

Panja attacks Mamata on Congress pact

'She has been stabbed in the back by someone she trusts'

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Kolkata, April 20: Mr Ajit Panja will fight his battle with Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee till the end.

On Friday, he had a few more things to say. "Having an alliance with the Congress is a blunder and the result would have been better if the Trinamul Congress would contest on its own power," he said.

Indirectly, he predicted that the election result of the Trinamul alliance will not be as good as expected. Accusing the Trinamul chief of ignoring his recommendations on selection of candidates in his own parliamentary constituency, Mr Panja said: "This is an insult to my

political standing and also goes against our poll plank of value-based politics."

Mr Panja, who has been representing the Kolkata Northeast constituency for many years, expressed his reservations about Trinamul's Burtola candidate Sadhan Panda.

"I wanted Atin Ghosh to be nominated instead of Mr Panda. I had listed 10 specific charges against him. He was the Congress candidate against me in the 1999 Lok Sabha election where he went after the Trinamul and me," he said.

Mr Panja felt his grouse against Mr Panda ought to have been given cognisance.

Granting nomination to Congress MLA Somen Mitra for the Sealdah

seat is another sore point with Mr Panja. He said: "Somen did not allow the Trinamul to campaign in Sealdah in the 1999 Lok Sabha election. He used muscle power and forced me and my supporters to withdraw from the area. We failed to put up a single bunting."

Mr Panja wanted Mr Tapas Roy, who joined the Trinamul from the Congress, to be nominated in Sealdah.

But Mr Roy was shifted to Burrabazar and Mr Mitra was given the Sealdah seat as part of the alliance between the two parties.

Mr Panja alleged that Ms Banerjee forged the alliance with the Congress at midnight without the knowledge of any Trinamul leader.

"Candidates like Sadhan Panda and Somen Mitra are enough to spoil the Trinamul wave," he said. Mr Panja believes the Trinamul Congress is playing second fiddle to state Congress president Pranab Mukherjee.

"The Bengal package was our poll plank in 1999 and it is still valid. But the party manifesto has no mention of the package," he said.

Mr Panja hinted Ms Banerjee has been "stabbed in the back by someone she has taken into confidence."

Mr Panja feels his outburst, far from hindering the party's prospects, will help it in the elections. "Workers will understand that the party is trying to be democratic," he said.



IN FRAY: Congress leader Somen Mitra signs his nomination paper at Lyon's Range in Kolkata on Friday. An ASIAN AGE photograph

3-cornered contest in Tripura poll

BY SANJIB DEB

Agartala, April 20: An alliance between the Congress and the Trinamul Congress for the byelection of the Banamalipur Assembly constituency in Tripura seems unlikely as both the parties have allotted symbols to their candidates.

Trinamul Congress candidate Ratan Chakraborty has filed his nomination papers on Wednesday while the Congress officially announced the name of Mr Mahitosh Saha as their candidate for the May 10 election. The Congress central election committee has already allotted a symbol for him.

Local leaders of both the parties have claimed that a talks for an alliance are going on at the central level but none of them seem to be confident about their outcome. Pradesh Congress Committee president Birajit Sinha, who returned on Wednesday from Delhi with necessary papers, allotting symbol to Mr Mahitosh Saha, said that the Congress central parliamentary board has cleared his name after discussions with the Trinamul leaders. However, the real contest is confined among the three major contenders.

'Keep BSF at border, not booths'

Tapan Das
Kolkata, April 19

THE STATE Home Department today reportedly informed the Centre and the Chief Election Commissioner its "inability" to withdraw Border Security Force personnel from their present posts and deploy them for the election duty.

The decision has primarily been prompted by the border shootout at the Meghalaya-Assam-Bangladesh borders.

Home Department sources said the State has made a strong plea against withdrawal of the BSF personnel from their present posts on the election eve, when threats of cross-border terrorism and subversive activities loom larger than ever before.

Incidentally, a large part of the 170 companies of paramilitary forces promised by the Centre for the Assembly polls were supposed to come from the BSF, which are now guarding the State borders.

The State Government had asked for 190 companies of paramilitary forces.

Withdrawal of BSF personnel would obviously make the porous borders between West Bengal and Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan even more vulnerable.

Not only the country's security and sovereignty would be jeopardised as a result, the entire election process may go haywire with a heavy influx of men, arms and ammunition, the note has said.

Reminding the Centre that the ISI's increasing activities in the border areas of the State have

Deploy all paramilitary personnel, Gill tells State

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, April 19

THE CHIEF Election Commissioner MS Gill in a directive to the State Chief Electoral Officer stated that all the 170 companies of the Central paramilitary forces must be fully deployed during the elections.

No Central force can be kept in "reserve", and in case any "reserve force" were required to be maintained, it must comprise the State police, Gill stated.

Speaking to reporters today, the CEO, Sabyasachi Sen, said the CEC had directed that the deployment of paramilitary forces have to be reviewed by a three-member committee.

Apart from the CEO, the State Chief Secretary and Home Secretary would be the Members of this committee, he said.

A Home Department official, however, said no Central force is kept as "reserve" during the elections. They are normally assigned to patrol different parts of the State before and on the day of election.

"These forces, which have already started arriving in the State will also be asked to undertake flag marches in the sensitive areas, especially in the North Bengal and in districts like Bankura, Purulia and Midnapore," the official said.

The CEO today expressed helplessness at the continued defiance by the cable television channels over the exhibition of films and serials by actors and actresses contesting elections.

"This is in clear violation of the model code of conduct, and since there is no provision for penal action against it, we can

do very little about it, except to repeat our appeal for compliance. I would, of course, bring it to the notice of the CEC if anyone lodged an official complaint with my office," he said.

Sen said 630 nomination papers, including three for the Midnapore parliamentary constituency, have been filed till date. While 172 nominations for Assembly seats and one for the Sabha seat were filed today, Midnapore led the tally with 28 nominations for Assembly seats and one for the Lok Sabha seat.

Prominent among those who submitted their papers included actress Madhabi Mukhopadhyay, Sadhan Pandey and Tapas Ray of the Trinamool, Shyamal Chakrabarty and Lakshmi Dey of the CPI(M) and Ram Pyare Ram of Congress.

for more security forces and sophisticated weaponry for combating cross-border terrorism and subversive activities, the department asserted.

To these alarming developments have been added the heightened activities of the PWG, along with its vote boycott call in Bankura, Purulia and Midnapore, the department warned.

fully been in the knowledge of the Union Home Ministry, the Home Department has pointed out that ISI's links with Ulfa, NSCN and KLO must also be taken note of.

The recent arrests of several ISI agents wanted in connection with several crimes, including the hijacking of the Indian Airlines plane reinforced West Bengal's long-standing demand

Demanding additional paramilitary forces for the elections, the Home Department has observed that withdrawal of BSF from the borders now would surely worsen the situation further. For, only 21 battalions of BSF are now stationed on the borders, as against a minimum requirement for 34 battalions. Each battalion consist of 6 companies, or about 450 men.

Ghani ultimatum to Mamata

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Malda, April 19: Malda leader A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury today warned Mamata Banerjee that Trinamul Congress candidates would have to face "dire consequences" if they contested from the district.

Ghani Khan was furious when told that Mamata had told an election rally in Murshidabad yesterday that her party would fight seven seats in Malda district.

"I'm the last person to give my observation on every issue she raises. She is not my leader. My leader happens to be Sonia Gandhi. Let Mamata do or say what she feels. I shall go on my own path," he said.

The Congress leader, who has rejected his party's deal with Ma-

mata, said his candidates had filed nominations in seven constituencies and four others would submit their papers soon.

Four Trinamul candidates filed nomination papers yesterday at Englishbazar, Old Malda, Gajole and Ratua constituencies.

Apart from Krishnendu, those who filed nominations yesterday were Phani Ray from Old Malda, Naba Kumar Hembrom from Gajole and Mohammad Ishaque from Ratua. Krishnendu said the candidates had filed the papers on Mamata's directions.

Malda district Congress leaders are angry that the stalemate is



Ghani Khan

dragging on with the elections just three weeks away. On Thursday, election symbols of nine candidates, including Goutam Chakraborty, who will fight from Englishbazar, reached Malda.

The inclusion of Chakraborty's name, however, brought little relief to Ghani Khan given that Trinamul has pitted Krishnendu from Englishbazar, a prestige seat.

District Congress leader Sabitri Mitra threatened that if Trinamul did not leave the Englishbazar seat to the Congress, there would be no alliance in Malda. She alleged that Krishnendu had violated norms of the alliance by fil-

ing his nomination from the constituency. "This is one reason why Congress workers have lost their interest in the alliance," she said.

Trinamul leader Debasish Saha said he had met Mamata at Lalbagh in Murshidabad yesterday. Mamata told him that under no circumstances would she withdraw her candidate from Englishbazar. "That is why we have already submitted nominations in seven constituencies. We will file nominations for four other seats in this district," Saha said.

However, the Congress today sought to play down the seat-share dispute. Pradesh Congress president Pranab Mukherjee told a news conference in Calcutta that he had spoken to Ghani Khan and he hoped that the problem will be sorted out soon.

THE TELEGRAPH

20 APR 2011

Panja outburst a boost for CPM'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

55-3 19/4

KOLKATA, April 18. - Mr Ajit Panja's outburst against the party leadership will be a minor morale booster for the CPI-M prior to elections, Mr Subrata Mukherjee, Trinamul Congress working chairman, said today.

Describing the diatribe as "unfortunate", Mr Mukherjee said had he been in Mr Panja's shoes, he would not have made his grievances public. Mr Panja, as the Trinamul chairman, should know the party guidelines. The matter is not likely to be discussed with Miss Mamata Banerjee as this is not an anti-party act. "There are more important issues on her agenda", Mr Mukherjee said.

Mr Panja had expressed his willingness to campaign for any Trinamul candidate. Mr Mukherjee, the Trinamul candidate from Chowringhee, was cool to the offer. "No heavy weights are required to campaign from Chowringhee. Street corner meetings are sufficient in my constituency", he said. Mr Mukherjee also took a swipe at CPI-M leader, Mr Anil Biswas's comments on the issue. "Who is bothered about Anil Biswas's remarks? He is always voicing his opinion about everything under the sun," he said.

Sailen Dasgupta's reaction: The LF chairman, Mr Sailen Dasgupta, today said Mr Panja's criticism of Miss Mamata Banerjee's style of functioning is the party's internal matter.

The people are watching the developments during the run-up to the poll and will make up their mind accordingly. The LF, he said will better its performance in the last Assembly poll.

THE STATESMAN

19 APR 2001

Panja: Mamata has ignored me

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 17. — Mr Ajit Panja today said he had been ignored by Miss Mamata Banerjee for the past two-and-a-half years. He, however, denied media reports that he would leave the Trinamul Congress and join the BJP.

"I am 68 now and I feel the party no longer needs me. I was not consulted for drafting of the election manifesto or the selection of the candidates. I turned down (Trinamul general secretary) Mr Mukul Roy's plea to be present when the manifesto was being released, for I didn't know what it contained. For the same reason, I kept away when the party's revised list of candidates was announced. The press conference was held in the chamber of my elder brother, Dr Ranjit Panja."

Mr Panja said there were still chances of restoring democracy in the party. He felt the manifesto should have explained why the Trinamul had pulled out of the NDA and decided that its MPs would abstain from voting in any no confidence motion against the BJP-led government.

"There were some instances where the party's decision-making process didn't work properly. But there is a chance for rectification and I'm sure Mamata will do that."

He said he had called the press conference because some papers were printing "lies" about him. He had waited for nearly a month for the party to issue a rejoinder. "After waiting for so long I thought I must go to the press and tell the truth."

Mr Panja said Mr Pranab Mukherjee and Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet have virtually trapped Miss Mamata Banerjee. "But their efforts will not succeed and she will come to power."

The former minister of state for foreign affairs said that after the Tehelka expose he had heard the PCC chief and the CPI-M general secretary were holding talks in Delhi and had sensed "something foul" was going on. "I had cautioned all

■ See PANJA: page 4

THE STATESMAN

APR 17 1994

Congress-Trinamool kicks off campaign in Bengal

SABYASACHI BANDOPADHYAY
& HARISH GUPTA
KOLKATA/NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

THE BATTLE royale for Writers' Building, the seat of the West Bengal government, began on Sunday with the Trinamool Congress-Congress, the principal threat to the ruling Left Front, hitting campaign trail at Shyambazar in north Kolkata.

All key leaders of both parties, including Trinamool's Mamata Banerjee, Sudip Bandopadhyay, Subrata Mukherjee, Pankaj Banerjee, and Congress' Pranab Mukherjee, Priyaranjan Das Munshi and Somen Mitra addressed the crowded rally called by Mamata's Save Bengal Front.

Both parties have also decided to jointly campaign in Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's constituency. AICC general-secretary Kamal Nath had said on Saturday that party chief Sonia Gandhi will campaign for three to four days in Bengal, beginning April-end.

Bengali film star Tapas Pal, contesting on a Trinamool ticket, too addressed the rally.

"CPI(M) leaders such as Jyoti



Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee and West Bengal Congress president Pranab Mukherjee at a joint election meeting in Kolkata on Sunday - PTI

Basu and H.K.S. Surjeet tried their best to sabotage the formation of the alliance," Mamata told the rally. "They wanted to control the Congress but I must thank Soniaji she did not pay heed to them."

In her 30-minute speech, Mamata, projected as the leader of the

alliance by all speakers, fired salvos at the CPI(M), saying the party could not do for people in its 24-year-rule what she did during her 17 months as a Union minister.

Accusing the CPI(M) of corruption, she said if she came to power, she would order a probe into all corruption cases.

INDIAN EXPRESS

17 APR 2001

Miles to go, but he must reach

Kinsuk Basu
Siliguri, April 15

IT ALL began with kicking studies at 14. A Class XI student then of the Siliguri Boys' School, he found it difficult to accept himself as the lone member from his community, rubbing shoulders with assorted bright sparks of the town. The journey which began then may have found a sense of direction, but it will be miles before he stops to rest. Before that, he will go the whole hog.

If you still don't know who he is, meet Atul Roy, a junior laboratory assistant with North Bengal University 10 years ago, and now leader of inarguably one of the most controversial political parties fighting the polls - the Kamtapur People's Party.

"Since I was a child, I felt the need to do something for the emancipation of our people, the original children of this soil. As I grew up, I began associating myself with different movements, but alas, only to realise how unfocused they were. A strange feeling kept gnawing inside: this was not the way, certainly not the way. So I decided to do something on my own." Roy said, sitting in a small room of his Shib Mandir home a few kilometers from Siliguri.

This desire to serve his community right saw the youngest son of the Roys chuck his job and join the Uttarkhand Party (UKD). A couple of years, and Roy realised there was something lacking in the leaders who were running the show. By all appearance, the UKD sought the emancipation of the dispossessed legions, but had no clear agenda of how to go about it. "I realised the qualities which make leaders of men were missing from the bunch leading the party. So I decided to contest for the president's post, only to suffer a solid drubbing."

It was in his late twenties that Roy decided to form a party of his own. It began with the Kamtapur Youth Organisation (KYO). His youthful exuberance found sympathisers; but leadership takes more than that. Within a year of its inception, the KYO went into oblivion. "But I didn't lose heart. A year or so on, I formed another party, this time the Kamtapur Liberation Front. Even this flopped," Roy says with a distant look in his eyes.

The failures probably were a lesson, a lesson Roy learnt the hard way. The man, who believes that realisation precedes revolution, finally came up with the KPP in 1996. A little over four years down the line,



thousands now have rallied behind the movement, even if it means putting their lives at risk. "Our supporters have been forced to go behind bars, even flee their homes. But they have realised that it's time they rose against the exploitation over decades." The mantra and the message are the same: a separate state for Kamtapuris.

But why a separate State?

"In North Bengal, the sons of the soil have been robbed of their dignity in their own place. It's not the Rajbanshis alone. We demand a separate State, for we firmly believe that by utilising the natural resources of this area, we can bring about economic independence for our people."

The man spearheading the movement does not believe that the CPI(M) can thwart it by unleashing terror. "They don't

have the power to penetrate villages. We know how to take on these communists. They might have the police but we too have our own ammunition. If required we would fight with lathis, kodals and gaantee. It won't be easy at all for the CPI(M). In fact, we believe the KPP is the only party here that can take on the Marxists," Roy says with a defiant glint in his eyes.

Photograph by Subhendu Gho

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

16 APR 2001

Salute to Mamata at unity show

9-8-83

The sole aim of our alliance is to remove the Left Front and Mamata is our future chief minister
Pranab Mukherjee

Mamata is the leader of the joint platform now and will be the leader of the new government which will come to power
Priya Ranjan Das Munshi

We have started our journey under the leadership of Mamata.
Somen Mitra

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, April 15: The first of the triumvirate has often been blamed for Mamata Banerjee leaving the Congress.

The third was her bitterest enemy when she was in the Congress.

The one in the middle has always walked the tightrope.

All three and all her senior in politics proclaimed Mamata as their leader at the Trinamul-Congress alliance's first joint election rally, held, ironically, at the Shyamnagar five-point crossing where Trinamul was launched over three years ago.

Mamata would have had every reason to feel satisfied had A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury been present on the date, along with this galaxy of Congress leaders. Another notable absentee, this time from her party, was Ajit Panja. Ghani Khan did not respond to Mamata's invitation to attend the rally, the Malda leader's absence leaving a blemish on the grand show of unity.

What a show it was, too, born — as the three Congress leaders described it — out of "historic necessity". History was written all over the banner that should have formed the backdrop to the happy-family domesticity of Pranab Mukherjee whispering into Mamata's ears, but wasn't there at all because the stage was open on all four sides.

Mamata and these three had last shared the dais — at a political meeting — in 1986 when then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao had addressed a rally before

the Lok Sabha polls at the Brigade Parade Grounds.

The crowd — largely Mamata supporters as the rally was officially a Trinamul affair — was aware of the symbolism. It burst into a thunderous applause as Mukherjee and Das Munshi arrived ahead of Mamata at the meeting.

From 3 pm, the crowd had begun to swell as the sun went behind clouds. Now, the wait began for Mamata. With every known face turning up, a roar went up from the crowd. By 4, when Mamata arrived, accompanied by actor and Trinamul candidate Tapas Pal, all of Bhupen Bose Avenue was chock-a-block.

People even climbed up hoardings, the Shyamnagar Metro station buildings, balconies and rooftops for a glimpse of the stage of unity, which was as crowded.

Having frequently referred to the Congress in the past as the B-team of the CPM, Mamata today vowed to defeat the Left with the partner that was now her B-team.

She said: "After that (taking power), we will take up each and every corruption case of the CPM-led Left Front and no one who is found guilty will be spared."

Mamata appealed to members of the state administration — often accused of serving the party in power during elections — not to take sides. "You don't have to join Trinamul. But, for heaven's sake, remain neutral."

Her flagship-slogan for the campaign will be: "Bodley deen, palley deen (change the government)."

"Repeat this slogan wherever you go — at tea stalls, at home, in clubs, offices, everywhere."

There was no hint of any change, though, in her stand on seat-sharing, despite the unresolved tangle with Ghani Khan who is refusing to give up two seats.

"Of the 294 seats, the Congress will field its candidates in 57 and Trinamul and its allies will contest the rest. Ours is a three-year-old party," she said, as if to underline how roles have reversed since she left the Congress. Hands that

TWO SHORT AT FIVE-POINT CROSSING



Mamata Banerjee, Somen Mitra and Pranab Mukherjee at the rally. Picture by Kishor Roychowdhury

moved the wheels of power in the Congress then were acknowledging her as the leader.

Mamata was, however, modest in victory. In the past, she has claimed to have been driven out of the Congress. Today, she said she had left the party to form her own outfit. Change was in the air.

Mukherjee said the alliance was the most natural thing that could have happened. "It was the demand of the common people."

Das Munshi found another bond: both belong to the same family as Mahatma Gandhi is the last word for both. "Our symbols may be different but in reality we're the same."

Somen Mitra was late, but his heart was there all the time. "We should shake off all conflicts and hesitations and work unitedly to-

wards defeating the CPM-led coalition."

Deadlock continues

Congress and Trinamul appear to be heading for a friendly contest for the Englishbazar Assembly seat in Malda with both parties launching their individual campaigns today.

While Ghani Khan struck to his position that he would not concede the seat to Mamata, Trinamul brought out a procession asking people to vote for its nominee Krishnendu Choudhury.

Ghani Khan addressed three public meetings in the Englishbazar area in support of the sitting Congress legislator, Goutam Chakraborty.

"I am not going to concede Englishbazar to Trinamul at any

cost and Goutam will file his nomination as the Congress candidate," Ghani Khan said.

At a convention of Congress supporters in Malda town, he said: "We will put up Congress candidates for all the seven Assembly segments of my Malda Lok Sabha seat. We will not yield either Englishbazar or Old Malda."

He advised all the seven sitting Congress MLAs to file nominations as soon as possible.

Trinamul's Krishnendu Choudhury returned to Malda from Calcutta this morning and hurriedly called a meeting of party supporters after coming to know of developments in the other camp.

He led a procession, campaigning for himself. "Yesterday, *didi* (Mamata) wrote a letter to the

AICC informing that I am the official candidate from Englishbazar. Moreover, she has asked me to start the campaign," he said.

For the Old Malda seat, Congress supporters are unwilling to campaign for the Trinamul nominee, Phani Roy, who has already begun the campaign.

The other irritant for the alliance — the newly-floated Save Congress Committee — today decided not to join Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party and instead contest the elections as independents.

Abul Basar Laskar, the convenor of the committee and Congress M.L.A., said at least 75 Congress workers, including 12 legislators who were denied tickets, will fight the elections as Independents.

'Deal' irks Somen camp

ANINDYA SENGUPTA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 14. - The Somen Mitra camp is peeved at the last-minute changes made by Miss Mamata Banerjee to accommodate Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi's candidates in Dinajpur.

Leaders owing allegiance to Mr Mitra and Mr Pradip Bhattacharya said the Trinamul chief had never been so obliging or benevolent when Mr Mitra demanded that sitting Congress MLAs of south Bengal be nominated.

Hours before the revised Trinamul list was published, Mr Das Munshi had extracted Miss Banerjee's promise that the Congress would be allowed to contest the Raiganj and Kaliaganj seats in North Dinajpur.

However, nothing of the kind was done when Mr Somen Mitra argued that sitting Congress MLAs of South 24-Parganas, Nadia and Burdwan should be renominated.

Miss Banerjee, who till the other day was against any sort of adjustment in regard to the Raiganj, Kaliaganj and Itahar seats, surprisingly gave in to Mr Das Munshi's requests. Apart from shifting the Raiganj Trinamul candidate to Kushmandi, she gave the Kaliaganj

seat to the Congress. Besides, Mr Das Munshi didn't want Mr Jainal Abedin to contest from Itahar as the Trinamul candidate. Miss Banerjee seems to have accepted that too.

Mr Somen Mitra had been vocal against the denial of Congress tickets to Mr Daulat Ali (Diamond Harbour), Mr Sudhir Bhattacharyya (Falta), Mr Tapas Banerjee (Asansol), Mr Sasanka Biswas (Hanskhali), Mr Abul Bashir Lashkar (Mograhat West), Md Sohrab (Suti), Mr Habibur Rahman (Jangipur) and Mr Anil Mudi (Tamluk).

In this case, Miss Banerjee was far from being accommodative. She even hinted at the possibility of giving tickets to Congress MLAs if they joined Trinamul. Congress MLAs like Mr Sanjib Das, Mr Ashok Deb and Mr Abdus Salam Munshi quit the party and declared themselves as Trinamul men.

What followed was their nomination as Trinamul candidates from Shyampur (Howrah), Budge Budge (South-24 Parganas) and Kaliaganj (Nadia). The Trinamul chief shifted Mr Chitta Bag, her nominee for Budge Budge, to Kamarhati in North 24- Parganas just to accommodate Mr Ashok Deb.

■ Cong, Trinamul to begin campaign:
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THE STATESMAN

15 APR 2001

Mamata, Congress race against debut deadline

OUR BUREAU

15/4
9.87 W3

Calcutta, April 14: Mamata Banerjee and the Congress burned midnight oil and tried to hammer out a deal on the last fistful of seats before the couple debuts tomorrow on a public platform at a venue with symbolic significance.

Congress leaders said late tonight they expected the stalemate on Malda's Englishbazar and Harishchandrapur, which veteran party leader Ghani Khan Chowdhury has refused to yield to the Trinamul Congress, to be broken by tomorrow.

On Sunday afternoon, Mamata is scheduled to kick off her roadshow for the Assembly polls at a rally at the Shyambazar five-point crossing in north Calcutta.

The meeting will also be addressed by Congress leaders, including state party chief Pranab Mukherjee and former president Somen Mitra. The five-point crossing was also the venue of Mamata's maiden rally where she had announced the names of her party candidates on the eve of the 1998 Lok Sabha polls after she had broken away from the Congress.

Congress chief whip Priya Ranjan Das Munshi met Mamata to finalise the deal on Raigunj which falls in his Lok Sabha constituency. Some other Congress leaders, too, called on Mamata after her return from Jangipara in Hooghly where she had gone to inquire into the circumstances leading to the killing of two Trinamul workers.

If the differences are ironed out by tomorrow, Trinamul sources said Mamata might announce the candidates at the rally.

Amid the hard bargaining, roles reversed in the Congress with Mukherjee, once a reluctant supporter of the alliance, targeting "overnight" sceptics in the party.

In an apparent reference to Ghani Khan, Das Munshi and member of Parliament Adhir Chowdhury, the state Congress president said it was unfortunate that those who once asked for an alliance with Mamata were overnight creating hurdles.

"Instead of wasting time on petty issues, we should see to it that this combine puts up a united fight against the ruling communists," he added.

Adhir Chowdhury is aggrieved over the poor "winnability" of the slots set aside for his supporters in his stronghold. Das Munshi, who had a heated argument with Mukherjee in Delhi over the candidate for Durgapur, was vocal in his criticism of the deal earlier but softened after yesterday's list met some of his demands.

Das Munshi echoed his new sense of optimism tonight, saying it was unfair to say that some leaders were unhappy with the alliance. "We feel that the contentious issues will be resolved in a day or two," he added. Ghani Khan was not available for comment.

Mukherjee, however, admitted that the Congress was not given its due share compared with its political presence in Bengal. He threatened disciplinary action against 12 party MLAs who have floated the Save Congress Committee after having been denied tickets.

Mukherjee's defence of the alliance caught many Congress leaders by surprise. Some leaders said Mukherjee might have changed his mind after Mamata assigned him to draft a common agenda of governance.

THE TELEGRAPH

15 APR 2001

Pradhan raring for Gorkha State

Kinsuk Basu
Kalimpong, April 14

THE KAMTAPURIS might not be the only thorns for the Left Front in north Bengal. It could just be one of many.

Stung by the recent decision of GNLFF chief Subash Ghisingh to dissolve the Kalimpong unit of the party, its former president and one of the most recalcitrant leaders of the Hills, CK Pradhan, has decided to go all out for a separate Gorkhaland, a promise, he believes, should be delivered at any cost. And Pradhan's decision to come clean on the allegation of conspiring against Ghisingh, days before the State goes to the polls, could just prove dear for Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee and his men.

In an exclusive interview to *Hindustan Times* on Saturday, he said, "It is not at all my lookout

whether I am in Ghisingh's good books or not. What matters is the love of my people. I am aware of their needs, their demands; I know they want a separate State, and we will have it.

"It might take some time, but I am confident we will get it. If I am dead by then, my son will surely see it," he said.

He still took pains to clarify that he had nothing against Ghisingh, though.

One of the frontline leaders during the turbulent 80s, Pradhan believes his mentor Ghisingh will "certainly bless him", though he might not approve of his move.

"I am on the right track; the one instructed by my father Ghisingh. It does not matter if I am alone. In '86 there was no one. I revived the GNLFF, so I know how to go about it," he emphatically states.

He said he planned to take the

vision to the masses and organise a mass movement. "I shall go to the bastis. If Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh could happen, Gorkhaland should not be a problem," he said.

The man, who till a month ago was considered closest to the DGHC chairman, is definitely hurt by Ghisingh's decision, built he would not say that his mentor had failed. Instead, he squarely put the blame on the Left Front Government to have neglected the development of the Hills.

"You have to give it to Ghisingh. I all these years he has achieved the impossible — built bridges and schools. One has his shortcomings. But how many bridges has Jyoti babu built during his tenure," he asked.

"DGHC received Rs 700 crore in 12 years. This is peanuts. Even a small State like Sikkim gets Rs 4 crore per annum. We have clearly been deprived of our

rights," he said.

If he was so sympathetic towards Ghisingh, why were his wings chopped so unceremoniously?

"Bad luck", said Pradhan. And that Ghisingh was "misguided by other councillors".

"It's a conspiracy against me. They talk of Chhatre but I have never met him in my life. Deep down, I think, Ghisingh knows his son could never have conspired to kill him. It really hurts to hear all this," he said.

He is not very happy about the GNLFF-sponsored bandh in the Hills, either. It is doing us more harm than good, he said.

"I have a suggestion before the GNLFF. If you think I have conspired against Ghisingh, get the police to arrest me. But withdraw the strike and bring peace back to the Hills," he said.

Photograph by Subhendu Ghosh

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

APR 14 1988

Lists unveiled in cloud of dispute

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, April 13: The much-awaited Congress and Trinamul lists for Bengal elections were unveiled today, but the wait continued.

Disputes over three Assembly seats — two in Malda and one in South Dinajpur — still stood in the way of a poll partnership without any rough edges, though the lists were released almost simultaneously by the two parties today, the Congress' in Delhi and Trinamul's in Calcutta.

The Congress list contains 59 seats, though under the sharing formula, it was allotted 57. The two additional seats — Harishchandrapur and Englishbazar — are under dispute, since both Malda leader A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury and Trinamul are staking claim. Along with these two, where it has left the choice of candidates to Ghani Khan, there are three more in which the party has not named candidates.

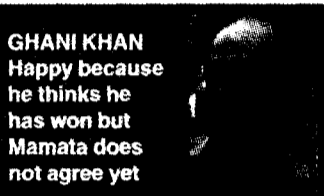
Three seats — the two in Malda and Kushmundi in Priya Ranjan Das Munshi's territory South Dinajpur — appear on both lists. Trinamul, however, claimed that it has got Kushmundi in return for surrendering two other seats to Das Munshi.

Sources said Trinamul has exchanged Raigunj and Kaliagunj for Chopra and Kushmundi on Das Munshi's request.

If Trinamul's claim to have pocketed Kushmundi is true, the disputed seats left now are Englishbazar and Harishchandrapur.

Releasing the list, Trinamul MP Sudip Bandopadhyay said the two Malda seats were still under discussion. Asked how long it would take to resolve the conflict, Bandopadhyay said: "We can wait

GHANI KHAN
Happy because he thinks he has won but Mamata does not agree yet



PRANAB
Still sulking from the fracas with Priya; Sonia prescribes ego massage



PRIYA
Gets two hated candidates out of the way; Ticket for wife is icing on the cake



SOMEN
After initial hiccups, appears to have ended up on the winning side



which are under former state party chief Somen Mitra's sway — have been accepted.

Ghani Khan said in Malda this evening that he would not give up his right to Englishbazar. He claimed that AICC general secretary Kamal Nath rang him up today, asking for the names of candidates for Englishbazar and Harishchandrapur. Ghani Khan was happy to see both seats on the Congress list, though the dispute with Trinamul was still raging.

Ghani Khan said he had not discussed the issue with Mamata and preferred to settle it with the AICC. "Mamata is not my leader. Please don't mention her name to me."

Trinamul reacted with restraint, signalling that it does not want to do anything to upset Ghani Khan. Sudip Bandopadhyay said: "He is a senior political leader and has been a prime mover for a *mahajot* of anti-CPM forces in Bengal. Once the issue is settled, he will accept the party's decision. We are sure he will come forward to help us remove the CPM from power."

Trinamul sources feel Mamata may compromise by shifting her candidate from Englishbazar to Harishchandrapur, which should be acceptable to Ghani Khan.

Adhir Chowdhury, Congress MP from Berhampore, is unhappy with the choice of seats in Murshidabad, though his brother-in-law Arit Majumdar got a ticket. "We do not have much of a prospect in many of these seats," Chowdhury said.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi has asked Kamal Nath and senior Bengal leaders to work on Chowdhury so that he does not put up a candidate against Atish Sinha, Congress Legislature Party leader, at Kandi.

till the last date for filing nominations, if necessary."

This is the second time Trinamul issued its list, the first having been prepared on the basis of the understanding with the BJP. The new list — 226-strong — has six new faces.

The new faces on the Congress list include Deepa, Das Munshi's wife. Congress sources said in 42 of the seats allotted to them, they were in a strong position to put up a fight. Most of the recommendations made by the respective district committees — many of

THE TELEGRAPH

APR 13 1997

Cong delays list, Ghani backtracks

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI/CALCUTTA, April 12. — The Congress today couldn't resolve its differences over selection of candidates for the West Bengal Assembly polls, though Mr ~~ABA~~ Ghani Khan Chowdhury softened his stand towards Miss Mamata Banerjee.

The list of Congress candidates could not be issued today, for the party's central election committee couldn't resolve the dispute over five of the 57 names. The party spokesman, Mr S Jaipal Reddy, said there were still some differences and that would be sorted out in a day or two.

But officially, the Congress has postponed issuing its list because party leaders would like the Trinamul to release its nominees' names first.

In a climbdown, Mr Khan Chowdhury today reportedly agreed to forego the Old Malda seat — one of the two demanded by Miss Banerjee as her party's share in the Congress-Trinamul alliance in Malda district.

Before agreeing to Trinamul's demand, in part, Mr Khan Chowdhury talked to Mr Kamal Nath and Mr Pranab Mukherjee several times over the phone. The two urged him to accept Miss Banerjee's demand.

But Mr Chowdhury is

determined not to leave the English Bazar seat for a Trinamul candidate. Earlier, he was adamant on not leaving any of the seven Assembly seats in the Malda Lok Sabha constituency to the Trinamul.

Rebel Congmen: The rebel Congressmen, who have formed the Save Congress Committee, will not field any candidate in the 57 seats to be contested by the Congress. Their opponents will be the Left Front and Trinamul.

The SCC plans to contest at least 100 seats and its leaders say requests from disgruntled Congressmen are flowing in to allow them to contest the polls.

Mr Daulat Ali, Congress MLA from Diamond Harbour and SCC chief adviser, said the rebels have received a proposal from the Nationalist Congress Party to merge with it. The SCC core committee will meet on 15 April to consider it.

"We are part... of the Congress legacy and ideology and we'll collaborate with the Congress the way the NCP is sharing power with it in Maharashtra. Our aim is to build a permanent organisation so that we can work with our self-respect intact," Mr Ali said.

- We'll come to power, says Mamata: page 4
- Azad, Vora on Kerala peace mission: page 8

THE STATESMAN

13 APR 2001

Sonia tells Mamata to resolve seats row

Cong strategy to force Trinamool chief's hand

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 11

THE CONGRESS central leadership, in an unusual move, put the onus of sorting out ticket distribution-related problems in its West Bengal unit on Mamata Banerjee. As leader of the Congress-Trinamool front, she must sort out these problems.

"As leader of the alliance, it is Mamata's duty to harmonise and unite workers of the formation," AICC general secretary Kamal Nath told reporters here today. "It rests on her to resolve all ground-level problems which will come up between the campaign period and the elections."

By putting the Trinamool leader in charge, the Congress perhaps hopes that to mollify rebel contestants she would be forced to make the concessions she refused to extend across the negotiating table. And if she fails to iron things out, she alone would be responsible for the consequences. This obviously short-term strategy could boomerang on the party. Not only does it put the AICC stamp on Mamata's supremacy over the PCC leadership, it also reduces Bengal Congress to a mere adjunct of the Trinamool. In Tamil Nadu too, the party had allowed Tamil Maanila Congress leader G K Moopanar to negotiate on its behalf with Jayalalitha.

But in Bengal, the leadership has taken the rather bizarre step of giving Mamata the carte blanche to talk directly to its cadres and leaders.

Asked about Congress veteran Ghani Khan Chowdhury's reaction to the choice of candidates in Malda, his citadel for many



WAR OF NERVES: MAMATA AND SONIA

years, Nath said: "This issue will be resolved between Mamata and Ghani Khan."

Likewise, to queries about the "Save Congress Forum" floated by discarded party MLAs, the AICC general secretary's response was: "I can understand their anguish. But in any alliance, there have to be sacrifices."

Nath dismissed suggestions of differences among PCC leaders over distribution of tickets and said compromises and sacrifices have to be made by all sections in forging alliances.

"There are no differences. I am consistently in touch with West Bengal leaders and Mamata. In any alliance there are compromises and sacrifices by all sec-

tions" Nath told reporters.

"We have tried to combine the ground strength of the two parties— Congress and the Trinamool," he said.

When reminded about Ghani Khan Chowdhury's threat of fielding candidates in all 11 seats in Malda district, he said he had talked to the Malda veteran and had told him that the problem with the English Bazar Assembly seat would be sorted out.

He condemned the critical statement of CPI(M) leader Anil Biswas on the Congress-Trinamool alliance and said it was an internal matter of the two parties and Biswas had no moral right to interfere in it.

More poll reports on pages 3, 4

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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ATTACK ON SAIFUDDIN

Wake up call to the Election Commission

SATURDAY'S attack by armed CPI-M cadres on PDS supporters at Nadanghat where their president Saifuddin Chowdhury was to address an election rally lays bare the Fascist character of the CPI-M in West Bengal. Not only did they smash the rostrum from where Chowdhury was to address the rally and throw the mikes and the entire sound system into a neighbourhood pond, but even rained lathi blows on his car in their bid to drive him away. The objective of this vulgar exercise was to warn local voters that any public display of sympathy for Chowdhury, who is the PDS candidate for Nadanghat, would invite serious trouble including physical assault. To drive home the point, local PDS conveners, who were with the CPI-M till the other day and the main organisers of the rally, were badly beaten up and they too were dumped in the pond. The attackers wouldn't have spared Chowdhury if his sympathisers had not protected him. In true Fascist style the Marxist marauders raised slogans which justified the attack and threatened to repeat it if needed. They have vindicated the charge levelled by Chowdhury when he left the CPI-M that the Marxists believed only in centralism and not democracy. That what happened in Nadanghat is no isolated incident is borne out by the fact that the Marxists have successfully prevented PDS from opening its poll office in Jadavpur where its general secretary Samir Putatunda is pitted against the chief minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya. There have also been reports of Marxists attacking PDS supporters and forcing PDS candidates to withdraw. What is worse is that after indulging in a *gestapo* style attack the Marxists launched a massive disinformation campaign. They even tried to give a communal twist to the incident which put even Goebbelsian tactics to shame. The Burdwan district magistrate's report on the incident falls in the same category.

