

Dolui pulls out again, lambasts Mamata

SUBHENDU MAITI
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MIDNAPORE/KOLKATA, May 9. — The Trinamul's Kespur candidate, Mr Rajani Dolui, today stepped aside from the poll fray for the second time in two days, saying he would not follow Miss Mamata Banerjee's instructions.

Mr Dolui said: "I've understood Mamata's gameplan. Yesterday she forced me to send back 470 Trinamul workers to several villages, including Jhantla, Sarsekhola and Khejurmani, in Kespur from the relief camp in Midnapore. If any of the Trinamul workers are killed Mamata will use the sympathy wave to her advantage and shout that democracy is at stake."

About 500 Trinamul supporters have been staying in the relief camp, set up by Mr Dolui, for those driven out of their homes by CPI-M cadres after violence erupted in Midnapore. "I'm now relaxed. It's a walk-over to the CPI-M," Mr Dolui said. He broke down while criti-

cising Miss Banerjee's role. All the 199 polling booths in Kespur are sensitive, and no Trinamul agent will be posted at any of them, he said. He requested the chief election commissioner, Mr MS Gill, to defer the polls in Kespur.

LATE on Wednesday night, Miss Mamata Banerjee lodged a complaint with the Midnapore DM against "CPI-M intimidation" and told him that Mr Rajani Douli will go around his constituency on Thursday, since officially he can't withdraw from the polls. A Dolui aide said Miss Banerjee was trying to save her face after the Kespur nominee criticised her.

On Monday, Mr Dolui had stepped aside from the poll fray, saying the CPI-M had let loose a reign of terror in Kespur and the law and order machinery had broken down. Yesterday, Miss Banerjee persuaded him to change his decision and assured him of security and logistic sup-

port. The Trinamul chief even held a poll rally for him. Miss Banerjee reached Midnapore again this evening. She'll stay there to thwart any CPI-M attack and will be back in Kolkata tomorrow to cast her vote.

Today, Mr Dolui alleged that about 500 CPI-M cadres, some carrying pistols, told the Trinamul workers to leave Jhantla as soon they reached the village. They returned to the camp.

Mr Dolui said: "I have sent a fax message to Miss Banerjee and the chief electoral officer, Mr Sabyasachi Sen. Trinamul workers in Midnapore are under threat after Miss Banerjee's childish instructions to me."

Miss Banerjee didn't visit the Trinamul workers in the relief camp, Mr Dolui said. "I sent her four fax messages on Monday to discuss the situation. But she avoided me yesterday in Midnapore too," he said.

Mr Dipak Sarkar, CPI-M's Midnapore unit secretary, was not available for comments.

■ Photograph on page 3

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Mamata and Left in dead heat

OUR BUREAU

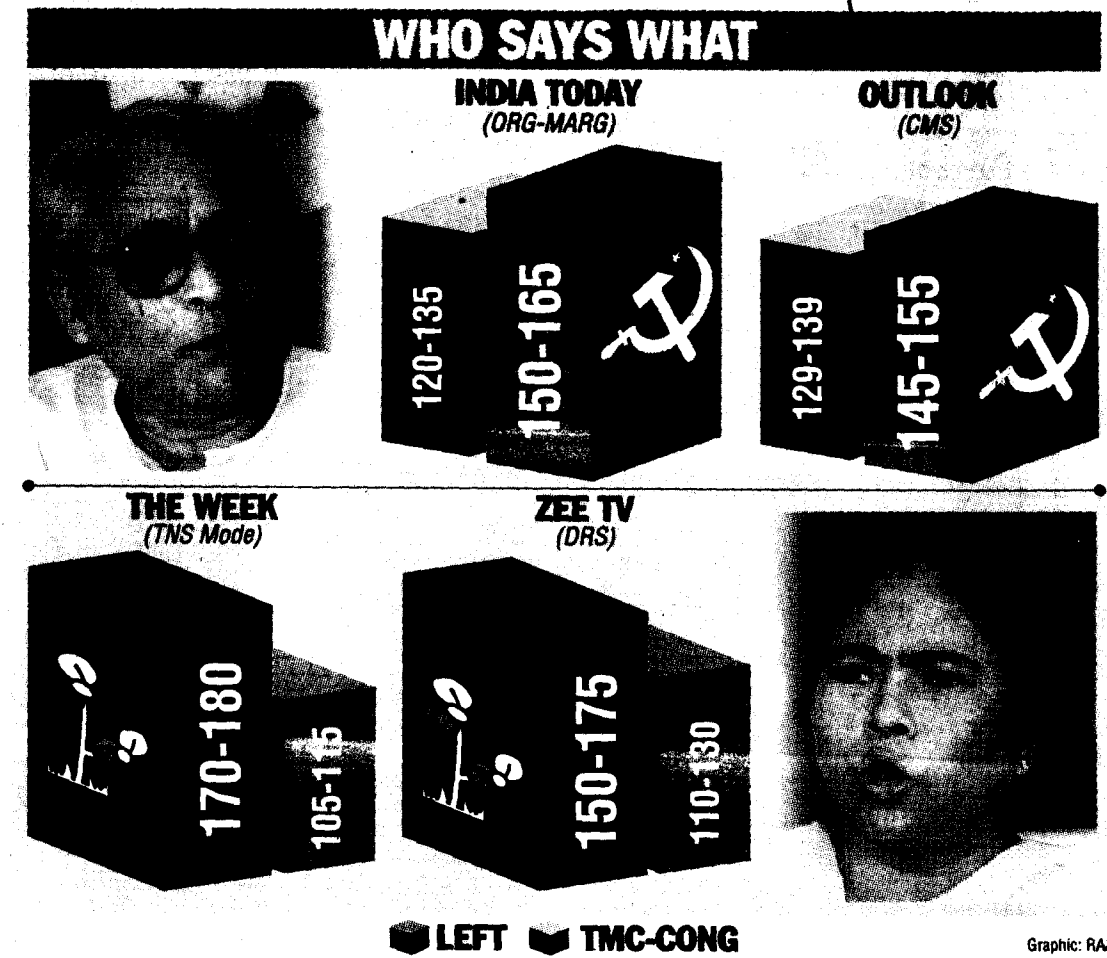
Calcutta, May 8: With Tuesday evening's thundershower pulling the curtain down on the campaign heat, the skies seemed to split wide open on whether Mamata Banerjee sails with the wind into the corridors of Writers' Buildings. She can. But never before in the state elections has victory and defeat hung on such heart-in-the-mouth balance.

It would have been easier to go along with the arithmetic if it were a numbers game and no more. In fact, that's what Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee hinted when he said, at his interface with the media this afternoon, that two ones do not always add up to two.

Adding up the West Bengal tally has been as difficult a job for opinion pollsters and psephologists this time. They, too, have been even-handed — with *India Today* and *Outlook* giving the Left Front a thin edge and *Zee TV* and *The Week* making it over to Mamata. Even *The Economist* of London plays it unusually safe. Mamata, it says in its latest issue, "has a good chance to end 24 years of communist rule. Most observers, however, think she will just miss".

The West Bengal enigma has even stopped Development and Research Services (DRS), which has had a stunning record of bang-on predictions of seats in 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha elections, from making it that close. In fact, a DRS survey has rarely kept the range of seats as wide as it has done for West Bengal this time.

The reasons are two-fold, says DRS director G.V.L. Narasimha Rao. One, as the roll of dice may not be fair, the percentage of votes, in which it has given the Congress-Trinamul alliance a 1 per cent edge over the Left, need



not be reflected in the number of seats. Second, there is a three percentage point error margin in the poll.

"You need to be lucky to get it bang on," says Shiloo Chattopadhyay of Mode, which has done the first poll for *The Week*. "Weather is still predicted but they don't hit the bull's eye everyday."

The problem with opinion polls, according to him, is that on many occasions people do not want to speak about their political preferences. "And we speak to

about 200 or 300 people in one constituency. In a constituency with several lakhs, that can be a very small figure."

Some others cite mathematical logic to point out fallacies. The argument goes like this. In an indirect election like ours, we are not merely voting for the party; we may also be voting for the individual. In popular imagination, the two might appear to be the same. In strict mathematical sense, it need not be so.

In the Chowringhee Assembly

constituency, for instance, the Trinamul vote would have an element of the personal Subrata Mukherjee vote. A different Trinamul candidate would have got the Trinamul vote, but not necessarily Mukherjee's personal vote. He or she may, therefore, get more or less than Mukherjee.

Mathematicians frown at the idea of aggregation. They would draw a parallel, for the sake of simplicity, with the game of cricket. Sourav Ganguly's India played three Test matches against Steve

Waugh's Australia this time. India won the rubber because it won two of the Test matches and not because we scored more runs in the six innings that we played. Political rubber, like in cricket, is won by winning the maximum number of constituencies, goes this logic.

If all this sounds somewhat complicated, that precisely is the scenario for the number crunchers. There is no denying, however, that Indian elections have seen yawning chasms between percentage of votes and number of seats.

This has happened in West Bengal as well as in other states. The undivided Congress in the state has polled 40 per cent or more votes in all elections except in 1977. But the vote share was not reflected in its share of seats.

Even in 1977, when the Left Front came to power, it polled 45.97 per cent of the votes, only 1 per cent less than its vote in the 1999 parliamentary elections, but won 178 seats. The Congress and the Janata Party together polled 43.35 per cent of the votes (Congress 23.34 and JP 20.01 per cent), but their share of seats was only 49 (20+29).

More than 1977, the spectre of 1967 is being evoked this time. With an unusually close call, some analysts predict, we may see the 1967 history repeating itself. In that election, the Congress was down to 127 in a 280-member Assembly and the combined Opposition — the CPM-led United Left Front and the Bangla Congress-led People's United Left Front — adding up to 133.

The Opposition patched up a total of 153 when Ajoy Mukherjee met Governor Padmaja Naidu with his claim to form the government.

But all this is footnote to the poll arithmetic. The text may yet be scripted the way Mamata turns her numerical advantage into a political lead on polling day.

Mamata push in decider district

FROM KUMARESH GHOSH

Midnapore, May 8: Mamata Banerjee wrapped up her campaign for the West Bengal elections from the Midnapore minefield which resounded today with the footfall of Central forces, inspiring confidence in her partymen.

Trinamul Congress' Keshpur candidate, Rajani Dolui, who had cried off the contest yesterday saying Trinamul supporters were unable to enter the constituency, jumped back into the ring at Mamata's prompting under the security cover of forces not answerable to local police.

Aware that with its 37 seats, Midnapore could well make the difference between victory and defeat, Mamata is camping here to keep attention focused on the district where, she fears, polls may not be free and fair.

"I have booked accommodation in a lodge in Midnapore till May 13, the day of counting. Calcutta is only a two-and-a-half hour journey from here. Any irregularities will bring me here at once," she said.

Underlining her stakes in the district, Mamata touched "the sacred earth of Midnapore, which drove away the British from Indian soil" and called upon people to shake off Left Front rule.

"You drove away the British from this soil. Drive away the Left Front now, which has failed to develop the state and has imported violence and terror. Start your second freedom movement here to drive the Left Front government from Bengal," she cried.

Sending Dolui back to Keshpur, she told him: "Don't leave the battlefield. Don't behave like a coward soldier. Go to the people.

Stay with them."

"I have talked to Sabyasachi Sen (chief electoral officer). He has instructed the district magistrate and the superintendent of police to go to Keshpur and stage a flag march. You take along your people and start campaigning for the last few hours," Mamata told him on the phone at midnight last night.

Mamata started for Midnapore after speaking to Dolui and reached the Rani Siromani Guest House at 2.30 am. Dolui tried to contact her again, but failed.

Mamata sent instructions to him to proceed straight to Keshpur and turned down his request that she visit the constituency. She also refused to grant him permission to share the stage at her Midnapore meeting.

Disappointed, Dolui left for Keshpur with about 1,000 supporters who had been ousted from their villages nine months ago.

Trinamul supporters living in relief camps at Garbeta, Sabong, Keshpur, Danton and Pingla also returned to their villages with police protection.

Addressing two large gatherings, Mamata came down heavily on police officers in the district. "All policemen are not bad. But there are officers here who are interested in their promotions after the elections, expecting Buddhhababu to be back in power. Remember that people will not vote for his government this time. It is we who are coming to power," she thundered.

The final warning was reserved for the CPM cadre: "This election is a fight between the people and the CPM. If you don't allow even one voter to cast his vote, you will face the consequences. I don't want to elaborate."

Graphic: RAJ

Dolui back, Kespur under CPM siege

SIMI KAMBOJ
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KESPUR, May, 8. — Less than 24 hours after "stepping aside" from the poll fray in protest against "CPI-M terror", the Trinamul's Kespur candidate, Mr Rajani Kanta Dolui, today staged a comeback.

But that has had no impact on the voters. The villages here are like any other in a backward rural setting — thatched huts, *kutch* roads, poverty and no electricity.

Yet what makes them stand apart is the silence that engulfs them. Watchful eyes follow you wherever you go. Faces are inquisitive but uneasiness sets in as soon as you ask someone a question.

The unwritten diktat is clear — "Don't talk to outsiders."

Chechura village in Kespur is terror-struck by the ruling party — though its panchayat consists of Trinamul members.

As a convoy of 10 vehicles carrying Punjab Police, CRPF jawans, policemen, the DM and the SP rolls into the village, locals are tight-lipped about the polls and law and order.

Sheikh Ariful Islam, a self-confessed Trinamul activist, joined the CPI-M after the "reign of terror." Shadowing the journalists, he will not let any villager talk to the reporters alone.

A week ago arms, including 17 single-barrel guns, 180 rounds of ammunition and cartridges were seized from the village and 51 people arrested.

Ask the locals who was responsible and, under the watchful eyes of CPI-M cadres, they manage to say only one word — "Trinamul".

Sheikh Md Ali, an octogenarian of Sasageria village, is so edgy that he dare not open his mouth even as a local CPI-M activist prompts him to say something

complimentary about the party. The cadre then declare that villagers are scared because Trinamul workers have struck terror in the area.

Asked whether she'll cast her vote, Jamila Begum says: "Bhot to diteyi hobey." Asked to elaborate, she runs inside her hut.

All this in the presence of police officers and peace-keeping forces. The convoy today undertook a march from Midnapore town to patrol sensitive areas - Sasageria, Neradeul, Mogra, Biswanathpur, Gopinathpur, Sarai and Saloidha in Kespur and Garbeta.

Fifty-four booths have been declared "sensitive" in Kespur and will be patrolled by paramilitary forces. Two companies of BSF and CRPF have already been deployed here.

However, the forces do not seem happy with their role. "We are taken around in circles every time in the name of patrolling," says a Punjab Police commando. "This can hardly be called patrolling. Leave the exercise entirely to us and we'll show what patrolling is all about", says another.

There have been rumours of paramilitary forces being unhappy about the release of some criminals who were earlier nabbed with arms by these agencies.

A lone Trinamul flag flutters in Jamtala market while the entire constituency is alive with flags and banners of the ruling CPI-M. Virtually every structure in Kespur sports a red flag but that of the main opposition party is absent.

The Trinamul office in Kespur town is a ramshackle and abandoned structure while the CPI-M's double-storeyed office has been freshly painted and has front garden.

Responding to questions on the virtual absence of Trinamul in Kespur, the DM Mr MV Rao, says Mr Rajani Dolui, the party's

candidate, had campaigned freely in his constituency till the end of April. After 51 people were arrested in Kespur during the arms haul, he stopped his campaign pleading ill-health. He, however, phoned Mr Rao this morning to say that he was in the fray.

Mr Dolui says, "I'm concerned because only 30 booths on the main road are being patrolled and the rest ignored. I was harassed during campaign. I changed my decision after the DM assured me a free and fair poll".

Mr Dolui began his campaign today taking with him 206 party activists living mostly in the four camps in Midnapore town to rehabilitate them in their villages in Kespur.

Miss Mamata Banerjee, Trinamul chief, today rushed to Midnapore and assured the electorate that all three Trinamul candidates from Kespur, Garbeta (east) and Midnapore would contest despite the CPM's strong-arm tactics.

She urged the electorate to be patient because the ruling party may create a lot of trouble for her supporters.

She said the 51 people held in Kespur were "innocent Trinamul workers", who were framed. She demanded their release or else, "no Trinamul polling agent will report for duty on 10 May."

But the administration countered saying 40 of the 51 people held had warrants against them for murder, arson and rioting.

The CPI-M is confident of increasing its margin in Kespur this time. Along with Chechura, Sasageria and Larageria villages are panic-stricken too. Two other villages, Sorni and Chhutargeria, have allegedly turned into arms-manufacturing units.

As the polls near, Kespur, villagers say, has almost turned to "Sheshpur" (Waterloo)



Securitymen patrol a Kespur village in Midnapore on Tuesday. — Sailendra Mal (More poll reports on pages 3, 4, 5 and 6)

State on warpath against EC

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 8. — Throwing Election Commission directives to the winds, the state administration won't deploy Central forces in sensitive areas on 10 May.

They will be either kept "on reserve" at police stations or tagged with "mobile patrols" of the state police. Observers today told the CEO, Mr Sabyasachi Sen, that Central forces should be posted inside sensitive booths in Midnapore, Bankura and Hooghly.

According to the arrangement manual available with the police, the CRPF and other Central forces are neither being deployed inside polling booths nor near them.

In Kolkata, Central forces will either be tagged with deputy commissioners in charge of a sector or with heavy radio flying squads. Constables "with lathis" will guard the booths. Though most polling stations in Kolkata have more than two booths, only one constable of Calcutta Armed Police will be posted in each station.

Like previous years, Central forces kept in "re-

serve" will be used in the event of an emergency. An inspector will be in charge of a polling premise with more than six booths and a premise with less booths will be monitored by a sub-inspector.

An officer, in charge of a Motishil Free College on Central Avenue in 1999 parliamentary elections, admitted that it's almost impossible for one officer to monitor six booths.

In the last elections, an inspector had instructed a constable to allow voters inside only if they had voters' slips. But after sometime, said the officer, a minister came with a deputy commissioner and accused the officer of not "allowing in genuine voters." The DC reacted to the minister's complaint and all people were allowed inside the premises. "Soon CPI-M men captured some booths," the officer told **The Statesman**.

According to EC directives, a minister should not go to any polling station except for voting.

This time too, DC (headquarters) is not very explicit in his instruction about ministers entering booths. His instruction says: "Ministers are not supposed to enter the polling premises."

WHOSE WATERLOO'S IT GOING TO BE?: PARTIES ROLL UP THEIR SLEEVES IN THE FIGHT FOR BENGAL

Buddha, Mamata head for final showdown

Ritwik Mukherjee

KOLKATA 8 MAY

THE COUNTDOWN has begun for the May 10 polls. A bare 48 hours — less than that in fact — remain to decide who will win West Bengal.

The battle lines have long been drawn. As campaign ended 4 pm Tuesday, the strategy planning of the respective "armies" was being fine-tuned, the ambushes perfected and the field guns checked for battle-worthiness by the respective generals: Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee and ruling CPI(M)-led Left Front chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

At two very different places of concern. She at Midnapore, to provide the much-needed comfort to her supporters allegedly "bearing the brunt of violence let loose by the Leftists"; he in his own constituency, Jadavpur, where defending home-turf has suddenly become critically important.

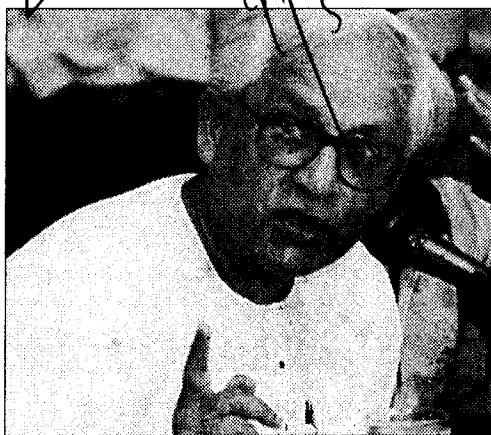
It was, in a way, a fair assessment of the poll scene. Mamata's chief concern is still Midnapore; the CPI(M)'s fabled election machinery backing the chief minister is none-too-sure of even Jadavpur where the mammoth turnout at Mamata's rally late on Monday evening only added to the CPI(M)'s worries.

This surely is West Bengal's most critical Assembly polls in a long, long time. It is also the one which is being monitored the closest. Whether it also turns out to be the bloodiest of them all, as many feel it will be, remains to be seen. But some 1.5 to 2 lakh security personnel will try to prevent unsavoury incidents in what could well be the Waterloo for either Buddhadev or Mamata.

If turnouts are indication enough of the results, Mamata has an edge in the campaign phase. If decibels are indication enough, the Left Front is certainly not as loud as it normally is. Mamata has stolen the thunder there too.

Alimuddin Street, CPI(M) headquarters in the state, is jittery possibly first time in the last 25 years.

At the end of a whirlwind campaign tour of more than 60,000 km across the state, Ms



A DAY AT THE RACES: Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee (left), state BJP president Asim Ghosh (centre) and Trinamool leader Sudip Bandyopadhyay meet reporters at the Press Club on Tuesday. — Mona Chowdhury

Banerjee sounded confident. "I know CPI(M) will unleash terror in some areas on polling day. I know they will adhere to large scale rigging in some areas. But mind you, there will be an upsurge in the rest of the state. And people will throw CPI(M) out of power".

Ms Banerjee's close aide, Mr Sudip Bandyopadhyay, was more specific. "The Congress-Trinamool combine will get 180-200 seats", he said. State Congress president Pranab Mukherjee and former

state Congress president Somen Mitra were also confident that they would come to power after 24 years.

The ruling party leadership says it "doesn't believe in predictions", but says it will come back to power with a bigger margin. Mr Bhattacharjee, at his last meet-the-press before the polls, went to the extent of elaborating on the plans and programmes of his government after the polls.

A "sure-confident-lock kiya

jaye" syndrome or yet another attempt at political one-upmanship? Difficult to say, but that's what the CPI(M)'s public face is. It can't care less for the Trinamool-Congress mahajot. In close circles, however, even Left leaders admit that their numbers could be less this time in the Assembly.

Almost all the pre-poll psephological predictions suggest that the West Bengal polls this time are destined for a photo finish.

Initially, it looked to be a low-

key campaign process, particularly in North Bengal. In the southern parts of the state also it did not pick up as it happened on earlier occasions. Political observers and parties had to keep their fingers crossed about the likely outcome of the polls.

However, the last lap of campaigning did change the scenario dramatically. Ms Banerjee, most certainly, drew the largest crowd in all her election meetings. A great deal of interest was also evident in Mr Bhattacharjee's campaign trail.

What was really surprising was the fact that Mr Bhattacharjee drew a much larger crowd in his meetings than his predecessor Jyoti Basu in the last few years. There are many even in Left circles who think with Mr Bhattacharjee there will be less worries.

Claims and counter-claims abound. Nobody is still sure of what the final outcome will be. But there sure is this very material desire for a change.

What sort of change? Do West Bengal's 48,690,870 voters want a change of party colour at Writers' Buildings? Do they believe that a Trinamool-Congress combine will be a better alternative for building up a more economically developed state? Or do they simply want the monotony of the Jyoti Basu raj to be replaced by a more dynamic Left Front team under Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, a team that will deliver instead of making promises.



PEP TALK FROM THE COACH: Mamata Banerjee embraces Madhabi Mukherjee, the Trinamool candidate from the Jadavpur constituency. Krishna Bose, MP, looks on. — Sub... t Pal

End of poll campaign a relief to the ear

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 8. - Campaigning ended at 4 p.m. today much to the relief of Kolkata. During the last few days of campaigning loudspeakers had blared at every street corner, violating the West Bengal Pollution Control Board's restrictions. When politicians could not make it their recorded messages were played out. For the past fortnight voters were subjected to sound pollution although the Calcutta High Court's Green Bench had directed long ago that sound level had to be restricted to 55 decibels. Moreover, many parties used loudspeakers after 10 p.m., violating the court order. Many politicians said it is difficult to follow the HC guidelines during polls. A PCB official said there were few complaints against political parties and the authorities are yet to take any action against anyone. Last week, when a CPI-M meeting was in progress in Behala, an old man died of heart attack. Local residents blamed the loudspeakers, which were fixed next to his window. The HC appointed special officer Mr Gitanath Ganguly said he too had noticed political parties violating the rules but residents were too afraid to complain. Mr Ganguly mentioned that

ABANTIKA GHOSH
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 8. - As West Bengal goes to the polls once more, here's a look at what the voter turnout figures in the state look like, compared to the national scenario.

Correlating the turnout trends with various factors yield data that don't seem to go with the national trend.

General Trends: In the 1996 elections, the national average of voter turnout was 57.9 per cent. In the West Bengal Assembly polls, the figure was a whopping 82.89 per cent. In Midnapore alone, 16 constituencies recorded more than 90 per cent polling, the highest in Sabang (96.51 per cent). Left Front candidates won 12 seats. Some of the narrowest victory margins for the Congress were also in these constituencies.

One hundred and forty constituencies saw a more than 85 per cent voter turnout; none in Kolkata. Left Front won 106. The Left fared worst in the city, winning just seven of the 22 seats. In only 14 of the 33 constituencies with less than 75 per cent turnout and two of the nine constituencies with less than 65 per cent turnout could Left candidates register wins.

Electorate break-up: The turnout factor is subject to the composition of the electorate. For instance, it has been seen that men are more likely to vote than women. Again, the more dominant sections of society such as the educated, the upper caste and the urban are most likely to vote.

The pattern scarcely holds in the state. Of the 23 constituencies where female voters' outnumber males, just four recorded less than 80 per cent turnout;

Do the figures reveal enough?

Parties' Position in West Bengal Assembly Elections

	1952	1957	1962	1967	1969	1971	1972	1977	1982	1987	1991	1996
Congress	149	152	157	127	55	105	217	20	-	-	-	82
Congress (I)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	49	40	43	-
Communist Party	28	46	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CPI-M	-	-	-	43	80	113	15	177	174	187	182	150
Forward Bloc	-	8	13	13	21	3	-	26	28	26	29	21
RSP	-	3	7	5	12	3	2	20	19	18	18	18
RCPI	-	-	2	-	2	3	-	3	2	1	1	-
FB (M)	12	2	1	1	1	2	-	3	2	2	2	2
CPI	-	-	-	18	30	13	35	2	7	11	6	6
Muslim League	-	-	-	-	3	7	1	1	-	1	-	-
SUCI	1	2	-	4	7	7	1	4	2	2	2	2
Gorkha League/GNLF	-	1	2	2	4	2	2	2	1	-	3	3
Others	48	38	20	88	65	22	7	36	10	6	8	10
Total	238	252	252	280	280	280	280	294	294	294	294	294

Others include: KNPP-17, JS-9, Bangla Mahasabha-4 (1952); PSP-21, LSS-7 (1957); PSP-5 (1962); Bangla Congress-34, PSP-7, SSP-7, LSS-4, WP-2, JB-1, Swatantra Party-1 (1967); Bangla Congress-33, SSP-9, LSS-4, PSP-5, JNDF-1, WP-2 (1969); Bangla Congress-5, PSP-3, WP-2, Biplabi Bangla Congress-1, Congress (O)-2, Jharkhand-2, SSP-1, JS-1 (1971); Congress (O)-2, WP-1 (1972); CPI (ML)-1, Congress for Democracy-1, Biplabi Bangla Congress-1, Janata Party-29 (1977); Congress (S)-4, DSP-3, SP-3 (1982); WBSP-4, DSP-2 (1987); SP-4, DSP-2, Janata Dal-1, Jharkhand-1 (1991) and DSP-2, SP-3, Biplabi Bangla Congress-1, Jharkhand-1, FB (S)-1, Ind-2 (1996).

none below 75 per cent. Interestingly, in 15 seats, Left candidates won with a comfortable margin. Two constituencies - Pandua and Kalna - with the male/female ratio is 1:1, recorded 85.52 per cent and 88.94 per cent turnouts. Kabirtirha, where the number of females per 1,000 males is the lowest, had one of the lowest turnouts (61.45 per

cent). Congress won the seat.

This time, there are 31 constituencies where the fairer sex dominates, in numbers that is. If statistics say anything, the LF won't be complaining.

Industrial: In 1996, the Left Front lost 22 seats and gained only two in industrial belts. In five, there was a turnout of more than 85 per cent. Workers whose cause the Left never tires of espousing don't seem too enthusiastic, do they?

Literacy: The educated voters' apathy is a nationwide trend; West Bengal, for a change, isn't an exception, though there are discordant notes.

Kolkata with the highest liter-

acy figure (81.31 per cent) has the lowest turnout (71.64%)

Cooch Behar tops the turnout list at 89.60 per cent. The district's literacy is 67.22 per cent, not much below the state average of 69.22 per cent. LF won in seven of the nine seats in the district.

At 88.2%, Midnapore is a close second in turnout terms. But the district also has a commendable literacy figure of 75.17%, making it difficult to draw a direct correlation between the two. The least literate district of North Dinajpur (48.63 per cent) saw 79.92 per cent people voting. Left Front won nine of the 12 seats in North and South Dinajpur.

The above data warrant at least one conclusion. The Left fares consistently well in rural, under-educated, non-industrial seats - preferably with an exorbitant "turnout". Will it all fall into a pattern?

A CHINK IN THE LEFT ARMOUR?

ASIM PRAMANIK
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NAGRAJOLE (Murshidabad), May 8. - Nagrajole, known as "Vietnam of Hariharpara", came across a flag, that doesn't belong to the LF, for the first time in 15 years. The Congress-backed Independent candidate from Hariharpara, Mr Niyamat Sheikh, yesterday entered the village to remind people they have a right to vote.

Mr Sheikh has the blessings of the Behrampore MP, Mr Adhir Ranjan Choudhury. He toured the village, but failed to gain an audience. None dared to attend his rally. Nineteen cars carried supporters of the Independent candidate from neighbouring villages.

The Murshidabad SP said: "Nagrajole being a sensitive area, adequate police arrangements needed to be made."

Asked about what prevented them from attending the rally, a villager said: "Only what is dictated by the Left is obeyed in the village." The villagers of Nagrajole had almost always maintained a studied silence.

"We've come here to rescue the unfortunate lot in 'Left captivity' for the past 14 years". Observers feel that with only an appeal to vote for candidates other than the Left ones can work wonders in the Hariharpara Assembly constituency.

SOME of the national issues which featured prominently in the 1991 and 1996 Assembly elections continue to be relevant to West Bengal's 14th Assembly election slated for Thursday. In 1996, parliamentary and Assembly elections were held simultaneously and the hawala scam which broke before the occasion became an important campaign issue for the Left Front.

But the Congress did manage to double the number of seats it held after the 1991 Assembly elections - a mere 41 because the BJP emerged as a political force and eroded significant sections of the anti-Left vote bank which, until then, had been loyal to the Congress.

This time round, the *Tehelka* issue has replaced the hawala scam. But the Trinamul-Congress tie-up, the main coalition of Opposition forces, has not been affected because Mamata Banerjee walked out of the National Democratic Alliance with her

Mahajot nonstarter boon for Left

Compared to the tirade against Jyoti Basu in the 1996 elections, the criticism against Buddhadev Bhattacharya is almost muted. The Opposition is seeking votes to put an end to the CPI-M's terror tactics in parts of the state and topple the incumbents at Writers' Buildings, writes TIRTHANKAR MITRA



Sonia Gandhi and Mamata Banerjee in Serampore on Thursday. —AP/PTI

party. So, the issue did not affect her political image. However, the Left Front candidates are harping on the issue as it would help label the BJP as the main Opposition force. This would, according to the Left thinktank, make a section of the anti-Left voters cast their votes in the BJP's favour and cut into the Trinamul votebank, giving an edge to the Left Front.

Senior BJP leaders have seen through the Left Front's gameplan. Realising that their party is now a marginal force in the state, they have called upon the people to vote for that party which can ensure the removal of the Left Front from West Bengal.

Seeing their salvos sailing above the Congress-Trinamul ranks, the Left Front has revived the Bofors issue, its main campaign plank in the 1991 election. For, the front knows the Bofors issue led to the removal of the Congress from power at the Centre for the second time since

Independence. No wonder, the Left Front, unable to stir the electorate over *Tehelka*, has again raised Bofors. Besides, there has been a subtle change in the Left Front's stance towards the Congress. Like in 1991 and 1996, the front is targeting the party as part of the main Opposition force. Ever since the Congress aligned with the Trinamul, the Left Front stopped referring to the Congress as a secular force.

In fact, the massacre of the Sikhs after, Indira Gandhi's assassination which had been shelved since the emergence of the Trinamul Congress, is being raised now.

Though the grand alliance comprising the Congress, the Trinamul and the BJP has not materialised, the Left Front knows it can ignore the Congress at its own peril in West Bengal.

With BJP votes likely to drop, chances of success for the Congress-Trinamul alliance improves considerably. The

Opposition's gameplan has undergone a sea change this year, compared to the last election. Compared to the tirade against Jyoti Basu in the 1996 elections, the criticism against Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya is almost muted.

The Opposition is seeking votes to put an end to the CPI-M's terror tactics in parts of the state and toppling the incumbents at Writers' Buildings.

The Left Front's campaign managers claim that Mr Bhattacharya's elevation to the chief minister's post is the first sign of change for the better. To counter charges of terror tactics, the Left thinktank is harking back to the bloodbath of the 1970s.

Only too aware that apart from land reforms, the two-decade-long Left rule has not ushered in major improvements in education, health and industry, it is, indeed, treading on thin ice. The Left leaders are clearly apprehensive after the results of the 1999 parliamentary elections.

The Opposition secured 53 per cent votes. The rest went to the Left Front. With the Trinamul securing about 37 per cent and Congress 13.5 per cent of the votes, fractured unity of the Opposition forces led to the victory of the Left Front candidates in 29 seats.

Though the Congress and the Trinamul votes are likely to be consolidated in the Opposition's kitty, there are problems waiting to be ironed out.

Enjoying the blessings of district satrap Adhir Choudhury, independent candidates are likely to queer the pitch for the hastily cobbled Congress-Trinamul alliance in Murshidabad.

With ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury too busy to protect the political fortunes of his proteges in Malda, the position

of the Left Front candidates has improved in this Congress bastion.

The Left Front should thank its stars that the mahajot comprising the Congress, the BJP and the Trinamul did not materialise.

Had it taken off, it would have been a cakewalk for the Opposition which has been out in the cold for the past two decades.

(The author is on the staff of The Statesman, Kolkata.)

110-15
8/5

Panskura magic may not work this time

By Malabika Bhattacharya

MIDNAPORE, MAY 7. Two years ago, the Trinamool Congress supreme, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, created history of sorts by winning the Panskura parliamentary seat in a fiercely fought by-election. Her victory, which proved the pundits wrong, was no mean achievement as it happened in a traditional Leftist bailiwick. Flush with success, she extolled the Panskura line even though it meant striking terror, use of arms and capturing of booths.

In 2001, in an election which is one of the most crucial in 24 years, Ms. Banerjee is upset as she witnesses the collapse of her vaunted Panskura line, thanks to the popular resistance in the Assembly segments that fall under the constituency. Nowhere is the resistance more pronounced than in the violence-scarred Garbeta and Keshpur which armed Trinamool supporters had invaded.

"This election is a farce. They (the communists) are not allowing us to campaign in Garbeta and Keshpur," Mr. Rajani Doloi and Mr. Rafiq Mohammad, the Trinamool candidates for the two seats, said.

Mr. Doloi, who has won the seat in the past, today announced his decision to withdraw his candidature. He had been expressing his wish for some-time to retire from the election in the face of "the red terror."

However, according to Trinamool sources, Mr. Doloi decided not to contest the poll because he found it difficult to handle unruly party workers. Reports suggest that he may consider joining the Bharatiya Janata Party in the coming days.

Mr. Doloi believes that a section of local Trinamool leaders defeated the purpose of the now-botched raid of several villages of Keshpur and Garbeta on April 26.

On that day, armed Trinamool supporters tried to storm several villages of the two Assembly segments under cover of darkness but the attempt was foiled by an alert police and villagers.

Mr. Mohammad, 40, portrayed

by a section of the media as the hero of Panskura after Ms. Banerjee set the tone for adulation, is disillusioned too. "They (the communists) have let loose terror," says Mr. Mohammad who was accused of manipulating the election machinery, booth capturing, rigging and strategic use of violence in the Panskura parliamentary election.

The Trinamool Congress actually unveiled the line during the 1998 panchayat election. Distant places like Keshpur, Garbeta, Sabang, Pingla and Khejuri grabbed headlines for bloody political clashes, arson and looting. Overnight, faceless, nameless villages like Sarui, Balpai and Chamkaita-

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDNAPORE

la became famous and expressions like "combat," "surrender," "capture," and "musket" entered the local lingo.

Like many others in the party, Mr. Mohammad realises that the celebrated Panskura line, which catapulted Mr. Bikram Sircar, a former bureaucrat, in Parliament may have outlived its utility.

What has made his exit doubly difficult is the fact that he is pitted against a formidable candidate in Garbeta (East) — Mr. Sushanto Ghosh, 42, also a Minister, who is credited with the rolling back of the Panskura line over the past year.

As this correspondent witnessed during the tours of the violence-scarred region at periodic intervals, there has been a metamorphosis in the villages — from helpless tolerance to active resistance.

For months, fear stalked the areas as cars and jeeps zoomed in and out and unknown faces started having a free run of the areas. Extortion, violation of women and forcible occupation of Government lands, given to the landless under the land reforms programme, became a regular af-

fair. The panchayat offices downed their shutters and land remained untilled for days as the villagers would not venture to touch it out of fear.

"There is no point talking about Keshpur, Garbeta. No one wants to listen to the true story. A section of the media projects us as killers of innocent villagers," Mr. Ghosh told *The Hindu*.

In the past two-and-a-half years, at least 65 people in the trouble-prone areas of Midnapore were killed and 1,325 injured in violence. At least 3,696 cases of looting and arson were recorded and 2,105 people rendered homeless.

A study of the events during the past few years would reveal that the real story behind the violence lies elsewhere.

In Keshpur and Garbeta, erstwhile landlords numbering about 1300, inspired by the Trinamool's call to "teach the communists a lesson," came forward and took the lead in communist-bashing. They had a reason to do so — the Leftists had distributed nearly 45,000 acres of land to the landless during the past 24 years. The court cases created hurdles for distributing another 20,000 acres.

Mr. Mohammad, whose original home is in Keshpur's Sankua village, is a landlord and was a Congressman till the Trinamool came into existence. He runs a transport business in Midnapore town and lives there with his family. "I cannot go back to my village. The communists will kill me if I do," he said. His detractors, however, say he cannot go back home because he has created enemies within the Trinamool.

All things considered, Midnapore, the largest district in India with 37 Assembly seats, will be one of the deciding factors in the May 10 election. The Left Front has under its control 27 seats. Both the ruling communists and the Opposition claim that they will improve their position. If the collapse of the Panskura line is anything to go by, the Opposition has apparently set for itself too tall a target.

THE HINDU

8 MAY 2001

Mamata's chances dim: Pramod

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 7

UNION MINISTER Pramod Mahajan today said he would not be surprised if Mamata Banerjee did not make it to the Writers' Buildings. He added that the Trinamool Congress chief had only herself to blame for this.

The BJP leader, in the city to campaign for his party candidates, said: "Winners look different and Mamata does not look like a winner... I would not be happy if the Left Front came to power but it does not look like Mamata can win either."

Mahajan tried to project the BJP as the third alternative and was optimistic about it reaching "double digit figures" in the poll tally. But he said the key to the Writers' Buildings would be in the hands of the BJP as a hung Assembly seemed inevitable in the State.

Mahajan said he has been monitoring Bengal politics for long and this time it seemed that the anti-incumbency factor "which was long overdue" would leave its impact.

He said that given the right alternative, people were eager to oust the Left and accused the Congress of not trying enough to provide an alternative for the Left Front.

Mahajan said with the Trinamool-BJP alliance an indirect mahajot was taking shape. "Irrespective of the Congress leadership, workers at the grassroots level and people in general were getting used to the idea." Under the circumstances, he claimed,



Pramod Mahajan with BJP candidate Sankarlal Jhawar at a Brabourne Road rally on Monday.

Mamata had made a "very wrong assessment".

If there was one person in the NDA who stood by Mamata through thick and thin, it

was George Fernandes and she chose him as the object of her wrath. "This is very ungrateful of her," he said. The minister said this would divide the anti-

Left votes.

Mahajan claimed that the Assembly polls would not have an impact on the NDA Government.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 8 MAY 2001

Trinamul's Kespur nominee 'steps aside'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 7. — The Trinamul's Kespur candidate, Mr Rajani Dolui, today "stepped aside" from the poll fray because of the "terror unleashed by the CPI-M".

Mr Dolui is the first person in the state to have "walked out" of a contest. Mr Jyoti Basu too had backed out of the contest for the Baranagar seat in 1972, alleging massive rigging by the Congress. But he had done so after votes had been cast.

Mr Dolui told **The Statesman** over the phone that the CPI-M didn't allow him to put up posters and campaign in the constituency. His offices have been damaged and polling agents threatened with dire consequences.

"It's impossible to contest the poll. There is red terror everywhere. Trinamul supporters are being threatened. The administration is looking the other way. If I contest the polls, no one knows how many of my party colleagues will be killed by the CPI-M," he said.

Mr Dolui has faxed a letter to the chief election commissioner, Mr MS Gill, apprising him of his decision. Copies of the letter have been sent to the Midnapore DM and SP and the state's chief electoral officer, Mr Sabyasachi Sen.

The CEO, however, said Mr Dolui would technically still be a candidate, for it's not possible a nominee to officially withdraw after 26 April, the last date for withdrawals.

CPM MEN FIRED AT

KOLKATA, May 7. — Police fired four rounds at a group of CPI-M workers at Mathpukur in Tangra last night.

The armed youths attacked police and ransacked a Trinamul Congress party office in the Tiljala area.

Nominee roughed up: Mr Ibrahim Mollah, BJP candidate from the Canning East Assembly constituency, was beaten up near Sarengabad, Canning, South 24-Parganas, today. —SNS

Mr Sen said the poll officials would do everything to address Mr Dolui's complaints. The Trinamul candidate met the Midnapore DM this afternoon to lodge more complaints.

Mr Sen said he had asked the district authorities to ensure that Mr Dolui was able to campaign and those who attended his meetings weren't intimidated. An observer was appointed for Kespur and CRPF patrolings had been intensified.

The observer had been asked to visit the relief camps set up for those driven out of their homes. Mr Dolui has complained that many of his supporters have been forced to leave their villages. Mr Sen said that if necessary, poll officials would escort voters from the camps to the polling booths.

Mr Dolui has informed Miss Mamata Banerjee too about his decision. He has written to her saying: "The situation here

clearly demonstrates that the election has been turned into a farce... (So) in consultation with the Trinamul leaders of our block (we) have unanimously decided to switch over from the election process."

Mr Dolui said the CPI-M, in league with police, had unleashed a reign of terror in the rural areas. Armed CPI-M cadres roam around on motorcycles and at gun points have snatched Trinamul supporters' ration cards and voters' identity cards. They have been pressurising Trinamul supporters and members of their family not to vote.

The condition of those who have agreed to become Trinamul polling agents is worse. They have been beaten up and CPI-M cadres have threatened to kill all of them. Trinamul leaders have not been allowed to hold meetings and all the party's posters and banners have been torn.

Mr Dolui alleged that despite complaints police and the administration have not taken action against the CPI-M cadres. Fifty-one Trinamul workers were arrested on 29 April. More than 1,000 party supporters were still living in the camps and the administration hadn't taken any initiative to bring them back to home.

He said he had sent several faxes to Mr Gill, asking for more securitymen for Kespur.

"But no step has been taken either by Mr Gill or the CEO to restore peace."

■ See KESPUR: page 4

THE STATESMAN

11-10 Doubts about Didi

A week, the cliché goes, is a long time in politics. It can also often be quite cruelly decisive. This is particularly true of the coming week for the redoubtable Mamata Banerjee. As West Bengal readies to go to the polls later this week, Ms Banerjee must await its outcome with more anxiety and trepidation than hope. Even taking into account the notorious unreliability of the psephologists' art in this country, it is as yet far from certain if the poll results would enable Ms Banerjee to take that coveted short walk to Writers' Building. So what went wrong for the feisty 'Didi' from Kalighat in Kolkata? While pundits will in due course analyse the tactical, strategic and ideological shortcomings of Ms Banerjee's politics with greater prescience, two observations can safely be made on the basis of available evidence. First, and most important, perhaps has been a curious and highly damaging lack of decisiveness at the heart of Ms Banerjee's political strategy. Having reneged on the NDA alliance by taking the moral high ground in the wake of the Tehelka revelations, she betrayed a strange lack of conviction about her electoral prospects by attempting to run with the hare and hunt with the hound. To wit, she struck a hasty electoral alliance with the Congress and has run a sporadic campaign of joint rallies with Congress president Sonia Gandhi in tow. At the same time, however, she also contrived to throw the longevity of this alliance into doubt by keeping the door half-open on her possible return to the NDA fold should things go wrong at the hustings. In another politician this kind of ambiguity may be condoned, even valorised, as a sign of political shrewdness but for Mamata's constituency a great part of her allure is her heart-on-the-sleeve political innocence. She stands or falls with it.

