards to cast votes, despite Mr Dasgupta himself challenged them.

All this was masterminded by Miss Banerjee, who has been camping in Midnapore town for the past few days, he said.

"The blueprint was designed by the central minister. This is an ominous sign for Indian democracy", the CPI leader said.

The Trinamul chief reacted by saying that Mr Dasgupta, being the candidate, escorted "a gang of criminals to rig the poll at Soroi booth".

Mr Dasgupta said: "Thanks to Mamata for not alleging that I captured the booth".

Mr Deepak Sarkar, district CPI-M secretary, alleged that the polls were rigged in about 100 booths. He too demanded repoll in 30 booths.

Mr Subhankar Sarkar, Congress candidate, said the election was a "farce" as both the CPI-M and Trinamul musclemen rigged the polls in their respective strongholds, in connivance with the police.

Mr Dasgupta, however, said he had no complaints regarding the polling at Panskura West, Nandanpur, Daspur, and Debra Assembly segments.

THE STATESMAN

JUN 2 1980

85% turnout in Panskura by-poll

Gurudas for repoll in 30 booths, Mamata relaxed

Arindam Sarkar
Panskura, June 5

Belying fears of a bloodbath, polling in Panskura remained by and large incident-free today. But complaints of rigging came in from many parts.

The district administration said there was 85 per cent polling in the seven Assembly segments of Panskura — Keshpur, Debra, Pingla, Sabong, Panskura West, Daspur and Nardapur.

Barring a few stray incidents at Keshpur and Pingla, the election went off smoothly. Nobody was arrested for creating trouble. Though, for the first time, electronic voting machines were used in the State's rural areas, the voters had no problems using them. Around 75 per cent of the voters came with their photo ID cards," Midnapore district magistrate M V Rao said. "The security forces will remain here for a few days more to handle difficult situations."

Returning officer and additional district magistrate, Midnapore, A Subbiah, however, said both

the Trinamool Congress and the CPI had registered complaints of booth jamming and intimidation of voters. CPI candidate Gurudas Dasgupta has demanded repolling in 30 Keshpur booths and the Trinamool has claimed that voters were harassed and scared away from a number of polling stations.

After polling ended, an upset Dasgupta said: "Trinamool workers virtually took over the booths in Keshpur, Pingla and Sabong. There was large-scale intimidation and coercion of voters in these areas. Many booths were jammed, ballot papers stamped and our polling agents thrown out. I am sorry to say the administration failed to come up to the mark. I will take up the matter with the Election Commission. With illegal arms in their hands, the Trinamool men played havoc. That did the damage. We have demanded repolling in many booths." The CPI leader was reportedly roughed up by Trinamool supporters at Saroi in Keshpur. In Calcutta, Chief Electoral Officer Sabyasachi

Sen said he was yet to receive any complaint from Dasgupta. "But our reports say that he was heckled and pushed around by some Trinamool men."

Unlike Dasgupta, Mamata Banerjee was relaxed. Her party was not interested in a repoll, she said. "This election has cost us so many lives. We are just not interested in a repeat. I don't believe in repolls. They will only lead to more bloodshed. We want peace to return. Today, we gave the CPI(M) a run for their money. We are not scared of the results, but they are. The Left will remember this battle. We believe the CPI(M) will try to create trouble here in the next few days. The administration should now ensure that the voting machines are kept in safe custody and not tampered with."

She alleged that many of her polling agents had been beaten up and in some places presiding officers had helped the CPI candidate. "In spite of all this, I congratulate the Election Commission for holding the polls peacefully."

Related report, photos on Page 5

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 JUN 2000

Red fort breached

LF loses Panskura after 20 yrs, Trinamool triumphs

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 8

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IT WAS a day of celebration for the Trinamool Congress today. Party chief and Union Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee's nominee, Bikram Sarkar, defeated the CPI's Gurudas Dasgupta in the crucial Panskura parliamentary by-election by a margin of 41,415 votes.

This is for the first time that the Left Front suffered a defeat in any Lok Sabha by-election in its 23-year-long tenure.

The Trinamool candidate polled 4,26,711 votes against 3,85,301 votes polled by Dasgupta. The Congress candidate secured only 20,495 votes and lost his deposit.

Congress chief whip Abdul Mannan demanded immediate punishment of those who forced the AICC to put up a candidate in Panskura. "The results prove that the Congress has been made a laughing stock and those responsible for that must answer".

The Panskura seat fell vacant after the death of Geeta Mukherjee who had won this seat seven times in a row since 1980.

In 1977, Abha Maity had won the seat as a Left-backed Janata candidate. "I owe this victory to Mamata Banerjee", said an overwhelmed Sarkar.

The atmosphere in the CPI office at Midnapore was gloomy. Gurudas Dasgupta and CPI state secretary Manju Kumar Majumdar sat silently inside the party office. "This is the most unfair election held in recent times," Gurudas Dasgupta told *The Hindustan Times* over the telephone from Midnapore.

Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee was unwilling to buy this. "Had the CPI won the polls, everything would have been fair. No point crying about it now. We have given a fitting reply to the Left Front", Mamata Banerjee said.

Gurudas Dasgupta, however, claimed, "The election has been rigged. The administration completely failed to conduct the polls as per Election Commission norms. The peace that prevailed here on the day of the poll was that of connivance between the Trinamool hooligans and the administration. No wonder, there are a large number of booths where I got less than 10 votes. And most importantly, the defeat proves that the Left

Front organisation failed completely".

From the poll statistics, it is clear that the LF vote-bank is eroding in the Panskura constituency. In the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, CPI's Geeta Mukherjee got 54.82 per cent votes, in 1998 the figure stood at 54.81 per cent. And in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the Trinamool and the BJP gave Gita Mukherjee a stiff fight and she barely scraped through by 46,000 votes and her vote percentage fell to 49.19 per cent. In the last two general elections, the Left Front's performance in the seven Assembly segments of the Panskura constituency has been far from impressive.

As for the five other segments, in 1998 the Left Front candidate got 56.5 per cent in Pingla, 54 per cent in Daspur, 51.9 per cent in Nandanpur and 50 per cent in Panskura West. But in 1999, these figures came down to 51.6, 47.3, 48.4 per cent and 47.1 per cent respectively.

Violence erupts: Fifteen people were injured in clashes between Trinamool and CPI (M) supporters as tension prevailed in the district after the by-poll result, a PTI report from Midnapore said.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 JUN 2000

Mamata admits *mahajot* is over for now

Arindam Sarkar
Calcutta June 9

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THE STUNNING Trinamool victory in the Panskura by-election may have restored the party's confidence but Mamata Banerjee is still characteristically matter-of-fact. Sitting in her crowded party office, Ms Banerjee acknowledged the cheers of her supporters. But, she also acknowledged that the *mahajot* was dead in the water.

"In the present circumstances, it is over. It cannot happen," she said. "The Congress has said that it will have nothing to do with the BJP. But we will not leave the BJP for the Congress."

Nevertheless, Ms Banerjee has still not abandoned her dream of leading all non-Left forces in Bengal to fight the CPM. Her solution is simple: "People need not join the Trinamool. Those in the Congress who want the *mahajot*

can leave the Congress and float a new outfit. Then we can form an alliance with them."

The tough talk reflects the changing fortunes of the Trinamool. When the party fared poorly in the recently-concluded municipal elections in the State, many people were convinced that the Mamata wave was beginning to ebb. A defeat in Panskura would have confirmed that assessment.

Ms Banerjee is defensive about the municipal defeat. She offers many reasons. Her party leaders were busy with the *mahajot* proposal. They chose the wrong candidates. And inevitably, the State administration is accused of rigging the polls.

"Assembly and parliamentary elections are conducted by the Central Election Commission," she explains. "But civic elections are

conducted by the State Election Commission. So, the CPM can have its way in civic elections but not in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections."

This may seem like making excuses after the event but Ms Banerjee does appear to genuinely believe that her party stands a chance of defeating the Left Front in the next Assembly election.

Her argument is that the CPM's base depends on rural Bengal. Panskura, a predominantly rural constituency represented a test case. If the Trinamool could wrest it from the Left then it demolishes the dismissive claim that Trinamool was a purely urban party.

According to Ms Banerjee, vicious infighting within the Left has caused many cadres and middle-level leaders to desert the

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CPM for the Trinamool. This helped ensure Bikram Sarkar's victory in Panskura and will pay-off in the Assembly elections.

"Many have joined us," she says. "I am not going to reveal which are the districts where we have won over the leaders but I can say that out of 17 districts in Bengal, we have already captured 15."

That claim sounds like wishful thinking. But Ms Banerjee's confidence is matched only by her bluster. Besides, she has a new challenge coming up. Sitting in her office, she is busy selecting posters for the Calcutta Municipal elections due on June 25.

Given the Trinamool's recent surge, it is possible that it will capture the Calcutta Municipal Corporation later this month. But Ms Banerjee goes even further: "We are going to drive Jyoti Basu out of Writer's Building," she says gleefully.

Encounter

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 JUN 2000

Left Far Behind

Bengal's Midnapore district is back in history-making mode — this time for allowing a Trinamul Congress candidate to capture the vital Panskura Lok Sabha seat. However, Midnapore's chief claim to fame lies in the spirited fight it put up in 1942, five years before independence. For many months at that time the British Raj stood banished, and the people had ruled through a virtual parallel government. Leading this island of sovereignty were the Congressmen of the local Mukherjee family: One of them, Ajoy Mukherjee, was later to form the Bangla Congress, and in fact, became the first non-Congress chief minister of West Bengal. Not surprisingly, Panskura remained a pocket-borough of the Mukherjee *poribar*; its most loved didi, Geeta Mukherjee won the seat seven times in a row for the Left Front. But even her charisma had started to fade, and in the 1999 Lok Sabha polls she won by less than 50,000 votes. To most observers that was an indication that the Left was on its way out of Panskura. Geeta Mukherjee's death brought on the end sooner than the comrades would have expected. Not a single ploy worked. A whole array of the biggies of the Left and not-so-Left world were paraded before the electorate. But it was Mamata Banerjee all the way: Her candidate breached the Left bastion by a creditable margin of over 40,000 votes. This is a red-face that will not make the Left Front too happy. An embarrassed CPI has claimed that the elections have been rigged, that some booths have registered an impossible hundred per cent turnout, and in others, their party has got a ridiculously low number of votes.

But that speaks more about the Left Front than anything else. Given the Left's stranglehold on Bengal, it stretches credibility that the local administration could be taken over by the Trinamul-BJP combine. And if polling officers have really turned a blind eye to rigging by Trinamul activists — as Gurudas Dasgupta has alleged — then it augurs ill for the Red brigade. For it means that, in the popular perception, Mamata Banerjee is already CM-in-waiting. It is only when there is a genuine groundswell against the ruling party that the opposition can rig elections or even intimidate voters. That, however, might be an over-reading, especially considering the Trinamul-BJP's rout in the recent civic polls. Panskura is more likely a symptom of the breakdown of the Left's cohesion, and the increasing tendency of the CPI(M) to play big brother. The Left Front in West Bengal has been a model for coalition politics, for it showed how a big partner could keep its allies together. Today, the CPI could legitimately claim that Panskura has been lost because the CPI(M) organisation failed to motivate its supporters. Over the past month, Panskura has witnessed some of the most bloody pre-poll violence in West Bengal and in such a situation the polarisation has become sharper. That has cost the Congress heavily, but it has also helped consolidate the anti-Left vote in favour of Trinamul. Perhaps, the challengers have been aided by some fake votes. But the Left should be happy for that: After all, aren't they the ones to have transformed the art of rigging into a 'science'?

THE TIMES OF INDIA

10 JUN 2000

Left leaders speak in different voices

Saroj Nagi
New Delhi, June 12

HR-9
12/6

THERE IS a clear dichotomy evidence in the assessments made of the Panskura defeat by CPI-M general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet and his CPI counterpart A B Bardhan on the one hand and West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu on the other.

While Mr Basu maintained that the people had made "a mistake by defeating" the Left Front candidate Gurudas Dasgupta and voting for those who are "anti-people", Mr Surjeet claimed the electoral outcome did not reflect the popular mood of the people.

Both Mr Surjeet and Mr Bardhan have identified large-scale rigging and the Trinamool Cong's alleged terror-tactics as the prime reasons that led to a "manipulated" electoral outcome and their candidate's defeat. Both doled out figures to substantiate their charge, saying that in several booths, the LF polled an "unbelievable" and "ridiculous" three or four votes while the Trinamool recorded nearly cent per cent. "Is such a thing possible without rigging?" they queried.

Mr Basu, on his part, steered clear of making such allegations. Asked about the charges of mas-

sive rigging and police non-cooperation, he was quoted as saying, "I have no such information."

Instead, he chose to reiterate his earlier comment that the people of Panskura had made a mistake by defeating the LF. Although Mr Basu's remarks could be interpreted as a tacit admission of a ground-level shift from the LF to the Trinamool, in stating what he did, Mr Basu was perhaps guided by the fact that he was the CM.

For a Chief Minister to admit of any manipulation of votes and administrative and police non-cooperation would amount to an

Panskura post-mortem

admission of the government's slipping grip. More so, the Election Commission had pulled up the State Govt over the recurring clashes between the CPI-M and the Trinamool cadres in the area. Besides, there was no official complaint of rigging and the chief electoral officer had commended the "peaceful election".

Although there is no such restraint on a party organisation from alleging rigging, both the CPI and the CPI-M were hard-pressed to explain how a ruling party — which has often been accused of scientific rigging and jamming booths — can level such an allegation unless the popular mood itself has shifted against it.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 JUN 2000

In a quandary in UP

THE BJP is doing neither itself nor its Chief Minister in Uttar Pradesh any good by failing to take any decision on Ram Prakash Gupta's future. At the same time, it is unable to prevent any speculation, even if it is motivated, that a change is in the offing. The latest in this respect is that Mr Gupta will stay on till the end of the party's organisational polls and of the panchayat elections in the state. But by imposing a time limit thereby, all that the BJP has done is to confirm that the Chief Minister is on a short leash. Evidently, such an approach is not tailored either to ensure administrative stability or to bolster the Chief Minister's position.

This problem, of course, has plagued the BJP right from the start of Mr Gupta's tenure. Even when Kalyan Singh's sudden revolt compelled the party to choose the virtually unknown Mr Gupta, it was regarded as some kind of a stop-gap arrangement intended to tide over an immediate crisis. Moreover, if Mr Gupta was selected, it was because the party shied away from choosing any of the Uttar Pradesh heavyweights — Kalraj Mishra, Rajnath Singh or Lalji Tandon — because of the ego hassles. The same constraint is still preventing any unanimity about Mr Gupta's successor although it is becoming clearer by the day that as long as the present Chief Minister remains in office, the party's fortunes will continue to decline. The fall in its popularity, which was revealed by the drop in its voting percentage from 36.5 in 1998 to 27.6 in 1999, has since been substantiated by the surprising victory of Kalyan Singh's party in a recent by-election.

It was really the shock of that defeat which seems to have persuaded the BJP to reconsider Mr Gupta's future. There was apparently even a suggestion to replace him with Rajnath Singh. But opposition from Kalraj Mishra and others seems to have stalled that move. The BJP, therefore, is in a quandary. It can neither move forward nor backward. Yet, UP is a state which has traditionally reflected the fortunes of parties with all-India pretensions. A setback there can have repercussions which are much wider than what are normally warranted by a party's performance in a single state. If the BJP's problems continue, it will not only make the party's current allies — the breakaway groups from the Congress and the BSP — more assertive, it will also be a signal to both friends and foes that the party's overall prospects are not all that bright.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 JUN 2000

Surprising result

POLITICS IS a mystery which even politicians apparently cannot fathom. For more than a month, West Bengal Congressmen have seemingly been keen on closing shop and either move en masse to the Trinamool Congress or at least become its junior partner along with the BJP in a grandiose anti-Left Front *mahajot* or grand alliance. To attain their objective, the present PCC chief, Barkat Ghani Khan Chaudhury, and his predecessor, Somen Mitra, had not been hesitant to defy the party high command, sometimes even threatening to resign if it asked the West Bengal PCC to shun any contact with the BJP via the Trinamool.

Yet, unknown to them or the high command, during the time the PCC was readying itself to play second fiddle to Ms Mamata Banerjee, the political tide was turning in its favour. Had the municipal polls not been held, it is possible that the State Congress or large sections of it would have joined the Trinamool. But now the election results have underlined a remarkable recovery by the Congress. While the Left Front, predictably, has been successful in winning a far larger number of municipalities, the Congress has come second quite easily, leaving Trinamool lagging quite some distance behind.

The immediate fallout of this extraordinary performance by a party which even its senior office-bearers in the State had thought was without a future is the burial of the *mahajot* concept. It was floated by Ms Banerjee because she thought she was leading a final assault on the Left Front. Now her capability to lead, let alone topple the Left Front, is under a cloud. Not only will the Congressmen have second thoughts about Trinamool's future, the latter's setback may encourage Ms Banerjee's detractors in the BJP, like Tapan Sikdar, to get their own back, especially in retaliation for the manner in which she compelled the BJP to reduce its claims for seats in the forthcoming Calcutta Corporation election. In politics, nothing succeeds like success. Ms Banerjee had been riding high because of the strong challenge she was posing to the Left Front for the first time in many years in West Bengal. Even the CPI(M) was showing signs of nervousness, not least because some of the Marxist dissidents were moving close to her. But her latest reverses are bound to lead to a reassessment of her political clout by both her friends and foes, not only in the State but also at the Centre.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

31 JUN 2000

Dissent over Lanka issue

THE Centre's position on the continuing ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka once again triggered off dissent within the ruling NDA, with Pattali Makkal Katchi chief S. Ramdoss taking a strident stand against the Vajpayee regime's decision to extend a credit of \$100 million to the Chandrika Kumaratunga government in Colombo. The PMK chief urged the government to reconsider its offer for humanitarian aid and instead mount intense pressure on Colombo to arrive at a permanent political settlement to honour the sentiments of Tamil minorities.

US favours India

THE United States favoured the Indian government's stance on the ethnic strife in Sri Lanka. Addressing mediapersons here, US ambassador to India Richard Celeste said any solution to the problem in Sri Lanka should be within the framework of the constitution of that country. The US ambassador said there was a possibility that Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee would visit the US in September this year although no firm dates have been fixed as yet.

WORLD

Leaders pay respect to Assad

FOREIGN leaders, including heads of state from the Middle East nations, paid last respects to Syrian leader Hafez al-Assad who was buried in Damascus. Except for France's Jacques Chirac, heads of states from western countries were absent at the funeral and were represented by ministers or officials. Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, Iran's Mohammad Khatami, Lebanon's Emile Lahous, Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh and Sudan's Omar Hassan al-Bashir were among the presidents who flew to Damascus to pay respects before Assad's flagwrapped coffin.

Putin welcomed in Germany

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin met German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder for a summit aimed at reviving a relationship vital to both sides that has lost its spark in the last 18 months. Putin, who arrived from Spain on Wednesday evening, was welcomed by Schroeder on a wet Berlin morning at his office, which formerly housed the Communist leadership of East Germany.

Kim back in Seoul

SOUTH Korean President Kim Dae-jung returned home in triumph after a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang that could mark a historic turning point between the two old Cold War adversaries. The two Korean leaders reached an ambitious agreement, that could set the stage for the Stalinist North to emerge from its self-imposed isolation and rebuild its stunted economy. The accord was welcomed around the world.

1876 NATION B.S. 9

Pilot dies in accident

FORMER Union minister and front rank Congressman Rajesh Pilot was killed in a road accident in his Lok Sabha constituency Dausa, cutting short a highly successful

The Economic Times
INDIA EXPRESS Times

18 JUN 2000

Houseowners want a say in civic affairs

Sailen Sii
Calcutta, June 19

HOUSEOWNERS OF the city want a representative in the civic body to safeguard their interests.

The Calcutta House Owners' Association has fielded candidates in three wards—Ward 7 at Bagbazar and Wards 82 and 84 near Kalighat—their symbol being the rising sun. The candidates are Sanat Neogy (Ward 7), *Nimai Mondal* (Ward 82) and Arati Roy (Ward 84).

"We contribute 79 per cent of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation's annual revenue. We are taxed for everything from street lighting to beautification, water supply and sewerage system. Why shouldn't we participate in the corporation?" asked the association convener, Sukumar Rakshit.

A lanky man in his early thirties, Rakshit complained that houseowners in the city have been victimised by the civic administration for decades. For instance, houseowners alone are made to pay 0.5 per cent tax for Howrah Bridge when tens of thousands of commuters and vehicles passing the bridge daily are not taxed. He points out that a CMDA report of 1996-97 says that the houseowners of the city consist just 21 per cent of its over ten million population

and they are the only ones who pay civic taxes while a vast majority remain outside the tax net.

He complains that houseowners are fleeced by some CMC employees. Files do not move from a table unless superintending officials are bribed. "Assessment and Building departments top the list in taking bribes," he said.

The West Bengal Premises Tenancy Act, 1998, must be implemented immediately. The President signed the Bill on December 12, 1998, and the State Government notified the Bill in Calcutta Gazette on December 28, 1998. "Yet, The West Bengal Premises Tenancy Act, 1956 remains in force. What holds back the State Government from enforcing the Act," he wondered.

Rakshit says the Rent Control department has proved to be a thorn in the flesh. Whenever a tenant has a dispute with his houseowner, he deposits the rent with the department. Till today about Rs 60 crore is lying with the department. Houseowners will have to spend around Rs 90 crore to realise their dues. "What is the use of such a system?" he asked.

"We know that our candidates have little chances of making it to the CMC this time. But, creating awareness about our problems will be rewarding to us," he said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

20 JUN 1998

Poll managers give Trinamul-BJP clear lead, Marxists fret over Ghani snub

Cong CPM's last hope

BY TAMAL SENGUPTA

CPM hopes rest on the Congress in the battle for Calcutta. An internal assessment by the Marxists just three days short of the civic poll indicates that the party can hope to form the next board in the Calcutta Municipal Corporation only with the support of the Congress.

At the moment, this is also the best possible scenario drawn up by the party's poll managers. They fear that a more realistic scenario gives the Trinamul Congress a clear lead.

The CPM leadership on Tuesday was worried by the statement of state Congress president ABA Ghani Khan Choudhury, who said the party will maintain "equidistance" from both the Trinamul and the Left, in the event of a hung verdict to the 141-seat corporation. Choudhury's policy of equidistance was scant consolation for the CPM. Party state secretary Anil Biswas said if the Congress sticks to such a policy, it can hope to improve its poll prospects.

What Biswas and his comrades dread most is the Congress aligning with the Trinamul and the BJP to keep the Left out of power if the verdict is hung.

Ghani Khan Choudhury was enigmatic when asked of such a possibility. Rank outsiders in the race for the Corporation, the Congress leadership is all but convinced that it will have to piggy-back on a larger partner if it has to justify its political existence in Calcutta. Choudhury ruled out the possibility of aligning with the Left, but was not as categorical when asked if he will keep the Trinamul-BJP too at arm's length.

Even if it signifies a massive erosion in the Left's support base, the possibility of a hung verdict is keeping the party cadre going.

They are banking on the party's ability to turn a lost situation into a fighting chance. News

THREE PARTIES, 141 WARDS AND PROMISES TO KEEP



- Special emphasis on development in slums to improve quality of life

- Metropolitan committee to monitor development in Greater Calcutta
- No deals with contractors on development schemes
- Water bodies will not be filled up
- Ward committees to be set up for transparent administration
- Realisation of civic taxes to collect more revenues to fund development schemes
- Employees to be trained to make the administration more responsive
- More children's parks and amusement centres
- Steps to be taken for land-use mapping
- More jobs to be generated through self-employment schemes



- New water supply projects for Calcutta. Renovation of ponds, lakes and creation of more waterbodies

- Renovation of Adi Ganga by using funds from the Ganga Action Plan (GAP)
- Open drains to be made underground in five years
- Door-to-door garbage collection in all 141 CMC wards
- Setting up of malaria detection camps in every ward within the next five years
- All major roads to be widened and laid with concrete
- Rehabilitation scheme for hawkers evicted during 'Operation Sunshine'
- One-window system for Corporation taxes
- Stricter building rules for construction of highrises
- Drive against corruption in civic administration



- Slums not to be demolished; emphasis on development projects for slum-dwellers

- Overhauling of the age-old drainage system
- Number of health centres and maternity homes to be increased
- Multi-storied night shelters, like those in Delhi and Mumbai, for the homeless
- Drive against "promoter raj". Special efforts to renovate old and dilapidated houses
- Hostels for working women
- Power supply to be improved
- Road space in the city will be increased to cope with rising number of vehicles. A series of flyovers connecting the north and south of the city
- Underground parking lots in business areas
- Ban on graffiti, strict enforcement of pollution control norms

Chart by Nilratan Maity

within the party has been far from encouraging for them.

The internal assessment made by the state leadership has suggested that the party may lose its control over the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) and, in all probability, the Trinamul-BJP combine will get 80 to 83 wards in the June 25 polls.

On the other hand, the party believes that the Congress will do better in north Calcutta than in

the southern suburbs of the city and the Garden Reach-Metaabruz belt.

One CPM leader who is closely associated with the party's city unit said: "We will face our most difficult electoral battle — since 1977 — on June 25". In the last Lok Sabha polls, the CPM had lost all three Lok Sabha seats in the city. A wardwise analysis of the Lok Sabha results put the Trinamul-BJP combine well ahead of

the Left in 122 of the total 141 municipal wards.

The party assessment revealed that in case the Trinamul fails to retain its control over at least 40 wards out of 122, 82 wards will still be under its control, which is enough for a majority in the CMC, which has 141 wards. This calculation has worried CPM leadership, many of whom believe that "the political situation in the city has not undergone a major change

since the last Lok Sabha polls, conducted about eight months ago."

CPM cadre are also grudgingly Jyoti Basu's absence from the campaign. "Though Basu is not publicly campaigning this time, he is always with us, advising us how to counter the Trinamul-BJP's campaign for the civic poll," said Biswas. But that is little solace to the CPM cadre, who see in Jyoti Basu the party's best vote-catcher.

