

Heavy turnout in Tripura municipal polls

Syed Sajjad Ali
Agartala, December 16

A HIGH polling rate and stray clashes between activists of rival political parties marked the civic polls in Tripura on Saturday.

About 75 per cent votes were polled to elect 17 councillors in the Agartala Municipal Council and 125 members in 12 nagar panchayats.

Counting of ballots would be taken up tomorrow morning at 10 centres spread all over the State and the results would be announced by the evening.

State election commission secretary Nepal Chandra Sen told reporters here that no untoward incident was reported. "We did not even receive any complaint from any political party so far for any kind of violation of law." However, polling was held under massive security cover.

Opposition political parties, however, alleged booth jamming, rigging and threats in many areas, despite unprecedented security arrangements.

The Trinamool Congress has demanded a re-poll in the Ranir Bazar Nagar Pan-chayat and will extend the demand in other areas once more information is available, says party State president

Sudhir Majumder. In the nagar panchayats of Sonamura, Kamalpur and Ranir Bazar, 80 per cent polling had taken place.

In the State capital, about 65 per cent votes were polled. The slow voting this time was in complete contrast to the 1995 civic polls.

Sporadic clashes were, however, reported from a ward in Agartala, Teliamura (West district) and Amarpur in South district. Paramilitary forces had to resort to a baton charge to quell a Trinamool-CPI(M) clash in a ward. Additional forces were deployed in the locality. Tension prevailed in the area since Friday night after the Trinamool booth office was not allowed to set up because of threats from supporters of the ruling party.

The Koroilung area of Teliamura and few wards in Amarpur were also reported to be tense. Leader of the Opposition and senior Congress party member Jawar Saha complained that the ruling party had rigged polls in many wards of Amarpur.

He alleged that some candidates and a number of polling agents had been threatened to leave the polling booth.

The CPI(M), however, said the polls were peaceful barring "one or two minor incidents". Party leader and MP Khagen Das said in the

evening that though the party had not yet analysed the voting, they were confident that the "Left Front would win the civic polls".

The Trinamool Congress, meanwhile, has alleged that the ruling party manipulated polling in many wards by casting false votes.

Accusing the Congress of being a silent spectator, Trinamool leader Subal Bhomik said, "Only we put up the resistance to the rigging."

Trinamool State convenor Ratan Chakrabarty alleged that party banners and festoons had been destroyed late on Friday night. He blamed both the Congress and the CPM for alleged misconduct.

Para-military and State forces, besides special task force commandos were deployed in all the sensitive and vulnerable places to ensure peaceful polling.

Prohibitory orders under section 144 CrPC had been promulgated in the State capital, sub-divisional towns, important places and border areas to prevent any untoward incident.

The border security forces also tightened their vigil along the 856 km long Indo-Bangla border to prevent movement of militants, miscreants and unauthorised elements.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 DEC 2000

MAKING BUREAUCRACY ACCOUNTABLE

KARNATAKA'S CHIEF MINISTER, Mr. S. M. Krishna, has zeroed in on a critical factor that can make governance successful and the implementation of schemes beneficial to the people — ensuring the accountability of officials. After all, the Government can only lay down policy and the legislature approve budgetary allocations. It is left to the bureaucracy, at all levels, to ensure the proper implementation of policies and programmes. The Ministers are accountable to the legislature and indeed to the people, at least during the next election; and the officials are accountable to the Government. It is entirely up to the Chief Minister and his Cabinet colleagues to make the officials answerable, and the competence of any Minister can be judged from the way he or she monitors the schemes and policies of his or her Department and identifies problem areas quickly. To that extent, the bureaucracy will be accountable only when the Ministers and elected representatives develop the expertise and experience to gauge the way programmes are implemented and keep a tab on the officials who are in charge of them. By devolving power, the Minister must get the Secretary in the Department to review all projects and report back in time to remove the bottlenecks.

Mr. Krishna has rightly called for a public debate on this question of accountability and even offered to amend the Karnataka Civil Service Rules to ensure that officials are answerable. He must also look at administrative reforms. It is equally important to make sure that the officials are not victimised by Ministers or elected representatives just because they do not fall in line. The independence of the executive, just like the judiciary or the legislature, has to be ensured at any cost. But that does not mean the officials are not answerable to the political leadership of the day. Apart from internal mechanisms, they have avenues like the

State Administrative Tribunal and the Central Administrative Tribunal to challenge victimisation or seek justice. As head of the Civil Service, it is the responsibility of the Chief Secretary to not only protect the rights and privileges of civil servants but also ensure that they are accountable to the Government. There are enough wings in the Government to monitor this aspect of administration and deal with the problems as they arise. The question is: are the State Governments, the Chief Ministers and the Cabinet Ministers really discharging this duty? Of course, they will never fail to pull up an official who may be suspected of favouring the Opposition or causing problems for the ruling party.

Some of the areas that the Karnataka Chief Minister has raised in the accountability debate deal with public utilities or the essential services — drinking water supply and the public distribution system, for instance. With many States affected by either floods or drought, maintaining public health and hygiene, besides providing safe drinking water along with other essential supplies, takes top priority. When the Government releases special funds for relief works, the elected representatives in that area, the local government and the district administration must monitor the progress and ensure the smooth and successful implementation of all works. That is only an example. It applies to all departments and all levels of government. When public funds are deployed, it is the duty of both the elected representatives and the official machinery to make sure that every rupee is well spent and the benefits reach the people for whom it is intended. When that does not happen, it becomes imperative to fix responsibility. To do that, there has to be a system of proper and continuous monitoring and reporting. Perhaps Karnataka can lead by example in evolving an accountability system in governance.

THE HINDU

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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2000

POINTERS FROM UTTAR PRADESH

AFTER THE DRUBBING it received in the polls for the rural bodies in Uttar Pradesh a couple of months ago, the BJP in the State would find solace in that its performance in the elections to the urban bodies was not all that bad. After all, it did appear, even until a couple of weeks ago, that the downslide in its popular base that had begun to show up in the 1999 general elections was only going to continue. In this sense, the fact that the party could retain six out of the 11 corporations in the State will be read by the party's leaders as a positive indication. A section of them may even accord the credit for this to Mr. Rajnath Singh and his appointment as Chief Minister leading an influential section of the upper castes — the Rajputs — back into the BJP fold. But then, the fact that the BJP lost the Mayor's post in Allahabad, Kanpur and Gorakhpur and also suffered reverses in several municipalities across eastern Uttar Pradesh suggest a beginning of a decline. If the Allahabad verdict assumes significance because it also happens to be the Lok Sabha constituency of BJP strongman and Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, the BJP's defeat in Gorakhpur (to an independent) reflects the anger against the members of the Rajnath Singh Cabinet.

In all these, the message from Uttar Pradesh is clear and that is against the BJP's attempts to communalise the political discourse. In addition to this, the successive reverses suffered by the party since the 1999 Lok Sabha elections can be seen as an alienation in the State from the abrasive tactics adopted by the BJP to retain its power. By reducing ministerial offices to instruments to manage a majority in the State Assembly and making Cabinet Ministers of persons having criminal records, the BJP leadership has shown an indifference to democratic values and principles; and the drubbing received by the party in the elections to the

local bodies suggests that the people of the State have registered their disapproval of those goings-on. It also signals that the emotive slogans that were used by the BJP (around the Ayodhya dispute) are no longer effective mobilisers in the State's political discourse. The Sangh Parivar did revive its attempts in the past few months to whip up the same kind of emotions that helped the BJP come to power in Uttar Pradesh a decade ago; for instance the RSS camp at Agra sometime ago or the public debate that the BJP leaders initiated through introducing legislation aimed at restraining the construction of places of worship through which the party's cadre was attempting to conjure up fears of the ISI setting up bases across the State were all conscious efforts towards this end. The inability of the BJP to benefit from these attempts simply reflects the rejection by the people of such sectarian ideas.

Be that as it may, there is yet another important signal from the elections results; and that relates to the inability of the forces against the BJP to combine their strength. It may be true that Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party has emerged as the biggest force against the BJP in the State. But then, the fact that the BSP has managed to retain its relevance in the State's political map — the party's candidate making it to the Mayor's post in Meerut as well as its vote share across the State — cannot be glossed over. Similarly, the Congress seems to be showing signs of a revival and the fact that the party has wrested the Kanpur Mayor's post suggests that it has managed to retain the gains made in the last general elections; it is another matter that the Congress has not been able to consolidate any further. All these are factors that must be taken into account by the various players on the Uttar Pradesh political scene while working out the strategy for the State Assembly elections due within a year.

THE HINDU

30 NOV 2000

Why parties bent their backs in UP

Sunita Aron & Pankaj Jaiswal
Lucknow, November 28

THE HYPE over the civic elections has left the urban populace of UP stunned. For the first time, political parties had gone all out to capture the 649 urban local bodies in the State.

There are two reasons for the politicians' enthusiasm. The 73rd and 74th amendments of the Constitution had resulted in the devolution of financial and administrative powers to urban local bodies.

Secondly, the parties are desperate to test the political scene before the crucial assembly polls.

Incidentally, a database of the 1995 civic election results was not available either with the State Election Commission or with any political party in Lucknow.

It is only this time that the civic election had attracted this attention.

A comparative analysis of the results revealed a twist of fortunes for major political parties.

The BJP wrested the mayoral seat in Moradabad from Samajwadi Party and the latter lost its hold over rural areas that were considered its citadels.

Another significant fact is the emergence of independents and eunuchs all over the State regardless of socio-economic factors.

In the 1995 elections, though 232 independents had won out of the

HOW PARTIES FARED IN FIVE MAJOR CITIES		
Kanpur (110 Corporator seats)		
	1995	2000
BJP	57 & 11*	36
SP	11	18
CONGRESS	3	33
BSP	5	5
LCP	Nil	1
IND	23	17
* (11 independents had later joined BJP)		
Varanasi (90 seats)		
	1995	2000
BJP	48	25
SP	39	35
CONGRESS	2	14
BSP	1	5
OTHERS	Nil	11
Agra (80 seats)		
	1995	2000
BJP	34	29
SP	6	15
BSP	30	26
CONGRESS	3	6
OTHERS	7	4
Lucknow (110 seats)		
	1995	2000
BJP	74 (including 6 of RKP)	48
SP	23	35
CONGRESS	9 (including 4 of LCP)	12
BSP	1	7
CPI	Nil	2
RKP	Nil	1
IND	3	5
Allahabad (70 seats)		
	1995	2000
BJP	32	14
SP	7	17
CONGRESS	13	6
BSP	Nil	5
OTHERS	18	28

Graphic by SANJAY

SP to go it alone in UP Assembly poll

ENTHUSED BY its performance in the recent civic elections in Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party has decided to go it alone in the coming Assembly polls.

This was stated here today by SP general secretary Amar Singh. "There is no question of forging alliance with any party," he told newsmen.

He said his party fared "exceedingly well" in the municipal elections, gaining control of over 33 municipalities and 106 nagar panchayats, leaving the BJP, BSP and the Congress way behind.

Mr Singh maintained that in the municipal corporation election, the saffron party finished second by winning 45 municipalities compared to the SP's 58. The BSP (27) and the Congress (15) stood third and fourth respectively.

"Our performance has been better than any of these parties though our victory has not been rightly projected," the SP leader claimed. In the nagar panchayat, he said, his party, with 106 town area chairmen left the BJP trailing far behind with 61, followed by the BSP (49) and the Congress (15).

HTC, New Delhi

total 418 Nagar Panchayats seats, more than half of them had later aligned with the BJP in their respective civic bodies.

The difference in the winning margin reflected a change in the results' pattern. This could be explained by the number of candidates who contested the polls. There were 164 contestants for 11 mayoral seats, 7,540 for 828 corporators' post in Nagar Nigams and 1,788 contestants for 192 Nagarpalika Parishad chairper-

sons' post.

There were 30,029 contestants for Nagarpalika members' posts, and 3,223 candidates for 416 posts of Nagarpalika chairpersons' post. A total of 25,007 candidates contested for the Nagar Panchayat seats.

The devolution of powers is said to have stimulated leaders cutting across party lines. The Uttar Pradesh government had decided to set aside seven per cent of the State government's total tax revenue to urban local bodies after 1995.

UP local polls: Mayoral results a face-saver for BJP

Umesh Raghuvanshi
Lucknow, November 27

THE VICTORY of three eunuchs in the civic elections, including one as mayor of Gorakhpur, is seen as a reflection of the voters' ire against established political parties.

The urban voter indicated that he could not be taken for granted and that his fascination with the Bharatiya Janata Party was fast fading.

The 'upsets' in the election is said to be the result of selection of 'wrong' candidates and inner-party squabbles. The fact that the BJP managed to retain six mayoral seats out of 11, in place of its earlier tally of eight, is considered as a face-saver, since even the party stalwarts expected a worse result.

The results have given the Congress and the Bahujan Samaj Party some reason to rejoice. Both these parties have now gained a foothold among urban voters.

As for the Samajwadi Party, the results indicate a mixed trend. Its hold over the minority votes seemed to be slipping. However, the party had registered its presence in the Nagar Panchayat Parishads where it was not in the reckoning.

The victory of a large number of independent candidates points to voters' disillusionment with major political parties.

The results have given all the four major KAVAL towns of Lucknow, Kanpur, Varanasi and Allahabad hung houses with independents holding the key. The highest number of 59 seats has gone to independents in the Nagar Palika Parishads.

The verdict in Lucknow, which is the Prime Minister's Lok Sabha constituency, is an indicator of the BJP's showing. While the sitting Mayor, S C Rai

was re-elected, only 45 of its candidates in a house of 110 could be elected as against its earlier tally of 75.

The eunuchs' victory has embarrassed political parties, especially in Gorakhpur, where Asha Devi alias Amarnath Yadav defeated candidates of all major parties. So strong was the support for Asha that all her rivals lost their deposits. Almost all BJP leaders,

favour. While the BJP defended its position by claiming that the election focused on local issues and could not be interpreted as a comment on the performance of the BJP-led NDA government, all opposition parties asserted that they had done better than the last time.

The Congress and the BSP started from a count of

heavily in the minority-dominated towns, such as Moradabad and Aligarh. In both these places, the BJP candidate won. In Meerut, which is dominated by minority voters, the Bahujan Samaj Party emerged victorious.

The BJP had managed to salvage its position by winning six of the 11 mayoral seats, namely Lucknow, Varanasi, Agra, Moradabad, Gaziabad and Aligarh. Yet, the party lost two sitting seats, Kanpur to Congress, and Gorakhpur to an Independent. In Bareilly, however, a BJP rebel won. "We won more than we had expected" is the chorus among partymen.

Party leaders ignored major reverses in the holy towns of Faizabad and Ayodhya, where it conceded chairmanship of both the Nagar Palika Parishads to the Congress.

In Varanasi, the party won 25 corporators seats as against 48 in 1995 elections. In the industrial town of Kanpur, its number of corporators fell from 48 to 25.

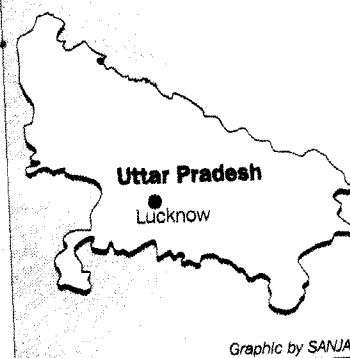
Instead, the BJP leadership in Delhi seemed thrilled with the results. They were only too pleased for having replaced Ram Prakash Gupta with Rajnath Singh.

Senior BJP leaders said the change of leadership in Lucknow had shown results. Rajnath Singh, UP BJP chief Kalraj Mishra and others had shown that BJP's future could be salvaged if everyone buried their differences and worked together, BJP Parliamentary Party spokesperson V K Malhotra said.

He said the impression that the UP Municipal polls would sound the death knell for the party in the State and also for the NDA at the centre had been belied.

He said of the 191 Nagarpalika Parishads, the BJP had improved its tally from 38 to 65, of the 11 mayoral posts it bagged six and of the 416 town area committees, it won 151.

RESULTS OF THE UTTAR PRADESH LOCAL BODIES' ELECTIONS						
Mayors: 11						
BJP	SP	BSP	CONGRESS	IND	OTHERS	
6 (8)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (nil)	2 (1)	—	(Last election figures in brackets)
Corporators: 828 (Results declared 433)						
153	112	57	49	34	28	
Nagar Palika Parishad Chairman: 192						
45	37	23	19	59	9	
Nagar Panchayat Chairman: 416 (Results 163)						
29	30	20	6	74	4	



Graphic by SANJAY

including Chief Minister Rajnath Singh, had campaigned for her.

The other eunuchs who won are Salamuddin, who won the corporator's seat in Varanasi, and Bijli, who won the Nagar Panchayat president's post in Farrukhabad.

With such mixed results, every major political party is trying to portray the outcome as being in their

zero in the civic elections. Hence, every victory was seen as a bonus for the two parties. The SP, however, put a brave fight and claimed supremacy in the Nagar Panchayat Parishads. It boasted of a better performance in urban areas, while its popularity in rural areas seemed to be decline.

The result indicated that the party needed to revise its strategy regarding minorities. SP candidates lost

Subrata vows to reserve 15% jobs at CMC for Muslims

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, November 24

MAYOR SUBRATA Mukherjee took Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee's quota politics a step further by declaring that there was no constitutional provision that could stop him from reserving 15 per cent of jobs at the Calcutta Municipal Corporation for Muslims.

Mukherjee today met a delegation of West Bengal Pradesh Quami Tanzeem. Led by party MLA Sultan Ahmed, the delegation thanked the Mayor for the bold step.

"We urged him to implement the decision as early as possible and distribute the reserved seats among all minority communities," Ahmed said.

The delegation hoped that the Mayor would implement some part of his promise during the holy month of Ramzan.

The delegation also requested the Mayor to take steps to promote Urdu.

"Calcutta has as many as 20 lakh Urdu-speaking people. They cannot read either Bengali, English or Hindi. Thus, signboards at the CMC, its borough offices and other offices should have messages in Urdu also," said general-secretary of the Tanzeem, Idris Ali. The delegation also wants road names, important advertisements and

publicity hoardings to be written in Urdu.

"It will do a great service to the Urdu-speaking population of the city if the civic authority can gradually adopt Urdu in its official work," Ali added.

Tanzeem members also apprised the Mayor of the poor condition of CMC-run Urdu medium schools. "Schools buildings are in a dilapidated condition and there is a shortage of teachers, educational aids and other infrastructural facilities. We requested the Mayor to release necessary funds to improve the condition of these schools," said councillor Iqbal Ahmed.

The delegation also pointed out that though eight Urdu dailies are published from the city, they do not get Government advertisement. The CMC, they thought, could help out.

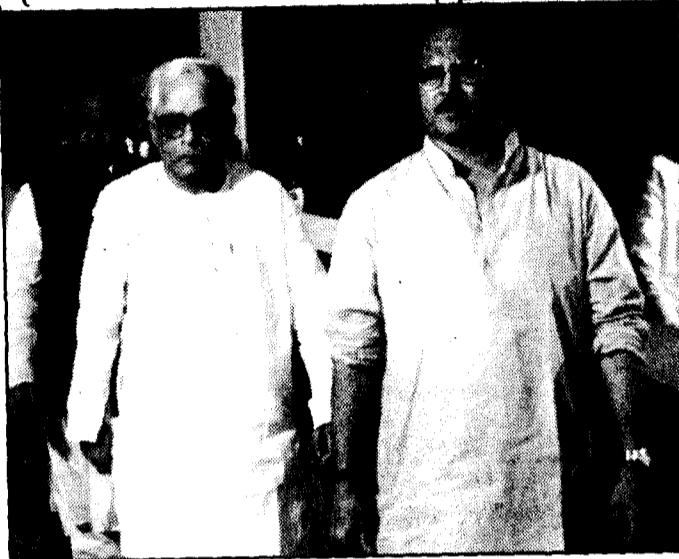
Project to modernise water supply

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, November 24

DIFFERENCES THEY have in plenty, but Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today vowed to bury political animosities for the sake of the city's development. "Otherwise, history will not forgive us," he said, Mayor Subrata Mukherjee by his side. The Chief Minister was speaking at the official inauguration of the Calcutta Water Supply Management Project initiated under Indo-French Protocol Cooperation.

"The major problems that the city's water supply system faces are high background water leakage and insufficient water in the system to satisfy demand, unknown flow distribution in the system and low pressure within the distribution system and insufficient revenue. The project will focus on all these," the Mayor said.

The Rs 34.7 crore CWSMP commenced in August 4, 2000. Recent estimates indicate that approximately 100 million gallons of water are unaccounted for, out of a total daily supply of over 250 million gallons. The project area (wards 1 to 100) includes a major part of Calcutta, with a daytime population in excess of 5.5 million in 104 sq km. This area contains some 655 kms of water pipelines, much of this is 60 to 100 years old and in



Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and Mayor Subrata Mukherjee at the inauguration of the Calcutta Water Supply Management Project in the city on Friday. Photo: HT

need of repair and replacement. Add to this inadequate mapping and a lack of network system performance data renders operations and maintenance extremely difficult and cumbersome. The maps called 'Smart maps' were made way back in 1905. Even the CMC's revenue generation is abysmal. Around 94 per cent of the supply for domestic consumption contributes just 18 per cent to the revenue while industrial, commercial

and institutional (ICI) users contribute 82 per cent to the revenue but consume just six per cent of the water.

Seureca-SPACE Consulting Engineers and Schlumberger Industries of France are carrying out the project. "We will map the zone (ward 1 to 100) using traditional survey methods to Ground Penetrating Radar, satellite imagery to produce accurate digital maps of the primary grid," said

Ian Rodgers of Seureca. Upto 150 flow and pressure electromagnetic meters with data loggers will collect data at 15 minute intervals, providing continuous centralised information on the system flow and pressure. Other steps will be to install water meters for 100 top ICI users.

The feature of the project will be the development of a water management software called Water Infrastructure Management System (WIMS) and a computer-based Water Management Control Centre at the CMC. The software will provide reports of supplies and pressures. It will enable billing information to be compared with actual flows in each zone, provide reliable information to improve the capacity to distribute available supplies and enable preparing the CMC towards a 24-hour water supply service.

"It is the first time in the world that such a software is being developed for intermittent water supply," said Rodgers.

Ward 63 has been picked up for demonstration, rehabilitation and water-saving activities. This will include meters for all consumers, 500 service connections will be identified and repaired. "Ward 63 activities will provide data and experience that may be replicated throughout Calcutta later," said Graham Johnson-Jones of Seureca.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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91-10 Special Pleading 9/11

The recent reshuffle of Union secretaries is proof, if any were needed, that our bureaucracy continues to be run as a legacy of the British Raj. What prevails 53 years after Independence is the 'generalist' culture of the Raj rather than multidisciplinary competence and knowledge to advise ministers on policy. Senior civil servants, it seems, need only function as efficient staff officers. What else explains the transfer of a finance secretary with years of experience in that field and with only months to go before retirement? Or the fact that his replacement is an officer with no previous knowledge of finance and again has only months to go before superannuation? Similarly, an officer with no background in defence is posted as defence secretary reinforced by a number two equally innocent of any knowledge of the subject. In a parliamentary democracy, the ministers are generalists, some of them with competence and knowledge and others without that; the latter's sole qualification being the bank of votes they command to give the government its majority. This mix of the competent and the incompetent is expected to be supported by top-level civil servants with knowledge of the subject and proven managerial and policy-making skills so that they can bridge the gap between the ministers and heads of organisations and departments who are professional specialists. Below the levels of secretary and additional secretary, too, there is a constant and very rapid turnover of generalist civil servants with the result that today's civil service is nothing more than a corps of staff officers graded according to their seniority. There is no human resource development policy which would encourage civil servants to acquire background and expertise in certain inter-related fields and then to update their knowledge in tune with new developments.

A generalist civil service is a typical product — and cause — of our reactive decision-making culture. A generalist civil servant posted to a new charge would take at least six months to acquire confidence to take any new initiative. His subordinates and the organisations on which he is to advise the minister would start respecting his judgment only when he displays adequate knowledge. If he tries to pull rank without any knowledge or background, he would only invite resentment and that, in turn, will generate tension, slow down decisions and lead to sub-optimal policy-making. This is what accounts for lethargic decision-making and general inertia in governance. After 53 years, the government has started addressing the problems of revamping the national security framework and a group of ministers is busy examining the reports submitted by four task forces and its recommendations are expected in the next few weeks. Similarly, what is needed is to set up a series of non-political expert groups to examine and report on reforms in policy-making in central and state governments, revenue collection, maintenance of law and order, development of infrastructure and social services, regulation of economic activity and impact of information technology on governance. And all this, with the underlying basic objectives of improving governance, making it more people-friendly, reducing corruption and downsizing babudom. A group of ministers should take decisions and implement the recommended reforms expeditiously and not allow the staff officer corps to bury them.

Keshubhai rivals seek his removal

By Manas Dasgupta

GANDHINAGAR, OCT. 7. Both the victor, the Congress(I), and the vanquished, the BJP, in the recently concluded panchayat and municipal corporation elections in Gujarat have been hit by dissidence.

While a large number of leaders in the ruling BJP, including some Cabinet colleagues of the Chief Minister, Mr. Keshubhai Patel, have raised the leadership issue after the party's dismal show in the local elections, the Congress(I) has lost two of the 21 district panchayats it won, to the dissidents.

The party's impressive show in the local bodies elections was marred by the presence of dissidents in the elections for the presidents of the Ahmedabad and Kutch district panchayats with the leaders of the erstwhile Rashtriya Janata Party of the former Chief Minister, Mr. Shankarsinh Waghela, playing truant. Mr. Waghela's two trusted lieutenants, Mr. Madhubhai Thakore in Ahmedabad, and Mr. Babubhai Shah in Kutch, defeated the official nominees of the party for the presidential posts and got their own candidates elected to the office with the support of the BJP members.

Piqued at the unexpected reverses, a spokesman of the Pradesh Congress(I) commented that Mr. Waghela's men had betrayed the party in the same way they had betrayed the BJP in 1995 when Mr. Patel was running his first term as the Chief Minister.

The party has suspended the newly-elected presidents and vice-presidents of the two district panchayats and has issued show cause notices to the dissidents including some "original" Congress(I) leaders like Mr. Motibhai Chavda, the former district party president, and Mr. Gunvant Makwana, party member of the State Assembly and son of the former MP, Mr. Narsinh Makwana.

The party has also lost the chance of electing its president for the Amreli district panchayat where both the Congress(I) and the BJP

were tied at 15 seats each in the 31-member panchayat.

The remaining seat having gone to the Samata Party, an alliance partner of the BJP at the Centre, the Congress(I)'s Presidential candidate was defeated in the elections. The BJP had earlier won the Porbandar district panchayat, the only one to be captured by the BJP in the elections.

In the BJP, after the Jails Minister, Mr. Jaspal Singh, the Water Supply Minister, Mr. Narottam Patel, and the Minister of State for Youth and Cultural Affairs, Mr. Mahendra Trivedi, had raised questions about the advisability of continuing with Mr. Patel as the Chief Minister.

The latest to jump into the bandwagon of the dissidents was Mr. Patel's number two in the cabinet and the former Chief Minister, Mr. Suresh Mehta, who too has demanded disbanding the Bharat Barot inquiry committee appointed with the blessings of the Chief Minister to probe into the causes of the party's debacle.

Mr. Mehta's fax message to the party's national president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, and the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, suggesting constitution of a central committee to look into the party affairs in the State is considered to be significant by the political circles here.

Though he was known to be unhappy with Mr. Patel's style of functioning, he had never come out in the open despite the fact that he had refused to withdraw his resignation from the Patel cabinet which he had submitted in December, 1998, but not accepted by the Chief Minister.

The dissidents, after lying low for the last two and a half years with Mr. Patel ruling supreme in the State party and administrative affairs, have started regrouping themselves in the wake of the party's defeat in the local elections.

The dissident rank has started swelling and a murmur of protest against the leadership of

Mr. Patel could be heard in the BJP Legislature Party as well.

The dissident MLAs, now claimed to be numbering about 50 in the 116-member BJP Legislature Party, had been holding meetings in Gandhinagar to chalk out their strategy to build up pressure on the party high command to replace Mr. Patel by someone acceptable to all sections of the party.

Mr. Narottam Patel and Mr. Mahendra Trivedi were not as forthright as was Mr. Jaspal Singh to demand Mr. Patel's resignation, but they too have held the performance of the present Government substantially responsible for the party's poor showing in the local elections.

Mr. Narottam Patel, known to be a close confidant of the Union Textile Minister, Mr. Kashiram Rana, who is always tipped as a possible alternative to Mr. Patel to take over as the Chief Minister if the high command agreed for a change in the leadership, has raised strong objections against the appointment of the Bharat Barot committee.

Mr. Trivedi, who lately had been expressing his displeasure over Mr. Patel's leadership, was more vehement in criticism. "Our leaders have lost touch with the people which has contributed to the poll debacle," he said.

Even before the elections, Mr. Trivedi claimed to have forecast a BJP wash-out in the local elections at least in his home district, Bhavnagar, and had pleaded with the Chief Minister not to hold him responsible for the adverse results since he was not consulted in the selection of candidates.

In fact, after Mr. Patel, the partymen's ire was directed against the State unit general secretary, Mr. Sanjay Joshi, a RSS "prant pracharak" on deputation in the BJP. Both Mr. Jaspal Singh and Mr. Trivedi claimed that the candidate selection was entirely left to Mr. Joshi who had "messed up things." Incidentally, Mr. Joshi is the replacement for Mr. Narendra Modi, after the latter was shifted to the Centre in the wake of the rebellion by Mr. Waghela in 1995.

THE HINDU

7-10-1999

ment of Arabs by the French police, restrictions on Turks in Germany, whether Turkey finally makes it into the EU or not. There will be unprovoked attacks on Blacks and Browns in Marseilles, London and Leeds, and friction between Whites and Browns which will sometimes be less vicious and less prevalent than friction between Browns of one persuasion and origin and Browns of another. Life goes on.

As for a Nazi persuasion gaining power in Europe and spreading itself despite the goodwill and "vigilance" of

He saw himself as fortified by reflected authority and at the age of 13 and 14 counted himself as part of the staff rather than as a snotty little Uriah Heep. He was Mr Baker's sneak. He would complain about other children having spied them climbing the forbidden fence or having caught them illegitimately out of school when he went to fetch sandwiches. Baker would then beat the miscreants and Gary would rub his hands and exult in their punishment while waiting on the landing and hearing their cries.

Opponents of repeal, including the Catholic, Jewish and Muslim leaders in the country, take a stand on moral grounds, presumably in the belief that homosexuality is an ideology which can corrupt. The truth is, the Clause does nothing practical one way or another. Its repeal will not send British schools spinning into gay activity. Its retention doesn't condemn us to the dark ages. Truth is, this is statutory insult and should not exist in a liberal democracy

"monitors," that's as dead as a duck in a pancake with Hoi Sin sauce.

My sanguine conviction is born of my days as a school-teacher when I noted that the most vicious boys and girls joined the police force or went into trading this or that commodity, from pigeons to pot and the pathetic and sad became politicians of one sort or the other.

There was Gary the hunchback who was the acolyte of our fierce sergeant major of a deputy headmaster, Mr Baker. Gary never attended class. He hung around Mr Baker's office and was sent out to do his bidding, carrying notes or registers or going out to buy sandwiches.

He hated "immigrants" and once called me a "Paki" while refusing to take instruction. My complaints resulted in him being reprimanded by Mr Baker who exhorted me to be tolerant of the abuse because "Gary is feeble, you know." I was tolerant. Gary disappeared one day and after three, the police were called to search for him.

They didn't find him but he reappeared on the fifth day carrying six or eight bottles of spirits in his hands and wearing a dinner jacket and trousers which were far too large for him. He struggled up the back stairs of the school at break-time attracting the attention of the entire playground who followed him to taunt him, as the burghers of Paris did to Quasimodo. He stumbled on the stairs and, to the delight of the others, being quite drunk, shouted the most foul abuse at Mr Baker. He was calling Baker out, challenging him and referring to him in unflattering ways as a pederast and as a several items of sexual anatomy.

Mr Baker, hearing the row, appeared, incensed, and the mob dispersed like mice before a cat.

Gary stumbled and fell at Mr Baker's feet, his bottles crashing around him. Baker picked him up by the scruff of the over-large dinner jacket and dragged him to his office, shouting at me to get the mess cleaned up and escort the children back to the playground. Gary was mercilessly flogged. He left school after this.

I saw him again years later on a National Front march, his freedom of expression protected by rows of metropolitan police. He was carrying a banner which enjoined Pakistanis to "go home."

FARRUKH DHONDY is a writer and columnist

Civic anti-defection law in force

BY A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, Aug. 29: Wiser from its experience of horsetrading during the formation of the Calcutta civic body in June, the government has acquired powers to stop defections.

The Calcutta Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Act, 2000, got underway today after Governor Viren Shah gave his consent to the Bill. The Bill, aimed at putting a stop to switching of loyalties by a councillor after his election, was passed in the Assembly during the budget session.

Under the new legislation, a councillor will be stripped of his seat for violating the anti-defection clause.

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An independent councillor will also face dismissal if he or she joins any political party six months from the date of election.

However, the Act says, if one-third of the elected members join a new party, they will not lose their seats in the CMC. If the mother party accuses any councillor of defection or of disregarding the whip on an issue, the case will be referred to the chairman of the CMC board who has been equipped with powers to give a verdict.

The Act is a major weapon in the hands of the ruling Left Front, most probably to be used against the Trinamul Congress-BJP combine which is expected to seek support in the days ahead from

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other parties to gain absolute majority and continue to run the CMC for the full five years.

The Left Front and Trinamul Congress-BJP combine won an equal number of seats (61) out of the total strength of 141 in the CMC election. But the Trinamul Congress formed the municipal board after getting support from five independent councillors. The party is still far behind the absolute majority.

As independent councillors are not bound to obey any whip and do not have political bindings, the Trinamul leadership is aware of the danger of their shifting support to the Left Front any time against an attractive offer.

In order to make its control

firmer, Trinamul has been trying to gain support from the Congress which has bagged 15 seats. Already three Congress councillors have switched loyalties and more are bending towards Trinamul.

The Left will try to stop Trinamul from gaining majority with the help of the new Act.

"Our move is to maintain political discipline in the elected board of the CMC. The character of the board may change if some councillors cross the floor in disrespect of the people's verdict. It is also unethical," said municipal affairs minister Ashok Bhattacharya.

The government has instructed the CMC to not restructure any borough committees, which Trinamul is trying to initiate.

THE TELIGRAF

30 AUG 2000

A WEBSITE on the city of Calcutta would generally not have enthused anybody. There are already quite a few. But when it happens to be the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, it does raise a few curious eyebrows.

What has happened to these people, one might ask. Normally they would love to be hidden under piles of dusty papers or not be seen at all. But to be glued to computers or hooked to cyberspace!

It's a new awakening here at the CMC. Making it possible is the redoubtable commissioner, Asim Barman. "It could not have been possible to put in place a website on the CMC activities without the keen interest of the commissioner," says Mr Ram Ray, a key figure himself in the development of this most comprehensive site on CMC and, of course, the city of Calcutta. Mr Ray, the Response Group supremo, too like Mr Burman has led from the front.

But somewhat unsusung has been the team of specialists from TCG. TCG Software Services is the brainchild of Mr Purnendu Chatterjee of the George Soros fame. Mr Chatterjee descended upon West Bengal and the city of Calcutta like a good samaritan a few years ago. His presence certainly buoyed the hope of the native Bengalis who believed that Chatterjee, with his mega dollars, would change the way people

The Response Group and TCG have put together CMC's new website, Calmanac, writes Subhash Mohanti

looked at Bengal. What will eventually happen only the future will tell. But for the time being, his software company is helping CMC to become more IT savvy.

And, of course, there is



FAR SITES: Mayor Subrata Mukherjee (left) with West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu and Purnendu Chatterjee of TCG at the launch of the website in Calcutta recently. — Mona Chowdhury

CMC enters e-ra

merce a reality for Calcuttans. To actually give Calcuttans a feel of the e-era, CMC is trying to switch all its dealings with the hoi polloi to the "click and mouse" concept. Not only will the CMC customers be able to see their tax bills, trade licence applications, tender documents on the website but also download them through 12 dedicated internet kiosks being set up with the help of Calcutta Telephones. And there is more in the Calmanac, which is the part that deals essentially with the corporation's matters. This is just the beginning of the story. "While the first phase of the project will usher in e-governance, the second phase will opt for e-commerce," said Mr Veer Sagar, CEO of TCG Software.

The first part of the project,

from art and culture to doing business in the state, Mr Ray said.

There will be information on places to visit, things to buy, food joints, just a with click. And it is needless to say that every detail about the City of Joy will be available, with snapshots. "In fact, this should form the basis of the future e-commerce initiatives that CMC may take," said sources.

The second phase of the project, which is expected to roll out gradually, will see e-commerce actually taking place. The source said: "In the second phase, citizens will be allowed to pay all these bills online. Say, someone wants to pay amusement tax, all he needs to do is type in his code number. Not only can he pay online but also immediately get the receipt printed."

"Also, all form and tender notice downloads which are available in the first phase can actually be submitted online in the second," he added. While the Response Group is designing the site interface, TCG is looking after the back-end applications that will be run on it.

With such ambitious plans ready to hit the city's cyberworld in a couple of months from now, look out for the tech-savvy babu-moshais, next time you are in town.

Hence, do log into calmanac.org to tune in with the times and get information on your very own city, at the click of the electronic quadriped (mouse to the uninitiated).

