

# 'My return to NDA is unconditional'

Kalyani Shanker

*The Trinamool Congress' return to the NDA had been in the air for some time. So, when it finally happened, no one was surprised. But, there were questions about the reasons and the motive for returning to the alliance that the party was led out of by its mercurial chief, Mamata Banerjee, in a blaze of publicity some months ago. Mamata insists her return is unconditional.*

*Excerpts from the interview:*

**Your return to NDA is seen as the return of the prodigal daughter. Any comments?**

This may be the view in some quarters. You cannot say this is how people see it. Every state has its own political compulsion. Take Andhra Pradesh. TDP cannot go with the Congress, which is its main enemy in the State.

In my State, CPI-M is our main enemy and we cannot go with it. Besides, Atal Bihari Vajpayee is an elderly man and we respect him. And when the Trinamool was set up in 1998, we decided to support the NDA from outside and we gave Vajpayeeji support for one year and then we supported him from inside. And when telhka happened, we resigned from the ministry and left the NDA. Even after that, we felt we should not disturb Vajpayeeji's Government or support anyone else here.

You cannot show me a single issue on which we voted against the Government. So, our support continues. This time around, when the PM wanted to resign, I wrote to him on my party's behalf urging him to continue. We told him, "We need you. If you want, we are ready to strengthen your hands."

**This was after you lost in the polls. The basic question is why did you leave and why did you come back? There is no change in the situation between then and now.**

No, no. When we left, we left because of telhka and whatever we demanded then, the Government eventually — but after our resignation — accepted. We were facing elections and we took a decision that we would give issue-based support.

Then came the PM's offer to resign. We felt very bad. We wrote him a letter and then we invited George Fernandes to our rally. He came, and he requested us to rejoin the NDA. We said 'yes'.

**Is your return to NDA unconditional?**

Of course. What condition? In political life, we may think everything is conditional. But the only condition is that we should be pro-people. And we should take care of people. Nothing else.

**There are reports that you have demanded that Ajit Panja should not be given a Cabinet berth.**

No, no. I have demanded nothing of the sort. Panja is a suspended member of our party. Our party rules say that if a member is suspended, he is not entitled to hold any position in the party. And an enquiry is on against him. He has to accept whatever whip we issue.

**Is there a possibility of your revoking his suspension?**

An inquiry is going on. In any case, the Trinamool Congress Parliamentary Party, the State committee and the national committee have all endorsed it.

**Your critics say that because of the poor performance of your party in the polls, your bargaining power has been denied. Would**



probe into the telhka issue is going on. I think Fernandes is an efficient man and he will come out of it. From what I have seen in the papers, he has said after the commission gives its report, he would join. I respect his views.

**In view of the recent revelations about the use of sex workers by the telhka investigators, what do you think of the whole thing?**

The problem is that when the inquiry is going on, we should not comment on it. But there must be some code of conduct. You always blame the politicians. There are some good politicians also, even if they are no more than just one per cent.

Likewise in journalism. There are some journalists who pretend they are very good, but misuse their powers.

**Jana Krishnamurthy said recently that parties treat the NDA like a rail bogie and jump in and out of it whenever they like?**

Can you draw a *Laxman rekha* for any party? One party cannot interfere in the affairs of another party. In democracy, there should be mutual cooperation and understanding between one and another. Every political party has its own self-respect, its own ideology and its own principles. There should not be any bar on that.

**What are your plans for Bengal?**

We fought against money power, muscle power and administrative power. Wherever people got the opportunity to vote, they voted for us. But when they rig elections, the voting is 90 per cent to 150 per cent for the CPM. We complained to the Election Commission, but no action was taken. In Bengal, there are no democratic rights, political

rights, no fundamental rights and no human rights. Despite all that, Trinamool alone got 1.12 crore votes, and with our allies we got about 1.5 crores.

You show me one political party that has achieved this in three and a half years. We started with three MLAs and now we have 60. We have nine MPs in the Lok Sabha and one in the Rajya Sabha. We have the Calcutta Corporation and 10,000 panchayat members.

But we don't even have a party office because we have no money. We did not give a single paise to any of our candidates. It is very easy to criticise.

**What went wrong with your alliance with the Congress?**

The problem with the Congress is that it is hobnobbing with the CPI-M.

It happened like this. We did not want to go into the polls alone. First, we waited for the BJP, but it did not respond. Then came the Congress resolution at its session that the party wants to fight CPM. So, we decided on seat adjustment with the Congress.

But the problem was with the state Congress leaders, not the central leaders. According to our agreement, we did not field any Congress rebel against the party's official candidate. But the Congress did not keep its part of the deal and put up rebel candidates against us. Worse, they also gave these candidates lots of money. These rebels cut into our votes; we could have got 60 more seats.

**Any comments on the Prime Minister's statement on Ayodhya?**

I don't know what's happening on that front. But if the matter can be solved, I will be very happy.

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# Trinamul leaders endorse rejoining NDA

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
 5-7  
 69  
 J.P.P. S.M.C.

KOLKATA, Sept. 5. — A meeting, convened by Miss Mamata Banerjee today to discuss organisational aspects at length, ended with her appeal to Trinamul MLAs and MPs for their approval of her decision to rejoin the NDA.

Miss Banerjee placed the issue at the fag end of the meeting and asked her partymen to offer their views, though the party had authorised Miss Banerjee to decide on the issue. Party leaders said her decision was right and there shouldn't be any dithering in approving it. After this, the decision to rejoin the NDA was approved.

But her assertion that she wouldn't tolerate politics in education and hint at opposing "safronisation of education" was a little out of place.

The Maharashtra Niwas meeting of MPs and MLAs continued for about five hours with legislators from every district raising issues of their choice. Af-

ter the meeting with the legislators and mayors-in-council, the Trinamul's working committee discussed ways to justify the party rejoining the NDA.

The first meeting deliberated at length on membership which eventually saw the date for submission of forms being extended by another 15 days.

Party MLAs were vocal, saying proper procedures hadn't been followed in distribution of membership forms. Mr Arunava Ghosh, Dum Dum Trinamul MLA, said forms, without signatures, had been issued, hence, partymen were in the dark about where the forms had gone. He was backed by some leaders.

Miss Banerjee told the gathering that forms should be distributed to willing people and there shouldn't be any dearth of forms. Forms now will be distributed from Nizam Palace. Mr Ambica Banerjee, Howrah Trinamul MLA, said the membership

drive should be intensified. Miss Banerjee asked Mr Partha Chatterjee (MLA) to prepare a report on Haldia Petrochemicals stalemate and the party's stand on it. Mr Goutam Basu said reports should be prepared on CESC's power tariff too. She asked Mr Chatterjee to look into the matter and Mr Debi Pal to act as an advisor.

## MAMATA HOLDS PARTY MEETING TO STRENGTHEN ORGANISATION

A steering committee for organising the party's panchayat conference on 22 September was formed. The mayor, Mr Subrata Mukherjee, and MLA, Mr Parshesh Pal, would be key players.

Miss Banerjee has reportedly decided to send notes to about 14,000 elected panchayat representatives and about 600 party councillors of all the civic bodies in the state to attend the panchayat conference.

On organisational affairs, Mr KP Singh Deo and Mr Abdul Karim Choudhury reportedly argued that the party hadn't chosen the right candidates for the Assembly polls. At this, Miss Banerjee said no candidate had been forced upon the Purulia district party leadership. Mr Singh Deo then said the party had become weak in the district and the Congress had gained. At this, she said that it was obvious as the Congress had been allotted most of the Purulia seats.



Miss Mamata Banerjee

## Neither red nor saffron'

KOLKATA, Sept. 5. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today said she was against lending any colour to education.

At a two-hour-long Trinamul meeting, the party chief said education should be free from politics. This was her reply to Mr Subrata Mukherjee's arguments on that the party should dwell on what exactly "safronisation" means. The mayor said he found nothing wrong in the study of ancient and traditional Indian literature or Marxism. The readers or students should be exposed to Indian and foreign philosophy and that there shouldn't be any curb on education of one's choice.

At this, Miss Banerjee said Trinamul wouldn't hesitate to fight against any state interference in education. — SNS

988 sub. MAHANTA'S EXIT 119.12 2/10

THE RESIGNATION OF Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta both as president of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and as leader of the party's legislature wing may have saved him the embarrassment of being asked by the general body to quit. Even if it is true that the immediate context for Mr. Mahanta's exit from the party president's post (that he held ever since he helped found the AGP some 15 years ago) was the story about his "marriage" with a woman employee in the Assam State secretariat, there is no denying the fact that he was under pressure to quit for some time now. In this sense, his detractors in the party seized upon the charges of bigamy as a chance to replace him. That Mr. Mahanta announced his resignation a couple of days ahead of the general body meeting convened specifically to discuss the "crisis" caused by the reported marriage of the former Chief Minister confirms his losing clout in the party fora. And, in this sense, the story about his marriage had only come in handy to those within the party who had begun to find Mr. Mahanta becoming a liability for the AGP.

The AGP's defeat in the elections to the State Assembly, in which several of Mr. Mahanta's Cabinet colleagues lost (Mr. Mahanta himself lost in Dispur, one of the two constituencies he contested), was seen as a fallout of the effete leadership he provided and his own acts of commission and omission during the five years he was Chief Minister of Assam. Even if it may be unreasonable to hold the Chief Minister alone responsible for the body blow that the AGP suffered in the polls, Mr. Mahanta himself had acted in such fashion that had reduced the AGP into his fiefdom. While the manner in which he ensured the ouster of Mr. B. K. Phukan — his comrade from the days of the All Assam Students Union — soon after the AGP formed its Government in 1986 was inexplicable, Mr. Mahanta went about easing out almost all those who were with him in building the AGP into a powerful political outfit in the

same way as he finished Mr. Phukan. Mr. Mahanta, in this way, knocked the bottom off all the ideals and the fire that symbolised the AASU and, rather than presiding over the AGP with a vision that could live up to the ideas that had generated the massive public support it received, he did everything to reduce the platform into yet another political party whose objectives began and ended with preserving his own vested interests. All these took their toll in the defeat of the party in the last elections.

Be that as it may, Mr. Mahanta was not the only weak link, so to say, insofar as the AGP was concerned. It is a fact that the party, in its 15 years of existence, has lost its moorings. This was only natural in one sense. The AASU to begin with and the AGP when it was founded symbolised the expression of the collective anger of a cross section of the people of Assam against the tendency among the political leaders in the State, the Congress in particular, to look up to their high command in New Delhi. It was in this context that the AASU as a movement could strike roots in the State. While the first slogan was to identify and deport "foreigners" from Assam, the AASU and the AGP after 1986 came to represent the aspirations of the people of the State and, in this sense, showed all the promise to emerge into a strong platform against the Delhi-centric politics in Assam. But then, Mr. Mahanta failed to deliver and the AGP dispensation even in its first term turned out to be corrupt. And it was ousted from power in 1991. And if the party managed to wrest power once again in 1996, it was because the AGP as a party was not decimated. The situation now is different. It may be true that Mr. Mahanta is no longer what he was when he led the party to victory twice in 15 years. But then, the AGP as a party would be said to have learnt its lessons if those left in it decide in favour of a collective leadership rather than promoting any one leader.

# Goswami takes over as AGP president

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, Sept. 6: - Mr Brindaban Goswami, former education minister and founder leader of the Asom Gana Parishad, today succeeded Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta as the party president.

His name was proposed by the acting president, Mr Biraj Kumar Sharma, and unanimously accepted by the general council after about eight hours of deliberations on the leadership issue, among other things.

The meeting was continuing - at the time of filing the report - to decide on whether the executive committee, which remained to be constituted, should be of ad hoc nature with an entirely new set of members or whether the old committee should continue.

Earlier, the general council accepted the resignation of Mr Mahanta who left for Delhi even as the meeting was on. Not a word was spoken in his favour.

The meeting also accepted the resignation of the executive committee. The committee had decided at its meeting on 21 August that it would resign to facilitate formation of a new



Mr Brindaban Goswami

committee.

It resigned, owning moral responsibility for the electoral defeats the party had suffered in the last few years.

Speaking at the meeting before being made the president, Mr Goswami said that the party was facing a crisis and it has to reorganised.

"Let us forget the by-elections and panchayat elections and, instead, work wholeheartedly towards rebuilding the party from scratch," he said.

He said regionalism, which

the AGP represented, is still relevant. "The electoral defeats were not a vote against regionalism but against the leadership," he said.

"The AGP was born from the hearts of the people of the state, but we failed to fulfil their aspirations and hopes. We must make a fresh beginning," he said.

Acknowledging Mr Mahanta's contribution to the party, Mr Goswami hoped that the former party president would be able to clear his name. "After all, these are merely allegations.

Talking to reporters, former minister, Mr Zoinath Sharma, said the doors of the party were still open for Mr Mahanta.

"He had to leave under certain circumstances. If he can tide over those circumstances and emerge with a cleaner image, he should be welcomed back to the party," he said.

Mr Mahanta, who didn't attend the meeting, said in a leaflet distributed at the meeting but which was not allowed to be read out that his party colleagues should not doubt his integrity because the allegations were part of a conspiracy.

THE STATESMAN

- 7 SEP 2001

# Look where the pirouette has landed Mamata

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30/8

**N**EVER mind whether the red carpet unrolled by the National Democratic Alliance for Mamata Banerjee had a hole too man, the fact remains that she had to swallow a bitter pill, going by the highlights of this week's national politics.

It is no coincidence that the return of the Trinamul Congress to the NDA and the announcement of the hike in railway passenger fare took place within a gap of two days.

The creeping suspicion is that there was a trade-off between the NDA government's decision to impose special safety surcharge on rail traffic (read imposition of tax burden on hapless railway passengers) and the Trinamul Congress's re-entry into the NDA.

Miss Banerjee was not only the staunchest opponent of an increase in the passenger fare but also took pride in presenting two consecutive railway Budgets without a hike in passenger fare. That she turned, in the process, railway economics upside down and used the railways as an electoral gambit are a different matter. It was Miss Banerjee who made the most noise against a fare hike. But the Centre robbed her of her lung power by announcing the fare hike within 48 hours of her readmission into the fold. Never before did politics and economics blend so well!

It would be far-fetched to suggest that the hike has been made to rub salt on the wounds of Miss Banerjee who has been given a berth in the NDA on stated and unstated conditions.

But the two events have far deeper political connotations. In normal circumstances these would have concerned national politics alone but are now impregnated with purely regional impli-

The Centre has robbed the Trinamul chief of her lung power by announcing the railway fare hike within 48 hours of her re-entry into the NDA. This is a message of sorts for one who has had to give in to stated and unstated terms to stay close to power, writes UDAY BASU

cations. To be precise, the two events have caused ripples in the relatively placid waters of West Bengal politics, post-Assembly election. CPI-M state secretary Anil Biswas has said: "Our party is not bothered about the Trinamul's re-entry into the NDA". Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya was equally dismissive: "Let's ignore the Trinamul Congress."

That the CPI-M heavyweights can afford to write off the Trinamul with such ease and contempt speaks volumes for their political astuteness which is a perfect foil to Miss Banerjee's political bankruptcy or her politics of ad hocism.

The Trinamul chief is a unique example of how a politician can turn huge anti-establishment sentiments into support, albeit grudging, for continuation of *status quo*, thanks to her



incredible capacity for changing her mind ever so often. Her main political asset before West Bengal went to polls on 10 May was her anti-CPI-M stance and there was a groundswell of support from people who wanted change for the acts of omission and commission by the Left Front government.

Then followed the bizarre Mamata ballet of myopic political expediences. When the people got tired of her politics of resignations and threats of resignation, she dumped the BJP to escape the sandstorm of Tehelka. Then she embraced the very Congress with which she had severed ties, dubbing it the CPI-M's "B" team.

With the Trinamul's credibility dipping almost to sub-zero levels after the crushing defeat in the Assembly election, she divorced the Congress for the second

time and tied the knot with the NDA a second time. To describe Trinamul politics as a marriage of convenience will be an understatement.

The return to the NDA was not only inevitable but also the only option available to the party to be counted as a political force.

Mr Biswas is not far from the truth when he asserts that the only base on which the Trinamul can survive is not positive

popular support but power and the trappings of administrative office.

The Ajit Panjas, the Bikram Sarkars, the Nitish Senguptas or the Subrata Mukherjees can give a hundred and one excuses to justify the Trinamul's need for staying close to power. They may also argue that power will act as a quick-fix to ensure that there is no desertion of party supporters in the next five years in which the Marxists have the mandate to reign supreme.

But power and pelf alone cannot bring health to a political party. Only ideology and hard, sustained work among the masses can act as a true springboard to power. The Trinamul is pitifully deficient in these aspects.

If Miss Banerjee is counting the days to tread the corridors of power in her old, familiar pair of soiled rubber sandals - sometimes held together by a safety pin - it will only be one more futile pirouette that is patently hers.

In that event, politics remains the oil-smearred pole that will make the Trinamul slide two steps down every time it tries to move up.

Miss Banerjee needs to learn these lines from the Bible by heart: Strait is the gate and narrow the way.

(The author is Special Representative, The Statesman, Kolkata.)

THE STATESMAN

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# Moopanar passes away

J.P.P  
T.M. Raman

By Our Tamil Nadu Bureau

**CHENNAI, AUG. 30.** The Tamil Maanila Congress president, Mr. G.K. Moopanar, a veteran Congressman and long-time associate of Kamaraj, died here early this morning at a private hospital. He was 70.

Mr. Moopanar, who rose to prominence in the national scene during the post-Emergency days of Indra Gandhi, was



known as the Kingmaker who decided the fate of Congress Chief Ministers. And in the era of coalitions, he was tipped for the Prime Ministership on at least two occasions: in 1996, when Mr. Deve Gowda emerged as the dark horse and, in 1997, when Mr. I.K. Gujral became the consensus candidate of the United Front Government.

The TMC chief, ailing for some time, had been put on the ventilator in the last two weeks. The end came quietly a little after 5 a.m. today. After being admitted to the Sri Ramachandra Medical College Hospital on July 31 for a hip bone surgery, he developed a lung infection resulting in a rapid deterioration in his health.

One of the most amiable and popular political leaders from Tamil Nadu, Mr. Moopanar was among the frontrunners for Prime Ministership when the United Front formed the Gov-

ernment. Ironically, it was his Congress identity and proximity to Ms. Sonia Gandhi that stood in the way of his being chosen for the top job. In the end, he remained a 'King-maker' who never became the King.

An indication of his popularity and acceptance as a 'statesman-politician' both at the State and national levels was evident from the list of those who turned out today at the Kamarajar Arangam where the body was kept for public homage. The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, who had planned to visit him in hospital, came to place a wreath instead and paid homage to a "staunch loyalist" of the Nehru family. As she put it: "He remained at heart a Congressman."

The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalitha, paid glowing tributes to her ally and called at his residence to pay homage. The DMK president, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, who remained a "good friend" even after the break-up of the DMK-TMC alliance, called at the hospital on Wednesday and came to the Warren Road residence to pay his last respects.

Congress leaders, Chief Minis-

ters and leading politicians from across the political spectrum paid homage to the departed leader.

There were two essential features which all of them remembered — Moopanar's unswerving commitment to secularism and his sense of "political decency."

Born on August 19, 1931, in a rich agricultural family at Kapistalam in Thanjavur district, Mr. Moopanar took to politics early in life. Beginning his political career as a disciple of Kamaraj, Moopanar gradually climbed the ladder in the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) to become the Thanjavur district president in 1965. Because of his loyalty to Kamaraj, he joined the Congress (O) at the time of the split in 1971, only to return the parent body in 1974 after the death of his leader. Thereafter, he had a one-year stint as the TNCC president when Indra Gandhi recognised his organisational skills and took him to the national scene. He became a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1977 and the party general secretary in 1980. During this period, he served Indra Gandhi as a hatchet man and troubleshooter,

deciding the fate of several Congress Chief Ministers.

He returned to State politics with the death of MGR and the split in the AIADMK. The Congress decided to go it alone in the 1989 Assembly elections, and Rajiv Gandhi projected Moopanar as a Chief Ministerial candidate. He ended up as the Leader of the Opposition.

In the post-Rajiv era too, Mr. Moopanar remained loyal to the Congress, despite differences with Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao. Ultimately, it was Mr. Rao's last-minute alliance with the AIADMK that led to a parting of ways and he launched the TMC just before the 1996 Assembly elections. In alliance with the DMK, his party swept the polls and joined the United Front Government. After Ms. Sonia Gandhi took over as the AICC president, Mr. Moopanar acknowledged her as his "national leader."

Mr. Moopanar is survived by his wife, Mrs. Kasturi Ammal, daughter Ms. Usharani, and son, Mr. G.K. Govindavasani.

The funeral will take place on Friday evening.

Editorial on Page 12  
Tributes on Page 15



The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, paying tributes to G.K. Moopanar in Chennai on Thursday. — Photo: K. Pichumani

## THE MAHANTA AFFAIR

Whatever the outcome, AGP will suffer

LADY Luck has deserted Prafulla Mahanta since 1998. His LAGP drew a blank in both the Lok Sabha polls and was humiliated by the Congress in last May's assembly elections. Now Mahanta is left with having to clear, by October, charges of his "secret second marriage" to an employee of the state legislative assembly. The party executive meeting on Tuesday concluded that it was a conspiracy by the Congress but that seems to be for the record because they also decided that all members would resign en masse to allow for the committee's reconstitution. The setback for Mahanta is clear and devastating. If the AGP chief was so confident that the woman's allegation was "highly concocted, imaginary and baseless" and masterminded by vested interests to malign him, he should have set all doubts at rest and challenged her in court. However, his handing over charge to deputy Biraj Sarma should not raise eyebrows since he already had plans to leave Assam for some time; it was just the timing of his announcement that gave the impression he was stepping aside because of the allegations. The former chief minister's private life is his personal affair, but the fallout is public and political. The man who ruled the state twice for nearly 10 years, should have been a role model, instead he finds himself deserted by his whole committee. Corruption in politics is endemic but student leaders-turned-politicians seem to be indulging in carnal shenanigans add a new dimension to the degeneration that is politics. Only recently the AGP suspended former Bodo minister Rajendra Mushahary after he was charged with raping a tribal girl and fathering a child. Another former minister was also involved in a rape case.

Mahanta's last ministry comprised some ministers who had in their previous tenure faced corruption charges and had to be removed. Time will tell whether Mahanta has violated the moral code or has been a victim of machinations. But the damage is irreversible; even if he manages to come clean, it is bound to be difficult for him to continue to head the AGP. Whatever the outcome, the 16-year-old party's reputation has taken a knock and it needs a new leader.

THE STATE

14 AUG 2001

# Mamata stability hand for Atal



Mamata: Return route?

## BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Aug. 2: Mamata Banerjee today said her Trinamool Congress will spare no effort at ensuring the continuation of the Vajpayee government and prevent a mid-term election to the Lok Sabha.

"I am going to Delhi to vote against the adjournment motion brought by the Opposition parties against the NDA government over the Unit-64 issue. We do not want destabilisation of the government as it will only lead to an expensive mid-term poll," she told reporters before leaving for New Delhi.

Mamata's decision to vote in favour of the government on a crucial issue came after a detailed discussion between the Trinamool chief whip in the Lok Sabha, Sudip Bandopadhyay, and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) over the modalities on reviving ties between the party and the

NDA. The Trinamool chief has decided to offer issue-based support to the Central coalition, but is yet to accept any code of conduct as a condition for her party's return to the NDA.

Asked to elaborate on her stand on the Unit-64 issue, Mamata said: "The government must protect the interests of two crore investors and initiate a probe, if necessary. We will like the Prime Minister's intervention in the matter and want stringent punishment for persons who will be found guilty. There must be proper monitoring of funds invested in the scheme. But the issue does not warrant a change of government. We cannot afford to have a Lok Sabha election every alternate year."

The Trinamool leader did not reveal her immediate plans vis-à-vis the NDA but reiterated that her party intended to "strengthen Prime Minister Vajpayee's hands". Sources said Mamata would

like to extend her party's support to the NDA Government from outside like the Telugu Desam instead of joining the ministry.

Mamata, who could not attend the monsoon session of Parliament earlier due to illness, decided to leave for the capital this afternoon after receiving an urgent message from the PMO in the wake of the discussion on the adjournment motion. The BJP leadership sought Mamata's and her party MPs' support to ensure the government's survival in the crucial voting over the Unit-64 issue.

The Trinamool leader is expected to call a meeting of her parliamentary group to discuss the party's stand vis-à-vis the NDA "in the changed situation". She may also meet Kamal Nath, the AICC general secretary in charge of Bengal, to explain the progressive deterioration of Trinamool's relationship with the state Congress after the polls. Mamata had earlier made it clear that it would

be difficult for her party to maintain a "working relationship" with the Congress if the high command did not "change the PCC leadership".

Mamata, however, has directed her party legislators to maintain floor coordination with the Congress inside the Assembly as far as possible to keep the Left Front government on tenterhooks. She has also taken note of the discontent expressed by some senior Congress legislators over PCC chief Pranab Mukherjee's "unilateral announcement terminating the entente between the two parties".

Mamata's decision to stand by Vajpayee in "his hour of crisis" triggered derision from the state CPM. State secretary Anil Biswas said the Trinamool leader's politics was "devoid of any ideology". "She is alternately courting the Congress and the BJP as her party lacks political direction," Biswas said.



# First round of Trinamool-NDA talks hits Panja wall

Arindam Sarkar  
Kolkata, July 23

THE BALL has stopped at Mamata Banerjee's court after the first round of negotiations between the Trinamool and the NDA yesterday. And the man who emerged as the stumbling block in the first round was Ajit Panja.

NDA convenor George Fernandes brought up Panja with Mamata emissary Nitish Sengupta. And Sengupta, realising the sensitive nature of the topic, told Fernandes to discuss the matter directly with the Trinamool Congress chief.

"I had a conversation over the phone with George Fernandes. It was positive, but when he picked up Panja's topic I

told him to discuss the matter directly with Mamata. I told him, instead of talking to different people, it is better if he thrashes out the issue with Mamata and that would put an end to speculations. I presume they must have talked," Nitish Sengupta told the *Hindustan Times* over the phone from New Delhi.

Fernandes told Sengupta that the Trinamool leadership should amicably settle differences with Panja, sources said. Perhaps, indicating that the BJP wanted Panja with Mamata to join the Cabinet. It was difficult to accommodate Panja in the Cabinet if he remained a suspended Trinamool member and the BJP wanted the NDA convenor to clear the bottleneck.

"The MPs will abide by Mamata's decision and I believe our gesture towards the NDA by sitting in the Treasury Benches and subsequently on the floor of the House will send them a clear signal. George called me on July 21 after noticing news on the internet that Mamata had indicated in her rally that she was not returning to the NDA. This shows they are interested in us too. But the media should play a more positive role. No point in



speculating negatively and spoiling the turf," Sengupta said.

Trinamool MPs believe that nario would have been an amicable solution between the two leaders, if the impasse continues they are with Mamata.

Bikram Sarkar and Sudip Bandyopadhyay are likely to meet Fernandes. But where does that leave Panja? At the moment, neither Mamata nor Panja are willing to bury the hatchet. So an amicable solution is out of the

question. "I have no problems in going and talking to her but I know the very next day she will humiliate me in the media," said Ajit Panja. Though the MPs agree that the best possible scenario would have been an amicable solution between the two leaders, if the impasse continues they are with Mamata.

Bikram Sarkar, Nitish Sengupta, Krishna Bose, Ranjit Panja, Ananda Mohan Biswas, Sudip Bandyopadhyay and Akbar Ali Khondekar are of the view that under no circumstances would they go with Panja and split the party.

But what's the solution? "At one point of time, a decision was taken to suspend him. Now it seems the BJP

can't do without him and we too can't suggest his name for a Cabinet berth for revolting against the leadership. So if need be, the inevitable will happen," an MP said. "Mamata will not cow down in front of Panja and therefore an expulsion is on the cards to facilitate smoothening of the relationship with the NDA, unless a miracle occurs," an MP pointed out.

Panja is not scared. Because he knows if he can't get two MPs with him, he will fall under the defection Act in Parliament. Under the circumstances, an expulsion is welcome and will assure him a berth in the next Cabinet reshuffle. "I am not scared. You will see the kind of organisation I put in place after the Pujas," Panja said.

# NDA re-entry not on agenda: Mamata

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, July 21. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today indicated that returning to the NDA was not on her agenda now. She said the Trinamul had enough fight the CPI-M alone.

The upshot of today's rally is that Trinamul Congress is not interested in seeking a re-entry into the NDA at the moment and is equally prepared to snap ties with the Congress in West Bengal.

Addressing a huge rally at Esplanade today to observe Martyrs' Day, Miss Banerjee said: "We do not need to go to Delhi to fight the CPI-M. We don't require Delhi for this. The people are with us. We can fight the CPI-M alone in Bengal".

So, indications are clear that Miss Banerjee wants to buy time and wait for an honourable settlement with NDA leaders.

Trinamul activists from Darjeeling, Coochbehar, Malda, Murshidabad, North and South 24 Parganas, Hooghly, Nadia, Burdwan and Kolkata came in large numbers.

The Salt Lake Trinamul Congress, led by Mr Dulal Mondal and Mr Banibrata Banerjee alone, brought 27 truckloads of supporters. Same was the case with South-24 Parganas — Mr Gobinda Naska and Mr Tamonash Ghosh being in the lead.

Lashing out at the CPI-M, the Trinamul chief said her party was here to stay and today's rally was a reflection of this. "Today's rally proves that we have been able to

## SAME LOK SABHA SEATS FOR TRINAMUL

KOLKATA, July 21 — At a meeting at the home of Mrs Krishna Bose this evening, Miss Mamata Banerjee made a forceful presentation of the go-it-alone line she had hinted at in the Martyrs' Day rally earlier in the afternoon.

All the MPs, except for Mr Ajit Panja and Mr Nitish Sengupta, were present. Mr Sengupta, who is in Delhi, was telephoned from the meeting.

Trinamul sources say everyone, including Mr Sengupta, Mr Bikram Sarkar and Dr Ranjit Panja, endorsed Miss Banerjee's line. It was decided that the Trinamul members would occupy their original seats in the Lok Sabha when the monsoon session of Parliament begins on Monday.

Along with the Trinamul MPs, it was learnt, Mr Ajit Panja is also scheduled to leave for Delhi on Sunday.

This evening, Mr Panja was busy playing his Ramakrishna role at a staging of the *Noti Binodini* play at Bally in Howrah.

Reacting to Miss Mamata Banerjee's decision to go it alone, Mr Muzaffar Khan, state BJP vice-president, said it would be difficult for her to either implement the Bengal package or resist CPI(M) terror without the Centre's backing. "If she really wants to chart an independent course, why is she making such efforts to get back into the NDA," he asked. — SNS

make a turnaround within two months of the Assembly elections", the Trinamul chief said.

She announced a number of plans to revamp Trinamul Congress and boost the flagging morale of party workers in the districts. Of these, a 27-July party programme at Nanoor, a Midnapore Chalo on 9 August and celebration of the foundation day of Chitra Parishad on 28 August are some.

After this, block, sub-division, district and state level conventions would be organised for imparting training to party workers.

These programmes would be wrapped up with a Brigade Parade ground rally in December

that would "sound the death-knell of the Left Front government", Miss Banerjee said.

At today's rally, the Trinamul chief resorted to her oft-repeated "rigging slogan", saying that the Left Front government had not won with the votes of the people but with "long-range rifles and criminals". She cited Kespur, Gohat, Khanakul, Arambagh, Pingla as cases in point.

The Trinamul chief alleged that the CPI-M was keeping track of her movements and even her phones were being tapped. Regarding the Z category security being provided to her, Miss Banerjee said that she had written to the Union home minister not to provide security.

## Panja sings NDA tune

SOUGATA MUKHOPADHYAY  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHINSURAH, July 21. — "I do not agree with Mamata Banerjee's decision to suspend, nor do I care about it," said Mr Ajit Panja, the suspended Trinamul leader, to a crowd of about 4,000 people at the parallel 'martyrs day' meeting today.

"The real Trinamul has assembled here at Ghor More. It was, is and will remain a part of the NDA and will continue fighting Left Front's violence and atrocities to bring democracy back in West Bengal. This day marks the beginning of NDA's West Bengal chapter," he said.

"Miss Banerjee's decision of expulsion — which was misspelt with a 'tion' in her letter — was another of her whims and autocracies that she has been exercising throughout her career," fumed Mr Panja.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr George Fernandez were extremely sympathetic towards Miss Banerjee, but she took undue advantage of that for her personal gains, he said.

Several other dissident Trinamul leaders, including Mr Tapan Dasgupta, Mr Bani Sinha Roy, Mr Dilip Das, Mr Kalyan Chakraborty and Mrs Minati Adhikari were present at the meeting.

The meeting was also marked by the presence of Central and state level leaders of other NDA allies, including Mr Muzaffar Khan, Mr Pratap Banerjee, Mr Debasish Mitra and Mr Debabrata Chowdhury of the BJP, Mr Amitava Dutta of the Janata Dal (United) and Mr Nek Mohammad of Ram Vilas Paswan-led Jatiya Lok Shakti.

While the lesser leaders of Trinamul showed restraint towards Miss Banerjee in their speeches, the more prominent ones as well as the non-Trinamul leaders poured their hearts out in accusing the Trinamul supremo for strengthening the hands of Left Front in West Bengal.

The convener of the meeting, Mr Goutam Burman, said Miss Banerjee had repeated the same autocracies against which she had protested and for which severed herself from the Congress to form the Trinamul Congress. The organisation would now concentrate on its consolidation and train its members as "booth soldiers" for the next panchayat and Assembly elections, he added.

Mr Panja also announced a "martyr's fund" that would provide monetary compensation to the families of the killed workers. He said his organisation would launch a membership drive after the Pujas. Till then he advised his party workers to concentrate on social welfare, which he called "missionary" work.



An ambulance makes its way through the Trinamul Congress rally at Esplanade on Saturday. — The Statesman

## Rally throws traffic out of gear

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, July 21. — Traffic was disrupted in several parts of central, north and south Kolkata this afternoon because of the Trinamul Congress rally at Chowringhee Square.

The rally, held without police permission, was attended by a crowd of about 20,000 to 25,000, police said.

Trinamul supporters from north started arriving after 2 p.m. from Howrah via Bra-bourne Road flyover, India Exchange place, Rabindra Sarani and Bentinck Street.

Trinamul supporters from south came via

SP Mukherjee Road, Ashutosh Mukherjee Road, Jawaharlal Nehru Road and AJC Bose Road.

Supporters from Sealdah came via SN Banerjee Road and those from north took College Street and Nirmal Chandra Street.

Police said traffic was disrupted mainly in Moulali, SN Banerjee Road, College Street, Nirmal Chandra Street, Esplanade and Jawaharlal Nehru Road but was restored after 4.45 pm.

A tree at Chowringhee Square lost many of its branches when enthusiastic onlookers clambered up for a better view of the podium.

# Time for Trinamul to say yes or no

BY OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, July 18: Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress expects the process of its return into the NDA fold to enter a decisive stage tonight.

NDA convener George Fernandes is expected to flag off the re-induction process on his return from Mongolia late tonight, two officials known to be part of Mamata's think-tank said.

It is important for Mamata to time her return to the Centre in the next 48 hours as the Prime Minister is reportedly mulling a ministerial shuffle before Parliament convenes for the monsoon session on Monday.

"Tomorrow and the day after are most crucial for us. We will have to take a decision — yes or no — by Friday so that Mamata can make an announcement at her rally in Esplanade on Saturday in memory of the 13 youths killed in police firing eight years ago," said a senior party official.

"In a meeting last week, we unanimously authorised Mamata to take the final decision on rejoining the ruling coalition. Whatever her decision is, we will accept it. Let one thing be clear: we are not interested to join anywhere without honour and prestige," Trinamul spokesman Sudip Bandopadhyay said.

Party sources said the immediacy of Trinamul's return would depend on the kind of initiative Fernandes took and the manner in which Atal Bihari Vajpayee would like him to proceed.

"The two key players in the next two days are Vajpayee and Fernandes and we have information that both are keen to have Mamata in the coalition. They have also understood the mood and intention of Trinamul. Also, leaders of other NDA constituents, particularly in the DMK, are very

pleased with the way Mamata reacted to the Karunanidhi incident. So we think we are favourably poised," said a party official.

Senior Trinamul leaders, however, cautioned that Mamata's return would be difficult without an "adequate gesture" from Vajpayee or the NDA top brass.

"We can't just go over and re-join the NDA on our own. After the party's debacle in the Bengal



Mamata

polls, if Mamata has to volunteer herself to the NDA it will look as if she has begged for it. We believe the NDA leadership understands our position, so we expect some kind of invitation. It's just that Mamata wants to return with her head held high," sources said.

If the "required signal" does not come by Friday, Mamata might decide to sit in a neutral area in the Lok Sabha and lend issue-based support to the government, sources added.

With Trinamul inching closer to the NDA, a large section of the party wants to snap ties with the Congress. "Bitterness with the Congress is on the rise and a major section of the party wants the alliance to end," said a Trinamul official.

Panja at the news conference. Picture by Pradip Sanyal

# Panja maps ministry return

F-9  
1977

**BY OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT**

**Calcutta, July 17:** Rebel Trinamul Congress MP Ajit Panja today said his suspension from the party was "illegal" and he would certainly like to go and become a minister at the Centre if Atal Bihari Vajpayee so desired.

Panja lashed out at Mamata Banerjee and challenged her and Sudip Bandopadhyay to prove that they were primary members of the party. "The decision at a meeting last night on my suspension pending an inquiry is illegal. The rules, on the basis of which action was taken, do not exist. Such a decision by Mamata Banerjee, who is not even a primary member of Trinamul, is wholly whimsical and another example of her deteriorating mental condition, arbitrary and without any reason," Panja said.

He claimed that the majority of those present at yesterday's meeting were "mentally" on his side and they tried to persuade Mamata against taking any action. "But, in her typical way, she sort of arm-twisted them into taking the decision to suspend me. The rule under which I have been suspended from the party does not exist," Panja said.

However, a senior Trinamul MP, who was present at last night's meeting, rebutted the dissident leader's claim. "I was there all along in the meeting but never did

we try to persuade Mamata against taking any action against Ajit Panja. I think the relationship between Mamata and Ajitbabu is now beyond repair," the MP said.

Party spokesman Bandopadhyay said this evening that separate letters have already been sent to Vajpayee, NDA convener George Fernandes and the Lok Sabha Speaker. "Ajit Panja is referring to the old party rules before it was registered with the Election Commission as All India Trinamul Congress. While taking action against Panja, we have only followed the directives and guidelines set by the Election Commission," Bandopadhyay said.

Panja, however, rubbished the argument and said that Mamata has all along taken arbitrary decisions and suspended and expelled party members at will. "But not a single partyman has received any letter of suspension or expulsion. I challenge Mamata to give me in writing that I am suspended and I challenge her to prove that she herself is even a primary member of the party and quote her membership number. She only informs us about actions taken against us through the media," Panja said.

Calling Mamata a "coward", the rebel leader said she had forgotten her Bengal Package. "Her Bengal package now only concerns removal of Ajit Panja so that he does not become a Central minister," he said.

# Mamata is mad, says Panja

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, July 17

AJIT PANJA hit back at the party that suspended him yesterday, calling the Trinamool Congress chief insane, cowardly, whimsical and struck with Alzheimer's disease.

He alleged that Mamata Banerjee forced her party leaders to suspend him, and had threatened to resign unless they fell in step.

He accused her of harbouring malafide intentions and said she was carrying out an agenda of personal vendetta.

She was a woman with evil designs, he said, who made the dead bodies of hundreds of her party men killed by the CPI (M) her stairway to becoming a leader. Her machinations, he said, are aimed at hoodwinking West Bengal's six crore people.

On his own suspension from the Trinamool Congress, Panja

said, "The entire proceeding is not just illegal but non est., that is it does not exist."

The clothes he chose to launch his tirade in, were suggestive: a light yellow *panjabi* with an embroidered *jora phool*—the Trinamool's election symbol.

Panja plans to send "evidence" of Mamata's insanity to the Trinamool doctors' cell.

This consists of a documentation of unpredictable behaviour, disorders of thought and intellect, aura of grandeur, pre-senile dementia and disturbed sleep wake pattern and nighttime wanderings.

Mamata, according to Panja, should be sent to mental asylum in London.

"She seems to have the intelligence to suspend me to block my prospects of becoming a Central minister again. So that she becomes a minister. The cat is out of the bag," he

said. As you wonder whose cat and whose bag, Panja says he is ready to rejoin the ministry as and when the Prime Minister invites him to.

"I am a mature politician and I am telling you she is insane. Though I realise a blind person should not be called blind," the former Union minister said.

Panja said his suspension was illegal since under Trinamool's constitution, no member can be either suspended or expelled without a proper notice and without giving the member an opportunity to defend himself.

"None of this was done. In fact, she threatened her colleagues yet again with resignation if they did not take the decision," said Panja.

According to Panja many members of the core committee later rang him to apologise. Panja was suspended

from all posts except the primary membership yesterday. "Let her prove her primary membership before taking any action against me. She never became a member," said Panja.

Panja will hold a rally in Chinsurah on July 21 to mark the seventh anniversary of the 13 workers of the party killed in police firing.

"We will also remember CPI, BJP, RSP, Forward Bloc, Congress and Trinamool workers who lost their lives," Panja said.