The second factor which has hurt Ms Banerjee's campaign has been her inability to manage dissensions within her ranks. Ajit Panja's overtures to the Vajpayee government may have been a personal preference which she could not have done anything to prevent, but her total lack of influence in the choice of its timing — owing in part to her own high-handedness — bespeaks of a serious tactical naivety. From the immediacy of the campaign to the proximate future. Anything less than resounding success — which in this case would be nothing less than a simple majority or, at the very least, a position within credible striking distance of it — portends an unsavoury political future for Ms Banerjee. An outcome where the Trinamul gains substantially, which is certain, but not enough to form a government is ironically the least desirable denouement for Ms Banerjee. For the chances are that such a scenario will not only erode her authority, take away her carefully-cultivated mystique of invulnerability — she has so far not confronted a downturn in her political career — but also raise questions about her tactical and strategic acumen. In such an eventuality, Didi would do well to remember that neither the people nor the political class in this part of the world are particularly kind to leaders who fail to deliver after promising the moon.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 8 MAY 2001

Bengal's election campaign degrades dialogue to mud-slinging

The brash shall inherit

ASHIS CHAKRABARTI

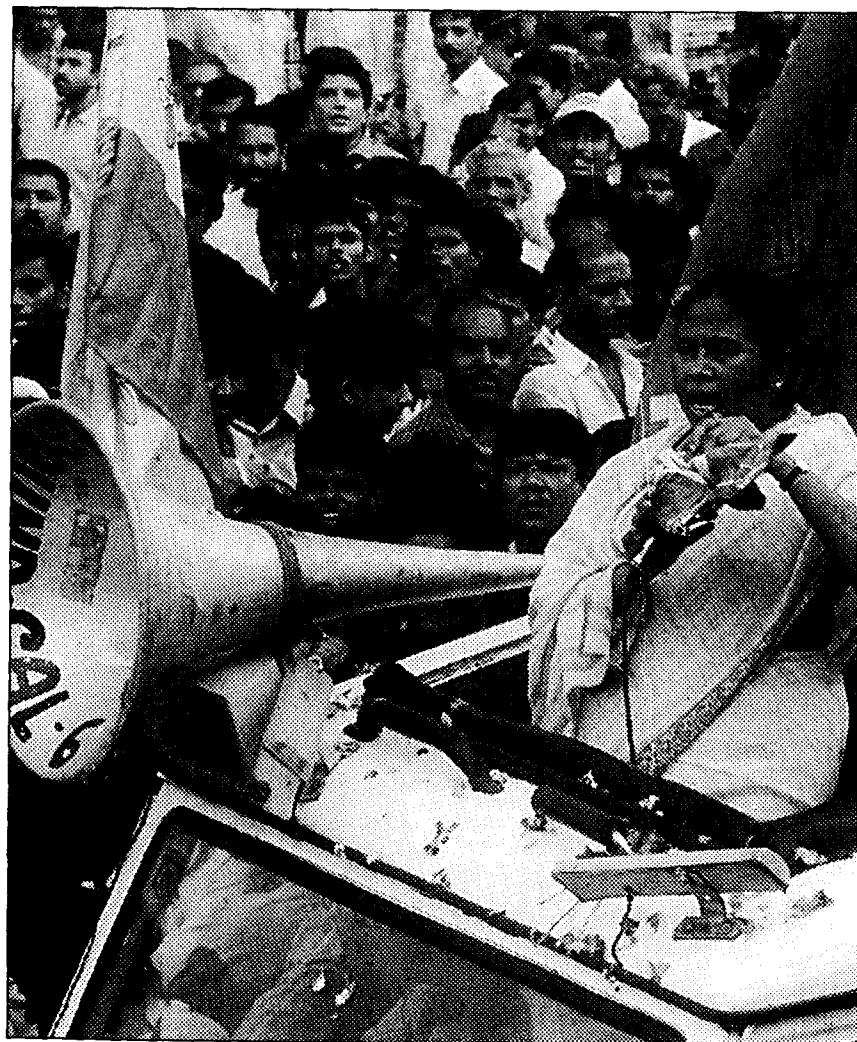
Democracy, it has been said, means saying the nastiest things in the nicest possible ways. The run-up to the West Bengal assembly elections this time has seen the poll rhetoric plunge to a new low. Such was the heat of the campaign that contending parties had little time for the niceties. Irrespective of which of the contenders — the Left Front or the Trinamool-Congress alliance — finally makes it to the Writers' Buildings, the campaign this time will be remembered as one in which dialogue and dirt were hardly distinguishable, when speeches often bordered on the vulgar and the lunatic.

One has only to recall Mamata Banerjee telling election rallies that if the Communist Party of India (Marxist) killed her during the campaign, she had left instructions at home that her body should not be cremated till the Left Front is ousted. Matching her rumbling was the state CPI(M) secretary, Anil Biswas, who accused Mamata of plotting a fake attack on herself and getting admitted to a nursing home to try and add the sympathy factor to her winning chances. Then there was Jyoti Basu going around calling Mamata a "420" (the old charge about her fake American university doctorate), which, in turn, prompted her to warn Basu of the 440 voltage that she claimed to be capable of discharging.

All this would be utterly ridiculous, if it were not a pathetic manifestation of the bankruptcy of political dialogue. Even allowing that the language of electoral politics, particularly in India, has often been that of petty village squabbles, there is more to the West Bengal campaign this time than a linguistic degradation.

The trend is ominous insofar as it degrades the level of political discourse to cheap entertainment reeking of rotten minds. The first casualties of this are decency and dignity of dialogue. But, far more importantly, it reduces politics to dirty chat from the serious business it ought to be. Such campaigning would try to raise a laugh over issues which could be matters of life and death for millions of people. The problem is that the people too are beguiled into laughing away what ought to be real issues for them. Politicians' antics would be no more than talking points over Scotch whiskey for the elite; for the less fortunate, these would provide simple fare for tittle-tattle. Over a period of time, inert minds would not be able to distinguish between the serious and the banal, between banter and a message.

We have seen this happen to politics in other parts of India. At different places, this has taken different forms. What passes for Lalooisms in Bihar is often plain and simple verbal thuggery. The point — and that is also the problem — is that he not only



gets away with those antics, but also convinces his people that politics is all about antics. In several southern campaigns, we had seen the unedifying spectacles of third-rate filmfare take over political discourse. In Uttar Pradesh, leaders like Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayavati have repeatedly taken recourse to farcical methods to get across their messages. The methods stuck and the messages mostly came unstuck.

That this has now come to West Bengal signals the demise of the *bhadralok* brand of politics. The exact connotations of the *bhadralok* — and the politics that has prevailed in its name — have long been debated. Analysts have been sceptical about the use of the term in understanding Bengal politics. One view is that in attempting to explain everything it explains nothing. And, of course, the Bengali *bhadralok* identity transformed itself over decades — from the old *zamindar* to the urban middle class and to even shopowners and small businessmen in the middle income groups. Some analysts have argued that the *bhadralok* should actually mean the rep-

She may still have the *bhadralok* as part of her support base, but she simply does not need the *bhadralok* politics

resentative of the establishment and that the *bhadralok* brand of politics is actually the attempt to maintain the *status quo*.

Curiously, the first attack on *bhadralok* politics in West Bengal came from the left. If the left graffiti lampooning Mamata this time makes the point, its genesis could be traced to the United Front campaign against the Atulya Ghosh-Prafulla Chandra Sen duo in the 1967 elections. That poll campaign really marked the beginning of slanderous political mud-slinging in the state.

But, after 24 years in power, it is the left, more than the Congress, that has become the most recognizable face of

bhadralok politics. The left's call to change society and politics has, over the years, played second fiddle to the call to maintain *status quo*. But the history of electoral battles as well as social upheavals has repeatedly showed that status quoists can be as ruthless and as unscrupulous as agents of change. The decline in dialogue is therefore matched by an increase in violence, verbal and physical. Hence the dumping of the *bhadralok* facade and the plunge into the abyss of unreason.

Mamata did not go through any such metamorphosis. She came on to the stage at a time when the Congress — the traditional *bhadralok* party — was forced to reinvent itself. Her success came exactly the opposite way — matching the Marxists in their words and action. Not for her the old Congress mantra of the middle path. Nor is she bothered with even trying to make the nasty look nice. Her street fights and their vocabulary, sometimes grotesque and raucous, are her medium as well as her message. She may still have the *bhadralok* as part of her social support base, but she simply does not need the *bhadralok* politics. The obvious reason is that she is the face of the anti-establishment movement. Hers is the mission to break the political *status quo*.

One might argue that there is no crying need to mourn the demise of *bhadralok* politics. But that is not the point. The point is whether politics will regain its desired discourse, whether dialogue will return to sweep the dirt tracks clean.

That choice is with the voters, who must also do their bit to make it the politicians' choice. But the uncomfortable fact in polarized politics such as West Bengal's is that party loyalties make ostriches of us. The voice of reason is drowned by the call of the vote and the vision of civil society clouded by the cannon-fire of partisan battles. A Mamata acolyte would therefore fume at Jyoti Basu's barbs at her, but would gloat over her theatrics. Politicians can afford to strut and fret on the comic stage, especially in election time. But the common people's life can only be tragic if it is reduced to the theatre of the absurd.

This is not even funny. In fact, there is something cynical about the way politicians on the campaign trail have made a mockery of the pressing issues of the body politic. It betrays a tendency to take the voters for granted, insult their intelligence and make a plaything of them. It is not enough to say you deserve the politicians you get. The voters must ensure that the politicians also get what they deserve. If they deserve nothing better than mud, the idea should be to stick them in mud. If the politicians have reneged on their task, the voters cannot afford to let it, and them, pass unpunished.

THE TELEGRAPH

8 MAY 2001

Sonia Gandhi at a rally in Behrampore on Friday.

Sonia's poll call upsets Goalpokhar Muslims

Archis Mohan
Goalpokhar (Uttar Dinajpur), May 4

IT IS said a week is a long time in politics. The Congress candidate from Goalpokhar Assembly constituency Deepa Das Munshi, however, might soon find 20 minutes can be longer.

With just six days to go for the elections, Deepa and husband Priya Ranjan Das Munshi must have thought the Sonia Gandhi meeting would put the issue beyond Deepa's opponent's grasp. However, what transpired has given Deepa's rival, Forward Bloc's Hafiz Alam Sairani, a new lease of life.

While the meeting was scheduled at 12.30 pm at Chakulia High School ground, Sonia's chopper arrived on the scene at 12.52 pm. By the time she left it was 1.30 pm and soon trouble started.

The qazi of the nearby mosque alleged that the Congress leaders conducted the meeting just when the all-important juma namaz was in progress. "They do not care either about us or Allah. If that is their attitude now I shudder to think what would happen after she wins," said Inayat Ali. He bitterly complained that he had come to hear Sonia from 40 km. "They could have been more sensitive and waited for another 20 minutes rather than disturbing the namaz by using the microphone."

While Congress workers led by Munshi himself tried to smoothen ruffled feathers, they conceded that it was an oversight that could cost them dearly. "This is obviously the handiwork of Sairani and his men. Seeing that he is losing the battle, he has been trying to create communal tension. But we should have been more careful," said one Youth Congress worker.

The constituency has 62 per cent Muslims. The Congress president's presence, however, again underlined how much the Gandhi suffix matters in Indian politics. Nearly 75,000 people



DEEPA AND PRIYA RANJAN DAS MUNSHI

had gathered just to lay their eyes on Gandhi parivar's bahu. And as soon as she got up to speak many in the audience started leaving.

"I just wanted to see her, what she says isn't important. She has the Gandhi name and that is important enough for me to vote Congress yet another time," said grey haired Ayesha bibi. Sonia criticised the Left Front's 24 years. "It is a time of crisis for this great State. It is a Government of tyrants who came to power in the name of workers and poor but have exploited the State and its people for the benefit of their party."

Sonia talked about the Left's failure in health, industry and even agriculture. "The only alternative is change," she said. Earlier, Congress Chief Whip in the Lok Sabha, Munshi concentrated on the BJP's communal politics. "There were five cricketers involved in the betting scandal, but all apart from Azhar were absolved. He paid the price for being a Muslim," Munshi said. "L K Advani wanted that people living in border areas should have identity cards. It was his strategy to weed out Muslims. I protested the plan. I promise you on this holy day of jumma that after the elections are over, just as I exposed George Fernandes, I will expose Advani."

Cong chief on solo run with 'new Bengal' pledge

HT Correspondents
Behrampore / Malda, May 4

SONIA GANDHI today promised Bengal a new millennium. A clean administration, headed by Mamata Banerjee, she said, would lead the State to peace and prosperity.

On a solo campaign run today, she addressed rapturous crowds in Behrampore and Malda. Alliance partner Mamata Banerjee was away campaigning in Cooch Behar. At both venues, her message was: "Show the rest of the country how a corrupt and anti-people Government can be voted out of power".

At the YMA Grounds, Behrampore, she read from a prepared text in Hindi. "Choose your own destiny. In a few days from now, you'll get an opportunity to uproot the Left Front Government and secure for yourselves an era of progress after 24 years of darkness," she said to repeated applause.

At Malda, she said: "It has been 24 years. The LF has given the people nothing other than violence, lawlessness, backwardness and corruption. Vote it out." Sonia was accompanied by Kamal Nath, Pranab Mukherjee, Atish Chandra Sinha and others.

Atal seeks change, spares Mamata

FROM SUNANDO SARKAR

Bulbulchandi (Malda), May 5: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee called upon Bengal to vote for change, but questioned the ability of the Congress-Trinamul Congress alliance to serve the state.

Vajpayee dubbed former ally Trinamul the CPM's "C-team" but avoided directly targeting Mamata Banerjee at his first election rally in the state today.

The BJP was not a big power in Bengal and would not be in a position to form the government, the Prime Minister admitted, adding that the party's role would be that of a "brake".

Change is the "crying need of the times", Vajpayee told the crowd at the Bulbulchandi High School grounds, a kilometre from the home of Tapan Sikdar, BJP's first minister from the state. "You have got an opportunity to change things," he repeated.

Vajpayee accepted that the Congress-Trinamul alliance was

the most formidable opposition to the Left Front at the moment and said he was "sorry" to lose Trinamul. But that did not stop him from describing his former ally as the CPM's "C team". Trinamul had joined hands with the Congress, which it had dubbed the CPM's "B team", he explained.

Vajpayee had his priorities right: he devoted most of his time to the Left, the Congress came a distant second and Trinamul, an even more distant third.

The Prime Minister struck at the Congress for teaming up with the Left in Parliament and fighting it outside. He said the Opposition was attacking him without reason. "They even demanded my resignation though I told them that I was ready to institute a probe into the Tehelka episode," he said. "But the BJP is in a majority in Parliament. Why should I resign?"

The Congress will not do well in the other states going to polls, Vajpayee insisted, adding that it was a declining party "moving fast towards its sunset".

"I still don't know why Trinamul parted ways with us," he said. It had made a mistake and would not be able to do any good for the state with the Congress as a partner, he added.

The Prime Minister echoed L.K. Advani in questioning the new alliance's ability to dislodge the Left but he was not as blunt as the home minister who had campaigned in the state on Wednesday and Thursday.

Mamata, too, had left it to Sonia Gandhi to attack the BJP during a joint campaign amid loud signals from Trinamul that it has not foreclosed the option of returning to the BJP-led alliance after the elections.

Though Vajpayee largely spared Trinamul, local hero Sikdar made it clear that for him the party was a bigger enemy than the Left. Mamata had betrayed a "god-like" Vajpayee, she was communal and most of her partymen had turned against her for ditching the BJP, he said.

■ Biswas fears violence, P 6

THE TELEGRAPH

6 MAY 2001

6 MAY 2001

Congress a sinking ship, says Vaipayee

the rally eventful by getting into a scuffle with Mr Vaipayee's security men. The commandos tried to prevent him from bringing the BJP candidates contesting from his Dum parliamentary constituency into the sanitised zone in front of the stage, and up close to photographers.

Mr Sikdar, however, prevailed. The candidates came up to the bamboo fence close to the cameramen and then sat in a row at the foot of the stage, within the sanitised area. Mr Sikdar introduced Mr Vaipayee to the crowd but did not give a speech.

Among the state BJP leaders who spoke were Mr Asim Ghosh, state unit president, and Mr Muzaffar Khan, state vice-president.

Mr Vaipayee repeated his Malda call that the people should elect a few BJP members who would act like a brake, "a small but indispensable part of the automobile."

Hinting that Miss Banerjee had left the NDA to win Muslim votes, Mr Vaipayee pointed out that he had won from Lucknow which has a large Muslim population. The BJP had also won from Delhi's Chandni Chowk where too a large number of Muslims live. Mr Vaipayee was asked at the airport whether Miss Banerjee would return to the NDA.

■ See VAJPAYEE, page 3



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee waves to the crowd at the Kamarhati rally on Sunday as Mr Ajit Panja looks on. — The Statesman (More poll reports on pages 3 & 4)

PM hints at Panja's return

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & PTI

KOLKATA, May 6. — Yesterday he dubbed the Trinamul Congress CPI-M's 'C' team. Today, he hinted at its defeat in the Assembly polls and a split in its ranks.

Addressing a rally at Kamarhati, North 24-Parganas, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said the Trinamul has chosen a sinking ship (Congress) as its partner; whoever tries to ride it will sink too. "Hum to dubey hain sanam, tujhko leke dubenge," he said mocking the Congress.

"Had the Trinamul remained with the NDA, we could have brought about a change here," he said. However, unlike yesterday, the Prime Minister did not make any direct reference to Miss Mamata Banerjee and was less critical of her party.

He instead chose to praise Mr Ajit Panja, who spoke at the rally, and focus on the Left Front's "misrule" and how the Congress disrupted Parliament's budget session over the Tehelka expose.

He hoped Mr Panja would "soon become my colleague again." Mr Panja had "perfor-

med efficiently in the foreign ministry," improved India's relations with several countries and spread the word of Ram by playing Ramakrishna's role in the play *Noti Binodini*, he said.

He also hoped that some more of Mr Panja's colleagues in the Trinamul might support his government. The Trinamul MP, Union minister Mr Tapan Sikdar added his bit to make

VAJPAYEE: 'We're trying to eradicate corruption'

(Continued from page 1)

He said that would be known after the polls.

About the Left Front's "misrule", the Prime Minister said at the rally: "The state's finances are in a poor shape. Investment has stopped, no employment opportunities are being created, curricula are being changed in undesirable ways and the path to development is closed. The dividing line between the ruling party and government is getting blurred."

In contrast, he said, the NDA government in three years had improved things on several fronts. "India now holds its head high. While foodgrain used to be imported, now there is a problem of storing surplus grains."

Pakistan's Kargil push had been thwarted and India had refrained from entering that country, though it could have done so, he said. The

Bangladesh Prime Minister had expressed regret for the Mancachar incident and promised to hold an inquiry, but "some people are trying to create a war-like atmosphere, saying India should use nuclear weapons."

The Prime Minister was critical of the Congress for demanding his government's resignation without waiting for the report of the judicial panel probing the Tehelka expose. He did not blame the Tehelka journalists because "they were doing their job" — trying to reveal the truth. "We're trying to eradicate corruption and are prepared to sit with the Opposition to decide on electoral reforms."

Mr Panja, who spoke just before the Prime Minister, said he was at the meeting to pay his respects to Mr Vaipayee, who had given him and Miss Banerjee a sympathetic ear on the state's problems.

He iterated that Miss

Banerjee "had not consulted anybody" before leaving the NDA and that there was no democracy in the Trinamul. "Who has left the NDA," he asked, claiming the declaration of the party's support for the NDA still stood.

He praised Mr Vaipayee for facilitating the Haj pilgrimage for a large number of Muslims. He requested the Prime Minister to keep the "Bengal package" alive.

Mr Vaipayee left for Delhi around 7.30 p.m.

Trinamul reaction

"We attach no importance to Mr Panja's sharing the dais with the Prime Minister," Trinamul leader Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay said. Dismissing his claim that some party MPs and MLAs are backing his rebellion, Mr Bandopadhyay said Mr Panja is "totally isolated in the party".

RES

All dressed up but...

Mamata Banerjee is likely to gain ground in the coming assembly election in West Bengal and pose a real challenge to the Left Front government. She may, however, still end up becoming a victim of her impulsive character

FOR THE ebullient Mamata Banerjee, the middle of the road might prove to be a very dead end. There is a distinct possibility that after the outcome of the West Bengal assembly elections scheduled for May 10 is known, the fiery spinster from Kolkata may become weaker even as her party emerges stronger. How can this apparent contradiction be explained?

It is indeed possible, as a matter of fact quite likely, that the Trinamool Congress would expand its support base in the state of West Bengal, which has been ruled by the Left Front for a record 24 years. Though Banerjee and Congress president Sonia Gandhi have addressed a rally together, the Trinamool leader has not wholeheartedly embraced the Congress. She is still apparently maintaining a distance from her parent party. At the same time, by breaking away from the NDA government, the former Union railway minister may find her tightrope walk yielding negligible political dividends.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the redoubtable Banerjee is a crowd-puller par excellence, her popularity extending far beyond the urban limits of Kolkata to the verdant villages of West Bengal and eastern India. Certainly, no non-Communist leader after former Chief Minister Bidhan Chandra Roy, has enjoyed the kind of popularity she has in recent years. The coming assembly elections are going to be crucial for her political future because she has chosen to maintain an 'independent' stance.

On the one hand, she has burnt her bridges with the ruling NDA government led by the BJP. Simultaneously, having set up the Trinamool as a separate electoral entity in December 1997, Banerjee has fiercely protected her independence despite the Congress accepting her as the unquestioned chief ministerial candidate (in the teeth of opposition from sections of the local Congress leadership).

This ambivalence may restrain the prospects of her political ascendancy in the immediate future even if her political alliance performs well in the election.

The opportunistic alliance between the Trinamool and the Congress is expected to obtain at least 40 per cent of the popular vote in West Bengal. In the 1996 assembly election, as well as in previous elections, the undivided Congress had received a similar proportion of the vote. Yet, the party could not obtain a proportionate number of the 294 seats in the state assembly because of the vagaries of the first-past-the-post system. So what are the chances of the Trinamool-Congress combine garnering substantially more than the 82 seats won by the undivided Congress in 1996? The chances are pretty bright for a variety of reasons.

First, anti-incumbency feelings may have an impact on West Bengal's voters even if such sentiments have not mattered much over the last two and a half decades. Secondly, the communists have been weakened because the CPI(M) rebels led by Saifuddin Choudhury are likely to cut into the traditional support base of the Left. Thirdly, as minister for railways, Banerjee had sought to implement a host of new projects to benefit her state. Finally, the Left Front has, in the past, emerged victorious because of the absence of a credible alternative to it. This time, however, the Trinamool claims it is the alternative to the communists.

What is also working against the Left Front is the dismal industrial situation in West Bengal. Industries like

textile and engineering have seen better days and new industrial units have not come up to compensate for jobs lost in the 'old economy'. Earlier, the communists used to blame New Delhi for most of the woes of the state. Policies like freight equalisation of coal and steel had robbed the state of its locational advantages, it was pointed out.

However, the era of liberalisation saw the dismantling of many of the policies of the licence-control raj, including freight equalisation. Hence, the Left has been left without its favourite whipping boy.

Banerjee realises that the Left bastion can be dented only if there are one-on-one contests in most of the assembly constituencies. But despite her best efforts, this is unlikely to take place. The fact that the BJP's supporters in urban areas are unhappy with her could work in favour of the Left. Then, by accommodating the candidates of the Congress, she has alienated a section of her own flock.

She is also being perceived as being crassly hypocritical. Not very long ago, she had derogatorily dubbed the Congress as the 'B team' of the CPI(M) and described the party as a watermelon — green outside and red inside.

There are some other considerations supporting the incumbent government in the state. In a state where ideology seems to matter, the Trinamool is seen to be

a political outfit bereft of ideology. More importantly, by replacing Jyoti Basu with Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, who is almost 30 years younger, the Left Front is trying to refurbish its image of being a political formation led by geriatrics.

Banerjee's biggest problem is her own maverick personality and headstrong attitude. If she had quit the NDA after the Union government hiked kerosene prices, her current position would have carried greater credibility. But she chose to sulk and bide her time. She, moreover, wanted

to gain popularity by presenting a railway budget which would not increase passenger fares. She chose the tehelka.com episode to burn her bridges with the NDA barely two months before the polls. Yet, she is refraining from criticising Vajpayee.

The real reason for her wanting to distance herself from the BJP is, of course, not very difficult to find. One out of four voters in West Bengal belong to the minority Muslim community which is not exactly enamoured of the BJP. But Banerjee cannot readily acknowledge this fact since she became part of the BJP-led NDA government in October 1999 after staying out of the government following the 1998 general elections.

The other important limitation of the Trinamool is that it does not have a second-rung leadership worth the name. Besides Banerjee herself, very few of her supporters have a popular base.

Now her cup of woes seems to be running over with some of her supporters sulking and cribbing openly. Witness the recent actions of Ajit Kumar Panja, who, more than most others in her party, has a long career in politics and has served as a Union minister in Rajiv Gandhi's government from 1985 onwards. Panja clearly wanted to remain a minister and is openly aligning with the NDA and the BJP.

Despite the distinct likelihood of her gaining ground in the coming election, Banerjee may still end up becoming a victim of her impulsive character. That, indeed, could be her unfortunate denouement.



BOTH SIDES NOW: Mamata Banerjee

BUDDHA STOPS WAVE

Mamata hurt by alliance with Sonia

BY OUR BUREAU

COUNTDOWN: 4 DAYS TO DESTINY

Kolkata, May 5: The Left Front is going to the polls on May 10 gasping under the dead weight of a 24-year-old dusty establishment.

The only thing the Left has in its favour is a new chief minister. Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has refreshed the sagging image of the Left in the last six months he has assumed office. He has made promises people want to hear and has also made a beginning.

The Opposition realises it will never be so close to power again if the elections are

allowed to be "free and fair." Ms Mamata Banerjee has drawn up the battle lines. Her alliance could give the Left a run for its money if Ms Banerjee can rein in the product of that combine — the rebels in both camps. There is discontent in the Trinamul because Ms Banerjee handed plum seats to Congress defectors. The Congress grassroots feel the party leadership did not honour their loyalty by giving in to Ms Banerjee's demands. Certain senior leaders were sacrificed at the altar

of this tie-up when Ms Banerjee browbeat the Congress high command to accept only 57 of the 294 seats.

On the other hand, the Left faces its own set of problems. The most serious threat is incumbency and its embarrassing baggage of stagnation. The other glaring victims are industry, education, health and work culture. Election

Turn to Page 2

PAGES 2 & 3

■ Lunch theories: PM, Advani rift intact
■ CPM banks on BJP in Ashoknagar

Buddha stops wave, Mamata hurt by alliance with Sonia

Continued from Page 1

promises have dried into hollow words and the people's sense of neglect and betrayal has shown in recent elections. In the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the Front had managed 46.74 per cent of votes, closely followed by Ms Banerjee at 37.95 per cent.

On the organisational front too many self-styled leaders forced large chunks to grumble and fall away from the once-disciplined Front. The Party for Democratic Socialism was formed by the CPI(M)'s former Rajya Sabha MP Saifuddin Chowdhury, who promised the people a new Left.

But the most dramatic threat to the Front since 1952 is a populist opposition that rose suddenly when the Front had almost closed the door on any sort of opposition to its rule. The Trinamul's popularity fed on the growing lard that was anti-establishment. A disciplined organisation, its failures gaping, now faces a disorganised force that has its feet solidly planted in political chutzpah. Of the 83 Congress MLAs that came to power in 1996, Ms Banerjee's brighter prospects weaned away 41. The united Congress and Trinamul will give the Front a run for its money to the Writers' Buildings.

An overview of the entire state comes up with uncomfortable truths for the Front. The Front has given up on Kolkata. In fact, it took just one term till 1982 to alienate the capital. The Left brought the first flush of hope in 1977 for the people of Kolkata. Here was a party that would find ways to wriggle out of the horrors of the Emergency and poor administration the city had inherited from the Congress, people thought. But the Front, which had its priorities clear, wriggled out of its commitment to the city and focused on rural Bengal. The Front became confident of dominating institutions with the party organisation as it was not possible for rural belts to create an alternative social formation. In the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the Front lost all seats in Kolkata. Its major opposition then, the Trinamul Congress-

BJP combine, got 48.89 per cent in 1999. The Assembly elections in 1996 gave a more cruel verdict. The Front came to power with only 10 seats from Kolkata — four less than its 1991 score of 14. The Congress increased its tally to 15 from 10 in 1991 and got a higher percentage of votes (49 per cent) than the Left's 43.

In the process, the Front forgot to address the urban middle class, something it has begun to make amends for good in the run-up to the May elections by an honest admission — "We must have gone wrong somewhere." But at the back of their minds the Front knew Kolkata could only play around with 24 seats from the total of 294.

Sanjay Bhadra has found out that increasing crime and the police's inability to reach any spot on time in South 24 Parganas will bring down the Front's tally of 18 out of the district's total 25 seats. The stretch along the Diamond Harbour Road is the most crime prone in Bengal. Villagers still recall the dacoities in Usti and Kanpur last November.

The Party for Democratic Socialism is a major force in this district because of popular leader Samir Putatunda, who is a candidate against chief minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee from Jadavpur. CPI(M) MLA Abdul Rezzak Mollah won Canning East by the highest margin in 1996 of 66,000 votes. Soon after the formation of the PDS, 93 CPI(M) district leaders, including the local committee secretary, left for the PDS but was promptly coerced to return to the parent party the very next day. Infighting in the Left between big brother CPI(M) and the RSP continues in the district. This week, five CPI(M) supporters were shot and then hacked to death by the RSP. To save themselves from the wrath of the CPI(M), the RSS has been allowed by villagers to conduct 12 training camps in the area where anti-Left supporters are active members.

There is only two hours of power in the Sagar Islands. Of the five lakh hectares of arable land, only 1.6 lakh has been

irrigated. Another woe of farmers here is the capture of a vast expanse of water bodies for prawn culture. Saline water was introduced in these water bodies rendering them useless for any other pisciculture projects.

Companies Birla Synthetic, the New Central Jute Mill, Sulekha Ink and the Krishna Glass Factory have closed down in the last five years. The Front's promise of a leather complex in Bantala, an industrial zone in Baruipur and a brand new port in Kulpi have still not seen the light of day.

Sanjay Bhadra also toured North 24 Parganas and Nadia. Two factors — lack of industrialisation and the September floods — have fuelled the anti-incumbency wave in North 24 Parganas where the Left got 24 out of the total 28 seats last time. It lost Ashoknagar to the BJP in a byelection. In 11 Assembly segments in the district, the Left scraped through by a margin of less than 4,000 votes in 1996.

The September floods ruined crops worth Rs 33 crores and damaged property worth Rs 45 crores. Nearly 105,385 hectares of agricultural land was destroyed. Inadequate flood relief reached the worst-hit areas of Bongaon, Amdanga, Baduria, Machhlandapur and Saratnagar. In the industrial sector, more than half of the 5,256 registered factories in the district have closed down in the last 10 years. Important among them were the Probortok, Baranagar and Gauripur jute mills. Labour discontent came to a boil when two managers of the Baranagar Jute Mill were burnt alive by unemployed workers.

Constant floods, erosion of the Hooghly banks and border crime plague Nadia. Nearly 5,000 mud huts have been washed away in the last one year. The 190-km Indo-Bangla border is porous enough to breed crime. There were three-and-a-half battalions of the BSF manning the stretch just two years ago. Last year one battalion was transferred to Jammu and Kashmir.

Subrata Chattopadhyay reports from the "Sheffield of Bengal," Howrah, that

the CPI(M) has lost the key to the district's industries. Major companies like Guest Keen Williams, Burn Standard, Remington, Bridge and Roof, and India Machinery have closed down. Many jute and flour mills are either sick or extinct. The CPI(M) also lost the entire agrarian belt from Panchla to Shyampur to the Congress in 1996. The Front managed eight of the 16 seats last term, half of which were decided by a margin of less than 5,000 votes. The CPI(M)'s might rests on the trade union base in Howrah — a force that remained behind minus the industries. Howrah's CITU leader and party district secretary Deepak Dasgupta is expected to retain the industrial belt between Shibpur and Bally. However, the CPI(M) is not taking any chances in this cut-throat district. It has changed four candidates in the rural sector and three in the urban areas.

As one moves up the Hooghly, the picture becomes more grim for the Front. The Trinamul has weakened the CITU base in the Hooghly district, reports Falguni Banerjee. Two important CITU leaders Mohon and Moloy Ghosh were murdered last year. Hindustan Motors is very sick and so is Dunlop. Twenty-one factories have closed down in the last five years, the most recent being North Group Jute Mills in Champdani last week. Nearly 4,000 workers lost their jobs. Mr Jyoti Basu promised Asia's biggest food processing centre to this district and laid the foundation stone of the Dankuni Modular Food Park. A boundary wall has still not come up. Mr Basu also promised Arambagh a mushroom export company. A foundation stone was duly laid. The district CPI(M) later said the project was not feasible. The Chinese Wire factory was also promised to Baidyabati.

The business community in Burdwan also seeks change, feel Rahul Das and Debdupta Ghosh. The 50 lakh voters of the district are not wooed by the Left's promise of setting up 34 new industrial units when hundreds, including coal mines, have closed down. Sick industries, unemployment, a water crisis in

Asansol, inadequate health care and appalling civic amenities are perennial problems. Though Burdwan is the highest rice producing district, farmers still suffer from inadequate irrigation facilities and shortage of cold storage units.

It is only violence and not votes as one moves up from Burdwan. The state's largest district Midnapur, reports Biswabrata Goswami, has drawn the maximum attention of the Election Commission, which fears the bloodiest election ever here on May 10. Midnapur, with more than 56 lakh voters in 37 constituencies, is the most prestigious fight. He who flexes his muscle most wins. The Trinamul rushed in in 1999 when it defeated the Left in the Panskura Lok Sabha byelections. Voters are held at gun point in violence-hit areas like Garbeta, Keshpur, Pingla and Sabong. The district sent Trinamul MP Nitish Sengupta to the Lok Sabha in 1999. The district has swelled this time with 1.3 per cent new voters, all clamouring for change.

Lack of water, inadequate health care and the Jharkhand parties hold the keys to the elections in Bankura and Purulia. Correspondent Sujit Nath noticed dogs in the emergency wards of the Bankura Medical College Hospital. Health minister Partha De is a candidate from here. The CPI(M), desperate to retain all 13 Assembly seats from the district, is not highlighting the achievements of the health minister in its campaign. Instead, they are projecting him as the only bhadralok candidate in the district — a plank they hope might finally see him through. Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and Mr Jyoti Basu admitted in public meets that not much has been done in the health sector here. The BJP got 7.86 per cent in the last elections. If that vote now goes to the Congress-Trinamul combine, it would mean curtains for the Left. Terrorism has gripped Purulia. The Peoples' War Group has only a one-point agenda — kill the CPI(M). The forests of Kakrajhor resound with the boom of arms training from dawn till dusk. Villagers are proud their sons are "soldiers"

and donate generously to the PWG's cause. On top of that, there has been no rain in Purulia for more than seven months now. The Front has reached no water to the district either.

Ms Mamata Banerjee was born in Birbhum. There can be no greater truth than that to its voters, reports Sujit Roy. She started her election campaign from this district, the first rally being in Kirnahar, the birthplace of ally and state Congress president Pranab Mukherjee. At Kirnahar the overcast sky indicated a thunderstorm. By the time Ms Banerjee reached her own birthplace Rampurhat, it was pouring. "Let peace come down in this district like the rains today," Ms Banerjee had told voters of arid Birbhum, who still go without power despite the Bakreshwar thermal plant.

Infiltration from Bangladesh and the CPI(M)'s policy of denying it in public but permitting it in practice is likely to backfire in the districts of Malda and Murshidabad. The Left and Congress were evenly divided in Murshidabad with nine seats each in 1996. The Front depended on the 1.6 million Bangladeshi (Figures: Indian Statistical Institute) infiltrators that have crossed over to India between 1981 and 1991 and settled in the border areas. Unofficial estimates put that figure at 7.2 million from 1981 to 2000, Kounteya Sinha reports.

The bait was Indian citizenship in return for votes. But just citizenship does not satisfy hunger. Infiltrators did not get land, nor jobs. All those who have come away from Rajshahi in Bangladesh responding to the lure of ration shops are either toiling in the fields or pulling rickshaws. The BJP is a major challenge to the Left on that score.

Malda is the only district in Bengal where the Front's neglect showed in the ballot in 1996. The Front had got 10 out of the 11 seats in 1987. In 1996, the tables turned completely and the Congress garnered nine.

Distribution of flood relief has always been a sore point in this district. Last year, the CPI(M) promised Rs 2,000 to

each flood-affected family. They got only Rs 1,000. Trucks carrying relief were carted off from warehouses.

The CPI(M) announcement that at least one village in every anchal has been given power in Dinajpur has come as a curse for the Front. That achievement has a darker side, feels Uma Shankar Pandey. Every anchal has 25 villages, the Opposition pointed out. If one village has got power, the other 24 have not.

The Gorkha National Liberation Front retains its stranglehold on the hills, where Ghising's word is still law. It is true the GNLF has quietly stood behind the CPI(M) in the state Assembly but increasing demands for complete autonomy and more assistance in terms of funds has been mounting over the years. There is only one worry for the Front. A section of the hills has already begun to believe the Front will never grant statehood — the precise reason behind the attack on Mr Ghising in February, who they think has sold out the "hill dream" to the CPI(M).

A 24-year-old coalition government is the longest in political history. Before 1977, Indian states saw 19 coalition governments, none of which survived for more than three years. In the international market, the longest coalition government was in Portugal, for six-and-a-half years. Twenty-four years is an achievement, only if the Front was not trapped in it.

Joter rajniti faces too many jots today. The Congress-Trinamul, the PDS and other small groups, the Suci-Naxals [the CPI(ML-Liberation), the CPI(M-L) and the CCR], and the BJP and other small parties. Each group is small in separate pockets of the state and each will try to rein in support even if it means resorting to the Left's means of rigging.

The only ways out for the Front are the small jostling spaces between the jots. The more jots, the more division of the anti-Left mandate. The Front can only hope these cracks between the Opposition jots will be able to usher in enough light for another five years.

Vajpayee dubs Trinamool CPM's 'C' team



Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Tapan Sikdar wave at the crowd in Bulbulchandi, Malda, on Saturday.

SUBHENDU GHOSH/ HINDUSTAN TIMES

Jaideep Mazumdar
Bulbulchandi (Malda), May 5

LASHING OUT at Mamata Banerjee for the first time since she quit the NDA, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today dubbed the Trinamool Congress as the CPI(M)'s 'C' team at a mammoth rally in this small town near the India-Bangladesh border.

Addressing a predominantly adivasi crowd at the Girija Sundari Vidyamandir grounds here, the Prime Minister regretted the Trinamool's decision to sever links with the NDA Government.

"Mamata used to say the Bengal Congress was the CPI(M)'s 'B' team. By joining hands with the Congress, the Trinamool has become the CPI(M)'s 'C' team. The Trinamool Congress never understood the real issues. I doubt if the Trinamool-Congress alliance can do any good to Bengal. The Congress is on the decline all over the country," he said.

He tore into the Left Front Government for having "retarded" West Bengal's development. Communism, he said, was a dated ideology and had no place in the modern world.

"China has embraced economic reforms. Russia has transformed itself. But the communists here cling on to their redundant theories and refuse to face the reality. They do not even know what they want."

But he made it clear that he had no illusions about his party's electoral prospects in the State.

"I'm often asked what the elections here have in store for the

BJP. I think we will perform the role of a car brake. We will perform the role of a responsible Opposition, like we have performed for so many decades at the Centre. We'll stop the State Government from driving rashly."

Arriving here to a tumultuous welcome with conch shells and drums, Vajpayee drew instant applause when he extended New Year's greetings to the audience in unaccented Bengali.

He regretted West Bengal's decline from a front-ranking State to one of the lowest down the economic ladder.

"Industries are closing down here, no one is willing to make fresh investments. Farmers don't have enough power and irrigation facilities. Poor educational and health care facilities have made life miserable for the common man."

Challenging the Left Front Government to prove its charge of deliberate neglect of the State by the Centre, he said West Bengal was being provided with the necessary financial aid. "We have provided large amount of funds. But they have not reached the people."

The administrative machinery in West Bengal and the CPI(M) party machinery, he said, had become one. "This amounts to subversion of democracy."

Prime Minister A B Vajpayee assured support to farmers in improving communication links to help them obtain a better price for their produce. Vajpayee also promised the farmers of Bengal better institutional support.

Related reports on pages 5 & 9

A TEST FOR MAMATA BANERJEE

AFTER HAVING ESTABLISHED herself as the rallying point of the anti-Left Front sentiments in West Bengal, Ms. Mamata Banerjee will now face the more serious challenge of taking on the well oiled election machinery of the CPI(M)-led combine in the State. The performance of the Trinamool Congress in the 1998 Lok Sabha polls had established that Ms. Banerjee could take away with her most of the Congress(I)'s traditional support base (in and around Kolkata). And this was followed by the exodus of a majority of the Congress(I)'s MLAs. It was in this context that Ms. Sonia Gandhi "instructed" her party's West Bengal unit to strike an alliance with the Trinamool Congress even if the deal meant denying renomination to a section of those MLAs who had consistently refused to accept Ms. Banerjee as their leader in the State. That Ms. Banerjee could manage to force the Congress(I) to concede to her the leadership in the battle against the CPI(M)-led combine was indeed an achievement; all those senior leaders in the faction-ridden State unit of the party — including the Pradesh Congress(I) chief, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee — were kept out of the negotiations. But then, the difficult test for Ms. Banerjee lies ahead. The May 10 polls to the State Assembly will be critical for her political survival.

The West Bengal polls are of critical importance to the Congress(I) too. Even if it is true that the Congress(I)'s stakes are not all that high in that the party is only a junior partner in the Mamata-led alliance, the decision to join the front in West Bengal has disturbed the Congress(I)'s equations with the Left at the national level. By agreeing to join the Mamata bandwagon in West Bengal, the Congress(I) will have to give up any hopes of cooperation from the Left at the national level in its efforts to replace the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance at the Centre. And given the numbers in the Lok Sabha — particularly the strength of the Left parties — any attempt towards this end is bound to come a

cropper. The West Bengal poll is bound to have its impact on the Congress(I)'s scheme of things in this larger context. Add to this the revolt from within the party's State unit as well as in the Trinamool Congress. There are reports of disenchantment in the Trinamool Congress ranks over the choice of candidates in several parts of West Bengal. And there is the outburst by Mr. Ajit Panja against Ms. Mamata Banerjee — accusing her of stifling democracy within the party. All these may not be problems specific to the Trinamool Congress alone. But then, it is a fact that Ms. Banerjee's authority within the party had never been challenged hitherto. Add to this the attitude of Mr. A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury towards the alliance on his home turf — Malda. There is no way that the Trinamool-Congress(I) combine can gloss over these factors in the days to come.

Be that as it may, the ruling Left Front too has problems of its own. Having been in power for as long as 24 years, the anti-incumbency factor is something that the CPI(M) and its allies cannot wish away. In addition to this, there has been a series of problems within the CPI(M) leading to the exit of some important local leaders of the party in and around Kolkata and also in the northern districts (Darjeeling in particular) where the party organisation no longer exists. There have also been the instances of defiance by a member of the State Cabinet, Mr. Subash Chakravarty, known for his skills in mobilising crowds for the party in the past couple of decades. There are reports of Mr. Chakravarty joining hands with Ms. Mamata Banerjee. Add to these the fact that the Left Front will have to do without the charisma of Mr. Jyoti Basu. It may be true that the Left parties had not depended entirely on any individual. But then, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's short term as Chief Minister was marked by escalating violence in many parts of West Bengal. The West Bengal poll scene is indeed marked by a great deal of uncertainty.