Upbeat Trinamool vs defensive CPM

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 24

WHOSE CALCUTTA will it be anyway? Some 4.7 million Calcuttans will decide tomorrow whether to give the Left Front another term in the municipal corporation or to usher in change by opting for a Trinamool-BJP board. Neighbouring Bidhanagar, which too goes to the polls the same day, can only offer foot-notes to the Calcutta verdict.

Much more is at stake, though, than the red-brick building on S N Banerjee Road. As intrepid Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee declared during the campaign, the battle for Calcutta will lead to the final assault on the other red-brick building in BBD Bag, where Jyoti Basu has been reigning for 23 years. For the Left, too, losing the Calcutta battle will be half-losing the Assembly war early next year.

That is why, despite the mani-

politically belongs to the Trinamool-BJP combine, which won in 122 of the 141 wards in the last Lok Sabha polls. All city MPs are from the Trinamool and the larger number of city MLAs in the State Assembly from the undivided Congress. Even in the last civic elections in 1995, the Left managed to retain

festos, civic issues played second fiddle to the political campaign. Coming close on the heels of the Trinamool's victory in the Panskura parliamentary by-election, the bitterly-fought battle easily took on political overtones. Statistically, despite the Left's control over the civic board, the city

control of the municipal board with a razor-thin majority, having bagged 70 seats, against the Congress's 69 and the BJP's two. The difference in vote share of the Left and the Congress was just 9,316, which was less than one per cent of the total votes. It was a near-repeat of the verdict of 1985, when the Left and its ally, the Janata Party, actually got less votes than the Congress — 6,22,689 votes (44.65%), compared to 6,27,122 (44.97%) of the Congress — but managed to retain the board by winning more seats. In 1990, however, the CPI(M) rigged its way to the board in many areas.

Salt Lake

Total electorate: 1,83,932

Total wards: 23

Total candidates: 113

Left Front: 22

Left-backed Inds: 1

Trinamool Congress: 17

BJP: 14

Congress: 22

Cong-backed Inds: 1

Wards reserved for women: 6

Total booths: 124

Calcutta

Total electorate: 47,00,000

Total wards: 141

Total candidates: 1,122

Left Front: 138

Left-backed Inds: 3

Trinamool Congress: 116

BJP: 23

Congress: 138

Cong-backed Inds: 3

Wards reserved for women: 47

Total booths: 3,774



IN THE SHADOW OF THE GUN: A poll official examines an electronic voting machine on the eve of the CMC polls while policemen keep vigil. Photo: Pabitra Das

Calcutta, but has failed to reach a complete agreement in Biddhannagar.

Statistics and a pro-change mood may give her an edge over the Left, but poll politics is also about several imponderables. One, for example, is the share of the Congress

the Trinamool's chances is one crucial question. The rebels in each camp are another question. The city's answer to these and other questions will be known on June 28, when the ballots are counted.

Related reports and photographs on Pages 3 & 5

25 JUN 1998

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

CIVIC PROSPECTS

Left on edge, but split vote will help

PSEPHOLOGY is a notoriously unpredictable business. So even though the Calcutta corporation and Salt Lake civic elections are almost upon us it would take a brave person to attempt predictions of the outcome, especially in Calcutta. Before the municipal elections last month, many would have written off the Left Front in Calcutta. Not entirely unreasonably. There was and still is a mood of general urban disenchantment and anger at the Left Front, for a variety of reasons. The most important among them are the collapse of the urban infrastructure in almost every sphere — education, health, communications, *et al.* The lack of development and unemployment gives the disenchantment a raw edge. But what perhaps seals popular disenchantment is the arrogance of the Left leadership. Whether at Alimuddin Street or at Writers' Buildings the leaders live in a world of privilege and affluence brushing aside the gaze of the media, public scrutiny and the genuine aspirations of the people they claim to serve. Not a good prescription for popularity. This would not by itself be so disquieting for the Left but for the emergence of Mamata Banerjee as a rallying point for anti-Left forces. Through uncompromising resistance to the Left she succeeded in emerging as a potential alternative. So far so good. In between came the Trinamul and Left's reverses in the municipal elections. And then Panskura, where Mamata Banerjee demonstrated that she had charisma enough to threaten the Left Front. But does all this mean that the Left is a write-off.

Not necessarily. It is acknowledged that the corporation has made some improvement to the urban environment in the last few years. And though that just means a progress from hellish to a little bit less hellish, in effect it means that a number of Left councillors could have done some good work. Since the image of the candidate, his or her track record and personal equations play an important role in civic elections this could help the Left. But the biggest advantage on the Left side is the split in the anti-Left vote, with the Congress having fielded candidates in all 141 wards and carrying out a vigorous campaign. Despite the Congress's debacle at Panskura, it cannot be written off, given the party's almost miraculously strong showing in the municipal elections in May. In small margin scenarios the Congress could make the difference. Nevertheless, Trinamul probably has a slight edge taking into account the incumbency factor.

In Salt Lake, however, the Left have the edge. And the reason is anything but performance. The Left municipal board has presided over the complete collapse of the civic infrastructure — water supply, garbage collection, lighting and the condition of streets resemble amenities you would expect in a district town in Bihar rather than in a satellite township to a "metropolis". But, there will be four-way contests in 11 wards and three-way contests in the rest. The Salt Lake ward sizes and, therefore, the margins are minuscule. The division in the anti-Left vote will be even more significant here.

THE STATESMAN

JUN 2007

CPI-M confident as Opp breathes fire

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 25. — The state CPI-M leadership sounded confident of retaining the CMC and the Salt Lake Municipality while the Trinamul-BJP combine and the Congress alleged that the polls were rigged.

Mr Anil Biswas said the polls were by and large peaceful, except for stray incidents of violence by the Trinamul-BJP combine. Both Mr Sailen Dasgupta, the Left Front chairman and Mr Biswas congratulated people for their cooperation.

Mr Biswas claimed that the LF would retain the twin boards. He dismissed the Trinamul-BJP's claim of a large-scale rigging by the CPI-M and alleged that the combine had tried its best to create trouble during the polls.

In wards 33, 34, 37, 43 and 54, CPI-M were allegedly attacked by Trinamul supporters. In booths 8 and 10 of ward No. 43, Trinamul men threw bombs and destroyed voting machines. Mr Biswas demanded repolling in the two booths.

The CPI-M supporters, Mr Biswas claimed, did not make any attempt to retaliate.

Mr Asoke Ghosh and Ms Manju Majumdar, state secretaries of the Forward Bloc and the CPI respectively, congratulated the voters.

Miss Mamata Banerjee alleged that the CPI-M rigged the CMC polls in wards 70 to 75, intimidated voters with bombs and guns, attacked Trinamul candidates and polling agents and reduced the election to a farce.

The picture was no different in Salt Lake, where police and the administration allowed CPI-M cadres to have a field day.

Miss Banerjee was confident that wherever people could vote without fear, they voted for Trinamul candidates. "It was a state-manipulated election conducted by a partisan State Election Commission and as such police and the administration helped CPI-M cadres rig the poll. But the results will be different in the next Assembly

elections where neither Mr Jyoti Basu nor Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya can manipulate the poll to be conducted by the Election Commission. The Panskura Lok Sabha by-poll results confirm this fact."

The Trinamul chief complained that rigging was rampant in Entally, Beniapur and Garden Reach areas. "I even intercepted a bus-load of CPI-M cadres near Piyali on EM Bypass. When I challenged them, they confessed they were from Dum Dum and were brought in for rigging," she said.

Miss Banerjee urged Mr Chayan Mukherjee, DIG, who was present near the spot, to



Mr Anil Biswas and Miss Mamata Banerjee



arrest the culprits.

Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya's response to that was: "I have not heard of any such incident. Why don't you ask her why some criminals from Midnapore are staying at Nizam Palace under her shelter. The police will arrest them if they create trouble."

What about the Trinamul Congress allegation that the

CPI-M had brought in men from outside to rig the election? "It's all baseless," the deputy chief minister said. "On Vidyasagar Setu, the police stopped goods vehicles in which Congress supporters were trying to enter the city.

The PCC president, Mr Ghani Khan Chowdhury, also alleged rigging and booth capturing by CPI-M men with the difference that his party workers tried resisting CPI-M cadres wherever possible, while the Trinamul offered no resistance.

Mr Saugata Roy, PCC vice-president, and Mr Sultan Ahmed, PCC general secretary, alleged that rigging and booth capturing by CPI-M cadres mostly occurred in north and central Calcutta and Behala.

Mr Tapan Sikdar said the CPI-M cadres made a mockery of democracy at Salt Lake. A detailed report on electoral malpractices would be sent to the Governor, Chief Election Commissioner and Central ministers, he added.

The BJP candidate of ward 75 in Hastings, Mr Ibrahim Khan, withdrew from the polls today in protest against "widespread booth capturing".

The state BJP president, Mr Asim Ghosh, said 16 of the 28 booths in the ward had been captured by CPI-M cadres. Police extended full support to CPI-M cadres, he alleged.

Mr Ghosh said the BJP candidate from ward 59, Md Wali, and Ms Meena Devi Prohit from ward 22 were attacked by CPI-M mobs.

In ward 100, where BJP candidate Mr Sudipta Majumdar received many tendered votes, 300-odd CPI-M cadres tried to snatch the voting machine in SB Girls High School at Garia.

In Salt Lake's ward No. 6, the presiding officer was severely beaten up when he refused to let in unauthorised persons into the booth. The voting machine was damaged. "We wanted repoll but our appeal was ignored and the election process started an hour later," Mr Ghosh said.

Cops turn a blind eye as CPM 'machinery' rolls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 25. — Terror and "planned" rigging. These sum up the CPI-M's trump card at Salt Lake's ward 12.

A Statesman reporter saw how the CPI-M's "machinery" worked — at Acharya Prafulla Chandra School in AK block. There were disruptions from the morning at the booth, but things came to a head after 2 p.m.

Batches of bogus voters stood in queue before booths No. 2 and 3 with voters' slips. (Some gave themselves away by their conversation, as they mentioned that they were not Salt Lake residents.) Trinamul

polling agents questioned their eligibility; the presiding officer asked them to produce their credentials. And then the "drama" began.

The CPI-M polling agent sprang up from his seat and shouted: "Who cares about names? It's late — come, come let's finish our work."

The Trinamul candidate, Mrs Tulsi Sinha Roy, protested. Soon, about 30 armed men appeared at the door, shouting abuses. They beat up Trinamul agents and dragged them out of the booth. This reporter found herself in the middle of the tussle, and barely managed to wriggle out of it.

Policemen guarding the booth were whisked off to the corner room. Their colleagues in the other



These men couldn't vote at Garden Reach despite having valid ID cards. — Bijoy Sengupta

booths looked on. So did the BJP and Congress polling agents.

Hundreds of policemen — juniors and seniors — had long arrived. Strangely enough, they didn't venture inside the polling station. Men wearing CPI-M badges hovered, to ensure "smooth" rigging.

Inside the school building, Mrs Sinha Roy pleaded with election officers: "Please let us have a fair poll." A CPI-M cadre made an obscene gesture and yelled: "Didn't you do it in Panskura?" Somebody else called out: "Get on with what you were doing." A man was busily pressing the EVM, with the polling officer switching it on and off. At the end of the two-hour "opera-

tion", the presiding officer said: "Voting was quite peaceful here, but for minor disruptions."

The presiding officers were not content with allowing the CPI-M to rig the polls. Going a step further, they refused to let the Trinamul candidate enter the polling booths. Mrs Sinha Roy helplessly pleaded with a presiding officer in this reporter's presence. She wasn't allowed in as poll officials didn't want to incur the CPI-M's displeasure.

Last time, the CPI-M won the seat by a margin of 56 votes. "Isn't that enough reason for CPI-M cadres to rig today's polls?" remarked Mr Sudip De, Trinamul election agent in ward 12.

THE STATESMAN

Stray clashes mar civic polls

HT Correspondent
 Calcutta, June 25

● Repoll in five booths on Tuesday ● Opp. rubbishes Left's peaceful-election claims

STRAY CLASHES, incidents of booth jamming and bomb-throwing marked the civic polls in the city today. But the scale of violence was way below what was feared.

The State Election Commission has ordered repoll in five booths in Calcutta and Bidhannagar.

On Tuesday, repolling will be held in booths 8 and 10 of Ward 54, booth 14 of Ward 141 and booth 29 of Ward 33 in Calcutta and booth 3 of Ward 17 in Salt Lake. Besides, repolling has been ordered in booth 8 of Ward 141, where only one vote was cast.

The State Election Commission said the municipal returning officers had found that the election process was tampered with in these wards. Hence, the repoll order.

The underlying tension was pronounced in Salt Lake. Rival political parties blamed each other for mobilising non-residents from the fringe areas to rig the polls. The turnout was above 65 per cent in the city and around 70 per cent in Salt Lake.

Ranjit De died after a heart attack when a bomb exploded at Patwar Bagan at the fag end of polling. Five others were injured when bombs were thrown in Madan Chatterjee Road, Rajendra Mallick Road, Girish Park, Haji Mohammed Mohsin Square, K K Tagore Road, Balaram Dey Street, Narkeldanga Main Road, Muktarab Babu Street, Surendranath Banerjee Road, and in front of Anjuman Girls High School in central Calcutta and Modern High School in south Calcutta.

State Election Commissioner Anish Majumdar expressed satisfaction that the polls have been



CALCUTTA CALLING: Mayor-hopeful Subrata Mukherjee (left) and First Citizen Prasanta Chatterjee catch up on poll developments on Sunday. Photos: HT

"peaceful". So did Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya.

Both said there was no major violence, barring some incidents of bomb-throwing, complaints on harassment of voters and movement of unauthorised people in some parts of the city.

The Opposition rubbished the claims of Mazumdar and Bhattacharyya. Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee said that apprehending defeat, the CPI(M) has resorted to large-scale terror tactics. WBPC president A B A Ghani Khan Chowdhury said the CPI(M)'s rigging machinery was out in full strength, a complaint echoed by the State BJP president Asim Ghosh.

Trouble broke out in the morning

Lensmen assaulted

CPI(M) SUPPORTERS on Sunday manhandled three newspaper photographers, including Subhendu Ghosh of *The Hindustan Times*, while they were trying to take pictures of a Trinamool camp at Bidyasagar Island in Ward 4 that the Left hooligans had attacked with bombs. The cadres were allegedly egged on by Chief Minister's Protocol Officer.

HTC, Calcutta

at Anjuman Girls High School in Ward 54, where an electronic voting machine developed a snag.

Trinamool supporters mobbed the polling station and damaged another voting machine, the Deputy Chief Minister said.

Polling was suspended for over two hours at a booth in Ward 6 of Salt Lake, where the police cased warring rivals. It all began when a group of people brandished certificates of identity signed by Transport Minister Subhas Chakrabarty and insisted that they be allowed to vote. When they were turned away, violence erupted.

The mob dispersed only after Chakrabarty and Union Minister Tapan Sikdar reached the spot. Bhattacharyya confirmed reports of violence and intimidation in Ward 11, where the police had to reassure residents to come out and vote.

Bhattacharyya thanked the electorate and appreciated the administration and police who, he believed, had done a commendable job. In all, 239 people were arrested for poll-related violence. The police intercepted a matador carrying 25 people near Vidyasagar Setu that displayed a fake Election Commission sticker to hoodwink securitymen.

The police refused to confirm reports of booth jamming at Arya Bikash Vidyalaya, Cossipore, Sarat Chandra Sur Institution, Tangra, Arya Kanya Vidyalaya and Metropolitan Institution.

Related reports, photographs on Pages 3 and 5

Miffed Mamata breathes fire

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 25

19/1-3
20/6

TIME: 1.45 pm. Mamata Banerjee steps into her black Tata Sumo. At the head of a convoy of cars driving single file, she heads straight for the Mitra Institution booth in Kalighat to vote.

She then leaves on a whirlwind tour of the city. The mobile phone in her hand barely stops ringing, as her lieutenants feed her with the latest from different wards. As updates on CPI(M) cadres going the whole hog pour in from all corners of the city and also from Salt Lake, she throws up her arms in disgust: "What is the point in holding such elections?"

She directs her driver Rafiq to do a short round of the city. First stop: Chetla. Next Ballygunge. Then to Kasba and off to Salt Lake. Near Science City, she notices a bus-full of people (registration number WB-19/6077). Mamata asks her men to stop the bus. "Where are you headed," she asks them. "To Ballygunge," one of them answers back. "Why," she asks them. The passenger fumbles for an answer. "These are all false voters," says Mukul Roy, a Trinamool man accompanying Mamata.

A flustered Mamata barks out an order to her driver: "Let's return." Back home, she returns to work. Orders fly thick and fast. "Give me a list of all the counting centres," she tells her aides. "Make sure all my men being harassed by the CPI(M) cadres are rescued." Not surprising. For insiders say, whatever might have happened and whatever the CPI(M)'s claims, the Trinamool remains opti-

mistic about forming the Calcutta Municipal Corporation board with the BJP.

"Unlike last time, the vote in the Added Areas and Behala has definitely gone Trinamool's way. No wonder, the CPI(M) rigging machinery was at work in north and central Calcutta," says party MP Ananda Mohan Biswas.

Insiders claim, the equation is simple. There are 32 wards in South Calcutta, 18 in Behala and 10 in Jadavpur. Here, of the 60, the Trinamool will bag 40. In north and central Calcutta, there are 32 wards each. Of the 64, the Trinamool hopes to get 25. The BJP will get 6. Thus garnering a total of 71 seats and the CMC.

In other words, the Trinamool is not depending on the Congress to form the board, if there is a hung verdict. An insider said that the Trinamool would prefer to sit in the Opposition, but will not take Congress help to form the board. Equally adamant is WBPCCC president Ghani Khan Chowdhury. He rules out any honeymoon with the Trinamool at this juncture.

But the Left is confident of retaining the CMC for the fourth time in a row. Anil Biswas reiterates twice that the CPI(M) will form the board in the CMC. "The Trinamool tried to create trouble by getting people from outside. But they failed. Police arrested 1,200 Trinamool workers. At many places, these outsiders even lost their way but our men helped them to get away from being caught by the police," he says.



Mamata Banerjee instructs her party workers on the EM Bypass on Sunday. Photo: Pabitra

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 JUN 2000

No time lost, parties gear up for Round-2

Arindam Sarkar
Calcutta, June 26

A DAY after the high-stakes ballot battle in the city and in neighbouring Salt Lake, marred by violence and rigging charges, political parties were back to calling each other names. Gearing up for what is billed as the mother-of-all battles for the Assembly in the State, politicians wasted no time in fanning out to marshal their resources for the final kill.

Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee was in Naihati for a foundation stone-laying ceremony of a rail bridge over the Hooghly. BJP stalwart Tapan Sikdar was in Birbhum on party work. In the city, WBPCC president A B A Ghani Khan Chowdhury rushed to a slum, razed last night, allegedly by Left toughs. The CPI(M) top brass went into a huddle at a strategy session, presumably to study the mechanics of the revolution, they themselves

insist is a continuous process.

Barely has the dust settled on the civic poll campaign trail and the haze is yet to clear. But they all have seen through it. Each party is confident that it will emerge on top. A cocksure Left Front today said its grip over the CMC and Bidhannagar will remain in place. The Trinamool, just as sure, claimed the Calcutta verdict could go no way but theirs and the Congress said it would have the last laugh, for the polls would return a hung board in the CMC area.

But no matter how big the Congress and the Trinamool-BJP combine talk, they both concede that the CPI(M)'s rigging machinery walked away with the honours yesterday.

"You won't believe it, but the CPI(M) polling agents harassed me in my own booth in Ward 73. This was when I went there to vote. If this

is what they do to me, imagine what a common man has to go through. You call this a free and fair election? Their machinery began rolling only after 12 noon, when they sensed a rout in the CMC polls. There will be trouble on counting day as well," Mamata Banerjee said.

Hours before leaving for Birbhum, BJP stalwart Tapan Sikdar was also blowing hot at the Left.

"I have no words to describe what happened in Salt Lake. It was atrocious. Good,

this has taught us a lesson. During the Assembly polls, we will make sure the Centre intervenes. Even after all that has happened, I believe the Trinamool-BJP will capture CMC."

The Congress believes it will end up with 20 CMC seats, but even while saying so, party leaders conceded that the figure was on the higher side. "We will do well in cen-

tral Calcutta, particularly in the Muslim belt. We will spring many surprises in south Calcutta and the Mahajot will do well in Garden Reach," said WBPCC vice-president Saugata Roy.

The CPI(M), though, is not interested in these allegations. Party State secretary Anil Biswas said those who were planning a Panskura rerun in the civic polls had failed. Their frustration is showing in the wild charges they are making.

Equally confident was CPI(M) South 24-Parganas District Secretary Samir Putatunda. "All this talk of the Trinamool doing well in the CMC's Added Areas is tall talk."

But what about the rigging charges? "They made a fool of us in Panskura. That Lok Sabha seat belonged to us. But they caught us on the wrong foot. This time around, it was a do-or-die battle for us. And we pulled out all stops.," Putatunda added.

The Day After

25 JUN 2000

NO LESSONS LEARNT

SVS Stop indulging Bangladeshi migrants

THE killing of a 17-year-old boy in police firing in Delhi's Jamuna Pushta on Friday followed by the attack on a police outpost by an irate mob of Bangladeshi migrants are serious developments. It was a sequel to the police questioning a Bangladeshi, said to be a close associate of one of the suspects responsible for the Red Fort blasts on 18 June. The mob freed him and ran riot forcing a police firing. The action evoked routine condemnation by religious and political leaders. These events warn politicians that indulgence for illegal migrants can create serious law and order problems with socio-economic tension and communal violence. For almost two decades Bangladeshi shanties in Jamuna Pushta have been a Congress vote bank and a source of cheap labour for contractors. HKL Bhagat had a hand in nurturing illegal migrants. He enrolled them as voters and stonewalled attempts to deport them. His message attracted illegal migrants in droves. Political and official patronage did not stop when BJP ran Delhi. The promises of dealing with the "menace" were forgotten. Except for disenfranchising a few thousand, the BJP looked upon Bangladeshis as a vote bank.

This despite the piles of official reports which say that many Bangladeshi migrants are engaged in narco-terrorism. Some, trained in Pakistan and Afghanistan, have been caught fighting as *mujahideens* in the Kashmir Valley. Pakistanis have also been using them as guinea pigs for identifying safe passage along the LoC in Jammu and Kashmir. But this has not deterred politicians from patronising Bangladeshis. Even the Delhi chief minister and key functionaries of government and political parties, including Sonia Gandhi, have rushed to them with politically timed relief. Partners of the West Bengal Left Front raise the bogey of an "anti-Bengali drive" whenever moves are made to deport illegal Bangladeshis. Political irresponsibility cuts across party lines. Buddhadev Bhattacharya has called infiltration one of the "most serious problems". But unfortunately action has not matched words. And there lies the root of the problem which has the potential to destabilise large parts of eastern and north-eastern India.

THE STATESMAN

27 JUN 2000

Cadre terror in city

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 26. — CPM cadres bombed Trinamul supporters' homes and thrashed their leaders as police watched in Beliaghata today.

In Garden Reach, the cadres fell upon Trinamul and Congress homes and beat up residents. In nearby Metiabruz, they smashed the nose of a Trinamul candidate for the CMC election.

In Jorasanko, a bomb went off before the house of Mr Sanjoy Bakshi, Trinamul youth president.

Police said they were helpless at Beliaghata because they did not have enough arms to fight the Marxists.

They claimed brothers had quarrelled in Garden Reach. In Metiabruz, they said they had made a few arrests.

Later in the evening, the CPI-M organised a "peace march" on Beliaghata Main Road to protest "Trinamul terror". The mayor, Mr Prasanta Chatterjee, and local CPM leader, Mr Tuhin Bera, led.

At Alimuddin Street, CPM state secretary, Mr Anil Biswas, said hoodlums imported into the city by a frustrated Trinamul had created trouble in Beliaghata. "What else can they (Trinamul) do?"

Repoll today

CALCUTTA, June 26. — The state election commission tonight ordered a repoll in booth 14 of ward 141, booths 8 and 10 of ward 54 and booth 29 of ward 33 of the CMC. A repoll was ordered in booth 3 of Salt Lake Municipality's ward 17. All repolls have been scheduled for tomorrow. Those who could not vote because polling was adjourned at ward 141's booth 8, will also vote tomorrow. — SNS

■ Editorial: Vitiated Verdict, page 8

Around seven this morning, Marxist cadres threw bombs at Trinamul supporters' homes at Khodaganj, Beliaghata. Some residents were dragged on to the streets and beaten up.

Around 11 a.m., 200-odd cadres with guns and bombs accosted Mr Mantu Sanyal, Trinamul-backed dissident CPM candidate in ward 33, as he came out of Beliaghata police station after complaining about the morning's attack. With Mr Sanyal were two Trinamul leaders, Mr Pabitra Das and Mr Dilip Singh.

The cadres threw two bombs at the police station, sending all the policemen scurrying inside. They stayed in for the next half-

an-hour. A senior officer at Lalbazar later

■ See CADRE: page 4

CADRE: Trinamul candidate assaulted

(Continued from page 1)

explained the police station's armoury was no match for the mob's.

The cadres threw bombs about at random, said witnesses. One of them, a cadre called Naru, was seen firing shots in the air as the Trinamul leaders fled for their lives.

The mob dispersed after the CAF came on the scene. Running off, the cadres threw three bombs at Mr Sanyal's home. Police have started a suo motu case against Naru. Two of his accomplices were held near Alochhaya cinema.

Around the same time the Marxists were running riot in Beliaghata, their comrades were attacking homes of Trinamul and Congress workers in Garden Reach.

Mr Zulfikar Hassan, DCP (Port), dismissed the terror as a family quarrel. Two brothers who are Trinamul supporters were harassed by three other brothers who are CPM supporters, he said.

At Metiabruz this evening, Dr Ananth Bandhu Maity, Trinamul candidate at ward 141, had his nose broken by CPM cadres. He was admitted to a nursing home in Garden

Reach.

Late tonight there was drama at Jorasanko police station, after Miss Mamata Banerjee arrived to secure the release of Mr Bakshi, detained earlier in the evening.