Ram Vilas Paswan has already agreed to send a senior functionary of his party to the rally. BJP leaders Tapan Sikdar and Ashim Ghosh might also attend.

"She failed to give even a single person from the families of the workers killed employment in Railways. All South Kolkata boys and girls were given jobs."

# Make me army chief, I'll tackle J&K, roars a miffed Thackeray

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
MUMBAI, JULY 13

SHIV Sena supremo Bal Thackeray says he isn't one bit surprised that he was not invited by the Centre for the dinner being hosted in honour of General Pervez Musharraf: "Who will invite me? I am more dangerous than ISI and Lakshar-E-Toiba. In addition, our horoscopes don't match."

In his characteristic style, Thackeray today shrugged off the diffidence one would associate with the ally of the government, to say in plain and simple terms that the outcome of the much publicised summit between Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf would, in his opinion, be a big zero.

"I am saying it again and again. The outcome of the summit between Vajpayee and Musharraf will be a big zero, a very big zero. Since the two countries have been unable to resolve the dispute in the last 53 years, I don't think the two leaders will be able to find a lasting

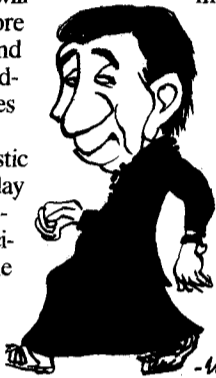
solution. It will be just another summit," Thackeray said.

Ever since Vajpayee declared his intention to meet Musharraf, the Sena has attacked the BJP for its decisions, partly because its view has not been considered on key policy matters. *Saamna*, the Sena mouthpiece edited by Thackeray, was also critical of the NDA government for the preparations being made for the visit. It had objected to the decision to relax norms while granting visas to Pakistani nationals visiting India.

To some extent, Thackeray admitted today, it is true that the Vajpayee-led government has ignored the Sena's views on certain issues. "Certainly, our views on disinvestment of Air India or the agenda for the summit were not taken into consideration. But I don't want to make issue out of it since we want to continue in the government. If we withdraw from the NDA at this juncture, the country will witness anarchy," Thackeray added.

Thackeray said the views of the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



from the front page

## I'll tackle J&K: Sena chief

Sena were forcefully presented by Sena representative, Union Power Minister Suresh Prabhu, at a recent meeting of the NDA. We have made our stand very clear," he said.

When asked if he has a solution to resolve the disputes between India and Pakistan, Thackeray said, he would be in a position to provide a solution, provided he was made the chief of the army. "Don't make me President or Prime Minister, but appoint me as the army chief, I will provide a solution, which will be acceptable to all," he added.

Thackeray feels the Centre was giving undue importance to Musharraf despite the fact that he had insulted Vajpayee during his visit to Lahore. Then, he had refused to salute Vajpayee, saying he was preoccupied with a delegation from China.

Thackeray came down heavily on the Vajpayee government for its "defeatist attitude" towards Pakistan and demanded that Musharraf be told to release the 54 Indian prisoners of war (PoWs) languishing in Pakistani jails before coming to India.

"Why is Government of India not adopting a tough stand on the release of Indian PoWs, making it a pre-condition for Musharraf's visit?" Thackeray, who was accompanied by his son Udhav and nephew Raj Thackeray, said.

Rolling back 2008

# Mamata likely to forgo NDA berth to keep out Panja

Arindam Sarkar  
Kolkata, July 11

ON THE eve of the crucial Trinamool Congress Parliamentary Party meeting, Mamata Banerjee is pondering not taking a Cabinet berth herself to keep Ajit Panja out of the NDA Government.

If the BJP is eager to induct Trinamool rebel Panja into the Cabinet, Mamata is equally adamant to keep him out. But her MPs are insisting that the Trinamool chief should be the only person to take a Cabinet berth now.

"Mamata wants to stay back at the moment and concentrate on revitalising the party organisation, which is in complete disarray. She says she would be able to put her house in order by the Pujas and then only she would accept the NDA invitation to join the Cabinet," said an MP. "But we will insist that she goes in first as Bengal expects a lot from her. She performed remarkably as Railway Minister. Let's see whether she accepts the proposal."

The formal invitation letter from Trinamool Congress Parliamentary Party Chief Whip Sudip Bandyopadhyay has been despatched to all the nine MPs for the tomorrow's meeting. In the meeting, Mamata and her MPs are expected to endorse the decision of rejoining the NDA



and select the Ministers of State who will represent the party at the Centre.

Sources said since Mamata is delaying her entry into the Cabinet, she has demanded three MoS berth. She is most likely to select Sudip Bandyopadhyay, Bikram Sarkar and Ranjit Panja as Ministers of State, it is learnt.

But the scenario could be different if Mamata agrees to accept a ministerial berth herself. If she does join now, one of the three leaders is likely to be left out. And since Sudip is the party Chief Whip, chances are that he might not get the berth. The final decision will be taken tomorrow.

According to sources, Ajit

Panja, being an MP, has also been invited in the Parliamentary Party meeting that is supposed to be held at Mamata Banerjee's house. Apparently, realising that many workers might congregate there, Ranjit Panja and Krishna Bose have also proposed to hold the meeting at their houses. "All the MPs have insisted that Ajit Panja should be invited but the venue could be changed for security reasons," said an MP.

But is it sure that Trinamool is rejoining the NDA? "Look, Bikram Sarkar, Sudip Bandyopadhyay, Ranjit Panja, Ajit Panja, Krishna Bose, Nitish Sen Gupta and Ananda Mohan Biswas are all for going with the NDA. Mamata knows their minds. That leaves only Mamata and Akbar Ali Khondekar. The House is clearly divided and Mamata will never go against the majority opinion," said a senior Trinamool MP.

"Moreover, she knows that apart from Trinamool, PMK and Ajit Singh (Lok Dal) will also join the Vajpayee Cabinet. We expect the meeting to be conclusive tomorrow and the announcement made by July 14. Because the Cabinet reshuffle is expected on July 18 or 19," he said. "As of now, the rumour is that the Trinamool will get Textile, Railways and Telecom portfolios. But nothing is final yet."

# Mamata inches closer to NDA, hints at break with Congress

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, July 3

MAMATA BANERJEE, it appears, is yielding to pressure from party colleagues on returning to the NDA. Today, she distanced herself further from the Congress and backed the Prime Minister on the Centre's reaction to the Jayalalithaa episode.

"Now, it's only a matter of time before she makes up her mind to go back. She has made it clear to the party working committee that it's no longer possible to continue with the moribund alliance with the Congress. The Trinamool will press for only one ministerial berth this time - for Mamata Banerjee," a senior party MP said. Indeed, the Tamil Nadu



episode gave the Trinamool the issue Mamata was looking for to show solidarity with the NDA. At the same time, she was also waiting to distance herself from the Congress. Hence, her strong reaction to comments from State and Central Congress leaders after the poll debacle.

"They don't want to keep the alliance going. So, it's best that we walk alone. What's unethical in it? They didn't for once bother about ethics when they put up dummy candidates against the Trinamool. They sabotaged so many of our candidates. Was that fair," Mamata asked.

"We are watching the developments in Tamil Nadu. The PM has our support. We will stand by whatever decision the Cabinet takes on Tamil Nadu," she said.

Justifying her stand Mamata said: "When we were in the NDA we opposed the Government on Balco. Now we think what Jayalalithaa did was shameful."

**On Page 3: Panja blasts  
"whimsical" expulsions**



# Mamata closer to NDA

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, July 1. - Miss Mamata Banerjee today inched closer to the NDA government over the arrest and alleged heckling of Mr M Karunanidhi in Chennai yesterday. She iterated her party's support for any Union Cabinet decision on Tamil Nadu.

Mr Sudip Banerjee has left for Delhi to convey Trinamul's support to the government on this issue.

Miss Banerjee described the arrest as "unconstitutional and smacking of political vendetta". The practise of attacking political opponents originated in West Bengal, she said.

Taking a swipe at the state government, the Trinamul chief recalled that she was dragged out of Writers' Buildings in 1993. Miss Banerjee, then a member of the PV Narsimha Rao Cabinet, tried to see

Mr Jyoti Basu with a deaf mute girl, who had been raped. She was forcibly removed and after this incident, the press corner in the state secretariat was shifted.

The Congress has not commented on Miss Banerjee's statement. "We cannot comment on her decision." Mr Pranab Mukherjee, PCC chief said today. He skirted the issue of Trinamul supporting any Cabinet decision on Tamil Nadu but joined ranks with the party to condemn the incident.

"Let us remember we live in a civilised society," Mr Mukherjee said. "The law will take its own course, but my party criticises the way in which Mr Karunanidhi and some of his colleagues were treated by policemen." Asked if there was a possibility of President's rule being imposed in Tamil Nadu, Mr Mukherjee dismissed it as a hypothetical question.

# *Ekla cholo* Panja alone at show

BY A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, June 30: Rebel Trinamul Congress MP Ajit Panja's much-hyped political convention at Mahajati Sadan today proved to be a damp squib as he failed to rope in any MP, MLA or councillors.

However, Trinamul chief Mamata Banerjee's rally, which coincided with Panja's convention, drew a huge crowd. At the rally, attended by a large number of MPs, MLAs and councillors, Mamata announced a string of agitational programmes to expose the CPM in the wake of the Salt Lake stadium scandal involving transport minister Subhas Chakraborty.

A desperate Panja brought in

disgruntled party workers from the districts for the convention. He also roped in Union minister of state for communication and BJP MP Tapan Sikdar and his two close aides, Asim Ghosh and Muzaffar Khan.

However, BJP MP and Union minister of state for chemicals and fertilisers S. Mukherjee skipped the programme though he was present in the city. Much to Panja's embarrassment, no representative from the NDA attended the convention.

Apparently spurned by party leaders, Panja announced that he would stick to his *ekla cholo* policy to reinstall democracy in the party. He virtually floated a parallel or-

ganisation by announcing a core committee and 15 frontal committees as part of his effort to revamp the party.

"We want to make the West Bengal Trinamul Congress a cadre-based party to carry on the fight against atrocities by the Marxists," the MP said. He added that the core committee will be at the helm of affairs and will monitor party programmes. Panja announced that the committee will observe Martyrs' Day at Chinsruha on July 21, the same day that Mamata will observe a Martyrs' Day at Esplanade East.

Reiterating that he had no plan of splitting the party, Panja said the convention was called to give a

new look to the organisation. "We are trying to rectify the mistakes committed by Mamata," he said. The party had to suffer a lot due to Mamata's "whimsical and impractical decisions", he added.

Sikdar, a known Mamata critic, said he would rather support a Panja-led Trinamul than one headed by Mamata. "Unlike Mamata, Panja believes in value-based politics and does not tell lies or betray a friend," he added.

In his inaugural address, Panja stressed the need for rejoining the NDA and strengthening the hands of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. However, the convention was silent on Chakraborty's alleged nexus with criminals

# DMK leaders <sup>GM</sup> reject short-cut to freedom <sup>307</sup>

**The Times of India News Service**

CHENNAI: The political drama in Tamil Nadu has taken a new turn with arrested DMK chief M. Karunanidhi deciding not to press for bail and the two Union ministers refusing to accept the state government's release order on Monday.

Mr Karunanidhi "has expressed his willingness to face the charges against him in a court of law, and not to press the bail petition he had moved following his arrest", said P. Shanmugasundaram, the former chief minister's lawyer, after a meeting with the arrested leader at the Chennai prison on Monday afternoon.

Mr Shanmugasundaram said the DMK leader wanted to know the legal position on the bail petition. "I told him that getting bail would not be a problem. Despite that, he chose not to press for it."

Mr Karunanidhi has been remanded until July 10 in the fly-over scam.

Meanwhile, the two Union ministers, Murali Maran and T.R. Baalu, on Monday refused to accept the release order issued by the Tamil Nadu government and

demanding that the cases against them be dropped.

They have decided to remain in custody until its expiry on Tuesday, said Mr Shanmugasundaram. Speaking to the press at Apollo Hospital, where Mr Maran has been hospitalised, Mr Shanmugasundaram pointed out that the FIRs filed against the ministers were still pending and, therefore, the two of them had decided to stay on in custody until its expiry.

Both Mr Maran and Mr Baalu were asked to sign an undertaking by the police that they would appear before them whenever required. However, both of them refused to do so and instead demanded that the cases against them be withdrawn.

On Monday evening, the police visited Apollo Hospital to inform Mr Maran that he was being released from judicial custody. But DMK legal wing secretary R.S. Bharathy, who was present there, asked the police if the FIR had been quashed. When the police replied in the negative, he said that the two ministers would not accept the release order.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

# NDA knocks Jaya for midnight swoop on DMK

THE NEW SOUTHERN STARRER—TEN FLY OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST



AP/Sun TV

DMK chief M. Karunanidhi is roughed up as he is arrested by police at his residence in Chennai.

## Submit report by 9 a.m. today, PM orders governor

By Smita Gupta

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: With Tamil Nadu chief minister J. Jayalalitha refusing to take the Prime Minister's phone calls, and governor Fathima Beevi maintaining a silence on the midnight arrests of former Tamil Nadu chief minister K. Karunanidhi and Union ministers Murali Manan and T.R. Baalu, the Union government found itself left with no option on Saturday night but to crack the whip.

The Vajpayee government gave the governor until 9 a.m. on Sunday morning to file a report on the developments in the state since chief secretary P. Shankar, although directed to do so, had thus far not submitted any report to the Centre. It also decided to convene a meeting of the Union cabinet on Sunday at 12 noon to take stock of the situation and recommend constitutional or legal remedies.

For the Centre, the arrests of the two cabinet ministers amounted to "a very serious violation of both the federal polity as well as a defiance of the legitimate authority of the Centre", as law minister Arun Jaitley put it.

Indeed, the resolution adopted at the NDA's emergency meeting took as dim a view of the state government as of the governor, saying the silence of the latter, "who is the upholder of the constitution, is worrisome". Elaborating, NDA convenor George Fernandes explained, "The normal tasks of

the governor include keeping the Centre informed of major developments in the state. When two Union cabinet ministers are arrested, it is the bounden duty of the governor to inform the PM and the President. But the governor did not think it proper to brief the PM on what has happened."

But while the NDA meeting expressed itself strongly on the events in Tamil Nadu, and expressed its outrage at the manner in which the arrests of the political leaders had taken place and the crackdown on the media, it was not clear what action the Centre was planning to take, constitutional or legal. Mr Jaitley, when asked whether the government was considering imposing Article 356—President's Rule—or using Article 355—which gives the Centre the power to ensure all state governments act in accordance with the provisions of the constitution—said, "All options are open. What has happened is a serious violation of the constitutional guarantees and to restore those norms, the government will decide what action is needed."

Stating tersely that "no law of the land prevails in Tamil Nadu", Mr Fernandes, in answer to a direct question on whether President's rule was being contemplated, emphasised, "The PM should take all necessary steps to see the constitution is not transgressed and ensure that the majesty and dignity of the federal polity is upheld."

## 'Action perfectly correct and legal'

CHENNAI: Under attack for the manner in which DMK president M. Karunanidhi was arrested, Tamil Nadu chief minister J. Jayalalitha on Saturday night stoutly denied charges of police excesses against him.

In a lengthy statement, she said the Tamil Nadu government had taken perfectly correct and legal action. She maintained that on the contrary, it was Mr Karunanidhi, his son M.K. Stalin and their colleagues who had consistently broken the law.

She denied the PMO's statement that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had been trying to contact her. She had not received any telephone call from the PMO, she said. "On the contrary, the Prime Minister chose to speak to Tamil Nadu chief secretary P. Shankar and asked him to convey the news to me. He asked the chief secretary to send a detailed report and keep him informed about the latest developments." (PTI)



## Thumbs down for Jaya's media managers

By Ashok Kamath

NEW DELHI: Muthuvel Karunanidhi apparently saw it coming. When she was out of power, Jayaram Jayalalitha had, on many occasions, publicly sworn that if she returned to power she would send Mr Karunanidhi to the very cell in Chennai Central Jail where she was jailed for 27 days in 1996 and force him to eat off the same plate she used when she was there.

It is therefore scarcely surprising that when DIG Mohammed Ali of the Tamil Nadu police's CB-CID (crime branch, criminal investigation department) came calling at Karunanidhi's Gopalapuram home at 1.45 a.m. on Saturday, Sun TV cameramen were at hand to capture the arrest. It turned out to be a master stroke for Mr Karunanidhi and the DMK (and, conversely, a thumbs down for Ms Jayalalitha's media managers). Powerful video footage of the elderly ex-chief minister being bundled out, kicking and screaming, have contrabanded like nothing else to the nationwide outrage that his arrest has generated. No less shocking were the clips of Union minister Murali Manan being carted away by the police as though he were an inordinately heavy sack of potatoes.

## Karunanidhi sent to jail, judge's medical remand defied

By Swati Das

The Times of India News Service

CHENNAI: A shocked nation reacted with widespread condemnation to what was viewed as political vendetta as former Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi was dramatically arrested in the early hours of Saturday morning without a warrant. In scenes reminiscent of the Emergency, Mr Karunanidhi was dragged out of his bedroom by the police and roughed up for his alleged role in the Rs 12-crore fly-over scam, triggering widespread tension in the state.

Mr Karunanidhi's son and Chennai mayor M.K. Stalin, a prime accused in the case, later in the day surrendered before a judge while nine others, including former chief secretary K.M. Nambiar, were taken into custody by the police in a pre-dawn swoop in the first major offensive by the All India Anna Dravida Kazhagam (AIADMK) government against its principal rival, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). Among the others whose names figure in the list of accused are DMK ministers Ko. Si. Mani and K. Ponnudi, Stalin's personal assistant Raju

## Sun TV asked to black out arrest

CHENNAI: In an unusual step, the Chennai police on Saturday ordered the Sun TV network to stop telecasting clippings of the arrest of DMK president M. Karunanidhi and warned of "action" if it continued with the telecast. "If Sun TV continues the telecast, action will be taken against it in accordance with the law," police commissioner K. Muthukaruppan said in an order. (PTI)

Munnetra charges of misappropriation of Rs 12 crore during the construction of the ten mini-flyovers, with the bail approval posted for notice and counter on July 3. He is the second of the 14 accused in the case, his son and Chennai mayor M.K. Stalin, who surrendered later, has been named the first accused.

Shortly after midnight, Union industry and commerce minister Murali Manan and the family members of both leaders insisted they accompany Mr Karunanidhi and the posse of police to the CB-CID office. Mr Manan and Union environment minister T.R. Baalu were also roughed up and the latter was taken into preventive custody.

They were then taken to the Veppery police station where Mr Manan was forcibly hauled out and removed and Mr Karunanidhi was then driven to the residence of principal sessions judge Ashok Kumar. Mr Manan arrived later at the judge's house in a rickshaw. He was taken to Apollo Hospital for treatment of a leg injured in the melee.

The judge remanded Mr Karunanidhi to judicial custody until July 10 on charges of misappropriation of Rs 12 crore during the construction of the ten mini-flyovers, with the bail approval posted for notice and counter on July 3. He is the second of the 14 accused in the case, his son and Chennai mayor M.K. Stalin, who surrendered later, has been named the first accused.

# AIADMK team meets PM, Sonia

110-13

**By Our Special Correspondent**

**NEW DELHI, JULY 5.** The AIADMK delegation today called on the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, to apprise them of the events related to the arrest of the former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karuna-

nidhi, and others, before winding up their mission in the capital.

Briefing reporters after the meetings, the State Education Minister, Mr. M. Thambi Durai, said the Prime Minister gave them a patient hearing. The delegation told Mr. Vajpayee about the manner in which the two Union Ministers, Mr. Murasoli Maran and

Mr. T. R. Baalu, behaved with the police and "exceeded limits". He also charged that the former Chief Minister had enacted a "drama" before his arrest. The delegation also handed over a memorandum and copy of the videotapes prepared by the State police to the Prime Minister and Ms. Gandhi, to press home their point of view.

At the meeting with Ms. Gandhi, the delegation thanked her on behalf of the AIADMK general secretary and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalithaa, for supporting the party and the State Government.

Mr. Thambi Durai said the Congress president told them that she had gathered information about the events in Tamil Nadu from her party channels despite being abroad during the period. Earlier, the Congress general secretary, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, briefed Ms. Gandhi.

The AIADMK delegation, which included two Ministers, Mr. Thambi Durai and Mr. C. Ponnaiyah, tonight left for Chennai after meeting leaders of various political parties, the President, the Vice-President and Union Ministers. The delegation's task was made easier after the AIADMK parliamentary party leader, Mr. P. H. Pandian, fixed a meeting with the Union Law Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley. Apparently, Mr. Jaitley contacted the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, and opened channels of communication.



**The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, with some members of the AIADMK delegation, which called on him at his residence in New Delhi on Thursday. — Photo: S. Arneja**

# Trinamool MPs skip Panja meet

HT Correspondent *KP-1*  
Kolkata, June 30

DISSIDENT TRINAMOOL Congress leader Ajit Panja's 'special convention' of his ilk turned out to be a damp squib today as none of the frontline leaders turned out at the meet. Even Panja himself fought shy of going flat out against Mamata Banerjee, saying that he was not trying to split the party.

Panja, however, launched parallel bodies to the Trinamool's frontal wings like the Mahila Congress, Youth Congress, trade union, legal and SC-ST cells at the convention, which was attended by Union Minister Tapan Sikdar and other State BJP bigwigs.

On the party's return to the NDA, he said: "It's a matter of days. I am certain since I've seen the letter myself. It clearly states that the Trinamool has full con-

17  
fidence in the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. I believe the Trinamool is still a part of the NDA as it was never out of it."

The only time the veteran leader lashed out at the party leader was when delegates asked him about Mamata's meeting with Sonia Gandhi. "I have information that she told Mrs Gandhi that if the Congress decides to topple the Government, all her MPs except me would be behind her. This is betrayal by all standards."

The convention was heavily attended by ordinary party workers and district-level leaders, signifying the simmering dissent against Mamata. "The leaders might not have turned up because of certain compulsions, but the people who elected them have. And that is our success," Panja said to cover up the absence of the party glitterati. This was preceded by a short



SUBHENDU GHOSH/HINDUSTAN TIMES

Ajit Panja and Union Minister Tapan Sikdar at the meeting.

speech that saw the gathering take an oath to reiterate its support to the NDA. Those present also vowed to oppose any form of dictatorship within the party.

Calling himself and others at the meet the "Class IV staff" of

the Trinamool, Panja said the party seemed oblivious of the grassroots realities and thus needed urgent reforms.

"We are not trying to break away as such. Our leader is still Mamata Banerjee, but we are trying to bring about certain reforms within. You can say we're reformists."

But while Panja treaded cautiously, district leaders made no secret of their wrath at Mamata's whimsical attitude. Senior Cooch Behar leader Dilip Das said Mamata had "sold" the Raigunj seat to P R Das Munshi for a hefty sum.

Sikdar said the Trinamool under Panja's leadership was in the NDA and would continue to be so. "Without Panja, the Trinamool cannot be allowed to return to the NDA."

Page 3: Thin crowd at Mamata rally

## Mamata, Panja to hold parallel rallies today

KOLKATA, June 29. — Miss Mamata Banerjee and her estranged party colleague, Mr Ajit Panja, will hold parallel rallies in the city tomorrow.

Several streets, especially those in the city's central parts, will be clogged as Trinamul processionists will converge in front of Metro cinema. The processions will move towards their destination from Raja Subodh Mullick Square from 1.00 p.m. Miss Banerjee will begin her address around 3.00 p.m.

Closure of jute mills and the state's deteriorating law and order situation will be the main topics of her speech, it was learnt.

Though Mr Panja's rally scheduled to be held in Mahajati Sadan at 8.00 a.m. has been ostensibly called to strengthen the Trinamul, Mr Tapan Sikdar, Union minister of state for telecommunications, will attend it. Mr Sikdar is known to be a habitual critic of Miss Banerjee though they were both in the NDA Cabinet earlier this year. Mr Panja said that Mr Sikdar has assured him he will attend the rally. He has talked to six Trinamul MPs except Miss Banerjee and Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay.

Mr Subrata Mukherjee, mayor, who had to call off the hawker eviction drive under Miss Banerjee's pressure has also been contacted. However, Mr Panja was in the dark as to how many of his Trinamul invitees will attend the three-hour rally.

— SNS

# Mamata signals end to alliance

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, June 26

MAMATA BANERJEE today signalled an end to her party's alliance with the Congress when she said: "The Congress is a burden to the Trinamool, not an asset."

"We had reached an electoral alliance with the Congress and I was under the impression that central leaders of that party wanted to keep the pact going. However, recent statements made by PCC leaders seem to indicate that they aren't interested. Well, if that's the case, neither are we. We will be on our own and the fact remains that the Trinamool is the main Opposition party here. It has 60 MLAs, 71 councillors and nine MPs. If they are under the impression that they can throw their weight around they are mistaken," Mamata said. "But our doors will always remain open for those who want to join us in the fight against the CPI(M)."

Mamata said she was keeping her options open on rejoining the NDA. "When we decided to join the formation, our MPs sat together and took the decision. When we decided to leave, again it was a consensus decision. Our MPs must once again put their heads together and decide on whether to go back. We will hold a strategy session only after Bikram Sarkar, Nitish Sengupta and Krishna Bose are back. Personal commitments have kept them away from full-time party work."

Sarkar, Sengupta, Bose and Ajit Panja are all pro-NDA and have been demanding that the



Mamata Banerjee with Mayor Subrata Mukherjee at a press conference in the city on Tuesday.

party return to the NDA as soon as possible.

Mamata's aggressive anti-Congress stance today must have been music to the pro-NDA lobby. "Good that sanity has prevailed. For the good of Bengal we want Mamata to return to the NDA," Sarkar said. "Now that she has said it, let her act. I've all along been saying that an alliance with the Congress would prove disastrous. She has

finally realised it, Panja said.

Mamata, though, attached little importance to Panja. "He's just a primary member of the party. No MP MLA or councillor is with him. He is isolated and we won't expel him because then he'll become a Minister."

Senior Congress leader Somen Mitra said Mamata's statement was hardly a surprise: "She's all so predictable. She did it to the BJP. She's doing it to the

Congress now. Good, now she can't blame us."

Reacting to Mamata's announcement, CPI(M) State secretary Anil Biswas said: "Her statement must have come as a major loss of face for the Congress. All arrangements of convenience are destined to end up this way."

**On Page 3: Mamata forms panel on hawker eviction**

## Panja stumps Trinamool chief with invitation

Arindam Sarkar  
Kolkata, June 26

AJIT PANJA pulled a fast one on Mamata Banerjee today when he invited her to his June 30 convention. "She's still chairperson of the All-India Trinamool Congress and I welcome her to attend the Mahajati Sadan convention. There's only one condition, though. She has to believe in the principles for which the meet is being held."

Panja's statement came hours after Mamata dismissed him as merely a primary member of the party. "Mamata's pressure tactics won't work. I'm going ahead with the convention," Panja told *Hindustan Times*.

But even in saying so, the dissident leader reiterated that he wasn't doing anything to harm the party. "This convention is not an act of defiance. The 15,000 party workers who have signed up for the convention consider her as their leader. But they believe that she is surrounded by a coterie that is misguiding her," Panja said.

The leader of the dissident camp said Mamata had done a sensible thing by going soft on the NDA. However, he personally believed that the Trinamool had never ceased to be an NDA partner. For, no formal communication announcing the decision had yet been sent to Speaker GMC Balayogi.

"The party must send such a letter to the Speaker at least 14 days before Parliament session begins. After all, he has to make sitting arrangements for the MPs. I have already written to Balayogi telling him that I would sit in the NDA enclosure, even though I'm not a minister," Panja said.



# Lonely Mamata bursts into tears

BY A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, June 25: The bottled-up burden of defeat exploded in the Trinamul Congress tonight as Mamata Banerjee burst into tears at a meeting of the party's elected representatives.

"Everyone is leaving me, now that I am in a tight spot after Trinamul's poor performance in the elections," a councillor quoted Mamata as telling the meeting convened to decide whether hawkers should be evicted from the city pavements.

Mamata's breakdown, which came 43 days after a humiliating debacle at the hustings, was witnessed by a stunned group of Trinamul MLAs from Calcutta and councillors.

After the elections, Mamata

26/6  
was caught in a tug-of-war between a section of the party's MPs, who wanted her to return to the BJP-led coalition, and MLAs, who preferred preserving the alliance with the Congress.

Tonight's meeting turned stormy when Mayor Subrata Mukherjee threatened to resign if hawkers were not evicted from the 21 major thoroughfares.

Dissolving in tears, Mamata told the gathering at Maharashtra Niwas that she was passing through a bad phase and party leaders were deserting her, according to a councillor present at the meeting.

At the end of the meeting, Mamata formed a 10-member committee led by the mayor to find out whether it would be prudent to evict hawkers from Calcutta pave-

98.8 JML  
ments and the banks of Tolly's nullah with active government participation. The committee will submit its report within 10 days.

The trouble started when legislators Saugata Roy, Pankaj Banerjee and Sadhan Pande said hawkers should not be evicted by the Trinamul-run Calcutta Municipal Corporation alone.

"The state government should also be actively involved. It is the poor hawkers who have cast their ballots in our favour. Now if we evict them unilaterally, the CPM will make it an issue and campaign against us. We will lose our pro-people image," Roy was quoted as telling the meeting, which stretched to five hours. Roy, Banerjee and Pande were joined by Subrata Bakshi and others.

Trinamul is worried about re-

habilitating the evicted hawkers without government help. Municipal affairs minister Ashok Bhattacharya had assured the corporation of the government's help in the eviction drive but a section of Trinamul was not convinced.

Mamata expressed displeasure at the way CMC bulldozers were used to evict encroachers on EM Bypass a few days ago. "Even two Trinamul offices were demolished. We had a good following in that area," Mamata said.

An MLA who was present at the meeting said the mayor, the councillors and the MLAs softened their stand and tried to console Mamata when she was in tears. When the meeting ended around midnight, Mayor Mukherjee accompanied Mamata to her Kalighat residence. (See Page 9)

**PRINCIPLES FOR 'REJUVENATION'**

# Is Panja planning a coup in party?

HT correspondent  
Kolkata, June 19

AJIT PANJA seems to be moving towards engineering a split in his party, while Mamata Banerjee weighs the pros and cons of returning to the National Democratic Alliance.

District leaders who met at his home today decided on six guiding principles for "rejuvenating" the party. Democracy should be established within the party, they decided, and no form of dictatorship would be accepted. The party should reject the "unholy alliance" with the Congress, continue links with the NDA and expose CPI(M) brutalities in the villages and towns.

Panja is also planning a political conference of Trinamool workers at Mahajati Sadan on June 30.

The former Minister of State for External Affairs was the first within the party to question her decision to ally with the Congress. He has since been stripped of all party posts, a decision that he does not accept.

What happened today shows clearly that Panja is about to make a final bid to seize the initiative of leadership from Mamata. And to do this, it is to the grassroots workers that he is taking his case.

Panja claimed that over 15,500 Trinamool members gave their signatures in the last 20 days on an oath to rejuvenate the party. "These oath forms will be distributed in all the 42 parliamentary constituencies and 294 Assembly segments. These forms will have to be returned by June 25. A core committee will be formed with representatives from these segments on June 30."

In the second phase, he said, such forms would be distributed until August 14. As soon as these forms reach the polling station level in a district, a district-level conference will be held.



"The booth-level committees will render social service and will be converted into election committees three months before any election," he said.

Panja found fault with Mamata for describing as "power-hungry" Trinamool MPs who were in favour of joining the NDA. He said this was "most unbecoming" of a leader of her standing.

"What, on the other hand, is she doing? She secretly meets George Fernandes. She goes with a party delegation, but meets Sonia Gandhi alone. Mrs Margaret Alva comes and meets her. But why this hush hush? The party is a public trust and everything should be open".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# The meeting that melted Fernandes

## Mamata unlocks door with sorry

OUR BUREAU

June 17: Behind the flurry of statements by heavyweights in the BJP-led coalition that the doors are open for Mamata Banerjee to return lies a meeting where the Trinamul leader came as close as possible for her to say sorry to George Fernandes. And, behind the near-apology lurks the suggestion that the gentle nudge to Mamata might have come from Atal Bihari Vajpayee himself.

Since that meeting earlier this month in Delhi, Fernandes and his Samata Party colleague Nitish Kumar have said Mamata is welcome to rejoin the NDA. Nitish Kumar has gone a step further and said he is prepared to give up the railway ministry if Mamata is keen on getting it back, which apparently she is. Nitish Kumar first said this on a trip to Bengal. Today, he repeated it in Lucknow.

Samata sources said Fernandes conveyed to his colleagues that Mamata was "repentant" for what she had said about the former defence minister "in the heat of the moment" and reportedly stopped just short of a formal apology when she called on him. Sources said the Trinamul chief sought to explain to Fernandes that the decision to quit the NDA and team up with the Congress was "purely on account of electoral compulsions and not with an intention to settle personal scores or hurt any leader".

Following this, Fernandes, who is also the NDA convener, prevailed on his party colleagues not to oppose Mamata's re-entry. At

least two senior Samata MPs, Raghunath Jha and Prabhunath Singh, had publicly spoken out against Trinamul's reinduction on grounds that Mamata left the coalition after making an "issue" of Fernandes' resignation from the Cabinet because he was named in the Tehelka tapes.

Samata sources said, despite the unhappiness in the party over Mamata's reinduction, Fernandes decided to "forget and forgive". "His priority is to keep the NDA government intact and if Trinamul's re-entry shores up the numbers, he will have no problem," they said.

The Samata Party's under-

vener despite the Tehelka tapes shows he really values him," a source said.

Neither the BJP nor the Samata could say when Trinamul's reinduction would take place. Samata sources believe that the much-awaited Cabinet expansion would take place between July 18 and 22, just before the beginning of the Monsoon session.

"It is hoped that by then the political realignments would fall into place," one of them said, referring to the re-entry of Trinamul and the Pattali Makkal Katchi and the formal split in the Rashtriya Janata Dal.

Within Trinamul itself, the view is gaining ground that the party need not wait until the Uttar Pradesh elections to rejoin the NDA. Trinamul's general secretary Dinesh Trivedi said: "The Uttar Pradesh elections will have no bearing on national politics. And it is quite possible the BJP will fare better than most analysts expect." He refused to comment on the possible return to the NDA.

"She will only go where prestige and honour lie. She is the last person to compromise her dignity," said a leader close to Mamata.

That she sees her future — at least in the short term — in the NDA and not with the Congress is evident from the way she has tried to make up with leaders of the ruling coalition. The latest instance is her silence on the statement Advani made before the Liberhan Commission, refusing to accept the disputed Ayodhya structure as a mosque. A senior Trinamul leader said: "Mamata is unlikely to get into any communal thing at the moment."

■ See Pages 8, 9



George and Mamata

standing is that it was the Prime Minister who initially suggested to Mamata that she ought to make up with Fernandes if she was serious about coming back. Mamata had first called on Vajpayee and home minister L.K. Advani before phoning Fernandes to set up an appointment.

With Fernandes' change of heart, BJP sources said a "major hurdle" in the way of Mamata's return was removed. "As the NDA convener, there is no way Vajpayee could have over-ruled his objections and brought in Mamata. The fact that Vajpayee has allowed Fernandes to continue as the con-

# Mamata keeps her options on NDA open

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, June 10 — Trinamul Congress chief Miss Mamata Banerjee today said she prefers to keep options open for joining the National Democratic Alliance. She said there is nothing "hide and seek" about the matter.

Earlier when asked by reporters about chances of Trinamul Congress joining the NDA, she, however, said: "Why ask the same question daily?"

"I am neither ruling out the matter nor saying that there is no possibility of joining the NDA," she told reporters after holding a meeting in Midnapore on her party's recent poll debacle.

Miss Banerjee said the previous decision of leaving the NDA was a collective decision of the party leadership. "This time if we take any decision, it will be taken by the party's working committee."

Terror tactics of Left Front cadres, as alleged by Trinamul Congress leadership to explain the party's poll debacle in the district, however, appears to have taken a back seat in today's meeting.

"As terror has been unleashed by Left Front workers all over the state, we are focussing on the lack of development in this district," party spokesman Mr Pankaj Banerjee said. The day's meeting was attended by eight Trinamul MLAs and MP from Panskura Mr Bikram Sarkar.

Mr Dipak Ghosh, MLA, had been given overall charge of revamping the party organisation in the district. Stating this Mr Banerjee said that committees will be formed at the district, block and booth levels to rejuvenate party organisation.

Miss Banerjee will lead a Trinamul team to Midnapore on 23 June. A sit-in demonstration will be held before the offices of the SP and the DM

# MAMATA:

(Continued from page 1)

demanding the district's development.

The Assembly poll results in the district shocked the party leadership which hoped for major gains after Trinamul wrested the Panskura parliamentary seat from the Left.

This time, the Trinamul-Congress alliance had won only ten out of 37 Assembly seats in Midnapore — the largest district of the the country.

Though Miss Banerjee had camped in Midnapore on the election day, she failed to ensure her party's victory there.

The Trinamul leadership announced that stock-taking meetings would be held in Hooghly on 14 June to be followed by another one in Burdwan.

**Cong stand:** The state Congress leadership, made it clear that the existing coalition remains as long as Trinamul stays out of the NDA. "We are not breaking the coalition," Mr Pranab Mukherjee, state Congress president said earlier during the day.

Mr Atish Sinha, former leader of the Opposition, will meet the present incumbent to this post on 18 June and chalk out floor sharing arrangement for the forthcoming Assembly session which begins the next day.

With the state Congress still looking upon the Trinamul as its ally, the former will start campaigning on the Tehelka issue against the NDA.

A signature campaign, for this purpose, will be launched soon.

THE STATESMAN

JUN 20 2001

# AMMA IN POWER

## A Surrender To Blackmail

By SUBHASH C KASHYAP

58-6  
8/6

THE controversy surrounding the appointment as chief minister of a person convicted of corruption and disqualified for membership continues. It is unlikely to die down in the near future. Also, the issues it raises call for a long-lasting national debate.

What the Tamil Nadu Governor — a former Supreme Court Judge — did on 14 May has drastically altered the norms of political discourse and conduct. Gone are the days when mere suspicion of wrongdoing, adverse finding by a committee or commission of inquiry or framing of charges would invite resignation of a holder or public office. Corruption is said to have ceased to be an issue in public life.

It is being argued unabashedly and without any moral or legal compunctions that under Article

164(1) of the Constitution, the Governor has an unfettered right to appoint anyone as the chief minister as if while there are qualifications and disqualifications for being "members", there are none for being "ministers". Article 164(4) is being interpreted to mean that even disqualifications for membership do not apply to occupying ministerial office for six months.

### SOFT OPTION

There can be a legitimate difference of opinion on whether the court judgment convicting Miss Jayalalitha on corruption charges and awarding a three-year sentence was correct or whether the 1997 interpretation given by the Election Commission to Section 8(3) of the RP Act 1951 and the rejection of her nomination paper by the RO on that ground were good in law. Miss Jayalalitha's appeal in the Tansi corruption case is already pending adjudication. She can, on a point of law, question the vires of the Election Commission directive with regard to the interpretation of Section 8(3) of RP Act. But, these are all matters which are in the exclusive judicial domain and one has to have the patience and good sense to await the court's verdict. Meanwhile, the law as it stands has to be respected.

There is no doubt that the Tamil Nadu Governor had a very difficult task to perform. Even though Miss Jayalalitha herself could not be said to have received any mandate of the people, the parties under her leadership had swept the polls and a clear majority of legislators had elected her the leader. She and her followers appeared entirely unwilling to accept anyone else. If she was not sworn in immediately, the Governor might have been accused of flouting the people's mandate and of indulging in anti-democratic conduct. Also, with the likely demonstrations,

The author is former secretary-general of the Lok Sabha.

rioting and immolations in support of the self-proclaimed mother of Tamil Nadu, a serious law and order situation might have been created. The Governor under the circumstances acted swiftly and presumably accepted her assurances of hav-

Act 1951 specifically provides that a person convicted of an offence and sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years shall be disqualified from the date of such conviction and for six years after release.

The foundational principle of the parliamentary system is that the executive comes out of

the legislature, remains part of it and is always responsible to the popular House. Members of the Council of Ministers, therefore, have got to be from among the members of the legislature. The principle is actually reinforced by Clause (4) of Article 164.

The basic principle requiring ministers to be members of the legislature clearly suggests that only those eligible or qualified to be members can be appointed ministers or chief ministers. Anyone

who stands disqualified from being a member stands doubly disqualified from being appointed a minister or chief minister so long as the disqualification lasts.

### ABSURD RESULTS

Any other interpretation lead to absurd results. If a person not qualified or disqualified from membership can be appointed and can continue as a chief minister for six months, then not only those convicted of some of the most heinous offences but even those who are not citizens of India, are below 25 years of age, are occupants of offices of profit under the government, or are insane or insolvent would become eligible for the chief ministership. After all, if a person convicted by a lower court can hope to be completely exonerated on appeal in six months' time, it is also conceivable for a non-citizen to become a citizen, holder of an office of profit giving it up, an unsound mind returning to sanity, an insolvent becoming solvent or someone below 25 getting to be 25 in the next six months. That certainly could never be the intent of the founding fathers nor can that ever be an acceptable interpretation.

True, the conviction by the lower court may not be upheld by the higher courts and Miss Jayalalitha may be ultimately held not guilty. On the grounds of what is called balance of convenience, it is argued that depriving her of the chief ministership would have caused irreparable loss to her and to the people.