THE HINDU

- 4 MAY 2001

Sonia, Mamata call for end to Left Front rule

Arindam Sarkar
Kharagpur, May 3

SONIA GANDHI and Mamata Banerjee kicked off their joint campaign for the May 10 State polls today amid great fanfare and cheering from the crowd.

The Congress chief, on a whistle-stop tour of the State, addressed four meetings in South Bengal, hopping from venue to venue in two helicopters with State PCC president Pranab Mukherjee, party general secretary in-charge of Bengal Kamal Nath and Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee in tow.

Beginning the day with a meeting here at Kharagapur, Sonia also addressed rallies at Burdwan, Serampore and Ranaghat with Mamata, before leaving for Kolkata with Mukherjee and Kamal Nath. She will spend the night at Raj Bhavan and leave tomorrow for North Bengal to address three meetings at Cooch Behar, Raiganj and Behrampore before flying back to Delhi.

Earlier, the Congress chief was greeted by an enthusiastic crowd even before the two choppers - one carrying Pranab Mukherjee with her, and the other with Mamata and Kamal Nath - could land near the Ravan Maidan here at 10.35 am.

'Sonia Gandhi zindabad' 'Mamata Banerjee zindabad', the crowd cheered. As the two leaders walked up to the dais and waved, the crowd went into raptures. Indeed, it was Sonia, rather than Mamata, who stole the show at all of today's meetings. "I can see on coming here that there is a wave for change. The coming election is a fight for freedom of the people. The CPI(M) has reduced people here to slaves. It's time now to break the shackles," she said amid loud applause. "Here is a Government that has done nothing for you for 25 years. What can you expect it to do in the years to come? You must vote for people who will work for you and your State. In Bengal, the Congress and the Tri-

HFI 2/5
TRINAMOOOL MP HINTS AT RETURN TO NDA FOLD

EVEN AS the two parties slug it in the State polls, Trinamool MP Nitish Sengupta on Thursday said his party might extend outside support to the BJP-led Government at the Centre after the polls. "As of now we are out of the NDA, but we may extend issue-based support to the Vajpayee Government from outside like TDP after the polls," Sengupta said.

PTI, New Delhi

namool have come together to defeat the CPI(M). We had initial difficulties in reaching a tie-up with Mamata. But once she left the NDA, we resolved to work together," Sonia said.

"CPI(M) Ko Hata Diyiye", she urged the crowd at Serampore, where she addressed a meeting at the local stadium.

Criticising the Front Government, she said, "There is no rule of law. It's the CPI(M)'s writ that runs. There is no audit in the panchayats and zilla parishads. Bengal today has the maximum number educated and jobless youths. The police and administration are being forced to toe the CPI(M)'s line. Violence is rampant and there has been no development in rural areas. But to do something about it, we need your cooperation. Mamata and I need your votes. Vote for us and let's change the face of Bengal."

Lashing out at the BJP, Sonia said the NDA Government had forfeited all rights to rule the country. The Tehelka scam had exposed the depth of corruption in the Government, she said. Mamata Banerjee, however, said nothing against the BJP.

She said the hour had come to give the CPI(M) a fitting reply. "I would urge you all to vote for Trinamool and the Congress candidates on May 10. Please make sure that anti-Left votes don't split this time," she said amid loud cheers.

• Another report, photograph on P4

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

MAY 2000

Buddhadeb will tilt the balance

By Mushirul Hasan
and Suranjan Das

KOLKATA, MAY 2. "I would certainly vote, but my vote is a secret," said Abdul Ahad, a vanpuller in the Muslim majority village of Malikipur in 24 Paraganas district. This cautionary note cuts across the 48,123,469 voters in Bengal who will elect their 294 MLAs next week. Much of this is the result of inter-party violence that has led to deaths and marred the campaign in certain areas. "Political cleansing is the order of the day; civil society has ceased to exist," says Ms. Krishna Bose, Trinamool Congress Member of Parliament from Jadavpur. Her view is hotly contested by Left activists, who accuse her party of instigating violence.

The election fever is sweeping Bengal. Flags flutter from shops and houses, though streets everywhere were deserted on May Day. In areas where community TV sets do not exist, people gather around the central square of their village to discuss how best to ensure a better future for themselves. "Politicians come and go, but we have to think of a party that can serve our present and safeguard our future," says an emaciated peasant in Kalikapur village.

The coming election is important not only for this peasant but for the future of the CPI (M)-led Government and its most formidable adversary, Ms. Mamata Banerjee. For the Marxists the battlelines are clearly drawn. A clear-cut victory would be interpreted as a vote of confidence after the exit of Mr. Jyoti Basu, who relinquished power after nearly 24 years. More importantly, it would bolster the stature of his successor, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. Already, the CPI (M) is sensing victory, following weeks of confusion and uncertainty.

Perceptions matter more than policies. Mr. Bhattacharjee, a Presidency College graduate, is attracting huge crowds at his election rallies, and has successfully established himself as a pragmatic and accessible public figure. He is not merely Mr. Basu's successor, but is widely regarded as someone who has so quickly left his personality imprint on this campaign. Many hope that his economic blueprint, more in tune with the demands for liberalisation, would rescue Bengal from underdevelopment and industrial stagnation, though sections of the party claim that such a blueprint already exists and it is being implemented.

What has made the difference to Mr. Bhattacharjee's stature is the attitude of the urban elite, who have shifted their political allegiances from time to time in the past, and for whom land reforms or anti-poverty programmes count for nothing. After weeks of dithering, they grudgingly concede that the present Chief Minister inspires confidence in trade and business circles, and in the absence of a viable alternative, the Left Front is their best bet.

Over and above everything else, Mr. Bhattacharjee's image of a caring, upright, fair-

minded and affable leader is a major political asset. His message is simple, but different. His style, hallmark of a *bhadralok* culture, is endearing and reassuring. This factor counts more in Bengal than anywhere else in the country. In a society where caste polarisation has not taken place, this cultivated image of the Chief Minister will bolster the fortunes of the CPI(M) in the elections. Indeed, the balance will be tilted by the presence of the 56-year-old Mr. Bhattacharjee rather than the party's own record in the past or the energy of the cadres. Party officials at the Muzaffar Ahmed Bhavan on Alimuddin Street may not concede, but at this juncture he is their main trump card.

Yet, the going will be tough, if one considers the rapid decline in the Left Front's share of votes — from 54.52 per cent in the 1980 parliamentary elections to 47.35 per cent in 1996, and 47.35 in 1998. In the Assembly elections, too, its share of votes has plum-

WEST BENGAL PERSPECTIVE

meted from 51.6 per cent in 1982 to 48.02 per cent in 1996.

Mr. Anil Biswas, State secretary of the CPI (M), attributes the discontent towards the Left Front to the rising expectations of the expanding bourgeoisie and the Government's failure to fulfil all their needs. Fair enough. But, then, why should such people now repose their confidence in a party that has failed to deliver during the last 24 years? Especially since the State has made no rapid strides during the Left Front's last 5-year term.

On the plus side, land reforms have been this Government's major contribution towards changing the balance of power in rural Bengal. But public memory is notoriously short. "The young have sadly erased the revolutionary struggles from their memory; they have forgotten, moreover, years of Congress misrule," says Mr. Biswas. But Ms. Mamata Banerjee's camp followers, on the other hand, catalogue various factors, including rising unemployment, the stultification of industrial growth and the deteriorating law and order situation, to legitimise their "do or die" campaign against the Government. The point is well taken. Disillusionment with the Left is not confined to the middle class but extends to the peasantry who are fast losing the land to the same *jotedars* who were made to part with their land. "Marxism", says Ms. Madhabi Mukherjee, celluloid star of yesteryears pitted against the Chief Minister, "is an imported doctrine, a seasonal flower that is bound to wilt sooner than later."

The flower may not wilt as yet, and yet the road to electoral success is strewn with numerous difficulties. But one thing is for sure. Unlike some of the other States, Bengal will remain ideologically polarised for decades to come and the battlelines will always be drawn between the Left and the centrist

forces. The revolutionary fervour is considerably diluted by the exigencies of time, but the Left is unlikely to abandon its commitment to social justice and equality.

The import of their message is all but lost to the Opposition parties. Today, the Congress is gasping for breath and its chances of winning are limited to its traditional strongholds. Mr. A. B. A. Ghani Khan Choudhury is flexing his muscles in Malda, whereas the Congress-backed Independents, described by the PCC president, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, as "unbridled horses", are up in arms in Murshidabad. This is bad news for a party that is devoid of any programme that would put it back on the rails. It is already fragmented and weakened by a divided leadership.

The BJP may corner a few seats on the strength of the unsettled conditions on the Indo-Bangladesh border, but its long-term survival on Bengal's political landscape is at best a remote possibility. Although the BJP vote shot up to 11.36 per cent in the 1991 Assembly polls owing to the Hindutva wave, it dropped to 6.45 per cent in 1996. This time round its share of votes may plummet further.

In effect, what keeps the midnight oil burning at Alimuddin Street is the upsurge of support for the Trinamool. Fiery and passionate, though impetuous, Ms. Banerjee has successfully assailed some of the communist strongholds: *Didi aschke*, *CPI(M) bhay pacche* (The CPI(M) is scared as Didi comes on) was the cry at a Trinamool rally in Calcutta on May Day. Yet her decision to withdraw from the NDA, followed by her hurriedly concluded pact with the Congress, has dampened the enthusiasm of her supporters.

Even if she succeeds in rallying round her supporters in the days to come and splits the Left Front votes, caused by the PDS, she will need to do well in Birbhum, Burdwan, Bankura, Purulia, Hoogly and Midnapore. These districts account for as many as 118 seats, or approximately 40 per cent of the total seats. If the outcome of the 1996 Assembly and the 1999 parliamentary elections is any guide, the Left is sure to press home its advantage. In the event, Ms. Banerjee's political fate will be sealed in Bengal, her principal political akhara and her diminishing role in State politics will affect her bargaining position in New Delhi.

The elections in West Bengal are poised for an interesting countdown. Whether the people endorse Mr. Bhattacharjee's dictum, "the only alternative to the Left is a new, improved Left", or accept Ms. Banerjee's call "for change", will be known on May 13 when electronic voting machines from 61,542 voting centres produce the results. Whatever the verdict, the results will have far-reaching implications for Bengal as well for the future of coalition politics at the Centre.

(The writers are historians of modern India.)

THE HINDU

3 MAY 2001

CBI arrests one for Garbeta 'killings'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 1. — The CBI today arrested one person in connection with the alleged killings of Trinamul workers at Chhoto Anguria village in Garbeta, Midnapore, on 4 January. Sheikh Mokhtar was remanded in police custody for 14 days. A revolver was seized from him.

Mokhtar is one of the 10 persons whom the CBI suspect to have been involved in the incident. All of them have been interrogated. Villagers said the suspects were moving freely till the CBI team arrived.

The sleuths, who had talked to a number of witnesses,

have found several flaws in the CID's investigation.

They are now looking for the driver of a local CPI-M leader, Mr Tapan Ghosh, whose vehicle was allegedly used to remove the bodies.

The CBI team also talked to the families of the five missing persons who are believed to have been killed. Some of their statements were, however, confusing, officers said. Some were too scared to speak or could not recollect how many bodies were seen on the night of the incident.

CPM cadres injured

About 18 CPI-M cadres were

injured when some Trinamul Congress workers, reportedly led by Mr Hasem Ali Khan, attacked them with bombs and iron rods at Sharda village in Amta, Howrah, yesterday. Eight victims sustained splinter injuries and were admitted to a hospital in a critical condition.

Police said the mob of about 30 Trinamul men also ransacked six houses. No one has been arrested.

In its first list of candidates, the Trinamul had named Mr Khan as its nominee from Kalyanpur. But following an understanding with the Congress, the Trinamul has left the seat for the latter and it's

being contested by Mr Asit Mitra, sitting Congress MLA, as the combine's candidate. Police said Mr Khan was allegedly involved in several criminal activities.

Meanwhile, Shamim Akhtar Khan (27) was killed by three youths at Chandrapur, Amta, on 26 April. His body was found in a field at Sankrail yesterday.

Two persons, Jiru and Anwar, have been arrested.

Police said that three youths had kidnapped Bapi on 26 April and later killed him. The incident was a sequel to a rivalry between the killers and Bapi's father, Mr Saiful Khan.

Pant ready to clarify to Shabir Shah

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 1. The Centre's designated interlocutor on Kashmir, Mr. Kishen Chand Pant, is prepared to have an "open mind" on the clarifications sought by the resistance leader, Mr. Shabir Shah, about the nature of dialogue the Vajpayee Government wants to initiate in Jammu and Kashmir. Yesterday, Mr. Shah, chief of the Jammu and Kashmir Democratic Freedom Party, had said he was prepared to sit across from Mr. Pant but before he did that he and his party would want some "clarifications".

Today, Mr. Pant noted that the "clarifications" would be gladly provided once there was a formal communication from Mr. Shah. Mr. Pant has a similar open and accommodating attitude to the All-Party Hurriyat Conference, but there has been no communications from the APHC, though the conglomerate has more or less rejected the "dialogue".

Mr. Pant met the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, this morning, though he described his interaction as a routine one. He met the Prime Minister on Sunday and apprised him of the developments on the Kashmir front.

The Centre is keeping an open mind even when various groups appear to have reacted negatively to the dialogue initiative. The Government is aware that the public response of many of these groups is invariably different from their private calculations and thinking. For example, it is believed that the APHC's public

stance was considerably at variance with the tone and tenor of the deliberations in the executive.

The Centre is also mindful of the fact that most of these Kashmiri groups are vulnerable to threats from the Pakistan-controlled militant outfits but at the same time loathe the idea of any kind of "security" from the Indian police forces. Within hours of Mr. Shah expressing a conditional willingness to talk to Mr. Pant, he is believed to have received a threat from Al-Ummar Mujahideen, floated by Mr. Mustaq Ahmad Zaragar, one of the three persons freed for the passengers in the Kandahar hijack drama.

Mr. Pant would be taking all these dimensions into consideration before responding to the Kashmiri groups. However, it is not certain when, if at all, he will visit Srinagar. The former Chief Minister, Mr. G. M. Shah's Awami National Conference had asked Mr. Pant to come to Srinagar rather than expect the Kashmiri leaders to call on him in New Delhi. On this score, too, Mr. Pant has an open mind and is not averse to travelling to Srinagar.

Lashkar threat

NEW DELHI, MAY 1. After lying low for several months, the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba has said that it would step up militant activities in Jammu and Kashmir to scuttle the peace process, and vowed to continue 'fidayeen' (suicide) attacks to achieve its goal of "disintegrating India through armed struggle". — UNI

THE HINDU

- 2 MAY 2001

51 held after Keshpur night of violence

HT Correspondent
Midnapore, April 30

KESHPUR LAST night slid back into violence after a two-month lull when 70 to 80 allegedly Trinamool supporters descended on the Chechura, Mahisgearia and Makha villages with bombs and assorted firearms.

Loud blasts and the crackle of indiscriminate gunfire in the darkness drew a police patrol from neighbouring Neradeul, triggering an hour-long exchange of bullets in which the police fired 16 rounds. The police evaded injury, but at least two Trinamool supporters reportedly escaped with gunshot wounds.

Midnapore SP AK Maliwal said 51 Trinamool men had been taken into custody, 38 of them wanted in criminal cases in Garbeta, Keshpur, Chandrakona and Daspur. He reported seizure of 60 .12 bore rifles, 17 pipe-guns, four rifles, six muskets, 180 rounds of ammunition, and 116 .303 cartridges.

District CPI(M) secretary cited the attack as evidence of a poll-wary Trinamool's desperation to disrupt the polls. Trinamool candidate for Keshpur Rajani Doloi, however, said it was a joint raid by the CPI(M) and the police on a peaceful congregation of Trinamool oustees.

In another incident, a CPI(M) worker was injured today when suspected BJP supporters fired on a CPI(M) procession in Goalator. Five BJP supporters were arrested.

In Kolkata, outgoing DGP Dipak Sanyal said last night's violence in Midnapore was the

TRINAMOOl MLA MANHANDLED

TIKIAPARA RESIDENTS on Monday roughed up Trinamool Congress MLA Ambika Banerjee. Local Trinamool councillor Mohammad Salim and two others sustained minor injuries. Banerjee said his security guard had to whip out his revolver to frighten the angry mob. Detailed report on P5

result of "attempts by various political parties to spread their areas of influence."

Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, however, blamed all of it on the Trinamool. Hordes of armed Trinamool men had gathered on Chandrakona Road with an intent to attack villagers when the police surrounded them.

"There was an exchange of fire between the two sides. While police fired 16 rounds in self-defence, the Trinamool hoodlums fired 40 rounds. Seventeen improvised firearms and 180 rounds of ammunition were recovered from them, and 51 Trinamool supporters were arrested," he added.

On Mamata Banerjee's reported complaints to the EC against former Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, he said: "She has made it a habit to make all sorts of baseless allegations. She spoke some days ago of attempts to burn her alive at Suri. The fact, however, is, there was a minor short-circuit. And this was immediately set right. The police report is with me. Anyone interested may take a look at it," he said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 MAY 2001

There's no Cong-Trinamool alliance, declares Ghani Khan

Ritwik Mukherjee

MALDA 30 APRIL

TRUST MR A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury to say this! Mr Chowdhury, on Monday, refused point blank to accept the existence of any mahajot between Congress and Trinamool Congress (TMC) in the state for the May 10 polls.

The Khan broadside comes a fortnight after the two parties tied the knot and a couple of days before Congress chief Sonia Gandhi arrives to address a few joint election rallies with TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee.

"Who says there is an alliance? You take it from me, there is no such alliance anywhere across the state," Mr Chowdhury told ET.

"This is all eye wash. The workers of the two parties have failed to come together, and certainly not at the mental plane," he went on to add.

Speaking to ET at his Kotowalli residence, Mr Chowdhury ruled out the possibility of the Opposition coming to power in the state.

"When there is no such alliance, it is really funny to say

that the Congress-TMC combine will come to power," he said.

But the former Union minister and former state party chief sounded extremely confident that Congress would win all the eight seats it is contesting in Malda.

In English Bazar constituency, Congress candidate Gautam Chackraborty is facing a four-cornered contest with CPI(M), BJP and TMC candidate Krishnendu

POLL POURRI

Chowdhury, who is also chairman of the local municipality.

Asked about the possibility of Congress candidates winning in his district after all the discontent and division of votes, the Messiah of Malda said: "What do you mean by possibility? When I say they will win, all of them will win. And Ghani Khan Chowdhury knows how to make them win."

Ms Gandhi's proposed meeting in Malda on May 4 will be a major show of strength for Mr Chowdhury. He is now busy sending out instructions to his lieutenants on how to mobilise the

crowd on that day.

"There has to be the maximum people from English Bazar and Malda Town — and that's an order," a Mr Chowdhury commanded before setting out for an election meeting at Panchanandapur.

He is virtually having to run from one place to another because all the Congress candidates in Malda (two of whom are his brothers and one a sister) are riding piggyback on Barkat Da's public image and popularity.

And Barkat Da, or 'Bhaiya,' as his brothers and sisters affectionately call him, obliges all.

On his way to Panchanandapur, Barkatda was asked the obvious question: "What if Ms Gandhi speaks for the alliance?" An unmoved Mr Chowdhury said: "Let her speak whatever she feels like. But mind you, the election on May 10 will be fought by me and my men."

"In politics, everything depends on the approach. And everyone has the right to have his or her own approach to reach a goal," he added.

The Economic Times

1 MAY 2001

Mamata locks herself in, offers to step down

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 13. — Reporters and photographers who went to Miss Mamata Banerjee's home on Harish Chatterjee Street today to seek her comments on her party's poor showing in the polls were in for a disappointment. She had locked herself in her room and did not come out even once. Victorious Trinamul candidates met her privately at the party headquarters. Miss Banerjee offered to step down as chairperson of the Trinamul Congress, accepting defeat. However, Mr Pankaj Banerjee, chairman of Trinamul's policy making committee, said an emergency meeting of the committee asked Miss Banerjee to reconsider her decision.

"Mamata is our leader and we

need her to organise the people to fight the red terror. Our party is not leaving the scene. We will play the role of a responsible Opposition in the Assembly," he told reporters in the afternoon. But he couldn't say whether she would listen.

Mr Banerjee said most people in the state wanted a change but could not vote freely because of the CPI-M's terror tactics.

"The people of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Assam have exercised their franchise freely and changed the ruling governments... Nowhere in the country has the administration so shamelessly backed the ruling party to win the polls," he said.

He blamed the Election Commission and the CEO for not cooperating with the Opposition. Many people could not vote because of the state EC's whimsi-

cal attitude. The central observers remained silent and did not write their reports correctly, he added.

In the rural belt, state sponsored terrorism ensured that thousands of people were not allowed to vote. On whether the alliance with the Congress had led to the disaster, he said the alliance had worked fine and it would continue.

Mr Subrata Mukherjee said such a defeat was unexpected. He said party leaders would sit together to determine its causes.

"There was positive response from those who attended Mamata's meetings in the districts, but the election process was manipulated brilliantly by the CPI-M on the poll day and people were prevented from voting freely," he said.

■ See MAMATA: page 4



HOME ALONE AND SULKING: A crowd of dejected Trinamul supporters outside Miss Mamata Banerjee's residence in Kolkata on Sunday. — Sailendra Mai

58 MAMATA: (Continued from page 1)

Mr Mukherjee said the party did not have the organisation or the finance to combat the CPI-M. The Trinamul Congress had to fight against the Centre, EC and the state EC and this was a difficult task, he observed.

He said the party started campaigning late. Also, the victory of the party nominee in the Panskura by-poll had helped the CPI-M set right its organisational faults. The Trinamul had failed to assess this organisational capacity, he said.

Party workers who thronged Miss Banerjee's home felt that poor organisation, lack of funds and selection of wrong candidates in some constituencies had led to her defeat.

THE STATESMAN

14 MAY 2001

LF sweeps N Bengal, reverses for Cong in Malda

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SILIGURI, May 13. — The Left Front has once again stamped its authority in North Bengal. The Trinamul-Congress's performance in the region has been dismal. The Left Front has won 34 (two more than what it got in 1996) out of the 49 seats of North Bengal. The Trinamul-Congress has bagged 11 seats while the GNLF had retained its seats. An Independent candidate has won Chopra, North Dinajpur. The "winds of change" failed

to blow over this region. The Trinamul has won just one seat at Islampur in North Bengal. A "We have always maintained that people are not fools. If the Trinamul-Congress thought they could hoodwink voters by making outlandish allegations and claims, it is their problem and the result is showing," the CPI-M candidate from Siliguri and urban development minister, Mr Asok Bhattacharya, said. He has won by a margin of 22, 328 votes. "A partial administration, through a deliberate deploy-

ment of security, ensured that the Trinamul polled less and the CPI-M more than its share," the Trinamul district chairman Mr Pratul Chakrabarty alleged. Barring the defeat of the PWD and agriculture marketing ministers, Mr Manohar Tirkey at Kalchini and Mr Biran Maitra at Harishchandra-
pur, respectively, no major upsets came up here. The results have also shown that the KPP has not been able to make much headway in the region. The CPI-M has wrested Man-

ikchak, English Bazaar, Ratua and Malda from the Congress, besides retaining its two old seats, Habibpur and Gazole, adds SNS from Malda. It has now six out of the district's total 11 seats. In the 1996 Assembly elections, the Congress had won eight seats and the Left Front three, including Harishchandra-
drapur. The results are a major setback for Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury, particularly the losses of English Bazaar and Manikchak. He had campaigned hard for both the can-

didates in these two seats. In English Bazaar, the CPI-M candidate, Mr Samar Ray, defeated his closest rival, Congress's Mr Gautam Chakrabarty. The Trinamul candidate, Mr Krishnendu Choudhury, came third. The Malda seat was won by Mr Subhendu Choudhury (CPI-M), defeating Mr Phani Bhushan Roy (Trinamul). In Kaliachak, Mr Khan Chowdhury's brother, Mr AH Khan Chowdhury, retained the seat by defeating his closest CPI-M rival, Mr Biswanath Ghosh.

In Sujapur, Mr Khan Chowdhury's sister, Mrs Rubi Noor, defeated CPI-M's Mr Abdul Rauf. Gazole was won by CPI-M's Mr Sadhu Tudu. In Habibpur, Mr Jadu Hemram (CPI-M) defeated Mr Ramlal Hansda (BJP). CPI-M's Mrs Asima Choudhury wrested Manikchak from Congress's Mr Ram Prabesh Mondal. Mr Sailen Sarkar (CPI-M) won Ratua, beating Congress's Mr Samar Mukherjee. Araidanga was retained by Congress.

THE STATESMAN

14 MAY 2000

Upbeat Mamata sure of victory

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 11

EVEN AS exit polls suggest that Left Front would make it this time again, the Trinamool Congress' language of power — 48 hours before the results — spoke of its getting better of the Left Front in the battle for the Writers' Buildings.

On Friday, some Trinamool leaders visited the party chief, evidently to assure her of a thumping victory. No one, interestingly, dared to spell out the margins. And as if convinced by the reports reaching her till late in the evening, an upbeat Mamata Banerjee claimed the Congress-Trinamool alliance would form the Government riding on



MAMATA BANERJEE

the mandate of the masses.

"People of Bengal have given their mandate and we're sure of victory," Mamata said this afternoon, adding that she was confident of the Independents' support for her claim to power. Outside her Harish Chatterjee Street house, hundreds have gathered by then, all eager to be a part of the buoyant mood that was sweeping across the area. The Trinamool, it seemed, was just waiting for the call.

But the leader did not stop short with her claims to victory alone. She picked upon Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee to describe how the Left Front had instigated violence across the state, more so in the Chief Minister's own constituency of Jadavpur.

"It's a shame for democracy. The Chief Minister acted as a mafia don and we demand a re-poll in his constituency. We had repeatedly appealed to the EC not to treat Bengal at par with other states since the situation here is extremely volatile and different from that of others."

The CPI(M), unfazed by the sweeping claims of the Opposition, spat venom on the Trinamool leader and her visions of power while iterating its claim of a "confident victory."

"It would be fool hardy on Mamata's part if she is dreaming of power," quipped Biman Bose.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Star Trinamool man, others roughed up

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 10

TRINAMOOL CONGRESS candidates Tapas Paul and Ajoy Sanyal have been allegedly manhandled here today. CPI(M)'s candidate from Entally Mohammed Salim also faced similar incident.

Alleging that nearly 400 armed CPI(M) cadres had forced their ways into a polling booth opposite Gokhale Memorial School at around 12.45 pm, Paul, Trinamool candidate from Alipore, said he was attacked along with his wife Nandini when they tried to resist the "illegal entry".

"They were harassing valid voters and the moment I raised my voice, I was hit from behind. They assaulted my wife and tore off her dupatta. All this took place under the nose of the police. How did they allow the hoodlums to get inside the booth?" Paul protested. An FIR was filed with the Bhowanipur police station. No arrests had been made.

Sanyal, Trinamool candidate from Beliaghata, said he and his supporters were beaten up near the Narkeldanga High School. He alleged that CPI(M) supporters kept him captive in his own house hurling bombs indiscriminately.

Raj Kanojia, DC (Headquarters), said additional reinforcements along with RAF and central paramilitary forces have been rushed to Beliaghata. He said situation was under control.

Sanyal also alleged that he was assaulted when he tried to resist the rigging by the CPI(M) this afternoon. At least five of his companions were bashed up, area residents said.

CPI(M)'s Md Salim lodged an FIR with the Beniapukur police station in protest against Tri-



ASHOK NATH DEV/HINDUSTAN TIMES

An injured Jainul Haque, cousin of Left Front candidate Mohammed Salim, in Entally on Thursday.

namool's attack on his brother Jainul Haque at the Beniapukur Bidyapith polling station.

The incident took place at 8.35 am when Salim and his brother saw some "anti-socials" led by Bashir Ahmed trying to intimidate CPI(M) polling agents in booth no. 41. As they went to protest, three persons manhan-

dled Salim trying to hit him with iron rod. Jainul, a karateka, was bludgeoned from behind.

A profusely bleeding Jainul was taken to a local clinic and was given seven stitches. Ahmed and his aide Azmat were arrested, but the other two accused Safakat and Bachu Chakrabarty fled.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 MAY 2001

BEHRAMPUR (Murshidabad), May 10. — Polling could not be conducted at Hikampore polling station (booth no. 118 and 119 of 63 Behrampur) as an irate mob ransacked the station at 9 am and damaged the electronic voting machines (EVM). "An armed gang broke into the room and started beating the RSP polling agents," said the presiding officer, Mr Masud Ali, adding that the angry mob damaged the EVMs as a protest against the miscreants, who tried to rig the poll.

The miscreants were Congressmen, complained Mr Kartic Sahana, RSP contestant from Behrampur. Member of Parliament Mr Adhir Choudhury however dismissed the allegation and blamed RSP partymen for destroying the EVMs.

Police said 24 persons were arrested in connection with the incident. However it was also learnt that police had fired two rounds and damaged some houses.

District Magistrate Murshidabad, Mr Vivek Kumar said, "The Behram-

pore SDO has been directed to file a report. As poll could not be conducted repoll is inevitable."

Based on the report of the observer, Mr GM Pathak, repoll has been recommended for booth no. 12 and 20 of 54 Jangipur, in Secondra area, Mr Kumar added.

Two booths of Hijole Begunbari area (booth 90 and 91) of Beldanga had boycotted polling, informed Mr Vivek Kumar, adding that overall polling in the district has been peaceful except some sporadic incidents.

Out of the total 4560 EVMs, 8 were replaced as they went out of order, it was learnt.

Mr Adhir Choudhury said, "Police have played the role of CPI-M cadres. They have compensated the deficiency of CPI-M's muscle power. CPI-M terrorised the booths to lessen the voting percentage in Congress dominated area."

Adhir accuses Left Front of rigging

mbagh, the poll was rigged in almost all the booths. Of 222 booths in Khanakul, polling could be held in only 30. However, there was less violence than expected, he said.

"Our fears came true. Home Guards with short clubs were posted at sensitive booths, while armed police were posted in peaceful ones." Central forces were not deployed in any of the booths, Mr Ghosh said. He alleged the administration did not cooperate with the BJP.

Three or four days before the polls, Mr Ghosh said, the chief electoral officer had taken "some positive action" on the basis of the BJP's complaints. But today he behaved differently.

"I tried to contact him twice today to complain about the situation in Garbeta East and West, Tarakeswar and Howrah (North). It was with great difficulty that I could speak to him. But he didn't tell us what measures

he had taken."

The DMs and SPs too were "difficult" to be contacted. Those who could be contacted promised action, "but didn't report back."

Mr Ghosh alleged BJP supporters were attacked by CPI-M, Trinamul and Congress workers at various places. As soon the polling ended, two bombs exploded near the state BJP office in Jorasanko, he said.

Mr Tapan Sikdar said Miss Mamata Banerjee spent the day in an "airconditioned hotel room" in Midnapore to ensure the defeat of the BJP candidate in the Midnapore Lok Sabha by-poll.

Repoll demand in Buddha's turf

The Trinamul Congress has demanded repoll in Jadavpur constituency because of "massive booth-jamming, rigging and intimidation of voters by the

forced him to jump into Subhas Sarker, he said. Eight party workers were injured at Salboni and Beliaghata.

Three party candidates — Mr Nirmal Maji (Ukrai), Mr Chittaranjan Bag (Kamarhati) and Mr Kalyan Banerjee (Asansol) — were assaulted by CPI-M workers. The car of Mr Nitish Sengupta (MP) was attacked at Mugberia from where the state fisheries minister, Mr Kiranmoy Nanda, is contesting. Tapas Pal, Trinamul nominee in Alipore, has lodged a complaint after his "wife was manhandled by CPI-M cadres".

Mr Bandopadhyay alleged two CPI-M ministers, Mr Sushanta Ghosh and Mr Suryakanta Mishra, had helped cadres cast false votes in Midnapore.

He said that despite repeated complaints to the CEO, Mr Sabyasachi Sen didn't rise to the occasion. Additional police force was not deployed at sensitive booths. Several state officials tried their best to ensure the victory of CPI-M candidates. Mr Bandopadhyay is, however, confident that the Trinamul will return to power.

The party spokesman, Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay, said a large number of people in Jadavpur could not vote because they produced valid documents other than photo ID cards to prove their identity. But, he alleged, some CPI-M supporters were allowed to vote without photo ID cards.

He said CPI-M cadres jammed booths and intimidated voters at 3,400 booths in 29 constituencies. These are: Jadavpur, Ballygunge, Belgachia East and West, Dum Dum, Ukra, Kespur, Sabong, Khejuri, Garbeta East, Howrah South, Goghhat, Arambag, Khanakul, Basanti, Chandrakona Road, Howrah South, Amdanga, Titagarh, Rajarhat, Tarakeswar, Maheshtala, Gaeshpur, Bijpur, Noapara, Garden Reach, Sonarpur and Cossipur.

A Trinamul worker died at Beliaghata after CPI-M cadres chased and

MAY 2001
MAY 2001

PLATFORM | Soumya Bhattacharya

Rumble in Bengal

7-17-08 MS HC-8

In a broader sense, the government, the people and the opposition are united about one issue — change. Today's election is a vote for governance more than government, for policy more than politics

CHANGE. IT'S a six-letter word with which Mamata Banerjee is trying to overturn a 24-year rule. More than anything else, Bengal's most bitterly fought polls in nearly the last quarter of a century hinges on change. From manifestos to campaigning, from rhetoric to arithmetic, change has become the lifeblood pumping into the heart of this election.

"*Bodle din, palte din, ebar noeto* never (Change everything, it's now or never)" has been the war cry of Mamata's Trinamool Congress, which promises to free Bengal from the stagnation of the past. She vows that industrialisation will sweep across the state like never before, she promises to keep all the Left Front's unkept promises and more. The hope of a new Bengal drives the engine of her appeal to the electorate this time. What fuels that engine is the energy she brings to every meeting.

But wait a minute — it's not just Mamata. Being the leader of the party that is laying siege on Writers' Buildings, she ought to have been talking about change. And that is what she has been doing. After all, the Opposition — in any election anywhere — makes change the pivot of its campaign.

The interesting thing is this. The Left Front is also chanting the mantra of change, swearing by an altered Bengal that will be carved out by an altered party. And they will be the agent, they say, of that makeover.

In more ways than one, though, it is occasion for a makeover. For the first time in the last 50 years, this is a poll without Jyoti Basu. And the Left Front, led by the CPI(M), is trying to

show that it is leaving Basu behind, sloughing off the baggage of the past and reinventing itself as a contemporary party in sync with the new economy and the new realpolitik; that Basu's departure, more than creating a vacuum, has created the right set of circumstances for the party to adapt to a new reality and be flexible about it.

The Left Front could have been crying itself hoarse about the stability it could provide. It could have been talking about its track record to flesh out the agenda it has for the people. Instead, it has been hardselling the change that it will usher in if it is given the chance.

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has been projected as the dynamic face of this new scenario, as the man of the future who will rid the party of the fustiness of its past. This

is a mandate on Basu's Bengal. But the promise being held out to the electorate — provided they vote for the Left Front — is of Bhattacharjee's Bengal.

The message being sent out is that though voting for the CPI(M) will mean voting for a party with the same name, it will mean casting one's ballot for a party with a very different outlook.

As much as about anything else, politics is about image and perception. Which is why spin-doctors and campaign managers abroad are key players in an election, the crucial men who make the machinery of a party run. Subtly but surely, gradually but irrevocably, the spin doctors of the CPI(M) have ensured that the perception of the party — with Bhattacharjee at the helm — has altered.

The tom-tomming of land reforms and work in the agricultural sector as achievements has been flogged too much for too long in a state tired of being left on the margins of what is increasingly being seen as progress in today's context. Bhattacharjee, voters are being told, is the IT-savvy, industry-friendly leader who will put Bengal on the road map of development. It is largely about perception, about image.

Undoubtedly, this is clever strategy. Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh fought and won the last Assembly elections in his state

in 1998 on the same plank: 'Vote for me and I will give you a new polity.'

Bhattacharjee has been consistently trying to do pretty much the same. He is the man who will marry Marx and market economics, who will look ahead rather than behind. He may be fighting the Trinamool, but he is also fighting atrophy within his own party. Change without churning is what he wants for the people.

The unique thing about this election is that in a broader sense, the government, the people and the opposition are united about one issue — change. This is, therefore, a vote for governance more than government, for policy more than mere politics. In an ideological sense, overriding everything else, the signal seems to be: Never mind who wins, Bengal is set to win in the end.



CHANGE IS PERMANENT: Mamata Banerjee

Bengal's hour of reckoning is here

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 9

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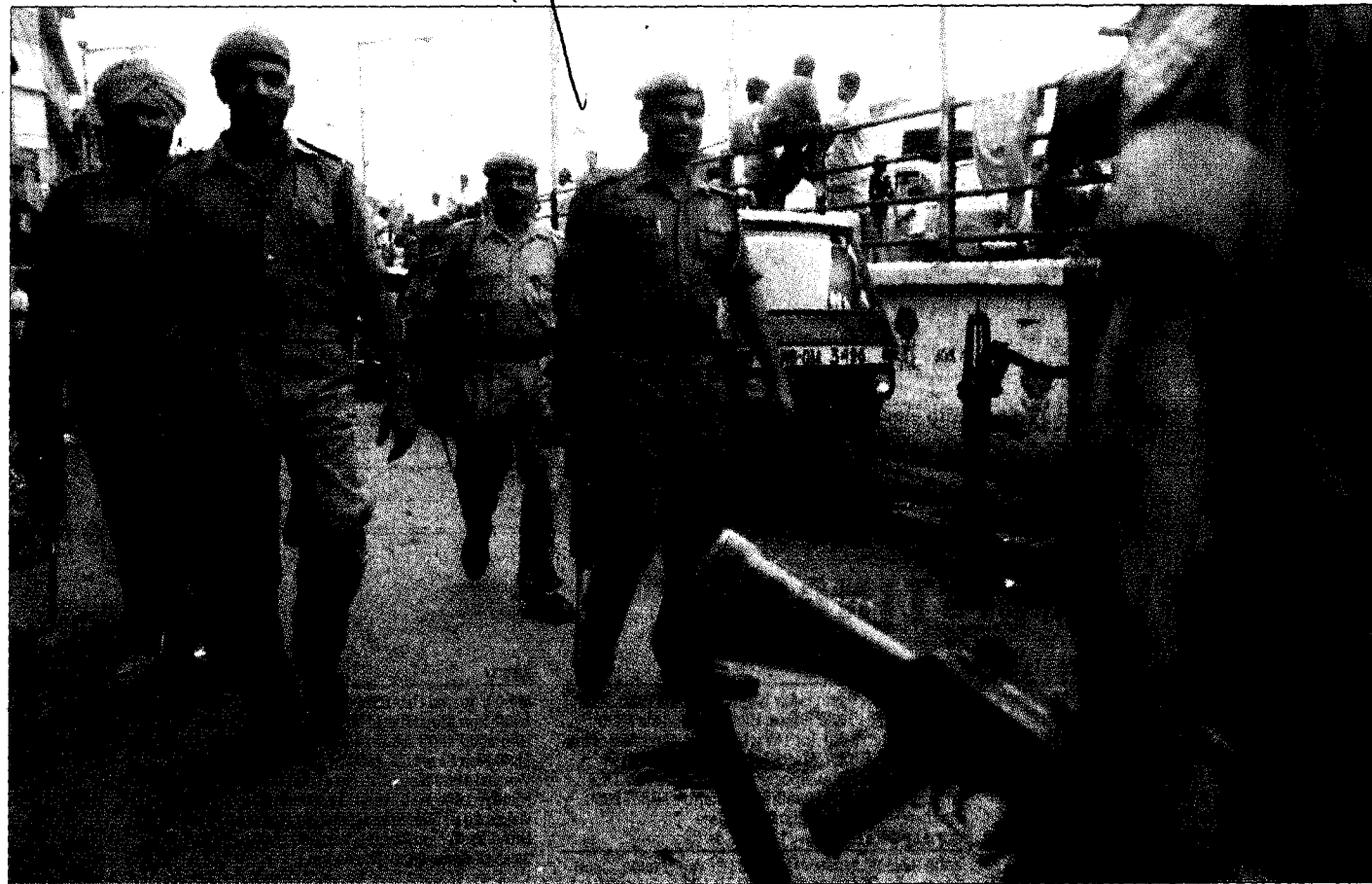
THE STATE'S election machinery snapped into action today, 24 hours before West Bengal goes to what is being seen as the most important Assembly election for it in years. The CEO said arrangements for holding a peaceful election were complete, but there were reports of violence already from the districts and in parts of the city.

The Election Commission has banned politicians from hopping from seat to seat in helicopters on the days of polling and counting. No political leader, except candidates and their polling agents can tour constituencies in cars. The rule applies to ministers, and even former chief ministers.

This is the directive that the State Chief Electoral Officer and Director, Civil Aviation have received from Chief Election Commissioner M S Gill. It follows reports that some leaders plan to fly from seat to seat to ensure fair polling.

The directive is meant to ensure, Gill has made clear, that politicians do not usurp the EC's powers or step into the panel's jurisdiction. Supervision and monitoring of elections, and ensuring that the code of conduct is followed, are solely the Election Commission's responsibilities, as Article 324 of the Constitution makes clear.

Besides, touring of constituencies on polling day would amount to campaigning during a period of time when it is prohibited. The EC has imposed no restrictions on ordinary citizens, who can drive anywhere they wish. Asked whether leaders could move around in their



CRPF personnel patrol the streets of Kolkata on Wednesday on poll eve.

private capacities, CEO Sabyasachi Sen was non-committal.

Today, the CEO said that the EC is fully equipped for free and fair polls tomorrow. More than 250,000 polling personnel will conduct the election, in which 4.86 crore people are expected to cast votes in 61,546 polling booths. Apart from 170 companies of paramilitary forces, 42,000 State Police personnel, another 15,000 of Calcutta Police, a few thousand Home Guards and National Volunteer

Force members will be on duty across West Bengal.

Midnapore has the dubious distinction of having 22 companies of paramilitary forces on duty. Anyone who faces any difficulty or fears trouble can get in touch directly with the Lalbazaar Control Room at the following numbers: 235-0230, 255-3024, 214-1212/13/14/17/18.

Violence on poll eve

The State got today what may be

a foretaste of what it may expect tomorrow. Prasad Mukherjee, I-G (Law and Order) said a man was killed in Domkol, Murshidabad, and another in Jagatdhal, Hooghly.

Bombings were reported from Nabadwip, Birja in Birbhum and Jangipur and from parts of Kolkata, where a CPI(M) worker was injured while making a bomb in a house on Gurudas Road.

Swapan Das, 42, who has been admitted, to NRS Medical Col-

lege and Hospital with severe burns, has named a local CPI(M) leader as his patron.

The Trinamool Youth Congress president, Sanjay Bakshi's car was the target of a bomb attack in Jorasanko, though no one was injured.

Trinamool MLA Pankaj Banerjee said that four men were hurt when a bomb exploded in a house at Netaji Nagar. A CPI(M) party office at Pathuriaghata was attacked last night.

No one will bet his money on this one

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 9

THE CM and the wannabe CM have both gone the whole hog. Now it's time for the die to be cast. And, unlike in the past, this time around, no one's willing to bet his money on who would win the 2001 vote. The race to the Writers' Buildings is wide open. And the power, for once, wrests with the 4.86 crore-strong electorate. Will the bodley dao palte dao slogan sweep away the forces of continuity?

That, time will tell. For, unlike in 1996, Alimuddin Street too is acting unusually coy. So is Harish Chatterjee Street. Anil Biswas, talking to reporters today, was not as cocksure as he usually is. He didn't for once say that his party would get a majority on its own. The Left Front, he said, would get a comfortable majority - by his standards a modest estimate.

Biswas's mellowness, in a way explains Jyoti Basu's repeated calls for Left Front unity during his campaign. The Front's USP, a new-look, voter friendly Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, too said he was confident of peaceful polling. But not a word did he utter on what he expected from the electorate. He will exercise his franchise at Patha Bhavan School at 9 am.

The same uncertainty dogs Mamata Banerjee. Hours before leaving for Midnapore, she looked tense and refused to comment on whether she expected her Bangla Bachao Front to move into Writers'. "It's difficult to make such predictions. Tomorrow will be a historic day. And we



are waiting for a historic mandate." Bluster, sans substance.

Mamata said she feared largescale violence tomorrow. "Booths in Midnapore, Bankura, Birbhum and Burdwan are highly sensitive." The Trinamool chief expects to return from Midnapore by noon tomorrow. She plans to cast her ballot at Mitra Institution in the afternoon.