The effort is perhaps the administration's effort to give the city a befitting gift on its 310th birthday, reflecting the changing e-ra, in these electronic times.

And, as the aggressive advertisement campaign says, it's a whole new world altogether, where life in this city of joy is made easier via the infobahn.

From history and architecture to mundane matters like addresses and names, it's all there for the asking. So, do drop in...oops...I, mean, to log in to the new age.

Mayor smells vendetta

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

59-3 15/8
CALCUTTA, Aug. 17. — Mr Subrata Mukherjee, mayor and Congress MLA, expressed surprise today over the "inordinate haste" in slapping the provisions of anti-defection laws on him. The mayor was making his submission at the Speaker, Mr Hashim Abdul Halim's chamber in the Assembly building.

Mr Mukherjee is heading a Trinamul-BJP board in the CMC since he was elected as a Trinamul Congress candidate. The CLP headed by Mr Atish Sinha has been trying ever since to slap provisions of the anti-defection laws on the Mr Mukherjee.

Similar cases of at least four legislators who have left the Congress to join the Trinamul had been pending with the Speaker for The next 1 1 November



Mr Subrata Mukherjee

more than a year. The CLP's initiative against this backdrop smacked of political revenge, the mayor said.

A large section of Congress MLAs had defied the whip to vote against Mr Debaprasad Roy, the party's official candidate, in the Rajya Sabha polls. No steps had been taken against them though their act was an infringement of the anti-defection laws.

"The CLP which made me chairman of five subject committees is not let to expel me. Moreover, there has been no move on the AICC's part to take any disciplinary action against me," he said. It was the AICC which gave me the party symbol, not the CLP, whose leadership is hounding me" he added. The next meeting of the matter is scheduled for

THE STATESMAN

18 AUG 2000

75 pc turnout in Rajasthan civic elections

HT Correspondent
Jaipur, August 20

RAJASTHAN WITNESSED peaceful polling for the 126 municipal committees in the State today with the voter turnout exceeding 75 per cent.

The elections were postponed in Malpura, Todaraisingh (district Tonk) and Kankaori in Rajsamand district because of outbreak of communal violence in these areas last month. Twelve persons were killed on July 10 at Malpura in Tonk district due to communal violence.

Similarly, curfew was imposed in Kankori town in Rajsamand following the communal clashes between two communities and candidates were unable to file their nomination papers.

The present municipal polls saw a contest mainly between the BJP and the Congress. The smaller parties had been rendered irrelevant due to their lack of base in smaller towns of the State.

It will be an uphill task for the Bharatiya Janata Party to retain their 1995 tally when it had established its supremacy in more than 80 out of the 129 municipalities whereas the Congress won in only 39 municipal committees. Being in power in 1995, the BJP got the advantage of the ruling party.

However, now BJP leaders are banking on anti-establishment votes.

During the past municipal elec-

tions, the Congress had faced the problem of wrangling within the party in several municipalities. Therefore, this time round, it decided not to contest the polls in five committees - Rajgarh, Alwar and Tizara (Alwar dsitric), Mundwa in Nagaur district and Nohar in Hanumangarh district.

The Rajasthan PCC chief Girja Vyas was confident that the party would come out with a majority in the current elections, claiming that the BJP had "nothing to say against our nominees".

She said people had faith in Mrs Sonia Gandhi's leadership and would help the party to win these elections in the State, which were of utmost importance to the party.

She added that they had won the panchayat and the municipal corporation elections, which could be attributed to the policies and programmes of the Congress.

State BJP president Bhanwar Lal Sharma told *The Hindustan Times* that his party had sought to highlight the issues pertaining to the welfare of common people. He said, "We highlighted the anti-people decisions taken by the Gehlot Government during its 20-month period."

He alleged that Congress misused the official machinery during the polls in Rajasthan.

Meanwhile, the State Election Commission said the counting of votes would begin at 8 a.m. tomorrow and all results are expected by 2 p.m.

The EFC & panchayats

By George Mathew

The Eleventh Finance Commission has given enough viable proposals to enhance the financial capacity of the panchayats.

THE REPORT of the Eleventh Finance Commission (EFC) is a damning indictment of the working of the panchayats and their handling by State Governments. The EFC has come to the conclusion that the 73rd Constitution Amendment has not significantly altered the functional domain of the panchayats at various tiers. The Centrally-sponsored schemes or the State-level schemes for improving civic services have not been transferred to the local bodies for grassroots level planning and implementation. The EFC also found that panchayat accounts and their audit were deplorable. The database was poor and no reliable data was available on finance, budget needs, and basic civic and development functions.)

The EFC has gone in great detail into the financial needs and allocations. It has sanctioned Rs.1,600 crore annually for panchayats and Rs.400 crore for municipalities to be distributed among the States. We can debate whether this Rs. 8,000 crores for the coming five years is enough for nearly 2.5 lakh gram panchayats, 6000 intermediate and 500 district level panchayats to become the third tier of Government. But (the EFC has also given enough viable proposals to enhance the financial capacity of the panchayats)

The EFC's criteria for distributing Rs. 1,600 crores annually among the States is the key to this entire exercise. Population was the sole criterion adopted by the Tenth Finance Commission in the allocation of ad hoc grants. The EFC's stand that "population should not be the sole basis for Statewise allocation as it has the effect of perpetuating the status quo", is a timely corrective in the context of the present debate on population growth and the North-South divide on the issue. Reiterating that the people are at the centre of governance and development, the EFC has given 40 per cent weightage for the population criterion. The States which have shown commitment and taken the initiative for decentralisation are recognised.

On the basis of an elaborate methodology, an index of decentralisation was constructed on the following ten parameters: (1) Enactment of State panchayat legislation in conformity with the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act; (2) Intervention/restriction in the functioning

of the panchayats; (3) Assignment of functions to the panchayats in the State panchayat legislation vis-a-vis the Eleventh Schedule; (4) Transfer of functions to the panchayats by way of Rules/Notifications/Orders of State Governments; (5) Assignments of State Panchayat Acts; (6) Levy of taxes by the village panchayats; (7) Constitution of State Finance Commissions and submission of Action Taken Reports; (8) Action taken on the major recommendations of the SFC; (9) Elections to the panchayats; (10) Constitution of district planning committees.

The 20 per cent weightage given to this is not sufficient — it could have been more for pressuring States which are lethargic about decentralisation. The other EFC criteria are: distance from highest per capita income, 20 per cent weightage, revenue effort, 10 per cent weightage and geographical area, 10 per cent weightage.

The EFC's most important recommendation pertains to enhancing local bodies' revenue through property and house tax, octroi/entry tax and user charges. It notes that property or house taxes are not revised periodically. Octroi is a contentious issue but there is a need for "a suitable tax that is buoyant and can be collected by local bodies". So far, local bodies have been shying away from raising resources fearing unpopularity. But studies by the Institute of Social Sciences have shown that when people feel that they get value for the money they pay as taxes, the revenue of panchayats goes up substantially.

The EFC also believes that the capital cost of civic services such as primary education, primary health care, safe drinking water, street lighting, sanitation, maintenance of cremation/burial grounds, public conveniences, etc., should be met under the budgetary heads concerned of the States and their cost of operation met by raising taxes and user charges. It says that it is "with concern for the people in focus, that we are recommending grants to the States for immediately passing it on to the panchayats and the urban local bodies

that have a primary responsibility in this sphere. No amount from this grant should be given to the intermediate or district level panchayats where these do not have any direct responsibility for maintenance of these services". And, the EFC says, these grants would be untied except that they cannot be used for salaries and wages.

The third area of the EFC's recommendation is accounts and audit. In most panchayats, the accounts are not kept properly and they cannot be blamed either. They have no proper infrastructure or personnel and the States have not prepared detailed guidelines. The Local Fund Audit Director or a similar authority audits the accounts in most States. The EFC wants the audit to be entrusted to the Comptroller and Auditor General of India. Moreover, the local bodies, especially village level panchayats, which do not have trained staff for accounts must contract out the upkeep of accounts to outside agencies. Half-a-per cent of the total expenditure of a panchayat could be placed at the disposal of the CAG for audit-related expenses. The EFC wants the audit reports to be placed before a Committee of the State legislature, like the Public Accounts Committee. The Commission suggests a yearly grant of Rs. 4,000 for a panchayat for upkeep of accounts. The fourth recommendation pertains to database. For creating a proper database with the future possibility of computerisation and linkup through V-SAT, the EFC has provided Rs. 200 crores. This data centre has to be developed at the district, State and Central Government levels.

The EFC has given considerable attention to Constitutional, legislative and administrative changes required to strengthen the panchayats in the following areas: 1) The schemes on subjects in the 11th and 12th Schedules have not been fully transferred to the panchayats and municipalities by the States. Wherever the programmes have been entrusted to panchayats, it was as an agency function — the panchayats having no role in planning and implementation. The transfer must be

made mandatory. 2) Since the roles of the three tiers of the panchayats have not been clearly delineated, the executive decisions are creating a chaotic situation. Only a clear legislation on the subject can improve the position. The EFC also recommends proper maintenance of accounts for all village and intermediate level panchayats and creation of a database for the local bodies.

3) The Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Urban Development must take steps to clear the impediments — parallel structures for implementing central schemes (e.g. DRDA) — in the way of the local bodies functioning as institutions of self-government. 4) The rigid uniformity of three tiers envisaged in the Constitution must be made flexible through a Constitution amendment. 5) The extension of the 74th Amendment to the Fifth Schedule areas and application of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Sixth Schedule areas need to be speeded up. 6) The Village Councils in Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland must be recognised as panchayats as in the 73rd Amendment by legislative measure or the respective States must extend the amendment to their areas. 7) Constitutional steps should be taken to ensure that the hill areas of Manipur come under the 73rd Amendment. 8) Wide variations in the areas and populations of panchayats are making them in certain cases non-viable units. Administrative re-organisation is needed. 9) The District Planning Committees (DPCs) should be constituted in all States and should not be made executive bodies.

These 'nine commandments' of the EFC must be taken seriously by all concerned. They must become the subject of national debate and legislative and administrative action. The EFC has done what it could with a clear perception and vision. Now it is left to the State Governments as well as the Centre to build on it. The panchayat representatives and civil society must put pressure on the States, for without that nothing will move. A necessary condition is that all panchayats must get a copy of Chapter VIII of the EFC's report on Local Bodies and its Annexures for study and action.

(The writer is Director, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi.)

Mamata wins vintage municipality

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Aug. 14: Fresh from the close-call conquest of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, Mamata Banerjee scored a convincing victory over the CPM today when her Trinamul Congress stormed to power at undivided Bengal's first municipality, Uttarpara-Kotrung in Hooghly district.

Trinamul bagged as many as 17 of the 24 seats in the municipality, leaving the CPM with a humiliating tally of four. The Left Front has been ruling the municipality since 1981.

The Trinamul triumph came despite a wave of violence unleashed by alleged CPM supporters who had also assaulted a number of journalists, threatened voters and driven out election agents

during the polling yesterday.

In defeat, too, the CPM flexed its muscles. After the results were announced, party supporters ransacked two places in Uttarpara. CPM supporters also heckled a correspondent of a private television channel when he was covering the election results.

Last time, when the total number of seats was 25, the CPM had won 13 and the CPI one. The pre-split Congress had eleven councillors, seven of who joined Trinamul when it was born.

The CPI this time has retained ward number 17, but the BJP failed to open its account. The Congress' tally has been reduced to two.

"Our party's success in the Uttarpara municipal polls indicates people's victory against the CPM's terror and a fitting reply to the attacks on mediapersons.

People now want a change after putting up with the CPM's misrule," said a jubilant Mamata.

Both the state and district CPM leaders have been taken aback by the poll outcome. "The result is totally unexpected. Our party perhaps could not make the correct assessment about the prospects of the opposition. We also suspect sabotage by a section of party workers in some wards," a senior district CPM leader said. He also wondered whether the party's decision to field 12 new candidates contributed to the debacle.

Mamata had projected Pinaki Dhamali, party candidate from ward number 5, as the chairman of the municipality. He is expected to assume charge within a few days. Utpaladitya Banerjee, the Trinamul nominee from ward number 14 who was severely as-

saulted by CPM cadre yesterday, also won.

The CPM had spared no effort to retain the municipal board. The number of wards was reduced from 25 to 24 in a re-alignment to suit the party's political convenience. When the polling map was redrawn, care was also taken to allocate more number of wards to areas where the CPM was strong.

Media protest

Mediapersons have decided to observe Wednesday as a 'Black Day' to protest the assaults. Wearing black badges, they will march to Raj Bhavan to submit a memorandum to the Governor.

Chief minister Jyoti Basu and his deputy Buddhadev Bhattacharya took strong exception to the "indiscriminate assault". (Details on Page 6)

THE TELEGRAM

15 AUG 2000

Stormy scenes at corporation council meeting

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, August 8

THE FIRST sitting of the new Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) council today turned out to be a stormy affair.

The fracas started when chairman Anil Mukherjee started reading the condolence motions. Trinamool councillors insisted that the House pay homage to victims of the Nanoor carnage too. The Left demanded that those killed in Cooch Behar too should be shown similar respect. Eventually, the House paid homage to neither the Nanoor nor the Cooch Behar victims. Left councillors were up in arms again when chairman Mukherjee refused to admit councillor Buddhadeb Basu's motion on 'value-based politics'. The motion's target was the Mayor for his dual status as Trinamool councillor and Congress MLA.

The Left Front councillors protested against the chairman's refusal to explain why he had shot down the motion. A semblance of order prevailed only after Mayor Subrata Mukherjee conceded that the Opposition had every right to know the basis of the chairman's decision. "It has been rejected because of its defamatory nature," the chairman explained.

A Congress motion on waterlog-

ging moved by Trinamool party leader, Sailen Dasgupta, too was rejected. "There has not been any waterlogging to my knowledge in the last three days," the chairman said.

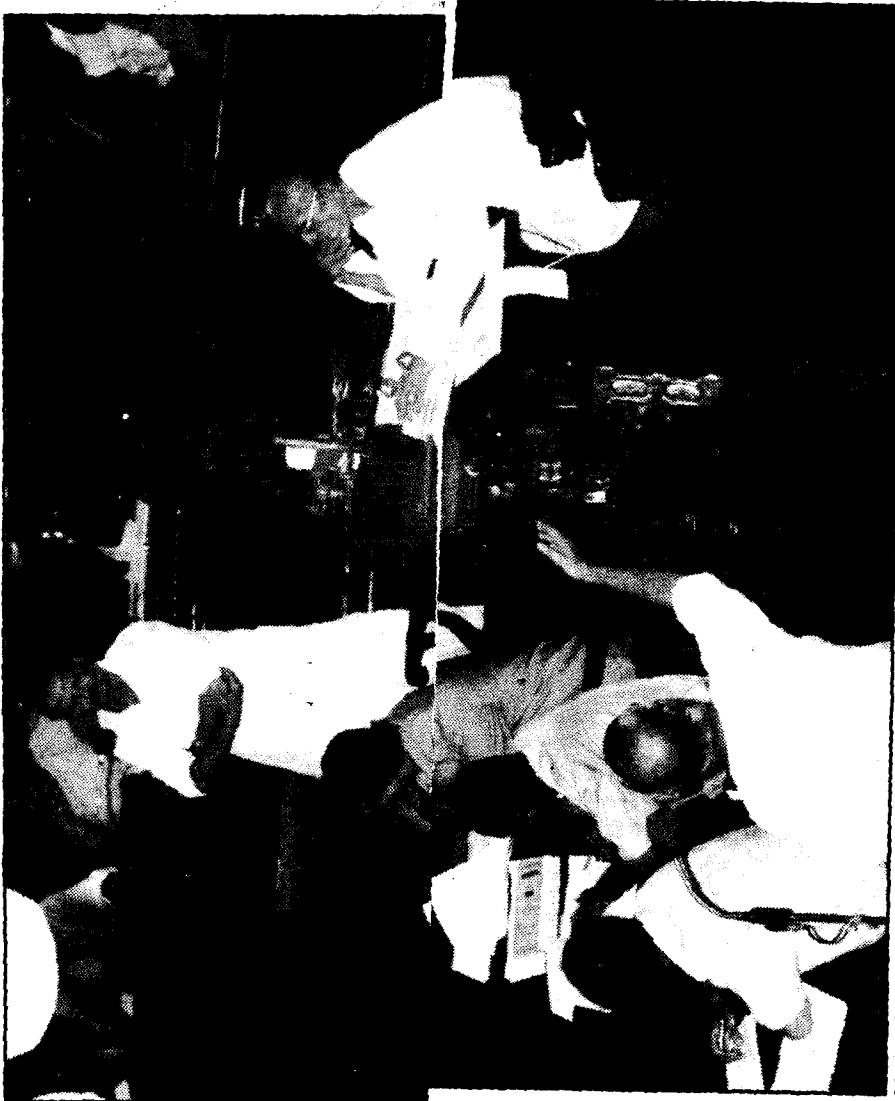
But more was yet to come. A proposal to rename a road after Satyajit Ray triggered a heated argument between Trinamool and Left councillors.

The Mayor proposed renaming a prominent road instead of Eastern Metropolitan Bypass after the maestro. Leader of the Opposition, Kanti Ganguly, objected to this, saying: "There is already a film institute named after

him." The Mayor, however, agreed to refer the proposal to the CMC's Road Renaming Committee. A motion to rename a city road after film and theatre personality Utpal Dutt moved by Left Front Councillor Buddhadeb Basu was also recommended to the committee.

While there were heated discussions between Left and Trinamool BJP councillors, the dozen-odd Congress members remained silent spectators for most part of the hour-and-a-half long proceedings.

Motions to form borough committees, increase the accounts committee's strength and more funds for the Mankundu mental hospital in Hooghly were passed.



Mayor Subrata Mukherjee listens as Leader of the Opposition Kanti Ganguly speaks at the first meeting of the CMC council. Photo: Subhendu Ghosh

Bureaucracy... and its failings

55-10
118

Max Weber is undoubtedly the bureaucrat's favourite philosopher. Max laid great store by bureaucracy. It would provide 'rational-legal administration', he said: government based on reason and law. He expected it to become the dominant mode of organising human affairs, as indeed it has, especially in India. However, at a time when it is widely perceived that our bureaucracy has not lived up to Weber's great expectations, allow me to bring to light a failing of bureaucracy that Weber himself had tellingly noted.

In *Parliament and Government in a Reconstructed Germany*, a much neglected work, Max Weber warned that bureaucrats could not be relied upon to provide leadership - which had to be left to charismatic politicians. The bureaucrat was a *kleber*, Max said, using the German word for 'sticky' or 'gluey'. That is, the bureaucrat would stick to his chair, refusing to take bold decisions. To him the chair was all-important. A politician is more likely to resign on a major point of difference and make the matter public. This is important for democracy. Thus, good politicians are essential. Bureaucrats cannot deliver on their own because they are followers, not leaders.

We see this failing of bureaucracy all around us. How many Gujarat cadre IPS officers have resigned

▶ ANTIDOTE / SAUVIK CHAKRAVERTI

rather than implement prohibition? After all, the National Police Commission under Dharma Vira had come out strongly against prohibition. In the Delhi Gymkhana Club, bureaucracy's favourite watering hole, we cannot find a single officer who campaigns against

the nasty state monopoly over the retail trade in alcoholic beverages that operates in Delhi. This business of being *klebers* is a fatal failing of bureaucracy. We do not have 'rational-legal administration' in India only because of this. Bureaucrats typically cling to their chairs and serve their political masters faithfully. (They do not serve the people). This gutlessness precludes the possibility of open dissent. And yet, knowledge-based dissent is essential. In the Weberian typology, it is the bureaucrat (not the politician) who brings reason into government. Bureaucracy is supposed to be knowledge-based. Is a state monopoly over a retail trade government based on reason? Or is it



kleptocracy?

Within the bureaucracy, I have come across many officers who are liberals. They have seen through the socialist nonsense that this country has practiced for fifty years and they firmly believe in the free market. In their official capacities they try very hard to implement market-based solutions. One young IAS officer I have often met, and deeply admire, has even come out with a manifesto for a liberal party; but he continues to serve the socialist state; and this adds to the strength of socialist legitimacy. It takes strength away from the budding liberal movement. Similarly, Montek Singh Ahluwalia is the architect of liberalisation; whenever I have heard him speak, he has spoken in favour of market-based public policy solutions; but he continues to be a member of the centralised state's Planning Commission. This adds a big economist's name to bolster socialist legitimacy; this weakens India's budding liberal movement.

Ludwig von Mises pointed out another failing of bureaucracy: that it is a system by which youth sacrifices itself for the aged. In a bureaucratic hierarchy, the young start at the bottom of the ladder and slowly climb to the top by obeying their older superiors. The rule of the aged we see in India is entirely because of this. We are an excessively bureaucratized nation. Thus old people rule. The young are under a tight leash.

I call upon the young liberals in the bureaucracy to stand up and be counted. They should eschew the tendency to be *klebers* and put up knowledge-based dissent to socialism. About two years ago, when Montek had just been appointed to the PC, and in an interview expressed that 'a radical change was needed in economic management', this newspaper editorially advised him to tell the government to shut down the PC. The rest is history. Planning continues. And Montek has his coveted chair.

The fact is that socialism is intellectually dead. Bureaucratic legitimacy is critically dependent on intellectual legitimacy. This is something the system lacks today. This cannot be regained unless bureaucrats themselves realise that they are being taken for a ride by the socialist state. They are losing their own legitimacy by upholding state socialism. They must act to save themselves.

8 AUG 2000

The Economic Times

8 AUG 2000

Women sweep UP panchayat elections

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW, Aug 7. — Women's power and the might of money and muscle have to come out in bold relief in results of the district panchayat chiefs' election in Uttar Pradesh. Nearly half the seats have been won by women, and not all these were reserved for them.

Results for three districts could not be announced because none of the contestants could poll more than 50 per cent of the votes. There have been ties in Etah, Kanpur City and Kus-hinagar. Elections were held in 70 districts.

In Sultanpur, the Congress lost despite Mr Satish Sharma's campaign. Mrs Ameeta Singh defeated Mr Rajkishore Singh, the personal choice of Mrs Sonia Gandhi. Mrs Singh got 24 votes against the Congress candidate's 18.

Another setback for the Congress was in Rae Barriley. Mr Ganesh Prasad Maurya who was supported by Mr Akhilesh Singh, another Congress leader, made it by garnering 28 votes defeating the party's official candidate, Mr Ram Shanker Choudrhy. This was despite a last-minute adjustment with the BJP. Over all, the results should

leave the BJP in a happier position. The party did much better than it had done five years ago. In 1995, it won in only 12 districts. The BJP along with its allies and Independents supported by it has 26, the Samajwadi Party, despite its tall claims, won in

NAJMA HEPTULLA

NEW DELHI, Aug. 7. — Lauding the success of women candidates in the recent elections to the zilla parishads in Uttar Pradesh, the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha has said they should serve to pressure the Centre to bring the Women's Reservation Bill to Parliament.

Women had been elected to head 34 of the 63 zilla parishads, and though 33 per cent of the seats had been reserved for them they bagged more than 50 per cent, Dr Najma Heptulla said in a statement issued here today. — SNS

nearly the same number of districts.

The BSP, another major player in the state, won in 10 districts, the Rastriya Kranti Party of Mr Kalyan Singh won in two, the Congress won in two and the Lok Dal headed by Mr Ajit Singh held its sway in Bagpat, Western UP. The manner in which the elections were fought by the various parties suggests that power still

remains concentrated in a few families, some headed by known mafia elements.

All parties indulged in this tactics, though the trait was more pronounced in the BJP. Many winners from the BJP and its allies were female kin of the ministers or senior leaders. Where the seats not reserved for women, politicians fielded their male relatives. Brother of the Loktantrik Congress chief, Mr Naresh Aggrawal, won unopposed from Hardoi. The BJP state president, Mr Om Prakash Singh said the victory of relatives of party members indicated their popularity.

THE STATESMAN

Snag stumps experts, repoll tomorrow

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 30

THE STATE Election Commission has ordered repolling at Booth 3A in Ward 16 of Salt Lake on Sunday. The fresh poll will be held at the same venue from 7 am to 3 pm, State Election Commissioner A K Majumdar said here today.

The formal notification was signed by Majumdar at 8.30 pm after hours of deliberations with his senior officers. The repoll has been necessitated by a technical snag that developed in

the memory panel of a control unit of an electronic voting machine (EVM). The snag was detected during Wednesday's counting.

Local engineers made two futile attempts to rectify the snag on Wednesday. The Election Commission then wrote to the Hyderabad-based manufacturers of EVMs, the Electronics Corporation of India Ltd (ECIL), requesting them to send an expert to correct the fault.

ECIL manager Koteswara Rao

struggled with the EVM for more than an hour before declaring the snag was "irreparable" at 2.15 pm.

North 24-Parganas District Magistrate Alapan Bandyopadhyay, who is also the Returning Officer for the Bidhannagar civic polls at about 3.30 pm briefed reporters about the failed attempt. "We will pass an order notifying the date and time of counting only after the fresh polls are over at 3 pm on July 2," Majumdar said.

Replying to a query on the validity of the repoll after the results of the remaining

22 wards have been announced, Majumdar said the commission was well within its powers to do so.

Supporters of the CPI(M), BJP and Trinamool Congress, who had gathered outside the Central School near Labony, had to go back dejected. The two main candidates, CPI(M)'s Gita Biswas and BJP's Banani Sanyal, left the counting centre after three days of suspense, vowing to win the next round on July 2.

Photograph on Page 3

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 JUL 2000

Trinamool ahead in numbers game

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 30

THE BATTLE for Calcutta is interestingly poised with both the Trinamool Congress and the Left Front, the two contenders for power at the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC), making claims and counter-claims. What has added to the drama is the confusion over numbers: it is still not clear how many seats the rival parties have won.

While the Trinamool Congress claims that it has already mustered the support of 65 councillors, the CPI(M) is unwilling to accept that. "First of all, the figure claimed by the Trinamool is incorrect. Both the Left Front and the Trinamool-BJP combine have 63 seats each. The Congress has 15. So, a single vote in favour of our mayoral candidate could seal the Trinamool's fortunes. I strongly feel that the game is still wide open," said CPI(M) leader and Calcutta District Committee

member Rabin Deb.

The CPI(M) first got a rude jolt in its efforts to reach the magical figure of 71 when the Nationalist Congress Party's councillor, Hridaynath Gupta, joined the Trinamool Congress. The Left was hoping that Gupta would join them. Then, three more Independents, made it clear that they would back Mamata Banerjee.

But the Left Front is unwilling to back out in the face of these set-

Civic Board

backs. Insiders say that the CPI(M) is working on the three Independents, trying to win them over. "We will surely not divulge our gameplan. But it is wrong to assume that the Left Front is out of the race in Calcutta Municipal Corporation," said CPI(M) leader and party strategist Subhas Chakrabarty.

Party sources said the Left's hope now hinges on the support of the 15

Congress councillors. With nine of the Congress's 15 civic representatives deciding against supporting the Trinamool because of its alliance with the BJP, Left floor-managers are banking on their support during the voting to elect the Mayor. This despite the fact that State Congress chief A B A Ghani Khan Chowdhury has ruled out support to the Left Front. "The vote for the Mayor is done through secret ballot. So you cannot predict anything. Moreover, there is no defection law applicable in corporation voting," said a CPI(M) leader.

Today, WBPC working president Priya Ranjan Das Munshi added his bit to the ongoing tussle for power. He alleged that the Trinamool was using unfair means to woo Congress councillors. "Instead of resorting to such malpractices, the Trinamool can approach us for support. The fact is without the Congress, the Trinamool cannot form the CMC board," he claimed.

Repoll ordered at snag-hit Salt Lake booth

Experts fail to repair machine

BY A STAFF REPORTER

The State Election Commission on Friday ordered a repoll on Sunday at booth number 3A of ward 16 in Salt Lake, where an electronic voting machine had developed technical snags during counting on Wednesday. Consequently, counting was withheld.

Experts from Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL), which manufactured the machine, failed to put it right.

In another development, Calcutta High Court on Friday refused to entertain a prayer from CPM district secretariat member, Amitava Nandi, who sought its intervention in the "deadlock" created in Salt Lake's ward 16. At around 4.15 pm, Bikash Bhattacharya, on behalf of the North 24-Parganas district CPM, appealed to the court of Justice KJ Sengupta to hear the case on Friday, as it was urgent.

Justice Sengupta said as court time was over, the petitioner should appeal to chief justice A.K. Mathur. Chief justice permitting he would hear the matter on Saturday. Bhattacharya did just that.

Bar Association secretary and Trinamul Congress leader Arunava Ghosh told the chief justice's secretary that he was opposing Bhattacharya's move.

The chief justice said: "The court cannot assign the matter for hearing on an emergency basis now as the matter is political. The case cannot be filed before Monday."

Meanwhile, ECIL experts from Hyderabad, called by the

state election commission, failed to activate the machine. Around 11 am, the expert team, led by Koteswar Rao and S. Dasgupta, started examining the EVM in the presence of the candidates, election agents, polling agents of different political parties and mediemen. Even after hours, they achieved little. Ultimately, they found out that a component of the machine's memory bank was defective. Rao announced that the defunct component could not be repaired.

"The EVM was functioning during voting because the total number of votes cast was recorded. It developed a snag later and we don't know yet how it happened. But the fault can't be corrected," Rao said. Immediately, CPM election agents demanded to know why a faulty machine was provided. District magistrate Alapan Bandopadhyay pacified them saying it was accidental.

Bandopadhyay sent a report to the state election commission on how the machine could not be repaired. The ECIL also submitted a separate report after which the commission ordered a repoll at the booth.

The votes of this booth will be the deciding factor in the formation of the municipal board since both the Left Front and Trinamul Congress have won 11 seats each out of 23 wards.

The repoll order is bad news for the CPM as the area is dominated by BJP supporters. Mamata Banerjee has already shown keen interest in the matter and is willing to personally supervise the voting process.

The Hindustan Times

NG-17 Foes and friends

CALCUTTA'S FAILURE to vote decisively in the recent civic election has had the effect of blurring traditional political lines. Perhaps the most significant development in this context is Jyoti Basu's call for a CPI(M)-Congress tie-up to keep the 'communal' Trinamool-BJP combine at bay. Although the Marxists and the Congress have had indirect alliances as when both of them supported the Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral Governments at the Centre, this is for the first time that a proposal has been made for an understanding in a State where the two have been sworn enemies for many years. Mr Basu's as well the CPI(M)'s attitude towards the Congress had, of course, become much softer in recent years. It is not only that the veteran Marxist leader and his party were willing to support a Sonia Gandhi Government had one been formed last year, Mr Basu had also advised the voters to vote for the Congress in last year's general election in the constituencies where there was no Leftist candidate.

The purpose for the advice was to defeat the BJP. It is the same objective which has now made him call for a CPI(M)-Congress alliance in Calcutta. Although there is little likelihood of such a pact, the very fact that such a suggestion has been made at all, and by none other than Mr Basu, suggests that the old barriers are breaking down and that Indian politics is entering a new phase. The West Bengal Congress may be averse to the idea, if only because it will reinforce Mamata Banerjee's taunt about the State Congress being the CPI(M)'s 'B' team, but the party high command in New Delhi will probably keep Mr Basu's suggestion in mind for use on a suitable occasion, especially at the Centre.

If two old foes can think of shedding their enmity, what about two old friends reassessing their present separation? Given Trinamool's failure to secure a majority, the obvious course for it would be to revive the *mahajot* idea and woo the Congress. But Ms Banerjee no longer seems keen on *mahajot* and, more important, the Muslim councillors in the Congress have categorically ruled out any truck with her as long as the BJP remains her ally. It is a difficult choice for Ms Banerjee. If she retains her alliance with the BJP, Calcutta may slip out of her grasp. But is it worth saving it at a time when, as the UP results have shown, the outlook for the saffron lobby is not very cheerful?

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 1 JUL 2000

LF to contest Mayor's post

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, July 1

THE LEFT Front today formally decided to contest the mayoral elections for the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. At the end of an hour-long meeting of Left Front constituents, the first since the CMC polls, leaders also made it clear that they would not seek the support of the Congress to form the CMC board.

"We have taken account of the State Congress stand. We have decided not to seek the support of the Congress. But this does not mean that we will not contest in the mayoral election. We'll not allow the Trinamool-BJP combine to walk away with the board unopposed," CPI(M) Politburo member Biman Bose said. He denied speculations that the Left was backing out. "In the past, too, there have

been several occasions when we failed to get a majority, but we were nevertheless in the race. And on many occasions we were able to form the board. This could well happen in the case of the CMC," Bose argued.

He, however, clarified that the Left was not into horse-trading. "We are not approaching anybody. But if somebody wants to support us, he is welcome. So far nobody has approached us."

Other Front leaders echoed Bose. "There is no question of seeking Congress support. We will contest alone, whatever be the result," said Forward Bloc State secretary Ashok Ghosh. "Since the Congress has made its decision clear we will not go begging at their door," added State PWD Minister Kshiti Goswami.

But without Congress help, does the Left Front, which has only 61

councillors in the 141-ward CMC, stand any chance of forming the board? "The Trinamool says that it has the support of 65 councillors but there is a lot of contradiction in its camp. And that confusion will show during the election of the Mayor. Moreover, do not forget that the election is through secret ballot. So the board can go to any side," claimed RSP State Secretary Debabrata Bandopadhyay.

Insiders say that though the CPI(M) was willing to make one last effort to win over the Congress, Front constituents Forward Bloc, the CPI and the RSP opposed such a move at the meeting. Again, while the CPI(M) is still hopeful about the outcome, Front partners are reconciled to the idea that they will not be able to form the board. "We are contesting for the heck of it," admitted a senior Front leader.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 2 JUL 2000

HORROR STORY

No safety or health care in Calcutta

THE case of the man presumed dead at the Calcutta Medical College and Hospital but discovered to be alive by relatives who removed him to a private nursing home covers everything from mystery (who brought him to the hospital after he was assaulted) to the appalling state of health care in West Bengal. Citizens now take such periodic shocks in their stride. Didn't the Group D staff in the same hospital attack a police outpost a few days ago? Everything concerning state hospitals is a disgrace, not only because the health minister was busy campaigning for the civic elections. Callousness and corruption are endemic. The police outpost at the hospital which should track cases admitted at night is usually in the dark — while touts and criminals run loose. The message for Calcuttans is simple: lack of safety on public thoroughfare compounded by criminal incompetence. The injured man was lying "unclaimed" in the Emergency wing and about to be removed to the morgue. No civilised society would let that pass. Had it not been for union power, the staff concerned would have been dealt with severely, the police reprimanded and the hospital superintendent penalised. But Calcuttans are in a class by themselves; their tolerance is exceptional.

What options do people have? In this case the victim came from a family that could afford better treatment. For others it might have been a premature death. Is it so difficult to free hospitals from criminals, touts and unions? Or for citizens to seek police protection? That all this is no aberration is evident from the Medical Council of India's strictures against this hospital where infrastructure and teaching staff are hopeless and inadequate. The government managed face-saving devices before the MCI inspector arrived. Citizens continue to be deprived of basic amenities. And with government showing a lack of will and resources, there is no hope of improvement. Did the voting pattern in the civic elections surprise anyone?

THE STATESMAN

3 JUL 2000

WIN: 20/7
(Continued from page 1)

Violent Left win in Salt Lake

few voters; most of them from the municipal office, came to the booth after that. These voters, Trinamul men alleged, were transport minister Mr Subhas Chakraborty's men.

Miss Banerjee reached the spot with Trinamul leaders, Mr Ranjit Panja, Mr Sovandeb Chattopadhyay, Mr Subrata Mukherjee and Mr Bikram Sarkar. Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay was posted at the booth since morning. So was Mr Sikdar.

Trinamul leaders kept pointing at "outsiders" who scampered in through the open field. Mr Sovandeb Chattopadhyay lodged a complaint with the state poll panel, saying genuine voters had been turned away because their votes had been cast by others.

After the complaint, tender votes were accepted. But Mr Sadhan Pandey squatted near the booth, demanding "action against bogus voters". Some cadres reportedly attacked him; police lathicharged again.

Voting ended at 3 p.m. and counting began after an hour. As soon as the results were declared, CPI-M supporters in the municipal office shouted with joy.

Miss Banerjee said the CPI-M had won by scaring away voters. "It's very unfortunate that I couldn't ensure fair poll here. The CPI-M has won the ward through organised, intense rigging." Miss Banerjee soon wheeled out of the area, saying: "This won't happen in the Assembly election."

Mr Sikdar accused the CPI-M of false voting and creating violence and demanded resignation of the state deputy chief minister, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya.

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, July 2. — The CPI-M won Salt Lake's ward 16 today and will form the municipal board, for it now has 12 seats against the Trinamul's Congress's 11.

The crucial repoll turned out to be the most eventful. Political workers, — mostly from CPI-M — threw bombs, fired at random and scared away genuine voters. Police lathicharged and fired tear-gas shells to control violence but arrested none.

The minister of state for communications, Mr Tapan Sikdar, was hurt when a CPI-M supporter threw a chair at him. Police said a CPI-M worker was injured when Mr Sikdar's security guard fired at him.

Repolling was held today at booth 3A of ward 16, where the electronic voting machine had developed a snag when votes were being counted after last Sunday's polls. Experts from Hyderabad couldn't repair the EVM.

The Trinamul-BJP couldn't wrest the seat, where seven tender votes were cast today.

Mrs Gita Biswas (CPI-M) got 369 votes today. She was ahead by 87 votes in the ward's two other booths. Mrs Banani Sanyal (BJP) got only 232 votes today and lost by 224. The Congress candidate, Mrs Indrani Bhattacharya, finished a poor third.