Arriving around 12.30 a.m., Miss Banerjee accused the DC (Central), Mr Raj Kanojia, of harassing Mr Bakshi on CPI-M instructions. "The present government will not rule forever. You should be impartial," she warned the policeman.

Mr Kanojia said police had not arrested Mr Bakshi; only brought him to the police station to "sort things out".

THE STATESMAN

27 JUN 2000

Post-poll clash in Beliaghata

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 26

IN A major flare-up following the civic elections yesterday, Trinamool and CPI(M) supporters fought pitched battles in Beliaghata this morning. Traffic came to a standstill as both sides threw bombs at each other.

The local police being unable to control the situation, reinforcements were sent from Lalbazar. The police burst tear-gas shells and the Rapid Action Force swung into action to separate the warring groups.

It all began around 11 am when Mantu Sanyal, a Trinamool-backed Independent candidate for the Calcutta Municipal Corporation polls, started demonstrating in front of the Beliaghata Police Station along with his supporters. He was protesting against booth-capturing by CPI(M) cadres during yesterday's election. Trinamool leaders Dilip Singh and Pabitra Biswas were also with him.

When the Trinamool delegation was coming out of the police station after submitting a memoran-

andum, bombs were hurled at them.

As news of the attack on Mantu Sanyal and the others spread, Trinamool activists from Bhatikhana, Rashbagan and the Joramandir area chased the miscreants, who they alleged were CPI(M) cadres. The entire area turned into a battlefield. Later,

quently chased away by CPI(M) workers," said CMC Mayor Prasanta Chatterjee. "This evening, when our party cadres demonstrated against the Trinamool violence the situation became tense."

Chatterjee believes that since repoll has been ordered in the adjoining Ward, 33, Mantu Sanyal and Pabitra Biswas were trying to create trouble in the area. "Yesterday, Pabitra Biswas, known as Almari Khokhon in the area, destroyed a voting machine. So a repoll had to be ordered. Pabitra Biswas is a Congress councilor who has a criminal case against him," Chatterjee alleged.

But Trinamool general secretary Mukul

Roy has a different story to tell. "The CPI(M) is spreading false stories about Mantu because he is a dissident leader and we are supporting him. Mantu was the personal bodyguard of Pramode Dasgupta for 15 years. So his credentials are impeccable. Actually, since a repolling has been ordered in Ward 33, the CPI(M) is scared of losing the seat," he said.



RAF personnel patrolling Beliaghata on Monday. Photo: HT

Mantu Sanyal lodged a complaint with the police and alleged that the CPI(M) supporters had ransacked houses of 25 Trinamool supporters.

"They (Trinamool men) unnecessarily created tension in the morning. They forced many shops to close down and also pelted stones at cars and buses. Yesterday, during the polls, Mantu created trouble in Ward 34 and was subse-

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 JUN 2000

Ballot bomb ticks on taut Calcutta

BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, June 27: Early this morning, Pradip Mandal visited the Kalighat temple, said his prayers but refused the *prasad*. For two days, the youth, one of the topara home of Mamata Banerjee, has been having water for breakfast, water for lunch and water for dinner. He will break his fast only after counting for the Calcutta and Salt Lake civic polls begins at 11 in the morning tomorrow.

In Salt Lake, Mira Banerjee is not fasting but she, too, is praying fervently. Mira, a bank clerk and an ac-

tivist of the CPM women's wing, refuses to read newspapers or discuss the polls, lest she says something that might mean a bad omen for her party.

Across Calcutta, political workers and voters are counting the hours till the results for the civic polls are declared. Sunday's elections have hijacked conversation in the city and has been occupying Calcutta's minds for two days.

The chief contenders, the CPM and Trinamul, each claimed it will win. But Trinamul is doubtful of its chances in Salt Lake. Mamata Banerjee said under no circumstances will the Trinamul-BJP have any truck with the Congress to form the boards. Asked if she was doubting her

chances, she shot back: "What makes you think we will sit in the opposition? Why don't you see the results first?"

Trinamul insiders said that in the event of the party's inability to achieve a clear majority, it will look for councillors willing to break away from the Congress.

A positive signal from the Congress for Mamata came yesterday after some of its leaders, disappointed with the high command for not approving the *mahaajai* suggested by Mamata, asked the PCC secretariat to lend issue-based support to the Trinamul-BJP in the event of a hung verdict.

State election chief Anish Majumdar said: "It will take hardly three to four hours to complete the counting

process with the help of the electronic voting machines," he added. Counting will be over by 4 pm.

Security has been beefed up around the counting centres. Bureaucrats have been detailed to supervise the counting along with police officers.

In the offices of the CPM, the Congress and the Trinamul, leaders instructed their agents to be watchful during counting. "The game (of counting) is not that easy. We have also taken our own precautions. Our boys are well-trained," said Mamata Banerjee.

The CPM has decided to press its experienced agents into service. However, the Congress and the BJP were in disarray and were trying to find agents for all the counting centres.

Trinamul assessment			
	CMC	Salt Lake	
	Best	Worst	Best Worst
Trinamul	74	52	4 2
BJP	3	2	6 5
Left	53	77	12 12
Congress	11	10	1 4
Left Front assessment			
	Best	Worst	
Left	72	63	16 14
Trinamul	55	64	5 7
BJP	2	2	1 1
Congress	12	12	1 1
Total wards CMC		141	Salt Lake 23

THE TELEGRAPH

28 JUN 2000

9/8 MB

Trinamool scores in Calcutta civic polls

W 10-1 22/6

By Malabika Bhattacharya

CALCUTTA, JUNE 28. The Trinamool Congress-BJP combine appears all set to form the Board in the Calcutta Corporation which elected a hung body. The Trinamool and the communists were locked in a close fight in the adjoining Salt Lake municipality where each secured 11 out of the 23 wards. The result could not be declared as counting was held up in Ward 16 where an electronic voting machine developed a technical problem.

In Calcutta, the Trinamool-BJP combine secured 61 seats with the Trinamool alone bagging 57. The CPI(M)-led Left Front won 60 seats, while the Congress(I) secured 14. Independents accounted for six seats. "We will form the Board in the Calcutta Corporation without the Congress(I)'s help,"

Ms. Mamata Banerjee, Trinamool chief, said. She hoped that the bulk of the newly-elected Congress(I) councillors and a few Independents would cross over to her party to help form the Board in the 141-member Corporation. That would mean the support of 71 councillors.

The Trinamool dealt a heavy blow to the CPI(M) when it defeated the sitting Mayor, Mr. Prasanta Chatterjee, and got its candidate, Mr. Subrata Mukherjee, elected. The twin polls were the last big showdowns before the Assembly elections due 2001.

According to analysts, Ms. Banerjee's victory in the civic polls and in the Panskura Lok Sabha by-election clearly showed that the marxists had started losing their base. The civic elections also showed that the BJP hardly mattered.

THE HINDU

29 JUN 2001

The man who mauled the Mayor

Kinsuk Basu
Calcutta, June 28

ON A small sheet of paper he scribbles numbers at regular intervals. Outside Hare School, his followers scream with joy as the lead increases with every round of counting. But Swapam Samaddar in a picture of poise. As the Trinamool Congress candidate pitted against no less a person than the CPI(M)'s Prasanata Chatterjee, Samaddar knows what it takes to beat the Mayor of the outgoing CMC at the numbers game.

Today, Samaddar turned up at Hare School just after counting began and did not leave till the



final results were out. He probably knew that he had a tough fight on his hands, but this man from Belia-ghata wouldn't admit it.

"From the time Chatterjee decided to change his ward, I knew it would not be a difficult task defeating him. He was an outsider. You can't identify with people by just posing for photographs."

His words are lost in a din of cries. A middle-aged man walks out of the counting room and declares the results of yet another round. "They have all voted for us. It's a clean sweep in three booths," he declares. Samaddar makes a quick entry on the sheet of paper, makes a mental calculation and smiles. "Keep a check on the next round. It will be a difficult one," he tells his supporters.

A television microphone pops up in front of him as Samaddar returns to his bench outside the counting room. Swapam babu, what was the reason behind this success? Asks the interviewer. "I think it was partly for the party coupled with my efforts to work for my locality. People have given their mandate against the false allegations that were being hurled against me. But I never made any personal attack on Chatterjee."

By now, counting is midway and a youth zooms out of the counting room shouting, "Bisu da, thik bar korey nebo." This is just what the crowd outside was waiting for. They break out in impromptu jigs and as Samaddar emerges flashing the victory sign, his followers shout back, "Ebar votey jitlo key, Bisu da abar ke."

So did you know a victory was in the waiting? "I had repeatedly said that if the election was free and fair, I would win. Mayor or no Mayor."

It's 5 pm and Samaddar prepares to receive his certificate. His supporters jump around in joy, waving the party flag. "Stop doing all this. We must return to work."

But his followers just wouldn't listen. "Dada likhey deben, Swapam Samaddar giant killer." And giant-killer he is indeed.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

JUN 28 1980

Sleeping over a photo finish in Salt Lake

Jaideep Mazumdar
Calcutta, June 28

IN THE end, the fate of Calcutta's exurb hinged on the quirkiness of an electronic voting machine. Poised on a knife's edge, the results to the 23 seats in the Bidhannagar Municipality remained lock-jawed at CPI(M) 11, Trinamool 11. The results of the other seat - Ward 16 - could not be declared as the control unit of one electronic voting machine developed a snag.

If there was drama through the day, there was heart-stopping tension through the night. CPI(M) and Trinamool members left the counting centre at Kendriya Vidyalaya near Laboni around 6 pm. The CPI(M) claimed it would retain Ward 16; Trinamool was confident that the BJP candidate it had supported would win.

It was a touch-and-go from the start. An hour after counting began at 10 am, Trinamool mem-

bers, who had set up camp at the counting centre's west gate, erupted in euphoria. Having won Wards 1, 7, 8 and 11, they had a 4-0 lead. CPI(M) supporters trudged off towards their camp at the northern gate like a team that had conceded too many goals even before the match had warmed up.

For CPI(M), worse was in store. Transport Minister Subhas Chakraborty's brother-in-law Nandagopal Bhattacharyya lost in Ward 10. Along with that, came the trends from Wards 2, 3, 5 and 6: Trinamool was leading in all of them.

As in the nature of close matches,

though, the tide soon began to turn. Radhanath Chand of the CPI(M) won in Ward 4. Before long, the CPI(M) had wrapped up Wards 21, 22 and 23. By about 2.45 pm, as

An hour after counting began, Trinamool Congress members erupted in euphoria. Having won Wards 1, 7, 8 and 11, they had a 4-0 lead. CPI(M) supporters trudged off towards their camp at the northern gate like a team that had conceded too many goals even before the match had warmed up

news of the CPI(M)'s leads in other wards came, red abir was out. A half-smile was back on CPI(M) leader Amitav Nandi's face.

But red would surely not be the only colour of abir today. As CPI(M) candidate and sitting councillor in Ward 5, Sikha Dasgupta, lost to Trinamool's

Ashes Mukherjee, packets of green abir were cut open and thrown towards the murky afternoon sky. Trinamool's Manju Banerjee won next from Ward 6, followed by the party's Gopa Banerjee in Ward 2 and Ujjal Das in Ward 3. The Bidhannagar Trinamool leaders

Poura Sabha, Trinamool leaders felt, was theirs. The CPI(M), however, was down but far from out. It pocketed Wards

9, 14, 15, 17, 18 and 19. As a victorious dhoti-kurta clad Dilip Gupta, CPI(M) candidate from Ward 15 and the Chairman of Bidhannagar Municipal Board, walked out of the venue towards the party camp, cheers reached a crescendo. The victory of an Independent candidate supported by the CPI(M) in Ward 13, Sudhanshu Shekhar Ganguly, prompted Gupta to announce to assembled reporters his plans as the board chairman for another term.

Trinamool, though, had soon pulled off back. Tulusi Sinha Roy won from Ward 12. But when Gupta declared that the CPI(M) candidate in Ward 161—he only remaining ward—was leading the BJP's man, the CPI(M) thought that it had crossed the last frontier.

But the snag put the celebrations on hold. Some quick calculations later, it emerged that this was a photo finish. At 11-all, the machine holds the key to the real finish.

Watermelon man to clean-up man

Subrata vow

to set right

Left wrongs

BY BARUN GHOSH

On what turned out to be a Wonder Wednesday for the Trinamul Congress, there was no doubt who the stars of the show were — supremo Mamata Banerjee and mayor-in-waiting Subrata Mukherjee.

"My priority is to improve the quality of life in Calcutta after assuming office as mayor of this historic city," smiled Mukherjee, face caked in green *abir*, kurta drenched by the monsoon showers, minutes after being declared elected from ward 87.

"I will try my best to fulfil all those promises we have made to the people of Calcutta in our party manifesto," added Mukherjee, once christened "water melon" by Mamata and now labelled "watermelon mayor" by Jyoti Basu.

In the same breath, Mukherjee, who continues to be a Congress MLA from Chowringhee, expressed his gratitude to Mamata Banerjee for projecting him as Trinamul's mayoral candidate.

"This is a challenging job for me, because I will have to clear the mess the CPM has created in the Corporation since 1985," announced Mukherjee.

He then hit the streets to "thank the people". Leading a victory procession near Rabindra Sarobar stadium, he waved to the crowds and said: "I had come to seek your support before the polls, now I come to thank you for voting me to power."

Trinamul Congress MLA

Shovandeo Chatterjee was on hand to greet Mukherjee with a garland. Barely a month ago, Chatterjee had voiced his opposition to the party's choice of Mukherjee for the mayor's chair. "Let us resolve today to work for the welfare of the people of Calcutta together," Mukherjee said.

A little later, sipping a cup of tea at a makeshift party office near Gariahat crossing, Mukherjee unveiled grand plans to "beautify this City of Joy".

"For the past 15 years, the CPM has done nothing concrete to improve the city's age-old defective drainage system or modernise the ineffective garbage-collection system," he observed, pledging to right the civic wrongs that the people of Calcutta had suffered under Left rule.

Convinced that he would be able to prevail upon the Centre to allot more funds for the city's development, Mukherjee said he would approach the Prime Minister through Mamata at the earliest. "I feel that there will be no problem in getting funds from the Centre if we seriously work for the people of Calcutta," he said.

Mukherjee also promised "stringent action" against "unscrupulous promoters" engaged in grabbing land in and around the city. Multi-storied night shelters for the homeless, modelled on the lines of Mumbai and Delhi, also figures high on Mukherjee's mayoral agenda.

TMC-BJP COMBINE WRESTS INITIATIVE IN CIVIC POLLS; CONG, INDEPENDENTS HOLD KEY

Flower power leaves the Left red-faced

Our Calcutta Bureau
CALCUTTA 28 JUNE

MAMATA BANERJEE'S Trinamul Congress (TMC) wrested the initiative from the ruling Left Front at the Calcutta Municipal Corporation on Wednesday, although there was considerable confusion about the final tally till late in the evening on Wednesday.

The state election commission figures show: TMC-BJP 60, Left Front 57, Congress 14 and Independents 6. Results for four seats were yet to be announced. Of these, TMC was leading in two and the CPM in two others.

TMC sources and Writers' Buildings in its official briefing have, however, put the figures at: TMC-BJP 64 (61+3), Left Front 62, Congress 12 and Independents 3.

In the simultaneous polling at Salt Lake, the TMC was locked in an eyeball-to-eyeball duel with the



WINNING SMILES: Mamata Banerjee felicitates Subrata Mukherjee at her residence in Calcutta on Wednesday

Mona Chowdhury

CPI(M), each having bagged 11 seats out of 23. The result of the one remaining seat still remains to be declared.

Either way, at the CMC, the

TMC-BJP combine was in the lead to form the board. The majority required to do so is 71 seats and the TMC-BJP combine seems to have an edge in this regard.

A visibly elated Ms Banerjee told newsmen: "We will form the board and you take it from me that we will have no ties with the Congress." She, however, made it clear that if anyone from among the winners in Congress decides to switch camps, he will be welcome.

Anil Biswas, CPM's state secretary is, however, not giving up hope yet. "We will most certainly contest for the mayor's post," he told newsmen. Mr Biswas is banking on Congress support to be able to retain hold at CMC. Interestingly, CPM's star candidate, mayor Prasanta Chattopadhyaya lost his seat by 2,300 votes to TMC's Swapna Samaddar.

Ms Banerjee's confidence, on the other hand, was boosted by positive feelers she received on Wednesday from Independents and Congress winners.

■ **Mamata sure of winning Cong support: Page 2**

The Economic Times

Mamata, Cong locked in baiting game

OUR BUREAU

June 29: Eyeball to eyeball, Mamata Banerjee is staring hard at Congress leaders, trying to wean away the party's councillors to form the Calcutta civic board in a power game that will be lost by whoever blinks first.

The Congress has dug its heels in, revelling in the idea that its 14 councillors have made it the kingmaker. The party's high command in New Delhi today named its price to Mamata: she

must dump the BJP. "The writing on the wall is clear. Mamata is an emerging force in Bengal. But the minorities are with us. If she wants to be chief minister, she should make up her mind fast," said an AICC leader who handles Bengal affairs.

Mamata's immediate concern, however, is not the chief minister-ship for herself but the crown of mayor for Subrata Mukherjee. Trying to engineer a split in the Congress, she said: "We will welcome anyone who wants to fight the CPM. We are optimistic of

forming the board."

The Congress high command is waiting for Mamata to make the first move. Senior Congress leaders, while agreeing it will be "too much" to expect the Trinamul chief to ditch the BJP, want Mamata to at least make a "face-saving gesture" so that the two parties can get closer.

The leaders will be willing to consider support if Mamata agrees to give the Congress the deputy mayor's post and denies a mayor-in-council berth to the BJP. The leaders in Delhi believe Ma-

mata's next move will be in accordance with the "ground realities" shaping the run-up to next year's Assembly polls.

The Trinamul-BJP combine claimed it had moved a step closer towards forming the board. A Trinamul leader said lone Nationalist Congress Party councillor Hridayananda Gupta has pledged his support. The Trinamul said it now has the support of 65 councillors and needs six more to win a vote in the 141-member House.

However, the State Election

Commission has still not made an official proclamation on the results of the civic polls.

In the Left camp, many were stunned by the CPM's decision to contest the mayoral poll despite its poor showing. Veteran members of the party's state and Calcutta district committees feared that the CPM will be further embarrassed in the mayoral poll.

The new mayor of the CMC will be selected by secret ballot in an election by councillors in the third week of July. The term of the present board expires on July

14. If the election results in a tie, the mayor will be selected by the toss of a coin.

The anti-defection law is not applicable in the CMC. This crucially tilts the balance in favour of Mukherjee, who will bank on cross-voting by Congress councillors in his favour unless the party splits and supports Trinamul.

Wary of this, the Congress is trying to create firewalls around its municipal party. Sonia Gandhi telephoned A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury and congratulated him. Sources said 10 Janpath has

taken direct charge of monitoring developments in Calcutta.

At a meeting called by Chowdhury, Somen Mitra, Pradip Bhattacharya, Sultan Ahmad, Saugata Roy and Manas Bhuniya took a tough stand. They said it was inconceivable that Congress councillors will support Subrata. The Congress is confident that at least nine of its councillors, who are from the minority community, will have nothing to do with Trinamul-BJP. But Trinamul leaders are still working on some Congress councillors.

30 JUN 2007

WARNING SIGNALS FOR THE LEFT

THE IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE by Ms. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress in the elections to the Calcutta Corporation and adjoining Salt Lake Municipality may not be a surprise. After all, the metropolis had never been a citadel of the ruling Left Front even in the past and Ms. Banerjee had only supplanted the Congress(I)'s base to a large extent. However, the ruling Left Front's base has shrunk this time and the very prospect that the CPI(M)-led combine may now have to depend on the Congress(I)'s corporators — 14 of them — in order to retain their control over the city's civic body cannot but be a signal of the times to come. The ruling combine's reverses are not just in terms of the number of seats; the defeat of the Mayor, Mr. Prasanta Chatterjee, a heavy-weight in the CPI(M) too, at the hands of the stormy petrel of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), Mr. Subrata Mukherjee, now in the Trinamul Congress, cannot but be seen as significant. Mr. Mukherjee, for those familiar with the political scene in West Bengal, represented the Congress(I)'s response to the CPI(M)'s style of functioning — a down-to-earth approach to issues — in contrast to those Congress(I) leaders from West Bengal with moorings in quarters close to the party high command. Ms. Mamata Banerjee's role in West Bengal's political theatre is also the same.

It is in this context that the results of the polls to the city Corporation assume significance apart from the fact that the development has come close on the heels of the emphatic victory of the Trinamul Congress nominee in the by-elections to the Panskura Lok Sabha constituency a fortnight ago. The gains by the Trinamul Congress, while the BJP, an ally of Ms. Banerjee, could not even register its presence, are not only an expression of popular resentment against the ruling Left combine but also a pointer to the consolidation of this mood behind Ms. Banerjee and her party. The leaders in the Left Front may gloss over the writing on the wall only at their peril. The charge that the Panskura polls were rigged —

this is what the CPI(M)'s leaders in New Delhi had to say after the Panskura verdict was out — had not only exposed the party to some ridicule but was also indicative of the extent of alienation of such leaders from the ground reality. The results of the Corporation elections cannot but convey to these leaders in the CPI(M) that it is time now for "rectification". The developments in West Bengal since 1998 (after Ms. Banerjee floated her own regional outfit) will have to be acknowledged by the Left Front leaders as part of a process in the course of which their entrenchment in the State's political discourse is being challenged seriously. And any such introspection must involve an honest review of the Left Front's record of governance.

Be that as it may, the results have also exposed the Congress(I) as a party to a set of challenges. The Congress(I) corporators now hold the key in deciding which among the two big platforms — the Left Front or the Trinamul Congress — will control the Corporation. And this will require the party high command to decide once and for all on a question that has been nagging it in the past few months; the idea of a 'mahajot' floated by Ms. Banerjee, the BJP and supported vehemently by the Congress(I)'s State unit president, Mr. A. B. A. Ghani Khan Choudhury. Any support to the Trinamul Congress in the present context will knock the bottom out of the Congress(I)'s claims to agitate against the ruling NDA at the Centre, while teaming up with the CPI(M)-led combine in the Calcutta Corporation could lead to further erosion of whatever support base the party has managed to retain in the State even now. The party high command has itself to blame for the situation; the crisis of sorts it faces now is only a fallout of its prevarication over the 'mahajot' idea. One would expect the high command to wake up, at least now, and be guided by ideological convictions rather than short-term gains and decide as to what will be the role of the 14 elected members of the Congress(I) in the Calcutta Municipal Corporation.

Not Left, Not Right

Two different elections, and bad news in both for the ruling parties. In the Calcutta Corporation, the Trinamul has rolled back the Red carpet. And after the UP Panchayat elections, there's a sudden profusion of red faces among the saffron brigade. Yet, the signs were already there for both the Left Front in West Bengal and the BJP in UP; the decline had begun much before the actual fall. But there is a difference between the performance of the Right and the Left. In the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had touched rockbottom with barely 30 seats. Today, it would seem to have gone beyond redemption. The Left Front, on the other hand, appears to have recovered some ground after the terrible beating it took last year, when it lost all the seats in and around Calcutta. Five years ago, the CPI(M) and its allies were one short of a majority in the corporation, but by 1999, Calcutta had already become Trinamul country. In other words, the euphoria in Trinamul ranks may be more for public consumption than really felt. The Trinamul-BJP combine was aiming for a straight majority rather than a hung assembly. In fact, it is the Left Front which has reason to be relieved, for it was fighting with a double handicap: It is an open secret that for years the CPI(M) has relied heavily on some of its leaders to arrange underhand electoral deals with the Congress — leaders who have now fallen out with the party bosses. The CPI(M) also had a number of rebel candidates this time, a price paid for its attempts to cleanse the party organisation.

The Right, however, is on notice. The BJP has been pushed to the third place in the Panchayat elections, behind the Samajwadi Party and the BSP. For the BJP, this rout must be doubly painful because Uttar Pradesh has the ability to make or mar the party's chances in any general election. The party drew the bulk of its seats from UP both in the 1996 and 1998 elections. It was again UP that foiled the BJP's expectation of 250 seats in the 1999 elections. So UP is vital for the long-term survival of the Vajpayee government. What is worse, this debacle comes close to the upcoming assembly elections in the state, which will be the real test of the party's popularity. Little wonder, then, that BJP high-ups have called for an urgent examination of the party's organisation at the grass-roots. This is indeed ironical. For, all along — over the past six months — party workers in UP have insisted that the problem for the BJP exists not at the lowest level but at the very top. Maybe it is the absence of a charismatic figure at the top that is responsible for this state of affairs. The complaint against Ram Prakash Gupta is that he has failed to check factionalism and has also been unable to politically counter former chief minister Kalyan Singh. Gupta-baiters attribute his survival to his perceived proximity to Prime Minister Vajpayee. Surely this explains why senior BJP leaders immediately conveyed the bad news to the prime minister. When Mr Vajpayee returns from Lisbon, he may find he can no longer prop up Mr Gupta.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

THE TIMES OF INDIA

30 JUN 2000

Cong plays hard to get

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 29. — The Left Front and Trinamul Congress would both like to form the CMC board with Congress support, but the Congress says it has not received any formal request. In a written statement the PCC, however, ruled out supporting the Left Front.

Miss Mamata Banerjee, who said yesterday her party would not form the board with Congress support, changed tack today. She wouldn't mind if the Congress came forward to support the Trinamul, though she won't seek it.

The CPI-M and Mr Jyoti Basu himself today said the party had got in touch with the Congress. Before leaving for Israel, the chief minister said: "We have already sent word to the Congress. It is up to them to take a stand." He also "hoped" Congress councillors would abstain in the vote for mayor's post, which the CPI-M will contest.

In Delhi, CPI-M politburo member, Mr Prakash Karat, also said his party had sought the Congress's support. But Mr Pranab Mukherjee maintained that neither the Left nor the Trinamul had got in touch with the Congress.

Echoing him in Calcutta, the PCC chief said: "No party or leader has approached us as yet. We would have to know first what is exactly expected of us before we can spell out our stand."