A feature of this election is the myriad formations and the number of new players in the fray. And unlike in the past, these small contenders could emerge as key players. Unhappy Congress leaders could make Mamata's calculations go haywire. A B A Ghani Khan Chowdhury and Adhir Choudhury, for instance, could upset her apple cart.

The Party For Democratic Socialism, led by Mr Clean Saifuddin Choudhury, too could do much the same to the Left Front. Uncertainty, therefore, is the name of the game.

The Election Commission however claims to have made elaborate security arrangements to ensure peaceful polls. The state police have sounded a red alert in all the five districts along the Bangladesh border - South Dinajpur, North Dinajpur, Malda, Nadia and North 24 Parganas to prevent infiltrations from across the border.

The State has also taken steps to foil disruptions by the People's War Group. Three hundred additional companies of the Rapid Action Force have been deployed in the volatile districts, in both north Bengal and south Bengal.

The Election Commission has also taken care to appoint as many as 146 observers to monitor polling all over the State.

Arindam Sarkar
Midnapore, May 9

MIDNAPORE

FOR AN outsider, the silence in Garbeta, Keshpur, Sabong and Pingla would be spine-chilling.

People won't come outside their thatched huts, let alone talk. The only sign of life are the columns of paramilitary forces marching up and down the roads, or peering down from their formidable-looking vehicles, fingers taut on the triggers of AK 47 rifles.

For a second, you would think Midnapore was under curfew. But the elaborate security arrangements are supposed to ensure free and fair polling tomorrow.

Nobody has forgotten that violence reigned in the district between May 1998 and August 2000, leaving scores of people missing, maimed or plain dead. Hundreds of houses were razed to the ground. There could be hundreds and hundreds more. Hence the gun-totting securitymen and the

Fear holds the key as Midnapore goes indoors

deathly, spine-chilling silence.

After all, the political stakes are very, very high. There are 37 seats involved, and many heavyweights in the fray. Whichever party takes the lead here will be that much closer to Writers' Buildings and power.

Its hasn't helped either that the volatile Trinamool chief will be camping here tomorrow to take on the might of CPI(M) heavyweights like Surya Kanta Mishra, Sushanta Ghosh, district secretary Dipak Sarkar and Politburo member Biman Bose. No wonder the district administration has decided not to risk flare-ups.

Of the 7,226 booths, 1,600 have been declared highly sensitive. Of these, 450 have been branded hypersensitive. Twenty-two companies of paramilitary forces,

comprising CRPF, BSF, CISF, SSB and Punjab Police personnel have been deployed in the trouble-prone segments of Keshpur, Garbeta, Pingla, Sabong, Khejuri, Belpahari and Jamboni. The district police too are providing a force of 3,900 armed and unarmed men.

Yet, the villagers are no willing to leave their thatched huts, let alone talk.

The district, which has 56,65,476 voters, has been divided into 600-odd sectors. Each will have a mobile squad of armed policemen, patrolling 10 booths from dawn to dusk. There will be 50 additional mobile units and RT squads roving about with wireless sets.

There will be additional forces for PWG-dominated Belpahari, Jamoni and Garbe-

ta East and their 93 booths. Around 30,000 security personnel have been deployed.

"To monitor the polls, we have 23 election observers, of whom, six are expenditure observers; the rest will be general observers. For sensitive pockets like Sabong, Garbeta East, Keshpur, Pingla, Khejuri and Salboni, we have provided individual observers," district election officer and district magistrate MV Rao said.

But how do the political parties rate their prospects in this crucial district? The CPI(M) is hoping to improve on its 1996 tally. In 1996, the Left Front won 28 seats, with nine going to the Opposition. This time round, local CPI(M) leaders are looking at a minimum of 29 to 30 seats. But the party might lose Contai North, Contai South, Ramnagar, Tamluk, Panskuar East, Maishadal, Kharagpur and Sabong, they concede.

Trinamool and Congress leaders, however, are confident that the combine will not only retain these seats. It will also win Mukuberai, Sutahata, Midnapore Town, and Nandipur.

Kamtapur was key factor

DEBASHIS BHAUMIK
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

COOCH BEHAR, May 14. — The Kamtapuri factor played an important role in the Cooch Behar Assembly elections.

The rivals — the CPI-M and the Trinamul Congress — have blamed each other of being responsible for the creation of the Kamtapuri movement about two years ago when it started gaining momentum in the district.

A section of the local intelligentsia pointed out the CPI-M was against the Kamtapur organisations from the very beginning and thus earned the support from the "Bhatias" during the recent polls. "Bhatia" are residents of this district who have migrated here from elsewhere.

The "Bhatia" population in the district is roughly estimated to

comprise 48 per cent of the total. Four Assembly seats of the nine in the district are reserved for the Scheduled Castes who represent nearly 52 per cent of the district's population.

The "Bhatias" were fearing eviction from the district in the wake of the Kamtapuri movement.

The apprehensions was sparked off by a slogan which had been raised by the Kamtapuri organisations when the movement was at its peak about one-and-half-years ago calling for the ethnic cleansing of the "Bhatias".

The CPI-M's continuous tirade against the Kamtapuri organisations, dubbing them separatist forces, appears to have gone down well with the "Bhatias". What did not were the attempts by the Trinamul and the BJP to forge alliances with the KPP purely for electoral

gains.

The poll results were a reflection of this, political observers here believe.

Trinamul leader Mr Mihir Goswami said that the Kamtapuri movement was initiated by the CPI-M for its self-interest. "Once they had put up their own partymen to gear up the movement they then tried to pose as a saviour for non-Kamtapuri groups".

Just before the polls the CPI-M called off their men from the ethnic movement, Mr Goswami alleged.

He equated the situation with the CPI-M's initial opposition to the Gorkhaland movement in the Darjeeling hills but subsequent warming up to Mr Subash Ghisingh.

He observed that the KPP was not the only factor for the debacle of the Trinamul-Congress alliance. A few faction leaders

in the alliance worked against official nominees, he alleged.

The district Left Front convener, Mr Chandi Pal, denied that their candidates won only on the strength of "Bhatia" votes. He alleged that the Trinamul was behind the formation of the Kamtapur movement. A large chunk of KPP supporters had cast their votes in favour of the Trinamul nominees.

He said the people's verdict had gone against the Trinamul, and the Kamtapuris had tried to disturb North Bengal's peaceful atmosphere. Mr Pal said that the Kamtapuri militants had killed 10 CPI-M workers in North Bengal in the recent past. A large portion of the Rajbangshi community continued to be with the Left, he added saying, "Not all have joined the Kamtapuri organisations".

THE STATESMAN

15 MAY 2011

Mamata a temporary phase in politics: Anil

Buddha promises ideal govt; ministry on Friday

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 14. — A victorious Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya promised good governance at Writers' Buildings today.

The state's sixth Left Front ministry, headed by Mr Bhattacharya, is scheduled to take oath on 18 May. The CPI-M state secretariat met today to discuss the ministry's composition. It was attended, among others, by Mr Bhattacharya, Mr Jyoti Basu, Mr Anil Biswas and Mr Biman Bose.

Several new and young faces will be inducted to make the government more dynamic. The list of ministers will, however, be finalised at tomorrow's Left Front meeting.

At Writers', Mr Bhattacharya reiterated his commitment to improve the government's work culture. He had done so when he took over as chief minister in November last year, but nothing much had happened since then.

Today, he spoke of providing a more responsive and speedy administration.

Mr Bhattacharya appeared no different in victory, trying to create an impression that the election results were all expected. "We now have more responsibility on our shoulders."

He outlined his plans for the uplift of those below the poverty line. The government would try to reach out to these people and frame better policies for them, he said.

He also stressed on better communication between government and the public.

The new government would focus on employment, youth welfare, education, health care,

public distribution system and industrialisation, he said.

The election commission will issue a notification tomorrow morning constituting the 13th Assembly. The Governor will issue another notification dissolving the present House.

Anil on Mamata: Mr Anil Biswas has dismissed the "Mamata phenomenon" as a temporary phase in state politics. "Her entire politics, as we so often stated, is devoid of any ideology and as such it can't be sustained for long," he told *The Statesman* today.

The polls have proved beyond doubt that people will always reject a "restless leader like Miss Mamata Banerjee, her unstable leadership and opportunistic stand that

■ Editorial: Buddhadev's victory! page 6

■ More reports on pages 3, 4

results from her craving for power."

He said the Congress, Trinamul and the BJP had formed an "undeclared mahajot" to defeat the Left Front. "But the people could easily detect the dishonesty and lack of ethics of this kind of politics and as a result the Opposition became alienated from the people."

The CPI-M state secretary admitted that there was an anti-incumbency mood among the electorate. But the Left Front had overcome it by explaining to the people what the government had achieved and what it couldn't. "This self-analysis helped the people realise that we're sincerely trying live up to their

expectations."

But was there not a "mini-revolt" within the CPI-M before the polls? "Every party faces such a situation at some point of time. We have addressed the problem through a purification drive. For this the party could remain united."

Was not the party under siege when it went to the polls? Mr Biswas denied this.

He said the Left Front had both strong and weak points. Land reforms and agricultural growth are among the strong points.

On the negative side was unemployment which had resulted in discontentment among the youths, he said. "We've begun to respond to the problem with new ideas and our improved performance in both urban and rural areas shows people are appreciating our efforts."

Mr Biswas thanked the media for its negative coverage of the Left Front government. "The media hostility had put our cadres on alert and some of our sympathisers, who had decided to remain aloof from politics for some reasons, rallied around the party to save it from the biased media blitzkrieg."

About the comment of Mr Rabin Deb (party MLA from Ballygunge) that the Left victory was a mandate against Mr CR Irani, editor-in-chief of *The Statesman*, Mr Biswas said: "I don't know what the MLA exactly said. But, certainly we've no personal enmity against any one. In fact, I've the finest of relations with each and every editor and a large number of journalists."

He promised the government would not interfere with the policies of the newspapers and TV channels.

15 MAY 2001

The wise Buddha

It's a new Left Front that has won West Bengal

HOW does the Left Front do it? Many factors account for its sixth consecutive triumph in West Bengal but the most important were probably the three 'M's: party machines, the message and Mamata Banerjee. Not only has the Left held on to a steady share of the vote, it has won almost as many seats as it did five years ago and recovered ground in urban and middle-class areas to boot. To win in so decisive a fashion is quite extraordinary. No other party in India can show anything close to this unbroken run of success. Once again at the heart of the Left's extraordinary electoral performance lies the organising abilities of party cadres, especially those of the CPI(M) who, after a quarter of a century, are well entrenched in the countryside and are said to know voters' aspirations like the back of their hands. But even the most formidable party machines would find it hard to deliver the vote unless the message is right. From the 87-year-old Jyoti Basu who travelled 2500 km campaigning for the Front as well as Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee came a message which the state wanted to hear: economic growth, jobs, new industry.

The push for new industry has been on for some time. The Front hopes to do on the industries front through infrastructural and policy reform what it achieved in agriculture with land reforms. Almost unnoticed in the rest of the country, the Left's stand on liberalisation has been undergoing change. The hostile rhetoric is toned down, foreign investment is being wooed though reservations about opening up to foreign trade remain. No longer is there unquestioning

support for the public sector. The Left could fairly claim today to stand for capitalism with a human face. To have received applications worth a mind-boggling Rs 48,000 crore for investment in industry, as Jyoti Basu points out to all who will listen, West Bengal must be doing many things right. Certainly voters seem persuaded the Left Front has been moving in the right direction.

Mamata Banerjee, sulking in her tent, must wonder how her opponents managed to defy the anti-incumbency wave which swept out governments in three other states. Part of the answer is Banerjee's alliance with the Congress did not offer a credible alternative. Banerjee and many pundits seem to have underestimated the intelligence of voters when they predicted the Left would face its toughest test in this poll. It turns out most of the people do not trust opportunistic politicians and shrill populism. In contrast to the parade of alliances the Trinamool Congress made and broke and made again, the Left presented a steady, mature and solid front. At the same time it has been able to manage the transition from Basu to Bhattacharjee smoothly. The Basu years close deservedly with a splendid victory. From here on it will be his successor on his own. Bhattacharjee can expect the usual rough ride that the CPI(M) and Left Front partners reserve for their leaders when the polls are over. He will have to find a way of putting his weight behind younger reform-minded members and restraining the old guard if he intends to deliver on his economic promises. He should savour his victory today. From tomorrow onwards the road gets rough.

INDIAN

15 MAY 2001

BUDDHA SMILES AGAIN

● Left Front leaves Trinamool alliance way behind ● BJP, PDS draw a blank

HT Correspondents
Kolkata, May 13

NEVER SAY never again.

Mamata Banerjee learnt this the hard way today as her 'ebar or never' slogan chewed the dust of her dreams to make it to the Writers' Buildings as the Left Front returned to power with a thumping majority for the record sixth consecutive term.

As State after State crumbled under the weight of an anti-incumbency backlash, the Left Front not only bucked the trend but also smashed to smithereens all speculation of a wafer-thin majority and a close contest with the Trinamool Congress that were dished out by myriad opinion and exit polls. At the end of the day, it was clear that the psephologists' nightmare is spelt West Bengal.

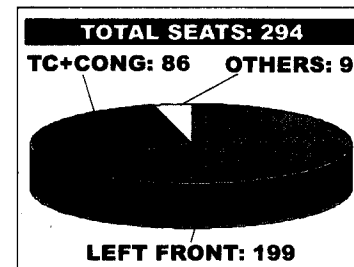
It was also clear that change was what the State's populace wanted all right, but they found new Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's soothing promise of a changed Left an infinitely safer bet than a changed regime altogether.

Of the 294 seats declared, the Left Front has won 199 — the CPI(M) 144, Forward Bloc 25, RSP 17, CPI seven, I P two, WBSP four and the Forward Bloc(M) one. The Trinamool won 59, the Congress 26, SUCI two, GNL three and the Independents nine.

With this, the Left falls short of its 1996 election figure of 204 by just five seats. On the other hand,

with the Congress-Trinamool managing just 86 seats between them, the Opposition that got 82 in the last polls has been able to increase its figure by only four.

For all the tall talk, the BJP came a cropper as none of its 200-odd contestants won. Ditto for the Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS), which fielded candidates in over 100 seats. The only consolation, if any, for the Opposition is that CPI(M) has fallen three short of a simple majority on its own in the 294-member



House.

While throughout the day, the Trinamool chief stayed indoors, alone, the mood at the CPI(M) headquarters on Alimuddin Street was understandably bubbly. In the evening, as the contours of a Left sweep became clear, party cadres took out processions with Red flags across the State. About the same time, a sulking Mamata — still incommunicado — announced through a party spokesman her decision to quit as Trinamool chief.

Cadres flooded the streets of Kolkata as news spread that Buddhadeb had won from Jadavpur by 30,000 votes. "I told you before that we would win by a comfortable majority.

The people's verdict is a clear indication that they have voted for the Left Front's policies carried over the last 24 years and they want peace and stability. This is the victory of the people and the Left Front," said Buddhadeb. As in the past, this time too the Left has done remarkably well in the rural belt, reaping a tidy harvest in the heartland districts of Burdwan, Bankura, Hooghly, Birbhum, Midnapore and Hooghly. This time, they have even made inroads in Kolkata, traditionally considered anti-Left, and in such Congress strongholds as Malda.

The CPI(M) State Secretariat will meet tomorrow to discuss the formation of the new Government. The oath-taking ceremony is likely on Thursday, but party leaders were tight-lipped on the Cabinet candidates. "It's too early to comment on this," said Politburo member Biman Bose.

Buddhadeb, however, hinted the Cabinet would "need fresh blood". Chances are young leaders such as Mohd Salim and Robin Deb will be rewarded with ministerial berths.

■ More reports, photographs on pages 3 and 4
■ Detailed results on Page 5



Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee flashes the victory sign on Sunday after results showed that the Left Front would return to power for a record sixth term.

Blaming it all on Mamata

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, May 13

ONLY SOME hours back, she had her fingers raised in a sign of victory. Today, she's probably biting them in regret. Her hasty decision to tie up with the Congress had cost her a lifetime opportunity to drive the Left out of Writers' Buildings.

Her assessment had gone way off the mark. So much so that yesterday she was working on a list of Cabinet members. As the results poured in today, she withdrew into a shell.

Mamata generally shuts herself in when she's upset. And, dashes off resignation letters when the tide turns against her. She did no different today. This time, she quit from the leadership of her party, owning moral responsibility for the whitewash.

Again, much on the expected lines, her party colleagues requested her to reconsider the decision. An injured look about them, they cried foul. The CPI(M) had rigged the polls, resorted to unprecedented violence. A partisan administration had made things so much easier for the Left.

The truth, however, is Mamata and Mamata only, is to blame for her predicament. The Congress, her alliance partner, says as much. PCC president Pranab Mukherjee and party stalwart Somen Mitra both felt that the alliance had proved much too expensive.

Tapan Sikdar, till some days back her alliance partner, squarely blamed Mamata for disregarding Bengal's desire for change. Indeed, her decision to snap ties with the BJP, a formation people had accepted as an alternative to the Left Front, was never perceived as opportunistic.

Instead, the arrangement with the Congress was seen as one. For, after all, the Congress was always at the receiving end of Mamata's barbs. She referred to the party as the CPI(M)'s B-team.

Over the last two months, Mamata committed one blunder after another. She presented a disastrous Railway Budget— her populist proposals creating no ripples in Bengal. Subsequently, her hurried decision to pull out of the Union Cabinet alienated her from the people. Then, she lost precious time on cobbling together an alliance with the Congress.

The Left Front, on the other hand, took off fast. First to release its list of candidates, its campaign machinery got rolling well on time. Mamata was among the last to release her candidates' list. She, in fact, released two lists that only added to the confusion. Her selection of nominees was shoddy that caused rumblings in her own party. A doddering Trinamool organisation proved no match for the well-oiled Left Front machinery. And to top it all, her one-point "palte din, bodley din" slogan made no sense to the voter. Change for change sake is not Bengal's credo.

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, on the other hand, went from strength to strength. Turning on a charm, which Bengal has never seen before, he won hearts and sent out the right signals — wooing industrialists and candidly talking of his Government's lapses.

While Mamata ranted against Buddhadeb and Jyoti Basu, the Chief Minister hardly ever mentioned her name. Instead, he and his Front partners harped on the unruly ways of the Trinamool Congress.

Trinamool Congress crestfallen

By Malabika Bhattacharya

KOLKATA, MAY 13. In the well-hyped battle for control of West Bengal, the CPI(M)-led ruling Left Front entered the Writers' Buildings securing an absolute majority in the 294-seat Assembly.

As the news of Left's spectacular victory spread, jubilant supporters streamed into the streets of Kolkata and other parts of Bengal chanting slogans and holding aloft banners. Loyal supporters of contesting parties waited outside the counting centres throughout the day to get an idea about the trends.

Expectedly, the mood in the Congress-Trinamool camp was gloomy. The Trinamool Congress chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, had locked herself up in her Kalighat residence. At noon, when various television channels showed that the combine stood no chance of occupying office for another five years, Ms. Banerjee came out of her room and said "we accept the people's verdict."

According to her aides, a visibly upset Ms. Banerjee hardly spoke to anyone save her secretary, Mr. Gautam Basu, over the intercom.

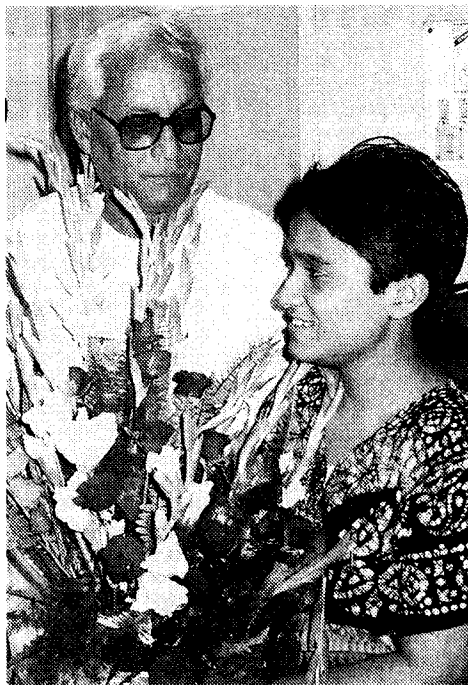
The Trinamool supremo, who had raised the slogan, "Now or Never," would not respond to the pleas of the supporters of the Trinamool winners in the South Kolkata parliamentary constituency either, who thronged her residence with green *abir* (scented coloured powder) to celebrate their victory.

By contrast, the 56-year-old Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, was happy but showed exemplary restraint while commenting on the results. In the company of his colleagues, Mr. Biman Bose and Mr. Anil Biswas, in Alimuddin Street, at the CPI(M) headquarters, Mr. Bhattacharjee was sitting relaxed.

The CPI(M) leader, Mr. Jyoti Basu, was glued to the television in his Salt Lake residence. Now and then, he would speak to the party leaders over the telephone and seek additional information. A beaming Mr. Basu arrived at the headquarters in the evening and congratulated his successor and party colleagues.

Among the Left Front candidates who won the poll were the controversial Transport Minister, Mr. Subhash Chakraborty, the Finance Minister, Mr. Asim Dasgupta, Mr. Manab Mukherjee, the Tourism Minister, Mr. Nirupam Sen, Mr. Mohammad Salim and Mr. Rabin Deb.

A disappointed Ms. Banerjee informed the Trinamool leaders through her aides that she had decided to step down as party chief. The



Ms. Sucharita Bhattacharjee offers flowers to her father, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal, on his poll victory in Kolkata on Sunday. — Reuters

leaders, however, huddled together and communicated to her their decision to continue resisting the Left under her leadership.

"The CPI(M) and police created terror and did not allow the average man to vote freely. Wherever they could (vote freely), we won," Mr. Pankaj Banerjee, chairman of the Trinamool's policy-making body, said.

Till evening, there was a huge crowd outside Ms. Banerjee's residence. Party supporters and mediapersons were waiting patiently to get a glimpse of her. Sensing her grim mood, none of the party's front-ranking leaders, who won the election, tried to seek an audience with her. The winners are Mr. Subrata Mukherjee, Kolkata Mayor, Mr. Pankaj Banerjee, Mr. Shobhandeb Chattopadhyay, Ms. Nayana Bandopadhyay, actor Mr. Tapas Pal and Ms. Sonali Guha, winner of the prestigious South 24-Parganas' Satgachia seat — former Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu's constituency.

The combine's other partner, Congress, was relatively happy as it has succeeded in securing 26 seats. The leaders, in private, were critical of the highcommand's decision to tie up

with the Trinamool saying the party on its own, could have fared even better.

Among the Congress' notable winners were Mr. Somen Mitra, former State unit president and Mr. Atish Sinha, leader of the Congress State Assembly.

Buddhadeb to continue

KOLKATA, MAY 13. The CPI(M) today said that Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee would be the Chief Minister of the sixth Left Front Government in the State and the date of swearing-in the new Ministry would be finalised on May 17.

The CPI(M) State secretary, Mr. Anil Biswas, told newsmen here that Mr. Bhattacharjee had been projected as the leader and it would be formally endorsed in the State committee meeting on May 17.

Victory will have bearing on national politics: Basu

The former Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, today said the Left Front's return to for the sixth consecutive term in West Bengal would have its direct bearing on national politics.

"We are grateful to the people for reposing faith in the Left Front," Mr. Basu told reporters. He described the Left Front's return to power as "a record in India's parliamentary politics".

"It is unprecedented in any country that a coalition of Left parties is re-elected to power for sixth term in a row in a province," the 87-year-old Marxist leader said.

Brushing aside the exit poll prediction, he said, the results had gone once again in Front's favour. "Exit poll is absurd," he said, adding the verdict had belied all "calculations and gossips and the Front is back to power for the sixth term".

Mr. Basu expressed hope that the Front would perform much better by removing all its weaknesses and implementing its plans and programmes more effectively. Taking a dig at the Opposition for "spreading canards" against the CPI(M) much before the polls, he said the Front would like to have the cooperation of opposition parties "which unfortunately have no programmes for the masses".

"The Front's responsibility has increased considerably and people's hopes and aspirations have to be met," he said. Basu expressed hope that the Front would try to remove its weaknesses.— PTI

THE HINDU

14 MAY 2001

1977, 82, 87, 91, 96, 2001...

Buddha's bigger battle begins

BY ASHIS CHAKRABARTI

Neither he nor the CPM would admit this in public, but today's massive verdict for the Left Front was as much a personal triumph for Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee as it was one more testimony to the party's formidable organisation and its famed election machinery. He was the new face, the new image that sent out a signal that Bhattacharjee was the great helmsman who would push the Jyoti Basu era behind — in the party and the government. Here was the man to take both along in the great leap forward.

That was the promise that Bhattacharjee himself held out and the party held its ground with it. But now Bhattacharjee has to keep that promise. Having won his battle against Mamata, he now has to win the crucial battle within the party over some fundamental issues of change.

One reason why large sections of the urban middle class seem to have returned to the Left's fold is that Bhattacharjee succeeded in convincing them that he not only promised change, but had actually begun the process. He underscored the importance of change at his first interaction with the media after the Left victory. "We are changing," he said. The verdict suggested that the majority of people liked his, rather than Mamata's, agenda for change.

Moreover, Mamata's was an agenda, not only for change, but a complete break. The Trinamul Congress leader failed where Bhattacharjee succeeded — in driving home the message that his would be change with stability and continuity. This seems to have had its appeal to people in towns and villages, cutting across socio-economic barriers.

To start with, Bhattacharjee has identified three areas which needed policy changes — education, health and, of course, economic reforms. In ushering in change in education, he has to ensure that the idea of excellence is no longer dumped as elitism and hence sacrificed at the altar of so-called egalitarianism. In doing so, he will have to open the gates far wider for quality private enterprise in education, especially in management.

In his first six months as chief minister, he initiated steps to accept the new economy mantras in line with the change in the party's position on reforms. He — and the party — will continue to uphold the seen and unseen virtues of the public sector. But his economic agenda will come to rely more and more on private enterprise. This may be the case, not just with education and industry, but with areas like health and urban development as well.

In many of these, he has taken two steps forward and has to see that he does not have to go one step back. This is where his most important battle with the party may be waiting to happen. In education, many party leaders still think that the anti-elitist policies, ushered in by Promode Dasgupta, are valid even today. In economic reforms, too, he may find himself out of step with the party.

Despite his long years of heading the party's youth wing, Bhattacharjee has never been an organisation man. But he has to do two things at a time now: he has to be his own man and he has to fashion the party in his own new image. It is not a parallel, but he may have to do something of what A.B. Vajpayee had to do with the RSS — keep the Sangh parivar at Nagpur, while he ruled in New Delhi.



Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at the party office after the victory. Picture by Aranya Sen.

Recluse Mamata at political crossroads

Never say never again

BY SUJAN DUTTA

Her campaign against the Left scattered the four winds, Mamata Banerjee today stands alone, wondering where to go and how to go about it.

The Left's unrelenting charge has been numbing for her, going by her immediate response to it — she was a recluse through the day.

She was preparing to take credit for a victory she assumed was inevitable. Now that she has lost, she is taking all the blame. The painful security of solitude she took refuge in as the results poured in is anything but the hallmark of a leader: when her followers needed her most, she was trying only to console herself, own moral responsibility for the defeat by offering to resign as national chairperson of Trinamul.

What has happened of the fire-eating elder sister, the *dididi*?

In her first test of fortitude, Mamata is beginning to show signs of failure. Holding the party and the alliance together must be her top priority if she is to continue in politics.

Trinamul MPs have scarcely concealed that they are flirting with the idea of breaking away and rejoining the NDA. Ranjit Panja, who was with Mamata for much of her campaign, has been severely critical of her. His brother and Trinamul chairman, Ajit Panja, has already thrown the gauntlet. Nitish Sengupta, too, has voiced reservations about continuing with Mamata.

Having gone so far with the Congress in so high-profile a manner, it will be next to impossible for her to tie up with the BJP again. Mamata's political future continues to lie in her alliance with the Congress because it still gives her a broader spectrum of appeal to the electorate in Bengal than a tie-up with the BJP does.

She can count on Sonia Gandhi for some support, given her rapport with 10 Janpath. But that rapport, too, is subject to test. The Congress despises



Mamata on the eve of the results. (AFP)

those who cannot win elections for it. Mamata will need Sonia now, much more than in the past. Her problem is that she will not be able to negotiate from a position of strength despite her party being the dominant partner in the alliance.

Within the relationship with the Congress, Mamata can expect a revival of old rivalries. Somen Mitra and friends will use the election results to justify how the tactic of heaping scorn on the Left without building an organisation has failed. There is little doubt that it has. Political resentment in Bengal has been harnessed better by the Left because its organisation is deeper and broader, enabling it to beat Mamata at her own game.

Topple and change was Mamata's slogan which the Left co-opted and accommodated within its establishment because its cadre reach every constituency till the booth level and mobilise its voters to cast their ballots. Lack of organisation has meant Mamata has not been able to translate resentment into votes and votes into seats.

Mamata's first test to keep the alliance alive will be in the Calcutta civic corporation. Mamata can expect Subrata Mukherjee to toughen up, too.

RESULTS SPECIAL
PAGE 8

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

BJP debut dreams turn to dust

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, May 13: In a stunning mandate, the ADMK, whose chief Jayalalitha was disqualified from contesting the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, returned with a vengeance, while the Left Front romped back to Writers' Building with a comfortable majority in West Bengal.

In Kerala, the anti-incumbency sentiment took toll of the Left Democratic Front (LDF), which made way for the United Democratic Front (UDF). The other casualty of discontent with the ruling government was the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), which was crushed by the Congress.

Assam chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta lost in the prestigious Dispur seat to a political novice. Mahanta won in another seat, but with a sharply reduced margin.

The unambiguous verdicts in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal defied pollsters' projections of "close" fights in both cases.

In Pondicherry, the Congress also seems set to retain power, though it is just short of a simple majority.

In an election in which the honours were shared by the Congress and its allies and the Left Front, the BJP made no impact. The party failed to open its account in Kerala and Bengal, both of which it keenly eyed. BJP leaders had openly spoken of a hung Assembly in both states and claimed the party would play a "decisive" role.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, May 13: Bengal has renewed its faith in the Left with a vengeance.

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has been given such a thumping majority that Mamata Banerjee's alliance has frozen well short of the three-figure mark, for all its hype and hyperbole.

So shocked is the Opposition camp, so utterly at loss that its leader did not even present herself in public today. Mamata offered to resign, owning moral responsibility for her alliance's defeat.

"It was but natural," said Bhattacharjee of the victory, hours after the results became apparent. Till then, in Alimuddin Street, the margin of the victory had not sunk in. In the Left camp, leaders were restrained.

The Left Front won 199 seats — just four less than its 1996 tally — of the 294 for which elections were held. Counting for the Baruipur constituency was yet to be concluded. In the 1999 Lok Sabha poll, the Left was ahead in 189 Assembly segments.

The endorsement of the Left as the government Bengal deserves for the sixth time in a row since 1977 has come with a rider: the CPM has, for the first time, lost its absolute majority. It has got 143 seats, the majority mark being 148.

Bhattacharjee retained his Jadavpur seat, which he won by more than 29,000 votes. Five ministers of the outgoing Cabinet were worsted in the hustings.

Such was the sweep for the Left Front that it cut across districts and regions. It not only retained its hold over the Red heartland of Midnapore, Bankura, Birbhum, Purulia and Hooghly, but surged and recovered seemingly lost ground in North 24 Parganas and Nadia.

The CPI today also won the Midnapore Lok Sabha bypoll, caused by Indrajit Gupta's death, where its nominee Prabodh Panda beat Manoranjan Datta of Trinamul by 15,000 votes. Even in Calcutta, Mamata's home turf, the Front wins were a major surprise. Only in South 24 Parganas, the revolt of Samir Putatunda and his Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS) halted the Left juggernaut, though not quite stalling it.

More than the PDS, however, the BJP played the spoiler on a scale that the Trinamul-Congress alliance had not bargained for. The saffronites seemed to have come to the aid of the Marxists in over 30 seats, proving once again that Mamata lost the battle with the failure of the *mahaajot* offensive. Her alliance with the Congress gave her an advantage, but it fell far short of what she needed to throw out the Left.

The Left's sweep was not only geographical but also social. It has won in the countryside and made gains in urban centres and industrial areas, indicating that support for it has come from farmers, the middle-class and workers.

"This is unprecedented in world history. Our responsibility has gone up manifold," said Jyoti Basu. Basu was bitterly critical of the media which, he said, was

making unfounded allegations against the Left.

"The people of this state know us for 24 years. They know what we are capable of doing and what we have not been able to do. I greet them for reposing faith in us," said Bhattacharjee. He did not envisage problems because the CPM had not won a majority on its own.

However, the Forward Bloc indicated that it will ask for the deputy chief minister's post. This, Forward Bloc leaders say, will be in keeping with the principle adopted at the time the Left Front was formed — that the largest party will have the chief minister's post and the second largest the deputy chief minister's post.

Bhattacharjee said industrial development will be the new government's top priority. He said he will not adopt a path of confrontation but the government will not endorse the Centre's policies that let foreign companies prey on domestic markets. "There is a Central list and a state list and a concurrent list. We just want a working relationship with the Centre," he said. He will begin the exercise of forming his team tomorrow.

"People of West Bengal want change. So we are also changing. They (the Congress-Trinamul) are status-quoist," Bhattacharjee said. "I also want their support and hope they will be a constructive Opposition. I want to understand the problems of those who did not vote for us and seek their support. This victory is a reconfirmation that for 24 years we have been on the right track."

Despondency set in in the Mamata camp and grew with every hour that the leader kept herself away. As expected, the blaming exercise also began. Ranjit Panja, who was with Mamata in the campaign despite his brother, Ajit Panja's rebellion, today hit out at her.

Over the past two days, Mamata Banerjee had been proclaiming aloud that though there were irregularities in the voting, she was sure of winning.

THE TALLY

LEFT	
CPM	145
Rest	54
OPPOSITION	
Trinamul	59
Cong	26
OTHERS	
	9
Total seats: 294	

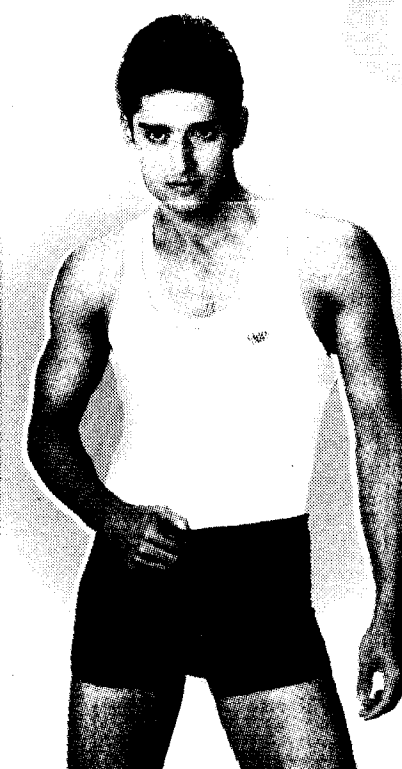
QUOTE

Not 'you' but 'we'

BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE

asked if he had won the elections for the Left Front

Confidence that comes from within ...




LUX
Rambo

VESTS • BRIEFS

DISTRIBUTORS WANTED

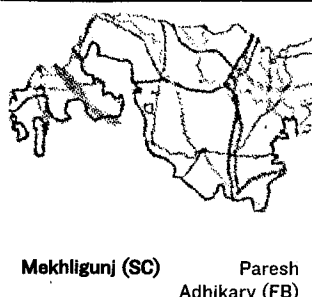
Required financially sound distributors for West Bengal. Interested parties in relevant trade may contact within 7 days: Biswanath Hosliery Mills Ltd. 39, Kalkrishna Tagore Street, Kolkata - 700 007 Tel.: (033) 238 2091 Fax: (033) 233 4343.

DARJEELING

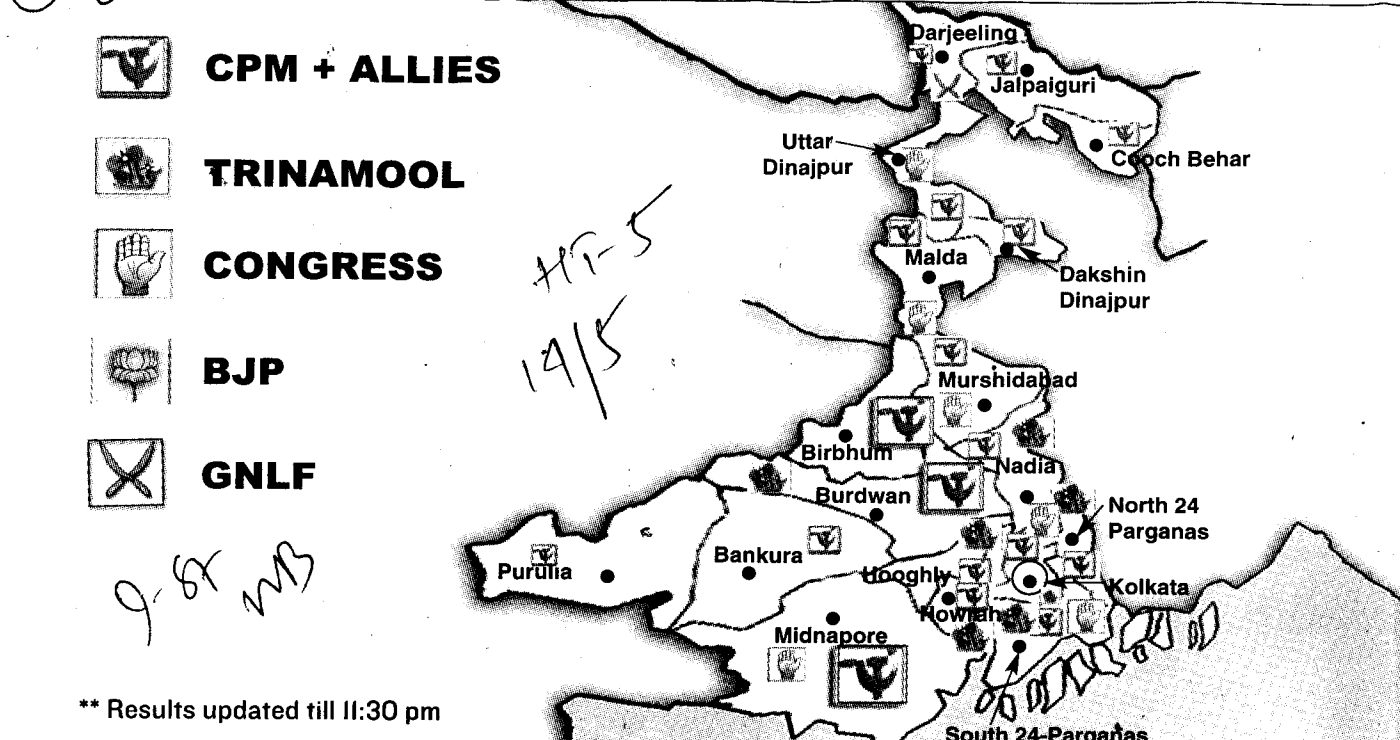


Kailmpong	Golan
Darjeeling	Lepcha (GNLF)
Kurseong	D K Pradhan (GNLF)
	Shanta Chetri (GNLF)
Siliguri	Asok Bhattacharya (CPM)
Phansidewa	Prakash Minz (CPM)

COOCH BEHAR



Mekhligunj (SC)	Pareesh Adhikary (FB)
Sitalkuchi (SC)	Sudhir Ch Pramanik (CPM)
Mathabhanga	Dinesh Ch Dakua (CPM)
Cooch Behar (N)	Dipak Ch Sardar (FB)
Cooch Behar (W)	Akshay Thakur (FB)
Dinhata	Kamal Guha (FB)
Natabari	Tamser Ali (CPM)
Sital	Nripen Roy (FB)
Tufangunj	Pushpa Chandra Das (CPM)



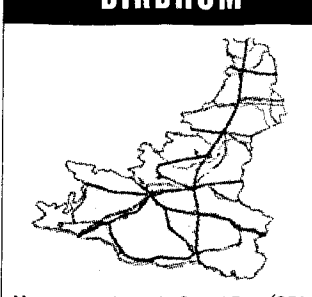
CPM + ALLIES
TRINAMOOL
CONGRESS
BJP
GNLF

HT-5
19/5

9.6X MB

** Results updated till 11:30 pm

BIRBHUM




Nanoor	Ananda Gopal Das (CPM)
Bolpur	Tapan Hore (RSP)
Lavpur	Nabanita Mukherjee (CPM)
Dubrajpur	Not available
Rajnagar	Bijoy Bagdi (FB)
Suri	Braja Mukherjee (CPM)
Mahammadbazar	Dhiren Sen (CPM)
Mayureswar	Bishnu Let (CPM)
Rampurhat	Asish Banerjee (TC)
Hansen	Asi Mal (Cong)
Nalhati	Kalimuddin Shams (FB)
Murari	Qamri Elahal (CPM)

BURDWAN



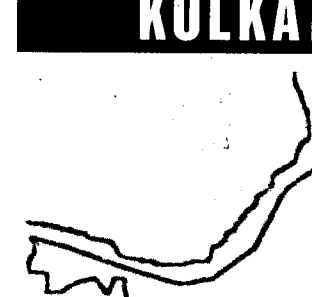

Kulti	Manik Lal Acharya (FB)
Barabani	Manik Upadhyay (TC)
Hirapur	Meloy Ghatak (TC)
Asansol	Kalyan Banerjee (TC)
Raniganj	Bansa Gopal Chowdhury (CPM)
Jamuria	Pelab Kabi (CPM)
Ukhra	Madan Bauri (CPM)
Durgapur I	Mrinal Banerjee (CPM)
Durgapur II	Apurva Mukherjee (TC)
Kanksha	Ankure Sareesh (CPM)
Aushgram	Not available
Bhatar	Not available
Galsi	Not available
Burdwan (N)	Nishit Adhikari (CPM)
Burdwan (S)	Nirupam Sen (CPM)
Khandaghoosh	Not available
Raina	S P Pal (CPM)
Jamulpur	Samar Hazra (CPM)
Memari	Tapash Chatterjee (CPM)
Kalna	Anju Kar (CPM)
Nadonghat	Ratan Das (CPM)
Manteshwar	Abu Ayesah Mandal (CPM)
Purbashthall	Subrata Bhowal (CPM)
Katwa	Rabindranath Chatterjee (Cong)
Mangalkot	Sadhana Mullick (CPM)
Ketugram	Tamal Ch Majhi (CPM)

NORTH 24-PARGANAS



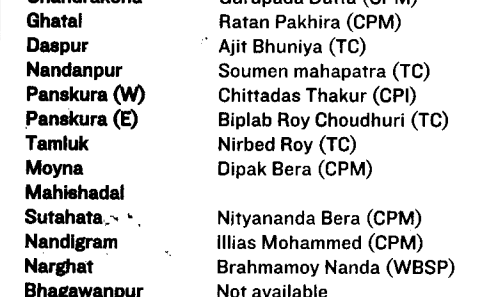
Bagdah	Not available
Bongaon	Not available
Gaighata	Jyoti Priyo Mullick (TC)
Habra	Tapati Dutta (TC)
Ashoknagar	Sarmistha Dutta (CPM)
Amdanga	Hashim Abdul Halim (CPM)
Barasat	Ashok Mukherjee (TC)
Rajarhat	Tanmoy Mandal (TC)
Deganga	Md Yakub (FB)
Swarupnagar	Mustafa Bin Kasim (CPM)
Baduria	Kazi Abdul Gafur (Cong)
Basirhat	Narayan Mukherjee (CPM)
Haenabad	Gautam Deb (CPM)
Haroa	Kshiti Mandal (CPM)
Sandeshkhali	Kanti Biewas (CPM)
Hingalgunj	Nripen Gyne (CPM)
Bilpur	Jagdish Das (CPM)
Nalhati	Ranjit Kundu (CPM)
Bhatpara	Not available
Jagdaddal	Not available
Noapara	Not available
Titagarh	Not available
Khardaha	Not available
Panihati	Not available
Kamarhati	Not available
Baranagar	Amar Chowdhury (RSP)
Dum Dum	Not available
Belghachia (E)	Subhash Chakraborty (CPM)