But then, it is equally conceivable that the conviction is upheld by the highest court and in that case the appointment of a guilty person as chief minister could be said to have meanwhile caused irreparable damage to the people and the polity and therefore balance of convenience should have dictated greater caution. After all, contesting an election for membership of the legislature or being a minister is not a fundamental right.



ing the disqualification removed and getting elected to the legislature within six months. She was obviously for a more pragmatic approach and a path of least resistance, leaving it to the law courts to decide.

But, adoption of such soft options and surrender to threats of mob violence and blackmail may have dangerous ramifications. While the popular will deserves respect, democracy is inconceivable without rule of law. Everyone, however high, is bound by the Constitution. The Governor also takes an oath under Article 159 to "preserve, protect and defend the Constitution and the law".

While under Article 361 the Governor enjoys personal immunity from being proceeded against in a court of law, it certainly does not follow that the highest courts are precluded from pronouncing on the unconstitutionality of certain acts. In fact, acts of Governors, including the appointment of chief ministers, have been subjected to judicial review.

### DISQUALIFIED

It would have been ideal if the governor had advised "Amma" not to stake her claim to the chief ministership till the removal of disqualification. If that failed, the Governor had to follow the Constitution and the law. Between politics and the Constitution, the latter had to have precedence.

Article 173 of the Constitution lays down the minimum qualifications for membership of houses of state legislature in terms of age and citizenship and says that additional qualifications may be prescribed by parliament by law. Article 191(1) lays down the disqualifications. Those specifically disqualified for membership are: holders of office of profit under the government, persons of unsound mind so declared by court, persons who are undischarged insolvents, those who are not citizens of India and those who are disqualified by or under a law made by Parliament. Section 8(3) of the Representation of the People

THE STATESMAN

3 JUN 2001

# Martyr tag eludes Bhindranwale

FROM GAJINDER SINGH

**Amritsar, June 6:** On the 17th anniversary of Operation Bluestar, Akal Takht *jathedar* Joginder Singh Vedanti today called upon all Akali Dal factions to unite but did not declare Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale a martyr despite pressure from the radicals.

Asking the various factions to unite and work for the "betterment of the community", he appealed to Sikhs to help soldiers who had deserted the army in protest against the storming of the Golden Temple on June 6, 1984. "It is the community's job to look after them," he said. He also demanded the release of Sikh youths held under Tada, saying they were innocent and "should not be made to suffer".

The Sikh leader came down heavily on the use of liquor and money to woo voters in gurdwara elections. "The power flowing from money and liquor has no place in Sikhism," he said. "Bringing such things to win gurdwara elections is disreputing the religion."

Vedanti lashed out at the Congress for ordering Operation Bluestar. "The army action can never be forgotten. It came during a period when thousands of Sikh men, women and children had gathered at the Golden Temple complex to pay tribute to the sixth guru, Guru Arjan Dev. Many devotees perished in the operation which was ordered mindlessly," he said. June 6 is observed as Ghallughara Day (Genocide Day).

There was, however, no men-

tion of Indira Gandhi. Last year, he had justified the former Prime Minister's assassination. "Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah Abdali, Massa Rangad and Indira Gandhi have all suffered the same fate for desecrating the Golden Temple," he had said in a hard-hitting speech that surprised even his detractors.

Saying cannons were used to demolish the Akal Takht, the *jathedar* said Sikhs would always remember the sacrifices of the martyrs of 1984. "The names of the martyrs who died protecting the *panth* (community) have been written in gold in Sikh history. We respect their martyrdom," he said.

Vedanti did not declare Bhindranwale a martyr despite pressure from various Akali and militant factions to do so in the special prayer that followed his speech. Sikhism's most well-known seminary, the Damdami Taksal, Bhindranwale's family members and some radicals believe he is still alive.

The Akal Takht chief has asked the chief of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Jagdev Singh Talwandi, to probe whether Bhindranwale is alive or dead.

Sources said Vedanti held a series of secret meetings last week with Punjab chief minister Parkash Singh Badal and Akali radicals on the issue of Bhindranwale's martyrdom.

Takht officials said representatives of the Damdami Taksal and Bhindranwale's family would be summoned by the Takht for discussions.

THE TELEGRAPH

# Jaya divorces Congress, courts third force

FROM OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

**New Delhi, June 6:** Will she, won't she, join the third front that is. Jayalalitha is not saying, but Amma today gave ample hints which way she is likely to go as she called on CPI leader A.B. Bardhan — only the second-ever meeting pledged to throw her weight behind the Left-led effort.

Both appeared pleased as punch after the 30-minute meet at the CPI headquarters. Jaya seemed more than eager to become a partner in the Jyoti Basu-led People's Front, the resurrected third force. Bardhan indicated it was only a matter of time before the ADMK chief was formally invited to join. Discussions on her entry into the front, Jaya said, were making "slow and steady progress".

If the imperious Tamil Nadu chief minister had shut the door on the NDA yesterday, never mind her shawl to the Prime Minister, Jaya today virtually washed her hands of the Congress, her ally in the state.

"I do not have an alliance with any party now. Our alliance with the Congress was only for the Assembly elections," she told reporters, choosing to ignore the fact that her party is sharing

power with the Congress in Pondicherry as a junior partner.

CPM general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet, the navigator of the People's Front, was not in town — he had left for London yesterday. "I will talk to him over the phone," Jaya said.

"Nothing will come in the way of my relationship with the CPI. We have had cordial personal and political relations," she added.

Bardhan said he would soon send Jaya a copy of the front's common minimum programme, released last week.

Sources said Jaya made it clear to the CPI leadership that she had no intention of returning to the NDA. On the contrary, she wanted the People's Front to take proper shape so that it could offer the people an alternative to the BJP and the Congress.

The front leaders don't appear too perturbed about the string of corruption charges staring Jaya in the face; the chief minister herself, during the discussions today, seemed confident of being able to "manage" them.

According to the Representation of the People Act, Jaya will have to get herself elected to the Assembly within six months, but for that she will have to find a way of dodging the legal bar banning her from contesting polls because

of her conviction in the Tansi land case. The chief minister, sources said, appeared to have thought of a way out of the problem. She told Bardhan that the Supreme Court decision to refer the cases to a constitutional bench was a "shot in the arm" for her.

The People's Front is waiting for the Uttar Pradesh elections to be over before it starts expanding. Until now, the front leaders have not made any concrete proposals to Jaya.

"Had we invited her, she would have been in the front by now," a Left leader said.

Since Mulayam Yadav is the main challenger to the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, the front does not want to upset the balance now by encouraging new entrants.

But the response from the Left leadership suggests that Jaya, regardless of corruption charges, is welcome to join, though Laloo Yadav isn't.

"The main problem is his alliance with the Congress, which Mulayam will not accept," explained a Left leader.

Jaya, too, is opposed to the Congress, especially Sonia Gandhi. She holds the Congress president responsible for the failure to stitch together an Opposition alternative in 1999 by insisting on becoming Prime Minister and keeping Mulayam out.



Tamil Nadu chief minister Jayalalitha with home minister L.K. Advani in New Delhi. Picture by Jagdish Yadav

# Mamata in a dilemma over rejoining NDA

By Our Special Correspondent

KOLKATA, JUNE 5. The Trinamool Congress chairperson, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, is camping in New Delhi trying to gauge the National Democratic Alliance partners' mood on returning to the BJP-led NDA Government at the Centre in the coming days.

Ms. Banerjee is busy discussing the matter with her MPs who are keen on returning to the NDA without wasting any more time as they fell the party would lose if it still maintained ties with the Congress.

For Ms. Banerjee, ensuring a smooth return now is not easy. The NDA partners, especially the Samata Party, are cut up with her for deserting the Alliance at a time when the partners were expected to stay together to resist the Opposition onslaught over the Tehelka tapes issue.

Ms. Banerjee knows she is caught in a cleftstick. For one, if she returns to the NDA now, she could lose her credibility. If she resists the move, chances are the party will split.

Her woes do not end here either. After being reconciled to re-joining the NDA, she thought it wise to do so from outside. But, she is finding herself under tremendous pressures from her MPs to return to the Vajpayee Cabinet.

Ms. Banerjee is said to have given in to the pressures but, personally, she has decided to stay out of the Government, at least till the Tehelka tapes report is made public.

According to party sources, Ms. Banerjee

is finding it hard to shortlist the possible entrants to the Cabinet. Mr. Bikram Sircar, Mr. Nitish Sengupta and Ms. Krishna Bose are keen on becoming Ministers, and Ms. Banerjee knows that unless at least two of them are accommodated, she could lose them to the party rebel, Mr. Ajit Panja.

The Trinamool leader is said to have shortlisted three of the seven MPs — Mr. Sircar, Mr. Akbar Ali Khondkar and Mr. Sudip Bandopadhyay.

The inclusion of the last named is interesting as Mr. Bandopadhyay was initially reluctant to desert the Congress. Realising that a return to the NDA was almost certain, he changed his mind.

In the final count, however, Ms. Banerjee may be forced to declare herself willing to join the Government along with Mr. Panja.

## Bengal BJP sore

The Bengal BJP, however, is against including Ms. Banerjee and Mr. Bandopadhyay in the Vajpayee Cabinet as they had spewed venom against the NDA. "We have no problem with the other MPs," Mr. Muzzaffar Khan, State BJP vice-president, said.

On the other hand, Ms. Banerjee's relations with Ms. Sonia Gandhi's Congress are deteriorating by the day. Though the two met a few days ago, Ms. Banerjee did not have any good words for the State Congress workers alleging that they had worked against her party candidates in the polls.

According to the Congress, Ms. Banerjee met Ms. Gandhi only to express her

grievances so that she would be in a position to utilise it in the coming days to prepare the ground for severing links with the Congress.

## Feud in State Cong.

The State Congress is currently witnessing a feud between the two factions led by Mr. Somen Mitra, former president, and Mr. P. R. Das Munshi, party MP, over who would head the party in Bengal. Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, currently the State unit chief, has decided to step down and get involved in party work at the national level.

Who will be Ms. Gandhi's choice? According to analysts, she may name Mr. Mitra as the president if the Trinamool severs links with the Congress, needing an organiser of his calibre to break the Trinamool at the roots.

If Ms. Banerjee decides to continue the alliance, the mantle is likely to fall on Mr. Das Munshi, known to have maintained a rapport with Ms. Banerjee. PTI reports:

Meanwhile, the Trinamool policy-making body chairman, Mr. Pankaj Banerjee, has ruled out his party's immediate return to the NDA, but said the issue might figure during the party's June 10 meeting in the city.

"We are not thinking in terms of rejoining the NDA since more important issues, such as the CPI(M)'s atrocities on Trinamool workers in north 24-parganas, Midnapore and Coochbehar districts, in particular, are yet to be settled," he said.

THE HINDU



# Trinamul may grovel back to NDA

ANINDYA SENGUPTA  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, June 4. — Trinamul MPs and MLAs, who met the Prime Minister in a delegation on Friday, have urged Miss Mamata Banerjee to work out the modalities for rejoining the NDA.

The request was reportedly made at a meeting, convened hurriedly by the Trinamul lawmakers decided on the Mohan Biswas's house in Delhi. The Trinamul lawmakers emerged from the Prime Minister's Office with a smile on her face.

The Trinamul MPs and MLAs gave Miss Banerjee the freedom to decide on when and how to return to the NDA, particularly the face-saving formula to sever ties with the Congress. Some MPs suggested that the process be completed before Parliament's monsoon session, for

NEW DELHI, June 4. — Miss Mamata Banerjee has been silent for the past couple of days. She was supposed to address a press conference after a Trinamul team met Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mrs Sonia Gandhi on Friday. She cancelled it the next day ostensibly because of the Nepal tragedy. But even two days later she doesn't seem eager to hold the press meet. For, many feel her meeting with Mr Vajpayee was more of an attempt to pre-empt the possibility of a split in the parliamentary party, which appeared so real ever since Mr Vajpayee virtually gave an invitation to Mr Panja. — SNS

MAMATA KEEPS MUM

a reshuffle of portfolios is on the cards. The meeting iterated that the tie-up with the Congress in the state would be useless because it's "no longer a party but a formation of groups and sub-groups, led by Mr Pranab Mukherjee, Mr Somen Mitra, Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury and Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi".

Initially, only the Trinamul MPs discussed the need to rejoin the NDA. They expressed their views after Miss Banerjee asked them to decide upon the party's future course of action. Later, the MLAs joined in with their views. And all the 20 lawmakers who met the Prime Minister reportedly favoured rejoining the NDA. Miss Banerjee reportedly kept silent throughout the meeting, barring her comments on the party's pre-poll alliance with the Congress.

Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay, who earlier was against rejoining the NDA, too sup-

ported the other party lawmakers. His contention was that little purpose could be served by sticking to the tie-up with the Congress.

Barring Mr Ajit Panja and Mrs Krishna Bose, all party MPs were present at the meeting that saw an utterly humiliated Trinamul admitting its pre-poll mistakes and preparing itself to rejoin hands with Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, even if it meant biting the dust.

What transpired at the Delhi meeting is being kept under wraps to pre-empt detractors in the party and the dominant faction in the state BJP unit from foiling Trinamul's attempt at a rapprochement with the NDA, party sources said.

The Trinamul will let the Prime Minister know about the portfolios it wants and Mrs Bose has been entrusted to do the job before his knee surgery.

■ More reports on page 3

# Atal first, Sonia later for Mamata

OUR BUREAU

**New Delhi, June 1: With Atal Bihari Vajpayee before the elections, with Sonia Gandhi during the elections. Three weeks after, Mamata Banerjee was with both — all in the space of a couple of evening hours. As night descended, she left a question hanging in Delhi's air: who will she be with when the sun comes up?**

Smarting from a humiliating defeat, she met Vajpayee first, alone and in a delegation, and then popped across to 10 Janpath to repeat the routine with Sonia Gandhi even as the circle around the Prime Minister was gloating over how she was back to acting the daughter to Vajpayee.

After the meeting with the Prime Minister, Mamata came out to say that she had congratulated Vajpayee for inviting Pervez Musharraf. The talks with Sonia over, Mamata did not once refer to the Congress president as her partner, choosing to call her the leader of the Opposition instead.

Sources close to the Prime Minister were claiming that she called Sonia worse things before Vajpayee, complaining how she had been left in the lurch by the party with which she had forged

an electoral alliance.

If the Vajpayee camp is exaggerating, it's for Mamata to call the bluff.

For now, she is holding her cards close to the chest. Sonia cited every reason why the two Congresses should come closer, stopping just short of making a formal invitation to rejoin. She reeled out statistics to show the BJP lost its deposit in over 250 seats and even invoked Rajiv Gandhi's memory to say how he admired Mamata.

The Trinamul leader made no commitment, one way or another. Congress leaders, grasping at straws in the wind, found solace in Mamata's comment that Sonia had assured her she would do everything to keep the alliance alive.

At 7 Race Course Road, the tide appeared to be turning in her favour. Vajpayee cancelled all previous engagements to give her a patient hearing as she insisted that her favourite Prime Minister, against whom she had not spoken a word during campaigning, make time for her.

The candour with which she spoke — not the least against some Congress leaders who she blamed for the poor show — surprised Vajpayee. Only a few days ago, the Prime Minister had ruled

out her return to the National Democratic Alliance. But he is relenting.

And, why not? As Vajpayee stood up to receive the memorandum brought by the Trinamul delegation, alleging rigging and post-poll violence, Mamata — mindful of his weak knees — placed her hand on his arm and urged him to remain seated.

The seat, Vajpayee is aware, will stand on firmer ground, and less at the mercy of the 29-member Telugu Desam, if Mamata were to return with nine MPs. In the Prime Minister's Office, today's meeting sowed the belief that Mamata had not really gone astray.

Mamata said Vajpayee gave her complaints against the Left Front a "patient" hearing and described his response as "most positive" without explaining.

Will she return to the NDA? "All that we discussed today was the atrocities committed on the people of West Bengal," she replied.

Ajit Panja, unhappy over the break with the BJP, and Krishna Bose, who is sick, were not in the Trinamul team that met Vajpayee. Another, Bikram Sarkar, dropped out when the delegation went to Sonia.

■ Picture on Page 8

TEL 122 334P6

# Sonia tightens Mamata bond

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI AND  
RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

**New Delhi, May 31: Setting at rest speculation that the Congress was thinking of reviewing its ties with Trinamul, Sonia Gandhi today asked Priya Ranjan Das Munshi to join Mamata Banerjee's delegation to the President to register "anger and anguish over mass rigging" during the elections.**

Sonia's gesture came a day before Mamata's meeting with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The Trinamul leader is also expected to meet Sonia on Friday.

Sonia, who openly talks about her special bond with Mamata, has made it clear that she would not let Trinamul join the "other side". Sources recalled that during the poll campaign, Mamata had pledged not to go back to the NDA. "If there is no change in her stand, why should we burn bridges with her?" a Sonia aide said.

Das Munshi was asked by Sonia to join Mamata's team at 5.45 pm, 15 minutes before Trina-

mul's scheduled meeting with President K.R. Narayanan. The delegation submitted a 10-page memorandum to Narayanan, urging him and the Centre to start a probe into the "malevolent manner in which the elections were conducted".

"The choice is whether we want the India of Rabindranath Tagore where the citizen's head is held high and the mind is without fear, or we want Garbeta, Chhoto Angaria, Nanoor et al where life is besieged with fear and the head hangs down in chagrin asking whether one has committed a crime by expressing one's choice or whether one has the right to return to one's home to exercise one's franchise," the memorandum said.

Sonia's move to warm up to Mamata is a snub to a section of the Bengal Congress leaders which wanted the party to part ways with Trinamul. For Sonia, a tie-up with Mamata is important for the next general elections. The AICC chief believes that on its own, the party will not be able to cross the single-digit mark in Bengal, which has 42 Lok Sabha seats.

Mamata, who had yesterday said she had no plans to rejoin the BJP-led alliance immediately, sounded more ambivalent today in the company of her MPs, minus Ajit Panja and Krishna Bose — who has been admitted in a Mumbai hospital for knee surgery.

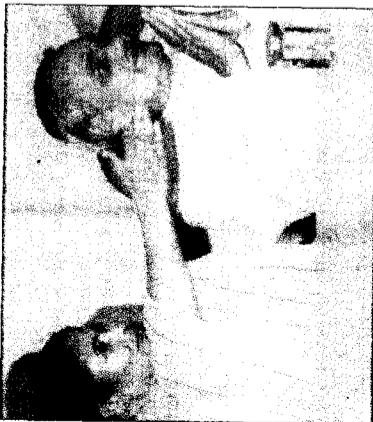
Mamata refused to commit herself on whether she would return to the NDA. "Our programme here is very clear: there is no political purpose. It is merely to meet the constitutional heads to inform them of the way in which the polls were rigged," she said.

However, both Trinamul and BJP sources were less categorical in their comments and admitted that Mamata's meeting with Vajpayee tomorrow would have "some political significance". "For us it is a way of testing the waters," Trinamul sources said.

The exercise appears to have begun yesterday. Senior Trinamul functionary Dinesh Trivedi called on BJP vice-president and the Bengal in-charge Kailashpati Tripathi in an effort to size up the BJP's "current mood" and find out if it was willing to welcome back its former partner.

THE TELEGRAPH

# Sonia or Atal? Mamata keeps options open



MAMATA BANERJEE WITH THE PM

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, June 1

KEEPING THE guessing game going today, Mamata Banerjee met both Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Sonia Gandhi here. The Trinamool Congress chief met the Prime Minister at his Race Course residence and later crossed over to 10 Janpath to parley with the Congress president.

Mamata's one-to-one with the Prime Minister added fuel to speculation that she might ultimately rejoin the NDA. The visitors' book at Vajpayee's residence had listed a meeting between a Trinamool delegation and the Prime

Minister. The visitors were supposed to hand over a memorandum on rigging in the Bengal polls. But Vajpayee ended up giving Mamata an exclusive interview.

In what came as a damper for pro-NDA members in her party, Mamata had yet another one-to-one session with Sonia Gandhi — one she described as "very warm". To the Congress chief she reportedly made the same complaints against the Left's rigging machinery.

Mamata apparently complained to Sonia against some PCC leaders for their "non-cooperation" during the Assembly polls and passing the buck to her for the alliance's poor showing in the elections.

Playing her cards close to her chest, Mamata refused to say much to reporters. Whether she had discussed her party's reinduction into the NDA was not clear.

She is reportedly under intense pressure from some of her MPs to rejoin the alliance she had walked out of some months back.

Quizzed by reporters on the possibility of her party again becoming an NDA member, all she said was: "I have come to Delhi. Now I am returning to Kolkata."

She said she had complimented Vajpayee for his initiative to invite General Pervez Musharraf for talks. She wished

him recovery after his knee surgery. But she said that the Prime Minister's response to her was "positive" and that he had given her a patient hearing.

Mamata secured an assurance from Sonia that the Congress would support her party's cause against the Marxists both in Parliament and outside.

She said she was grateful to the AICC president for the audience she had granted her: "We will try our best to protect the alliance's interests."

AICC secretary Kamal Nath said: "The demand for a commission of inquiry into the rigging is supported by us and we will take this up jointly at various fora."

# Mamata to meet President with poll complaints

STATESMAN NEWS SYSTEM

KOLKATA, May 26. - The President will meet a 20-member Trinamul delegation on 31 May to hear out their complaints of large-scale rigging and subversion of the democratic process of elections in the state.

Miss Mamata Banerjee, the party spokesman, Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay, the mayor, Mr Subrata Mukherjee, the Trinamul leader in the Assembly, Mr Pankaj Banerjee, party chief whip, Mr Sovandeb Chattopadhyay, and party MLAs, Mr Sadhan Pande and Mr Saugata Roy, will be among those who are scheduled to meet with Mr K R Narayanan. Trinamul MP, Mr Ajit Panja, won't be participating in the delegation.

The party had sought an appointment with the Presi-

dent to impress upon him their claim that electoral malpractices on 10 May led to the defeat of several Trinamul candidates and hence paved the way for a landslide Left victory.

The Trinamul leadership was informed this morning that Mr Narayanan had fixed 31 May as the date for the hearing.

Miss Banerjee had alleged on 13 May, the day the results came out, that the chief election commissioner, Mr M S Gill, had turned a blind eye to repeated complaints against central election observers.

She also alleged that the state administration had shamelessly supported the ruling party.

Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay said: "We are going to highlight the role of the Election Commission and its utter

disregard to our complaints. Boothwise results collected from several constituencies are a glaring indication of how the entire electoral process has been subverted by the ruling party".

The leaders would plead with the President to intervene and review the parliamentary election process "participating in elections with a party like the CPI-M in power was a farce."

The only novel aspect of the new Left Front government was that Writers' Buildings had shifted to Alimuddin Street, Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay alleged.

"It's the party that controls the government and because of this the administration shamelessly supported the CPI-M to win the polls. We are going to tell this to the President," he remarked.

THE STATESMAN

27 MAY 2007

# Mamata coming closer to the BJP: Panja

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, May 25

STUNG BY the Trinamool's recent move to cut him to size, a disgruntled Ajit Panja today hit back saying Mamata Banerjee was running the party on an ad-hoc basis with little or no regard for putting down things on paper.

The veteran MP from Kolkata North-West said this was a part of the Trinamool chief's policy and it is this design of running the show on words — and words alone — that could well pave the way for her return to the NDA. He felt Mamata was gradually coming close to the BJP-led front at the Centre.

"Mamata's return to the NDA should not be a problem as there is nothing on paper to prove that

the party has withdrawn its support. It was purely a verbal resolution and no letter was sent. Neither the PMO nor the Speaker received any letter from the party expressing its desire to opt out of the alliance. The claim that a letter was sent on March 15 is not true. I have even personally inquired with George Fernandes. Since everything has been done verbally, she can always return to the alliance," Panja said.

As if to justify his claim, Panja said he was yet to receive a letter from the party informing him that he has been stripped of the post of Trinamool State president. "It seems that Mamata is using the media to pass on information even to her party members. Isn't this ridiculous?"

The disappointing response to

rally has left Panja somewhat dejected. He admitted that his efforts to form a separate executive committee comprising disillusioned party members has received a jolt. "Those who are willing to be with me are yet to decide owing to certain compulsions. But there is a large chunk of dissatisfied members who turn up every morning and vent their frustrations." He said: "Today there are several leaders flocking around her. But in 1998 when I started off with Mamata, where were they? We had put in lot of hard work and sweat to see the party shape up. Now the party believes in informing its seniors through the media. No one bothers to send a letter. All this definitely sends wrong vibes to party workers at all level."

Not one to accept defeat, Panja held yet another meeting in East Kolkata today.

The Trinamul top brass did not make any statement either against Panja or the National Democratic Front. But party MP Sudip Bandopadhyay congratulated the Prime Minister on his move to invite Pakistan for talks.

Panja did not shy away from hitting back at Bandopadhyay for his "oozing concerns." "Ask him not to comment on external affairs. The result would be disastrous as on May 10," Panja said.

"Yesterday Mamata suddenly went to visit a victim in South 24-Parganas. It's good but then someone should tell her that the gimmick of riding on a bike to make it into the interiors doesn't work anymore," he said.

INDIAN INDUSTRIES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 MAY 2001

# No rejoining NDA: Sudip

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 25. - The Trinamul has severed all ties with the NDA and won't rejoin it, Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay, party MP and spokesman, said today.

"Let this be absolutely clear. The Trinamul has decided not to go back to the NDA. We quit... because of Tehelka. We are no longer in the NDA and we state this in unequivocal terms. We have informed the Prime Minister. If necessary, we will inform the Speaker," he said.

Mr Bandopadhyay said recent reports on the possibility of a rapprochement with the NDA were baseless and there had been no talks, even in private, with NDA leaders on the question. The party leadership's stand is to continue its alliance with the Congress, he added.

The Trinamul MP admitted that this alliance couldn't create an impact at the grassroots level because of shortage of time. But he felt it would take shape in due course.

He said poll results were not a reflection of reports that Trinamul's existence had been threatened. He cited statistics to prove that the three-year-old Trinamul had posed a stiff challenge to the CPI-M and the combined Opposition vote was more than the LF's.

The Trinamul has sought an appointment with the President to impress upon him their claim that the polls had been rigged and hence the results did not reflect the popular verdict.

Mr Bandopadhyay said Trinamul had got 1.12 crore votes, only 22 lakh votes less than CPI-M. The Congress got 29 lakh votes and the Congress-Trinamul combine's vote percentage was about 40. The BJP polled around five per cent, while the rest of the Opposition - the SUCI, KPP, NCP, Independents and GNLF - got about nine per cent of the votes.

Considering the LF's vote share (46 per cent), Mr Bandopadhyay said the Marxists should be ashamed to declare their victory as the people's victory as most people had voted against them.

"Mass rigging and shameless support by the state administration and central forces led to the LF's victory," he said.

THE STATESMAN

# Panja rally reply to party punch

BY OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

**Calcutta, May 22:** Barely 24 hours after he was removed from a key party post, Trinamul Congress rebel Ajit Panja lined up a rally near the Sealdah flyover tomorrow to garner support against those responsible for his removal. Stung by Panja's recent statements, Trinamul MPs and MLAs convened an emergency meeting yesterday and had him removed from a key post at the instance of Mamata Banerjee. But they let him continue as a member.

Still smarting under the humiliation, Panja told reporters

this afternoon that the rally will prove that "people are with me". "Hundreds of Trinamul workers and leaders, including MPs, are expected to join. This is the only way to voice our protest against the way in which the party is being run these days by an inefficient leadership." He claimed that some party leaders have confirmed their participation.

The Trinamul leadership has taken strong exception to Panja's proposed rally, saying this would be another example of his going against the party line. "Panja is free to do whatever he likes, but he should have sought permission from the leadership," said Trinamul

general secretary Mukul Roy, adding that no party leader will attend tomorrow's rally.

Undeterred, Panja's men campaigned through the day for the rally. Sources close to Panja said defeated Trinamul candidate from Keshpur, Rajani Dolui, who had threatened to pull out of the fray to protest against Mamata's negligence towards him, might attend. Other dissidents like Krishna Mukherjee from Serampore, Dilip Das from Raigunge and Mohammed Rafiq from Midnapore might also join the rally.

However, Panja's daughter Mahua Mondal and elder brother Ranjit might skip. "I am still unde-

ecided whether I will attend the rally," said Mahua, who lost as Trinamul candidate from Vidysagar. Ranjit, who was present in yesterday's meeting, will also not attend. "I think Ajit is going the wrong way," he added.

Panja today raised the pitch of Mamata-bashing and dubbed her an "inefficient leader." Stating that she has become "mentally ill", he said: "I want her to take rest for a few more days to come to her senses." He questioned whether Mamata and "loyal" MP Sudip Bandopadhyay were primary members of the party. "As none of them are primary members, they have no authority to remove me

from the post," he argued.

Panja saw nothing wrong in hankering after a berth in the Vajpayee Cabinet. "I am an experienced person. And then what's the harm if I ask for a berth in the Cabinet? I still consider myself an integral part of the NDA as the Trinamul Congress has not officially severed its links with the NDA," he reasoned.

Asked if he has any plan to split the party, Panja replied in the negative. "Instead, I want to strengthen the organisation by bringing in those being sidelined in the party," he said, adding that he has no plan to quit the organisation.



# Party keeps punished Panja in bear-hug

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, May 21: The Trinamul Congress today removed Ajit Panja as chairman of the party's West Bengal state committee, but allowed him to "continue" as an ordinary member.

Trinamul, which took the action after a meeting of its MPs at Mamata Banerjee's house, charged Panja with "anti-party activities" and dropped him from the working committee. "Panja will simply continue as one of the ordinary members in the organisation," Trinamul spokesman and MP Sudip Bandopadhyay said.

The party's move to retain Panja as a member is being seen as an attempt to keep him within the scope of the anti-defection law and deny him an opportunity to join the Vajpayee government. Panja had called on the Prime Minister in Delhi on Saturday.

An agitated Panja tonight described the disciplinary action as "unconstitutional, illegal and whimsical". "I am still the chairman of the party and will not step down, come what may," he added.

"The removal is a unanimous decision of the working committee meeting, attended by all party MPs, except Panja and Nitish Sengupta. As Sengupta's wife is seriously ill, he could not attend the meeting," Sudip said.

Trinamul leaders said the decision was taken at the two-and-a-half-hour meeting. Though Mamata was present, Krishna Bose presided over the meeting. The flashpoint for cracking the whip was a letter Panja sent during the day to party MPs and other functionaries criticising Mamata.

Those present at the penalty session, including Panja's brother Ranjit Panja, were vocal against the letter in which the dissident took strong exception to the manner in which the North-East Trinamul Youth Congress committee had been dissolved without his consent. Panja also demanded that Mamata withdraw her statements against chief election commissioner M.S. Gill and chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

Panja argued that the letter he had received from party general secretary Dinesh Trivedi on May 18 inviting him to attend today's

"emergency" meeting did not mention his recent acts and remarks. "So, if these were not on the agenda of the meeting, my removal does not stand," he added.

Convinced that Mamata was instrumental in his removal, Panja dubbed her "a whimsical and erratic dictator". "Morally, people have already removed Mamata from the post of the party's chairperson as they have voted against her," he added.

He also slammed Sudip. "Sudip was absconding soon after the elections and now he has reappeared on the scene. I feel a warrant of arrest should have been issued against him," Panja said.

He said the party should have issued a notice to him before taking action. "This removal is illegal," he added. However, Trinamul leaders claimed that the party was forced to punish Panja by irate legislators. "Ajitda has no right to criticise Mamata. As the partymen kept demanding Panja's removal from the post of chairman, Mamata gave in and left the matter to those present," said a Trinamul leader.

■ Picture on Page 9

THE TELEGRAPH

11 May 2004

# Return to NDA, MPs tell Mamata

By Malabika Bhattacharya

KOLKATA, MAY 19. The Trinamool Congress chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, is said to be under great pressure from party functionaries, especially the MPs, to reconsider a comeback to the NDA as they think that it was a far better bet than the Congress in West Bengal as reflected in the just-concluded Assembly elections. The Trinamool MPs, who met here last night at Ms. Krishna Bose's residence, told Ms. Banerjee that the results showed the party was wrong in severing links with the NDA.

Explaining, Mr. Ranjit Panja, Trinamool MP, also the party rebel Mr. Ajit Panja's brother, told a press conference today that the way the Congress had "backstabbed" the Trinamool in various constituencies, it was clear that forging an alliance with it was a great mistake. "We think the BJP was a better choice than the Congress."

Ms. Banerjee, who is still reeling under the impact of the electoral debacle, assured the six MPs who attended the meeting that she would give serious thought to returning to the NDA. Mr. Ajit Panja stayed away from the meeting as he had left for New Delhi, presumably to meet the BJP's central leadership about his

future course of action while Mr. Nitish Sengupta, the other MP, said that he could not make it because of his wife's indisposition.

Shaken by reports that at least five Trinamool MPs were readying themselves to quit the party in order to join the NDA, Ms. Banerjee hurriedly called a meeting of MPs to tell them to stay put and not to take a hasty decision.

She argued that before taking any drastic decision such as returning to the NDA, it was advisable to first study the situation especially the Congress' inclination towards the Leftists at the national level, the State Congress leaders' attitude towards the Trinamool in the coming days and the party's abilities to sustain the anti-Left campaign in Bengal.

It is well-known that Mr. Ajit Panja and a few other MPs including, Mr. Nitish Sengupta, Mr. Bikram Sirkar and Ms. Krishna Bose were toying with the idea of quitting the Trinamool to cross over to either the BJP or form a separate bloc of their own in the coming days. The BJP leadership had even assured ministerial berths to Mr. Panja and a few other MPs.

Sensing a change in Ms. Banerjee's attitude towards the NDA in the past few days, the MPs, save Mr. Panja, are said to have decided

to give Ms. Banerjee a little time to rethink her position vis-a-vis the NDA.

According to sources, the BJP leadership is also trying to figure out Ms. Banerjee's mind on the issue of supporting the NDA. If the Trinamool chief shows signs of softening her attitude towards the NDA, the BJP would not touch Mr. Panja and others for a while but wait for Ms. Banerjee to rejoin the NDA lock, stock and barrel.

## Panja flayed

PTI reports:

The meeting condemned Mr. Ajit Panja for deliberate defiance of the party directives and for issuing statements against the party's interests before and after the elections. Mr. Panja's attitude and activities were "highly unfortunate and reprehensible", Ms. Krishna Bose said.

## Panja meets Vajpayee

PTI reports from New Delhi:

Mr. Panja tonight called on the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and is said to have discussed the post-Assembly election scenario in West Bengal. The meeting lasted half-an-hour, sources said.

# Shiv Sena opposes ceasefire extension

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 21 MAY

THE NDA meeting on Monday saw the Shiv Sena opposing any further extension of the ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir. However, other allies of the BJP left the decision to the wisdom of the government, but said the issue should be handled cautiously.

The Sena, which has been opposing the ceasefire initiative, put forth its by-now-familiar political point — that there was need for sterner action against the jehadis. Although the allies of the government shared the demand for top-most priority on security issues, said the decision should take into account the recent violence in the Valley and the overall security situation in the border state.

On its part, the security agencies are not exactly inclined to an extension of ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir. They are of the view that since the government was allowing pro-active action against militants, the initiative could lose its sheen in western capitals.

The NDA meeting, which took stock of the political situation, also decided to firm up a concrete strategy for facing polls in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Uttar Pradesh is crucial for the government as an adverse verdict there could have

an ominous impact on the Vajpayee dispensation.

A revival of the NDA in Uttar Pradesh would mean that the BJP will have to network with fringe elements in the state.

While the polarised political situation in the state provides little elbow room, the attempt has to add more votes to its upper caste base.

In localised multi-cornered competition, community-based mobilisation could become the most effective strategy for vote gathering. The BJP is hopeful of major gains as such a context leaves parties like the Congress vulnerable to community-based rivals like the SP and BSP. In fact, they have created a space for themselves at the expense of the Congress.

Defence minister Jaswant Singh told reporters that NDA meeting was of the view that "the peace process should remain in place but there should be no let-up in the fight against terrorism."

Mr Singh, who had attended a meeting of the Unified Headquarters in Srinagar on Saturday along with home minister L.K Advani, said their views on the situation in Kashmir were conveyed to NDA partners and the advice of the allies on the peace process was sought.

*The Economic Times*

22 MAY 2001

# Rejoin NDA, party MPs urge Mamata

Arindam Sarkar  
Kolkata, May 20

AJIT PANJA is not alone. All the seven other Trinamool members of the Lok Sabha want Mamata Banerjee to go back to the NDA. They are apparently trying to convince her that the party should end the alliance with the Congress, since no good came of it in the election anyway.

Mamata reportedly is in favour of watching the political situation for a while before taking a decision. But her MPs want her to strike when the iron is hot: now is the time, they say, to mend fences with the BJP since the Samata Party is making hostile noises over the crisis in Manipur. Besides, the panchayat elections are due in a year-and-a-half.

The Trinamool leader holds a meeting of the party's national committee tomorrow. All her MPs will attend, except Rajya Sabha member Jayanta Bhattacharya, who says he was not invited. The two main agenda of the meeting reportedly are: the need to revitalise the organisation, and whether the party should return to the NDA. Ajit Panja, who has openly rebelled against Mamata's decision to leave the NDA, too has been invited.

Trinamool's national general secretary, Dinesh Trivedi, Mukul Roy, treasurer Tomonash Ghosh, members Dilip Mazumdar, Prasun Banerjee, Biman Banerjee will be present. Mayor Subrata Mukherjee, party president Subrata Bakshi, leader of the legislature party Pankaj Banerjee, Chief Whip, Sobhan Deb Chattopadhyay, deputy leader Ambica Banerjee will be there also.

Her MPs have been reportedly telling Mamata that the people of West Bengal had accepted the



## PRANAB SETS ORGANISATION ABOVE CHARISMA

AN INDIVIDUAL'S charisma in the absence of party organisation is not enough to win an election, Pranab Mukherjee told Congress legislators on Sunday. The PCC president did not mention Mamata Banerjee, but the reference was not lost. He made it clear also that the Congress would not blindly follow the Trinamool. **Detailed report on P4**

Trinamool-BJP combine as a valid alternative to the Left Front. The combine did fairly well in the 1999 general election.

A Trinamool MP, who did not want to be named, said: "At a meeting at Krishna Bose's home two days ago, all of us tried to convince Mamata that we should return to the NDA and back the Vajpayee Government. Otherwise, we won't be able to combat the State-sponsored terror in West Bengal. Most of our MPs are of the same view. Mamata, though, is non-committal. She somehow believes that her MPs are with her. This is political short-sightedness."

The MPs, along with other senior leaders, want Mamata to stop listening to Subrata Bakshi and Mukul Roy. These two, they believe, are at the root of the mischief and misled Mamata about the political situation.

Ajit Panja, who disapproved of snapping ties with the NDA from the beginning, said: "Even after the debacle Mamata has not taken any lesson. She has retained the same team. What's more she seems to be building a close coterie and a Brahmin lobby with city-based politicians from her own parliamentary constituency. There is no inner-party

democracy. Take for instance, the selection of the legislature party leader. She took all the decisions, and the meeting was only a façade. I firmly believe we are still with the NDA and are part of the alliance."

Bikram Sakar, who won the Panskura parliamentary constituency in a by-election that was largely seen as a mandate for Mamata, said: "Her aides and sycophants suffer from paranoia. They have their own personal agenda and are misleading Mamata. Unless things change, the party is doomed."

Jayanta Bhattacharya said he was not surprised at not being invited to tomorrow's meeting. "It was expected, because four months ago I opposed the party line and tried to give a true picture to Mamata. Since then I've been sidelined. Such things cannot go on and subsequently other MPs will face the same fate."

**BJP stand:** The BJP is not thinking of accepting Mamata Banerjee's party back in the NDA fold. "There is no such proposal," party general secretary Narendra Modi told reporters on the sidelines of the two-day session of party central office bearers in Mussourie on Sunday, reports PTI from Mussourie.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 MAY 2001

Ranjit Panja at a Press conference in the city on Saturday.

# Ranjit post-mortem blames hasty Congress alliance

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, May 19

TRINAMOOL MP Ranjit Panja is uncomfortable with rumours over his joining the NDA with a purpose. He came down all the way from Barasat to the Press Club today to clarify that he wasn't joining the BJP. Panja also shot down possibilities of his leaving the Trinamool Congress. He, however, agreed with his brother Ajit Panja that the Trinamool's pulling out of the NDA and its tie-up with the Congress was a major reason behind the party's debacle in the polls.

"I am neither joining the BJP nor do I have a motive to drive a split within the Trinamool Congress. But I feel that our pulling out of the NDA was a hasty decision. We couldn't take the new alliance with the Congress to the grassroots. Instead the new tie-up bred confusion among voters in my parliamentary constituency. We need to analyse the poll results and do some soul searching."

Panja was sceptical about the Trinamool going abruptly with the Congress. "The reason was to grab the 12 per cent votes that remained with the Congress still. But it didn't work. On the contrary, Congress activists spread over Badra to Barasat opposed the tie up from within. They voted for the CPI(M) also. The disgruntled stood as independents mainly to spoil the Bangla

## AJIT PANJA KEEPS THE GUESSING GAME GOING

Ajit Panja on Saturday met Prime Minister AB Vajpayee and Home Minister L K Advani. The meetings assume significance in the light of recent speculation about an impending split in the Trinamool and the likelihood of Panja being inducted into the Union Cabinet in the reshuffle exercise expected shortly.