Mr Chowdhury received a call today from Mrs Sonia Gandhi, who congratulated the PCC for winning 15 CMC seats. "I told Mrs Gandhi that I am going to meet the elected councillors along with other party functionaries during the day and will do whatever they decide,"

he told the press conference.

Congress councillors decided at the meeting to abide by whatever Mr Chowdhury decides. An SNS report from Delhi said the party's central leadership is likely to endorse whatever the state unit decides. Senior leaders at the AICC office said the question of supporting Trinamul-BJP "did not arise".

The PCC chief insisted at the press conference that the Congress was a "unified, single" entity. Mr Somen Mitra and Mr Saugata Roy, present at the press conference, supported him.



Basu: Cong should support us

- More reports on pages 3 & 4
- Editorial: Grassroot support, page 6

There were reports last night that some Congress councillors were contemplating crossing over to the Trinamul fold. Miss Banerjee today was confident her party would control the CMC, but would not say how. She insisted however: "We are not engineering defection in any party, nor do we have the money to buy councillors."

How, then would she manage the required the number? "That is a secret I would not

like to share with you."

The state CPI-M leadership was tightlipped today, but Mr Basu made no bones over his opinion that the Congress as a "secular" party should "support" the Front. Asked what would happen if it refused, he prompt answer was: "others" will control the civic board.

"We have ruled the CMC for several years at a stretch. Now others may rule. But that, however, may not happen with us trying to form the board," the octogenarian leader said.

Like Mr Basu, the Trinamul chief felt anti-Left forces (read Congress) "should" help her party form the board. "The mandate is clearly against the CPI(M)-led Left Front."

The Trinamul, she said, had the right to stake claim as the single largest party. "We fielded 118 candidates. Fifty-seven won, while three winning Independent candidates enjoy our support," she said.

An Independent councillor, Mr Hridaynath Gupta, has extended support to the Trinamul. Mr Gupta, who parted ways with the Congress after being denied a ticket, was present at a meeting of newly elected Trinamul councillors convened by Miss Banerjee today. This raised the Trinamul-BJP combine's tally to 65.

The Trinamul chief admitted that the alliance with NDA was responsible for her party's poor performance in Muslim-dominated areas.

Mr Basu was not disappointed with the Front's performance. The Trinamul, he said, did not do as well as it should have done considering that all parliamentary representatives from Calcutta belonged to the party. He admitted, however, that he was unhappy with the Front's performance in Salt Lake.

THE STATESMAN

30 JUN 2000

Mystery shrouds minister's death

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, May 2. — Nearly two days after Bidyut Ganguly died of severe burns, it remains unknown if the minister became the victim of an accident, killed himself, or was killed.

CPI-M leaders are tight-lipped. Ganguly's wife and daughters refuse to speak.

Police have only said the death was "unnatural". They have not been specific. Mr Kuldip Singh, SP, North 24-Parganas, said their inquiry would take some time; police were waiting for expert opinion. "Unless all the investigation reports including the post mortem examination report come in, we can't comment exactly on the circumstances under which the mishap occurred."

Did Ganguly kill himself?

"The reports will reveal the truth," Mr Singh said.

The chief minister too has said the government is waiting for the post mortem examination report on the cause of death. The home secretary, Mr Sourin Roy, said: "Let us first see the post mortem examination report."

Forensic experts today collected pieces of flesh, torn cloth and ash from the room where Ganguly suffered the burns. They scraped carbon deposits and traces of inflammable oil from the charred walls and floor.

They hoped the samples would tell them when and how the fire occurred.

The SP said it was only Ganguly's body that had caught fire. The furniture in the room was not damaged.

Suicide?

Mr Anil Biswas's statement that Ganguly was suffering from depression has fuelled speculation that the minister committed suicide.

Neighbours have said there was oil on the minister's body. Both the maid and the local people who had rushed into the bedroom said they had smelt kerosene. The door was bolted from inside, they said.

But SSKM doctors have said there was no kerosene on the body. Police found no kerosene container in the room.

To back up his "accidental fire" or "cigarette-in-bed" theory, a senior police official said: "If it was suicide then I must say Bidyutbabu chose the most painful method."

So what made the state CPI-M secretary hint at a connection between Ganguly's depression and death?

It is learnt that in the past few months, Ganguly often failed to make sense to his comrades in party discussions. His arguments were incoherent, and he appeared not to be in a healthy frame of mind.

He had disapproved of

lengthy discussions on the choice of nominees for the civic polls, and thought them to be a waste of time.

He repeatedly said there would be bloodshed in Bhatpara during the election — something comrades do not remember him as ever having said before.

Ganguly was troubled by the strictures Alimuddin Street passed on his lifestyle. CPI-M top brass once rapped him for using a cellphone given by the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation, which also footed his bills. He returned the phone after the rap.

There were also reports of Ganguly having been censured by Alimuddin Street for indulging in activities considered socially unacceptable. His party bosses apparently kept a tab on his activities — nor did the minister have the best of relations with the members of his family.

Police have recovered from a pond Ganguly's pillow, bedsheet and mosquito net which had caught fire. There are reports that they had been dumped in the water by Ganguly's relatives.

Forensic experts think these items, had they got them intact, might have given valuable leads. "Examination of the items in the original state would have helped us further", said one.

THE STATESMAN

Basu says 'suicide', party says why

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

9.87 WBS
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CALCUTTA, May 5. — Bidyut Ganguly had indeed died by his own hands, Mr Jyoti Basu and his deputy said today. Hours later, the state CPI-M suggested the reason: Ganguly had been acutely depressed after his "wayward" lifestyle earned him a caution from the party and censure at home.

Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, said in a statement that both party and family had tried to get Ganguly to mend his ways. But he seemed unable to keep his promise of restraining and correcting himself.

Earlier, the chief minister had made no attempt to explain the suicide as he faced reporters at Alimuddin Street this morning. He simply told them the post-mortem report says the former commerce and industry minister had killed himself.

6/5
Later at Writers' Buildings, the deputy chief minister too refused to suggest a reason for the suicide as he read out from a prepared statement.

"North 24-Parganas police ... from the circumstantial evidence, and after examining witnesses, have concluded that it was a case of suicide," Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said. "The autopsy report confirms that death was caused by burn injuries, which were ante-mortem (inflicted before death) in nature."

The post-mortem report indicates that Ganguly had poured kerosene on himself before setting himself on fire, Mr Bhattacharya said. The government is waiting for the findings of the forensic laboratory.

What could have led Ganguly to kill himself? Mr Bhattacharya said: "I have nothing to add to what I have already said."

He clarified he was merely stating the government version. So does the party

have any idea? "The party has its own procedure," the deputy chief minister said.

Last year, some CPI-M leaders from North 24-Parganas had complained about Ganguly's lifestyle and pressed the party to punish him. They alleged Ganguly would often misbehave at party functions. They wrote about the extravagance at the wedding of Ganguly's daughter, which they said was unbecoming of a Communist.

Senior party leaders from Murshidabad spoke of the former minister's "misconduct" at a party function in Behrampore. To top it all, a similar complaint came from Bangladesh Communist Party leaders after Ganguly visited that country. Some of the former minister's relatives too complained to the party about his ways.

Alimuddin Street summoned Ganguly and warned him. The party had almost made up its mind not to renominate him for next year's Assembly polls.

THE STATESMAN

5 MAY 2000

Kamtapur activists may shelter fleeing cadre

Bengal police fear N-E militant influx

FROM KESHAV PRADHAN

Siliguri, May 6: North Bengal police are keeping a close watch on Kamtapur activists in view of the possibility of their giving shelter to Bhutan-based Ulfa and Bodo militants.

If Bhutan flushes out the militants from its territory because of growing pressure from India, "a section of the northeastern militants may try to take refuge in areas where the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) has some influence," inspector-general of police (north Bengal) K.K. Das told **The Telegraph**.

"We don't want to take chances even though we are yet to officially know about the possible flush-out action in Bhutan. But we feel the time is ripe for such action," he added.

The situation in the region has

become a major source of concern for the authorities since the gunning down of CPM Jalpaiguri district committee member Pranesh Pal at Ghogsapara near the Bengal-Assam border on Thursday.

According to district magistrate (Jalpaiguri) Subroto Gupta, preliminary investigations indicated involvement of the KLO in the murder. The KLO is one of the three organisations fighting for the formation of a separate state of Kamtapur for Rajbanshis in north Bengal.

Das said Bhutan may find it difficult to completely uproot the militants who have formed a kind of economic system in the border region. He said the militants normally pay money to border villagers for logistic support. He feared that the presence of people of similar ethnicity and topography in north Bengal might help

the militants escape detection.

Since last year, at least a dozen militants have been arrested in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts. The number of arrests has been more in Jalpaiguri which has a sizeable Bodo population.

Recently, the government decided to deploy a combat force of state police personnel, especially trained at Salua in Midnapore, in the two northern districts to contain subversive activities. It also announced upgradation of the border task force to guard the border with Nepal in view of reports of growing ISI activity there.

The state and railway police have also made special arrangements to guard the rail and road bridges over the Sankosh river that join the Northeast with the rest of the country following the bomb explosion at New Jalpaiguri on June 22 last year.

THE TELEGRAPH

- 7 MAY 2000

Violence in Keshpur as Shah tour ends

Arindam Sarker
Keshpur (Midnapore), May 6

A SPATE of kidnappings took place and gun battles raged in this district barely 24 hours after Governor Viren J Shah's trip to Midnapore.

Yesterday, even as Shah was closeted with senior district officials discussing ways to improve the law and order situation in the violence-torn district, nine Trinamool Congress workers were kidnapped by CPI(M) supporters from Anandapur in Keshpur. Five of them returned home yesterday and the remaining four were released today by the kidnapers.

Today, stray gun battles took place in the border areas of Khetua village in Keshpur between Trinamool and CPI(M) cadres. "We are not shocked by the incidents. Kidnappings and gun battles have become the order of the day. And the fact that these incidents happen on the day the Governor visits the town proves that the dis-

trict administration has failed in its duty. We have lost faith in the police and we know they will never come to our rescue," said district general secretary of Trinamool Congress Mohammad Rafique.

Trinamool leaders here say that peace will never return to Keshpur unless the CPI(M) is defeated in Midnapore. "We are scared not only of the CPI(M) cadres and district leaders

Trinamool Blames CPM

but also the police. This time, we were lucky that our men returned home. In the past, many Trinamool workers who have been kidnapped are still missing and in many cases we have not received even their dead bodies," Trinamool district president Dinen Roy said.

Trinamool leaders feel that the CPI(M) has resorted to terror tactics because the party is steadily losing ground in the district. "Many

CPI(M) members have joined the Trinamool and thousands have become our supporters. No wonder, the CPI(M) leaders and cadres are trying to check this erosion by resorting to violence," said a Trinamool leader from Keshpur.

"We will also hit back at the CPI(M). All these years, we have suffered silently, but today we are prepared to take them on. We will take revenge. They cannot get away," cautioned Dinen Roy. "Kidnapping is only one of the many methods that is being adopted by the CPI(M) to curb our growing strength in Keshpur. We have lost hundreds of our men in the gun battles with them."

"It is a question of survival, protecting our family and holding on to our property. We are poor farmers but to defend ourselves we have taken up arms. Realising that they are steadily losing support here, the CPI(M) cadres are determined to kill all of us. But we will not allow that to happen," said Trinamool leader Shaanup Paria. Photograph on Page 2

THE Trinamul Congress's successive sweeping victories in the recent elections to the management boards of Midnapore district's four of the five cooperative banks have rattled the ruling West Bengal Marxists. And losing control of the biggest bank — Midnapore Cooperative Agricultural and Rural Development Bank (MCARDB) — after 22 years has left many of them wondering whether this is the harbinger of a political change in the state since they, to keep the bank under their total control, had always ensured the Opposition's exclusion from the management board through "selection".

The poll results of the banks' management boards have conclusively proved the massive erosion in the Marxists' once impregnable rural base in a red citadel like Midnapore. The results are proof enough of the growing alienation of the Marxists from their traditional supporters. This is certainly ominous for the Left Front's prospects in the next month's crucial Panskura parliamentary by-election.

The poll results are significant since they reflect the changing mood and voting preferences of share-croppers, small and marginal farmers and also of middle and rich peasants who are the shareholders of the four banks. For the last 23 years they had overwhelmingly voted for the Marxists. While the share-croppers, small and marginal farmers were once the Marxist storm-troopers and were responsible for the CPI-M's rapid spread in the country's largest district, today a large chunk of them are their worst enemy. Disillusionment with the Marxists has resulted in switching their allegiance to Trinamul. The middle and rich peasants, who had once jumped onto the Marxist bandwagon, have now latched on to the Trinamul Congress as they think that the Left Front has nothing new to offer any more.

The poll verdict is significant for another reason: it is a loud protest against the cult of organised political violence that the Marxists first unleashed in 1969 during their second United Front rule and which has now turned a large chunk of Midnapore into a seething cauldron of mindless violence. The Marxist bid to regain control of lost territories by snuffing out the Trinamul Congress through "armed operations" and the Trinamul's eye-for-an-eye policy have complicated matters. But it is the partisan use of official machinery by the Marxists that has shaken public confidence in the entire state administration. This has fuelled unprecedented violence which in the last 20 months has claimed over 50 lives in the Keshpur region alone. The damage and destruction to property are incalculable and development has come to a standstill.

Even the local administration admits that a mini civil war is on and a bulk of the district's nearly one crore population is affected. Almost every household, suffering from a siege mentality, is stacking arms supplied mostly by village smithies. For nearly two years they have manufactured nothing but guns and cannons to equip the two warring forces which possessed by a demoniacal spirit of revenge are determined to fight to the finish. Party offices have become veritable arsenals. Party supporters are sent for "operations" after undergoing a crash course in archery and guns. Villages are divided on party lines. Either they are wholly with the Trinamul or with the Marxists. No mixed following is tolerated. Trinamul supporters seeing the stockpiling of arms by the Marxists are also on a buying spree. For this they have imposed *dharjya* (extortion) on many Midnapore school and college teachers which has

Midsummer madness in Midnapore

The violence unleashed by the Marxists has pushed India's largest district to a point of no return, writes MANASH GHOSH



The 'armed operation' by the Marxists and the Trinamul's eye-for-an-eye policy have fuelled unprecedented violence which in the past 20 months has claimed over 50 lives in the Keshpur region

created strong resentment among the teaching community.

Strangely a large chunk of the small and marginal farmers which was in the vanguard of the Marxists' expansion in Midnapore is today spearheading a bloody campaign for the Trinamul whose sole purpose is to eliminate the Marxists. Fierce Marxist reprisals, backed by police in some cases, have added fuel to the fire. A district not used to such bestiality even during the height of the freedom struggle or agrarian



movements like the Tebhaga has now become notorious for daily rituals of cruelty.

The Marxists are wholly blamed for brutalising politics in Midnapore. In fact they are reaping the bitter harvest of what they had sown in Keshpur in 1969 when they lynched a peasant for refusing to be their supporter. What they subsequently did stunned even fellow Communists. In the late seventies houses and properties of CPI leaders were looted and burnt as the Marxists, keen to spread their influence, wanted to grab the sizable CPI bases in the district. The house of Pulin Tripathi, a respected assistant headmaster of Mohanpur school, was looted thrice (he lost his collection of the *Rabindra Rachanabali* and other priceless books). Sukumar Sengupta, the then secretary of the district CPI-M justified the attacks as "expressions" of *ganorosh* (people's wrath) against the "revisionist" pro-Congress policies of the CPI. He had



told a delegation of CPI leaders, "I know why you have come to complain. You are jealous that we have grown to become the biggest party from an insignificant outfit."

Ironically the same ruthless tactics are being adopted by the Trinamul to uproot the Marxists which the latter had employed to annex the CPI bases over two decades ago. And those applying them today were once committed comrades of the CPI(M). Corruption, arrogance, intolerance and the partisanship of the Marxists have today turned them into "renegades". The alienation is so great that except in Keshpur and Narayangarh, the Marxists were trounced in all the seven assembly constituencies in the board election of MCARD Bank despite these returning Left Front candidates in successive assembly polls. A large number of the village poor, including Muslims and Santhals, who to save themselves from the persecution of *jotedars* had once sought refuge from the Marxists, are today leading the Trinamul onslaught.

Their complete U-turn is the result of growing disenchantment with the local Marxist leadership for the way they have run the panchayats and conducted the party affairs and themselves. Much of the current Marxist predicament stems from its failure to confront and weed out the corrupt and divisive elements, who have no faith in the ideals

that the party stands for. In fact in its eagerness to expand the organisation it preferred to overlook the blemishes. None in the leadership bothered about them so long as the going was good for the party.

Complaints about *pattas* not being handed over to the landless who were recipients of vested land or well-to-do 58-year-olds being provided with old-age pension in preference to deserving 75-year-olds living below the poverty line were never entertained. Charges against the panchayat functionaries and the party's LCS (local committee secretary) taking cuts from various forms of assistance were always swept under the carpet. Clear cases of extortion from rich and poor farmers were never investigated. Grievances against the arrogance, inaccessibility, intolerance and opulent lifestyle of the local leadership were never heard. No notice was taken of party comrades who for a pittance "sublet" their Government teaching jobs to unemployed local youths. While Marxist loan defaulters were shielded, the ones without political protection were prosecuted. The highly partisan approach to development work also contributed to the process of alienation.

The disillusionment was also brought about by the Marxist panchayat functionaries refusing to be accountable to the village community. Although this failing is visible also among the non-Marxists, it assumes diabolical proportions because of a near-complete dominance of the panchayats by the Marxists.

Most of the gram *sangsads* or beneficiary committees are never allowed to meet as a result of which villagers are totally in the dark about how the panchayats have spent their money.

But it is the failure of the panchayats to create employment opportunities and execute development work that has estranged the natural allies. With less and

less money flowing from the centre and the state and agriculture getting increasingly mechanised the ability of the panchayats to create mandays for the rural poor is getting severely restricted. Ever since 1991 employment-oriented rural development work has suffered the most because of drastic cuts in central and state assistance. In addition the creation of durable assets in recent years has been negligible. The high hopes of progress and development that the Marxists had aroused by introducing land reforms and institutionalising panchayats lay shattered. Mechanisation of agriculture too has contributed to this. Before 1994 the *aman* cultivation used to create 170 working days. After mechanisation the figure has come down to 118.

Midnapore's "neo rich" middle peasantry, which has benefited the most from panchayats, has also moved away from the Marxists. Although they now raise three crops instead of one largely because of the rapid spread of irrigation and other facilities, they think that the Marxists with limited resources at their disposal, are in no position to meet their demands of increased production and agricultural development. They feel that the Trinamul-BJP Government at the Centre would be able to fulfil their expectations. The rich peasants too think alike. Having been victims of extortion, they nurse a deep sense of hostility against the Marxists. But the administration's refusal to execute over 8,000 court warrants against the Marxists involved in various court cases and its playing second fiddle to the ruling party bosses has enraged them.

(The author is Senior Writer, The Statesman)

THE STATESMAN

Grand alliance tempts key players

By Malabika Bhattacharya

CALCUTTA, APRIL 6. The Congress(I) president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, and her Delhi-based advisers are unaware of a place called Behala. For most Congress(I) supporters in West Bengal, Behala has suddenly become a mantra because on Wednesday, Mrs Gandhi's Congress(I) and Ms Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress joined forces in the South Calcutta neighborhood to elect a Congressman borough chairman keeping the ruling communists at bay.

Significantly, in the first ground-level application of the idea of mahajot or grand alliance, neither side spoke about the Bharatiya Janata Party whose still-to-be-defined position is cited by analysts in the context of discussions on the proposed mahajot.

A week after the Congress debacle in the Rajya Sabha elections in West Bengal, the news from Delhi about what Mrs Gandhi called an alliance of like-minded parties or what Ms Banerjee described as the mahajot has energised the Congress(I) and made the already aggressive Trinamool perkier.

Functionaries of the two parties and their frontal organisations have begun to discuss the alliance at various levels keeping in view the approaching elections to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation and over 80 municipalities, almost all run by the CPI(M)-led Left Front.

Ms Banerjee's alliance with the BJP and her party's existence as a powerful component of the National Democratic Alliance are tugging at their minds but the workers of the two parties are pressing their leadership to forge a mutually-beneficial relationship to prevent the usual split of anti-Left votes. It appears that the workers will hammer out a loose alliance and present the same as fait accompli to the leadership.

All things considered, Bengal politics has entered an exciting phase. On the one hand, Mr Jyoti Basu is going to quit the centre-stage in a few months leaving a level-playing field

where the Communist Party of India (Marxist), for the first time in 23 years, will have to face the electorate, the Opposition and an unfriendly Centre without the decisive advantage of Mr. Basu's presence at the helm. On the other, the Opposition parties especially the Congress and the Trinamool are about to re-engineer their politics in anticipation of the big picture, the contours of which will be determined by a host of inter-locked Bengal-specific and national issues.

The task of re-engineering non-Left politics in West Bengal will depend on four key figures: Mrs Gandhi, Ms Banerjee, Mr. A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury and Mr. Somen Mitra.

After her near-fatal error in judgment which led to the debacle in the Rajya Sabha elections, Mrs Gandhi appears to have dealt with the Bengal crisis rather well recognising the true worth of the Mitra-Khan Choudhury combine. The party chief whip, Mr. P.R. Das Munshi and his followers are now pressing Ms Gandhi against the Mitra-Khan Choudhury combine, which they believe had masterminded the cross-voting against the official candidate. Though the Bengal situation is going to encourage Congressmen in other States to do a Mitra on the Congress high command, a hard line against the combine will most certainly recoil on the high command as a large number of Congressmen including senior leaders will desert the party.

On the contrary, Mrs Gandhi appears to have regained some lost ground by granting audience to the Mitra-Khan Choudhury combine thereby initiating concrete moves towards a grand alliance.

Right now, Mrs Gandhi's job is to keep the party together, for which she will require Mr Mitra in the days ahead because of the latter's fierce but under-publicised commitment to the party, its ideology and allegiance to the Nehru-Gandhi clan. Besides, Mr Mitra and Mr Khan Choudhury have an unimaginable grip on the average Congressman, thanks to the emotional investments they have made in him over time.

It is too early to make a definite comment on the mahajot. But, it appears the key players are feeling tempted to do a V.P. Singh on the ruling Left. They are likely to try and replicate the situation in which Mr Singh successively acted as a bridge between two conflicting forces, the Left and the BJP and ousted the Congress from office. The coming days will tell whether or not such an experiment will be repeated.

Security to be tightened at Attari

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 6. The Centre has identified several measures for strengthening the security measures at Attari railway station and Wagah land customs stations on the Indo-Pak border to foil attempts by Pakistani agencies to push in fake Indian currency, arms and explosives through Samjhauta Express train.

The security measures were identified at a review meeting held yesterday during a visit of the Union Home Secretary, Mr. Kamal Pande, and other senior officials of the Home Ministry to Ajnala sector in Amritsar, Wagah border, Attari railway station and Raja Sansi airport.

It was decided to limit the baggage allowance from Indian and other visitors through Samjhauta Express. It was proposed to limit the baggage allowance to Rs. 3000 per person for those travelling by train to Attari railway station.

Other measures include total baggage check and the decision to keep the porters out of the railway platform. Baggage trolleys have been introduced for the facility of passengers and four x-ray machines installed for screening of the baggage.

The review meeting was attended by from the railway board, immigration, Central Board of Excise and Customs, Punjab police and the Director-General, (BSF).

THE HINDU

7 MAY 11

No controversy in Panskura: Das Munshi

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, May 13

IRRESPECTIVE OF the result of the forthcoming by-polls in Panskura, the Congress party's decision to put up a candidate there is in keeping with the party's policy of opposing the NDA. And the decision of a section the PCC to oppose the high command's move is of no consequence, said PCC working president and Congress chief whip in the Lok Sabha Priya Ranjan Das Munshi.

"The decision to contest in Panskura has been taken by the high command and whoever defies party chief's decision will do so at his own peril. In a democratic party like ours, individuals have right to defy the decision but the AICC will take action against them at an appropriate time," Das Munshi said.

"Moreover, the PCC had taken a decision to maintain equidistance from the Trinamool and BJP on February 10. So I don't see any deviation from party policy."

Refuting the allegations made by a section of the PCC leadership that Das Munshi was misleading Congress chief Sonia Gandhi about the ground political realities in Bengal, Das Munshi said: "Who am I to mislead? And those who are alleging are themselves responsible for the party's present position in State politics. Under Somen

Mitra, the Congress between 1993-1998 was wiped out in Bengal. But today I am again trying to revive the party here."

Commenting on the statements made by some senior PCC leaders that they would not campaign for Subhankar Sarkar, the Congress candidate in Panskura, Das Munshi said that this decision would do the party good.

"All those who campaigned for the party in the last three years have failed to produce results. Instead, they have only brought the party's position down. So the party will be happy if they don't campaign for the candidate in Panskura," he said.

Das Munshi agreed that Panskura was a difficult seat and that the Congress was not really bothered whether the party candidate wins or loses. "We have to make our presence felt and that is very important. Moreover, we can-

not forget that the CPI(M) and the district administration will work together to defeat our candidate.

So I have requested the Election Commission and Home Minister LK Advani to deploy central forces so that free and fair elections could be held in Panskura," Munshi added.

Talking about the rebel faction in the PCC, Das Munshi claimed that they don't have the "guts to leave the party". "They are political opportunists who after enjoy-

ing the harvest from Alimuddin Street (CPI-M headquarters), now want to have a high yielding prospect from Harish Chatterjee Street (Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee's residence). They will

never split the party and if they do, they will return once Mamata denies them tickets," he said.

Das Munshi believes, the rebels have become a liability not only for the Congress but will become one for Mamata too.

"Today they are blaming me for the failure of Mahajot, but the fact remains that the distribution of symbols was in the hands of PCC president Ghani Khan Chowdhury and not mine. So why blame me for the failure of Mahajot in the civic elections," he asked.

He suggested that the Congress was not against the Mahajot but there were certain pre-conditions to which all the partners — Trinamool, BJP and the Congress — should sign prior to the alliance.

"One, Barkatda should be our leader if we win. Secondly, there should be a comprehensive economic agenda. Third, all of us should condemn the Jamaat Islami, Bajrang Dal, VHP, and RSS. Fourth, condemn the review of the Constitution and finally, start a movement against the withdrawal of subsidies on essential commodities," he said. "Only then a dialogue can start."



