

Police with finger on trigger as Panskura goes to polls

Arindam Sarkar
Panskura, June 4

THIS PREDOMINANTLY rural Lok Sabha constituency with an electorate of over a million goes to the polls tomorrow with the administration and the police going on a security overdrive, as the spectre of violence looms large over most of the seven Assembly segments.

If the toll of human lives cast 26,000 the way up to the polls, has given this election a particularly bloody face, it has also surpassed all other by-polls in terms of security arrangements.

With the Election Commission keeping a watchful eye and stalwarts of rival parties, including Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee and CPI(M) Politburo member Biman Bose camping here, the police and the administration have geared themselves up to react to any flare-up, particularly in the 300 booths marked "super-sensitive" in Keshpur and elsewhere.

Prohibitory orders under Section 144 have been clamped throughout the constituency and its borders sealed. As many as 16 check posts have been erected at the entry

points of seven blocks.

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Polling will be held between 7 a.m and 5 p.m in 1,310 booths. There are five candidates in the field. But the contest is essentially between CPI's Gurudas Dasgupta and Trinamool Congress's Bikram Sarkar. The seat fell vacant after

cers in conducting the polls.

"Of the 41 assistant returning officers, 25 have been posted in the Keshpur, Pingla and Sabong segments. We will also have four additional district magistrates in Kharagpur, Ghatal, Tamluk and Midnapore," said returning officer and ADM Midnapore, A Subbiah.

Equally staggering are the police arrangements. Apart from 6,500 district police personnel, two companies of RAF, four of the Eastern Frontier Rifles and eight companies of the State Armed Police will keep vigil during polling. "Each booth will have two armed and two lathi-wielding policemen. Apart from this, 158 additional armed guards will be deployed. Each sector will have a reserve force at its disposal for quick deployment if there is trouble," said

Gaurav Dutt, SP, Midnapore.

It is Keshpur, however, that is getting most of the attention. All the 199 polling stations in this area have been declared sensitive and of these 57 have been marked super-sensitive. "There are 40 sectors in the Keshpur segment alone. And all the super-sensitive polling stations are being provided with additional armed guards," said Dutt.

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A police picket at the Midnapore Collegiate School grounds on Sunday. Photo: HT

the death of CPI veteran Geeta Mukherjee.

The constituency has been broken up into 193 administrative and 188 police sectors. Each such sector will monitor five polling booths. Apart from the returning officer, who is also the Midnapore additional district magistrate, there will be 41 assistant returning officers and seven executive magistrates to assist the returning offi-

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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80 p.c. turnout in Panskura

PANSKURA (West Bengal), JUNE 5. The by-elections to Panskura Lok Sabha constituency passed off peacefully today with 80 per cent voter turnout even as both the Trinamool Congress and the ruling Left Front alleged false voting and police inaction.

The State Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Sabyasachi Sen, told newsmen in Calcutta that the trouble-torn Keshpur, which witnessed largescale violence recently, recorded the highest of 84 per cent polling.

Stating that no major incident had taken place during the polling, the CEO said he had informed the Chief Election Commissioner, Mr. M.S. Gill, of the situation and the CEC had expressed satisfaction.

The CEO said that the CPI candidate, Mr. Gurudas Dasgupta, had demanded repoll in 30 polling booths alleging that voters were intimidated and prevented from casting their ballot in some

areas at Keshpur. Mr. Dasgupta also alleged that police remained mute spectators and at many places voters were allowed to vote without any identification documents, the CEO said.

The Trinamool Congress leader and Railway Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, camping in Midnapore, expressed happiness over the polling and congratulated the Election Commission on taking precautionary measures.

"I congratulate the Election Commission. People could come out and vote because of the precautionary measures taken by EC. This is the beginning of restoration of democracy in West Bengal", Ms. Banerjee said.

She said that the police had, by and large, played a 'good' role but one section had 'behaved like CPI (M) cadres'. The ruling party, she alleged, had resorted to false voting by bringing people from outside.

Ms. Banerjee said that the Tri-

namool Congress had fought every inch in Panskura.

"We do not want any repoll. We have staked our lives for this by-poll. I do not want any more bloodshed. It is difficult to hold a fair election in West Bengal. There is no justification in demanding repoll".