KOLKATA





Behala (E)	Paras Datta (TC)
Behala (W)	Partha Chatterjee (TC)
Garden Reach	Md Amin (CPM)
Cossipur	Tarak Banerjee (TC)
Shyampur	Subrata Bose (FB)
Jorabagan	Sudhangshu Seal (CPM)
Jorasanko	Satyannarayan Bajaj (TC)
Burrabazar	Tapash Roy (TC)
Bowbazar	Nayana Banerjee (TC)
Chowringhee	Subrata Mukherjee (TC)
Kabritirha	Ram Pyare Ram (Cong)
Alipore	Tapash Paul (TC)
Rashbehari	Sovande Chatteropadhyay (TC)
Tollygunj	Pankaj Banerjee (TC)
Dhakuria	Saugata Roy (TC)
Ballygunj	Rabin Deb (CPM)
Entally	Md Salim (CPM)
Taltala	Debash Das (CPM)
Bellaghat	Manab Mukherjee (CPM)
Sealdah	Somen Mitra (Cong)
Vidyasagar	Laksmi De (CPM)
Bartolla	Sadhan Pandey (TC)
Maniktala	Pareesh Pal (TC)
Belgachia (W)	Rajdeo Goala (CPM)

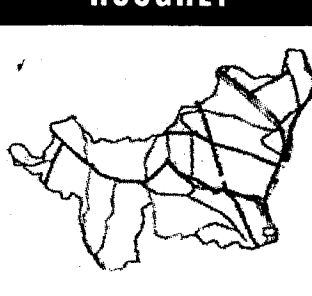
MIDNAPORE



Chandrakona	Gurupada Dutta (CPM)
Ghatla	Ratan Pakhira (CPM)
Daspur	Ajit Bhunia (TC)
Nandanpur	Soumen mahapatra (TC)
Panskura (W)	Chittadas Thakur (CPI)
Panskura (E)	Biplab Roy Choudhury (TC)
Tamluk	Nirdeb Roy (TC)
Moyna	Dipak Bera (CPM)
Mahishadal	Nityananda Bera (CPM)
Sitahata	Illias Mohammed (CPM)
Nandigram	Brahmamoy Nanda (WBSP)
Narghat	Not available
Bhagawanpur	Not available
Khejuri	Not available
Cantal (N)	Not available
Cantal (S)	Sisir Adhikari (TC)
Ramnagar	Not available
Egra	Not available
Mugberia	Not available
Parashpur	Not available
Sabong	Not available
Pingla	Rampada Samanta (Ind)
Debra	Not available
Keshpur	Nandaran Dal (CPM)
Garbeta (E)	Susanta Ghosh (CPM)
Garbeta (W)	Krishna Prasad Duley (CPM)
Salboni	Khagendranath Mahata (CPM)
Midnapore	Not available
Kharagpur (Town)	Not available
Kharagpur (Rural)	Nazmul Haque (CPM)
Keshlari	Not available
Narayanganj	Not available
Danton	Nandagopal Bhattacharjee (CPI)
Nayagram	Bhunitath Soren (CPM)
Gopiballavpur	Bhabani Shankar Hatyal (CPM)
Jhargram	Mina Santani (CPM)
Binpur	Not available



HOOGHLY



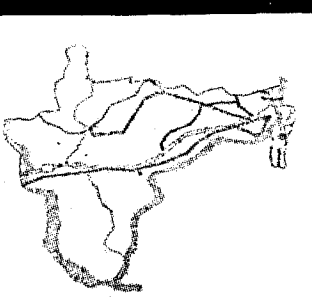
Jangipara	Ibha De (CPM)
Chanditala	Bhaktaram Pan (CPM)
Uttarpara	Swaraj Mukherjee (TC)
Serampore	Ratan Dey
Chandpani	Abdul Mannan (Cong)
Chandernagore	Kamal Mukherjee (Cong)
Singur	Rabindranth Bhattacharya (TC)
Haripal	Kaliprasad Biswas (CPM)
Tarakeswar	Pratim Chatterjee (CPM)
Chineurah	Naren De (FB)
Bansberia	Ashutosh Mukherjee (CPM)
Balagarh	Dibakanta Routh (CPM)
Pandua	Ali Shiekh Majed (CPM)
Poiba	Sakti Pada Khanra (CPM)
Dhaniakhali	Kripa Sindhu Saha (FB)
Pursurah	Nimai Mal (CPM)
Khanakul	Bansibadan Moitra (CPM)
Arambagh	Binoy Dutta (CPM)
Goghat	Shibprasad Mullick (FB)

SOUTH 24-PARGANAS



Goeaba	Ganesh Mandal (RSP)
Beanti	Subhas Naskar (RSP)
Kultali	Prabodh Purkait (SUCI)
Joynagar	Debasprasad Sarkar (SUCI)
Barulpur	Not available
Canning (W)	Gobind Ch Naskar (TC)
Canning (E)	Abdur Razzak Molla (CPM)
Bhangar	Badal Jamadar (CPM)
Jadavpur	Buddhadhab Bhattacharjee (CPM)
Sonarpur	Nirman Mandal (TC)
Bishnupur (E)	Dilip Mandal (TC)
Bishnupur (W)	Subrata Bakshi (TC)
Maheshtala	Mursalin Molla (CPM)
Budge Budge	Ashok Deb (TC)
Satgachhia	Sonali Guha (TC)
Falta	Tamanash Ghosh (TC)
Diamond Harbour	Hrishi Haldar (CPM)
Mograhat (W)	Noorar Rehman (CPM)
Mograhat (E)	Basari Kazi (CPM)
Mandirbazar	Chowdhury Mohan Jatua (TC)
Mathurapur	Kanti Ganguly (CPM)
Kulpi	Jagaranjan Halder (TC)
Patharpatriama	Jageshwar Das (CPM)
Kakdwip	Monturam Pakhira (TC)
Sagar	Bankim Ch Hazra (TC)

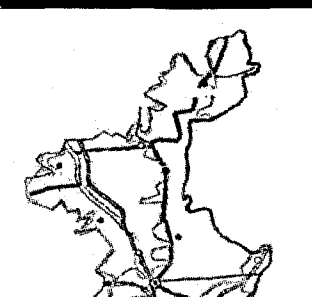
HOWRAH



Belly	Kanika Ganguly (CPM)
Howrah (N)	Lagandeo Singh (CPM)
Howrah (C)	Ambika Banerjee (TC)
Howrah (S)	Badal Bose (CPM)
Shibpur	Jotu Lahiri (TC)
Domjur	Padmanidhi Dhar (CPM)
Jagatballavpur	Biman Chakraborty (TC)
Panchla	Sailen Mandal (FB)
Sankral	Sital Sardar (TC)
Uluberia (N)	Mohan Mandal (CPM)
Uluberia (S)	Rabindra Ghosh (FB)
Shyampur	Kalipada Mandal (TC)
Bagnan	Nirupama Chatterjee (CPM)
Kalyanpur	Ashit Mitra (Cong)
Amta	Pratyush Mukherjee (CPM)
Udeyarnayanpur	Nanigopal Chaudhuri (CPM)

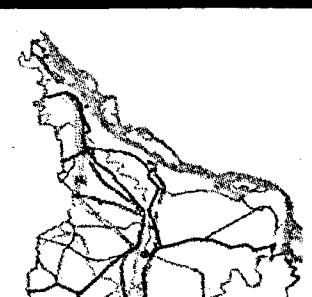


NADIA



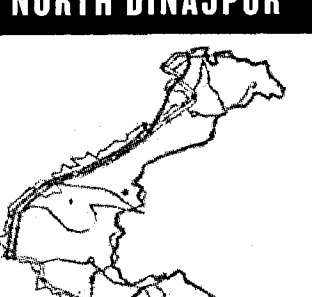
Karimpur	Not available
Palashipara	Not available
Nakashipara	Kalol Khan (TC)
Kalgunj	Not available
Chappra	Not available
Krishangunj	Not available
Krishnagar (E)	Not available
Krishnagar (W)	Not available
Nabadwip	P Saha (TC)
Shantipur	Ajoy Dey (Cong)
Hanskhali	Nayon Sarkar (CPM)
Ranaghat (E)	Ashim Bala (CPM)
Ranaghat (W)	Sankar Singh (Cong)
Chakdaha	Satya Sandhan Chakraborty (CPM)
Haringhata	Not available

MURSHIDABAD



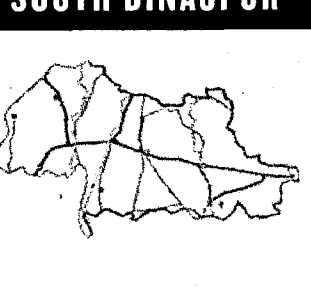
Farakka	Moynul Haz (Cong)
Aurangabad	Humayun Reza (Cong)
Suti	Jane Alam (RSP)
Sagarighi	Not available
Jangipur	Abul Hasnat (RSP)
Lalgola	Not available
Bhagabangola	Not available
Nabagram	Not available
Murshidabad	Chhaya Ghosh (FB)
Jalangee	Not available
Domkal	Not available
Naoda	Abu Taher (Ind)
Hariparpara	Niyamat Sheikh (Ind)
Behrampore	Maya Rani Pal (Cong)
Beldanga	Golan Kibria Mia (Cong)
Kandi	Atish Sinha (Cong)
Khargram	Biswanath Mandal (CPM)
Bareyan	Amalendranath Lal Roy (RSP)

NORTH DINAJPUR



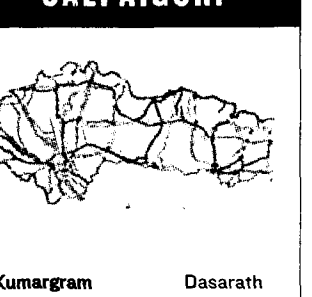
Chopra	Hamidul Rehman (Ind)
Islampur	Not available
Goalpokhar	Hafiz Alam Sairani (FB)
Karandighi	Gokul Roy (FB)
Raigunj	Not available
Kaliagunj	Not available
Itahar	Not available

SOUTH DINAJPUR



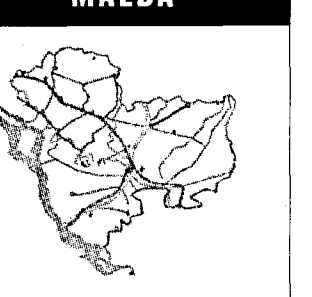
Kushmandi	Narmada Roy (RSP)
Gangarrampur	Narayan Biswas (CPM)
Tapan	Khara Soren (RSP)
Kumargunj	Mafooz Khan (CPM)
Balughat	Biswanath Chowdhury (RSP)

JALPAIGURI



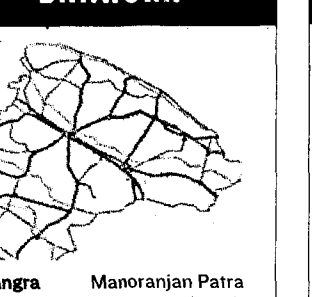
Kumargram	Dasarath Turkey (RSP)
Kalchini	Not available
Alipurduar	Nirmal Das (RSP)
Falakata	Not available
Madarihat	Not available
Dhupguri	Lakshmi Kanta Roy (CPM)
Nagrakata	Chaitan Munda (CPM)
Moinguri	Bachamohan Roy (RSP)
Mal	Somra Lakda (CPM)
Kranti	Sudhan Raha (CPM)
Jalpaiguri	Gobinda Roy (FB)
Raigunj	Jatindranath Roy (CPM)

MALDA



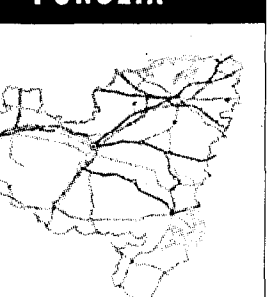
Habibpur	Jadu Hembram (CPM)
Gazole	Sadhu Tudu (CPM)
Kharba	Not available
Harishchandrapur	Not available
Ratua	Sailen Sarkar (CPM)
Araldanga	Sabitri Mitra (Cong)
Malda (SC)	Subhendro Chowdhury (CPM)
English Bazar	Samar Roy (CPM)
Manikchak	Asima Chowdhury (CPM)
Sujapur	Rubi Noor (Cong)
Kaliachak	Abu Hasen Khan Chowdhury (Cong)

BANKURA



Taldanga	Manoranjan Patra (CPM)
Raipur	Open Kisku (CPM)
Ranibandh	Makar Tudu (CPM)
Indpur	Kiriti Bagdi (CPM)
Chhatna	Not available
Gangajalghati	Not available
Barjora	Sushmita Biswas (CPM)
Bankura	Kansinath Mishra (TC)
Onda	Anil Mukherjee (FB)
Bishnupur	Jayanta Chowdhury (CPM)
Kotolpur	Manasi Ghose (CPM)
Indus	Nandadulal Majhi (CPM)
Sonamukhi	Sukhendulal Khan (CPM)
Jalpur	Sanjiram Mahato (Cong)

PURULIA



Banbuan	Upendranath Hansda (CPM)
Manbazar	Mahata Shamyappari (CPM)
Balarampore	Not available
Arsa	Not available
Jhalda	Nepal Mahato (Ind)
Purulia	Nikhil Mukherjee (CPM)
Para	Bilasibala Sahish (CPM)
Ragunathpur	Usharani Baul (CPM)
Kashipur	Not available
Hura	Abinash Mahato (CPM)

SWEARING-IN: PANJA DEFIES MAMATA BOYCOTT

Not for confrontation with Centre: Buddhadeb

By Our Special Correspondent

KOLKATA, MAY 18. As the clock struck 11 this morning, the communists-led 48-member Left Front Ministry in West Bengal was sworn in for the sixth time in a row at a glittering ceremony in Raj Bhavan witnessed by a host of celebrities. The Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress preferred to stay away on the grounds that the Leftists had occupied office by rigging the elections.

Clad in a flamboyant rust silk kurta and off-white *dhoti*, the Bengal Governor, Mr. Viren J. Shah, administered the oath of office to the 56-year-old Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, dressed in a crisp white *dhoti* and *kurta*. Mr. Bhattacharjee took the oath as Chief Minister in Bengali as his mother, wife and daughter, among about 2,000 people, looked on. The ceremony over, a smiling Mr. Bhattacharjee told mediapersons, "It's a huge responsibility. I shall try to live up to the people's expectations." He said his Government would avoid any confrontation with the Centre with which it wanted a "working relationship".

Nirupam Sen, No. 2

Of the 48-member Council of Ministers, 34 are of Cabinet rank and 14 Ministers of State. The Ministry has nearly 14 new faces. The entry of Mr. Nirupam Sen, veteran CPI(M) leader from Burdwan, as the second-in-command, is being interpreted by many as the Front's effort to help Mr. Bhattacharjee give the Government the required push.

Turning her back on the celebrations, Ms. Mamata Banerjee lamented to her party MPs the fate of the railway projects in Ben-



The Trinamool Congress MP, Mr. Ajit Panja, congratulating the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, before the swearing-in ceremony at the Raj Bhavan in Kolkata on Friday. — Photo: Sushanta Patronobish.

gal. Neither she nor any one of her family members watched the Front's oath-taking ceremony broadcast live on television as they were all "busy".

BJP in attendance

Later, Ms. Banerjee led a procession in the city to protest the "large-scale rigging" in the Assembly election. Ms. Banerjee's colleague, Mr. Ajit Panja, however, was under the media gaze at the ceremony when he congratulated the new Chief Minister. Ms. Banerjee's former ally, BJP, was represented by its MP, Mr. Satyabrata Mukherjee, and the State party president, Mr. Asim Ghosh. "It's undemocratic to stay away from an event like this," Mr. Ghosh said.

The swearing-in was attended by CPI(M) politburo members — Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet, Mr. Prakash Karat and Mr. Sitaram Yechuri — and other Left Front leaders. Actor Mr. Soumitra Chatterjee, litterateur, Ms. Nabanita Deb Sen, and Rabindra Sangeet doyenne, Ms. Suchitra Mitra, were Mr. Bhattacharjee's honoured guests. Poet and lyricist, Mr. Javed Akhtar, who had campaigned for the Leftists in the past month, also graced the ceremony reciting Urdu poems on request.

PTI reports from Delhi:

The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, congratulated Mr. Bhattacharjee and Mr. Tarun Gogoi on becoming Chief Ministers of West Bengal and Assam.

THE HINDU

19 MAY 2001

Governor Viren J Shah administers the oath of office to Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at the Raj Bhawan on Friday.

LF undecided on Forest, Co-op

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 18

THE PROCESS of allocation of portfolios could not be completed today, though Jyoti Basu had wanted it to be over by tonight. The Left Front, it seems, cannot decide who gets Forest and Cooperation.

The CPI(M) wants the Forward Bloc to get the Forest and Tourism portfolios, so that it can keep Cooperation for itself. But party leaders in North Bengal are not ready to forego the Forest portfolio. And without Forest, Tourism is of little interest to the FB. The CPI(M) State secretariat tried in vain to reach a consensus today. The Left Front chairman, Sailen Dasgupta, has called for another meeting on Sunday.

The CPI(M) is keen on the Cooperation Department as it can play a crucial role in the sec-

ond phase of land reforms.

After 24 years of Left Front rule, land distribution has reached a plateau in West Bengal. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee now looks forward to setting up agro-based cooperatives and industries to harness rural skills.

The FB state secretary Asoke Ghosh, it is learnt, even agreed to an "exchange" that would give Forest and Tourism to Kamal Guha, and Cooperation Department to the CPI(M).

With the CPI(M) divided on the matter, Kamal Guha today stepped into the Cooperation Minister's room at the Writers'. Even if Big Brother decides to "give away" Forest and Tourism, it will have a trying time finding a portfolio that is important enough for Jogesh Burman, who was the Forest Minister in Basu's Cabinet.

The CPI(M), it seems, is hav-

ing a trying time with both heavyweights and the green-horns. Very little is left for the newcomers after Nirupam Sen, Asim Dasgupta, Suryyakanta Mishra, Subhas Chakrabarty, Mohammed Amin, Satyasadhan Chakrabarty, Kanti Biswas, Gautam Deb and Manab Mukherjee have their shares of power.

The Chief Minister keeps Home, Information and Culture, and Hill Affairs with him.

Nirupam Sen may have Commerce and Industry, Industrial Reconstruction, Planning and Development. Suryyakanta Mishra gets Health, Abdur Rezzak Mollah Land Reforms, Panchayat and Rural Development and Asim Dasgupta Finance and Excise. Mohammed Salim gets Youth Affairs and Self Employment, Mohammed Amin gets Labour, Minority Development. Subhas Chakrabarty keeps

Transport and Sports. Asok Bhattacharya retains Municipal Affairs and Urban Development.

Mrinal Banerjee gets Power. Bangsagopal Chowdhury gets Technical Education and Training, ESI. Manab Mukherjee gets Information Technology, Environment, Pratyush Mukherjee gets Cottage and Smallscale. Nema Mal gets Food Processing and Horticulture. Amalendralal Roy gets Irrigation and Waterways, Amar Chowdhury gets PWD, Chhaya Ghosh Agriculture Marketing, Hafiz Alam/Sairani Relief. Others will have more or less have the earlier portfolios.

The CPI(M) is yet to decide portfolios for Jogesh Burman, Sailen Sarkar and Nandarani Dal. Minister of State Kanti Ganguly is likely to have Sunderbans Affairs Department while Sushanta Ghosh may serve as a Minister of State for Health.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 MAY 2001

Promises to keep: A tough road ahead for Buddha

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 18

THE EUPHORIA will subside after few days. Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and his Cabinet colleagues would move into their chambers next week. And then they face the reality: Can they fulfill the expectations of the people? Can this Government usher in the renaissance in the spheres of industrialisation, health, education, infrastructure and cooperative farming (the second phase of land reforms) as promised to the electorate?

Will the Left Front make a radical shift from its earlier stand towards participation of MNCs and encourage joint ventures in the State? Will the militant trade unionism help the industry captains run the corporate sector as profit-oriented centres? Will the primary health centres and its subsidiary units improve the quality of medical services to the people of Bengal? Can Bengal have more engineering and medical colleges to stop the brain-drain of the State?

Moreover, will infrastructure develop significantly to meet the challenges of the teeming millions and the desires of the business community? Or for that matter, can IT and biotechnology that has been lagging miserably in this State take a kick-start and catch up with such technologically advanced States like Karnataka and Hyderabad?

The questions are endless as the people of Bengal wonder whether the Government will be able to fulfil its promises.

As Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee gets down to work, somewhere at the back of his mind, there is a question: Will I be able to live up to it all and infuse new impetus into the State climate.

No wonder all eyes will be on the Chief Minister, his Industries Minister Nirupam Sen, Health Minister Surjya Kanta Mishra, Land and Land reforms Minister Rezzaq Mollah, Finance



(From left), Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's mother and wife, Left Front chairman Sallen Dasgupta at the swearing-in ceremony.

Minister Ashim Dasgupta, Transport and Sport and Youth Affairs Minister Subhas Chakraborty, IT Minister Manab Mukherjee and Satyasadhan Chakraborty and Kanti Ganguly who will head the education departments.

Buddhadeb is aware that he has a challenge on his hands. He has to not make his Cabinet more transparent, dynamic and accountable, but also has to contain the coordination committee, the trade union bodies and the party mandarins for whom it would be a new beginning outside the bamboo curtain.

In fact, the sixth Left Front Government can only fulfill all

its promises if it adopts the China's Open Economic Policy and come out of the iron curtain and red tapism that has been a hallmark of the CPI(M) apparatus in Bengal.

However, if the past six months of Buddhadeb's tenure is any indication then it seems the Left in Bengal is slowly moving towards Mikhail Gorbachev's concept of Glasnost and Perestroika.

For, they have understood unless there is openness in their organisation, they will get more and more alienated from the people.

And without restructuring, the people would not continue to

repose their faith on the Red brigade for long. Deep inside, the CPI(M) leaders know that they have been given a chance by the people to prove themselves and fulfill their promises. If they fail to deliver, this could be their last term at the Writers' Buildings.

No wonder, in order to fulfill the people's aspirations, Buddhadeb and his party is determined to pay special emphasis on IT, biotechnology, infrastructure, health, education and industrialization.

"I am grateful to the people for having reposed faith on us. We have done our best in the last 24 years in the field of agriculture and land reforms. Equally good

has been our achievement in the panchayati system, irrigation, etc. But we have lots of weaknesses. Those need to be immediately corrected. And let me tell you, to fulfill my vision of an industrialised Bengal I will go to any extent," Buddhadeb said.

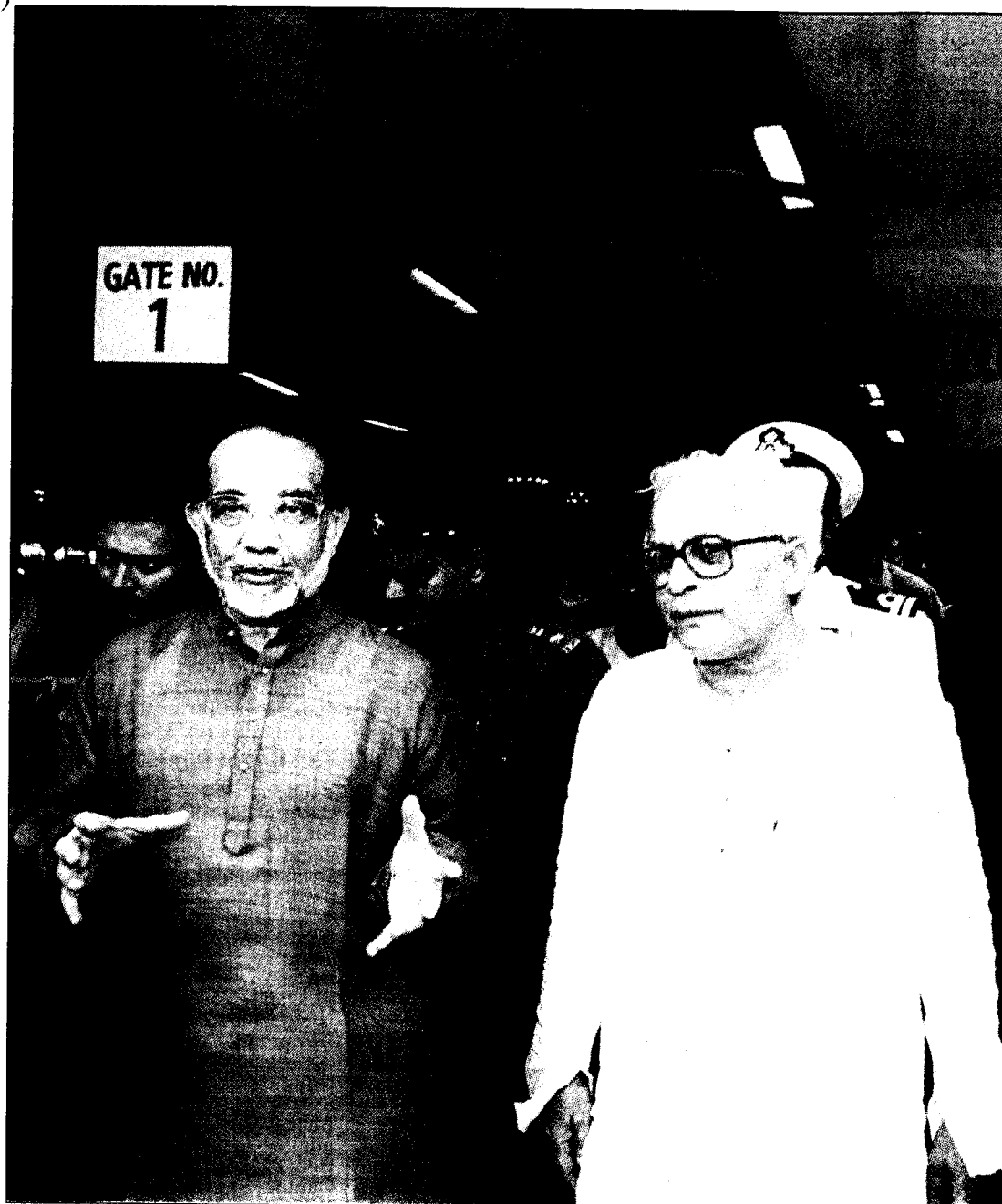
Fortunately for Buddhadeb, his Marxists colleagues at Alimuddin Street share his feelings and determination. The CPI(M) top brass is no longer rigid, inflexible, tightlipped and closed to the happenings of the world.

The best example of this is the induction of Nirupam Sen, a senior party ideologue and CPI(M) central committee member as Minister for industries. Sen though an orthodox Marxist is known for his liberal views on industrialisation and the role of the MNCs in the economy.

Equally significant is to give another party ideologue and efficient Minister Surjya Kanta Mishra the health portfolio. A doctor by profession, Mishra is now faced with a stiff challenge of turning around an abysmal medical system in the State. Not an impossible task for a man like him if one takes into account his role as the Land and Land Reforms Minister of the State.

Another department that would play a crucial role in this term for infrastructure development is transportation and who could be better at it than Subhas Chakraborty. A man of action and tremendous flexibility, in this term Subhas is expected to increase the speed of vehicle movement in the city, reduce traffic congestion and also oversee the construction of several flyovers in the State.

On paper, it seems Buddhadeb's team looks impeccable. Six months down the line, when they all have settled down, it can be assessed whether Buddhadeb's buddies are on their way to usher in a new Bengal and turn this eastern State of India as a business and happening destination of the world.



Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee with Governor Viren J Shah at the Raj Bhawan on Friday.

HINDUSTAN TIMES PHOTO

15 first-timers on Bengal

list of ministers

98
30

New Left comes with new faces

1895 51

BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, May 17: Speculation over the fate of two CPM stalwarts was set at rest with Asim Dasgupta and Satyasadhan Chakraborty figuring on the list of 48 ministers unveiled by the Left Front today. The list has 15 new faces.

Dasgupta was finance minister in the previous government and Chakraborty was in charge of education. There was strong opposition from a section of the party to their reappointment. It is difficult to see Dasgupta anywhere other than finance, perhaps with curtailed responsibility, but what portfolio Chakraborty will get is still uncertain. Education is one of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's top priorities with industry and health.

"Buddhababu will have over-all control on these departments, though there will be separate ministers," a source said.

The ministry of the New Left will be sworn in tomorrow. Of the 48 members, 34 are of Cabinet rank and the rest are ministers of state. In strength, it is one member in excess of the previous one. Portfolios will be announced on Monday.

Left Front chairman Sailen Dasgupta said of the new faces, nine are of Cabinet rank, the prominent among them being Nirupam Sen, whose name appears immediately after the chief minister's, confirming his num-

ber two status, and Mohammad Salim. Nandarani Dal, who won from controversy-ridden Keshpur, enters the ministry also with Cabinet rank, perhaps as a reward for her incredible margin of over a lakh. (See Page 9)

Subhas Chakraborty, who held transport and sports earlier, returns expectedly with Mohammad Amin, Suryakanta Mishra, Gautam Deb, Manab Mukherjee and Kanti Biswas. Lakshmi De is expected to be the chief whip.

Even before the portfolios are announced, at least one leader has made clear his unhappiness at not finding his name on the list. The MLA from Ballygunge, Rabin Deb, was absent from the CPM's state committee meeting this morning. Sources said Deb had aspired to a ministerial berth, but did not turn up after learning he was not going to get one. Deb, however, had a different explanation for missing the meeting. He said he had a stomach upset.

Somnath may go

One important change expected outside the ministry could happen at the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation with its chairman and MP, Somnath Chatterjee, expressing reluctance to continue. "Buddhadeb has decided to give tremendous thrust to industry which implies manifold increase in responsibilities. So, I'm thinking whether I can continue in this position. My health is failing. I have other preoccupations in Delhi," Chatterjee said.

THE TELEGRAPH

Buddhadeb retains faith in old guard

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 17

THE NEW Cabinet in West Bengal will be a happy mix of experience and youth. The old guard won't be dumped. Only the berths left vacant by Jyoti Basu and those who lost the polls will be filled. Tomorrow, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee will take the oath of office as Chief Minister.

Today, Left Front chairman Sailen Dasgupta named 34 Cabinet Ministers and 14 Ministers of State. "It is a historic day today. I take the pleasure to announce that the Left Front will form the Government for the sixth successive term," he said

But he didn't announce the portfolios. These might be finalised by tomorrow night. There will be 23 Cabinet Ministers from the CPI(M), five from the FB, three from the RSP and one each from the CPI, the West Bengal Socialist Party and the Democratic Socialist Party.

Kamalendu Sanyal is the only omission. Sanyal, who served as the Minister of State for Land Reforms, has been denied a berth this time. Asim Dasgupta, Subhas Chakrabarty, Suryakanta Mishra have all found berths in the new Cabinet. CPI(M) central committee member Nirupam Sen, RS member Mohammed Salim, Nandarani Dal, and Malda district secretary Sailen Sarkar will represent the CPI(M). The party has rewarded Nimai Mal with a Cabinet berth this time.

New among the Ministers of State are winner of Mathurapur and CMC Opposition leader Kanti Ganguly, trade union leader from Howrah Pratyush Mukherjee, Narayan Biswas from Dinajpur and Iva De.

Sushanta Ghosh, who engineered the red comeback after the Panskura bypoll debacle, will remain a Minister of State. "Nandarani Dal is an old hand. She was the party's MLA from Goghat, but shifted to Keshpur in 1982 and has consistently won the seat since then. She is much senior to Sushanta," Dasgupta said explaining why Dal had got a Cabinet berth.

Former Ministers Kamal Guha, Chhaya Ghosh and Goalpokhor's giant killer Hafiz Alam Sairani, who defeated Dipa Das Munshi, are the Forward Bloc inductees, replacing Bhakti Bhusan Mandal Satyaranjan Mahata and Biren Maitra.

RSP has nominated Amalendralal Roy and Amar Chowdhury to man Irrigation and Waterways and PWD. Debabrata Banerjee, the party's State secretary, has quit electoral politics, while Kshiti Goswami and Manohar Tirkey have lost the polls. Dasarath Tirkey from Alipurduar will be a Minister of State.

For the CPI, the Democratic Socialist Party, the West Bengal Socialist Party and the Marxbadi Forward Bloc, the new Cabinet effectively remain the same.

Related reports on Page 3

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 MAY 2001

Subrata in swear-in muddle

Tapan Das
Kolkata, May 17

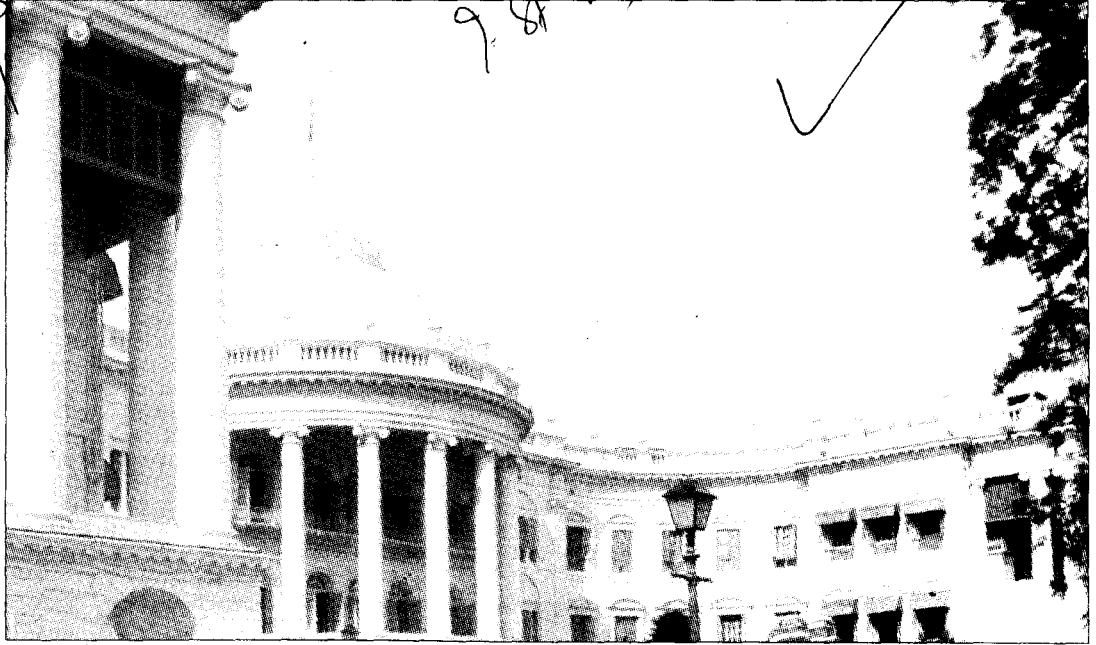
FOR ALL his loyalty to the party chief and respect for the Trinamool's decision to boycott the swearing-in ceremony, Mayor Subrata Mukherjee may still decide to turn up at the Raj Bhawan tomorrow.

The Trinamool has decided to boycott the swearing-in tomorrow in protest against "rigged elections by the CPI(M) and Left Front". However, the party's election ally, Congress, has sharply disagreed with this decision and expressed its desire to attend the ceremony.

Betraying a sense of deep dilemma, Mukherjee remained non-committal till late evening on his presence. If at one moment he would mumble: "I would rather not attend tomorrow's function in deference to the party's wishes and directive."

The next moment he would hasten to add: "I know that as Mayor I must uphold the dignity and honour of this august post. The Chief Minister has rightly sent an invitation to me, requesting my presence at the solemn swearing ceremony."

While this stand seemed somewhat equivocal to many, State Government officials said: "We have no reasons to believe that the Honourable Mayor, being the



first citizen of the capital city, would do anything against the long-established tradition, protocol and the propriety of the exalted office that he occupies now."

But what has added to the predicament of Mukherjee is that the Deputy Mayor, BJP's Mina Devi Purohit, will surely be there tomorrow. "I deem it a great honour to have been invit-

ed to attend this very important function, and I'll certainly be present there," Purohit said.

Asked about the Trinamool's "boycott" decision and the Mayor's reported hesitation, Purohit didn't mince her words. "The Mayor must attend tomorrow's function, and he must not set a bad precedent by absenting himself, no matter what is his

party's decision in this respect. We at the CMC did not take any collective decision to boycott the swearing-in ceremony by the Mayor, or anyone else."

Thus, it remains to be seen whether Mukherjee will be conspicuous by his absence, and would allow his Deputy to hog the limelight with her assertive presence.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 MAY 2001

Kespur MLA gets Cabinet post

9-68 MS 52-1 1875

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May. 17. — A two-tier 48-member Left Front ministry, headed by Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, will be sworn in at Raj Bhavan tomorrow. The portfolios will be allocated later but the Kespur MLA, Mrs Nandarani Dal, has been given a Cabinet berth.

The ministry will have 33 old and 15 new faces, the most notable debutante being Mrs Dal. There are four other women in the ministry.

The ministers' list prepared by the CPI-M state committee was okayed by the Left Front Committee today.

The CPI-M has 33 ministers, Forward Bloc and RSP five each, the CPI two, and DSP and SP and FB (Marxist) one each. The last Left Front government had one less minister.

Though Mrs Dal has been elevated to Cabinet rank, Mr Susanta Ghosh of Kespur-Garbata fame and re-elected from Garbata East, remains a minister of state.

Kespur, Garbata and Pingla have been rocked by CPI(M)-Trinamul clashes for the past two years in which Mr Ghosh and Mrs Dal have led their party cadres from the front.

Mr Biman Bose, CPI-M politburo member, said there's nothing surprising about Mrs Dal's Cabinet berth because she's senior to Mr Ghosh. She has been fighting elections since 1969, when she represented Ghatal.

Among the other new ministers



Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Mr Sainen Dasgupta and other leaders at the Left Front meeting on Thursday to finalise the new ministry. — The Statesman

are Mr Nirupam Sen, Mr Kanti Ganguly, Mohammed Salim (CPI-M), Hafiz Alam Sairani (FB) Mr Dasarath Tirkey and Mr Amalendra Roy (RSP).

Mr Kamal Guha (FB) and Mr Sainen Sarkar (CPI-M), inducted in the ministry this time, had been ministers in previous Left Front governments.

Mr Sainen Dasgupta, LF chairman, and Mr Bose urged the media not to publish unfounded reports and wild spec-

- Partymen question boycott decision: page 4
- Midnapore village in grip of red terror: page 4
- Nirupam, Salim get the nod: page 5

ulations about the portfolios to be allotted by the chief minister in the next couple of days.

They said that during the past few days, the media had been speculating about the new min-

istry just like they had done while making the Trinamul-Congress the winner.

Mr Bose appealed to the Trinamul to reconsider its decision to boycott the swearing-in ceremony.

He said the rigging charges and comparing this year's polls to that of 1972 made no sense. In 1972, the Left combine withdrew its candidates and poll agents by 2 p.m. in protest against the "farce", whereas

the Trinamul-Congress not only contested this time but also expressed confidence of winning.

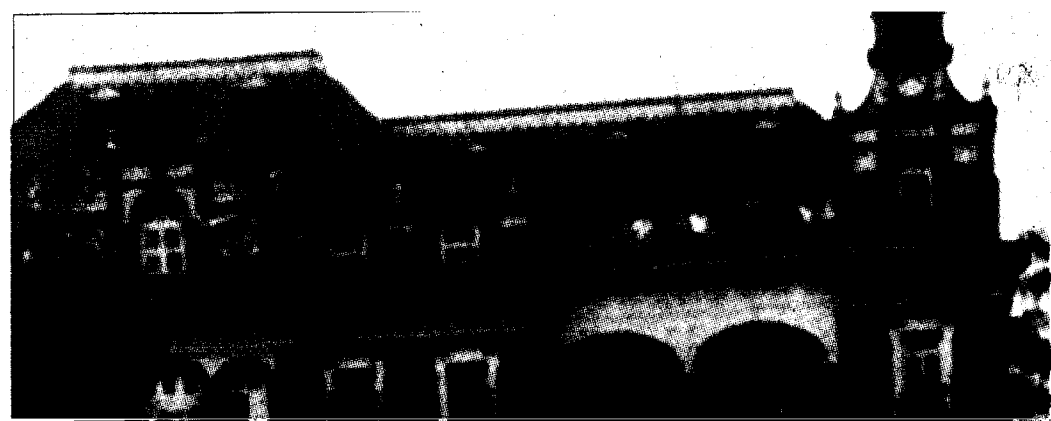
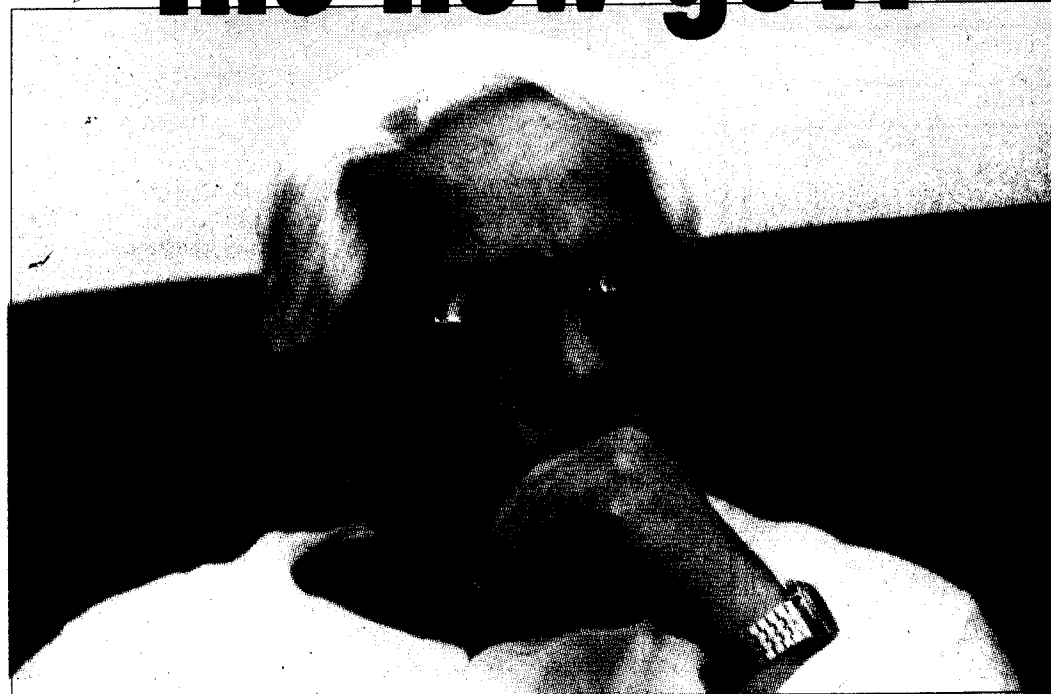
The BJP state chief, Mr Asim Ghosh, will attend the swearing-in in "the true spirit of democracy," Mr Muzaffar Khan, party spokesman said today. The BJP will extend "constructive cooperation" to the government outside the Assembly but will take to the streets if it adopts anti-people measures.

THE STATESMAN

7 8 MAY 2001

RETURN OF THE LEFT FRONT

Expectations from the new govt



Buddhadev Bhattacharya has proved the pollsters wrong; will he prove Left Front's critics wrong too?

ANANTA CHAKRABORTY

WE'VE just chosen a pleasant *bhadralok* to the loud, unkempt *didi*-of-the-masses. Yes - we've gone by looks (even though they are only skin deep) for electing a chief minister and his (or her) government. Now let's talk business.

The balloting brouhaha is over and the dhoti-clad Bengali *babu* begins work Monday with some of his experienced former colleagues, as well as some new, energised ones. It's good to hear that, with this "crack team," Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya is all set to erase "misconceptions" about the state's snail-paced development. But one hopes, good governance will precede politics, and some important aspects will be addressed to.

Mr Bhattacharya has been saying that the need-of-the-hour is to introduce reforms in three sectors - health, education and industry. One couldn't agree more, but the "humble" West Bengal citizen begs to add some more preferences to Mr Bhattacharya's list of priorities.

Yes, we fervently hope the new government would keep its promises and look into matters of education more seriously than ever. Historically, West Bengal once had an advantage over other states, but slowly lost much of its reputation. The schools, colleges and universities were all here by the time a government took charge soon after Independence. All it needed to do was, run them properly.

But that's history. What people in Kolkata and West Bengal witnessed over the past two decades was a thoroughly politicised ambience in institutions. (Now there are student union leaders in schools as well, to declare *bandhs*.) One hopes, for the sake of a better Bengal, the new government will not encourage any more of these agitations.

After all, good politics is good only when it leads to good economics.

The new government must pledge to rectify the situation and catch up with other developed states in terms of higher education and research, and connect fruits of research with industry.

The good news is English has made a comeback in primary education, which means, the government has taken note of the criticism, and is trying to make its education policies more constructive.

There will be a thrust on information technology - we already have a new department to work towards improvement in telecommunications. The government, with its limited resources, is not expected to generate much funds for IT industries. Here, the challenge will be to involve more and more private enterprises.