Undoubtedly these are sure signs of desperation and nervousness as the Marxists have begun to wake up to the threat posed by the PDS to their traditional rural vote bank. Already the PDS has begun eroding the strongest Marxist base in pockets of Burdwan and south 24 Parganas districts and this has made them jittery. Obviously it is no longer the "bogus party" which Jyoti Basu had called it a month ago. The irony is that Alimuddin Street knows the reasons why the PDS has begun gaining ground at the cost of the CPI-M who are unable to do anything as they have compromised on principles and lack courage and political will to carry out the radical measures needed to save the party. But this does not bother their leaders who think that the best way to tackle dissidence and opposition is either to bribe them or unleash the red brigade. With important CPI-M leaders predicting a "bloody election" the incident at Nadanghat is a grim warning to the Election Commission to be extra watchful during the run up to the election. Already political killings have started in the districts. This is a wake up call.

THE STATESMAN

12 APR 2001

Seat tremors jolt Cong from Bengal to Delhi

OUR BUREAU

April 10: Delhi was singed by the fire raging in the Bengal Congress with state party chief Pranab Mukherjee today walking out of a meeting in exasperation at differences over selection of candidates.

Although Mukherjee returned after 15 minutes to resume the first meeting of the screening committee to pick 57 candidates, at the end of the day the party was still left to stew in the juice of Malda leader A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury's vow to put up candidates for all 11 seats in his district.

In Murshidabad, the other rebel leader, Adhir Chowdhury, had decided to field seven Independents. This means that in these districts, the alliance with Trinamul is as good as defunct, if the Congress leadership fails to amicably settle the issue.

Sonia Gandhi might have spoken too soon when she confided in an aide: "Tell me, what have I done to deserve this?" She did not know then that the Save Congress Committee, formed by sitting MLAs

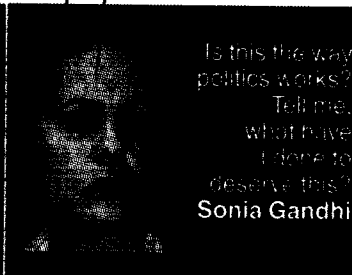
I have told Nath that I am not concerned how the alliance is taking shape. There is no need for anyone to poke his nose into Malda

Ghani Khan



Is this the way politics works? Tell me, what have I done to deserve this?

Sonia Gandhi



who are not getting tickets, was lining up 75 candidates to contest under its banner. Five have already decided to file nominations.

These pockets of rebellion, if allowed to simmer, will only lead to a division of opposition votes, exactly what Mamata and Sonia had tied up to avoid.

Word also possibly had not reached her then that two Bengal leaders — Mukherjee and Priya Ranjan Das Munshi — were fighting with their claws out over a candidate for Durgapur. Mukherjee wanted Chandrashekhar Banerjee to be given the seat, but Das Munshi opposed his candidature, describing him as an outsider.

In the middle of the tussle,

Mukherjee abruptly left the meeting and came back only after AICC general secretary Kamal Nath called up, requesting him to resume talks. A few days ago, Sonia had witnessed a similar walkout by Kerala leader K. Karunakaran.

Later, the two said sorry to each other. Nath said after that everything went off well. "Nothing untoward happened," he added.

Sources said the meeting cleared 49 names and left eight to be decided by the central election committee that is likely to gather tomorrow. Most of these candidates belong to Malda, Murshidabad and Dinajpur where Ghani, Adhir Chowdhury and Das

Munshi are pushing for their nominees. Of those selected, 14 are minorities, seven SC/ST candidates and four women.

Ghani followed up the letter he had written to Sonia yesterday, seeking a clear position from Mamata on two Malda seats the Congress had conceded to Trinamul, with a phone call to Nath. "We will not bow to any pressure from outside and will put up Congress candidates for all the seats here, come what may," he said.

Ghani said he would not allow anyone to interfere in Malda. "If Trinamul fields candidates, it will be suicidal because Malda is a Congress domain."

He was, however, prepared to campaign alongside Mamata. "But she need not come to Malda because it is not necessary."

Truckloads of Congress supporters from Bharatpur, given to Trinamul, arrived at Adhir Chowdhury's doorstep for justice. "Grievances of ordinary party workers are genuine," he said.

Ranks of the dissident Save Congress Committee also swelled with five more MLAs joining it.

■ See Page 6

24 hours given to clear air

on two Malda seats

Ghani fires ultimatum at Mamata

OUR BUREAU

April 9: Stirrings of discontent in the Congress over the alliance with Trinamul in Bengal threatened to grow into a storm of rebellion with Malda mogul A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury and senior leader Priya Ranjan Das Munshi protesting against the seat-share deal.

Already struggling to quell a rebellion led by K. Karunakaran in Kerala — also over ticket distribution — Sonia Gandhi was tonight hit by a bombshell from Chowdhury, giving a 24-hour ultimatum to Mamata Banerjee to spell out her stand on English Bazar and Old Malda constituencies. The Congress has agreed to concede these two seats in Malda district to Mamata, but Chowdhury is standing in the way.

In a hard-hitting letter to Sonia, Chowdhury said he would not allow Trinamul nominee Krishnendu Chowdhury to contest English Bazar. Nor would he hand him Harishchandrapur, in the same district, as an alternative.

In a parallel move that got under way today, dissident Congress members launched a Congress Bachao Committee to field candidates in at least 28 seats. The group included three sitting MLAs who are not getting tickets along with about a dozen of their like. "We call upon all those Congress MLAs who are being denied tickets to join the committee and fight the elections as Independents," Abul Basar Laskar, con-

venor of the committee, said.

Two such MLAs from Murshidabad district, Sorab Hossain and Habibur Rahman, have quit the party, deciding to contest as Independents.

Expressing regret over the seat-share deal, Chowdhury said he had never envisaged a scenario that would force him to concede seats in his pocketborough. Chowdhury said he would insist on English Bazar MLA Gautam Chakraborty being retained. He demanded that Sonia send all election symbols to him so that nothing "untoward" happens in the Assembly segments of his parliamentary constituency.

Das Munshi, too, is opposing the seat-share deal on grounds that the Congress has been short-changed. He, however, denied writing to Sonia.

Chowdhury said he would wait for Mamata's response for 24 hours. Trinamul dismissed the so-called ultimatum as an internal matter of the Congress.

"We are not at all concerned with Chowdhury's letter. Our leader Mamata Banerjee struck a seat-share deal with Sonia Gandhi in course of which she spelt out her mind. There is no question of her doing it again in response to a letter which does not concern her," said Trinamul MP Sudip Bandopadhyay.

Chowdhury's missive comes hours before the AICC's screening committee meets in Delhi to finalise the list of candidates.

■ See Page 6

THE TELEGRAPH

10 APR 2001

Buddha says sorry to Sunshine victims

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, April 8

IN A dramatic espousal of the very people whom his Government put out of business, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today said the onus of police harassment of hawkers lay on him and that they were forced into hawking as the Left Front Government couldn't give them anything else.

"The hawker unions tell me that there have been police excesses. I hold myself responsible for this," the Chief Minister said while addressing unorganised sector workers at Netaji Indoor Stadium. With the Assembly election just a month away and the two main Opposition parties coming together, the attempt at atonement for Operation Sunshine couldn't have been more appropriately timed.

Bhattacharjee said hawking

was a means of sustenance and helped the poor to survive. The hawkers, he said, wouldn't have taken to the profession had the Government been able to provide them gainful employment. He asked the union leaders to leave the issue to him and he would take care of their problems.

In the same paternal note, the erstwhile crusader against militant trade unionism extended support to workers for taking up the cudgels against factory-owners. Referring back to the Baranagar incident, in which two officers were murdered by agitated workers, he asked factory-owners to abide by the law in dealing with workers. According to him, factory workers are often exploited and paid half their wages.

Coming to the point, he said workers would have to decide whether they wanted a pro- or an anti-poor Government. He

blasted the NDA Government and the Congress-Trinamool combine for forcing factory closures, reckless privatisation and opening the floodgates of 'unnecessary' imports. Bhattacharjee said the BJP, Trinamool and the Congress were the parties for the rich while the Left Front stood for the poor and the working class. People would have to decide whether they wanted anarchy or law and trade unionism or exploitation. The Left Front works for the poor, the farmers and the workers and the only way it can do so is by staying at the Writers' Buildings. And, if it fails to work for them, he thundered, it would have to leave Writers'.

The Chief Minister also slammed the Trinamool for whipping up a law and order problem in the State. Kespur was quiet in the last 22 years, he said, neither were there any Khanakul or Arambag.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1997

Chief poll officer seeks report

9.58 AM Kolkata, April 8 HFC 3



WEST BENGAL Chief Electoral Officer Sabyasachi Sen today sought a report from the Burdwan District Magistrate on the attack on PDS leader Saifuddin Choudhury by alleged CPI(M) activists.

Choudhury, a former CPI(M) leader, who is contesting the coming State Assembly Polls from Nadhanghat constituency in Burdwan, has alleged that he was heckled and one of his party workers was brutally assaulted by "CPI(M) goons" at Islampur village last night while on his way to canvass support.

"I have asked the district administration to furnish a report to me on the incident

which came out in the newspapers today," the Chief Electoral Officer told reporters at the State secretariat.

To prevent recurrence of such incidents and ensure a peaceful poll, Sen directed all candidates to give prior information to the local police on their scheduled public meetings and processions.

The Chief Electoral Officer said action might be taken against the candidates in the event of any untoward incident if they failed to keep the local police stations posted of their programmes.

He said he would apprise the Election Commission about each and every incident of violence during the campaign.

PTI

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 APR 2007

Congress, Trinamul clinch deal for all seats

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 7.— The Congress and Trinamul Congress finally reached agreement on seat sharing for all 294 Assembly constituencies today. The former will contest 57 seats and the latter 229. Eight seats have been left for Trinamul's ally, JMM.

However, the names of the candidates and the constituencies have not been announced.

Miss Mamata Banerjee said she would announce the Trinamul list within a day or two. Mr Pranab Mukherjee said the list of Congress candidates would have to be cleared by the high command.

Addressing a joint press conference with Miss Banerjee, the AICC general secretary in charge of West Bengal, Mr Kamal Nath, said the problems that had cropped up had been sorted out. Seat adjustment between Congress and Trinamul Congress in 276 constituencies had been announced by Mr Nath last week. Mr Nath arrived in the city last night and held a meeting with Miss Banerjee which continued till early this morning.

He said: "Congress and Trinamul will work together to put an end to 24 years' of misrule of the Left Front government."

Senior PCC leaders, including Mr Pranab Mukherjee, Mr ABA. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, Mr Somen Mitra, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, Mr Pradip Bhattacharya, Mr Atish Sinha, Mrs Rubi Noor and Mr AHA. Ghani Khan Chowdhury met at Mr Nath's residence on Robinson Street.

Miss Banerjee arrived with Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay, Mr Pankaj Banerjee, Mr Subrata Mukherjee, Mr Sobhandeb Chattopadhyaya and Mr Mukul Roy and held a meeting with the Congress leaders.

Miss Banerjee congratulated Mr Nath and other Congress leaders for forming the alliance because of which "one to one fight will take place with the CPI(M)."

Miss Banerjee said many people had tried hard to prevent the alliance from taking shape. The CPI-M general secretary, Mr Harkishen. Singh. Surjeet, even wrote to the Congress president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, and requested her not to form the alliance. "But it is good that Mrs Sonia Gandhi did not listen to Mr Surjeet and went all out in favour of the alliance."

Mr Banerjee said she would be holding election meetings with the Congress chief. "We must

work together to put an end to the misrule of the CPI(M)."

For the first time after pulling out from the NDA, Miss Banerjee criticised the BJP for "maligning" her party. She said after the list of Trinamul candidates was published on 6 March, 39 seats were reserved for the BJP. Then the Tehelka issue cropped up and Trinamul left the NDA. But after that neither did the BJP leaders contact her nor did they discuss anything about the alliance.

Admitting that she had called the Congress the "B team" of the CPI-M, she said the situation in which she had made the observation was different. She said the attitude of the Congress towards the Marxists changed after the third front was formed.

She said some of the candidates whose names have been already announced would have to be shifted to other seats. She said the Trinamul manifesto would be published shortly. The Congress will publish its manifesto separately and Mr Pranab Mukherjee would write the joint agenda.

Miss Banerjee said Mr Ghani Khan Chowdhury's wishes had been honoured. In Malda, candidates nominated by him would fight the polls.

Mr Gautam Chakraborty, Congress MLA from Englishbazar and one of Mr Khan Chowdhury's lieutenants, said he would contest from his home constituency. This means Miss Banerjee's candidate for Englishbazar, Mr Krishnendu Chowdhury, would have to be shifted to some other seat.

Tough fight, says Anil: Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state committee secretary, said party workers were being told that there would be a tough fight in the coming election. He, however, said the Congress-Trinamul alliance would not be able to defeat the Left Front.

His party would ask Congress supporters to vote for the Left because "their own party has surrendered unconditionally to Trinamul."

BJP stand: The seat-sharing arrangement between Congress and Trinamul has "solved nothing," Mr Tapan Sikdar said. He said a number of sitting Congress MLAs were being deprived for no fault of theirs. "Congress has surrendered to Miss Banerjee's diktat in a pitiable way," he remarked.

Mr Asim Ghosh, state BJP president, said the party had decided to contest the Tollygunge seat, where Trinamul is fielding Mr Pankaj Banerjee.

■ Karunakaran resigns from CWC post: page 10

THE STATESMAN

Mission of charity leads to Mother

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, April 7

DRESSED IN a blue checked shirt and dark blue trousers, Bill Clinton didn't for once glance at his Omega watch, nor did the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity. A stickler for time, Clinton was scheduled to spend only half-an-hour at both the places. Instead, he spent an hour each at the two.

By the time Clinton left Mother House, the former US President had bowed over the Sisters with his sincerity, simplicity and respect for Mother. "He is a good-hearted man. We were overwhelmed by his visit. We will pray for him," Superior General Sister Nirmala said after he left for Shishu Bhavan.

Clinton was received at Mother House by Sister Nirmala, Sister Priscilla and other senior Sisters. Sister Nirmala took him to the courtyard and introduced him to nine of the closest associates of Mother.

The introduction over, he moved on to pay homage to Mother Teresa's tomb, where he placed a bouquet of white gladioli and said a small prayer. Around 160 Sisters sang Mother's favourite hymn, *Make me a channel of your peace*.

Clinton then shook hands with the Sisters and slid into the chat mode. "I am so honoured to be here. When I met Mother Teresa in Washington after the Breakfast Prayer, she had asked me to come over and I had promised I would. I am happy I have finally made it. I don't know how my wife managed to come here before me. I



AP PHOTO

Bill Clinton with an inmate of the Shishu Bhavan on Saturday.

am going to come again. The next time, I will come with Hillary and Chelsea."

Sister Nirmala then brought him back to the courtyard, where he was presented with two portraits of himself. "These have been done by a deaf and a dumb boy," she said. "Where are they," he asked.

Sister Nirmala also presented him two paintings of Mother Teresa, one of them by Ritu Singh. Sunita Kumar, a close aide of Mother, presented him her book *Mother Teresa of Calcutta*. The left-handed Clinton

signed a copy for the author.

Sister Nirmala and Clinton then went into the parlour, where they spent over 15 minutes. "I am really happy with the work being done by the organisation. I would like to help too," he told her. Before leaving Mother House, the Superior General gifted him Mother's 'miracle medallion' and 'business card'. The latter had etched on it the words: *The fruit of Silence is Prayer/The fruit of Prayer is Faith/The fruit of Faith is Love/The fruit of Love is Service/The fruit of*

Service is Peace.

Clinton then headed for Shishu Bhavan, where little girls garlanded him and sang a song, composed specially for him. "He was really moved by the song," Kumar said. Clinton visited the wards of the handicapped children and toddlers. "He brought laddoos for the 300-odd children. They were so happy to be with him. They danced and sang. He, too, joined them," Sister Majuri said.

More reports and photographs on Page 3

Annual signal for house tax hike

BY DEEPANKAR GANGULY

Two per cent a year rise in levy likely to strike at root of graft

House tax in Calcutta is set to be hiked at the rate of two per cent a year as part of a planned reform of the levy structure after next month's Assembly election, civic officials said on Friday.

Working on an amendment to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) Act, 1980, the officials said the present practice of a minimum 10 per cent hike every six years would be replaced with an automatic annual rise in the tax.

An estimated 650,000 house-owners will benefit from the planned amendment. Mayor Subrata Mukherjee said: "We want to make the hike an across-the-board, annual affair. The practice of revaluation every six years is at the root of corruption, as well as harassment of citizens."

The CMC earns about Rs 170 crore a year from levying house tax on 650,000 owners, the bulk of whose property, according to a survey, is "awfully under-assessed." The present combined valuation of the buildings, being narrow at Rs 275 crore, does not offer much scope for operating a realistic house tax.

The upcoming restructuring of the mode of paying house tax is an area where the two rivals — the communists at Writers' Buildings and the Trinamul Congress-BJP combine in the CMC — have reached an agreement after setting aside their differences on various other issues.

Mayor Mukherjee and his men got down to fashioning the draft amendment only after state municipal affairs minister Asoke Bhattacharya concurred with the proposal and assured them of the government's support in course of a recent meeting.

The 20-year-old Act will be amended after the constitution of the Assembly next month.

House tax, or property tax, in Calcutta is a contentious issue because the civic authorities administer it in a clumsy fashion, often failing to carry out the revaluation of the buildings on time.

One cited reason for the delayed revaluation is the shortage

of skilled inspectors in the CMC's building department which, however, does not fully explain the travails of the house or property owners in Calcutta.

All the CMC's attempts in the past to reform the cumbersome revaluation system came unstuck because a powerful nexus of corrupt building assessment inspectors and middlemen, who capitalise on the helplessness of the house-owners.

Minister Bhattacharya was not available for a comment, but his department officials said the government was favourably disposed towards the amendment because it promises benefits for tax-payers. However, it will be applicable only to those buildings which remain unchanged in respect of addition, alteration or use during the interim period.

THE TELEGRAPH

7 APR 2001

Budge Budge civic chief escapes attempt on life

HT Correspondent

Kolkata, April 4

THREE UNIDENTIFIED men shot at Budge Budge municipality chairman Sailendranath Ghosh and an aide just after noon today in New Alipur.

Both have been admitted to SSKM hospital, where the condition of 70-year-old Ghosh is believed to be critical. Ghosh and Uttam Ghatak (57) were walking back to the former's car after visiting chartered accountant Amitabha Ghosh at O Block, when a white ambassador pulled up, near the Burtolla bus stop.

Three men stepped out of the car, one elderly and the other two in their late twenties. All three carried guns, and tried to overpower Ghosh from behind.

Ghatak, who is Budge Budge Oil Tanker's Association vice-president, told interrogators at SSKM Hospital, "Ghosh tried to resist - one of the men fired, but missed. I then tried to shake them off, when I saw Ghosh slumping. I tried to chase the fleeing assailants, but they were throwing bombs and something hit my arm."

New Alipur officer-in-charge, R.K.Maiti said, "The revolvers they used were crude, perhaps that is why they missed at first."

Witnesses said the assailants picked up a purse that had slipped from Ghosh's hand. Police said locals tried to give them a chase, but could not keep up with the car which sped towards Tollygunge Circular Road. Locals informed police and took Ghosh to hospital in a taxi.

Ghosh's driver, Pranab Khara, had fled, leaving the car behind. He later contacted police, saying he ran away because he was scared. Police, however, were not convinced and said he would be interrogated.

Ghosh has gunshot wounds in his head and neck. Doctors have extracted a bullet from his head,

but he needs another operation. "His condition though critical is improving," a doctor said.

Ghosh, had gone to meet the chartered accountant after filing a defamation suit against a local Budge Budge tabloid in Alipur Court. His lawyer, Kamal Bandopadhyay, said that the tabloid had published an article linking his client and Ghatak in the attack of another Left leader Ananda Biswas. "Ghosh left my chamber at 11:30 am," Bandopadhyay said.

Detective department chief Banibrata Basu later said that no

Eleven injured in CPM-PWG clash

EXTREMISTS BELONGING to PWG and supporters of CPI (M) exchanged fire, seriously injuring eleven persons from both sides at Subhagarh under Garbeta police station on Wednesday. Additional SP S S Panda, IGP (Western Range) Jitram Bhagat and the commandant of the Eastern Frontier Rifles B N Ramesh rushed to the spot with one platoon of EFR and one company of RAF personnel. The EFR and RAF failed to arrest anybody.

PTI, Midnapore

clear motive for the attack was established. Ghatak's daughter Mousumi said she wasn't aware of any threats to her father.

But descriptions of the two younger assailants reportedly match that of Niten Giri and Haran Giri, two men who had been forced to leave a village in Budge Budge by the panchayat because of their criminal antecedents. Police are trying to ascertain their whereabouts.

CPI(M) state secretary Anil Biswas suspected that the assailants were "hired assassins".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 APR 2001

AGREEMENT ON 276 SEATS; HITCHES REMAIN

Cong., Trinamool clinch deal

By Malabika Bhattacharya

KOLKATA, APRIL 2. The Congress and the Trinamool Congress today announced the formalisation of the alliance for the Assembly election in West Bengal, scheduled for May 10.

After a two-hour meeting, the Trinamool chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, and Mr. Kamal Nath, All-India Congress Committee general secretary in charge of Bengal affairs, announced that the two parties had reached an agreement over 276 of the 294 Assembly seats.

The alliance, still under construction, left a sizable number of Congress functionaries, including some sitting MLAs, disgruntled as they realised that their aspirations would be sacrificed by the high command for the overall objective of fighting the ruling leftists.

"I appeal to the workers of both the Congress and the Trinamool to work together under Ms. Banerjee's leadership in the coming election to oust the leftists from office," Mr. Kamal Nath said.

Neither Mr. Kamal Nath nor Ms. Banerjee, however, was willing to put on record the number of seats each party would contest. Unsubstantiated reports suggest that of the 276 seats, the Trinamool would contest 225 and the Congress 57. The Trinamool may consider the Congress for a couple of more seats. The rest would be allotted to the Trinamool's other allies — Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and the

United Communist Party of India.

"We took time to formalise the alliance because it does take time to finalise 294 seats," Ms. Banerjee observed. For the record, the Bengal unit of the Congress recorded its protest with the high command over the past week saying it considered the Trinamool's offer of 55 seats "unreasonable". Moreover, the State Congress functionaries found Ms. Banerjee's decision to deny tickets to at least 16 sitting Congress MLAs "unacceptable".

"All these MLAs remained loyal

to the Congress till this day. How can the party leadership think of sacrificing them? It's unethical," was the line of argument the State leaders adopted with Mr. Kamal Nath during the several rounds of discussions held in Kolkata and Delhi. Mr. Kamal Nath seems to have succeeded in his mission as the State Congress' front-ranking leaders accepted the terms of the agreement without questions. "I am a loyal soldier of the Congress. I accept the party's decision," Mr. Somen Mitra said.

AGP inches closer to BJP

By Barun Das Gupta

GUWAHATI, APRIL 2. The general council of the Asom Gana Parishad, which held a six-hour long marathon meeting here today, stopped short of formally announcing an electoral alliance with the BJP.

Party insiders said the AGP president and Chief Minister, Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, would leave for Delhi tomorrow and a formal announcement is likely on Wednesday. There were some hitches on seat-sharing, they said. Besides, the AGP was finding it difficult to accede to the BJP demand that it be given the Home portfolio should the alliance come to power.

Mr. Mahanta told the general

council that the BJP had made a formal request to the AGP to join the NDA and they would have to take a decision on it. The council authorised Mr. Mahanta to take a final decision on the "NDA proposal". But nobody was left in any doubt on what that decision would be. Mr. Mahanta's six-page speech was a tirade against the Congress which he dubbed the "enemy of the nation".

This January, the AGP had dubbed the BJP a communal party at its State conference at Nagaon. Reminded of this today, the party spokesperson and Sports and Youth Welfare Minister, Mr. Moidul Islam Bora, admitted that the BJP was a "slightly thodisi communal party".

CPI(M) to snap ties: Page 15

THE HINDU

3 APR 2001

3 APR 2001

Cong, Trinamul pact for 276 seats

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 2. — The much speculated Congress-Trinamul seat adjustment talks for the Assembly polls finally took off today with the two parties agreeing to fight in 276 seats. The understanding in the remaining 18 seats will be made known in a day or two.

After meeting the Trinamul chief, Miss Mamata Banerjee, at Nizam Palace, the AICC general secretary in charge of West Bengal, Mr Kamal Nath, said: "I'm happy to announce that the Congress and Trinamul will fight against the CPI-M in 276 seats. Negotiations are on for 18 seats. It'll be resolved in a day or two."

Miss Banerjee said: "The Congress and Trinamul Congress will announce the list of candidates separately and talks with the Congress for about 18 seats are on and will be resolved within a day."

Calling today's alliance an "achievement," Mr Nath said, Miss Banerjee would be the chief ministerial candidate. He was optimistic that the Congress and Trinamul would be able to put an end to 24 years of CPI-M misrule in the state. He said both the parties would fight under Miss Banerjee's leadership.

"I'll request the Congress and Trinamul Congress workers to work hard to oust the CPI-M in the state. Mamata will be the leader in doing this."

Both Mr Nath and Miss Banerjee did not divulge the break-up of seat adjustment. "We'll give the break-up only after an agreement on 294 seats is arrived at," Miss Banerjee said.

Though not announced formally, today's announcement meant that the Trinamul Congress has severed its ties with the BJP. Some Congress lead-

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ers who might be denied tickets have begun talks with the BJP.

It was learnt that the Trinamul Congress would not field a candidate against Mr Somendra Mitra, Mr Atish Sinha, Mr Daulat Ali, Mr Abdus Salam Munshi, Mr Sasanka Biswas and Mr Ashok Deb.

Mr Tapas Roy, who was fielded against Mr Mitra in Sealdah, is likely to contest from Burabazar.

The Congress has also demanded the Bijpur, Naihati, Rajarhat, Bagda and Basirhat seats. Except for Basirhat, the Trinamul Congress will accept the demand of the Congress in the North 24 Parganas.

Mr Nath arrived here this morning. He held several rounds of talks with Mr Pranab Mukherjee, PCC president, and Mr PR Das Munshi at his Robinson Street residence. He also held a meeting with the Trinamul leader, Mr Sudip Bandyopadhyay. Later, he and Mr Bandyopadhyay went to Nizam Palace to meet Miss Banerjee.

Earlier, the Congress had offered a friendly contest in 17 seats with the Trinamul which Miss Banerjee had refused yesterday.

Trinamul Congress leaders said they would go to their respective constituencies immediately to begin campaign.

BJP stand: Mr Asim Ghosh, state BJP president, today said it was more or less certain that the Congress MLAs, who would be denied tickets under a Congress-Trinamul seat-sharing arrangement, would tie up with his party. The number seemed to be 14 or 15.

But he said the possibility of this alliance depended on the outcome of the Congress-Trinamul talks. "Trinamul is under great pressure and it may concede the Congress's demand at the last moment," he said.



MUG'S GAME: The same old faces evoke fresh interest as TV cameramen jostle to attend a joint press conference by Miss Mamata Banerjee and Mr Kamal Nath in Kolkata on Monday. — Bijoy Sengupta

EC no to state officials' transfer

H BULA DEVI
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 2. — The Election Commission has turned down West Bengal's plea for transfer of Excise department officials after the model code of conduct came into effect from yesterday.

The poll panel, however, has permitted the Kolkata collector to continue in his post, accepting a state government plea.

The state had sought EC's permission for the transfer of the Excise officials before the poll dates were announced. But since the code came into effect from Sunday, the poll panel dismissed the plea, officials said. It has directed the government that all functionaries linked to the election process

should be immediately transferred. District commissioners serving a district for more than four years too have to be transferred. Such DCs have to serve elsewhere till the polls are over. The steps are being taken to ensure a "free and fair" election. Similar instructions have been issued to other states going to the polls.

West Bengal had requested EC to let the Kolkata and Darjeeling collectors to continue in their posts. As "exceptional cases" the permission has been granted. The EC has already shot down an Assam government proposal to let two DCs continue in their posts, and said they be transferred immediately. The Assam government wanted the Nagaon and Sonitpur DCs to continue in their posts and requested the

poll panel in mid-March to let them do so. But since the two have put in more than four years in their posts, the EC rejected the state's plea, officials said.

The poll panel has said the new incumbents in Nagaon and Sonitpur should be posted immediately to enable them to familiarise themselves with the tasks needed for poll management. Assam has already transferred about 49 functionaries, including DCs, ACs and SDOs, linked to the election, officials said.

Only electronic voting machines will be used for the polls in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry. In Assam, they'll be used in and around Guwahati.

■ More reports on pages 2, 3

CBI probe order pleases Garbeta

HT Correspondent
Midnapore, April 1

HT-5
2/4

THE WISHES of the people of Chhoto Angaria have been granted at last with the Calcutta High Court ordering a probe into the Garbeta massacre.

The CID probe had failed to throw any light on the killing of the 11 Trinamool workers at the house of Abdur Rahaman Mandal, a Trinamool worker himself, on January 4, allegedly by CPI(M) activists.

While the CPI(M) cadres are worried, about 500 BJP workers went on a procession in Garbeta last evening approving the order. They demanded the arrest of the culprits and guilty police officers and the resignation of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee for attempting to hush up the incident.

There were similar processions at Chandrakona Road and the Ghatal subdivision.

Interestingly, Trinamool workers also joined the procession despite the loosening of the Trinamool-BJP ties.

Like the CPI(M) leaders, district officials too were reported to be anxious about the probe. They fear that they may be pulled up if the CBI finds their handling of the incident biased.

BJP leaders are confident that the collusion of the Garbeta police and the killers in the smuggling of the bodies will be revealed in the probe.

The police have so far been protected by the Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and the State Government is desperate to stall the probe by obtaining an injunction from the Apex Court, allege the BJP leaders.

Also, no arrests have been made so far in connection with the gang-rape of Farida Bibi, wife of Trinamool worker Ezarul Mallick, on March 20 at Sarsa in Garbeta, allege BJP leaders.

She was raped in the presence of her 12-year old daughter, just a day after her return from a 10-month stay at a make-shift camp following CPI(M) torture.

THE HINDUSTAN TIME.

- 2 APR 2001

Total tie-up may elude Congress, Trinamul

UDAY BASU
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 1. - Friendly contests in a number of seats may be inevitable even if the Congress and Trinamul forgo an alliance.

Congress leaders today hinted at such a possibility as the only face-saving formula for those eager to have an alliance.

Hard bargaining between the Congress and Trinamul during the past few days has failed to resolve the thorny issue of how to renominate all the sitting Congress MLAs.

At present a Congress-Trinamul alliance looks uncertain, thanks to the two parties' rigid stands. It's another matter that Congress leaders, including AICC general secretary, Mr Kamal Nath, has put up a brave front.

Mr Pradip Bhattacharya, PCC vice president, said the keenness of the Congress rank and file for a united fight to end LF "misrule" shouldn't be doubted. "And that fact should be given the most importance during seat sharing talks."

The alliance's fate depends on whether the Trinamul is prepared to accept the claim of 18 sitting Congress MLAs to be renominated. PCC leaders said the claim was justified and it would be suicidal not to renominate the 18 MLAs.

Three typical examples are those of Mr Daulat Ali of Diamond Harbour, Mr Anil Mudi of Tamluk and Mr Abdul Munshi of Kaliaganj.

Mr Ali has won the seat more than once. In Diamond Harbour, the Trinamul wants to field its candidate, Mr Amjad Ali. But Mr Ali is not a resident of Diamond Harbour, nor is he a popular figure in the constituency. Moreover, the Trinamul nominees from there lost in the last Assembly and Lok Sabha polls.

Mr Mudi has twice won from Tamluk and belongs to the area. For this seat the Trinamul has fielded Mr Nirbed Roy, "a rank outsider" Mr Munshi has won the last two polls from Kaliaganj. Congress leaders say ignoring the 18 MLAs for a "greater cause" (alliance) will boomerang on both parties.

"Moreover, how can we face these MLAs who stood by the party during its worst crisis without following many of their colleagues to the Trinamul? Ironically, the MLAs who betrayed the party and joined the Trinamul are now assured of berths. This will be very difficult for a loyal party MLAs to accept," a Congress leader said.

Congress leaders say Miss Mamata Banerjee should concede the "legitimate" demand of the sitting Congress MLAs if she wants to prevent a split in anti-Left votes. "She stands to gain the most since she will be the undisputed chief ministerial candidate if the alliance wins," a PCC leader said.

If the Trinamul still persists in frustrating the claims of the Congress MLAs, the two parties may be locked in a "friendly" contest in these seats, while they tie up in the rest.

THE STATESMAN

- 2 APR 2001

CBI to probe Midnapore 'carnage'

BY TAPAS GHOSH

Calcutta, March 30: In a blow to the CPM-led government weeks before the Assembly elections, Calcutta High Court today directed the CBI to investigate the alleged massacre of Trinamul Congress workers by suspected CPM supporters at Midnapore's Chhoto Angaria village in January.

The division bench of Chief Justice A.K. Mathur and Justice Girish Gupta told the CBI to conduct the investigation and submit a report to the court by June. The judges said the inquiry has to be conducted by an official not below the rank of superintendent of police.

The government has decided to move the Supreme Court against the verdict. Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee

said law and order was a state subject and the CBI should not be dragged into it.

In a strongly-worded judgment which could give the Opposition a stick to beat the government with, the judges passed strictures against the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), the state's crime detection agency. The Left Front government had earlier rejected the Opposition's demand for a CBI inquiry.

Lashing out at the government, the judges said: "The court is of the opinion that there was no fair investigation at all. Three months have lapsed, (but) the CID has neither traced the dead bodies nor arrested the accused named in the FIR, except one."

"Reports submitted by the National Human Rights Commission and the CID were examined

by the court which felt that there was a need for a comprehensive investigation by the CBI to uphold the principles of fair justice and restore confidence in the people's minds."

It is the second time in four years that the court has censured the government and its law enforcing agencies and asked the CBI to investigate a political issue of public importance. The first was the mysterious disappearance of Bikhari Paswan, a jute mill worker from Hooghly, in 1997.

Today's order, which came on a public interest litigation filed by the Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights, has given Mamata a shot in the arm and prompted her to coin a new slogan targeting the CPM: "Buddha told a lie, court ordered CBI." (See Page 11).

Claiming that her stand had been vindicated, Mamata said: "It is time that Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee resigned as chief minister." Mamata had claimed that 11 of her supporters were killed by CPM cadre on the night of January 4 in the village in violence-scarred Midnapore. She had asked for a CBI probe, which was rejected, and had also demanded President's rule in the state.

The rights panel had sent a delegation to Chhoto Angaria as had the NDA, which was led by its con- vener George Fernandes. Both teams had concluded that a mas- sacre had taken place in the vil- lage, but despite their claims, not a single body of those alleged to have been killed was found.

The PIL was moved by city lawyer and Trinamul leader Kalyan Banerjee.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

31 MAR 2001

Court orders CBI probe into Chhoto Anguria

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, March 30. — Calcutta High Court today passed an order directing the CBI to investigate the Chhoto Anguria incident of 4 January this year in which 11 Trinamul Congress supporters had been allegedly killed by CPI(M) cadres. Chhoto Anguria is within the Garbeta area of Midnapore district.

(The state government is going to move the Supreme Court against the High Court order. The chief minister, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, said a special leave petition would be filed.)

The Division Bench of the Chief Justice Mr A K Mathur and Mr Justice Girish Chandra Gupta which passed the order asked the DG, CBI, to depute an official not below the rank of SP

to probe the case within three months and submit a report.

Their Lordships issued the order after looking into the reports of the National Human Rights Commission and the West Bengal CID on the Chhoto Anguria incident.

The Bench observed that the state CID had failed to conduct a fair investigation of the case in the last three months since the incident. The state police had failed to trace the bodies and to arrest the accused persons mentioned in the FIR, except one. To ensure justice and to instil confidence in the minds of the people an investigation by the CBI was necessary.

Mr Kalyan Bandopadhyay and Mr Joymala Bagchi appeared for the Committee for Protection of Democratic Rig-

hts, the petitioner. Mr Subroto Mookherjee, Mr Prabir Kumar Ghosh and Mr Rajesh Ganguly appeared for an added party. The Advocate-General, Mr Nara Narayan Gooptu, Mr Tapan Dutt and Mr Manick Das appeared for the state.

Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said: "We do not accept the High Court order. This is a state matter. We cannot have the CBI interfering in it."

The chief minister said the CID was probing the incident and had gathered several clues. "It is quite capable of solving the mystery. Two persons have been arrested and some others have been identified but are yet to be arrested. They will submit their findings soon," he said.

■ Another report on page 4

THE STATESMAN

31 MAR 2001

CBI probe into Chhota Angaria

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 30

THE CALCUTTA High Court today ordered a CBI probe into the suspected carnage at Chhota Angaria village. The State Government will move the Supreme Court against the order.

The investigative agency must depute an official above the rank of sub inspector to handle the probe and file a report within three months, a Chief Justice A K Mathur and Justice Girish Chandra Gupta ruled.

The court hauled up the CID for its failure to book the culprits and described its investigation as "mala fide". The administration has failed to check killings in Midnapore, which has been turned into a virtual killing field, the judges said.

The court was hearing a public interest litigation moved by The

Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights. The committee, in its petition, alleged that the State Government was trying to bury the truth about the incident. "People have every right to know the truth."

Reacting to the order, the Chief Minister said: "Our appeal will be based on the fact that law and order is a State subject and the CID has been probing the matter. It has made some headway in the case. It is quite capable of doing the job entrusted to it by the State Government."

Trinamool Congress leader Pankaj Banerjee said the order had vindicated the Opposition charge that the Government was trying to hush up the case. "Our stand has been vindicated. The Chief Minister must quit."

On February 11, suspected CPI(M) men gunned down at least 11 persons at Chhota Angaria.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

31 MAR 2001

Cong, Trinamul inch towards poll alliance

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 29. — The Congress and Trinamul tonight appeared to be on the road to forging an alliance for the West Bengal Assembly polls, though it may take some more time to finalise the seat sharing.