In all, 608 of the booth's 808 votes were cast today. The CPI-M had won the ward in the last polls too. But the councillor, Mr Chandan Bose, had to switch wards because ward 16 this time was reserved for women.

A strong police force and journalists' presence in and around the Administrative Training Institute booth couldn't stop political workers from creating



A policeman lobs a teargas shell to control warring CPI-M and Trinamul Congress members at Salt Lake on Sunday. — The Statesman

terror and casting bogus votes.

The Trinamul chief, Miss Mamata Banerjee, reached the ward in the afternoon and stayed put till the results were declared. She pulled up the SDPO, Mr Humayun Kabir, for "helping the CPI-M rig the polls", and complained of the indifference of the administration.

Trouble first broke out around 9 a.m. when some BJP workers protested against booth j a m m i n g allegedly by CPI-M cadres. That led to a clash. Police lathicharged to disperse CPI-M and BJP-Trinamul supporters.

After two hours, CPI-M supporters were seen hovering near the booth. A Trinamul worker told police that CPI-M cadres sitting at a nearby tea-stall were walking in and out of the ward's municipal office, across the street, to cast bogus votes. CPI-M cadres intervened

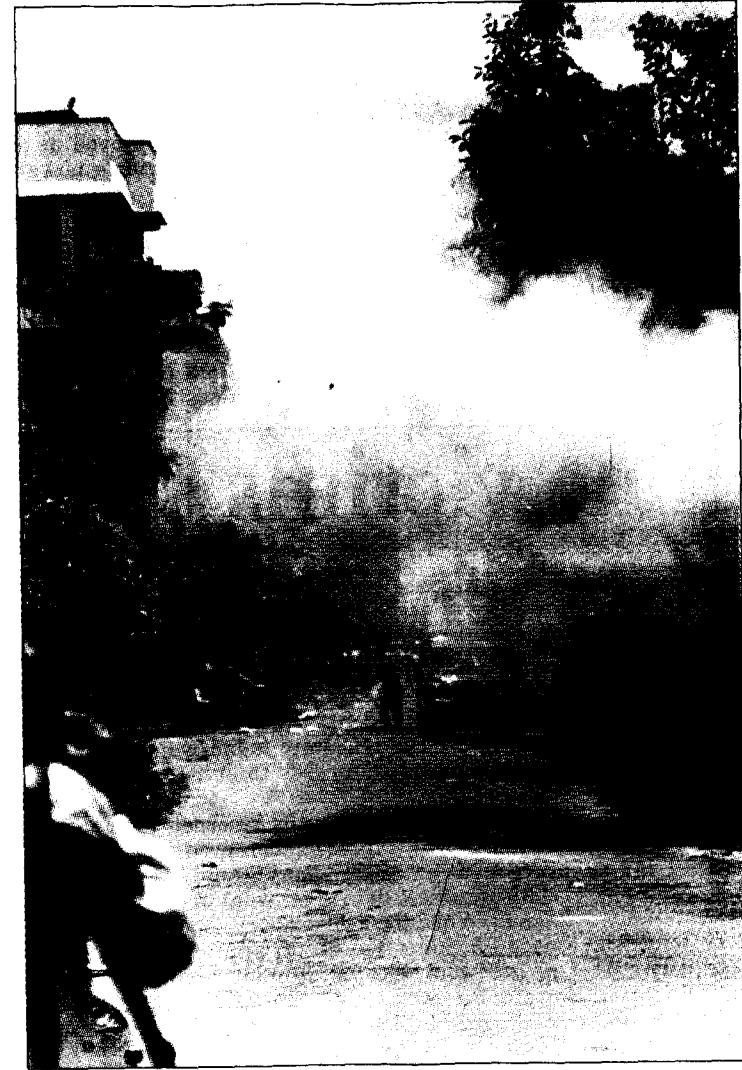
and soon the second clash followed. Police lathicharged again.

When the Trinamul supporters were retreating to their polling camp a CPI-M cadre reportedly threw a chair at Mr Sikdar. His supporters retaliated, and thus began a battle with chairs. The area was soon full of CPI-M cadres, led by Mr Amitava Nandy, the party's state secretariat member.

Mr Nandy got his men to barricade the roads. The result: genuine voters couldn't go to the booth. Mr Saurav Bose (Block FD, No 153) for instance, couldn't vote. Nor could Mrs B Saha and many others like them.

Bombs started exploding after the barricades were put up. And someone began firing. The bombs were thrown from terraces of nearby highrises. Some were thrown from atop the municipality's water tank.

■ More reports, photographs on pages 3 & 4



A CPI-M man hurls a bomb during Sunday's repoll at Salt Lake's ward 16. The ward was the decider in the race for the civic board, where CPI-M and Trinamul were earlier tied at 11-11. — Sailendra Mal

The CPI-M cadres overpowered the Trinamul workers and damaged their polling camp. Some CPI-M cadres reportedly fired, though no one was injured.

Police fired in the air and lobbed tear-gas shells. Though reporters on the spot were wit-

ness, the DIG (PR), Mr Gautam Chakraborty, denied police firing.

Then it was police's turn to put up barricades. Residents shut themselves indoors. The queues disappeared, and very

■ See WIN: page 4

Our tally is 66 now: Mamata

SM 4/7
9-1822
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, July 3. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today presented before a Press conference three Independent councillors of Calcutta Municipal Corporation to claim that the Trinamul-BJP combine's tally has now gone up to 66.

The Trinamul chief said four Independent councillors — Mr Hridayanand Gupta, Mr Debashis Kumar, Mr Mainul Haq Chowdhury and Mrs Aparna Roy — have joined her party. Mrs Roy was, however, not present at the Press conference.

Miss Banerjee was confident that the Trinamul-BJP combine would form the CMC board. "The Left Front has 61 councillors, while the Congress has already announced its councillors will either abstain from or remain absent during voting for

Move by Congmen

CALCUTTA, July 3. — A section of Congress councillors are toying with the idea of fielding a mayoral candidate for the CMC. The mayoral election is slated for 8 July. Though the AICC and PCC disclaimed any knowledge of such a move, Mr Iqbal Ahmed and Mr Manjur Iqbal, both Congress councillors, unveiled this plan.

(Details on page 3)

the mayoral election. In that case the Trinamul is certain to form the board," she said.

According to Miss Banerjee, the Congress' tally is 14 and not 15, since Mr Hridayananda Gupta is being shown by the Congress as its councillor,

though Mr Gupta contested the election as an NCP councillor.

She also contested the Left Front's claim that it has 62 councillors. "The LF's tally is 61. Mr MH Chowdhury, whom the LF has claimed to be in its fold, has now joined our party," Miss Banerjee asserted.

"A major concern of ours is to ensure protection to these councillors who are being intimidated and lured by the CPI-M for helping it form the board. We have already sought personal security for Mr Chowdhury and Mr Subrata Mukherjee, our mayoral candidate, will meet the South 24-Parganas SP, in this regard," she said.

The Trinamul chief believes neither any Congress councillor will help the LF win the mayoral election, nor will the CPI-M "stoop so low to resort to horse-trading".

THE STATESMAN

7 JUL 2000

DOWNHILL IN UP

BJP does badly in panchayats

DOES Kalyan Singh's exit have anything to do with the BJP's poor performance in the Uttar Pradesh panchayat polls? The conclusion is warranted by the exceptionally strong show put up by the Samajwadi Party which took 25 per cent of district panchayats. There must be a default factor working somewhere, especially since the former UP chief minister's utility lay precisely in giving an otherwise upper caste trading community party a broader social visage in keeping with the times. There have been other consequences of the general weakening of image the party seems to have undergone with factionalism under Kalyan Singh. A significant shift in upper caste votes towards the SP has been reported. Only time will tell whether this will affect the BJP's fortunes at the assembly level, or is something that has to do with the peculiar logic of panchayat elections where party affiliations are set aside in favour of preserving local oligarchies. The upper caste man may see more sense in voting for a Yadav in a Yadav dominated area, than be out in the cold with a loser. This is where Kalyan Singh's contribution may have been useful, especially in finding suitable candidates in the reserved seats.

Mulayam Singh is calling it the last nail in the BJP's coffin. In any case, this is the third straight round of elections — following the assembly by-polls and the Rajya Sabha elections in which there was cross-voting — in UP where the BJP fared badly and the usual demands are being made for a change in the leadership, even though it is less and less certain that Ram Prakash Gupta was brought in to win elections rather than contain factionalism. However, there has been an erosion in support for the ruling party across the board and it is likely that sooner rather than later Gupta will be made a scapegoat. The rural electorate accounts for 60 per cent of the voting population and even if the dynamics are not the same, some of this disaffection with the BJP is bound to get reflected at the assembly level too. Gupta has been unable to convey the impression of having a strong administrative hand and has many failings — such as having obscure and possibly shady advisors — without having the corresponding skulduggering skills. The BJP seems to be clueless about what to do next in UP except make Cabinet ministers lead austere lives for roughly 10 months in the hope that will make up for everything else.

THE STATESMAN

. 4 JUL 2000

Two Congress councillors defy party line

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, July 3

YET ANOTHER element of confusion was injected into the already-muddled scenario of the mayoral election in Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC). A section of the newly-elected Congress councillors, defying the party line, declared today that they would not abstain from the elections scheduled for July 8.

"We will not only vote in the contest for Mayor but even field our own candidate," said Iqbal Ahmed, Congress councillor from Ward 62. According to him, at least 9 of the 15 party councillors want to vote in the mayoral elections. "We will exercise our right and vote according to our wishes. Abstaining is not an option," added Manzar Iqbal, Congress councillor from Ward 61. Iqbal Ahmed was sure that if the Congress fields a non-controversial candidate for the post of Mayor, disgruntled elements in the Left Front and the Trinamool Congress would vote in his favour.

Many anti-Secularists are sure that they would vote for our candidate. Even in the Left, councillors from parties other than CPI (M) would vote for us," he claimed. Ahmed said that he would be informing the PCC of his decision tomorrow. "Let them expel me from the party for this. They will make a hero out of me," he added.

Ahmed's statements have bought

the smiles back on the faces of such Left Front councillors as Kanti Ganguly, Sudhangshu Seal and Samar Roy Chowdhury, who were huddled inside Ganguly's chamber discussing the shape of things to come. "I am not going to speak to the press. All your questions will be answered by Alimuddin Street," Ganguly told reporters.

His cellular phone emanated a beep and he rushed out. It was Jyoti Basu on the line from Tel Aviv wanting to know the state of affairs. Clearly, Basu trusts Ganguly as much as Alimuddin Street. "It reminds me of 1985 when Basu had phoned from Madras to know the situation before the no-confidence motion against the then Mayor, Kamal Basu," a senior reporters recalled.

"The oath-taking ceremony for the newly-elected councillors will take place on July 7 and 8. The secret ballot for the election of Mayor will take place at 3 pm on July 8," informed municipal secretary Sajal Kumar Bhowmik. His

assistant addresses by the 90 new councillors. They are to be sent letters intimating them about the oath-taking ceremony as well as the elections.

"There will be holiday at the CMC headquarters on the day of the elections and enough police as well as para-military forces will be present to prevent any violence," said chief municipal commissioner Asim Barman.

Cong councillor insists party must field candidate for Mayor

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, July 5

CONGRESS COUNCILLOR Iqbal Ahmed is steadfast on his demand that the party should field a candidate for the Mayor's post. He is even ready to risk expulsion from the party to go against its decision to abstain from the July 8 vote.

"They can't control the corporation from the Assembly. Let the PCC expel me for not towing the party line. That will leave me with many options," an angry Ahmed said.

He claimed that all the other party councillors were with him. They plan to meet State Congress president A B A Ghani Khan Chowdhury tomorrow and suggest to him their choice of the mayoral candidate.

"The candidate for deputy mayor will be chosen from one of the four woman councillors," said Ahmed,

who went to the Assembly today for parleys with Congress legislators.

The political uncertainty seems to have also sparked a renewed spell of bitterness between the Congress and the Trinamool councillors.

"Pradip Ghosh (a Trinamool leader) is a Left Front stooge," Ahmed said, soon after Ghosh and Sovandeb Chattopadhyay made their customary rounds to gauge the situation.

As politicians struggled to get their equations right, the CMC was being spruced up for the mayoral polls. Chief Municipal Commissioner Asim Barman and deputy commissioner of police (central) Raj Kanojia were busy during the day making security arrangements for election day. "After what happened on Sunday in Salt Lake, the authorities do not want to take any chances. We are even keeping an

ambulance ready," said a senior official.

The corridors of Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC)'s headquarters resounded with the sound of hammers hitting nails as sundry renovation work went on. The sweepers busied themselves cleaning the council room and electricians checked the microphones.

The two mayoral candidates turned up at the CMC offices to collect their nomination forms. Kanti Ganguly, busy talking on the phone, refused to talk to the press. His assistant informed that tomorrow the BBC will interview Ganguly at Santoshpur Stadium. The last date for submitting the forms is July 7.

"It seems like a one-day cricket match. Don't know who will win," said Ganguly's assistant. Deep creases on his forehead suggested that he for one was not confident of his boss's victory.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7-11-70

Trinamool accused of 'kidnapping' councillors

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, July 5

IT IS not only a game of numbers, but also one of calling each other names. As the race for the mayoral election of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) gathers momentum, the main adversaries — Trinamool Congress and the Left Front — have launched a vitriolic attack against each other. If it was Mamata Banerjee yesterday accusing the CPI(M) of indulging in "horse-trading", it was the turn of CPI(M)'s Politburo member, Biman Bose, to turn the heat on her.

Dismissing the charge levelled against his party by the Trinamool chief, Bose said it was "a clear case of the thief crying thief". It was the Trinamool, he said, which had been trying to wean away councillors from other parties to win the mayoral election.

Speaking to *The Hindustan Times*, Bose asked, "How can a party which just had four MLAs and yet secured the election of its nominee in the Rajya Sabha poll take such a holter-than-thou attitude?"

Bose went on to allege that the

Trinamool had "kidnapped" some newly-elected councillors and whisked them away to some undisclosed place.

He specifically mentioned that the councillor of Ward 141 had been taken away from his home by the Trinamool people.

The CPI(M) leader said that the Trinamool had been emboldened after it had won the Panskura Lok Sabha by-election with the help of "criminals".

He regretted that such a party could accuse the CPI(M) of criminalising politics.

Bose justified the Left Front putting up its candidate for the mayoral election even without having a majority in the 141-member council by claiming that both the Left Front and the Trinamool-BJP combine had 61 seats each, the middle space being occupied by other parties and Independents. He suggested that the neither should take the support of this group for granted.

Bose said that in Raghunathpur and Rampurhat municipalities the Left had no majority. Still it could form the board with the support from Independents and other parties.

6 JUL 2000

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Cong to take oath, opens up mayor's race

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, July 6. — The Congress today decided to have its CMC councillors take oath tomorrow, paving the way for its critical participation in Saturday's mayoral vote.

The decision came after another Congress councillor, Mr Rajkishore Gupta, switched over to the Trinamul, reducing the party strength from 15 to 13. Mr Gupta has been seen with Trinamul councillors at Nizam Palace since the past few days.

The Congress decision has thrown the mayoral race wide open.

Initially, the Trinamul's task seemed easier, for the Congress hinted its councillors would stay away from the mayoral election, leaving Miss Mamata Banerjee's party to slug it out with the Left.

This made the Trinamul intensify its efforts to win over five Independents and appeal to Congress councillors to help it form an anti-Left board.

Mr Iqbal Ahmed was the first Congress councillor to demand that the party contest the mayoral election. The issue was raised again at a meeting today. The state party unit will take a decision tomorrow.

The Congress got a jolt yesterday when its councillor, Mr Shams-uz-Zaman Ansari, joined the Trinamul. After Mr Gupta's switch today, the Trinamul-BJP combine's tally is 68.

The PCC president, Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury, held a meeting today. Twelve councillors expressed loyalty to the party. Mr Paresh Pal, known to be close to Miss Banerjee, went to the PCC office in the morning, but skipped the meeting citing illness. Mr Saugata Roy, PCC vice president, said. Mr Somen Mitra, Mr Sultan Ahmed and Mr Roy were present.

The meeting decided to use the anti-defection law against Mr Ansari and Mr Gupta. Mr Subrata Mukherjee, Trinamul's mayor candidate, however, said rules stipulated the anti-defection law could be enforced only after six months of the election.

"The law is faulty, but till it's set right, one has to accept the reality. What is more, we are not splitting the Congress. The latter's councillors are only responding to the Trinamul chief's appeal to help her form an anti-Left board," Mr Mukherjee said.

CPI-M politburo member, Mr Biman Bose, today accused the Trinamul of horse-trading to "unethically" capture the CMC board. "It's funny that the Trinamul chief is levelling the charge of horse-trading against us. But the truth is that Trinamul is offering money and other baits. West Bengal has never had such a political culture. Trinamul introduced it by getting its candidate elected to Rajya Sabha with only four MLAs."

The Trinamul's acting chairman, however, said his party had had to keep its councillors at Nizam Palace "out of sheer fear" of the CPI-M. "Does Mr Bose expect us to take these councillors to the CPI-M party office?"

THE STATESMAN

7 JUL 2000

Holed up in safe houses before the Big Match

Arindam Sarkar
Calcutta, July 7

SWAPAN SAMADDAR, the man who mauled the Mayor in Ward 30, sits in a room in Hotel Ruit Deen, sipping his evening tea, relaxed. With him are three other Trinamool Congress councillors, just as relaxed. The mood is one of confidence; they know Trinamool candidate Subrata Mukherjee would sweep the mayoral election tomorrow, and it shows.

So, when Rajiv Deb walks into the room and says, "Tomorrow is the D-Day and we will win," none of them hesitates. Four heads nod together. Four voices

echo the same phrase: "Of course."

They have been holed up in the hotel for the past two days with 21 other Trinamool councillors—the party's attempt to keep its flock together. In other places—Nizam Palace, Maharashtra Niwas and Haryana Bhavan—other Trinamool councillors are being kept "captive", under the watchful eyes of party leaders Rajiv Deb, Pradip Ghosh, Mukul Roy, Subrata Bakshi and Sanjay Bakshi.

But none of them seems to mind at all. As Samaddar puts it, "It was a terrific experience." More like that of a football team huddled together before the Big Match. In fact, Samaddar is

sure he's going to "miss these days" after tomorrow's poll. "All of us came to know each other better. We never felt that we were being forcefully kept in custody but rather like an anti-Left team preparing for the Big Match tomorrow." So what if they haven't met their families for the past two days, only talking to them over the telephone. So what if they had to do with the hotel food: dal, roti, two types of mixed vegetables, sometimes a fish dish for variety, and chutney.

In Nizam Palace, too, it is much the same story. The Trinamool councillors feel safe here, unlikely to be bothered by the "pestering" CPI(M) men.

Trinamool general-secretary Mukul Roy is keeping close tabs on the councillors staying here. "Our councillors were afraid of being harassed by the CPI(M) but following our arrangements, everybody is relaxed," says Roy. Even the Congress councillors, who have decided to vote for the Trinamool candidate, have moved into the hideouts.

The plot to move into the safe houses was hatched 72 hours before the D-Day. On that night, Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee met all her cotril-lors and party MPs and MLAs at Sikka Palace. The get-together was followed by a dinner. "Every party has its own strategy; this was ours," said Banerjee.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

8 JUL 2000

Parties gear up for mayoral polls today

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, July 7

THE BEAR hug and the bonhomie belied the intense rivalry between the contenders for Mayor's chair.

Displaying a healthy sporting spirit, the Trinamool Congress's Subrata Mukherjee and the Left Front's Kanti Ganguly embraced each other before submitting their nominations for the mayoral polls at the Calcutta Municipal Corporation's headquarters today.

The two were also among the 141 newly-elected councillors who were administered the oath of office and secrecy in the Council Hall of the CMC by Ward 98 councillor Archana Bhattacharjee.

"I feel like going back to the Assembly. The Mayor's room is very small and it does not even have an air-conditioner," Mukherjee said, obviously confident that he would emerge victorious tomorrow.

But Ganguly was nostalgic about

having to vacate his room, which he has occupied for the last five years in his capacity as member, Mayor-in-Council (conservancy). "I don't feel good about being pitted against Subrata. He had helped me a lot during Operation Sunshine," Ganguly said.

This morning, Trinamool councillors, packed in luxury buses, were the first to arrive at the heavily-guarded CMC headquarters. The oath-taking ceremony finally got moving at 11.30 am.

The focus, however, was on the 13 Congress councillors, who sprung a surprise when they arrived in full strength at around 1 pm. Paresh Pal was his usual self, frank and forthright.

Describing party leader Somen Mitra as a Left Front stooge, he said, "Nobody loves the party, they are all using it for their gains. Under no circumstances are we going to vote for the Left. I, for one, will vote for the Trinamool."

Related reports on Page 3

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Left loses grip after 29 years

Jubilation, jigs and a five-foot fall

BY A STAFF REPORTER

It was day of reckoning for Trinamul Congress supporters. A staunch Trinamul worker, Sambhu Sarkar of Tollygunge, leapt in joy and dived off an electrical transmitter box on SN Banerjee Road, a few yards from the Calcutta Municipal Corporation headquarters, after it was announced that party nominee Subrata Mukherjee had beaten Kanti Ganguly of the CPM by four votes.

"*Jai ma Kali. Mamatadi, we have made it to CMC,*" Sarkar shouted as he plunged off the power transmission box. Witnesses said Sarkar had perched himself atop the five-foot-high box to get a vantage view of the poll outcome.

Sarkar was badly injured in the fall and could not raise himself from the pavement. Dumbstruck bystanders watched as he lay writhing in pain. Trinamul activists who were milling around stopped a passing taxi and took him to SSKM Hospital.

There was a stampede seconds after the results were announced at 5.45 pm. A huge police force in riot gear had barricaded the building, but initially, they had been outnumbered. According to police and witnesses, two Trinamul workers fell to the ground and were trampled upon by their jubilant colleagues. However, there were enough policemen on reserve on the spot to prevent any untoward incident.

There was unprecedented security on the roads leading to the CMC headquarters. In an effort to nip any trouble in the bud, police had blocked all entry points to the CMC building. Securitymen kept a close watch on Trinamul supporters and others crowding around the place. Trinamul cadre, smelling victory, far outnumbered their CPM counterparts.

"It is difficult, but we are optimistic that about our nominee, Kanti Ganguly, scraping through," said Sudhir Das, CPM local committee member from south Calcutta. Das was surrounded by two dozen party activists. "*Ki hochchey, dada? Kantida berobey?* (what is happening inside the building? Will Kantida swing it off?)" asked one of them.

Green *abir* flew thick and fast and cries of "*Mamatadi zindabad, Trinamul Congress zindabad*" rent the air as jubilant Trinamul workers took to the streets. The CPM supporters had left the area.

Traffic was stalled in Esplanade for some time after the results were announced as Trinamul workers were dancing and singing on the streets.

THE TELEGRAPH

9 JUL 2000

HP-7

Trinamool Congress wins historic Mayoral battle

9/7

By Malabika Bhattacharya

CALCUTTA, JULY 8. Ms. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress, today made a significant progress in State politics when it wrested control of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation from the Leftists, who ran it for a record 10 years. Mr. Subrata Mukherjee, who defeated Mr. Kanti Ganguly by securing 66 votes as against the rival's tally of 62, became the first non-left Mayor of Calcutta in 32 years.

A total of 128 out of 141 councillors participated in the mayoral election by way of secret balloting, bringing to a climax, the battle for Calcutta, which kept Bengal politics taut for over a month. It is a personal glory for Ms. Banerjee, who hit the winning street in May with somewhat limited success in the elections to 79 municipalities, but grabbed na-

tionwide headlines by defeating the Leftists in Panskura by-election in early June. Now she has ousted the same opponents from the CMC, the elections for which took place in late June. It now remains to be seen whether the Trinamool Congress caps the winning run by snapping up the post of chairman of the neighboring Salt Lake municipality, where elections to this effect will take place next week.

According to political observers, Trinamool's victory in the CMC may pave the way for newer political configurations in West Bengal where the Assembly poll is due in June 2001.

Ms. Banerjee's victory was largely due to the State Congress, which asked 13 of its total 15 councillors to absent themselves from voting, presumably to en-

sure that none of them cross-voted for the Left while participating in the election. Two councillors had earlier defected to the Trinamool, giving it an edge in the numbers game. The Left's tally was a clear indication that one councillor from the Trinamool-BJP combine had cross-voted for the Left.

The Congress(I) has said since the new Mayor does not have a clear majority, he would have to depend on it. The Trinamool supremo, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, said "we have proved again that the Leftists' support base in Bengal is eroding." Though Ms. Banerjee reserved her comments on the role of the Congress(I) in the Corporation election, her party supporters praised the party for its indirect support to the Trinamool.

THE HINDU

Panchayat chiefs' election may be a murky affair in U.P.

9/7/97
H.D. - 7

9/7

By Our Special Correspondent

LUCKNOW, JULY 8. With the three-tier Panchayat elections over in 71 districts of Uttar Pradesh, the stage is now set for the election of the district Panchayat chiefs. With no party winning a majority of the 2134 members of the Zila Panchayat who constitute the electorate, money, muscle and caste factor are likely to play a decisive role. Both the Samajwadi party and the BSP are wary of the possible misuse of official machinery by the ruling BJP to win the election.

The Samajwadi Party had won a good number of these posts in 1995, when Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav was the Chief Minister, courtesy the BSP with which it was running the coalition. The Party had ditched the BSP in the Zila Panchayat poll, which became one of the causes for the parting of ways between the two parties subsequently. The Panchayat elections this time, however, was more peaceful compared to 1995 in U.P., but the BJP failed to win many Zila Panchayat seats, despite being in power.

All the parties, who had expelled the rebel candidates during the elections, are now only too willing to make up and reinduct them. And for that matter, none of the parties, at least on record, were willing to make poll adjustments to win between them a majority of the 71 offices. The BJP was hopeful of a

tie-up with the BSP, but the BSP leader, Ms. Mayawati announced that her party would have no electoral understanding with any party for the election. However, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav is convinced that the two parties had struck a deal.

The recent Panchayat election verdict notwithstanding the State BJP leaders have assured the Central leadership that it must wait for the outcome of the Zila Panchayat chief's election, in which BJP would be ahead of other parties. Mr. Yadav expressed his apprehension that the BJP would take recourse to nominations to the Zila Panchayats to help the party to win a few of the 71 posts. However, the BJP is divided over its choice of candidates, with State party leaders lobbying for their own proteges. In the one-leader parties like the Samajwadi Party, BSP, LCP and RKP there was no such predicament.

Mr. Yadav however held that the BJP was ahead of the BSP in the second position, while the SP had topped. Once, it was shown that the BJP had been relegated to the third position politically in U.P., Mr. Yadav's ploy to work on the Muslim psyche with the fear of Hindutva would end and they may turn at will to the BSP. Hence the assertion that the BJP was still a force in U.P. and the Samajwadi party alone had shoved it to the second position.

THE HINDU

9 JUL 2000

Cong abstains, Subrata mayor

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, July 8. — Mr Subrata Mukherjee was elected mayor of Calcutta today, ending 15 years of Left Front hold on CMC. The Congress abstained from voting.

Mr Anil Mukherjee was elected chairman, completing the Trinamul triumph.

Mr Mukherjee likened his victory to a nor'wester, adding that the Trinamul's destination now would be Writers' Buildings.

Mr Mukherjee won with 66 votes, one short of Trinamul's projected tally — against Mr Kanti Ganguly's 62. Though the new mayor refused to go for a witch-hunt to find out which Trinamul-BJP councillor had voted against him, some Trinamul councillors suspect it was Mrs Sunita Jhavar, a BJP councillor.

Mr Anil Mukherjee of the Trinamul was elected chairman with 67 votes whereas Mr Subrata Mukherjee got 66 votes. Trinamul leaders asserted that it was Mrs Jhavar who had voted for the Left Front candidate for the mayor's pos

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She has denied the allegation.

The Congress had issued a whip asking its councillors not to vote — a major factor shaping the Trinamul victory.

One view is, the presence of some Congress councillors could have led to cross-voting in favour of the Left. However, a Trinamul councillor said had the Congress taken part in voting, Mr Mukherjee would have got at least six of the 12 Congress votes.

The Trinamul-BJP combine

■ More reports on pages 3, 5

smelt victory long before voting had begun. The 67 councillors owing allegiance to Mr Mukherjee lined up ahead of the Left Front councillors and sat on the Treasury benches, as if they had already won.

The Left Front councillors were a listless lot sitting in the Opposition benches. As they took their seats, they looked around for Mr Kanti Ganguly, the Left Fronts candidate, who was nowhere in sight.

chamber door. Apart from a missing Mr Ganguly, both groups were tense over whether the Congress councillors would vote.

At the stroke of three, Mr Ganguly walked in after most of the 61 Left Front councillors had taken their seats. Instead of joining his comrades, Mr Ganguly shook hands with his rival and returned to his seat after a brief exchange of pleasantries with the Trinamul councillors.

There were heated exchanges between Trinamul and Left Front councillors over the pen to be used in ticking the preferred candidate's name. The Trinamul members insisted on using their own pens. Mrs Archana Bhattacharya, who conducted poll, said all voters must use a black-ink ball pen provided by the civic body.

As the argument continued, cell-phone beeps kept echoing in the cavernous council chambers. Mrs Bhattacharya ordered all the councillors to switch off their phones. Later the Trinamul and BJP

■ See SUBRATA page 5

Subrata:

(Continued from page 1)

members deposited their pens with the municipal secretary.

Voting started at 3.45 p.m with Mr Kanailal Ganguly of ward one casting the first vote. There was palpable tension in the council chamber, with both mayoral candidates sitting erect, watching the councillors who would decide their fate.

Voting ended at 5.30 p.m and counting began after about 25 minutes. When the ballot papers were being sorted, Mr Mukherjee sat calmly in his chair surrounded by his party-men. Walking in later, Mr Ganguly chatted for sometime with Mr Anup Chatterjee of the Trinamul Congress before taking his seat.

The Left Front candidate's Mrs. When they numbered 62, ecstatic Trinamul members began congratulating each other even before their leader's ballots were counted.

There were wild scenes of jubilation when it was found that Mr Mukherjee had polled 66 votes. The Trinamul members ignored the solitary instance of cross-voting and shouted "Subrata Mukherjee zindabad."

THE STATESMAN

- 9 JUL 2000

Turncoat councillors get plum portfolios

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, July. 9. — The four Independent and two Congress councillors who switched over to the Trinamul Congress and paved the way for the victory of its mayoral candidate have been rewarded by places in the Mayor-in-Council and other important positions in the CMC.

Mayor Mr Subrata Mukherjee, who announced his team today, said the composition of the new set-up reflected the city's cosmopolitan character.

The Trinamul's unilateral announcement of BJP councillor Mrs Meena Devi Purohit as Deputy Mayor caused some embarrassment for the state BJP, which had suggested Mr Debabrata Majumdar for the post.

Miss Mamata Banerjee said three of the 10 MIC members were from a minority community, two represented the city's Hindi-speaking population, while the Mayor is from south Calcutta and his deputy from north. "We try to constitute the MIC keeping in mind the



Subrata: 'cosmopolitan' team

city's cosmopolitan character. While the choice of a woman councillor as the Deputy Mayor is a unique feature, the team is a mix of efficient and seasoned leaders."

Mr Mukherjee had said Miss Banerjee would discuss with state BJP leaders the Trinamul's choice of Deputy Mayor. But in a late night development, state BJP vice-president Mr Muzaffar Khan announced that the party's central leadership had approved Mrs Purohit for the post.

The new members of the Mayor-in-Council are: Mrs Mala Ray (conservancy), Mr Javed Ahmed Khan (health), Mr Anup Chatterjee (roads and engineering), Mr M Huq Chowdhury (education and information), Mr Shams-us-Zaman Ansari (marketing and lights), Mr Pradip Ghosh (slums), Mr Swapan Samaddar (buildings), Mr Rajiv Deb (sewerage and drainage), Mr Shobhan Chatterjee (water) and Mr Hridaynand Gupta (parks and squares).

The Trinamul leadership also formed an advisory committee to the Mayor that will be headed by Mr Raj Kishore Gupta. The other members are Mr Tarak Singh, Mr Durga Mukherjee and Mr Atin Ghosh.

Mrs Aparna Neogi has been made the chief whip, Mr Debashis Kumar the secretary, while Mr Mantu Sanyal and Mr Dulal Das Thakur are in the chairman's panel. Mr Pan-kaj Banerjee, the Trinamul acting chairman, will head the committee that will coordinate the MIC's work with the party.

■ Another report on page 3

Difficult times ahead for BJP 107

Vijay Sharma
Lucknow, July 9

THE BHARATIYA Janata Party's (BJP) debacle in the three-tier panchayat polls could not have been more ill-timed. At a time when the party is struggling hard to keep its flock together, the results have jolted the party.

Erosion in the BJP's support base, which has been causing concern to party leaders as the Assembly elections are scheduled after one-and-a-half years, is evident by the panchayat poll outcome.

What is actually worrying the party brass is the fact that the rural bodies would be responsible for various works in the fields of education, health care, family planning, irrigation, agriculture etc. following the decentralisation of powers.

The leadership is aware that these bodies can play a crucial role in mobilising support in favour or against any particular party at the grass roots level in the Assembly elections. The setback the party suffered even in its strongholds in the eastern and western regions of

the state has sent shock waves as it still considers Uttar Pradesh as its last hope after the poor performance and track record in Bihar and other places.

Political observers here say that the ongoing infighting in the party, a weak and ineffective government that has so far failed to deliver, and the deteriorating law and order sit-

uation are the main reasons why the party is slipping up. It was because of this reason that the high command had indicated a change of leadership, holding Chief Minister Ram Prakash Gupta squarely responsible for the debacle.

But the move led to another controversy. Leaders within the party, mainly those opposed to Union Surface Transport Minister Rajnath Singh, joined hands and

demanding the removal of the State party chief, Mr Om Prakash Singh, also. Their argument was that Mr Ram Prakash Gupta was only "morally" responsible for the poor performance as he was not directly involved in the panchayat polls, while Mr Om Prakash Singh was "directly" responsible for it.

However, senior BJP leaders

is a contender for the coveted post of the Chief Minister. Speaking to this scribe soon after his return from Delhi where the party high command decided not to make any change in the leadership, Mr Tandon denied that the results were any yardstick to measure the party's popularity. Mr Tandon says that the real acid test would be the elections for the zila parishads' chairmen. He asserted that the BJP is all set to capture the maximum number of chairmen's seats.

However, facts are contrary to Mr Tandon's claims. The fact remains that the party failed to win even a single seat in Lucknow.

Mr Tandon avoids discussing this topic by saying that the result of any single constituency indicates nothing about the support base of the party in the state. He attributes the defeat in Lucknow to lack of co-ordination among local-level leaders.

To be concluded

UP Panchayat Polls and After

here are smug in the belief that all is still well in the party. They are just not ready to believe that the results are any sign of the party's dipping popularity graph. Housing and Urban Development Minister Lalji Tandon claims that the party has won a record number of seats in the panchayat elections.

Mr Tandon, a close lieutenant of the Prime Minister, who was also the election in-charge of Mr Vajpayee's constituency, Lucknow,

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 JUL 2000

Kanti leader of Opp in CMC

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, July 10. — Calcutta district committee of the Left Front at its meeting today decided to nominate Mr Kanti Ganguly as Leader of the Opposition in the CMC. Mr Sudhanshu Sil of the CPI-M and Mrs Hena Chakraborty of the RSP have been made chief whip and deputy leader of the Front.

Politburo member Mr Biman Bose and Mr Samir Putatunda, the CPI-M's South 24-Parganas district secretary were present at the meeting.

Mr Raghunath Kushari, convenor of the district committee, said they would soon start an agitation demanding central funds for the megacity project.

Of the Rs 1,600 crore required, the Centre has so far provided Rs 104 crore while the state has contributed Rs 214 crore.

Mr Rabin Deb, CPI-M state committee member, said for the last few years, the Front has been demanding its "due share" of megacity funds from the Centre.

Mr Kushari said an analysis of the CMC poll results would be made to find out the reasons behind the Left's defeat.

THE STATESMAN

Trinamul's Anupam to run for Salt Lake chairman

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, July 10. — The Trinamul Congress today decided to field Mr Anupam Dutta, councillor of Salt Lake's Ward-7, for the post of the chairman of the civic body. Mr Dilip Gupta is the Left Front's candidate.

The party has also nominated Mrs Manju Banerjee for the post of president who will conduct the chairman's election.

The Trinamul, which has 11 councillors against Left Front's 12, has not yet given up hope of winning the chairman's election. After its success in the CMC mayoral poll, it's upbeat and reportedly trying its best to create a split among Left councillors.

Observers say the Trinamul is desperately trying to win over councillors belonging to the Subhas Chakraborty camp. Three of the 12 LF councillors belong to Mr Chakraborty's camp.

Yesterday, some leaders of the North 24-Parganas district committee of the anti-Subhas camp expressed fears that some Subhas loyalists might sabotage Mr Dilip Gupta's prospects. The transport minister's rivals want to win in Salt Lake at any cost.

They attacked Mr Torit Topdar, a prominent Subhas loyalist, at the North 24-Parganas district committee meeting for defying the party's diktat on selecting the candidate for chairman of Titagarh municipality. They demanded disciplinary action against Mr Topdar.

While the district unit wanted Mr Jagannath Prosad Singh to become the civic body chairman, the Topdar-Chakraborty lobby did everything to push Mr Bejoy Protap Chand.