Priya Ranjan Das Munshi

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 MAY 2000

Mamata's peace bait for Panskura

Arindam Sarkar
Garbeta, May 14

GIVE ME Panskura, I'll give you peace and prosperity in return, Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee told voters here today.

"The CPI(M) will not get away with the torture and terror it is inflicting on the people of Midnapore," the Trinamool leader, here to kick off the campaign for the Panskura by-poll, warned.

"The people here will never forgive the CPI(M) cadres and I will not forget what my workers are undergoing here. Some policemen, led by the SP, Midnapore, have become a tool in the hands of the CPI(M). They are merely carrying out orders of the party bosses. The SP should understand that now that the by-poll date has been announced, he is no longer answerable to Chief Minister Jyoti Basu and his deputy, Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya. The police

officer now functions under the Election Commission," she thundered amid loud cheers from the massive crowd that had gathered to attend her first meeting at Keshpur.

The Trinamool chief addressed public meetings at Keshpur and Garbeta, the two Assembly segments, which are part of the Panskura Lok Sabha constituency. Party leaders Sudip Bandyopadhyay, Pankaj Banerjee and the Trinamool candidate from Panskura, Bikram Sarkar, were present.

The CPI(M), fearing a defeat in Panskura and in the 2001 Assembly polls, is resorting to the "politics of the bullet", the Railway Minister said. "Many of their own members, angry with the high-handedness of the cadres, are crossing over to the Trinamool."

"Today, two CPI(M) councillors Mohammed Zalil and Nabi Hussain Ansari and a minority leader Shahanshah Jehangir have joined us," she said introducing them to the people. "This

is just the beginning. Many more Muslim leaders of the CPI(M) will soon join us," said Trinamool Congress Minority Cell convenor Al-Haj Abul Kalam.

Banerjee accused the CPI(M) of driving a wedge between Hindus and Muslims. "They are trying to divide our force. I promise to look after your needs. But you have to give me Panskura. This will be our first jolt to the CPI(M). We will then uproot them from Bengal," she said. The Trinamool chief said that her party was collecting reports on the CPI(M) and administration-perpetrated terror in Keshpur, Debra, Pingla, Sabong, Chandrakona and Panskura. These will be made public in due course. "My people have shed tears. Many have been maimed and a large number killed. People no longer feel safe. I am shocked to learn that they sell off their lands to protect themselves. Don't be scared of the red flag," Banerjee said.

Another report on Page 5

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 MAY 2000

■ Mamata men squabble over nominations ■ BJP h
nds out ultimatum

Trinamul CMC list gives BJP the short shrift

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, May 17. — The Trinamul Congress today came out with a list of 108 candidates for the CMC polls, leaving only 19 seats for the BJP. An indignant BJP threatened to field 35 candidates on its own if its ally didn't loosen its fist within two days.

Trinamul Congress leader, Mr Pankaj Banerjee, said his party had not decided on nominations at 13 wards. The Trinamul, he said, plans to give tickets to some eminent people.

But Trinamul insiders said the seats were being held back for friendly Congressmen, mostly sitting councillors.

The state BJP went into an extended huddle as the Trinamul made its offer. At the

end of the secretariat meeting, a senior leader announced: "Unless the Trinamul reconsiders the list, the BJP may field 35 candidates and change the CMC wards."

Mr PD Chitlangia, state unit vice president, described the Trinamul decision as "unfortunate". It would cause his party difficulty, he said.

Mr Chitlangia was surprised the Trinamul did not consult his party before making today's announcement. The BJP will discuss the matter again with its central observer, Mr Kailashpati Mishra, who arrives tomorrow, he said.

Mr Mrinal Das, a state BJP secretary, alleged the Trinamul had ignored the interests of his party. It will also "harm the interest of the BJP-Trinamul Congress alliance", he warned.

The decision will "weaken the anti-Left force and encourage the Left Front".

According to Mr Das, the BJP was cooperating with its ally in forming the mahajot. "But it seems from the attitude of the Trinamul Congress that the party leaders want to throw the BJP out of the alliance."

For the Trinamul, Mr Banerjee said his party had had seat adjustments with the BJI since 1998. "This time there'll be seat adjustments," he said.

On the BJP's demand for more seats, Mr Banerjee said the allies would talk. "We have given the BJP those seats where they stand chance to win."

Though the mahajot could not be given shape this time, it would definitely be formed afterwards, he said. Mr

Banerjee announced that the RSP MLA from Kumargram, Mr Shalib Toppo, had in a letter today expressed his desire to join the Trinamul.

But the Trinamul's problems too surfaced today.

As the list of 108 was made public after a party meeting at the Nizam Palace, groups of Trinamul workers demonstrated in protest against the denial of tickets to their favourites.

Agitated partymen shouted slogans criticising Mr Pankaj Banerjee. They scuffled with Mr Sanjay Bakshi, a senior party member. Some aggrieved party members demonstrated near the house of Miss Mamata Banerjee, who was away in Delhi. Their target was obviously Mr Banerjee who played a key role in selecting the candidates.

THE STATESMAN

16 MAY 2000

Kespur bathes in blood, Buddha admits failure

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KESPUR/BEHRAMPURE, May 21. — The entire Kespur block has virtually turned into a morgue and things aren't expected to get any better with the government pleading helplessness today.

As many as 10 people have been killed in sporadic clashes between CPI-M and Trinamul Congress workers since yesterday evening. With this, the toll in clashes goes up to 15 this week and 21 since January. Thanks largely to a defunct and callous police administration in the district, say locals.

That they are not way off the mark was evident when Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya conceded that administration had indeed collapsed in Midnapore. The Deputy Chief Minister also called for more police force there, forgetting perhaps, that as home (police) minister, it is his prerogative to reinforce or reduce forces.

A group of Trinamul men looted and torched the house of Mr M Bhattacharya, a member of the CPI-M's district secretariat at Balpai this evening. Several CPI-M cadres were injured when they tried to resist. The attackers looted several houses at Dilantabar, Saliara and Saliara, adding to the tension.

Mr Suvankar Sarkar, the Congress candidate for the Panskura Lok Sabha seat, who went to Kespur for a fast-unto-death from this morning demanding peace, was whisked away by police in view of the tension in the area.

"Polls cannot be held in such a situation. Peace should be ensured before polls take place," he said.

Things turned violent after the by-election in the Panskura Lok Sabha seat was announced. Kespur is an Assembly segment under Panskura. Thousands of people of rival parties have gone on the rampage in at least 14

villages for the past three days, the police being fully aware of each of them.

Things got worse when CPI-M-backed goons, who sneaked into the area from adjoining Garbeta block raided nine Trinamul-dominated villages. The latter retaliated by attacking five CPI-M strongholds.

Clashes occurred at Kalagram and Soroi which continued for about four hours since last evening.

Of the 10 killed in the clash, bodies of 8 have been identified as those of Trinamul workers.

COOCH BEHAR TOLL

COOCH BEHAR, May 21. — Three persons were killed when Trinamul and CPI-M workers clashed outside Chatpokihaja Refugee Primary School in the Hajrahat-I panchayat area, 17 km off Mathabhanga in Cooch Behar, this morning.

The school was the venue of a polling booth for the by-election to the Hajrahat-I panchayat. The incident forced a suspension of polling an hour after it started.

Trouble erupted at about 7.20 a.m. when armed men, said to be CPI-M workers "who had surrounded the booth since last night started attacking voters heading for the booth. — SNS

■ Darjeeling poll report, page 3

Two other bodies were thrown into a well at Chandanberia. Paresh Kolay, abducted yesterday, is still untraced.

CPI-M hoods had shot at the Trinamul workers' legs after which they were hacked by local cadres. Trinamul avenged this by shooting down two prominent local CPI-M workers.

Over 100 houses were burnt and about 160 looted in affected villages, leading to mass exodus.

Seven Trinamul men were injured when police fired at Chakraghab. But police did not visit the villages raided by CPI-M cadres though informed earlier, alleged a Trinamul leader in Kespur.

Admitting the government's impotence, Mr Bhattacharya said at Behrampore: "There is virtually no political control in Midnapore." But quickly shifted the blame to "that irresponsible woman"— Miss Mamata Banerjee. What is taking place in Kespur is largely because of her unruly supporters, the Deputy CM declared.

So what's the solution? "The number of policemen posted in Midnapore should immediately be increased. Moreover, there is a genuine dearth of police vehicles there."

According to Mr Bhattacharya, no political party should tolerate criminals in its fold. He said he had asked police to weed out 'black' elements irrespective of party affiliations.

He is scheduled to visit Midnapore on 27 May. The Chief Minister is slated to visit the district on the 31st.

Mr Bhattacharya said arrangements had been made for the Panskura by-poll. More EFR personnel have been sent and police are on maximum alert.

His statement that Miss Banerjee is the villain of the piece was echoed by CPI-M leader Mr Anil Biswas, who held the Trinamul leader's recent speech at Kespur responsible for the bloodbath. He alleged that she had called upon her supporters to maim CPI-M workers and made other provocative statements.

His colleague Mr Biman Bose went a step further, saying Trinamul was taking help of a "foreign agency" to create a major law and order problem before the civic polls. The Trinamul spokesman described this as "wild and unsubstantiated".

THE STATESMAN

22 MAY 1971

12 killed, 60 wounded in Keshpur flare-up

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, May 21

AT LEAST 12 people have been killed in a renewed burst of violence between CPI(M) and Trinamool Congress supporters at Keshpur since last night. More than 60 people have been injured and hundreds of houses torched. The clashes started on the very day the district administration banned the carrying of arms and ammunition in Panskura Lok Sabha constituency.

Violence erupted at Gopinathbari village and quickly spread to Birbira and Chakraghab, senior Midnapore police officers said over the telephone. Supporters of rival parties fought pitched battles with bombs, matchetes, swords, bows and arrows.

"Gopinathbari was the epicentre. From here, the violence spread to

the adjoining areas. Police fired four rounds to scatter the warring groups.

One person was injured in the firing," inspector-general of police, Prasun Mukherjee said.

More than 100 houses were set ablaze and at

least 150 looted in Birbira and Chakraghab. Close to 1,500 people have lost their homes and quite a few have fled their villages.

Seven of those killed have been identified so far. Among them, Sheikh Jhari, Inal Haw, Asad Ali, Wazed Ali and Jamshed Ali are said to be Trinamool supporters.

Julfai Mullik and Besaraf Mullick

Rural by-poll violence

Calcutta, May 21

THREE PERSONS were killed and five injured in clashes between CPI(M) and Trinamool Congress men near Mathabhanga, Cooch Behar, today. The clash began after a group of Trinamool men allegedly tried to stop some villagers from voting in the panchayat by-poll. Two CPI(M) men and one of the Trinamool died on the spot. Elsewhere, in Ghutiarisharif, South 24-Parganas, an executive magistrate, A K Ganguly, was attacked by suspected CPI(M) men. The officer was supervising the panchayat by-polls.

MTC, Calcutta

situation.

are reportedly CPI(M) men. One other cadre died when he was being brought to the SSKM Hospital, Calcutta.

Unofficial sources said three more bodies had been fished out of a village well in Keshpur, raising fears that the toll could rise.

The deputy inspector-general, Midnapore range, Rajender

Singh, and SP Gaurav Dutta have both rushed to the spot and are camping there.

The Eastern Frontier Rifles and Rapid Action Force too have been deployed at Keshpur and adjoining areas to contain the

violence erupted again in Sabong, when CPI(M) and Trinamool workers clashed in 12 villages simultaneously.

"The cadres looted and set fire to several houses at Dubrajpur, Shyamsundarpur, Butchak Bazar, Gouripur, Khoran and other villages. Congress panchayat mem-

bers Amal and Nirmal Bera and Badal Maity of the Trinamool were abducted by suspected CPI(M) men," said WBPCG general secretary Manash Bhuniya.

Agency reports said the house of a CPI(M) leader, Hem Bhattacharyya, was burnt by the arsonists.

"Law and order has totally collapsed here, but the State Government is taking no note of it. Governor Viren Shah visited the place and prohibitory orders too were clamped. But all this doesn't seem to have worked. This proves the incompetence of the State Government," Trinamool leader Pankaj Banerjee said.

CPI(M) Politburo leader Biman Bose squarely blamed the Trinamool for the latest flare-up in Keshpur. "Trinamool leaders are inciting trouble. They often give inflammatory speeches. They have goons on their payrolls."

Cong calls Bangla bandh on May 25

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, May 22

HT 1 2365
THE WEST Bengal Congress today called a 24-hour Bangla bandh on May 25 to protest against the growing lawlessness in the State. This is seen as a bid to steal a march over the Trinamool Congress over the killing of 11 people at Keshpur in sporadic incidents in the last 48 hours.

Though there was no fresh trouble at Keshpur today, the area remained tense. Hundreds of people have lost their homes in two days of violence.

Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee, who was on a tour of north Bengal, cut short her trip and rushed to Keshpur today. She took the police and the State Government to task for failing to check the spiralling violence.

"This cannot go on forever. Jyoti Basu and his Government are to blame for the collapse of law and order in places such as Keshpur. The CPI(M) is hand-in-glove with

the police. But remember, the last judgment rests with the people. I will consider calling a bandh, only after I return to Calcutta," she said.

Earlier, when she reached Keshpur thousands of Trinamool supporters greeted her. She placed wreaths on the bodies of seven partymen killed in the clashes with the CPI(M).

Back in Calcutta, PCC president

A B A Ghani
K h a n
Choudhury

gave the bandh call at a late-evening news conference, which came at the end of day-long deliberations. It was Youth Congress president Paresh Pal who had first threatened a bandh on the Keshpur issue. The date was advanced by a day, because May 26 is the last date for filing nominations for the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) elections.

Earlier in the day, Trinamool Chief Whip in the Lok Sabha

9 8 1 1 1 3
Sudip Bandyopadhyay demanded that the Election Commission intervene in a situation where "our men are being wantonly killed by the CPI(M), with the police as abettors".

Khan Chowdhury and Trinamool general secretary Mukul Roy, too, urged Chief Election Commissioner M S Gill to ensure that paramilitary forces were deployed in Panskura Lok Sabha constituency, of which Keshpur is an Assembly segment.

Meanwhile, the CPI(M) and the Trinamool blamed each other for fomenting trouble at Keshpur. Chief Minister Jyoti Basu and his deputy,

Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya, said Banerjee's "inflammatory speeches" at Keshpur on May 14 had aggravated the situation. She only was to blame for the fresh flare-up.

Trinamool leaders returned the compliment alleging that the deputy chief minister had egged on

his party men against the Trinamool workers "by asking the police to help the CPI(M) spread its hegemony before the by-election to the Panskura Lok Sabha constituency".

The Chief Minister claimed the Trinamool had gone back on its word on keeping peace at Keshpur. He reviewed the Keshpur situation today. Among those present at the meeting were the deputy chief minister, Panchayat Minister Suryakanta Mishra, the chief secretary, the home secretary and the director-general of police.

Basu ruled out another all-party meeting for now. The chief minister said every effort would be made to ensure that the Panskura by-election went off peacefully. The police request for additional force and more vehicles would be met.

A senior State police officer said that there was a strong police presence at Keshpur already and reinforcements would be sent.

Related reports on Page 3

Keshpur Violence

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 MAY 2000

Trinamool not to support Bangla bandh on May 25

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, May 23

BRUSHING ASIDE appeals from the State Congress, Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee said today that she would not support the Congress-sponsored bandh on May 25 as it would not help the people of Keshpur in any way. "What's the use of such a bandh, when it will not solve the sufferings of our people who are being killed by CPI(M) cadres?" she said.

Banerjee said she would be leaving for Keshpur tomorrow to meet family members of the 10 Trinamool workers killed there on May 20. "I will go there frequently. And I want to see who will stop me. The CPI(M) has started the battle we will take the war to their camp," she thundered. "We have decided to hold Keshpur Divas here on May 26 at Subodh Mallik Square to launch a Ganatantra Bachao Andolan."

"We want peace and democratic rights of the people to be restored, but the CPI(M) is incapable of giving that. We will fight the CPI(M) politically," Banerjee added.

She expressed shock over the manner in which CPI(M) cadres were torturing Trinamool workers, hanging them from trees and chopping off their limbs. Even children, she alleged, were not spared; they were being fired at on the grounds that they were supporters of Trinamool and villages after villages were being torched. "There is a complete violation of human rights, leave alone democratic rights of the people," she said.

"Yesterday I handed over the corpse of my workers to their families. I am proud of my workers who are waging a struggle in Keshpur with their blood. Today, the times are so bad that I learnt poor villagers were selling off their property and lands to protect themselves from the CPI(M)-

sponsored terrorism," Banerjee added.

She accused the State Government of colluding with the attackers in Keshpur. "I told the Chief Election Commissioner that the police were receiving orders from the CPI(M) and torturing people in Keshpur. Since law and order is a State subject, the CPI(M) is misusing its powers. We demand immediate transfer of the Midnapore SP," added Trinamool MP Sudip Bandopadhyay.

Hitting out at Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, Banerjee said that he was no longer in a position to run the State. "He is ruling the State like blind Dhritarashtra. He needs rest and should leave the State administration in good hands. He has no right to spoil the future of Bengal," she said.

The State BJP said though it supported the issues behind the bandh, it did not support the strike.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 MAY 1974

Twelve hurt in bandh violence

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, May 25

THE 12-HOUR Bangla bandh today called by the Congress to protest against "lawlessness and mass killings by the CPI(M) in some parts of Midnapore" passed off peacefully, barring some incidents of clashes between the police and bandh supporters. Police fired two rounds in the air to disperse Congress workers at Nabagram in Murshidabad when they were putting up a road block on National Highway No. 34A.

At least 12 people throughout the State were injured in skirmishes with the police. Altogether 878 persons were arrested.

Life was affected in large parts of the State, including Calcutta. Though the Metro Rail remained unaffected, train services in Eastern Railway and South-Eastern Railway were disrupted as

bandh supporters squatted on the tracks. Indian Airlines maintained its normal flight schedules. The Calcutta-Haldia Port systems remained unaffected.

Markets, shops and business establishments remained closed at most places in and around Calcutta. Schools and colleges remained closed. Attendance in offices and banks was below normal even though the State Government pressed into service 948 buses and 85 tramcars. Private buses and minibuses, private vehicles and taxis stayed off the roads.

Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya, however, described the bandh as a "flop".

He said the police fired two rounds of blanks after repeated lathi-charge and firing of teargas shells failed to disperse Congress supporters who were obstructing NH-34A at Mahadhipur village near Nabagram in Murshidabad. One

policeman and two bandh supporters were injured in the incident.

Bhattacharyya claimed that attendance at the State Secretariat was 60 per cent, against the average of 65 per cent. Eyewitness accounts, however, said that save for finance and home departments, attendance was between 35 and 40 per cent.

Director-general of police (law & order) Prasun Mukherjee said of the 878 people arrested, 321 were taken into custody for obstructing train movement at over 30 stations. Stating that the bandh "was largely peaceful", he said the law and order situation was under control. Two Congress MLAs, Sheikh Daulat Ali and Asit Mitra, were put behind the bars as they staged sit-in demonstrations and blocked roads in Diamond Harbour and Bagnan. He said tea gardens, collieries and most industrial units in the State functioned normally.

Related report on Page 3

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 MAY 2001

LF lauds police for 'peaceful' polls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, May 28. — The Left Front today claimed the civic polls had passed peacefully, ignoring the cries of the Trinamul Congress and the Congress that "CPI-M goons and a partisan police" had reduced the polls to a farce.

Mr Sailen Dasgupta lauded the police. Members of the Trinamul, BJP and the Congress tried to create problems at a few places, but major disturbances were avoided through timely police intervention, the LF chairman said.

He said there were also reports of outlaw trouble in four Khardah booths.

The Congress has demanded

523
29/3
repoll in at least 24 booths in North 24-Parganas, while it waits for poll reports from North Bengal.

Trinamul spokesman Mr Pankaj Banerjee, however, did not demand a repoll. "Such a demand is meaningless, as there has been no polling. The CPI-M and a partisan administration have throttled democracy. We sent four fax messages to the state Election Commissioner, Mr Anish Majumder, informing him about the large-scale rigging, but he told us that polling was going on peacefully," he said.

It is no use complaining to the state election commissioner, who is doing the CPI-M's bidding, Mr Banerjee said.

However, the Trinamul will keep the Chief Election Commission and the Union home minister posted with the conduct of the civic elections violating all democratic norms, he said.

The BJP's state unit vice-president, Mr Muzaffar Khan, also said that a detailed report on electoral malpractices would be sent to Mr LK Advani.

The Trinamul also alleged that the state deputy chief minister had held a "secret" meeting with the police at Midnapore yesterday, where he instigated them to launch an offensive against the Trinamul activists. "This is another gross violation of the election code of conduct and we have decided to

lodge a complaint with the CEC," Mr Banerjee added.

The BJP state unit president, Mr Asim Ghosh, said his party will submit a memorandum to the Governor tomorrow in protest against CPIM's electoral malpractices.

Mr Ghosh alleged CPI-M supporters had assaulted two candidates of his party in Titagargh and destroyed the party's booth camp in Khardah. In Asoke Nagar, several voters were prevented by CPI-M supporters from entering booths.

CPI-M supporters rigged the poll also in Bally's ward 17 and created problems in some booths in Old Malda and English Bazar municipalities, Mr Ghosh said.

THE STATESMAN

29 MAY 2001

Left Front looks to win back refugees

SUB
29/5
SUMIT SEN
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, May 28. — Concerned at the party's waning influence in the erstwhile refugee settlements in West Bengal, the CPI-M state committee has decided to initiate steps in a desperate bid to win back the voters there who, in large numbers, have moved away from the Marxists in recent years.

According to a decision by Alimuddin Street, instead of merely depending on the party-affiliated United Central Refugee Council (UCRC) to win over the voters of the refugee belts, the party itself will take direct initiatives in this regard.

It may be recalled that all these years, it was mainly the UCRC which used to do the spadework in the refugee pockets on the CPI-M's behalf. According to a report prepared by the state government's refugee rehabilitation committee in 1981, the total population of such refugees was about 80 lakhs. Now the figure stands well above a crore.

A secret CPI-M document indicates Alimuddin Street's candid admission that the party is losing its foothold in the erstwhile refugee bases like Tollygunge,

Jadavpur, Dhakuria, Dum Dum, Barrackpore, Krishnagar and Ranaghat, previously known as Leftist strongholds. The recent election results have indicated that the party is failing to maintain its past influence over the voters there.

Party insiders say that the CPI-M's defeat in Krishnagar, Dum Dum, Jadavpur and Barasat had come as a rude shock to Alimuddin Street which is now desperate to improve the party's position in such areas well before the crucial assembly polls of 2001. What had shaken the confidence of the Marxists were the two successive defeats of the party nominees in Dum Dum, a major base of the erstwhile refugees from east Pakistan, and then Bangladesh, at the hands of the BJP. This was despite the UCRC's hard work in refugee concentrations in Dum Dum during the last Lok Sabha polls.

The CPI-M note admits that the new generations of these refugee families are no longer swayed by the Leftists. Instead, they are supporting anti-communist forces. By this, the CPI-M note obviously means the BJP and the Trinamul Congress.

The CPI-M state committee has, therefore, called for special programmes to expose the "communal character" of the

BJP and the RSS among the voters in these pockets. Attempts should be made to win over the voters in these areas, excluding the sections of the erstwhile of refugee which have become affluent by this time. The poorer sections of this population ought to be involved with mass movements on various common issues and also those pressing for central assistance for ensuring their proper rehabilitation.

In a renewed attempt to forcefully take up the cause of proper rehabilitation of this population, the CPI-M leadership has also decided to observe the golden jubilee celebration of the UCRC between 11 and 13 August in Halishahar in North 24-Parganas. This is part of an exercise to strengthen the UCRC which seems to have lost much of its previous clout with settlers.

The CPI-M's state leadership has planned movements to expose the "failures" of central governments in the past, mostly Congress regimes, to provide adequate assistance for the rehabilitation of these settlers. Such movements will also press for adequate funds from the Vajpayee government in this regard, apart from immediate recognition of 998 refugee colonies in the state.

THE STATESMAN

29 MAY 2001

No Central forces needed for Panskura by-poll: CEO

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, May 29

NO CENTRAL forces are needed for the Panskura by-poll, chief electoral officer Sabyasachi Sen has told Chief Election Commissioner M S Gill.

Briefing reporters at the Writers' Buildings today, Sen said the State administration had assured him 2,000 security personnel to keep peace on June 5, when Panskura goes to the polls. This will include men from the State Armed Police, Rapid Action Force and Eastern Frontier Rifles. This deployment will be at least two-and-a-half times more than in the last parliamentary elections in the constituency.

Sen said Gill rang him up in the morning and enquired about the road connecting Sabong and Jalchak. The road was reportedly dug up at several places to stop policemen from reaching trouble spots. Gill was informed that the road had been repaired.

A Congress delegation today met Sen and urged him to call an all-party meeting to stop violence in Midnapore and ensure peaceful

polling in Panskura.

Atish Sinha, senior party leader and Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, said the team told the CEO: "Campaigning has become difficult in Sabong, Keshpur and in parts of Pingla. These are areas our party candidate Subhankar Sarkar

The State Government had pledged 2,000 security personnel to keep peace on June 5. This deployment will be at least two-and-a-half times more than in the last Lok Sabha poll in the constituency

and other leaders cannot even enter. The situation in the other segments is just as tense and might worsen any moment."

They contended that Sarkar was not being given police cover and armed escorts during canvassing. "The police, as well as the adminis-

tration, are partisan. They must be asked to remain strictly neutral," the delegation demanded.

The team, which included Congress MLAs Saugata Roy and Tapas Roy and party general secretary Pradipto Bhattacharya, impressed upon the CEO that since he was the Election Commission representative, he should not go by the "mere assurances of the Left Front Government. We expect you to act independently and ensure that voters are not intimidated by anyone."

Sinha and his colleagues told the CEO: "The model code of conduct is being violated with impunity in Panskura. Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya had met police officers during his election tour and several ministers are using official cars for campaigning. A Union Minister was seen moving around in Panskura with an I-G of the Railway Protection Force."