Mr Bhattacharya already has the faith of the chambers of commerce. Now only the Left Front has to ensure a better work culture among its trade unions and avoid political interventions in private management-worker relations.

Roads as part of the infrastructure need to be taken seriously, if the government is as serious about industrialisation as it claims to be. Linking other cities and towns with West Bengal is a must for attracting investment from nationals and multi-nationals. The states electricity board must deliver to enhance growth in the suburbs.

Mr Bhattacharya has often talked about providing good health to citizens. This should naturally top the priority list because good health is an important component of any poverty alleviation programme. The least the government can do is ensure people's access to safe drinking water, basic health facilities and medicine. Government hospitals - with their available infrastructure - should appear safer to the public. Involving NGOs in maintaining the hospitals and rural health centres should be a good idea.

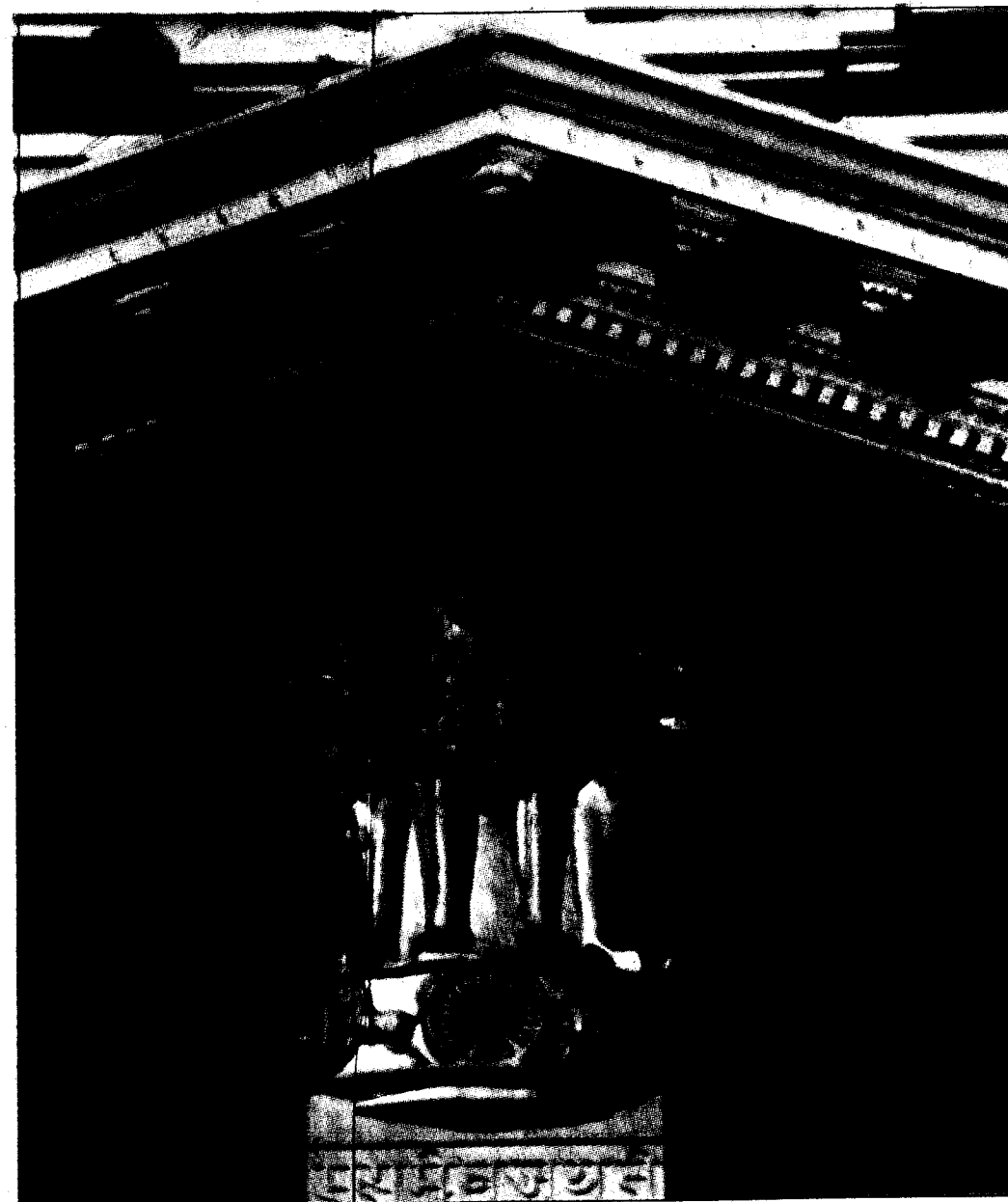
For its urban voters, the government has already tied

up with some private health organisations. Better monitoring of health laws should be enough to maintain a standard.

When he was the acting chief minister, Mr Bhattacharya had taken some stringent moves to curb corruption in the bureaucracy. People would expect the drive to continue because the idea, eventually should be, to remove corruption in everyday life. After all, a corrupt system discourages foreign investment.

It's all very well that the Left Front has given way to decentralisation by bestowing more power on the panchayats. The result should be good if the panchayat leaders don't restrict development to their own areas, depending on their political affiliation. The standing complaint has been that the CPI(M)-controlled panchayats have had more access to funds than the ones belonging to the Congress and Trinamul. Even smaller Left Front partners have complained of this kind of deprivation.

To look into so many aspects will not be easy for the new government. But rectifying some of these problems will do the people and eventually, the government, a lot of good.



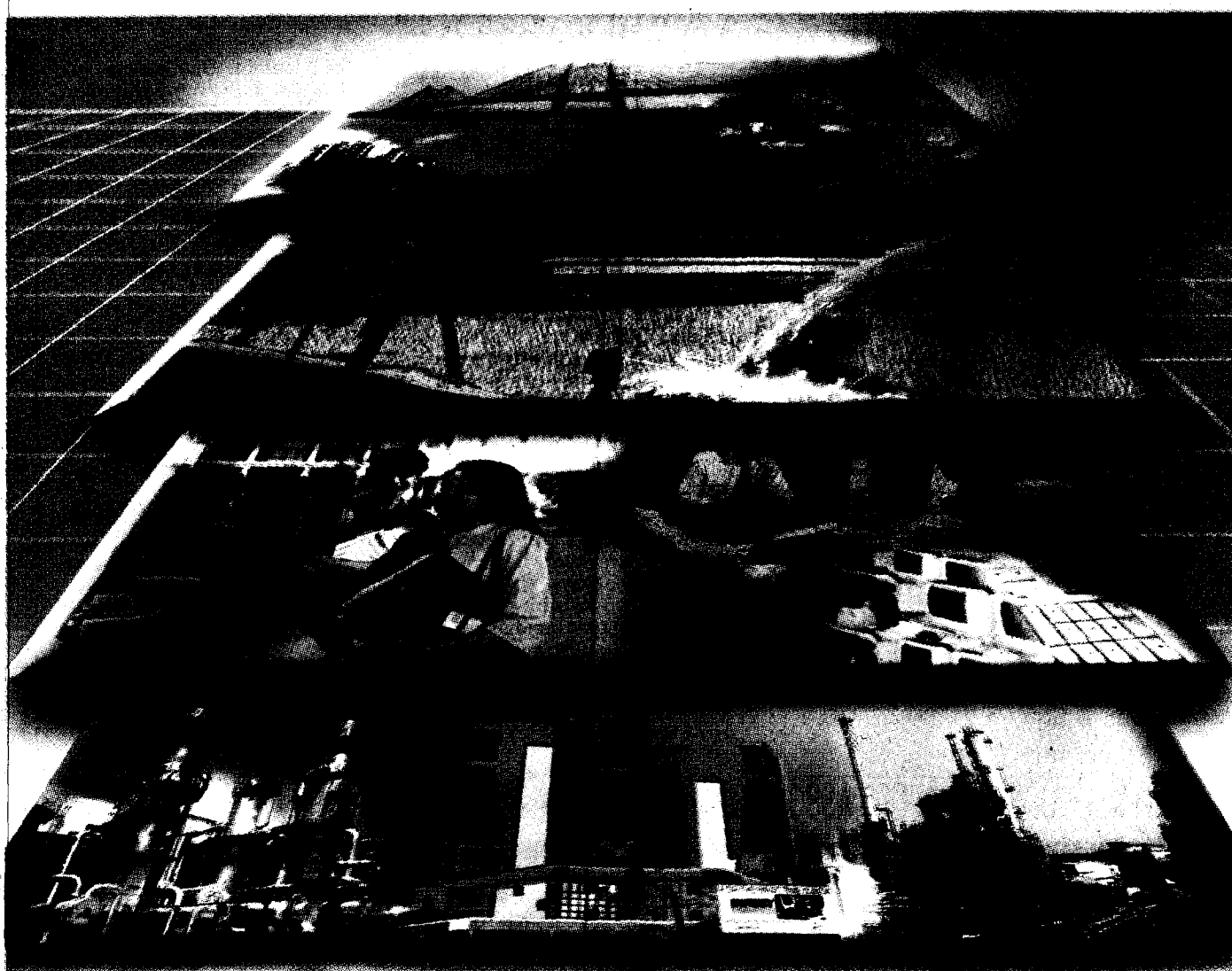
Heartiest Congratulations to the Left Front Government on their 6th consecutive Oath Taking Ceremony

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(Top left) A pensive Buddhadev Bhattacharya before the poll results were declared

(Above) Bhattacharya greeted by a shower of petals after taking over from Jyoti Basu as the chief minister

(Top right) The seat of power. Writers' Buildings will stay red for the next five years

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Buddha oath to put Bengal on fast track

Industry cheers installation of 6th Left Front Govt

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 18

INDUSTRY CAPTAINS rubbed shoulders with Left stalwarts as Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee took oath of office as Chief Minister of the sixth Left Front Government today. The Trinamool Congress boycotted the ceremony.

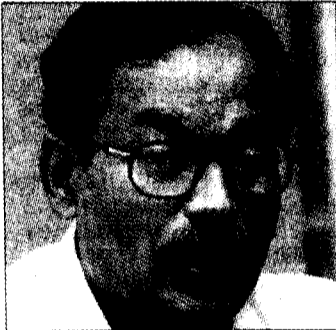
Although there was no boycott call from the Congress, none of the party leaders was present at the Raj Bhawan.

The swearing-in, held on the sprawling Raj Bhawan lawns, began around 10.45 am, when Buddhadeb walked in with Jyoti Basu and his Cabinet colleagues. The gathering, including the likes of S K Birla, Sanjeev Goenka, Harsh Neotia, Pawan Kumar Ruia, Sisir Bajoria, S K Roy and US Consul-General Christopher Sandrolini, cheered him lustily.

Clad in spotless dhoti and kurta, Buddhadeb mingled with the invitees, shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries. Among those present was Ajit Kumar Panja, Trinamool Congress renegade. The new leader shook hands with him. Later, Panja told reporters: "I am here only to perform my constitutional duty."

Governor Viren J Shah, in a brick red kurta entered the venue at 10.58 am. Two minutes later, after the Raj Bhawan band played the National Anthem, he administered the oath of office to Buddhadeb. Thereafter, members the 48-member ministry took oath.

Buddhadeb sat on the dais as his colleagues read out from a prepared text. Among them were Nirupam Sen, Ashim Dasgupta, Subhas Chakrabarty, Surya Kanta Mishra, Mohammad Salim and Sushanta Ghosh. Basu, CPI(M) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet, Left



NIRUPAM SEN (TOP) & NANDARANI DAL

Front chairman Sailen Dasgupta, Buddhadeb's wife and daughter sat in the front row.

BJP State president Ashim Ghosh and Union Minister of State for Fertilisers Satyabrata Mukherjee were present at the function. City Mayor Subrata Mukherjee did not turn up, following party leader Mamata Banerjee's diktat.

Also present were Sheriff Suchitra Mitra, former footballers Chuni Goswami and PK Banerjee, actors Soumitra Chatterjee, Shubhendu Chatterjee, Nirmal Kumar and Biplab Dasgupta, writers Buddhadeb Guha and Nabanita Deb Sen.

Swearing-in over, it was time for business. Buddhadeb drove down to the Writers' Buildings for his first day in office as the



Nirupam Sen: Commerce & Industry
Asim Dasgupta: Finance
Suryakanta Mishra: Health
Md Salim: Youth Affairs & Self Employment
Md Amin: Labour
Subhas Chakrabarty: Transport, Sports
A R Mollah: Land Reforms, Panchayat, Rural Development
Manab Mukherjee: IT, Environment
Mrinal Banerjee: Power
Gautam Deb: Housing, Public Health
Amalendra Roy: Irrigation & Waterways
Nandagopal Bhattacharjee: Water Resources Development
Amir Chatterjee: PWD
Chitralekha Mukherjee: Health
Pradyumn Dasgupta: PWD

State's seventh Chief Minister.

But, before he entered the secretariat, he spoke at a reception organised by the Coordination Committee - an umbrella organisation of Left trade unions - at Writers'.

The mandate, he said, was for better governance and the onus was on the State Government staff. Agriculture, health and industry would be the thrust areas. And, as he introduced Sushanta Ghosh and Nandarani Dal to the crowd, loud cheers went up. Party supporters, admirers and curious onlookers jammed the streets as the Chief Minister accepted a memento and released six balloons.

More reports and photographs on Page 3

1995 MAY 18

Heavyweights for industry, health

BY BARUN GHOSH &
OUR DELHI BUREAU

May 16: A combination of Sen and Sen could be Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's formula for Bengal's industrial revival.

The CPM's highest decision-making body at the state level will meet tomorrow to put its seal of approval on the party's list of ministers, but indications are that Nirupam Sen will be allotted the high-priority portfolio of industry and commerce.

Bhattacharjee has already listed industry, health and education as areas on which his government will focus attention.

In Delhi to attend the party's politburo meeting, Bhattacharjee said he would seek the help of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen to put Bengal on a new economic track. "I have earlier consulted

Prof. Sen and will consult him more in the coming days."

Party ideologue Nirupam Sen, who won from Burdwan (south), will be the second man in terms of importance to Bhattacharjee, though he is joining the government for the first time.

Suryakanta Mishra, the leader from Midnapore, is expected to get health, his seniority — third in the government pecking order — very much in tune with the significance the chief minister attaches to the portfolio.

At its meeting today in Delhi, the CPM politburo left decisions on ministry-making to the "able hands" of the state leadership. After the state secretariat gathers tomorrow to finalise the party's nominees, the Left Front committee will meet to draw up the full list where the candidates of the allies will come in.

Left Front chairman Sailen Dasgupta said tonight Sen was going to get a key portfolio.

In education, where too Bhattacharjee intends to introduce a new agenda, status quo is expected to continue despite reservations in a section of the party about persisting with higher education minister Satyasadhan Chakraborty. State party secretary Anil Biswas controls education from his seat in the headquarters at Alimuddin Street through men of his choice in government and appears to be getting his way in the coming ministry, too.

Unless the balance changes dramatically against Chakraborty at the secretariat meeting, Bhattacharjee may be seen as a loser in his attempt to free government decision-making in education from the clutches of the party.

In much the same way, the

likely appointment of Sen as industry ministry will be viewed as another victory for the party in that he is a strong organisation man, having been Burdwan district secretary with a long history of working as a backroom boy.

At the same time, though, the heavyweight choice would send a strong signal that the government is serious about its industrialisation effort. Even though Sen's views are conventional, they would not weigh down Bhattacharjee's thrust because of the consensus in the party over putting industrialisation on top of the new government's agenda.

The CPM today denied the co-operation portfolio to Forward Bloc, the second largest partner in the Left Front, turning a deaf ear to its protests. It allotted forest and tourism, instead.

■ See Page 10

THE TELEGRAPH

17 MAY 2001

Trinamool to boycott swearing-in

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 15

TRINAMOOL CONGRESS MLAs will boycott the May 18 swearing-in ceremony of the Left Front Government led by Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

"This is a black Government and our MLAs have unanimously decided to stay away from the ceremony. In West Bengal, violence has got the better of democracy. We are analysing the results and will set up teams of MLAs to visit areas where the CPI(M) is terrorising people," Mamata Banerjee said after a meeting with her MLAs.

Party legislators today unanimously elected Pankaj Banerjee the Trinamool Congress Legislature Party (TCLP) leader. Sovandeb Chattopadhyay was elected Chief Whip, Ambika Banerje became Legislature Party deputy leader, Jatu Lahiri the treasurer and Kalyan Banerjee secretary.

Of the four legislature committees, Subrata Mukherjee, Saugata Roy and Nirmal Ghosh are likely to head three, one going to the Congress. "Pankaj Banerjee and senior Trinamool leaders will finalise the matter with the Congress. We plan to prepare a report on the recent elections, booth-wise and table it in the Assembly to prove how polls were rigged. In some booths, of the 800 votes polled, 790 have gone to the CPI(M). We will highlight such instances,"

BUDDHA QUILTS TO TAKE CHARGE

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee tendered his resignation to Governor Viren J Shah on Tuesday at the Raj Bhavan. The Governor has accepted the resignation and asked him to continue in office till a new Government is sworn in. Bhattacharjee and his cabinet will take the oath at Raj Bhavan on Friday. **HTC, Kolkata**

Sovandeb Chattopadhyay said. "This Government has come to power through force. We will ensure the Government can't take any anti-people policies," Banerjee added.

EC hits back at Mamata: The EC has dismissed as "beneath contempt" the "despicable" personal remarks of Mamata Banerjee against CEC M S Gill who was accused of failure to check rigging in the Assembly polls under "influence" of the Vajpayee Government.

"The Election Commission is a three-member body of equals and all decisions on the recent elections have been taken by the EC, jointly and unanimously." Therefore, whatever despicable remarks have been made against Gill are necessarily a reflection against the entire commission and are categorically dismissed as beneath contempt," it said in a press note.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 MAY 2001

A disaster, yet another resignation, and a confused Trinamool

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, May 14

THE DISASTER hasn't chastened her. A day after Bengal voted the Left Front back to power, she remains just as defiant and far removed from the ground realities.

Mamata Banerjee spews venom at almost everybody — the Election Commission, the State Government, the CPI(M)'s rigging machinery.

They all conspired to sink her ship. But when it comes to introspection, she does little or nothing.

Talk to her of getting a proper party organization in place and she gets back at you: "Why, what's wrong with the organization? It's just fine."

Mamata claims she has analysed the election results and is convinced the Trinamool-Congress alliance would have definitely won power had the contest been free and fair.

Today, her MPs and the newly elected legislators called up her Harish Chatterjee Street home and urged her to take back her resignation in this hour of need.

But not many of them were seen by her side — an indicator of the fact that all's not well in the party.

Indeed, the Trinamool Congress is a divided house.

Leaders such as Sudip Bandyopadhyay, Pankaj Banerjee, Subrata Mukherjee, Sadhan Pande, Ranjit Panja and Sobhan Deb Chattopadhyay are convinced the Trinamool must stick



PANKAJ BANERJEE



SUBRATA MUKHERJEE



SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY

with the Congress.

But those like Ajit Panja, Bikram Sarkar, Ananda Mohan Biswas and Nitish Sengupta want the alliance to end immediately.

The latter school believes that unless Mamata sheds her blink-

ers and clears her vision, there's little hope for her.

This is the time to take stock and rethink strategy, not to write resignation letters. To take on a party like the CPI(M), the Trinamool too must have a proper structure.

A coterie of sycophants encircles Mamata. This she must get rid of.

Though the Panja-Sarkar-Biswas-Krishna Bose team hasn't yet raised the banner of revolt, it's biding time.

"I spoke to her today. I told her

that instead of resigning she ought to lead from the front. The ground level party worker needs to be motivated. Let her revamp the organisation, streamline candidate selection and self-critical, I see no hope for the party," said Krishna Bose.

"Irrespective of what the verdict has been, we believe Bengal wants change. We have to channelise this desire into votes," Bose said.

"Mamata should have seen through this conspiracy hatched by the CPI(M) and the Congress to destroy her. I sincerely hope Mamata will bring in more openness in the party. This will be her last chance," Bikram Sarkar said.

Ajit Panja too has some harsh words for the Trinamool leader. Mamata, to him, is whimsical,

her understanding of politics inaccurate.

"It's a shame that we could win only 60 seats. I knew it was coming. Tehelka was no issue here. There was no need to hastily pull out of the NDA. It was all so impulsive. She tied up with a party the people of Bengal had dumped long ago."

Party Rajya Sabha MP Jayanta Bhattacharya too is a belligerent man. "For the last one year, she has been fed misinformation. No wonder, all good district leaders were denied tickets. People with no understanding of politics were made district observers and given charge of candidate selection. She's arrogant, has no political sagacity. It's high time she mends her ways, or else both the parliamentary and legislature parties will split. After all

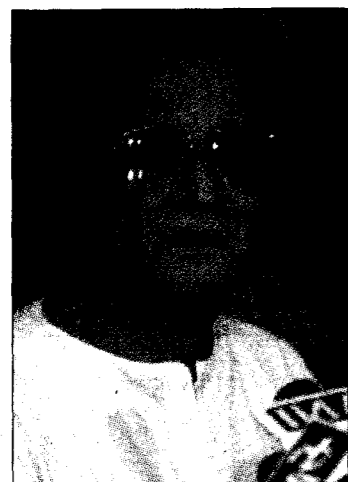
out of the 60 candidates who won the polls on Trinamool tickets, 40 crossed over from the Congress," said Jayanta. A section in the party isn't opposed to returning to the BJP-led alliance.

For the present, the disgruntled MPs and district leaders are waiting and watching. They aren't ready to jump ship immediately. As one MP put it, "We will watch as for 180 days. If by then things get better, we will stay. Otherwise..."

Panchayat polls are one-and-a-half years away. For that, the Trinamool must field 60,000 candidates in 37,000 villages.

The party hasn't done any planning for this. Six months down the line, the leaders feel, it will be clear if Mamata will be in a position to take on the CPI(M) in the mini-Assembly polls.

Panja apologises for Mamata attack on EC



HT correspondent
Kolkata, May 14

TRINAMOL CONGRESS State President and member of the Lok Sabha, Ajit Panja, who parted ways with Ms Mamata Banerjee after the Trinamool left the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), has sharply criticised Ms Banerjee's diatribes against the Election Commission (EC). As the Trinamool's State President he has apologised for the "utterly shocking and irrelevant statements" against the EC's role in the conduct of the elections in the State.

Panja who was approached by mediapersons for comments on Ms Banerjee's allegation that the Centre had "purchased" the EC and the defeat of the Trinamool Congress-Congress combine was the result of a conspiracy by the Centre, the EC and the State Government, said that he would not attach much importance to these statements as they were made in a state of shock.

Nor would he take any responsibility for such irresponsible utterances.

"It appears that she is still suffering from the shock of losing the battle. It is thus quite normal that she would utter irrelevant things. I would thus give her three days' time to calm down so that reason prevails on her. However, I feel that such a statement had been made against an independent agency like the EC and I apologise for the same", Panja said.

The former Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting said if what Ms Banerjee had alleged was to be true it would appear that there had been a "maha maha maha visvajot" of conspiracy to defeat her. "These are whimsical and irrelevant utterances and beyond all canons of natural justice."

Asked if he was planning to leave the Trinamool, Panja said there was no question of it even as the BJP had offered to induct all Trinamool MPs in the NDA minus Mamata Banerjee.

He mentioned that all the Trinamool MPs had resolved on March 16 that while the party's ministers would step down from the Vajpayee Cabinet they were reposing full faith and confidence in the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee.

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 14

THE LEFT Front's performance in Kolkata has surprised many. But, a closer look at figures indicate that the Left has only wrested back the Assembly segments that it had earlier lost to the Trinamool, apart from retaining those which were in its fold.

If the CPI (M) has won four seats, it has lost four more in the city, and one of these was held by a minister.

The Assembly seats of Jorabagan, Vidyasagar, Entally, Taltala, Beleghatta, Belgachhia West, Shyamapukur, Ballygunge have sent representatives of the Left Front, particularly the CPI (M) and the Forward Bloc, to the Assembly. This is considered surprising because of the strong anti-Left wave perceptible even a few months before the elections.

It was the CPI(M)'s victory at

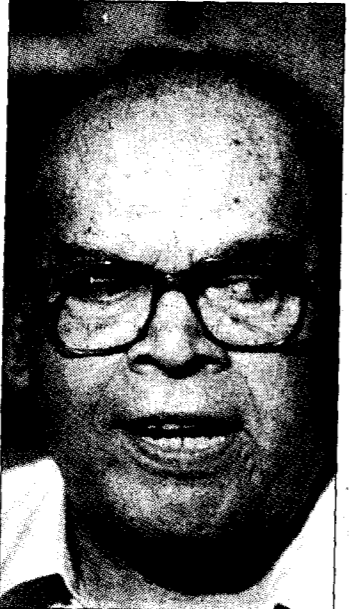
ENGLISHBAZAR DEFEAT

Cong, Trinamool play the blame game

Gautam Chaudhuri
Kolkata, May 14

THE CONGRESS and Trinamool Congress in Malda are virtually at each other's throat after the CPI(M) pipped both to wrest control of the controversial Englishbazar seat and emerge winners in six of the 11 seats in a district, known to be a Congress stronghold.

"Mamata Banerjee's inflexibility has cost us dearly and she handed over English Bazar virtually on a platter to unfancied CPI(M)," said the defeated Congress candidate from Englishbazar, Gautam Chakraborty.



ARA GHANI KHAN CHOWDHURY

Chakraborty said it would have been impossible for the CPI(M) to win the seat, if the Trinamool had not been there to cut into the Congress votes.

Trinamool candidate Krishnendu Chowdhury predictably blamed the Congress for the loss of Englishbazar and the poor performance of the Congress-Trinamool alliance in the district.

"None other than Ghani Khan Chowdhury is responsible for this situation. Khan Chowdhury still treats Malda as his personal fiefdom and the Congress is paying the price for his uncompromising stance. So is the Trinamool," Krishnendu said.

Malda district Congress president Sabitri Mitra said it was politically inconceivable that the alliance with the Trinamool would work.

"There was healthy distrust between workers of both parties and the controversy over Englishbazar was largely responsible for our poor showing in the district."

"The alliance was imposed on and it is natural that it has not worked," Mitra said.

Mitra, however, retained her Aradanga seat.

The reality remains that the CPI(M) has made it to the winning post simply by taking advantage of the proxy war between Khan Chowdhury and Mamata over the Englishbazar seat.

While the CPI(M) candidate Samar Roy polled about 50,000 votes in the seat, the Congress came second with 39,000 and Trinamool a close third with 33,000 votes.

It is simple calculation that the CPI(M) would not have stood a chance if the two Congress were together.

Khan Chowdhury himself was not available for comment and remained isolated "at his mansion at the outskirts of Malda town."

"He (Khan Chowdhury) is glum and is not talking to anyone. He has taken the defeat at English Bazar and the Congress show in Malda personally," Chakraborty said.

For Khan Chowdhury, there are ample reasons for worry.

The Congress, which won eight of the 11 Assembly seats in the last Assembly election, has conceded three seats to the CPI(M) — Manikchak, Ratua and Englishbazar, while the CPI(M) has retained Gajole, Kharba and Habibpur and wrested Old Malda seat from Trinamool.

The sole compensation for the Congress was that it could take away Harischandrapur seat from the Forward Bloc.

The result in constituencies like Sujapur and Kaliachak, considered as Khan Chowdhury's pocket boroughs, show that the Congress has suffered heavy erosion in both the seats.

Khan Chowdhury's sister, Ruby Noor, retained the Sujapur seat but the lead has whittled down to 11,000 from 38,000 in the 1999 parliamentary election.

In the Kaliachak constituency, Khan Chowdhury's brother Abu Hasan managed to win but he too had a lead of a mere 6,000.



Mamata Banerjee on Monday walks to her first Press conference after being trounced in the polls.

The wickets that fell on way to Left Front win

Kolkata, May 14

THE LEFT Front retained power for an unprecedented sixth consecutive time in the just-concluded Assembly elections but several party heavyweights lost from their respective seats.

In fact, the LF had the more star casualties than its arch-rival, the Trinamool-Congress alliance.

Among the ministers who lost are Health Minister Partha Deb (Bankura), PWD Minister Kshiti Goswami (Dhakuria), Minister of State for PWCID Manohar Tirkey (Kalchini), Relief Minister Satya Ranjan Mahato (Jhalda) and Minister for Agriculture Marketing Biren Moitra (Harischandrapur).

While Left Front chief whip in the outgoing Assembly, Robin Mondal lost the Rajarhat seat, CPI(M)'s North 24-Parganas district secretary Amitava Nandy lost from Habra.

Asian Games gold medalist Jyotirmoyee Sikdar lost in Ranaghat-West.

But Speaker of the outgoing Assembly Hasim Abdul Halim won from Amdanga.

Other bigtime leaders who won are Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee in the Jadavpur constituency against Trinamool candidate and yesterday filmstar Madhavi Mukherjee. Finance Minister Asim-Dasgupta too won from Khardah and Transport Minister Subhas Chakraborty from Belgachia East.

Heavyweights of the Trinamool-Congress alliance who lost include Trinamool all-India general secretary Mukul Roy (Jagaddal), PCC general secretary Manas Bhuniya (Sabong) and sitting Congress MLA Gautam Chakraborty (Englishbazar).

PTI



CPM supporters celebrate the party's victory.

Trinamool scores 15 in Hooghly

THE TRINAMOL CONGRESS alliance has won five of the 15 seats in Hooghly district. The Trinamool Congress won the seats of Uttarpara, Srirampur and Singur whereas the Congress won at Champdani and Chandanagar. For the first time since independence, the Left Front lost the seat of Uttarpara.

The CPI(M) regained the Banskhera, which it had lost to the Congress in 1996. Agriculture Minister Narmen De defeated Robin Mukherjee of the Trinamool Congress. The CPI(M) lost the Singur seat where the sitting MLA Bidyut Das was beaten by a retired headmaster, R N Bhattacharya. CPI(M) won three of the four seats in Arambag subdivision — Pursurah, Khanakul and Arambag — by overwhelming majority, and the fourth seat, Goghhat, went to the FB.

HTC, Hooghly

Left Front regains lost ground in city

Jorabagan that took observers most by surprise. The CPI(M)'s Sudhansu Seal, chief whip of the party in the CMC, wrested the seat from Trinamool's Sanjay Bakshi.

The CPI(M)'s Mohammad Salim trounced the Trinamool's Sultan Ahmed at Entally, by more than 6000 votes. Salim had lost to Ajit Panja in the last Lok Sabha polls. In the Entally segment, however, Salim had polled more votes than the Trinamool and the Congress put together. It is presumably his "clean" image that has helped him consolidate his lead in the constituency.

For the Trinamool, the big win was Saugata Ray's over PWD minister. Kshiti Goswami in Dhakuria, by more than 4,000 votes. Ray had switched over to

the Trinamool from the Congress weeks before the election. The Trinamool made a poll issue of the perceived incompetence of the ministry headed by Goswami. Also, Goswami did not probably get much help from the CPI(M)'s famous election machinery, which the party used for its own candidates in neighbouring Jadavpur and Ballygunge.

The last minute alliance with the Congress, and the changes this necessitated in the poll list did not work much to the Trinamool's advantage.

The Trinamool fielded Dilip Das from Uttar Dinajpur to take on the CPI(M)'s Debesh Das at Taltala. He proved no match for the CPI(M), but a local candidate could have made a difference.

Tapas Roy, who earlier won the Vidyasagar seat, had been tipped to take on the Congress's Somen Mitra. He was later shifted to the Burrabazaar constituency. That the Congress-Trinamool alliance managed to win both the seats was largely due to the charisma of the two candidates.

Her outbursts can't have helped Ajit Panja's daughter Mahita Mondal, who lost in Vidyasagar. She had to contend against the CPI(M)'s Lakshmi Dey and the poll machinery the party could bring into play. To make matters worse, her own partymen were reluctant to campaign for her.

For Dey, who had come under a cloud after the Bowbazaar blasts and over his alleged association with satta don Rashid Khan, the

victory was crucial.

Subrata Basu's victory in Shyamapukur was not really surprising. It was a FB stronghold till the party lost it to Trinamool in a 1999 by-poll. The non-Left votes split this time, and the resentment against Mamata's dumping of the NDA saw the FB cruise home.

In the rest of the seats in Kolkata, the results were not unexpected. Manikchak and Beleghatta, two constituencies close to each other, saw close shaves for both the winning candidates. Paresh Pal of the Trinamool retained Manikchak, but by a narrow margin of 698 votes.

In Beleghatta, Manab Mukherjee surged past Ajay Sanyal. Local issues dominated the election this time. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's industry-friendly overtures and the now-heretofore attitude of Mamata Banerjee were the other factors.

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Subrata renews call to clear pavements

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 30

MAYOR SUBRATA Mukherjee, who was forced to call off his drive against hawkers last year after Mamata Banerjee put her foot down, has again raised his voice on the need to clear pavements for pedestrians.

Hawkers will be allowed on the 21 important intersections if they do not build permanent or semi-permanent structures and leave enough space for pedestrians, he said today.

"We do not want to remove hawkers but we want controlled hawking. Pedestrians have the first right over the pavements," Mukherjee said.

The Mayor also wants a 'hawker-free zone', which will stretch from Millennium Park to Jawaharlal Nehru Road on one side and Victoria House to Victoria Memorial on the other.

When Mukherjee tried to

crack down on hawkers shortly after taking over as Mayor last year, the Trinamool leader would have none of it. Such a move, the party feared, would tell on its election prospects.

Fruit row: The leader of the Opposition in the CMC, Nirmal Mukherjee, has demanded an inquiry into Monday's seizure of fruits.

"The law does not allow confiscation of whole fruits with the cut fruits. There should be an inquiry as to where the whole fruits go," he said.

The drive against cut fruits was essentially one against the hawkers, he felt.

The Hawkers' Sangram Committee has threatened to march to the CMC headquarters demanding the fruits back. "This is blatant theft. They should either produce the whole fruits or give us compensation," said a Committee spokesperson said.

MoU signed with Centre to tone up power sector

TIRTHANKAR MITRA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 30. - To turn around the West Bengal State Electricity Board and rejuvenate the state power sector, a MoU has been signed by senior Union power ministry officials and state power department functionaries for five years.

To be reviewed annually, the onus of implementing the nine-point reform programme lies mainly with the West Bengal State Electricity Board which "has to break even by March 2003" and to get positive returns from 2003-04.

Signed by the Union power secretary, Mr Ajay Shankar, and the state power secretary, Mr Asim Barman, on 5 May, adherence to the MoU is a condition of receipts of funds from the Union government for "re-

novation, modernisation and updating of thermal and hydroelectric units"

The funds will also be utilised for upgrading transmission, sub-transmission and distribution networks including energy accounting and metering. The utilisation will be monitored every three months.

The ministry of power will extend adequate soft loans through Regional Electricity Commission or other agencies for supply of electricity to villages.

Funds will be provided by Power Finance Corporation to meet financial needs of the power sector in relaxation of normal conditionalities. The ministry of power will extend support to the state government to execute critical transmission projects.

Profitability is the key note

of the reform programme which seeks to make distribution centres of the WBSEB into profit centres. To achieve this, each centre shall prepare its separate "commercial account/ shadow profit and loss accounts" by 31 March 2002.

The state government will ensure the security of the outstanding dues of central public sector undertakings as the scheme is approved by the Union government. It will also have to be ensure that the CPSU's outstandings don't exceed two months' billing.

The state government will complete rural electrification to provide electricity to all villages by March 2006. WBSEB shall undertake energy audit at all levels to identify and reduce transmission and distribution losses and bring them

to the level of 20 per cent by 2005.

All WBSEB thermal power stations will be brought under West Bengal Power Development Corporation Limited.

The state government will ensure timely payment of subsidy required in pursuance of its orders on tariff determined by West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission. The state government will ensure filing of tariff petitions timely and implement the orders of the WBERC unless stayed by court orders.

"Signing this MoU amounts to an agreement to privatise the power sector in the state to oppose which trade unions had called nationwide strike in the power sector in December last year," the president of WBSEB Employees' Union, affiliated to INTUC, Mr Milan Choudhury, said.

THE STATESMAN

31 MAY 2002

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Buddha meets President and PM

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 30

IN A round of courtesy calls before retiring to Banga Bhavan this evening, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee called on the President, the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister to seek the Centre's cooperation for West Bengal's development and safeguard of its international border.

In the capital for the CPI-M's three-day Politburo and central committee meeting, the new Chief Minister took over from where he had left off the last time he went to the North Block to discuss with L K Advani, among other things, the activities of the ISI, PWG and the Kamtapur People's Organisation in Bengal.

When he was here last year, shortly after taking over from Jyoti Basu, Bhattacharjee had sounded Advani on the deployment of additional forces in the State to deal with the problem. This morning, he again stressed the need for joint operations with Central agencies and asked for additional forces to strengthen vigil along the porous Indo-Bangladesh border.

Bhattacharjee said while the State needed 34 BSF battalions, it has only 22. He also disclosed that the Home Minister had assured him "some additional forces". He said several other issues of the State's interests were discussed during the 30-minute meeting. However, he chose not to elaborate, clearly reserving his right to speak on them till Saturday when he addresses his first press conference in Delhi after being elected the Chief Minister.

He was also tight-lipped on his 40-minute meeting with the Prime Minister. But he is believed to have raised and discussed some development-related issues at the meeting.

Meanwhile, ahead of the two-day Central Committee meeting tomorrow, the CPI-M Politburo today analysed the results of the recent State polls, including the LDF's crushing defeat in Kerala, and discussed the emerging political scenario following the NDA's defeat in these elections.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

MAY 31 1997

Arrest reveals NE-Kamtapur links

FROM PROBIR PRAMANIK

Siliguri, May 30: After the arrest of a hardcore militant from Cooch Behar, police have established links between the separatist Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) and northeast extremist groups.

Cooch Behar superintendent of police Kailash Chandra Meena said, acting on a tip-off, police arrested Dinabandhu Burman (29), a KLO activist, from Matabhanga on Monday night.

"Burman's arrest has exposed the links between KLO, the Kamtapur Peoples' Party (KPP) and the United Liberation Front of Asom," Meena said.

"During interrogation, Burman revealed that he had been part of a batch of 32 KLO trainees which had received training in the use of advanced arms from the

Ulfa in their jungle hideouts in neighbouring Bhutan. His was the second batch."

Burman was trained to use the 9 mm pistol, AK-56, SLR and universal machine gun (UMG) at the Ulfa's central headquarters in Sandupjungkar in south-eastern Bhutan.

The district police chief said the batch was trained by senior KLO and Ulfa commanders for two months. Ulfa commander Himanshu Choliya was the main instructor.

He was aided by KLO commander Mihir Das and Pabitra Singha.

Burman revealed that the elusive KLO chairman and commander-in-chief Jeevan Singh alias Tamir Das had supervised the training session at the Ulfa headquarters between July and August in 1997. The KLO activist

said the batch was later sent to Ulfa's Dewthang area camp for training in hand-to-hand combat for another two months.

After that, the trainees spent three years at Ulfa's central headquarters learning guerrilla warfare and survival skills. The KLO trainees periodically took part in "joint Ulfa-KLO operations" both in Assam and north Bengal over the past two years, Burman revealed.

He admitted that he "surfaced" and returned to his native village, GB Khota under Matabhanga police station, earlier this year.

"We suspect Burman had been acting as a talent-spotter for the militant organisation looking for new recruits among the Rajbanshi youths in the district," Meena said.

"Burman has revealed that while the KLO is the extremist

wing, the KPP and the All Kamtapur Students' Union present the moderate facade. But the three organisations are inter-linked and are closely aided by the Ulfa and a Bodo militant outfit," Meena said.

Police found out during interrogation that the KLO has at its disposal an arsenal of sophisticated arms, including AK series assault rifles and 9 mm pistols.

"The militant organisation was on a recruitment spree, looking to infuse new blood into the guerrilla outfit. The arrest is a major breakthrough for the Cooch Behar police. We now have some specified information on the KLO and its activists and contact persons in the district. We expect to nab other re-surfaced KLO hardcore activists holed up in the district," the district police chief added.

THE HILLS MPB

Ministers to submit reports every six months

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 29. — The state government has asked its ministers to submit progress reports of their respective departments every six months.

Mr Nirupam Sen, industry minister, and Mr Asim Dasgupta, finance minister, held meetings with ministers of 11 departments at the Writers' Buildings today to discuss allotment of funds and status of projects. Mr Sen's presence at these meetings surprised few as it has become clear that he would be the second man in the Buddhadev Bhattacharya ministry.

This is the first time a minister of the industry department called the shots along with the finance minister.

Mr Dasgupta said funds would be given to the ministers after considering the progress of the projects. He said: "We're following the Left Front manifesto. The volume of the annual plan in the state will be decided after meeting ministers of all departments".

Mr Sen and Mr Dasgupta met ministers of agricultural, PWD and water resource and water investigations departments in the afternoon. Senior officials, including principal secretaries and secretaries of the respective departments, were present.

The marathon meetings continued till late tonight. Mr Dasgupta said discussions would be held with eight other ministers tonight. He said meetings with ministers of 39 other departments would be held on 30 May and 2 June.

Mr Sen said all state government employees will have to do their duty as "they were being paid by state government."

Cong, Trinamul boycott Assembly over arrests

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, June 29. - Trinamul and Congress MLAs boycotted the Assembly session today demanding Mr Subhas Chakraborty's dismissal and protesting against the Speaker's refusal to allow a discussion on Tuesday's arrest of criminals.

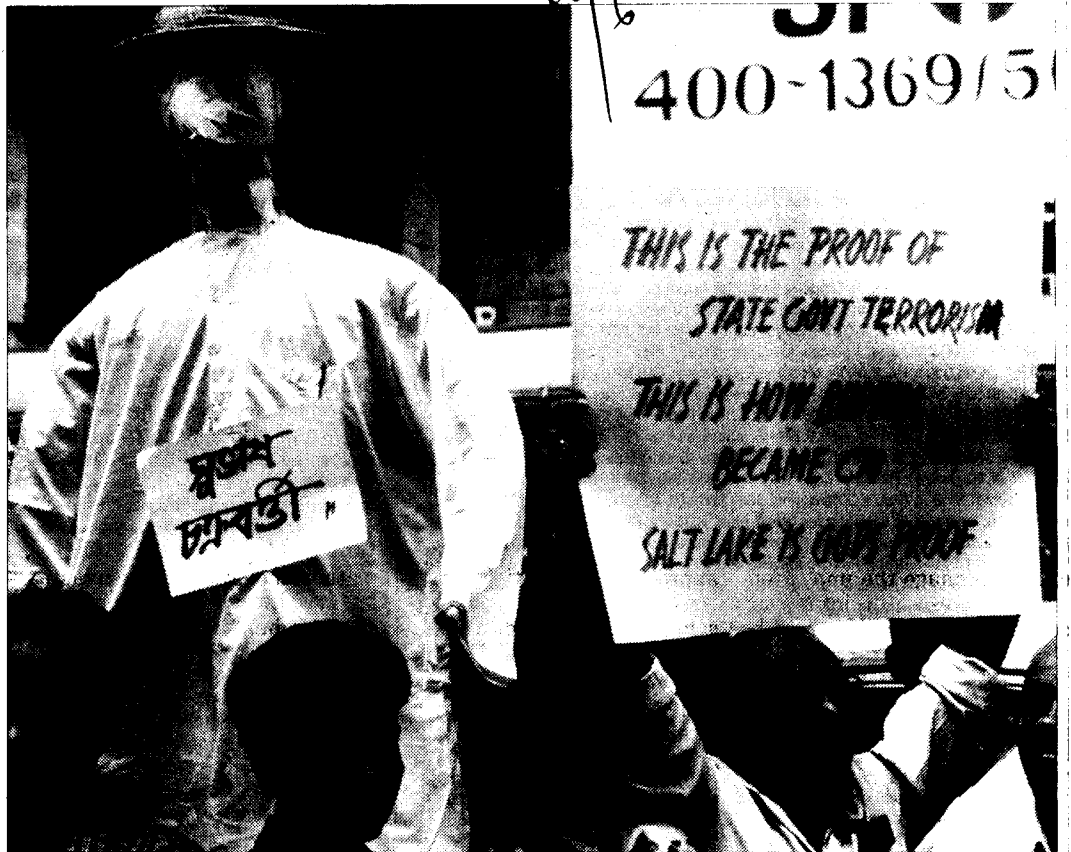
The Speaker told the parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Prabodh Sinha, today that Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya would make a statement on the issue on Monday.

The House proceedings went on smoothly because of the absence of Opposition MLAs.