The State Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadev Bhattacharjee, said in Calcutta that he had received information that Mr. Dasgupta was manhandled at Sarui village in Keshpur from where three CPI polling agents were also kidnapped. The district S.P. was asked to investigate.

Ridiculing the allegation Ms. Banerjee said that the CPI candidate, on the other hand, "had gone to the village with criminals and beaten up our partymen.

Under the full glare of the media, Dasgupta chased away the people and had polling suspended for sometime. Our partymen, infact, saved his life." — PTI

THE HINDU

56 JUN 7 1989

POLLS: CEC expresses satisfacti

80% turnout ■ LF candidate seeks repoll in 30 booths

Panskura by-election issues off peacefully

(Continued from page 1)

what happened today in Sabong and Pingla is nothing but poetic justice. Sitting at Sabong party office today, he said the Marxists are now getting a bitter taste of their own medicine. They are now reaping what they had once sown once. In Calcutta, the chief electoral officer, Mr Sabyasachi Sen, said there was no report from the district administration, police or the four Central observers to substantiate the allegations of rigging. "It's true that some agents could not stay in the booths.

But no agent was missing. When police looked into the allegations it was found that they had either gone home or were present in the booths. Some had gone to the police camps", he said. Voters had boycotted the election at Brahmanpur in Pingla demanding electrification and Amraoal in Panskura West in protest against bad condition of roads. "There was no major violence. The police, however, had to intervene at some places when rival groups engaged in scuffling", Mr Sen said. The deputy chief minister, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya,

however said: "Our voters were intimidated and our polling agents driven out of several booths at Kespur and Pingla". On the Soroi incident, where Mr Dasgupta was manhandled by Trinamul activists, Mr Sabyasachi Sen said a Central observer and the police were present there and they intervened in time. On Mr Dasgupta's demand for repoll in 29 Kespur booths, the CEO said Mr Gill would go through the reports of the returning officers and central observers before deciding whether a repoll was necessary. "In his letter to the CEC, Mr. D.

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WS SERVICE

Control

Bhavan, attended functions since morning. The CPI candidate, Mr Mr Mukherjee, Mr Anand Dasgupta, demanded Mr Kshiti Goswami, failed to poll in 30 Kespur booths. A ar on Green Cities, inauguration of the police and district Center by the Governor, Mlministration connived with e Trinamul and didn't allow adar in India, Mr Richard polls to be held in a free designing a win-win agenda fair manner, he alleged. ion and at the same time cre Surprisingly, Miss Mamata anerjee had no serious comy. of Calcutta High Court laints. In fact, she was "not Justice Bhagawati Prasad happy" at the way the polls ddress at the seminar warnead been conducted. "Of ming and the rise in sea levurse, they have cast false otes in their strongholds in ousands, but have not rigged he election the way they usually do."

Braving frequent showers more than 80 per cent of over 1 million voters exercised their franchise — 5 per cent higher than last Lok Sabha poll.

The two main contenders — Mr Gurudas Dasgupta and Mr Bikram Sarkar — were confident of their "victory". Mr Dasgupta is hoping that the four red bastions — Panskura West, Daspur, Nandanpur and Debra — would give him a massive lead which would not only offset the losses that he might suffer in the three Assembly segments of Kespur, Sabong and Pingla, but would also help him score a resounding victory.

Surprisingly, he did not demand repoll in at least 65 booths at Pingla and Sabong where Trinamul hoods, according to him, had driven out Left Front polling agents from booths and not allowed nearly 30,000 Left Front voters to cast votes.

But he admitted large-scale erosion in the Left Front support base.

The most significant feature of today's poll was the voters' discernible mood for change. Even in the red citadels like



STATE OF THE NATION: Ninety-eight-year-old Sushil Maity of Sabong, has probably carried the burden of citizenship to the polling booth as many times as there are holes in his tattered vest. Will those who sought his vote on Monday promise his great grandchildren a life better than the one they gave him? — Rajib De

way it used to some years ago. Voters said many disaffected party leaders and important panchayat functionaries have opted to be neutral and some have even helped the Trinamul with advice and guidance. This had helped in further erosion of Left base in Panskura.