Later, the CEO said: "I am giving a serious thought to the Congress suggestion of calling an all-party meeting." Both the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister had last week turned down the demand for such a meeting.

THE HINDUSTAN

30 MAY 2000

Tense Alimuddin watches 'grand alliance' moves

9.8.00 - 513 2/A
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, April 1. — With the dominant PCC camp favourably responding to Miss Mamata Banerjee's call for a "grand alliance" against the Left Front, worried CPI-M mandarins are keenly watching the developments before chalking out their strategy to deal with the situation.

Officially, Alimuddin Street is attaching no importance to the proposed alliance. But inside the party, the concern is evident. A section in the CPI-M feels the LF will face its toughest challenge yet in the coming elections, civic body and Assembly polls, in the event of an overt or even covert understanding between the Trinamul Congress and the ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury-Somen Mitra camp in the Congress.

CPI-M insiders do not rule out the possibility of the party considering advancing the next Assembly polls, if the situation so demands. Moreover, in the event of Mr Jyoti Basu deciding to quit active politics later this year, the party will be hardly left with an option.

All attention is now focussed on the proposed meeting between Mrs Sonia Gandhi and Mr Khan Chowdhury and Mr Mitra in Delhi. The duo, originally scheduled to leave for Delhi today, have postponed their departure and will now leave tomorrow.

Mr Mitra made it clear today that he will not hesitate to highlight his "views" during the meeting. They are also expected to meet Miss Mamata Banerjee in Delhi.

Mr Sultan Ahmed, senior PCC leader close to Mr Somen Mitra,



Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi



Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury

said today that only an alliance under the leadership of Miss Banerjee could lead to the ouster of the CPI-M from power.

At a closed-door meeting between Mr Mitra and his comrades at Mr Atish Sinha's home yesterday, it was decided that both Mr Khan Chowdhury and Mr Mitra would forcefully plead for taking part in the Trinamul's proposed alliance without any delay. "If Mrs Gandhi agrees to it, it will be a wise decision on her part, otherwise we will have no option but to explore the idea of breaking away from the

Congress and forming a new outfit," some leaders of the Somen Mitra camp said today.

The Mitra camp is expected to hold an emergency meeting soon after the return of the duo from Delhi. A PCC meeting may follow afterwards.

Both the PCC president and Mr Mitra are expected to persuade Mrs Gandhi to agree to allow the state PCC to function independently as far as possible. On the issue of any understanding with the Trinamul chief at least locally, the two leaders will press for a go ahead from Mrs Gandhi. They will also gun for Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi for "misleading" her in selecting the Rajya Sabha candidate from West Bengal.

Leaders close to Mr Mitra said in the note prepared by Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, he also pressed for creating a climate for reaching an understanding with the Trinamul in the future. There should be no reason why such a step can't be initiated right away, they argued.

In his note Mr Das Munshi had harped on Mr DP Roy's loyalty toward Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and the present AICC chief, his detractors said. But Mr Das Munshi refrained from projecting Mr Mitra's contribution toward the party, cleverly leaving the issue of whether or not to nominate a sitting MLA for the RS seat to the AICC.

Mr Mitra's loyalists argued that CWC leaders like Mr Pranab Mukherjee, Mr Ahmed Patel, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad and Mr Arjun Singh did not raise any objection to Mr Mitra's candidature for the RS seat despite his being an MLA.

Law does not require Rabri to quit: Experts

Hemendra Singh Bartwal
New Delhi, April 4

AMIDST GROWING clamour for Chief Minister Rabri Devi's resignation, Constitutional and legal experts are of the opinion that while the law does not require a political functionary to step down from office on being chargesheeted, propriety and convention demand that they should resign.

Besides, they feel, in view of the court ordering the issuance of non-bailable warrants against Rabri Devi, there might be practical problems on her continuance in office if she is placed under arrest. A Chief Minister cannot run the administration of the State from within a jail, it was pointed out.

According to senior Supreme Court advocate A.M. Singhvi, neither the Constitution of India nor any statute mandates the resignation of an incumbent Chief Minister in such circumstances. However, propriety may require such a functionary to resign so as to preclude altogether the remotest possibility of inhibiting criminal investigation in the State over which he or she presides.

In the present case, the precedent has been set by her husband Laloo Yadav himself who stepped down from the Chief Minister's office after being chargesheeted in the fodder case, he pointed out.

"However, one can't elevate this

to the status of a legal obligation and the decision must ultimately be left to the conscience of the person concerned," he added.

Senior counsel Shanti Bhushan too was of the view that a precedent had been set by RJD president Laloo Yadav when he resigned as the Chief Minister and handed over charge to Rabri Devi.

As a matter of propriety, he stressed, a chargesheeted person must not be the head of government. Apart from that, there would be other considerations. During trial, her presence may be required in the court day after day. There was the possibility that bail may even be denied and Rabri Devi could be taken into custody. In such circumstances, she could not continue to function as the Chief Minister, Mr Bhushan said.

Mr Rajiv Dhawan, another senior counsel, too agreed with this view. If Rabri Devi faced a long-term detention, she must follow the example of her husband and resign, he felt.

Yet another celebrated senior advocate of the Supreme Court, who wished to remain anonymous, recalled that in the past a large number of Chief Ministers had resigned from office after the high courts passed strictures against them in different cases. However, he hastened to add, they had done so only after mala fides had been found against them.

THE HINDUSTAN

5 APR 2000

Sikdar rules out alliance with Cong

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, April 5

THE STATE BJP is reacting cautiously to the ongoing effort in forming a *mahajot* by the West Bengal Congress and the Trinamool to fight the Left in the State.

Apparently apprehensive that the party might be marginalised if the two Congresses came together, BJP leader and Union Minister for Communications Tapan Sikdar has ruled out any "grand alliance" in which both the Congress and the BJP could be partners. "The Congress is our main opponent in national politics. They cannot be our partners. Only the dissident factions of the party can ally themselves with us," he said here today.

Asked about the possibility of the BJP and the Congress forming an axis with the Trinamool at the hub like the way CPI(M) and the BJP came together to install the V P Singh-led Janata Dal Government, Sikdar said the concept of a grand alliance would be defeated in that case. As it is, he said, Mamata was not "talking to the Congress as a party, but to some individuals".

The recent Rajya Sabha election results proved that many in the State Congress were unhappy with the parent party. These dissidents, which wanted to fight the CPI(M),

would form the elements of the "grand alliance", as would split-up groups from the Left Front, he said. The Congress could be part of an alliance, which had the BJP as its constituent, only on the condition that "it publicly announces that it does not consider the BJP a communal party".

Echoing Sikdar, Union Minister of State for Finance Dhananjay Kumar said it was not the Congress but some leaders in the State Congress who had been negotiating with Mamata Banerjee for an alliance on the purpose of defeating the CPI(M). This did not imply that the Congress and the BJP would come to an understanding. He clarified that the Congress had supported the economic policies of the BJP-led Central Government without creating an impression that it had entered into an understanding with the BJP.

Meanwhile, two Trinamool Congress councillors in Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) today voted for the Congress nominee in the election to the Borough 13 committee. This signifies a tangible progress in the efforts of bringing about a "grand alliance". The Congress councilor Sailen Dasgupta was re-elected by polling four Congress and two Trinamool Congress votes in the nine-member borough.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 APR 2000

Cong, Trinamool plan joint rally

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, April 6

THE IMPONDERABLES notwithstanding, the groundwork for the *Mahajot* between the Congress and the Trinamool Congress has already started in the State. A section of the Congress leaders is planning to organise on April 12 its first *Mahajot* procession in the city in which Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee and WBPC president A B A Ghani Khan Chowdhury are expected to participate.

Two days later, Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee, Minister of State for External Affairs Ajit Panja, Trinamool MP Sudip Bandyopadhyay and former PCC chief Somen Mitra will be present at the function where Mamata will flag off two new trains from Sealdah station, said PCC general secretary Sultan Ahmed.

"We have started sending clear signals that the *Mahajot* is a reality and not a dream. The first litmus

test for the grand alliance will be next month's municipal polls and by the time the Assembly elections are due in 2001, the alliance will be fully operational," said Trinamool Rajya Sabha MP Jayanta Bhattacharya.

For the municipal polls, both Mamata and Ghani Khan Chowdhury are reported to have agreed that the Congress, which holds sway over 23 of the 82 municipal boards, will be allowed to retain their seats.

In other places, the Congress has agreed not to put up candidates against the Trinamool. "We are only concerned with the Trinamool. The BJP does not figure here. It is to be seen how the BJP factor in the alliance is worked out," said Sinha.

But many Congress legislators feel the BJP card is being waved by those who are opposed to the grand alliance and do not want the Congress and Mamata to come close. "The Congress had treated Mamata very badly. Despite that,

today, she has extended her co-operation to *Barkatda*. If anyone tries to sabotage this alliance, we will not spare them," said State Youth Congress president Paresh Pal.

Congress legislators also said that those opposed to the *Mahajot* were digging their own political grave. "Today, the Mamata-wave is omnipresent and the Congress is day-by-day losing its relevance here. If we don't realise this, we are bound to lose heavily in the polls," said Abdul Mannan.

Meanwhile, PCC working-president Priya Ranjan Das Munshi today called on Ghani Khan Chowdhury in Delhi. It is reported that he told the PCC chief that he was willing to work under his leadership.

However, sources said Mamata has made it clear to Chowdhury that all decisions regarding the *Mahajot* will be taken only by them. In other words, Das Munshi will have no say in the new political formation.

Hurriyat turns down Govt's offer of talks

THE ALL-PARTIES Hurriyat Conference (APHC) has rejected Union Home Minister Lal Krishan Advani's offer of talks saying the proposal for talks within the Constitution of India was "unacceptable".

Maulvi Abbas Ansari, one of the three leaders of the secessionist conglomerate who arrived in Srinagar today, told *The Hindustan Times* that there was no question of bilateral talks with the Indian government. Mr Ansari said: "The question does not arise", when asked if the Hurriyat will respond to offer of talks by the Home Minister.

"Do you think we sacrificed 70,000 lives for the bilateral talks", he said. "This is not the problem concerning only the Indian occupied Kashmir but also the area under Pakistan's control. We can serve as a bridge to resolve the issue".

Details on Page 8

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 7 APR 2000

Mamata will be happy if Barkatda becomes CM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 6. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today said talks have begun to find a "mechanism" to form the 'grand alliance' in West Bengal, and that she would be happy if Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury becomes chief minister.

Her remarks came amid signs that many central Congress leaders have taken a harder stand compared with West Bengal PCC leaders on the conditions for the alliance.

These central Congress leaders have reportedly been arguing — against a go-ahead for alliance talks by Mrs Sonia Gandhi — that such a move would dilute the party's "secular credentials".

They smell danger in Mr LK Advani's statement yesterday that the days of anti-Congressism are over and the BJP has no objection to the 'grand alliance' plan. Led by Mr Arjun Singh, they have reportedly told Mrs Gandhi that allowing the talks without a commitment from Miss Banerjee that she would snap ties with the BJP would land the Congress in trouble.

The Trinamul Congress leader brushed aside the possibility today, telling reporters she has no plans to cut off the relationship with the BJP, making a distinction between politics at the Centre and the state.

What about Mrs Gandhi's remark at Amethi, ruling out an alliance with anybody who supports the BJP? Miss Banerjee said: "I gave a call for the grand alliance. Mr Ghani Khan Chowdhury responded to that. He hasn't set me any conditions."

Then she was asked about the alliance's possi-

ble chief ministerial candidate. Was it herself? Miss Banerjee replied: "How can I say that? It is for the people of West Bengal to decide who would be chief minister."

Could Mr Khan Chowdhury be the candidate? This time the Trinamul leader said: "I shall be very happy if Barkatda becomes chief minister."

One issue that highlights the difference in the viewpoints of the PCC and the central leadership is that of a Trinamul-BJP-Congress adjustment for the upcoming West Bengal municipal polls. The central leaders are unnerved by reports that such seat talks are already on.

PCC leaders have told the high command that there's no way this can be avoided, because "whether we want it or not, such arrangements have always taken place in West Bengal".

The central leadership doesn't seem convinced by the PCC gameplan: that the Congress would leave seats for Miss Banerjee, and she would be free to grant the BJP seats from "her quota". The Congress will field candidates against the BJP to show its "secular character".

"It will be hard to convince people with such a deal," a senior Congress leader said. "The only solution is, Miss Banerjee must dump the NDA."

Many Congress leaders think she will be forced to do this anyway before next year's Assembly polls, because "she can't keep being a party to the NDA's anti-people stands".

Miss Banerjee, however, today said she has no plans of returning to the Congress.

Meanwhile, things look smoother in the PCC with Mr PR Das Munshi meeting Mr Khan Chowdhury at the latter's home, and proposing to "work together" for the party's sake.

THE STATESMAN

7 APR 2 00

BRIGADE AGAINST THE LEFT: ALLIANCE AIMS TO ROOT OUT MARXISTS FROM THE BENGAL TURF

Cong in a bind, BJP sits pretty in Mamata's mahajot

Sobha Menon
NEW DELHI 8 APRIL

EVEN THOUGH the "grand alliance" mooted in West Bengal has caught the Congress in a bind, the BJP is sitting pretty.

The grand alliance of the BJP, the Trinamul and the Congress mooted by Mamata Banerjee, Trinamul leader, had all along the green signal of the BJP brass even if it took Congress chief Sonia Gandhi by surprise.

Sources said Mamata

Banerjee had initiated the move only after speaking to top BJP leaders and getting their clearance. The sources said Ms Banerjee had, in fact, been planning this kind of an alliance for a long time to end the Marxist rule in West Bengal. She sensed this was the right time when Sonia Gandhi fielded D.P. Roy for the Rajya Sabha after rejecting the candidature of the powerful state Congress leader Somen Mitra.

After D.P. Roy's defeat, it was alleged by Priyaranjan Das



Mamata: Showtime once again

Munshi, the party chief whip in the Lok Sabha who had all along backed D.P. Roy's candidature, that Somen Mitra along with Ghani Khan Chowdhury had worked for the defeat of the Congress' candidate.

D.P. Roy had lost by seven votes to Trinamul member Jayanta Bhattacharya and it was later found that the seven Congress MLAs who had voted against D.P. Roy were from Ghani Khan Chowdhury's Malda constituency.

Sensing this was the time to

move in for the kill, Mamata Banerjee had called Ghani Khan and proposed the setting up of an alliance to defeat the Reds in the state. If the grand alliance won the Assembly elections in March 2001, Ghani Khan could become the chief minister, she had suggested. All this with the BJP brass well in the know of the moves being made in West Bengal. The BJP doesn't mind

"We have nothing to lose," BJP leaders said.

■ **Another report on Page 14**

REALIGNMENT IN WEST BENGAL

THE INITIATIVE TAKEN by a section of the Congress(I) in West Bengal to forge an alliance among the Trinamool Congress, the Congress (I) and the BJP against the ruling Left Front is simply baffling. That the high command of the Congress(I), principal opposition against the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the Centre, should even let its West Bengal unit leaders engage in a dialogue with Ms. Mamata Banerjee knocks the bottom out of the party's claims to fight against the communal challenge. The initiative from the State unit leaders during the past couple of days — when the PCC president, Mr. A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury, held two rounds of talks with Ms. Banerjee — may well be explained away as just an exploratory exercise. After all, the talks have hitherto been held only between the Congress(I) and the Trinamool Congress, and the BJP has not come into the picture as such. But the very fact that the Congress(I) high command could shut its eyes and refrain from making it clear that the Trinamool Congress will have to walk out of the NDA before any such talks are initiated is certainly not consistent with the basic thrust of the Congress(I)'s position vis-a-vis the BJP.

Indeed, the developments on the West Bengal political front are only a reflection of the complete polarisation in the State with the Left parties at one end of the spectrum. It is also a fact that the Congress(I) is hardly a force in the State. And the Trinamool Congress (along with the BJP) has already managed to entrench itself in the political constituency that is opposed to the ruling Left Front. This was evident from the results of the Lok Sabha elections from West Bengal in both 1998 and 1999. Barring Mr. Ghani Khan Choudhury himself and Mr. P. R. Dasmunshi, the Congress(I) candidates were reduced to also-rans in the two elections. It is this reality that is now leading the Congress(I)

into a state of complete decimation in West Bengal and those left in the party are in search of a platform that could give them a fresh lease of life. Mr. Choudhury, Mr. Somen Mitra and others in their fold are simply concerned with their own future rather than with the party's stake in terms of its political stances. The "grand alliance" they are now talking about is guided more by their urge for self-preservation than by the larger interests of the State and its people as they claim.

It is necessary that Mrs. Sonia Gandhi make things clear to her own partymen from West Bengal rather than maintaining a stoic silence. An impression has already been created that the State unit leaders will have the blessings of the high command if they want to join the anti-Left combine even if it includes the BJP. The statement of four CWC members that the party will have nothing to do with the BJP lacks the stamp of the high command's authority. Another bizarre aspect of this development is the BJP's reaction to it. The statement by the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, that the Congress(I) was welcome to join the "grand alliance" against the Left Front simply shows the extent to which parties that claim to be wedded to certain ideological positions can bend and move freely between poles as long as such compromises help them in wresting power. This tendency — shifting with ease between diametrically opposite ends — can hardly strengthen the democratic structure. It is time now for the top brass of the various parties to do some serious introspection and resist the temptation of wresting power at all costs. In this context, the imperative for the Congress(I) high command is to put a stop to all attempts by a section of its West Bengal unit to lead the party into the BJP-led NDA camp. And this needs to be done urgently.

THE HINDU

10 APR 2000

Priya camp likely to oppose Cong entry into Mahajot

By Correspondent
Calcutta, April 10

CAMP FOLLOWERS of West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee (WB-PCC) working president P. R. Das Munshi are determined to stonewall Congress entry into the grand alliance in view of the BJP's presence in the proposed forum of anti-Left forces.

Das Munshi flew to Delhi last night to apprise the Congress president and the AICC of his stand. He has reportedly asked his group to be ready for a prolonged battle with the pro-alliance Congressmen over the issue.

Congress MLA Saugata Roy, a close aide of Das Munshi, told *The Hindustan Times* today that as a true Congressman they would never accept any dilution in party principles. "The BJP remains our sworn political enemy and the party can never be aligned with the BJP even indirectly," Roy said.

He pointed out that if the Congress became a part of the grand alliance, to which the BJP

remained a vibrant entity, it would only compromise the party principles and its secular image. "The effects would be disastrous for the party both at the national and State levels," he said.

Roy said the pro-alliance Congressmen were simply guided by personal and immediate considerations. He admitted the need for forging a front of anti-Left forces to take on the CPI(M), but felt that it would be suicidal for the Congress to walk into an alliance with the BJP in tow.

Roy, who resigned as deputy leader of the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) after the Congress loss in the Rajya Sabha election, demanded that the issue be first debated in the party, before a final decision is taken. He said he would also demand an immediate meeting of the CLP on the issue.

He felt it would be wrong to claim that majority of the Congressmen were in favour of the alliance. "Only 24 Congress MLAs voted for the Trinamool candidate in the Rajya Sabha election, while

36 others voted for the Congress candidate. How can one say then that all Congressmen are with the pro-alliance group," he asked.

Roy felt that in this situation, if Ghani Khan Chowdhury and his group went with the alliance, it would lead to a certain split in the Bengal Congress. "But we will never give up our principles for petty electoral gains," he added.

WBPCCC vice-president Pradip Bhattacharyya admitted that the situation was a bit tricky. Though rooting for the alliance to bring about total consolidation of anti-Left forces, he said the BJP factor could not be ignored. But he ruled out any split in the Bengal Congress and felt the alliance could not have the desired success, unless the Congress joins it with its own symbol.

Former PCC president Somen Mitra was, however, not ready to attach much importance to the BJP presence in the alliance. "The CPI(M) atrocities is more a problem to Bengal than the question of communalism," Mitra said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 APR 2000

Trinamul-BJP to share seats with Cong

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, April 10. — The Trinamul Congress and the BJP today decided to fight the elections to 82 municipal bodies in May-June as allies and share seats with the Congress as well.

The decision was taken at a meeting of state leaders of the two parties. The Trinamul-BJP combine would chalk out a formula in consultation with the PCC to field their respective candidates for the civic elections. The guiding principle to be followed will be "as is where is," Mr Pankaj Banerjee, chairman, Trinamul policy making body, and Mr Sudip Bandyopadhyay, MP, said.

The BJP leaders who attended the meeting included Mr Muzaffar Khan, state vice-president, and Mr Shantilal Jain.

Meanwhile, the Left Front committee is scheduled to meet

on 17 April to discuss, among other things, its strategy for the municipal elections. The deterioration of law and order in some places is likely to be raised by some of the Front constituents.

The Trinamul-BJP combine hopes that the Congress as a *Mahajot* (grand alliance) partner will not field any candidate against the BJP.

The PCC camp, led by Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury and Mr Somen Mitra, is still say how it seeks to resolve the thorny issue of joining the grand alliance, mooted by Miss Mamata Banerjee, with the BJP as a constituent.

The high command has given the go-ahead to the Khan Chowdhury-Mitra camp to negotiate with the Trinamul for the grand alliance without compromising the party's policy of not having any truck, direct or indirect, with the

BJP.

The detractors of this camp, led by Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, PCC working president, have said they would press for fielding party candidates against the BJP in the civic elections, even if the party joins the grand alliance.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee said: "Negotiations with the PCC leadership are on for forging the grand alliance and fighting the municipal elections from this platform. We have instructed our local units to prepare their lists of candidates keeping in mind the fact that the Congress will be our ally. We hope the Congress will abide by the ground rules of such an alliance and will not field its candidate against any of the alliance partners."

BJP welcomes Cong

The state BJP leadership today welcomed the Congress to join

the grand alliance. The party had earlier announced its reservations on accepting the Congress to the alliance.

Mr Asim Ghosh, state BJP president, said the party had changed its earlier stand on the participation of the Congress in the alliance following the "guidance by central leaders of his party and in view of local compulsions". The BJP-Trinamul alliance has been fighting the Left Front to "free the people here from 22 years of Left Front misrule", he said.

Mr Ghosh said his party would seek to contest one-third of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation seats.

But the BJP's demand for the CMC seats will be discussed keeping in mind the changed stand of his party on the participation of the Congress in the grand alliance.

■ More reports on pages 4, 5

THE STATESMAN

11 APR 2000

Somen, Mamata in unity show, kickstart Mahajot

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, April 13

THE MAHAJOT concept moved one step closer to reality today with one-time arch-rivals Somen Mitra and Mamata Banerjee sharing the same dais at a railway function and using the occasion to launch their anti-Left campaign. Burying past differences, the two leaders praised each other in public.

"Somenda is a senior leader of Bengal," Banerjee said, smiling at him. Mitra returned the compliment: "The future of Bengal is in her hands. She can redeem the people of the State from the atrocities of the CPI(M)-led Government here." The message was loud and clear: the two leaders had decided to join hands for a common cause leaving behind past bitterness.

Differences between Mitra and Banerjee surfaced way back in 1992, when Mitra defeated her in the race for State PCC president. Things came to a head in December 1997, when Mitra was instrumental in getting Banerjee

14A 9-8 MB
expelled from the Congress.

Mitra today said his detractors were trying to sell the idea that he was solely responsible for Banerjee's expulsion from the Congress and were trying to drive a wedge between him and the Trinamool chief. He also said that he was being blamed by a section of party leaders owing allegiance to WBPCP working president Priya Ranjan Das Munshi for the defeat of the Congress nominee in the Rajya Sabha elections.

"I want to set the record straight. I was not responsible for Mamata's expulsion from the Congress. Being the PCC president, I had to make an unfortunate announcement. But it was Oscar Fernandes who called me to say that the AICC wanted her out of the Congress. He also told me that V N Gadgil had already made the announcement in Delhi so I had to declare it here. It was a kind of a pressure situation," Mitra told *The Hindustan Times*.

"In politics, misunderstandings can always be there. But Mamata and I have always shared good per-

sonal relationship. She has always respected me and I have always treated her like my sister. As for the Mahajot, there is no alternative to it. Mamata is the alternative to the Left Front and we should strengthen her hands," he added.

Mitra said Das Munshi was spreading "lies" to create confusion among the Congress rank and file. "He has accused me of non-cooperation. But even after I resigned from the PCC chief's post in 1998, I always worked diligently for the party and also campaigned for our candidates," Mitra said.

But why is Das Munshi so hostile towards Mitra? "I don't know. He says the Mahajot was his brain-child. If that is so, what's wrong if we nurse his child? Actually, he has been exposed before the AICC chief, so he's issuing these irrelevant statements. It was he who convinced Sonia Gandhi that Mamata Banerjee was in his pocket. Perhaps, he didn't realise that his pocket had a huge whole," Mitra said.

■ On Page 5: Scalded blast ahead of Mamata visit

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 APR 2000

Mamata, Ghani to discuss mahajot, seats today

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, April 15. — Miss Mamata Banerjee will meet Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury tomorrow at his home to discuss the terms for the grand alliance's formation, and also the sharing of seats by their parties for the upcoming municipal elections.

The two leaders today separately spoke at length on the need to ensure the mahajot's success at any cost.

Trinamul and Congress insiders said each party had formed two teams for the seat-sharing talks. Mr Jayanta Bhattacharya, Trinamul MP in the Rajya Sabha, will be the coordinator.

At a meeting of Trinamul MPs, MLAs and other leaders at Nizam Palace today, Miss Banerjee reportedly emphasised the need to form the alliance. The gesture shown to "us" by a majority of Congress MLAs during the Rajya Sabha elections ought to be returned, she said.

She said she had taken the decision to form the grand alliance after talking to senior state Congress and BJP leaders. "If we have to make some sacrifices for the success of the alliance, so be it."

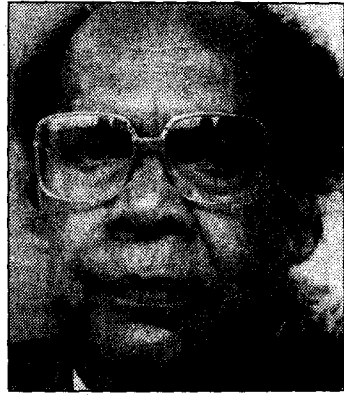
Miss Banerjee reportedly hinted that if needed, the Trinamul would not hesitate to give up a few seats for the civic body polls to accommodate the Congress.