At a two-hour meeting with state Congress leaders and Mr Kamal Nath at her home tonight, Mrs Sonia Gandhi virtually okayed an alliance with Miss Mamata Banerjee. She told Mr Nath and Mr Pranab Mukherjee to continue the seat-sharing talks with Trinamul.

(Miss Banerjee said in Kolkata earlier today that her party could have named candidates for all the 294 seats but she wanted an alliance of parties eager to end the CPI-M "misrule".

(She said her party would have to give up a few seats for the sake of the alliance with the Congress.

"I've invited political parties who want to end the CPI-M misrule and have kept our doors open to those who really want to fight the Left Front," she said. But she didn't say how many seats she would allot to the Congress. "We are working on it and as soon as the matter is finalised we will inform the Press.")

Mr Nath came out of 10 Janpath with Mr Mukherjee, Mr Somen Mitra, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and other

PCC leaders and tried hard to project a united image before the waiting journalists.

"We have conveyed our feelings to the Congress chief and we discussed every aspect in detail. The Congress will be prepared to make any sacrifice to defeat the Left Front. The Congress chief has praised our efforts to forge an alliance with Trinamul and asked us to continue our talks," Mr Nath said. But he betrayed his eagerness to make a breakthrough in his first mission as an AICC general secretary.

He ruled out any "serious differences" among Congress leaders and said: "It's not numbers but defeating the Left that's the top priority of the Congress." The party leaders around Mr Nath nodded. But sarcasm was written on the faces of the two warhorses — Mr Mukherjee and Mr Somen Mitra. A leader said the rule of the game ahead is not exactly about making "sacrifices" but "hard bargain" with the prodigal Congress daughter (Miss Banerjee).

Mr Nath will be in Kolkata tomorrow for talks with Miss Banerjee. Mr Mukherjee too will join them. Other Congress leaders will leave for the city tomorrow.

Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury didn't attend the meeting and left for Kolkata earlier in the day after writing a letter to Mrs Gandhi, saying that all

sitting Congress MLAs be renominated. He reportedly demanded a "free hand" in Malda district.

Mr Mukherjee was tightlipped. But Mr Mitra said: "All sitting Congress MLAs should be protected." At the meeting many leaders reportedly demanded 100 seats for the Congress. But they said the realistic bargain would be for 70 seats, with 50 as a benchmark.

After the meeting Mr Kamal Nath is reported to have faxed to Miss Banerjee three demands: seats for all sitting Congress MLAs; Congress claim on the Assembly segments where it was second in the last parliamentary poll and; adequate representation at the district level.

CPI-M warning: The CPI-M today warned the Congress against "forging an anti-Left platform" and said such a move could mean that the party was "forfeiting claim to be a force to fight the BJP and the NDA alliance".

A CPI-M politburo statement said the Congress-Trinamul talks had raised an important question: "Is the Congress leadership now veering towards an anti-Communist platform?" The CPI-M reminded the Congress that Miss Banerjee, "while negotiating" with it "has made it clear that she's willing to have an understanding with the BJP too to forge an anti-CPI-M front".

THE STATESMAN

30 MAR 2001

Red terror worse than SS Ray regime: PDS

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 29

IF THE mainstream Opposition parties are bitter about Left rule in Bengal, the Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS) is even more so.

Party secretary Samir Putatunda insists that the current brand of 'red terror' is worse even than the reign of 'terror' when Siddhartha Shankar Ray was the Chief Minister of Bengal. The PDS, therefore, will soon lodge a formal complaint to the Election Commission and the Director General of Police Dipak Sanyal.

"The Congress rigged polls at that time. But it didn't force party candidates to pull out - something the Left Front is doing. Our activists are being beaten up and harassed by CPI(M) toughs, all to put pressure on us. PDS candidates are receiving threat calls. Also, Alimuddin Street is trying to woo our candidates even with sops."

Putatunda fears that the "power hungry" CPI(M) would resort to all means to ensure Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's win at Jadavpur.

"The assault has taken a new shape. CPI(M) activists in Jadavpur are saying they will win the elections with revolvers.

But I won't let them to play this trick. I know all the hide-



SAMIR PUTATUNDA

outs." The PDS secretary will make door-to-door campaigns in the area to keep the voters informed about the "CPI(M) game plan." He would also expose the Front's "misdeeds" at an April 12 public meeting in Jadavpur.

Sachin Mondol, a PDS worker from Kasba, the PDS claims, is a case in point. In his complaint to the Kasba Police Station, Mondol narrates how he was beaten up by CPI(M) toughs.

"Two armed CPI(M) goons forced me into a lane near the Kasba Market. Two others were waiting there. They assaulted me and threatened me with dire consequences if I continued

being in the PDS."

Another PDS worker from Dhakuria has made a similar complaint. Jiten Pal, the PDS candidate from Sibpur endorsed what these men had said. "CPI(M) leaders called me up after my name came out in the PDS list. They said I hadn't done the right thing."

Later, PDS spokesperson Tapas Basu recounted how PDS workers were being heckled in Canning and Kalyani. "An innocent man in Tarakeswar was ostracized by the CPI(M) simply because he had spoken to Ram Chatterjee's son and PDS candidate Debashis Chatterjee.

Minister Pratim Chatterjee is trying every possible means to pressure the PDS candidate from Kharagpur. CPI(M) zonal committee members even abused when we were holding a meeting near Madanmohantalla in north Kolkata."

Asked about Tapati Saha who had deserted the PDS for its "autocratic functioning", the PDS secretary said: "She was present in the two State committee meetings.

She had also started doing the spadework to contest from Taltalla. Her recent comment that she was not aware of her PDS nomination doesn't hold ground." CPI(M) state secretary Anil Biswas, however, refused to react to the PDS charge.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 MAR 2001

STATE CONGRESS ASKED TO SCALE DOWN DEMAND

Sonia keen on clinching deal with Trinamool

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By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, MARCH 29. The Congress today hinted that an end to the standoff with the Trinamool Congress on seat-sharing in West Bengal was in sight. "We are prepared to make any sacrifice to defeat the CPI(M)," the AICC general secretary in-charge of West Bengal, Mr. Kamal Nath, said.

Briefing newsmen at the end of a three-hour-long meeting between the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, and the WBPCCL leaders, Mr. Kamal Nath said Ms. Gandhi had directed the party to hold "expeditious talks with the Trinamool chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee". Ms. Gandhi, who returned last night from Hong Kong, held a series of meetings — she met Mr. Kamal Nath in the morning and held extensive discussions later with the West Ben-

gal unit leaders. The aim was to find a common ground between the claims of the State unit and the party's national objective. The State unit has, after meetings spread over two days, pegged its claim to 72 seats.

Apart from the 42 seats that it currently holds, the Congress wants seats from where it stood second or where the CPI(M) stood first. Most of these seats are in North Bengal where the party believes it is stronger compared to the Trinamool. The State unit wants that the 22 MLAs from this region who remained loyal should be accommodated. "They should not suffer just because they remained loyal to the party," said a party leader.

The State leaders maintain that the seats they are claiming are based on merit. They claim that of the 72 seats it is asking for, the party had a lead in 51 Assembly segments dur-

ing the 1999 Lok Sabha elections which it had contested alone. Out of the 294 Assembly seats, the Congress is only asking for one-fourth, leaving three-fourths to the Trinamool.

Ms. Gandhi's directive to the State unit to "expeditiously carry out talks" with Ms. Banerjee appears to have been prompted by her determination to seal the BJP's fate in West Bengal and deny it the opportunity of gaining a foothold in the State. In stating that the party was prepared to sacrifice its share of the political cake to rein in the BJP, the Congress also sought to indicate that it was prepared to accommodate other parties.

The Congress has been consistently asking Ms. Banerjee to quit the NDA and had offered to align with her to fight the CPI(M). With Ms. Banerjee snapping ties with the BJP and the NDA, the party feels that if it fails to sew up the alliance, it will once again lay itself open to charges that it is not prepared to accommodate other parties.

The AICC leaders believe that though the State unit may have a case, they would like it to scale down its demand to facilitate an alliance with the Trinamool. "In the larger battle against communal forces we should be prepared to make sacrifices, if necessary," a senior leader said. They say that with Ms. Banerjee shutting the door on the BJP, the saffron brigade has been denied a chance of growing in the State, which in itself is a big achievement, in addition to the electoral benefits that will accrue to it because of its alliance with the Trinamool.

The AICC leaders feel that the party stands to gain in the post-poll scenario. They believe that with some luck, the Congress would be able to form governments in Kerala, Assam and Pondicherry, and at the same time be part of the winning alliance in Tamil Nadu and even West Bengal.

'NDA door opens both ways'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 29. A day after the BJP vice-president, Mr. Kailashpati Mishra, indicated in Kolkata that the party's alliance with the Trinamool Congress for the West Bengal Assembly elections was off and the BJP would contest the maximum seats on its own, the president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi, virtually contradicted him saying that the "door" was still open.

"Unless the Trinamool agrees to support the NDA Government at the Centre, we will go on our own," Mr. Krishnamurthi said, but suggested that the BJP was still "waiting" for an appropriate response. "Only when the Trinamool formally announces its understanding with the Congress will we take it as a signal (that our alliance with it is off)."

The party wants to send the signal that it was not the BJP which pushed Ms. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool out of the NDA, but the Trinamool which practised opportunistic politics.

As for Kerala and Pondicherry, the BJP was only looking to enter the Assemblies and mark its presence. In Kerala, it would be working to see the end of communist rule, just as in West Bengal, but this did not mean it would help the Congress in any way, Mr. Krishnamurthi said. In Assam, the party's strategy would be to improve its position.

Mr. Krishnamurthi explained the changing profile of the NDA — with some parties leaving it — saying the NDA door opened both ways. Some parties in it had chosen to go out, and the door was open for others who might want to walk in.

THE HINDU

30 MAR 2001

War of nerves: Mamata awaits Sonia response

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, March 28

IT WAS a relaxed Mamata Banerjee who sat playing Rabindrasangeet tunes on her synthesizer today in her room at Nizam Palace, and one who seemed prepared for all eventualities. She has drawn up lists for all 294 Assembly constituencies and has told party workers to start campaigning in their constituencies.

"By 1 am, I had made up my mind to declare today that the Trinamool Congress would go alone in the forthcoming Assembly polls," Mamata Banerjee said in an interview to *Hindustan Times*.

"But then, the Congress lead-

ers called from Delhi and asked me to wait for another 24 hours since Sonia Gandhi was returning tonight from abroad. And they wanted to consult her. But I have not moved an inch from my stand, now it is for them to either buy my formula or keep away from me.

"Unlike my party where our leaders have left the decision to me, the Congress is a divided house. You have the Pranab Mukherjee, Priya Ranjan Das-munshi, ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury and Somen Mitra camps. I hope Sonia Gandhi can unite the camps. After all, it is they who suggested that they want to fight with me against the CPI(M) by passing a resolution in the AICC session. I have noth-

R K JAIN CLEARS TRINAMOOL CHIEF

MAMATA'S OFFICE on Wednesday received an apology from RK Jain, against whom Trinamool leader Dinesh Trivedi had filed a legal notice. In the letter, R K Jain has regretted the inconvenience caused to her. "I have never met you nor do I know you in person...I seek forgiveness," he said.

HTC, Kolkata

ing to lose, if they backtrack. I have always fought alone and I am again preparing to fight alone again."

Mamata said she had prepared a list for all the 294 seats. She will personally kick off the election campaign on April 15, at the Shyambazar five-point crossing.

"In 1997, when I left the Con-

gress, everybody said that I was politically written off. But I think I have proved them wrong. And this time too, if the Congress dithers and I go alone, after the polls all those who think I am foolish will stop criticising me. I have already wasted 15 days, so I don't mind giving another day to the Congress. I expect to receive a clear signal

from the Congress by tomorrow afternoon," Mamata said. "But the Congress should not put forward any conditions. I have never played conditional politics and will never do so in the future. They have to drop all those MLAs from their list who have entered a clandestine deal with the CPI(M) to ensure victory. Otherwise, I will not compromise. I keep my word, the BJP must have realised that," she added.

Mamata said that the BJP chapter was closed. The tehelka tapes, she said, was the last straw.

"For the last six months, unnecessary pressure was put on me. I will not mention names but several ministers and

bureaucrats continuously humiliated me. I was finding it difficult to function as Railway Minister. I was being blackmailed. My phones were being tapped and intelligence was asked to follow me. Not only that I also came to know that Vigilance has been put after me. Such things cannot be tolerated. Then came tehelka, where my name also appeared as '70 per cent'. That was it," Mamata said.

"I don't know why the PM is moving slowly. We don't want this Government to fall. And we will not support a Third Front Government with Jyoti Basu as PM. Unless Vajpayee cleans the Government soon, his regime can face problems in the future," Mamata said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 MAR 2001

West Bengal most densely populated

5/1 29/3
KOLKATA, March 28. — West Bengal continues to have the highest density of population in the country, according to the findings of the 14th census. Announcing the results of the census conducted between 9 to 28 February in the state, Mr Vikram Sen, census commissioner, today said 7.8 per cent of the country's population stay in West Bengal though it occupies only 2.7 per cent of the total land area of the country.

Compared to the previous census, the rate of population growth has dropped in the state from 24.73 per cent to 17.84 per cent. Despite a check on the population growth in the state, it ranks fourth in terms of population preceded by UP, Maharashtra and Bihar. — SNS

THE STATESMAN

2 MAR 1951

Bengal gets pass marks, just

► FROM PAGE 1

"But in the 1991 census," the minister said, "we had ranked 18th in literacy rates among all states, including minor ones like Mizoram. According to another Central survey in 1997, our women's literacy rate was the highest among major states, second only to Kerala.

According to the 1997 report, Bengal had the third largest number of literate persons among the major states after Kerala and Maharashtra."

The state's 69.22 literacy rate is largely due to a high 81.31 per cent rate in Calcutta, 78.49 per cent in North 24-Parganas and 77.64 per cent in Howrah.

In Calcutta, 77.95 per cent of the women were literate as on March 1, 2001, compared with 72.09 per cent in 1991. For men, this year's figure is higher at 84.07 per cent against 81.94 in 1991.

But the census, while putting Calcutta's population at 45,80,544 in 2001, up from 43,99,819 in 1991, has found that more and more people are moving to the suburbs with flats and commercial complexes coming up in the North and South 24-Parganas.

"There is a tendency among the middle- and lower middle-class people to buy flats and move to North and South 24-Parganas. We have noticed the same trend in Chennai, Mumbai and Hyderabad. We are trying to calculate the number of people commuting daily to Calcutta," Sen said.

The census found Bengal was the most thickly populated state in the country with a population density of 904 per square km. The most densely populated districts after Calcutta are Howrah, North 24-Parganas and Nadia.

Calcutta has a population density of 24,760 per sq km. Howrah, North 24-Parganas and Nadia lag behind at 2,913, 2,181 and 1,172 respectively.

The census put the population of Bengal at 8,02,21,171 as on March 1 against 6,80,77,965 a decade ago. Midnapore remained the most populous district, comprising a little over 12 per cent of the total population.

North 24-Parganas and Burdwan ranked second and third respectively at 11.18 per cent and 8.63 per cent.

Marginally above national average, but way behind the leaders

Bengal gets pass marks, just

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

state behind 11 others. The state can, however, draw comfort from the sharp drop in population growth at 17.84 per cent over 1991-2001 compared with 24.73 per cent in the previous 10 years.

Releasing the 14th census report on Bengal for 2001, Vikram Sen, director of census operations, said the state recorded a 12 percentage point increase in the literacy rate over the past 10 years. The census, he said, was carried out between February 9 and February 28.

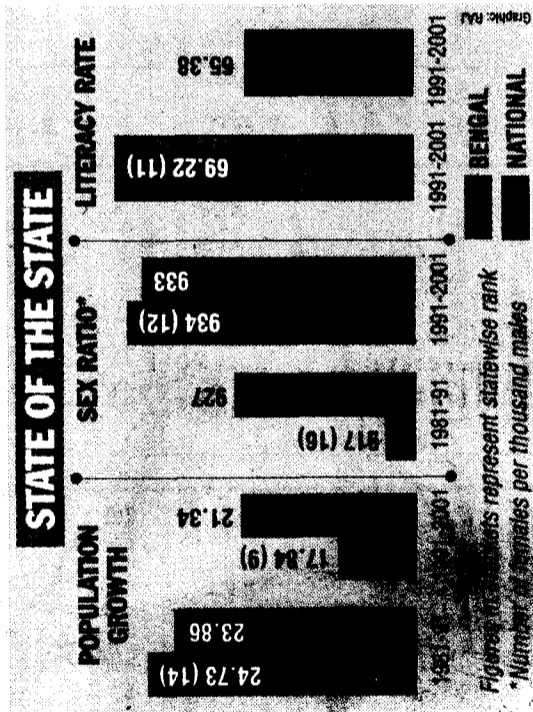
But school education minister Kanti Biswas would not comment on the report as he was yet to see it.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Calcutta, March 28: The census verdict is clear: Bengal is nowhere near the top. At best, it is just better than average.

Bengal, with its policy of education for the masses, has a literacy rate of 69.22 per cent. It ranks 11th among states, while Kerala, another Left-ruled state, is at the top with a 90.92 per cent literacy rate. Tripura, too, is ahead of Bengal with a 73.66 per cent literacy rate.

Bengal's sex ratio at 934 females per 1,000 males — a notch above the national average (excluding Union Territories) of 933 — has again put the



Cong-Trinamul tie-up hopes recede

MANASH GHOSH
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, March 28. — The hope of a Trinamul-Congress alliance in the state is fast fading despite Mrs Sonia Gandhi's eagerness to have one.

This is because Miss Mamata Banerjee has already announced the list of Trinamul candidates for 228 seats, leaving little room for manoeuvring. Thus, she's in no position to oblige state Congress leaders demanding 85 seats.

The state Congress leaders, desperate to safeguard their constituency and primacy in the party, have come up with such tough seat-adjustment terms that the talks, being held in Delhi, have almost come to a grinding halt. Trinamul leaders here are getting ready to "Eka chalo rey. (Go it alone)."

Senior Trinamul and Congress leaders today said there was little chance for Mrs Gandhi to ride roughshod over the state Congress leaders; numerous in number and unanimous against

seat adjustment with Miss Mamata Banerjee on her terms.

The state Congress leaders, including Mr Somen Mitra, Mr Pradip Bhattacharya, Mr Atish Sinha and Mr Manash Bhuniya, in Delhi now for the talks, have taken such an unrelenting stance on seat adjustment that Mrs Gandhi would find it difficult to make them agree to Miss Banerjee's formula for seat adjustment. And if Miss Banerjee has to accept the seat-sharing terms offered by the state Congress, she'll have to make such major adjustments that nothing will remain of her already announced nomination list. That will put the Trinamul's entire poll preparation in jeopardy.

The reason for Miss Banerjee's unwillingness to accept Congress's seat-sharing formula is that in 20 (still with the Congress) of the 42 MLAs' Assembly segments, the Congress lost heavily in the 1999 parliamentary elections. Hence, renominating them from those constituencies would be as good as giving away the seats to the

Left Front on a platter.

The Congress because of severe erosion in its rank and file has just a token presence in those 20 seats. Trinamul candidates had comfortable leads in Assembly segments like Sealdah (from where Mr Somen Mitra gets elected to the Assembly), Burrabazar, Jorasanko and Kabitirtha in the last Lok Sabha polls. Even in last year's Calcutta Municipal Corporation election, the Trinamul bagged all the three wards comprising the Sealdah Assembly seat. The Congress drew a blank.

What's also creating problems is that Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, Congress MP from Raiganj, eager for a tie-up with Miss Banerjee, wants his nominees for all the seven seats in his parliamentary constituency. He is opposed to two Trinamul candidates whom Mamata has fielded from Itahar and Raiganj.

Similarly, Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury wants Miss Banerjee to accept two sitting Congress MLAs as candidates for Englishbazar and Araidan-

ga in Malda. But Miss Banerjee is not willing to oblige.

But it is the long-standing antipathy of Mr Somen Mitra and his supporters towards Miss Banerjee that has made matters worse. Mr Mitra, as the unofficial chief of the state Congress, is against any alliance with Trinamul. For, he fears that will erode his organisational control over whatever is left of the PCC.

Mr Mitra's other fear is that if an alliance is forged, he'll be cornered in the new set-up because Mr Das Munshi shares an excellent rapport with Miss Banerjee. Mr Pranab Mukherjee, PCC chief, is also "mighty unhappy" for being kept out of the present seat-sharing talks.

What's interesting is that Mr Mitra's supporters and CPI-M leaders, including Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, are airing identical views against a Congress alliance with the Trinamul.

■ Desert Mamata, BJP tells Trinamul leaders, page 4

■ Sonia has a Hobson's choice, page 8

THE STATESMAN

23 MAR 2001

Tie-up talks with Cong stuck, Mamata may go it alone

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, March 27

ALLIANCE TALKS between the Trinamool and the Congress appeared doomed today, with AICC general secretary Kamal Nath and PCC chief Pranab Mukherjee under mounting pressure from the Bengal leadership not to accept the number of seats Mamata Banerjee was willing to offer till late in the day.

As Congress leaders went into a huddle in Delhi, Banerjee met her senior lieutenants at Nizam Palace in the city to discuss if the Trinamool should face the polls alone. Later, a party insider said Banerjee had more or less concluded that that is how it should be. She would hold a Press conference in the city tomorrow to make her stand official, the source said.

Even before this, it was obvious at a meeting Kamal Nath, Pranab Mukherjee, P R Dasmunshi and ABA Ghani Khan Chowd-

hury held in Delhi that none of the State satraps was willing to forgo his advantage in the staggered bargaining game with Banerjee. Some even went to the extent of saying that the Congress should go it alone.

To make matters worse, there was growing pressure on the PCC leaders from the party's district presidents to refrain from having an alliance with the Trinamool. Indeed, Somen Mitra, Atish Sinha, Pradip Bhattacharya, Manas Bhuniya and Kumud Bhattacharya had been asked to be in Delhi tomorrow to brief the AICC on the latest situation in the State, a Congress insider said. While the Bengal leaders would leave for Delhi, Congress workers would hold 'anti-alliance' demonstrations in front of the PCC office and elsewhere in the State, he added.

The development comes at a time when the party's district presidents have already said that there must be at least two seats

for the Congress in each subdivision of the State - a situation that would automatically jack up the Congress share of seats in case of an alliance to more than 100. Mamata must also make a public apology for having called the Congress a B-team of the CPI(M), they said.

Earlier, Dashmunshi was probably outlining the shape of things to come when he said, "We told Mamata that in whichever Assembly segments her candidates had got the first and second positions in the 1999 Lok Sabha polls, the Trinamool might put up its candidates. And wherever we had retained such positions, the Congress should be allowed to contest. We should not limit ourselves to the numbers game. It is her stake to become Chief Minister, it's she who should come around."

"As far as we are concerned, the seats can be between 65 and 80, but they must also be winning seats," Das Munshi said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 MAR 2001

PARTY RELEASES LIST OF NOMINEES

PDS still ready for Cong alliance

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 26

THE PARTY for Democratic Socialism (PDS) doesn't depend on the Congress anymore but hasn't dumped the idea for good. Instead it keeps track on its recent talks with the Trinamool Congress and will consider a patch-up once again if the proposed alliance fails.

"The Congress has its own political compulsion. We have our own. What if we don't get the Congress at the moment? We can get it after the elections also," PDS president Saifuddin Chowdhury said while publishing the first list of 60 candidates. Chowdhury will fight from Nadanghat in Burdwan.

The party, at present, plans to go alone with smaller constituents like Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Samajwadi Janata Party, the Bahujan Rashtriya Party, Marxist Forward Bloc and some others. Sumanta Hira's Paschimbanga Ganatantrik Mancha has joined the democratic secular front.

PDS secretary Samir Putatunda will take on the Left Front's chief ministerial candidate Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee from Jadavpur. It seems that Putatun-



PDS chief Saifuddin Chowdhury and Samir Putatunda with other members at the Press club on Monday.

da, who was initially reluctant to contest from Jadavpur, has taken up the challenge. "Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is a failure as Chief Minister and Home (Police) Minister. Our men are being harassed, heckled and beaten up by the CPI(M) toughs during his regime."

Blaming the Left Front Government for the upsurge of the BJP in the country, Chowdhury said: "Things would have been different if the CPI(M) didn't commit the mistake it did in 1996 when it got the offer to lead the democratic secular front. Its blunder helped the BJP to come

to power. It has to pay for it."

The PDS list includes four sitting MLAs and former CPI(M) councillors from Cossipore and Burrabazar namely Amar Bhattacharya and Debashis Das. CPI(M) MLA Tapati Saha will contest from the Taltolla seat. Ram Chatterjee's son Debabshish Chatterjee will fight against Front candidate Pratim Chatterjee from Tarakeswar.

The PDS has also fielded some of its office-bearers. Tapas Basu is the PDS candidate from Ballygunge, Surangama Bhattacharya from Dhakuria, Sudeshna Chatterjee from Tollygunj, Giyasud-

din from Jangipur. Noted Bengali poet Sarat Mukherjee will fight on a PDS ticket from Alipore. Sunandan Roy Chowdhury is pitted against CPI(M) candidate Subhas Chakrabarty from Belgachhia (East).

Mrityunjoy Mukherjee from Hirapur and Sankar Banerjee from Rashbehari with Trinamool Congress background have also got the PDS ticket. PDS pins its hopes on candidates from Murshidabad and Nadia and parts of Burdwan. Mozammel Haque, Subhas Bose and Asit Saha are the dark horses, PDS leaders say.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 MAR 2001

MAMATA WILL BE PROJECTED AS THE LEADER: KAMAL NATH

Cong., Trinamool identify common ground

9.8.13

10/1/13

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, MARCH 26. The Congress today said Ms. Mamata Banerjee had "become the symbol of the anti-Left sentiment in West Bengal" and that the party would have no reservations in projecting her as the leader of the combine in the State. This was stated by the AICC general secretary in charge of West Bengal, Mr. Kamal Nath, who returned from Kolkata today after a meeting with Ms. Banerjee.

Preparing the ground for seat-sharing, the party spokesperson, Mr. Anand Sharma, said, "It is our belief and conviction that she will have nothing to do with the BJP or the NDA."

The Congress' line assumes significance in the wake of last night's meeting between Mr. Kamal Nath and Ms. Banerjee in Kolkata, the first formal contact between the parties. After the two-hour meeting, the Congress leader held extensive discussions with the party's State unit till well past midnight.

Talking to reporters here, Mr. Kamal Nath said that the talks were based on "the fact that Ms. Banerjee will have nothing to do with the BJP". He exuded confidence that the Ms. Banerjee herself would make a declaration on the matter shortly.

The parties, he said, had begun the preliminary exercise of short-listing the seats that they wanted to contest. "The whole idea is to have an arrangement which supplements our strengths and can effectively help defeat the CPI (M)."

He said the Congress had always maintained that it was in favour of joining hands with any party to defeat the Left Front in the West Bengal, so long as the party had nothing to do — directly or indirectly — with the BJP.

Mr. Kamal Nath is scheduled to hold another round of talks with the State unit leaders tonight and the Pradesh Congress Committee leaders have been asked to reach Delhi. He will also confer with the Congress president, Ms. Sonia

Gandhi, when she returns from her visit to Hong Kong on Wednesday, before flying out to meet the Trinamool chief again.

Despite their upbeat mood — having finally almost wooed Ms. Banerjee out of the NDA fold — the Congress leaders indicated that the seat-sharing talks would be painstaking. They stressed that for the Congress it was not the number of seats but which seats it would contest that mattered. "Numbers alone are not important, we want winnable seats," said a party leader.

Mr. Kamal Nath admitted that the parties were yet to sort out the nitty-gritty of seat-sharing and yesterday's meeting was limited to "defining the broad contours" of the impending battle against the CPI(M).

However, informed sources indicated that the Congress would ideally want to retain the seats of all the 42 sitting MLAs in its ranks; it is also insisting on being allowed to contest from the As-

sembly segments where the party stood second in the last election. The Congress initially had 79 MLAs in the present Assembly; but a series of desertions saw the number reduced to 42. However, Trinamool Congress sources maintained that the ground realities have undergone a major shift and the Congress cannot demand seats on the basis of past performance. "A combined Congress, with Ms. Banerjee in its ranks, won 79 seats. Now, the situation is different."

Yet another problem is that Ms. Banerjee has already announced the names of candidates contesting in 228 seats, some of which the Congress too wants to contest. Both sides admit that the process is a difficult one, but maintain that ultimately an agreement would be hammered out. "Whatever seats we win will go into Ms. Banerjee's basket, so where is the conflict," asked Mr. Kamal Nath.

Workers sulky; BJP still hopeful: Page-13

THE HINDU

27 MAR 2013

Trinamool, BJP war of nerves continues

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 21

THERE'S NO winner yet in the war of nerves between the Trinamool Congress and the BJP as Mamata Banerjee today stuck to her stand of abstaining in a no-confidence motion in Parliament while her party made it clear that it wanted the alliance with the BJP in Bengal to stick.

BJP vice-president Kailashpati Mishra, here on a damage control mission, said: "Both the PM and the BJP want the alliance to last. We want Mamata to be the Chief Minister of Bengal. It must be very clear that our fax to her was not an ultimatum.

It's just that the Prime Minister wants an assurance from Mamata. After all, any day the NDA Government can face a trial on the floor of the House and he must know her stand in such a scenario."

Both the parties today silenced their guns and said they wanted the alliance to stick. There has been an apparent change of heart on Mamata's part after the PMO and the BJP told her last night that the fax was not an ultimatum.

"We don't want a divorce with the BJP. We want the marriage to last. As for the seat adjustment, we stick to the 39 seats given to the BJP as it was worked out by

Mamata in consultation with State BJP leaders," Trinamool policy-making body chairman Pankaj Banerjee said.

BJP State spokesman Tathagatha Roy said: "We would do everything possible to maintain the alliance. But in case things go wrong, we will contest in 115 seats."

But Mishra struck a different note. "We have accepted the 39 seats given to us by Mamata. But she can surely change some seats, as we are demanding. I think things will settle down if Mamata starts communicating. But if she breaks the alliance, we have to go alone."

The BJP is also upset that she

is flirting with the Congress. "How can Mamata tie up with the party she left because it is a known CPI(M) ally?" posed Tathagatha.

To this, Pankaj said though the Trinamool is open to talks with the Congress to fight the CPI(M), nothing has been communicated to his party yet. "The Congress is welcome to join our broad-based alliance that would also include the BJP."

PCC president Pranab Mukherjee insists that Mamata can have straight contests with the CPI(M) in 200-odd seats out of the 294. In the rest, she should allow the Congress to put up candidates against the BJP.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

22 MAR 2001

Govt seal on Basu perks

22/3
BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, March 21: The Cabinet today formalised the special facilities and privileges given to Jyoti Basu after his retirement.

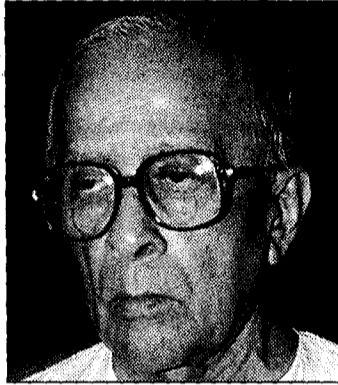
Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said the benefits were granted to Basu following a home department notification issued on November 6, 2000, the day he stepped down.

"The matter came before the Cabinet as a mention case. We do not discuss old matters brought before us in the Cabinet meeting as a matter of information. Such cases are automatically deemed approved," Bhattacharjee said.

The legal department is learnt to have suggested to the government that the notification on facilities given to former chief ministers and Speakers should be approved by the Cabinet so that they can be continued if there is a change of government.

According to the government notification (No. 307 and 307 A—Home) issued by chief secretary Manish Gupta on November 6, 2000, Basu will continue to enjoy all privileges he got as chief minister, except his salary.

The notification says: "The state government is of the opinion that any person who has served for at least one full term of five years as the chief minister or as the Speaker of the Assembly should be granted some facilities and privileges



Jyoti Basu

in recognition of the services rendered by him."

Basu's package includes a special security net, furnished residence along with a garden, lawn and staff quarters, secretarial assistance, unlimited medical and travel expenses, an official car with chauffeur and fuel and maintenance paid for, electricity and cooking gas, telephones with STD at government cost and a sumptuary allowance of Rs 1,500 per month.

Office furniture and secretarial equipment will be provided

by the state public works department.

Former chief ministers — there's only Siddhartha Shankar Ray alive now — and Speakers — there are none — will also be eligible for the same benefits.

Bhattacharjee, however, continued to parry questions on Basu's perks. He refused to reply to queries on why the notification, issued on November 6, was brought before the Cabinet at its last meeting before the elections. He also refused to answer a question on why the former chief minister was given a free furnished government house when he has a personal residence in the city.

Burnpur arrests

Police arrested two firearms suppliers from the Burnpur Boy's School ground and seized five single-shutter pipe guns and 10 rounds of ammunition from them. Officer-in-charge of Hiranpur police station Atul Chatterjee said the two men were moving around the school campus yesterday when they were arrested.

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THE TELEGRAPH

22 MAR 2001

BJP ultimatum to Trinamul backfires, moves afoot to save poll pact in Bengal

The Times of India News Service
NEW DELHI: The BJP's ultimatum to the Trinamul Congress that it decide within 24 hours on the question of supporting the NDA government from the outside or face the consequences seems to have backfired.

Angered by the BJP's pressure tactics, the Trinamul Congress has threatened to oppose the Vajpayee government in parliament. The Trinamul has also refused to concede to the BJP's demand that 16 of the 39 seats allotted to it for the forthcoming West Bengal polls should be exchanged. The BJP has sought changes in these 16 seats offered to it by the Trinamul, its poll partner in that state, as it considers them to be CPM strongholds.

Surprised by the Trinamul's reaction, the BJP was forced to rush its vice-president Kailashpati Mishra to Kolkata on Wednesday to try and save the electoral alliance between the two parties in West Bengal. Mr Mishra is likely to hold discussions with Trinamul leaders on the party's threat and

report back to the central leadership at the party's national executive slated for March 24 and 25.

Angered by the letter from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Trinamul Congress chief whip in the Lok Sabha Sudip Bandopadhyay said, "If the need arises, we may even oppose the

Vajpayee government in parliament. We take strong exception to yesterday's fax from the PMO's Sudhindra Kulkarni seeking our assurance within 24 hours of providing outside support to the NDA. The tone of the letter was uncivilised." Stating that the Trinamul Congress was determined to stay away from the NDA, he asserted, "There is not even one per cent chance of our party returning to the NDA."

Mr Bandopadhyay made it clear that

his party would not have any ties with the BJP save the seat-sharing arrangement in West Bengal for a one-to-one fight against the ruling Left Front in the forthcoming assembly polls. He also ruled out any swapping of seats offered to the BJP by the Trinamul.



A.B. Vajpayee **Mamata Banerjee**

Rs 42 cr. of taxpayers' money lost in six days

The Times of India News Service
NEW DELHI: Both houses of parliament have remained paralysed since March 13, the day a decoy arms dealer's spycam let the nation peep into the sleaze in defence deals. With an unrelenting opposition demanding the Vajpayee government's resignation and the government digging its heels in, parliament has lost six working days—and the exchequer a whopping Rs 42 crore.

Mamata, Cong break ice

BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, March 20: A new configuration against the Left Front began crystallising today as Sonia Gandhi took a personal initiative for an electoral alliance with Mamata Banerjee after putting Congress state bosses on the backburner.

In a simultaneous development, Mamata worked herself into a fury at the tone of Monday's missive from the Prime Minister's Office, thought to be a prelude to dumping the three-year-old alliance with the BJP and thrashing out a new deal.

Arriving from Delhi late in the evening, state Congress president Pranab Mukherjee said he would hold talks with Mamata tomorrow. But sources said back-channel discussions were already being held directly by Sonia and

Kamal Nath, AICC general secretary in charge of Bengal.

The sources said Sonia overruled Mukherjee when he suggested that the Congress take a cautious stand and drive a hard bargain. "The situation calls for a strategic electoral adjustment with Mamata. We shall, in the next few days, try and work out the modalities," Kamal Nath said. He spoke with Mamata twice today to convince her to part ways with the BJP.

The sources said Sonia and her aides were happy with the progress of the talks, but it was now up to Mamata to reciprocate. "The success or failure of the talks will hinge on how she responds to us," a Congress leader said.

The fax message from the PMO sought a public statement from Mamata within 24 hours, reaffirming Trinamul's "full faith in Prime Minister Atal Bihari Va-

jjpayee". The fax also asked her to state that like the Telugu Desam, Trinamul would lend outside support to the NDA government.

"This is unparliamentary and uncivilised. There is no question of rejoining the NDA," Trinamul MP Sudip Bandopadhyay said. He added that the party regarded the fax not as a threat, but "it certainly is an ultimatum to us".

Bandopadhyay made it clear that Trinamul would not have any joint manifesto with the state BJP. Nor will Trinamul exchange any of the 15 seats the BJP has been demanding.

However, state BJP president Asim Ghosh reiterated that all the 15 seats have to be exchanged as "all of them are losing ones". In a last-gasp attempt to keep alive the pact, Vajpayee has despatched BJP vice-president Kailashpati Mishra to hold talks with Mamata tomorrow.

THE TELEGRAPH

STATE FINANCE PANEL REPORT YET TO BE IMPLEMENTED

Decentralisation still a dream

HKS
2/13

Subhamoy Chatterjee
Kolkata, March 20

THE LEFT Front Government always swears by "decentralisation of powers". But its records, when it comes to the crunch, border on the dismal.

Nothing proves this more than its lackadaisical approach to the recommendations of the first State Finance Commission (SFC). Even four years after the SFC submitted its report on the devolution of funds to the local bodies, nothing has been done as yet. The SFC, the first of its kind in the country, was appointed with much fanfare in the wake of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, aimed at endowing the local bodies with greater financial leverage.

In the wake of the constitutional amendments, the Left Front Government had gone to town that it would decentralise the planning process and financially empower the three-tier panchayati raj institutions and the municipalities so that they could reach the fruits of development at the doorstep of the ultimate beneficiaries.

It was with that end that the sabdhadhipatis of the zilla parishads, the sabhapatis of the panchayat samitis and the pradhans of the gram panchayats were made repositories of powers, while the district magistrates and the Block Development Officers (BDOs) were sidelined.