Though he was not available for comment after the meeting with the PM, Panja had stated earlier that he was going to apprise Vajpayee and Advani about the post-poll violence unleashed on Trinamool and BJP workers in Bengal by CPI(M) cadres.

HTC, New Delhi

Bachao Front's prospects."

He argued that his party could have put up much better performance if it had stuck to the NDA. "Large sections of Muslims in my constituency had accepted the Trinamool though it was a member of the NDA family. They had accepted the Trinamool-BJP front as a credible alternative to the Left Front. The new alliance didn't work at least in my area."

Panja wasn't sure about the Trinamool Congress Parliamentary Committee's decision over

snapping ties with the NDA. "There was a verbal discussion about the pull out. But I am not sure whether our Chief Whip has conveyed it to the President or the Speaker of Parliament." Instead he maintained that the party Parliamentary Committee should sit together to carve out its future course. "We had a preliminary discussion yesterday where all the seven party MPs agreed to take a unanimous decision. Ajit Panja couldn't attend the meeting because he had flown to Delhi. Nitish Sengupta was absent because his wife was ill. Mamata listened to all of us and decided to call a review meeting after she compiled the results all over the State."

Asked about the Trinamool disaster, he said: "Red terror and rigging is a major factor. But that is not all. We can't ignore our organisational weaknesses, inner squabbles and lack of funds. It calls for an introspection before we choose our ally. And Ajit should have a say in the discussion."

Panja expected the Trinamool chief to thrash out "misunderstandings with Ajit Panja" and invite him to the next meeting.

True, Ajit Panja's tirade was embarrassing for the party, but it didn't affect the party's prospects, Ranjit Panja maintained. "But then dissent is a part and parcel of democracy. Ajit has said nothing that calls for disciplinary action."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 MAY 2001

# Panja waits for Atal's Cabinet call

Arindam Sarkar  
Kolkata, May 17

AJIT PANJA has made up his mind. He'll join the Union Cabinet if Atal Bihari Vajpayee wants him to.

And if one goes by what the Prime Minister said in his recent Kamarhati rally, the Trinamool Congress leader is likely to find a place in the Union ministry. The Prime Minister had referred to Panja as a former colleague, who might soon be a colleague again in future. A ministry reshuffle is likely in the first week of June.

"Technically, there's no docu-

ment which says that the Trinamool has withdrawn from the NDA. If Vajpayee asks me to join his Cabinet to serve the people, I would do so. I respect the man and will do whatever work he gives me. As for the other MPs, it's for them to decide," Panja told *Hindustan Times*.

Asked whether the charge that he had bitten the Cabinet-berth bait was true, he said: "I've been a minister for 17 years. When I first became a minister in 1971, Mamata was still in school. So was Sudip Bandopadhyay. They don't have the right to level such charges at me. What's the harm if I want to

be a minister? Doesn't Mamata dream of becoming Chief Minister some day? I certainly have the licence to join the Cabinet."

"The way things were going, I knew a disaster was staring the Trinamool in the face. Mamata and her coterie of sycophants are entirely to blame for this. She alone took all the decisions. And in her we have a person who doesn't have foresight and political sense. She disregarded senior leaders. So insecure was she that she didn't even trust her shadow. All through her campaign, she called Buddhadeb names. Not for once did she talk of policies. The party

organisation, rickety as it is, flopped," Panja said.

Describing the Trinamool's alliance with the Congress as "unholy", he said Mamata didn't realise that the Congress was out to sabotage her. "I warned her. And every time she told me, she understood everything. And, in the end, she went ahead and did what she wanted to. She ought to have realised that I know the Congress better than her. And even now, she's cutting a sorry figure, making baseless allegations against M S Gill. Let her accept defeat gracefully or else she and her party is doomed."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18/5

# Where the Opposition strategy failed

**T**RINAMUL Congress supporters, flag in hand and jubilant cries of victory, moved briskly in a procession along Harish Chatterjee Street.

The shouting reached its crescendo as they announced Buddhadev Bhattacharya's defeat near the residence of their party chief Mamata Banerjee on Sunday morning. Though "didi" had locked herself in, she probably heard them proclaim that her arch political rival had been made to bite the dust. That things turned out differently is another matter.

The incident is a pointer to the causes why the most formidable challenge to the 24-year Left Front rule remained a stillborn threat. The Trinamul workers were probably echoing many of their leaders who had lulled Miss Banerjee into a false sense of success.

Like their leaders, the Trinamul rank and file had placed Miss Banerjee on the chief minister's chair when she was not even within sniffing distance of Writers' Buildings.

No wonder, having lived in a house of cards of her own making, she remained in doors when the news of the defeat of party candidates poured in from all parts of West Bengal.

It was a rare moment of introspection for a general who had dispensed with her lieutenants.

Apparently, the reality of the disaster had not sunk in as she lashed out at the Election Commission the next day.

It never struck her that even a sizeable section of the urban middle class Kolkata voters who gave their franchise overwhelmingly in her party's favour in the parliamentary as well as civic elections last year, had opted for Left Front candidates.

Nor did her thinktank, grandiosely referred to as the

policy-making body (Niti Nirdharan Committee) dared suggest anything.

The suggestion of a probe into the cause of the debacle were shot down as Miss Banerjee blamed widespread terror tactics behind the Left Front's landslide victory.

Catchy it may have been, the slogan of *ulte din, palte din*, it did not go down well with the Bengali *bhadralok* who preferred a more sedate mode of change.

In fact, the *bhadralok* preferred to return to the red fold, if election results in the Shyampur, Entally, Jorabagan and Vidyasagar seats — all Trinamul bastions — are any indication.

Most of Miss Banerjee's campaign speeches were more of a stalling match than an outpouring of her political thoughts.

Reasons offered for overturning the Left Front, such as failures in the fields of health, education, industry and labour were not backed by statistics.

Her main slogan "*Hoy ebar noy never*" was more of an indication of her personal desperation to grab power than a desire to redress peoples' grievances.

A marked absence of collective leadership and its functioning spelt doom for the Trinamul's cause.

While Miss Banerjee campaigned round the state with the odd MP in tow, all her party stalwarts, be it the wily Subrata Mukherjee or the old workhorse Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay, were busy in their respective constituencies.

With front-ranking leaders like Mr Mukherjee, Mr Chattopadhyay and Pankaj Banerjee not leading the rank and file, those in the next rung of leadership like Jyotipriya Mallik, Subrata

Most of Mamata Banerjee's campaign speeches were in the form of a slanging match rather than an outpouring of her political thoughts.

Her reasons for the overthrow of the Left Front, such as failure in the fields of health, education, industry and labour were not backed by statistics. She was also lulled into a false sense of success, writes TIRTHANKAR MITRA



Trinamul Congress supporters in front of Mamata Banerjee's house at Harish Chatterjee Street on Sunday. — The Statesman

Chattopadhyay could have highlighted the Left Front's shortcomings, their absence lowered the voters' confidence that the Bangla Bachao Committee — comprising the Trinamul-Congress combine — could give them a better deal.

In a marked contrast to the Trinamul gameplan, the Left Front fielded all its big guns

during the campaign. Starting from the octogenarian Jyoti Basu to the greying ideologue Sitaram Yechuri, all joined ranks and fired broadsides at the Trinamul-Congress alliance.

In many places, committed voters felt assured and some of the floating voters were tempted to cast their vote in the Left Front's favour.

The Trinamul did not learn any lessons from the Left Front which is a master of election tactics.

No wonder, the Trinamul leadership did not point out the incongruity after Left Front candidates won by thumping margins in Khankul, Goghat, Kespur, Arambagh and Garbeta at a time when Opposition candidates won by slim margins in Kolkata and its suburbs.

The plus points which have emerged in Miss Banerjee's favour are the defeats of the candidates fielded by Adhir Choudhury in Mirshidabad and ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury in Malda.

The puncturing of the egos of these Congress satraps will ensure that the Congress-Trinamul alliance has a smooth progress, in the fallout of an election where the Trinamul-Congress combine is likely to be unhealthy for the body politic of the state.

Especially after Miss Banerjee indicated that it would be tit for tat in the Assembly sessions.

Scenes reminiscent of the Uttar Pradesh and Bihar assemblies are likely to be witnessed in West Bengal.

Given the Trinamul's record of conducting agitations which some how fail to be translated into mass movements, the Left Front will have enough ammunition to discredit an upbeat Opposi-

tion. But then the present Opposition hardly is numerically superior to the one which opposed the Left Front in 1996.

But the Treasury Benches may have to suffer sleepless nights as the ministers will now have the twin task of passing bills and matching the Opposition's lung power.

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

Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee with newly elected legislators in Kolkata on Tuesday. — API/PTI

WEDNESDAY, MAY 16, 2001

## MAMATA'S ANTICS

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THE TRINAMOOL CONGRESS chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, is at it again. It may be true that the stormy petrel from West Bengal is known for her penchant for hurling insinuations at persons holding office. But then, the accusations against the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), Dr. M. S. Gill, in the wake of her party's poor showing in the polls, are only a reflection of a tendency that is clearly inimical to the spirit of democracy. That Ms. Banerjee refuses to resist the temptation to reduce political debates to street brawls is indeed a cause for concern. And more so when she fails to distinguish between political adversaries and persons holding Constitutional office — the CEC this time. She may be wanting to salvage the sinking morale of her party cadre. It is only natural for the Trinamool Congress chief to feel lost after the crushing defeat of her party in the State Assembly polls. Far from making it to Writers Building, the Trinamool Congress-Congress(I) combine even failed to muster enough support to emerge into a strong opposition to the Left Front in the new Assembly. But then, she needs to learn the art of accepting defeat and to identify her own shortcomings rather than looking for conspiracies all the time.

Such a poor show after all the hype — the poll eve alliance between Ms. Banerjee and Ms. Sonia Gandhi's party in the State was seen as having the strength to give the ruling combine a close fight — could not but have shaken Ms. Banerjee. And the Trinamool Congress chief was even otherwise not known for being courteous to her political adversaries. But then, the allegations against the CEC — that Dr. Gill was party to a conspiracy hatched by the Central Government — are just absurd to say the least. And her complaint that Dr. Gill refused to get back to her even after the several messages she sent on polling day is hardly anything. The CEC cannot be blamed for holding meetings with his officials (and not entertaining her telephone calls) on the day when voting was taking place in four States. Such outbursts after losing in elections and

charging the CEC with having conspired against her party do not reflect any sense of responsibility that one could expect from someone who has put in long years in public life and also held responsible positions in the Union Cabinet. Ms. Banerjee's statements cannot but invite ridicule and it is time that her camp followers in the Trinamool Congress as well as those in the Congress(I) high command (for the party is still with Ms. Banerjee in West Bengal) make it known to her that such theatrics will do no good. The Congress(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, will have to distance herself from the stormy petrel's ways in no uncertain terms. And unless Ms. Banerjee learns to take electoral reverses in her stride, she will have to reconcile herself to the idea of fading out from public life.

Be that as it may, the political leadership of the NDA, including the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, too will have to share the blame for Ms. Banerjee's intemperate remarks. After all, the Trinamool chief was encouraged by them, on several occasions in the past, to carry on with such theatrics. The manner in which the NDA as a platform stood by her when she went about abusing those in power in West Bengal during the past couple of years could only have encouraged the Trinamool chief to resort to more such theatrics. As for instance, Ms. Banerjee's decision (twice between September 1999 and April 2001) to publicise her resignation from the Union Cabinet was tolerated by Mr. Vajpayee and others in the NDA. Similarly, the NDA's convenor, Mr. George Fernandes, was willing to air-dash to Kolkata to please the Trinamool chief. The intemperate remarks by Ms. Banerjee are only a fallout of these. It is another matter that the Trinamool chief has chosen Mr. Vajpayee and his colleagues in the NDA as the targets. One would expect the leaders of the various parties within the NDA as well as those in the Congress (I) to come out firmly and convey to Ms. Banerjee that the theatre of the absurd will have to close.

THE HINDU

16 MAY 2001



# Mamata oath to skip swearing-in

BY OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, May 15: If you can't beat 'em, don't join 'em. First came the offer to resign as her party's chairperson, then came the vitriolic attack on chief election commissioner M.S. Gill; today, Mamata Banerjee said her legislators will boycott the swearing-in of the new Left Front government at Raj Bhavan on Friday.

"This government has not come to power through a free and fair poll. It is terrorism which has emerged victorious. We are not going to attend the swearing-in ceremony of such a Cabinet," Mamata said after a meeting with Trinamul legislators and other functionaries at Maharashtra Nivas this afternoon. Over 40 MLAs attended the meeting.

1673  
The Chhatra Parishad, the Congress' student-wing, has decided to observe a "black day" on the day the new ministry is sworn in. Though an official decision is yet to be taken, it is unlikely that Congress legislators will attend the function.

After the meeting at Maharashtra Nivas, Mamata announced that Pankaj Banerjee, legislator from Tollygunge and chairman of the party's policy-making body, will be the leader of the Trinamul Legislature Party. Ambica Banerjee, MLA from Howrah (Central) will be the deputy leader and Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay, legislator from Rashbehari, has been named the chief whip.

Jatu Lahiri, another Howrah legislator, has been appointed treasurer and Kalyan Banerjee, MLA from Asansol, will be the

secretary.

At the meeting, the names of four party MLAs — Subrata Mukherjee, Sougata Roy, Nirmal Ghosh and former IAS officer Dipak Ghosh — were suggested for chairing the different House panels like the Public Accounts Committee and the Assurances Committee. The chairmanship of one of the committees is likely to be offered to the Congress.

Trinamul MLAs who attended the meeting said that unlike yesterday, Mamata's mood was better today. "We are a three-year-old party. From three MLAs in the Assembly, we have increased our tally to over 60. Is it not an achievement? We will improve our position in the future. If our present position does not suit anyone, he or she is free to join any other political party like the BJP or the

CPM," Mamata asserted.

She also told the legislators that it would be wrong to say that Trinamul's dismal performance was because of organisational weakness. "State-sponsored terrorism was totally responsible for the poor showing," she is learnt to have said.

Apart from chairing the legislators' meet, Mamata stayed indoors at her Kalighat residence. She briefly came out to attend her cubby-hole office around 1.30 pm to meet several MLAs, especially those from South 24-Parganas where Trinamul performed well.

Trinamul sources said that a number of supporters who fled their villages in Bankura, Hooghly and Midnapore visited Mamata. She met the people, who alleged that they had fled fearing attacks by CPM activists.

THE TELEGRAPH

16 MAY 2001

# Mamata: Centre and poll panel conspired to defeat us

9- P. P. T. M. C. (M.S.)

## STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 14. — The Centre had joined hands with the election commission to defeat the Trinamul in West Bengal because it wanted to teach the party a lesson for pulling out of the NDA, Miss Mamata Banerjee said today.

"It was evident from the election commission's attitude that it was playing a very partisan role. The Centre had manipulated Mr MS Gill. He'll retire shortly and may get a plum post after that. This was done deliberately because I had left the NDA. But rest assured I'm not going back," Miss Banerjee said in his first reaction to her party's debacle.

She attributed the Left



Miss Mamata Banerjee addresses a press conference at her residence in Kolkata on Monday. — The Statesman

## GEORGE'S NDA OFFER

PATNA, May 14. — If Miss Mamata Banerjee wants to rejoin the NDA, the alliance will consider the proposal, Mr George Fernandes said today.

The NDA convenor congratulated Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya on his victory and said the alliance would cooperate with the Left parties in running the state. He said Miss Mamata Banerjee could have won the state polls had she remained with the NDA. — UNI

state. Trinamul has won the Dum Dum and Rajarhat seats in Mr Tapan Sikdar's constituency. The party has also won

Nakasipara which is in the constituency of Mr Satyabrata Mukherjee (another BJP MP and Union minister). We have bagged two seats in Assam too." She said her alliance with the Congress will continue. The PCC president, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, who had been to her home this morning confirmed this.

Asked if her "organisational failure" was responsible for Trinamul's debacle, Miss Banerjee said her organisation had worked fine where people were allowed to vote freely. "Our organisation has worked well in Satgachia, Bishnupur East and West, and Behala East and West where the party has defeated sitting CPI-M MLAs.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee, chairman of Trinamul's policy making committee, said the party members today held a meeting and requested Miss Banerjee not to resign from the chairman's post. "At this moment we need her most and we'll continue to fight under her leadership." The MLAs would sit tomorrow to draw the future course of action.

**Chhoto Anguria witness:** Abdul Bakhtar Mondol, prime witness to the alleged Chhoto Anguria massacre, today came to Miss Banerjee's home with his family alleging they were driven out of Garbeta last night by CPI-M cadres. Trinamul workers in Garbeta were being beaten up by CPI-M cadres, Mondol alleged.

THE STATESMAN

## 1-10 RETURN OF SHE 15/5 9 P.P. AIADMK

The triumph of Ms J. Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu may lead to nervous speculation about what makes a leader. A close call could have, perhaps, been understood, given the well-worn anti-incumbency factor and various kinds of disillusion with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government headed by Mr M. Karunanidhi. But the magnificence of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's victory puts paid to pedestrian musings. If the results of the assembly elections in Kerala show the healthy face of the democratic process, there is no doubt that the results in Tamil Nadu show the unhealthiest. If a convicted criminal is welcomed back to rule a state with such an indisputable mandate that she immediately claims for herself the chief minister's chair, there is something rank in popular opinion. On the face of it, the democratic process here is functioning with the same vibrancy as in Kerala. Tamil Nadu bundled Ms Jayalalitha out in the 1996 assembly elections, amid accusations of abuse of power, corruption, misrule, indifference to the poor and actual crime. That she was set free in the "television scandal" case could not have made much difference to perceptions about her moral character, since it was her conviction in the Tansi land case that prevented her from contesting the elections this time. What is now being proposed is preposterous, that a convicted person should become chief minister, thumbing her nose at the law of the land and at all decency in political and civic life.

It is not enough to attribute the AIADMK's win to the "sympathy factor" or to the success of Ms Jayalalitha's "misinformation campaign". It may be true that Mr Karunanidhi is seen as corrupt too, and his projection of his son, Mr M.K. Stalin, as the next leader did not help his image. But what is alarming is the people's defiance of the courts. It shows a depth of contempt for the judicial system and a cynical disregard of corruption in the form of personal aggrandizement that expose a terrible failure of political administration, culture and morality over the years. Add to this Tamil Nadu's passionate love for whatever is larger than life, Mr Karunanidhi's insecure handling of his allies which led the Tamil Maanila Congress and the Pattali Makkal Katchi to throw in their lot with the AIADMK, his sudden preference for caste-based parties, his inability to stem discontent among the poor when prices of essential goods rose through a ripple effect of Central policies — and there is suddenly a topsy-turvy world. It is enormously important to see that this topsy-turvyism does not come to pass. It is bad enough that Mr R. Balakrishna Pillai was allowed to contest in Kerala in spite of criminal conviction. To compound the error would ring the death knell for any effort to clean the political arena of corruption.

THE TELEGRAPH

# We didn't have enough time, say PDS leaders

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, May 14

SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHURY'S dream of a "straight, right path" as equidistant from the Left and the Rightist camps may have gone haywire in terms of mathematical numbers, but the dreamer is convinced there's nothing wrong in dreaming "right."

That the political debacle of the Party for Democratic Socialism in Assembly 2001 polls had nothing to do with his selection of the "right path" — in other words, the policies of his party — shorn off the conservatism, orthodoxy and the totalitarianism of the Left, was made absolutely clear in course of Chowdhury's conversation.

Where does the PDS stand now after the people's absolute mandate for the Left? "Still on the

right path," Chowdhury maintained.

Saifuddin is confident of not only the bearing factor but the political correctness to have the PDS as the "right critique" of the Left policies.

Looking back to the fate of the critiques in the Left camp, the prominent being Subhas Chakrabarty and Kshiti Goswami, (the former barely made it and the latter could not), the PDS's future as a reviewer of the Left policies is of suspect.

Wasn't there an ample indication of it this election? In all the seats the party contested, except for Mozammel Haque from Murshidabad, no other PDS candidate could reach the five-figure number in terms of votes. The number of votes in the PDS kitty ranged between 299 in Hanchkhali to 15,748 in Murshid-

abad, with most candidates veering around the 3,000-5,000 mark.

The leaders to bag a decent number of votes after Haque were Subhas Bose from Chakdah (7,500) and Satyen Ray from Haringhata (5,000). Saifuddin Chowdhury himself got 4,900 votes from Nadanghat, despite there being a "strong current in his favour" and Samir Putatunda got 1,800 from Jadavpur.

If anything went wrong for the PDS, it was the timing — the time of the launch just a few months before the polls. The time was not right. In fact, premature to expect anything from the PDS, Chowdhury said.

The time was ripe for a change. People were looking for a "better alternative" to the Left Front, the PDS leader said. But, people were definitely not looking up to Mamata and her party

as an alternative, leave aside the question of being better, Chowdhury asserted.

In the absence of the alternative that the people were looking for, the Left's kitty went on swelling. An anti-Opposition vote swing was responsible for the comfortable majority for the Left, a fact admitted by both Chowdhury and Putatunda.

"People were not willing to take chances by wasting their votes on the less winnable candidates. The voting pattern was determined by the fact, whom the people wanted to win and consequently to lose. Naturally, the PDS, not being a winnable horse, had nobody to rally for or against it.

"Even many of our supporters and workers voted for Buddhadeb, just to make sure that Trinamool stays out of the race,"

said Putatunda.

This time, there was a sharp polarisation of votes either for or against incumbency, for or against change and it was decided that forces trying to strike a middle path, both in terms of its policies and winning chances, would not stand a chance. This bitter truth dawned on the PDS leaders on the eleventh hour, Putatunda said.

But, striking out the PDS from voting options as of now does not mean striking out the party from the political map altogether.

The feedback the PDS leaders claim to have received during election campaigns were exceptionally encouraging. An atmosphere has been created for acceptance, Putatunda said.

"We've been accepted as a theoretical alternative, but the practical work of building up an

organisation and reaching out the party's message to one and all needs to be done," Chowdhury said in a desperate attempt to establish the theory part of the party is flawless.

Then, what went wrong? "We did not get enough time to reach out to one and all. We entered the election fray without even getting the time to organise ourselves and consolidate our strength. There were many booths, where we could not even send our agents," Putatunda said.

This was just the beginning, the PDS is hoping to strike back in the coming elections. And, if one thought Mamta's catchline "ebar nahole never" had lost all steam, Chowdhury and Putatunda would rather make them believe in the better late than never theory.

# Mamata man opts out of <sup>HT</sup> Keshpur race <sup>9/5</sup>

## Trinamool office attacked in Tiljala

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, May 7

TRINAMOOL'S candidate in Keshpur Rajani Doloi today faxed a message to the Chief Election Commissioner saying he was pulling out of the contest in protest against administrative inability to ensure security for his supporters and stop the threats that they have been facing.

Coming a day after the nomination process ended, Doloi's move has no practical implications. The last date for withdrawal of nominations was on April 26, and scrutiny of all nominations was completed yesterday.

CEO Sabyasachi Sen said that "technically", Doloi remains a candidate. The CEO asserted that Doloi had been provided security. More Central forces have been deployed in Keshpur and an observer has been posted just for the seat. "We have told Doloi that he should give us a list of people who he says are in makeshift camps. I have instructed the DM to ask these people if they want to return home. If they don't, they will be provided police escort on the polling day."

At a meeting with the Panskura MP, Bikram Sarkar, and District Magistrate MV Rao on Saturday, Doloi had complained of the harassment his supporters were facing and expressed unhappiness at the district administration's "lack of concern". Sen had said then that the EC would investigate the complaints case by case. Doloi was asked to report specific cases. The CEO was especially concerned over Doloi's complaint that people who attended his meeting were being threatened.

Doloi met Rao again this afternoon, Sen said. "It is not just

Keshpur, we have many other sensitive areas in the district. It is not feasible, given the number of policemen we have, to post armed guards in all poll booths in Keshpur," the CEO said.

Other Trinamool candidates in Midnapore have been complaining of harassment by CPI(M) cadres. Mrinal Kanti Das, candidate from Patashpur, said yesterday he and his supporters were out campaigning when CPI(M) workers attacked them.

The party's district secretary, Sisir Adhikari, told a Press conference at Midnapore town today that Jyotirmoy Kar, Trinamool candidate in Contai (North), was also attacked while canvassing with his supporters in Nilpur, Siulibar and Beldanga.

Trinamool candidates in and around Kolkata also had complaints against the CPI(M). Sujit Bose, contesting from Belgachia (East), alleged that the CPI(M) was out to make mischief in Salt Lake.

The Trinamool office at Tiljala in Sonarpur constituency was ransacked last night. The party candidate in the seat, Nirmal Chandra Mondal, has lodged a complaint with the CEO blaming CPI(M) cadres for the attack. The CEO has ordered an inquiry.

The men who ransacked the Trinamool office, reportedly led by a local extortionist called Ganesh Bar, attacked the home of a rival gang leader Babloo Dalui on the same night. Babloo, once close to Ganesh, recently swore allegiance to the Trinamool.

The CPI(M) had complaints too. Its State secretary Anil Biswas told the CEO that Trinamool supporters had attacked a CPI(M) candidate, Jyotin Roy, in Jalpaiguri district.

# PM flashes Panja comeback signal

## Vajpayee predicts doom for Trinamool-Congress alliance

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, May 6

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee today predicted the Trinamool-Congress alliance's doom in Bengal, with rebel Trinamool leader Ajit Panja nodding in assent. Vajpayee was addressing a poll rally at Belghoria on the northern outskirts of the city.

Greeting Panja as a "former colleague, who might soon be a future colleague", Vajpayee shook hands with him. Panja reciprocated, saying, "I'm not alone. There are other leaders, MPs and MLAs with me." There were many Trinamool-banner waving Panja supporters at the rally. Vajpayee said, "The Congress is a sinking boat. Whoever jumps on board, will go down with it." He wondered if it was necessary at all to revive the party. If the Trinamool-Congress combine were voted in, it would be like being thrown from frying pan to fire. The CPI(M) itself had been a big enough disaster, he added.

"The youth of Bengal is leaving the State in droves. Industrialists are shying away. Under the present dispensation, I see no hope at all for this State. Things

have to change. There is no dearth of resources and talent. All you need is a forward-looking, dynamic Government," the Prime Minister said. "We would have changed the face of Bengal had the Trinamool stayed in the NDA. It's a pity it left," he added. He lavished praise on Panja for attending the rally.

Panja kept his guns firmly trained on Pranab Mukherjee and Harkishan Singh Surjeet. "They formed a clique and misled Mamata Banerjee. They are out to destroy her career," he said. Mamata, he said, had committed a Himalayan blunder by leaving the NDA to join hands with the Congress. Then he broke into a song, which said: "Mamata, my leader" would "ultimately have to admit that she made a mistake."

"Vajpayeeji has been extremely nice to us. He was all support for the Bengal Package. If implemented, the package would have worked wonders for the State. He was always ready to give us a patient hearing whenever we met him with our problems," Panja said. Blasting the Trinamool leadership, he said, "We had pledged to fight the polls under Vajpayeeji's leadership. Whatever happened to that pledge?" Mamata's decision to leave the NDA was motivated. "It was to rake in the minority votes that she left the alliance," he said.

Vajpayee, who spoke a few words in Bangla, before switching back to chaste Hindi, said: "For now, we will play the role of a constructive Opposition. But Mark my word, the Left and the Congress are both spent forces. Why revive the Congress? Bid them goodbye and show the communists the door. Your alternative lies in the NDA."



Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Ajit Panja share a dias at Belghoria on Sunday.

PABITRA DAS, HINDUSTAN TIMES

### VAJPAYEESPEAK

ATAL BIHARI Vajpayee on Saturday sidestepped questions on Mamata Banerjee's re-entry into the NDA, saying the matter might be given a thought after the polls. "Chunao hone do. Uskey baad dekha jayega (let the election be over. After that, we may look into it)," he replied when asked if the NDA's doors were open for Mamata's re-entry. PTI

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 MAY 2001

# Made for each other

Sonia-Mamata ties epitomise politics without principles

THE photographs, splashed across front pages of national dailies, tell an incomplete story. They frame a smiling Congress president with a smiling Trinamool Congress chief, waving together to the crowds at the duo's first joint rally in the first leg of their joint campaign for West Bengal. But despite the happy-to-be-together-again visuals and the ringing rhetoric about the partnership freeing a hapless West Bengal from the Marxists' yoke on that podium at Kharagpur in Midnapore district, something is amiss. As the countdown begins for the May 10 polls, there are indications that there may be more to that cheerful twosome in West Bengal than meets the eye.

Some telling signals can be decoded from what the two leaders said, and did not say, at Kharagpur on Thursday. It is surely not incidental that while Sonia Gandhi trained her guns on the BJP and brought in Tehelka in her 10-minute oration, Mamata Banerjee maintained a loud silence on the NDA. Any reference, direct or indirect, to her former allies was conspicuously absent in the Trinamool chief's speech. Seen together with Mamata's failure thus far to communicate to either the President or the Lok Sabha speaker about her decision to part ways with the NDA, the suspicion is inevitable: Banerjee is obviously keeping her options open with the NDA till after the Assembly results are out. Should she fail to win Bengal, the Trinamool chief may yet scurry back into the ruling pact at the Centre, the one she had flounced out of with such righteous post-Tehelka indignation just a few weeks ago. This obvious dissonance in their relative positioning vis-a-vis the BJP is not the only point of di-

vergence between the new partners either. Notably, in her speech, Sonia was compelled to contest Didi's oft-repeated charge that the West Bengal Congress had never made any effort to launch a serious campaign against the Communists over the past 24 years, that it was the Marxists' B-team. Despite the evidence that the Congress' equations with the Left have soured at the national level because of its alliance with the Trinamool, doubts clearly persist in the Trinamool about the earnestness of a Sonia-led Congress' charge against the Left Front in Bengal. Last but definitely not the least, the Congress-Trinamool relationship is clouded by prominent sulks within both parties. In the Trinamool, while Ajit Panja has openly expressed unhappiness over Mamata Banerjee's decision to leave NDA and team up with the Congress, others are only more muted in their dissent. As for the Congress, a Prarab Mukherjee-led pack in the faction-ridden West Bengal Pradesh Congress has made no secret of its unease with accepting Mamata Banerjee as supreme leader in the state, and at what it sees as the party High Command's abject surrender to its rebel.

Clearly, all is not hunky dory in the coming together of the Congress and the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and attractive photo-ops will not be enough to paper over the chasms within. In the coming days, it may prove difficult for Sonia and Mamata to keep up the appearances of a happy family and to pretend that there is more to the alliance than one party's desperate attempt to hold on to its meagre footholds in the state it lost decades ago and the other's single-minded pursuit of the right arithmetic to capture it.

INDIAN EXPRESS

5 MAY 2007

## Party MP differs with Mamata on NDA ties

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 3. — Mr Nitish Sengupta, Trinamul Congress MP, today said the party would decide after the polls whether it still technically remains within the NDA.

Mr Sengupta's comments, at a press conference here, indicated his heart is for the NDA, but unlike Mr Ajit Panja, he lacks the courage to confess it.

Mr Sengupta called the press meet to discuss West Bengal's "political situation". He narrated the "reign of terror unleashed by the CPI-M" in Midnapore, Bankura and Hooghly districts.

Asked about Mr Panja's statement that the Trinamul is still with the NDA, Mr Sengupta said: "That's Mr Panja's individual perspective. I've no comments." But what is his perspective? "The issue of Trinamul's ties with the NDA will be after the elections".

But did not Miss Mamata Banerjee say that the issue had been settled? His reply: "Well, I said the issue will be decided later".

He said Mr Panja's decision to share a platform with Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee was his "personal choice".

Will he do the same if invited? "I would have politely turned down the invitation".

THE STATESMAN

3-5-83



# Compulsions force Mamata into silence



Saugata Roy  
Kolkata, April 30

AJIT PANJA has been going at the Trinamool Congress all guns blazing, but all he has managed to draw from Mamata Banerjee is a deafening silence. Why? Every other day, he urges "uncompromising Didi to be her original self", yet Mamata says nothing, for the last thing she wants now is a poll martyr breathing down her neck.

There could be another reason for her silence. Some suggest that Mamata's actually waiting for the polls to get over. She would then be able to gauge the impact of the tie-up between the Trinamool and the Congress. Only if it clicks, will she take Panja on. If it doesn't, she might return to the NDA.

The conjecture isn't without substance. For, the Trinamool Parliamentary Committee hasn't formally conveyed its decision to "snap ties with the NDA" to the Lok Sabha Speaker yet. Trinamool MPs still haven't shifted out of the Treasury Benches.

When Panja wrote to the Speaker recently stating that he was still with the

NDA, party chief whip Sudip Bandyopadhyaya didn't come clear on his party's stand. Neither did he refute Panja's claim that the Trinamool hadn't even informed the Prime Minister about the pull out decision. Again, Mamata has nothing to say on the issue.

There is now speculation that Panja might join the BJP after Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to the city. There is also talk of former bureaucrats Nitish Sengupta and Bikram Sarkar pitching their lot with Panja even before the polls are over.

The man himself rules out any such possibility, perhaps because he doesn't have enough support among party MPs to engineer a split. Besides, he sees no reason to go for the final break as long as the party gives him the long rope. He would much rather continue making disturbing noises and rake up contentious issues. The idea is to mobilise opinion within the party to dump the Congress.

Panja has targeted the Congress-Trinamool alliance, not Mamata. "I still admire her. I understood that Mamata would have the final say on selection of

candidates. But this didn't happen. Instead, what I feared has come true. The political eclipse, I had warned against, is complete now: that Mamata has inked the Common Minimum Programme." The veteran parliamentarian is only too keen to rescue his leader and bring her back to normal self.

The BJP top brass in Delhi, it seems, is keen to win the Trinamool back. This was clear when HRD Minister Murlidhar Joshi said his party's priority was to defeat the Marxists. Unlike his colleague, Tapan Sikdar, BJP vice-president Kailashpati Mishra too had swallowed Mamata's last minute ditch saying she had fallen prey to a Congress-CPI(M) conspiracy.

The BJP has made it clear that it will continue with its tie-up with the Trinamool in civic bodies such as Calcutta Municipal Corporation, municipalities and the panchayats. The Trinamool chief has reciprocated, deliberately focusing her attack on the Left and not saying a word against the BJP. Signals such as these leave scope for speculation on a post-poll patch up.

Mamata herself is bound by her own

compulsions. She knows that she can't dislodge the Left Front without minority support. And the perception is that a large section of Muslims still have faith in the Congress.

She isn't willing to snap ties with the NDA either, but can't spell it out because of Congress pressure. That possibly explains the indulgence she gives Panja, even when he says the Trinamool is with the NDA.

The rebel Trinamool leader knows of it. He, therefore, keeps the Prime Minister in good humour, as if to keep the ground ready for the homecoming.

The Trinamool chief is aware of the anti-Congress sentiment within her party. She had a feel of it during the meeting of the Trinamool Policy Making Body at Sudip Bandyopadhyaya's residence on April 17. Subrata Mukherjee was unhappy over her the signing off from the NDA Government, let alone MPs such as Ranjit Panja, Nitish Sengupta, Bikram Sarkar and Krishna Basu. Their displeasure is quite evident from their absence in the poll campaign when their party goes for the most crucial polls.

# Mamata will rejoin NDA after polls: Panja

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, April 29

AJIT PANJA said today that the Trinamool leadership was lying about having quit the NDA Government. It was fishing for minority votes but would rejoin the NDA once the polls were over. "They claim the party has come out of the NDA alliance, but the fact remains it has not. They want the votes and then join the alliance after the polls. This is hoodwinking and back-stabbing the minority community."

Contrary to party's claims, no letter on snapping links with the NDA had been sent to the Lok Sabha Speaker, he asserted.

"I have checked with the Speaker's office. There has been no such letter. The Prime Minister will soon be here in the city. Ask him if he has got any letter. The letter sent him on March 15th did not convey the party's decision to quit the alliance," the rebel Trinamool leader said.

Panja said if this indeed was the party's strategy, it was a dangerous one. "The weaker sections

depend on us. I have seen this myself. Now we can't turn our backs on them like this."

Twelve days after making his grievances public, Panja said he had still not come to terms with the Trinamool's tie-up with "the CPI (M)'s B-team". However, ruling out quitting the Trinamool, he said, "Where will I go? I had a major role in formation of this party. It's my baby."

He said he could campaign for any Trinamool candidate, but only on condition that he would be allowed to speak on issues he

had raised at various meetings. He said he had reservations about Sadhan Pande, Trinamool nominee for Burtolla, and Somen Mitra, Congress candidate for Sealdah. "I have told my boys to work for all Trinamool candidates in my constituency, but not Pande. He doesn't deserve it."

On his meeting with the Prime Minister in Delhi, Panja said he had one-to-one discussions on a number of issues. "We discussed national politics and the ensuing polls in five States, especially in West Bengal."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 APR 2001

# Panja takes his battle with Mamata to Delhi

HT Correspondents  
Kolkata & New Delhi, April 28

AJIT PANJA today called on Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Union Home Minister L K Advani and reiterated his support to the NDA Government from outside, thus distancing himself from Mamata Banerjee, who is yet to convey the Trinamool's stand on the Government in the Lok Sabha.

Asked why he called on Advani when he had clarified his stand to Lok Sabha Speaker G M C Balayogi, Panja said: "Advani seemed confused about our party's stand following the confusing statements from the Trinamool Chief Whip. I told him the party adopted only one resolution on April 15 and it called for strengthening the PM's hands. There was no resolution to quit the NDA."

Later, Panja held talks with Vajpayee over the much-touted Bengal Package, which finds no mention in the Congress-Tri-

namool common minimum programme. "The PM asked me about the status of the package. I told him that it had been put on the backburner. He was ready to help me out when I promised that I would like to carry it out."

Panja's meeting with Advani has set abuzz speculation of a new alignment within the Trinamool. Party insiders believe he is trying to emerge as the rallying point for grassroots workers unhappy over the tie-up with the Congress. Instead of joining the BJP, he is keen to mount pressure from within to dump the Congress. His meeting with Vajpayee is aimed at sending the signal to closet rebels that he enjoys the confidence of the PM.

Trinamool leaders are in a bind over Panja. With the polls round the corner, they can't afford to purge him, but can't look the other way either. "We all respect Ajitda. The party should listen to his grievances. But I would expect that he wouldn't do anything to

put the party in a spot," said Shobhandeb Chattopadhyay.

Panja refuses to admit he is damaging the Trinamool's poll prospects. "I apprised Advani how cadres have been rigging the polls. As he is the Home Minister, I urged him to deploy additional forces. Is this anti-party activity?"

His revolt has brought visible cheers in the State BJP circles, particularly among followers of Tapan Sikdar, who is learnt to have played a key role in fixing Panja's meeting with the PM. For the State unit, the immediate priority is to ensure that Panja attends Vajpayee's proposed poll rally in Kolkata on May 5.

"It will be a moral victory for us and will put pressure on Mamata. Mamata has to take a stand on the issue or face desertions in the Trinamool ranks," said State BJP vice-president Muzaffar Khan.

But former Chief Minister S S Ray maintains that Panja should have resigned as Trinamool MP before airing his dissent.

# BJP will invite Panja to Vajpayee's rally in city

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, April 26

THE BJP has decided to invite Ajit Panja at the Prime Minister's May 5 meeting in Kolkata in deference to the dissident Trinamool MP's wish.

BJP State President Asim Ghosh said today that a formal invitation would be sent soon to Panja. "He expressed his wish publicly during talks with the electronic media and we have decided to honour his sentiments", Ghosh said. Asked if they would invite other Trinamool leaders as well, he said it would be done if they too wanted to be with the PM.

The State BJP said apart from the Kolkata meeting, the venue of which had not been decided, the PM would address a meeting at Malda. Union Home Minister LK Advani, too, would spend a couple of days in West Bengal as part of the party's election campaign and address public meetings in Midnapore, Rampurhat and some other places, he added.

Union Human Resources Minister Murl Manohar Joshi would come over to the State and hold meetings in the Joynagar, Dum Dum and Calcutta North West constituencies. Information and Broadcasting Minister Sushma Swaraj would spend three days between May 2 and 4, campaign-

ing in the State and address meetings at Balurghat, Kumargunj, Dhupguri and other north Bengal areas besides Nadia and Bankura.

Other prominent leaders joining the campaign would include Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Rajnath Singh, Jharkhand Chief Minister Babulal Marandi, Bhairon Singh Shekawat, Rita Verma, Sumitra Mahajan and film stars Shatrughan Sinha and Vinod Khanna. Gosh said that NDA leaders like George Fernandez, Nitish Kumar and Ram Vilas Paswan would address meetings in constituencies where the Samata Party and other allies were in the fray.

Ghosh said that the BJP had changed its nominee for the Shibpore seat in Howrah, which would be contested by local party leader Prabir Roy. The candidature of party nominees in several seats like Vidyasagar in Kolkata, Bhagabanpur in Midnapore and Gaighata had been cancelled during scrutiny. The electorate in these constituencies would be urged to vote according to their conscience, he said.

The BJP, he said, would contest in all 269 seats in this election. Occasional discords in a party as big as the BJP were unavoidable, but these were being sorted out through discussions, Ghosh said.



AJIT PANJA: A LUCKY BREAK?

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 APR 2001

# Injustice done to me, says Jayalalitha

By S. Vijay Kumar

**MADURAI, APRIL 26.** The acceptance of the nomination papers of former Minister and sitting MLA, Mr. Balakrishna Pillai, in Kerala was a clear indication that injustice had been rendered to her, according to the AIADMK leader, Ms. Jayalalitha.