Subhas rivals also slammed his camp for helping the Congress form the Gobardanga municipal board. They will take up the matter with Alimuddin Street to know if it had the state leadership's sanction.

THE STATESMAN

11 JUL 2000

CPM swims home in Salt Lake without hiccup

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, July 12. — The Left Front retained the Salt Lake municipality today despite apprehensions of cross-voting by CPI-M councillors. Mr Dilip Gupta has been elected the chairman for a second term.

The result of the chairman's election was in keeping with the civic poll earlier, with CPI-M getting 12 votes against the Trinamul's 11. Mr Anupam Datta was the Trinamul candidate for the chairman's post.

CPI-M leaders were visibly tense as counting began. They were even seen keeping a close watch on Mrs Lakshmi Seal, CPI-M councillor and a Subhas Chakraborty loyalist. As results showed, Mrs Seal didn't finally defy the party whip.

Trinamul bosses, on the other hand, appeared relaxed as they probably knew there wouldn't be any cross-voting. But some of them were visibly happy after they learnt that Trinamul votes hadn't split.

Mr Tapan Talukdar, CPI-M councillor who presided over the election, said the result indicated that both the parties played by the book, despite media reports on chances of switchovers. There was speculation that four pro-Subhas councillors could change sides and help the Trinamul form the board.

After the 23 new councillors were sworn in today at the new

municipality complex, they chose to select the chairman through ballots. Mr Talukdar, of ward 18, was elected unopposed as president of today's meeting.

On the withdrawal of the Trinamul's candidate from the president's post before the chairman election, Mr Anupam Datta said the party decided to do so after a meeting this morning. Mrs Manju Banerjee, Trinamul councillor of ward 6, was earlier slated to contest the president's post.

However, Mr Datta said: "Though we have been defeated, we will try to bring a no-confidence motion six months from the day the municipality starts functioning."

The newly-elected Mr Gupta said it was not possible to divide the CPI-M on the basis of ideology on the floor of the municipality. He stressed on redressal of civic problems in Salt Lake.

The presence of a host of CPI-M leaders in Salt Lake was reminiscent of the 2 July repoll. Most top leaders were in sight, including Mr Amitava Nandi, Mr Rabi Sarkar, Mr Manas Mukherjee, Mr Mana Das, Mr Gobinda Ganguly and Mrs Aparna Gupta. Even Finance Minister Mr Asim Dasgupta squeezed out time from his tight schedule to join his comrades.

However, not a single Trinamul MLA or MP was around. It was left to Mr

Jyotipriya Mallick, Trinamul general secretary, to advise party councillors on the voting process.

After winning, Mr Gupta said solving the water crisis in Salt Lake would be his priority. For this, water would be supplied from Palta through Dum Dum. He promised special emphasis to improve road condition. For garbage dumping, a one-square mile area had been earmarked, he said, adding that there were plans to set up a market complex at Falguni.

Mr Sailen Dasgupta, Left Front chairman, and Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, congratulated the people of Salt Lake for enabling the Left Front form the board. Politburo member Mr Biman Bose said the result was only expected since the Left had already secured a majority by winning 12 of the 23 seats. He said the Trinamul had hatched a conspiracy to capture the board by resorting to the worst form of horsetrading.

Trinamul spokesman Mr Pankaj Banerjee said the result did not reflect the preference of Salt Lake residents, who had voted for a change. "Left Front thwarted the people's will with muscle power."

Echoing this, state Congress vice-president Mr Pradip Bhattacharya said the result showed the CPI-M's manipulative powers, not the people's will.

■ Photograph on page 3

THE STATESMAN

13 JUL 2000

Curfew in Dariapur, polling put off

Poll clashes kill 6 in Ahmedabad

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GANDHINAGAR, Sept. 17. — Civic polls in the city were marred by violence as six people were killed and 18 injured in group clashes and police firing in the walled city's Dariapur area today.

Authorities were forced to suspend polling and clamp an indefinite curfew in the area. The RAF has been deployed in Dariapur.

(A PTI report said seven people were killed, among them the Seva Dal's city unit chief, Vasram Ravat. Three died of bullet injuries, and the others were stabbed.)

The Gujarat food and civil supplies minister, Mr Ashok Bhatt, said trouble began shortly after noon, when supporters of the Congress candidate, Mr Harsanlala, clashed with Independent candidate, Mr Ajmat Tyrewala's men over bogus voting. The police post near the area was also stoned.

Mr Bhatt accused Congressmen of "engineering the riots because their candidates were losing heavily".

He claimed that the Congress supporters had earlier tried bogus voting in other booths in the city, but were unsuccessful.

The BJP's men, he said, were nowhere near the scene of violence.

Others, however did not give the BJP a clean chit. They said the saffron party was worried at the low turnout — 20 per cent by late afternoon — in the Dariapur area, and started the violence.

Shops and vehicles were burnt, and police had to fire several rounds and use teargas to quell the rioters.

But, another group pinned the blame on the police. According to them, a group of people had gone to police at the "tambu chowki" to complain about misbehaviour with women during voting. But police ignored them. An altercation followed and a shot was fired, killing one person. But, it isn't clear who fired the shot.

Immediately, pandemonium broke out. There was heavy brickbattling and shops were torched. The area was soon littered with stones, bottles and bricks.

Polling in other areas went off peacefully, the health minister said. Mr Bhatt claimed that polling was completed in Shahpur and Kalupur, areas adjoining Dariapur, without any violence.

In Surat, no untoward incident was reported, barring a stabbing at Rampura. An Independent candidate was also injured in a group clash this evening.

THE STATESMAN

18 SEP 2000

Ahmedabad civic elections turn violent, 6 killed

The Times of India News Service

AHMEDABAD: Indefinite curfew was imposed and polling suspended on Sunday afternoon in the sensitive Dariapur area of the city as six persons were killed and about a dozen injured when police opened fire to quell violence following clashes between groups owing allegiance to rival political parties.

According to the police, the stabbing of a youth near Dariapur tower coupled with a mob trying to capture a booth at a municipal school near the sensitive Tambu Chowky area vitiated the atmosphere.

While Dariapur has always been the focus of law and order in Ahmedabad, sources say that apart from stray incidents, the area had been relatively quiet since the post-Babri Masjid riots in 1993,

which was under the influence of the underworld don Abdul Latif.

The polling was suspended at 1.24 p.m. even as arson and stone-throwing continued in the Vadigam, Nagina Pol and Dabgarwad areas of Dariapur.

Meanwhile, re-polling was ordered in at least four booths in Nava Wadaj area following incidents of booth-capturing. Bogus voting was reported from booths in the Varachha road area of Surat, while the Congress and BJP activists are reported to have clashed in Rajkot's ward no 4.

Charred vehicles, furniture and scrap dotted the roads, even as a burning log landed in a wooden balcony of a house in Vadigam in Dariapur.

Extra platoons of the Rapid Action Force (RAF) and the SRP had to be called in to take control of the situation.

Rumours of cross-voting at certain booths on Jordan road in Dariapur are reported to have sparked off the clashes which turned violent with people shifting support from one political outfit to another. "There are reports of women turning up in burqas as bogus voters in some booths which annoyed certain political groups", said a senior police official.

At Dariapur alone there were at least five parties that had influential contenders in the polls in this ward which has been dominated by the Congress. The BJP, the Shiv

Sena, the Samata Party and a new political outfit floated by former corporator Mohammad Husain Barejia — Muslim

POLITICAL RIVALRY

- Re-polling ordered in four booths
- Bogus voting reported in Surat
- RAF, SRP deployed
- Several police officials injured

Vikas Manch are in the fray.

Interestingly, Samata candidate Mehrunissa Mansuri, who claims to be Latif's wife, was also a strong candidate here.

Joint police commissioner B.J. Gadhvi (Sector II) told TOI that the police first lobbed teargas shells and then resorted to firing to disperse the violent mob.

According to him, several police officials were hurt and vehicles were also damaged in the clashes.

An independent candidate from Kalupur ward in Ahmedabad, Ajmat Tyrwala, received injuries when he was attacked by a mob at a polling booth and was robbed off his watch and cellphone, the police said, adding he was rushed to the hospital.

SC upholds verdict on Punjab Lok Pal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, Sept. 25. — The Supreme Court today upheld a Punjab and Haryana High Court judgment quashing the Punjab government's decision to appoint Harbans Rai as Lok Pal of the state.

A Bench comprising Mr Justice BN Kirpal, Mr Justice MB Shah and Ms Justice Ruma Pal said the High Court had come to the correct finding that there was no consultation with the Chief Justice of the High Court as per the rules on appointment of the lok pal and quashed the same.

"It is open for the state government to proceed to appoint a new lok pal as per the rules and regulations," the Bench said.

The Solicitor-General, Mr Harish Salve, with advocate Mr Rajiv Dutt contended that

Mr Prakash Singh Badal had appointed Mr Rai as lok pal after consulting the then Chief Justice orally though nothing was there on the High Court records to show that it was done.

The Bench said it was an established precedent that all consultations on such sensitive issues were done in writing and not orally and added that the High Court has committed no error by holding that Mr Rai's appointment was done without following an important regulation.

The state government has challenged the High Court judgement which had also quashed all the reports submitted by Mr Rai regarding corruption charges against certain politicians.

Mr Salve submitted that though the government appreciated the finding that no prop-

er consultation was done before appointing Mr Rai, it would not be correct to quash the reports submitted by the former Lok Pal.

The Bench said during the pendency of the petitions, the High Court order quashing the reports submitted by Mr Rai would be stayed. Looking at the delay in appointment of a new lok pal, the Bench observed that "everyone seems to be happy not to have a lok pal."

Earlier, Mr Salve said that Mr Badal had fixed an appointment with the then Chief Justice to consult him on appointment of Mr Rai and the said meeting took place at latter's residence.

The Bench asked why Mr Rai, who has already headed five to six commissions, has been favoured and how many of such appointments were made by the Akali government.

THE STATESMAN

25 SEP 2000

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Civic polls results a rude jolt for BJP

ADJ

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 31. — Some senior BJP leaders were both surprised and unhappy at the Congress' emergence as the principal Opposition in the municipal polls. The party, however, put up a brave face and stressed the need for unity among anti-Left forces. The Congress flaunted its unexpected victory as proof that its stand against the proposed mahajot was correct.

The BJP thought otherwise and claimed the results had vindicated that the people of West Bengal wanted change and that there was a greater need now for the anti-Left forces to unite and dislodge the Left Front government in the Assembly elections due next year.

Local elections could not be a pointer to the electorate's mood as these were fought on local issues, it tried to argue. The BJP claimed the result would not make any impact on the Trinamul's relations with the NDA government at the Centre. Mr M Venkaiah Naidu said all those who had thought the Trinamul would leave the

NDA would now prove to be incorrect. "There cannot be a mahajot without the BJP," he stressed.

Senior BJP vice-president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, said there still was a strong case for the mahajot, where the Trinamul could have an understanding with both the BJP and the Congress. The Assembly elections would see a sharp polarisation between the Left parties and the would-be alternative to the LF combine, he said. The elections then would be fought on principles and policies, he said.

As against this, there was jubilation in the anti-mahajot camp within the Congress. The party's central leadership is reportedly happy that its decision not to align with Miss Mamata Banerjee had proved correct and Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury and Mr Somen Mitra had been proved wrong in having given too much importance to Miss Banerjee.

The central leadership's decision for the Assembly elections would now carry more weight with leaders of the party's West Bengal unit.

THE STATESMAN

1 JUN 2000

Post-poll realpolitik may force Cong-Trinamool to close ranks

Ashis Chakrabarti
Calcutta, May 31

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THE ANTI-LEFT grand alliance or the Mahajot may have come a cropper till now. But, as a clearer picture of the party positions and the voting patterns in the just-concluded civic polls in West Bengal emerged today, it looked increasingly certain that the Congress and the Trinamool Congress would be forced to close ranks in the near future.

If anything, the municipal polls have proved that a considerable part of the Congress's support base in the State has survived despite the onslaught of the Trinamool-BJP combine. Not only has the Congress bagged 16 of the 79 municipalities on its own, it can also form the boards in several more with the help of the Trinamool.

Putting up a brave front on her party's unexpectedly poor showing in the polls, Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee today put the same argument, albeit from her point of view. "We could take control of 20 more boards by joining hands with the Congress," she said. If that happens, these boards would be primarily controlled by a Congress-Trinamool regrouping, with the BJP playing an insignificant role.

Much more than a disjointed Mahajot, this new combination could be a real cause for worry for the Left Front. While the LF maintained its supremacy in the polls, its share of the municipalities has finally come down from 43 in 1995 to 33. The State CPI (M) secretary Anil Biswas, however, claimed that with the help of Independents the Left would eventually take control of 42 boards.

Of a total of 1,562 seats in the municipalities, for which the counting had been completed, the LF captured 792, with 51 per cent of the total votes. The Congress bagged 328 seats with 21 per cent. The Trinamool-BJP alliance's share was 344 seats with 22 per cent of votes. Independents accounted for 98 seats.

Though its share of seats was higher than the Congress's, the Trinamool-BJP combine could get only eight municipalities on its own.

After the initial joy and gloom, respectively, leaders of both the Congress and the Trinamool now admit that they would have done

much better, if not with a Mahajot, at least with an alliance between the two. "We don't know how Mamata tackles the question of the BJP. It's her problem, but we can't be a party to any alliance with the BJP," PCC vice-president Pradip Bhattacharyya reiterated.

Cong appeal

BUOYED BY civic poll results in West Bengal, the Congress has appealed to Mamata Banerjee to sever her ties with the BJP to facilitate Congress-Trinamool Congress tie-up in the Assembly polls next year. Meanwhile Mamata Banerjee in Calcutta ruled out severing ties with the BJP in forming the "Mahajot" to fight the Left Front. "Our pre-election pledge for tying up with the BJP will have to be kept and there is no possibility of severing ties," she said. (Agencies)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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5/16 BENGAL POLLS 2/6

Neither Trinamul nor Left have reason to rejoice

THE *mahajot* idea coming unstuck has clearly hurt the Trinamul badly, as the results of the West Bengal municipal elections showed that it could gain control over only 8 out of the 78 civic bodies. As evident from Mamata Banerjee's claim that the Congress has received less seats than the official results show, she has been caught on the wrong foot. A lot of hype was generated around her, and her politics had to have more substance before she could hope to dislodge the Left Front. Her politics, like that of the Left Front, is principally one of emotion and handouts to special interests. Subhas Chakraborty is right when he points at broad based development making use of technological advancements of recent years being the need of the hour in West Bengal; none of the parties presently in the fray appear positioned to deliver this. The municipal poll results reflects mostly local issues; Congress local bodies having performed creditably in their areas, doing a reasonable job of providing amenities in municipalities like Joynagar-Majilpur or Berhampore, have reaped the benefit. The principal gainer from the polls so far is the Congress, which is organisationally in tatters and whose leaders such as Ghani Khan Chowdhury and Somen Mitra were not seen leading from the front during the run-up to the polls. The Left Front, by contrast, pulled out all the stops, with Jyoti Basu and Buddhadev Bhattacharya campaigning intensively. The CPI-M commands a large organisational machinery, besides having the advantage of running the administration which conducts the polls. Taking these factors into account, support for the Left Front has suffered an erosion; like the Trinamul, it has no reason to whoop with joy but needs to do some soul-searching.

9.6.15
The BJP has had a complete washout in the state, for which it has its own organisational weakness and Tapan Sikdar's leadership to blame. Being coalition partners with Trinamul at the Centre, they should have been natural allies for the poll; the only reason they couldn't arrive at an understanding has to be a high degree of mistrust, suspicion and clash of egos at the local level. Tensions between Trinamul and Congress are more understandable, as Trinamul is aligned with the BJP and Congress with the Left in national politics. Although Priyaranjan Das Munshi has reportedly invited her to rejoin the fold and take over the leadership of the Congress, she is unlikely to take the bait as she knows that Sonia Gandhi will dump her the moment she needs to flirt with the Left. Mamata appears caught between two stools, between national and state level politics: she is so busy nowadays in Delhi that she did not have much time to campaign locally. Whether there is any juice left at all in the *mahajot* idea will be demonstrated during negotiations over the 19 hung municipalities, most of which Trinamul and Congress can carry if they decide to co-operate. The Left, doubtless will have many carrots to offer Congress ward councillors precisely to pre-empt such co-operation, or offer to support a Congress board from outside. Which way the Congress inclines, will offer an indication of what it considers its fundamental alignments.

THE STATESMAN

2 JUN 2000

Cong sweeps Karnataka rural polls

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

BANGALORE, June 9. — The ruling Congress has captured in 26 of the 27 zilla panchayats as counting of votes in the two-phase zilla and taluk panchayat elections in Karnataka ended here today.

The results have come as a shot in the arm for the eight-month-old krishna government.

Mysore was the lone zilla panchayat which the opposition Janata Dal (S) won.

The Congress secured two-thirds majority in 23 zilla panchayats and a simple majority in three.

Of the 890 zilla panchayat seats, the Congress won 649 and the JD(S) only 80. The JD(U) had to be content with 73 seats and the BJP was a poor fourth with just 41 seats. The result of one seat in newly formed Bagalkot zilla panchayat has not been announced following a court order.

Of the 3,255 taluk panchayat seats, the

Congress won 2,099. The JD(U) was way behind for the second position with 357 followed by the JD(S) with 300 seats and the BJP with 249 seats. Results of three seats have been withheld for technical reasons. A repoll is likely and a final decision will be taken on receipt of the reports, officials said.

The Congress dealt a crippling blow to the BJP in its stronghold of coastal Karnataka and Mahad areas by capturing all the zilla panchayats in the region. The Congress won all the 24 seats in newly formed Udupi district and 30 of the 31 seats in Dakshina Kannada district. The BJP managed just the remaining seat.

Even in Uttara Kannada and Kodagu districts, the Congress performance was very impressive. In Uttara Kannada, the party bagged 27 out of 35 seats and in Kodagu 22 of the 26 seats. In Shimoga, the home district of BJP president, Mr BS Yediyurappa, the Congress won 18 of the 27 seats and the BJP just five seats.

In Mandya, home district of chief minister, Mr SM Krishna, the party secured majority by winning 21 of the 39 seats. It faced stiff a fight from the JD(S), which bagged 12 seats.

The Congress won two-thirds majority in the zilla panchayats of Bangalore (Urban), Tumkur, Chitradurga, Davanagere, Shimoga, Chamaranagar, Hassan, Kodagu, Chikmagalur, Udupi, Dakshina Kannada, Belgaum, Bijapur, Bagalkot, Dhrawad, Gadag, Haveri, Uttara Kannada, Bidar, Bellary, Raichur, Gulbarga and Koppal.

Mr Krishna said the landslide victory of the Congress in the zilla and taluk panchayats had silenced his detractors who had been complaining that the government had ignored rural development and concentrated in promoting information technology. Talking to journalists, he said rural people had reposed confidence in his eight-month-old government and thanked them for the massive mandate his party had received in the elections.

THE STATESMAN

10 JUN 2000

Vittal backs down on CVC rôle

SHIVNATH JHA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 13. — Senior politicians cutting across party lines today appeared relieved when the Central Vigilance Commissioner, Mr N Vittal, accepted before a joint parliamentary committee that the CVC's rôle was "advisory", and its focus was "administrators and not politicians".

Mr Vittal reportedly argued before the committee that the CVC should be given greater powers to make it "more relevant" at a time when bureau-

crats were tending towards corruption.

Some members of the 22-member JPC (15 from Lok Sabha, seven from Rajya Sabha) indicated they were apprehensive Mr Vittal was following in the footsteps of the former Chief Election Commissioner, Mr TN Seshan — chasing the media limelight. When a member asked him if it was so, Mr Vittal reportedly said the publicity was intended to make the people aware that the CVC existed.

The committee under the NCP's Mr Sharad Pawar is studying the CVC Bill and

debating ways to make the institution more effective. The present CVC owes its status to an Ordinance which the Bill has to replace in Parliament's monsoon session. The JPC will meet again on 17-18 July.

Mr Vittal's plea for more powers was opposed by one of the vigilance commissioners, who told the JPC the Bill's provisions were okay, and that the CVC's rôle was only advisory.

Scores of senior officials interviewed by the JPC have expressed fears that allowing more powers to the CVC could create problems in the long run. The

CVC, they feel, should not be given the general power of supervision, a JPC member said.

Mr Vittal said he has already informed the committee of his views on amending Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946, enabling the CVC to investigate IAS, IPS and Indian Forest Service officials posted in the states.

The Bill empowers the CVC to supervise the CBI and Enforcement Directorate "partially" but Mr Vittal wants to leave no stone unturned to acquire more power over these investigating agencies.

THE STATESMAN

14 JUN 2000

It's Trinamool vs Trinamool

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 16

FOR THE electorate in Ward 11 of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) in Borough II, it is surely a hard decision. The choice is between twin-flowers and twin-leaves, the former the symbol of the Trinamool Congress and the latter that of the dissident Trinamool candidate.

The voters are in a quandary as the battle between official and rebel Trinamool candidates has turned out to be a virtual proxy war between the two topmost party functionaries—Mamata Banerjee and Ajit Panja, both colleagues in the Union Cabinet.

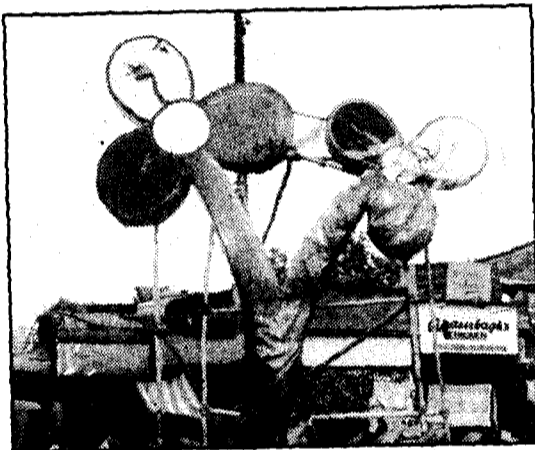
Mamata Banerjee has already declared that she would campaign for her party candidates everywhere in the city, except Ward 11, which comprises the busy Hatibagan area. Her open sympathies for the rebel Trinamool candidate has not only soured her relations with Panja but has caused a vertical split between the two Trinamool factions in the area. Panja remains unfazed in the face of the challenge and has taken personal initiatives to ensure the win of Rita Mondal, the Trinamool candidate.

It all began when Panja brushed

aside opposition from local Trinamool leader Atin Ghosh to clinch the nomination of Rita Mondal, wife of the sitting councillor, Prabir Mondal. Atin Ghosh, a staunch Mamata loyalist, in his turn, fielded Aparna Roy as an

before the CMC election to safeguard their political future. Three of them were rewarded with re-nomination on the Trinamool ticket, while Prabir managed to field his wife in Ward 11, reserved for women this time. Local Trinamool

Borough Battles - Ward 11



Independent under the twin-leaves symbol, declaring a total war against Panja and his nominee. "How can you support the wife of someone, who switched over to the Trinamool on the election-eve?" says Ghosh, who continues to be a close aide of Mamata Banerjee.

Such dissidence in the Trinamool is not confined to this ward. All the four sitting councillors, who won on the Congress ticket last time, crossed over to the Trinamool

workers are hardly amused at the "rehabilitation" of former Congress councillors into the party fold. "These people consistently stonewalled the Trinamool and it is unfortunate that the same set of people is being welcomed now," dissident Trinamool activists say.

For the Front, which won five of the nine wards in the borough last time, the rebellion in the Trinamool ranks has come as a real boon in strict electoral terms. Fighting against a strong anti-establishment mood of the electorate, the division in the Trinamool has only bolstered its chance to retain control of the borough.

The Front draws further comfort from the presence of the Congress (which won four wards in the 1995 polls) in all the nine wards, as a split in anti-Left votes has become a certainty in this situation. Says Purnendu Sengupta, chairman of the CMC and CPI candidate, who is seeking re-election from Ward 10: "We will retain control of the borough and win by bigger margins."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 JUN 2000

Mamata wants Salt Lake as 'gift'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 16. — Heady with the Panskura victory, Ms Mamata Banerjee today asked voters of Salt Lake and Calcutta to continue the "good work" started by their rural brethren and "gift" the twin boards to the Trinamul Congress.

This was how Ms Banerjee kicked off her campaign for the twin civic bodies in Salt Lake and Calcutta, both of which go to the polls on 25 June.

And the crowd seemed to lap up her Panskura rhetoric: they waited patiently for her at Salt Lake, braving a two-hour down-pour. And women and children formed a large percentage of her listeners.

Clearly defining the Trinamul as the only viable anti-Left option in the state, she asked voters not to waste anti-Left votes by voting for the Congress.

No anti-Left vote should go to the BJP-supported candidates either, she implied, adding that there were only three wards in Salt Lake where her party was supporting Leftist Independents.

Clearly making a distinction between the two audiences — one was at the relatively-middle-lower-middle-class pocket of Nayapatti in Mahishbathan and the other at the far more posh and urbane pocket of

BD-block — Ms Banerjee repeatedly stressed that development would be her party's main concern if voted to the elite municipality.

Punctuating her speech with some street-level Hindi, "Jo humse takrayega, chur-chur ho jayega", at Mahishbathan and quotes from Rabindranath and Swami Vivekananda at BD-block, Ms Banerjee had a common theme today: that people should go out to vote "fearlessly, preferably as early as possible" and take the cue from Kespur's voters.

"Continue what Panskura has

done. Let the municipality be your gift to our young party," she pleaded.

And it was not on a mere anti-CPI-M platform that she was seeking their votes, she reminded voters. It pained her to see the state of Salt Lake, BC Roy's dream. She recalled last year's floods which had left Salt Lake's voters in waist-deep water and without water and electricity for some days.

"We'll change how things get done here," she added.

Promise number two alluded to the common Salt-Lake voter's grievance number one:

"We'll rationalise the tax structures. And the Trinamul will keep the promises it is making."

Two other concerns of the average Salt Lake voter, mainly from the educated middle-class, education and industry too found mention. "Why do meritorious students from Salt Lake have to go to Chennai, Bangalore, Chandigarh and Delhi for higher education?" she asked. "And what is the infrastructure the CPI-M-controlled municipality has created for attracting business and industry here?"

Deteriorating law-and-order situation in Salt Lake, which has seen a large number of dacoities and snatchings in the last few months, came in for sharp criticism.

"Police here have been told to guard a few of our chief minister's close relatives, leaving the common man at the mercy of the criminals," she alleged.

Panskura won't affect CMC polls: Buddha

CALCUTTA, June 16. — Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya today painted a rosy picture of the Left Front's poll prospects in the Calcutta and Salt Lake civic polls. The home (police) minister doesn't think that the Panskura Lok Sabha bypoll result will affect the the civic polls. "We will ask voters whether there has been a deterioration or a slight improvement in civic amenities," he said at Writers' Buildings. "Besides, city dwellers are alert, conscious and cultured; they know us for the past 23 years. They will decide correctly".

FB candidate attacked

CALCUTTA, June 16. — The Forward Bloc candidate of CMC ward 77 was heckled allegedly by Congress-backed goons this evening. Ms Shamima Khan was addressing a meeting in Ekbalpur Lane when a soda bottle was thrown at her. The meeting was cancelled. She has been admitted to a hospital.

CPM man shot

BARRACKPORE, June 16. — A CPI-M man was shot dead at Naihati in North 24-Parganas this afternoon. Debu Ghosh was sitting in front of the party office on Ghosh Para Road around 5.30 p.m. when four people came there. They surrounded Ghosh and one of them shot at him from close range.

BJP's promises

CALCUTTA, June 16. — Eradication of corruption and providing civic amenities will be the BJP-Trinamul Congress combine's main aim if it wins the CMC polls, the BJP says in its manifesto. Mr Ashim Ghosh, state BJP president, said today the Left Front had not spared the Calcutta Municipal Corporation from its 24 years' "misrule". The CMC had failed in every sphere. — SNS



Trinamool hardsells its better-Calcutta dream

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 19

THE CONGRESS in Bengal is no more than a tool in the hands of CPI(M) general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet. No wonder its candidate polled only two per cent votes in Panskura," senior Trinamool leader Pankaj Banerjee said here today.

Banerjee, Trinamool Policy-Making Body chairman, was releasing his party's manifesto for the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) elections.

"The Trinamool is the only alternative to the CPI(M). This is what the people believe. All those in between are just stooges. The Congress is another face of the same coin. In the last 15 years, the CMC, under the Left Front, did nothing for the people. And on June 25, the fell blow will

be dealt to them," said Banerjee.

The Trinamool manifesto promises a civic services committee comprising local MPs, MLAs and citizens to address public grievances. The party will set up a panel of experts to look into all illegal structures built by promoters.

"The huge burden of corporation taxes has made it difficult for homeowners to maintain their

CMC Poll Manifesto

premises. As a result, they are forced to sell their property to dishonest promoters. We will check these unscrupulous builders, reduce the tax burden and provide soft loans to residents to repair their houses," Banerjee said.

"We will also set up night shelters for the destitute, who sleep on pavements. Since we were against Operation Sunshine, we will

ensure that all those displaced get alternative facilities," he added.

Hitting out at the Left Front for its failure to provide adequate potable water to many city areas even after being in power for 15 years, Banerjee said: "The first stage of the Garden Reach Water Plant was built by the Congress Government between 1972 and 1977. To this day, the plant's second phase has not got off the ground. No wonder, taps often run dry in south Calcutta. The problem is just as acute in the north."

Banerjee criticised the civic body for failing to eradicate malaria, enteric, arsenic poisoning and other water-borne diseases. "We will follow the WHO prescriptions to fight these diseases. Slums will be developed. The Left Front claims we will privatise all civic services. This is not true. We will seek help from financial institutions to beautify the city," he added.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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District leaders defy Ghani instruction Cong joins force with BJP, Trinamul in civic boards

TANMAY CHATTERJEE
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 22. — For Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury and known Mamata-baiters in the Pradesh Congress Committee, the tables have turned.

Despite the PCC chief's recent instruction that party leaders should keep no truck with the Trinamul Congress and BJP, Congressmen in the districts are busy forging their own "mahajot", alliances of convenience.

The argument is, if Opposition leaders do not close ranks, the Left Front will assume control of the 19 hung municipalities to which elections were held on 28 May.

After the election, both the Congress and the Trinamul Congress challenged official figures on hung and tied municipalities. Even the Left parties took a different view on the hung civic bodies, dubbing 12 of them as "undecided".

But after weeks of hectic lobbying the Congress-Trinamul-BJP 'combine' has managed to form boards in five civic bodies — Daihat (Burdwan), Jhalda (Purulia), Tamluk and Ghatal (Midnapore) and Bankura. Efforts are on to forge alliance in at least five other municipalities in Hooghly and the North 24 Parganas.

Yesterday at Jhalda, two BJP councillors and five Congress councillors joined hands to elect Mr Raghunandan Das of the Congress board chairman. This should not please the Congress chief, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, but the party's councillors said they had offered their support as "individuals" and not on behalf of the party.

Senior PCC leader, Mr Pradip

Bhattacharya, said: "We are aware of the developments. We have told our men that they can take their own decision regarding formation of boards so long as they don't support any Left party. Interestingly, it was the Trinamul that helped the Left Front form the board



HEADS I WIN, TAILS YOU LOSE:
Mr Ghani Khan Chowdhury (above)
and Miss Mamata Banerjee (below)



at Serampore." At Daihat municipality in Burdwan, the Trinamul (three seats) and the Congress (five seats) joined forces. Mr Santosh Das of the Congress became chairman while Mr Baidyanath Mukherjee of the Trinamul was elected vice-

chairman. Out of 14 seats, the BJP got one and the CPI-M five.

Trinamul leaders formed the board at Bankura municipality with direct help from the Congress. Out of 23 seats, the Left Front had won 10 and a Left-backed Independent got one. However, the Trinamul, with seven seats and the Congress with four seats, scraped through with the support of the lone Independent candidate.

At Tamluk in Midnapore, Mr Rabindranath Sen of the Trinamul became the chairman because, out of 19 seats, the Trinamul-BJP- Congress alliance had got 11 seats against the Left Front's eight. At Ghatal, Mr Sadhucharan Pal of the Congress was elected chairman. Out of 17 councillors, the alliance has 11.

The North 24-Parganas district Trinamul president, Mr Bhupen Seth, said an alliance would formed in some of the hung municipalities by the end of the month. At Gobardanga, for example, the Trinamul has secured seven out of 17 seats, followed by the Left Front's six and the Congress' four. At Bongaon, the Trinamul, BJP and Congress have jointly got 12 out of 21 seats. At Ashoknagar and Taki, the formation of boards will depend on Independent candidates.

In Hooghly, a similar alliance is on the cards at Bansberia and Baidyabati municipalities. Out of 22 seats in Bansberia, the CPI-M has 10, the Trinamul, seven and the Congress, five. Out of 22 seats in Baidyabati, the Trinamul has nine, while the BJP and the Congress have one each. Here too, the leaders are banking on an Independent.

Campaign ends, the countdown begins

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 23

THE CITY fell into a hushed, tense silence at 3 pm sharp today as the frenzied month-long campaigning for the June 25 Calcutta Municipal Corporation poll came to an end. Leaders went into a huddle in their party offices, taking stock of the situation, the simple arithmetic of numbers.

Some talked of violence, of musclemen being brought in from the districts, others of plans some party might be hatching to rig the polls. They were all trading charges, unsure of the outcome, but all dead serious, because this is "more than just a civic poll"—as CPI(M) State secretary Anil Biswas pointed out—with "ramifi-

cations for the future".

"It was an unprecedented political campaign in recent times. We held hundreds of meetings that were attended by thousands of people. However, although our campaigns were in keeping with the rules of the game, the Trinamool launched a slander campaign against us. Mamata Banerjee only told lies to the voters," Biswas alleged.

He claimed Banerjee has been misinforming the people by saying that her intervention led the Prime Minister to keep in abeyance the Cabinet decision to close down public sector units here.

Banerjee refused to comment, saying only time would show who

was right, and who wrong. She was sure the verdict would be in favour of the Trinamool. "The people are with us," she said.

"The Trinamool-BJP combination will form the board in CMC. They will be able to muster sufficient numbers to get an absolute majority. Another good indication is that Muslims too have started relying on the Trinamool," Ajit

Panja said, echoing Banerjee's optimism.

Congress leaders, however, believe that none of the parties will get a clear majority and that their party will play a crucial role in the formation of the civic board. "Although everyone is trying to write us off, I personally believe

that we will be the key player after the poll results are out," said PCC vice-president Saugata Roy. "And if the Left Front thinks it can win by pursuing terror tactics, it is mistaken."

His fear of terror was echoed by BJP vice-president Muzaffar Khan, who alleged that he had definite information about the CPI(M) bringing musclemen from Howrah and Hooghly to rig the corporation polls in south and north Calcutta. "The Panskura result was a blow to the Left Front. And the desperation of the Left is showing," he said.

However, Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya pointed out that the State has made all necessary arrangements to ensure free and peaceful polls.

CMC Polls

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 JUN 2000

Mayoral race: big stakes, close fight

Prasanta fights 'outsider' tag Mamata tries a Panskura in Subrata's ward

TIRTHANKAR MITRA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 23. — It seemed it was David vs Goliath as Mr Swapan Samaddar, sitting Trinamul councillor, took on Mr Prasanta Chatterjee, mayor, in ward 30. But as the campaign progressed, the gap narrowed — the contestants now appear more evenly matched.

Mr Samaddar says Mr Chatterjee is an "outsider", and announces Panskura would show the way in the ward. How can a non-resident come to the ward's help in an election.

Mr Chatterjee shrugs off the "outsider" tag. And explains he has had to be a so-called deserter simply because his wards have been reserved for women at earlier elections.

Mr Chatterjee is aware that ward 30 is a "marginal" seat — Mr Samaddar won by a mere 613 votes in 1995. And he hopes to cover the distance and go much ahead this time around.

The mayor is hopeful too that Mr Shankar Saha, Congress, will cut into the Trinamul's vote.

Miss Mamata Banerjee's charisma and his familiarity with individual voters form the bases of the Trinamul nominee's expectations.

He has focussed the campaign on water supply, drainage and slum development — problems plaguing ward residents.

The mayor on the other hand, is stressing on national issues. But he has promised to transform the area into a model ward if he wins. About the only thing the rivals share is the common apprehension of poll-day violence.

TANMAY CHATTERJEE
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 23 — It's difficult to catch a glimpse of the sky from the streets of ward No. 87 in south Calcutta.



The Trinamul Congress, Congress and

enough space for goods vehicle to pass. The walls, however have been spared.

Welcome to the posh neighbourhood from where Mamata Banerjee plans to send the city with a new map. Her candidate, former state minister and still the official Congress MLA for Chowringhee, Mr Subrata Mukherjee, is telling voters about his plans for a better Calcutta.

"Every vote for Subrata will go to me," Miss Banerjee heard saying at every meeting. Hers is also the most visible face, thanks to thousands of posters and banners par workers have put up.

Congress's three-time winner Mr Niren Chatterjee, popularly known as "Chinada", appears unperturbed.

His supporters are not lagging behind as far as publicity is concerned.

"People know me. I work hard for them. Mamata is not a factor here," Mr Chatterjee says, and quickly points out that Mr Mukherjee is the "red watermelon" because he is not sure which party he belongs to.

Mr Kishor Zaveri, the "Left front nominated and CPI(M)-supported" Independent candidate is also being projected by the Congress as evidence of the ruling Front's "blessings" for Mr Mukherjee. How is it that a political nonentity like Mr Zaveri is contesting with the official CPI-M symbol, Congressmen ask.