The 30 departments were asked to release 50 per cent of their Plan funds to the districts where District Planning Committees (DPCs) were to formulate plans and implement them. It meant that as much as Rs 750 crore would be available to the local bodies annually. The money came to be included under the head "grants to local bodies" in the departmental budgets.

The Government did not stop there. It appointed the SFC under the chairmanship of late Satyabrata Sen, then also chairman of the State Planning Board (SPB) to explore the ways and means of increasing the financial entitlement of the 17 zilla parishads, 122 municipal bodies, 340 panchayat samitis and 3300 gram panchayats.

A Marxist-academician that he was, late Sen brooked no delay. He went about his job with his customary flair and a rare thoroughness. The report he submitted in November 1995 was a splendid specimen of how the State resources could be devolved to the local bodies. The SFC recommended that 16 per cent of the State's tax revenue be made over to the panchayati raj institutions and the municipal bodies.

Sources said that the local bodies would stand to get at least Rs 600 crore a year if the SFC award was implemented. "But no one had heard about the report ever since. The Government had said that it was looking into the details of the arrangements of sharing the revenue. But nothing moved on the ground. There should have been a Cabinet Subcommittee or at least a Secretaries Committee to monitor the implementation of the SFC award if the Government was at all serious about it".

Curiously though, ~~the Kerala~~ Government had implemented the SFC report, authored by the same late Sen, in its entirety. "The total devolved fund has gone down to the lowest level there without any hitch", the sources said.

What makes this charade of devolution here complete is the Government's decision to appoint a second SFC, headed by Deb Kumar Bose, even as the report of the first one has virtually been shelved.

The Statesman

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MAMATA'S LESSON

srb Welcome second thoughts. 78/3

MAMATA Banerjee's announcement that her seat deal with the BJP stands is the clearest possible indication that she realises she has cried wolf once too often. This takes nothing away from her understandable distaste for the sleaze that the Tehelka tapes brought to public view, but to admit that she did not need to wear her integrity on her sleeve and that the logical alternative, an alliance with the Congress in Bengal is not on. In the Bofors case Rajiv's lies were aggravated by miserable attempts at a cover-up, which cost him the election. His immediate reaction to Swedish Radio disclosures was to allege a conspiracy to destabilise his government, followed by assertions that no Indians were involved. When proved wrong, he proceeded to expose himself further by asking if the payments were industrial espionage how could anyone complain? He was really admitting without meaning to that as Indians officially had details of the competitive French gun, Sofma, he had passed on the details to the Swedes, an utterly dishonest action. Each subsequent Congress administration has lent a new dimension to corruption. There was the urea deal under Rao, where full payment was made overseas for a shipment, which never arrived. Mamata has just realised that to ally with Sonia with her talk of the *moral right to govern* would be hypocrisy of a very high order. She needs time. Unfortunately someone seems to have removed the muzzle from Tapan Sikdar who dubbed Mamata's action unfair.

Meanwhile the Congress under Sonia proceeds without pause to confirm that they do not have a single intelligent idea in their heads. At the Bangalore session of the AICC, there was reaffirmation of the mixed economy, so mixed that it has taken a long time to untangle it. While the country is trying valiantly to get rid of the economic baggage of the past, the Congress would shore up lost PSUs. Senior leader Chandrajit Yadav is not allowed to speak as it displeases madam; he wants some soul-searching and complains that the party is seen as belonging to the rich, to which Arjun Singh's response is that it does not want any manifestation of caste and the rich to him is a caste! Original thought but not likely to appeal! That the party is on its knees is clear from the reversal of the brave position taken at Panchmarhi that the party may take a hundred years but would go it alone rather than compromise with its principles. After the alliances in Tamil Nadu with Jayalalitha and others elsewhere, it is now pleading for any alliance that will give it even a few crumbs of power.

Mamata must realise that Sonia's Congress has an unbreakable understanding, part overt part covert with her arch rivals, the CPI(M) in Bengal and she can hardly respond to the Congress invitation. Her statement therefore that the seat adjustment worked out earlier stands reassures her supporters that she has her head screwed on right after all. Operation damage control will proceed apace but she should have tarried for the two hours needed to avoid creating confusion. Not even her worst enemy thinks she needs to prove her immunity from corruption and the better option would have been to stay put and use her influence to get proper inquiries launched into what has come to light. Vajpayee is not the man to rub it in and the process of reconciliation should be complete before the elections. If the experience teaches her to be less impetuous, it will have served a purpose.

THE STATESMAN

20 MAR 2001

State bonanza for former chief ministers, Speakers

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, March 19. — The state government proposes to provide certain amenities to former chief ministers and assembly speakers. The proposal will be placed before the Cabinet meeting on 21 March, Writers' Buildings officials said.

The only former chief ministers alive are Mr Jyoti Basu and Mr Siddhartha Shankar Ray and they will be beneficiaries of the proposed amenities. Mr Ray takes no benefit from the state and is provided with security cover by the Centre.

The former CMs and speak-

ers will be given pension that an MLA gets and the expenditure for their security will be borne by the state government, officials said. The former CMs and speakers will be provided with free well-furnished houses.

Like ministers they will get "unlimited medical allowance." They will be provided with allowance for travelling throughout the country.

The state government plans to provide them with secretarial staff as well. They will each have one confidential assistance, one personal assistance and two attendants.

The state government has

proposed to provide them allowances for newspapers, electricity bill, LPG gas, driver's salary and maintenance of vehicle. They will also get Rs 1,000 each towards office expense allowance.

The government will take care of their telephone bill, including STD expenditure.

If the proposal is passed, the former chief ministers and speakers each will get Rs1500 and Rs 100 per month as entertainment expenditure.

The government plans to recruit about 1,200 constables before elections, though in December it had decided to freeze recruitment.

THE STATESMAN

20 MAR 2001

Mahajot onus on Mamata

UDAY BASU

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

9. 6/19/3
KOLKATA, March 18. - Caught between the Congress and the BJP, the Trinamul Congress has now to shoulder the responsibility of cobbling together an anti-Left grand alliance.

The Congress and the BJP are sitting pretty, leaving the ball of forging the mahajot in the Trinamul's court.

Cracks have appeared in the alliance with the Kamptapuri People's Party severing ties with the Trinamul-BJP.

(At Jalpaiguri the KPP president, Mr Atul Roy, told PTI today that the party yesterday reviewed the current political situation in the state and decided to pull out of the alliance with the BJP and Trinamul.)

The Congress and the BJP have said they are ready to oblige Miss Mamata Banerjee on her oft-repeated terms for the alliance.

The Congress has welcomed Trinamul's snapping of ties with the NDA and announced at its Bangalore plenary that it won't compromise with its "anti-communal and anti-communist" agenda.

18/19/3
While it's anybody's guess to what extent the Congress will maintain its anti-CPI-M posture, it has, at least on the surface, fulfilled Trinamul's demand for snapping its "covert" links with the CPI-M.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee, chairman of Trinamul's policy-making committee, said the Congress should refrain from supporting the CPI-M at the Centre and states like Bihar and Tamil Nadu, if it wanted to ally with Trinamul in West Bengal. But it has little on paper to complain against the Congress after the Bangalore assertion.

The BJP state committee has put the onus of uniting the anti-Left forces on the Trinamul by announcing that it won't demand more than the 39 seats offered to it.

Mr Muzaffar Khan, BJP state vice-president, said his party had only urged the Trinamul to change some seats - Joransanko, Kulti (Asansol), Rampurhat (Birbhum) and Purbasthani (Burdwan).

The BJP game plan is to give to the Trinamul chief a choice that is unacceptable to her and thus put the blame on Miss Banerjee for possible failure to unite anti-Left forces.

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

9. 6/19/3

Seat deal with BJP stands, says Mamata

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, March 17. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today did not make her stand clear on her support to the BJP at national and state levels.

The Trinamul Congress chief said her MPs would abstain from voting in the event of a no-confidence motion against the NDA government.

"There is no question of supporting either the NDA or the third front in the event of a no-confidence motion. In such a situation, the Trinamul Congress MPs will abstain from voting."

She told reporters before attending the meeting of the party's policy-making committee that her seat adjustment with the BJP still stood and that the latter would contest in 39 seats. "We do not betray our friends. But if they betray us, we cannot help." She told reporters: "You will have to wait for another couple of days to get the picture."

Mr Asim Ghosh, BJP state president, said the alliance was alive and kicking. "Let us sit together... We shall fight unitedly."

The BJP state unit has, however, expressed dissatisfaction over the poll list. The party's state election committee demanded that the Trinamul agree to exchange some of the 39 seats. The Trinamul wants to exchange those seats where it feels its winning chances are bleak. "We had contested a third of the seats in the last two Lok Sabha polls, and this would mean 93 or 94 seats in Assembly polls," Mr Ghosh said. "Yet, we have accepted only 39 this time so that anti-Left forces can unite."

Mr Ghosh described Miss Banerjee's decision to abstain from voting as a "negative way" of supporting the NDA government. By withdrawing support, he said, she had

shown her opposition to the government and this would logically mean she would vote against it in Parliament. Since she had decided not to do so, it was clear that she was indirectly supporting the government. "Sometimes, abstention gives tremendous strength to governments," Mr Ghosh said.

Miss Banerjee said she had full trust in Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and that the dignity of the Prime Minister should be restored. She was convinced that Mr Vajpayee would be able to clean up the government. She said she had always wanted a transparent government and was ready to support any party that would guarantee this. Miss Banerjee said she left the NDA in the interest of the people.

She ruled out rejoining the government even if the crisis was over.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee, chairman of the policy-making committee, said the Congress must decide in the Bangalore session whether it wanted to fight the CPI-M. The Congress has made alliances with Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav and Miss Jayalalitha though they are facing corruption cases.

He said the party would welcome anti-CPI-M forces in the state to fight against the "corrupt and inefficient" government in the ensuing polls.

He said the policy-making committee congratulated Miss Banerjee and other party MPs for quitting the NDA. The mayor, Mr Subrata Mukherjee, Mr Saugata Roy, Mr Ajit Panja, Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay, Mr Akbar Ali Khondkar, Mr Subrata Bakshi, Mrs Mala Roy and Mr Sanjay Bakshi were present at the meeting.

Mr Ghosh will go to Delhi tomorrow with Mr Tapan Sikdar and Mr Satyabrata Mukherjee, both Union ministers, to discuss with central BJP leaders state unit's grievances.

Cong beckons, but Mamata cool

OUR BUREAU

March 16: The Congress tonight offered to go into the Bengal elections with Mamata Banerjee as the chief ministerial candidate, though the Trinamul leader refused to shut the door on the BJP.

"Now that she has left the NDA, we will extend our full cooperation," AICC general secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad said in Bangalore.

Back in Calcutta after severing her ties with the NDA, Mamata said: "We have no reservations against any party whatsoever in order to oust the CPM... (But) I want to make it clear Trinamul is strong enough to contest alone."

At its plenary, the Congress has authorised Sonia Gandhi to open talks with Mamata once the green signal comes from Cal-

cutta. The Trinamul leader said she had not held any discussions with Congress leaders on an alliance.

Growing impatient at persistent questions about the future of her poll alliance with the BJP, she said: "I will make everything clear in a day or two."

Mamata, however, made it clear that she was reluctant to end the understanding. "I strongly feel that the present situation does not merit dismantling of the Save Bengal Front (of which the BJP is a member)," she said.

She arrived in the city at 8.40 to be greeted by a huge gathering of Trinamul supporters and immediately went into a meeting with senior party leaders.

If a section of the BJP gets its way, Mamata's dilemma over whether or not to continue with

the alliance will be resolved for her: At a meeting of the BJP state secretariat, it was decided that the party would put up candidates for all 294 Assembly seats.

Heading this group is Tapan Sikdar, Union minister of state for telecommunications, whose relations with Mamata are bitter. He has described Mamata's departure from the Vajpayee government as "good riddance".

"She formed Trinamul by breaking away from the Congress. Now she wants to unite the two parties," he said. Sikdar is threatening to field candidates in all seats to "teach Trinamul a lesson".

The moderates in the state BJP appeared wary of disturbing the alliance. State BJP president Asim Ghosh and vice-president Muzaffar Khan said they would go

by the advice from Delhi.

Ghosh said the party would finalise its decision at a meeting here tomorrow to be attended by Kailashpati Mishra, the central observer for Bengal.

Sources said the the central leadership would not like the state unit to go on the offensive against Mamata — and push her towards the Congress — as long as she did not snap the link herself.

The moderate section also believes that Mamata might continue the alliance she has stuck to her resolve to take on the Left in straight contests. "We need a one-to-one fight to ensure the defeat of the ruling communists," she said even today.

Mamata has also made it apparent that her party will not get involved in any move to pull down the Vajpayee government.

KPP-Trinamul alliance may fall through

SUDIPTA CHANDA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

17/3
SILIGURI, March 16. -- The proposed electoral alliance between Trinamul Congress and the Kamtapur People's Party may have gone for a toss following Miss Mamata Banerjee's decision to snap ties with the NDA.

The decision is expected to be announced shortly, the KPP president, Mr Atul Roy, indicated today. "The move has been a haughty one. We are now forced to review the issue of poll alliance with the Trinamul," Mr Roy told **The Statesman**.

Though not a strong political force in North Bengal, the BJP has a fair share of supporters among the migrants from Bangladesh and Assam.

They make up a sizeable chunk of the electorate in the constituencies that have been allocated to the KPP by the Trinamul.

"We cannot afford to lose their support," Mr Roy said pointing out that the BJP has bagged quite a few panchayats in the

constituencies earmarked for the KPP. "This indicates a strong presence of the BJP in the rural areas of the six districts of North Bengal," he claimed.

Incidentally, the six Assembly seats left for the KPP by the Trinamul and a seventh one that it has been wanting, are adjacent to the Bangladesh border and heavily populated by infiltrators from that country.

The KPP president himself aims to compete from the Rajganj Assembly seat in Jalpaiguri district.

The constituency is unique since it extends to the Bangladesh border in the east and contains 14 wards of the Siliguri Municipal Corporation on the western end. The BJP has a moderate following at both ends of the constituency.

"The Trinamul's decision to sever ties with the NDA will divide the votes and ruin our chances at the hustings," Mr Roy said.

The KPP may have already distanced itself from other pro-Kamtapur organisations by staying away from the 72-

hour North Bengal bandh called jointly by the All Kamtapur Students' Union, Kamtapur Women's Rights Forum and the Kamtapur Bhasa Sahitya Parishad.

The bandh ended rather tamely today largely due to the non-participation of the KPP. More interested in political gains at the moment, the KPP has made it clear that flexing of muscles is out for now, even if it costs the support of the bandh sponsors during the elections.

While assessing its numerical strength and converting it into ballots is the main concern of the KPP at present, for the other pro-Kamtapur parties it is the basic question of survival.

With all top AKSU leaders behind bars and KWRF leaders on the run, the two organisations' desire to create pressure and get them back in action has suffered due to the KPP's non-committal attitude towards the bandh.

"While the Left parties are trying to woo the voters by inaugurating supposedly development related projects at this crunch hour, it would

be suicidal for us to support the bandh," argued the KPP president.

Though the AKSU is a separate organisation from the KPP, the KWRF, initiated and nurtured by the KPP, seems to have developed a mind of its own that is independent from the KPP's political line.

Admitting the fact, the KPP leadership, however, does not attach much importance to it. The Bhasa Sahitya Parishad, largely an organisation of the Rajbanshi/Kamtapuri genteel, is an important cog in the Kamtapuri wheel.

Its move to corner some initiative in the Kamtapuri struggle through the bandh has also suffered due to the KPP's non-involvement.

How far the KPP's move would sour relations between the pro-Kamtapur organisations and how much of it would reflect in the ballot box is something the elections will decide. But the fact remains that despite their claim of a common programme, the pro-Kamtapur organisations are far from united.

THE STATESMAN

17 MAR 1991

State BJP to contest all 294 Assembly seats...

Gautam Chaudhuri
Kolkata, March 16

A DAY after Mamata Banerjee pulled out of the NDA, the State BJP has decided to contest all the 294 seats in the coming Assembly polls in West Bengal.

State BJP president Asim Ghosh admitted today that the party's alliance with the Trinamool Congress is in jeopardy indicating that ~~if necessary~~ the BJP is ready to go it alone in the elections.

BJP sources said the party is ready to meet any eventuality. "The party may put up candidates in all the 294 Assembly seats in the State, if the alliance with the Trinamool is snapped.

Ghosh said that the contradictory positions being adopted by Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee had complicated the scenario. He described it as a peculiar situation where Mamata had expressed support for the political alliance with the BJP at the State level, even after quitting the NDA Government. "It's a highly contradictory stand that will only confuse the people and will not benefit the alliance at all," Ghosh remarked.

He said they were now looking towards Delhi for directives, which he hoped would be received by tomorrow. BJP vice-president Kailashpati Mishra is expected in Kolkata tomorrow to attend the election committee meeting of the State BJP along with the two party Union Ministers from the State, Tapan Sikdar and Satyabrata Mukherjee.

BJP-Trinamool alliance in CMC under threat: Page 3

... But Mamata keeps alliance hopes alive

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 16

ON HER return to the city tonight, the Trinamool Congress chief hinted that her party had not yet scrapped its poll alliance with the State BJP.

Mamata Banerjee seemed unperturbed that the State BJP secretariat had decided to field candidates in each of West Bengal's 294 Assembly constituencies. She said: "I have heard about it but there is no need to think that everything is over at this stage. The decision to withdraw support from the NDA was taken by the Trinamool Parliamentary Party; the decision regarding Bengal will be formulated in the next 48 hours by the MLAs and organisational leaders."

She said the 'Bangla Bachao

Front' was still alive and that she wants to give the CPI(M) a one-to-one fight in the polls.

Is an alliance with the State Congress possible, now that she has left the BJP? Mamata said that what she had announced six months ago stands even today. "I welcome everybody who wants to defeat the CPI(M)," she said.

Mamata told *Hindustan Times* that her party had the popularity, mass support and resources to fight the electoral battle alone and now it was for the other parties to decide whether they want to cash in on her party's popularity to oust the CPI(M) from Bengal. Thus, she indicated that if the BJP snaps ties with Mamata here, it is not the Trinamool but the former that would suffer the most at the hustings.

Cong back on Mamata radar

OUR BUREAU

March 15: Mamata Banerjee's resignation from the National Democratic Alliance has opened up the possibility of her party reaching an alliance with the Congress for the Bengal elections.

Sources close to Mamata, however, said: "She has given her word to the BJP and she is unlikely to go back on that." This suggests an incredulous scenario where she snaps her ties with the BJP at the Centre because of the tarred reputation of the government, but continues with the alliance in Bengal.

The Congress high command is elated at the prospect of joining hands with its truant daughter — Sonia Gandhi always wanted Mamata back in the party. Short of that, she was anxious to have at least a poll understanding.

Kamal Nath, AICC general secretary in charge of Bengal, called up Mamata twice today to congratulate her on her "brave" decision. Sonia Gandhi plans to take charge of the negotiations after Kamal Nath does the groundwork.

Mamata has, however, kept the Congress guessing, partly because she will be in a stronger position when the bargaining starts for seats if she dangles the threat of the alliance with the BJP.

The other reason she is not rushing into withdrawing from the seat adjustment in Bengal is her reluctance to cause further hurt to Vajpayee. The Trinamul resolution sent to the Prime Minister today curiously said that Mamata and Ajit Panja were resigning to strengthen the hands of the Prime Minister. She told the

media as much.

This triggered speculation that after George Fernandes' resignation she might return to the ministry. At the least, she was keeping the door open to the BJP.

She will not be in much of a hurry to break off with the BJP in Bengal and forge a new alliance with the Congress. Ajit Panja said: "We are all going back to Calcutta tomorrow. We shall decide our future course of action only then."

Mamata will be the happiest if she is spared the unsavoury task of snapping the electoral understanding. "If the BJP decides to walk out of the alliance, we have nothing to do," Trinamul sources said.

There were indications that, before anything else, the Trinamul leader may prepare a list of candidates for the 39 seats she has given to the BJP to provide for a situation where she contests without an alliance.

Even though Mamata was noncommittal about the fate of the seat adjustment with the BJP, her close confidant and chairman of Trinamul's policy-making body, Pankaj Banerjee, said in Calcutta that the arrangement would have to be reviewed. "Now that we are no longer a part of the NDA, we will have to take a fresh look at the situation," Banerjee said.

For the benefit of readers and newspaper sellers, a new distribution point is being opened at Mandirtala bus stand at Shibpur from 15.3.2001. For any publication requirement please enquire at the point.

KLO kills two Left leaders

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

JALPAIGURI/SILIGURI, March 14. - Two local Communists leaders were shot dead in Dhupguri under Jalpaiguri district by suspected KLO ultras today - the first day of the three-day North Bengal bandh called by pro-Kamtapur parties. (A truck driver who refused to help them escape in his vehicle was also killed, adds PTI.)

Elsewhere in the region life remained unaffected by the bandh. Mainul Alam (42) of the CPI-M and Mamtajuddin (32), a CPI leader, were shot by a group of unidentified men when they were riding towards Deomali on a scooter. The assailants, whom police suspect to be KLO militants, escaped into the nearby forest after the attack.

Mainul died on the way to Dhupguri Hospital and Mamtajuddin succumbed to injuries at Jalpaiguri Sadar Hospital.

SP, Jalpaiguri, Mr Ranvir Kumar and DIG, Jalpaiguri

Range rushed to the spot. Combing operations were on to nab the culprits.

While the police felt the killings were not bandh related, the CPI-M Jalpaiguri office said the deceased had been campaigning against the bandh. Since February 2000, five CPI-M leaders were killed by suspected KLO militants. Among the dead were three school-headmasters and two Kisan Sabha leaders.

In other parts of North Bengal, the bandh, called by All Kamtapur Students' Union, Womens' Rights' Forum and Kamtapuri Bhasha Sahitya Parishad, had little effect. Markets, government institutions, banks and most schools functioned normally with just a marginal fall in the traffic.

Security arrangements were tightened in 'vulnerable areas' like Shivmandir and Phasidewa in the Siliguri sub-division. RAF and CRPF personnel had been posted.

THE STATESMAN

15 MAR 2001

Trinamool in a spot in Bengal

By Our Special Correspondent

KOLKATA, MARCH 14. The Railway Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress in West Bengal is in a spot as the ruling Communists today questioned her integrity saying she was a partner in the BJP-run Government at the Centre which was currently in the eye of a storm over the Tehelka tapes.

"The portal exposing corrupt politicians and bureaucrats has named Ms. Banerjee also. What will she say now?" Mr. Anil Biswas, State secretary of the CPI(M), said. The Leftists think their ratings would go up and Ms. Banerjee's image would receive a beating, courtesy Tehelka. According to the Leftists, Ms. Banerjee showed herself in bad light a few days ago when she entered into an understanding with Mr. Shibu Soren's Jharkhand Mukti Morcha for the coming Assembly polls. "She is collaborating with persons like Mr. Shibu Soren who earned notoriety for his corrupt deeds," Mr. Biswas said.

Trinamool threat

The Trinamool leaders threatened to resign from the NDA Government if a probe into the alleged scandal involving politicians

and bureaucrats in a defence deal was not ordered.

The party's policy-making body chairman, Mr. Pankaj Banerjee, told mediapersons that the Government would do well to order an inquiry either by a Joint Parliamentary Committee or both Houses of Parliament or by a sitting judge of the Supreme Court or the Central Bureau of Investigation. The Trinamool supremo had written a letter to the Prime Minister urging him to order a probe immediately. "Any delay in ordering an inquiry will raise doubts in the minds of the average man". The CPI leader, Mr. Gurudas Dasgupta, demanded an inquiry by a Joint Parliamentary Committee and resignation of those named by Tehelka. "The JPC should be empowered to call for evidence from the people involved, irrespective of their position".

Cong. happy

The Bengal Congress leadership, led by Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, is enjoying every bit of the Trinamool's current discomfort. They said that the party had done the right thing by not aligning with Ms. Banerjee who would not give up her ally, the BJP.

"The BJP is utterly corrupt and

pursues anti-people policies. It's now for the people to see whether we were right or wrong in keeping our distance from the mahajot," Mr. Somen Mitra, former Bengal Congress president, said.

Third Front

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, stressed the need for a grouping of secular forces to counter the "corrupt" NDA Government.

Now that the corruption of the NDA Government has come to light, we think that there is no other alternative but to bring together the secular forces in the Third Front," he said. According to him, developments were taking place in Delhi towards formation of the Third Front. Mr. Bhattacharjee said besides the Left parties, the Rashtriya Janata Dal chief, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, and the Samajwadi Party supremo, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, were also part of the Third Front. "The differences between the two leaders would be sorted out".

He said that the Leftists would not mind aligning themselves with the RJD because it was necessary to resist the BJP, "the biggest threat to the country".

15 MAR 2001

Bangladeshi arms flood Bengal across porous border

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 12

IT'S NOT just Bihar, munitions are finding their way into the State's thriving arms market from Bangladesh as well. IB reports suggest that arms dealers are not merely using the porous Bashirhat and Bongaon borders. They are also smuggling in their lethal cargo via North Bengal.

This also substantiates what till now was a vague suspicion — that trade in arms and narcotics were inter-linked and these were being brought into the State from the North-East. Senior officers admit that the North-East is awash with such

Bangladeshi arms. The admission follows a previous Narcotics Control Bureau report suggesting that arms are being brought in through routes reaching far back to the Golden Triangle.

The supposition till now was that major chunks of arms reaching the State were being smuggled in from Bihar. The recovery of three 303 and 12 bore bullets bearing the BMM (Bangladesh made magazines) insignia from two arms factories unearthed near the city fringe, however, has come as a rude jolt to the State police.

Alarmed at the trend, the State police now intends to sound the IB for additional information on the matter. IB officials, however, assert that this is not a new trend, but what certainly is new is that these should be found so near the city.

They also point out that this must indicate an unusually high demand for ammunition in the run-up to the polls.

The supposition till now was that major chunks of arms reaching the State were being smuggled in from Bihar. The recovery of three 303 and 12-bore bullets bearing the BMM (Bangladesh made magazines) insignia from two arms factories unearthed near the city fringe, however, has come as a rude jolt to the State police

Police today claimed information of two more similar factories in rural South 24-Parganas and another in one of its urban pockets.

The main arms dealer, Qutub Mollah, is still absconding. Whatever little the police have learnt about him suggests that not just South 24-Parganas, Qutub, an excellent driver, used to sell his arms and ammunition to people in North 24-Parganas and even faraway Midnapore. Earlier discoveries of such

arms factories in the Kandi subdivision of Murshidabad did not result in recovery of Bangladeshi ammunition. It was suggested that such arms were entering Murshidabad from either Pakur or Farakka from Bhagalpur.

Later reports however indicated that what was being smuggled in would be far outweighed by what was being manufactured at mushrooming arms units in the district. Earlier IB reports had suggested that such

small units were most common in select pockets of Hoogly, Midnapur, Murshidabad, South and North 24-Parganas. "If the police had acted on those reports such factories could have been traced earlier," a senior IB official said.

A senior officer who had supervised the Murshidabad and South 24-Parganas raids said the guns seized were locally-made one shotters and pipe guns, with a few improvised revolvers.

"In Murshidabad we had even detained the arms dealer and he had confessed that he had learnt the trade from one Afzal, his mentor. Afzal, a small-time criminal from Satui in Berham-

pur, had fled to Chapra, where he learnt how to make guns.

On his return to Murshidabad 10 years ago, he taught the tricks to a few others, thus forming the nucleus of the now thriving trade. Police till now has been unable to link this to the arms haul in Govindapur village.

However they have not ruled it out. ASP (Rural) Rajesh Kumar Singh said this would be known only after Qutub was arrested.

Meanwhile, one Rajesh Sharma was held at Garden Reach in the city today with four revolvers, which he confessed to have brought from Bihar for sale to local criminals.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 MAR 2002

Saif to form third front with Cong

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE 9-87

KOLKATA, March 7. — The Party for Democratic Socialism, Congress and a few smaller parties will form Secular Democratic Front to fight the CPI-M and the Trinamul Congress in the West Bengal Assembly polls.

A common minimum programme and the number of seats the front partners will contest are being worked out, said the PDS president Mr Saifuddin Choudhury.

Mr Pradip Bhattacharya, PCC vice-president, said the SDF's list of candidates would be finalised after 10 March, the day the PCC executive committee would meet to discuss the issue.

Mr Choudhury had held preliminary talks with the PCC chief, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, and it was agreed that the SDF would help neither the Left Front nor the NDA partners — the Trinamul and the BJP — after the polls.

He ruled out that the new front would in the end help the Left Front by splitting the anti-Left votes. "On the contrary, had we not been in the fray, the LF and the right reactionaries

would have got the votes. We are for a realignment of political forces and the proposed front will play a crucial role."

The former CPI-M MP took exception to Mr Jyoti Basu's description of the PDS as a "bogus party". "There are many civilised words in the English language and Mr Basu could have used any of them. I expect political parties to maintain a minimum decorum while talking about their adversaries."

He said newspaper reports in the past few days indicated the CPI-M has got panicky over the formation of the PDS. It has also charged the PDS with having a "vague ideology".

"When we sought honourable separation from the CPI-M, we didn't intend to take political sanyas. Our ideology is based on Marxian principles which are being applied as the present situation demands," Mr Choudhury said.

Ghani not to join SDF: Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury has reportedly expressed unwillingness to be part of the Secular Democratic Front, SNS adds from Malda.

■ More reports on page 4

THE STATESMAN

- 8 MAR 2001

Measles virus behind mystery disease, says State Government

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 5

THE PATHOGEN that caused the "mystery disease" is a mutant variety of the measles virus, the State Government claimed on Monday, nearly a month after the outbreak in Siliguri. Many sceptical city experts, however, suggested the conclusion was reached in haste to silence critics.

The conclusion, Health Minister Partha De said, was based on the primary findings of the Indian Council of Medical Research from patients' blood samples and cerebro-spinal fluid extracts.

A similar strain had been observed during an outbreak in

western Maharashtra two years ago, he said.

Since this is a primary finding, it has been decided that a committee of five to seven members — from the National Institute of Virology, Pune, the School of Tropical Medicine, Kolkata, and other institutes — would be set up to probe the cause of infection, including possible human failure.

Many Bacteriologists and virologists in the city, however, refuse to buy the Government's argument. They say that not a single patient in Siliguri showed rashes on his body, unlike measles patients. Besides, most victims were adults, whereas it's children who are most susceptible to the

measles virus.

As for the claim that the virus was a mutant variety, the experts counter that an adult who had had measles, rarely catches a lung infection from the same virus even decades later.

A rare case can never take the form of a near-epidemic. Besides, the virus cannot have undergone such a huge mutation that the rashes would disappear from the patients, they argue.

The mystery fever has been raging in North Bengal and has already claimed close to 37 lives. The State Government was battling mounting criticism for its failure to come to grips with the situation.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 MAR 2001

Mahajot magnet draws 8 Cong. MLAs to Trinamool

By Malabika Bhattacharya

CALCUTTA, MARCH 4. The Trinamool Congress chief and Railway Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, dealt body blow to the Congress in West Bengal today as she weaned away eleven senior functionaries — eight MLAs and three All-India Congress Committee members.

Coming ahead of the Assembly elections slated for April, today's development jeopardised the State Congress leadership's attempt to consolidate its ranks in the face of Trinamool's growing popularity.

Though barring Mr. Sougata Ray, Bengal Congress vice-president, none of the deserters was a heavyweight, Ms. Banerjee can be expected to cite the crossover as an example of her party coming to be accepted as the only major anti-Left Front force, and also as a boost to her mahajot idea.

"While negotiating with me for a mahajot, the Congress leaders pressed me to sever ties with a particular party (BJP). I only want to tell them that they would do well to snap ties with the communists," Ms. Banerjee said.

The crossover was announced at a 'Congress unity convention' in a city auditorium. Other legislators who left the Congress were Mr. Tapas Roy, Mr. Paresh Pal, Mr. Tarak Banerjee, Mr. Sital Sardar, Mr. Devi Shankar panda, Mr. Anupam Sen and Mr. Shibdas Mukherjee. Mr. Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, a close associate of PCC chief, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Mr. Samir Roy and Mr. Pranab Basu were the three AICC members. Seven PCC members also cast their lot with the Trinamool at the convention.

Amidst slogan-shouting, the Trinamool Congress chief who floated a new 'Bangla Bachao Front' thundered that it would do what the Congress could not all these years. 'Hoi ebar noi never' (Either this time, or never).

Ms. Banerjee announced that seven of the eight MLAs would be given tickets for the coming polls. Mr. Panda, who was indisposed, said he would not contest.

The deserters charged the Congress high command and the State leadership of being hand-in-glove with the CPI(M), saying they paid no heed to their demand for a one-to-one fight against the State's ruling Left Front. Mr. Ray said they came to the decision after a great deal of introspection.

Expected, says Pranab

Mr. Ray said that for the last one month they had tried hard to forge a mahajot, but nothing material-

ised. The State Congress president, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, however, said that the desertion of these MLAs was only expected.

He declined comment on whether today's development would mar the Congress' prospects in the coming polls. Mr. Mukherjee refuted Mr. Ray's allegation that he had held a meeting with Ms. Banerjee on February 2 to pour cold water on the efforts for an electoral understanding between the Congress and Trinamool. "Meetings are held to cement alliances. I don't understand how one can hold a meeting to break an understanding."

Cong. hardens stand

By K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, MARCH 4. The Congress has hardened its stance against the idea of a 'mahajot' (grand alliance) following reports that eight MLAs, including three AICC members, had decided to leave the party to join the Trinamool Congress. The Kolkata development has not taken the party high command by surprise as the eight MLAs were among those who were pushing for the mahajot. The high command has asked the Pradesh Congress Committee chief, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, to send a report. The view here is that the eight MLAs would not be able to take with them the Congress vote. Mr. Mukherjee, and senior leaders, Mr. A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhary and Mr. Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, are in Kolkata to deal with the crisis.

The AICC secretary, Mr. Anil Shastri, told *The Hindu* that the eight MLAs were among the 19 who had submitted a memorandum to the party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, favouring a grand anti-Left Front alliance to be led by the Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee.

"It was expected that a section of the State Congress would prefer to go with Ms. Mamata Banerjee," Mr. Shastri said. In fact, the view here is that this development has taken place precisely because the Congress spurned the mahajot. He reiterated that the Congress would not be seen either directly or indirectly with the Bharatiya Janata Party. "It is up to Ms. Banerjee to take a decision whether she wants to keep company with the BJP or not," Mr. Shastri said. He said the Trinamool Congress would gain only if it aligned with the Congress and cited the results of the Kolkata Board as a case in point.

Meanwhile, the BJP has welcomed the Kolkata development. Senior leader, Mr. J.P. Mathur, said the decision of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, too, to join the Trinamool indicated that a kind of mahajot was taking shape.

THE HINDU

5 MAR 2001

Bengal Congress splits, 8 MLAs join Trinamul

The Times of India News Service
KOLKATA: The Trinamul Congress (TC) will have to deal with the Congress factor in the coming assembly polls in West Bengal. Only eight Congress MLAs joined the Trinamul Congress on Sunday even though 30 were in favour of the grand alliance.

Welcoming the rebel MLAs, led by Sougata Roy, an angry TC chief Mamata Banerjee accused the Congress leadership of selling the party to the CPM. She also ruled out any further alliance talks with the parent party. In an announcement intended for fence-sitters, she said that her list of poll candidates would be out by Wednesday.

As a result, Mamata's Save Bengal Front, which includes the BJP and smaller parties like Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and the Kamtapur Peoples Party, is a far cry from her cherished Mahajot or grand alliance against the ruling Left Front.

It seems only the pro-Mahajot Congress heavyweight Barkat Ghani Khan Choudhury and rebel CPM leader Subhas Chakroborty can save the day for Ms Banerjee, if they decide on an open or tacit understanding with the TC, observers felt. But the former is unlikely to leave the Congress and Mr Chakroborty remains indecisive. Predictably, the Left Front leadership is happy.

Mr Roy said that a few more fence-sitters among Congress MLAs were likely to switch over to her side. But state Congress leaders close to PCC president Pranab Mukherjee did not conceal their joy in managing to preserve their remaining flock largely in tact. Initially, 22 MLAs had joined Mr Roy in demanding an alliance with Ms Banerjee. They asked party president Sonia Gandhi to start negotiations with the TC, ignoring its BJP connections.

Another group close to Khan Choudhury is unlikely to leave the party, though one of Mr Choudhury's followers Paresh Pal joined the Trinamul along with fellow MLAs Sougata Roy, Tapas Roy, Dr Anupam Sen, Sital Sardar, Debisankar Panda, Sibdas Mukherjee and Tarak Banerjee. Three other AICC members Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, Samir Roy and Pranab Basu also left the Congress to join the Trinamul Congress.



Mamata Banerjee

Ms Banerjee assured all the eight MLAs of party tickets in the coming election. The railway minister, however, cautioned that her doors were closing. "Our candidate list will be out within 2-3 days. I tried to convince the Congress leadership. But they insisted that I shun the BJP. I told them to shun the CPM. Those Congress leaders are selling the party to the CPM. We will have no relation with them.

For those who want the CPM to be ousted, it's now or never," she thundered at the Congress unity convention called by rebel Congressmen.

However, there was no dearth of euphoria and enthusiasm among young Congressmen at the jam-packed university institute hall. Slogans and applause greeted every speaker who derided the Congress leadership for 'hobnobbing' with the CPM, both at the state and central level. As the rebel MLAs criticised Sonia Gandhi and her men for having an alliance with 'corrupt' Laloo Prasad and Jayalalitha as well as with 'communal Muslim League in Kerala,' the assembled rank and file joined the jeering with shouts of shame.

The mad rush to the podium to reach Ms Banerjee resulted in pandemonium, as she was jostled around. For many people present, it was a pointer to the fact that despite her personal popularity she still lacked the mantra to rein the crowd.

DIVIDE AND RULE

- Mamata rules out further talks with Cong. on alliance
- To announce list of poll candidates by Wednesday
- All 8 MLAs assured of party tickets
- Mamata accuses Cong. leadership of selling party to CPM

KPP dithers on Trinamool alliance

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 2

Kamtapur Peoples' Party's (KPP) is yet to take a decision on an alliance with the Trinamool Congress. Indications that KPP might not go for a tie-up have given a jolt to Mamata Banerjee. KPP leader Atul Roy said that the ground was still not ready for a deal with the Trinamool.