Talking to reporters here before leaving for Coimbatore, Ms. Jayalalitha said the question whether the candidate was a sitting MLA or not was irrelevant.

"Mr. Balakrishna Pillai was convicted and sentenced to five years rigorous imprisonment. That is the point which has to be considered when accepting or rejecting a nomination. The question of being a sitting MLA or MP will arise only when the issue of arrest is concerned. That has nothing to do with filing a nomination for a new election," she noted.

Describing herself as a "victim of injustice", she said the officials in Kerala were not forced to reject the nominations of candidates unlike in Tamil Nadu, where she alleged the Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, had himself "threatened" officials of dire con-

sequences. "Now, I am seeking justice from the people," she said.

Parrying questions on how she would proceed further, Ms. Jayalalitha said her legal advisers were looking into the legal remedies. Would she obtain a stay against conducting elections in the four Assembly constituencies where her nomination papers had been rejected? "I have no intention to stall the elections," she said adding she was concentrating on taking the AIADMK and its allies to victory.

Ms. Jayalalitha, who claimed that her allies had expressed their support to her, said she was proud of her party cadre for abiding by her request not to indulge in any violence.

The AIADMK treasurer and Dindigul MP, Mr. C. Seenivasan, said telegrams had been sent to the Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. M. S. Gill, pointing to the 'injustice' done to Ms. Jayalalitha. The law had been bent in Tamil Nadu for the convenience of the Chief Minister, he alleged and added that public sympathy had increased for Ms. Jayalalitha as a fallout of her nomination papers having been rejected.

THE HINDU

27 APR 2001

THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 2001

## THE DISQUALIFICATION AND BEYOND

NOT UNEXPECTEDLY, MS. Jayalalitha has been disallowed from taking direct part in the electoral fray. Her disqualification was always on the cards after the Election Commission reaffirmed the validity of its 1997 order — which prohibited those sentenced to two years or more of imprisonment from contesting an election even if their sentences were suspended. In doing so, the Election Commission tacitly implied that the recent Madras High Court ruling — which Ms. Jayalalitha's legal advisers hoped had provided a window of opportunity for her to contest — had no material bearing on its order. The legal situation was muddled, quite inexplicably, with the AIADMK chief choosing to file her papers in four Tamil Nadu Assembly constituencies despite the fact that the Representation of the People Act (RPA) expressly prohibits a candidate from contesting more than two seats. If Ms. Jayalalitha believed that staking a claim in four places would increase her chances of her nomination being accepted in one or another constituency, she was hopelessly wrong; as it turned out, this only became, and quite correctly, an additional ground for disqualification in a couple of constituencies.

Most of the arguments for and against the AIADMK chief's candidature were based on legal or technical considerations. Now the issue has assumed a larger and worrying moral dimension with the AIADMK chief (and her all-too-faithful allies) insisting that the disqualification will not inhibit her from being Chief Minister in the event of a victory by the AIADMK front. This is an indefensible position to adopt — one that deserves to be rejected outrightly for failing to respect due institutional process and the established canons of probity in public life. It is true that the law is silent, or at least ambiguous, about whether a person disqualified from contesting an election

or convicted in a court of law may be sworn in as Chief Minister. But this is purely because the framers of the Constitution never anticipated such an outlandish possibility. The constitutional provision which permits a person who is not a member of a legislature to become a Chief Minister (with the proviso that he or she be elected within six months thereof) was never intended to cover those who have been expressly disqualified from contesting elections (in Ms. Jayalalitha's case, for a period of six years from the date of conviction). Therefore, Ms. Jayalalitha's chief ministerial ambitions violate the very spirit of the law.

It would have been far more politic, as well as dignified, had the AIADMK general secretary ruled herself out of the chief ministerial sweepstakes. Ms. Jayalalitha has been convicted in three corruption cases and there are those who have been pressured into quitting office for much less. The uproar over a CBI chargesheet against the former Bihar Chief Minister, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, eventually resulted in him demitting office. Three years ago, Mr. Sedapatti Muthiah resigned as Union Minister for Transport after a special court in Chennai framed charges against him in a corruption case. Ironically, Mr. Muthiah had declared he stepped down on the directive of his party chief, Ms. Jayalalitha. Having been disqualified from contesting, the AIADMK chief would do better if she focussed on working wholeheartedly for the victory of her front rather than lay chief ministerial claims or allege that her nominations were rejected by officials who succumbed to political pressure. It is possible she may gain some electoral mileage from portraying herself as a victim of political circumstances, but the truth is that she owes her disqualification wholly to herself.

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DR. HINDU

26 APR 2001

ROs CITE CONVICTION; AIADMK MEN PROTEST 'INJUSTICE'

# Jayalalitha's papers rejected

By Suresh Nambath

**CHENNAI, APRIL 24.** The nomination of the former Chief Minister and AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, for the Tamil Nadu Assembly election was rejected in all the four constituencies where she filed her papers.

The Returning Officers of the four constituencies — Andipatti, Krishnagiri, Pudukottai and Bhuvanagiri — cited her conviction on corruption charges in the TANSI land deal cases and declared her papers invalid.

As top leaders of the AIADMK and the DMK-led NDA monitored the developments while still on the campaign trail, their representatives entered into heated arguments during the scrutiny of nominations which took place amid tight security.

## Blockade in Krishnagiri

Krishnagiri witnessed dramatic scenes with AIADMK men demonstrating against the "injustice" by hurling chairs in the office. They also resorted to a road blockade. Police arrested senior AIADMK leaders Mr. M. Tham- bidurai and Mr. K.P. Munusamy. Frayed tempers in Pudukot- tai Tempers ran high in Pudu- kottai, where Ms. Jayalalitha was



The AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, making a point at a roadside election meeting at Thirumayam, near Pudukottai, on Tuesday. — Photo: M. Rajarathinam

expected to campaign later in the day, as a large number of AIADMK workers gathered to hear the verdict of the Returning Officer. When both the AIADMK and the DMK representatives began a wordy duel, the RO, Mr. E. Kandasamy, adjourned the proceedings after seeking their arguments in writing, and left the office.

He was inaccessible until he returned at 9 p.m. to make the for-

mal announcement of the rejection.

## Walkout in Bhuvanagiri

In Bhuvanagiri, AIADMK leaders, Mr. K. Malaisamy and Mr. V. Ramasamy staged a "walkout" at the office of the returning officer after accusing him of acting out of "bias". The AIADMK representatives wanted a day's time to explain some legal points in support of the nomination, but the Re-

turning Officer, Mr. P. Santham, did not oblige. Mr. Ramasamy alleged that the RO's attitude showed that the decision to reject the nomination was "pre-conceived".

In Andipatti, the returning officer, Ms. Jaya, ruled that, under Section 8 (3) of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), disqualification started from the date of conviction by the trial court. When counsel for Ms. Jayalalitha questioned the validity of the Election Commission circular barring persons convicted for two years or more from contesting the election even when their sentence had been suspended, the RO insisted that the Election Commission was competent to issue the 1997 circular. Also, the guidelines of the Election Commission were binding on the RO. Moreover, the nomination was also invalid, as Ms. Jayalalitha had filed papers in more than two constituencies. This was not permitted under Section 33 (7) (b) of the RPA.

## 'Excess nominations'

The "excess nominations" became a controversy in Bhuvanagiri too. Although the AIADMK side argued that Ms. Jayalalitha was intending to withdraw from two other constituencies, it did not satisfy the RO.

In Krishnagiri, the Returning Officer, Mr. M. Mathivanan, disqualified Ms. Jayalalitha on the basis of the Election Commission circular as she had been convicted in the corruption case.

But he appeared to have accepted the argument of the AIADMK team that the "excess nominations" were those filed in Pudukottai and Bhuvanagiri and that these need not be taken into account while considering the Krishnagiri nomination.

# Cong tie-up bodes ill for Trinamul, says Panja

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 23. — The Trinamul-Congress alliance continues to be dogged by differences.

Mr Ajit Panja today said the Trinamul's poll prospects will be affected because of its alliance with the Congress. The PCC president, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, said that if the seat-sharing arrangement between the Congress and the Trinamul fails at Malda or Murshidabad, the alliance wouldn't work there.

Mr Panja said the Trinamul-BJP alliance would have come to power after the Assembly polls. Asked how many seats the Trinamul-Congress alliance would bag, he said: "It is early to predict anything now but it can be said once the last date of withdrawal of the candidates is over." He said people

didn't like the alliance and many had lost faith in the Trinamul after the common minimum programme with Congress was announced.

"You cannot form an alliance with a party whom you had called the B team of the CPI-M." The Congress and the CPI-M had connived to bring down the Trinamul in the state, he alleged.

Mr Panja said that many Trinamul leaders had praised his move, adding that such moves would restore democracy in the party. He, however, refused to disclose the leaders' names.

The Trinamul leader said he was willing to speak at his party election meetings, if invited. But he wouldn't go to Burtola, Mr Sadhan Pandey's constituency, nor to Sealdah, where Mr Somen Mitra is contesting.

"The Congress workers had broken my camp offices in the last parliament-

tary polls in 1999. Also, people will call me mad if I go to speak in favour of Mr Mitra," he said.

Asked if he would campaign for his daughter, Mrs Mohua Mondol, at Vidyasagar, Mr Panja said: "She is now an adult and if she invites me surely I

■ **Anil tries to hardsell software to Pranab, page 3**

■ **Join Trinamul for campaign: Sonia, page 4**

will go to her constituency." He, however, admitted that she had not yet invited him.

Mr Panja said his constructive criticism of the Trinamul won't help the CPI-M in any way. It will help the Trinamul restore intra-party democracy.

Asked if he was ready to face any disciplinary measure, he said: "I have

spoken the truth and for the truth I'm ready to face the consequences."

**North Bengal:** Former PCC chief Mr ABA Ghani Khan Choudhury is still adamant that he won't concede the English Bazar and Old Malda seats to Trinamul. If the latter doesn't withdraw its candidates in the two seats, the alliance partners will be locked in a contest in all seats in the district.

Similarly, the Congress MP and Murshidabad strongman, Mr Adhir Choudhury, has made it clear that if any seat in his district is given to the Trinamul, it would mean a cakewalk victory for Left Front. Several key Congress leaders have already filed their nomination papers as Independents against Trinamul nominees.

The PCC chief was asked what he was doing to save the alliance in the two districts. Mr Mukherjee avoided a

direct answer, saying: "What would happen would happen."

He was angry when it was pointed out to him that Mr Khan Choudhury had written to the high command explaining his stand on the seats deal in his district. "I see almost daily in the newspapers that Mr Khan Choudhury has written something or the other to the high command. Can anyone show me one such letter and the date when it is written?" he said.

Mr Mukherjee has also decided not to campaign in places, including pockets of Malda, where the alliance couldn't be forged. The Congress, he said, decided to field one candidate in Darjeeling against GNLF. The Trinamul had offered three seats to GNLF, but the latter fielded two candidates at Phansidewa and Siliiguri, a thing it had never done in the past.



# Jaya jittery over nomination backlash risk

## FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**Chennai, April 22:** With only two days to go for the final word on her candidacy, ADMK chief Jayalalitha is turning jittery, apprehending large-scale violence if her nomination is rejected in both Andipatti and Krishnagiri.

"The DMK is planning acts of sabotage after the decision is known on Tuesday and would conveniently put the blame on my party," Jayalalitha said today.

In her statement, she claimed DMK chief and chief minister

M. Karunanidhi's son Stalin's lieutenant Saidai Kittu was overheard asking his men to abstain from violence only till Tuesday.

Reacting swiftly to the allegation, the DMK replaced Kittu from Saidapet constituency in the city with a trade union leader.

Jayalalitha also charged the DMK with conspiring to prevent her from contesting the May 10 Assembly polls.

Though Jayalalitha named Stalin's men, the tenor of the statement indicates she fears her own cadre could run amok if the returning officers in both the con-

stituencies rule against her.

She has called for restraint from the cadre and sought to reassure them that victory is theirs anyway.

However, the Dharmapuri incident of February last year, when a bus carrying college girls was burnt, killing three, after her conviction in the Kodaikanal hotel case, should be fresh in her mind. ADMK candidates were defeated in all the byelections immediately after that.

It took a while for her to live down that odium, and given the volatility of the ADMK cadre,

many fear there could be an encore on Tuesday.

Any such violence could seal Jayalalitha's fate in the Assembly elections.

The ADMK cadre are upset over the prospect of her disqualification and some of them have gone on record saying they would launch an all-out struggle if her papers were rejected.

Union rural development minister and BJP leader Venkaiah Naidu, however, described Jayalalitha's apprehensions as "baseless".

"Jayalalitha and ADMK are

only saying this to play a trick on the people to gain some sympathy," he said.

"Jayalalitha filed her nominations knowing very well they will be rejected," he said.

The DMK, fighting with its back to the wall, should, however, welcome any act of violence and arson as it would totally discredit the ADMK. But whether it would indulge in violence and put the blame on its rival, is a moot point.

The people and the law and order machinery are both keeping their fingers crossed.



Jayalalitha

APR 22 1997

# 'I will support the NDA government even if Mamata orders me not to'

**Interview of the Week**  
*Sabyasachi Bandopadhyay meets AJIT PANJA*

*FORMER union minister of state for foreign affairs Ajit Panja is one of the founders of Trinamool Congress. Until last week, Panja was known for his talents including acting. It changed early last week when the mild-mannered Panja called a press conference to attack Trinamool chief, Mamata Banerjee. The relationship between Mamata and Panja has never been very smooth. Mamata often accused Panja of hankering after ministerial berths while Panja complained that her intention was to marginalise him. Things reached a flashpoint when the Trinamool withdrew from the NDA government over the Tehelka issue. Panja has refused to accept the decision and says he will support the NDA in Parliament. He refutes the reports that he is joining the BJP. Sabyasachi Bandopadhyay spoke to Panja about his plans. Excerpts:*

■ **Your party is fighting a tough battle against the Left government in West Bengal. But just 25 days before the election you have raised the banner of revolt against your leader. Isn't the revolt ill-timed?**

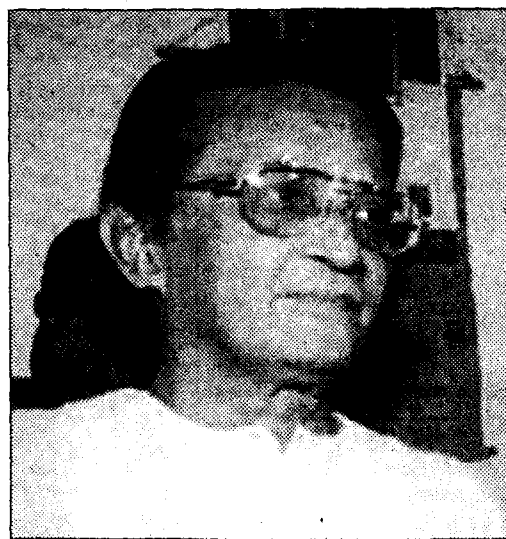
Before I answer your question I should explain the background behind me coming out with the truth. The day Tehelka broke out all of us — the 8 MPs of Trinamool Congress — met at Akbar Ali Khondakar's (a Trinamool MP) house to decide our course of action. There we decided that Mamata and me will resign from the cabinet but will support the NDA from outside except on the Tehelka tapes which we would abstain from voting.

The next day I read in newspapers that the Trinamool has withdrawn support to the NDA. I was surprised and checked with other leaders. It was news to them as well but they kept mum. Advani called me and asked what our position was. I told him I was also in the dark. Advaniji said he had

tried that but could not contact her.

A couple of weeks later at a meeting at the house of Sudip Bandopadhyay (Chief Whip of Trinamool in Lok Sabha) Mamata snubbed me. She got up during the course of the meeting and accused me of hobnobbing with Advani and Vajpayee. She said those who disobeyed her orders will be thrown out of the party. I quietly walked out of the meeting.

Then talks started between the Trinamool and the Congress. Mamata said she would give me the



responsibility of selecting 50 candidates. She also said not more than 50 seats will be given to the Congress. But I was kept in the dark about the candidates. Seats were given to persons who have even attacked me.

On April 13 Mamata sent a letter requesting me to release the candidates' list. I refused since I had no knowledge of who was being selected. They decided to release it at the chamber of my brother (Dr. Ranjit Panja, MP). In our party's history never has the candidates' list been released at the chamber of a doctor. They were deliberately trying to drive a wedge between us.

They also requested me to release the manifesto which I refused. I told them that if I had to

release the manifesto I would have to have a knowledge of every word of it. But I knew nothing of the manifesto. I was never consulted while it was being prepared. In fact the manifesto was prepared in such a slipshod, amateurish way. I have never seen such a drab, insipid, non-political manifesto.

■ **Was it all deliberate?**

All this time, Mamata kept on telling me that I would be consulted on every stage. She used to say 'Ajitda, you don't worry. I will do what you are saying'. But gradually it dawned upon me that Mamata no longer takes me into confidence. She does not need me any longer. So I kept away. But there were questions from my friends and the media about why I was doing so. So I decided to come out.

The Trinamool Congress has become the private property of Mamata. But even they can not handle it properly. They have not sent any letter to the Speaker that they are withdrawing support to the NDA government. And in that case if Mamata goes to attend any session she will have to sit on Treasury benches. And the same is true with me. It's ridiculous.

If I kept mum now and spoke out after the elections people would say that I did not speak out earlier because the poll prospects of my daughter would be harmed). (Panja's daughter Mohua Mandal is a candidate). I don't want to be called an opportunist. Hence the revolt or whatever you call it.

■ **What do you plan to do now?**

Firstly, I will support the NDA from outside if the need arises. And this I will do even if Mamata orders me not to do so because the decision was taken by the Trinamool Parliamentary Party. Secondly, if any Trinamool candidate requests me to come and campaign I will go.

■ **Are you going to join BJP?**

The question does not arise. My aim is to strengthen the party and establish democracy there. Why should I join BJP? Pranab Mukherjee and H.K.S. Surjeet have joined hands to grab Trinamool. But I will not let that happen.

# Trinamool has no formal alliance with Cong: Panja

Saugata Roy  
Kolkata, April 20

AJIT PANJA claims his party, the Trinamool Congress, has no formal tie-up with the Congress. "It doesn't matter what is being said. The truth is there's no document formalising such an agreement between the two parties."

"Such talk of an alliance with the Congress—a party we in our party documents call the CPI(M)'s B-team—is a slur on Mamata Banerjee. There's still time. She should immediately put the record straight and go to the polls alone," Panja, president of the West Bengal Trinamool Congress unit, told *Hin-*

*dustan Times*. The rebel leader says he will hit the road once the nomination process is complete to campaign for Trinamool candidates. And what of his talk of joining the BJP? "There's no substance in these rumours. But I stand by the Trinamool parliamentary party resolution, which pledged outside support to the NDA. And let me remind you, it hasn't been revoked."

Mamata, he is convinced, is being misguided by a clutch of power brokers. "I still admire her. I beseech her to be her natural, uncompromising self. I have only contempt for men such as Sadhan Pande. His deposit was forfeited in the last Parliament polls. Pankaj Banerjee dumped

the party when it was in crisis and Sudip Bandopadhyay is a liar," he says.

The senior parliamentarian claims Pranab Mukherjee would be the sole gainer from this alliance. "If the so-called alliance wins, Mukherjee would claim credit for it and thus ensure his Rajya Sabha seat. And, if it loses, he will have the CPI(M) to fall back on, as he did during the 1996 Rajya Sabha polls."

Does this explain why the Trinamool-Congress plan of formalising their tie-up by releasing a joint manifesto soon? "That will be a disaster for West Bengal and its people. We were elected on a manifesto that

talked of the Congress as a CPI(M) stooge. Had it been Switzerland, people could have exercised their right to recall against such betrayal. This manifesto is our Bible. It must not be violated. Yes, the Trinamool chief is authorised to make changes in it. But she has to justify them," he said.

But why did he give his revolt call now? "Won't his stand weaken the party when it's going to the polls, perhaps the most significant in its two-and-half year history?" "No," he says. "Instead, the timing is perfect. If I did it after the scrutiny of nomination papers, my detractors would say Panja came up with his views only after his daughter got the

Trinamool symbol from Vidyasagar. If I waited till the elections, all I said would have been useless. Anyway, I'm convinced the Trinamool would have won the polls on its own. It didn't need a Congress crutch.

"God forbid, if the party does suffer reverses, people would say Mr Panja you're abandoning your baby when it's in trouble."

Panja says he didn't even know the contents of his party manifesto. "I was not even consulted." So would he quit the president's post? "No. I've resigned once on the oil issue. I've resigned over Tehelka. Not any more. The next resignation will be from life."



THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 APR 2001

# Mamata won't let Panja become a poll martyr

Saugata Roy  
Kolkata, April 18

THEY MAY stand poles apart on the political spectrum, but act much like each other when it comes to managing dissent within. The Trinamool will do to Ajit Panja what the CPI(M) did to Subhas Chakrabarty. It won't let him be a martyr and reap political dividends ahead of the polls.

Policy making body chairman Pankaj Banerjee and general secretary Mukul Roy have been reticent, but senior Trinamool leader Sadhan Pande today dropped broad enough hints that Panja had a "hidden agenda" couched in his call for democracy. "You know it all. But he can't get ahead with his plans without ensuring sufficient numbers. After all, the Trinamool can't make him a Union Minister. Why should we pressure him to come clean? It will come out on its own."

The Trinamool policy making body met today at Nizam Palace to assess the impact of Panja's surprise salvo against the Tri-



AJIT PANJA

namool chief. The members took note of the disaffected leader's shrill call for democracy as also his arguments against the "serious shift" from what the Trinamool had said about the Vajpayee Government and the Congress.

The party top brass would much rather urge Panja to start his "apology campaign" from Vidyasagar where his daughter Mahua Mandal is pitted against CPI(M) heavyweight Lakshmi De. "Let Panja beg apology to the electorate at Vidyasagar and get

Mandal through," Pande said.

Party insiders confide that other Trinamool candidates won't invite the former Union Minister to sing the Vajpayee Government's praise and thereby damage the Congress-Trinamool combine's electoral prospects.

In a bid to consolidate the ranks, a section of which seems affected by Panja's sympathy for the "deprived", the Trinamool will meet State CEO Sabyasachi Sen tomorrow with complaints against the "red vengeance." The policy making body chairman recounted how CPI(M) goons had "killed" Trinamool supporters in the districts.

Panja's arch rival Sadhan Pande says he is surprised at the former Union minister's sudden concern for democracy. "Ajit Panja is our State president. In most cases, he has nominated his loyalists as leaders of our mass organisations. The presidents of our student, youth, and women wings in Kolkata are all Panja loyalists. How could he talk of lack of democracy?"

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 APR 2001

# Mamata insults sink Panja in ocean of tears

Our Kolkata Bureau

KOLKATA 17 APRIL

HE COULD just then have been in the elements of his new-found acting skills. Or he could have been at this scintillating professional best, arguing the case out point after point. He could also have been a 68-year-old veteran of many a political battle, who felt genuinely hurt and slighted.

It was impossible to say which role he was performing at that moment. But when his eyes brimmed over with real-time tears and the former Union external affairs minister and TMC leader Ajit Panja started sobbing in the midst of a packed Press Club narrating the sequence of his humiliation vis-a-vis Mamata Banerjee's style of functioning — there wasn't a soul around who wasn't caught off guard.

Nobody had quite expected Mr Panja to start weeping. And the tears coupled with the clinical precision of his broadside against the TMC supremo, was just about devastating.

Outside, on the Press Club lawns and on the main road, thousands of Mr Panja's supporters had gathered shouting slogans in favour of their leader. They came in lorries, they came in LCVs, they came walking. But they came nevertheless, from all directions — hordes of Panja-loyalists in a not-too-often seen exhibition of grassroots support.

Amidst all this, a sobbing Panja declared: "I am not leaving the party. I am not joining BJP. TMC is nobody's private property. I'll go and campaign for any party candidate, asking for my help — let me make that absolutely clear. I will also strive relentlessly to establish democracy within the TMC from inside."

Mamata cannot but take note of all this. Amid the general confusion that prevailed at the Press Club, an emotionally surcharged Panja could not control himself while stating how he had been insulted within the party in the last two-and-a-half years.

"You tell me what I have done to deserve such insults..."

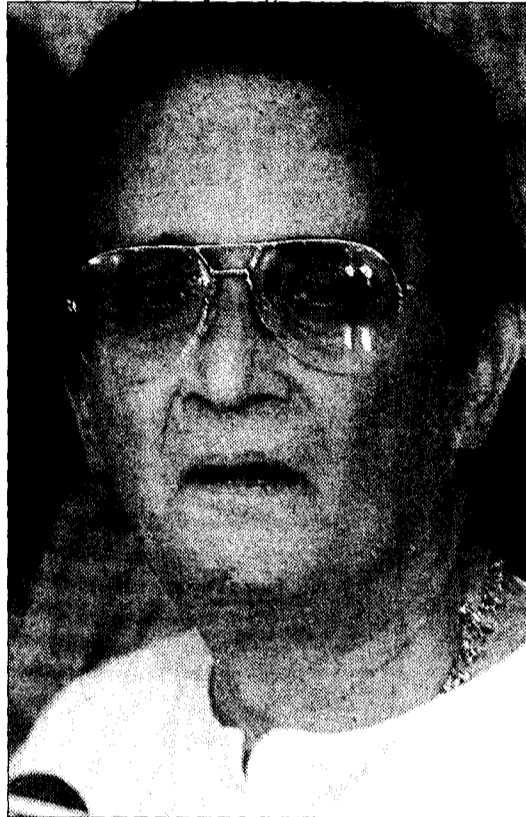
A sobbing Panja could not quite go on anymore. He quoted from newspaper reports, proceedings of the state legislative Assembly and Mamata's last election manifesto to drive home the point: "Mr Pranab Mukherjee is CPI(M)'s own man in Congress."

And with that, Panja launched into a veritable tirade against Mr Mukherjee as well as a section of the state Congress leadership, including Mr Somen Mitra.

"Pranab Mukherjee and Harkishen Singh Surjeet have hatched a conspiracy against Mamata, which the latter is failing to understand," he said.

The present election manifesto of TMC is a "clear case of non-application of mind," Mr Panja said.

He felt that the TMC should have explained its stand on critical issues like withdrawal of support to



**PUFFED CHEEKS: Ajit Panja gets emotional while laying bare his differences with Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee at the Kolkata Press Club on Tuesday. — AFP**

the NDA government, or its alliance with the Congress.

"There may be political compulsions that require a party to change its stance, but the reasons must be explained clearly to party workers and the common electorate," Mr Panja said.

Coming as it did from a veteran of many a political war, perhaps even Mamata Banerjee cannot quite ignore the message. Whether Panja's plain-speak could weigh heavily against the TMC-Congress poll prospects or favour the Left Front, one thing is absolutely clear. It is now entirely upto Mamata Banerjee to make the next move.

Astute that he is, Panja played his cards to perfection. He spoke highly of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and NDA government's commitment to West Bengal's development, so that if need be, he could re-join the NDA. One more point perhaps that has somewhat queered the pitch for Mamata.

Panja himself was righteous at the end of it all. "I only felt that truth should prevail," he said.

## SI PANJA: 167A

(Continued from page 1)

my leaders and colleagues, but they didn't listen to me."

Mr Panja, however, iterated he had no grudge against Miss Banerjee. "Mamata and I had laid the party's foundation and the question of leaving her doesn't arise." He said it would be foolish of the CPI-M to think of reaping benefits from this press conference. "We should all fight together to put an end to the CPI-M misrule."

**BJP reaction:** Mr Muzaffar Khan, state BJP vice-president, said Mr Panja's statements had vindicated the BJP's position. "We have also been insisting that leaving the NDA was a wrong decision on Miss Mamata Banerjee's part. By allying with the Congress, the CPI-M's B-team, she has only strengthened the Marxists' hands."

THE STATESMAN

18 APR 20

# Mamata insulted me: Panja

By Malabika Bhattacharya

**KOLKATA, APRIL 17.** A weeping Mr. Ajit Panja, Trinamool Congress MP and chairman, today turned against the party supremo, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, accusing her of being a dictator and humiliating him, but stopped short of submitting his resignation.

A packed conference hall at the Kolkata Press Club saw an emotional Mr. Panja charge Ms. Banerjee with taking unilateral decisions on the official policies and "insulting" him on several occasions. "For over two years, I silently swallowed all insults from her. Never did I react for fear of harming the party's interests." Mr. Panja spoke

on several issues including Ms. Banerjee's style of functioning, the Trinamool's "faulty" election manifesto, withdrawal of support from the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance Government and the tie-up with Ms. Sonia Gandhi's Congress, "the CPI(M)'s b-team".

Mr. Panja arrived at the Press Club followed by a large number of supporters in trucks and vans shouting slogans. During the conference, when several supporters forced their way into the hall, Mr. Panja had to climb onto a chair and urge them to leave. According to analysts, Mr. Panja had "revolted" expecting disciplinary action as otherwise he would not be able to leave the party for fear of being penalised under the anti-defection law.

Only the other day, Mr. Panja said, in the presence of several party workers, most of them younger than him, Ms. Banerjee charged him with maintaining contact with BJP leaders. "I warn you not to keep in touch with the BJP. If any party functionary does so, he or she will have to face dire consequences."

Mr. Panja said he left the room utterly humiliated. Ms. Banerjee then ran to him and apologised. "But those inside the room did not know about the apology. So what was the use of such an apology?" Point-



The Trinamool Congress MP, Mr. Ajit Panja, addressing a press conference at the Kolkata Press Club on Tuesday.

— Photo: Sushanta Patronobish

ing out that he did not bargain for this kind of behaviour from someone he had never wronged, he said, "maybe, she has no need for me. After all, I am an old man."

The former Union Minister said three other party MPs — his brother Mr. Ranjit Panja, Mr. Nitish Sen-gupta and Ms. Krishna Bose — too were unhappy with the decision to leave the NDA. "We had decided to resign from the NDA on the Tehelka tapes issue but pledged our support to the Government from outside. All of a sudden, I saw that the Trinamool has withdrawn support from it."

That Mr. Panja was upset over the severing of links with the NDA became evident when he read out passages from the party's manifesto brought out during the last parliamentary election stressing the need for maintaining ties with the NDA and reposing complete faith in the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee.

The Trinamool manifesto for the Assembly polls for one, did not mention the reasons for the party's withdrawal of support to the NDA. For another, it never explained why it had to ally with the Congress, described only the other day as communist-friendly.

THE HINDU

18 APR 2001

# Telengana threatens to split Desam

FROM G.S. RADHAKRISHNA

Hyderabad, April 16: Dissidence erupted in the Telugu Desam Party with deputy Speaker K. Chandradeskar Rao threatening to resign and float a new party, the Telengana Rashtra Samiti, by this month-end.

This is an attempt to protest against the injustice meted out to Telengana and breaking the promise of a separate statehood to the region.

Since the late seventies, autonomy to Telengana was promised by the Congress and the Desam regimes but nothing has been done till date.

Rao belonged to the group of 75 legislators who were hand picked by chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu for the Assembly in 1993 and again in 1999. He was the first Desam leader to shoot off a protest letter on the eve of the power tariff hike last year. Since then he skirted any attempt to meet the chief minister.

The growing dissidence in the Desam is not only aimed at Naidu but also his style of functioning and his coterie of ministers and bureaucrats.

The minorities and the Reddys have already distanced from the Desam. During the 1999 elections the Desam survived not on its own strength but on the popular wave in favour of the BJP and Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Naidu also managed to survive the onslaught of the Congress which lost nearly 43 seats with margins of less than 500 votes and another

er 57 with margins of less than 1,500 votes.

Only a few of Naidu's critics are surfacing in view of the vicious grip the Desam boss has over the party as well as absence of political acumen of any senior leader to run the party.

Two senior leaders, K. Vidhyadhar Rao and B. Gopalakrishna Reddy, tried to mobilise a group in the party but were brutally crushed by Naidu. Gopalakrishna Reddy lost his Assembly seat due to sabotage by Naidu in 1999. Since then he has almost been isolated in the party.

A senior Desam leader said if there was a strong opponent to Naidu about 85 to 100 legislators would support the new leadership. Naidu regularly monitors the partymen and initiates steps to quell any revolt in the Desam.

"Naidu thinks that he alone works and is always right. There are many who differ. But lack of a charismatic leadership has kept us glued to him. NTR's son Harikrishna has disappointed many," says a party leader.

But for the ensuing panchayat elections, the Congress campaign has failed to make any dent in the Desam popular base. But the Left campaign aimed at the middle-class is worrying Naidu because they had supported him in the last elections.

With fresh taxation anticipated in the guise of "user charges" the chief minister will have to wield his magic wand in yet another game of tricks in the political arena.



## TMC expels Chidambaram, three others

571 TMC INDIA  
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

16/4  
CHENNAI, April 15. - The Tamil Maanila Congress today expelled the former Union minister, Mr P Chidambaram, and three others for anti-party activities.

The TMC disciplinary action committee chairman, Mr AR Marimuthu, told reporters here that the party, which had kept the expulsion orders in abeyance since 31 March for allowing a chance for a 'change of heart', announced the decision after Mr Chidambaram appealed from a DMK platform to vote out the AIADMK-led alliance last night.

The Tamil Maanila Congress also announced the expulsion of two sitting MLAs, Mr B Ranganathan and Mr D Sundaram, and a party functionary, Mr A Kasilangam.

THE STATESMAN

16 APR 2001

*M.O.*  
*ISA* **Jayalalitha to contest from two places** *J.P.P.*  
*AIADMK*

**By Our Special Correspondent**

**CHENNAI, APRIL 14.** The AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, who is fighting the possibility of electoral disqualification, today announced that she is contesting from two constituencies in the coming Tamil Nadu Assembly polls.



Ms. Jayala-

litha chose Andipatti in Theni district, which was represented earlier by her party mentor, MGR, and Krishnagiri in Dharmapuri district, another AIADMK stronghold, to file her nomination.

This ends speculation that she might not enter the electoral fray to avoid any adverse political impact of a possible disqualification.

This is not the first time that Ms. Jayalalitha is seeking election from two constituencies.

In 1991, she contested from Kangeyam and Bargur winning from both places.

In 1996, she lost election from Bargur, the only seat she contested from.

**THE HINDU**

**15 APR 2001**

# BJP plots to split Trinamool camp

Ritwik Mukherjee

KOLKATA 14 APRIL



Ajit Panja

THE BJP leaders are planning to effect a split in the Mamata Banerjee camp with the help of former Union minister Ajit Panja, his brother and Trinamool Congress MP Ranjit Panja, two other Trinamool MPs Krishna Bose and Nitish Sengupta.

The ruling party in the Capital has already sent feelers to these leaders saying it would be "only too delighted to offer ministerial berths to these Trinamool leaders if they desert Ms Banerjee and join the NDA government."

Former Union defence minister and NDA convenor George Fernandes has been specially assigned to "negotiate the terms and conditions" with the Trinamool leaders.

The logic for targeting these

leaders is simple. All four Trinamool MPs are unhappy about the party's alliance with the Congress and also about the nomination of candidates. They have minced no words in expressing their displeasure about Ms Banerjee's style of functioning.

Ms Banerjee is never tired of keeping others guessing about her next move. But this time round, it is Mr Panja who's keeping his political boss guessing.

The political grapevine has it that the BJP leaders are trying to persuade Mr Panja to rejoin the Union Cabinet. If Mr Panja can come out of Trinamool with three of his colleagues, they can give the anti-defection law a slip.

Mr Panja was conspicuously absent at the party's media conference to release the revised candidate list of candidates at his brother's place on Friday evening. Dr Ranjit Panja, on Saturday, branded Ms Banerjee's move to come out of the NDA as "abrupt and hastily taken."

He said the Trinamool-BJP would have done better than the Trinamool-Congress poll pact

*The Economic Times*

15 APR 2001

# Quitting NDA was a hasty step, says Trinamool MP

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, April 14

AT LEAST one of Mamata Banerjee's MPs thinks that the decision to cut ties with the NDA was "abrupt" and that the alliance with the Congress will not go down well with voters.

Trinamool MP Ranjit Panja said here today that a Trinamool-BJP alliance would have pulled votes.

"People had accepted the Trinamool-BJP alliance. We fought two Lok Sabha elections together. We would have had smooth sailing if Mamata didn't withdraw from the NDA so hastily. We have been opposing the Congress for three years. It will be hard to explain to voters what made us change tack."

Ranjit Panja's remarks were the first signs of discontent among senior Trinamool leaders over Mamata's recent moves.

He also expressed dissatisfaction about selection of candidates in the Assembly segments of his own Barasat parliamentary constituency.

"I had indicated my preferences, based on the prospects of each nominee. But in most seats those ranked lower in the order have been given tickets," he said. Panja



RANJIT PANJA

however dismissed rumours that he was joining the BJP.

"If I have ideological differences with my party, I have the option of quitting politics. But before that I will speak to Mamata Banerjee," he said.

Though the first to voice resentment, Ranjit Panja may not be the only party MP unhappy with recent developments. Akbar Ali Khondekar, Nitish Sengupta, Ananda Mohan Biswas are reportedly upset with the way Mamata has ignored them in choosing

## BJP IN LAST-MINUTE HUNT FOR CONGMEN

The BJP is making a last-ditch attempt to woo dissident Congress MLAs into its fold. The party will bring out its final list of candidates for the Assembly polls on Monday.

"There are still 40-odd hours left before we announce our candidates' list and a lot of things may happen by then," said State BJP chief Asim Ghosh. "But they must make up their mind quickly." He said the BJP would contest between 230 and 240 seats while 55 seats would be left to NDA allies.

Detailed report on Page 3

nominees for Assembly segments of their constituencies, consulting local and junior leaders instead.

These MPs, like Panja, resent the sudden pullout from the NDA and with the way the party snapped ties with the BJP before the crucial Assembly polls here.

That Mamata ignored their views while choosing candidates only made matters worse.

Related reports on Page 3

# Maran to keep away from active politics, cites health reasons

By M. R. Venkatesh

10-1579

**CHENNAI, APRIL 14.** Barely a few hours before the DMK was to release its list of candidates for the Assembly election, senior DMK leader and Union Commerce and Industry Minister, Mr. Murasoli Maran, today stunned the party leadership by announcing his intention to "keep away from active politics on health grounds."

Mr. Maran made known his decision through a one-line oral statement over the phone to the two national news agencies. But, he was not available for any elaboration on this.

Shortly thereafter, Mrs. Dayalu Ammal, wife of the Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, accompanied by Union Cabinet Minister, Mr. T.R. Balu, called on Mr. Maran at his residence.

After the meeting, Mr. Balu told reporters: "He is not keeping well. That is all."

Later in the day, senior DMK Minister, Mr. Arcot Veerasamy, called on Mr. Maran, but told reporters that he had only enquired after the health of the latter. Asked if Mr. Maran's decision would affect the election prospects of the DMK, he replied: "I am more worried about his health."

After a second meeting, Mr. Balu said Mr. Maran would not be able to undertake "hectic campaigning" due to health reasons. In reply to a question, he said Mr. Maran would continue to be in the Union Cabinet.

Mr. Maran, who had a miraculous recovery from a heart ailment in November last, is understood to have been "unhappy" with the manner in which the

9-P.P. DMK  
DMK handled some of the issues related to seat sharing with its allies.

During the month-long exercise of alliance formation, seat-sharing and candidate selection, the party functionaries who were actively involved in the



process had kept a prudent distance from Mr. Maran as they did not wish to "strain him" on these issues due to his health condition. Further, it is learnt that Mr. Maran had conveyed to a senior party colleague his dissatisfaction over some of the second line leaders playing a key role in the alliance talks. He was also "unhappy" over the

DMK giving away some of its holding seats to the allies.

Significantly, this morning, Mr. Maran had a 45-minute talk with Mr. Karunanidhi at the latter's residence when he came to exchange Tamil New Year greetings. A few hours later, he announced his decision to quit active politics apparently to give vent to his "disappointment."

Mr. Maran's announcement prompted many senior party leaders to call on him apparently to assuage his ruffled feelings. Of late, Mr. Maran had been taking efforts to patch up the MDMK's rift with the DMK, though the DMK leadership had already ruled out any scope for rapprochement.

# Hi-tech State pledge in Trinamool manifesto

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, April 11

THE TRINAMOOL Congress released its election manifesto today. Coming almost three weeks after the Left Front manifesto, the Trinamool document calls for putting an end to the "misrule of the Left Front regime" in Bengal and says it's "time for a change".

"In the last 24 years, people reposed faith on the Left Front and had great expectations from them. But they have failed to deliver in all spheres of life. But during this period there was no alternative for the people. In the last three years, the Trinamool Congress has become a strong Opposition force. People have realised this and now they want us to deliver. In this manifesto, we highlight all that we want to do for the people if they vote for us," Trinamool leader Sudip Bandopadhyay said after releasing the manifesto.

"The CPI(M) is facing a strong challenge from the Trinamool under Mamata Banerjee's leadership. People want Mamata and people want change. And we are grateful to people for all the support they have extended. We once again ask for their support to dislodge the Left Front," he said.