Trinamul MLAs, wearing black badges, went around the Assembly lobby with posters, shouting slogans against Mr Subhas Chakraborty. They accused the ruling party of harbouring criminals and demanded Mr Chakraborty's removal from the state Cabinet. Mrs Sonali Guha was seen blowing a whistle to punctuate Trinamul's slogans.

The CPI-M MLA, Mr Padmanidhi Dhar, vehemently criticised the Opposition MLAs and their conduct. He said certain newspapers were indulging in "yellow journalism".

The criminals arrested on Tuesday night enjoyed the patronage of Mr Ambica Banerjee and Mr Jatu Lahiri, Mr Dhar said. RSP's Mr Tapan Hore said there wasn't any proof that



Trinamul demonstrators with an effigy of Mr Subhas Chakraborty at Jadu Babu's Bazar on Friday. - The Statesman

the arrests had been made from a youth hostel located in Yuba Bharati Krirangan.

Mr Debaprasad Sarkar (Suci) repeated his demand for a probe into the arrests. Mr Bhattacharya is yet to make a statement on the issue. The public and the House members

are confused about the reported involvement of a minister in the matter, he said.

The LF members refuted Mr Tapas Pal's charges that the CPI-M was demanding money for screening his and Mrs Nayana Bandopadhyay's films in some video parlours in Mid-

napore.

Mr Tapan Hore said no such parlour existed in the place mentioned by Mr Pal.

Mr Jahangir Karim (CPI-M) said the Contai Trinamul councillor, Mr Subhendu Adhikary, had termed Mr Pal's allegations as "false".

Stadium scam: Was it an inside job?

Saugata Roy
Kolkata, June 29

WHO FRAMED Subhas Chakrabarty? Or was he framed at all? Questions such as these have come up within the CPI(M) after the sensational report on the arrest of a band of criminals from Salt Lake and Howrah broke. Leaders from North 24-Parganas will raise the issue at tomorrow's State Committee meeting.

The man himself has cried himself hoarse calling it a devious attempt to tarnish his image. His supporters squarely blame rivals in the North 24-Parganas party unit, such as Amitava Nandi. They had apparently tipped off the police about the presence of the hoodlums inside the Salt Lake Stadium. The immediate provocation: The Nandi camp was rearing to take revenge against Chakrabarty for the humiliation suffered by Nandi in the Beni Engineering muddle.

"The police acted with remarkable and unusual alacrity. That is what has been bothering us. Don't forget, the officer who led the raid party is supposedly close to a rival faction," said a Subhas aide. Indeed, Humayan Kabir, the officer in question, had played a controversial role during the violence-marred Salt Lake municipal bypoll. Nandi himself was in charge of the party machinery in Salt Lake then.

The seeds of Tuesday's sensational raid, the aides say, were sown during that July 1999 by-election. The officer in-charge of Bidhannagar (south) police station had then lodged a suo motu



SUBHENDU GHOSH/HINDUSTAN TIMES

Trinamool Congress supporters burn an effigy of Transport Minister Subhas Chakrabarty outside the State Assembly on Friday.

FIR saying that as many as 300 goons had sneaked into Salt Lake to cause major disruptions and manoeuvre the polls. Kabir refused to take cognizance of that complaint. What appears strange is the fact that the same police officer played the lead in chasing a band of criminals from far away Howrah all the

way to Salt Lake.

Kabir, Subhas aides say, had picked a fight with sympathizers of the State Transport Minister when he was posted as SDPO, Barrackpore. Tarit Topdar, MP from the constituency - and a known Subhas loyalist - had a bitter relation with the officer. Subsequently, the officer was

shifted to Howrah.

But there are some weak links in this thesis. The raid proved beyond doubt that Salt Lake Stadium had become home to a group of criminals - even if they owed allegiance to the Trinamool Congress, as was claimed by CPI(M) MLA Kanika Ganguly in the Assembly. Even

the argument given by SP Howrah Somen Mitra looks flawed - at best an afterthought. It would be impossible for a gang, with policemen hot in chase, to break into a stadium guest house.

Even if they were Trinamool men, the fact that people such as them found a safe shelter in the

Salt Lake Stadium raises questions on Chakrabarty's credentials, says skeptics. Nandi camp followers claim the criminals rounded up on Tuesday night were a notorious lot. North 24-Parganas party leaders have all along been aware of their activities. "They shifted base from Bally to Belghoria. From there, they were driven out. A Subhas-loyalist gave them shelter at Baranagar. But they had to clear out of that place as well. Chakrabarty, who knows every nook and corner of North 24-Parganas like the back of his palm, is definitely aware of who these people are. How then did they get entry into the stadium and stay put for months on end? The incident has brought to light Chakrabarty's hidden Trinamool links," one of them claimed.

The Nandi camp laughs off the conspiracy angle. "Soumen Mitra, SP Howrah, is an upright man. It's no secret that even Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee appreciates his good work. He's the last man to take actions such as these yielding to party pressures. That Trinamool men would be lodged inside the stadium was beyond their imagination," said a Nandi man from Salt Lake.

"Chakrabarty, himself on a sticky wicket, is overreacting simply because he has too many skeletons in his cupboard," he said.

On Page 3

- Opp continues House boycott
- Police play numbers game over escape
- 'I have my party behind me'
- Cops defend their own against Subhas wrath

Criminals and their political patrons

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, June 29

IN THE trading of charges between rival political outfits over the stadium scandal, one thing perhaps has gone unnoticed: that criminals from the districts are increasingly shifting base to such city areas as Salt Lake, Lake Town, Baguihati and Dum Dum. This despite the fact that Salt Lake is a high-security district because many top-notch ruling party politicians and bureaucrats live here. Could it be possible that politicians of all hues have been providing these criminals shelter in safe houses? The police have the cell phone number of at least 14 persons but they would not reveal their identity. Why?

Interrogations suggest Palash Das, the ring-leader of the team rounded up late on Tuesday night, had been operating in connivance with youths from the fringe areas of North 24-Parganas. While Swapan Barui, Palash's nephew, played a crucial role in forging an alliance between criminals from North 24-Parganas and Howrah, it is still uncertain who allotted a VIP room at the Salt Lake Stadium to Palash, who reportedly has four wives. The Howrah police interrogated one of them, who had put up in Salt Lake, to identify the nature of political affiliations that her husband enjoyed. Besides Belur and Howrah, investigations now suggest, Palash was also active in Dum Dum and Lake Town for years when he was involved in several extortion cases from promoters

Opp continues House boycott

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, June 29

TRINAMOOL and Congress MLAs continued their boycott of the Assembly today, though Opposition leader Pankaj Banerjee and senior Congress MLA Abdul Mannan signed the House attendance register.

The Trinamool legislators held a demonstration in the lobby, but without Congress participation. All of them wore black badges in protest against the Speaker's 'partisan role'.

"The Government is in a spot. It's busy finding excuses for the mess at the stadium. The Speaker too is buying time to hide the truth. He could have allowed a discussion yesterday," Pankaj Banerjee said.

"We will organise protest rallies in the districts as well. Before that, we will continue the boycott till Tuesday."

CLP leader Atish Sinha said, "We have jointly decided on the boycott programme." But Congress MLAs like Abdul Mannan, Mahababul Haque Chowdhury, Asit Mitra had submitted adjournment motion proposals, which the Speaker took up in the House today. "They didn't flout the party whip. They submitted the proposals earlier," Sinha said.

The protest also had a comic side to it. The younger lot of Trinamool MLAs held a mock House session. The mood was reminiscent of a playground, with Trinamool MLA Sonali Guha playing the referee.

She made free use of a whistle, peppering the monotonous slogans — "Chor chor Subhas chor, Chor chor Buddha chor." Others held aloft placards that said "aami Subhas bolchhi, eder mukti na dile amader manritiya chole jabe."

Senior MLAs Saugata Roy, Nirmal Ghosh, Paras Dutta stood apart and watched the show.

Some Trinamool members, however, felt the party had done enough to draw public attention and should focus now on more urgent issues, including the arrest episode, in the House.

"We can't afford to continue like this, especially when the Government will table its Education Budget on Tuesday," a Trinamool MLA said.

Later, 100 Youth Congress members courted arrest at the Assembly gate during the recess, demanding Subhas Chakrabarty's resignation. They also burnt the Transport Minister's effigy.

Trinamool councillor Sujit Bose put up a blockade in front of the Salt Lake Stadium. The party will hold a rally at the Shyambazar Five Point Crossing on July 1 to expose the "minister-anti-social nexus."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 6 2011

Shelter scandal erupts on govt

9-87 MB 29/6

OUR BUREAU

June 28: Aftershocks of Tuesday night's arrest of armed criminals from Salt Lake stadium — the lair of sports minister Subhas Chakraborty — rocked the government and the CPM today, and gifted the Trinamul Congress an issue over which it went on the rampage in the Assembly.

Initial reports had said that 16 antisocials, sleeping in a dormitory inside the stadium, were arrested by a team from Howrah police. But Howrah SP Somen Mitra today said that the 16 people had been picked up — 11 of them were arrested later — from the "ramps of the stadium" where they had fled to take shelter after being chased from the nearby Kadapara slum.

Away in Delhi for a check-up, Chakraborty — the fountainhead of rebellion in the CPM — sniffed in the arrests a "conspiracy by the police and my detractors to malign me". The minister said the raid at Salt Lake stadium, "which is under my control", could not have occurred without the nod from the "highest quarters of the party and the government".

The police, however, sought to paper over the controversy and said "no connection had been established between the criminals and Subhas Chakraborty".

The incident has, nonetheless, the potential of taking the lid off the enmity between factions in the CPM. The issue is likely to rock the party's two-day state committee meeting beginning Saturday.

The CPM said it was concerned at the revelation that armed criminals had taken shelter in the stadium, but added that it would reserve comment till



Trinamul MLA Nayna, who claimed injury in the House scuffle. Picture by Pradip Sanyal

the government conducts an inquiry. Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee will make a statement in the Assembly on Monday.

"I'm not a policeman who can tell you what kind of people were in the stadium that night and why. For a clearer picture, you will have to wait for a statement from the government," state CPM secretary Anil Biswas said.

On the ropes after the election debate, Trinamul leader Mamata Banerjee pounced on the issue. She said her legislators would boycott the Assembly for three days from tomorrow and take to the streets. "Tomorrow we will observe a statewide protest day and

on Sunday evening, we will hold a rally on the issue at Shyambazar five-point crossing," she added.

Maintaining that the arrests justified her charge of "state-sponsored terrorism in Bengal", Mamata said: "It is a case of constitutional breakdown in Bengal. This government has no right to be in office. The Centre should come forward and protect the country's Constitution. I will write to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Union home minister L.K. Advani seeking their intervention."

The issue has given Mamata an opportunity to interact more with her former allies at a time when a debate is raging in Trinamul on whether to return to the Central coalition or not.

The fissure between the current allies came to the fore in the Assembly with the Congress choosing to remain a silent observer as Trinamul MLAs launched an offensive against the government.

As soon as the House sat at 11 am, Trinamul MLAs demanded a detailed discussion on the issue, but Speaker Hashim Abdul Halim rejected their plea.

Led by Pankaj Banerjee, Trinamul legislators ransacked the Speaker's podium, overturned desks, yanked off microphones, smashed furniture and destroyed official papers as they pressed for the resignations of Bhattacharjee and Chakraborty. Congress members did not join in the protest.

The Speaker had to call in the Assembly guards to rein in the marauding Trinamul legislators. In the scuffle that followed, a few MLAs tripped.

Mamata, however, claimed at a news conference later that the guards had "mercilessly beaten up my legislators at the ruling party's behest". (See Page 9)

Opp puts govt on the mat over arrest of criminals

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, June 28 — Hell broke loose in the West Bengal Assembly today over the arrest of 11 criminals reportedly from Salt Lake Stadium on Tuesday night.

The House had to be adjourned 20 minutes after it began deliberations in the morning session. When the members re-assembled at 1 p.m., the Speaker, Mr Hashim Abdul Halim, described the adjournment as "recess".

Some newspaper reports today said the criminals were "used" by a CPI-M minister of North 24-Parganas during the Assembly polls and were allowed to stay in the Yuba Bharati Krirangan guest house.

Within minutes of the the Assembly convening at 11 a.m., Trinamul MLAs rushed towards the well and laid a siege on the Speaker. They shouted slogans like "Criminal-er sarkar, aar nei darkaar (We don't want a government of criminals)" and "Chor, chor Subhas chor (Subhas Chakraborty is a thief)".

The Left Front members were taken aback, so were the securitymen inside the House.

The Trinamul MLAs, led by the leader of the Opposition, raised a point of order and demanded a thorough discussion on the subject. But Mr Halim refused to comply and announced the names of members scheduled to read out their questions.

The Speaker, however, was surrounded by Trinamul members.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee rushed to-



Two of the arrested criminals being taken to the third SDJM's court in Howrah on Thursday. — The Statesman



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 28. — Mr Subhas Chakraborty today denied any link with those reportedly picked up by the police from the Salt Lake stadium late on Tuesday night. He alleged that the report was a conspiracy hatched by the police, Trinamul Congress and the newspaper group that published it.

He also denied the indication in the report that the whole thing could possibly be part of a conspiracy by his rivals within the CPI-M.

When questioned by reporters how could the police be part of a conspiracy against a senior minister in the state government, Mr Chakraborty said some sections of the police have never been loyal to the Left Front government. He said he would find more details after reaching Kolkata.

Mr Chakraborty said: "For the past 30 years there have been conspiracies against me", but did not clarify whether it was from within the party or outside.

He denied that 11 people had been arrested. According to him, only two have been arrested. He said he could not be held responsible for the people staying at the youth hostel in the Salt Lake stadium. He said blaming him on this ground would be like blaming the prime minister or the defence minister for a bomb blast near the South Bloc.

SNS adds from Kolkata: The CPI-M has nothing to do with the arrest of a gang from the Salt Lake stadium complex on Tuesday night, Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, said today.

"It's totally a government matter and the state government is looking into it. The police, who have made the arrests, would submit their report to the government and action would be taken accordingly," Mr Biswas told reporters.

He said he had learnt about the arrests from newspaper reports and had no knowledge about who were at the stadium complex and what for.

When told that the arrested men had confessed to the police that they had been in the complex since the last Assembly elections and had worked during the poll at the bidding of a state minister, Mr Biswas said: "Our party has no dearth of workers and we never need to hire men for conducting an election."

Responding to the charge made by Miss Mamata Banerjee that the police had no credit for the arrest as it was a fall-out of the CPI-M's "internal feud", Mr Biswas said it's only natural that Miss Banerjee would "see internal feud in everything".

Mr Biswas ruled out the arrest would tarnish his party's image. "Our party's image is such that it doesn't get tarnished so easily," he asserted.

SP's stand: Mr Subhas Chakraborty did not have any links with the 11 alleged criminals arrested from the Salt Lake stadium

wards the Mr Halim, snatched his microphone and began addressing the House — an "unprecedented" happening.

Mr Banerjee said the ruling party had rigged the polls and let loose violence and Tuesday night's arrest and the confessions of those arrested shows how CPI-M had used criminals to subvert democracy.

The chief minister, present right from the beginning, remained a passive onlooker as were members of the Treasury benches.

The Trinamul members stood up on their benches, got hold of some microphones and damaged them. They broke lamps too. Supported by some Congress members, they kept shouting slogans and blocked

the aisle leading to the Speaker's chair.

Mr Arjun Singh, Mr Tamo-nash Ghosh, Mrs Sonali Guha, Mr Subrata Bakshi, among oth-

On page 4

- CM must quit: Mamata
- Subhas not responsible: Sikdar
- Criminals injured inside lock-up

ers, were seen thumping their desks with wooden bars — in the cacophony nothing could be heard.

But the ruling party members continued with their questions. The urban development and

municipal affairs minister was scheduled to reply to a specific question. Mr Ashok Bhattacharya rose to do so but few cared to listen to him.

The LF chief whip, Mr Lakshmi Dey, tried to restrain his colleagues, visibly angry with the developments.

Mr Subrata Mukherjee, mayor, Mr Saugata Roy, Mr Sovandeb Chattopadhyay argued against the presence of securitymen inside the House. At this, some Trinamul members rushed towards the security men and told them to leave the House.

But by that they had cordoned off the areas in front of Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya and Mr Halim the Speaker. A scuffle followed. Some Trinamul members such as Mr Arunava

Ghosh, Mr Partha Chatterjee and Mr Nirbed Roy preferred restraint but found few takers.

The pandemonium continued for about 25 minutes, during which business came to a halt, prompting the Speaker to adjourn the House.

The Trinamul MLAs went to the leader of the Opposition's chamber to decide the next course of action. After a brief meeting, the members decided to seek the Governor's intervention. They sought an appointment with the Governor, who readily agreed.

About 65 Trinamul and Congress members submitted a memorandum to the Governor and sought details on the possi-

■ See HOUSE: page 4

■ See SUBHAS: page 4

HOUSE

Continued from page 1

ble action that could be taken against Mr Subhas Chakraborty.

They returned to the House around 1.30 p.m., shouting slogans. Pandemonium followed again.

The Trinamul members disrupted the session again. They tore papers to shreds and waved the newspapers that had carried the arrest reports.

After about 15 minutes, the Opposition MLAs again walked out of the House, saying they had returned only to register their protest after meeting the Governor.

As usual, the Congress was rudderless, with its leader, Mr Atish Sinha, absent. Mr Abdul Mannan (Congress) criticised his absence and said it was "very unfortunate" that his party couldn't take a stand on the newspaper reports. "We don't know what to do. Some of our MLAs joined the Trinamul protest."

On the Trinamul members' behaviour, the Speaker said: "I don't know why they behaved like this. Moreover, they have no right to damage public property." The Speaker's opinion was shared by the RSP MLA, Mr Tapan Hore.

Mr Halim said the Trinamul could have raised a point of order after the question hour. But he ruled out suspending or expelling any member for today's protest. "I'm going to ensure normal functioning of the House and that's my priority."

Taking advantage of the Trinamul MLAs absence, CPI-M members lashed out at the party for disrupting the House proceedings. Mrs Kanika Ganguly, CPI-M member from Howrah, told the House in the afternoon that the dreaded criminals arrested on Tuesday night were associated with the Trinamul.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee said the Trinamul would decide tomorrow on its next course of action in the Assembly.

Subrata threatens to quit, Mamata in tears

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, June 25

ALL HELL broke loose at Maharashtra Niwas tonight where Mamata Banerjee was holding a meeting with her MLAs, Councillors, MPs and organisation leaders over the issue of hawker eviction.

About 15 minutes before that Mamata had suggested constituting a 19-member committee comprising MP Sudip Bandopadhyay and MLAs such as Saugata Roy, Sadhan Pande and Pankaj Banerjee to oversee and monitor the work of CMC. This was taken as an insult by Mayor Subrata Mukherjee. He said that unless he was given a free hand he would step down as Mayor.

This came following the argument placed by the MPs and MLAs that in their constituencies the hawkers cannot be evicted without them being consulted. Therefore, they wanted the Mayor to work in consultation with them before taking any action about eviction of hawkers from their Assembly segments. When Mamata defended the MLAs and MPs, Subrata stood up and threatened to quit. That was the last straw. Mamata broke into tears, picked up her bag and walked out crying: "You people run the party. I have nothing to do with it."

Earlier, the Subrata and Saugata Roy camps slugged it out for five long hours, failing to break common ground.

Subrata and his group demanded that Mamata support the eviction drive. But Saugata's men insisted that they wouldn't allow that without a proper rehabilitation package.

Saugata, who wields considerable clout in the Trinamool policy-making body, found a staunch supporter in actor-turned-lawmaker Tapas Paul.

The deadlock reflected the party's inability to weigh between a Rs 1,400-crore ADB loan, which the CMC is scheduled to receive by next month, and the political implications of such a drive. After her recent poll debacle, Mamata did not want to rush to a conclusion and opted to buy time.

This was one of the blackest nights for Mamata. Ajit Panja is said to have told confidants that he had been offered independent charge of either the Ministry of Coal or the Ministry of Commerce. On September 30, he will announce the core committee and the task force for all 294 Assembly segments and 42 parliamentary constituencies in Bengal.

Bani Singha Roy, who contested the last elections on a Trinamool ticket and lost and Dilip Das, who was forced to contest from Taltala because of Mamata's tie up with the Congress, today joined the Panja camp.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Accor pulls out of Great Eastern deal

Suman Layak
Kolkata, June 25

THE HONEYMOON is over. French hospitality major Accor Asia Pacific, roped in by the State Government to infuse fresh blood into the ailing Great Eastern Hotel, has called it quits.

The company couldn't arrange funds from Indian banks and financial institutions to finance the deal. This, sources said, was the main reason for Accor's decision to backtrack.

Last week, Accor wrote to the State Government indicating they were no longer interested in taking over the State-run hotel.

Accor cited the sudden rise in salaries of the hotel staff and the presence of tenants on Great Eastern property as reasons for the pullout.

Far from it, insiders said. The truth is Accor's strategy has all along been to mop up resources from Indian banks and financial institutions. Nevertheless, it didn't click.

The ruthless undercutting of rates by the city's hotels too forced Accor to rethink its decision to get involved in the project. Recently, even the Park snatched a lucrative deal with the Indian Oil Corporation from Great Eastern.

The hotel's monthly wage bills have shot up by close to 60 per cent following implementation of the Pay Commission's recommendations. The monthly wage bills, including indirect payments, run up to Rs 35 lakh, with the direct bill at Rs 29 lakh.

With the hotel tottering on the



brink of collapse, the State Government might be forced to grant a monthly dole of Rs 25 lakh to Great Eastern to keep it going. Some more Government funds might be sunk in to tone up the infrastructure. Floors would be done up and the air-conditioning improved.

A new member-secretary is likely to take over the hotel administration from the first week of July. The member-secretary is a key functionary who looks after the administration as well as the Government's interests.

Way back in 1998, the State Government advertised for a partner to run the hotel as a joint venture. Apart from Accor, there were two other bidders - veteran hoteliers Ajit Kerkar and Satish Kumar.

In November last year, the State Government chose Accor over its two competitors.

The hotel is now putting final touches to a Puja packages to attract tourists from other States during the festive season. It will go flat out to market its services.

Trinamool boycotts Governor's address

By Our Special Correspondent

KOLKATA, JUNE 14. West Bengal's ruling Leftists today got a taste of things to come when Ms. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress blocked the State Governor, Lt.Gen.(retd.) S.K. Sinha, from reading out his speech on the first day of the Left Front in the Legislative Assembly after assuming office for the sixth term in a row.

When the House met at 3 p.m., 57 out of the 60 Trinamool MLAs entered the House with placards that read "the Leftists have rigged the election", "the Chief Minister (Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee) won the poll by cheating", and so on. They shouted slogans when the Governor came in to read his speech. Clad in a black sari, Ms. Sonali Guha, a first-time MLA, participated in slogan-shouting in a big way along with Mr. Subrata Mukherjee, also the Kolkata mayor.

The filmstars Mr. Tapas Pal and Ms. Nayana Bandopadhyay, new entrants to the Assembly, preferred to study the scene rather than get into action, rightaway.

The MLAs hurled copies of the Governor's speech at the Speaker's podium when Lt. Gen. Sinha was struggling to read it. The Speaker, Mr. Hashim Abdul Halim, tried to restore order but the Opposition was in no mood to listen. The Governor's stayed in the House for five minutes. The speech was taken as read.

The 24 of the 26 Congress MLAs



MLAs of the Congress and the Trinamool Congress entering the West Bengal Assembly, holding placards against the new Left Front Government on the first day of the monsoon session on Thursday. — Photo: Sushanta Patronobish

were relatively quiet as they seemed to have reconciled to the fact that the Trinamool MLAs were much more talented so far as action was concerned.

Mr. Lakshmi Dey, the Front chief whip, however, appreciated the Congress' behaviour inside the House saying the party was more experienced than the Trinamool and knew how to handle

parliamentary democracy. "We expect constructive criticism from the Congress".

During the day, Mr. Hashim Abdul Halim, a CPI(M) MLA and leader of the ruling Front, was elected Speaker for the fifth term.

He defeated the Trinamool nominee, Mr. Abdul Karim Chowdhury, by polling 193 ballots in the 294-member House. Mr.

Chowdhury secured 79 ballots. The Congress MLA, Mr. Mahabul Haque, who was also in the fray, secured a single vote.

At the time of announcement of the result, the Trinamool MLAs staged a walk-out on the ground that the lone nominated Anglo-Indian member was allowed to participate in the election.

Halim Speaker again

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, June 14. — Mr Hashim Abdul Halim today created history when he was elected Speaker of the state Assembly for the fifth consecutive time. Mr Anil Mukherjee (Forward Bloc) was unanimously elected Deputy Speaker.

But before that, Trinamul and Congress MLAs staged a walk-out after the pro tem Speaker, Mr Gyan Singh Sohanpal, refused to allow fresh election of the Speaker.

The trouble began after the nominated candidate from the Anglo Indian community, Mrs Gillian Rosemary Hart, cast her vote. Mr Saugata Roy (Trinamul) said she could not vote as she was a nominated member. He said the Constitution had stated that the Speaker should be chosen by the members of the House. By members, it is meant elected members, not nominated ones, he argued.

Chaos prevailed after this and the results of the Speaker's election were not announced for quite some time. However, no LF MLA, including the law minister, Mr Nitish Nandan Adhikari, came forward to counter Mr Roy's argument.

Finally, Mr Sohanpal issued a ruling and said there was no bar for the nominated member to take part in the Speaker's election. Quoting the Constitution, he said "the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker should be chosen by the members of the House." The members include both elected and nominated ones as no specific status of the members who can participate in the Speakers' election has been mentioned by the Constitution. For example, in case of the President's election, the Constitution has stated that only elected members can participate. So, there was no bar for nominated members to participate in the Speaker's election, he said. Not satisfied with Mr Sohan-

OPPOSITION PROTESTS MAR FIRST DAY OF NEW ASSEMBLY

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, June 14. — The 13th state Assembly began its first session today on a note of protest by the Opposition over the Governor's failure to read out the entire text of his address and faux pas in playing the national anthem. The Opposition also boycotted the proposal of thanks given to the Governor for his speech.

Trouble began when the acting Governor, Lt-Gen (Retd) SK Sinha, entered the House with two rows of security staff.

Trinamul MLAs instantly began protesting against the presence of securitymen in the House. As the Governor began reading his address, the MLAs rushed towards the chair and shooed away the security staff.

The Governor read out the first and last sentence of his speech amid cries by Trinamul MLAs and then stood up as the anthem began to be played.

But the anthem stopped midway and the Governor got up to leave. His security staff formed a cordon to prevent Trinamul MLAs from getting close to him. The MLAs then began protesting against the mistake in playing the anthem. They charging the government with showing disrespect to the anthem.

To make matters worse, the anthem resumed, making the Governor stop in the Assembly lobby as he was being escorted out by the Speaker. It was followed by some patriotic songs.

pal's argument, the Congress and Trinamul MLAs walked out of the Assembly hall.

Mr Halim then urged Opposition members to cooperate with him for the smooth running of the Assembly. He said debates on many key issues would be held during the session and hoped that the members would



An agitated Mr Subrata Mukherjee in the Assembly on Thursday. — The Statesman

Later, Mr Pankaj Banerjee, Leader of the Opposition, said the government had shown double disrespect to the anthem. It had flouted the convention not to play any music after the anthem was over.

He said the faux pas reflected the government's incompetence and was "a sign of nervousness for having rigged the polls".

The Speaker said the Trinamul had made much ado about an unintentional mistake.

Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya later told reporters that a technical mistake had led to the faux pas on the anthem. He has sought a report.

The Governor, in his address, stated: "It is a matter of great satisfaction that the Assembly polls and by-poll to one Lok Sabha seat were peaceful, barring a few stray incidents".

But the Trinamul and Con-

gress said the state had made the Governor say "a string of lies" about the conduct of the polls and its performance.

"The Assembly polls were rigged... Thousands of our supporters fled their homes because of atrocities by CPI-M men," Mr Pankaj Banerjee alleged.

He asserted that the Governor did not read out the bulk of the text because he didn't agree with its contents.

Responding to this, Mr Halim asked: "Does the Governor agree with the Trinamul MLAs' behaviour?"

The Governor's address outlined the previous government's performance and the new government's plans. The Trinamul-Congress boycotted the proposal of thanks given to the Governor for his address because "there is nothing... to be thankful about". — SNS

maintain decorum and preserve the sanctity of parliamentary democracy.

Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya congratulated Mr Halim and said the government would welcome constructive criticism.

Mr Halim got 193 votes against Mr Abdul Karim Choudhury (Trinamul) who se-

secured 79 votes. Before the election began, Mr Mahboob-ul-Haque (Congress) said he had withdrawn from the election. But he got one vote.

Two SUCI legislators did not vote. Two RSP MLAs couldn't vote because they arrived late. Four Congress, three Trinamul and six LF MLAs were absent.

THE STATESMAN

15 JUN 2001

14 pages

Speaker's post to be contested after 24 years

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, June 13. — The Speaker's post will be contested for the first time in 24 years and the 13th Assembly will begin tomorrow amid Trinamul threats of a "tit-for-tat" approach against the Left Front in the House.

Though Mr Abdul Karim Choudhury (Trinamul) is the Opposition candidate for the Speaker's post against Mr Hashim Abdul Halim (LF), Mr Mahboob-ul-Haque (Congress) too has filed his nomination. The pro tem Speaker, Mr Gyan Singh Sohan Pal, will conduct the Speaker's election tomorrow.

The Trinamul has demanded the Deputy Speaker be chosen from among Opposition members — a practice followed in the Lok Sabha — but LF has chosen Mr Anil Mukherjee for the post.

Mr Halim, Speaker in the last Assembly, today said the House was ready with its "usual security arrangements" to deal with unpleasant situations.

If elected Speaker, he said, he would be lenient with raucous Opposition members and not suspend or evict them from the House to avoid "falling into the trap of the media". It's not a coincidence that most MLAs, known for creating trouble, were defeated in the 10 May polls.

After Trinamul's debacle, Miss Mamata Banerjee said the results were not a reflection of the people's verdict, for the LF had rigged the polls. Her MLAs would "pay the Left legislators in the same coin inside the House," she had said, indicating the House sessions would be tumultuous. Mr Halim said the

Opposition has "a big role to play" and appealed to the MLAs at an all-party meeting to maintain the dignity of this House.

"The House belongs to the Opposition and people's issues can be highlighted through debates and not by disrupting proceedings. Trouble inside the House only help the government get away without questions being asked," Mr Halim said.

Should the Deputy Speaker be chosen from among Opposition legislators? Mr Halim said: "This House never had such a convention. The Congress, during its rule, didn't do so. But the Trinamul expects LF to create such a precedent. We've created many precedents — giving 50% of the House's time to the Opposition and granting the Opposition leader a Cabinet minister's rank, with a car, house phone, a room in the Assembly, etc. But we shouldn't be expected to do everything the Opposition wants."

Mr Halim asked the media not to project "out of proportion" unseemly behaviour of Opposition MLAs and ignore "well thought out (legislators') speeches".

The new Speaker will formally announce the name of the Opposition leader. The Trinamul has elected Mr Pankaj Banerjee as its legislature party leader.

The Governor will address the House tomorrow and the debate on his speech will be held for four days, from 18 June.

The budget will be placed on 22 June. The last Assembly had passed a vote-on-account for four months. The budget estimates will be for eight months.

■ More reports on page 3

THE STATESMAN

4 JUN 2001

Cong goof-up on Speaker's election

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, June 13. - The floor coordination between the Trinamul and Congress in the state Assembly today suffered a hiccup when the Congress fielded Mr Mahababul Haque as its candidate for the post of Assembly Speaker who will be elected tomorrow.

Mr Haque later said he would announce his withdrawal from the contest in the Assembly tomorrow, as he could not officially back out at this stage on technical grounds.

The Congress' decision to be in the fray came days after the Trinamul announced its candidate, Mr Abdul Karim Choudhury. In fact, the name of the Trinamul candidate was proposed by its MLA, Mr Ambika Banerjee, and seconded by Mr Atish Sinha (Congress).

Mr Haque, elected from Kharba in Malda, is an aide of Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury. His name was proposed by Mrs Sabitri Mitra, a confidante of Mr Khan Chowdhury, and seconded by Mr AHA Ghani Khan Chowdhury, Mr ABA Khan Chowdhury's brother.

The Trinamul and Congress had earlier fielded Mr Choudhury as their common candidate.

Explaining away the embarrassment, Mr Sinha said Mr Haque had submitted his nomination "by mistake". "As he was in Malda he did not know that we had jointly fielded a candidate with the Trinamul," he said. He added that Mr Haque

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH TO BE OPPOSED

KOLKATA, June 13. - The Trinamul Congress and Congress will oppose the Governor's speech at the Assembly tomorrow according to the parliamentary tradition. This was decided at a meeting attended by the Congress and Trinamul legislators at the Nausad Ali hall of the Assembly today.

Talking to reporters, Mr Pankaj Banerjee, Trinamul legislative party leader said that the legislators of both parties would oppose the Governor's speech as "it was bound to paint a rosy picture, contrary to the real state of affairs. It won't highlight the deteriorating law and order situation in the state, nor will it say anything about the deplorable health care system or the failure of the state government in the field of industry or education." He said that though the chief minister, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, had assured protection to Trinamul supporters, in reality the CPI-M was trying hard to stifle the voice of the Opposition.

Eleven Trinamul Congress workers were killed in post-poll violence. Houses of hundreds of party workers had been gutted and few thousands were forced to leave their villages because of CPI-M terror. He said the state government had come to power by rigging the election. The Opposition, he said will be antagonistic towards the state government till it changes its stance and becomes a people-friendly one. Mr Atish Sinha of Congress said that the Opposition would pick up key issues and play the role of watchdog. - SNS

did not contact him before filing his nomination. He insisted the development had nothing to do with the alliance.

Mr Haque said he had submitted his nomination papers as he had not received any instruction to the contrary from the party. He later wanted to withdraw his nomination but could not do so as the time for withdrawal of nominations was over.

The LF nominee for the Speaker's post, Mr Hashim Abdul Halim, is set to create a record of sorts by becoming the Speaker for the fifth consecu-

tive term.

There will be no contest for the deputy Speaker's post. The LF candidate is Mr Anil Mukherjee. The Trinamul-Congress has demanded that the incumbent be chosen from the Opposition as is done in the Lok Sabha.

Mr Haque has several grievances against Mr Halim. The condition of the MLA's hostel is deplorable and the MLAs from the districts are denied the basic facilities. He said Mr Halim had not taken the initiative for improving the hostel's condition.

THE STATESMAN

14 JUN 1971

Cong, Trinamool in joint bid for Speaker's post

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, June 12

THE TRINAMOOL and the Congress today decided to put up Abdul Karim Choudhury of the Trinamool against Hasim Abdul Halim in the June 14 Speaker election, sending signals that they would take on the LF on every issue on the floor of the House.

This will be for the first time since the Left Front came to power in 1977 that the Speaker will be chosen through an election. It will also be Halim's first taste of a contest in his unbroken stint since 1982.

Leader of the Opposition Pankaj Banerjee told the *Hindustan Times* that Choudhury's name as the joint candidate had been proposed today by Ambika Banerjee of the Trinamool and seconded by Atish Chandra Sinha, Leader of the Congress Legislature Party at a meeting of the MLAs from both parties. The nomination papers would be filed on Wednesday, he said.

Banerjee said the decision to field Choudhury, "the senior most among the Opposition MLAs and belonging to the minority community from North Bengal has been taken to protest against the installation of a Government through forgery and depriving the people of their right to exercise their franchise". He said that the LF's stubborn refusal to allot the Deputy Speaker's post to the main Opposition Trinamool had further steeled the party's resolve to contest the Speaker's election.

Five-star billing a 'face-saver' for CU

BY A STAFF REPORTER

The five-star status, awarded to Calcutta University by the National Assessment Accreditation Committee (NAAC) on Friday, has come as a "face-saver", university officials said on Saturday, particularly after Jadavpur University was recently named a "Centre of Excellence" by the University Grants Commission (UGC), placing it in the national big league.

"It is a great achievement for all of us. We will try and improve our showing to retain this glory," said CU vice-chancellor Ashis Kumar Banerjee. A press conference has been called on Monday.

NAAC officials, who conducted an on-the-spot survey of all the university departments in April, communicated the decision through a faxed message on Friday. The five-star status will entitle CU to the maximum allocation of UGC funds in the next five years.

The UGC has made it mandatory for all universities and undergraduate colleges affiliated to it to be rated by the NAAC, which will determine the quantity of financial assistance due to it.

The following are the criteria

for being granted five-star status:

- A self-assessment report to be prepared by the university for five years. It requires to be approved by NAAC officials who inspect the campus and interact with students, teachers and employees
- Infrastructural facilities like spacious classrooms, well-equipped laboratories, modernised libraries and computer facilities
- Quality research projects and time-bound completion
- Full-proof examination procedure, success rate of students, timely publication of results
- Teaching of uncommon subjects

Even though CU falls short of the required standard in terms of examination system and publication of results, it scored for having a Pali department and good infrastructural facilities.

CU science secretary M.K. Sen-gupta said: "We plan to stress re-

search work in science and technology and improve our work culture."

The NAAC approval is valid for five years, after which the university will have to get a fresh accreditation. Though CU was one of the contenders in the UGC sponsored "centre of excellence" race among 370 UGC registered universities, it failed to get a position among the top five universities short-listed by the UGC. In Calcutta, Loreto College has won a five-star status from the NAAC.

"Many universities in the country have been granted five-star status. We would have been happier if CU had been placed in the top bracket as it is one of the oldest universities in the country," said a senior teacher.

Jadavpur University, where an NAAC inspection is due, is also hopeful of getting the same ranking. The NAAC is likely to complete inspection there in two months, sources said.

Three other Bengal universities — North Bengal, Burdwan and Kalyani — have got NAAC accreditation. While Burdwan has won a four-star status, Kalyani and North Bengal have been awarded three stars.

THE WEATHER

Temperature:
Max: 34.2°C (-1), Min: 28.5°C (+2)
Relative humidity:
Maximum: 87% Minimum: 68%
Rainfall: 12.1 mm
Today: Generally cloudy sky with possibility of light to moderate rain accompanied by thunder in some parts
Sunset: 6.14 pm, Sunrise: 4.55 am

THE TELEGRAPH

Mamata blamed for poll flop show at CWC meeting

HT Correspondent
New, Delhi, May 28

MAMATA BANERJEE'S failure to explain to the electorate her reasons for leaving the NDA is to blame for the Congress-Trinamool alliance's debacle in the Assembly elections, a report submitted before the CWC today said.

The Congress's highest policy-making body discussed threadbare the party's performance in the recent Assembly polls amid reports of the Trinamool leader's renewed flirtations with the NDA.

West Bengal Congress chief Pranab Mukherjee said he believed Mamata took a soft line on the BJP and unleashed a tirade against the CPI(M). This confused voters, especially Muslims. This perhaps explains why only one Muslim Trinamool nominee got elected to the Assembly, though several of its non-Muslim candidates won with sizeable minority votes.

Instead, she would have done well to explain to the voters why she had decided to part company with the NDA. Such a move could easily have better activated the Trinamool cadres, confused by her change of stance.

Though several other issues were discussed at the three-hour meeting, the centrepiece of the strategy session was Uttar Pradesh. Leaders discussed ways of resurrecting the moribund party unit in the State.

That party president Sonia Gandhi was worried about the

DIDI TO MEET PM

MAMATA BANERJEE will have her first interaction with Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L K Advani this week since her dramatic exit from the NDA and her party's rout in the Assembly polls. Banerjee would apprise the two leaders and the President of the rigging and violence, allegedly perpetrated by the Left Front in the Bengal polls, Sudip Bandopadhyay said. He ruled out any "political discussion" during the meeting with Vajpayee and Advani. **PTI, Kolkata**

state of affairs in Uttar Pradesh was clear when she emerged from the conclave and conceded before reporters that the Congress "was not in terribly good shape in UP". She ruled out any change in the party's leadership in the State.

Earlier, behind closed doors, leader after leader stressed on the need to re-energise the party in the State. Antidotes for the illness ranged from immediate formation of the PCC unit, extensive campaigning by senior leaders, especially the Congress president to lift the sagging morale of workers and making senior leaders in charge of various districts.

The CWC also had cause to celebrate and the upbeat mood in the party was reflected in Sonia's opening remarks when she thanked party workers for spectacular victories in Assam, Kerala and Pondicherry and blocking the BJP in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 MAY 2001

Speak no evil, Front tells ministers

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 28

THE LEFT Front today laid down a strict code of conduct for its ministers, which prevents them from airing grievances in public.

Thirty-three ministers, all from the CPI(M), will submit action plans to Industries Minister Nirupam Sen and discuss development projects with him. The other 15 ministers from the Forward Bloc, CPI and RSP will report directly to Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

This was decided today at a Left Front meeting, where the ruling alliance laid down a code of conduct for ministers. The ministers also met after the Front meeting ended. Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee told his ministers that the Cabinet should focus on dynamism and efficiency.

"As for our ministers, they

will submit their report to Nirupam Sen. He will process the departmental work and then submit it to the CM. The ministers of other parties will directly give their report to Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee," CPI(M) Politburo member Biman Bose said.

The Chief Minister, CPI(M) State secretary Anil Biswas, Forward Bloc State secretary Ashok Ghosh, RSP secretary Debabrata Bandopadhyay, Biman Bose and former Chief Minister Jyoti Basu attended the meeting. "Basu said that the Front owes its success to the unity of all its allies. In the future too, the Left Front should work together to effectively implement all Government work and expedite the execution of plans," said Biman Bose.

The Left Front leaders decided to stress on collective leadership. Just as the CPI(M) will keep a watch on the perform-

THE LEFT FRONT DIRECTIVE

DO'S

- Ministers from the CPI(M) to submit departmental plans to Nirupam Sen.
- Ministers from other parties will report directly to the Chief Minister.
- Ministers should ensure that departmental projects move fast.
- The LF will meet at least once a year to review performance of the Govt.

DON'TS

- Ministers should not talk about plans to the media before they are discussed in the Cabinet.
- Ministers should refrain from making any comments about colleagues to the media.
- If a project is not cleared, ministers should not go to the press.
- Ministers should not neglect project

SURAJIT DEBNATH

ance of its ministers, other Left parties should do the same with their ministers.

Front leaders also agreed to meet more often. In the districts too, Left leaders will meet regularly. "The Left Front will meet twice every three months and once a year the Left Front should review the performance of the ministries," Biman Bose said.

"All ministers should refrain from making comments about colleagues and in case anybody's proposal is not accepted in the Cabinet the ministers should not go to the press. Instead, they should interact with the CM and settle the matter."

Hashim Abdul Halim will be retained as Speaker and Anil Mukherjee as Deputy Speaker, today's meeting decided.

Nirmal Mukherjee will replace Kanti Ganguly, now a minister, in the CMC as Leader of the Opposition. Amal Mitra, now a MLA, will replace Sudhangs Seal as Chief Whip.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 MAY 2001

Post-election violence sweeps three districts

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 28

POST-POLL VIOLENCE swept the districts of Nadia, Hooghly and Malda today, claiming three persons and injuring many others.

Gun toting Hoodlums unleashed terror in these districts. In Kalyani, for instance, the CPI(M) claimed that one of its members had been gunned down by such a gang of toughs. In Malda, a BJP gram panchayat member lost his life. Residents of Konnagar in Hooghly remained in-fear after yet another killing late on Sunday evening. The law and order situation remained grim and Dinesh Vajpai, the new man in the Director-General of Police's chair had a difficult day in office.

Fifty-five year old Nirod Halder of Jogendra Colony, Dakshin Chandmari in Kalyani was shot dead by assailants who broke into his house and fired from point blank range. The sad part of the story was that Halder wasn't the target of the killers.

29/5
They were hunting for Sukharanjan Mondal, alias Sukha, a criminal who had taken refuge in that house. The incident took place around 11.30 pm on Sunday.

The assailants arrived on a motorcycle and fired nearly 100 rounds. They left after Sukha and Halder were dead.

While Kalyani CPI(M) zonal committee secretary Subodh Ganguly claimed Halder to be a party sympathiser, his other comrades went a step further and charged the police with partisan behaviour.

In the shooting, which continued for more than 35 minutes, Halder's wife Suchitra and sons Ripon and Tapan were seriously injured. They were admitted to Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital.

Sukha, Nadia police said, was a criminal who stood in the way of contractors owing allegiance to his rival group. They were bagging lucrative contracts in Government organisations such as the PWD. Aware that his life was under threat, took shelter in Kalyani.