Another new face in the fray is Ms Samita Sen of the dissident Trinamul faction. She is contesting with the "jora pata" (twin leaves) symbol.

With a straight fight between the Trinamul and the Congress on the cards, stories about how Mr Mukherjee is "spending lavishly to buy votes" or how he is "bringing in outsiders to exhibit muscle power" are making the rounds.

Mr Mukherjee's opponents, including senior CPI-M leaders, are reminding people how he had "dissolved the board" at the Calcutta Municipal Corporation after becoming the municipal affairs minister in Mr Siddhartha Shankar Ray's Cabinet.

Mr Mukherjee says he became minister after the board was dissolved by his predecessor, Prafulla Kanti Ghosh.

"Tell them to check the facts first. First, it was Mr Ray who was in power. Second, the board was dissolved to revamp the old structure. If there was an election, we would have won it because we were in power."

Not willing to comment on his prospects, Mr Mukherjee said: "I announced in public that I have left the Congress. Why don't they throw me out of the party? I don't want to thrust another by-election on the people."

THE STATESMAN

24 JUN 2000

Strict security for mother of civic battles

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 24. — The battle of ballots to decide who takes the Calcutta and Salt Lake civic bodies — Mr Jyoti Basu or Miss Mamata Banerjee — begins at 7 a.m. tomorrow. Polling will be held in 141 wards in Calcutta and 23 in Salt Lake. Security has been beefed up in and around the city after reports that CPI-M and Trinamul Congress had brought hundreds of muscle-men from outside the city.

About 20,000 policemen will be on duty. Some city wards will be under strict vigil. (Police raided Trinamul office at Salt Lake late tonight suspecting arms had been stored there, though reportedly nothing was found.)

(Late tonight, some CPI-M cadres gathered outside a guest house in Park Circus, alleging

a Congress candidate had put up men there to rig tomorrow's polls. Residents "heard bomb blasts" outside the guest house before police intervened to disperse the cadres. (In ward 67 at Kasba, bombs went off around 1 a.m., though no one was injured. (A clash broke out at Man-

icktala around midnight when CPI-M supporters attacked a BJP office. (Suspected CPI(M)-backed hoodlums have been terrorising people in Garden Reach since last night. They threatened rival partymen and beat up some of them. Five people were injured. Some women who tried to stop them were heckled. Three houses were vandalised at Alifnagar. Md Mughal (Congress) said police were in-

■ Editorial: Civic prospects, page 8

■ More reports, another photograph on page 3

formed, but did nothing.) The Left and Trinamul camps both believe they'd win but a demoralised Congress is doing its best to come third in the civic bodies. The BJP, not a big threat, hopes to maintain its 1995 tally of two seats.

Last time, the Congress won 66 seats and gave CPI-M a stiff fight. The Left sought the support of an Independent, Mr Jhunnu Ansari, to form the board.

But the Trinamul's emergence has altered the equation. Miss Banerjee's party managed to win over 35 Congress councillors to its side. They brought the tag of the "main Opposition party" for the Trinamul.

The October 1999 Lok Sabha polls saw the *jora phool* (twin flowers) symbol bloom in 122 of

the 141 Calcutta wards. Then came Panskura, Trinamul win embarrassed the CPI-M.

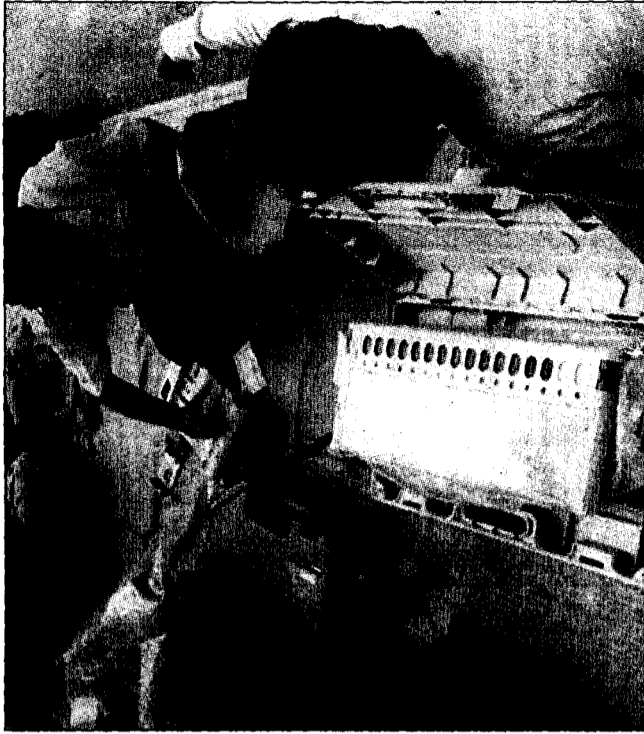
Trinamul leaders, however, know the civic election is a different ball game, and it won't be possible to win 122 wards.

But, CPI-M's confidence is unshaken. It believes it will form the CMC board, but won't quote a figure higher than the magical 71.

The faction-ridden Congress, which has two important leaders — Mr PR Das Munshi and Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury — squabbling, would be glad to get 15 seats.

The CPI-M hopes that wards in north and east Calcutta, Tollygunge, Behala, parts of central Calcutta and Garden Reach will help the party notch up a victory. The party's optimism stems from Trinamul's

■ See POLLS: page 3



Polling officers get voting machines ready at Netaji Indoor Stadium on Saturday. — The Statesman

25 JUN 2000

Opposition cries foul over rigging, Left laughs away charges

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 25

A SPOLLING drew to a close in the city and Bidhannagar today, the Trinamool Congress, the BJP and the Congress accused the CPI(M) of large-scale rigging. They charged the dominant Left Front partner with intimidating their polling agents and scaring away voters in most of the 141 CMC wards and 23 of Bidhannagar.

Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee said that the CPI(M), fearing a drubbing in the civic polls, resorted to terror tactics in as many as 70 of the 141 wards in the CMC area.

"Since the civic elections were held under the State Election Commission, the polling and presiding officers took no cognizance of our complaints. Even Ministers moved from booth to booth supervising the Left rigging machinery. No election under Left Front rule can be free and fair," Mamata said.

"Subhas Chakraborty and his cadres murdered democracy in Bidhannagar. Our candidates Anita Mondal and Chameli Naskar were attacked and electronic voting machines smashed in two booths," alleged Trinamool MP Jayanta Bahattacharya.

"We apologise to the people for failing to create an atmosphere where they could cast their votes in a congenial environment. We would request them to give a fitting reply to the Left Front in the Assembly polls," added Trinamool Policy-Making Body Chairman Pankaj Banerjee.

"Democracy was raped here in broad daylight by CPI(M) cadres," said BJP State president Abhisin Ghosh. "They targeted our candi-



(Left) Security forces in action at Garden Reach during polling for the Calcutta Municipal Corporation on Sunday. Bombs exploded on S N Banerjee Road. Photos: HT



scared. Today they showed signs of desperation." Equally critical of the CPI(M) was WBPCC

president A B A Ghani Khan Chowdhury. "False voting was rampant. In many places our agents were beaten up. We are grateful to the people for supporting us, but the Left Front Government throttled the mandate. How can you expect us to do well? The administration, the police and the CPI(M) cadres worked in tandem against us. We do not treat the outcome of the polls as a defeat."

But CPI(M) State secretary Anil Biswas laughed away the allegations. "Whenever the Trinamool realises that it will not win, it starts accusing the CPI(M) of rigging. We are proud that despite intimidation by the Trinamool workers, thousands of our cadres behaved responsibly. In several wards, our cadres were assaulted and Trinamool men exploded a bomb at Amherst Street."

"The Trinamool and the BJP tried to get men from outside but since they failed to deliver, they resorted to terror tactics in many places. In Salt Lake, Union Minister Tapan Sikdar himself entered Booth 6. Soon tension spread.

"Only a police lathi-charge brought things under control. Trinamool workers also threw bombs in some wards to scare people away," he added. "As for the role of the police, we have no complaints against them and they did a good job. The peaceful polls convince us that we will retain both the boards again."

"Unlike Panskura, where they drove out our polling agents, this time they failed to disturb a single agent of ours. Mamata is known for her destructive activities and the people will not support her. I am sure the people of Calcutta will continue supporting the Left Front," CPI(M) leader Biman Bose added.

Buddhadeb admits eroding vote bank

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 25

DIGRESSING FROM the party line, Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya today admitted the eroding support for the Left among the urban poor—the “natural class ally”.

“It is the anti-incumbency factor and our inability to provide the supporters with jobs. The poor are lured by the Opposition campaign promises without realising that unemployment is a national problem. We have to win over this section at any cost,” he said.

Reflecting on the Left’s 23-year rule in the State, Bhattacharyya was sure of an undiminished support from the intellectuals of the society. Though a sizeable chunk of the vote bank has deserted the Left camp, he said academics and cultural activists have stayed loyal to the party.

Bhattacharya said the State should concentrate on strengthening the public distribution system

and chart out effective self-employment schemes to prevent voters from leaving the party.

Touching on the hawkers’ issue, he came out in support of projects to rehabilitate those who were evicted and had not yet found a place in the new space allotted for them.

Bhattacharyya was optimistic that the discerning public would never opt for a saffron

Government in preference to the existing one. He dismissed the

impressive inroads made by the Trinamool Congress as “a temporary phenomenon”.

“It will not last for long. The party has neither the ideology nor the strength to make a permanent impact among the poor people. However, a section—mainly the rich—will vote for it,” he said.

Reiterating what Transport Minister Subhas Chakrabarty said a few days ago, Bhattacharya said: “None but a developed and vibrant Left Front can replace the existing Front.”

Candid Confession

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 JUN 2000

Left crows, Mamata complains

Crying Cong may laugh last

OUR BUREAU

June 25: A string of violent incidents marked Sunday's cliffhanger of a civic poll that will keep pollsters and pundits on tenterhooks for two days.

The disturbances drove away voters but deputy chief minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya claimed nearly 70 per cent polling. The fear of violence combined with the sultry weather to discourage voters in parts of the city and Salt Lake.

A 58-year-old heart patient, Ranjit Dey, died of shock when a bomb exploded near him as he was walking home at Jorasanko in north Calcutta.

Brimming with confidence, the CPM was the only party that proclaimed: "We will form the civic boards in both Calcutta and Salt Lake." The Congress' surrender was abject, with PCC chief A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury admitting: "We have been defeated by CPM's musclepower." Mamata Banerjee did not know where she stood.

"In 70 to 75 wards, the CPM has terrorised our candidates and voters but we have fought tooth and nail against their terror tactics," she said.

Trinamul's mayoral aspirant Subrata Mukherjee said "we are hopeful of forming the board" but Mamata's campaign managers were sceptical of their chances in the north. One said: "There will be a hung board and the Congress councillors will decide who forms the board."

A hung verdict will mean that

Independents — a number of them are in the fray — and the Congress will be wooed by both the Trinamul and the Left.

The CPM advertised its confidence despite the impressive showing by the Trinamul-BJP in elections in the recent past. CPM polliburo member Biman Bose had claimed just after the Panskura Lok Sabha bypoll early this month that his party would win. It lost by 40,000 votes.

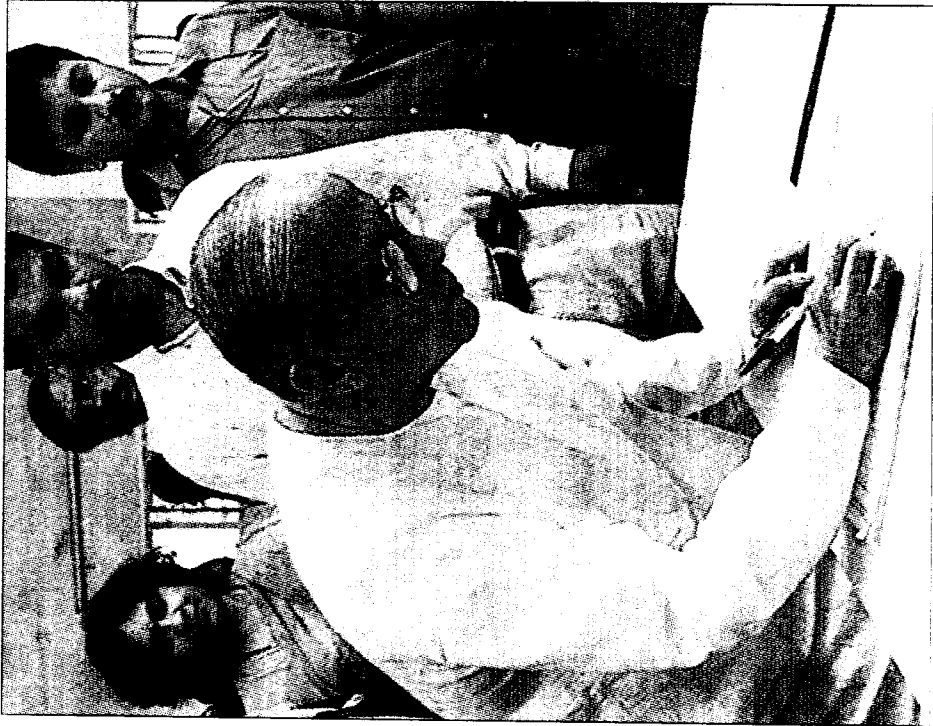
Mamata, too, had said after the Panskura byelection that polling was peaceful and she was satisfied. Her reaction today was different. "The civic polls have been conducted by the State Election Commission, a state government baby. When elections are conducted under the Central Election Commission I will show them what elections are like," she said.

Saugata Roy, PCC spokesman, said: "We have no report of booth capturing and rigging by Trinamul. It was the CPM that chased our workers in many places."

In Salt Lake, the picture was clearer with Trinamul, BJP and Congress contesting against each other and against the CPM. "Our prospects have been hampered by Trinamul. Subhas Chakraborty personally supervised booth capturing by CPM cadre," said Tapan Sikdar, BJP minister.

Disturbances took place almost across the city and in Salt Lake but there was no suspension of polling. Till late evening, neither the Congress nor Trinamul had demanded a repoll, though 24 incidents of violence were listed. The CPM demanded repolling.

VIP VOTER AND MINISTER WAITING TO VOTE



Jyoti Basu at a Salt Lake polling booth. Mamata Banerjee waits for her turn with her ration card. Pictures by Amit Dutta and Santosh Ghosh



in two booths in ward 54 in Calcutta alleging that the electronic voting machine was damaged after Trinamul workers hurled bombs. In Salt Lake, too, a machine was damaged in CD block after a clash between Trinamul and CPM workers inside a polling station.

The BJP withdrew its candidate Ibrahim Khan from ward 75 in the Watgunge area in protest against the "rejection of terror unleashed by the ruling CPM."

Behala, Jadavpur, Regent Park, Tiljala and Kasba. Nearly 20 people were injured and 300 held.

Tension ran high in wards 23 and 25 in the Jorasanko area where alleged Left workers threw nearly three dozen bombs. Several Forward Bloc workers were seen nursing welts received from police lathis at Jorasanko. "We are in power for the last 23 years. I have never seen the police treat us like this. The police are openly

supporting Trinamul," said Abhoy Burman of Forward Bloc.

Repoll on Tuesday

Repoll will be held on Tuesday in five booths in CMC area and one booth in Salt Lake municipality. The CMC booths are number 8 and 10 in ward 54; 14 in ward 141; 29 in ward 33; and 8 in ward 131. In Salt Lake, the repoll will be in booth 3 of ward 17.

See Page 6 and Metro

POLLS:

(Continued from page 1)

booths in several wards by CPI-M cadres, something that Miss Mamata Banerjee's followers could not do.

The cadres stormed into some wards in the morning, taking the Trinamul by surprise. All that the Trinamul's central election office could manage was to fax complaints to poll officials.

A visibly flustered Mrs Anita Mondal of the Trinamul rushed to Salt Lake (North) police station with her supporters to demand repolling in ward 11. At least three bombs were thrown near the Apeejay School booth in ward 11 and by noon all booths had been "captured". Mrs Mondal broke down, complaining that not a single Trinamul MP had come to her help.

There were reports of rigging in wards 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 14, 17, 21, 22 and 23. Residents said "outsiders" who had sneaked into Salt Lake mainly from North-24 Parganas were responsible.

Mr Alapan Bandopadhyay, North-24 Parganas district magistrate, claimed that polling in Salt Lake was "peaceful". So did the State Election Commissioner, Mr Anish Majumdar.

Dr UN Biswas, Joint Director of CBI, a voter from BJ Block, said there were many strangers in the locality and a bomb exploded near his polling booth.

In the heart of Calcutta, CPI-M cadres assaulted photographers near Mitra Institution when they tried to take a snap of Miss Mamata Banerjee casting her vote. Milan Dutta, reporter with Anandabazar Patrika, was beaten up by CPI-M men at FE municipal school. Mr Subhendu Ghosh, photographer with the Hindustan Times and Mr Subir Malakar, a Bartaman photographer, were heckled by CPI-M cadres outside booths.

State EC records high turnout ■ Stray violence in Calcutta

Rigging stains civic polls in Salt Lake

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 25. — Certified peaceful by the administration, polls to the Salt Lake municipality turned out to be a nightmare for voters today amid reports of large-scale rigging, bombing, intimidation and smashing of two EVMs. The CMC election was more disciplined, barring stray incidents of violence.

Calcutta Municipal Corporation elections recorded a 65 per cent turnout while Bidhanagar Municipality recorded 70 per cent, according to State Election Commission estimates.

The deputy chief minister, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, congratulated police and the people on the "peaceful" election. The election was peaceful, he said, because "the Trinamul Congress was scared today".

Mr Bhattacharya's party cadres, however, went on the rampage in several Salt Lake wards, targeting Trinamul workers and policemen. Even the media was not spared.

The high percentage of polling also may not have reflected people's participation. There

SFI leader, Mr Tamas Chatterjee, was hurt and admitted to NRS Hospital.

There were reports of stray violence in CMC areas. A middle-aged man, Ranjit Dey, died of shock when a bomb exploded near him at Patwarbagan in Amherst Street area. Three members of a family were hit by splinters on Balaram Dey Street when Congress workers threw bombs at Trinamul Congress leader, Mr Sanjoy Bakshi's residence. An old woman was hit by a splinter near a booth on Hariram Ram Goenka Street; so was a little girl near Ganesh Talkies.

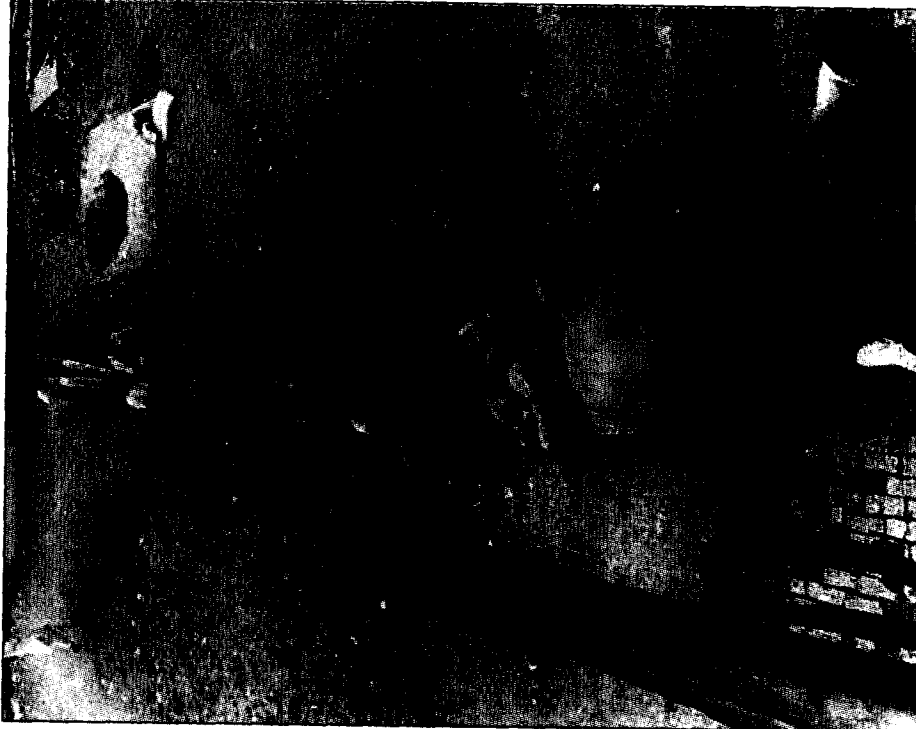
Bombs were thrown near

■ More poll reports, photographs on pages 3 & 4

Anjuman Girls' High School in Park Circus, Don Bosco School in Beniapukur areas, Gurudas College in Phulbagan, Marine House in Watgunj and Alochhhaya cinema in Beliaghata.

Mr Swapan Samaddar, the Trinamul's candidate against the mayor, Mr Prasanta Chatterjee, in ward 30 was

beaten by RAF personnel just before the polls. He was injured by insurgents. The BJP-led



Addressing a public meeting

defamation suit against the state Youth Congress chief and former minister, Mr Billal Miah, for his remarks against Mr Manik Sarkar.

Subhas not always wrong, says Buddha

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 25. — Mr Subhas Chakraborty seems to have found a sympathiser in Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya.

"Not everything that Subhas says is wrong", the deputy chief minister told reporters, explaining Trinamul Congress-BJP's increasing popularity.

"For rural farmers and urban intellectuals, there's no alternative to the Left Front. But the urban poor is against the LF. Because, one, being in power for 23 years we've become victims of the anti-incumbency factor. Two, today's urban youth ... thinks Trinamul-BJP can fulfil his aspirations. But this is a temporary phenomenon. We'll come up with a better public distribution system and self-employment schemes."

Is the Left Front incapable of meeting the needs of the people? Mr Bhattacharya said: "The alternative ... (is) to be more sympathetic, more democratic and more tolerant."

But isn't that what Mr Chakraborty has been saying? Mr Bhattacharya said he wasn't always wrong.

On the Trinamul, he said: "Those who worship Nathuram Godse and talk about the Mahatma can't provide any leadership. It's (Trinamul-BJP) no alliance. They have no



The CPI-M politician member said the Centre had remained a passive onlooker when common people were being killed by insurgents. The BJP-led

Pro-Trinamool MLAs face expulsion from House

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 26

THE EXPULSION of six Congress MLAs from the Assembly became inevitable today after they defied the party whip and abstained when the Congress adjournment motion on law and order was put to vote.

The six MLAs, including Subrata Mukherjee, Pankaj Banerjee, Ambica Banerjee, Rabin Mukherjee, Sadhan Pandey and Dilip Das followed the Trinamool Congress and BJP MLAs to stay away from voting on the motion—a stand taken by SUCI MLA Debaprasad Sarkar. This is the first time that the pro-Trinamool MLAs defied the Congress whip in the House, even though they had shared the platform with Mamata Banerjee on earlier occasions.

Leader of the Opposition, Atish Sinha, said his party would urge the Speaker to cancel the membership of these MLAs. Sinha did not name

the defectors, but said: "They have defected on the floor of the House and are liable to be disqualified as members under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution." Congress chief whip Abdul Mannan asked the Assembly secretary to provide him with the voting record to nail the defectors.

The Congress Legislative Party, however, reserved disciplinary steps against MLAs Sanjoy Bakshi, Sabuj Dutta, Tushar Mondol and

start while proceedings are complete for others," Sinha.

Mannan said: "Our motion had nothing to hurt the Trinamool or the BJP. It was directed against the administration. My friends have, in essence, endorsed the ruling party by staying away from voting."

The Trinamool loyalists followed Mamata Banerjee's advice to distance themselves from the CLP resolution, even though it was trimmed and terms such as 'Trinamool anti-socials' dropped to prevent a divide in the party. Unfazed by the CLP threat to cancel his House membership, Pankaj Banerjee criticised the motion for going silent on the CPI(M) terror in the districts where Trinamool supporters are being beaten up and their houses torched. "We will take to the streets to expose the tacit understanding between the Congress and the CPI(M)."

The Left Front voted the motion out. Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya argued that the violence was restricted to 11 of the 444 police stations.

Cong Whip Defied

Asoke Mukherjee, whom it did not serve a whip as the Speaker has already initiated disciplinary proceedings against them. These legislators are also learnt to have abstained from voting.

Pro-Trinamool legislators blamed the CLP for its double standards when it issued a whip to Mukherjee, whose membership is under scrutiny. "His is a separate case because the hearing is yet to

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 JUN 2000

Cong may play hard-to-get after civic elections

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 26

AFTER THE initial euphoria over the *Mahajot*, the Congress seems to have rediscovered its animosity towards the Trinamool Congress, simply to secure its political future.

The way the Congress has been pursuing a vigorous hate campaign against the Trinamool after a brief honeymoon seems to have come as a surprise to party workers, but it would be wrong to take it on face value. Congress leaders make Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee's maverick attitude entirely responsible for the souring of ties between the two. But there is more to it than meets the eye.

Congress leaders seem to be moving with a definite plan in mind. Their impressive showing in the earlier municipal polls has only confirmed the party belief that it still has a degree of relevance in State politics. It is clear that without Congress help, the Trinamool

will not be able to upset the CPI(M) applecart. And, Congress leaders are now cashing in on this political relevance, irrespective of its dwindling support base.

It is against this backdrop that the Calcutta Municipal Corporation polls have gained added importance. Party insiders confirm that the Congress game plan now hinges on the CMC poll results.

With the possibility that the Congress could play the role of a decider - in case neither the Left Front nor the Trinamool-BJP combine manages to get a majority on its own in the CMC - the Congress looks keen on playing a distancing game with the Trinamool. The party would now prefer to take a hard-line stance that may allow it to go into a hard bargaining position with the Trinamool, if the idea of a grand alliance is revived before the 2001 Assembly elections.

But the WBPCCC still remains

divided over the issue. A strong section of south Bengal leaders are open to the *Mahajot* even now to safeguard its own political future. But those from north Bengal are fiercely against the concept, simply because the Trinamool is stronger in the south than in the north. But even leaders, who once worked closely with Mamata Banerjee to make the *Mahajot* a reality, find it politically wiser to adopt a wait-and-see attitude before jumping on to the *Mahajot* bandwagon.

In the meantime, the Congress prefers to play the pressure game with the Trinamool, to which the Congress Legislature Party moves to isolate the pro-Trinamool Congress MLAs appear to be an example.

"We would like to deal with the Trinamool from a position of strength and make it clear that it will be wrong to take the Congress a weakening force that is ready to dance to her tunes," says a senior WBPCCC office-bearer.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 JUN 2000

Mamata against joining hands with Cong in CMC

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NAIHATI, June 26. — Trinamul Congress will not form the board in the Calcutta Municipal Corporation with the support of Congress even if such a situation arises, Miss Mamata Banerjee hinted today. The Trinamul would rather prefer to be in the Opposition.

The Trinamul chief said the 15 Congress MLAs who had defied their party whip on the floor of the Assembly will be given "hero's welcome" on 21 July. She stressed on the "people's grand alliance" instead of any alliance forged among political parties just to retain power.

The minister alleged that the

CPI-M rigged civic polls in Calcutta and Salt Lake with the help of their ministers. She said the people will reply to their "machinations" in the next Assembly polls.

The reports of rigging by the Left Front activists had been sent to the Governor and the Centre.

The railway minister was talking to reporters after laying the foundation stone for the construction of a new railway bridge at Naihati.

The 100-year-old Jubilee Bridge which required repairs would be replaced with the new bridge.

The project would cost about Rs 64.51 crore. At present, only a single line would be provided. Later, the double line facility

would be introduced to connect Naihati with Krishnagar and Howrah.

The new bridge has been named after Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.

The minister also said the new trains announced in the rail budget will be flagged off within the first week of July.

The unutilised lands around Naihati, Kanchrapara and adjoining areas would be used for the shopping complex. A permanent gallery on the life and works of Bankim Chandra would be set up at Naihati station.

The minister also urged the state government to name the Naihati station after Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.



Miss Mamata Banerjee

THE STATESMAN

21 JUN 70

Basu asks for Cong help

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

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22/6
CALCUTTA, June 28.
Overcoming its initial shock over the CMC poll results, the CPI-M has initiated a move to muster the magic number with outside support and stake claim to form the board.

In the process, the party heavyweights have begun exploring the idea of seeking support of the Congress and Independents to enable a depleted Front take over the CMC for another term.

In the evening, the state secretariat of the CPI-M met the top brass of the party's Calcutta district committee and held a preliminary discussion about the Left strategy on how to fight the mayoral election.

Party insiders say senior leaders are now divided on whether to seek direct support from the Congress at this juncture. While some party bosses are in favour of it, some hardliners are opposed to such a move.

Mr Jyoti Basu, however, told "We will definitely try to form the board in the CMC." Mr Basu admitted that the CMC results were not up to the expectations.

Addressing a press conference at Alimuddin Street, the CPI-M state secretary, Mr Anil Biswas, announced the LF would field its candidate for the mayoral election in the CMC. He, howev-



Having missed what the party thought was its calling, this CPM worker makes a call to find out just how low the party has sunk. — Bijoy Sengupta

er, refused to spell out the Left's strategy on this, saying this ~~was discussed and evolved~~ meeting to be held shortly.

LF insiders say there is still uncertainty whether the other constituents like the Forward Bloc and the RSP, whose pronounced policies equidistance from the BJP and the Congress, will finally agree to the CPI-M to seek either covert or overt support from the Congress, with 15 councillors, to enable

the LF to form the new board.

Yesterday, Mr Basu indicated preference for an understanding with the Congress to fight the 'communal' BJP and its allies. Given the situation, the Left has no other option other than seeking Congress support if it has to prevent the Trinamul-BJP combine from forming the CMC board.

In that case, either the Congress and some Independent councillors have to abstain during the mayoral election or

lend support to the LF directly

A similar move has already been initiated by the LF in its desperate bid to form the board in the hung Barasat municipality, where both the LF on the one hand and Trinamul and Congress on the other have 11 seats each.

LF insiders say the CPI-M has already initiated a move to reach a covert understanding with the Congress to help the LF form the board in Barasat.

Mr Sailen Dasgupta, the LF chairman said the details of the strategy for the LF in the mayoral election would be finalised only in the Front's committee meeting. He refused to specify whether the LF would directly seek Congress support.

Mr Anil Biswas denied the Panskura poll result had any impact on the twin civic body polls. The results of the CMC and Salt Lake polls also would not have any bearing on the next Assembly polls, he said.

Mr Biswas said the LF performance in the CMC polls was good, considering the last Lok Sabha results in the CMC areas where LF had led in only 25 wards. On the reduction of the Front's strength in the CMC in comparison to the last CMC polls, the CPI-M state party secretary said his party would do a post-mortem to find the reasons behind this.

He regretted the defeat of Mr Prasanta Chatterjee, the former mayor, saying he was an honest man.

THE STATESMAN

29 JUN 2000

Errant EVM holds key to Salt Lake

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 28. — Who forms the municipal board at Salt Lake now depends on what an electronic voting machine in ward 16, which developed a snag in the last stage of counting, has in store for the candidate.

The EVM in booth 3A, which developed a snag around 1 p.m., has been sealed off in the presence of

polling agents, said Mr Debashish Bose, sub-divisional officer, Salt Lake. "We'll know what to do only after an expert is brought in

from Hyderabad to repair the EVM," he said.

Votes counted with two other machines in ward 16 had shown the CPI-M's Mrs Gita Biswas as leading by 87 votes over the BJP's Mrs Barnali Sanyal, when this one was found defective. (Doordarshan and a private TV channel even reported Mrs Biswas had won;

the mistake was later rectified). The defective EVM would not give the break-up of votes, though its memory read 556 votes.

The CPI-M and Trinamul Congress have won 11 wards each in the 23-ward municipality, which means that the results in ward 16 are crucial to who controls the board.

The State Election Commission was contacted when the

EVM in booth 3A was found to have developed a snag. A computer mechanic was brought in two hours later, but had no luck with the machine.

As word got round, Mr Amitava Nandi, CPI-M North 24-Parganas district secretariat member, visited the booth to calm anxious party supporters. His advice for them was to keep vigil at the counting room.

The administrative official present assured him that the "machine was safe".

- Basu asks for Cong help, page 3
- Trinamul wave hits Basu's island, page 4
- City changes colour, page 4
- More photographs on pages 3 & 4

THE STATESMAN

JUN 29 1988

City deals big blow to Left Fro

29/6
 ■ Cong kingmaker in CMC ■ Salt Lake hangs on edge

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE 5/1

CALCUTTA, June 28. — Calcutta voters have given a severe jolt to the Left Front, returning a hung board that may go to the Trinamul with defections from the Congress. Its mayoral candidate trounced by 2000 votes, the Left Front with 60 seats is 11 short of majority in the 141-ward civic body.

In Salt Lake, the CPI-M and Trinamul Congress have secured 11 seats each; ward 16, where counting could not be completed because an EVM developed a snag, decides who controls the 23-ward municipality.

The Congress, with 15 CMC wards in its kitty, is now the deciding factor in Calcutta, where the Trinamul has emerged as a formidable force with 57 seats. The CPI-M plans to seek support from the Congress and Independents to form the board. Alimuddin Street will contest the mayor's post, probably banking on Congress councillors' abstentions.

The Trinamul has said it won't seek the Congress's support, but will accept support from Congress councillors in their "individual capacities". A late night report indicated the possibility of nine Congress councillors joining the Trinamul fold. Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury has convened a meeting tomorrow.

The five Independent winners are also key players in the game of board formation. The Trinamul has Mr Mantu Sanyal (ward 34) and another Independent on its side. It is



ONWARD TO WRITERS' NOW: Miss Mamata Banerjee at home on victory Wednesday. With the bouquet is Mr Subrata Mukherjee. — Sailendra Mal

not known what Mr Debasish Kumar (ward 85) of Trinamul Bachao Committee, and Mr Hridayanand Gupta (ward 45),

supported by Nationalist Congress Party, will do. The CPI-M can bank on Ms Anjana Ghosh (ward 47) of RJD.

CIVIC ELECTION RESULTS			
SALT LAKE		CMC	
Total wards	23	Total wards	141
Left Front	11	Left Front	60
Trinamul	11	Trinamul/BJP	57/4
Congress	Nil	Congress	15
Counting held up	1	Ind	5

The BJP, which contested 23 seats in Calcutta, has won four — an indication that it must yet depend on Miss Mamata Banerjee's party for its political existence in the city.

Mr Jyoti Basu had stayed away from the campaigning, and the results are being viewed as a reflection on the ability of second generation leaders to steer an election without the octogenarian.

Mr Prasanta Chatterjee's defeat was a major upset, the more so since all the Left Front mayors-in-council have won — a message to Alimuddin Street that party symbol played second fiddle to performance. Mr Chatterjee had often been considered an ineffectual mayor. Ward 30 in Beliaghata rejected the mayor for the sitting Trinamul councillor.

The refugee colony areas spread over Jadavpur and Tollygunge gave a clear verdict of their rejection of the Left Front. Even BJP candidates fared well in areas considered Left bastions till recently — Mr

Kulendu Som of CPI-M lost to an unknown BJP candidate in ward 96. Mayor-in-council Archana Bhattacharya managed a narrow win by about 150 votes in ward 98. Mr Prahlad Chakrabarty and Ms Shyamali Bhadra of Trinamul wrested wards 97 and 95 from the CPI-M.

In the added areas of Behala, Jadavpur and Garden Reach, the CPI-M got 23 seats, Trinamul 13 and Congress 4. The Left lost three seats to the Trinamul, betraying a remarkable erosion in its support base. In Behala, CPI-M retained its 1995 tally of six seats; the Trinamul got 10 and Congress two.

The Trinamul Bachao Committee, which has won ward 85, could be a crucial player in post-election alliances. Its leader, Mr Arun Hazra, was cautious in his reaction: "We will make a decision on Sunday." He refused to comment when asked whether his party would oppose Trinamul even if that helped the Front.

Left Front's in the race, says Anil

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 28

"WE WILL field our own Mayor candidate. We will decide on the name at the next Left Front meeting," CPI(M) State secretary Anil Biswas said here today.

Ruling out an alliance with the Congress, that he claimed had won 15 wards, Biswas was silent on roping in rebel Left and Trinamool councillors, who might be instrumental in helping either of the political combines in forming the board.

Unfazed by the reverses in the CMC polls, Biswas insisted that the Left Front had fared better in these civic polls compared with its performance in Calcutta in the last Lok Sabha elections. "These results will have no impact on the coming Assembly polls," he said.

Forward Bloc State secretary Asoke Ghosh, however, does not want to cling to power. "Although there is no clear mandate for any political alliance, the Left should not go for any opportunistic alliance to stake claim."

The Forward Bloc leader conceded that his party was the worst hit in the civic polls, where it could retain only Ward 29 of the four. It had won in the last elections.

State CPI assistant secretary Himangshu Das was candid enough to admit that Left had suffered major reverses. "We have to review the results and draw lessons from it as to why we got a rebuff

electorate even after firing major development work, however, got wind of the last Lok Sabha and their elections. The Left has a sharp to regain the faith of voters," Das said.

As far as the SP saw nothing wrong in the six wards, its State secretary Debabrata Banerjee says that the Trinamool suffers from erosion in its votebank in the Left. "We have been restoring our votebank and our position in Behala. Trinamool has got 9 lakh votes in the 24 lakh votes polled in the city, which is far less than the polled during the last elec-

tion organisation let it down: The Front's "weak" organisation is the reason for its defeat in the CMC polls, State Minister for Municipal Affairs Ashok Mukherjee said today.