"This manifesto is the new hope for people and will eradicate their grievances. The Left has reduced Bengal to an abysmal State, where parliamentary democracy is under threat. Economically we have become backward and the IT industry is still a dream," he said. "But all that will be overcome once we come to power." Sudip said the Trinamool would deliver a clean Government and Bengal would become a hi-tech State like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Photograph on Page 4

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 APR 2001

# AGP walks into NDA fold with poll alliance

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI APRIL 9

**I**GNORING the reservations of the state unit, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) today went ahead and reached an understanding with the ruling Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) for the coming Assembly elections in the state, and brought the regional outfit into the NDA fold.

Under the seat-sharing arrangement arrived at after prolonged parleys between the two parties, the BJP will contest 44 out of the 126 seats in the state assembly and leave the rest for AGP and other allies, Assam Chief Minister P K Mahanta and BJP president Jana Krishnamurthy announced here.

The announcement came a day after the BJP office in Guwahati was ransacked by suspected BJP dissenters protesting against the alliance plans.

"Keeping the larger interests of Assam from the point of view of security, economic progress and prosperity, it was decided by AGP, BJP and allies that elec-

tions should be fought together so that Assam can have a stable, enduring and purposeful government," Krishnamurthy said.

"AGP has decided to fight the poll in alliance with a national political party, BJP, and other

seen."

On the reservations within the party over the alliance, he retorted, "I know the party cadres better than you."

Home Minister L K Advani, who was present on the occasion announced AGP's entry into the ruling NDA at the Centre.

The details regarding the 44 seats including identification of constituencies and selection of candidates would be finalised in the next few days, Krishnamurthy said. Of the 108 seats for which AGP-BJP had held discussions with 18 being left for Bodo (13) and Hill Areas (5), AGP and allies would contest 64 seats.

State BJP leaders, who were in the capital for consultations, expressed reservations over the alliance but said they would abide by the decision of the Central leadership. There has been a series of protests in the state against the alliance.

The BJP had earlier announced that it would go it alone in the assembly elections accusing AGP of aligning with the SULFA and Congress of backing ULFA.

## Phukan joins NCP front

■ **GUWAHATI:** FORMER Assam Home minister and one of the founders of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Bhriku Kumar Phukan has joined the group headed by P.A. Sangma's NCP to provide "a viable alternative" to the AGP, the BJP and the Congress in the state.

like-minded regional parties, who are responsive to the problems of the state in view of the changing economic, socio-political scenario. The alliance will fight the elections for continued unity, peace and progress of the state," Mahanta said. Asked who would be projected as the alliance's Chief Ministerial candidate, Krishnamurthy said, "after results are announced, it will be

INDIAN EXPRESS

## ALLIANCES GALORE

Tamil Nadu polity fragmented 456

**B**ARRING the DMK and AIADMK heading two major fronts, every other political party in Tamil Nadu has split as the state prepares for the Assembly election, causing an unprecedented psephological disarray. Never before has the state witnessed such odd alliances as the ones put together by Jayalalitha and Karunanidhi. The Tamil Maanila Congress, whose advent is steeped in its opposition to the corrupt regime of Jayalalitha, has been given pride of place in the AIADMK front, leading to a revolt by a section of the party under P Chidambaram. The anti-corruption plank of the DMK lost its sheen when it admitted the Makkal Tamil Desam into its front. The MTD was floated by S Kannappan, a minister in the Jayalalitha government and the main accused in the coal import case along with the former Chief Minister. M Gopalakrishnan, former chairman of Indian Bank involved in the Rs 2,000-crore scam who was arrested and charge-sheeted, is the general secretary of the MTD.

The Pattali Makkal Katchi of the backward and numerically strong Vanniar community, which has never contested two consecutive elections from the same front, has crossed over from the DMK to the AIADMK front. The Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, another footloose party, has also left the DMK front on flimsy grounds but was not so lucky as the PMK in finding suitable accommodation in the AIADMK front. Vaiko, whose MDMK is still a constituent of the NDA, was greeted with "house full" sign by the AIADMK. Tamilkudimagan, a tainted minister in the DMK government and a former Speaker, was given a red carpet welcome by the AIADMK. The realignment of forces has made the task of psephologists perilous but the balance has shifted in favour of the AIADMK alliance, provided Jayalalitha is able to lead it from the front. As a convicted criminal with more than two years' rigorous imprisonment weighing on her head, she has been rendered ineligible to contest the election under the Representation of the People Act. She has moved the Madras High Court with a plea to remove the disability. Will a criminal become Chief Minister?

THE HINDU



# Orders reserved on Jayalalitha plea

By Our Special Correspondent

**CHENNAI, APRIL 10.** After more than five hours of arguments spread over two days, the Madras High Court today reserved orders on a petition filed by the former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalitha, seeking a direction to suspend her conviction in two TANSI land deal cases, to enable her to contest the coming Assembly elections.

Mr. Justice Malai Subramanian, reserved orders after hearing the arguments advanced by counsel for Ms. Jayalalitha and the State Government.

Continuing his submissions today, counsel Mr. P. P. Rao said disqualification for six years after undergoing a sentence following the conviction was too long in the life of a politician, enough to snuff out a career. It would be impossible to repair the damage caused.

Referring to the Government's contentions pointing to a Supreme Court observation that corruption was a disease like cancer which ought to be nipped in the bud, he said the point would not hold good here as the possibility of her acquittal in appeal could not be ruled out. The Supreme Court had said the

presumption of innocence must prevail throughout the appeal period too.

These days one could watch in the media, one party accusing the other of corruption. While one said charges had been framed against members of the other party, the rivals contended that the former had persons convicted by courts. "We are concerned that such issues... instead of being placed before the people, were being sought to be settled by means of judicial forums."

Mr. N. Natarajan, counsel for the State Government, said the larger issue was corruption in public life. The issues raised on behalf of the petitioner were technical in nature and it would be impossible to interpret all the aspects. But the spirit of the law was to ensure good governance.

The Prevention of Corruption Act had explained who was a public servant and what a misconduct was. It did not differentiate between a political public servant and a bureaucratic public servant.

The Supreme Court had taken into consideration these aspects in the relevant cases. The question of morality might be wide, but a person's conduct while in public office should be

considered in the present case. If one went by the same spirit of the Act, in the interest of the public, purity of administration and purity of the legislature were vital.

## 'EC guidelines stand'

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 10.** The Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. M. S. Gill, today evaded a direct reply to whether the AIADMK leader, Ms. Jayalalitha, would be able to contest the coming Assembly polls?

"There is a law. Our stand of 1997 holds good, these instructions stand," he said.

"We are awaiting the verdict of the Madras High Court which has reserved its order today on Ms. Jayalalitha's petition. We will see if the High Court order affects us. We will apply the law of the land. Our instructions and guidelines are there and they stand," Dr. Gill told reporters. The CEC said Ms. Jayalalitha had challenged certain sections of the Representation of the People Act and the State Government was responding to it.

INDU

11 APR 2002

# EC to decide on Jaya, says HC

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHENNAI, April 11. — Madras High Court today left it to the Election Commission to decide whether Miss J Jayalalitha, who filed a petition seeking a stay of her conviction in the Tansi land case, could contest the 10 May Assembly election.

Dismissing her petition, Mr Justice J Malai Subramanian, in his 26-page order, said the question whether the AIADMK general secretary could contest the election or not had to be raised before the Election Commission "which may decide as to whether a person is entitled to contest in the elections pending appeal against his or her conviction". However, in his view, if the sentence of imprisonment was suspended he did not think Miss Jayalalitha was disqualified from contesting the election.

The judge said the petitioner had sought suspension of the conviction on the ground that she may be permitted to exercise her statutory right of contesting the election. It was no doubt a valid reason because she was leading one of the largest political parties in the ensuing election and she is also heading a front consisting of very many political parties.

conviction was also for an offence under Sections 13(1) and (d) read with Section 13 (2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, this court is unable to exercise its discretion in her favour", the judge ruled.

In view of the consistent stand taken by the court in



Miss Jayalalitha

similar cases earlier, the petition was dismissed. However, the judge held the view that conviction and sentence were "inseparable twins" in the eyes of law and the moment the sentence was suspended, the conviction was also deemed to have been suspended.

"Otherwise, the framers of the Criminal Procedure Code

to contest in the elections pending appeal against his or her conviction is a point that has to be raised before the Election Commission", he said. The judge said under Sections 8 (2) and (3) of the Representation of the People Act, the emphasis was only on the sentence and not on conviction. The disqualification arose only when the person was sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years.

The verdict, which could drastically affect Miss Jayalalitha's political future, was pronounced in a jam-packed court hall. Even as the judge finished reading the operative portions of the order, Mr N Jyoti, one of Miss Jayalalitha's counsel, swooned and had to be rushed to the court dispensary for medication.

Confusion prevailed even after the verdict as to whether Miss Jayalalitha could contest the election or not.

While the pro-Jayalalitha section maintained that she could contest the election as the Judge had clearly expressed his view, the pro-DMK camp insisted that the judgment was only a obita dicta and was not binding on the Election Commission which would go by its own interpretation of the law

# Saif was not attacked by CPM men?

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 9. — Mr Saifuddin Choudhury was not attacked by CPI-M men at Purbasthali on 7 April, says a Burdwan DM report.

In his report to the state chief electoral officer, the DM has said PDS supporters had organised a meeting at Islampur, Purbasthali, on 7 April without informing police.

When Mr Choudhury was on his way to Islampur after addressing a meeting at Manateshwar, some of his supporters were using a microphone at the Islampur venue. At the same time, CPI-M cadres were leading a procession in the area. Some CPI-M cadres asked Ziarul, a PDS worker, to stop playing the microphone. But Ziarul didn't do so. The CPI-M cadres then ransacked the stage and disrupted the meeting, the report said.

Mr Sandeep Mondal, another PDS worker, reached the spot before Mr Choudhury did and was allegedly heckled by some CPI-M cadres after an altercation.

Some of the CPI-M men then gheraoed Mr Choudhury's car and shouted slogans. But his car was not damaged, neither was he assaulted.

Later Mr Choudhury lodged an FIR at Purbasthali police station, stating that Mr R Islam, the panchayat pradhan of Nandanghat, and two other CPI-M activists Laltu and Pintu Mondal were involved in arson and rioting. The three were later arrested.

Asked what steps the administration has taken to stop attacks on candidates Mr Sen said, "All these cases were not referred to me, and in most cases FIRs were not lodged with police."

However, he said that he has instructed all district magistrates to inquire about the incidents whenever any such political clashes are reported in print or electronic media.

He also said that if a candidate or his associates are seriously injured and admitted to hospital police will have to start suo motu cases.

Mr Sen said that according to the Election Commission's directives, providing security to all candidates is not mandatory. Police will have to assess the threat perception before providing security to anyone, he said.

**PDS stir:** The Party for Democratic Socialism today organised protest demonstrations in different parts of the state against an alleged attack on its president, Mr Saifuddin Choudhury, at Burdwan on Saturday.

THE STATESMAN

APR 2001

# Putatunda interprets Left malady

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 6. - Mr Samir Putatunda has criticised Mr Jyoti Basu in an article for calling PDS "a bogus party". He asserted that the CPI-M's wrong political decisions, coupled with poor party administration, were responsible for the reversal of the Left movement in West Bengal.

Mr Putatunda's article has come out in the party organ in Bengali, Nutan Path, released by Mr Saifuddin Chowdhury yesterday.

Mr Putatunda says in his article that CPI-M leaders had tried to convince LF leadership, including Mr Basu, that the party was being run without ethics. Remaining in power in the state seemed to be the chief objective of the party, he writes. Also, the internal organisation was divided into many factions. But the leadership refused to listen to this and continued its dictatorship.

Mr Putatunda feels that there is a "lack of tolerance and patience" in the party. The CPI-M is trying to malign PDS. But people can't be easily fooled.

In many districts, party members have been cornered by false allegations against them. Some leaders are playing the "nasty partisan game" to establish their control over the party, the PDS leader says. The CPI-M has failed to bring new faces within its fold during the past 24 years. The party is trying to stop its workers from joining the PDS. It is even using the administration and police to this end. In many cases, pressure has been created on PDS workers in their place of work.

The CPI-M "can't withstand the PDS' popularity any more and hence its trying to foil its move in every possible way."

It was learnt that the South 24-Parganas administration has intensified Mr Putatunda's personal security, apprehending attack on him.

THE STATESMAN

## UNITED STAND

When in 1997 Ms Mamata Banerjee had walked out of the Congress in a huff, she had erected an artificial barrier between herself and her natural habitat. It was assumed by most that this was a separation and not a divorce. The announcement that the Congress and the Trinamool Congress will jointly fight the forthcoming assembly elections in West Bengal ends the separation. Ms Banerjee's transient flirtation with the Bharatiya Janata Party, the principal obstacle to the formation of a grand alliance with the Congress against the Left Front, had ended when she resigned from the National Democratic Alliance government. The Congress-Trinamool Congress alliance takes Ms Banerjee a few steps closer to what has all along been her stated political objective: the defeat of the Left Front. The alliance rules out the possibility of a split in the anti-left votes in West Bengal. The Bharatiya Janata Party's presence will be a token one since its electoral success in the state was derived from the joint front it had with the Trinamool Congress. The election on May 10 will be a polarized one with only two players, the left on one side and Ms Banerjee on the other. The Congress has accepted that Ms Banerjee will lead the election campaign against the Left Front. This is exactly as it should be. Ms Banerjee has earned for herself the status of a leader who has been uncompromising and relentless in her opposition to left rule. Her entire political campaign has the removal of the left from Writers Buildings as its focus.

If the Left Front is the main victim of the coming together of the two Congresses, the chief gainer is the Congress. The state Congress, after the formation of the Trinamool Congress, had practically made itself into a political non-entity. It had lost credibility as the jibe that it was nothing more than the left's running mate, popularized by Ms Banerjee, caught the public imagination. This was manifest in the last Lok Sabha polls when in many constituencies the Congress vote bank shifted *en bloc* to the Trinamool Congress. This was the sign that traditional Congress voters no longer saw the party as an anti-left force. Ms Banerjee had taken the wind out of the Congress sails. That wind has now come back. The Congress is poised to gain in electoral numbers and regain its credibility. This gain follows the recognition of Ms Banerjee's strength and stature. Those who opposed her can now eat humble pie but there is the possibility of that pie being laced with the rich wine of an election victory.

The formation of this anti-left opposition is clearly the result of long negotiations. But the negotiations should not detract from the overall context that forged the alliance. One important element in the context was the refusal of Ms Sonia Gandhi, the Congress president, to shut the door on Ms Banerjee. Ms Gandhi kept herself aloof from the petty bickerings of the state Congress and saw in Ms Banerjee a leader who had a popular appeal among the people of West Bengal. On Ms Banerjee's part, there was the acceptance that her goal could be reached only if all the anti-left votes were brought into one basket. Within this context, once she left the NDA, a Congress-Trinamool Congress alliance became inevitable. Politics is by nature unpredictable but Ms Banerjee and the Congress can be satisfied that they have for the nonce maximized the possible. //

THE TELEGRAPH

4 APR 12

# BJP humiliated me, says Mamata

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, April 3

THE CONGRESS-TRINAMOOL agreement over seat sharing has left the BJP red-faced. But Mamata Banerjee says it's the BJP leaders who are to be blamed for the official divorce.

"For the last one month, Tapan Sikdar, Satyabrata Mukherjee and other BJP leaders have been humiliating me. They lambasted me and called me names in public meetings, but I restrained myself.

"All along, they have tried to put pressure on us and frequently went back on their words. Now I hear they are saying that I backstabbed the BJP. I will answer

this when I start campaigning," the Trinamool chief told the *Hindustan Times*.

She says the story doing the rounds is, the Trinamool gave all the bad seats to the BJP and kept the good ones for itself, which is completely false.

"The number of seats and the Assembly segments were finalised after discussions with their local leaders. It is they who then got smart and demanded a swap in 16 seats. This was precise tactic. Such things won't work with me. I was always open to talks but they never tried to reach out. And, it was their leadership that announced the alliance was over. We never said anything like that."

Senior State BJP leaders, already working on disgruntled Trinamool and Congress leaders denied tickets, are unmoved by these arguments.

"Mamata Banerjee has proved herself to be an opportunist. Being in the Government for two years, she took all the benefits to polish her image in Bengal. But when she realised a new political combination might emerge in the future at the Centre, she looked for an issue to dump the BJP. She is foolish if she thinks the NDA Government will fall," said Tapan Sikdar.

State BJP leaders said Mamata has been treating them with disdain for the last couple of years.

"But can she deny that her proximity to the Prime Minister, his blessings and the manner in which he pampered her contributed to her stature? Can she deny that NDA leaders were always at her beck and call whenever she faced trouble?" Sikdar fumed.

"She will not get away so easily, we will expose her in the Assembly polls. Don't forget that our organisation is very strong and we are no longer a nascent party. In the last two years, we compromised our parivar to accommodate her and give Trinamool the prominence in Bengal. Now she will not have it her way," he said.

Dejected State BJP president

Ashim Ghosh said: "What a fall of a great leader! But she cannot blame us for this. Instead of closing the doors on us, she should have realised that the 16 seats that we were trying to exchange could have been sorted out through negotiation. Instead, she offered us 32 CPI(M)-dominated seats of the total 39. If the Congress thinks Mamata is going to give them easy seats, they are living in a fool's paradise."

But Mamata is confident that people know the Trinamool is the real Opposition and only those who ally with it will benefit in the polls. "I can tell you, BJP won't get a single seat this time."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

4 APR 2001

# Trinamool, Cong resolve seat dispute

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, April 7

THE TRINAMOOL Congress and Congress today made a formal announcement of a poll alliance, and said they had put their differences behind them.

The two parties will fight together to defeat the "misrule of the Left Front Government", Mamata Banerjee and Kamal Nath said. The Trinamool and its allies will contest 229 seats, the Congress 57, the JMM eight. Most of the Congress's representatives in the outgoing Assembly have been accommodated.

AICC general secretary in charge of Bengal Kamal Nath said, "Four days ago, I said that the Congress and Trinamool had reached an understanding in 276 seats. Now all the pending issues have been settled. Today we mark the day of consolidation between the two parties that will go whole hog to defeat the Left Front here."

"The spirit of consolidation should filter from top to bottom in both the parties and united we shall fight. The Congress is a large party so there were some differences but now everything has been sorted out."

Mamata thanked Congress chief Sonia Gandhi for not succumbing to pressures from the CPI(M), though it was raking up the Bofors issue again. "Surjeet had even written a letter to Sonia. We are grateful that she didn't allow that to disturb the alliance between Trinamool and Congress. After the tehalka episode, we had to leave the NDA and resign from the ministry. Now we have nothing to lose and we welcome the Congress for fighting with us against the CPI(M) here," the Trinamool chief said.

Mamata explained that in the past she had called the Congress,



SUBHANKAR CHAKRABORTY/HINDUSTAN TIMES

(From right) Mamata Banerjee, Kamal Nath, Pranab Mukherjee, Ghani Khan and Somen Mitra at a Press conference on Saturday.

the CPI(M)'s B-team because it had propped up the Deve Gowda and IK Gujral Governments. But the Congress has now changed tack and has declared openly in the AICC session that it wants to defeat the Left Front in Bengal. So we are going with the Congress."

The Trinamool will contest the 39 seats it had previously left to the BJP. "For the last one month, I waited for them," Mamata said. "But none of them contacted me. Instead, their leaders insulted us publicly. So now we are tying up with the Congress."

When asked whether she still had faith in Atal Bihari Vajpayee, an agitated Mamata said: "You have the prerogative to ask questions. I have the right not to answer."

"We will declare our manifesto

within a day or two and the candidates' list will follow soon. The Congress will have its own manifesto. Pranab Mukherjee is also working on the common agenda of governance which will be released soon. And I am also looking forward to a joint campaign with Sonia Gandhi here."

PCC president Pranab Mukherjee said that the Congress would take four or five days to finalise its list.

"We have identified the seats. And the party will also decide on the candidates soon. Moreover, there is no hard-and-fast rule that the seats of the candidates cannot be changed or that a sitting MLA has to be re-nominated. The party's central election committee decides that," Mukherjee said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

8 APR 2001

# Mulayam guns for PMO again

HT Correspondent and PTI  
New Delhi, April 3

MULAYAM SINGH Yadav fired yet another salvo against the PMO today. Senior PMO official Ashok Saikia, he alleged, was under the CBI's scrutiny when he was given the posting.

"I want to ask the Prime Minister how Ashok Saikia, who was facing CBI probe, was appointed in the PMO and how the inquiry against him ended," the Samajwadi Party leader told reporters, two days after accusing same official with tapping telephones of Opposition leaders.

He will, "when the time comes", disclose names of the leaders whose phones he says were tapped - possibly in Parliament. What did he make of the PMO's denial? "The PMO will always say the charges are baseless."

Yadav said in Lucknow on Sunday that he had a list of leaders whose phones were tapped and had "definite" information on the matter.

The PMO had denied as "baseless and unfounded" the allegations levelled by him. The PMO had also said: "If any specific complaint of phone tapping or implicating an Opposition leader is brought to the notice of the Government, it will certainly be looked into."

**Morcha gears for battle:** The Lok Morcha, as the non-Congress Opposition or the "third front" calls itself, will take on the Government in Parliament, after talks with Opposition parties that are not part of the group.

Morcha chairman Jyoti Basu announced this here today. The Morcha's second meeting at

CPI(M) leader Harkishan Singh Surjeet's home has decided that a committee of five top leaders will prepare a common minimum programme within a fortnight. Morcha leaders will announce the programme at a rally at Azamgarh on April 17.

Former Prime Ministers V. P. Singh and H. D. Deve Gowda, Samajwadi Party president Mulayam Singh Yadav and CPI leader A. B. Bardhan were present at today's meeting. Calling the ruling coalition an "opportunistic combination", Basu said NDA Government had no right to continue.

V. P. Singh, Deve Gowda, Surjeet, Yadav and Bardhan will write the programme. Surjeet said the Morcha would define the parameters of its programme and the parties that agreed with it would be admitted to the front. Laloo Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal, he said, was already a member.

Surjeet ruled out joining hands with the Congress in Assam, since the Congress had forged an alliance with Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress.

Basu said Mamata's position was not clear. She was "with the Prime minister", but she had also teamed up with Sonia Gandhi. The people, he said, would give "a befitting reply" to the Trinamool Congress in the Assembly election.

He said that as part of the NDA Government, she had been a party to the decisions that compromised the country's sovereignty. She was party to decisions like reduction of government employees by 10 per cent over the next five years.



# Cong stand upsets Mamata

Arindam Sarkar  
Kolkata, April 1

ALLIANCE TALKS between the Trinamool Congress and the Congress hit yet another road-block today.

What upset Mamata Banerjee was a faxed message from the AICC saying that the Trinamool must allow all 42 Congress MLAs to contest. The 30 other Assembly constituencies demanded by the WBPC are negotiable.

The Trinamool leader apparently flew into a rage after receiving the message and locked herself up in her Nizam Palace room. She refused to meet visitors. Even party MP Akbar Ali Khondekar was sent back when he came to meet her.

AICC general secretary in charge of Bengal Kamal Nath is rushing back to the city tomorrow for further discussions. Mamata reportedly told him last night that she was willing to accommodate only 23 Congress MLAs. She wouldn't be able to

make room for the remaining 19, among them MLAs from Sealdah, Diamond Harbour, Kalyanpur, Jorasanko, South Kontai, Tamluk, Shyampur and Bagwan-gola. Kamal.

In other words, she pitched for seats represented by senior Congress MLAs like Somen Mitra, Sanjib Das, Asit Mitra, Sailaja Das and Daulat Ali. Her argument: She has already fielded her own candidates in these constituencies.

After receiving the missive from Delhi, she held discussions with party chief whip in the Lok Sabha Sudip Bandopadhyay. She directed him to tell Kamal Nath, who is expected in the city tomorrow, that if the AICC stood rigid its stand she wasn't interested in any further discussions. Her aides later said unless the Congress relented, she would break off parleys and go it alone.

The PCC, meanwhile, is in a ferment. Party leaders, during their discussions with Sonia, argued that MLAs committed to



her leadership should not be left in the lurch. Those who had not deserted the party even in the worst of days and in the face of intense pressure from Mamata shouldn't be denied their seats.

If the AICC president went through with the alliance, with Mamata calling the shots, a number of senior Congress MLAs would get a raw deal. They cited the case of Saugata Roy. In the 1999 Lok Sabha polls, the Congress bagged a measly 8.8 per cent vote in Alipore. Roy's

Assembly constituency. But when he crossed over to the Trinamool he was given the prestigious Dhakuria seat.

Yet another example is the Bhaganwangola Assembly seat held by the Congress. Here, Abu Sufian is the party MLA. In the 1999 Lok Sabha polls, the party got 33.09 per cent votes, while the Trinamool bagged 16.69 per cent. This indicated that the constituency was a Congress stronghold. Mamata wants Sufian dropped.

Tapas Roy crossed over to the Trinamool and was given Sealdah, when he polled only 21 per cent votes in Vidyasagar in the 1999 parliamentary polls. Somen Mitra represents Sealdah. Mamata wants him dropped as well. Tarak Banerjee won the Kashipur seat on a Congress ticket in 1996. In the 1999 Lok Sabha polls, his party's vote count slumped to 123.94 per cent. He crossed over to the Trinamool this March and Mamata gave him a ticket. Senior Congressmen consider him a failed leader.

# Mamata-Cong deal done, seal remains

## OUR BUREAU

**March 30:** Mamata Banerjee tonight virtually sealed a seat-share deal with the Congress for the West Bengal Assembly elections.

"In a day or two, the chapter (discussion on seat sharing) will be closed and the message will go to the people that we want to fight the CPM together." Mamata said after a three-hour meeting with Kamal Nath, the AICC general secretary who was despatched by Sonia Gandhi to work out an arrangement.

The meeting, held at Trinamul MP Sudip Bandopadhyay's house in central Calcutta, ended at 1 am.

Nath, who drove to Bandopadhyay's residence immediately after arriving by the evening flight from Delhi, described his talks with Mamata as very satisfactory. "We have moved forward positively. Tomorrow, I shall report to my party chief Sonia Gandhi and continue the discussions. We are coming close to our objective," he said.

Asked how many seats Mamata had agreed to concede, Nath said: "Numbers are unimportant now. The Left Front government, which has done nothing for West Bengal, has no business staying in power. We are very close to a confirmation (on clinching a seat adjustment deal). In the next one or two days, we hope to reach our objective. Everything is moving satisfactorily."

Trinamul sources said Nath had carried Sonia's instructions that a poll pact with Mamata would have to be forged even if the party had to make sacrifices.

A day after Sonia indicated to the Bengal unit that some sitting legislators may have to give up their seats, Nath said it in as many words. "Does it happen in any state that all sitting MLAs are renominated and given tickets?"

he said in Delhi before leaving for Calcutta.

Party sources said as many as 15 MLAs might lose their seats. Legislators who had defied the party whip in voting against Congress' Rajya Sabha nominee D.P. Roy last year are the most vulnerable.

Nath and Bengal Congress president Pranab Mukherjee met Sonia to finalise the number of seats to which the party would stake claim. Nath had drawn up a list of 75 seats, but sources close to him said he would be "happy" to net 60-odd seats, including "45 winning ones".

Nath, the general secretary in charge of Bengal, has all along asserted that the Congress would be satisfied with "40 winning" seats. But the state unit does not agree and wants the high command to ask for at least 97 seats.

Sonia, who yesterday silenced Somen Mitra and others by showing them files of their past statements on the CPM, told Nath and Pranab to act "in accordance with workers' aspirations".

Party leaders in Bengal are reconciled to the idea that some sitting MLAs will not get tickets but each one is confident of retaining seats for "loyalists". As a result, Nath's Calcutta mission will not be easy.

Party leaders said once the seat-share issue is resolved, the focus will shift to the possible meeting between Sonia and Mamata and the common minimum programme which the Congress wants.

A section of the Congress, however, feels that considering Mamata's scant regard for "paper work", drawing up the agenda will be a "futile exercise". Moreover, the partymen said, the Congress and Trinamul have no differences on social, economic or political issues.

■ See Page 10

THE TELEGRAPH

31 MAR 2001

# AGP eyes ethnic vote bank for coming polls

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
GUWAHATI, MARCH 29

WITH elections round the corner, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) president and state Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta has begun wooing ethnic and tribal groups.

While the Assam government on Monday announced the inclusion of the Satnami community in the list of More Other Backward Classes (MOBC), the Kiran Sheikh community has been named as an Other Backward Class (OBC).

The inclusion of the Satnami community is expected to create an impact among tea workers in the state, with many belonging to this ethnic group. Tea workers may be the deciding factor in as many as 25 of the state's 126 Assembly constituencies.

The attempt to woo Kiran Sheikhs, a small section of



Muslims living in the Barak Valley on the other hand, is an attempt to wean them away from the Congress, especially in view of a section of Hindus drifting closer to the BJP.

Mahanta and his party have launched a scathing attack on the Centre for allegedly sitting on declaring the state's Koch-Rajbangshi community as Scheduled Tribes, despite repeated pleas. Interestingly, the Koch-Rajbangshis had been

declared as included in the ST list in 1995 when the Congress was in power in the state and the Centre. But since that was done through an ordinance and not by a proper Bill in Parliament, their status abruptly came to an end after six months. Mahanta claimed on Monday that while the state government had recommended to the Centre long ago to include the Koch-Rajbangshis in the Scheduled Tribes list, New Delhi has been deliberately neglecting the issue.

INDIAN EXPRESS

30 MAR 2001

# Mamata apology for Sonia confession

988  
TMC

G.A. 29/3

**FROM RASHEED KIDWAI**

**New Delhi, March 28:** The Congress and the Trinamul Congress have worked out a compromise formula that will see Mamata Banerjee "apologise" to the electorate for her alliance with the "corrupt and communal BJP" and Sonia Gandhi admit her "folly" of being soft on the Left.

Sonia, who returned from Hong Kong tonight, will be briefed by general secretary Kamal Nath who plans to leave for Calcutta tomorrow after identifying seats for the Congress.

Sonia is keen on meeting Mamata to provide an "extra push" to the alliance. While no date has been fixed, sources said the Trinamul leader wants it to be held after the seat-share deal is finalised.

The prospect of a tie-up with Trinamul has enthused the Bengal Congress so much that at least a dozen "serious candidates" have cropped up for each Assembly segment. In Murshidabad alone, party leaders are eyeing all 19 seats. They want Mamata to vacate Vidyasagar and Srirampur, where the daughter of former

state Congress president Gopal Das Nag is in the fray as Trinamul candidate, on the ground that the Congress has a sitting MLA.

The state Congress wants to claim 102 seats, but Kamal Nath presented a more pragmatic figure of 55-60. The breakup of 102 goes like this: in the 1999 general elections, the Congress finished ahead of Trinamul in 53 Assembly segments, Congress MLAs retained control in 24 seats and one or two seats each in 18 districts.

Bengal Congress leaders spent considerable time debating whether seats that fell vacant after the death of party MLAs should belong to them or Trinamul. Mamata has long been claiming that these Congressmen had leanings towards her party. On the other hand, an overwhelming majority of Congressmen favoured the party staking claim to the seats where their colleagues had won in 1996.

State Congress leaders said Sealdah would be a "prestige seat" for them but Mamata is still trying to obtain it for Tapas Roy. Mamata told Congress leaders she had "nothing against" sitting MLA Somen Mitra and she would

ensure a safe seat for him.

But the state Congress is unwilling to barter Sealdah. Sources close to Somen also rejected a proposal to consider him for the Rajya Sabha. "There will be no Rajya Sabha election for the next one-and-a-half years," they said.

Kamal Nath, who chaired today's meeting, said partymen were enthusiastic about the alliance, leading to a mad rush for tickets. "Suddenly we have a situation where in each seat, there are many aspirants. In the absence of seats going to the Congress quota, each leader has his/her own assessment," he said, insisting that the party would not settle for less than "40 winning seats".

## BJP ends alliance

Accusing Mamata of stabbing the "Vajpayee government in the back", the BJP today formally snapped ties with Trinamul. Breaking the 16-month alliance, BJP vice-president Kailashpati Mishra said: "We have closed our doors on Mamata and will fight the Assembly elections with some NDA partners and small parties." (See Page 6)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

29 MAR 2001

# PDS announces list; blow to Cong tie-up

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, March 26. - The Party for Democratic Socialism has announced its first list of 60 candidates for the Assembly polls today, virtually sealing the fate of an alliance with the Congress.

The Congress has accepted the "reality" that there can't be any seat adjustment with the PDS at this stage, when the prospect of a Trinamul-Congress tie-up has "brightened".

Mr Samir Putatunda, PDS secretary, had a round of talks with Mr Somen Mitra, former PCC chief, and Mr Pradip Bhattacharya, PCC vice-president, yesterday. Each side explained its "political compulsions".

The Congress reiterated its stand that it is committed to align with the Trinamul, if the latter severs its links with the BJP, whereas the PDS made it clear it will not be in an alliance with the Congress where the Trinamul is also partner.

"This is because the Trinamul is yet to explain to the people why it had joined hands with the BJP and why it wants to come out of it. Isn't it sheer greed for power by any means," Mr Saifuddin Choudhury, PDS president, said.

Mr Choudhury, however, said the doors for negotiation with the Congress are still open, since the talks can be resumed if Trinamul and Congress fail to form an alliance.

Mr Kamal Nath, AICC general secretary in charge of West Bengal, held talks with Miss Mamata Banerjee yesterday and is scheduled to continue his parleys later.

Meanwhile, the PCC vice president stressed ~~that~~ the relations with the PDS continue to be friendly because both the parties have made common cause in fighting the CPI-M-led Left Front "misrule".

When asked about the PDS' announcement of its list of candidates, Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary said: "We are indifferent to the development."

Mr Putatunda will contest the poll from



Mr Saifuddin Choudhury and Mr Samir Putatunda during the release of the PDS poll list in Kolkata on Monday. - The Statesman

Jadavpur, the chief minister's constituency, while Mr Choudhury has been fielded from Nadanghat in Burdwan. Mr Tapas Basu, PDS spokesman, is in the fray from Ballygunj.

Mr Putatunda said he has chosen the Jadavpur constituency to send the message to the electorate that though he has not much ideological difference with Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, the latter "being a prisoner of his party has failed to discharge his duties as home minister".

On the other hand, the BJP state unit reiterated its stand that until Miss Banerjee spells out in unambiguous terms whether she is with the NDA there can't be any seat adjustment with it.

"We are ready to field candidates in at least 200 seats and some of our NDA al-

lies, including the BJD and Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's party, are willing to field their candidates," Mr Muzaffar Khan, BJP state vice president, said.

It's really unfortunate that the Trinamul is going ahead with its plan to tie up with the Congress, which was considered as the CPI-M's "B" team till the other day, Mr Khan said. Even last month Congress MLAs were joining the Trinamul complaining that no real fight against the CPI-M is possible as long as they remained in the Congress.

"It's a pity that Miss Banerjee could think of disassociating herself from Mr Vajpayee, who not only rallied behind her all the time, but even visited her mother at her Kalighat residence," he added.

THE STATESMAN

27 MAR 2001

# Trinamool hardens stand against BJP

By Our Special Correspondent

**KOLKATA, MARCH 21.** The Trinamool Congress today moved closer to the Congress, its parent body, and further distanced itself from the BJP, reiterating that it would not extend support to Vajpayee-led NDA Government as was demanded by the BJP.

In a bid to placate the Trinamool chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, Mr. Kailashpati Mishra, BJP vice-president who is in charge of West Bengal affairs, said here that the Trinamool Congress had "misinterpreted" the message he had sent to Ms. Banerjee on Tuesday. Mr. Mishra was rushed here

401 213  
after the Trinamool took offence to the tone and wording of a faxed ultimatum it received from Mr. Sudheendra Kulkarni, officer in the Prime Minister's Office.

"It was never meant to be either a threat or an ultimatum. It was in good faith that we urged her to reiterate her position with regard to the NDA within a time-frame. Mr. Vajpayee lost by a single vote in 1998 on the floor of Parliament. We don't want a repeat of that situation," Mr. Mishra said.

Ms. Banerjee, however, was in no mood to respond to Mr. Mishra's request. According to indications, she is now moving

towards building a new relationship with the Congress in the State. Though the Trinamool leadership is mouthing the line — that the party would not like to break its ties with the BJP — it was quite evident that Ms. Banerjee was simply waiting for the BJP to take the initiative in formalising the break.

The BJP leadership seems to have reconciled itself to her stand, and this was evident from the announcement today that it had already identified at least 115 constituencies to field candidates. "We see a lack of keenness on her (Ms. Banerjee's) part to share seats with us," Mr. Mishra noted.

Ms. Banerjee was not available for comment; she was busy discussing possible seat-sharing arrangements with AICC functionaries and aides in her party.

Meanwhile, the Congress camp in Bengal is happy with the developments; it thinks a Trinamool-Congress combine would win a majority in the coming poll. "The Trinamool has already pulled out of the NDA. Things are moving in a positive direction," Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, West Bengal Congress president, said. However, some Trinamool and Congress workers are upset with their leaderships for coming closer to each other.

THE HINDU

21 MAR 2001

# BJP to send Kailashpati to salvage Trinamul tie-up

TAPAS RAY and TARUN GOSWAMI  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, March 20. A showdown appears to be in the offing between the BJP and Trinamul Congress. The latter today took strong exception to a letter reportedly written by a PMO official, Mr Sudhindra Kulkarni, prompting the BJP to mount a fire-fighting mission by deciding to rush its vice-president, Mr Kailashpati Mishra, to Kolkata tomorrow and disclaiming that the letter was written by Mr Kulkarni.

Mr Sudip Bandhopadhyay, Trinamul MP, said Mr Kulkarni wrote to Miss Mamata Banerjee yesterday asking her to declare in writing within 24 hours her support to the Prime Minister and the NDA government and had even set out its wording.

He claimed the PMO wanted the undertaking to read: "The Trinamul Congress affirms its full faith in the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, and like the Telugu Desam Party, our party will lend full support to the NDA government so that the country is not pushed in the vortex of instability by the machinations of the Communists and the Congress."

Calling the letter "uncivilised and unparliamentary", Mr Bandhopadhyay said the Trinamul

would not reply to it "even in 24 years". It was unfortunate, he said, that the BJP was dictating terms to one of its allies in such language. "The BJP has overstepped its limit."

The Trinamul Parliamentary Party had given a letter to the Prime Minister on 15 March in which it had stated it would pull out of NDA and that the two ministers from the party,



Miss Banerjee

■ Mamata now most isolated, page 3

Miss Banerjee and Mr Ajit Panja, would resign.

The party couldn't change its stand every day and under no circumstances did the question of going back to the NDA arise, he said. "It is a cent per cent guarantee that we are not

going back to the NDA."

Mr Tapan Sikdar said today the BJP would contest the Assembly polls with the help of NDA partners such as the BJD and the Samata Party as the Trinamul had refused to support the NDA government.

He told **The Statesman** over phone from Delhi that BJP's state election committee would meet in Kolkata tomorrow to decide how many seats the party would contest. "We'll certainly contest more than 200 seats. Mamata will now realise what it means to take on the Marxists without the Centre's backing and with a partner like the Congress which will finish her politically."

The party's state unit, on the other hand, today wrote to the Trinamul saying it wanted a change in 16 of the 39 seats it had been allotted by the Trinamul.

Those seats are difficult ones, and even in the remaining 23 the party is not on a strong wicket, Mr Asim Ghosh, state unit president, said. In 10 of these, the Left Front had won by very large margins. However, Mr Ghosh said his party was not demanding those seats to be swapped as that would be against the unity of the alliance.

■ See TIE-UP: page 6

## TIE-UP: Sudip turns down seat-swap plea

(Continued from page 1)

Mr Ghosh, who returned from Delhi last night after apprising the Prime Minister of the latest situation in the state, said Miss Banerjee could not become chief minister "if we lose in a large number of seats out of the 39 we have been given."

He said his party's intention was "to fight the battle under Miss Banerjee's leadership and it is in the interest of both parties that the BJP wins a good number of seats... While we had contested 33 per cent of the seats in 1998 and 1999, we've have agreed to contest only 13 per cent this time and are not asking for a single seat more than the 39 given to us."

He, however, refused to say whether the BJP central leadership would intervene if the Trinamul refused to meet his demand.

The seats the BJP has demanded are: Alipurduar, Dhurguri (SC), Balurghat East (SC) or Kumarganj, Kaliganj, Ranaghat East (SC), Joynagar or Canning, West (SC), Kharagpur Town, Dantan, Chhatra, Rampurhat, Nadanghat or Purbasthali, Kulti or Hirapur, Bagda (SC) or Bongaon, Karimpur, Uluberia South or Shyampur, and Jorasanko.

The BJP has considerable

influence in such areas as Dhurguri, Moynaguri and Falakata, and these should have been given to it after the KPP pulled out of the alliance with the Trinamul. Mr Ghosh said.

Mr Bandopadhyay, however, rejected any seat swap at this point and said it was for the BJP to decide whether it wanted to go with his party in the polls.

He reiterated the party's door was open to those who wanted to fight the CPI-M and welcomed the the Congress's announcement in Bangalore that the party would "fight seriously" the CPI-M in the state.

Asked whether the Trinamul had begun discussions with the Congress, Mr Bandopadhyay said Congress leaders were yet to approach them. He, however, did not rule out the possibility of an understanding with the party.

On the prospect of the Trinamul entering into an arrangement with the Congress, and leave the Congress free to field candidates against the BJP, Mr Ghosh said there were two options before his party. It might then decide to put up candidates against every Congress candidate, or it might decide to walk out of the alliance with Trinamul.