She made an indirect reference to some party members' doubts about the move to make Mr Khan Chowdhury the leader of the planned alliance. "Our main aim," she reportedly said, "should be to ensure the total success of the grand alliance. Mr Khan Chowdhury told me in Delhi that he all he wants is that the CPI-M should be ousted from power during his lifetime."

Later, Mr Pankaj Banerjee told reporters that the Trinamul would do whatever it can to ensure that a combined Opposition fields a common



Miss Mamata Banerjee



Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury

VICTOR QUILTS BJP

NEW DELHI, April 15. — Actor Victor Banerjee today resigned from the BJP saying he lacks the temperament to "sincerely and devotedly serve a constituency for five years". He also suggested he felt the strain of being in a party whose ideology he couldn't share.

Banerjee wrote to the party president, Mr Kushabhau Thakre, that: "The concept of Hindutva as a social movement, where it might hurt the fundamental rights and sentiments of fellow human beings, is something I did not subscribe to when I joined the BJP, and cannot ever. Politics was never my cup of tea."

Though his contribution to the party "may have been minimal, at a time when you desperately needed support not just in West Bengal but in India at large, I did my bit to put you on the map". He said that though the BJP might be a winning ticket today in politics, "the compromises that one has to make with personal principles and values make me uneasy". — PTI

candidate against each Left Front nominee in the civic body polls.

He said a team of MLAs and leaders of the Trinamul, the Congress and the BJP will meet the Governor on Wednesday to highlight the state's worsening law-and-order situation and also the overall decline of the state during LF rule.

Alleging that CPI-M supporters, backed by police, are attacking Opposition activists, Mr Banerjee said that leaders of the three parties would from now rush to the spots where such attacks happen.

From 19 April, Trinamul supporters will begin a statewide agitation against CPI-M "atrocities". Mr Banerjee thanked the PCC and the BJP for their "sincere efforts to form the grand alliance".

Earlier, Mr Khan Chowdhury said that the Congress's efforts to form the grand alliance has the sanction of the party high command. The alliance would be a total success.

He, however, avoided a direct reply on his party's stand towards the BJP being part of the alliance. "In politics, no one is untouchable," he said. "Our main concern is to ensure that there is no split in the anti-Left vote."

Trinamul-BJP talks: After tomorrow's Mamata-Ghani talks, state BJP leaders will discuss the alliance with senior Trinamul leaders.

Mr Paras Dutta and Mr Rahul Sinha, state BJP general secretaries, today said their party is committed to forming an anti-CPI-M platform to free the people of the state from Front misrule.

THE STATESMAN

16 APR 2000

~~Ghani Khan ready~~
to quit on
'mahajot' issue

CALCUTTA, APRIL 16. The West Bengal Congress(I) president, Mr. A. B. A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, today threatened to quit the party if it was embarrassed over joining the "mahajot" (grand alliance) against the CPI(M) in the State, even as the Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, maintained that the BJP would not be dumped.

After a crucial meeting with Ms. Banerjee on the formation of the alliance ahead of the civic polls next month, Mr. Chowdhury told reporters that he would "walk out" if some of his partymen felt that he was putting them in difficulty by joining the "mahajot."

On reservation of some Congress(I) leaders over the formation of an alliance with the BJP as a constituent, he asked, "How the question of BJP comes? We will drive away CPI(M) with the help of Mamata. — PTI

THE HINDU

17 APR 1984

Mamata, Ghani set Mahajot rolling

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, April 16

TRINAMOOLOO CONGRESS president Mamata Banerjee and WB PCC chief A B A Ghani Khan Chowdhury today set into motion their Mahajot. Chowdhury later told reporters he was ready to walk out of the Congress if the AICC felt he was putting them in difficulty.

The two leaders met for 20 minutes at the State Congress president's home, after which they announced that their parties and the BJP would fight the coming civic elections under the grand alliance banner. They would campaign jointly to ensure there is no division of anti-Left votes.

"If the CPI(M) can unite the left forces and rule the State, the name of the Left Front, we can't form a grand alliance with anti-Left forces to beat the CPI(M) in the State. Mahajot is a continuous

process and Barakatda, as the State Congress president, has welcomed it. In this political battle we will emerge victorious against the CPI(M)," Banerjee said.

Chowdhury said the people of the State had responded favourably to the concept of a grand anti-Left alliance. "There is no reason why we should bother about what the detractors say. Mamata is a well-known figure of

districts. We have selected a separate team to negotiate with the BJP," she said.

Insiders said Banerjee and Chowdhury took stock of how the alliance was shaping up in the districts. "We have already reached an understanding in 60 per cent of the seats. The rest will be over within a week. In case of any difficulty, the leaders have agreed to sit either in Calcutta or Delhi to solve

PCC Chief Willing to Quit Cong

west Bengal and by joining her, we can drive the CPI(M) out of power."

Banerjee said the BJP was a Trinamool ally and would remain so. "The Congress has nothing to do with the BJP. They will only talk to us on campaigns and seat adjustments. We have already appointed Congress and Trinamool observers in the dis-

the problems," said a party leader.

The leaders have also decided to kick off the Mahajot meetings in the districts. "Trinamool Youth Congress chief Sanjay Bakshi and State Youth Congress president Parash Pal have been asked to make all preparations for the Mahajot meetings in the districts before the municipal polls in May," said Trinamool MP Jayanta

Bhattacharya.

Chowdhury told *The Hindustan Times* that he had spoken to AICC president Sonia Gandhi three times in the last few days. "She understands the situation and nobody can sabotage the process now. Delhi has realised that the people of Bengal are supporting the Mahajot. And whoever sabotages this movement will be identified as a friend of the CPI(M)," he added.

"We are abiding by the high command's orders. If the Congress leadership wants to throw us out of the party, we have no problems," said Parash Pal.

"There is no question of upsetting this pact. Because the Congress councillors have welcomed the Mahajot and they feel that they now stand a better chance of fighting the CPI(M) in the coming civic elections," Congress councillor Rajiv Deb said.

Ray favours step-by-step approach on 'Mahajot'

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 17

SENIOR CONGRESS leader Siddharth Shankar Ray is in favour of a "step by step" approach to the 'Mahajot' (Congress-Trinamool-BJP alliance) in West Bengal in order to defeat the CPI (M), lock, stock and barrel.

"The basis of such an alliance will be secularism and the Congress will not make any compromise on this vital issue," Mr Ray said here today at a Press conference.

Mr Ray, who also happens to be a former West Bengal Chief Minister, said that to begin with, an understanding based on seat adjustments in over 1600 Municipal wards and 145 odd Calcutta Corporation wards could be worked out to defeat the CPI (M) during the

pending Municipal elections.

These Municipal elections, according to Mr Ray, could be a dry run for the crucial State Assembly polls slated to be held next year. "The Municipal polls could be fought on the basis of a common minimum programme connected with the urgent needs of the people. Any kind of an understanding in the forthcoming State Assembly elections would follow the success of the arrangement in the Municipal polls," he indicated, saying that the need of the hour was to pool all the anti-CPI (M) votes in every ward to ensure total rout of the Marxists.

Drawing a distinction between the CPI (M) and its alliance partners, the senior Congress leader said that the proposed 'Mahajot' was primarily aimed against the Marxists. "CPI (M)'s arrogance, atrocities, sectarianism, incompetence, dictatorial attitude, violent methods and

corruption would be principal planks of the poll campaign," he asserted. Detailing the finer points of Municipal-centric 'Mahajot', Mr Ray said the Congress would primarily negotiate seat adjustments with the Trinamool Congress while leaving its partner free to enter into further seat sharing with its allies such as the BJP.

Mr Ray, who has had wide ranging discussions with Trinamool Congress chief Ms Mamata Banerjee and other senior State Congress leaders including Ghani Khan Chowdhury in Calcutta, recently revealed that he had submitted a "Working Paper" to the party high-command including its president Sonia Gandhi on the proposed 'Mahajot'. He accused the Marxists with having played havoc with the State administration over the last many years particularly pushing it to a depressing low in economic development.

OTHER SIDE OF MAHAJOT

Advani may have the last laugh

A FACILE assumption is being made that because the votes polled the last time by Congress, Trinamul and BJP total more than those of the Left Front, we are about to witness elimination of the Left in West Bengal and emergence of a new combination led by Mamata Banerjee who would be chief minister. She has already gone back on her word that she would be pleased to see Ghani Khan Choudhury in the chair. There are two aspects that are being overlooked. First, the Trinamul and the Congress have been breaking each other's heads for quite a while; also, that it was Somen Mitra who expelled Mamata from the Congress. Although minister in a BJP-led government, the stormy petrel of Bengal politics has lost no opportunity to declare that she is the real Congress. The BJP cannot be blamed if they wonder how long it will be before the real gets into bed with the sham.

The second bag of doubts centres around the difficulty of getting cadres to first understand and next accept that the animosity and acrimony of the past is really past. The dry run will be municipal elections and they are not far away. Fun and games will start as soon as seat allotments begin. In any event it is ridiculous to suggest that Congress will only talk to Trinamul and leave the latter to talk to BJP. Will Congress workers root for BJP candidates or only for Trinamul ones; will Trinamul workers raise three cheers for the BJP and only two for the Congress? Combinations are endless and all of them are suspect. Ghani Khan's hold is only in Malda, it is naive to assume that Muslims generally will rally to the combine merely because he is part of a troika with a game leg. The biggest single question mark is over Mamata herself. Her most ardent admirers will concede that she has neither policy nor programme except what sells, like extra trains. For the rest, despite a ministerial veneer, she and her party remain agitators, disrupters, who constantly create a nuisance and break the law over noise pollution with impunity. She has welcomed all manner of discontented politicians. Pankaj Banerjee, chairman of her Policy Planning Committee has crossed the bridge between Congress and Trinamul so often that one has lost count. Subrata Mukherjee, described not without cause as the B team of the CPI-M, is working chairman of Trinamul's state committee. At a moment of the CPI-M's choice, he can be reined in and made to do the dirty on Mamata. In other words the emphasis is on haste, on numbers and spread — in as many directions as possible — trade unions, hawkers, plain ruffians, on the hackneyed premise that organised vote banks are good value for money.

LK Advani has gone out of his way to suggest that he embraces the *mahajot* idea with both hands. The shrewd tactician has his reasons. If the *mahajot* succeeds, he can shunt Mamata to Bengal and Congress under Sonia will have no place else to go. If it fails, he can say with a straight face that the responsibility is Mamata's, the BJP were not even speaking to the Congress; a good position to be in, wouldn't you say? In the meantime, Jyoti Basu has had a new lease of life and may lead the Left Front into the next elections. And at this point of uncertainty, it is not unreasonable to assume that voters may well decide that it is better to stick with the devil they know.

THE STATESMAN

26 APR 2000

FRIDAY, APRIL 21, 2000

INEPT LEADERSHIP

9-88 ND

THE WEST BENGAL imbroglio over the Trinamool Congress sponsored anti-Left 'mahajot' (grand alliance) has exposed, yet again, the woe-ful failures and inadequacies of the Congress(I) high command — Ms. Sonia Gandhi to be specific — on two critical fronts. First, in setting before the party a clear ideological vision that is in keeping with the nation's secular and pluralist political ethos and, second, in steering the organisation towards that goal unwaveringly. When she stepped into the political arena, shedding the cloak of mystique, there was a great expectation that her connection with the Nehru family would work a miracle for the party which stood totally dispirited and alienated from its traditional constituencies. Barring some positive signs in the initial phase as seen notably in the November 1998 round of Assembly elections, the record of Ms. Gandhi at the helm has proved to be a very disappointing one, blotted as it is by a series of miscalculations, blunders and flipflops. Witness, for instance, her infamous "we-have-272" claim and her obdurate stand against power-sharing with prospective allies (after the downfall of the Vajpayee Government in 1999) and the party's equivocation over 'coalition', not to mention its flipflops in Haryana and more recently in Bihar. All these and her widely perceived inability to deliver votes on a scale expected of one belonging to the 'dynasty' have unsurprisingly meant considerable erosion of the high command's authority, as reflected in the widespread cross-voting in the recent Rajya Sabha biennial elections, with West Bengal providing the most brazen example.

In a wider perspective, the way the Congress (I) high command has responded to the opinions of its units in Bihar and West Bengal has brought out a sharp contradiction which, apart from sending confusing signals all round, called into question the party's commitment to secularism and, in an extended sense, inevitably led to a weakening of the anti-communalism plat-

form. Less than a month ago, the central leadership had invoked its secular credentials to overrule the local party unit's strong reservations about extending support to the RJD Government; and this, notwithstanding the fact that such a partnership meant a retraction from its poll commitment and a compromise of sorts on its anti-corruption plank. But in West Bengal it has had little compunction in going along with a defiant PCC establishment's moves for a tieup with the Trinamool Congress within an umbrella grouping called 'mahajot' that included the BJP. All the assertions by spokespersons that the party would have no truck with the BJP either "directly or indirectly" sounded hollow against Ms. Mamata Banerjee's authoritative rejection of any suggestion of her snapping ties with the BJP or walking out of the NDA.

All this is not to say that the Congress(I) should forsake its political interests in West Bengal or to refute its democratically legitimate right to bid for power by joining forces with others against the CPI(M)-led Left Front. The point is only that the ideological imperatives at the national level — in this case, fighting the majoritarian communalist forces represented by the BJP and other outfits in the sangh parivar that pose a big challenge to the country's secular and pluralist polity — should not be given the go-by in the name of striking opportunist "strategic alliances" for short-term gains. It is precisely here that the quality of leadership counts critically, all the more for a party like the Congress(I) which finds itself terribly emaciated both in the organisational and electoral senses. Going by the way Ms. Sonia Gandhi has steered the party through the stormy political currents so far, it must be said that she is yet to prove her mettle as a leader with vision who can rise above succumbing to the intrigue of an inner-party coterie and take independent decisions that would advance the party's interest.

THE HINDU

21 APR 2000

BAND-OBAST: COMRADES WILL NOT BE LEFT OUT OF THE KNOT NAUTANKI

Ghani not about to abandon mahajot

Bino Sharma
NEW DELHI 22 APRIL

THE MAHAJOT is not off. It might be a tactical retreat under pressure, but the WBPCC chief Ghani Khan Choudhury has no intentions of scuttling the mahajot (grand alliance), said sources. Enemy number one for Ghani Khan Choudhury, the Somen Mitra combine and its supporters is the ruling Left combination in West Bengal, not the BJP. And they have also seen that it is not Sonia Gandhi, but Mamata Banerjee who can deliver the goods in Bengal, added sources.

Sources said Congress general secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad, who was despatched to West Bengal after the PCC chief said he was "too busy" to come to Delhi, had a tough time convincing Mr Choudhury and Mr Mitra to attend the press conference he addressed in Calcutta. Remarks by the PCC chief might have created a temporary crisis, but this will be sorted out soon, said party sources, more so after Trinamul leader Mamata Banerjee has made it clear yet again that she cannot "leave the BJP" to shake hands with the Congress in West Bengal.

For the ruling Left combine, this has come as a bolt from the blue and the combine leaders have already requested Jyoti Basu to postpone his retirement plans and shoulder the responsibility of leading the party to another elec-

toral win. The Left is even "sponsoring" the meeting of the third front in Calcutta and the four former Prime Ministers are scheduled to visit the city to address meetings.

But the woes for the Congress under Sonia Gandhi does not stop here. For the first time, all factions of the DPCC joined hands to raise the banner of revolt against

the Delhi chief minister. Most of the senior Congress leaders were present at the press conference as well as the 19 MLAs who want the chief minister out. They have levelled serious corruption charges against the chief minister and have asked the party chief to set a time frame for the election of the new leader.

"This is a bold step by the MLAs opposing the chief minister. The Congress chief will have to take note of it. She just cannot let things go out of hand," said a senior CWC member.

And after the problems in West Bengal and Delhi, Maharashtra could be the next trouble spot for the Congress leadership.

RSP pits ganajot against mahajot

Sobha Menon
NEW DELHI 22 APRIL

IF MAHAJOT (grand alliance) is what Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee is threatening the ruling front with in West Bengal, the Left intends to retaliate in an equally forceful manner — with a ganajot (people's alliance).

The move is being planned by

a constituent of the Left Front — the RSP. Besides the CPI(M), the CPI, the RSP and the Forward Bloc, the people's alliance proposes to include the CPI(ML), the SUCI and all other Marxist-Leninist parties which have

given up their "annihilation policy and come overground."

RSP leader and PWD minister in the West Bengal Cabinet Kshiti Goswami claimed that the Left Front had to stand united to ward off any challenge during the forthcoming Assembly polls in March next year. Though rather upset about the "indifferent response" to build up a "united movement", Mr Goswami said if necessary, the RSP would write to the CPI(M), CPI and Forward

Bloc to hold a meeting with the Left Front to discuss Left unity. No formal meeting of the Left Front government has been held after the "April crisis" (the fall of the 13-month-old Vajpayee government).

While the RSP has been trying to build up Left unity, the CPI(M) has been busy "dissuading the Congress against having any truck with the Trinamul Congress and the BJP." Sources in the CPI(M) claimed that Buddhadev Bhattacharyya had held several meetings with Congress chief whip in the Lok Sabha Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi.

Mr Dasmunshi, known for his "anti-mahajot" stance, appears to be the "only hope" of the CPI(M). But with the Congress appearing to have given the green signal to the state unit to go for an understanding with the Trinamul Congress, Mr Dasmunshi appears cornered at the moment.

The political scenario in the state, however, remains fluid, with Mamata Banerjee declaring that there's no question of a mahajot without the BJP and the Congress, on the other hand, making it clear that it would have "no truck with communal forces". The central secretariat of the RSP, which met in New Delhi on April 18 and 19, has called upon all Left and democratic parties to join hands to put up a joint offensive against the anti-people policies of the government.



Mama(ta) Mia

The Economic Times

23 APR 2000

Mahajot aims at saving West Bengal: Modi

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, April 22. — Just as non-Congress parties had united to save democracy in 1977, the *mahajot* in West Bengal aims to save the state, BJP leader, Mr Narendra Modi, said today.

He was here on a two-day visit in connection with organisational elections of the party, scheduled for June-July.

Denying that the grand alliance is political opportunism, Mr Modi said the BJP did not believe in political untouchability. "Even in 1977 we had joined hands with the Left to save democracy in India," he said.

The proposal of a *mahajot* was mooted by the Trinamul Congress chief, Miss Mamata Banerjee, and the BJP is not opposed to the idea. The Congress has to decide its stand, he said.

West Bengal has suffered an irreparable damage under the Left Front regime and the state is rapidly declining, Mr Modi said at a press conference here.

He countered the charge that the BJP was indulging in double standards by criticising the Congress for joining hands with Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar and yet doing something similar in West Bengal.

"There is a big difference," Mr Modi said. "We are reaching out to the people with an open mind and presenting our proposal before them where as the Congress had abused and attacked Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav to get votes in Bihar but after the elections it betrayed the people and joined hands with Mr Laloo Yadav."

The Congress had failed to provide good governance and now it has failed to perform as a constructive Opposition party, he said, the Congress lacks direction and is indulging in negative politics.

Citing instances of Congress doublespeak, Mr Modi said, during Mr Bill Clinton's visit the Congress which had earlier opposed the nuclear test talked about minimum deterrent but when reporters questioned Congress leaders on the issue, they denied having spoken about minimum deterrent capabilities.

The Congress amended the Constitution 79 times and also spoke about need for review but now it is opposing the review committee only because Mr PA Sangma has been nominated as a panel member.

Mr Modi stressed on the need for electoral reforms, saying the BJP is in favour of accepting the Indrajit Gupta committee report. Let the EC discuss this report and let it be accepted, he said.

The NDA government has achieved remarkable success by taking the initiative in making terrorism a major point all over the world, Mr Modi said.

When the nuclear tests were conducted critics said India would be isolated but today Mr Vajpayee has shown how the country is setting the agenda at international meets, he said.

He denied reports of dissidence in the party's state unit and stressed that the alliance with BJD was functioning smoothly.

THE STATESMAN

2 APR 2000

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Mahajot shelved for now 274

By Angana Parekh

NEW DELHI, APRIL 25. The controversial "grand alliance" in West Bengal has been shelved as far as civic elections are concerned, it was announced tonight, after a meeting between Ms. Sonia Gandhi, Congress(I) president, and A. B. A. Ghani Khan Choudhary, Bengal unit chief.

But Mr. Chaudhary, a strong advocate of the alliance, made it clear that the proposal for an understanding with the Trinamool Congress was very much alive and would be pursued vigorously for the Assembly elections next year in order to defeat the ruling CPI (M). "We all agreed that the 'mahajot' has come to stay."

However, Mr. Choudhary said for the next month's civic polls, it would not be possible to extend the 'mahajot' principle everywhere because "of time constraints; "but wherever possible, we will try to follow it." In reply to questions, the PCC chief said the Congress(I) would indeed oppose the BJP — a shift from his ambivalent position yesterday.

The development comes as a victory of sorts for Ms. Gandhi. She has managed to hold the State unit together by putting the 'mahajot' proposal on the backburner; and has succeeded in extracting an assurance from Mr. Chaudhary that the Congress(I) will put up candidates against the

BJP. This would go some way in protecting the party's secular credentials. Earlier in the day, she categorically said that the Congress(I) would have no understanding with the BJP.

A formula was worked out this morning when Mrs. Prabha Rau, AICC general secretary in charge of the State, and her predecessor, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, met Mr. Chaudhary and Mr. Somen Mitra. It was explained to the Bengal leaders that the Congress(I) would have more bargaining leverage with the Trinamool Congress for the Assembly elections if discussions on alliance were conducted after the civic poll results were announced.

THE HINDU

26 APR 2000

'Maha'-fiasco in Bengal?

GIVEN THAT the very concept was replete with contradictions from the start, it is hardly surprising that the proposed *mahajot* in West Bengal has run into all kinds of difficulties. Its basis was flawed since it envisaged a breakaway outfit reuniting with the parent party to fight a common enemy, forgetting several obvious drawbacks. First, the patently cynical move chose to ignore the fact that the personal angularities which led to the rupture in the first place cannot be papered over easily. Secondly, the clash of interests between the parent organisation's state and central units over the new political line will result in prolonged dithering which will make an understanding increasingly difficult to achieve. And, thirdly, the third player in the field will begin to see the confusion over the proposed alliance and the accompanying charges and counter-charges as detrimental to its own interests.

In these circumstances, irrespective of the Grand Alliance coming into being or not, none of the parties involved is likely to emerge unscathed from the attempt to put it together. The BJP's West Bengal unit, never very pleased with Mamata Banerjee's rough-and-ready style of functioning, will wonder whether the accretion of strength, in case the Congress joins her, will make her a more difficult partner. Besides, even an indirect alliance with an old adversary like the Congress will not help the BJP's reputation in the State. On her part, Miss Banerjee may wonder how useful to the cohesion of her party will be the return of her *bete noire* Somen Mitra and the ailing Ghani Khan Chaudhury whose writ does not run beyond Malda. The Congress, even if it does not split, may find the attractions of joining a possible winning side almost irresistible. But if it splits, the prospect of playing second fiddle to Miss Banerjee will not be a happy one.

Clearly, the continuing tug-of-war will harm the reputation of everyone involved. Such an outcome is not surprising, considering the difficulty which the Congress is facing of reconciling its opposition to the BJP at the central level with aligning with it, even indirectly, in West Bengal. The capitulation to a former rebel, Miss Banerjee, is also not pleasant. The gainer because of the disarray among its opponents may well be the Left Front, for as long as its support base of 47 to 48 per cent of votes remains intact, it can hope to stay ahead in the race.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

40 April 1991

N-plant issue raises heat in W. Bengal

The Times of India News Service

CALCUTTA: The Centre's recent move to set up a nuclear power plant in West Bengal has created a controversy with a group of intellectuals expressing serious reservations against it.

The intellectuals, among whom are former state power minister Sankar Sen, former MP of the CPM Malini Bhattacharya, economist Amiya Bagchi, actor Saumitra Chatterjee and poet Arun Mitra, in a statement issued in Calcutta on Wednesday, said that any nuclear power plant should not be built in the state in view of its hazardous nature and irreversible effects.

Expressing concern over the West Bengal government's initiative to persuade the Centre to set up the power plant and suggest the Sunderbans as the possible site, the intellectuals instead suggested that research on development of safe and renewable energy generation

be accelerated.

If the project materializes, it will be the first nuclear power plant in the country in a decade.

Following chief minister Jyoti Basu's request to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in February to allow setting up of a nuclear power plant in the state, the Nuclear Power Corporation recently asked the West Bengal government to select a site for the proposed plant.

The state government has tentatively chosen two sites at the Sunderbans near the Bay of Bengal. The demand for the plant, first raised by the liberal camp inside the CPM that include CPM's district secretary of South 24 Parganas Samir Putatunda and party MP Radhika Pramanik, has already been challenged by the party hardliners. Mr Jyoti Basu has openly come in support of the power plant.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

28 APR 2000

CPI pulls out of Left Front Govt

Gautam Chaudhuri
Calcutta, March 7

THE CPI stunned political circles today when it announced its decision to quit the State Cabinet in protest against the denial of a Rajya Sabha seat to the party. It has, however, decided to continue as a partner in the Left Front for the sake of Left unity.

The CPI State Council at an emergency meeting unanimously resolved in favour of the unprecedented step soon after the Left Front decided to allot the fourth safe Rajya Sabha seat to the RSP. For the other three seats, the CPI(M) has renominated its sitting MPs, Biplab Dasgupta, Dipankar Mukherjee and Nilotpal Basu.

A visibly-agitated State CPI Secretary Manju Kumar Mazumder described the Front decision as unfortunate.

He said that they had already communicated their decision to the central leadership of the party and would announce the next course of action after talks with the CPI central executive.

This is for the first time during the 23-year rule of the Left Front in West Bengal that a Front partner had gone to such an extent to register its protest.