The incident has left area resi-

dents shocked. Many said Sukha would have died any way. Insiders claimed that days after he was rendered homeless, a Kancharapara-based CPI(M) leader had arranged a temporary shelter for Sukha. On Sunday, he did not want to return to this haven.

Around the same time on Sunday night, Basudev Yadav, a BJP supporter and gram panchayats member at Malatipur in Samshi was killed when a group of men raided his house and went on a shooting spree. Armed with sophisticated weapons, they gunned down Yadav and shot his son Bishnu before leaving with valuables. Local BJP leaders condemned the attack saying it was a "planned CPI(M) operation to wipe out opponents. The district police, however, insisted it was a case of dacoity, not a political killing.

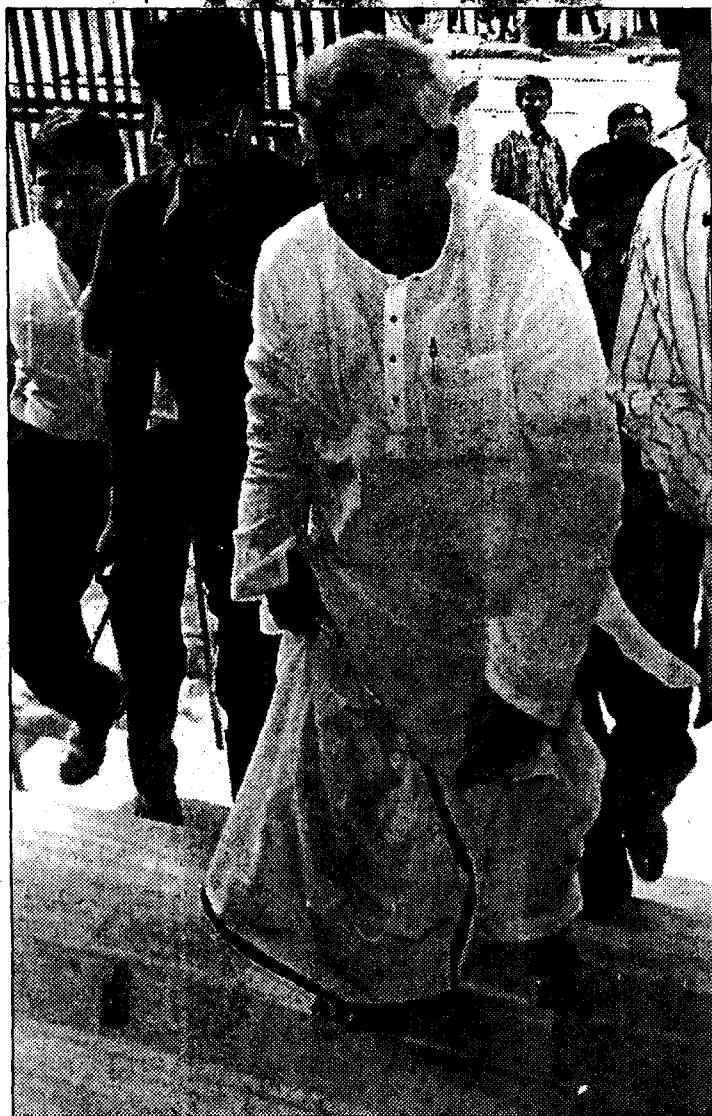
In Konnagar, Trinamool leaders traded charges against the police saying that 30-year-old Mobarak Hossain was gunned down around 8.30 pm on Sunday. He was their worker, not a local goon.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 MAY 2001

THE 13TH ASSEMBLY

THE ASIAN AGE 18 MAY 2001 5



SCALING HEIGHTS: A confident Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is all set to take over as the chief minister. An ASIAN AGE photograph

The Team

This is the Left Front's youngest cabinet ever. The sixth Front ministry has 12 new faces while the size of the cabinet has been increased by one to 48. The Front has also announced that Mr Lakshmi De will be the chief whip in the Assembly. The swearing-in of the ministers is on Friday. The cabinet will decide on their portfolios after a meeting on May 21.

▶ CHIEF MINISTER: Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee

MINISTERS

- ▶ Mr Nirupam Sen
- ▶ Mr Md Amin
- ▶ Mr Asim Dasgupta
- ▶ Mr Subhas Chakrabarty
- ▶ Mr Md Salim
- ▶ Mr Suryakanta Mishra
- ▶ Mr Kamal Guha
- ▶ Mr Biswanath Chowdhury
- ▶ Mr Nandagopal Bhattacharya
- ▶ Mr Kiranmoy Nanda
- ▶ Mr Prabodh Sinha
- ▶ Mr Kalimuddin Shams
- ▶ Mr Amar Chowdhury
- ▶ Mr Gautam Deb
- ▶ Mr Kanti Biswas
- ▶ Mr Naren De
- ▶ Mr Manab Mukherjee
- ▶ Mr Asoke Bhattacharya
- ▶ Mr Satya Sadhan Chakraborty
- ▶ Mr Amalendralal Roy
- ▶ Mr Rezzak Molla
- ▶ Mr Mrinal Banerjee
- ▶ Mr Banshagopal Chowdhury
- ▶ Mr Dinesh Daku
- ▶ Mr Nisith Adhikary
- ▶ Mr Upen Kisku
- ▶ Mr Anisur Rahaman
- ▶ Mr Jogesh Burman
- ▶ Mr Nimai Mal
- ▶ Mr Sailen Sarkar
- ▶ Ms Nandarani Dal
- ▶ Ms Chhaya Ghosh
- ▶ Mr Hafiz Alam Sairani

MINISTERS OF STATE

- ▶ Mr Pratim Chatterjee
- ▶ Mr Dhiren Sen
- ▶ Mr Sushanta Ghosh
- ▶ Mr Dasharath Tirkey
- ▶ Mr Maheswar Murmu
- ▶ Ms Anju Kar
- ▶ Ms Bilashibala Sahis
- ▶ Mr Ganesh Chandra Mondal
- ▶ Mr Sreekumar Mukherjee
- ▶ Mr Kanti Ganguly
- ▶ Mr Pratyush Mukherjee
- ▶ Mr Narayan Biswas
- ▶ Mr Nayan Sarkar
- ▶ Ms Iva Dey

THE HINDU

18 MAY 2001

NHPC and W Bengal sign MoU

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 26. — The National Hydroelectric Power Corporation has signed a memorandum of understanding with the West Bengal government for a 900 MW joint venture in Purulia Pumped (power) Storage Project. The project, to be commissioned in 2005, would be funded through a loan from the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), a release said.

The MoU was signed by the NHPC CMD, Mr Yogendra Prasad, and Mr Asim Barman, WB power secretary, yesterday, in the presence of the Union power secretary, Mr A K Basu.

The Purulia project aims at correcting a major imbalance between thermal and hydel power generated in the eastern grid. West Bengal and entire eastern region is powered predominantly by thermal power generation systems (as, indeed, is most of the country), with minimal hydroelectric power used. The mix of hydel to thermal power is a meagre 3:97 in the state, and 12:88 in the entire eastern region, against the most desirable mix of 40:60.

Ironically, peak demand in the region is suppressed due to a shortage of peaking power, while there is an energy surplus during off-peak periods. With thermal power hav-

ing to cater to the bulk of peak and off-peak, fluctuating as well as base load generation there is serious strain on the quality of power available in terms of frequency and voltage. This makes the operations system inefficient, unstable and injurious to the electrical equipment installed in the system, NHPC officials said.

The Purulia project would remove the incompatibility in the system.

The state government would have the first option to buy power generated from the joint venture project (in which it will hold 33 per cent stake, compared to NHPC's 67 per cent) at prevailing rates which are to be worked out. The

WBSEB (state electricity board) would enter into a power purchase agreement (PPA) with the JV company (JVC) to purchase power generated by the project. The JVC would also enter into a PPA with the West Bengal Power Development Corp (WBPDC) for purchase of intake power for pumping. The WBPDC would have the first option to sell off-peak power to the JVC for pumping purposes.

According to NHPC, the power purchase rates would be fixed by the JVC on the basis of capital expenditure incurred on the Purulia project and the input cost of power for pumping during off peak hours.

PURULIA PROJECT

THE STATESMAN

...of the Left Front victory rally...

Trinamul wants deputy Speaker's post

9-87 WD
51-3
27/5

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 26. — The Trinamul wants the Deputy Speaker's chair in the Assembly, in keeping with the Lok Sabha tradition.

The Trinamul MLAs, accompanied by their Congress and SUCI counterparts, today requested the Speaker, Mr Hashim Abdul Halim, to reserve the Deputy Speaker's chair for the Opposition.

Though the TDP's Mr GMC Balayogi became the Lok Sabha Speaker, his deputy's chair went to Mr PM Sayeed of the Congress. The Trinamul, despite then being a part of the NDA, supported Mr Sayeed's candidacy, primarily on Miss Mamata Banerjee's insistence.

After that example was set, the Trinamul wants the Deputy Speaker's chair to be

reserved for the largest Opposition party.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee, Opposition leader, and Mr Sovandeb Chattopadhyay, Trinamul chief whip, told the Speaker that the Left Front should be gracious enough to leave the Deputy Speaker's post. They requested Mr Halim to resolve the issue before the Assembly session begins from 14 June.

Mr Halim told them that he alone couldn't decide the issue. The leader of the House, that is, the chief minister, has to be consulted before a decision is taken. But he assured Mr Banerjee and Mr Chattopadhyay that he would look into the matter at the earliest. He, however, asked them to talk to Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, too.

Mr Chattopadhyay and Mr Abdul Mannan, Congress

MLA, had come up with the same request during the last Assembly.

But because the proposal had been given at the fag end of the session, Mr Halim had advised them to wait till a new government was sworn in. Mr Chattopadhyay today didn't rule out the possibility of going in for a vote if a consensus on the issue failed to emerge. But since the LF has a two-thirds majority, the Opposition motion for a Deputy Speaker's is sure to be defeated.

The Congress has already floated Mr Gyan Singh Sohan Pal's (Kharagpur Congress MLA) name for the post. And the Trinamul is not happy with the proposal, for it wants its nominee for the post.

All this, regardless of whether the Left Front would allow the Deputy Speaker's chair to go to the Opposition,

THE STATESMAN

27 MAY 2007

DIVIDED IN DEFEAT

Cracks in Congress-Trinamul alliance

SIGNALS emerging from the PCC do not suggest that the Congress-Trinamul alliance will survive the drubbing it received at the hands of the Left Front. And for good reason. Trinamul had much more at stake than the Congress which has no reason to be displeased with its tally of 20 seats from the 59 it contested. Now the question is whether Sonia Gandhi will allow the state unit, in the changed circumstances, to play second fiddle to Trinamul within the assembly and outside. Already the two parties have announced their respective leaders in the House and Pranab Mukherjee has taken pains to clarify that his party doesn't subscribe to Trinamul's view that disappointment was due entirely to a rigged election. Now Pranab claims that Congress didn't go along with Trinamul's boycott of the swearing-in ceremony — just that he wasn't in town and "it so happened that no one else from the party could go". The argument is contrived. It conceals the truth that the PCC has nothing more to derive from the alliance.

All this may also have been dictated by compulsions at the national level. The Congress is watching developments within the NDA following the defeats of the DMK and the Asom Gana Parishad and the discontent among NDA partners like Samata and the increasing tensions between moderates and hardliners within the Sangh Parivar. The Congress has nothing to lose in keeping its options open in Delhi rather than subscribe to Mamata's excesses after the defeat. Which is why Pranab balances Mamata's threat of a stormy Trinamul performance in the assembly with the submission that the Congress will play the role of a "classical Opposition". The divergence is clear and confirms that the PCC will not take any disciplinary action against either Ghani Khan Chowdhury or Adhir Chowdhury for the damage they caused the alliance. If Trinamul has the arduous task of rising above despair the Congress is in a less embarrassing position. It had hoped to shine in reflected glory but can look for other opportunities. Mamata has some hard thinking to do.

THE STATESMAN

23 MAY 2007

Self-employment is LF govt's new mantra

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 21. — The government will give more importance to self employment instead of trying to create a false impression that it could create jobs in large numbers.

The new state industries minister, Mr Nirupam Sen, who entered Writers' Buildings for the first time as minister after 1987, said globalisation has led to "jobless growth". Most industries coming up now are capital intensive rather than labour intensive. Hence, the need for self-employment, he said.

The minister said the state had had detailed talks with CII representatives about encouraging entrepreneurial talent in West Bengal.

Mr Sen spoke of reopening closed industries even as the Kelvin Jute Mill in Barrackpore shut down leaving 3,000 workers jobless. This is the fourth jute mill in the area to be closed down in a month.

The minister said it wasn't possible for the state alone to reopen closed industries and rejuvenate sick ones. Central assistance too was needed.

And funds alone were not the answer. It was necessary to study whether there was a market for the products of these industries. There was

'REVIEW WTO TERMS'

NEW DELHI, May 21. — West Bengal today asked the Centre to renegotiate with the WTO to protect India's agricultural interests and safeguard the livelihood of the poor both in cities and villages. Mr Asim Dasgupta, representing Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, said the Centre had accepted WTO's terms without consulting the states. — SNS

■ Details on page 8

■ More reports on page 3

■ Editorial: Higher Education, page 6

also a need to encourage agro-based industries, he said.

Mr Sen said he will give top priority to removing red tapism to enable industries to be set up speedily.

He will also review the number of industries that had come up in the state in the recent past, the quantum of investment that had poured into the state and the number of industrial projects that had not been implemented.

Mr Sen said trade unions must play a responsible role. Trade unions must realise that they can't exist without

industries while entrepreneurs too must acknowledge that they can't run industries without workers.

The state labour minister, Mohammed Amin, said the state government won't tolerate militant trade unionism. 'Do it now': "We shouldn't leave any work undone. This is our policy," Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said today.

Speaking to the reporters, the chief minister said, "We have started working from today and our policy is 'do it now.' We shouldn't keep any work pending."

He said that not only ministers but even officers and employees at all levels should follow the new rule. He said that from now on attendance and performance of employees will be monitored properly for which the home-personal department will be beefed up.

Asked whether a "core-committee" will be formed to monitor the employees' attendance and performance, Mr Bhattacharya said, "At this moment, there is no necessity for that. The task force which comprises LF representatives is already there".

The chief minister met other ministers and officials to discuss appointments in different corporations and government undertakings.

THE STATESMAN

Centre forms CMs' panel on subsidy

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 21. - The strong opposition by the states over the decentralised foodgrain procurement plan had pushed the Centre into forming a chief ministers' committee to evolve a mechanism for reducing the mounting subsidy bill on account of handling foodstocks. The proposed committee will also review the list of items under the Essential Commodities Act and Control Orders, levies on agricultural products and recommend a strategy to promote export of agricultural products in the context of the WTO regime.

"I agree with some of the concerns expressed by the chief ministers. At the same time, you will appreciate the glaring problems in the present centralised system of procurement under the aegis of FCI," Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, said after many states rejected the Centre's proposal to decentralise procurement, storage and distribution of grain to prevent wastage and cut the subsidy Bill.

Besides looking into the implementation of Food for Work programme and the Grain Bank Scheme, the committee on food management and agricultural exports would also develop strategies for diversification of agriculture and risk management through an effective crop insurance scheme.

The agriculture minister, Mr Nitish Kumar, will be the convener of the committee which will comprise chief ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Assam, Uttar Pradesh,



A delegation from Andhra Pradesh, led by chief minister Mr N Chandrababu Naidu, meets the Prime Minister at his house in New Delhi on Monday. - PTI

Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, West Bengal and Kerala and Union ministers of commerce, finance, food and rural development and Planning Commission deputy chairman.

The Centre had anticipated opposition to the decentralised foodgrain procurement plan at the chief ministers' conference on WTO agreement on agriculture and food management, but it was the intensity of their criticism which might hold the decentralisation plan.

In his inaugural address earlier in the day, Mr Vajpayee had asked states to evolve a consensus on DFP, describing the cost of centralised procurement, storage and distribution as being "unacceptably high". He acknowledged many state governments were "still unclear about the advantages of the new initiative" and said he would have the finance minister to give an "exposition" to the chief

that the proposal was "impractical" and amounted to the Centre abdicating its responsibility.

West Bengal, Karnataka and Orissa asked the Centre to defer the move till state governments were able to create the infrastructure required for the task. Others, including Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab, felt the state governments need not be involved in this. Madhya Pradesh was amenable to the proposal on the condition that the Centre announces a subsidy package, designed to meet individual requirements of different states. There should be adequate financial flexibility to take care of peculiar situations in a state, he said.

Punjab chief minister Mr Prakash Singh Badal said the proposal was "impracticable" and "inadvisable". The state governments may not have enough financial resources to procure, store and handle huge quantities of foodgrains, he argued, claiming that the existing system of procurement through FCI was functioning smoothly. Haryana chief minister Mr Om Prakash Chautala, too, was against changing the existing system.

Another opponent of the decentralisation plan, Mr Chandrababu Naidu felt that all is well with the existing system, but wanted the government to take due steps to improve FCI's efficiency. The plan was "flawed", he said, asserting that since the Centre decided the minimum support price the

WEST BENGAL WANTS WTO TERMS REVIEWED

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 21. - West Bengal today made a strong case at the chief ministers' conference to re-negotiate with the World Trade Organisation to protect India's agricultural interests and safeguard the livelihood of the poor sections of society and farmers.

The state finance minister, Dr Asim Dasgupta, while pointing out how the "first-world nations" have protected the interests of their farmers and ensured "greater subsidies for them" through "green, blue and amber boxes", demanded that India renegotiate for a "livelihood box" as the "negative impact" of the WTO terms could "threaten the livelihood" of a large section of Indians.

He said the Centre had gone ahead on the WTO front, especially with regard to lifting quantitative restrictions on 700

items "without proper consultations with the states as is required constitutionally since agriculture is essentially a state subject". He also favoured India initiating a South-South dialogue while renegotiating the WTO terms.

He said it was wrong to propagate that the WTO terms are mandatory. "When the developed nations are negotiating with the WTO to protect their domestic interests, why shouldn't

India do it?" Dr Dasgupta said.

He expressed satisfaction that the Centre has agreed to set up a high-level committee under the Prime Minister to deal with the issue of negotiating with the WTO but was not sure whether the decisions on lifting QR will be stayed till the committee submits a action-plan.

Dr Dasgupta was "relieved to see the government, in the face of opposition from many states, stalling its decision to do away with the PDS for people above poverty level."

Dr Dasgupta referred to the reports that the high-level committee on long-term grain policy headed by Prof Abhijit Sen, recommended strengthening of PDS. He also demanded that the Centre reintroduce the Essential Commodities (Special Provisions) Act 1981, immediately with adequate provisions.

On strategies for coming out of the present limbo and achieving "at least a four per cent annual rate of growth of sustainable agricultural production" and self-sufficiency in all major crops, Dr Dasgupta underlined the importance of carrying out land reforms, as was done in West Bengal.

He also demanded a Rs 200 crore grant for West Bengal (the state government would be ready to match this central support with a suitable contribution) for irrigation projects.



Mr Asim Dasgupta

responsibility for procurement should also rest on its shoulders. Kerala chief minister Mr AK Antony was equally vehement in his opposition. By proposing direct movement of grains from surplus to deficit states, the Centre was trying to shift its responsibility, he said. The move was "tantamount to abdication by the Centre of its obligations under the present

Public Distribution System". The West Bengal finance minister, Mr Asim Dasgupta, feared a "near anarchic situation" where states would compete with each other to buy grain, driving up price levels, if the plan was implemented. He suggested that the government should not take a final view on the subject till the high-level committee on long-term grain policy appointed

by the Prime Minister submitted its final report.

The Orissa chief minister, Mr Navin Patnaik wanted the FCI to continue till state agencies are capable of handling decentralised procurement. Karnataka made a similar point, demanding that the proposal be deferred till necessary facilities for procurement and storage are created.

40-10
22/5

TUESDAY, MAY 22, 2001

BUDDHADEB'S TASK AHEAD

THE EMPHATIC VICTORY scored by the CPI(M)-led Left Front in West Bengal may have come as a surprise even for those who had seen the 24-year-long regime in the State as having performed reasonably well. After all, the Trinamool Congress-Congress(I) combine had seemed to have emerged as a powerful force in the State and at a time when anti-incumbency sentiment had begun to spoil the poll prospects of many parties in power across the country, the ruling Left Front in West Bengal was perceived to be on a weak wicket in this election. The CPI(M)-led combine had several other odds against it. There was trouble within the party in several districts and for the first time in recent memory, rebels had even founded a party. Apart from this, the Left had suffered some reverses in the past few years beginning with the successive defeats that the CPI(M) nominee suffered in the North Calcutta Lok Sabha constituency from where the BJP managed to win. And then came the CPI's defeat in the byelections to the Panskura Lok Sabha constituency that had been its citadel for many years. And then the fact that Mr. Jyoti Basu was not there to lead the Left Front's campaign this time. That the ruling combine could ensure such an emphatic victory is indeed a reflection on the strength of its organisational base and its platform.

To Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, who had stepped into Mr. Basu's shoes a few months ago, goes the credit for having enthused the party's cadre during the poll campaign. There were apprehensions over this, even among those who sympathised with the Left Front combine, as to whether the CPI(M) did the right thing when it relieved Mr. Basu at a time when elections to the State Assembly were only a few months away. The results have only established that the ground realities were to the contrary. There is indeed a message from West Bengal that the various other parties in the political spectrum will do well to

emulate. And that is the sense of priorities that had guided the regime throughout the 24 years in power. It may be true that Mr. Basu's long inings as Chief Minister had dispelled several notions about his party including the perception that the Left parties were no good when it came to managing a Government. The experience with the earlier dispensations in West Bengal where the Left had a role had contributed to the building of such a perception. But then, if there is one factor that must have played the decisive role in ensuring the return of the Left all these years in the State, it certainly is the record of "Operation Barga". The redistribution of surplus agricultural land to the landless, carried out under the direct supervision of the party veteran, Benoy Choudhry, is indeed the most important achievement of the Left Front in West Bengal.

There are other such measures too; the decentralisation of power, an area in which West Bengal is miles ahead of many other States and the management of the public distribution system are aspects that must have aided the Left Front's emphatic victory. One would expect Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and his 48-member team that has been sworn in to not just persist with such measures but work out plans for industrial and economic growth. There are bound to be problems in doing so particularly in the context of the new imperatives for the State Governments in the liberalisation context and a squeeze on State finances. Rather than resorting to rhetoric — the easy way out — the State Government in West Bengal will have to pay serious attention to the issues of development. Mr. Bhattacharjee will also have to focus a lot more attention on the law and order front. It was one thing for him and his partymen to have blamed the political opposition — Ms. Mamata Banerjee in particular — for resorting to violence. But quite apart from election eve tensions, even the general law and order situation needs to be addressed.

THE HINDU

22 MAY 2001

CM launches industrial initiative at Alimuddin

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May. 20. — In keeping with his election pledge, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya launched his industrial initiative today. The chief minister met top functionaries of the Confederation of Indian Industry at Alimuddin Street.

The timing and the venue raised eyebrows, as it was unusual for a Left Front chief minister to convene a meeting of top industrialists at the CPI-M headquarters instead of at the state secretariat.

He, however, explained that he chose Alimuddin Street to meet captains of industry, because he doesn't normally go to Writers' Buildings on Sundays.

The venue of the meeting also signals how Alimuddin Street and Writers' Buildings will

work in tandem.

Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, has already explained the Left Front government implements policies formulated by the front, though Alimuddin Street doesn't interfere with the state government's day-to-day functioning.

The CII team included the newly-appointed president Mr Sanjiv Goenka, and chairman (eastern region) Mr Harsh Neotia.

Mr Nirupam Sen, minister for industry, industrial reconstruction, planning and development, attended the meeting.

Mr Bhattacharya told reporters after the meeting that the state government would work in close collaboration with the CII for industrial development.

The chief minister said the CII had approached the state government for improving the liv-

ing condition of about two million people living below the poverty line in and around the city. It has also proposed to take initiatives for providing employment opportunities for them.

Mr Goenka said that CII had requested the CM to revive the committee, comprising state officials and CII representatives, set up in 1999 to facilitate interaction between the government and industry.

On the proposed scheme for uplift of people below the poverty line, he said: "We will appoint an agency of international repute which has worked elsewhere on this model."

Mr Goenka and Mr Neotia have lauded the emphasis on developing knowledge-based industries. The CII plans to organise an international summit in the city in November.

THE STATESMAN

21 MAY 2000

Business pilgrimage to red sanctum

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, May 20: History was made today when a delegation of the country's leading business lobby walked into the den of the CPM here for discussions with chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and industry minister Nirupam Sen.

Never before has an official team of an industry association as big as the Confederation of Indian Industry stepped thus into the office of a political party that has just assumed power.

CII president Sanjiv Goenka

and eastern region chief Harsh Neotia, both based in Calcutta, were part of the team, but the presence of Tarun Das, CII director-general, gave it a national character.

By way of results there was little other than an expression of charitable work CII wishes to do. The association, however, is returning to Calcutta after a long gap with a big show in an ICE (in-entertainment) summit in November to highlight Bengal's infotech potential.

The dust kicked up by the visit

to Alimuddin Street will take some settling, though. "Never before in 24 years did we have to go to the party headquarters to convince the government that we would supplement its initiatives for industrialisation. If we ever did, we did it at Writers' Buildings or at Jyoti Basu's residence. A party office cannot be the venue for such an interface," a leading industrialist said.

Tarun Das admitted that the visit was unprecedented. "But, come to think of it, what is the harm if a delegation goes over and meets political leaders in

their offices?" he said.

Even CPM leaders were a tad surprised when they learnt about the CII team's visit. They feared that the sight of businessmen sitting down with party leaders for a comfortable chat at the headquarters would send wrong signals to supporters and give the Opposition ideas. It would be seen as demonstration of what CPM detractors allege: that there is a cozy relationship between the party and local business.

Trinamul leaders Sudip Banopadhyay and Pankaj Banerjee said the visit was "another proof

of how big business is bending to the Left... We did not imagine that industry would surrender in such a pathetic manner to the party."

Sources said the CPM leadership was not fully aware of the shape of the team because of a communication gap with the chief minister. Bhattacharjee said: "Today is Sunday. I am not going to Writers'. Moreover, Sanjiv and Harsh have no problem visiting our party office."

Many critics of the visit also found the topics of discussion — urban poverty reduction and spread of computer literacy —

strange for a business team to be talking about. They saw in it an eagerness to conform to the party's political programme.

In private, the industrialists said the CII decision would not have faced criticism had a similar team been sent to the BJP office after the NDA government took charge. When these sentiments were conveyed to him, Harsh Neotia, in the middle of hosting a dinner, said: "I am busy, you see, guests have started coming in... I think I'll be able to address the issue better tomorrow."

Picture on Page 8

THE TELEGRAPH

21 MAY 1997

Left Front partners resolve portfolio row

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 19

THE LEFT Front put an end to the guessing game today as it announced the portfolios for all 48 ministers.

The CPI(M) has kept the Forest and Tourism departments, leaving the Cooperation portfolio to the Forward Bloc. "We couldn't afford to dispense with two berths and get one from the FB in exchange. We had to accommodate our ministers too," said Biman Bose.

CPI(M) Minister Jogesh Burman from Jalpaiguri has retained the Forest Department while the Tourism portfolio has been handed over to Dinesh Dakua from Cooch Behar.

The Forward Bloc has made some changes. Naren De will take charge of Cooperation while his old department, Agriculture, goes to Kamal Guha.

The reshuffle, Bose said, has been tailored to address the new situation. "People want the Government to work. We have tried our best to let it take off. The Left Front will keep a tab on the Government's performance, review

it from time to time and make changes accordingly."

Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee keeps Home (Police), Information and Culture. He will take charge of Science and Technology as if to break out of his 'culture czar' image. Asim Dasgupta will continue as Finance Minister but with tempered responsibilities. Planning and Development has been handed over to Nirupam Sen. Sen is also the Commerce and Industry Minister and has with him Public Undertakings and Industrial Reconstruction. The argument: Dasgupta has to attend meetings in Delhi.

Outgoing Industry Minister Bangsagopal Chowdhury will take charge of the Cottage and Smallscale Industry.

Suryakanta Mishra will assume charge of the Health Department with Panchayat and Rural Development. "Pratyush Mukherjee will complement him in running the department." Abdur Rezzak Mollah has got the Land Reforms portfolio.

Old guards like Subhas Chakrabarty, Satyasadhan Chakrabarty, Kanti Biswas,

Asok Bhattacharya, Biswanath Chowdhury, Nandagopal Bhattacharya, Kalimuddin Shams, Kiranmoy Nanda, Gautam Deb, Prabodh Sinha, Anisur Rahman, Nisith Adhikary will retain their portfolios.

Mohammed Salim has been prized with Minorities Development, Self Employment for the Urban Unemployed, Youth Services and Technical Education.

Manab Mukherjee will head IT. Mohammed Amin will succeed Shanti Ghatak as the Labour Minister. Nandarani Dal, gets Mass Education while Hafiz Alam Sairani will replace Satyaranjan Mahata in Relief. Former Minister Chhaya Ghosh has been nominated for Agriculture Marketing. RSP veterans Amalendralal Roy and Amar Chowdhury have Irrigation and Waterways and PWD under them.

Sushanta Ghosh takes leave from Transport to assume new charges like Labour, Employment Exchange and Employees' State Insurance while Kanti Ganguly will look after Sunderban Affairs.

LF core committee report: Page 3

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 MAY 2001

master's stamp on Buddha new team

The party's determination to retain control over the functioning of the new government was evident in the remarks of politburo member Biman Bose. "We'll change the portfolios, if necessary. Even the chief minister's work will be closely monitored," he said.

Among the top seven CPM ministers, three are party state secretariat members. Bhattacharjee, Nirupam Sen, Mohammed Amin and Mohammed Salim are CPM central committee members. Suryakanta Mishra, the number three man, is in the state secretariat but not in the central committee. Bhattacharjee, Sen and Mishra will make the power trio in the ministry.

Finance minister Asim Das-

gupta, who enjoys little clout in the party hierarchy, had his portfolio downsized with the department of planning and development being taken away from him and given to Sen who has so far been a party ideologue. Sen will also handle commerce and industry. The importance Bhattacharjee—and the party—is attaching to Sen is evident from the size of his portfolio bag.

Dasgupta, who held the third position in Jyoti Basu's Cabinet, is now in the fifth position. His name figured on the list after Mohammad Amin who has been given the labour department this time.

Subhas Chakraborty has managed to retain his transport and sports portfolios. He has also

been given charge of the Hooghly River Bridge Commission.

"The CPM is more interested in rapid industrialisation of Bengal and, in doing so, the party would have to involve each of its ministers equally," Bose said after releasing the list of ministers and their portfolios today.

Besides Sen's prominence in the Cabinet, allocating labour to Amin is another indication that the CPM is sincere about industrialisation. Amin is a "party yes-man" and would be able to handle issues related to labour dispute and industrial relations. It is obvious that the CPM will not tolerate militant trade unionism.

CPM state secretary Anil Biswas still has the last say on ed-

ucation affairs. Two of his trusted men, Satya Sadhan Chakraborty and Kanti Biswas, are holding the same education portfolios as in the previous Cabinet.

Manab Mukherjee is the minister for the newly-introduced information technology department.

Destination party HQ

The New Left's brainstorming with industry will begin at an unusual venue tomorrow when a CII delegation calls on the chief minister at the CPM headquarters on Alimuddin Street. At the first-ever such presentation at Muzaffar Ahmed Bhavan, the CII team will unveil a prospective roadmap for the industrial revival of Bengal.

■ See Page 8

WHO GETS WHAT

Buddhabab Bhattacharjee: Retains pet portfolios police, information & culture and science & technology
Nirupam Sen: Heavyweight slots befitting his Number Two status. Gets industry, public undertakings, industrial reconstruction and Asim's planning & development

Suryakanta Mishra: Number Three wins new hotspot health. Retains CPM's village vehicles, rural development and panchayat

Ms. Amin: Labour, among the new thrust areas, goes to trade union leader with unorthodox political views
Asim Dasgupta: Biggest loser in the new dispensation. Retains finance but

loses planning and development
Subhas Chakraborty: Left untouched with old portfolios. Considered a good-conduct certificate for not leaving the party

Ms. Salim: Rewarded with minorities development and welfare for trouncing Sultan Ahmed

Manab Mukherjee: The first high priest of Buddha's hi-tech hub in Writers', the ministry of information technology

Satya Sadhan Chakraborty: Party retains hold on higher education
Mandarant Dal: Ideal choice for mass education in recognition of the "massive" margin in Keshpur

■ Nirupam gets prized portfolios ■ Asim, Subhas retain ministries ■ Suryakanta gets health

LF will put ministers to test

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 19. — The Left Front today seemed to lack its usual self-assurance as it announced the portfolios of the 48 ministers sworn in yesterday.

Mr Biman Bose, who announced the portfolios, said the Left Front would keep a "strict vigil" on the ministers' performance. The performance will be reviewed after a year or so and the portfolios reshuffled, if necessary.

The CPI-M politburo member said some LF partners had

differences over the distribution of portfolios.

The system of review and reshuffle has been introduced to better the government's performance, he said. "Whatever needs to be done, will be done." Several departments had been split up and shuffled around to improve the government's efficiency.

Mr Bose lost his patience several times when journalists quizzed him on the need for introducing the new system after 24 years of Left Front rule. "We just want the work to take off

now," he said.

Among the 48 ministers, 34 are of Cabinet rank and 14 are ministers of state. The chief minister,

■ On page 3: Full list of ministers
■ On page 5: Ranjit Panja blames Cong tie-up for Trinamul debacle

Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, has retained the home (police) and information and cultural affairs departments. In addition, he will look after the science and

technology department.

As expected, Mr Nirupam Sen has been given second position in the Cabinet.

The industry, public undertakings and industrial reconstruction, and planning and development departments are under his charge.

In the previous government, the planning and development department was under Mr Asim Dasgupta. He is now left with only finance and occupies the fifth position in the Cabinet. There had been widespread discontent, within the Left Front

and outside, over Mr Dasgupta's performance as finance minister.

Mr Dasgupta had been divested of a part of his portfolio because of "the many negotiations he is required to do, and the frequent travel he has to undertake," Mr Bose said.

The third position has gone to Mr Suryakanta Mishra who has retained the rural development and panchayat affairs department. He has been given the charge of health and family welfare too.

■ See BUDDHA: page 3

BUDDHA:

(continued from page 1)

In the previous government, the portfolio was held by Mr Partha Dey who had lost the polls from Bankura. The chief minister had criticised the department's performance several times during his poll campaign.

Going by its position in the list, the land and land reforms department seems to have been downgraded. It's under the charge of Mr Abdur Rezzak Mollah.

In education, the second area after health in which the Marxists had faced severe criticism, Mr Satyasadhan Chakraborty (higher education) and Mr Kanti Biswas (school education) have retained their portfolios. In addition to school education, Mr Biswas will look after the madrassahs.

Mr Subhash Chakraborty has retained the transport and sports departments and will also be in charge of the Hooghly River Bridge Commissioners, the agency responsible for the construction of flyovers.

The CPI-M MLA from Kespur, Ms Nandarani Dal, is the mass education minister and Mr Susanta Ghosh, the winner from Garbeta East, is the minister of state for labour, employment exchange and employees state insurance. He was the minister of state for transport in the previous ministry.

The tourism department has gone to Mr Dineash Dakua.

His party colleague from North Bengal, Mr Asoke Bhattacharya, has retained municipal affairs, urban development and town and country planning.

Mr Manab Mukherjee will continue to be in charge of the environment department. Besides, he will look after information technology, a new department created by splitting up the science and technology department.

The new department has been created to ensure rapid development of IT industry, Mr Bose said.

20 MAY 2001

Jubilant newcomers speak their minds

SOMA MUKHERJEE

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA May 18. — "The Left Front never makes false promises. Before election, we made some promises to the people and we'll try to keep them," Mohammed Salim, a new member in the state cabinet said today.

The new entrants were jubilant on their first day at Writers' Buildings. Most of them had not been allotted rooms and had to wait in the rooms of the "old" ministers. Some just left after meeting the chief minister. Those who managed to occupy a chair, were not hesitant to talk.

Asked in which department he could function well, Mohammed Salim said, "Those who have watched me in Parliament for past 12 years, know what kind of work will suit me. The party's decision regarding distribution of portfolios will be final." "Every person has his own choice," he said when reporters insisted to know his preference.

Mr Nirupam Sen, the CPI-M state secretariat member said, "The government will try to generate more jobs and emphasise on industrialisation. Our victory reflects people's support for Left Front

policy. However, information technology should be improved." Mrs Ibha Dey, the new minister of state, said, "I'm just feeling great. As an MLA, I worked for the people of Jangipara. Now I can do something for the whole state."

Mrs Dey, a teacher at Ranipara Girl's School in Hooghly since 1969, said she will take time off from her profession and work for the state. She left for Jangipara after a brief stay at Writers' Building.

Mrs Nandarani Dal, also left for Midnapore this afternoon. On her thumping victory, which raised eyebrows and invited rigging allegations, she said people of Kespur had voted for her.

For, Ms Chhaya Ghosh, the corridors of power are not new. She had earlier served as the relief minister.

This time she has been given charge of the agricultural marketing department. "I have no experience about this department. If there is any scope for work, then I'll work. If there is any problem I will take it up with the government and not with you," she told reporters.

Mr Hafiz Ali Sairani, the Forward Bloc minister had won from Goalpokhar defeating Mr Priya Ranjan

found this room empty and decided to sit for a while."

Mr Kamal Guha, of the Forward Bloc, had been a rebel for 10 years before he was sworn in as minister today. "This is nothing new to me. Though I was not a minister for 10 years I kept in touch with the administration," he said.

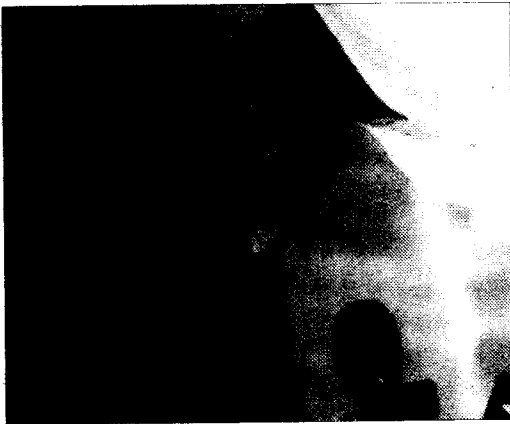
Speculations are rife that he would get the forest and tourism department.

Mr Kanti Ganguly was still upbeat about his victory over Mr Satya Bapui. "I'll do whatever I am asked to. Anything will be a challenge. Writers' Buildings is not new to me. I know every nook and corner."

Mr Pratyush Mukherjee, the new minister of state from Amta said, "I do not have any special feelings about ministry. I am in politics since 1966. I was a panchayat samiti member, a zilla sabhadipati, and an MLA."

Mr Dasarath Tirkey, the new minister of state, is from Kumargram. The labour leader said, "I've never dreamt of becoming a minister. Mr parents worked in Kumargram Tea Estate, where I began my career as a labour leader."

He said he will continue to work for the labourers in the tea-gardens.



Mr Mohammed Salim

Dasmunshi's wife. His day did not start on a pleasant note. A policeman was about to shove him off when a reporter pointed out that he was a minister. The sergeant quickly disappeared.

Mr Sairani took his seat in former relief minister Mr Satyaranjan Mahato's chamber. He said "My department has not been announced. I



Mr Nirupam Sen

policies in the past 25 years."

Without a room of his own, Mr Sen occupied a seat in Mr Asim Dasgupta's chamber. "The state government will have to live up to the people's expectations and the administration will have to be more sympathetic", he said. "If necessary, we have to start a movement against the Centre's liberalisation

CM vows to fight corruption

Lokayukt Bill will be passed soon: Buddha

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May. 18. — The 48-member Left Front ministry, headed by Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, was sworn in today before a galaxy of political and celluloid stars and some captains of industry.

The Governor, Mr Viren J Shah, administered the oath of office and secrecy to 33 Cabinet ministers and 15 ministers of state under a chandelier-lit canopy on the Raj Bhavan lawns.

There was hope and expectation all around about the direction the new ministry would take. As if to clear any doubts that some might have had, Mr Bhattacharya held a press conference after the swearing-in where he outlined his government's future plans.

He said the Lokayukt Bill would soon be passed to pull up corrupt political representatives. "We're bent on monitoring political servants — from the panchayat level to the Cabinet. Once the Bill comes into affect, every political representative will be accountable for their corrupt actions."

Taking the cue, the Statesman correspondent asked him: "Now that your government is determined to weed out corruption among officials, why is it that no action was taken against the state vigilance commissioner whose 'mal-practices' have been reported several times?"

Mr Bhattacharya avoided a direct answer. "You're talking about an individual, I'm talking about a system. I can't make personal comment."

Isn't it bad for the system that a man who is supposed to keep vigil on public servants was not removed after he had been accused of committing wrongs, the correspondent asked him.

Flashing a sheepish smile, he said: "I've got your point but you must realise that it's not possible for someone of my stature to publicly comment on a particular official. But we shall ensure that the Vigilance Commission works more efficiently."

He was quick to change the subject and say: "Along with strengthening the Vigilance Commission, we'll take public grievances against officials more seriously — specially when there is a specific complaint against an official."

Mr Bhattacharya was in a very approachable mood at the press conference. He replied to all the questions, albeit diplomatically.

About political interference in the administration, he said: "The party shouldn't and doesn't interfere in the administration's work."

On the return of hawkers to the city's pavements, he said: "Hawkers will have to vacate the stipulated 21 roads at the business centres. But is it all that simple to remove them from other places? That would be very inhuman."

Mr Bhattacharya was asked if he felt deprived of an experience as the Opposition leader in the Assembly. His witty reply: "There's still so much of life left. You musn't give up on me sitting in the Opposition bench."

He iterated what had been said in the Left Front manifesto when reporters asked him about the government's future plan of action. "We've identified our mistakes in health, education and industrial policies. I'm confident we'll be able to rectify them."

Can he do so with the same ministers who had worked in the previous government? "Yes, this is a collective responsibility and we'll be able to



Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya with his wife, Mrs Mira Bhattacharya, at Raj Bhavan after taking oath as chief minister on Friday. — Rajib De (More photographs on pages 3 and 4)

On page 3:
■ Buddha: We too want change

On page 4:
■ 'Unite people to fight misrule'

■ Euphoria greets Nandarani, Susanta
■ Jubilant newcomers speak their minds
■ Editorial: The new hope, page 6

cross the hurdles together."

The chief minister made it clear that his government would continue to be guided by the Left policies. "I'm not against labourers' strikes. But I insist that there should be a healthy working relationship between the workers and management," he said.

Mr Bhattacharya agreed the state is lagging behind in several areas. "But I must add that things are not so bad. There has been a delay in flyover construction, but the Haldia Petrochem was completed three months ahead of the schedule. Do It Now —

that'll be our motto."

Panja present

The Trinamul chairman, Mr Ajit Panja, made a surprise appearance well before the swearing-in started, though Congress-Trinamul MLAs boycotted it.

They have alleged the new government has no legitimacy because it had "won the polls through rigging".

Mr Panja was greeted by Mr Anil Biswas and Mr Bhattacharya. The BJP state president, Mr Asim Ghosh, too was present. There was a faint hope that Mr Subrata Mukherjee, city mayor and Trinamul MLA, and Madhabi Mukherjee, would attend the ceremony.

Yesterday, the mayor had spoken of his dilemma. He felt that as the Kolkata mayor he should attend the swearing in, while as a Trinamul MLA he couldn't flout the party's decision to boycott the ceremony.

Madhabi wanted to attend the ceremony because she had been invited. Quite a few of those present frequently craned their

necks in search of her, but she was not to be found.

Mr Panja told The Statesman that the boycott decision was unwarranted. "Why am I here? I'm paying my respect to the Constitution and fulfilling my constitutional obligations," he said pointing at the Ashoka pillar emblazoned on the dais.

Among the CPI-M leaders present were Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet, Mr Prakash Karat, Mr Sitaram Yechuri and Mr Jyoti Basu. Mr Bhattacharya flitted from one row of dignitaries to another and mingled with almost all sections of the audience.

He obliged photographers by posing with his family before heading for Writers' Buildings where he was given a tumultuous reception by members of the state government employees' coordination committee.

Industrialists Mr Sanjiv Goenka, Mr MK Jalan, Mr Rajesh Shah and Mr Harsh Neotia hoped the new government would take the state's industrial growth to new heights.