# Sena goes back on own edit in Saamna

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

SHIV Sena, a staunch ally of BJP, today denied reports that its supremo Bal Thackeray had demanded resignation of PMO officials, including Brajesh Mishra, saying the editorial in its mouthpiece Saamna reflected the views of its co-editor and not the party chief.

"Wrong information is being circulated. Nowhere has he (Thackeray) demanded the resignation of Mishra or N K Singh nor has he given any statement or interview in this regard," leader of Shiv Sena in Lok Sabha Anant Geete told reporters here at BJP press briefing.

Clarifying that the editorial was written by "Saamna" co-editor Sanjay Raut and not Thackeray, he said "Raut had only supported the government but had expressed an opinion (on PMO). Thackeray is not happy with the editorial".

Asked about Shiv Sena Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Nirupam's statement critical of PMO officials, Geete said it was his personal opinion and party did not subscribe to it.

Thackeray had said immediately after the expose that Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee should not resign under any circumstances but the government should be prepared for a full-fledged inquiry and anyone found guilty should be punished, Geete said.

"There is zero threat to Vajpayee government. Our party is fully supportive of the government," Sena sources here said.

The views of Sena were understood to have been conveyed by the party supremo Bal Thackeray to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on telephone today, the sources said.

The Sena's reaffirmation of support to the government came after Thackeray today demanded the removal of Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Brajesh Mishra and Officer on Special Duty N K Singh from the PMO till the judicial inquiry into the scandal was completed.



## 'Tehelka lied, no money was paid'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

THE Samata Party today debunked the claim of Tehelka.com that an amount of Rs 2 lakh was paid to it, saying that Minister of State for Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution V Sreenivasa Prasad was not present in Delhi on the day he was supposed to have received the money on instructions from party chief Jaya Jaitly.

"There is neither money nor anyone receiving it," Samata Party leader and Agriculture Minister Nitish Kumar, who is now also handling the Railways portfolio, told reporters here in the presence of Prasad.

According to the tapes, Kumar recalled, Jaitly had asked the two Tehelka journalists that the money be handed over to Prasad who was present in the room where the conversation had taken place on December 28 last year.

According to him, the reality was that Prasad was

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

### George is clean : Navy chief

NEW DELHI: CHIEF of Naval Staff (CNS) Admiral Sushil Kumar today sprang to the defence of his former minister George Fernandes claiming that the former defence minister did not push through the Barak missile deal. He also insisted that it was incorrect to drag in Fernandes' name since he came in the defence scene only in 1998. "It is wrong to say that Fernandes had tried to push through the Barak deal," Admiral Kumar said. "The navy was convinced of the efficiency, cost-effectiveness of the Israeli missiles which had undergone a series of tests since 1992," he added.

Fernandes it may be recalled had played a crucial role in installing Sushil Kumar as the CNS and sacking ex-Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat.

INDIAN EXPRESS

22 MAR 2001



# Left, Mulayam revive third front

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, March 15

THE THIRD front, the oft-tried experiment at a secular alliance of non-Congress parties, came out of nearly two years of hibernation today with a new name—People's Front (Lok Morcha)—under Jyoti Basu. The decision to revive the coalition was taken yesterday.

The constituents of PF are the CPI(M), CPI, Revolutionary Socialist Party, Forward Bloc, Samajwadi Party and Janata Dal (Secular). Former prime ministers V P Singh and H D Deve Gowda are also with it. Mulayam Singh Yadav, PF convener, said at a press conference that "our doors are open to all secular par-

"But they must distance themselves from the B.J.P.," veteran leader Madhu Dandvate said.

Leaders of the PF claimed that the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and Telegu Desam were "in touch" with them. Basu regretted the failure of the United Front experiment. "I am sorry the UF got disrupted. There is no time to lose for us. We shall be tested in the forthcoming elections to five states."

The 86-year-old Basu's health and advancing years has been considered by the PF leadership. "They have assured me I will not have to do much hard work. My friends understand my health problems, but I shall continue to work for the people till the end of my life."



JYOTI BASU

ties". The invitation was also extended to old Socialist allies who have gone over to the National Democratic Alliance.

The elections in five States will be contested by the parties individually under their distinct symbols, but it will be a collaborative effort.

The PF claims it stands for protection of workers and farmers. The World Trade Organisation was singled out for attack in the first statement released by it. Basu said a series of demonstrations, bandhs and ceaseworks would be organised beginning March 20.

On the revelations made in the tehelka tapes, Yadav said the PF was demanding not just the resignation of Defence Minister George Fernandes but the entire Vajpayee Government. He said the President must intervene and dismiss the Government.

# Third Front idea gets fillip with 'expose'

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 14.** The murky defence deals exposure that hit the Vajpayee Government has provided the much-needed fillip to proponents of a 'Third Front' with preparations under-way for a formal launch here tomorrow.

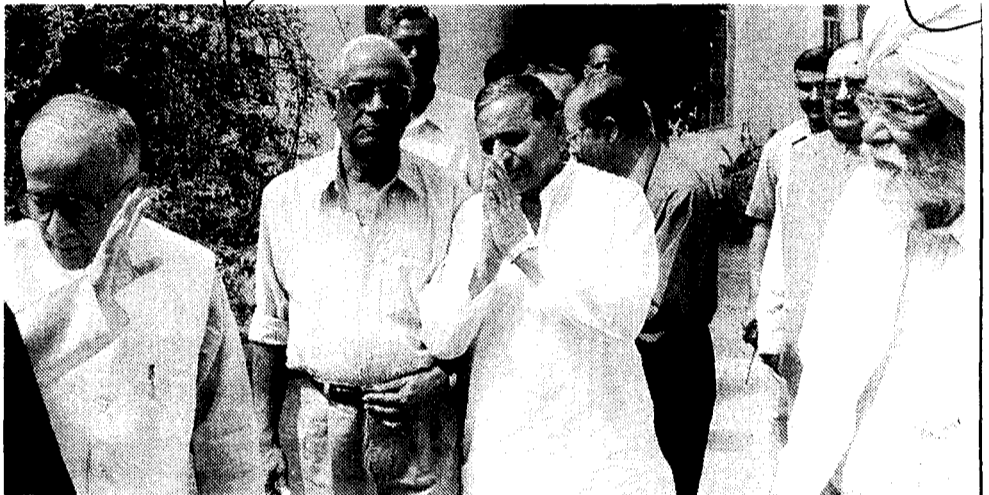
Significantly, today's meeting which discussed the move was attended by the Samajwadi Party president, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, who could be assigned a key role in the new formation. Mr. Yadav had earlier distanced himself from such an effort.

Even though there were indications that Mr. Yadav and two Left parties had reservations on the inclusion of Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal in the formation, the outfit is to be part of it.

The SP had been openly expressing against doing business with any party which has links with either the BJP or the Congress. The RJD shares power with the Congress in Bihar.

Although the meeting of senior leaders of Left parties and others supporting a "non-BJP, non-Congress" formation was scheduled several weeks ago, the website expose on shady defence deals provided the right backdrop to it.

The presence of the former West Bengal Chief Minister Mr. Jyoti Basu, in the Capital for the CPI(M) politburo sitting, was timed for a meeting here today which was attended by the



**Top leaders of the erstwhile United Front (from left), Mr. Jyoti Basu, Mr. A.B. Bardhan, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet, coming out of a meeting which sought the immediate resignation of the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI**

CPI(M) general secretary, Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet, two former Prime Ministers, Mr. Viswanath Pratap Singh and Mr. H. D. Deve Gowda (Janata Dal-Secular), the Samajwadi Party Chief, Mr. Yadav, the CPI General Secretary, Mr. A. B. Bardhan and Secretary Mr. D. Raja, and RSP leader, Mr. Abani Roy.

One point of view was that the formation of an alternative front should not be kept on the hold for long and to go ahead with those parties which were willing to join straight away. Broadbasing and taking on more parties who wish to be in the 'anti-Congress, anti-BJP' could be an ongoing effort.

APR 15 1998

# Tie-up with BJP still on: Mamata

HT Correspondent

Kolkata, March 17

SCOFFING AT speculations that Trinamool-BJP alliance is in jeopardy, Mamata Banerjee today categorically said that her party's poll alliance with the BJP in Bengal still stands.

"We don't betray our friends but if they want to leave us, we have nothing to say," Mamata said on hearing that the BJP State secretariat yesterday had decided to contest in all the 294 seats and was thinking of snapping ties with her.

At the BJP's central election committee meeting today, the party leaders decided that either tonight or tomorrow a team of BJP leaders led by State BJP president Asim Ghosh would call on Mamata Banerjee seeking readjustment of some seats allotted to them.

Trinamool sources said Mamata was not averse to the idea of discussing the matter with them. But Jorabagan seat that the BJP is demanding could become a bone of contention between the Trinamool and the BJP camps as Mamata is not willing to give them more than one (Burrabazar) seat in the city. "It is wrong to speculate that our alliance with the BJP has soured. The anti-CPI(M) forces led by Trinamool will contest in all the 294 seats in the forthcoming elections.

As for the BJP, if they have any problems regarding seats, let them come forward and have discussion with us regarding the matter," Trinamool Policy-Making Body chairman Pankaj Banerjee said.

As for an alliance with the Congress, Mamata indicated that she would not go out of her way to win the Congress over. "If they want to give one-to-one fight to the CPI(M), they are welcome to join our alliance," Banerjee said. But the fact that the Trinamool is far from enthusiastic about an alliance with the Congress in Bengal became clear when Banerjee said: "First let the Congress completely snap its ties with the CPI(M) all over the country. Moreover, it should also sever ties with such corrupt elements like Laloo Prasad Yadav and Jayalalitha."

**Mamata to abstain in a trust vote: P3**  
**Shut door on Mamata, says Paswan: P9**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 8 MAR 2011

# Will Mamata return to NDA after polls?

Arindam Sarkar  
Kolkata, March 16

THOUGH MAMATA Banerjee has ruled out returning to the NDA Government even after George Fernandes's resignation, she might do just that after the West Bengal Assembly polls.

But what if the Prime Minister fulfils all her demands? Will she then change her mind? Not immediately. "We decided to withdraw support through a resolution of the Trinamool Parliamentary Party. But once we find that the Prime Minister has demonstrated the sincerity to erase the Government's tainted image, we will again review our

stand," Trinamool leader Ajit Panja said.

But this 'review' will be kept in abeyance till the polls are over, when Mamata will be able to devote more time to ministerial activities.

That the Trinamool is now firmly focused on Bengal was clear in party MP Sudip Banopadhyay's statement. "For the next two months, we are in Bengal. After that we will decide upon our future course of action."

And that not everything is over between the Trinamool and the NDA is clear from the fact that Mamata has refused to go for an alliance with the Con-

gress, hasn't closed the chapter of electoral understanding with the BJP in Bengal to fight the CPI(M) and also by the fact that she is in constant touch with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu to ensure that he doesn't withdraw support to the Government.

Her commitment to Vajpayee is evident from the way she ridiculed the possibility of the People's Front led by Jyoti Basu and Mulayam Singh Yadav to emerge as an alternative. "Basu and other People's Front vultures are fishing in troubled waters. They won't succeed."

Mamata's local compulsions and the fear of being seen in the

company of a scam-tainted Government before the polls compelled her to leave Vajpayee. But at the same time, she believes that once the polls are over and if the Trinamool is unable to form the Government in Bengal, she can be available for the railway minister's post — a post she is keen on as she also wants her Budget promises for Bengal fulfilled.

Mamata believes it might be possible to join the Government after the polls because by then Vajpayee will do the needful to cleanse the Government's image. Once that is done, she could easily return with her colleagues to the Cabinet and

retain support to the NDA. "We have given a free hand to the PM to cleanse the Government. And we know that a man of his stature can revive the NDA. All of us have tremendous faith in him," Panja said.

Said Mamata: "We have laid out several conditions for the Prime Minister to restore the Government's image. We want him to demonstrate his commitment to transparency, probity and integrity.

We were upset that the Government didn't act fast to restore the people's faith. So we had no alternative. We are watching the developments closely."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 MAR 2001

# Mamata cashes in on a crisis

HT-3  
1673

Arindam Sarkar  
Kolkata, March 15

SHE HAD very little option and only made a virtue of the tehelka issue to resign from the Cabinet. Mamata Banerjee's withdrawal from the NDA was inevitable when the Prime Minister turned down her demand to sack Defence Minister George Fernandes. This was what Mamata was desperately looking for to quit and jack up her popularity before hitting the campaign trail for the coming Assembly polls in Bengal.

But even after Fernandes resigned an hour after she pulled out, Mamata stuck to her stand of not supporting the NDA. "We had no personal vendetta against Fernandes. It was a question of the Government's integrity. Our parliamentary Party passed a unanimous resolution and decided to leave the Government. As for a review of our stand, we will do so only if Vajpayee fulfils all our demands and takes all steps to cleanse the Government," said Trinamool leader Ajit Panja. But he made it clear that there was no question of joining the Government now.

Mamata has been very upset of late. She failed to fathom why people didn't appreciate her populist Railway Budget. She was also aware that her popularity was dipping by the day and hit rock bottom with the tehelka exposé. Her association with a corrupt regime had clearly put a question mark on her clean image and her moral authority to level corruption charges on the Left Front.

Obviously she had to leave.



MAMATA BANERJEE

And though her Railway Budget failed to do wonders for her, today's decision to walk out of the Government has validated her image of a politician who doesn't hang on to power. Thus in a way, she has taken the wind out of the CPI(M)'s sails. The CPI(M) now cannot go for her jugular. Though the party has described her resignation as an election stunt, it's still advantage Mamata. And, that's exactly how she would have liked to kick off her campaign.

But what happens to the alliance with the State BJP? Or for that matter, will there be an alliance with the Congress now that she has left the BJP?

"The alliance with the BJP here is over and the seat adjustment with them stands cancelled. The party will hold an emergency meeting tomorrow after Mamata returns to the city

to decide on the future course of action," said Trinamool policy-making body chairman Pankaj Banerjee.

The State BJP president sounded anguished. "We have to watch and see. We will hold an emergency meeting to review the situation."

If the BJP is unhappy, the Congress is equally circumspect about the future. "There is no need to be euphoric about the development but now things are much easier for Mamata. If she wants an alliance with us, we are ready. If the Trinamool and the Congress join hands, we can easily defeat the CPI(M) here, said PCC president Pranab Mukherjee.

"Snapping her ties with the BJP was the first step. Now we have to work out the modalities. In the next 48 hours, the situation will become clear," said Congress leader Priya Ranjan Das Munshi.

But Mamata has categorically said she doesn't want any truck with the Congress. Her stand is understandable. With the Congress entering into a formal alliance with the CPI(M) in Tamil Nadu and Assam, any truck with the Congress would damage her reputation as a CPI(M)-baiter. As of now, she would rather prefer to poach on the Congress camp than join hands with them.

"If need be, I will fight alone. People of Bengal are with me and they know I am always beside them in their hour of crisis," Mamata said. A street-fighter to the core, she may be dead right, going by the way her decision to quit has been welcomed.

# Did Trinamul jump the gun

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 15. - Miss Mamata Banerjee has done it finally, but did she jump the gun? Just two hours before Mr George Fernandes announced his resignation, fulfilling her main demand, the railway minister and Trinamul chief, pulled out of the NDA government. Her move was in protest against the government's "inaction" over tehelka's exposure of the shady "defence deal".

She has formally conveyed her decision to the President and the Prime Minister.

Though the defence minister resigned within hours, the Trinamul refused to reconsider its decision. "We held a meeting after the news of Mr Fernandes's resignation. Let it be clear that

we were not personally against anyone. Also, the defence minister's resignation was just one of our demands, which included a JPC or judicial probe into allegations of corruption and action against officials found guilty. We want a probe into the authenticity of *tehelka.com* controversy and action against them if it's false. We've given a free hand to the Prime Minister to clean the mess. As of now, there's no change in our stand," Mr Ajit Kumar Panja said. Mr Panja too has resigned as the minister of state for external affairs.

Despite this claim, there apparently is a feeling among some Trinamul leaders of having "mistimed the action".

"The Trinamul will never compromise on the issue of corruption and national security.

Someone had to take a bold decision to send the right message across. We have done it," said Miss Banerjee, at a crowded press conference here.

Will the Trinamul snap its ties with the BJP in West Bengal for the Assembly polls? Miss Banerjee said: "The decision on the state will be announced in Kolkata after a meeting of our leadership there." She and her party MPs were scheduled to leave for Kolkata later tonight.

The Trinamul took the pullout decision this evening at a meeting of its parliamentary party held at MP, Mr Akbar Ali's house. The MPs unanimously resolved: "We firmly believe that the government should not be seen to be compromising with issues related to defence and national security..."

The implementation of Miss Banerjee's "threat" came as a setback to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, who earlier in the day tried for a patch-up through a letter to the Trinamul chief. Even a Vajpayee emissary couldn't win her back.

Miss Banerjee in her characteristic style said: "We love Mother India, our Bengal. We will not compromise with corruption or our national security. We are accountable to the common people of India."

Will she now join hands with the Congress which had asked her to leave the NDA?

"Trinamul is capable of standing alone. We know how to fight it alone," Miss Banerjee said. But some leaders feel the Congress will be her natural ally now.

Chidambaram at the news conference. (PTI)

# Split blow to Moopanar

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Chennai, March 16: P. Chidambaram today announced he was floating a new organisation — the Tamil Maanila Congress Democratic Forum — which would campaign against the ADMK-led front in the Assembly elections in the state.

He told reporters at a crowded conference here that he was not “actually leaving the TMC or floating a rival party, but simply trying to live up to the ideals for which the party was founded five years ago and setting up a forum towards that end”. He said some of his supporters wanted to contest the elections and he was exploring ways of fulfilling their aspirations.

Indications are that he will seek the help of the DMK to accommodate a few of his loyalists; DMK chief Karunanidhi would be only too glad to oblige the rebel TMC leader.

Chidambaram also appealed to TMC functionaries at all levels to strengthen his crusade and promised that the party would be reunited after the elections under a leadership faithful to the party's

“noble objectives”. He blamed a coterie for exploiting TMC boss G.K. Moopanar's illness and leading the party “down the garden path”.

Though Chidambaram would not name any of them, former Union ministers Jayanthi Natarajan and S.R. Balasubramaniam are among those who have been the most vociferous proponents of an alliance with the ADMK “in the larger interests of the party”. They are both close to Moopanar.

Natarajan's supporters are believed to have led a noisy protest within Sathyamurthi Bhavan, the TMC headquarters, two days ago after Chidambaram went public with his denunciation of the alliance with the ADMK.

Chidambaram regretted that the TMC had failed to extract an assurance of a coalition government or even of some common minimum programme from Jayalalitha before entering into a deal with her.

He contended that there was no way her nomination papers would be accepted by the election authorities, given the norms in force now. It was inconceivable that anyone convicted of corruption charges could be invited to form a government, he felt.

THE TAMIL MAANILA CONGRESS DEMOCRATIC FORUM

17 MAR 2001

17 MAR 2001

CONGRESS YET TO BE CONVINCED

## AIADMK, TMC reach alliance

By Suresh Nambath and  
Radha Venkatesan

CHENNAI, MARCH 9. At the end of a suspense-filled day of hard bargaining, the TMC president, Mr. G.K. Moopanar, met the AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, at her Poes Garden residence here, and reached an understanding for the Assembly election. But the two leaders refrained from making any formal announcement.

While Mr. Moopanar promised to give details of the talks tomorrow, Ms. Jayalalitha only said: "I have nothing to say today."

Apparently, the differences have boiled down to bargaining over an additional three seats. The AIADMK increased the seats on offer for the TMC-Congress combine from 45 to 47, but the TMC wanted 50 seats.

Though the talks between the TMC-Congress combine and the AIADMK showed considerable progress, Mr. Moopanar was not able to convince the Congress on the number of seats and the proposal for delinking Pondicherry from Tamil Nadu in any electoral pact.

The Congress is insisting on at least 15 seats, besides the Tiruchi Lok Sabha constituency, where a by-election is due. Mr. Moopanar is, therefore, trying to get the AIADMK to concede at least 50 seats.

### TNCC chief unaware

However, the TNCC president, Mr. E.V.K.S. Elangovan, indicat-



The AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, welcoming the Tamil Maanila Congress president, Mr. G.K. Moopanar, at her Poes Garden residence in Chennai on Friday. — Photo: M. Moorthy

ing his displeasure at the turn of events, said he was "not aware" of any alliance. He was awaiting word from the Congress high command. Similarly, the Pondicherry PCC president, Mr. V. Narayanasamy, said the high command was still considering the delinking proposal.

The pace of the developments was set by the AIADMK emissaries, the journalist Mr. Cho Ramasamy, and the Dravidar Kazhagam general secretary, Mr. K. Veeramani, who had separate

meetings with Mr. Moopanar. Only after a two-hour discussion with Mr. Veeramani did Mr. Moopanar decide to call on Ms. Jayalalitha.

Although a TMC delegation was expected to meet Ms. Jayalalitha at least twice in the day, the absence of a nod from the Congress high command delayed a Moopanar-Jayalalitha meeting till late in the evening.

As Ms. Jayalalitha was insisting on concluding the alliance today itself, the TMC and the Congress

spent the whole day grappling with various aspects including the seats package and the PMK's role in Pondicherry.

Initial hiccups arose on account of the Congress dissatisfaction with the "single-digit number" of seats from the original total of 45 seats. When the AIADMK raised the number for the TMC-Congress combine to 47, the TMC wanted to keep 37 seats, its strength in the current Assembly. But the Congress is not willing to settle for anything less than 15 seats.

Mr. Moopanar tried to allay the apprehensions of the Congress on the possible role of the PMK in the post-election scenario if a Congress-TMC front fell short of majority. He asked the Congress not to exercise itself over the issue as post-election problems did not have to be solved now.

Earlier in the day, the TMC election committee gave Mr. Moopanar its "unanimous view" on the alliance strategy, and authorised him to take an appropriate decision.

The procrastination on the part of the TMC and the Congress also delayed the seat-sharing talks with the Left parties. Both the CPI and the CPI(M), like the Congress, have made it clear that they would not settle for a "single-digit number" of seats.

A joint delegation of the CPI(M) leader, Mr. K. Varadarajan, and the CPI State secretary, Mr. R. Nallakannu, held two rounds of discussions with Ms. Jayalalitha. Not much progress was made in the first round as she was still waiting for confirmation of the alliance with the TMC.

In the evening, the Left parties were told that they were to come for talks in case the TMC agreed to the alliance. But, as the TMC continued to weigh all aspects of the AIADMK offer, this meeting was put off to late evening.

After the second meeting, Mr. Nallakannu said no agreement was reached on the number of seats, but the talks would continue on Sunday. The TMC and the Left would be part of the AIADMK-led alliance, he added.

Meanwhile, the Janata Dal(S) State president, Mr. G.A. Vadivelu, said the party had asked six seats, but was offered one by the AIADMK. Talks with smaller parties would continue on March 13.

## Cong. may consider delinking formula

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, MARCH 9. The Congress today indicated that it was willing to consider delinking of the Pondicherry issue vis-a-vis alliance for Assembly elections, but said no final decision has been taken. On the contentious alliance issue in Tamil Nadu, the party spokesperson, Mr. Jaipal Reddy, told presspersons this afternoon that "something authoritative and final would emerge within the next 24 hours".

Separately, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, in charge of Tamil Nadu affairs, said "We will not be part of any Government-sharing arrangement with the PMK," Mr. Azad said. However, its willingness to consider the delinking formula is a change from its previous position. Some days ago, Mr. Azad had stated that his party "had not yet applied its mind to the idea of delinking the two issues (alliance in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry)".

The Congress appears to have been encouraged to consider, by the TMC and also by a section from

within its own fold, the delinking proposal. Those in favour of treating the two alliances separately argue that the party has been forced to adopt that position despite its serious reservations about the PMK, because in Tamil Nadu it is up against a bigger danger in "the communal NDA alliance", while the fight in Pondicherry is to save the Government. The Pondicherry unit has also told the leadership that it is quite confident of winning enough seats along with the TMC to form a Government on its own.

The delinking formula, according to sources, if found acceptable might lead to breaking the log-jam over Pondicherry. The AIADMK has promised the PMK in writing the first chance at Government formation and finds itself unable to renege on that position. The Congress, on the other hand, is categorical that it will not be part of any power-sharing arrangement with the PMK. It also believes that it has much stronger claim as it is in Government in Pondicherry and is the main force there, with the largest number of MLAs.

THE HINDU

10 MAR 2001



# Sudarshan idea to be debated in RSS

BY SANJAY BASAK

**New Delhi, March 12:** The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is all set to raise its demand for Indianisation of Islam and churches during its three-day Pratinidhi Sabha to be held in New Delhi from March 16.

RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan had been raising the issue since the outfit's last meet at Agra in October. "The sabha, which would be held in Delhi for the first time, is expected to stress on the three main issues — Indianisation of Islam and churches, economy and construction of Ram temple at Babri site," sources said.

Mr Sudarshan had earlier stated that the leaders of minority communities have to "accept the fact that their roots belonged to India, that is Bharat." He said: "*Islam aur churchon ka bharatiyakaran hona zaroori hain* (Indianisation of Islam and churches has to be done. It's important)."

The RSS chief had stated that a section of leaders of the minority communities were "not willing to accept that their roots." An RSS functionary, while explaining Mr Sudarshan's views, said that the Sarsanghchalak, was "not trying to

hurt the religious sentiments" of the Muslims and the Christians. "What he meant was that since they (Muslims and Christians), were living in India, they must accept the greatness of this country.

For instance, they must accept that Ram temple was demolished to build Babri masjid. They have to seek their own roots," the functionary said. "In short, they must accept that Babur came to India as an aggressor," he maintained.

Sources claimed that during the sabha it would be made categorically clear that leaders of the churches and Islam would have to "accept this view." It was stated that the RSS would continue to raise the issue, till it was accepted by the minority community leaders in the country. The meet would also support the Ram Janmabhoomi movement on the basis of this background.

Sources disclosed that the RSS and the BJP have reached an "understanding" that the latter would not comment or criticise the former's views.

At the most the BJP, the political wing of the Sangh Parivar, "could dissociate itself from our views," a senior RSS leader said.

THE ASIAN AGE

13 MAR 2001

# Saifuddin eyes joint manifesto

BY OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Feb. 27: CPM rebels Saifuddin Chowdhury and Samir Putatunda, who recently floated the Party for Democratic Socialism, are planning to push for a joint election manifesto with the Bengal Congress after concretising seat-sharing arrangements.

A decision to this effect will be taken at the first state committee meeting of the PDS tomorrow. Nearly 50 members from across the state will attend the meeting.

The coming together of PDS and the state Congress has become possible with the latter choosing not to form a *mahajot* with Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress because of its links with the BJP.

Announcing this, PDS general secretary Samir Putatunda said tonight that the party will officially initiate a dialogue with the Congress for seat sharing early next week. "We have had several rounds of discussions with some key Congress leaders, including PCC chief Pranab Mukherjee and PCC vice-president Pradip Bhattacharya. But the modalities for the poll alliance are yet to be sorted out," he added.

The PDS chief claimed that CPM dissidents, particularly those sidelined in the organisation, have sent feelers to them expressing willingness to tie up with

the new party. "The Congress-PDS combine will emerge as a challenge to the ruling communists in the coming days," Putatunda added.

Bhattacharya later admitted at the PCC office that discussions were on at various levels for a poll tie-up with the PDS. "The state Congress does not mind collaborating with anti-CPM democratic secular forces to ensure the defeat of the communists here," he added.

However, pro-mahajot Congress MLA Sougata Roy today criticised Bhattacharya for making overtures to the PDS leaders. "A poll alliance with CPM dissidents will not help the state Congress fight the Marxists because the PDS is nothing but the CPM's 'B' team," he said.

Roy added that several Congress MLAs have lined up a "Congress Unity Convention" at Calcutta University Institute Hall on March 4.

"We want to bring together those Congress members who believe that unity with the Trinamul Congress is the need of the hour and can oust the communists from Bengal," he explained.

In another development, Sudip Roy, a member of the CPI's Calcutta district council, today resigned from the party to join the PDS. He said more than 200 members of the CPI's Calcutta unit will switch over to the PDS in next few days.

THE TELEGRAPH

28 FEB 2001

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# Revolt in Trinamool over seats for Congress entrants

By Malabika Bhattacharya

**KOLKATA, MARCH 5.** The Railway Minister and the Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, is having a mutiny on her hands for allotting tickets to the Congress MLAs who have just joined the party to enable them to contest the coming Assembly elections in West Bengal.

According to reports, a large number of Trinamool workers gathered on Sunday in front of Nizam Palace, the Central Government guest house in the city, where Ms. Banerjee is busy finalising the list of candidates and raised slogans protesting her decision to nominate the Congress legislators who crossed over to the Trinamool Congress on Sunday.

The Trinamool leadership is trying to put forward the explanation that the demonstration was organised by the West Bengal ruling communists, in collaboration with the Congress, to disrupt the ticket distribution process.

Trinamool sources said the party had been experiencing convulsions for quite some time over the inclusion of Congress functionaries. Many Trinamool workers who stood by Ms. Banerjee since its inception in 1997 were unhappy on seeing the deserters almost effortlessly getting in and succeeding in grabbing coveted positions in the Trinamool.

The rivalry appears to have taken a new turn with Ms. Banerjee promising seats to seven out of the eight Congress legislators who crossed over to the Trinamool Congress. The eighth, Mr. Debi Shankar Panda, is not contesting the polls as he is unwell.

The relations between the Trinamool and the Congress soured further today with Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, State Congress president, charging Ms. Banerjee with launching a war against the Congress rather than the communists. "She said that she is fighting against the communists but by taking the Congress MLAs into her party she has made clear that

her objective is to challenge the Congress," he said.

The Congress was seriously considering a one-to-one fight against the leftists in the coming election by entering into seat adjustments with the Trinamool. "We wanted to put up our candidates against the BJP nominees. But, the Trinamool would not agree. We have our commitments too," Mr. Mukherjee said.

Analysts say Ms. Banerjee may have blasted the Congress in public on Sunday for failing to help her give the mahajot or grand alliance a concrete shape but, in private, she has expressed her disappointment. She was looking for either a mahajot with the Congress or an exodus from it which would have prevented the triangular contests in the polls.

Ms. Banerjee was expecting at least 30 Congress MLAs to join her but most of them decided to stay on as Mr. A. B. A. Ghani Khan Choudhury, MP, told them to accept the party's stated position of the BJP.

**THE HINDU**

- 6 MAR 2001

# ✓ Eight MLAs dump Cong<sup>HPI</sup> for Trinamool

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, March 4

CONGRESS LEGISLATOR  
Saugata Roy today joined the Trinamool with seven other MLAs and three AICC members at a function where Mamata Banerjee reminded the audience of how the Congress had once shown her the door, and promised election tickets for the newcomers.

The Trinamool chief also claimed to have reached an understanding with the BJP, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and Kamtapur People's Party. "We will announce our list of candidates in a day or two," she said at the University Institute Hall function.

Those who jumped ship with Roy are: MLAs from Kolkata Tapas Ray, Tarak Banerjee, Paresh Pal, Shibdas Mukherjee from Nadia, Dr Anupam Sen from Jalpaiguri, Sital Sardar from Howrah and Debishankar Panda from Midnapore.

AICC members Sukhendu Sekhar Ray, Pranab Basu and Samir Ray also cut ties with the Congress. Councillor Amiya Mukherjee and Youth Congress leader Sajal Ghosh also changed sides. All of them, Mamata said, would be given tickets. All except Panda who, she said, was sick and unwilling to contest.

A triumphant Mamata recalled at today's function how the Congress had once expelled her. "On that day I was determined to do or die. Politics in Bengal is in a state of flux. Let us trust the CPI(M) now or we won't be able to do it ever." Saugata, who was the Congress deputy leader in the Assembly, said the

party leadership seemed to have a tacit understanding with the CPI(M) and was not interested in fighting the Left Front.

This is the second major exodus in the Congress Legislature Party. Earlier, 20 prominent MLAs from South Bengal and three from North Bengal had changed sides.

Saugata, whose relation with Mamata has borne strains in the recent past, today described her as the "most popular leader" in West Bengal.

Comparing the Assembly polls with the battle of Kurukshetra, Roy said: "Now that the battlelines are drawn, we look up to Mamata as our charioteer. She was forced to leave the Congress in 1997 and form her own outfit. But she took with her the Congress votebank."

Roy said that he, with other Congress leaders, had tried to rejuvenate the party, but in vain. "We couldn't raise the party's credibility despite increasing our numbers in the Assembly. Sensing the mood, I along with 27 Congress MLAs sent a fax to the AICC president urging her to forge an alliance with the Trinamool Congress. But no one bothered to respond to our appeal till February 28. Instead the Pradesh president met Mamata pressing her once again to pull out of the NDA."

"I feel Pranabda and his friends in AICC are still dreaming of forming a government at the Centre with CPI(M) support. They have joined hands with the CPI(M) in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh and are trying out the same trick in West Bengal."

**Related reports and photograph on Page 4**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 MAR 2007

# Trinamul lines up stars to beat hammer & sickle

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, March 7. - Film personalities, bureaucrats and footballers figure in the list of Trinamul Congress candidates which the party chief, Miss Mamata Banerjee, announced in the city today.

In all names of 228 Trinamul candidates have been announced. Names of seven more will be announced later, Miss Banerjee said. The party has conceded 39 seats to the BJP.

Actress Madhabi Mukherjee has been fielded as Trinamul candidate against the chief minister, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, for the Jadavpur seat. Two other film personalities - Tapas Pal and Nayana Das - will contest from Alipur and Bowbazar constituencies.

Arjuna awardee Prasun Banerjee and coach Amal Dutta will contest from Behala West and Shyampur constituencies.

The party has allotted eight seats to the JMM, six to Kamtapur People's Party and one each to the Samata Party and Biplabi Bangla Congress, a former constituent of the Left Front.

The Trinamul has made an understanding with three GNLF candidates for Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Kurseong seats. It has not fielded candidates against Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury's sister, Mrs Rubi Noor, and his brother, Mr AHA Ghani Khan Chowdhury, in Malda.

Twelve per cent seats have been reserved for women, Miss

Banerjee said.

Mr Saugata Roy has been shifted to Dhakuria from Alipur and he will contest against the state PWD minister, Mr Kshiti Goswami of RSP. Mr Tapas Roy, who recently joined the Trinamul, is fielded against the former WBPCCC chief, Mr Somen Mitra, at Sealdah. Mr Paresh Pal is pitted against former state transport minister, Mr Shyamal Chakraborty, at Manicktola. Mr Sultan Ahmed of the Trinamul will contest against former CPI-M MP, Mr Mohammad Salim. Mr Sukhendu Shekhar Roy, former AICC member who joined the Trinamul recently, will contest from Jagatdal. Mr Sujit Bose is fielded against the state transport minister, Mr Subhas Chakraborty, in Belgachia East.

Dr Nirmal Majhi will fight from Ukhra in Burdwan and Mrs Ratna Nag from Srirampur seat. Mr Jainal Abedin will contest from Itahar. Mr Govinda Naskar, who joined Trinamul Congress, will contest from Canning West (reserved seat.)

Mr Mantu Sanyal has been fielded against tourism minister Mr Manab Mukherjee at Beliaghata. Mayor Mr Subrata Mukherjee will contest from Chowringhee. Mr Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay from Rashbehari. Mr Subrata Bakshi, state president of the party will contest from Bishnupur West seat.

Mrs Sonali Guha, state Trinamul Chatra parishad president, will fight against Mr Gokul

Bairagi. Mr Nirved Roy will contest from Tamluk and Mr Sisir Adhikary from Contai South seat. Mr Chaitanyamay Nanda, will contest against his elder brother, the state fisheries minister Mr Kironmoy Nanda at Mukhberia in Midnapore. Veteran Congress leader Mr Rajani Dalui will contest from Kespur.

**FB loss:** Mr Satyanarayan Bajaj, a Forward Bloc candidate, today resigned from his party and will contest from the Jorasanko seat on a Trinamul ticket.

**Three ex-IGs in fray:** Three retired I-Gs will contest. Mr Ranjit Mukherjee will contest finance minister; Mr Asim Dasgupta, at Khardah. Mr CM Jatua and Mr Amal Dutta will contest from Mandirbazar reserved seat in South 24-Parganas and Kalna. Mr Dipak Ghosh, retired principal secretary of state information department will be contesting from Mahisadal seat in Midnapore.

**BJP not happy:** The state BJP is not happy with 39 seats. Mr Asim Ghosh, state president, and Mr Muzaffar Khan, vice-president, urged Central leaders to pressure Miss Banerjee to concede more seats. The state leaders met Mr AB Vajpayee, SNS adds from New Delhi. Mr Bangaru Laxman told Mr Ghosh and Mr Khan that Trinamul alliances with JMM and KPP should not come in the way of BJP-Trinamul Congress tie-up.

■ More reports on page 4

THE STATESMAN

9 MAR 2001

## Trinamool still open to tie-up with Cong.: Mamata

By Our Special Correspondent

**KOLKATA, MARCH 1.** The Railway Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, said today that she is still open to the idea of forming a "mahajot" or grand alliance with the Congress in West Bengal in the coming Assembly election.

Ms. Banerjee, who arrived here on Tuesday, told presspersons that the "mahajot" was possible if the Congress accepted the Trinamool in its present form. "We have an ally in the BJP. But, if the Congress is keen on the alliance, we will allot it seats from the Trinamool's quota," she said.

The Trinamool leader said what stood in the way of the mahajot was the political compulsions the Congress had at the national level. "The reality is, it (the Congress) is very weak in Bengal today."

According to her, the Congress should accept the one-to-one formula to fight the Bengal communists in the coming poll.

She announced that a sitting MLA of the Socialist Party, a constituent of the State's ruling Left Front, joined the Trinamool today. Two former MLAs of the Forward Bloc, another Front constituent also joined the Trinamool today, she said.

Ms. Banerjee said that she would float a new front which would include the BJP, the Jharkhand Party and the Kamtapur People's Party to counter the CPI(M)-led Front.

She refuted the charge that the Kamtapur People's Party was a separatist organisation saying that only the Kamtapur Liber-

ation Organisation was a militant outfit.

She said her party was holding talks with the BJP on seats and she was certain that there would not be any problem in adjustments. A joint manifesto with the BJP would be released soon.

Ms. Banerjee said her party would decide as to whether she would contest the poll.

## CPI(ML) leader hurt in lathicharge

**RANCHI, MARCH 1.** At least 10 persons, including the CPI(ML) general secretary, Mr. Dipankar Bhattacharya, and a police officer, were injured in brickbating and police lathicharge on a violent procession of the CPI(ML) near the Assembly here today.

Mr. Bhattacharya sustained serious injuries when police used lathis to quell the CPI(ML) activists. Police said the CPI(ML) procession, led by Mr. Bhattacharya, turned violent, broke the police barricade and started brickbating, injuring a circle inspector and a photographer of a local daily. The party legislator, Mr. Mahendra Singh, was also injured in the lathicharge.

Police resorted to lathicharge to ward off the attack and disperse the CPI(ML) activists. Several people were injured. The CPI(ML) activists came in a procession to the Assembly, demanding scrapping of Koel Karo hydel project and protesting against the police firing at Tapkara in Gumla district on February 2 in which eight persons were killed. — UNI

JAYALALITHA IGNORES CONG. OVER PONDY ARRANGEMENT

# AIADMK, PMK clinch deal

By Suresh Nambath  
and Radha Venkatesan

**CHENNAI, MAR. 5.** Virtually shutting out the Congress from its electoral front, the AIADMK today concluded seat-sharing negotiations with the Paattali Makkal Katchi in both Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. As a result, the third front option of the TMC, which is not inclined to dump the Congress, gained a fresh lease of life.

After a meeting with the PMK founder, Dr. S. Ramadoss, the AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, announced that the PMK would be given 27 seats in Tamil Nadu and 10 in Pondicherry. More importantly, she gave in to the PMK demand for leading the next government in Pondicherry in the event of the alliance winning a majority in the territorial Assembly.

As per the agreement signed by the two leaders, a PMK nominee would be the chief minister for the first half of the five-year term in Pondicherry. An AIADMK candidate would serve as the chief minister in the second half. Dr. Ramadoss told reporters later that he was "satisfied" with the arrangement.

The AIADMK decision to show the door to the Congress was conveyed to the TMC quite early today. A TMC delegation led by Mr. S.R. Balasubramaniam called on Ms. Jayalalitha immediately after the AIADMK-PMK accord. Although Mr. Balasubramaniam described the talks with Ms. Jayalalitha as "cordial", he said he did not want to say anything that would contradict the resolu-



The AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, and the PMK president, Dr. Ramadoss, with the electoral agreement in Chennai on Monday.

tion of the TMC to work together with the Congress in the Assembly polls.

Ms. Jayalalitha spoke to the TMC chief, Mr. G.K. Moopanar, twice during the day on "fresh proposals" in the light of AIADMK-PMK accord. According to sources, the renewed offer is 40 seats, which the TMC is free to share with the Congress.

Mr. Moopanar is unwilling to ditch the Congress despite pressure from a pro-AIADMK section of the second-rung partymen who do not see any scope for a third front. He is continuing efforts to save the alliance with the AIADMK by trying to accommodate the Congress too. He is also in touch with the Congress high

command to bring about a coordinated response to the changed situation.

The TMC election committee meeting ended inconclusively today. While the AIADMK had not set any "deadline", the committee would take a final decision tomorrow.