Even though the CPI(M) had periodical brush-offs with the RSP and the Forward Bloc, the other two major Front partners, a few times in the past over other issues, it had never snowballed into such a tangle.

CPI Minister Nandagopal Bhattacharyya told *The Hindustan*

^{8/3}
Times that at a time when the country faced threats from the BJP and the Sangh Parivar, it was all the more essential for the Left parties to remain united.

Bhattacharyya said it was shocking that a Parliamentarian of the stature of Gurudas Dasgupta was denied a berth in the Rajya Sabha in such a way.

Dasgupta, who has been in the Upper House for about 15 unbroken years, was in the running for renomination this time as well. With each candidate needing at least 49 votes to sail into the Upper House, the Left Front, now having 207 MLAs in the State Assembly, was put into an obvious quandary, since it could ensure safe passage to only four Front candidates.

But the RSP had a stronger case to get the fourth seat, fallen vacant by the retirement of Forward Bloc's Jayanta Roy, as under earlier Front agreements, the RSP and Forward Bloc would have candidates in Rajya Sabha in alternate terms.

The RSP was non-committal of the CPI decision, with the RSP State Secretary Debabrata Banerjee, pointing out that the Left Front would have another meeting on the issue tomorrow. "Let's hope for the best," he said. Forward Bloc State Secretary Asok Ghosh felt that injustice was meted out to the CPI.

"For larger interest, the CPI(M) could have easily withdrawn one of its three candidates to accommodate the CPI. We suggested the same in today's Front meeting," he added.

LF cracking up: Opposition

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, March 7

THE CPI'S decision to pull out of the Left Front ministry has taken political parties in the State by surprise. While Left Front partners appeared dismayed over the development, the Trinamool Congress and BJP said this was a sign of the Left Front cracking up.

CPI(M) State Secretary Anil Biswas hoped that the CPI would reconsider its decision to quit the State Cabinet.

Forward Bloc State Secretary Asok Ghosh said that the CPI had indeed been wronged. "We did mention it in the Left Front meeting today but the CPI(M) was unwilling to accommodate the CPI." Ghosh, however, hoped that the issue would be amicably resolved at tomorrow's emergency meeting of the Left Front.

Trinamool leader Subrata Mukherjee described the development as "the beginning of the end for the Left Front in West Bengal". BJP Vice-President Muzaffar Khan echoed similar sentiments. He said that CPI's decision highlighted the fact that LF partners remained divided in real terms.

Congress Vice-President Saugata Roy, however, did not attach too much importance to the CPI stance. "The CPI is clearly trying to have a strong bargaining position," he said.

■ CPM denies Gurudas RS renomination ■ Front meets today

CPI pulls out of LF ministry

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, March 7. — The CPI today decided to withdraw from the Left Front ministry, dealing a severe blow to Left unity before the Rajya Sabha elections.

The move is in protest against CPI-M's refusal to renominate CPI's Mr Gurudas Dasgupta for the RS polls in the state. The front today decided to nominate a RSP and three CPI-M candidates, for it has enough MLAs to win only four of the five RS seats. Mr Jyoti Basu didn't attend the front meeting and wasn't available for comments.

Mr Nandagopal Bhattacharya, water resources development minister, said CPI ministers would stop attending the Assembly and office and using government cars from tomorrow. Mr Srikumar Mukherjee (civil defence) is the other CPI member in the ministry, which the party joined in 1982. Some CPI leaders feel the CPI-M didn't let Mr Dasgupta

fight the RS polls because their party had refused to join the RJD-CPI(M) alliance during the Bihar polls. Mr Dasgupta is an able and respected parliamentarian and the CPI has a right to the RS seat, they said.

The front chairman, Mr Sailen Dasgupta, said: "Our stand remains unchanged. The Left Front will, however, meet ~~again tomorrow~~ to hold another meeting followed by hectic parleys among top CPI-M leaders in Calcutta and Delhi. Senior party leaders spoke to Mr Jyoti Basu too.

Mr AB Bardhan, CPI general secretary, has apprised Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet, CPI general secretary, of his party's stand. Mr Surjeet reportedly told him that he would discuss the issue with senior CPI-M leaders from the state when they visit Delhi on 9 March. (But Mr Bardhan ruled out withdrawing from the Left Front, adds a report from Delhi. After the CPI national executive meeting, he, however, said the party's state unit

had every right to protest against the LF decision.

(Reacting to the CPI state unit's decision, Mr Gurudas Dasgupta said, "Our party has made its position clear. I have nothing to add.")

Immediately after the front meeting, angry CPI leaders held an emergency state secretariat meeting at Bhupesh Bhavan and resolved that under the present situation it was no longer possible for "our party" to be in the LF ministry. "We'll, however, continue to remain in the Left Front," the resolution said.

Mr Bhattacharya and the CPI state secretary, Mr Manju Majumdar, said the party's state unit was in touch with its central leaders. It will review the situation before planning its future course.

Senior CPI leaders said Mr Bardhan had approved the state CPI unit decision.

Mr Bardhan, in Calcutta to attend Geeta Mukherjee's funeral, had asked Mr Basu and Mr Anil Biswas yesterday

to leave a seat for the CPI.

Mr Sailen Dasgupta said that after the CPI protested against today's decision, the front met again but couldn't come to a unanimous decision.

Mr Asoke Ghosh, FB state secretary, supported the CPI demand. He said the RSP and CPI should get a seat each. But the CPI-M leaders were adamant in their stand.

At the second front session, Mr Dasgupta reportedly asked a RSP leader whether his party would leave its seat for the CPI. The RSP refused.

Later taking to journalists, Mr Asoke Ghosh described the CPI's decision as "unfortunate". He hoped all front constituents would persuade the CPI to review its stand. "If need be, I'll talk to Mr Jyoti Basu too."

The RSP state secretary and irrigation minister, Mr Debabrata Bandopadhyay, said his party would urge the CPI M to leave one seat for the CPI to tide over crisis. He, however, said the RSP would not give up its seat.

Govt schools may get part-time teachers

SUMIT SEN
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, March 21. — The CPI-M is considering recruiting part-time teachers for secondary and higher secondary schools.

Senior party leaders have explored the possibility and indicated that they may ask the state government to go ahead with the move without much delay.

Owing to the serious financial crisis faced by state government, Alimuddin Street mandarins supported appointing

part-time teachers, says a CPI-M document. The proposal, taken at a recent meeting, if implemented is likely to create a controversy in academic and political circles.

Leaders say the CPI-M had earlier agreed to appoint part-time teachers in rural primary education centres, set up under a UK sponsored project.

The party document reflects its concern over the decline in academic standards in the state's educational institutions.

It calls for joint ventures to set some panchayat functionaries

over-dependence on contractors, the document alleges that the contractor-bureaucrat nexus has spoilt many a "party comrade". That has been cited as a reason for disunity among partymen.

At times, such contractors get undue patronage of the beneficiary committees of the three-tier panchayats. That spawns corruption and harms the party's image, the document says.

The CPI-M state committee is worried because panchayat members are not yet aware of

the party's guidelines on how to run rural bodies. Lack of initiative and despondency are visible even among enthusiastic and active panchayat party members. In many cases, CPI-M members' participation in panchayat activities is either uncertain or a mere formality.

Many new panchayat functionaries have not been given proper responsibilities. The document refers to CPI-M activists' failure to protest against corruption in non-Left

run panchayat bodies. In such

CPI-M UNHAPPY WITH PARTY-RUN PANCHAYAT BODIES' FUNCTIONING

cases, instead of organising movements against non-Left parties, CPI-M members have the tendency to wait for the state administration to take action against the erring panchayat functionaries.

The CPI-M state committee has, therefore, directed party units supervising the panchayat bodies to hold regular meetings. It insists that there should be better co-ordination between the CPI-M's frontal organisations and the panchayat management to ensure improved functioning of the party controlled panchayat bodies.

ANIL CITES HEALTH REASONS FOR PULLOUT

Basu not to contest 2001 polls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, March 21. — Mr Jyoti Basu will not contest the 2001 Assembly elections.

The state CPI-M unit today said deteriorating health had forced the octogenarian leader to pull out.

"There's no question of his contesting the 2001 Assembly polls. Mr Basu is not keeping well. He'll turn 86 next year and, given his health, it won't be possible for him to contest.

But he'll certainly be our chief campaigner," Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M politburo member and state secretary, said.

Though Mr Biswas said the decision was not new, today's official statement is bound to evoke reactions from the CPI-M and other political parties. The matter may

even come up for discussion in the CPI-M state committee's 26-March meeting.

Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, chosen deputy chief minister a few months ago, will be the party's "natural choice" as Mr Basu's successor — that is, if the CPI-M retains power. "Mr Basu will then guide Mr Bhattacharya in his duties," Mr Biswas said.

Asked whether Mr Basu had expressed his desire to pull out of the next elections recently, Mr Biswas said: "No. This had been decided much earlier."

Today's development will give rise to speculation over the CPI-M's poll prospects in 2001. For, without Mr Basu as

the chief ministerial candidate, the CPI-M may lose much of its appeal.

Some CPI-M leaders say today's official announcement may have a bearing on the civic polls — in at least 82 bodies. The Calcutta Municipal Corporation polls are likely to be held in June and elections to the other civic bodies may be held in May.

Last year, Mr Basu had expressed his desire to quit active politics, citing his poor health as the reason. But the party politburo, which met in November, did not agree and persuaded him to continue.

Senior CPI-M leaders say Mr Basu has been unhappy ever since the majority of members in the central committee, comprising hardliners, shot down the idea

of the party joining the United Front ministry that he was invited to lead in May-1996. Of late, the war of attrition between the hardliners and liberals has left him bitter.

Another reason for Mr Basu's unhappiness is his failure to bring in desired changes in the draft for updating the party programme, formulated in 1964. Despite the liberals depending on him, Mr Basu has not so far succeeded in making drastic changes in the programme. The party central committee will, however, meet again next month to finalise the draft.

Mr Jyoti Basu

Police beat up school teachers

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, March 27

A NUMBER of primary school teachers were injured, two of them seriously, in a police lathi-charge on Rani Rashmoni Road this afternoon.

The teachers, under the banner of the West Bengal Primary Teachers' Association, were trying to march to the Assembly, which was in session.

The procession of about 350 teachers started from Raja Subodh Mullick Square and ended at Rani Rashmoni Road. They were demanding better pay, improved service conditions and prompt payment of provident fund and gratuity.

Subsequently, a delegation of association leaders went to the Assembly to meet Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta and School Education Minister Kanti Biswas. But they were not allowed inside.

When those waiting at Rani Rashmoni Road got to know that their representatives had failed to meet the ministers, they grew restless and headed for the Assembly. A strong police picket blocked them and beat them up. The lathi-



A primary teacher injured in a lathi-charge in the city on Monday.
Photo: Subhendu Ghosh

wielding policemen did not spare women and the aged. Eyewitnesses said that six teachers suffered head injuries.

The Finance Minister later regretted the incident and directed the city police chief to submit a report to the home department.

Police, however, insisted that the lathi-charge was mild. They blamed the teachers for violating prohibitory orders. "Two teachers suffered head injuries when they fell on the pavement while trying to escape," Deputy Commissioner, Calcutta Police, Nazrul Islam said.

Cong defeats partyman in thumbs-up to Mamata

BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, March 29: Opening up possibilities of newer anti-CPM configurations in Bengal politics, Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul today ripped apart its parent party as the bulk of Congress legislators cross-voted to catapult Jayanta Bhattacharya, the Trinamul-backed Independent, into the Rajya Sabha.

Starting out with a bank of four MLAs — three of Trinamul and one of ally BJP — Bhattacharya posted a 43-36 victory at the expense of Debi Prosad Roy, the Congress candidate, to become the fifth entrant to the House from Bengal.

The supporters of former PCC chief Somen Mitra, whose nomination claim was overlooked by the high command despite a unanimous CLP resolution, are believed to have cross-voted en bloc, causing the upset and heaping humiliation on Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

At the day's end, a dejected Roy said he had not bargained for "the grand betrayal. This is the charac-

ter of Congress MLAs in Bengal. I will lodge a complaint with the high command".

A jubilant Bhattacharya said "there is no permanent enemy in politics" — hinting at a reconciliation between Trinamul and a part of the Congress.

An upbeat Mamata hailed Bhattacharya's victory as "indicative of positive changes in West Bengal's political scenario".

As soon as the results were known, a group of Chhatra Parishad supporters stormed the Assembly lobby, demanding stern action against the "black sheep" who betrayed the party.

CLP leader Atish Sinha conceded that the result was a major setback. "I am shocked. This will have an adverse impact on the party in the coming civic and municipal polls," he said.

Criticising Sonia Gandhi, Mitra's supporters Sultan Ahmed and Abdul Mannan said the result was a lesson for the high command which "imposed a candidate on party MLAs". Ahmed said the defeat was a result of "the party MLAs' revolt against Delhi's decision as the AICC had

humiliated the PCC and the CLP".

Mitra, however, was diplomatic: "As a party worker, I am pained at the outcome. We should introspect," he said.

Sources said Congress legislators who cross-voted to ensure Roy's defeat are eager to join Trinamul and expect Mamata to give them tickets in the Assembly polls. They added that once the exodus is complete, she will project her party as the main Opposition.

Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, believed to have engineered Roy's nomination, dared legislators who had voted against the official nominee to leave the Congress.

But, for now, his party is the butt of ridicule. "The Congress has no character. Outside the House, they are Trinamul, but inside they are Congress," said Jyoti Basu.

The four nominees of the CPM-led Front polled 209 votes, six more than its own number, courtesy smaller parties like the GNLF and the SUCI. Those who won from the Left Front are Dipankar Mukherjee, Nilotpal Basu, Biplab Dasgupta (CPM) and RSP's Manoj Bhattacharya.

THE TELEGRAPH

30 MAR 2000

Ghani for Mamata alliance

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

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9 8 23 517

CALCUTTA, March 30. — Within 24 hours of the Congress's shock defeat in the state's Rajya Sabha election, Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury today welcomed Miss Mamata Banerjee's call for a "grand alliance" to dislodge the Left Front government.

The Trinamul leader reciprocated by saying the PCC chief had "rightly understood the need of the hour" and stated she would soon meet Mr Chowdhury. Though she described the proposed meeting as a courtesy call, it may spell doom for the state Congress as the

two leaders would obviously try to hammer out a formula to bring under the "grand alliance" as many Congress MLAs as possible.

A revolt by at least 26 Congress MLAs from the Somen Mitra camp yesterday

paved the victory of the Trinamul-backed Independent candidate, throwing the state Congress into one of its worst crisis ever. And, Miss Banerjee is in no mood to let go this opportunity to break the Congress again. Even if that means joining hands with arch-rival Mr Mitra. On the possible contours of the alliance, she is, however, holding the cards close to her chest. "Just wait and see what happens," she maintained.

Mr Mitra has some reservations about tying up with the Trinamul as long as it remains a BJP ally. But Miss Banerjee believes this allergy for the BJP "can be removed through dialogue".

"Each individual may have his or her individual perceptions about particular issues. But we are uniting for a politi-

cal cause: save the state from bankruptcy and ruin brought about by 23 years of Left Front rule. The grand alliance is not for defending any religious creed, it is a political necessity," she said.

She asserted that her party is the "real Congress" and the Congress MLAs who voted for the Trinamul-backed candidate "endorsed this fact... These MLAs scripted the beginning of the end of Left Front misrule."

People from all walks of life would be accommodated in the alliance and would contest about one-fourth of the Assembly seats on the alliance's tickets, she said.

Basu unfazed

CALCUTTA, March 30. — Mr Jyoti Basu today scoffed at Miss Mamata Banerjee's call for a "grand alliance", saying it wouldn't affect the Left Front's prospects in the Assembly polls next year. He was speaking to reporters in the Assembly lobby. — SNS

She ridiculed comments of Mr Jyoti Basu and Mr Anil Biswas on yesterday's cross-voting by Congress MLAs. Mr Basu had said the incident proved Congress leaders were "devoid of any character", while

Mr Biswas said: "Even lunatics know what is best for them, but not Congress leaders."

Retorted Miss Banerjee: "The two CPI-M leaders should mind their own business. The party that is really shaken by yesterday's development is the CPI-M. For the past 23 years, it has been playing the game of dividing the Opposition to rule the state. Now the game is over, as yesterday's voting showed. We played our game so quietly that the CPI-M was at its wit's end."

She said the state was at the lowest ebb because of the Left mindset that spreads the red carpet for Mr John Major and asks President Bill Clinton to go back.

■ More reports on pages 2 and 4

■ Editorial: In a cleft stick! page 6

THE STATESMAN

31 MAR 2000

Maran pledges pro-export Exim policy

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 25. — The Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Mr Murasoli Maran, today told the reconstituted Board of Trade that the Export-Import (Exim) policy which will be announced by him on 31 March, 2000, will be an exporter-friendly one.

Presiding over the meeting here today, Mr Maran said that he was aware of the exporters' grievances — especially the Centre's decision to phase out the concessions on export earnings by 20 per cent every year as stated in the new Budget — and indicated that he had taken up the matter with the Finance Minister, Mr Yashwant Sinha.

Rapid expansion of exports was vital for ensuring speedy economic development and the Exim policy was one of the major instruments for achieving this end.

"Infrastructural bottlenecks must also be addressed and computerisation speeded up so as to eliminate procedural delays and harassment," Mr Maran added. He also agreed with the members that the deregula-

tion in the area of excise was a welcome development and similar deregulation could be carried out in the export sector also.

The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci), Mr G P Goenka, said that an annual export growth of at least 20 per cent would be needed to achieve a share of even one per cent of the world market and added that the services should be the main thrust area.

He also stressed the need to compensate unrebated taxes in a WTO-compatible manner, to activate the Tariff Commission and to devise institutional mechanism to counter barriers to market access in importing countries.

Mr Rahul Bajaj, president, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), stressed that WTO compatible ways must be found to support export if the desired growth level of 20 per cent was to be achieved. Handicaps facing exports in terms of infrastructure, interest rate must also be overcome.

He added that the rupee should find its own level and added that the CII supported the government's present position on the issue of rupee convertibility on

capital account. "The ultimate objective of government policies should be to strengthen the Indian industry particularly in the context of the phase-out of quantitative restrictions," added Mr Bajaj.

Mr Navratan Samdria, president, Federation of Indian Export Organisations (Fieo) sought postponement of the phase-out of tax exemptions under Section 80 HHC until specific measures were taken to reduce the transaction costs of exports which hindered global competitiveness and further suggested extension of the export proceeds realisation period from the present 180 days to 365 days.

Mr Ramu Deora, Chairman, Chemexil, highlighted the problem of state government levies such as sales tax, octroi and other local levies on inputs for export promotion, irrelevance of special import licence (SIL) in the present context and suggested support to export on the lines of the system followed in China where Duty Entitlement Pass Book (DEPB), duty drawback and other refund of taxes were routed through banks rather than the departments concerned.

THE STATESMAN

26 MAR 2000

No major conflict between Govt, President: Thakre

Chennai, March 26

THE BJP president, Mr Kushabhau Thakre, today said there were no major conflict between President K R Narayanan and the Vajpayee Government. Answering a question at a Press conference on the controversy over the presidential address at the banquet hosted to the visiting US President Bill Clinton, Mr Thakre said the President's speech "largely reflected the government's thinking in the matter". There were reports that the President's banquet speech was not cleared by the Union Cabinet and it had turned out to be an embarrassment to the Vajpayee Government.

The reports also said of late the President was not getting the banquet speeches cleared by the Government and was speaking on his own. The BJP president's remarks virtually confirmed the reports. Mr Thakre's remarks that "there were no major conflict" between the President and the Government indicated that divergent views do exist between the executive and the titular head.

'NO PRESIDENT'S RULE': Mr Thakre has ruled out imposition of President's rule in Jammu and Kashmir on the ground that there was breakdown of law and order in that State, in the context of the recent massacre of 36 Sikhs.



Since the problem had to be tackled with people's support, he said an elected Government always offered the best option. "You have to take the people into confidence", he added.

The Khalistani movement was tackled only with the active support of the people because they had realised that the movement was hampering development of Punjab, he pointed out and added that a similar situation was emerging in Jammu and Kashmir.

INDIA'S STANCE ON CTBT: "We have our own security concerns. If only the CTBT is changed taking our security concerns into consideration, we can think of signing it," the BJP president Kushabhau said.

The present form of Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty is "unilateral" and there is no question of India signing it, the BJP president said.

Mr Thakre said the US Senate had not ratified the draft of the treaty and wondered why India should sign it.

He said Clinton's visit to India had helped both the countries to have a better understanding. Clinton, during his tour, told Gen Pervez Musharraf to settle disputes with India through negotiations and not through any third party mediation, he said, adding this was for the first time the US had clearly supported India's viewpoints regarding its relations with Islamabad. (UNI, PTI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
27 MAR 2000

CPM rampage at Kasba

Fury at leader's murder ■ Bandh called in S Calcutta

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE 2A

CALCUTTA, Jan. 23. — CPM men ran amok at Kasba police station this morning, smashing furniture and vehicles and robbing police barracks, after a local party leader was shot dead at nearby Chal Patti market.

The cadres then looted and burnt down almost the entire market of 400 stalls, roasting poultry alive, and terrorised Bijon Setu traffic by hurling petrol bombs and burning vendors' carts.

After four hours of bombing, vandalism and arson, top CPI-M leaders "identified" the man who shot Mr Gurupada Bagchi, the party's Kasba-South local committee secretary, at 7.20 a.m. as he bought fish at the market. The assassin is Tarak Haldar, a Trinamul Congress goon, Mr Biman Bose announced.

But police said Haldar was till two years ago a CPI-M-patronised extortionist. And several Chal Patti shopkeepers suggested Bagchi's murder was a result of rivalry between two CPI-M groups for control of the extortion racket in the market.

But the CPI-M — which called a 24-hour bandh tomorrow in parts of south Calcutta — seemed to blame everybody else and targeted newspeople, the fire brigade and Kasba police.

Cadres carrying firearms, swords and rods first chased cops into the police station.

Then, in 30 minutes, they destroyed almost all furniture in the offices and the barracks, and yanked off doors and windows. They threw police two-wheelers into a pond, overturned vans, and wrecked 16 vehicles — including a government car — seized for traffic violation.

As off-duty policemen fled the barracks, the mob allegedly broke open cupboards and lifted mattresses to take away their money and other belongings.

Eight policemen on duty, including inspector-in-charge Mr SR Dutta, were beaten up and kept confined in the office till more police arrived leaving

their postings for the Netaji anniversary celebrations.

All this while, armed cadres stood guard outside and held off reporters and photographers, roughing up those who protested.

A group of cadres then marched off to the market, throwing bombs while they crossed Bijon Setu. As they looted sackfuls of rice and smashed the eggs, the cadres burst a few more bombs. Then they set the market ablaze and watched 300 stalls, loaded with grain and vegetables, burn down.

Two fire-tenders were prevented from reaching the market and a few firemen beaten up for protesting. The cadres threw bombs to keep off TV journalists who tried to get too close. Senior IPS officers watched

helplessly on the flyover with guns pointed at them.

It was CPI-M bigwigs who got the rioting to stop, at 11 a.m.

Mr Biman Bose, politburo member; Mr Manab Mukherjee, state environment minister, and Mr Naren Sen, Calcutta District Committee secretary, all arrived at the spot.

It was only then that the party succeeded in "identifying" Bagchi's killer. Mr Bose named him while briefing the press. He blamed the "antisocial activities" at Kasba on the Trinamul-BJP.

"They are out to ruin the state's tranquil atmosphere," Mr Bose said. He didn't forget to add that "a section of the police" has been encouraging "these activities".

The state BJP general secretary said: "I don't think the Trinamul and BJP are strong enough to create lawlessness in this CPI-M belt."

The murder

Bagchi, as on other Sundays, was buying fish before he would walk to the party branch committee office inside the market.

The killer got down from his bicycle and pushed his way up to the seller. He parked his bike just beside Bagchi, pulled out a revolver, pressed the muzzle against the victim's head and fired two shots, eyewitnesses said.

He fired another shot in the air to make room around him, jumped onto the bicycle and pedalled off without resistance.

'Real' culprit: Police's "priority" is to catch Bagchi's killer, IG (S Bengal) Mr KJ Singh told reporters. "Of course, those who ransacked the police station and barracks won't be spared."

Miss Mamata Banerjee said she had discussed the incident with Mr Jyoti Basu, but wouldn't reveal what the chief minister told her.

Bandh areas

Ballygunge Assembly constituency, Rashbehari Avenue up to SP Mukherjee crossing, Hazra-Pandit crossing, Golpark, Gariahat Road up to Ballygunge Phari, Kasba, Tiljala and EM Bypass up to Park Circus and Rashbehari connectors.

Bangla political crisis deepens

ERSHADUL HUQ
INDIA ABROAD NEWS SERVICE

DHAKA, Jan. 24. — The political stalemate in Bangladesh has been prolonged with Opposition leader, Ms Khaleda Zia, rejecting a fresh offer for talks and Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, accusing her arch rival of unleashing "politics of violence."

Sheikh Hasina, addressing a business leaders meeting here on Saturday, blamed the opposition for political violence on the streets. But at the end of her tirade she renewed her offer for talks to end the standoff with Ms Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led opposition.

The offer included discussions on the opposition demand that the Awami League government step down and hold national elections ahead of 2001, when Hasina's term ends.

"I am ready to sit with the Leader of the Opposition at any place she chooses", Sheikh Hasina told the business leaders. "She can raise any issue, including the one-point demand for the resignation of my government. If necessary, the talks will be broadcasted live over television and radio."

Hasina's offer came at the inaugural session of the two-day conference at which business leaders pressed for a dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition. The standoff has had a devastating effect on the country's economy. Sheikh Hasina however added "Unilateral initiative will not solve any problem if the other side does not come up with a positive mind."

At a public meeting yesterday, former Prime Minister, Ms Khaleda Zia promptly rejected Hasina's offer saying, "There is no scope for discussions as the government has already lost the opportunity to hold dialogue. Dialogue can only be held with a caretaker administration after the resignation of the Awami League government."

She said there had been scope for talks when the opposition had placed its four-point demand, which has since been replaced with a one-point demand for Hasina's ouster.

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