The Front in the metropolitan area is not as strong as it was in 1991, the Front hasn't been doing well in the CMC elections, he said.

But the Trinamool's claim that it had captured the civic polls in Calcutta and Salt Lake has been frustrated, he said.

However, described the Front's success in winning 62 seats in CMC and 11 in Salt Lake as "important". The Front bagged 62 seats, trailing behind the Trinamool, which got 64 in the civic polls.

Salt Lake results at a glance

votes beat Rebecca Sultana

Ward 1 Sukumar Ghosh (Trinamool) with 1092 votes beat Satipati Chatterjee

Ward 2 Gopa Banerjee (Trinamool) with 1619 votes beat Mira Majumdar

Ward 3 Ujjal Das (Trinamool) with 1049 votes beat Debmalya Roy

Ward 4 Ratanath Chand (CPM) with 1616 votes beat Dulal Mondal

Ward 5 Ashok Mukherjee (Trinamool) with 1040 votes beat Sikha Dasgupta

Ward 6 Manjula Banerjee (Trinamool) with 1014 votes beat Mukti Bhowmick

Ward 7 Anupam Dutta (Trinamool) with 971 votes beat Arniya Sen

Ward 8 Debashis Jana (Trinamool) with 886 votes beat Shibdan Chatterjee

Ward 9 Maya Manigram (CPM) with 2278 votes beat

Ward 10 Sabyasachi Dutta (Trinamool) with 1452 votes beat Dilip Ghosh

Ward 11



Anita Mondal (Trinamool) with 1447 votes beat Nandagopal Bhattacharya

Ward 12 Tulsi Sinha Roy (Trinamool) with 1384 votes beat Ira Chatterjee

Ward 13 Sudhansu Ganguly (Independent) supported by CPM with 641 votes beat Swarup Bhuyan

Ward 14 Soma Pramanik (CPM) with 2019 votes beat Chameli Naskar

Ward 15 Anil Gupta (CPM) with 3471 votes beat Ajit Mukherjee

Ward 16 Results not declared

Ward 17 Chandan Ghosh (CPM) with 1474 votes beat Banibrata Banerjee

Ward 18 Tapan Talukdar (CPM) with 1733 votes beat Swarup Kundu

Ward 19 Lakshmi Sil (CPM) with 1504 votes beat Rekha Chakrabarti

Ward 20 Minu Chakrabarti (Trinamool) with 2156 votes beat Sitanshu Datta

Ward 21 Himanshu Basu (CPM) with 2393 votes beat Panchali Panchowdhury

Ward 22 Animesh Bor (CPM) with 1859 votes beat Narayan Mondal

Ward 23 L Nandi (CPM) with 4145 votes beat Kalpana Banerjee

Ups and downs in the ballot battle

29/6 MF-3

The Winners

Subrata Mukherjee



A former State Minister and a prominent IN T U C leader, won the Assembly seat on a Congress ticket but switched over to Trinamool when Mamata Banerjee was riding the crest of popularity wave. Trinamool's mayoral candidate, Mukherjee, who is still technically a Congress MLA, is facing charges under the anti-defection law.

Ajay (Mantu) Sanyal

A dissident CPI(M) leader of Beliaghata, now leading Marxbadi Mancha, he got the better of his erstwhile comrade Rajib Biswas with Trinamool support.

Paresh Pal



Congress MLA from Manicktalla and State Youth Congress president, he almost had one foot in the Trinamool Congress until the party high command shot down the Mahajot idea.

Had a smooth sailing in the civic poll because Trinamool did not put up a candidate against him.

Mala Roy

A member of Mamata Banerjee's inner coterie, she was the Trinamool's Chief Whip in the outgoing council. As feisty as her mentor, she has a reputation of being a people's councillor.

Kanti Ganguly

Widely hailed as the man behind giving the city a clean

face, his win was a foregone conclusion despite his predominant role against the hawkers in Operation Sunshine.

Archana Bhattacharjee

A winner for the fourth consecutive time, she was the member, mayor-in-council (water supply) in the outgoing council and has a good track record.

Pradip Ghosh

A central Calcutta protégé of Somen Mitra, he was the leader of the Opposition in the CMC till he crossed over to Trinamool a few months back.

Dilip Kumar Gupta



Chairman of Bidhannagar municipality in the last board and a successful lawyer, he nursed his constituency well to sail through the elections.

Swapan Samaddar

A second-time councillor, he defeated heavyweight candidate Prasanta Chatterjee in ward 30 by playing the 'outsider' card against the "manhole mayor".

The Losers

Prasanta Chatterjee



Two-time mayor and a councillor dating back to the 1960s, has wide experience in urban issues like slum development which few others may claim.

Chatterjee was none too willing to contest this time since his previous constituency had been reserved for women.

His loss is likely to rankle ruling party the most.

Md Yakub

A veteran winner of municipal elections and Forward Bloc MLA, was won by a party deserter Elias Islam who contested as a Congress candidate.

Zeba Nasreen



Trinamool candidate for ward 60, hogged the media limelight by being daughter-in-law of former CPI(M) MLA,

Nizamuddin. Quoted 'D' far too often but without much success.

Tarak Singh

A Trinamool strongman and a constant thorn in the side of the ruling Left in the outgoing council, he lost because he refused to change his constituency when he was up against a formidable opponent in Sailen Dasgupta of Congress.

Ajit Mukherjee

Retired IAS officer and West Bengal cadre, took a plunge as an Independent candidate with support from Trinamool.

Mukherjee was projected to be chair of Bidhannagar municipal case Trinamool for the board.

Partha Roy Choudhury

Leader of the Congress municipal party, fought against Mamata Banerjee in the last parliamentary elections.

Nandagopal Bhattachary

A sitting councillor and brother-in-law of Transport Minister Subhas Chakraborty, Bhattacharyya is the secretary of the CPI(M)'s Bidhannagar local committee.

JUN 2000

Salt Lake fate locked in faulty machine

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 28

A TECHNICAL snag in the voting machine used in Ward 16 of the Bidhannagar Municipality has kept the Left Front on tenterhooks as experts are being flown in from Hyderabad.

As counting on that machine was stalled midway, votes cast by 565 residents of the posh FD Block of Ward 16 on Sunday stood between victory and defeat for the Left Front in Salt Lake.

The fate of the votes lay recorded in the control unit of database of the electronic voting machine (EVM) employed at Booth No. 3A of Ward 16. The snag developed this afternoon just as the CPM candidate had edged past his nearest rival.

Ward 16, with a 4841-strong electorate, was one of the few wards where the Trinamool and the BJP formed an alliance and the former had left the ward to the BJP.

Till 2.30 pm, CPI (M) candidate Gita Biswas had 1296 votes recorded in her favour with BJP candidate Banani Sanyal trailing behind by only 87 votes.

North 24 Parganas District Magistrate Alapan Bandyopadhyay, who is also the Returning Officer for the civic elections at Salt Lake, said hardware and software experts would be flying in from Hyderabad—where the machines are manufactured—tomorrow to fix the snag.

The decision to bring in outside help was taken after two futile attempts by local experts to untangle the problem. If the snag was not corrected by tomorrow evening repolling at the booth might be considered, Bandyopadhyay said.

The Trinamool-BJP camp believes that the majority of the 565 votes would go to Sanyal, given that most residents of FD Block are affluent and are non-Bengalis. Going by that logic, even if a repoll is held, the seat would be bagged by the BJP.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 JUN 2000

Subrata soars on Didi's magic

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 28

THE ABIR matched the kurta: both were bottle-green. The delirious celebration matched the convincing margin: 1,400 votes. Subrata Mukherjee, Trinamool Congress winner from Ward 87, matched the image of mayor-apparent: confident and full of benediction.

At 2.30 pm outside the Rabindra Sarovar Stadium counting station this afternoon, his supporters burst into song and broke into impromptu jigs as the result came out. Mukherjee arrived 15 minutes later. That was all that the crowd needed.

First-time contestant in a civic poll and first-time winner he may be, but Mukherjee is no stranger to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. He ran it as a minister when the Congress was in power in the mid-'70s. That might sound like a contradiction. But contradiction is Mukherjee's handmaiden. A Congress MLA and Trinamool mayor-candidate, he has been show-caused by the Speaker only recently for the dichotomy.

That's not all. Known to be not on the most cordial of terms with Mamata Banerjee till not so long ago (many have not forgotten the uncharitable remarks he had made about her), this is what he had to say about the Trinamool chief today: "The next five years will see the Mamata magic. Though I am the Mayor of Calcutta, Mamata Banerjee will be my guiding force. Just like Mamata has done a won-

Man Who Would Be Mayor

derful job with the Railway Ministry, she will again prove her mettle in guiding the CMC."

Outside Mamata's Harish Chatterjee Street home later, the Railway Minister paid back the compliment. "Meet your new Mayor and help him make Calcutta a beautiful place to live in. Subrata Mukherjee has done us proud by winning his seat."

Before that, in the afternoon, the euphoria had spilled over at Rabindra Sarovar. Mukherjee was borne aloft on the shoulders of party workers. There was a hope-

filled look ahead. "I was very tense because I had never contested corporation polls before. Here, the number of voters is so small and the margin so thin that only a handful of votes can seal your fate. Considering that this was a traditional Congress seat and even the CPI(M) had used all its resources to ensure victory for its man, my victory is unimaginable. The credit for this goes to Mamata Banerjee and the people of this city," Mukherjee said, voice choked with emotion.

But how does it feel to be Mayor? "It is a great feeling. But I have a tremendous responsibility and we have to do a lot of work before going to the Assembly polls. With Mamata in-charge and our manifesto as the guideline, we will definitely give Calcutta a new look," he said.

"Water supply, conservancy, and sewerage will be in our priority list. We are working on an action plan for Calcutta. It will be finalised within a few days," he added.

The promises flowed this afternoon, as did the rhetoric. After all, it was Subrata's hour of sweet victory.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29/6/11

Mamata leaves Left red-faced again

- Trinamool-BJP single largest group in CMC
- Mayor Prasanta Chatterjee among losers

Arindam Sarkar
Calcutta, June 28

AFTER PANSKURA, Calcutta, Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee went one giant step forward in her battle to unseat the Jyoti Basu-led Left Front Government in West Bengal by emerging victorious in the prestigious Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) elections, but falling short of a majority by just four seats. According to figures released by Writers' Buildings, the Trinamool-BJP alliance has captured 67 wards out of the total of 141 seats. The Left Front came a close second with 62 wards and the Congress a distant third with just 12 seats.

In neighbouring Bidhannagar Municipality, too, Mamata Banerjee upset all calculations and gave the Left Front a run for its money. In the 23-ward board, both the Left Front and the Trinamool are tied at 11 wards each. The crucial results of one seat has not been declared due to a fault in the voting machine.

As the final results came in, Banerjee announced triumphantly that the Trinamool-BJP combine would form the CMC board. "After a gap of 15 years, the Opposition has managed to storm the Left bastion. This is a creditable performance by the Trinamool Congress. The people have clearly indicated that they are no longer with the Left Front," she added.

But the Left is not willing to give up the battle for the CMC so easily. After a hastily-convened CPI(M) State secretariat meeting, the party claimed that forming the board was still an open game. Anil Biswas, the CPI(M) State secretary, both the Left Front and the Trinamool had won 61 seats each, the Congress and four seats went to Independents.

The Congress too claims that it has won 15 seats and that the Trinamool alone was not in a position to form the civic board. "We definitely want an anti-Left board but the Trinamool Congress should approach us. Since

the Trinamool has emerged as the largest party in the civic elections, if Mamata Banerjee talks with our president Ghani Khan Chowdhury we are willing to support them. The results clearly show that Trinamool alone cannot form the board in CMC. And it also shows that to defeat the Left Front in Bengal, the Trinamool

cannot ignore the Congress," said PCC general secretary Sultan Ahmed.

But as of now, Banerjee has ruled out any such possibility. She said that the Trinamool would not take the help of the Congress to form the civic board. Instead, she was more worried about her party's poor performance in the North-East and North-West parliamentary constituencies of Calcutta. But the Trinamool performed very well in Banerjee's own constituency, South Calcutta, and the Added Areas.

The CPI(M)'s poor performance in the Added Areas, which are traditional CPI(M) strongholds, and South Calcutta sealed the Left's fate. However, the CPI(M) did well in the Muslim-dominated areas of Garden Reach and Matiabruz. The Congress managed to win a few seats from central Calcutta and the Muslim-belt in Park Circus.

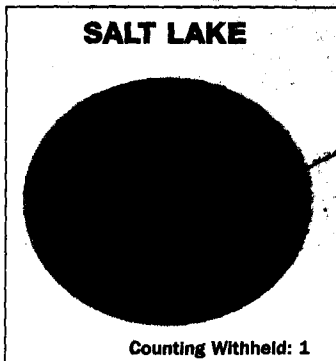
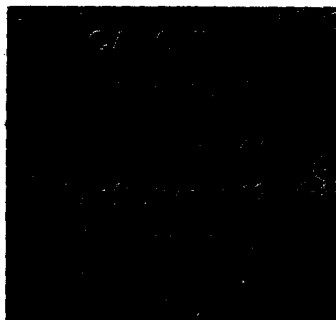
The coming two days will witness hectic lobbying by the CPI(M) and the Trinamool to win over the Independents and the Congress in order to form the civic board in Calcutta. If the CPI(M) is keeping its cards close to its chest, so is the Trinamool. "Just wait and watch," is all that Banerjee is willing to say at the moment.

Undeterred by the reverses in the CMC elections, CPI(M) State secretary Anil Biswas insisted that the Left Front was still in the race. "We will field a candidate for the Mayor's post. The name will be decided on at the next Left Front meeting," he said.

CPI(M) ally, Forward Bloc, however, does not want the Front to go in for any unprincipled alliance. "Although there is no clear mandate, the Front should not make any unprincipled compromises to form the board," party leader Asok Ghosh said.

He conceded that his party had hit the rock bottom in these elections. The party managed to retain only one of the four wards it had won the last time.

CPI leader Himangshu Das said that it was time for the party to draw lessons from the elections.



- On Page 3**
- The man who muddled the Mayor
 - Parleys on to dent Cong camp
 - Ups and downs in ballot battle
- On Page 5**
- Left Front still in the race, claims Anil
 - Sleeping over a photo finish in Salt Lake
- On Page 12**
- CMC poll result adds to Left's woes

Congress holds key to power in Calcutta

9-8-11
WB

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29/6

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, June 28: Faced with two choices, Calcutta made three. In a civic poll high in thrill value, the city (a) voted out the Left (b) favoured Mamata but added a rider — (c) that she must dump the BJP for the Congress.

In Salt Lake where 23 wards were at stake, the Left and Trinamul were tied when an electronic voting machine apparently conked out, leaving the winner of ward 16 undecided amid a host of unanswered questions.

The tragedy of this election is that even three days after the polls, there is no official announcement of the results. The State Election Commission headed by Anish Majumdar did not make any proclamation even after counting was over. This has created a situation in which none of the parties is confident of the number of seats they have won in an election that is too close to call. Majumdar did not take calls to clarify the position. What is certain is that the Left has lost its majority.

Chief minister Jyoti Basu, who, in a remarkable act of prescience, had stayed away from the campaign, said: "We did badly in the polls in Calcutta and Salt Lake because of our failure to respond to people's expectations."

Flower-power matched sickle-force ward for ward, booth for booth as the results tardily trickled out of the counting centres. It was only in the evening that the fractured mandate for the corporation's 141-seat council revealed that the anti-incumbency factor had the Left tottering.

THE TALLY

	CMC	Salt Lake
Total	141	23
TMC + BJP	61	11
Left Front	60	11
Congress	14	0
Ind	6	0

* Unofficial results at 10 pm. One result held up in Salt Lake

Realising the muddled verdict may make it difficult for them to stake a decisive claim to form the Calcutta municipal board, the CPM and the Trinamul-BJP combine furiously crunched numbers and prepared themselves for what looks like unavoidable horsetrading in the days ahead.

A pointer to the shape of things came from Basu who urged the Congress' national leadership for the second time in 24 hours to help the Left stop Trinamul from forming the civic board.

Together, non-Left candidates won in 81 wards, mirroring, with minor aberrations, the trend in voting in the last Lok Sabha polls in which all three Calcutta seats were picked up by Trinamul.

Once again after the municipal polls in district towns, Congressmen surprised themselves by winning 14 wards. Additionally enjoying the support of an Independent, the Congress now holds the key to control over the corporation. In New Delhi, a party spokesman said: "The Congress will maintain equidistance from Trinamul and the Left."

Asked if such a policy will not drive some councillors away, one

leader in Delhi said: "As long as the BJP is part of the TMC set-up, we cannot support it. We cannot stop persons who have made up their mind to leave the party." Even before the Congress has assessed its own performance, a section of its councillors has indicated it will support the TMC-BJP.

Late tonight, a meeting was going on at the residence of a Trinamul leader to persuade about five Congress councillors to support Mamata's candidate for mayor.

But the CPM is not giving up. State secretary Anil Biswas said the party would contest the mayor's post — a poll to be held among the councillors by secret ballot.

Mamata was in no doubt her party was forming the board. "I am delighted with the results," she said as supporters mobbed her in her Kalighat home and sprinkled green *abir*. "In Jyoti Basu's ward, the CPM has lost; in my ward (73), my candidate has polled the highest number of votes. Our candidate for mayor (Subrata Mukherjee) has been elected. Their mayor (Prasanta Chatterjee) has lost."

But the Trinamul-BJP combine failed to make the mark on its own. Had Mamata allied with the Congress and dumped the BJP, she would have gone past the halfway mark with much to spare.

Mamata has, of course, ruled out severing ties with the BJP. She has also said she will have no truck with Congress. "There is no possibility of us forming the board with Congress support. But individual Congress councillors are welcome to join us," she said in a thinly-veiled invitation.

■ See Page 6 and Metro

THE TELEGRAPH

7 JUN 2000

Ghani won't go Left, Mamata welcomes all

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 29

STATE CONGRESS president SABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury today made it clear that his party would not help the Left Front form the CMC board, but remained non-committal on extending support to the Trinamool Congress.

The Trinamool-BJP alliance, on the other hand, moved a step closer towards capturing the prestigious civic body after three Independent councillors - Hridaynath Gupta, Aparna Roy and Ajay Sanyal - joined the Trinamool. With these gains, the Trinamool strength in the CMC has risen to 65 making it the single-largest party. The Left claims it has 61 seats.

Though Mamata Banerjee today said there was no question of seeking Congress support, she clarified

that she was not averse to accepting help from individuals in that party. "I am not into horse-trading. We don't have a single paise to spare. There

is no question of going to anybody. All those who want to throw the CPI(M) out are welcome to help our mayoral candidate."

She said a number of councillors were willing to back her man for Mayor. "I won't tell you the names now. But parleys are on and on the day of the election, the names would be made public. I want to form the board as soon as possible. A lot of work needs to be done. I am in a hurry."

Chowdhury, perhaps eager to dispel the notion that his party was the CPI(M)'s B-team, said: "As for the CPI(M) our decision is clear. But we have not decided on the Trinamool. So far, nobody has approached us. Mamata has not spoken to me. I am waiting and watching. This morning I spoke to Sonia Gandhi. I will keep updating her on the latest. But, so far, she has not issued any directive."

The PCC chief today met mem-

bers of his party's CMC election panel and other senior leaders. The newly-elected councillors and seniors made up their mind not to support the CPI(M). They dropped broad hints that they would abstain from voting.

The discussions at the meeting centred on the question of supporting the Trinamool candidate for Mayor. Of the 15 Congress councillors, nine are Muslims. And, the minority community councillors clearly said they would not extend support to Mamata, for her party has an alliance with the BJP. "Under no circumstances will the Muslim councillors vote for the Trinamool. That leaves us with six. They might go any way," a party insider said.

Former State Congress president Somen Mitra, however, dismissed rumours that the Congress would split at the time of voting. "The Congress is united and it will follow

the PCC chief's directives. I foresee no cross-voting, because the councillors have left it to the PCC chief to decide on the course of action."

The insider confirmed that at the meeting Mitra went all out to persuade party councillors from voting for the Trinamool's mayoral nominee, Subrata Mukherjee. He apparently blamed Mamata for the Mahajot fiasco and to get even with her, insisted that the Trinamool dump the BJP, if it was interested in his party's support. But senior leaders, keen on reviving the moves for a Grand Alliance, shot down Mitra's idea.

But insiders did not discount the possibility of cross-voting. Chowdhury himself wondered: "How can I say what the councillors will do? Only they will decide their course of action." A party leader said that since the board will not be formed before July 15. "Where is the hurry? Given time, they might increase their numbers. Ultimately, they might not need our support at all," CLP chief whip Abdul Mannan said.

LF divided over bid for CMC board

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 29

THE LEFT is divided over Big Brother CPI(M)'s decision to try and explore possibilities of forming the CMC board. Although the Front is unanimous on the issue of contesting the mayoral elections, a sizeable section within the LF and the CPI(M) is unhappy with Chief Minister Jyoti Basu's appeal to the Congress to bail it out. Especially after the State Congress has made it clear that it will not extend support to the Left Front under any circumstances.

Asked to comment on Basu's appeal to the Congress, CPI State secretary Manju Majumdar said: "Why should we ask for Congress support beforehand? We have decided to field our candidate (for the Mayor's post) and anyone is free to vote for us."

Forward Bloc State secretary Asoke Ghosh maintains that the Chief Minister's appeal to the Congress has no value as the Pradesh Congress has more or less decided to abstain from voting during the mayoral elections.

It was the powerful CPI(M) State secretary Anil Biswas who set the ball rolling soon after the results were out by saying that "no one was an untouchable" to them. The CPI(M) will appeal to all political parties and Independents to support the Left Front mayoral nominee, Biswas said.

CPI(M) insiders say that a section of the party led by Basu is desperately trying to woo some Congress councillors, mainly from the Khidderpore and Behala areas, and also a couple of disgruntled Trinamool Congressmen.

But this move has come under fire from a group that is not opposed to putting up a mayoral candidate, but would like the Front to stay away from any unscrupulous alliance that would tarnish the party's image.



THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 JUN 2000

Middle classes still back Left Front

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 29

THE LEFT continues to be a party of the middle and lower middle classes. And nowhere is this more apparent than in Salt Lake, with its more or less clearly-defined areas - a number of blocks populated by mostly affluent people, the housing colonies by the middle classes and the Added Areas by the lower middle classes and the poor. The CPI(M) has bagged nearly all the wards populated by the middle, lower middle and the poor people.

But even though the Trinamool Congress has been able to upset the CPI(M)'s appellation in West Bengal's most prestigious address, a statistical analysis of the results can give the CPI(M) some cause for

cheer. Despite the CPI(M)'s tally reaching 11 as against 13 in the last civic polls in 1995, the party's vote share has increased. In 1995, the Left Front candidates polled 44 per cent of the votes cast while this year, the figure stands at 46.35 per cent. More so, since the poll percentage has fallen from 77.4 per cent in 1995 to 69.41 per cent this time.

The Congress, expectedly, has been the biggest loser this time. It could not bag any of the 22 seats and has no chance of winning the 23rd—a debilitating climb-down from the 10 seats it won last time. The Congress' vote share this time is 7.05 per cent, down from 43.8 per cent last time. The only face-saver for the party can be that the BJP polled even fewer votes

with a vote share of 6.89 per cent. Congress candidates did manage to secure the runners-up position in two wards—3 and 21.

The results of the civic polls were also an embarrassing defeat for Union Minister of State for Telecommunications. Sikdar, who was held responsible for the break-

Poll Analysis

down of poll alliance negotiations between the BJP and Trinamool by the latter, had put his reputation at stake in Salt Lake. He had campaigned vigorously and predicted that he alone would be able to deliver at least eight wards to his party's kitty.

Interestingly, most of the wards bagged by the CPI(M) had registered a high turnout of voters, with Ward 15, which returned CPI(M)

candidate and Municipal Chairman Dilip Kumar Gupta, registering the highest at 87.75 per cent. Most wards won by the CPM were also the ones from where reports of violence and false voting, allegedly by CPI (M) cadres, came in.

The highest victory margin was claimed by CPI(M) candidate at Ward 23, Ila Nandi, who thrashed her Trinamool-BJP supported rebel CPI(M) candidate Kalpana Banerjee by a margin of 2692 votes. The lowest victory margin was at Ward 13, where the CPI(M) supported Independent candidate scraped through with 60 votes.

The results were a setback for the Subhas Chakraborty camp. Chakraborty's brother-in-law, Nandagopal Banerjee, lost by 21 votes to Trinamool's Aita Mondol.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

0 JUN 2000

CPM divided over mayoral pitch

BY TAMAL SENGUPTA

The CPM's decision to contest the Calcutta Municipal Corporation's election for the mayor's chair has surprised many in the party.

Though the party and the Left Front have failed to manage the required number to form the Calcutta civic board, state secretary Anil Biswas and Politburo member Biman Bose announced on Wednesday that they will put up a candidate for the post of mayor.

Both Biswas and Bose justified the CPM's contesting the mayor's chair by saying that neither the Front nor the Trinamul-BJP combine would be able to form the board independently.

Party insiders said leaders like Subhas Chakraborty, Rabin Deb and Kanti Ganguly have been pressed into service to gauge the mood of the Congress and Independent councillors and whether

Senior leaders warn against playing into Congress hands

they would like to vote in favour of the CPM to form the board.

But many senior leaders in the CPM's state and Calcutta district committees, like Surya Kanta Misra and Naren Sen, feel the decision to contest the mayoral election will go against the party. They believe the party should accept the situation and take a lesson from it, rather than indulge in horse-trading.

Senior leaders felt it will also be difficult for the party to manage support in the election for the mayor from either the Congress or the Independent councillors.

If the party fails to mobilise support from the Congress, it will suffer further embarrassment.

"This defeat will be more hu-

miliating than our failure to retain control in the CMC," a senior Calcutta district committee leader said.

CPM leaders who do not support the party's decision to contest the mayoral election also feel that the Trinamul-BJP combine will use this as a major plank against the party in the 2001 Assembly polls. They feel that the Trinamul-BJP combine should be allowed to form the board and the CPM's duty would be to oppose them politically.

CPM state secretary Anil Biswas said on Thursday that the party was firm on its decision to contest the mayoral election.

He said the CPM nominee would be decided at a meeting of

the Left Front.

Biswas parried a question whether the CPM was expecting support from the Congress to prevent the Trinamul-BJP combine from forming the board. "Let the Congress finalise its decision. We will then decide our course of action," he added.

When informed about the Congress' decision of not supporting the Front in forming the board, Biswas said: "If Congress wants to stop us from forming the board, they can do that."

Observers feel the CPM is not very serious about forming the board because it knows it is far short of the required majority and it will play into the Congress councillors' hands.

Observers also feel that the CPM is trying to pressure the Trinamul-BJP combine into forming the board by threatening to fight the mayoral poll.

THE TELEGRAPH

30 JUN 2000

Experts' verdict awaited on ward 16 faulty voting machine

Salt Lake stuck in snag suspense

BY A STAFF REPORTER

Who will rule Salt Lake? Four days after the Bidhannagar municipality went to the polls, the all-important question remains unanswered — the fate of the township precariously poised on the electronic voting machine (EVM) of ward 16.

The score at the end of Thursday was tied at 11-all for the CPM and the Trinamul as the machine, which had developed a "technical snag" on Wednesday, could not be repaired. The state election commission awaits the verdict of a team of experts that arrived from New Delhi and Hyderabad on Thursday night.

"I had written to B.H. Ron, chairman and managing director of Electronics Corporation of India Ltd (ECIL), manufacturers of the voting machine, urging him to send engineers immediately," said state election commissioner

Anish Majumdar. The experts will examine the faulty machine on Friday morning, in the presence of the candidates, party representatives, election commission officials and the media.

The Election Commission of India has also been formally informed, as the machines were purchased by the commission. A team from Delhi is expected in the city on Friday.

The much-touted EVM, introduced for the first time in the last Lok Sabha elections, had gone on the blink at a critical juncture, with CPM nominee Gita Biswas leading Banani Sanyal of BJP by 86 votes, as per results

from four booths of the ward, and 565 votes waiting to be counted in the fifth booth.

Throughout Thursday, the sealed EVM remained under constant vigil. Hundreds of people,

including several 'outsiders', gathered at the offices of the district magistrate and the SDO, eager to know when the machine would be repaired and the counting resumed. While Left Front cadre appeared apprehensive of losing their grip over Salt Lake

once counting resumed, BJP supporters were left anticipating their "first seat in Salt Lake".

"What happens if the experts

from Delhi and Hyderabad fail to repair the machine? How will ward 16 be decided then?" was the most common query.

"The EVM is a very sophisticated gadget and has been introduced here recently. So, only the manufacturer can sort out the problems," said Majumdar. "And why are you thinking of the worst-case scenario? We are trying our best..."

But what will happen if the machine continues to malfunction? While some polling experts feel a repoll in the booth must be ordered, others claim that would be "unfair", as voters would be influenced by the Calcutta Municipal Corporation results that have been declared. The other option is to conduct a repoll in all Bidhannagar wards, which also may not be feasible. "I can not promise anything, nor can I predict the outcome. But something will happen on Friday, let's hope for the best," concluded Majumdar.

HARD COPY
Gita Biswas, councillor of ward no. 17 and Trinamul Congress candidate for mayor, will meet readers of The Telegraph and answer their queries at 65, Southern Avenue at 7 pm on Saturday. All are welcome

THE TELEGRAPH

20 10 100

Bengal Congress rejects Basu's plea for support

The Times of India News Service

CALCUTTA: With the West Bengal Congress on Thursday formally turning down the appeal by chief minister Jyoti Basu to support the Left Front, the Trinamul Congress appears as the frontrunner in the race to form the Calcutta Municipal Corporation board.

Mr Basu appealed to the state Congress to keep up its spirit of fighting communal forces and to support the Left Front candidate in the elections for the post of mayor in the civic body.

"Congress is the deciding factor in forming the board. If they do not support us, we shall sit in the opposition," Mr Basu told reporters at Calcutta airport before leaving for Tel Aviv.

CPM state secretary Anil Biswas said that the Left Front would "appeal to all political parties" to support the Left Front candidate for the post of mayor.

The Congress, however, rejected the appeal and decided not to support the Left Front, keeping its option open for lending support to the

Trinamul Congress. The party welcomed the "anti-Left Front verdict" of the people of Calcutta.

"We have not been approached by any political party yet. So our option to support any party or alliance in forming the board in the CMC is still open," state Congress president A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury said, adding that a decision on the issue might come "within a day or two". He ruled out the possibility of defections from the 15 party councillors to the Trinamul Congress camp.

During the meeting between senior state Congress leaders and newly-elected councillors, ten of the 13 councillors present said that the party should not support the Trinamul Congress in forming the board.

An upbeat Mamata Banerjee was confident that the Trinamul Congress-BJP combine, along with four independents, would come to power in the CMC. Ms Banerjee stated that she was in no mood to dump her electoral ally during the meeting of the newly elected Trinamul Congress councillors.

GRASSROOT SUPPORT

Ordinary voters reject the Left

DESPITE the uncertainty about the odd figure for Calcutta Corporation elections and uncertainty about the formation of the board, one thing is quite clear — that the people have voted against the Left Front, the moral, and probably actual, victory is Mamata Banerjee's. Given the numbers, and political compulsions, several scenarios are possible. It is probable that Trinamul will form the board. In this event, individual Congressmen will have to join Trinamul, since the Congress high command will not extend official support to Trinamul. Budgeting two independents for Trinamul, they will still need eight Congressmen. Paresh Pal and a few others can be counted upon to join Mamata Banerjee's triumphant bandwagon. Sultan Ahmed controls three councillors from the Muslim-dominated areas of central Calcutta. He is *mahajot*-minded and could jump Trinamul's way. However, Congress success in this area is a rejection specifically of Trinamul because of its BJP connection. That could be a deterrent. Somen Mitra, similarly minded, has a few councillors in hand. It is not entirely certain that he will go with Trinamul. If the Congress issues a whip to support the Left, which has been obliquely hinted at by central leaders, the resolve of Trinamul-minded elements to stymie the Left will be strengthened. It will accelerate desertions from the party, leading to the demise of the state Congress. But the Left is not going to give up its milch cow easily. It will deploy all its resources to checkmate Mamata. Jyoti Basu has publicly sought Congress support. This can be of long-term national significance. Fundamental issues of policy are involved. If the CPI-M wishes to revive a united front strategy at the national level, this is a test case of sorts.

The anti-Left mood is starkly underlined by the Salt Lake results. The anti-Left vote there was split three ways in 11 wards and two ways in the rest. Then there was the large-scale rigging by the CPI-M. Ahead of the vote, Mamata had written off Salt Lake. Despite this the Left is neck and neck there. If the "malfunctioning" voting machine can be revived the possibility is that the CPI-M's slender majority will be overturned. If there is a repoll, the fair solution in the circumstances, it is almost certain that CPI-M will lose ward 16 and the municipality. There is a lesson in this for the Left. The assembly elections are not far away, if they wish to recover from the sliding slope, they must clean up their act and make a last ditch attempt to shed its appalling arrogance and reconnect with the people. After two decades in power, they may no longer know how. The state election commission has played a dubious role. The elections were anything but free and fair. To top that the commission chose egregiously to keep the results under wraps for a further 48 hours. Plenty of time to manufacture a win in the vital seat.

Finally, despite rigging and threats, Mamata Banerjee emerges as the only credible leader. Her performance is impressive.

THE STATESMAN

Cong, CPM warm up for city board

SUMIT SEN
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, June 29. — Shunning its anti-Congress stand for the time being, the CPI-M is apparently desperate to get the party and some Independents' support to form a board at Calcutta Municipal Corporation.

As a precursor to its rapport with the Congress in CMC, the Left Front today backed the party to form a board in Gobardanga municipality. At Barasat it was the other way round: the Congress helped the LF to form a board.

At Gobardanga, the Left voted for the Congress and at Barasat, Congress councillors abstained during voting.

Before leaving for Israel today, Mr Basu held a closed door meeting with Mr Anil Biswas, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Mr Subhas Chakraborty, Mr Asim Dasgupta and Mr Tarit Topdar at Calcutta airport, party leaders said. They reportedly discussed the

strategy to fight the CMC Mayor's poll.

Prominent among the CPI-M candidates for the Mayor's post are Mr Tuhin Bera, Mr Sudhanshu Shil and Mr Nirmal Mukherjee, leaders said.

Mr Subhas Chakraborty, whose relation with some senior leaders has soured of late, has reportedly been given a free hand to help the party form a CMC board. Some other CPI-M leaders will help him in his efforts.

Mr Chakraborty reportedly has cordial relations with many leaders of other parties, especially the Congress.

CPI-M leaders said that after realising that cross-voting during the last Rajya Sabha polls would have favoured the Trinamul-backed Independent nominee, Mr Chakraborty had asked party leaders to initiate a move to help the Congress candidate. But his plea was turned down by CPI-M district committee.

CPI-M leaders said differences have surfaced within the

party on whether it would be prudent to seek Congress support, covert or overt, to run the CMC for another term.

Some senior CPI-M leaders and many Calcutta district committee and zonal committee members reportedly oppose the idea. They feel it would be unwise to seek Congress support, for it may cost the party dearly in future. Because the Congress, they alleged, had compromised with communal forces on many an occasion and was responsible for liberalisation, rendering thousands jobless. Thus, any such understanding will harm the CPI-M's image.

But other party leaders, especially liberals, advocate a tie-up with the Congress to form a board. There's no harm in doing so to counter the threat of the BJP and its allies.

Encouraged by Mr Basu's plea for Congress's support, the liberals have begun advocating an understanding with the Congress at various levels to counter the BJP and its allies.

THE STATESMAN

30 JUN 2000

Central team to consult States on 74th Amendment

HPD-14
MS

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 1. The Urban Development Ministry would consider formulating a model municipal corporation act which could act as a guide for State Governments, the Urban Development Minister, Mr. Jagmohan, said today.

Mr. Jagamohan told a press conference he would form a team of his Ministry and other authorities. The team would visit States and interact with the senior officials to bring about implementation of the 74th Constitution Amendment.

Through this Amendment, the Government had tried to give more administrative and financial powers on the local self governments besides providing for reservations for women in the urban local bodies and holding of elections to these bodies on a regular basis.

Mr. Jagmohan said that some mayors, who attended the National Conference of Mayors, complained that they have not been given any power or privilege except a red light on their official car. They also demanded that the terms of the office of mayor should be uniform all over India and that it should be extended to five years. They were also in favour of a switch over to the system of Mayor-in-Council everywhere.

While spelling out his plan to make the States fall in line by sending his team of officials, Mr. Jagmohan admitted that though State Finance Commissions had been set up by the State Governments following the 74th Constitution Amendment, the recommendations by these bodies had not been implemented and the situation remained somewhat confusing.

Seeking to analyse the problem that came in the way of implementation of the scheme of the Constitutional Amendment, he said that it had a number of holes in its fabric. First, it had not clearly demarcated the obligatory functions to be discharged by the local bodies. Secondly, it had neither defined the financial resources which the local bodies could tap nor specified the parameters of the administrative and man-

agerial autonomy to be given to urban local bodies.

Thirdly, the mode of election of the mayors and their role, functions and position in the civic set-up and administrative hierarchy had been kept vague. All these and connected shortcomings had caused a diffusion of responsibility and rendered the local institutions incapable of tackling the formidable challenges that cities threw up.

Mr. Jagamohan said that he was trying to resolve these problems and was keen on overcoming them without having to take recourse to a further amendment to pave way for realisation of the goal sought to be achieved through the original amendment.