The KPP decision has raised doubts among a section of Trinamool leaders on Banerjee's efforts to see a common platform against the ruling Left Front before the elections. Even as a section of Congress leaders take a step closer towards joining her party, what has come as a setback to Banerjee is the realisation that



it was with a section of these leaders that she had discussed the problems of Rajbanshis in New Delhi earlier in February.

Ironically, it is this meeting which has left the KPP leaders high and dry. Speaking to The Hindustan Times from his hideout in Siliguri, Roy claimed Banerjee had merely listened to

their demands when KPP leaders met her in New Delhi but did not promise anything. He added while the Trinamool was more concerned in "conquering the Writers", the KPP was focused in its demand for a separate statehood, although within the national framework.

"At the meeting we had spelt our grievances on how the Rajbanshis were being exploited. She did give a patient hearing and seemed to sympathise with our demand for a separate State within the frame of the Indian constitution. "But it's been nearly 30 days now and we're still not sure about her stand on our demands. We can't go into an alliance under the circumstances," an ailing Roy said. The

KPP leader is down with influenza and has not been attending his party's group meetings. "We are not sitting tight waiting for a response from Mamata's end. Our party has already begun groundwork for the polls. And we would field candidates in all our strongholds since we need someone who can voice the demands of the Rajbanshis at the Assembly," Roy said.

While Mamata remained busy during the day waiting for the disgruntled Congress to switch allegiance, KPP leaders spent hours discussing probable candidates in their strongholds across North Bengal including Moinaguri, Dhupguri, Kranti, Falakata, Raigunje, Japlaiguri Sadar and Phansidewa.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

• 3 MAR 2001

Highly-infectious disease: expert

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SILIGURI, Feb. 24. — A leading plague expert, Dr JC Gandhi, today said the mystery disease was not spreading fast, but was highly infectious.

Doctors from the National Institute of Virology are yet to diagnose the disease that has struck terror here. Dr Gandhi said: "The doctors have not been able to diagnose the disease yet. Analyses and elimination processes are on."

Describing the disease as an "outbreak bordering on epidemic", he said: "The clinical picture is very wide." In his opinion, there is no reason for panic as the virus, though intense, is "localised".

All those who have died or have been affected by the disease are one way or another connected to Medinova Nursing Home, from where the disease has spread, experts said.

Blood and body fluid samples of the affected patients would be sent for tests to the National Institute of Communicable Diseases, Delhi, and the National Institute of Virology, Pune. "The results could be expected by the end of next week."

He also said post-mortem reports of two persons who died from the disease would be available by tomorrow. "The reports may be helpful in identifying the disease."

Refusing to prescribe any preventive drug, Dr Gandhi forbids the intake of tetracycline capsules. Since Tuesday, the demand for the antibiotic has gone up after some local doctors prescribed it.

Doctors have suggested isolating the North Bengal Medical College Hospital and reserving it to treat those



Members of a local NGO clean a drain in front of a Siliguri hospital on Saturday. — The Statesman

affected with the mystery disease. "Work has begun according to the suggestion," the state urban development minister, Mr Asok Bhattacharya, said. He held a meeting with local doctors and nursing home owners in the day.

According to him, hospitals in Siliguri and adjacent areas

have been asked not to send patients suffering from other problems to the NBMCH. "If necessary, doctors will be sent to attend the patients."

A 10-member team of doctors also arrived here from Kolkata today. They will work with NBMCH physicians.



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THE STATESMAN

25 FEB 2001

WHO team is rushing to Siliguri as mystery disease claims 23 lives

By Debashis Sarkar
The Times of India News Service

SILIGURI: WHO is rushing a team of experts to the town with the toll from the 'mysterious disease' rising to 23. Following the state government's request, another expert from Apollo, Chennai, three from Indian Institute of Virology, Pune, six from Indian Institute of Communicable Disease, Delhi and 10 representatives of Health Service Doctors Association are also expected to arrive here on Friday, said urban development minister Ashok Bhattacharya.

Panic has gripped this north Bengal town. Both reports and rumours speak of an epidemic - even of doctors. Some schools have closed down.

Worse, several nursing homes refuse to treat patients suspected to be suffering from the disease, which remains unidentified.

High fever following mosquito bites is the only known symptom so far.

Opposition parties sought Bhattacharya's resignation and the mayor following the death of the brother of a corporation councillor at a nursing home.

Bhattacharya on Thursday identified a city nursing home as the "worst hit".

Over 16 of its doctors and para-medics have been infected, and five have died in the last two days, he confirmed.

Government sources traced the disease to the death of one Harekrishna Paul (45) at the nursing home in the second week of February. Strangely, the body developed 'rigor mortis' and began to decompose within three hours, though it normally takes 10 hours for rigor mortis to set in, they claimed. It also had superficial perforations in the abdomen.

Officials said all the doctors and atten-

dants who came into contact with Paul are either dead or in a critical condition. They also said two of Paul's relatives and a tenant of his, all healthy till they came into contact with him, died of the disease.

IMA secretary G. Dasgupta confirmed that the nursing home has been sealed and microbiological tests were carried out on Thursday.

Local traders have started selling surgical masks — district hospital superintendent Dr V. Thapa said these can provide only psychological satisfaction.

At a meeting presided over by Bhattacharya, officials decided to clean up the drains and destroy mosquito larva colonies. But they said they could do little until the experts identified the disease. The minister declared that action would be taken against doctors and para-medics who refused to attend to the patients. Orders were given to

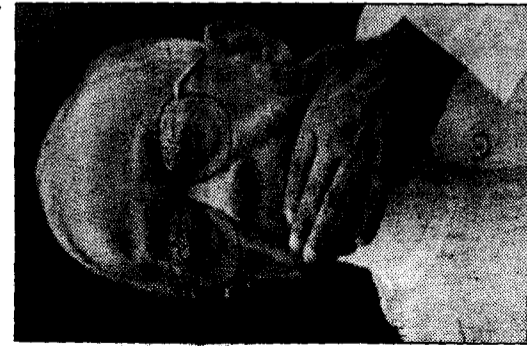
shut down all piggeries in the city and shift them out. Leave of government employees attached to the health, civil defence and PWD as well as the Corporation has been cancelled.

Siliguri - the commercial hub of adjacent parts of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim - has been hit hard by the panic. Business travellers are keeping away and hotels report a 25 per cent drop in occupancy.

Hardware and machinery merchant B.K. Agarwal reported a drop of 75 per cent in daily sales. A. Roy, director of a leading construction company, confirmed that many labourers had stopped reporting for work.

TIPA (Terai India Planters Association) spokesman S. Seal said, "Though this is the lean period, tea plants do require regular and constant care. We will be in big trouble if the panic spreads to the tea gardens."

Basu echoes Subhas on globalisation



Jyoti Basu

FROM NARESH JANA AND
KUMARESH GHOSH

Midnapore, Feb. 21: Jyoti Basu today put his seal of approval on rebel CPM leader Subhas Chakraborty's views on globalisation.

Two days ago, the transport minister had said that those in the CPM opposed to globalisation were "fools and half-educated". Today, Basu said "it would be idiotic to remain aloof from it (globalisation)".

Basu was addressing a packed rally at Dharma Maidan in the outskirts of Midnapore town.

"Globalisation is irreversible and no modern government should oppose this. Knowledge should have no limit and it is here that globalisation plays its brilliant role," he said.

Basu, however, put in a word of caution, saying the benefits of globalisation should not be one-sided.

"It should benefit us also. The way the BJP government is opening up the Indian market to multinational companies amounts to selling our country to them. Our protest is against this feature only and not against globalisation as such," the former chief minister said.

In his 30-minute speech, Basu criticised the Midnapore CPM unit as well as the district administration for failing to stem violence in Keshpur, Garbeta, Pingla and other neighbouring areas.

Nearly three weeks after he publicly apologised at a meeting in Calcutta for the administration's

failure to contain violence in trouble-torn Midnapore, he clarified this afternoon that he was kept in the dark about the developments during the last few months of his tenure as chief minister.

"What was my party and administration doing then? I was the chief minister at that time. But I was kept in total darkness about the motorcycle-borne hoodlums of the Trinamul-BJP combine who entered the villages and drove away our party supporters," said Basu.

He was concerned about the party cadre who had been forced to flee their homes. "I asked Budha (chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee) to ensure their (party workers') safe return and he has done it. I assure you this will never happen again," he said.

Basu appeared confident of the Left Front remaining in power after the polls. "There will be no more violence and there is no doubt that we will win again," he said.

Basu underlined the need to set up a secular third front and said he would go to Delhi soon to initiate the process.

Blasting the Trinamul Congress-BJP combine for spearheading a smear campaign against the ruling Left Front, the veteran Marxist said, "This is nothing but a ploy to put pressure on the Centre to invoke Article 356 in West Bengal."

State minister for panchayats Suryakanta Mishra told the rally that more political parties will be included in the Left Front this time.

Mystery malaise in death sweep

FROM PROBIR PRAMANIK

Siliguri, Feb. 21: The mystery malaise which crept up on Siliguri threatened to spin out of control with seven persons dying overnight, taking the total toll to 19 and spreading panic.

Fifteen patients are battling for life at the North Bengal Medical College and Hospital and seven in the Siliguri Sub-divisional Hospital.

Doctors of private hospitals have maintained that the disease — with symptoms like high fever accompanied by persistent headache, delirium, convulsion, or loss of consciousness — was encephalitis, but the government has termed it cerebral malaria.

Civic doctors who came back to Calcutta from Siliguri admitted that they were still clueless about

the disease. "We don't know if it is encephalitis, malignant malaria or any other disease," they said. "But that it is vector-borne, we are sure."

State urban development and municipal affairs minister Ashoke Bhattacharya, who held several rounds of meetings throughout the day here on the issue, said the government was tackling the disease on a "war footing".

"A six-member special team of medical experts from Pune, Delhi and Calcutta will arrive on Friday to identify and investigate the cause of the disease. Another team of experts from the Apollo Hospital of Chennai will also arrive shortly," he said. "This apart, a four-member vector control team from the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC), along with two neurologists, will arrive tomorrow."

While Pratima Pradhan, a 24-year-old nurse of a private nursing home, and Indrajeet Gupta, a 29-year-old resident of Mahananda Para, died last evening, five more — Ram Kumar Pal, 27, Jibon Singha, 29, Nibaran Goswami, 26, Bharu Dey, 28, and Ashis Chaudhuri, 40 — succumbed to the disease today.

Member mayor-in-council Javed Ahmed Khan confirmed that the state government has sought the help of the CMC's health department to identify the pathogen of the killer malaise. He said two doctors and two field staff, including the chief of the vector-control unit, have left for Siliguri with laboratory equipment.

Bhattacharya said funds would not be a constraint in checking the outbreak. "We have already sanctioned Rs 10 lakh. Ten

extra garbage-disposal vehicles have been requisitioned," he said.

The minister said the ward master and staff of the Indian Population Project-8 will be pressed into service for "a door-to-door survey of the impact" of the epidemic. "All cow-sheds and pigsties will be removed from residential areas and we have decided to cancel all leave of Siliguri Municipal Corporation employees," he added.

Bhattacharya has also requested owners of private nursing homes which are refusing to admit patients with the symptoms to cooperate with the government.

Nursing homes had stopped taking in patients with the symptoms following a controversy over issuing death certificates mentioning "encephalitis" as the cause of death.

THE TELEGRAPH

22 FEB 2001

'Budget-busy' Mamata cancels Ghani meet

19/2/98 WJ G.B.
**FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT**

New Delhi, Feb. 18: A pact-shy Mamata Banerjee cited pre-budget commitments to call off a meeting with A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, sending fresh tremors through the Congress.

The Trinamul Congress chief is insisting upon having an "open" alliance with the Congress and the BJP — a proposition that is unacceptable to the Congress. She has also rejected Kamal Nath's formula suggesting a three-way alliance that envisaged the Congress fielding candidates against the BJP but leaving seats for Trinamul in exchange of a similar gesture from her.

Mamata phoned Chowdhury, expressing regret over her failure to call on the Malda MP. While pro-mahajot Congress MLAs were still hopeful of a "working solution," many in the AICC did not share the optimism.

They said the "budget excuse" will go on till February 26, admitting that it will make party MLAs jittery.

The Congress camp was also upset over Ajit Panja's remarks that targeted state party chief Pranab Mukherjee.

Trinamul leaders, however, made it clear that Mamata had no intention to snub Barkatda. They said the railways minister was fighting a grim battle with finance minister Yashwant Sinha and top government functionaries, who are insisting on hiking passenger fare and freight charges.

"For Mamata *didi*, presenting a soft budget is more important as

it will make or mar our prospects," a Trinamul leader said, pointing out that seat-adjustment with the Congress is a "minor issue" compared to the ongoing battle in Rail Bhavan.

Sources said Mamata was neither willing to toe the Congress line nor prepared to burn bridges with the BJP.

An alliance with the BJP is high on her agenda and she plans to bring out a common manifesto with the BJP. "She wants everything over the table, nothing tacit or hidden," a Trinamul leader said.

He added that the Trinamul chief was not "ashamed" of having a tie-up with the BJP. If Mamata goes ahead with a common manifesto with the BJP, the Congress will have no option but to distance itself from the Trinamul.

Trinamul sources said if nothing works out between her and the Congress, she may still make "concessions" for some Congress MLAs close to Chowdhury. Chowdhury supporter Shankar Singh met Mamata, but the Trinamul chief remained non-committal.

In the evening, Congress MLAs camping in Delhi called on Mukherjee, who is leaving for Chennai to hold talks with Jayalalitha.

The Congress leadership fears a minor split in the state Congress though it is trying hard to limit the damage. Congress president Sonia Gandhi is in constant touch with Kamal Nath to keep herself abreast on Bengal developments.

THE TELEGRAPH

19 FEB 2001

Mamata hints at limited *mahajot*

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

9-8
47

New Delhi, Feb. 17: Hopes of a *mahajot* receded further today as the much-talked-about meeting between Mamata Banerjee and A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury did not take place till late tonight.

However, sources in the Mamata camp said the Trinamul Congress was prepared to make some "concessions" to Chowdhury in Malda by leaving a "few" seats for his supporters, provided the Congress did not field candidates where it got less than 5 per cent of the votes.

While this still kept alive hopes of some kind of a Trinamul-Congress understanding for the Bengal polls alive, the chances of a *mahajot* appeared bleak with sources indicating that Mamata was reluctant to meet Chowdhury, fearing a backlash from ally BJP.

The Ghani camp had sought an appointment with Mamata, but she had said that she would call on him "soon". Congress leaders today put on a brave front saying they were confident the Ghani-Mamata meeting would take place.

Fearing a mass exodus from the party in Bengal, the Congress high command has said it is prepared to enter into a limited understanding with Mamata in Malda and Murshidabad.

Kamal Nath, the Congress' general secretary in charge of Bengal, has suggested a three-way alliance. According to the plan, the Congress will not put up candidates against the Trinamul, but will fight the BJP. However, Trinamul leaders did not seem enthu-

siastic about the idea.

Despite the Ghani-Mamata meet not taking place, Kamal Nath appeared hopeful of the applecart not being upset. He said he was willing to meet the Trinamul boss with whom he claimed to enjoy an "excellent rapport". Kamal Nath said meeting the Trinamul chief would not be much of a problem. "I can always walk up to her in Parliament," he said.

Interestingly, WBPC chief Pranab Mukherjee has been kept out of the negotiations with Mamata though Mukherjee had spoken to Sonia yesterday.

Today, pro-*mahajot* leader Saugata Roy and his supporters left for Calcutta while Ghani supporters Abdul Mannan, Ruby Noor and Paresh Pal stayed on. They made it clear that they would not leave the Congress even if it failed to thrash out an understanding with the Trinamul.

Kamal Nath expressed satisfaction over the outcome of deliberations with Bengal party MLAs. He said all Congressmen seemed united in fighting against the CPM without joining hands with anti-secular forces. "All of them said they will fight the BJP and throw out the CPM," he said.

Congress sources said that, for the time being, Kamal Nath's deft handling has put the ball back in Mamata's court. "Kamal Nath and Sonia would not get the blame for ruining the *mahajot* or causing a minor split in the party. It is for Mamata to respond to Ghani who was a strong votary of a tie-up with Mamata," an AICC functionary said.

THE TELEGRAPH

18 FEB 2001

RAIDS

(Continued from page 1)

The I-T department had reportedly gathered enough information from various sources before deciding to visit Mr Chandan Basu's office. From information gathered by the Registrar of Companies, they learnt that Mr Chandan Basu and the Todis had been joint directors of some companies.

The raids set off intense lobbying by the industrialists concerned; the political bigwigs in Delhi came into the picture; and now the raids and surveys are going to stop.

An SK Todi letterhead, carrying an unsigned statement, has been passed on to The Statesman. It says: "I have been distressed at attempts by a section of the media to give I-T department's operation a political colour... Since 1965, I have invested in the industrial and social infrastructure of West Bengal through which 2,500 people have received direct employment. My investments were made irrespective of which government was in power and I am committed to the future of the state, its economy and its people..."

"This is not a politically motivated search but a routine procedure and it is being conducted regularly by I-T department in many medium- and large-scale uses."

Todi, Chandan raids stopped

said the department's officers in the city are shocked and demoralised. The Centre has poured cold water on the efforts to uncover the business operations of Mr Shravan Todi and Mr Chandan Basu, senior officials in Delhi said.

The Statesman reported this week that the I-T department had seized Rs 2 crore in cash and jewellery during raids on at least 35 offices and residences of Mr SK Todi and his three brothers, across seven districts.

The officials spent some three hours at Mr Chandan Basu's office, examining certain documents. It's common knowledge that the Todis are close to the CPI-M and Mr Jyoti Basu.

■ See RAIDS: page 3

ANINDYA SENGUPTA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Feb. 17. — Central tax authorities have reportedly bowed to political pressure and ordered the income-tax department to stop all search, seizure and survey operations at the offices of the SK Todi group and Mr Chandan Basu.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes has also sought an explanation why a survey was carried out at the Bondel Road office of Mr Chandan Basu, Mr Jyoti Basu's son, sources in Delhi said.

No search or seizures will be allowed till March, they said. And from now, any such raid would need to be cleared with the director-general (east), I-T.

I-T authorities here were tight-lipped; but sources

Vote-on-account presented

Opp sees poll ploy in Asim exercise

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Feb. 16. — The state finance minister, Mr Asim Dasgupta, today presented in the Assembly a Rs 11,228.92-crore vote-on-account for four months of the 2001-2002 financial year.

It envisages a deficit of Rs 3 crore. The vote-on-account was necessary because of Assembly elections, expected in late April or early May. It will enable the government to meet expenditure by drawing money from the consolidated fund of the state till the final budget is presented by the new government.

No new tax proposals were presented, nor were there variations in existing tax rates.

Though the minister said the vote-on-account should not allocate expenditure for new schemes, poll compulsions apparently led him to announce plans to generate 8,00,000 jobs annually over the next five years.

The Opposition said the vote-on-account was presented "with an eye on the elections." There were noisy scenes in the House while Mr Dasgupta read his speech. Mr Dilip Das and Mr Sanjay Bakshi, who had switched from Congress to Trinamul, and Mr Tapas Bannerjee (Cong) shouted slogans and rushed towards the minister.

The marshall and the watch and ward staff prevented them from snatching the minister's papers. The members then squatted in the Well with posters saying they could not accept an "election speech." The MLAs tore the budget papers and threw the pieces at House clerks.

An undeterred Mr Dasgupta continued to read his speech. He said the projected expenditure for the financial year is Rs 32,490 crore, an increase of 15 per cent over last year's. The plan expenditure was put at Rs 7,111 crore, a 23 per cent hike over that of 2000-2001.

The projected increase in the state domestic product at an annual rate of 8 to 8.5 per cent in the next five years will help meet the target of generating 800,000 jobs a year, Mr Dasgupta said. The SDP in the current year is 7.6 per cent while the country's GDP is 6 per cent.

As many as 300,000 additional jobs will be created annually in the service sector with the state's emphasis on information technology. Another 200,000 jobs will be generated in large, medium and small-scale industries as the state's industrial growth rate is expected to cross 8 per cent in three years.

Mr Dasgupta said the percentage of the state's population below the poverty line would fall to less than 10 per cent from the existing 26 per cent.

In November, Mr Jyoti Basu had quoted a World Bank report showing a decline in the poverty rate from 52 per cent in 1977 to 26 per cent.

Mr Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay (Trinamul) said Mr Dasgupta's statement was a bid to fool the people. Leader of the Opposition Mr Atish Sinha said the state was trying to shift the blame on the Centre for its failure.

■ Asim talks sweet on economy, page 4

THE STATESMAN

17 FEB 2001

Cong eyes pact with CPM rebel

9/8/11
BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Feb. 12: With hopes of a *mahajot* receding fast, the Congress has begun exploring the possibility of seat adjustments with the outfit that expelled CPM leader Saifuddin Chowdhury's intends to float.

The issue was discussed threadbare at a marathon meeting at PCC chief Pranab Mukherjee's residence last night. Also present at the meeting — apart from Chowdhury — was state unit vice-president Pradip Bhattacharya.

"The discussion was satisfactory. I am keen to join forces with the Congress to float a secular democratic front for the coming Assembly elections. But before that, I will float the new party I have been talking about for several months," Chowdhury said after the meeting.

Reciprocating Chowdhury's gesture, Bhattacharya said: "We, too, are eager to have a poll alliance with Saifuddin's new outfit. That is why we want him to launch his party at the earliest."

However, several Congress legislators who petitioned Sonia Gandhi to give them the go-ahead for a tie-up with Mamata Banerjee today reiterated that a grand alliance with the Trinamul Congress was the need of the

hour if they had to oust the ruling communists.

Party MLA Sougata Roy and AICC member Sukhendu Shekhar Roy, prime movers behind the *mahajot*, met Mamata at her Kalighat residence last night to discuss a possible switch-over to the Trinamul. Congress sources said all the 16 MLAs who petitioned Sonia would meet her on Friday to seek approval for poll adjustments with the Trinamul.

In another development, rebel CPM leader and South 24-Parganas district secretary Samir Putatunda appears set for a showdown at tomorrow's district committee meeting at the Alimuddin Street headquarters. Putatunda is still smarting from the humiliation of being dropped from the list of invitees in yesterday's party-sponsored meeting.

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and CPM state secretary Anil Biswas will be present at the session.

"Though the meeting has been called to choose nominees from the district for the coming polls, the humiliation meted out to Putatunda will figure in the discussions," said a loyalist of the rebel leader.

Rishi Halder, a former Zilla Parishad *sabhadhipati*, also criticised the way Putatunda was left out of the list.

THE TELEGRAPH

13 FEB 2001

'LF out to finish off opponents'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Feb. 11. - The attack on Mr Subash Ghisingh has proved that Opposition leaders in the state are not safe and that the Left Front is out to liquidate them, Miss Mamata Banerjee said today.

Mr Anil Biswas, however, shot back saying Miss Banerjee "should know facts before making such a wild allegation. She is wont to making rash and sweeping statements without carrying a whit to ascertain facts. If she is so certain she should give details about the assailants."

The Trinamul chief said the incident was not an isolated one. "Even a leader of Mr Ghisingh's stature is not safe - a sad commentary on the politics of vendetta being pursued by the Left Front."

Condemning the attack, Mr Biswas said it was still premature to conclude that the Gorkha Liberation Organisation was behind it. Investigations are on and the truth will

come out soon, he said.

The CPI-M state secretary also stressed that there was no intelligence failure. "The intelligence branch had information that Mr Ghisingh might be attacked and so his route was changed. But the assailants apparently got

ATTACK:

(Continued from page 1)

like the All Gorkha Students' Union.

But Mr Ghisingh dismissed the threats as "hollow" even though many of his colleagues stayed away from office and sought special security for themselves.

The GLO first betrayed signs of militancy during a clash between its supporters and police at Tinkatari in Kalimpong last November. Two persons were killed. On 26 January, two bodies of GNLFF workers were found near Relli in Kalimpong, suspected to have been killed by GLO men. Why one wonders is the GLO back in action after three months of relative quiet.

wind of the change and launched the attack."

Mr Muzaffar Khan, BJP state vice president, feared the state was going to see more such attacks before the Assembly polls. "The dismal performance of the Left Front government has made the CPI-M so nervous that it wants to create fear among the people to retain power."

He alleged there has been a subtle shift in the CPI-M's politics of vendetta. "After

spreading terror in Midnapore-Bankura-Hooghly belt, it is now using the communal card by mounting attacks on RSS activists in South 24 Parganas. The CPI-M is trying to project itself as the champion of the minorities."

The CPI-ML (Liberation) too has condemned the attack.

THE STATESMAN

12 FEB 2001

Hills shut down, Ghisingh safe

HT Correspondent
Siliguri, February 11

SATURDAY'S AMBUSH of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council chairman Subash Ghisingh's convoy on Pankhabari Road sparked angry protests all over Darjeeling today. Angry Gorkha National Liberation Front cadres marched through the town, burning cars and attacking the offices of rival political outfits.

The offices of the All Gorkha Students' Union and the All India Gorkha League were set ablaze, so were two vehicles of CR Rai, convenor of the United Democratic Front. A message sent by Ghisingh urging the public of the three hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong to remain calm went unheeded. An indefinite bandh from 6 am today crippled the hills.

The police have claimed some headway in identifying and tracing those behind the murderous attack on Ghisingh. On the basis of phone numbers recovered from a mobile phone and a diary left behind by the attackers at the encounter site, 15 people were tracked down and arrested from Kalchini in Jalpaiguri and neighbouring Cooch Behar district

today. Raids and combing operations are on. I-G (North Bengal) N R Das rushed to Darjeeling from Kolkata today. "All escape routes, including the Indo-Nepalese border, have been sealed."

A senior police officer told The Hindustan Times that a manhunt has been launched for one Pranay Pradhan (a close associate of Gorkha Liberation Organisation leader Chhatre Subba) who is believed to have masterminded the ambush. He said that Ghisingh made an unscheduled stop at the

ON PAGE 4

- Mystery jeep slowed down convoy
- Chhatre trump card stuns police

Rohini Park—a tourist spot being developed by the DGHC—on the way to Darjeeling. "This delayed his journey, but Ghisingh's movements were probably being closely monitored by someone and the message must have been conveyed over the cellular phone that was recovered," the officer said.

Though nobody has thus far claimed responsibility for the ambush, the needle of suspicion points at Subba. Minister for Hill Affairs and Urban Development Asok Bhattacharya said as much at

a briefing. "A preliminary reconstruction of last evening's events show there is sufficient reason to believe that the attack on Ghisingh was planned and executed by the GLO. We have reasons to believe that a Naga outfit could be training Chhatre Subba's men. A high-level inquiry has been ordered."

Das too spoke on similar lines. "We suspect the GLO is involved." He, however, conceded that the police still didn't have a clue to the identity of the militant who was killed in last night's firing. "He is a man with mongoloid features." He flatly denied that there was any security lapse on the part of the West Bengal Police. "It was an extremely difficult terrain and my men fought valiantly. That's why they managed to save Ghisingh. Full credit to them."

While the hills wore a deserted, troubled look, in Siliguri it was high action. Senior State Government officials are rushing here to ensure things don't spin out of control. Outside Paramount Nursing Home, Ghisingh admirers milled around to know about their leader's health. The DGHC chairman underwent a minor operation today. During the day, the DGHC chief spoke to his son Mohan.

Saugata meets Mamata ^{WB} on Mahajot ^{7/2}

Saugata Roy
Kolkata, February 11 ^{KM}

SAUGATA ROY, the Congress's deputy leader in the Assembly, is set to put his anti-BJP stance on the back burner for the time being and tie up with the Trinamool Congress before the Assembly polls.

Roy met Mamata Banerjee at Nizam Palace today. AICC member Sukhendu Sekhar Ray was accompanying him.

"We discussed the political situation in the State and submitted to the Trinamool chief a copy of the memorandum that we have submitted to Sonia Gandhi. I feel we should try to put up a one-to-one fight with the CPI(M) in the polls," Roy said. Congress MLAs Tapas Ray and Sanjeeb Das are also expected to come out in the open about their leanings towards the Trinamool.

Earlier, the Trinamool chief met legislators who have joined her party and had a closed-door meeting on the election strategy with Mayor Subrata Mukherjee.

Asked whether she would welcome all Congressmen who are knocking at her door for political survival, Banerjee said: "We should try to prevent the division of anti-Left votes. I see nothing wrong in some Congress MLAs professing a mahajot. I welcome all those Congressmen who are sincere in their opposition to the CPI(M). Let others do whatever they choose."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 FEB 2001

Subash Ghisingh ambushed, hurt

HT Correspondent & Agencies
Siliguri, February 10

MILITANTS ARMED with AK-47 rifles and grenades ambushed Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council chairman Subash Ghisingh's five-car convoy at Chilaunadhura between Pankhabari and Makaibari, today. Ghisingh suffered bullet injuries and was rushed to a private nursing home.

Ghisingh was returning to Darjeeling from New Delhi, where he attended a review meeting of the Darjeeling Accord. Around 5.45 pm, minutes after the fleet of cars entered the winding Pankhabari Road, the assailants intercepted it and lobbed a grenade at the escort car setting it ablaze. Driver Suman Chhetri died on the spot.

As the attackers kept up a barrage of gunfire from their automatic weapons, Ghisingh's bodyguards took up positions and returned fire. In the 15-minute duel, one of the attackers was killed. Five policemen were seriously wounded, Inspector-General of Police (law and order) Prasun Mukherjee said. The injured were admitted to the Kurseong Hospital. The dead was identified as a "jangi" (militant).

Bullets rained down on Ghisingh's vehicle and one grazed his left ear. After the assailants withdrew into the thickly wooded hills, Ghisingh—profusely bleeding and in a state of shock—was admitted to Paramount Nursing Home in Siliguri. Later, Urban Development Minister Ashok Bhattacharya said: "Ghisingh has been wounded critically".

No outfit has claimed responsibility for the ambush, but the needle of suspicion points at Chhatre Subba's Gorkha Liberation Army. The radical outfit had set a December 31 deadline for all DGHC councillors to resign or face dire consequences.

Soon after news of the attack broke, shops and official establishments in the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong downed shutters.

Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee condemned the attack on Ghisingh as a dastardly act. "It should be condemned in the strongest terms. I have issued orders for the immediate arrest of the assailants."

The GNLF has called an indefinite strike in the three hill subdivisions till all the attackers are held. Party district secretary I N Pradhan has demanded a CBI probe into the attack. He blamed the district police for major security lapses and said Darjeeling's borders with Nepal must be sealed immediately. The entire area is tense.

At the nursing home, doctors attending on Ghisingh said the wounds were superficial, but he had suffered



multiple-pellet injuries to his soft tissues. "He is conscious but in trauma. His blood pressure is stable, but he would need an operation. We are planning to stitch the sutures," said Dr A K Khandelwal, medical officer, Paramount Nursing Home.

Ghisingh had addressed a Press conference at Pital village after touching down at the Bagdogra Airport, where he had identified the West Bengal Government as the main stumbling block to the formation of Gorkhaland. "No matter how hard we fight, we need a no-objection certificate from the State Government, as is mandatory for the formation of separate States."

The DGHC chairman said he had conveyed to the Centre his party's demand for a review of the 1988 Darjeeling Accord and the inclusion of hill council in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 1 FEB 1988

Bullets fly, blood flows in airport nightmare

BY PRONAB MONDAL

Calcutta, Feb. 10: A CRPF jawan went on a shooting spree at the Calcutta airport early on Saturday, killing two policemen and injuring two before turning the gun on himself.

The jawan, R.D. Burma, and the policemen are in hospital. Burma's condition is stated to be stable.

The incident, the first of its kind at the airport, took place at the arrival wing of the international terminal at 2.50 am. All passengers except one, who had arrived by the British Airways flight from London shortly after 1 am, had left by then.

Witnesses said Burma had struck up a conversation with a colleague when he reported for duty around 11 pm on Friday. The two paramilitary men were talking about going on leave and visiting their families. There was nothing unusual about Burma's demeanour, officials said.

Around 2.45 am, P.K. Dey, a subsidiary intelligence bureau officer, was going through the papers of Sanjib Basak, who had arrived by the British Airways flight. Dey had spotted certain discrepancies in Basak's travel papers and was questioning him. Basak had been sent back from Heathrow airport after some anomalies were found in his visa.

Burma was then standing near the entrance. Suddenly, he walked up to the immigration counter, shouldered his rifle and shot at Dey. The bullet hit Dey on the right arm. Shocked, an injured Dey dived behind the counter. Basak began running for his life. It was then that Burma fired the second shot, hitting sub-inspector Ilyas Mondal (37), who fell to the ground with a bullet wound on his left chest.

Burma then fired three more rounds. One of

the bullets pierced sub-inspector Mahadev Roy's (52) chest. The bullet exited his body and hit B. Pal, an inspector of Calcutta Police, on the right leg. Both Pal and Roy had come out from behind the immigration counters to find out what was going on.

Burma then went to the apron gate where he shot himself in the abdomen, but it was a blank. He then walked towards the cargo gate, where he placed the rifle butt on the ground and shot himself again in the stomach. This time, he slumped to the ground, bleeding profusely.

Jawans coming in for the next shift spotted Burma. They put him in the van they had arrived in and took him to the SSKM Hospital.

A sub-inspector of Calcutta Police, Abhas Ghosh, who witnessed the incident, said: "One minute there was peace and quiet, the next there were bullets flying all over the place. It was horrible and gruesome."

The airport staff summoned the duty doctor to the immigration area. According to the acting airport director, N. Kaushal, the doctor administered first-aid after which the four policemen were taken to hospital in two ambulances.

Roy died on the way to the NRS Hospital operation theatre. Mondal was pronounced dead at the SSKM Hospital. Both Pal and Dey were admitted to SSKM with Burma, who was operated upon. A tight security ring has been thrown around the ward where Burma is admitted.

Superintendent of police at the airport O.P. Gupta said it seemed as though Burma had taken aim and fired. "We are completely baffled why he should have done such a thing," he said.

Airport security was beefed up today with more policemen deployed in the passenger arrival and departure areas.

More reports on Page 6

The curse of the devil

BY A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, Feb. 10: It was the "curse of the devil" that made him go berserk, said colleagues of R.D. Burma, who went on a sudden shooting spree at the airport early this morning.

The CRPF jawan is now battling for life in the intensive care unit of SSKM Hospital.

Burma, who was transferred to Calcutta from Arunachal Pradesh only a week ago, would often tell his colleagues that there was a curse on him that was keeping him away from his family in Tripura.

"He kept telling us he wanted to leave for home in a day or two but a tribal djinn was preventing him from meeting his family," said a jawan who did not want to be quoted. "It was then that we suspected perhaps something was wrong with him."

The jawan said Burma believed in "all kinds of superstitions" and felt strongly about some kind of a malefic "supernatural power" working against him.

"In the few days that I interacted with him, there seemed to be something obsessive about him, something that I just can't put a finger on," he said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Devil's curse

FROM PAGE 1

One of Burma's colleagues recalled that while joining for night duty at 11 pm on Friday, Burma was told by another jawan from Tripura that he would be leaving for home to meet his family.

"This may have suddenly upset Burma as he was desperate to go home on leave," the jawan said. "This loneliness may have snapped something in his mind."

But senior CRPF officials disputed this "streak-of-insanity" theory. They said something else might have "provoked" the jawan. "Burma was totally fit, both mentally and physically, when he took over night duty on Friday," said deputy inspector-general Anil Kumar. "I have spoken to a lot of people and they all say that in the last few days they had noticed nothing unusual about him."

Kumar said in the four hours that Burma was on duty, "something must have happened" which led him to take such drastic action. "Maybe it was a dispute with immigration officials."

But R.K. Gupta, deputy commissioner, security control of the Calcutta Police, ruled out the possibility of a dispute. "There was absolutely no possibility of an altercation or provocation in the immigration area," he said. "This is an attempt to pass the buck on to Calcutta police for the irresponsible behaviour of the jawan."

THE TELEGRAPH

11 FEB 2001

Buddha lambasts Mahajot plans

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, February 9

THIS ASSEMBLY seems to have little charm left for legislators with a new one only a couple of months away.

Most MLAs chose to stay away from today's session either to woo their constituencies or strike deals with allies. Opposition leader Absh Sinha too had very few party-men to back him. Congress chief whip Abdul Mannan joined late and a party leader Saugata Roy was busy charting out plans with the Trinamool.

During the debate on the Government's address, Chief

Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was quick to comment that the State Congress had surrendered to the BJP-RSS combine. "It is now busy mixing polarities to achieve the magic number. They are a frustrated lot."

The treasury bench was also not immune to the uncertainty syndrome. Many CPI(M) heavy-

weights such as Transport Minister Subhas Chakrabarty, Housing Minister Gautam Deb, Small Scale and Cottage Industry Minister Pralay Talukdar and other Left Front ministers played truant which they seldom did during the Chief Minister's address when

Jyoti Basu was in office.

Although Basu didn't attend today's session, he was discussed during the debate. Pointing to Basu's confession that he was not aware of the violence in Midnapore, the leader of the

who were then busy regaining their lost base through brute force? If you perform well, you do not have to keep saying that the Left Front would retain power. It exposes the uncertainty within you," Sinha said.

Bhattacharjee, in his reply, said the Trinamool-BJP combine and its politics of violence were the root of all evils in the trouble-hit zones. "I am yet to get a comprehensive report of the CID enquiry and will lay it before the House as soon as I get the full text."

He claimed that law and order was better in West Bengal than in most States. Referring to the

Trinamool-BJP's understanding with the Kamtapur People's Party in North Bengal, the Chief Minister said: "They have now found a new ally in North Bengal. They propose to develop North Bengal by tying up with those backed by the ULFA and the ISI."

The Trinamool loyalists couldn't bear this any longer. They left the House in a huff while the Congress chief whip tried in vain to hold them for some more time. "What more has he to say after so much bloodshed?" Trinamool MLA Shovande Chattopadhyay said. They demanded a CBI inquiry into the Chhota Angaria killings.

CM Address To Assembly

Opposition mocked Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee who was then the Home (Police) Minister. "Basu's statement is enough to emphasise the gravity of the crisis. What was Bhattacharjee doing then? Why didn't he inform Basu? Was it because he wanted to hide his men

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 500 200

Cong MLAs seek deal with Trinamul

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Feb. 7. - Nineteen Congress MLAs have written to Mrs Sonia Gandhi seeking her permission for seat adjustments with the Trinamul Congress.