In almost whole of Sabong and Pingla there is no visible presence of the Left Front, especially of the CPI-M, except in their party offices. Mr Harekrishna Samanta, district secretariat member of the party and a former zilla parishad sabbhadhipati, today looked a sad and worried man at the Sabong party office. He received endless reports of forcible occupation of polling booths in Bhemua and Balpai anchals by Trinamul supporters. He had no reply when asked why his comrades were not resisting.

The answer was provided a little later outside the party office by a junior comrade. "Today's Trinamul goons were once our comrades. Some of those who could resist are now living in camps as these goons have burnt down their houses. So it is an open field for Trinamul to score as many goals as it wants. Even the police are not coming to our aid. In this rain they have refused to go to the interior booths to give protection to our comrades," he said.

But these anchals like many others in Panskura were once red bastions which were both feared and respected. No opposition or challenge was tolerated. If anyone dared, he was not spared. In 1996 Assembly elections Marxists comrades along with an additional SP who is now the SP, Bankura, had hijacked six ballot boxes in Sabong which ensured the sitting Congress candidate, Mr Manash Bhuniya's defeat. Calcutta High Court last year had set aside the Sabong election results, but the LF had gone on appeal to the Supreme Court. To Mr Manash Bhuniya

Panskura and Debra, voters outside many polling stations were heard telling one another to give Miss Banerjee a chance.

The LF, according to them, had been tried out and tested eight times and there was no harm if the Trinamul was given an opportunity to prove its worth. Even Mr Nandagopal Bhattacharya, minister for minor irrigation, admitted that there was a distinct "wave for Mamata", but said Mr Gurudas Dasgupta would win because of

the organisational superiority of the LF.

The mood of change was discernible even among Left sympathisers which has encouraged non-committed Left and floating voters to opt for Trinamul in a big way. With the district CPI-M riven by factionalism and growing corruption in the party having taken a heavy toll of its credibility, the writ of the party does not run in the organisation or over other Left Front partners the

THE STATESMAN
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Trinamul wrests Panskura

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 8. — The Trinamul Congress today wrested the Panskura Lok Sabha seat from the Left Front by a margin of 41,481 votes.

Mr Bikram Sarkar, the Trinamul candidate, got 4,26,779 votes, while his nearest rival, Mr Gurudas Dasgupta of the CPI, got 3,85,298. Mr Subhankar Sarkar (Congress) finished a poor third with 20,497 votes.

After the results were announced, Mr Dasgupta repeated his allegation that the administration had bungled and Trinamul men had rigged the polls.

"The people of Panskura have made a mistake by defeating us", Mr Jyoti Basu, who had personally campaigned for Mr Dasgupta, told reporters.

The chief electoral officer, Mr Sabyasachi Sen, thanked the administration for helping him conduct a "peaceful election". He refused to react to Mr Dasgupta's allegation, saying he had not heard anything.

According to the final statistics, out of 10,07,395 voters, 8,41,204 had cast their votes. The Trinamul got 42.36 per cent of the votes, the CPI, 38.24 per cent and the Congress two per cent.

In Midnapore, Miss Mamata Banerjee described Mr Bikram Sarkar's victory as greater than her own at South Calcutta. Mr Sarkar had wrested from the Left a seat

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they had held since 1977, Miss Banerjee said — that too with the CPI-M in power.

Mr Sarkar said his victory was significant because it had been brought about by a people's mahajot. He said people had voted against the CPI-M's "vandalism, massive corruption and high-handedness" against which Miss Banerjee had been waging a relentless war for the past two decades.

Mr Gurudas Dasgupta said he had lost because of "organisational weaknesses,

massive rigging and administrative failure". He wondered if Miss Banerjee's "value-based" politics allowed for the massive rigging she had masterminded in Panskura.

Miss Banerjee said talk of values did not sound right in Mr Dasgupta's mouth. It was the CPI-M that had invented the mechanism of rigging, she said.

Mr Dasgupta did not think the Subhas Chakraborty factor had played a negative role. The district CPI-M secretary, Mr Dipak Sarkar, said the results would be different had the polls been free and fair.

Violence: As news of Mr Sarkar's victory spread, reports of clashes also poured in from all over the district.

At Panchami in Kespur, CPI-M cadres damaged two vehicles of the Trinamul's dummy candidate, Mr Hafizur Rahman. Fifteen people were injured.

On the other hand, Trinamul men threatened to blow up the CPI-M's office at Pingla. Massive assemblies of armed people were reported from those areas.

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