Noting that the resources available to the urban municipal bodies in India compared poorly with other countries, both developing and the developed nations, he said innovative funding techniques would have to be found to bridge the gap between the requirement and availability of resources.

One way could be to set up Municipal Urban Development Fund to provide debt financing to the cities and create larger and more financially viable institutions which could pool in the resources and borrow with ease and at lower cost.

THE HINDU

- 2 MAY 2000

DEMOCRACY AND THE COURTS

EVEN ¹⁹⁹² **THOUGH** THE Andhra Pradesh (A.P.) Government has secured a temporary reprieve following the grant of a stay by the Supreme Court (SC) on the order of the A.P. High Court (HC) to conduct elections to the Panchayatiraj institutions by June, the motives of the Telugu Desam Government are clearly suspect insofar as it has sought to postpone the polls under one pretext or the other ever since they became due in March this year. Its latest plea that it would rather utilise its meagre resources for drought relief measures than to hold elections must indeed have made it very difficult for the SC to allow it to go unheeded. But this would have carried conviction had the Government demonstrated some degree of earnestness in wanting to conduct the polls. On the contrary, it issued an Ordinance, prior to the expiry of the tenure of the panchayats in March, postponing elections to the mandal and zilla parishads by 6 months and appointing Government officers as persons in charge of their functioning. It had then cited the administrative implications of holding elections on the eve of the Constitution 87th Amendment to revert to the three-tier system as a ground for the postponement. In doing so, it merely withdrew from the commitment held out by the then Panchayatiraj Minister, at a meeting of floor leaders to discuss the proposals for the new amendment, that elections would be conducted as per schedule. Subsequently, the Government lost no time in filing the Special Leave Petition in the Supreme Court after the HC made its mind known on the matter.

The tenure of a panchayat as stipulated under Article 243 (E) of the Constitution is 5 years and this is precisely the ground on which the HC quashed the Ordinance. Rejecting the plea of a prospective 87th Amendment as a basis for the postponement, it asked the Government to complete the process of identification of reserved

constituencies for SCs, STs and women and hold elections by June. The HC's reasoning that democracy was an essential aspect of the basic structure and that the local bodies were an integral part of the democratic apparatus is especially pertinent in the present context. The impunity with which many States resort to devious means to delay elections to the Panchayatiraj institutions would suggest that, while they do not have a choice in the matter as far as periodically seeking the people's mandate for the Assembly and the Lok Sabha, most political parties are nervous about strengthening grassroots bodies.

A.P. is merely following in the footsteps of neighbouring Karnataka, which is still in the midst of elections to local bodies due in March 1999. If the then Janata Dal Government's "excuses" for the delay could be ascribed to its developing cold feet in view of the impending elections to the State Assembly and the Lok Sabha last September, the Telugu Desam's attitude in a post-election year is seemingly beyond imagination. Interestingly, the BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh is also in the grip of the same predicament and the Supreme Court has ordered that local elections be held in June. In this context, it is worth bearing in mind that non-Congress(I) parties are observing their commitment to devolution and local democracy more in the breach, as did the Congress(I) which heralded the landmark 73rd Amendment Act. This, however, is only another reminder that lofty goals set out by the legislatures in their many enactments have to be matched by appropriate political behaviour in the domain of realpolitik to facilitate social transformation. Therein lies the key to finding lasting solutions, not in scoring political points or looking to the judiciary for readymade answers.

NOTED

18 MAY 2000

Ally, partymen unhappy with Trinamool list

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, May 17

UNRULY DEMONSTRATIONS by Trinamool Congress supporters marked the release of the list of the party's candidates for the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) polls today.

Dissatisfied over the denial of tickets to some of them, a section of Trinamool workers heckled party leader Sanjoy Bakshi and later stoned the office of Pankaj Banerjee in Tollygunge.

They also staged noisy demonstrations outside the residence of Trinamool chief and Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee. She was, however, away in New Delhi.

Though visibly embarrassed by the open show of protest by some party members, Trinamool leader Pankaj Banerjee sought to underplay the issue.

"This is nothing but an impassioned outburst of some of our enthusiastic supporters and an indication of their wish to be in the

forefront of party affairs. It may have exceeded limits at times, but it would be wrong to interpret their over-enthusiasm as a show of defiance against the leadership," Banerjee argued.

Announcing the list, Banerjee said they had kept 19 seats for the BJP out of the 141 wards in the CMC. Conceding that the BJP had demanded more seats, he explained that since discussions

CMC Polls

were still under way, the chapter was not yet closed. "The BJP remains our firm ally and there is no room for misunderstandings between us in this regard," he added.

A spokesman for the State BJP said they would never agree to the Trinamool offer. With their leaders away in Delhi, the spokesman said that a clear picture was likely to emerge only after they come back to the city following talks with the central leadership

in Delhi.

No candidates were put up in as many as 12 wards by the Trinamool-BJP alliance, fuelling speculations that the seats are being earmarked for the Congress candidates in tune with the *Mahajot* spirit.

Banerjee, however, denied the possibility, pointing out they were in search of suitable candidates in these wards.

Irrespective of his denials, most of these wards happen to be in Congress strongholds in the city like Ward 37, an undisputed territory of Somen Mitra, former PCC president and a vociferous proponent of the *Mahajot*.

Trinamool's mayoral candidate Subrata Mukherjee will be contesting from Ward 87.

Mukherjee is expected to have an easy passage since the Left Front had given the seat to the Rashtriya Janata Dal, a fringe force in State politics.

■ Related report, photograph on Page 3

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 MAY 1993

BJP tries to pacify Mamata after quit threat

PM aides ask State BJP to scale down demand for civic poll seats

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, May 19

RAILWAY MINISTER Mamata Banerjee's threat to quit and pull out of the NDA has delivered a severe jolt to the Trinamool Congress-BJP ties, forcing aides to Prime Minister A B Vajpayee to ask the Bengal BJP to scale down its demand for seats in the polls to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation.

A peeved Banerjee, who cleared all her files at Rail Bhavan on Thursday evening to send a strong signal that she would take the extreme step, set a late-night deadline tonight for the BJP to sort out matter.

Banerjee stayed put at her residence throughout the day, cancelling her official engagements, and braced to face the Calcutta polls on her own party's strength.

Aides to Vajpayee, however, assured her that the Bengal BJP

leaders, who had been summoned to Delhi had been told to scale down their demand for seats.

An important aide of Vajpayee spent several hours late night at Banerjee's residence to urge her not to take a serious view of the Bengal BJP leaders' stance since the central party leadership would not let things go out of control.

With trouble brewing for some time between the two parties, Banerjee had conveyed to the Prime Minister and Home Minister L K Advani that the Bengal BJP should take a reasonable stand in the matter of seat-sharing.

The June 25 election to the country's one of the oldest municipal



Mamata Banerjee

corporation is crucial for Banerjee's plans to cobble together a front against the CPM-led front before the State Assembly polls early next year.

The civil polls have become important since her plans for a *Mahajot*—a grand alliance of the Trinamool, BJP and the Congress—have come unstuck as the

Bengal Pradesh Congress is divided on supporting her party if she does not snap alliance with the BJP.

With her party not expected to win the June 5 by-poll to the Panskura Lok Sabha seat in the absence of a *Mahajot*, Banerjee is keen that she is able to show her sway over Calcutta, her bastion against the Left.

The Bengal BJP unilaterally announced its decision to contest 45 of the 141 seats in Calcutta when the Trinamool Congress had allotted 19 seats to it and 12 for other parties opposed to the CPM.

Banerjee believes that a section of the Bengal BJP supporting Union Minister of State for Communication Tapan Sikdar and State unit chief Ashim Ghosh is out to scuttle her party's victory in the polls to ensure that the BJP replaces her party as the major force against the CPM in the State.

At the same time, another faction of the Bengal BJP is keen to avoid a showdown with the Trinamool Congress. They are impressing upon the central BJP leadership that "stability to the NDA Government at the Centre is more important than the BJP winning a few number of seats in the Calcutta Corporation."

On Page 12: Sikdar blames Mamata

Vajpayee resolves CMC seats row, BJP gets 23

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 20. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today saved the Trinamul-BJP alliance in West Bengal with a formula that has Miss Mamata Banerjee leaving 23 CMC seats for her ally.

A jubilant Miss Banerjee resumed her duties as railway minister and thanked Mr Vajpayee for the deal. "I am grateful to the Prime Minister for the understanding reached at his behest," she said.

(Late at night in Calcutta, however, a state BJP leader said the party might leave most of these 23 seats to the Trinamul.)

In the morning, Mr AB Vajpayee talked to Miss Banerjee on telephone, after which she agreed to leave 23 seats for the

state BJP, four more than she had earlier announced.

The BJP heaved a sigh of relief. "All is well that ends well," party vice-president, Mr JP Mathur, said.

The pact was reached after three rounds of meetings Miss Banerjee had with Mr Sudheendra Kulkarni, Mr Vajpayee's aide, and the state BJP leaders — Mr Rahul Sinha, Mr PD Chitlangiya and BJP councillor Mr Shanti Lal Jain.

Mr Kulkarni and Miss Banerjee then met separately in the afternoon. The BJP president, Mr Kushabhau Thakre, and vice-president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, were kept informed of the developments. Mr Thakre, Mr Kulkarni and Mr Krishnamurthy met in the evening and put the party's stamp on the deal.

Miss Banerjee broke the news to reporters after a one-to-one meeting with Mr Kulkarni.

Some state BJP leaders are reportedly unhappy with the deal. They have been advised to avoid any clash or misunderstanding with the Trinamul Congress.

Mr Rahul Sinha indicated most of the seats offered to them are weak.

The Trinamul will now contest 108 of the 141 seats. It has left 10 seats for some anti-CPM candidates, including former Left leaders.

Earlier in the day, Mr Tapan Sikdar threatened a separate election campaign if the Trinamul refused to concede "25-26 winnable seats" to his party, SNS adds from Calcutta.

■ Another report on page 3

THE STATESMAN

21 MAY 2000

More powers for local bodies still a mirage

By K. Ramachandran

CHENNAI, MAY 21. The much-touted district planning committees, aimed at arming the local bodies with more powers, may end up as just another non-starter. For the district planning committees (DPCs) are unlikely to become a grass-roots reality until the Centre makes a crucial amendment to the Panchayat Raj Act.

The State Assembly, in the just-concluded Budget session, passed a Bill to make the elected district panchayat chiefs DPC chairpersons (instead of the District Collectors). However, the State Government's attempt at devolving more powers to elected local bodies is yet to pass a critical test. The reason: the existing constitutional provisions on election to DPC members need an amendment, if the committees are to function as democratic units.

The DPCs replace the erstwhile district development councils (DDCs) that were headed by the Collectors. The DDC members included MLAs, MPs, panchayat union and urban local body chiefs.

But a "wrong piece of drafting in the original Act hampered the conduct of polls to elect the required number of DPC members", say administrators, with a note of dismay. The existing provision on DPC membership under the Panchayat Raj Act stipulates that "not less than four-fifth of the members to the committee should be elected from among the elected members of the rural local bodies at the district level and urban local bodies in proportion to their population".

Plainly put, the elections for DPC membership is restricted to the district panchayat members and municipal councils. But with Tamil Nadu having a ratio of one district panchayat ward for every 50,000 population, there are not enough members to constitute four-fifth

of the DPC membership. For example, Coimbatore DPC requires over 60 elected members under the Act. But there are only 27 district panchayat ward members. Even if all of them are 'elected', the purpose of the Act will be defeated. Hence, Tamil Nadu is pushing the Centre to amend the Panchayat Raj Act to operationalise the DPCs. Recently, the Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, had written to the Centre, seeking ways to solve the impasse.

States like Madhya Pradesh found a way out by making MLAs, MPs, heads of panchayat unions, municipal councils and town panchayats 'invited members'. Tamil Nadu could follow this lead, say those working in grassroot democracy.

The ongoing Constitutional review can

look at this in the interest of encouraging more decentralisation, as DPCs need to integrate village and block level plans. If elected members emerge from all the three tiers of rural local bodies, then the district plans will reflect all the interests and micro-level concerns.

Tamil Nadu has, in the last one and a half years, taken many legislative steps to decentralise rural administration. Water supply is now an obligatory function of village panchayats; amendments have been brought to enable local bodies to tap loans from financial institutions. In such a situation, development professionals note, the consolidated district-level plans finalised by all three tiers of the Panchayat Raj institutions can make a significant impact on rural development.

TAMIL NADU

22 MAY 2000

Faction-ridden CPM takes on a divided Opposition

Arindam Sarkar
Bhatpara (North 24 Parganas)

THE MARUTI vans colours symbolise the battle divide: red for the CPI(M) candidate Bharat Singh and green for the Trinamool Congress nominee, Arjun Singh. Slogans fill the air as their supporters cross each other time and again while campaigning for the municipal elections due here on May 28. But there is more to Ward 18 of Bhatpara Municipality than just the campaign tempo.

"This is miniature Bihar. The Trinamool candidate is in jail. What else can you expect from that party," asked Bhatpara Municipality Chairman Ram Prasad Kundu, who is contesting from Ward 10. Singh is one of the

accused in the murder of Trinamool councillor Bikash Basu.

But Arjun Singh's absence has not affected the spirit of his workers. His brother, Bhim Singh, has taken charge of the campaigning and is determined to wrest the seat for Arjun.

Elsewhere in Bhatpara, the campaign is low-key. Mainly because the CPI(M) is confident of once again retaining the board that it won in 1995. "This time too we are sure to win. The sudden death of Bidyut Ganguly will also affect the outcome of the polls here," argued Kundu.

CPI(M) MP from the area, Tarit Topdar, agreed with Kundu's

assessment. In fact, he feels that the party prospects in Barrackpore, North Barrackpore, Titagarh, Kanchrapara and North Dum Dum are extremely bright. "We will not only retain the 18 boards out of the 21 in North 24 Parganas, but might also snatch

leadership is divided into two warring camps - one led by Amitabh Basu-Amitabh Nandi and the other headed by Transport Minister Subhas Chakraborty.

"For all of us, the BJP, the Trinamool Congress and the Congress are our enemies. We

have differences of opinion amongst us but that will not reflect in our battle

against these parties," explained CPI(M) North 24 Parganas District Secretary Amitabh Basu.

Agreed Amitabh Nandi, the powerful CPI(M) district secretary member. "There is no question of inner-party conflict affecting the party's electoral

prospects." Sources said that the warring camps agreed to a temporary truce largely at the behest of the State CPI(M) leadership. And since 12 out of the 18 municipalities are controlled by what is known as the 'liberal' camp, the hardliners made a tactical retreat.

But wherever the liberals were in a minority, the hardliners came down heavily on them. "The liberals from the Kamarhati, Kanchrapara, Garulia and Baranagar municipalities have been purged by the party. But in spite of the setback, we are a force to reckon with. The hardliners, realising the ground realities, came to an understanding with Subhas Chakraborty," claimed an insider.

Municipal Polls/ N 24-Parganas

Meet for more powers to local bodies

By Our Staff Reporter

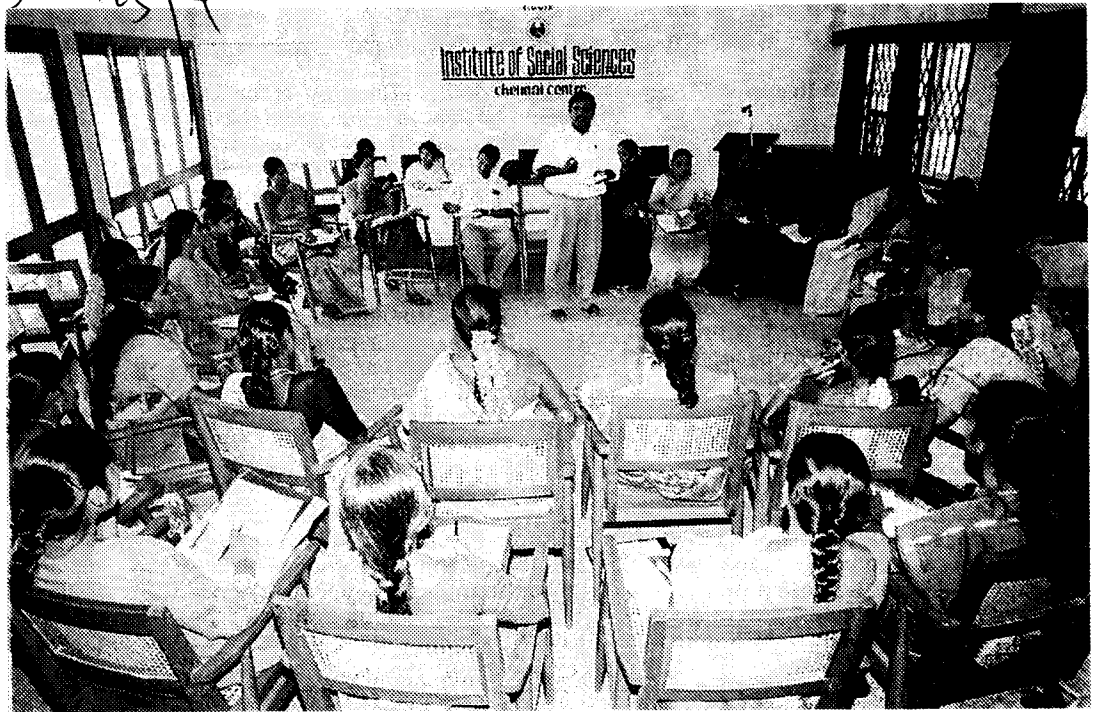
CHENNAI, APRIL 24. A separate 'Panchayat list' on the lines of the Central and State lists should be drawn up, to deal exclusively with the issues relating to rural local bodies and their governance.

The list would enable the long-sought demand to decentralise administration and make district panchayats stand alone governance units, speakers at a seminar on 'Grama Sabha and Women' said today.

The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) at present remained mere 'agencies' of the State and the Centre. This situation would have to be set right by granting the PRIs more power.

Though the 73 and 74 Amendments were progressive in reserving 33 per cent of seats for women, there were certain flaws in the Panchayati Raj Act which would have to be revised, Ms. Kalpana Sathish, of the Human Rights Advocacy and Research Foundation said. For instance, she added, the Amendments removed the provision where ownership of water resources of a particular area would be vested with the panchayat body.

The powers given to Collectors to dissolve panchayats should be withdrawn immediately. Bringing up the issue of the proposed 87th Amendment, Ms. Sathish pointed out that it would remove direct election, but at the lowest level. Membership to the district panchayat and panchayat union would be through indirect election, which would keep several small parties out of the picture. The recently constituted Constitutional Review Committee must look into such flaws and try to rectify the Act in order to give more power to rural local bodies,



Women members of panchayati institutions participate in a discussion initiated by the Institute of Social Sciences in Chennai on Monday.

Ms. Sathish added. Mr. K. Shanmugam, Director of Rural Development, provided statistics to show that the Government had substantially increased fund allocation for self-help schemes, over the years.

Under the 'Namakku Naame' project, the initial investment of Rs. 10 crores had increased more than four times with Rs. 47 crores last year, he said. The shopping complex scheme to be constructed at Collectorates would enable 'direct selling' of projects made at village level.

Mr. Shanmugam also urged the women representatives gathered to anticipate opposition and work accordingly. "Even if 10 people

are with you, it should suffice," he said advising them to fight issues such as corruption, bonded labour and poverty.

Ms. Sarojini Varadappan, social worker, also emphasised this aspect, asking women to fight the social evils with the support of the villagers. Though there were several impediments to the functioning of women representatives such as political interference, caste and gender colours, they must find the courage and strength to go on. While carrying out works to ensure availability of basic needs, women panchayat leaders should also bear in mind 'economic advancement'.

Prof. Palanithurai of the Gand-

higram Rural Institute suggested to the women members that they take up the cause of their colleagues in other panchayats against whom atrocities were committed. The family as a unit and the society would have to accept women as panchayat leaders, he added.

Mr. V. Ilango, Kuthambakkam Panchayat president, provided practical hints to the women panchayat presidents on the conduct of Gram Sabhas and co-ordinated a discussion among them.

Ms. E. K. Shantha of the Institute of Social Sciences, Chennai Centre, which organised the seminar, also spoke.

THE HINDU

25 MAY 2000

BJP fields candidates in all Salt Lake wards

ANINDYA SENGUPTA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, May 25. — The BJP has some good news for the CPI-M. Having had enough of the Trinamul Congress's "arm twisting", the party has fielded candidates in all 23 Salt Lake wards — a move that has Mr Tapan Sikdar's approval.

The Salt Lake BJP president, Mr Hrishikesh Kar, said: "we have Mr Sikdar's consent to file nominations in all 23 wards." Mr Kar himself wants to contest in ward 3 against a Trinamul rival.

The Trinamul Congress had nominated 16 candidates and left seven seats for the BJP. A shocked Dum Dum Trinamul chairman, Mr Arunava Ghosh, said it was hard to believe that the BJP could "backstab" its alliance partner, especially Miss Mamata Banerjee. "How can we allow the BJP to field candidates in wards won by Congress councillors in 1995?" Mr Ghosh asked.

Salt Lake may witness quadrangular contests, unless the BJP strikes a deal with the Trinamul in a couple of days. The Congress has already fielded candidates in all Salt Lake wards, ruling out chances of a mahajot.

According to BJP leaders, the initial deal with the Trinamul was that the parties would share 18 seats, leaving three to the Congress and two to dissident CPI-M leaders if the mahajot shaped up. As the grand alliance didn't click, BJP leaders demanded at least 12 seats. A proposition Trinamul leaders found hard to digest.

Trinamul leaders said they would give only seven seats to the BJP, as the saffron party didn't have adequate strength to fight the polls in even 50 per cent of the wards. The BJP was told that the Trinamul would give two seats to dissident CPI-M leaders from its own quota of 16.

Accordingly, wards 8, 9, 13, 15, 16, 21 and 23 were left for BJP candidates. What the BJP did, following a reported understanding between Mr Tapan Sikdar and Mr Subhas Chakraborty, was to leave wards 9 and 23 to the dissident CPI-M group led by Mr Sujit Bose.

Prior to filing nominations, BJP leaders insisted on being allowed to field candidates in 12 wards — 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 13, 15, 16, 17, 21 and 22 — which meant six more wards from the Trinamul kitty.

Trinamul leaders refused to budge, saying "a party without workers" cannot be given so many seats in Salt Lake. This prompted the BJP to file nominations in all Salt Lake wards.

BJP leaders blame the Trinamul's "negative attitude" for the impasse.

The Trinamul still stands its ground. The BJP had been given seven seats on the basis of ground realities, in wards where they had winning prospects, said a Trinamul leader. "If this forces the BJP to break the alliance, it would be an insult to the BJP national leadership too," he added.

State BJP secretary Mr Susanta Pal said: "we will try to negotiate with the Trinamul on seat adjustments. But it's not clear whether we will succeed." 29 May is the date for withdrawal of nominations.

THE STATESMAN

26 MAY 2000

6 killed in Bihar poll violence

HD-1
27/5

NEW DELHI, MAY 26. Six people were killed in violence during the by-polls to three Assembly seats in Bihar today. An estimated 62 per cent of the electorate exercised their franchise in Raghapur where the Chief Minister, Mrs. Rabri Devi, is contesting the seat vacated by her husband and RJD chief, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav.

A Patna report said three persons were killed in police firing and two others injured in Raghapur and Jamui Assembly constituencies.

Three persons were shot by security personnel at Bhimain village under Khaira block in Jamui Assembly segment when they tried to rig the polls.

At least three people were killed in a group clash in Raghapur. There were reports of snatching of ballot papers, group clashes and firing from the Raghapur, Jamui and Nirsa segments.

56 p.c. turnout in MP

In Madhya Pradesh, the turnout was 56 per cent in Kirnapur in naxalite-infected Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh. The Assembly byelection ended peacefully amid tight security.

Aska poll peaceful

The Aska constituency in Orissa witnessed peaceful polling with a turnout of 40 per cent. The seat, was vacated by Mr. Naveen Patnaik who resigned from the Union Cabinet after he took over as Chief Minister.

A Lucknow, report said over 45 per cent of the total electorate of 191,215 exercised their franchise in the Soron Assembly seat in Etah district of Uttar Pradesh.

Repoll in 5 Assam booths

The Assam Chief Electoral Officer ordered a repoll in five polling centres of Karimganj (north) constituency following ballot-snatching. The repoll will be held on May 29, an official report said.

Over 55 per cent voters of the three Assembly constituencies exercised their franchise. In Nalbari about 60 per cent polling was recorded, while Bhabanipur registered more than 50 per cent.

In Andhra Pradesh, an estimated 60 per cent of the 3,88,000 voters exercised their franchise as polling in the byelections for the Chevella and Bhongir Assembly seats ended peacefully.

In Meghalaya, the Mairang Assembly constituency witnessed 70 per cent polling. The main contest is between the Congress, the NCP and the UDP.

Heavy turnout in Rori

Our Chandigarh Special Correspondent writes:

The prestigious byelection to the Rori Assembly seat in Sirsa district of Haryana, vacated by the Chief Minister, Mr. Om Prakash Chautala, recorded a heavy turnout of over 90 per cent and polling passed off peacefully, according to an official spokesman here.

The younger son of Mr. Chautala, Mr. Abhey Singh, is in the fray as the Indian National Lok Dal-BJP nominee.

THE HINDU

27 MAY 2000

LF faces tough fight in civic polls

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, May 27

THE CPI(M) and its Left Front partners, which control 45 of the 79 municipalities going to the polls tomorrow, have a tough fight on their hands in several districts. This despite the fact that the *Mahajot* has failed to take shape in not more than 150 wards comprising 10 civic bodies.

The municipalities, which will get a taste of the *Mahajot's* strength, are Dinhat and Tufanganj in Cooch Behar, Arambagh and Tarakeshwar in Hooghly, Kharar and Chandrakona in Midnapore, Bolpur in Birbhum, Sopamukhi in Bankura, Kalna and Memari in Burdwan district.

Apart from the 150 wards of the

total 1,575, where the grand alliance has been formed, nearly 500 more wards in districts such as Nadia, Murshidabad, Malda, Hooghly, Midnapore, North and South 24-Parganas would witness fierce contests, for the Trinamool Congress-BJP alliance would go flat out to wrest them from the LF and the Congress.

An analysis of the pre-poll alliance in Nadia shows that not only the CPI(M) and its LF allies, but also the Congress would be up against stiff challenge from the Trinamool-BJP combine.

If the results of the last Lok Sabha polls to the two seats in the district are anything to go by, the Congress might suffer worst reverses. The Trinamool-BJP grouping, on the other hand, is sure to make big gains.

Murshidabad is another district where the CPI(M), the Forward Bloc and the Congress, as well, might lose to the Trinamool-BJP alliance.

Also, after having won a stunning victory in the Behrampore Lok Sabha seat a few months back, the Congress was in no mood to oblige the proposed *Mahajot* partners. Therefore, it is contesting in all the wards. The Trinamool is fielding 55 candidates, the BJP 36, the CPI(M) 56 and the Forward Bloc 20.

Elections to the 42 wards in Old Malda and Englishbazar would be keenly watched, for the Congress, now controlling 22 wards, is vying for all the seats. Regarded as PCC chief A B A Ghani Khan Chowdhury's "fortress", the poll results here are sure to be significant.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 MAY 2000

Tight security for municipal polls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, May 27. — Amid apprehension of violence, 79 municipalities in 15 districts are going to the polls tomorrow. Security has been tightened in these areas, especially in the sensitive booths in Midnapore, Hooghly, Bankura, Burdwan, South and North 24-Parganas.

The state election commissioner, Mr Anish Majumdar, held a meeting with the home secretary, Mr Sourin Roy, IG (law and order), Mr Prasun Mukherjee, the DMs and SPs to discuss the law and order situation.

Officials said the State Armed Police, EFR and RAF have been deployed in some "sensitive" areas to help the local police. Additional forces have also been deployed in five Assembly segments of the Panskura parliamentary constituency which is going to the polls on 5 June. Intelligence reports have predicted violence in a number of wards, officials said.

According to Mr Majumdar, special attention status has been given to four districts considering the areas of municipalities and number of voters.

For "special attention", DSPs will tour the wards. There will be patrol cars, standing pickets and special deployment of forces. This apart, 24 senior officers of joint secretary rank have been appointed as observers.

The PCC vice-president, Mr Pradip Bhattacharya and Mr Asoke Deb, Congress MLA met the state election commissioner today and urged him to deploy adequate police and paramilitary forces to ensure fair polls.

Mr Bhattacharya expressed the apprehension about outbreak of widespread violence tomorrow. He alleged that the ruling par-

TENDERED VOTES

CALCUTTA, May 27. — The state election commission has informed the voters through advertisements that in case someone finds that his vote has been cast, he will be allowed to cast a "tendered vote" after establishing his identity.

The tendered votes will help the authorities ascertain the number of false votes and if the number becomes quite substantial, the SEC can take the decision of a repoll. The case of tendered votes will be as valid as that of DMs referring a case fit for repoll. — SNS

ties, especially the CPI-M, had already deployed toughs.

The state BJP vice-president, Mr Muzaffar Khan, also expressed the apprehension that the CPI-M backed hoods would do everything to rig the polls. CPI-M activists would resort to violence in their desperate bid to turn the tide in their favour.

Yesterday, the CPI-M activists had hurled bombs at a vehicle carrying the BJP MLA, Mr Badal Bhattacharya, Mr Khan alleged. He too demanded adequate deployment of paramilitary forces.

Mr Anil Biswas, the state CPI-M secretary, however, described the Opposition parties' apprehension of violence as baseless. In the event of any problem, the state administration would do whatever is needed to effectively deal with the situation, Mr Biswas said.

A tough electoral battle is on the cards in a number of civic bodies with the Left Front and the Trinamul-BJP combine

throwing a stiff challenge to each other. The poll outcome will have an impact on Panskura by-election and also on the 25 June polls to the CMC and Salt Lake Municipality.

Of the 79 civic boards, 45 are presently held by the LF, while the rest are controlled mostly by the Congress and the Trinamul. With the virtual marginalisation of the Congress, the main battle this time will be confined between the LF and the Trinamul-BJP combine. Though the "mahajot" has fallen flat, an understanding between the Congress, Trinamul and the BJP has, however, reached in some municipalities.

On the other hand, in some civic bodies in North 24-Parganas, Hooghly, Nadia, Midnapore and Bankura, both the Trinamul and the BJP are locked in "friendly contests" after seat sharing talks broke down. This will certainly go in favour of the ruling front.

Mr Asim Ghosh, the state BJP president, said this could have been avoided, had the Trinamul been more co-operative. On the other hand, a section within the CPI-M is apprehensive of factional feud coming to the fore during the polls in some areas, especially in North 24-Parganas.

In all, 5,707 candidates are contesting in 1,575 seats. While the counting in 28 civic bodies will be held on Monday, the ballots for the rest 51 municipalities will be counted on Tuesday.

Polling officer dead: A polling officer drowned in a pond at Bapujinagar in the Noapara area of North 24-Parganas. The body of Mr Arnab Sengupta (32), was found this afternoon, reports UNI.

THE STATESMAN

20 MAY 2000

20 MAY 2000

Major reshuffle of Secretaries

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 28. The Government today effected a major reshuffle of Secretary rank officers which included new heads of many economic departments including Commerce, Civil Aviation, Power, Steel, Telecom Services and Coal. New Secretaries of many social and public welfare Departments such as Tribal Affairs, Education & Literacy, Food and Public Distribution, Women and Child Welfare and Public Grievances were also announced.

Some appointments were necessitated to fill the vacancies caused by the first batch of retirements on May 31 after a two-year moratorium due to the Fifth Pay Commission recommended increase in retirement age. In other cases, officers from other State cadres have been accommodated at the Centre or shifted to other Departments and public sector units.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet named the Defence Production Secretary, Mr. Prabir Sengupta, as the new

Commerce Secretary in place of Mr. P. P. Prabhu who retires on May 31. Mr. A. H. Jung, Special Secretary in the Power Ministry, will be the new Civil Aviation Secretary in place of Mr. Ravindra Gupta who will now man the Department of Defence Production vacated by the new Commerce Secretary.

The Steel Secretary, Mr. A. K. Basu, will be the Power Secretary in place of Mr. V. K. Pandit who retires on May 31. Mr. Basu is being replaced by Mr. A. K. Agarwal who is presently Secretary (Coordination and Public Grievances) in the Cabinet Secretariat.

Mr. V. N. Kaul comes from his home State of Madhya Pradesh to head the Coal Department in place of Mr. S. S. Boparai who has been repatriated to his home cadre of Punjab.

Mr. Vinod Vaish will head the Department of Telecom Services five months after he was shifted from this same Department following protests from telecom service officers. He replaces Indian Telecom Service officer, Mr. P. S. Saran who retires on May 31.

With this move, the IAS has appropriated both Secretary rank posts in the Communications Ministry.

Mr. V. K. Kundra, Advisor in the Planning Commission will replace Mr. Vaish as Special Secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Forests. The Secretary, Department of Public Distribution, Mr. M. D. Asthana, will man the post vacated by Mr. Kundra. The Secretary, Department of Food and Public Distribution, Mr. P. Shankar will head the Department of Public Distribution which has been merged with the Department of Sugar and Edible Oils on the transfer of Mr. Asthana to the Planning Commission.

Mr. S. K. Naik, Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, who has been shifted from his home cadre of Punjab, replaces Mr. Bhure Lal, who was named the Food Corporation of India Chairman in place of Mr. P. R. Dasgupta who retires on May 31.

Ms. Achala Moulik moves from her home cadre of Karnataka to become the Secretary, Department of Elementary Education

and Training. Mr. Dipankar Basu will be the Secretary (Coordination and Public Grievances) and his replacement as Chairman, Inland Waterways Authority is Mr. V. K. Khanna who has been shifted to the Centre from his home cadre of Punjab.

Mr. Vinay Kohli, presently with his home State of Assam has been appointed Secretary, National Commission of Minorities in place of Mr. S. Bandopadhyay who goes as Secretary, Department of Consumer Affairs.

Mr. B. K. Chaturvedi will be the Secretary, Department of Women and Child Welfare in place of Ms. Kiran Agarwal who has gone on leave. He was earlier the Special Secretary (Insurance) in the Finance Ministry and has been replaced by Mr. P. K. Banerjee who is the Chief Commissioner, Investment and NRI. His place has been taken by Mr. Valluri Narayan who has come from his parent Maharashtra cadre. Mr. V. K. Dhall has been repatriated to his home State of Madhya Pradesh on return from an international posting with the UNIDO.

THE HINDU

2 MAY 2000

29 MAY 2000

Stray violence, good turnout in civic polls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, May 28. — One person died and at least 20 others, including two policemen, were injured despite unprecedented security today, as nearly 75 per cent of the electorate in 79 municipalities turned out to vote in the civic polls.

Violence was reported in some municipalities, as the CPI(M)-led Left Front and the Trinamul-BJP combine had one of their last electoral showdowns before the Assembly polls.

Repolling has been ordered in four wards and eight polling stations in Bhatpara, Barrackpore and North Dum Dum. In Bhatpara, repoll will be held in booths 16, 11, 12 and 13 of ward 16 tomorrow. Repolls have also been ordered in booths 9 and 10 of ward 17.

Repolling will be held in booths 5 and 6 of Barrackpore's ward 18, and in booth 2 of North Dum Dum's ward 6.

However, the state election commissioner said polling was "by and large" peaceful, with tight security at sensitive booths. DSPs and poll observers toured areas within their jurisdiction extensively, Mr Anish Majumder said.

The only death was reported from Khardah, North 24-Parganas, where a 75-year-old woman died of shock as Trinamul and CPI-M men clashed with bombs and firearms near her house.

"VIP" intervention in polling was reported from two places. In Kalna, Burdwan, state mass education minister Ms Anju Kar allegedly went within 50 metres of booths in a constituency

where the candidate was her relative; and in Beldanga, Murshidabad, Congress MP Mr Adhir Chowdhury's car was stopped for lack of a permit.

A reporter of a Bengali news channel, Suman De, was beaten up by CPI-M cadres as he tried to get near a booth to record scenes of booth-capturing in Khardah. Four persons were arrested.

At Patuapara, police said a *Ganashakti* reporter, Pijush Banerjee, was beaten up by Trinamul workers.

In Purulia, at least 37 people fainted from the heat as temperature crossed 40 degrees Celsius. Ten people fainted in Hooghly's Tarakeshwar, Bansberia and Arambagh municipalities.

In Kharagpur's Koushallya, a Youth Congress supporter was

injured in an alleged attack by BJP men.

Three CPI-M supporters were injured in a bomb attack allegedly by a 500-strong Trinamul Congress mob at Uttar Barbhakhia in Pataspur. The blast blew away the asbestos roof of a primary school in the village. The mob ransacked and torched more than 20 houses. No arrests have been made.

But North 24-Parganas saw the worst violence. Bhatpara, Khardah, Titagarh, Naihati, Baranagar, New Barrackpore, North Dum Dum and Kamarhati had their share of bomb-throwing, booth-jamming, ballot-paper-snatching. Political workers, mostly from the Trinamul Congress, were

■ See POLLS: page 3

POLLS: election official beaten up at Bhadreswar

(Continued from page 1)

beaten up.

In Bhatpara, roads were blocked for over four hours in wards 19, 20, 21 and 22 to protest against booth-capturing. Trinamul candidates had guns pointed at them, were chased away from booths in these wards and had their agents beaten up. Five of them were hospitalised.

Bombs were thrown at voters' queues on Ghoshpara Road in ward 18.