The MLAs requested Mrs Gandhi to take up the matter with Miss Mamata Banerjee without any further delay. "The Assembly elections are not very far, every day is important and the delay might cost the party very dearly," they said.

The signatories apprehended that there would be a mass exodus of Congressmen if permission was not given now. Mr Saugata Roy, Mr Tapas Roy, Mr Tarak Banerjee, Mr Sudhir

Bhattacharya, Mr AH Khan Chowdhury and Mrs Rubi Noor were among those who signed the letter. They also met veteran party leader Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury yesterday and discussed the matter with him.

The leaders pointed out that the results of 1999 Lok Sabha polls were not very encouraging for the party. The Left Front secured 50.58% votes, the Trinamul-BJP combine got 37.19% votes while the Congress bagged only 13.29 % votes.

The West Bengal electorate would not forgive the Congress if Left Front candidates won seats because of division of votes. Already the Congress has been nicknamed as CPI-

M's B team, they added. It's time for the party to come out with a positive solution. The anti-Left wave in the state should be utilised to oust CPI-M, they added.

The leaders felt that the Central leadership should study the case of West Bengal separately. Referring to Mao's book On Contradiction, Mr Saugata Roy said even Mao had spoken of principal and minor contradictions. The minor contradictions should not be brought into the agenda immediately. Time was short, the party leaders could not wait for Delhi's permission indefinitely. They would decide their future course of action if there was no positive response from Delhi, he said.

THE STATESMAN

8 FEB 2001

Get real, we need Mamata and BJP: WB MLAs to Sonia

SABYASACHI BANDOPADHYAY
KOLKATA, FEB 8

WITH Assembly elections just three months away, the Congress in West Bengal is in a soup. On Wednesday, 18 of its MLAs and two AICC members sent a letter to party chief Sonia Gandhi urging her to let them form a "mahajot" with Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress and the BJP so that they can take on the Left.

By all indications, this group is expected to defect to the Trinamool since it's unlikely that Sonia will OK the proposal.

These rebels have the blessing of former PCC chief ABA Ghani Khan Choudhury who is himself a

staunch supporter of this alliance. This was announced by Saugata Roy, deputy leader of CLP who, along with Tapas Roy, MLA, met Choudhury at his house this morning to seek his consent. Roy called a press conference at his room in the Assembly today to release the letter. "We will wait for Soniaji's reply," he said, "and will then decide on our next course of action."

"The last general elections in 1999 to the Lok Sabha in the state threw up very divided results," the letter said. "The Left Front got 50.58 per cent of the votes, the Trinamool Congress and BJP got 37.19 per cent and the Congress 13.29 per cent. The Trinamool led in 65 Assembly segments, the Congress in 20 and the BJP in 18. So it is amply clear that if the anti-Left Front parties fight separately,

the people's aspirations for removing the Left Front from power will not be fulfilled," the letter said.

The letter also says that with only 13 per cent of the votes, the party cannot contest 294 seats since it has neither organisational nor financial strength.

"We understand the need to distance ourselves from the BJP which is our principal adversary at the national level... But we should not let the understandable antipathy for BJP to stand in the way of

an adjustment, so that there can be a 1:1 fight in all the seats in the state.

"In the special circumstances, we would request you to give permission to the West Bengal

Congress to have this limited seat adjustment with TMC, whose members were with our party only three years ago. Unless something is done urgently, we feel there will be a further exodus from our party," warned the letter.

The letter also said that the leaders were tired of being accused as the B-team of the CPI(M) and being told that the central leadership has a secret deal with the CPM. "This is our chance to prove to the people that we are not that," it added. The Trinamool Congress, expectedly welcomed the move of the leaders. "There should be concerted move by all anti-LF parties to oust the CPI(M)," Pankaj Banerjee, MLA and chairman of Trinamool's policy-making body told *The Indian Express*.

Look at arithmetic, we can't do anything alone, say 18 MLAs who are likely to defect



INDIAN EXPRESS

- 9 FEB 2001

Mahajot calculations

IT IS not only the nearness of the West Bengal elections which has led to the revival of the *mahajot* idea. An additional reason is the fresh lease of life which the CPI(M) has seemingly received under the new Chief Minister. The earlier belief that Jyoti Basu's departure from the post will spell doom for the party has been belied by Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's surprisingly satisfactory performance. It is not that he has achieved anything substantial. The time has been too short for that. But what he has done is to show that he is his own man and that the long period under Mr Basu has not killed all his initiative. The possibility, therefore, of the Left Front under the CPI(M) not faring too badly has made their opponents sit up. The latter must be all the more worried because any gains for the Leftists will be in the urban areas, where it was perceived to be on a weak wicket.

As before, the only way the CPI(M) can be countered is through a wide-ranging alliance. But Mamata Banerjee's efforts in this direction have met with resistance from the Congress, which would not like to be seen supping with the BJP. Since Ms Banerjee is unwilling to part company with the safe-front camp, the *mahajot* has failed to materialise. Ms Banerjee's stubbornness is explained by the fact that she expects a majority of Congressmen, led by former PCC president Barkat Ghani Khan Chaudhury, to join her party in case the party's central leadership remains firm about not having anything to do with the BJP, even indirectly.

Till now, the arguments about who will tie up with whom and on what conditions had been only a matter of rhetoric. But now the proximity of the polls has introduced a sense of urgency into the matter. On the face of it, the Trinamool is in a relatively secure position since most Congressmen regard her as the only person with popular appeal in the non-Leftist camp and would, therefore, like to be on her side. But that does not mean that the Congress will wither away. The party will survive, even as a rump, and receive its own portion of the anti-Left vote, even if its share is a small one. The gainer, as a result, will be the Left.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 FEB 2001

Saifuddin ready for war, minus Mamata

FROM NARESH JANA IN
MIDNAPORE AND OUR
CALCUTTA BUREAU

Jan. 30: Expelled CPM leader Saifuddin Chowdhury, trying to bring together anti-CPM forces in Bengal, today ruled out any electoral understanding with Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress.

At a news conference here today, Chowdhury, the founder of *Jana Chetana Manch*, an intended platform for convergence of Left and democratic, but anti-CPM forces, said he was opposed to forging links with Mamata because he regarded her as an "opportunist and most certainly not secular".

"I would rather leave politics than join hands with her because she is not secular and because her Trinamul is an ally of the communal BJP. There is no question of entering into any kind of understanding with her," Chowdhury said.

Chowdhury's *manch* has evoked limited response so far

from the CPM and other mainline Left parties. But the expelled leader hopes to join hands with transport minister Subhas Chakraborty, the resident rebel of CPM.

Though Jyoti Basu believes Chakraborty — regarded as his protégé — will not leave the CPM, Chowdhury expressed the hope that the minister, said to have been cornered in the party, will come out and form an anti-CPM alliance.

As an indication of a possible merger, Chakraborty will inaugurate a stall put up by *Jana Chetana* at the Calcutta Book Fair that opens tomorrow.

"We are not out to break up any party. If anyone wants to join us, we will welcome him. As for Subhasda... he will most certainly be with us," Chowdhury said.

The new Left party, expected to be floated in February, will field candidates in all the 294 Assembly seats, Chowdhury asserted.

CPM state secretary Anil Biswas rubbished Chowdhury's

claim that Chakraborty will leave the CPM. He said that Chakraborty, being a "responsible leader", would not leave the party under any circumstances.

"He can inaugurate as many book stalls as possible, but that does not mean he is going to leave the CPM," Biswas said.

The party chief scoffed at last week's meeting between Chakraborty and state Congress president Pranab Mukherjee on a possible collaboration between CPM rebels and the Congress.

Echoing Biswas, chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said at Writers' Buildings that he did not believe Chakraborty would quit the party with which he was associated for more than 30 years.

Meanwhile, Congress circles in Midnapore were upbeat over the presence of party MLA Ajit Khara, along with Chowdhury, in the sit-in that was organised during the day by the United Communist Party of India and *Jana Chetana Manch*.

THE TELEGRAPH

31 JAN 2001

Woes of Bengal

THE RESENTMENT expressed by the human rights commission in West Bengal over its national counterpart's move to investigate the latest spate of murder and mayhem in the state is only the latest twist in an increasingly depressing sequence of events. Some of the recent developments have been of a nature which can make one wonder whether the writ of law is enforceable anywhere in the state. Since these relate as much to the seemingly endless CPI(M)-Trinamool Congress clashes as to industrial relations, they reinforce the impression that nothing has changed since the dark days of Naxalite depredations and labour unrest. Unfortunately, the sudden deterioration has taken place at a time when the new Chief Minister had given some hope of starting on a clean slate both in relation to the Trinamool Congress and in the industrial field.

But even as Buddhadev Bhattacharjee made offers of a dialogue with Mamata Banerjee, the latter renewed her demand for President's rule because of the latest carnage. However, it is unlikely that she will receive a favourable response from the Centre. It isn't only that Article 356 has acquired a bad odour because of its past misuse; the Vajpayee administration may also wonder whether a dismissal at this stage will only help the Left Front Government under its new leader to recover the sympathy which it is otherwise losing. Besides, any hasty move may be unproductive considering the positive nature of some of Mr Bhattacharjee's latest initiatives. For instance, while emphasising the need for West Bengal's re-industrialisation, he has cautioned the working class against the kind of militant tactics which has given the state a bad name — an unusual stand for an avowed Stalinist.

It is on the law and order front, however, where the state Government's failure is more than apparent. But this is a legacy of the past in two respects. One, the CPI(M)'s unchecked supremacy of the last two decades has bred such habits of arrogance and intolerance among its (anti-social) supporters that their response to the Trinamool's challenge is invariably violent. Two, since the latter also does not comprise angels, the situation is becoming increasingly volatile over large parts of the state. Unless there is a determined effort by Mr Bhattacharjee and Ms Banerjee to restrain their cadres, the conditions can only get worse. Instead of trying to secure political mileage from the violence, all attention must be focused on restoring peace.

Heckled in House, Shah takes a walk

Subhamoy Chatterjee
Kolkata, January 22

GOVERNOR VIREN J Shah this afternoon created history of sorts when he walked a good furlong to Raj Bhavan after opening the Budget session of the Assembly amid sustained barracking from Congress and Trinamool Congress members this afternoon.

The last session of the present Assembly witnessed a repeat of the pandemonium of the inaugural day of last year's budget session, except that the Governor could read out his speech in 26 minutes this time around in the face of interruptions.

The Governor told reporters accompanying him to Raj Bhavan's western gate that he loved to walk and asked them to join him. He was

23/1
non-committal on the conduct of the Opposition in the House, suggesting that his decision to walk down the busy street in the afternoon rush had nothing to do with what had transpired in the Assembly. Shah had communicated his decision to Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and Speaker Hasim Abdul Halim an hour before the House assembled.

Apparently, every one, including the police and Opposition MLAs, dogging him from the chamber to the portico of the Assembly House and a bevy of cameramen and reporters were



Shah walks back to Raj Bhavan. Photo: Subhendu Ghosh

9-87 WBS
taken by surprise when Shah started walking towards the gate, leaving his car behind. His Secretary, Neena Sagi, the ADC and the security staff in tow, the Governor walked briskly, bringing traffic to a halt.

The Chief Minister confirmed that the Governor had told him that he would walk back to Raj Bhavan. The Speaker said it was "the Governor's personal decision and who am I to stop him". The fact that the head of the State could freely take a walk proved that Bengal was a peaceful State. He refused to accept that Shah's action reflected

badly on the Government.

The Governor's Secretary had written to the Chief Whip of the CLP, Abdul Mannan, on January 18. The letter contained an excerpt from a letter written by Jawaharlal Nehru, in 1952, asking Chief Ministers to restrain the members when the Governor addressed the House because the Governor performed a constitutional function.

The letter apparently failed to impress the Opposition which did everything to obstruct him throughout his speech. Slogans were chanted, paper balls were thrown at him and, on a number of occasions, the Trinamool and the Congress members got menacingly close to the podium, giving the Assembly security staff a real tough time.

● Related report on Page 3

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 JAN 2001

Opposition joins hands, demands President's rule

By Malabika Bhattacharya

KOLKATA, JAN. 22. The budget session of the West Bengal Assembly is bound to be a stormy one, if the inaugural session today was anything to go by.

Legislators of the Opposition Trinamool Congress, its ally, the BJP, and the Congress obstructed the Governor, Mr. Viren J. Shah, from addressing the House. Some MLAs even blocked the Governor's way when he entered the House.

A few also stood on the table in front of the Speaker's podium, from where he was addressing the House. The Assembly security staff cordoned off the area in front of the podium but a scuffle ensued as a Congress MLA, who is now with the Trinamool, tried to force his way through the security ring.

The Government Chief Whip, Mr. Rabin Mondal, helped the security staff in preventing the Opposition MLAs from reaching Mr. Shah.

The Governor's speech was inaudible as the Opposition legislators raised slogans about the law and order situation in the State, which they said was deteriorating by the day. They criticised the Left Front Government and demanded imposition of President's rule.

The legislators also demanded the resignation of the Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, for failing to protect the lives of their party workers across the State. Some of them hurled bags and papers at Mr. Shah during his address.

Senior Congress leaders who have since joined the Trinamool, the lone Trinamool MLA, Mr. Shobhandeb Chattopadhyay, and the BJP legislator, Mr. Badal Bhattacharya, jumped into the well of the House and raised slogans demanding the dismissal of the Government.

The Opposition members again tried to obstruct the Governor when he was leaving the House after his address. The Congress MLAs, Mr. Gautam Chakraborty and Mr. Ashok Deb, blocked his way. The

Governor then walked back to the Raj Bhavan, which is located adjacent to the Assembly.

I have done my duty: Shah

PJI reports:

The Governor told mediapersons who followed him that he had performed his constitutional responsibility. Declining to comment on the Opposition protest, he said, "I have done my duty. They have done their job."

On the Opposition demand for imposition of Article 356, he said they would have enough scope to debate it in the House.

Mr. Bhattacharjee condemned the way the Opposition obstructed the Governor and said it was against all parliamentary ethics. The Speaker, Mr. Hasim Abdul Halim, described it as "unparliamentary and indecent". It was only due to the security arrangements that the opposition members could not reach the Governor.

The Speaker said he was happy that the Governor had completed his speech in the House.

To a question on why Mr. Shah walked down to Raj Bhavan, he said, "It is his (the Governor's) decision. What can I do? I do not know if any other Governor walked down to the Raj Bhavan in the past." He said the Raj Bhavan officials had informed him before the House met that the Governor would walk back.

Earlier, in his address, Mr. Shah appealed to all political parties to cooperate with the State Government in its efforts to restore normality in some of the districts affected by political violence in recent time. Stating that the Government would continue its process of dialogue with the political parties in easing tension in the affected areas, he appealed to all parties to extend cooperation.

The Trinamool and BJP members staged a noisy walkout after the House re-assembled after the Governor's address.

Buddha scorns NHRC team

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, Jan. 21. — Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya today said the NHRC tour of his state was unwarranted. "I don't know why they went to the village, what they found or why has the team come," he said.

Mr Bhattacharya took exception to the bypassing of the West Bengal Human Rights Commission by the NHRC. The NHRC didn't even inform the state HRC, he said.

The Trinamul-BJP combine has only one programme — 'kill all, burn all' — as against the LF programme and record of performance in land reforms, panchayat and industrialisation, Mr Bhattacharya said.

He said the law and order in the state is better than in many big states. There have been no communal or caste riots here.

Kolkata's crime figures show that it is the best among the metros and even the NHRC, Union home ministry and National Crime Bureau have



Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya

acknowledged this, he said.

Of the 446 police station areas, only seven areas in Midnapore, Hooghly and Bankura are strife-torn, he said. This violence too is Opposition-led.

The chief minister said he had initiated a dialogue with the Opposition to solve these problems. The demand for President's rule is in itself "an admission of the Opposition's political defeat", he said.

The killings at Baranagar Jute Mill, he said, was an iso-

lated incident. The labour-management relationship in the state has been very cordial.

The chief minister said the state government has been urging trade unions to ensure production, productivity, quality and to cooperate with the management. While trade union rights and interests of the workers need to be protected, violence will not be tolerated.

On Miss Mamata Banerjee's complaint to Mr LK Advani that she fears for her life, Mr Bhattacharya said: "She says this all the time, there is nothing new."

The Trinamul is vacillating between the BJP and the Congress, for everyone knows voters will reject those who join hands with communal forces.

The Left had basic differences with the Congress and its economic policies, the Left has backed the Congress only when the choice has been between the Congress or the BJP, Mr Bhattacharya said.

THE STATESMAN

22 JAN 2001

Mamata asks PM for 356, TDP wants fair elections

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 16

PRIME MINISTER A B Vajpayee today expressed "deep shock" over the political violence in West Bengal when Mamata Banerjee led a delegation of alliance MPs to show him blood-soaked clothes, cartridges and other items recovered from Garbeta in Midnapore district.

TDP parliamentary party leader K Yerrannaidu was part of the delegation. He said his party was against invoking Article 356, but thought some Central action was necessary to ensure that the Assembly polls in Bengal were "free and fair".

The Trinamool Congress chief, who returned here after three weeks of relentless campaign against the Left, presented the "evidence" to Vajpayee to show the CPI(M) was involved in the alleged Chhota Angaria carnage.

A memorandum was handed to the PM, seeking President's rule in the State to check the killings.

In his response, Vajpayee said the situation in West Bengal was worse

than a civil war. "It is totally one-sided violence where non-Left workers and supporters are prime target for political reasons," he told the delegation.

He assured Mamata and the others that the Centre would apply its mind for a solution.

After the 40-minute meeting with Vajpayee, Trinamool chief whip Sudip Bandopadhyay said, "The Prime Minister is well aware of the situation and has expressed serious concern.... We hope he would react at an appropriate time."

Yerrannaidu said: "My party is disturbed over the Bengal situation and has urged the Centre to ensure safety of lives and property and also a free and fair election."

Asked if his party supported Mamata's demand, he said: "You know my party's stand on Article 356. It needs no elaboration. We are against any misuse of this Article since the inception of our party. In the present case, the Centre has all the relevant information and, therefore, it is the better judge as to what

action has to be taken."

The delegation included BJP MP Vijay Goel, who led the NDA team to the affected areas, Kolkata Mayor Subrata Mukherjee, State BJP leaders Ashim Ghosh And Muzaffar Khan, and the Trinamool MPs.

Bandopadhyay and Goel said the delegation told the Prime Minister that "people are being killed at random, parliamentary democracy is under threat and free and fair elections are totally impossible."

Goel said he had presented to Vajpayee the NDA report on the Garbeta killings, along with a copy of the FIR filed on the incident.

Aware that allies such as the TDP, the Akali Dal and the DMK were opposed to Article 356, she had downplayed the issue of President's rule. "I will apprise the Prime Minister of the serious situation in the State. It is up to him to take whatever action he deems fit," she had told reporters in Kolkata earlier. She suffered injuries on her foot in an attack by alleged CPI(M) workers during her visit to the affected areas.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 JAN 2001

Rights noise for Trinamul

FROM TAMAL SENGUPTA

Chhoto Angaria, Jan. 19: The chief investigator of the National Human Rights Commission concluded after his visit here today that there was a massacre, as alleged by Mamata Banerjee, on January 4.

Before meeting the CID probing the incident, Y.N. Srivastava, the commission's director-general (investigation), said he was "convinced" of the killings. He did not use the services of the local police either, taking the help of CRPF officers instead.

Srivastava and Shivaji Singh, senior commission official, toured the village for two hours.

Keeping district police officials outside, Srivastava and a CRPF assistant sub-inspector, Balbir Singh, went into Abdur Rahman Mondal's house, where the incident took place, to find a number of bullet marks on the inside walls. "Go and check the bullet marks on the wall, tell me how many rounds had been fired and from which type of guns," he instructed Singh. The CRPF jawan came out to say country-made guns were used.

He then asked Singh to examine whether there was firing from the two windows in the back of the house and check if there were bullet marks on the house

opposite Mondal's.

Singh did not find any, leading Srivastava to come to the conclusion that there was an exchange of fire inside the house and no attack was made from outside. He also asked Shivaji Singh to note that there was an explosion inside the house caused by a blast of cartridges possibly stored there.

Srivastava then called the officer-in-charge of Garbeta police station, Nikhil Bose, and wanted to know whether the police had found any blood outside the building. Bose pointed out to a bamboo pole outside Mondal's house where stains had been found.

Srivastava moved to a house closest to Mondal's and finding it locked, went to the next all by himself. A sickly woman opened the door and Srivastava entered the house. Emerging from the house after a 15-minute interrogation, he entered the temporary police camp opposite Mondal's house and called Kunal Adhikary, a state police official.

"Tell me what had happened that day? How many people were killed, where were the bodies? Who are the CPM supporters in this village and who are Trinamul Congress activists?" he asked. A slightly puzzled Adhikary

said he did not know since he came to Garbeta only on January 14.

Srivastava told Adhikary: "We have realised what had happened on January 4 night. We are here only for a couple of hours and have understood what had happened but you are camping here from January 14, but you don't know anything? You are a great liar."

Next, he met Mondal's mother, Kulsum Bibi, and his sister-in-law, who narrated to him what they had seen on January 4 night.

The investigation over, the former Bihar police chief told the assembled newsmen that he was convinced about the "killings".

THE TELEGRAPH

20 JAN 2001

Home secy to probe jute mill killings

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

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KOLKATA, Jan. 15. — The state government today appointed a one-man commission chaired by the home secretary to probe into Saturday's incident at Baranagar Jute Mill.

Apart from the spiral of violence that left three dead at the mill, the commission has been asked to delve into the current situation of the jute industry. It will also study the labour-management relation in the state across industries.

Mr Sourin Roy, home secretary, has been asked to submit his report in 45 days. Police investigation will run parallel to this probe. Two cases have

been registered by police.

Admitting that the terms were broad-based, the chief minister denied that the state government was trying to brush the incident under the carpet. "I am very serious about an inquiry and my government will come out with a report soon."

Describing the incident as "horrible", Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said: "It is all the more unfortunate because it happened under my administration," but added that it was an isolated incident. "It does not reflect the general scenario."

He didn't seem particularly worried about the impact the incident could have on the

investment climate in the state. "Investors know the industrial situation in West Bengal is not so bad."

Refusing to dwell on Mr Jyoti Basu's reported statement that such an incident had not occurred during his 24-year rule, he said: "Yes, I too haven't heard of such an incident in the past 24 years."

On why such an incident took place despite the hype about responsible trade unionism, the chief minister said he could cite at least 10 positive developments against this one incident.

■ More reports on page 3
■ Editorial: The reason why? page 6

THE STATESMAN

15 JAN 2001

Left blames Mamata, foreign hand for violence in State

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 14

THE LEFT blames the Trinamool Congress and a foreign hand for the spate of violence in West Bengal.

The disturbances, it says, are being created deliberately to destabilise the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee Government in the run up to the Assembly polls.

In Midnapore, the Trinamool-BJP alliance is colluding with the PWG and in North Bengal it is hand in glove with secessionist forces clamouring for a separate Kamtapur State, a communiqué circulated at the end of a Press conference addressed by senior Left leaders here said. Harkishan Singh Surjeet of the CPI(M), the CPI's A B Bardhan and Devarajan of the Forward Bloc warned the NDA Government not to commit the mistake of trying to throw out a Government elected with popular support five times.

In a joint statement, they said Home Minister L K

Advani was trying to give "credence to the NDA's partisan demand for the imposition of Central rule in the State on the basis of the recent Garbeta killings".

To mobilise public opinion against these designs, the Left has given the call for a protest day on January 16 in West Bengal and on January 24 in the rest of the country.

PM on Art 356

THE PRIME Minister says he is in no position to decide on the demand for Central rule in West Bengal. "...I am in no position to decide right now. I must consult my colleagues before making up my mind," Atal Bihari Vajpayee told reporters on board his aircraft on his way back to New Delhi from Indonesia. UNI, Ball

Surjeet, however, stopped short of saying that there was a direct nexus between the Trinamool Congress and the foreign powers. But he pointed out that the former US Ambassador to India, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, had in his memoirs mentioned at least two instances of his country funding initiatives to overthrow Left Governments in West Bengal and Kerala.

The 1995 Purulia armsdrop was organized with the sole motive of unleashing violence against the Left Government in West Bengal, the leaders claimed. The CBI too had talked of a conspiracy. "Yet, the NDA Government is now trying to scuttle the probe," one Left leader said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

15 JAN 2001



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BARANAGAR, Jan. 13. — The chief executive and the general manager of a jute mill were burnt alive today by irate workers.

The two executives were killed after one of them fired at a rampaging group of workers and killed one of them.

As West Bengal underlined its reputation for industrial restlessness, the chief minister, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, said he had ordered a high-level inquiry into the incident. Mr Bhattacharya is touring Malda and called up Writers' Buildings on hearing of the latest blot on his stewardship of the state.

Trouble began when about 250 workers marched into the mill's management block around 11 a.m. to protest against yesterday's suspension of two of their colleagues. Mr RR Tewari, a supervisor, said around 80 workers, armed with iron rods barged into the chief executive's chamber and went berserk. They set the air-conditioner on fire and

snapped telephone cables in the room before turning on the chief executive, Mr Jagadamba Pratap Tewari.

In self-defence, Mr JP Tewari took out a revolver from a drawer and shot a worker, Mr Bhola Das, at pointblank range. Das died on the spot. Mr Tewari, along with the production manager, Mr Manohar Sarkar, and general manager, Mr Goutam Ghosh, rushed in to rescue the chief executive.

The mob then turned on them. Mr RR Tewari managed to escape while the other two were mercilessly beaten up with rods. The workers then tied Mr JP Tewari and Mr Ghosh to chairs, poured kerosene on them and burnt them alive.

Police said they couldn't reach the spot because workers stopped them half-way.

Mr Manohar Sarkar was

admitted to the Barrackpore sub-divisional hospital in a serious condition. Rapid Action Force and EFR were deployed in the area as tension simmered long after the incident.

Three mill vehicles were



A gutted Ambassador at Baranagar Jute Mill. — The Statesman

set ablaze. The workers also attacked three other senior officials of the unit at Alam-bazar on Kali Krishna Tagore Road. They, too, were beaten up with iron rods.

Police said Mr JP Tewari was about 60 and lived in Jagaddal. The general manager was 42 and a resident of Bally. Mr Das, the casual worker, lived in the nearby

Chinikhothi area.

Employees said there had been a row between the management and the casual workers after some casual workers were retrenched at the "slightest pretext".

The chief executive's son, Mr Rajendra Tewari, security officer of a five-star hotel, said: "Some men had been threatening my father."

Mr Goutam Chakraborty, DIG (Presidency Range), who was at the spot, said: "Suspension of the two casual employees sparked the killings." Mr JP Tewari's revolver is missing, he added.

Twenty-seven workers have been arrested and the bodies have been sent for post-mortem. Police said some criminals had accompanied the workers when they attacked the chief executive. They were from the nearby Masjidmore area.

Mr Subhas Chakraborty, Mr Amitava Nandi, a CPI-M leader, and party MLA, Mr Lakshman Bhattacharya, visited the spot. Mr Nandi said the mill had been closed.

Another report on page 5

KLO joins Ulfa in R-Day boycott call

SUDIPTA CHANDA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SILIGURI, Jan. 13. — Fourteen militant groups, including the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation and the Ulfa, have called "a general strike" in their areas of influence on the Republic Day.

The groups, in a "solidarity statement", have urged the people to "boycott the Republic Day celebrations and observe the strike" in protest against the "illegal occupation of their respective regions".

Intelligence sources said leaflets containing the message were being distributed at Kumargram, Jalpaiguri, bordering Assam.

Appealing for the boycott the Republic Day celebrations, the leaflet says: "To all the people of our region these are events that symbolise their colonial bondage under repressive Indian occupation."

Besides the KLO and Ulfa, the militant groups that issued the leaflets include the NDFB, NLFT and the NSCN.

The Jalpaiguri DM Mr Subrata Gupta is, however, unaware of the leaflets. He said last year posters were put up in North Bengal, calling for boycott of the Republic Day celebrations. But this year, the district authorities have not come across such posters so far.

Anyone found distributing such handbills will be arrested, Mr Gupta said.

Patrolling has been intensified in the district. The authorities have also decided to step up security near government properties and railway tracks.

THE STATESMAN

13 JAN 2001

Midnapore awaits Atal return

OUR BUREAU

Gr 1/11
Jan. 13: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee will take up the issue of the alleged carnage in Chhoto Angaria as soon as he returns from his Vietnam-Indonesia trip tomorrow.

Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, also arriving in the capital tomorrow, will call on Vajpayee within two days to apprise him of the "volatile" situation in West Bengal, sources said.

Mamata is carrying with her video cassettes and other "evidence" of the "carnage" at Chhoto Angaria and the murder of student leader Sujata Das at Khejuri, both in Midnapore district, which she will submit to home minister L.K. Advani.

The Trinamul chief, who has repeatedly demanded President's rule in West Bengal, has rubbished the CID inquiry into the Chhoto Angaria incident and is insisting on a CBI probe.

The Prime Minister will also receive two other reports: from Advani and the NDA team that visited the state. Vajpayee faces the unenviable task of appeasing Mamata at a time when the Congress has stepped up its parleys with her. The Prime Minister and his party are also in a bind over a solution to the Bengal crisis.

The BJP is divided over invoking Article 356 in the state. So far, the party has maintained that as it lacked the numbers in the Rajya Sabha, without Congress support it could not have President's rule

imposed on the state.

However, Bengal Congress president Pranab Mukherjee rubbished the claim, saying that as elections are due in three months, the Centre need not wait for the Congress nod as there is no need to get the proclamation ratified by Parliament.

A section of BJP leaders vehemently oppose the idea of Central rule as they feel that if the CPM government is dismissed, it will gain sympathy.

The BJP assessment on whether Mamata will leave the NDA is also not uniform.

A section feels that she cannot afford to quit as her image has taken a beating of late and that the Congress cannot align with her while she is in the saffron camp.

Others suspect that she may leave after presenting the rail budget.

Senior BJP leader J.P. Mathur said: "My personal belief is that she will not leave the NDA."

Minister of state for communications Tapan Sikdar said if she deserts the BJP for the Congress, she will lose her credibility in the eyes of the people as she had earlier dubbed the Congress "as the B-team of the CPM". He added: "If she goes with the CPM's B-team, it will be a *mahajolt* (for her party) not a *mahaajot*."

In Calcutta today, Mamata ruled out quitting the NDA, saying she was confident of bringing all anti-CPM forces, including the Congress, on a common platform before the Assembly elections in West Bengal. (See Page 6)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

14 JAN 2001

Left hits back with armsdrop cover-up charge

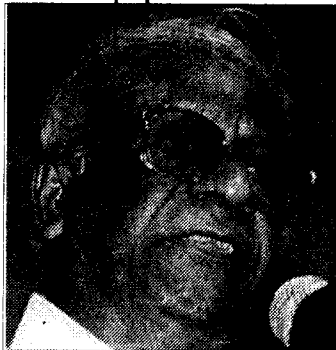
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 12. — Sensing a determined campaign by the Trinamul-BJP to impose President's rule in West Bengal, the central leadership of the Left Front has decided to launch a counter-offensive.

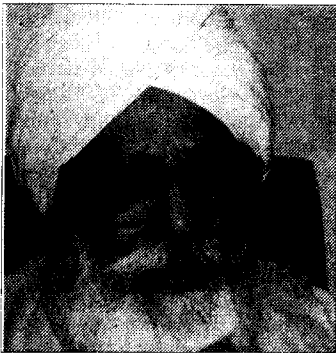
The CPI-M Politburo today accused the Vajpayee government of covering up an armed conspiracy (Purulia armsdrop) to destabilise the Left Front government in the state.

"The BJP-Trinamul campaign is busy purveying the propaganda that the CPI-M in West Bengal is launching armed attacks on its opponent .. the BJP-led government at the Centre is actually covering up the biggest incident of armed smuggling into the country, the Purulia armsdrop, which was meant to destabilise the state government," the Politburo said, asking whether the "unconcerned attitude of the Centre to this serious breach of security" was because it was targeted against a Communist-led government.

The coordination committee of the Left Front is holding a strategy session in Delhi tomorrow to work out a plan to counter the Trinamul-BJP campaign. A nationwide campaign to "expose the game plan to get rid of a



Mr AB Bardhan &
Mr HS Surjeet



democratically elected government in West Bengal" is on the cards.

The meeting will also discuss whether to match the rival's move — the NDA fact-finding team taking the issue to the Election Commission and the Trinamul-BJP MLAs taking their case to the Governor — by

taking the Left 'cause' to the high offices of Constitutional authority.

Mr Harkrishan Singh Surjeet said: "The Purulia armsdrop was a deep-rooted conspiracy to destabilise the longest-serving Communist government in West Bengal. The ongoing campaign is just an extension of it."

Mr AB Bardhan pointed out that "even at the time of the Purulia incident, the state government was officially informed by the Centre only after the incident actually took place, that too through a communication sent through ordinary mail".

Pointing out that the five Latvian crew members of the plane had been released at the request of Russia and another accused is reportedly being pardoned on the request of the UK, the Politburo asked the Vajpayee government to specify the steps taken to apprehend the main culprits.

Left circles expressed happiness about the Congress's refusal to come out in support of President's rule in the state. They said Trinamul supporters would desert Miss Mamata Banerjee once they realise that they are being used as pawns to instigate violence as part of a gameplan to discredit the Left Front government.

THE STATESMAN

13 JAN 2001

CELESTE:

(Continued from page 1)

baggage in India as they have in the USA".

The US Ambassador ^{SR 4} acknowledged that Pokhran nuclear tests in May 1998 and the sanctions imposed on India "rekindled a sense of paranoia on both sides". The new Bush administration will have to decide early on whether or not to continue sanctions, he added. He praised Mr AB Vajpayee's role in ceasefire operations in Kashmir. Mr Celeste hoped that conditions would allow India to resume dialogue with Pakistan soon.

Mr Celeste said the Kargil war in June 1999, "fought against the Pakistan-supported infiltration into Kargil" had led to a dramatic shift in Indo-US ties. He commended the NDA government for moving "beyond the doubt and suspicion which left previous governments ambivalent about identifying common interests and making common cause with the USA".

Highlights of the growing partnership, such as the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism, Joint Economic Dialogue, and Counter-Narcotics Collaboration, constituted Mr Celeste's speech. Trade and economic reform, broad-based development, non-proliferation and regional security, would require special attention.

THE STATE DEPT

13 JAN 2001

Celeste praises Buddha, slams poor work culture

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Jan. 12. — The fruits of recent economic growth may not have flowed freely to West Bengal and other states in eastern India, but the state's "less than robust work culture" was a deterrent to foreign investors, US Ambassador to India, Mr Richard Celeste, told a gathering of MLAs, industrialists and journalists, at the Assembly today.

Mr Celeste praised the new chief minister for his proactive attempts to invite foreign investors to the state, but pointed out that the state's reputation for calling bandhs and a "less than robust work culture" discouraged investment.

The Ambassador said that Mr Ron Summers, the Indian head of UNOCAL, a US oil company, had been eager to do business in West Bengal, but the day of his visit coincided with a bandh.

Asked to comment on Mr Celeste's statement, the chief minister blamed the Trinamul for calling the bandh. Disagreeing with the envoy's comment,



Mr Richard Celeste at the Assembly House on Friday. — The Statesman

Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said Japanese and British companies would not have invested in the state had work culture here been poor.

Mr Celeste said that the state required better infrastructure and stable labour conditions, supported by consistent transparent and evenly applied government policies.

From paranoia to partnership — that was the crux of Mr Celeste's speech today. He reviewed the progress in bilateral relations since former prime minister, Mr IK Gujral invited Mr Bill Clinton, to visit India in 1997.

Mr Celeste said political processes within the governing coalition and outside it, had slowed down the reform agenda. "Information technology is an exception, but even here, the Indian government has been reluctant to open up markets," he said.

Mr Celeste expressed concern about "the tendency to replace one kind of trade barrier such as a QR with another in the form of higher duties". He rued the fact that market access and the role of the WTO had become "as fraught with political

■ See CELESTE: page 4

THE STATESMAN

13 JAN 2001

Renewed 'grand alliance' offer draws former colleagues to Mamata's house

Ghani ready for mahajot with BJP ally

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Jan. 9: Two days after Mamata Banerjee relaunched the campaign for a grand alliance with the Congress, A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury and Priya Ranjan Das Munshi called on her at her Kalighat residence.

Chowdhury even assured Mamata that her alliance with the BJP would not stand in the way of the proposed mahajot.

"The emergence of anti-CPM forces is the need of the hour to oust the communists from Bengal and for that we can overlook the BJP factor," the former state Congress chief said. Congress MLA Parash Pal and Trinamul general secretary Mukul Roy were present.

Expectations had run high in state Congress circles about a year ago when Mamata visited Chowdhury's Salt Lake residence to discuss the mahajot for the first time. However, it did not materialise because of stiff opposition from the high command.

"But this time, we are firm about an alliance with you," he told Mamata. The former PCC chief said during his visit to Delhi tomorrow, he would brief Congress president Sonia Gandhi on the outcome of the discussion with Mamata.

The meeting began on a pleasant note with Mamata asking Chowdhury if there was any progress on the mahajot front.

The Congress veteran promised he would accompany the Trinamul leader across the state if she were serious about heading the grand alliance. He requested Mamata to undertake a tour of Malda and Murshidabad districts to ensure the consolidation of anti-CPM forces.

Mamata, in turn, asked the former PCC chief to lead the new anti-CPM combination instead of her. "Barakada, we will be with you if you renew the call for constitution of a platform of anti-CPM forces in Bengal," she said.

At this, Ghani Khan Chowdhury said: "Mamata, it is now your turn as I was unable to throw the CPM into the Bay of Bengal. I want to see the CPM out of power in my lifetime."

The issue also figured in a one-to-one meeting between Mamata and Das Munshi. Though Das Munshi maintained he had called on the Trinamul leader to extend support to her demand for promulgation of Article 356 in Bengal, loyalists said he also discussed the prospect of mahajot.

Several Congress leaders welcomed the move saying it was a step in the right direction, with the Assembly elections round the corner. "If the mahajot takes shape before the elections, it can be a real alternative to the Left Front," observed PCC vice-president Pradiip Bhattacharya. Congress MLA Pal added he would join forces with Mamata to fight the communists.



Ghani Khan Chowdhury with Mamata Banerjee at her residence. Picture by Pradiip Sanyal

Advani sees reign of terror

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 9: The Centre would have been satisfied had the Bengal government ordered at least a judicial inquiry into the alleged massacre at Chhoto An-garia, L.K. Advani said today.

"It is not a question of whether the probe by the state CID will be partial or impartial. If the Bengal government had ordered a judicial inquiry, it would have been another matter," the home minister said. He alleged that the police were indifferent to developments following the incident.

Advani said the government was awaiting Bengal's response to the Central advisory sent to chief secretary Manish Gupta.

But he added the "Chhoto An-garia incident was not a minor one and the situation was bad".

Advani said "what is disgusting is that there is a climate of 'terror' in the area where the 'massacre' of Trinamul Congress supporters took place. 'People are tongue-tied for fear of retribution from the ruling party. It is not an isolated incident. There has been a spate of such incidents and people have fled their villages. These incidents seemed to be related to the ensuring Assembly elections."

Voicing doubts over the state government's reports on the incident, Advani said: "We are getting reports that the Bengal government cannot controvert."

The Centre is not likely to let the matter die down fast. Though

it may not take any hasty step on imposing President's rule, some of its allies are for invoking Article 356 in the state.

The five-member Central team led by BJP MP Vijay Goel has recommended President's rule in its report submitted today to the home minister. But Advani was non-committal. "The government will consider every aspect in totality before deciding on whether Article 356 can be applied."

Reacting sharply, chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said: "What does he (Advani) mean by impartial? Is the CBI impartial? If it is, then the CID too is the same." Bhattacharjee, who ordered the CID to probe the incident, added: "My CID is efficient enough."

BJP pins hope on Cong in Bengal

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 9: The BJP-Trinamul combine in Bengal is not "strong enough" to defeat the Left Front in the Assembly elections, a BJP internal assessment has said.

A leader conceded there was every chance of the Left getting re-elected unless a mahajot is forged with the Congress through a tacit understanding. Otherwise, a chunk of the Congress will be weaned away.

He said Trinamul leader Mamata Banerjee's dilemma was evident in her "walking a tightrope" and trying to keep both the BJP and the Congress on her side.

"If the Congress does not become part of the mahajot, minority votes will split between the Trinamul, the Congress and the CPM. This will partially ensure the Left Front's return to power," he said.

He said BJP president Bangaru Laxman welcoming a mahajot in Bhubaneswar last week, if only as a "one-time exception", went a long way in clearing the air as far as Mamata is concerned.

"Otherwise she was not sure where the BJP stood vis-à-vis an understanding with the Congress. Now she is assured that there will be no objection from our side," the BJP general secretary said.

The BJP reading is that if the Congress rejects the mahajot offer, Mamata will split the party. "She will try and wean away a section of the state leaders and legislators. This will buttress her claim that in Bengal the Trinamul is the real Congress and the Congress rump that remains is finessed for all purposes," he said.

Trinamul man says his son among dead, police differ

Claims fly over bodies in morgue

CID team gropes in the dark

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MIDNAPORE, Jan. 10. — The CID officials investigating the reported massacre at the house of Abdur Rehman, a Trinamul activist, at Chhota Anguria in Garbeta for the past two days, are still groping in the dark. They are yet to come across any concrete evidence.

The 78-member CID team, consisting of Kolkata, Midnapore and Bankura district personnel and lead by Mr Chayan Mukherjee, DIG, conducted a day-long combing operation in the Saltora forest in Midnapore and Agunkumari and Bagdoba forests in the Jaipur area of Bankura today. The Trinamul Congress had alleged that it was in these forests that the bodies of 11 of its partymen were buried by CPI-M cadres. But nothing was found by the CID team.

Rehman made some "contradictory and inconsistent" statements during the two-hour interrogation by the DIG in the Garbeta forest bungalow last night. Mr KK Mondal, Additional DG, CID, who arrived today, made another attempt to cross-examine Rehman at Garbeta. Rehman was reported to be sick and did not turn up.

According to preliminary findings by the CID team, the inmates of Rehman's house were not attacked, nor was there any armed clash between the Trinamul and CPI-M cadres, leading to the massacre, as was being claimed by the Trinamul. If there had been any massacre, there would have been profuse bleeding at the spot which would have left tell-tale signs, the investigating officers felt.

It is likely that an explosion took place at Rehman's house when dumped cartridges

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Jan. 10. — A Trinamul Congress supporter, Mr Badal Mondal of Kespur today claimed that one of the bodies in the city police morgue was of his son, Soumyasree Mondal (25), missing since 26 September.

But the DGP, Mr Deepak Sanyal, said the bodies were exhumed from Pingla in Midnapore after the CPI-M complained that they were of its supporters allegedly killed by Trinamul men. The four were: Srikanta Singh (35) of Osthi village, Sukhdev Pingua (45) of Pingua village, Kanu Shinku (45) of Maligram village (all in Pingla) and Gangadas Das Adhikari (45) of Panpara village in Sabong.

Lack of communication between the Midnapore and Kolkata police led to confusion about the three decomposed bodies and a skeleton brought to the morgue on Nil Madhav Sen Road in the Jorasanko area yesterday.

The three bodies and the skeleton were brought to the morgue to be examined by forensic experts, primarily to determine the date and cause of death, Mr Sanyal said. Three were allegedly kidnapped and

one was missing. The four cases were filed in November.

The Midnapore police did not inform the police in Kolkata that they were sending the bodies for forensic examination and the skeleton for reconstruction, said Mr Narayan Ghosh, DC (HQ).

The sub-inspector of the Pingla police station, who brought the bodies, handed over the forwarding letter to the officer present at the morgue, but went away with the challans that contain the names of the victims, case numbers and the missing dates, Mr Ghosh said.

He said: "We have informed the Midnapore SP. An officer will come to Lalbazar with proper documents." Mr Ghosh said after the Trinamul man "identified" a body, the city police got in touch with the Kespur police station and asked the O-C to send documents on the missing case and the officer investigating it.

Mr Ghosh said: "We came to know that the bodies were recovered in early December and had been kept at the Kharagpur morgue since 5 December." The district police reportedly told city police

■ More reports on page 4

■ See BODIES: page 4

■ See CID: page 4

THE STATESMAN

11 JAN 2001

P.T.O.

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BODIES:

(Continued from page 1)

officers that they took almost a month to send the bodies to the morgue for autopsy since they failed to arrange proper transportation.

The Trinamul today demanded the resignation of Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya after Badal Mondal claimed to have identified a body as that of his son.

Trinamul MPs and MLAs, with their counterparts in the Congress and BJP, will meet the Governor tomorrow, demanding imposition of Article 356. The Trinamul Youth Congress has called a students' strike in Midnapore tomorrow and in the state on Friday.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee, chairman of the Trinamul policy-making committee, said Soumyasree, whose body was "identified" by his father, was reportedly to be missing from Gurapith Panchkuri in Kespur from 25 September and his father had lodged a complaint with the police. Mr Banerjee said Soumyasree was expelled from the CPI-M last year. On 25 September he was kidnapped by CPI-M men. He was tortured and later killed, Mr Banerjee claimed.

He said the attitude of the state government showed that it had tried to destroy the decomposed bodies. He wondered how could the DIG (Presidency Range), Mr Goutam Chakraborty, was so sure that the bodies were of CPI-M activists. He said Mr Chakraborty has no business in the matter as the city morgue was not under him. Dr A Gupta did an autopsy of the three decomposed bodies but the reconstruction of the skeleton was yet to be done.

THE STATESMAN

11 JAN 2001

GILL'S CONCERN OVER VIOLENCE IN BENGAL

Assembly polls in May

By Our Special Correspondent HD-1

NEW DELHI, JAN. 10. Expressing concern over the incidents of violence in West Bengal where Assembly polls are barely four months away, the Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. M. S. Gill, today said the Commission's role would arise only at the time of entering the poll process.

"At the moment matters being projected in the media are constitutionally in other domains. There is the State Government, the Centre and other organs of the State."

The Commission would focus on the polls in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Pondicherry, West Bengal and Assam well before the third week of May. On the situation in West Bengal, he said, "we are concerned and focussed on having a good law and order situation in all the five States during the polls." (According to a UNI report, Dr. Gill said Assembly elections in four States and the Union Territory of Pondicherry would be held in the third week of May. It was proposed to hold the polls simultaneously to ensure that results of one State did not affect those in others. The Assemblies in these States and Pondicherry should be constituted two weeks before their present terms ended.)

The Commission wanted to conduct a peaceful and fair poll. While the terms of the Tamil Nadu and Kerala Assemblies are scheduled to end on May 21 and 28, the terms of the West Bengal and Pondicherry

ry Houses expire on June 9 and the Assam Assembly will have its term till June 11.

Dr. Gill said his colleague on the poll panel, Mr. T.R. Krishnamurthy, would visit West Bengal tomorrow for assessing the poll preparations in the State.

The five-member National Democratic Alliance team which visited the violence-affected Garbeta town in West Bengal called on Dr. Gill today. Mr. Vijay Goel, BJP MP and member of the team, said it conveyed its apprehensions of escalation of political violence as elections approached. The team feared that state-sponsored terror would not be conducive to holding free and fair polls in West Bengal.

EC golden jubilee

Dr. Gill said the commission would commemorate 50 years of its existence, launching a two-day golden jubilee celebration here. The inaugural function at the Vigyan Bhavan on January 17 would be addressed by the President, the Prime Minister, the Lok Sabha Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition and the Union Law Minister, said Dr. Gill.

About 20 foreign participants, including chiefs of national electoral bodies and international organisations, would attend a seminar on electoral democracy and interact with their Indian counterparts. Representatives of the Election Commissions of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka are expected to attend the celebrations.

Osama seen at son's wedding

DUBAI, JAN. 10. International terrorist, Osama bin Laden, appeared happy and smiling at his son's wedding in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar in footage shown today on an Arab satellite channel.

The Al-Jazeera channel said the wedding of Ahmed bin Laden took place on Monday.

Ahmed married the daughter of Abu Hafas al-Masri, an Egyptian aide to Osama who fought with him in the 1980s against Soviet forces in Afghanistan, Al-Jazeera said. It did not give the name of the bride.

The bridegroom, wearing a traditional white Arab head-dress, was shown sitting on a carpet between his father, who was wearing a white turban, and another man believed to be Abu Hafas al-Masri. Two masked bodyguards could be seen in the background.

The channel said the bride and the groom were both born in Pakistan when their fathers were fighting in neighbouring Afghanistan. It did not give their ages. — AP

THE HINDU

11 JAN 2001

Bengal not conducive for polls, NDA tells EC

■ EC says it will intervene in state only after poll process begins

ENS AND PTI
NEW DELHI, JAN 10

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THE National Democratic Alliance today stepped up its campaign on the law and order situation in West Bengal by taking the issue to the Election Commission which said it was "concerned and very much focused on the aspect of a good law and order situation in all the five states" going to polls by the third week of May.

The five-member NDA delegation led by BJP MP Vijay Goel, which visited the violence-hit areas of Midnapore district, called on Chief Election Commissioner MS Gill and demanded that EC should take steps right now to ensure free and fair poll in the state.

The law and order situation in the state was "very bad" and the state-sponsored terrorism was forcing the people to flee from their places, Goel told reporters.

Stating that the commission could play a role regarding the law and order situation in West Bengal only when the assembly poll process began, Gill said "these days I very closely read all these statements. But at the moment, whatever these matters are, they lie constitutionally in other domain".

The commission's role came only at the time of entering into the election process, Gill said, adding that the commission was concerned and very much focused on the aspect of a good law and order situation in all the five states to

have a peaceful and fair poll.

He said the commission expected the authorities and political parties to fight the elections in a democratic and peaceful way. "Any thought towards push and pull should be denied", he said.

Gill said simultaneous elections to the five state assemblies— West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and Pondicherry— scheduled this year are likely to be held by the third week of May.

The tenures of the Tamil Nadu assembly expire on May 21 and Kerala on May 28 while those of West Bengal and Pondicherry expire on June 9. The term of the Assam Assembly ends on June 11. "We are very much focused. Elections will be held before the third

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

INDIAN EXPRESS

1 1 JAN 2001

Opposition in West Bengal divided over imposition of President's rule

Congress appears to be on a tightrope walk

By Anita Katyal
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The Congress appears to be doing a tightrope walk on the West Bengal situation. Faced with the perennial dilemma of playing the role of the opposition in the state and having close coordination with the Left Front at the Centre, as witnessed in the last Parliament session, the Congress is playing down the demand for imposition of President's rule in West Bengal.

Although there is a section in the Congress, led by chief whip Priyaranjan Dasmunshi, which favours a tie-up with Mamata Banerjee of Trinamul Congress, the party did not endorse Ms Banerjee's demand for Central rule. The party, instead, put the onus for this decision on the Central government and instead went along with the view that a CBI enquiry be ordered into the recent incidents of political killings reported from the Midnapore district. At the same time, it did not want to be seen to be condoning the violence in the state and, therefore, ended up mildly rebuking the state government gently for neglecting to maintain the law and order situation.

The party leadership, it is learnt, has not taken kindly to Mr Dasmunshi's statement that the Congress would support imposition of President's rule in West Bengal, if the Centre took such a decision. On Monday, Mr Dasmunshi retracted this statement, saying this was his personal opinion and instead supported the demand for a CBI enquiry. Congress spokesperson Ghulam Nabi Azad was also at pains to explain that Mr Dasmunshi had never really supported the demand for Central rule. As for the Congress, he said, the party is deeply concerned about the recent developments in West Bengal, stating that it was most unfortunate that the state government had failed to contain the violence.

According to Mr Azad, there were different versions about the recent incident of violence in Garbeta in Midnapore and that it is now for the Centre to assess whether it was a case of political killings or a breakdown of the law and order situation.

The Centre, he maintained, was best equipped to assess the situation since it had access to information from various sources, including the intelligence agencies. At the same time, he was quick to add that the Centre would also have to see if incidents of killings could be the basis for imposition of President's rule in a state. In that case, he said, a host of other states including Assam, should also be considered for a similar action.

Instead of targeting the state government, the Congress addressed itself to the Vajpayee government, reiterating that it is for the Vajpayee government to find the truth about the recent violence. "On the face of it, we only see that there were incidents of killings, but it is for the Centre to see if there is more to it," said Mr Azad.

BJP distances itself from Trinamul

By Smita Gupta
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: An internal assessment by the BJP has shown that the Left Front is once again in a commanding position in West Bengal, and with assembly elections due in the state in April, it is reconciling itself to the possibility of no political change in the state. The BJP has, therefore, decided to distance itself from the Trinamul Congress.

A senior BJP leader said, "The Trinamul is not doing well, partly because of Mamata Banerjee's whimsicalities. The Left may well return to power."

Against this backdrop, the BJP on Monday demanded a CBI inquiry into the killings in West Bengal's Midnapore district, but stopped short of endorsing imposition of President's rule in the state. This is despite a demand to that effect by Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee who is being backed by defence minister George Fernandes.

BJP vice-president Jana Krishnamurthy said, "Though the situation cries out for the imposition of Article 356, in view of the Supreme Court judgment, the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission and the fact that we are in a minority in the Rajya Sabha, we can't do it. It might be better to leave it to the people to give a fitting reply."

However, he added, "The remedy lies with the Congress. If the Congress is prepared to support us, then Article 356 can come into play. But the Congress is too busy with its own party elections." Referring to the party's attempt—which failed—to impose President's rule in Bihar, Mr Krishnamurthy said, "It is for the commission set up to look at the constitution to figure a way out."

Meanwhile, BJP leader Madanlal Khurana has quit as the party office bearer in charge of West Bengal, and was replaced by Kailashpati Mishra. Mr Khurana pleaded personal reasons for quitting the post.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2001

40-12

WEST BENGAL DEVELOPMENTS

1071

EVER SINCE THE Trinamool Congress managed to wrest a foothold in West Bengal, supplanting the Congress, Ms. Mamata Banerjee has not missed a single opportunity to press for the dismissal of the Left Front Government in the State. The developments during the past few days, with Ms. Banerjee upping the ante, based on reports of a "massacre" in a village in Midnapore district are tiresomely familiar. The theatrics that Ms. Banerjee has been indulging in — claiming to be in possession of evidence of a "massacre" even while the State Government continues to deny any such incident — with the NDA combine sending its "fact-finding" team to Midnapore to endorse with alacrity her claims, the Union Home Minister lamenting about the hurdles in the way of the Central Government's wish to invoke Article 356 of the Constitution, constitute an entirely predictable pattern.

Recall the instance when the Union Home Ministry dispatched a team of its officials to West Bengal (during Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's earlier term as Prime Minister) and also to Tamil Nadu then only in order to appease Ms. Banerjee and Ms. J. Jayalalitha (then a constituent of the NDA) and the high drama that followed those official visits. There was also the instance of Mr. George Fernandes, in his capacity as convener of the ruling alliance, spending a few hours (in a Midnapore village) and making a passionate plea for the dismissal of the State Government. It was clear, on all those occasions, that the campaign was with an eye on the Assembly elections, due before April 2001.

The high voltage campaign by the leaders of the Trinamool Congress has to be seen in this larger context. The statements by the political leadership of the NDA — driving hard the point that the Congress is to be blamed for letting the Left Front Government remain in power in the State — clearly point to a larger political design. That such a line is aimed at ensuring the consolidation of all those opposed to the ruling Left

Front in West Bengal behind the Trinamool Congress is obvious. After all, the results of the polls to the rural and urban bodies in the past couple of years had shown that the Congress continues to be a force in many parts of West Bengal. The poll results had also established that a total polarisation of votes for and against the ruling Left Front is necessary to bring about a change of regime in the State. The consistency with which the leaders of the NDA have been blaming the Congress for letting the Left Front continue in power is aimed at ensuring such a polarisation of forces behind the Trinamool Congress. With elections only a couple of months away, it is only obvious that the NDA would step up the rhetoric.

Meanwhile, the Congress too seems to be caught in this web. The meeting Mr. P. R. Das Munshi had with the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, (where he is reported to have presented evidence of the weapons used in the "massacre" at Chotoangara village) and the decision by the Pradesh Congress chief, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, to lead a protest march in Midnapore may be seen as measures by the party to be seen as opposing the Left Front. After the idea of a 'mahajot' was shot down by the party high command, the Congress leaders in West Bengal could not have resisted the temptation to join the anti-Left chorus. The compulsions are evident. But it is inimical to the party's interests to be seen as playing the NDA's game in West Bengal by way of endorsing the demand for dismissal of the State Government. Be that as it may, the ruling Left Front too will have to take to the task of governance in real earnest; there may be some exaggeration about the scale of violence by those in the Opposition for obvious reasons. But yet the Government cannot absolve itself of its responsibility for the violence in parts of the State. The imperative for Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee (in the immediate context) is to bring out the facts about the latest round of violence and the "massacre" in Chotoangara village.

THE HINDU

10 JAN 2001

Meghalaya Assembly gutted

SHILLONG, JAN. 9. A conflagration reduced the historic Meghalaya Legislative Assembly building to ashes as the blaze was still raging out of control, the Speaker, Mr. E.D. Marak, said.

Firemen with 15 fire tenders were battling the blaze which raced through the building with wooden fillings, Mr. Marak said.

The Assembly hall and adjoining offices had been razed to the ground and all records and documents had been lost, the Speaker said. The building was constructed before Independence by the British. — PTI

48 injured in Kashmir blasts

By Shujaat Bukhari

JAMMU, JAN. 9. Militants today made an abortive bid to blow up the Central Telegraph Office (CTO) in Srinagar by detonating a bomb outside the building in which 28 people were injured, some of them seriously, while in Anantnag, 20 people were injured when a grenade thrown by militants exploded and a middle-rung Hurriyat leader — Mr. Shahidul Islam — escaped a bid on his life.

Sources said a powerful, remote-controlled bomb went off outside the highly guarded CTO at around 10 a.m. when a large number of people were waiting in a queue to pay their telephone bills. At least 28 people, mostly civilians, were injured.

Five killed as security men go amuck

SRINAGAR, JAN. 9. Five security personnel, including a Sub-Inspector, were killed and four injured as two personnel of the BSF and the CRPF went amuck and allegedly fired at their colleagues last night, official sources said today.

In the first incident, which took place at the heavily-guarded residence of the father-in-law of the AICC general-secretary, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, at Hyderpora on the Airport Road, two CRPF personnel were killed allegedly by an irked constable on Monday.

The constable, Balbir Singh, of the 87th Battalion, got agitated over some issue and in a fit of anger fired indiscriminately, killing Sub-Inspector Harminder Singh Thakur and Constable P.A. Naidu, the sources said, adding Balbir was arrested after the shootout.

In another incident, a BSF jawan lost his mental balance and targeted his colleagues inside their camp at Jamalatta in downtown Srinagar today, killing three and wounding an equal number.

— PTI



The Chairman of the National People's Congress of China, Mr. Li Peng (centre), waving to the crowd on his arrival in Mumbai on Tuesday. — AP

Centre to await Bengal response

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 9. Expressing grave concern over the prevailing "climate of terror" in the violence-hit Garbeta town, the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, today said the Centre would consider "every aspect of the situation" before taking any decision on West Bengal.

Talking to reporters at his North Block office, Mr. Advani said the NDA team, which visited the site of violence in Midnapore district and submitted its report to him today, demanded imposition of President's rule.

"The operative part of the team's report is the demand for President's rule. It is a matter of great concern for us and the Government will have to consider every aspect before taking any decision," he said.

The Home Ministry would also wait for the State Government's response to the Centre's advisory sent yesterday. The advisory suggested an independent probe into the incidents of violence and alleged clashes between the CPI(M) and Trinamool workers.

Asked whether he was satisfied with the CID probe ordered by the Left Front Government, Mr. Advani said it should make "earnest efforts" at knowing the truth. It was not a question of the CID inquiry being "partial or impartial" but the fact remained that the CID was very much part of the establishment. "It was another matter if they had ordered a judicial inquiry," he added.

Asked about the impression conveyed by the five-member NDA team to him, Mr. Advani said the incident at Chotoangra village was "really bad". Describing the picture in the violence-affected area as grim, he said: "What is disconcerting is the cli-

mate of terror that pervades in the entire area. As a result, those who visited the site saw either a deserted village or tongue-tied inhabitants "lest they suffer the consequences of speaking up".

Mr. Advani said the persons who visited the site of the violence were returning with exhibits of the alleged massacre, including shells of bullets and parts of skulls. "It also shows complete indifference on the part of the police in preserving the spot."

'What is Cong. stand?'

The BJP today sought to know from the Congress its assessment of the situation in West Bengal and the view of the central leadership. Reacting to a Congress spokesman's statement that it was for the Centre to decide on the imposition of President's rule, the BJP vice-president, Mr. K. Jana Krishnamurthy, said the Congress central leadership did not even state whether it agreed or differed with the assessment of the BJP or the Trinamool.

Decision after PM's return

PTI reports:

Mr. Advani said the Centre would take a decision after the return of the Prime Minister this weekend. Apparently perturbed over the NDA demand for President's rule in the State and Mr. Advani's remark, the ruling Left Front held an unscheduled meeting tonight. Mr. Advani told presspersons here after a meeting with the NDA team, which visited the site of the "carnage", that the Government "as a whole will have to take a decision... We are waiting for Ms. Mamata Banerjee, Mr. George Fernandes (who is the NDA convener) and the Prime Minister, who will return after a few days."

State orders probe, NDA team wants 356

Govt-backed terrorism, 9.8% say MPs

Arindam Sarkar Garbeta (Midnapore)/Kolkata, January 8

THE NDA team that returned from Garbeta today has decided that a "mass killing" did in fact take place at Chhota Angaria on January 4, and that West Bengal is a fit case for President's rule.

The five MPs will meet Union Home Minister L K Advani and NDA convener George Fernandes in Delhi and tell them to sack Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's Government.

"The gruesome killings, the State-sponsored terrorism and the manner in which the administration and CPI(M) are working in tandem to kill innocent people and suppress facts prove that there is a complete failure of law and order," BJP MP Vijay Goel told *The Hindustan Times*.

"The police have accepted that there has been a mass killing here, and whatever we gathered from the local people convinced us that the CPI(M) and the administration are trying to suppress facts. We will recommend our case to NDA convener George Fernandes and Home Minister LK Advani. It is now for the Centre to act," Goel said.

Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Nirupam declared that the police and CPI(M) had ganged up to "suppress the truth" about the killings, and to ensure that the bodies are not found. "There is no doubt that only President's rule can bring peace to the State and save the people from CPI(M) terror," Nirupam said.

The INLD's Captain Inder Singh said he had found several 12 mm and .303 bore cartridges at the site, proving that sophisticated weapons had been used in the "massacre". "In fact, improvised weapons were also used, added the BJD's Prabhakar Samantaryay. The team - Goel, Nirupam, Singh, Samantaryay and the MDMK's C Krishnan - accompa-



NDA team leader Vijay Goel displays the weapons he recovered from Chhota Angaria in Garbeta on Monday. Photo: Ashok Nath Dey

nied by the Trinamool Congress's Sudip Bandopadhyay, visited Chhota Angaria this morning and spoke with the ostensible prime witness to the killings, Abdul Rahman, and his wife Anecsa. They went around the burnt thatched house where the alleged massacre had taken place, and inspected the innumerable spent cartridge shells, blood-stained pieces of cloth, pieces of burnt flesh and some country-made weapons strewn about the bushes.

"We are surprised to see that all 40 houses here are deserted and none of the residents of adjoining villages are willing to speak to us," said Goel. "The contradictory versions of the incident given by the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police convince us that the Centre should immediately intervene and conduct a CBI inquiry."

Advani says no to Central rule

L K ADVANI on Monday ruled out clamping President's rule on West Bengal, but Union Home Secretary Karthi Parthi was believed to have issued an "advisory" to State Chief Secretary Manish Gupta to hold an independent inquiry into allegations.

The Centre was "closely observing" the law and order in Bengal, which was "bad", Advani said. The Centre would take "stern measures" if the situation deteriorated, but there were no plans yet to use Article 356. Even a CBI probe, Advani said, could take place only if West Bengal asked for it, or a court ordered it on a PIL.

In Mysore, NDA convener George Fernandes backed Central rule in Bengal which was "witnessing lawlessness and murders", but added nothing could be done without Congress support. The Congress supported Mamata Banerjee's demand for a CBI probe, but its media department head Ghulam Nabi Azad seemed to say political killings alone could not be enough for using Article 356. *Agencies, New Delhi*

It's surprising that even after four days, the accused have not been booked." After inspecting the site of the alleged incident, Nirupam announced that if "one Ayodhya" and the so-called "death of secularism" could avert the dismissal

There could have been a political clash, says Buddha

HT Correspondent Kolkata, January 8

IN A major reversal of its stand on the Garbeta mystery killings, the State Government today directed the CID "to undertake a thorough probe of the incident".

This is a complete volte face, considering the fact that the State administration was all along saying that there were no killings at Chhota Angaria village on the night of January 4 and that only a house was burnt down. Later, under pressure, the Government put out a statement saying that "there might have been a clash".

What's more, the Government has agreed to have all the "evidences" of the ghastly killings examined by police sniffer-dogs and forensic experts. In a way, all this amounts to giving in to persistent demands by all the major Opposition parties in the State, led by the Trinamool Congress.

In a statement, the Government today said, "During investigations on 5th and 6th January, the police recovered and seized a number of empty cartridges, bullet heads, pipe bombs, remnants of improvised firearms, one blood-stained muffer, blood-stained earth and control sample of earth from the



place of occurrence... Recovery of the above-mentioned items at the place of occurrence indicates that there might have been a clash." Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee tried his best to maintain a brave front while briefing reporters.

"The clash could have been between political groups, or otherwise. It can be definitely concluded only after the CID inquiry."

The Chief Minister was also clearly on the defensive when asked about the "evidences" produced by Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee. "I have to go by the police report that no dead body has been found till now. Seventy-two hours have rolled by since the incident, and nothing can be said definitely. What can I do?"

Bhattacharjee added that the inquiry would also focus on the question of whether those allegedly killed had a definite political affiliation. The State Government's statement has also added a new dimension to the Garbeta incident. For the first time, it said that police inquiries have revealed that all the "missing/dead" have been "absconding" for the last seven months (since June 2000) as they were wanted in different criminal cases.

The Government has agreed to have all the 'evidences' of the ghastly killings examined by sniffer-dogs and forensic experts

● **ON PAGE 3: CPM holds fire on NDA charge**

Central team cries massacre

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, Jan. 8: The NDA team, which visited "the massacre site" in Midnapore's Chhoto Angaria village this morning, has come back convinced that law and order in Bengal was a "fit case for promulgation of Article 356".

BJP MP Vijay Goel, the team leader, told reporters that the incident warranted a CBI probe "as there have been attempts to cover up the massacre".

"We will urge the Centre to order a CBI inquiry if the state government does not take the initiative," he said. "I have no hesitation in saying that a mass killing has occurred here. We have got ample proof, but the district administration has taken it too lightly."

The five-member team started

early. Accompanied by Abdul Rahman Mandal and his wife Anisha, who were the first to file an FIR alleging their house had been torched, the team went around collecting evidences and came up with blank cartridges, a burnt piece of human flesh and a blood-stained axe.

When Ashim Ojha, a local Trinamul leader, cried out that he had found a severed arm inside Mandal's granary, Goel ran to the spot. "Yes, this axe might have been used to hack Trinamul supporters," he said.

Goel claimed that district superintendent of police Gaurav Dutta had admitted there was a massacre. He said Dutta conceded that 79 spent bullets had been recovered from the site and also confirmed that eight of those named

in the FIR were absconding.

Goel said they found bullet marks on the door and walls of Mandal's house and blood on the floor. "The local police has so far done nothing to undertake a proper inquiry. Neither forensic experts nor sniffer dogs were brought to the site. We cannot give the police unlimited time," he said.

Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Nirupam said the team was convinced the "mass killings were at the behest of the CPM cadre". "If Article 356 could be invoked in three states following the destruction of the Babri masjid in which only four people were killed, why should it not be invoked here?" he asked.

Prabhat Samanta Rao (BJD) and C. Krishnan (MDMK) slammed the Left rule as "the CPM's jungle raj". Lok Dal's Inder Singh

said all the men had fled following threats from CPM workers.

Asked how the Centre could invoke President's rule in the state when the NDA lacked majority in the Rajya Sabha, Goel said: "We will make the recommendation. It is for the government to find out ways to implement it."

After it returns to Delhi, the team will submit its report to NDA convener George Fernandes and acquaint home minister L.K. Advani with "the breakdown of the constitutional machinery in the state". The members also thanked the Congress for supporting them in their crusade against CPM "terror". "Priya Ranjan Das Munshi has already supported the demand. We will expect him to take up the matter with Sonia Gandhi," they said.

THE TELEGRAM

9 JAN 2001

... Mr. Sahani, is going abroad a few days and leaves behind teenage servant. Bhola, at Ashar's house. Apparently Bhola is an innocent boy, but he is to teach Sikander how to use a gun. When Sikander complains to Bhola, the Parashar family sees to believe him and asks why he made a false com-



For Your Love

At STAR Plus/8 PM a Kagaz: Shalini arranges a party for Karva chauth without inviting Indrapratap or Shobha. She keeps a vrat in the name of Indrapratap and Kaushalya thinks that she has kept it for Mahesh. Rajeev receives invitation for party and decides not to attend. At the function everybody...



Mohabbatein

ANGELS (A): Chaplin (4 shows), Lali (Barasati), Bimala (Madhyamgram), Auro (Chinsurah), Swapna (Chandernagore)

JAAN HATHELI PE: Hind (4 shows)

JALLAD NO. 1: Paradise, Kalika, Alochhaya, National

KHILADI 420: Elite, Priya, Talkie Show House (all 4 shows), Pustapasree (Behala), Mahua, Saikosree, Chetna, Ananya, Rangendra, Jayanti (Barrackpore), Bangabasi, Rakhi, Udayan (Shreebhadra), Sanskriti Lok Manicha (Burdwan)

MOHABBATEIN: Metro & Menoka, (12.15, 4, 8), Radha (12, 3.45, 7.30), Madhuban (2, 5.30), Ashoka (Behala) (2, 6), Sonali, Parijat, Lipi, Mirinalini, Atindra, Pari, Sarama, Pustapasree (Kadamtolla), Jyoti (Chandernagore), Rupali (Chinsurah), Star (Burdwan)

RAJU CHACHA: Orient, Basusree, Purnasree, Jagat (all 4 shows), Malanicha, Ashoka (Behala: noon), Ragini, Jaya, Pratulja, Debasree, Kalika (Habra), Shanti, Serampore Talkies, Nairaj (Burdwan) (3 shows)

BENGALI

AAPON HOLO POR: Binodini (Baguihati), Mahamaya (Dakshin Barasati), Gobinda (Channing), Bharati (Chakdani), Sreeguru (Nabadwip), Rabindra (Tarakswar)

Four-long gunbattle

meeting at the last minute, an information not known to Trinamul leaders.

Since most of these armed men were outsiders, Trinamul leaders sent Mandal, camping at the Garbeta party office since June 26, asking him to give shelter to the group in his house at Chhoto Angaria. Mandal left for the village in such hurry that he did not even inform the Garbeta police station about his return to Chhoto Angaria.

The group was holed up in his house, waiting for Ghosh's meeting. But they were noticed by other villagers. CPM supporters challenged Mandal to disclose the identity of the "guests" in his house, leading to the clash.

The police report does not say which side opened fire first nor how many were killed. Independent sources suggested a couple of deaths.

The chief minister said: "The police have seized empty cartridges, bullet heads, pipe-bombs, remnants of improvised firearms, a blood-stained muffler and sample of blood-stained earth."

But there was no sign of either the 11 persons claimed to be missing or of the 10 named as accused in the FIR. Bhattacharjee said: "All the 11 persons have been missing since June as they are wanted in criminal cases."

The Peoples' War Group claims that 10 of its supporters, who had gathered in Rahman's

house for a meeting, were killed that night has added a new twist to the mystery. It has raised doubts about whether the sides involved in the clash were, indeed, CPM and Trinamul supporters since the PWG has been active in the area for some time.

Sushanta Ghosh, a CPM minister from the district, today admitted fuel to speculation about PWG involvement. He said the CPM had total control over the area and had no reason to try and eliminate rivals.

"If at all, it's a clash between the Naxalites and the Trinamul-BJP, which the latter is trying to distort by trying to involve the CPM," he said.

More reports on Page 6

MAHAJOT AGAIN

PCC must sort out internal struggle

ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury's renewed noises in favour of a mahajot with the Trinamul Congress emphasises the crisis of identity that the Pradesh Congress has not been able to solve. Who does he speak for? The PCC chief, Pranab Mukherjee, has lately adopted a softer stance towards Mamata Banerjee. But it is far from clear whether he is acting on orders from Sonia Gandhi who had shot down Ghani's mahajot proposal last year. As things stand, Pranab may not have any option, more so after Bangaru Laxman provided the green signal to the Congress-Trinamul alliance. But even now Ghani and Pranab are hardly on speaking terms. Who in fact will be talking to Mamata? The veteran from Malda has the best anti-Left credentials in his party. While he is physically incapable of leading the organisation into a campaign, his latest offer to Mamata indicates there is a large section within his party that earnestly wants an alliance. Mamata has every reason to welcome this because she cannot be unaware of the fact that the Congress has a consistent vote bank. The party took a conscious position against the Left Front to allow Trinamul to form the board in Calcutta. The pro-mahajot wing can only hope that the understanding can be extended to the assembly elections.

Doubts, however, persist on whether PCC leaders are willing to play second fiddle. Pranab cannot claim a base in any part of the state. But with blessings from Delhi he is capable of putting obstacles in the way; his capacity for intrigue is not to be underestimated. The silver lining is that the attitude of the rank and file can be an overriding factor. There are other compulsions that explain why Pranab is more accommodating. What remains to be sorted out is Pranab's personal equation with Ghani. It could be an avoidable obstacle. There is also the ticklish issue of seat adjustments. The best hope for the alliance is a confession from Priya Ranjan Das Munshi that the Congress accepts Mamata as the consensus leader against the Left Front — with no denials from Pranab. That is why Alimuddin Street has redoubled its salvage effort. That is no reason why the state should erupt with violent confrontations with the police playing a passive or partisan role. And that will take some doing.

THE STATESMAN

8 JAN 2001

Mamata, Buddha in Art 356 war

Trinamul chief thanks Cong, repeats call for Central rule

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Jan. 7. — The Trinamul Congress today repeated the demand for imposition of Article 356 in the state in view of the "deteriorating law and order situation". Without naming the Congress, the party thanked the Congress leaders who visited Garbeta.

The Congress too, demanded that Midnapore should be declared as disturbed area. The leaders who visited Garbeta yesterday said it was a planned massacre.

Addressing a rally opposite the Metro cinema, Miss Mamata Banerjee said the state had failed to provide security to the citizens. A section of police were helping the CPI-M to terrorise rural people.