Police arrested over 40 people and recovered firearms and explosives, but dissatisfied Trinamul supporters gheraoed Jagaddal police station and blocked tracks near Shyamnagar to protest against "police inaction".

Armed men, allegedly CPI-M cadres, entered a booth in Titagarh's ward 21 and tore up ballot papers in front of polling officials. Two policemen were allegedly hurt while trying to control the mob, and polling was held up for 30 minutes. Police, however, did not arrest anyone.

About 300 Trinamul supporters gheraoed Khardah police station, accusing police of turning a blind eye to rigging. They alleged that CPI-M cadres had rigged the polls in the presence of state finance minister Mr

Asim Dasgupta.

Trinamul agents were removed from booths, bombs were thrown, and voters told at gunpoint not to cast votes. The Trinamul has demanded repolling in at least six polling booths in the municipality.

Trinamul men alleged that armed CPI-M cadres attempted to snatch a ballot box in Naihati. District officials, however, denied the charge.

Trinamul men were beaten up at a booth in ward 10 in Kamarhati. New Barrackpore, Barasat, Haliashahar and Baranagar did not witness any major violence, but there were allegations of booth-jamming.

In South 24-Parganas, CPI-M cadres tried to scare away voters from a booth in ward 17 of Budge Budge. A booth in ward 12 was also targeted by bomb-throwing men.

Trinamul men alleged that police beat up eight of their supporters, including a 70-year-old man, in Kalna at the behest of the state mass education minister. Five had to be taken to hospital.

Ms Kar also allegedly went within 50 metres of booths in ward 15 of the same municipality. Her relative was a CPI-M candidate in a neighbouring ward, a local Trinamul leader said.

An Independent candidate supported by a Congress faction, Mr Argha Chakrabarty, has been declared elected from ward 13 in Midnapur municipality.

Violence was reported from Arambagh, Bhadreswar and Chinsurah in Hooghly. Ballot snatchers roughed up the presiding officer of ward 14 of Bhadreswar, and shredded at least 45 ballot papers. Bombs were also near the booth, seriously injuring voter Ziauddin. Polling had to be suspended for about two hours.

Bombs were thrown at booths in wards 29 and 30 of Chinsurah as well.

The six Murshidabad municipalities saw an almost 80 per cent turnout. Two persons were injured in a clash between CPI-M and Congress cadres in Jangipu. A CPI-M cadre was beaten up by policemen in the same municipality.

Two persons were arrested in Beldanga and Ziaganj on charges of impersonation.

In Bally, Howrah, 11 people were arrested for electoral malpractices.

A man was arrested in Suri for trying to cast a false vote. Another was arrested for trying to stall voting.

No violence was reported from Nandak, Bankura, Burdwan and Purulia, district officials said.

Centre reshuffles 24 bureaucrats

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 28. — A major bureaucratic reshuffle today saw 24 secretary-level changes at the Centre, in key departments such as commerce, civil aviation and power.

Mr Prabir Sengupta will be the new commerce secretary. Mr AH Jung has been appointed civil aviation secretary. Mr AK Basu will be power secretary.

Mr Sengupta, who is now secretary in the department of defence production and supplies, succeeds Mr PP Prabhu, who retires on 31 May.

Mr Ravindra Gupta, who is now civil aviation secretary, will take over Mr Sengupta's assignment. Mr Jung, who now is special secretary in the

KEY DEPARTMENTS GET NEW SECRETARIES

power ministry, will be succeeded by Mr SS Sharma, currently director-general of National Productivity Council.

The steel secretary, Mr Basu, will replace Mr V K Pandit as power secretary when the latter retires at the end of this month. The department of telecom services will also have a new secretary in Mr Vinod Vaish. He succeeds Mr PS Sharan, who will retire on 31 May. The new steel secretary is Mr AK Aggarwal.

The secretary in the ministry of tribal affairs, Mr Bhure Lal, has been appointed chairman of Food Corporation of India in place of Mr P R Dasgupta who retires on 31 May. Mr Bhure Lal will be succeeded by Mr SK

Naik.

Other appointments finalised by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet are: Mr BK Chaturvedi as secretary, women and child welfare in place of Mrs Kiran Aggarwal who is proceeding on leave; Mr V N Kaul as secretary, coal in place of Mr SS Boparai, who returns to his parent cadre; Ms Achala Moulik as secretary, department of elementary education and literacy.

Mr Dipankar Basu will be secretary, coordination and public grievances; Mr A K Kundra will be special secretary, ministry of environment and forests; Mr K Srinivasan will be director-general, National Productivity Council

with rank and pay of secretary.

Mr VK Khanna will be chairman, Inland Waterways Authority of India; Mr Vinay Kohli will be secretary, National Minorities Commission; Mr M D Asthana will be Principal Advisor, Planning Commission.

Other appointments are: Mr P Shankar as Secretary, Food and Public Distribution; Mr S Bandopadhyaya as Secretary, Department of Consumer Affairs; Mr P K Banerji as Special Secretary, Insurance; Mr V K Dhall, currently on international assignment with UNIDO will return to his parent cadre of Madhya Pradesh; Mr S B Krishnan as Secretary, Technology Development Board and Mr Valluri Narayan as Chief Commissioner, Investment and NRI.

THE STATESMAN

29 MAY 2000

70% turnout in municipal elections

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, May 28

TODAY'S ELECTIONS to 79 municipalities in the State passed off peacefully barring some stray incidents of bomb-throwing, ballot-snatching and minor scuffles between political opponents. An elderly woman died of shock as a gang of rowdies threw bombs close to where she was sitting on a *charpoy* outside her home at Khardah, North 24-Parganas. The police rounded up at least 85 people from various parts of the State on charges of unlawful activities.

The State Election Commission estimated that 70 per cent of the 45.6 lakh electorate cast their votes for the 1,575 municipal wards.

According to a late-night report, the commission has ordered repoll in eight stations of four wards in three North 24-Parganas municipalities. Fresh polling will take place tomorrow. The panel said repoll will be held in two wards in



Police try to control a mob at Titagarh Bara Masjid after bomb blasts rocked the area during the civic polls on Sunday. Photo: HT

Bhatpara, and one each at Barrackpore and North Dum Dum.

Political parties reacted to the polling on expected lines. The Opposition, including the Trinamool, the BJP and the Congress, dubbed the exercise as a "farce", alleging large-scale rigging and booth-capturing. Left chair-

man Sailen Dasgupta expressed satisfaction over the peaceful and fair polling and dubbed the Opposition charges as "baseless".

Most of the violent incidents were reported in North 24-Parganas. This happens to be the only district where the CPI(M), controlling most of the civic bodies, is facing a combined challenge

from the Trinamool, the Congress, the BJP and rebels within the CPI(M) camp.

State Election Commissioner Anish Majumdar admitted as much when he said the commission had received complaints of unfair means being adopted in polling, mostly from wards in Khardah, Titagarh, Kamarhati, Naihati, Bhatpara, North Dum Dum, Ashoknagar-Kalyangarh and Barrackpore during the day. Majumdar said he had also received complaints from Bally and Budge Budge.

Inspector-General of Police (Law & Order) Prasun Mukherjee told *The Hindustan Times* that tension ran high in Babupara in Jagaddal police station area in North 24-Parganas after some members of a local club threw bombs. Mukherjee said 31 persons were arrested in this connection. The club was raided and 16 kg of explosives seized.

More reports, photographs on Page 3

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 MAY 2011

Left Front wins first round in municipal elections

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, May 29

THE CPI(M)-LED Left Front was ahead of its rivals in the elections to 25 municipalities, for which the results were declared today. The LF captured eight of the civic bodies, while the Congress won five and the Trinamool Congress two. Eight municipalities sprang fractured verdicts, with neither the Left nor the opposition winning a clear majority.

Another — Chandrakona in Midnapore district — witnessed a tie between the LF and the Trinamool. The BJP drew a blank in today's round.

Of the 79 municipalities which went to the polls yesterday, the counting of votes was taken up for 25 today. The counting for the remaining 54 will take place tomorrow. About 65 per cent of the voters took part in the repolling in eight polling stations in North 24-Parganas, where

Counting	25
Left Front	8
Congress	5
Trinamool	2
BJP	0
GNLf	1
Tie	1
Hung	8

polling was disrupted yesterday due to violence and clashes between rival political activists. The civic poll results are likely to make an impact on the crucial Panskura Lok Sabha by-election due on June 5.

While the LF managed to retain its supremacy, the real surprise of the first round of results was the performance of the Congress. Although in 1995 the party bagged 15 of the 25 municipalities of

which the results were declared today, its tally of five proved that the party could still stand up and be counted despite the Trinamool taking over the opposition centre-stage. "The results prove it would be premature to write off the Congress in West Bengal," said an elated PCC vice-president Pradip Bhattacharyya. Trinamool leaders, on the other hand, refused to comment at this stage. Obviously, they hoped for better results tomorrow.

The LF won Dinhat, Mathabhanga, Toofangunj, Kharar, Khirpai, Ramjivanpur, Taherpur and Purulia. For the Congress, victory came at Shantipur, Ranaghat, Birnagar, Cooch Behar and Vishnupur. The Trinamool won Contai and Sonamukhi. The eight hung municipalities were Jalpaiguri, Bankura, Suri, Raghunathpur, Ghatal, Tamluk, Rampurhat and Kharagpur. The Gorkha National Liberation Front retained Mirik.

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

30 MAY 2001

CIVIC: Cong retains most seats in last time

(Continued from page 1)

CPI-M won in three wards in Tamluk.

In Ghatal, the Congress won in seven wards, posting the highest number of winning candidates in the 17-ward municipality. The Trinamul Congress won in three wards while an Independent candidate supported by the party won in one ward. CPI-M candidates won the remaining six wards. There are indications that Congress might form the board.

There has been a tie at 12-ward Chandrakona: both the CPI-M and Trinamul captured six wards each.

The results so far indicate that the Congress cannot be written off in the state, though it was decimated in the last Lok

Sabha elections.

Jubilant over the party's success so far, Mr Sultan Ahmed, PCC general secretary, said: "Our party is still to be reckoned with. This is the message of the civic poll so far."

Among the Congress's upsets was losing Jalpaiguri municipality to the Left Front. The party, which formed the board last time, won 10 seats against the Left Front's 13.

But the party retained most of the seats it won last time. In Birbhum, it retained the Suri municipality. Rampurhat got a hung municipality: while the Congress, Trinamul and BJP together won six wards, the Left Front candidates won in the same number of wards and independent candi-

dates won

In Purur wards.

In Purur 13-ward Raghunathpur municipality the CPI-M won five wards and an independent candidate supported by it won one. The SUCI won three wards, Trinamul two, while the BJP and an independent candidate won in one ward each. Trinamul SUCI leadership has declared that it would not support any party to form the board.

The Left Front retained the Dinhat, Mathabhanga and Toofangunj municipalities in C and Nadia and Behar. Its performance in the Co.

Birnagar retained the Ranaghat, while the Santipur municipalities, in Taherganj posted its maiden victory.

THE STATESMAN

30 MAY 2000

Opp threatens Left sway on civic bodies

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, May 29. — Poll results in 25 municipalities declared today indicated a see-saw battle between the Left Front and major Opposition parties, the Congress and Trinamul.

The results show the Left Front has gained control over nine civic bodies, the Congress over seven, while the Trinamul has won two. Counting in Jhalda municipality in Purulia was postponed. Votes in 53 other municipalities will be counted tomorrow.

No party got a clear majority in Tamluk, Ghatal, Raghunathpur, Rampurhat and Bankura town. Late night reports indicated that the Trinamul and Congress might help each other to form the boards in Bankura, Tamluk and Ghatal with support from

MUNICIPALITIES	
POLLS HELD	79
DECLARED	25
LEFT FRONT	9
CONGRESS	7
TRINAMUL	2
GNLF	1
HUNG	5
TIED	1

the BJP and Independents. In Rampurhat and Raghunathpur, Independent candidates would be the deciding factor.

As expected, the GNLF won in Darjeeling district's Mirik municipality.

In a major upset, the CPI-M lost Sonamukhi municipality in Bankura, a Left bastion for years, to the Trinamul Congress. Of the 13 seats the

Trinamul won seven, the BJP one and the LF five. In Bankura town, the Left Front won 11 seats, Trinamul seven, Congress four. One ward went to a Trinamul-supported Independent.

In Midnapore, where Panskura chooses its representative to Parliament on 5 June, both the Trinamul and Congress did reasonably well in the civic polls. The Left Front retained Ramjibanpur, Khirpai and Kharar municipalities. The Trinamul Congress opened its account in the district wresting Contai from the Congress. The Congress retained the Kharagpur constituency.

In Tamluk and Ghatal, no party got a clear majority. The CPI-M and CPI won five seats between themselves, while Independents backed by the

■ See CIVIC:page 3

30 MAY 2000

P.T.O

LF keeps three civic bodies in Cooch Behar

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

COOCH BEHAR, May 30. — Of the four civic bodies in Cooch Behar district which went to the polls, the Left Front retains control of the Dinhata, Toofanganj and Mathabhanga municipalities.

The Trinamul had made inroads into the Dinhata civic body where it has won six out of the 16 seats and along with the Forward Bloc is the biggest party. The Congress here has drawn a blank while the CPI-M's strength remains unchanged - having won from four wards.

Though the Left Front remains dominant in the new board in Dinhata, the strength of the Forward Bloc has been reduced, its loss being the Trinamul's gain.

The Forward Bloc leader, Mr Kamal Guha, expressed disappointment over his party's performance in both Dinhata and Cooch Behar though the party's nominee defeated the vice-chairman of the Cooch Behar municipality, Mrs Renuka Sinha. But the Congress has increased its strength in the civic body, having won 16 out of the 20 seats.

In Toofanganj the CPI-M has gained two more seats since the last polls and brought its tally to ten. The Congress will be the only other Opposition party in the new civic body, having won from two wards, its strength reduced by half from the previous body.

The Trinamul-BJP combine here has drawn a blank, its district convenor attributing its defeat to a covert understanding between the CPI-M and the Congress.

31 MAY 2000

Cong comeback in municipal polls

● Left Front stays ahead ● BJP draws a blank

Ashis Chakrabarti
Calcutta, May 30

TURNING POLITICAL punditry on its head, the West Bengal Congress today made a stunning comeback on the State's political scene, notching up an unexpected tally in the municipal polls.

In what was billed as a dress rehearsal for next year's Assembly polls, the party re-emerged as the single largest challenger to the Left Front, surging far ahead of Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress and virtually wiping out her ally, the BJP. The results seemed to have driven the last nail in the coffin of Mamata's anti-Left *Mahajot*, at least for the time being.

The Congress, which began springing the early surprises in the first round of counting yesterday, maintained its winning spree today. The party's tally of 16 out of a total of 79 municipalities only half tells its success story. The Left Front captured 33 municipalities, against 43 last time, but the Left's success did nothing to detract from the Congress's great recovery. By comparison, the Trinamool managed to gain control of only eight

municipalities. The BJP drew a blank.

The undivided Congress had put up a stiff challenge to the Left Front in the last municipal polls in 1995, winning 34 of the 79 civic bodies which went to the polls. But the party's fortunes having sunk

Total	79
Left Front	33
Congress	16
Trinamool	8
BJP	0
GNLF	1
Tie	1
Hung	19
Withheld	1

since Mamata broke away from it and floated the Trinamool in 1997, few had expected the Congress to get anything better than an also-ran status this time.

"It's a mandate against the *Mahajot*," exclaimed an elated PCC working president Priya Ranjan Das Munshi over the tele-

phone from New Delhi. Das Munshi, who led a lonely crusade against the *Mahajot* in the teeth of opposition from pro-*Mahajot* leaders, including PCC president A B A Ghani Khan Choudhury, also described the results as a "mandate against communalism". In fact, he cited the cases of municipalities such as Sonamukhi, Dinhat, Toofangunj and Mathabhanga, which the party lost trying to put the *Mahajot* in place. "Twenty kilometers from Dinhat is Cooch Behar where we did not have the *Mahajot* and won," he said.

Not all Congress leaders, though, are ready to give the *Mahajot* a burial as yet. "After these elections, Mamata should realise that she has more to gain from allying with us than with the BJP," argued pro-*Mahajot* PCC vice-president Pradip Bhattacharyya. In fact, the two parties would have to do precisely this and come together in the 19 hung municipalities to keep the Left out. The Congress leaders would have no problems with that as long as the BJP is out of it. That could be the beginning of a new realignment in State politics. **Related report on Page 3**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

31 MAY 2000

Left Front loses ground

21/5 591

9-81-215

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, May 30. — The Left has taken a beating in the municipal polls, and the Congress has knocked the much-hyped Trinamul out of the race for the principal Opposition.

Miss Mamata Banerjee's party has won eight out of the 78 civic bodies results for which are out, behind the Left's 33 and the Congress's 16.

Nineteen municipalities have produced hung results, the GNLFF has got Mirik, and there has been a tie at Chandrakona.

The result at Jhalda municipality has been withheld.

Hectic attempts to form the board are on at the 19 hung municipalities — Chinsurah, Bansberia, Champdani, Baidyabati, Rishra, Daihat, Rampurhat, Bankura, Tamluk, Ghatal, Raghunathpur, Garulia, North Barrackpore, Bongaon, Taki, Gobardanga, Beldanga, Ashokenagar and Barasat.

The Trinamul has wrested Bolpur, Contai, Serampore and

Baruipur from the Congress and Sonamukhi, Nabadwip and Englishbazar from the Left Front.

In Left-dominated North 24-Parganas, the CPI-M retained control in 11 out of 20 municipalities; seven were declared hung. Two — Baduria and Basirhat — went to the Congress. The Left won Kamarhati in a close fight.

Malda district swung sharply away from the Left. The Trinamul and BJP wrested Englishbazar from the LF, winning 14 of 25 seats. The Congress held on to Old Malda, winning 11 of 17 seats. This is the first time in 23 years the Left has lost both municipalities in the district.

Of Hooghly's 11 municipalities, the Left retained four and the Trinamul wrested two from the Congress. Five — Bansberia, Chinsurah, Champdani, Baidyabati and Rishra — were

declared hung municipalities.

In the Left bastion of Burdwan, the CPI-M and its allies retained four out of six civic bodies. The Congress won Katwa for the third time. Daihat was declared hung after the Congress failed to repeat its 1995 performance.

In Howrah, the Left retained Bally, winning 25 out of 29 seats in the municipality.

In Nadia, the Congress retained three — Shantipur, Ranaghat and Birnagar — out

of seven civic bodies. The Left has retained three but lost the Nabadwip municipality to the Trinamul.

Out of six municipalities in Murshidabad, the Congress held on to three — Jiagunj, Kandi and Dhuliyon. The party

snatched Lalbagh from the Left Front. The CPI-M won in Jangipur, while Beldanga was declared a hung municipality.

Out of three municipalities in South 24-Parganas, the Left Front retained Budge Budge, and the Congress Joynagar-Mojirpur. The Trinamul wrested Baruipur from the Congress.

CPM fury

CPI-M supporters went on the rampage at Chinsurah tonight after their party narrowly lost Ward 22 of the municipality to the Trinamul. They damaged a number of cars and two-wheelers, including the district magistrate's vehicle. The Rapid Action Force was called out.

MUNICIPALITIES

POLLS HELD	79
DECLARED	78*
LEFT FRONT	33
CONGRESS	16
TRINAMUL	8
GNLFF	1
HUNG	19
TIED	1

* Results withheld at Jhalda

■ More reports on page 4

215 591

3 MAY 2000

Funds tap turned off for 'corrupt' civic bodies, 15 showcaused

Municipal boards face the heat

BY SHANKAR MUKHERJEE (1-8)
The government has initiated a move to fight "corruption" in the municipal bodies and regularise their casual staff with an eye on the forthcoming municipal polls.

Sources said 20 municipalities have been identified as "indulging in corrupt practices."
Government funds have been blocked to five of them and the rest asked to show cause.

The charges include appointment of casual workers without necessary government approval, fund diversion, failure to submit utilisation certificates, inability to prepare audit reports for years together and misappropriation of funds.

The decision was taken in the wake of a large number of complaints flooding both the Alimuddin Street office of the state CPM and the municipal affairs department at Writers Buildings.

Leaders of the CPM feel corrupt practices will have an adverse fallout on the party's prospects in the municipal elections. Eighty-two municipalities go to the polls in May.

The leaders believe the Opposition parties will make municipal corruption a major poll plank if no move is initiated to book the erring civic bodies. The party has directed its councillors to enervate mass contact to ensure better poll performance.

The government has also decided to recognise the casual employees recruited till 1998, provided the municipal boards concerned arrange for their salaries from their own resources.

Sources said municipal affairs minister Ashok Bhattacharya took the decision after chief minister Jyoti Basu's flashed the green signal. Basu has directed the minister to crack down on corruption in municipal bodies.

Bhattacharya has also been told to ignore the political colour of the municipal boards while taking necessary steps.

Officers from the directorate of local bodies and municipal affairs department will pay surprise visits to the municipalities and check the books of accounts. They will also verify the expenditure incurred by the municipal boards.

This apart, a special team of officers will verify the utilisation certificates and make spot visits to verify whether projects have been implemented as per sanctioned schemes.

The state government has also formed specific guidelines for the municipalities to run their affairs smoothly. The guidelines include:

- The board must meet at least once a month.
- No work can be undertaken without approval of the municipal board.
- Details of every expenditure,

with all supporting documents, will have to be furnished to the municipal affairs department.

■ No fresh funds will be released if accounts of previous expenditure are not furnished and found correct.

■ No municipality will appoint an employee or even a casual worker without the state government's approval.

"Our aim is to bring greater transparency to the municipal bodies and check corruption. We are giving them crores of rupees to provide better civic amenities to the people. We shall not tolerate misuse of funds," said Bhattacharya. "I have instructed my officers to prepare a list of municipalities indulging in corrupt practices," he added.

Bhattacharya said the state would bring an amendment to the Bengal Municipal Act, empowering it to replace any corrupt chairman in the people's interests.

Breathing life into the services

Reforming the bureaucracy, especially the Indian Administrative Service, is necessary for other reforms to work well, writes V.S. Mahajan

While the country went in for major structural reforms in 1991 to usher in a new era of modernization and globalization, no thoughts were spared for the need to introduce similar reforms in the functioning of the bureaucracy. In fact, bureaucratic reforms are necessary for the other reforms to function well.

During the 53 years after independence, the situation has only worsened as far as the political system and bureaucracy are concerned. This is amply demonstrated in the various hurdles that still exist in the country's liberalization process.

The Indian Civil Service was established by the British with an eye to bringing administrative transparency so that colonial rule functioned smoothly and without opposition. The ICS, at the time, was synonymous with honesty, and politicians often held the officers in great awe and kept a good distance from them.

After independence, the Indian Administrative Service was created largely in the pattern of the ICS. The change in name was meant to be symbolic of the transition from *videshi* to *swadeshi*. But ironically, it has failed to cater to the changing needs of administration in the free society that was ushered in with independence. Further, while this service has been in existence for over five decades, there has been no review of the system to bring it to the level required to serve well the needs and aspirations of a changing society. As a matter of fact, hardly any debate has been initiated into the functioning of the system.

The same traditional system of selection through examinations conducted on a commercial scale followed by an interview, the standards of which have come down drastically, continues to dominate. In this, it has become far removed from the ICS where standards were much higher. Thus, India's top civil servants who are expected to play a key role in providing a clean administration and bringing about welfare of the community, have failed to live up to the requirements of their office.

In the current political set-up, the loyalty of the bureaucratic class has increasingly shifted towards the political bosses rather than the country and its people. It is well known that the system of postings, transfers and promotions in the bureaucracy is largely controlled by politicians. No surprise, then, that IAS officers should be loyal to those in power than to anyone else.

But some soul-searching needs to be done to put the country's top service into proper gear. Several structural reforms are needed to overhaul it. This may be done after a review of the system of selection and the functioning of the service.

First, there is a need to revamp the current selection system. There is no justification for conducting a combined competitive examination for the IAS and allied

‘The practice of putting bureaucrats in important positions because of their administrative capacity, when they are less qualified than the technocrats placed under them, is unreasonable’

services. Allied services refer to a large number of other services ranging from Indian Foreign Service, Indian Police Service down to the secretarial services, which are all quite different from the IAS. A separate strategy must be adopted for the latter. Standards must be raised to ensure that the country gets the best brains. How this can be done should be debated and worked out with utmost care, and also, periodically reviewed.

Second, in order to have the best brains in the service, the reservations system needs to be done away with. Entry into the IAS should be purely on the basis of merit. However, in keeping with the Constitution's requirements, reservations may be retained in the allied services other than the IAS, IPS and IFS. In fact, entrants through the reservation quota may be allowed into these three services following creditable performance in the other services for which proper guidelines will have to be laid down.

Third, in the post-ICS period, there has been considerable political interference in the functioning of the services leading to a

drop in their overall quality. IAS officers have to deal directly with political leaders, whose interests are widely divergent from those of the officers. Thus national interest is often found to be at a discount. Charges of nepotism, corruption and favouritism have often been brought against IAS officers of late. This can be seen as the biggest fallout of the current political developments.

Not very long ago, a senior IAS officer was beaten up by a minister in Jaipur for refusing to carry out the latter's orders. However, one wonders why neither the officer nor his colleagues brought the case to the appropriate authorities. Had the system of the ICS been truly followed, the minister would have been sacked immediately by the governor and also debarred from contesting elections for a specified period.

Thus an institution like the Lok Pal needs to be created, exclusively for the redressal of grievances of higher cadre services. Quick action should be taken to protect the interest of honest, upright and

dutiful officers and those indicted should be severely dealt with, irrespective of their office. Here, it might be worthwhile to borrow from the Japanese system of creating an independent, non-political administrative personnel agency which is responsible for establishing standards of entry into public service, holding comprehensive qualifying examinations, compensation and disciplinary action.

Fourth, while an IAS officer is expected to be informed about current developments, especially in the field of public administration, be conversant with the economic and social system of the country, they must also be ready to adapt to the changes taking place in national and international perceptions. Experience, however, shows that most of these officers, assured of time-based promotions and basking under the protection of their political bosses, often fail to remain intellectually agile.

During the Nehruvian era these administrators were often exhorted to update themselves with the latest developments by reading books and journals on what was happening in India and elsewhere and were often required to participate in national level programmes, seminars and workshops. Such activities have been forgotten now.

It is therefore essential to discourage such apathetic attitudes and every IAS officer's promotion should be tied up with his performance in these areas as well. There are several national level institutes like the Indian Institute of Public Administration and the Administrative Staff College besides a number of state administrative institutes for this. The functioning of these institutes also must be periodically evaluated so that they can meet the demand for such training programmes.

Fifth, every state has created a network of corporations for the promotion of industry, trade, social development and others on which several hundred crores of rupees are spent annually. All these bodies have IAS officers at the helm who wield considerable powers. Thus, among bureaucrats there is a race to occupy prestigious posts, often easily achieved by pulling a political string or two.

But the very set-up of such bodies may be questioned. Why can they not be headed by experts in the respective areas rather than the IAS officers? In fact, the practice of placing bureaucrats in important positions on grounds of administrative capacity although they are less qualified than the technocrats placed under them, is highly unreasonable. It hampers efficient administration above anything else.

Thus, it is time that a national debate about reforms in the IAS and other top services is initiated. The government will be well advised to set up a high-powered committee with experts mainly from the non-governmental sector to go into the issue more carefully.

THE TELEGRAPH

17 FEB 2000

WHISTLE BLOWER

Civil Service Reform

51-8
9/11

THE Central Vigilance Commissioner, N Vittal, has submitted to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee a 13-point, high-sounding "zero tolerance-to-corruption plan". It is inspired by zeal; not informed by study or reflection. The Centre has drafted a code of ethics for civil servants in order to improve "accountability, transparency and customer friendliness" as the personnel secretary, BB Tandon, revealed on 18 November. Since crimes have continued despite Macaulay's masterpiece, the Indian Penal Code, 1860, the deterrence of a code of ethics is unlikely to be much higher than that of a statute whose violation exacts punishment.

None spares a thought for the pathetic state of the civil service today. On the one hand, there are men of high integrity in service struggling against odds to do their duty by the nation in a system which does not set much store by integrity. Then there are the likes of NK Singh who are mere servitors. He saw nothing wrong in asserting before TV cameras that none of the previous governments, who also he had served, did as well as the Vajpayee government. The Central Administrative Tribunal is a broken reed. The Supreme Court has been of little help against arbitrary transfers. NK Singh, an up-right officer, records in his memoirs, *The Plain Truth*, how he was hounded out of the CBI and shunted off to the BSF. Aggrieved by the tribunals' refusal to help, he moved the Supreme Court.

DISCLOSURE

His petition for special leave to the Supreme Court contained this shocking disclosure which rings true for two reasons. NK Singh is a truthful man. The episode has not been denied. "On 8 January 1991, Shri CB Gautam the Private Secretary of the second respondent (Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar) telephoned to the 4th respondent (Director, CBI) that the said Chandraswamy has sustained some injuries and the CBI team should go to his Ashram to examine him. This communication was conveyed to the Petitioner by his superior officer, the 4th respondent. The petitioner made it clear that he regarded the request as improper and, therefore, notice dated 18 January 1991 was issued to the said Chandraswamy to appear on 4 February 1991."

By AG NOORANI

The petition was dismissed by the Supreme Court on 25 August 1994 in a judgment delivered by none other than Justice JS Verma who, a year and a half later, won immortal renown for his rulings in the *hawala* case and as a champion of the rule of law. He ruled: "Transfer of a public servant from a significant post can be prejudicial to public interest only if the transfer was avoidable and the successor is not suitable for the post."

One would think that the test

The author is a lawyer and commentator on current affairs.

in such a case is whether the transfer was made *mala fide*; not whether NK Singh's successor was suitable. If an honest public servant is being shunted out for doing his duty, it is no defence to a charge of *mala fides* that he has been succeeded by a genius.

Justice Verma did not stop at that. He went out of his way to rebuke the man to whom he had failed to render justice. "The private rights of the appellant (NK Singh) being unaffected by the transfer, he would have been well advised to leave the matter to those in public life who felt aggrieved by his transfer to fight their own battle in the forum available to them." The judgment concluded with these sententious words: "We do hope that this would be a passing phase in the service career of the appellant and his crusader's zeal would be confirmed to the sphere of his official activity for improving the image and quality of public service of the police force, in which he holds a high office. By achieving that purpose, he would render much greater public service." NK Singh's transfer ended a fine career to the loss of the CBI, as everyone feared — except Justice JS Verma.

Vittal certainly means well when he urges the government to encourage "whistle blowing" by civil servants who discover wrong-doing by ministers of the government. But he clearly lacks a sense of humour. He would have the government promote legislation on "whistle blowing" on the lines of those in Australia and the US. But, surely, whistle blowing is possible only in a set-up in which the integrity and independence of civil servants are values cherished by them and by politicians in and out of power. It is an added safeguard. Of what avail liberty to blow the whistle if the very next minute the offender can be sent out of the field to one where his whistle cannot perform? And the Supreme Court will view the transfer as stoically as it did in NK Singh's case and uphold it because the offender was replaced by a player no less able than he.

ABUSES

This is not a plea against an Indian Whistle Blowers' Act, but for removal of the abuses that have crept in, especially, the arbitrary power of transfer and suspension. Officers have been suspended for long periods without any charges being delivered to them.

The whistleblower, it must be stressed, is an animal altogether different from the noisy jay who fancies himself as a crusader while still in service, with liberty to attack his superiors in the media and to play to the media, generally. Such a person is a palpable fraud and a menace to the probity of the service. The whistleblower, on the other hand, is a disciplined civil servant who, outraged at the discovery of wrongdoing, seeks to follow proper procedures for putting matters right. If his superiors suppress his protest, he must have the legal right, in proper cases, to alert Parliament and the nation. That is precisely what the law should provide. But, to make sense, it should be part of the wider reform.

N Vittal's action plan would have made better sense if his zeal was backed by careful study. Instead he went about seeking to inject morality with a plan of 13 points. The Almighty was content with 10.

WHISTLE BLOWING

Over the last decade in Britain, a mass of official studies and reports on the civil service have been published which have gone unnoticed here. The second report of the public service committee of the House of Commons, on "Ministerial Accountability and Responsibility", published on 24 July 1996, has two instructive paras (165 and 166) on "whistle blowing". It recalls Sweden's Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression, the Whistle Blowers' Protection Act of South Australia and the United States's Whistleblower Protection Act, 1989. There also exists in the US the office of Special Counsel to protect employees from "prohibited personnel practices". He has the right to receive disclosures of wrongdoing and power to order investigation into them. The Act of 1989 is however, only a graft on the Civil Service Reform Act, 1978 which provided substantial protection to federal employees.

Among the "personnel action" prohibited by the 1978 Act was

reprisal, by transfer or otherwise, for a disclosure of information which he "reasonably believes evidences a violation of any law ... or mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety". This is subject to two qualifications. Disclosure will not be protected if it is specifically prohibited by any law or if it is required by an executive order "to be

kept secret in the interest of national defence or the conduct of foreign affairs".

The Whistle Blower Protection Act, 1989 fortifies the Act of 1978 with additional safeguards. It is based on a congressional finding that "protecting employees who disclose Government illegality, waste, and corruption is a major step towards a more effective civil service". The Act lays down an elaborate scheme, with the office of Special Counsel at the apex, to protect the whistleblower. He does not operate in a vacuum but in a clime and a set-up in which the civil servant enjoys considerable protection.

THE STATESMAN

2 JAN 2000

Meet on balanced development

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 12

MINISTERS OF Urban Development and local self-government from various states and union territories will meet at a two-day conference in the Capital next week to deliberate upon a new "blueprint" for balanced development of towns and cities in the country.

Convened by Union Urban Development Minister Jagmohan, the conference is expected to discuss threadbare vital issues of development in today's context and the multifarious problems faced by the authorities in effectively delivering civic services to the rapidly-expanding population in urban areas.

Among the prominent issues to be discussed at the conference, beginning on January 17 at Vigyan Bhawan, will be the strategy to decongest major cities and improve their environment.

Another significant item on the agenda will be the policy to allow private sector participation in delivery of urban infrastructure services like water supply, solid waste management, sanitation, construction and maintenance of roads as well as development and maintenance of public parks and green areas.

According to official estimates, during the period 2001-2006, Rs 277.73 billion will be required by the country for provision of urban basic services to the population.

However, as against this require-

ment, the Ninth five-year plan has made provision for only around Rs 12,000 crore for urban development, water supply and sanitation.

Under these circumstances, it is evident that the financial support for such services from the government will be very limited and the need to invite private sector participation in these areas will arise, an official of the Urban Development Ministry stated.

At the conference, the State Ministers will also review the progress of centrally-sponsored schemes such as the Mega City Scheme, the scheme for Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT), Low Cost Sanitation Scheme and the Integrated Urban Water Supply Scheme.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 JAN 2000

Grants linked to elections

Centre's April deadline to Assam on panchayat polls

DIPANKAR ROY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SHILLONG, Jan. 24. — The Centre has set April 2000 as deadline for holding panchayat elections in Assam failing which the state will not get grants for local bodies given under Tenth Finance Commission guidelines.

While local body grants for 1996-97 have been released to all states without any condition, further releases will be made only on the basis of state governments complying with requirements such as conduct of local body elections and providing matching contributions. Since many states have not complied with the requirements, grants have not been released.

A Union home ministry official here said that panchayat elections in Assam were due in 1997. Requests to hold elections have fallen on deaf ears, he said. Though the ministry had offered all possible assistance relating to security aspects, the state government was yet to indicate what steps it had taken to hold elections, he said. At the meeting of the Prime Minister with Governors and chief ministers of north-eastern states and Sikkim here, Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta said that the elections would be held within the "current year".

PAGLADIA PROJECT

GUWAHATI, Jan. 24. — The ministry of water resources has cleared the much-awaited Pagladia Dam project in Assam, which is expected to reduce the flood problem to a great extent in Lower Assam.

The state flood control minister, Mr Promode Gogoi, said today the planning commission had agreed to release Rs 81.29 crore under the Ninth Plan and the rest in the Tenth Finance Commission. The total cost of the Pagladia project is Rs 540 crore as the dam will also produce a small amount of 4 MW power needed by the project and its neighbourhood. The planning commission informed the state government the ministry had agreed to fund the Pagladia Dam project to the extent of Rs 81.29 crore in the ninth plan and the balance in the tenth plan on the condition that the inclusion of this project would not affect the ongoing projects of this ministry in the Ninth Plan or in the Tenth Plan. — UNI

The chief minister, however, said that the state government would like to have a dialogue on the issue of autonomous councils vis-a-vis the panchayati raj system before the elec-

tions were held.

Mr Mahanta said that leaders of the four autonomous councils in the state — Bodoland Autonomous Council, Mising Autonomous Council, Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council and Lalung (Tiwa) Autonomous Council — were against panchayati raj system in their areas. He said that it was possible to exclude only the BAC from the operation of the Panchayati Raj system since it had a compact area.

Autonomous council leaders, according to Mr Mahanta, feel that panchayati system would affect the character of autonomous councils and their powers. This was because functions and powers of the councils were similar to those of panchayat bodies.

Mr Mahanta said the BAC area could be kept out of the purview of the panchayati raj system and alternative grass-roots bodies might be created under the control of council.

About Arunachal Pradesh, the home ministry official said that the state legislation on panchayati raj had not yet received President's assent. A Bill to amend the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992, was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in the last session to exempt the state from the requirement of reserving seats for SCs. The Bill could not be taken up for consideration.

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