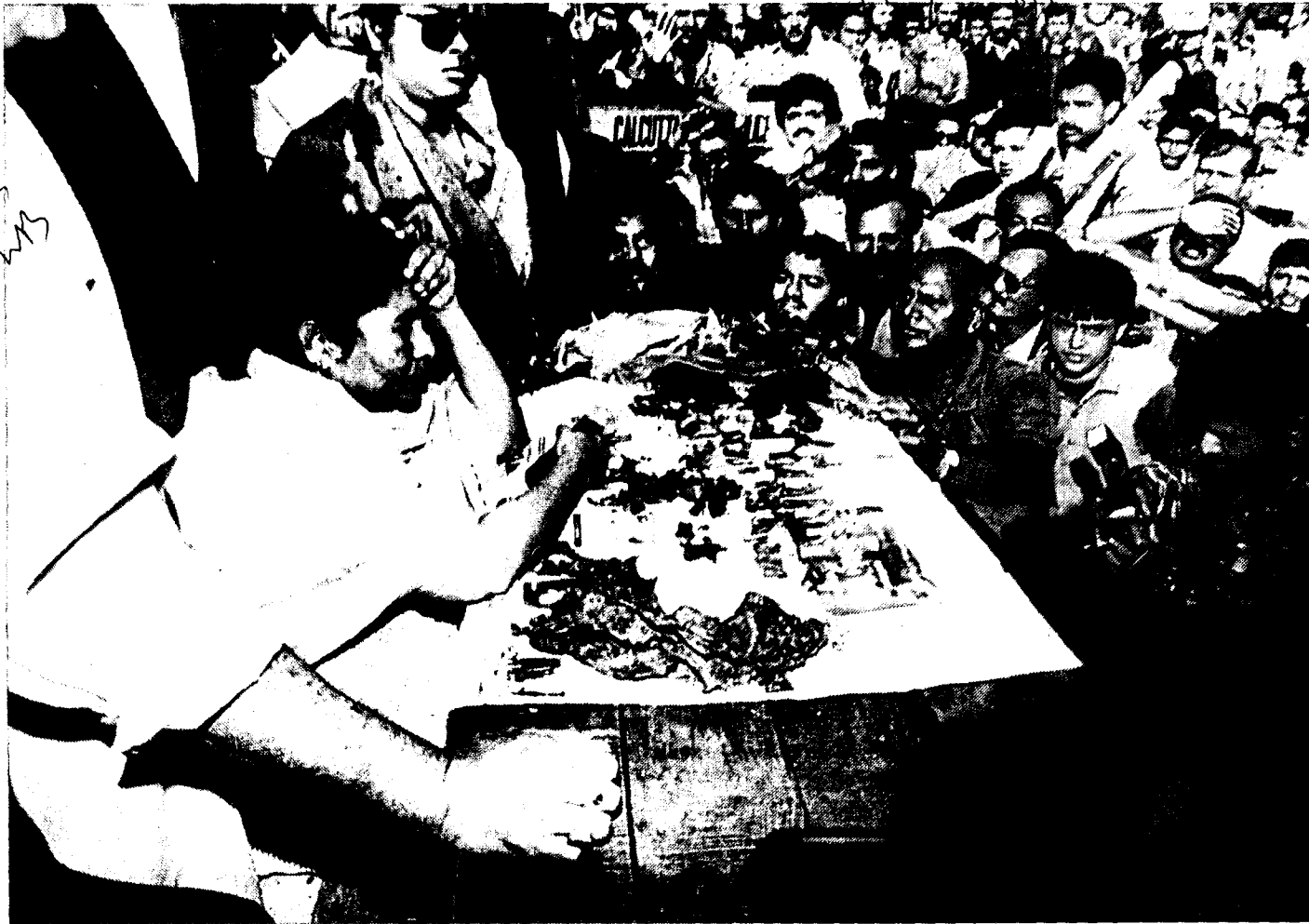
Under such circumstances the party had no other option but to demand imposition of President's rule.

She thanked the leaders who had visited Garbeta yesterday and supported the hartal. "The time has come for the anti-CPI(M) democratic forces in the state to get united", she said. Congress leaders including Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, Mr Somen Mitra, Mr Saugata Roy, Mr Tapas Roy, Mr Manas Bhuniya and Mr Sukhendu Roy had gone to Garbeta yesterday.

"After last year's Nanur massacre — in which 11 people were killed — we waited for months hoping that the situation would improve. But it has gone from bad to worse. Fines have been imposed on people in Midnapore and Hooghly for supporting the Trinamul."

She said she would hand over blood-stained clothes and remains of cartridges which brought from Garbeta to NDA team which visited Chhota Anguria this afternoon. The team would submit a report to LK Advani. Demanding a probe, Miss Banerjee queried why the administration had not sent any forensic team to Garbeta. Even after 48 hours, police didn't visit the spot, she alleged.

She said she would address a meeting at Palbazar in Midnapore on 9 January. She should know what the



Miss Mamata Banerjee looks pensive as she displays some empty cartridges and blood-stained clothes, reportedly collected from Garbeta, at a Trinamul Youth Congress rally at Esplanade on Sunday. — The Statesman

Toppling LF govt not easy, says CM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PURULIA, Jan. 7. — Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya today said it would not be easy for the Centre to topple his government. He reiterated his charge that the Trinamul Congress was spreading violence in the state.

The chief minister was speaking at a rally at the Manbhumi Sports Association Stadium in Purulia town.

The chief minister claimed all the economic programmes launched by the state government have been successful, thanks to a "definite policy" that the Left Front government follows. In contrast, he said, neither the Vajpayee government nor the Congress or the Trinamul has any policy.

Earlier in the day, Mr Bhattacharya inaugurated a new building of Michael Madhusudan College at Kashipur in the district. He said the government would extend all possible help to revamp the district's education system.

He also inaugurated a horticulture and floriculture development project at Vivekananda nagar (Bongabari). The Rs 10 crore-project is launched by the state government and Israel. Similar projects will come up at Barjora (Bankura) and Jhargram (Midnapore), the chief minister said.

Ten held: Ten people, reportedly Trinamul supporters, were arrested from near Cossipore palace for trying to show black flag to Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya. Two persons were injured when police lathicharged the demonstrators.

PCC CHIPS IN WITH SIT-IN PLAN OUTSIDE DM'S OFFICE

MIDNAPORE, Jan. 7. — The Congress workers will stage a seven-hour sit-in demonstration outside the DM's office here on 11 January, demanding a CBI probe into the Chhota Anguria "carnage".

Dr Manas Bhuniya, PCC general secretary, said here today that senior PCC leaders, including Mr Pranab Mukherjee, party's chief of the state, will take part.

He said Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, has a "transparent" image. So, by recommending the CBI probe, Mr Bhattacharya would have his "clean image maintained and remove misgivings" about the massacre from people's mind at the same time, the PCC leaders observed.

Dr Bhuniya alleged that the armed CPI-M cadres had prepared a blueprint in connivance with a section of police to wipe

out at least 11 home-returned Trinamul men in their night-long operation and remove the bodies.

The SP, Mr Gourav Dutta, admitted a clash between the two rival groups, but failed to say how many were killed on either side. He, however, denied of hearing any police "involvement" in the matter.

Meanwhile, even three days after the incident the joint police force of Midnapore and bordering Bankura couldn't find any body. The police conducted a hunt in the forests of Joypur and Garbeta, the SP said. Nor any arrest has been made in arson and killings.

Today, a six-member NDA parliamentary team, headed by Mr Bijoy Goel, MP (BJP) arrived here to make a study of the Chhota Anguria situation. Other members include

Capt Inder Singh (BLD), Mr Prabhat Samanta Rai (BJD), Dr CS Krishnan (MDMK), Mr Sanjoy Nirupam (Shiv Sena) and Mr Sudip Bandyopadhyay, Trinamul's chief whip in Lok Sabha.

The team will have a preliminary discussion with the district officials over the incident tonight before visiting the violence-hit village tomorrow.

Meanwhile, police have filed a criminal case against some prominent Trinamul and BJP leaders of Garbeta on charges of attacking the convoy of IG (Western Range), Mr JR Bhakat, last Friday. The SP's jeep and the pilot car were badly damaged and seven policemen were injured. However, the police superintendent was unhurt as he was travelling in the IG's car. — SNS

CPI-M is doing in the districts and how district administrations are helping the party to hush up matters.

She said though the party was against hartals, Friday's hartal had to be called as the voice of the people had been stifled.

She said after visiting Garbeta yesterday she was convinced that "bodies of those killed by

the CPI-M" had been removed from the spot and buried in nearby forest. "It is the CPI-M's policy to kill people and then bury or destroy the bodies. They did it with Bhikhari Paswan also."

The CPI-M has unleashed a reign of terror in rural areas and now whenever an untoward incident occurs, it blames the Trinamul, she said.

Her party workers were beaten up by CPI-M cadres without any provocation when they were returning after the Kespur rally on 3 January, she said.

She urged party workers not to be violent and fight the problem politically. "Be patient and maintain your cool and do not get provoked by the CPI-M", she advised them.

New claimant: The CPI-ML (People's War Group) today claimed that those "killed" in Garbeta were their sympathisers.

The party condemned the killing and described the CPI-M as a fascist party.

A team of the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights will visit the spot tomorrow.

Cadres robbed

KOLKATA, Jan. 7. — Some CPI-M cadres were robbed by a group of criminals at Balitikuri around 11 a.m. today. The cadres were on their way to a party meeting at Sarat Sadan near Howrah Maidan by a bus. Mr Pradyot Mukherjee, party MLA of Amta was heckled by the criminals. Nobody has been arrested. — SNS

Mamata shows bones but no bodies

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
AND AGENCIES

CHHOTA ANGURIA (Midnapore), Jan. 6. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today showed charred human bones, a skull and blood-stained clothes, alleging these were of party workers burnt to death by CPI-M cadres in this village. But she could show no bodies.

The state government maintained she could show no bodies because there were none. Miss Banerjee countered that the bodies had been buried by CPI-M cadres and police in the Jaipur jungle of neighbouring Bankura district.

The railway minister and Trinamul Congress leader plans to show the remains and spent bullets she collected from villagers today to the NDA convener, Mr George Fernandes.

A five-member NDA team will visit the village tomorrow. The leader of the team, Mr Vijay Goel (BJP), arrived in Kolkata tonight with Capt Inder Singh (INLD) and Mr Prabhat Samantaray (BJD). Dr C Krishnan (MDMK) and Mr Sanjay Nirupam (Shiv Sena) will arrive tomorrow.

Miss Banerjee called for the dismissal of the chief minister, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, who she claimed was "involved in the conspiracy", and imposition of President's Rule in West Bengal. The demand was echoed by former WBPC chief Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and Somen Mitra and senior party leader Manas Bhunia, who called on the Trinamul chief at the village. The state BJP made the same demand.

Eighteen Trinamul supporters were alleged to have been massacred, by CPI-M cadres with the help of police, on Thursday night after Miss Banerjee's rally at Kespur. Mr Mitra and Miss Banerjee today demanded a CBI inquiry, with the Trinamul chief declaring that her party would have its own investigation and find the bodies.



REMAINS OF THE DAY: A relative of an alleged victim collapses on reaching Chhota Anguria on Saturday. (Below) Spent cartridges handed over by villagers. — Rajib De



At Bankura town today, the chief minister pooh-pooched the charges, saying a "massive" police search in Garbeta and the jungles of Midnapore and Bankura districts had yielded no bodies.

"Police have erased all evidence which could have been examined by forensic experts," Miss Banerjee told reporters. "I think the chief minister is involved in the conspiracy to remove the bodies."

She accused the district administration of not initiating primary investigation, saying the SPs of Midnapore and Bankura and the circle inspectors of Garbeta and Bishnupur "committed the crime" jointly. "Midnapore SP Gaurab Dutta is a criminal and he should be removed immediately," she said.

The Prime Minister and his home minister have been told about the "barbaric incident"

and a Trinamul Congress team would meet them soon, she added.

The Union home ministry today enquired about the incident. State home secretary SN Roy, who took the call, replied that police have found no bodies at Garbeta, but a house was indeed burnt down at the village.

The Midnapore SP said Garbeta police have found six empty cartridge cases from the house, which belongs to Trinamul worker Abdul Rahman who had filed the FIR, adds SNS Midnapore.

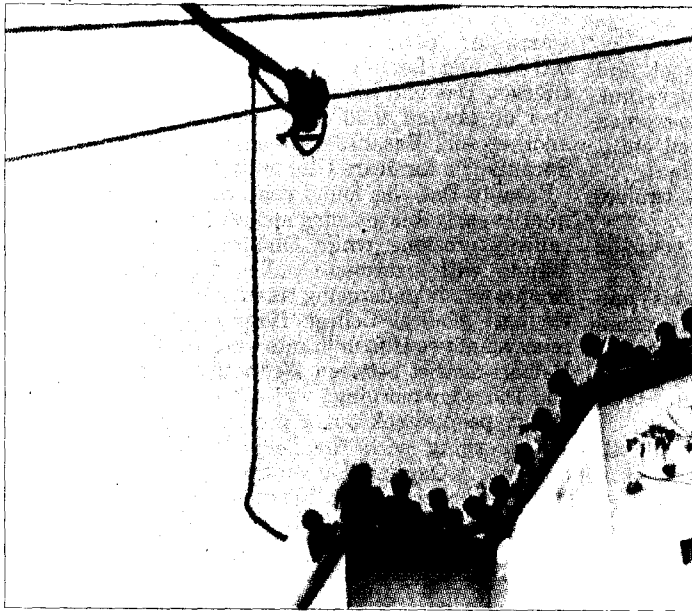
The SP said Rahman's statement during interrogation didn't match his earlier complaint. Grilled by police, Rahman said he didn't know six of the 11 persons whose names figure in the FIR. The six were from another village, he reportedly told the SP.

The five men Rahman knows are all wanted criminals in hiding, the SP said.

■ Reports on page 5

■ CM accuses Railways of collusion ■ NDA team to visit Garbeta

Hartal paralyses Bengal, sparks stray violence



The wire connecting a tram to its trolley ripped off by Trinamul supporters at Hazra crossing. — The Statesman

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Jan. 5. — Stray violence in parts of the city and the state marked the 12-hour Trinamul Congress hartal in West Bengal today.

The Trinamul today demanded the resignation of the chief minister for an alleged massacre in Garbeta last night. A NDA team along with Miss Mamata Banerjee will visit the area tomorrow.

Shops, private offices and business establishments were mostly closed in the state for the hartal. Attendance in government offices was thin. There was virtually no traffic on the streets.

Metro and railway services remained suspended. The chief minister accused railway authorities of participating in the strike. "In spite of our requests to run trains normally, the authorities announced in the first hour of the strike itself that services had been suspended," Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said.

Metro suspended its trains after police twice cleared hartal supporters trying to obstruct services. "After all, it is their minister who had called the hartal," the chief minister said.

Several people, including a 14-year-old girl in Howrah, were injured in clashes and police lathi-charge. In Calcutta and Salt Lake, police fired one round in the air and lobbed tear-gas shells.

The government, however, said the hartal had failed to bring the wheels of commerce and industry to a grinding halt. It did not have any impact in the tea gardens of North Bengal or in other industrial areas of

the state such as Asansol, Durgapur, Hooghly and North 24-Parganas, Mr Bhattacharya, said. But then he contradicted himself saying shops, business establishments as well as markets had remained closed.

He admitted that attendance in government offices was low. Only 32 per cent of Writers' staff turned up for work today. In the districts, attendance varied between 50 to as high as 90 per cent in Bankura.

Some 1,040 hartal supporters were arrested across the state for blocking roads.

All but three of the flights to and from the city airport operated today. Two flights to Bagdogra and one to Visakhapatnam were those that didn't operate, but because of poor visibility, officials said.

State buses and trams were run, but there were hardly any passengers.

■ See HARTAL: page 4



A state bus stranded on Hazra Road with a tyre deflated by Trinamul Congress supporters on Friday. — Bijoy Sengupta



Uncleared garbage on BT Road near Baranagar. — Shyamal Maitra



A young girl during her long wait for a taxi at Dum Dum airport. — Ashis Basu

■ More reports on pages 3 & 4

HARTAL: Long-distance buses badly hit

(Continued from page 1)

At least two state buses were burnt and 38 damaged in and around the city and adjoining areas. Two bus drivers were beaten up.

The ministers in the transport department, Mr Subhas Chakraborty and Mr Sushanta Ghosh, said state transport corporations plied 1,212 buses today instead of the normal 1,827. The worst affected were long-distance services. The NBSTC, which normally plies 400 buses, deployed only 48 today.

In North 24-Parganas, police fired two rounds in the air and resorted to lathi-charge to disperse hartal supporters. 10 people were injured in clashes across the

district, nine were arrested.

In Habra, Mr Tarak Das, Trinamul councillor, was allegedly beaten up by CPI-M cadres when he prevented some municipality staff from entering the office.

Keya Chatterjee, a class IX student of Howrah, was injured when CPI-M and Trinamul workers clashed with bombs at Baistampara in Shibpur. Trinamul workers hurled bombs on a CPI-M procession in Liluah and at workers who had come for work at Ludlo Jute Mill at Chengail.

Police fired tear-gas shells to disperse warring CPI-M and Trinamul men at Shyambazar crossing and fired one round in Salt Lake to disperse hartal supporters. The Trinamul councillor of ward 126, Mr Shyamadas Roy, was admitted to hospital

with head injury after a clash with CPI-M men at Shakherbazar.

Over 300 Trinamul workers led by Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay were arrested at Esplanade for violating law. Trinamul men burnt an effigy of the chief minister at Moulali crossing.

Mr Arup Biswas, councillor of ward 81, was injured while leading a procession. He alleged that acting DC (South) Mr Jayanta Basu had kicked him in his stomach. Mr Basu denied this, saying it was not possible to kick a councillor in presence of 2,000 men.

Tension prevailed at Hazra when Mr Prasanta Sur, former state health minister rode in on a state bus with cadres. Trinamul workers deflated the tyres and damaged the window panes of the bus.

THE STATESMAN

6 JAN 2001

18 massacred in Garbeta, says Trinamul

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA/GARBETA, Jan. 5. — The Trinamul Congress today alleged CPI-M cadres burnt alive 18 party workers, including four children, at Garbeta last night. The district BJP president, Mr Ram Prasad Tewari, however, said 11 Trinamul workers were killed.

Police could not confirm the killings as no body was found till this evening, though the SP, Mr Gourav Datta, admitted that 11 people were reported to be missing.

The chief minister said one Abdul Rahman had filed a complaint at Garbeta police station that his house at Choto Angeria village had been set on fire. However, no body could be found in the house or anywhere in the village, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said.

The I-G (South Bengal) has been asked to visit the spot.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee, chairman of Trinamul's policy-making committee, said armed CPI-M cadres had attacked the house of Abdul Rahman, a Trinamul leader, where some party workers had taken shelter. The cadres locked the house from outside, threw bombs on it and set it on fire.

Mr Banerjee identified 11 of those allegedly killed: Muktan Khan (20), Haider Khan (30), Rafique Mullick (36), Rabiul Hangil (28), Ema Haque Mondol (20), Enamul (18), Kajal (19), Shyam Patra (19), Amal Mulick (18), Umed (20) and Sattar (22). Four children who tried to escape were shot at and thrown into the burning house, he alleged.

He said the district administration was trying to bury the bodies. The party has sought the Union home secretary's intervention to ensure that a post-mortem is conducted on the bodies.

The district BJP chief, Mr Tewari, said about 60 armed CPI-M men attacked the house around 10.30 p.m., when 17 Trinamul workers were having dinner. While six people, including Rahman, managed to escape, the rest were killed, he said.

A police team traced Rahman's wife and his six children at a village bordering Bankura.

Nizam Khan, Rahman's neighbour, said the attack continued till 4 a.m. He claimed to have seen a headless body being dragged away. Mrs Rafika Mondal, who came to her father's house at the village, claimed she had seen some bodies outside Rahman's house which were later carried away towards Jaipur in Bankura through Baintal village.

At 3 p.m. today, smoke was billowing from what remained of Rahman's house. Drops of blood could be seen at three places outside the house.

■ See KILLINGS: page 4

THE STATESMAN

5 JAN 2001

KILLINGS:

(Continued from page 1)

The DSP (administration), Mr Aok Saha, said: "The blood has to be examined to ascertain whether it was a man's or an animal's. But no body or limb was found."

Miss Mamata Banerjee has informed the Prime Minister and the defence minister, Mr George Fernandes, about the Garbeta incident over phone. Mr Pankaj Banerjee has demanded the chief minister's resignation.

"Mr Bhattacharya has no more right to continue as chief minister when his government has failed to provide security to the people," he said.

Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, said he was not aware of the reported killing of Trinamul workers in Garbeta. He said CPI-M cadres had been told not to touch "common people. But, if Trinamul men set ablaze their homes, people are bound to retaliate. The party is responsible for whatever happened today."

THE STATESMAN

JAN 2001

Trinamul says 18 supporters killed, CPM denies charge

The Times of India News Service and Agencies

KOLKATA: The Trinamul Congress on Friday accused the CPM, which heads the ruling Left Front in West Bengal, of "burning" alive 18 of its supporters and "hatching a conspiracy to hide the bodies". It added that the state's law and order machinery had collapsed and West Bengal was a fit case for imposing President's Rule.

However, the state government has stoutly denied the Trinamul's allegations and claimed that the

person whose house had allegedly been set on fire as well as all his family members were alive and secure. The district magistrates of Midnapore and adjoining Bankura district said a house had been burnt in Chotoanguria village but the police had still not found any trace of bodies or any evidence of anyone being burnt alive.

While the confusion over the incident continued, a 12-hour statewide strike, called by the Trinamul Congress to protest an alleged attack by the CPM on its party chief Mamata Banerjee at Keshpur on Wednesday, paralysed normal life in West Bengal on Friday. The strike received the support of the Congress and the BJP. However, with the ruling Left Front opposing it, violent incidents were reported from a number of places.

The confusion about the "killings" was confounded by the conflicting reports and names furnished by Trinamul leaders in the city. Ms Banerjee, reportedly suffering from high fever, remained confined to her room throughout the day, but other party leaders briefed newsmen and furnished vivid details of the 'carnage'.

However, they added, information from the village—55 km from Midnapore town and about 200 km from Kolkata—was hard to come by and said that details would be available only on Saturday when an NDA fact-finding team was likely to visit Midnapore. The team is likely to be led by Union defence minister George Fernandes and Ms

Banerjee.

Providing "details" of the incident, Trinamul leader Pankaj Banerjee claimed that past midnight, some armed CPM cadres had surrounded the house of one Abdul Ghani Rahman (earlier named as Bakhtiar Mandol by the party), where 17 or 18 Trinamul supporters had taken shelter, and set it on fire.

He also claimed that four of the victims were children. The victims belonged to both the majority as well as the minority communities, he said. Mr

Banerjee also claimed that some of the victims had tried to escape, but they were either gunned down or hacked.

In a communication to the Union home secretary, the party has demanded that the "bodies" be recovered and a post-mortem examination be conducted. In a separate communication to the Prime Minister, it reiterated that the law and order machinery had collapsed in the state and that it was a fit case for central intervention under Article 356. The party also demanded the resignation of chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya. Ms Banerjee also spoke to the Prime Minister over the phone.

The chief minister said Rehman's house at Chotoanguria village had been partially burnt, but no casualties had been reported. "However, I have asked the inspector-general (of police) to go to the spot and make inquiries," he added.

According to him, "a rumour about an incident at Garbeta" had been doing the rounds since Friday morning. "The circle inspector and local thana officials went there but could not find bodies in the house." Rehman's family comprises his wife and six children. "After inquiries, the police found all of them alive and talked to them," he said.

An official of Garbeta police station said Rehman had come to the police station on Friday morning and had reported that earlier in the night, his home had been set on fire and six members of his family had been burnt to death.



Mamata Banerjee



B. Bhattacharya

Trinamul calls hartal today, will not stop office-goers

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Jan. 4. — The Trinamul Congress has called a 12-hour dawn-to-dusk hartal tomorrow in protest against "deteriorating law and order" in the state and "atrocities" of CPI-M cadres in rural Bengal.

Party workers have been asked not to stop office-goers, meetings and processions will be held to "request" people to participate in the hartal, said Mr Pankaj Banerjee, chairman of the Trinamul's policy making committee.

He said though the Trinamul was against 'bandhs', it had to call a 'hartal' tomorrow as the CPI-M had taken away the democratic rights of the people. "In such a situation, a hartal is the only way to voice popular discontent."

The Trinamul leader said people had lost faith in police. He said nearly 1,000 Trinamul supporters were injured when armed CPI-M cadres attacked them on their way back from yesterday's Kespur rally, while 25 party workers were still missing.

According to him, over 200 vehicles, including his own, were damaged in the cadre attack. Not a single policeman was around to rein in the cadres, he alleged.

But the CPI-M state secretary, Mr Anil Biswas, blamed the Trinamul for yesterday's violence over Miss Mamata Banerjee's rally. He said Trinamul hoodlums from 'outside' attacked several villages and burnt down some houses. Seven CPI-M workers and 32 policemen were injured, he said.

Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said: "Those who indulged in violence are calling a hartal. I can't understand against whom. There was no violence when I addressed a meeting in Kespur last weeks ago."



Trinamul Congress supporters Mr Ratan Sarkar and Mr Monotosh Dey show journalists on Thursday the scars of Kespur the day before. — The Statesman

■ CM PROMISES NORMAL TRANSPORT ■ CPM TO MOBILISE CADRES

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Jan. 4. — The state government will oppose tomorrow's hartal called by the Trinamul Congress, raising the spectre of a bloody confrontation.

The chief minister appealed to the people to reject the call and report for work. The administration would take all measures to maintain normalcy and police have been instructed to "prevent any act of violence", Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said.

Mr Anil Biswas said CPI-M cadres would take to the streets to thwart the hartal, but would not be "provoked by Trinamul workers" as the hartal was a calculated move by the Trinamul to spread unrest.

The Left Front appealed to the people to

ensure that the hartal meets with failure. In its statement, the Front said the Trinamul had started its terror tactics anew in Kespur.

Buses and trams would ply as usual, while the railway and airline authorities have been asked to run services normally, Mr Bhattacharya said.

"We are trying to get Central government transport departments to cooperate with us — we will ask the railway authorities to run their trains on schedule," he said while enumerating the steps to counter the railway minister's hartal call.

However, the Bengal Bus Syndicate said all private buses of the syndicate and its affiliated bodies would be pulled off the streets tomorrow.

■ See TRANSPORT: page 4



Miss Mamata Banerjee with her right leg bandaged, at her Kolkata home on Thursday. — The Statesman

TWO STEPS BACK

The biggest obstacle to a new and rejuvenated West Bengal is old political habits of showing protest. Today's *bandh* called by the Trinamool Congress is one in a long series of protests called by various political parties designed to disrupt daily life and production in West Bengal. The state, if it is to have any future, cannot afford to have any more bandhs. No sensible person in West Bengal believes that only one political party is responsible for the violence that affected some districts of West Bengal in the recent past and again reared its head in Keshpur in Midnapore two days ago. Whatever may have been the nature of that violent encounter, it does not justify the calling of a bandh. Under the leadership of the new chief minister, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, West Bengal and its people were coming to accept a new mood in which work and enterprise had priority over all other things. A bandh will only serve to dampen this mood. Mr Bhattacharjee has initiated a new momentum of activity and adherence to schedule in the government offices. Today's bandh and the weekend that comes on its heels will upset the work culture that was just beginning to fall into place. The Trinamool Congress, if it is sincere about its commitment to the future of West Bengal, could not have called the bandh at a worse time. Ms Mamata Banerjee may earn for herself a few political points but her bandh call is a setback for the state of West Bengal.

Ms Banerjee can, of course, argue that as someone opposed to the Left Front, it is her job to disrupt and embarrass the Left Front government. Her job, she can say with some justification, is not to add to the greater glory of Mr Bhattacharjee. But Ms Banerjee fancies herself and is fancied by many of her supporters as the future chief minister of West Bengal. Therefore she owes it to herself and to the people of the state to show a little more responsibility to the future of the state. There is more at stake here than the scoring of political points and even a chief ministership. It would, however, be a distortion of perspective to blame Ms Banerjee alone for propagating the culture of bandhs. The art of bandhs has been mastered and overused by left parties: they have used it when they were in opposition and are using it now that they are in power. There are no reasons to doubt that if the political tables were to be turned, the left would resort to calling bandhs to protest against real and imaginary grievances. Whatever be their other differences, when it comes to articulating protest there is little to choose between Ms Banerjee and the comrades of Alimuddin Street. So while West Bengal enjoys another undeserved holiday, investors who were chuffed by Mr Bhattacharjee's new pro-industry rhetoric will have doubts about bringing their capital to this

THE TELEGRAPH

5 JAN 2001

Scores injured over Mamata's Kespur meeting

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MIDNAPORE/KOLKATA, Jan. 3. — Miss Mamata Banerjee's public meeting in Kespur today was marked by sporadic violence in different parts of Midnapore district in which at least 60 people were injured.

The Trinamul Congress claimed that Miss Banerjee too was hurt on her way back from the meeting, when a stone allegedly thrown by a CPI-M supporter hit her leg. Police, however, did not confirm this.

But the Trinamul district committee chairman, Mr Sisir Adhikary, said the party would observe a "black day" in the district tomorrow to protest against "the attempt on Miss Banerjee's life by CPI-M cadres".

Late tonight, Trinamul district leader Mr Dinen Ray claimed that a party worker from Barrackpore was shot after he got off a bus at Chhutargeria in Kespur this evening. However, this was not confirmed by police.

Mr Ray further alleged that the CPI-M cadres carried the body away, which is why it could not be traced till late night.

Thirty-five Trinamul Congress supporters, 10 policemen and five CPI-M men were injured in clashes in Kespur, Chandrakona Road, Kolaghat and other areas. Some houses

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were also torched.

Trinamul leaders, however, said that 150 of their supporters were injured. Three of them were admitted to SSKM Hospital with bullet injuries, another was taken to NRS. Two others, Raju Banerjee and Lokman Khan, were admitted to Bishnupur Hospital in Bankura.

Trinamul leaders alleged that CPI-M cadres kept many injured Trinamul workers away from hospitals.

Police fired four rounds at Trinamul workers returning from the meeting, when they allegedly attacked a police party at Kolaghat.

Midnapore SP Mr Gaurab Dutta said three police jeeps and a number of buses were damaged by Trinamul supporters. A wireless set was also looted from a jeep. He said the Trinamul men fired at police jeeps from their buses injuring several policemen, including the Kolaghat O-C.

On the other hand, the Trinamul claimed that party leaders — Mr Jyoti Priya Mallick, Mr Sanjay Bakshi and Mr Tapan Dutta — were forcefully detained by police till tonight.

Three Trinamul supporters from Salkia — Gopal Das, Utpal Jati and Krishnendu Ghosh — were attacked by CPI-M cadres. A bullet grazed Das's face, while Jati was hit

by an arrow. The attackers hurled a bomb at Ghosh.

Four Trinamul men were dragged out of a Bankura-bound bus at Chandrakona Road, severely beaten up and abducted by CPI-M cadres after the meeting. The bus was badly damaged and the driver roughed up.

In protest, Trinamul men gheraoed the Chandrakona Road police station. Rabindranath Nandy, Nayan Pramanik, Raghunath Ghosh and Sailen Bhattacharya could not be traced till tonight.

Around 6 p.m. the Trinamul carried its protest to the Midnapore-Ranigunj state highway and Ghatal-Sarenga Road, blocking both roads. The blockade was still on at the time of filing this report.

But the SP said the Trinamul supporters had provoked CPI-M cadres by torching six houses belonging to CPI-M men. Four CPI-M cadres were injured when they tried to resist.

Even before the meeting, Mr Dutta said two police jeeps were damaged by Trinamul men at Korongapota at Kespur. Six policemen were injured when they tried to disperse the mob.

Mr Dipak Sarkar, CPI-M district secretary, said the party would hold demonstrations in the district tomorrow in protest against the attack on CPI-M cadres.

40 houses looted in S 24-Parganas

DEBASHIS KONAR
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BASULDANGA, Jan. 2. — An armed gang looted about 40 houses at Mallickpara village in Basuldanga, South 24-Parganas, last night. But no FIR has been lodged till this evening. The villagers are just too scared.

Police said the villagers are unwilling to lodge a complaint in fear of another attack. They said only five houses were looted.

About 35 men, armed with pistols, pipeguns and daggers, raided the village around 12.30 a.m. They split themselves into small groups so that several houses were looted simultaneously. The operation continued till 2 a.m. They looted cash and ornaments worth about Rs 5 lakh.

While some men raided the houses, others stood guard outside, villagers said. They locked some houses from outside.

The men had their faces covered and

some of them wore caps. It is suspected that they were residents of the area.

Some villagers alleged that police arrived at 12 noon. There were no policemen camping when **The Statesman** team reached the spot.

Mr Asraf Ali Mullick said dacoities are common in the area, but last night's incident was unprecedented.

■ Photographs on page 4

One of the first houses to be raided was that of a local school teacher, Mr Abdur Kuddus Mullick. "Six men entered our house and held me and my six-month-old grandson at gunpoint," Mr Mullick said. His daughter, Begum Parvin Bibi, said: "The dacoits tried to snatch my son .. I gave them all my jewellery."

Mr Erad Ali Mullick, a Kakdwip fruit seller, said he had to part with his wrist watch to save his life. Mr Mujibar Mullick,

a pawn shop owner, was perhaps the worst victim. He lost about Rs 2 lakh in cash and jewellery worth about Rs 50,000. But police said only Rs 5,000 was looted from his house.

Mr Rafiqul Laskar, a trader at Diamond Harbour market, said the dacoits hit his brother with the butt of a pistol and looted Rs 2,000. The gang also beat up Jainab Bibi, another relative of Mr Laskar.

Salt Lake: Four armed men looted cash and jewellery, worth about Rs 15,000, from a building material shop at Salt Lake's BF block today. Two men entered the shop and asked the owner to hand over money. Two others stood guard outside. When the owner refused to give in, they threatened to kill him. The dacoits snatched a gold necklace from a customer before fleeing.

Local councillor, Mr Sabyasachi Dutta, said police had not taken any action though three dacoities were reported in the area in the past two months.

THE STATESMAN

3 JAN 2001

Govt cold vibes for Kolkata

Saugata Roy
Kolkata, January 1

THE NEW Year is here but not the new name, at least not yet. The Writers' Buildings and other Government offices forgot to change the city's name today.

Though the State sounded Calcutta's death knell a few days back, the name remains alive and well. A Government circular had promised the changeover from January 1. The signboards at the GPO at Dalhousie Square, at police stations and telephone junction boxes spread across the VIP corridor at the Writers', all showed the old name. In the evening, a police van with Calcutta Police written in bold stood bang opposite the Writers' main gate.

Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta, however, spared little time for such trivialities. "The name has changed. We will hand the notification to you soon," Bhattacharjee said.

This notification had asked all Government organisations, directorates, subordinate offices under the department of posts, the navy

accounts office and others to start using Kolkata from today.

The central dispatch section of the Writers', that deals with Government letters, were hardly bothered. "We haven't received any such circular. Even if we get it, the change will take some time. How can you expect us to do everything in a day?" a dispatch section employee said. State information officials were too engrossed with their problems to think about the circular. A Government order to transfer 10 subdivisional information officers to North Bengal grabbed their attention. They said it had come without the Chief Minister's consent.

An official explained: "The transfer order was issued though the Chief Minister had wanted it stalled. The information officer in charge of the rural section was unaware of it. He has submitted his resignation. So we had no time to plan for the name change." Information director Tarapada Ghosh was unavailable for comment.

At the end of the day, the city had two names: Kolkata—the ministers prefer it, and Calcutta—people stick to it.

Snag plunges many areas into darkness

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 1

MANY PARTS of the State, including parts of the city, experienced power cuts after a 400-kv transmission line between the NTPC plant at Farakka and the West Bengal State Electricity Board sub-station at Jirat tripped around 5.15 pm today.

A WBSEB spokesperson said that the 400-kv sub-station at Jirat is the hub of the board's distribution network and as a result of the tripping of the NTPC supply line many parts of the State were affected. However, supply from NTPC, Farakka, was restored within 15 minutes and from around 5.45 onwards the supply scenario returned to normal. Salt Lake, which receives power from the SEB, too went without power for a while although alternative arrangements were made immediately.

Reports said that power supply to the Metro stations too was disrupted. The CESC spokesperson claimed that the Metro Rail also has an alternative source that is triggered on to restore power with two to three minutes of a disruption.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 JAN 2001

Transport Minister sticks to his guns

State Cong treads cautiously on Mahajot

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 2

THE MAVERICK CPI(M) leader, Subhas Chakrabarty, today indicated that, after having raised so many contentious issues, he would keep up the pressure on his party instead of leaving it.

The Transport Minister caused a stir in the party by commenting yesterday that the current drive to restore work culture was a deliberate attempt to run down Jyoti Basu.

"I have said whatever I felt like," Chakrabarty answered, when it was pointed out that he was singing a different tune to Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee on the issue of work culture and enforcing discipline among the State Government staff. Would he talk to

the Chief Minister? "If he calls me yes", was the laconic reply. The Transport Minister was talking to reporters at the Writers' Buildings.

Chakrabarty was told that Jyoti Basu had said that he (Chakrabarty) would lead the party and there was no question of his leaving it. "He has said it in his own way. I have always been a leader and shall remain as I am".

Would he leave the party? "Have I ever said that I would", the minister shot back. Was he nursing any grudge against the party? "I am happy as I am".

Chakravarty said he did not visualise any new political equations emerging at the moment, thus trying to scotch speculations about his raising the banner of revolt to form a new party on before Assembly elections.

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 2

THE STATE Congress would like to cautiously treat the concept of grand alliance with the WBPC President Pranab Mukherjee saying today that the entire issue would depend a lot on various political factors.

Talking to newsmen here, Mukherjee said that he was against forming an alliance merely to oust the ruling party from the seat of power. "Such an alliance should be formed on the basis of certain principles," he said, sticking to the stand that the Congress would never entertain the inclusion of the BJP in the proposed alliance.

The PCC president, however, steered clear of any firm decision on the issue at this juncture. He also refused to react on BJP President Bangaru Laxman's recent statement that the proposed grand alliance would be meaningless without the Congress. "Why

should I react to his remarks? Our stand remains clear," he said.

Mukherjee refused as well to assess if Jyoti Basu's retirement would benefit the Congress in the coming Assembly election in West Bengal. "Individuals are absolutely irrelevant to us," he remarked. Recent attempts by the Left Front Government to ensure a work culture among its employees, in his opinion, carried little significance. "They destroyed the work culture and there has been no improvement," he asserted.

Replying to questions on Kamtapur agitation, the PCC President said his party would never support the demand for a separate State. "But when they focus on the lack of development of North Bengal, we are with them, since the pace of development in North Bengal has been very tardy. He regretted the Left Front move to stoke Bengali sentiments to isolate the Kamtapuris. "Such an attempt was made by the Front

when the Gorkhaland agitation was on and it does not pay", he added.

Mukherjee said that all the 68 newly-nominated AICC members from West Bengal at their meeting today authorised Congress president Sonia Gandhi to nominate 12 members of the Congress Working Committee and nine members of the Central Election Committee.

Altogether 56 members were present today, while six members, now in Delhi, conveyed their full support to the resolution adopted. Six other AICC members absent at the meeting were Ghani Khan Chowdhury, Ruby Noor, Sabitri Mitra, Nityananda Dey, D P Roy and Satya Bapuli.

The PCC president said they would go on a "jail bhoro" agitation all over the State on January 4 to protest the "anti-people" policies of the Centre and the State Government and the "misrule" of the Left Front Government.



PCC chief Pranab Mukherjee at a press conference in the city on Tuesday. Photo: Subhendu Ghosh