Meanwhile, the Pondicherry Chief Minister, Mr. P. Shanmugham, told reporters after a meeting with Mr. Moopanar that the Congress would not surrender its number one position in the Union Territory. "While the alliance issue in Tamil Nadu is for Mr. Moopanar to decide, the Pondicherry issue will be decided by the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi," he said.

Following today's developments, the votaries of a third front, the New Justice Party founder, Mr. A.C. Shanmugham, and the Makkal Tamil Desam Katchi president, Mr. S. Kannappan, met Mr. Moopanar.

The TNCC president, Mr. E.V.K.S. Elangovan, and Pondicherry Congress leaders, Mr. P. Shanmugham and Mr. V. Narayanasamy, are likely to go to New Delhi tomorrow to consult the Congress high command on the strategy for Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry.

## Left seeks 40 seats

Ms. Jayalalitha held separate meetings with delegations of the CPI(M) and the CPI. The CPI(M) leader, Mr. K. Varadarajan, told reporters after the meeting that the CPI(M) had already committed itself to fighting the Assembly polls in the company of the AIADMK and the TMC. Asked specifically about the Congress being left out of the front, he said the CPI(M)'s concern was to arrive at a seat-sharing understanding with the AIADMK. The party had asked for 25 seats, he added.

The CPI State secretary, Mr. R. Nallakannu, said his party had demanded 15 seats from the AIADMK. Negotiations would continue, he added.

Left party leaders were unhappy with the "low number" of seats offered to them. However, Ms. Jayalalitha pointed out that the Left parties themselves had wanted more outfits accommodated in the secular front. And now, she was finding it difficult to share the available seats among the prospective allies.

THE HINDU

36 MAR 2011

## CONGRESS PUSHING FOR THIRD FRONT?

# Jayalalitha offers 45 seats to TMC, Congress

By Suresh Nambath  
and Radha Venkatesan

**CHENNAI, MARCH 6.** Even as the AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, came up with fresh proposals to accommodate the TMC-Congress combine in both Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, the Congress appeared keen on persuading the TMC to form a third front.

Seeking to save the alliance with the TMC and the Congress, Ms. Jayalalitha today raised the total seats on offer to the two parties to 45 in Tamil Nadu. The TMC and the Congress were free to distribute these seats between themselves, she told reporters here.

Ms. Jayalalitha modified her position on Pondicherry too, expressing a readiness to "relinquish" the AIADMK claim to chief ministership in favour of the Congress. As per the accord reached yesterday with the PMK, the chief ministership for the first half of the five-year term would go to the PMK and for the second half to the AIADMK. According to the fresh proposal, in the event of the alliance winning a majority, the Congress could lead the Government during the second half of the term after a PMK-led government completed the first half.

### Separate deal for Pondy

In another effort to break the deadlock in the talks, Ms. Jayalalitha suggested the delinking of Tamil Nadu from Pondicherry for arriving at a seat-sharing arrangement in Tamil Nadu. While remaining part of the PMK-inclusive alliance led by the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, the TMC and the Congress could form a separate alliance in Pondicherry independent of an AIADMK-PMK front, she said.

However, the Pondicherry Chief Minister, Mr. P. Shanmugham, was insistent that the Congress would not give up its prime position in the Union Territory.

Congress leaders dismissed the fresh proposals as "unworkable and unacceptable". The Congress, they said, could not share power with the pro-IITTE PMK, leave alone the chief ministership.

Also, there were no takers in the Congress camp for the proposal to delink Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. "We cannot oppose the PMK in Pondicherry when we align with it in Tamil Nadu," senior Congressmen said.

### TMC for more concessions

But the TMC president, Mr. G. K. Moopanar, wrestling with various options, continued to keep open channels of communication with both the Congress high command and Ms. Jayalalitha. While he does not see any scope for further improvement in the offer on Pondicherry, Mr. Moopanar is hopeful of wresting further concessions from the AIADMK on Tamil Nadu.

Among the options being explored are: per-

suading the Congress to accept the fresh offer, allying with a Congress-less, AIADMK-led front in Tamil Nadu and with a Congress-led front, independent of the AIADMK and the PMK, in Pondicherry, and dumping the Congress and aligning with the AIADMK.

However, in case the TMC decides to drop the "working-in-tandem" arrangement with the Congress, the pro-DMK section in the party is likely to push for an alliance with the DMK-led front. "If we are going to fight the elections without the Congress, then we might as well join the DMK-led front which will treat us more honourably," a TMC senior said.

Following a meeting with Mr. Moopanar, the TNCC president, Mr. E. V. K. S. Elangovan, said the TMC leader would announce a decision tomorrow.

Since Mr. Moopanar is keen on taking the Congress along in an alliance with the AIADMK, he is trying hard to work out a rapprochement between the Congress and the AIADMK on the 'Pondicherry package'. TMC sources said that besides pushing for 50 seats for the Congress-TMC combine in Tamil Nadu, Mr. Moopanar was trying to persuade the AIADMK to give the first half of the five-year term of Pondicherry chief ministership to the Congress instead of to the PMK.

After having asked the TMC to join the AIADMK-led front without the Congress, Ms. Jayalalitha today took pains to clarify that the AIADMK-PMK accord did not entail shutting out the Congress. There were still 20 seats in

Pondicherry available for distribution among the AIADMK, the Congress, the TMC, and other allies, apart from the PMK's share of ten seats, she pointed out. "Simply because the AIADMK has concluded an electoral seat-sharing arrangement with one party, it does not mean the doors are closed for other parties."

However, she refused to spell out any formula for sharing the remaining 20 seats. At the same time, she ruled out the possibility of re-negotiating the agreement already signed with the PMK.

### Flexible approach

Ms. Jayalalitha said talks were continuing on forming an AIADMK-led alliance including the TMC and the Congress. Mr. Moopanar was negotiating with the AIADMK on behalf of both the parties.

While she had not set any "deadline" for a response from them, she was hoping for a speedy conclusion of the alliance. The AIADMK was "quite flexible" in its approach to the alliance issue. However, she ruled out a coalition in Tamil Nadu as, unlike in Pondicherry, this was "not necessary".

Ms. Jayalalitha took strong exception to the Left parties going public over their dissatisfaction with the number of seats offered by the AIADMK. "There is such a thing as coalition dharma, a code of conduct for electoral allies. If the Left parties had grievances, they should have told me and not gone to the press," she said.

## PMK issue not addressed: Azad

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 6.** The Congress today remained lukewarm to the AIADMK chief, Ms. Jayalalitha's offer. Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, AICC general secretary in-charge of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, said the latest offer did not address "the core issue of the PMK being part of the Pondicherry Government".

The Congress was not averse to sharing power with the AIADMK, but it could in no way accommodate the PMK with which it had serious differences. "Our basic problem is not with the AIADMK, but with the PMK's participation in the Government, and what has been offered does not resolve that basic problem." Mr. Azad said it was for Ms. Jayalalitha to decide whether she wanted old trusted allies or wanted to go with new allies.

There was, however, a slight change in the Congress stand on delinking the Pondicherry issue with that of alliance in Tamil Nadu. Yesterday, Mr. Azad had rejected the idea.

However, when he was asked today about Ms. Jayalalitha's suggestion to delink the two, Mr. Azad parried the question, saying his party "had not given thought to delinking the two issues".

The Congress is banking on the TMC chief, Mr. G. K. Moopanar, and has been in touch with him. Despite reports of a section of the TMC mounting pressure on Mr. Moopanar to grab what was offered by the AIADMK, Mr. Azad said both the parties were working in synch.

The Congress appears unlikely to compromise on the Pondicherry issue or give up its government. The party believes it is the dominant force in the Union Territory and is quite capable of performing creditably on its own. While there are some differences in the perception of some State leaders and the central leadership on going ahead with the AIADMK alliance, there is a near-unanimity on not compromising on the Pondicherry Government.



# JMM to tie up with Trinamul

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 3. — Miss Mamata Banerjee's mahajot offer has at least one taker. The JMM president, Mr Shibu Soren today announced an electoral alliance with the Trinamul Congress for the forthcoming Assembly polls in West Bengal.

The Trinamul has offered reserved seats in tribal dominated areas of Purulia, Midnapore and Bankura to the JMM where Mr Soren, popularly called 'Guruji' by the tribals holds considerable clout. These areas once formed part of demand for the 'greater Jharkhand' and the JMM is spearheading a

THE STATESMAN

4 MAR 2001

577 ✓  
JMM: 4/3

(Continued from page 1)

movement in the region in this regard. The seat understanding between the two also extends to a few seats in North Bengal. Incidentally, Trinamul Congress did not have much presence in these regions.

Mr Soren said the Trinamul had offered them 14 seats but talks were underway to clinch a few more. These seats are Raipur, Raniband, Salboni, Jhargram, Nayagram, Binpur, Arsa, Bandwan, Kumargram, Falakata, Madarihat, Nagrakata, Dhugguri, Kalchni and Phansidewa.

Though most of these seats offered to the JMM were reserved for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes, few of them were unreserved.

He claimed that no hard bargaining took place for the number of seats and it came naturally. He said his alliance was restricted to Miss Banerjee and was not joining the NDA after severing ties with the alliance on issue of Jharkhand chief minister-ship. "Things change in politics and nature of alliance vary. We are not aligning with the NDA and would oppose it in Jharkhand."

# Jaya snubs Cong over PMK issue

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHENNAI, Feb. 19. — The AIADMK supremo, Miss Jayalalitha, today criticised the two Congress emissaries for making the PMKs entry into the AIADMK-led-front issue. The emissaries had gone to her residence to discuss seat sharing in the coming Assembly polls.

Miss Jayalalitha lashed out at Mr Pranab Mukherjee and Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad for raking up the admission of PMK into the alliance, sources said. She said as leader of the AIADMK and the alliance, she would decide on what was good for the front.

"Don't treat me like a satellite of the Congress", Miss Jayalitha reportedly said when the issue came up for discussion. The two Congress leaders were at her Poes Garden residence for more than an hour this afternoon.

While it could not be reliably confirmed, Miss Jayalalitha has reportedly offered 40 seats to the TMC and the Congress to be shared between them. She also offered the Tiruchirapalli Lok Sabha seat, which had fallen vacant following the death of Rangarajan Kumaramangalam, to the Congress.

Mr Mukherjee and Mr Azad were tightlipped after the

meeting and said they would inform Mrs Sonia Gandhi as to what transpired during the talks with Miss Jayalalitha. "You will come to know when the Congress Working Committee takes a final decision on the matter, Mr. Mukherjee told mediapersons outside Miss Jayalalitha's residence.

All aspects of the alliance, both in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry were discussed during the meeting, he added.

It was a day of hectic political activity here. The Congress emissaries met the TMC leader, Mr GK Mooppanar, before holding talks with the AIADMK supremo. They

again held discussions with Mr. Mooppanar at his residence after talks with Miss Jayalalitha.

Earlier, Mr Mooppanar denied reports of any official talks with the ruling DMK. The Congress and the TMC had decided to work in unison and evolve a joint electoral strategy, he said.

The two Congress leaders also discussed the issue with the Pradesh Congress Committee leaders. The TNCC remained divided over the issue with a section led by PCC president Mr EVKS Elango van insisting on the Congress exploring the third front option.



Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad and Mr Pranab Mukherjee with Miss Jayalalitha at her Poes Garden residence in Chennai on Monday. — PTI

THE STATESMAN

20 FEB 2001

# AIADMK

## resents Cong. attitude

By Suresh Nambath

**CHENNAI, FEB. 17.** The AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, agreed to meet the Congress emissaries on February 19, but she delayed consent to indicate her displeasure to the Congress high command for having demanded an "explanation" from the AIADMK for admitting the pro-LTTE Paattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) into the electoral front.

Highly-placed sources in the AIADMK today said the appointment came through only after the Congress made "desperate" attempts. Apparently, Ms. Jayalalitha was upset after media reports quoted Congress leaders as saying that the AIADMK would be asked to "explain" the admission of the PMK into the secular front.

Discussions during the meeting between Ms. Jayalalitha and the Congress emissaries, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee and Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, would be confined to the question of alliance between the two parties. Ms. Jayalalitha would not "countenance" any attempt by the emissaries to bring up the PMK issue.

AIADMK leaders maintained that their party is free to choose allies without having to permission from the Congress. "We are

not a subsidiary of the Congress; we are not a satellite of the Congress like the TMC," they said. The AIADMK, as an independent party, would take independent decisions on alliance.

In any case, party seniors point out that the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, who had sought clemency for Nalini, a convict in the Rajiv assassination case, could not possibly raise objections about the pro-LTTE leanings of the PMK. According to them, Ms. Jayalalitha was "outraged" when Ms. Gandhi sought clemency for Nalini as it was during the AIADMK regime that the accused in the Rajiv assassination case were brought to trial.

Ms. Jayalalitha, it seems, would like the Congress to not rake up the issue of the admission of the PMK into the front and directly begin seat negotiations. As the AIADMK alliance with the PMK had already been finalised, talks could only revolve around a possible electoral arrangement.

However, AIADMK leaders denied that Ms. Jayalalitha was upset at the Congress and the TMC deciding to bargain together for seats. "They can sink or swim together." The AIADMK, they added, had offered a "reasonable number" of seats to the TMC and the

Congress. Now, it was up to these parties to accept or reject the offer.

### We have some concerns: Sonia

By Radha Venkatesan

**MAYILADUTHURAI, FEB. 17.** The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, today indicated that the continuance of the Congress-AIADMK alliance would hinge on the scheduled parleys between the AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, and the senior Congress leaders, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee and Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad in Chennai on Monday.

"Mr. Mukherjee and Mr. Azad will confer with Ms. Jayalalitha on Monday. Only then can we say anything on the alliance," Ms. Gandhi replied to a query on when the Congress would announce its final decision on continuing its alliance with the AIADMK in the coming Assembly election in Tamil Nadu.

In a brief interaction with the media, after addressing a farmers' rally in Mayiladuthurai, she asserted that the Congress had "some concerns" over the PMK joining the AIADMK front. "Yes, we have some concerns," she said, but refused to elaborate on the "concerns".

**'Cong. only hope': Page 8**

# Mamata freeze signal to Atal envoy

FROM KAY BENEDEICT

New Delhi, Feb. 9: Sparking speculation that he could offer some concessions to his demanding ally, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today despatched Yashwant Sinha to meet Mamata Banerjee, who insisted on presenting a fare-hike-free railway budget given the Assembly elections in West Bengal.

The finance minister briefed Vajpayee on his discussions with Mamata later in the evening, but details were not available.

The Prime Minister sent Sinha

to meet Mamata soon after the all-party meeting called by the railway minister got over. Mamata had convened the meeting to discuss the budget and budgetary support to her department.

Though most parties made token noises for a populist budget, Mamata insisted that 90 per cent of the invitees had favoured a "pro-people attitude".

She, however, declined to give details of the meeting, saying she could not disclose the budget proposals as "this is the prerogative of Parliament".

Asked what she would convey to the Prime Minister after the

meeting, Mamata said: "What I talk with the Prime Minister is absolutely confidential."

The minister asserted that she could not question Vajpayee if he was firm on increasing the fares. "The Prime Minister is the captain. It is his prerogative," she said.

However, Trinamul Congress MP Sudip Bandyopadhyay made it clear that the party would insist on a populist budget. "We should go for a hike-free budget to reduce the burden on the common man," he said.

Though today's meet was aimed at getting an all-party en-

dorsement to pressure Vajpayee into allowing a populist budget, most groups pushed their own regional agenda while making perfunctory noises about a common man's budget.

The BJP did not support the demand for a hike-free budget, while the Congress stayed away from the meeting.

CPM's Nilotpal Basu disagreed with the government's suggestion that the fares be hiked in view of the Gujarat earthquake. He said there is a need to "balance and reconcile" contradictory trends — the railways' twin roles of being a fund raiser

and a public utility service, especially in backward areas.

Mamata's allies — the Biju Janata Dal, Asom Gana Parishad, DMK, Indian National Lok Dal, National Conference and Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Jan Shakti Party — demanded more funds for regional projects.

Mamata told the leaders of the regional parties to give their demands in writing. No resolution was adopted unlike last year, when a similar meeting had forced Sinha to increase budgetary support to the railways.

Apart from Mamata and Paswan, Union ministers Arjun

Sethi (BJD) and Digvijay Singh (Samata Party) attended the meeting. Sethi was critical of the railways for its "step-motherly treatment" of Orissa and also for "reappropriating" and diverting funds meant for state projects.

Mamata later told reporters that Congress leader Priya Ranjan Das Munshi had met her last night and offered support.

The BJP chief whip in the Lok Sabha, V.K. Malhotra, who was present at the meet, wondered how the government would mobilise resources if there was a clamour for more budgetary allocation from "all ministries".

THE TELEGRAPH

10 FEB 2001

# Mamata at PM's door for President's rule

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 16. — A 16-member Trinamul-BJP team led by a limping Mamata Banerjee met the Prime Minister this evening and demanded President's rule in West Bengal.

The delegation managed to rope in TDP leader, Mr Yerra Naidu, but had a setback of sorts when he refused to demand the imposition of Article 356, saying "the TDP's stand (opposition) on the Article is well-known".

Mr Naidu, however, expressed concern on the poor law and order in the state and urged the Prime Minister to take "effective steps to ensure a free and fair poll".

The delegation called upon the Congress to support the Trinamul-BJP combine at "this critical juncture of state politics". Delegation members said the Prime Minister expressed concern over the state's law and order.

A memorandum, detailing "CPI-M atrocities", including killings of opponents, attacks on SC-STs and minorities, rapes, video clippings, photographs, newspaper cuttings, cartridges and

even "some flesh and bones" collected from sites of violence, were placed before Mr Vajpayee.

The team charged the state government with aiding violence by supplying "arms from the state armoury". Mr Vajpayee was told about the recent attack on Miss Banerjee (the plastered leg in any case was too conspicuous to miss) and the chief minister's call to policemen to shoot at sight.

With the TDP distancing itself from the President's rule chorus, and two more NDA allies — DMK and Akali Dal — known to be hostile to the idea, today's exercise is seen as a pressure tactic to keep the heat on in the state as well as the NDA government to extract a populist rail budget.

Among those in the team were Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay, Mr Ajit Panja, Mr Subrata Mukherjee, BJP MP Mr Vijay Goel and the state BJP president, Mr Asim Ghosh. BJP ministers from the state, Mr Tapan Sikdar and Mr Satyabrata Mukherjee, were absent.

■ LF plans White Paper to 'expose' Cong, Trinamul: page 4

THE STATESMAN

17 JAN 2001

# Mamata allies join hands on Central rule demand

Arindam Sarkar  
Kolkata, January 9

MAMATA BANERJEE'S NDA allies are closing ranks behind her and stepping up the pressure for imposition of Central rule in West Bengal.

Today, the alliance team that visited Garbeta, met Home Minister L K Advani, handed him a report on the Chhota Angaria killings and told him that Bengal was a fit case for imposition of President's rule.

"The half-hour meeting with Advaniji started at 12.40 pm. He asked Home Secretary Kamal Pande to join the conference. We gave the Minister a report on what we saw at Garbeta and submitted that free and fair elections can be

held in Bengal only if Article 356 is invoked. Advani asked Pande to look into the matter. A decision on the issue is expected within a week or two," Sanjay Nirupam, Shiv Sena MP, told *The Hindustan Times* over the telephone from New Delhi. The BJP's Vijay Goel, the BJD's Prabhat Samantaray and the INLD's Captain Inder Singh, present at the meeting, painted equally bleak pictures of the situation in Bengal.

The pressure group has gathered strength with alliance convener George Fernandes and senior Minister Ram Vilas Paswan throwing their weight behind Mamata. "It is not just one massacre. For months now Muslims, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes have been persecuted. Such atrocities must stop immediately," Samantaray said.

## Advani keeps options open

THE CENTRE will consider "every aspect" of the West Bengal situation and "weigh all options" before deciding on the NDA team's recommendation for President's rule, L K Advani said in New Delhi on Tuesday. The response would have to wait for the Prime Minister's return from abroad; "even Mamata Banerjee and George Fernandes are away". The Centre was also waiting for Bengal's response to its "advisory" on an "independent inquiry", Advani said. **HTC, New Delhi**

is said to have told the team. "That done, the Congress here will be discredited if it does not support the Article 356 demand."

"True, the NDA is in a minority in the Upper House. But the Constitution provides that if the Lok Sabha clears imposition of Article 356 in a State, the Rajya Sabha's assent may be sought after six months. And we barely have three months left for the polls. Why can't the Government work on this," Trinamool MP Sudip Bandopadhyay asked.

Mamata believes that if the NDA didn't stand united then there was no hope for an anti-CPI(M) front emerging victorious in the Assembly polls. "Advaniji is possibly waiting for Vajpayeeji to return from Vietnam."

Advani, a source said, is extra cautious this time for he is unsure of whether the Congress would back the Government on the matter. With the Bihar fiasco still fresh in his mind, he isn't willing to take chances.

The NDA gameplan now is to keep Chief Election Commissioner M S Gill informed about the Bengal scenario and at the same time put pressure on the Home Minister and the Prime Minister on invoking Article 356. Mamata, meanwhile, is trying to get the TDP's support for her demand.

Mamata was peeved when the NDA team told her to personally convince Sonia Gandhi on the Central rule demand. "Let the alliance first finalise its stand," she

## Mystery bodies at city morgue

THREE HEAVILY decomposed bodies and a skeleton were brought to a city police morgue from Pingla, Midnapore, on Tuesday. There was intense speculation that the bodies were of Trinamool Congress workers murdered at Chhota Angaria, but the party refused to make any definite claim. "I am not telling you anything at all," Mamata Banerjee told *The Hindustan Times* late tonight.

Rabi Ghosh, president of Ward 26 Trinamool Congress, said he had gone to the Calcutta Police morgue behind Mohammed Ali Park with some friends around 4 pm to receive the body of Sandhya Marik, an area resident killed in a road accident yesterday.

"Near the gate, we saw a police van carrying four bodies in plastic bags. The bodies were giving off a very strong odour and seemed badly decomposed. We asked the helper of the van where the bodies had come from. He refused to answer initially, but when we insisted, revealed they had come from Pingla in Midnapore. We suspected foul play and called up Mamata immediately."

Trinamool MP Sudip Bandopadhyay, Mayor Subrata Mukherjee and MLA Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay were camping at the morgue late tonight. The leaders said they would not budge from the spot till the police clarified who the dead were and where they had found the bodies. **HTC, Kolkata**

## Killings spur Mahajot hopes

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, January 9

THE JANUARY 4 Garbeta killings seem to have drawn the Congress and the Trinamool closer, reviving hopes of a fresh grand alliance initiative.

Former PCC chief A B A Ghani Khan Chowdhury and CWC member Priya Ranjan Das Munshi today met Mamata Banerjee at her south Calcutta home separately.

In the evening, the Railway Minister skipped a scheduled rally at Jadavpur to meet a two-member Telugu Desam Party team comprising Ram Moni Reddy and C Suresh Reddy. Among other issues that came up at the half-hour conclave, was the situation in West

Bengal. Subsequently, Suresh Reddy told *The Hindustan Times*: "We are with Mamata on Article 356."

Earlier, Chowdhury, party insiders said, urged Mamata to take the lead in forming the *Mahajot*. The Trinamool leader, he was convinced, could act as the catalyst in stitching together the proposed alliance.

"Some years back I had said that the CPI(M) should be thrown into the Bay of Bengal. The Congress hasn't been able to do it. Probably you can," he reportedly told Banerjee. The Malda MP said he would discuss the situation with Sonia Gandhi tomorrow when he arrives in New Delhi.

Youth Congress leader Parash

Pal, who attended a Trinamool rally on Mayo Road today, accompanied Chowdhury to Banerjee's home. From there, some Trinamool leaders whisked him away for yet another closed-door meeting.

Chowdhury said it was futile discussing the TMC's alliance with the BJP coming in the way of the *Mahajot*. "We must come together to oust the Left Front."

Despite the positive vibes some senior Trinamool leaders remained skeptical as ever about anything concrete emerging out of the meetings.

The leaders, however, conceded that Congress support was imperative if Article 356 were to be invoked in the State.

# Mamata takes war to Buddha lair

CP 811  
9-8-87

## Alliance signal to Cong in twin-track strategy

### OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, Jan. 7: Undeterred by the lack of proof to back the Chhoto Angaria massacre claim, Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee today sought to take the battle to chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's camp and relaunched the campaign for a grand alliance with the Congress.

Addressing a modest rally at Esplanade, Mamata unveiled plans for a month-long campaign against the CPM, which will be kicked off on Tuesday from Jaldapour, Bhattacharjee's constituency since 1987.

The railway minister made it clear that she planned to engage Bhattacharjee in a frontal showdown, especially over law and order. "I am not in a hurry to go back to Delhi," she thundered. "I will stay back here to mount a campaign against the communists who have unleashed terror across Bengal."

The speech was high on such rhetoric and calculated to energise her supporters who have been on the defensive ever since Bhattacharjee introduced his "responsive governance".

Mamata tried to squeeze Chhoto Angaria at two levels. At one, she began preparations to sculpt

the name on the public consciousness and project the hamlet as another Keshpur, one of the most politically-inflammable belts in Bengal. At another, she drew upon the emotions generated by the explosive charge to restart the drive for the *mahajot* (grand alliance) of all non-Left parties, especially the Congress.

Mamata, who derided the Congress till the other day as the ruling CPM's "B" team, acknowledged its support for the Friday bandh and the visit by Somen Mitra and Priya Ranjan Das Munshi to Chhoto Angaria.

"I want them (the state Congress) to keep up its anti-CPM stand and not to budge an inch from this. We will fight the CPM united in the coming elections," she said.

The response from the Congress was guarded. Mitra acknowledged the need for a grand alliance but said her BJP connection could stand in the way.

Mamata, who could not climb the podium due to an injury in her foot, addressed the rally sitting on a chair in front of the dais. Trinamul insiders said Mamata was aware of the fact that the Chhoto Angaria "massacre" could not be milked much without producing the bodies. The roadmap of her agitation suggests that she is now

in a hurry to get into the slipstream of the heat and publicity the controversy has generated.

A day after the agitation inaugurated at the chief minister's constituency, the Trinamul will organise a mass hunger-strike near the Gandhi statue at the Maidan. On January 10, Mamata's supporters will gear up police stations across the state to highlight the "growing lawlessness".

On January 15, Trinamul parliamentarians, legislators and councillors will demonstrate outside district magistrates' offices and police stations. A rally is being lined up for January 24 in Hooghly. Two conventions have been planned for February 4 and 11.

The highpoints of the events are its spearhead — Mamata, who is scheduled to take part in all the programmes, and the target — Bhattacharjee, who oversees law and order. The administration is keeping its fingers crossed and indicated that violence could not be ruled out during the protests.

The CPM said it had taken note of the essence of her programme and asked its supporters not to get provoked. "Our experience is that she uses violence when she finds she is losing public support," said CPM state secretary Anil Biswas.

■ See Pages 8 and 9



# Mamata calls for CBI inquiry

9-P.P. TMC  
'Police removed the bodies from Garbeta'

**Arindam Sarkar**  
Garbeta (Midnapore), January 6

TRINAMOOL CONGRESS chief Mamata Banerjee today demanded a CBI inquiry into what she called "the brutal murder of her party workers" on the night of January 4 at Chhota Angaria village in Garbeta.

Banerjee arrived here today from Kolkata on a tour of the village along with a handful of Trinamool leaders. Unable to walk — she is still nursing the injury she suffered at Keshpur a few days back — Mamata sat inside the Tata Sumo, vacantly staring at the burnt-down house of Abdul Rahman, who claims he was witness to the gory murders..

Though the Trinamool chief kept her date with Garbeta, the NDA team that was supposed to visit the village never arrived. Later, senior party leader and MP Sudip Bandyopadhyay explained. "The team is being put together and would come down very soon."

"I am convinced the police removed the bodies. They have shown their barbaric nature once more. If the Chief Minister wants to know the truth, he should immediately hand over the case to the CBI," Mamata said, adding as an afterthought, "The poor will never get justice from this State Government."

Mamata watched as her partymen fanned out in search of clues. They found blood-

stains outside the houses of Rahman and his neighbours. Several cartridges and assorted bullets, pieces of flesh, a portion of a skull and a blood-soaked rope and a chopper were also recovered.

Mamata gathered the stuff in a plastic packet and took photographs of Rahman's burnt house. "Now I have enough proof to give to the Government. I will get forensic tests conducted. I want to go to Baital and Satora forests to look for the bodies. I'm sure the police must have hid them," she said.

During her one-and-a-half hour stay at the village, she talked to Rahman, his wife, mother, son and the father of Mukhtar Ali, who was allegedly killed that night.

"Only President's Rule in the State can save the people. The Chief Minister and the police will never conduct a proper inquiry," Trinamool leader Pankaj Banerjee said.

Earlier in the day, Congress leaders Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and Saugata Roy visited Chhota Angaria. Das Munshi expressed shock at the happenings and said he would talk to party chief Sonia Gandhi on the issue. He, too, demanded immediate Central intervention. Das Munshi and Roy were followed by Somen Mitra and Manas Bhuniya. After a brief conversation with Mamata, Mitra told reporters, "If the CPI(M) is innocent, the State Government should hand over the case to the CBI."

\* Related report on Page 5

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 JAN 2001

# NDA responds to Mamata claim

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, January 5

A NATIONAL Democratic Alliance (NDA) team will be visiting trouble-torn Garbeta in Midnapore district tomorrow.

They will make an on-the-spot assessment of the Trinamool Congress claim that 18 party supporters were burnt to death at Choto Aanguria village in Garbeta by CPI(M) cadres on Thursday night.

Mamata Banerjee, who is now resting her injured foot in Kolkata, confirmed that she will join the NDA delegation to Garbeta.

Today, even as the Trinamool-

sponsored 12-hour Bangla bandh was under way, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Union Defence Minister George Fernandes spoke to Mamata Banerjee over the Garbeta incident.

It was soon after this telephone conversation that the PM decided to send a NDA team to the trouble spot.

This, incidentally, is the second time that a NDA team would be visiting troubled Midnapore in response to Trinamool Congress demand.

Terming the Garbeta incident

“worse than the Jehanabad killings in Bihar”, senior Trinamool leader Pankaj Banerjee alleged that his party supporters were killed in a raid by CPI(M) goons on the house of one Abdul Ghani Rahaman late on Thursday

night. The house was set on fire, Banerjee said, and when the people inside — 18 of them including four children — ran out of the blazing hut, they were first fired upon and then hacked to death. The party claimed to have indentified 11 of those killed.d.

Banerjee demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Buddhadeb

Bhattacharjee over the issue and the imposition of Article 356 in the State.

But senior party leaders were non-committal over whether the Trinamool would pull out of the Centre if the NDA ignored their demand this time.

“Quitting the alliance is no answer,” is all that Subrata Mukherjee, a senior party leader and Kolkata Mayor was willing to say.

The State Government flatly denied having any knowledge of the killings. Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said that his office had received news of a fire incident in Garbeta. Beyond that, he knew nothing.

## Garbeta Killings

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 6 JAN 2001

# PMK move will strengthen Jaya's base

BY R. BHAGWAN SINGH

**Chennai, Feb. 5:** With the Pattah Makkal Katchi threatening to quit the NDA on Monday, the stars have brightened on the horizon for the AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha as she gets ready to face her most crucial political battle in the Assembly elections due in May. The Vanniyar caste dominated PMK has considerable following in the northern districts of Tamil Nadu, so losing it might cost the NDA dearly in Tamil Nadu.

True, he has not yet made his intentions clear but should the PMK's mercurial leader Dr S. Ramadas join the amma's 'secular' front, as is widely expected, the NDA would seem woefully weak

with only the MDMK and the BJP sharing the camp with the ruling DMK. The MDMK has some pockets of influence in the south while the BJP is still finding its feet in the Dravidian state. The DMK itself is having serious internal problems with the two influential sons of chief minister M. Karunanidhi at loggerheads over who should succeed the ailing father. The DMK chief minister has chosen to remain silent for the time being, not reacting to the PMK quitting the NDA government. In any case, the Prime Minister has not accepted the resignation of the two PMK ministers. Dr Ramadas has called for a press conference here Tuesday afternoon and is expected to reveal his mind.

Unconfirmed reports said he has an appointment with Ms Jayalalitha the following day.

While the Jaya camp is jubilant there is no official reaction from her though — the NDA constituents appear hopeful that Dr Ramadas would not press the res-

ignations. One theory doing the rounds here is that the PMK chief took the decision as a personal and emotional reaction to his failure in getting the NDA leadership to expel the Tamizhaga Rajiv Congress from the alliance for carrying on a campaign against the PMK. A state BJP leader, who did not want

to be named, said the PMK threat appears to be only a pressure tactic to get more seats for the coming elections, and it would blow over. For his part, the TRC chief and former Union minister Vazhappadi K. Ramamurthy has rubbed salt into the PMK wounds by issuing a statement which said its departure would not hurt the NDA government as it would still enjoy the required majority. "If the PMK had asked its ministers to resign from the Union Cabinet or rejoin it, that is purely their party affair. To involve the TRC in it in anyway has no basis," he said.

## NEW ANALYSIS

MPs — the PMK is a force to reckon with in the caste-dominated Tamil Nadu politics. Its leaders have recently boasted that the party had decisive following in 120 seats in the north, northwest and central districts. Since the AIADMK enjoys good support in the southern districts, roping in the Vanniyar party would immensely benefit Jaya in her do-or-die bid to win back power in the state.

But the PMK's coming could ruffle quite a few feathers in Jaya's nest. Particularly, the Congress and the TMC would find it difficult to co-exist considering that the PMK has been the most vocal supporter of the LTTE even after the Lankan outfit was convicted of murdering Rajiv Gandhi.

THE ASIAN AGE

6 FEB 2001

# PMK throws in its lot with AIADMK front

By Our Special Correspondent

**CHENNAI, FEB. 6.** With the Paattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) taking the plunge, the much-talked about political realignments have begun in Tamil Nadu, which is gearing for elections to the State Assembly.

In a day of rapid developments, the PMK's founder-leader, Dr. S. Ramadoss, called on the AIADMK leader, Ms. Jayalalitha, at her Poes Garden residence here and announced at a press conference that he was joining the AIADMK-led front.

It might have been a *coup de grace* for the AIADMK leader, but the swift move by the PMK has apparently ruffled a few feathers. Even the process of consolidating the 'secular front', led by the AIADMK, may have been disturbed by this development. Though there were indications that both the Congress and the TMC knew that the PMK was gravitating towards the AIADMK, they seemed to be stung by the decision when it came.

While the TNCC was benumbed and looked to the party's high command to respond first to this realignment, the TMC was clearly unnerved by the PMK's decision to join the 'secular front'. Both were in no mood or hurry to decide on their future course of action, preferring to wait and watch.

The ruling DMK was not surprised or amused by the PMK's pulling out of the National Democratic Alliance. The Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, might have been expecting this move, sooner than later.

But the caste-based parties are celebrating, trying to cobble together a 'third front' in the State. They are hoping that the TMC and its leader, Mr. G.K. Moopanar, will now part company with the AIADMK and agree to lead the third front, even if it cannot make an impact on the voters.

## Mixed fortunes

On the whole, it was a day of mixed fortunes for all the major parties. The AIADMK, obviously happy at the PMK's shift, was try-



The PMK leader, Dr. Ramadoss, calling on the AIADMK leader, Ms. Jayalalitha, at her residence in Chennai, on Tuesday. — Photo: V. Ganesan

ing to consolidate the front and reach out to the other allies, notably the TMC. Its task now would be to reassure the TMC that its number-two status in the front would not be compromised and its concerns over Dalits was misplaced. Whether Ms. Jayalalitha can convince Mr. Moopanar on this score remains to be seen.

The Congress was waiting for the party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, to respond light before reacting locally. On whether the Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry units think and act differently, or adopt a joint strategy for the polls — the party is looking towards New Delhi.

But there was information here that the PMK leaders, who were in Delhi on Monday, conveyed their decision to the Congress leadership before meeting the Prime Minister and handing in the resignation of their two Ministers. Since the Congress had not reacted formally till now, they were willing to believe that the high

command was 'aware' of the move.

## DMK: relief, concern

For the DMK, it was both relief and concern. Already worried about its prospects in the southern districts, the DMK is bound to be affected in the north and west — the Vanniyar (an MBC caste) belt — with the exit of the PMK from its front. But the breaking of ties ended a running feud within the NDA.

The ruling party's strategy will be discussed at its crucial meeting on February 16, after which the constituents of the NDA are to meet. As to whether the DMK can woo the TMC into its fold, the BJP's presence in the alliance will be the problem, for the TMC does not want to compromise on its 'secular' image. Apart from Mr. Vaiko's MDMK, the DMK has to depend on the BJP and the charisma of the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, to win this election.

(According to PTI, Mr. Karunanidhi made an open invitation to the TMC to join the DMK-led front. "We did not part company after quarrels. We had differences in perceptions of policies," he said when asked how he expected the TMC to return to the DMK front. "If the TMC wants to come back to our front, it is welcome." He said some more parties would join the front soon. He did not disclose the names of those parties, saying, "We will give you a full list soon.")

Two issues have been thrown up by the PMK move — the Dalit factor and the question of support to the LTTE and the forces of Ta-

mil nationalism. The Congress and the TMC will have problems accepting the pro-LTTE stance and pronouncements of the PMK.

Political circles feel that the 'churning process' has only begun and it could take a few days, even a couple of weeks, for the final realignment. Since the notification of the election is due only in March, there is time.

## AIADMK seeks to reassure TMC, Cong.

On her part, Ms. Jayalalitha, sought to allay the apprehensions of Mr. Moopanar on the PMK joining the AIADMK-led front by conveying to him the AIADMK's continued desire for an alliance with his party. The reassurance to Mr. Moopanar came after some persons in the TMC leadership communicated to Ms. Jayalalitha the feeling in the TMC camp that the AIADMK might now "dump" the TMC in favour of the PMK.

AIADMK sources said Ms. Jayalalitha spoke of the high regard in which she held Mr. Moopanar and the "feeling of mutual respect." Mr. Moopanar's response, it was reported, was "cordial". Ms. Jayalalitha was hopeful that an understanding would be "worked out" between the AIADMK and the TMC to mutual satisfaction.

AIADMK leaders also discounted the probability of the pro-LTTE views of the PMK emerging as a "stumbling block" to clinching alliances with the TMC and the Congress. In this context, they pointed out that Ms. Sonia Gandhi had herself pleaded for clemency to Nalini, an accused in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.

Also, if the BJP and the DMK did not have reservations about allying with the PMK, why should the Congress and the BJP have any, they wondered. AIADMK seniors also argue that the Congress and the TMC could have separate electoral arrangements with the AIADMK, independent of the PMK. In any case, the Congress was willing to have such an understanding with the Left parties in Tamil Nadu although it opposed them in other States.

Ms. Jayalalitha told *The Hindu* that attempts to portray the AIADMK as anti-Dalit did not have any basis. "Right from the days of MGR, the Dalits have been the strength of the AIADMK," she said. At no point of time, she added, the AIADMK had been perceived as anti-Dalit.

Actually, there were several Dalit parties in the AIADMK-led front — the various factions of the Republican Party of India headed by Mr. Shaktidasan, Mr. Damodaran and Mr. C.K. Tamilarasan. Besides, there were a large number of Dalits in the AIADMK itself, she said.

## PM sits over resignations

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, FEB. 6.** The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, was yet to decide whether or not to accept the resignations of the two PMK ministers, Mr. N.T. Shanmugham and Mr. E. Ponnusamy, who had resigned yesterday from the Union Council of Ministers.

According to aides, the Prime Minister was in no hurry to accept the resignations, notwithstanding the PMK leader, Dr. S. Ramadoss's announcement in Chennai that his party was hitching its wagon to Ms. Jayalalitha's. No explanation was available for this inexplicable delay in sending the two PMK's resignations to the President for acceptance.

# PMK will be part of secular front

## Jaya goes temple hopping

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

57-8 14/2

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CHENNAI, Feb. 13. — Miss Jayalalitha today said there was no threat to the formation of a "secular front" her party would lead in the coming Assembly polls. "At the moment ... I don't see any threat to its formation."

She also ended speculations that the PMK would be finally left out of the front.

The AIADMK chief said talks on the alliance were at a "very promising stage". The delay in finalising the front was attributed to the Congress and the Tamil Maanila Congress, which were yet to announce which side they would align. "It would be good for all of us if we could conclude the seat-sharing talks by the weekend," she said. Mrs Jayalalitha admitted that she had not heard from either the Congress or the TMC after the PMK expressed its wish to join the alliance.

The TNCC president, Mr EVKS. Elangovan, told reporters here that the Congress high command had informed Miss Jayalalitha about its reservations on the inclusion of the PMK in the front. "We're waiting for her response," he said.

As for the TMC, discussions on the issue ended today with partymen expressing their views to the party president, Mr GK Moopanar, who promised to announce his decision soon.

The DMK continued to woo the TMC. The chief minister and the DMK chief, Mr M. Karunanidhi, said yesterday that the Assembly Speaker and senior DMK leader, Mr PTR Palanivelrajan, had met Mr. Moopanar and invited him to join the DMK-led front. As for the reservations expressed by the Congress regarding the PMK's inclusion in the AIADMK-led front, Miss Jayalalitha recalled that the Congress (Tiwari), formed in protest against Mr PV Narasimha, had accepted the PMK's support in the Palani by-poll.

The AIADMK had contested against the Congress and won the seat. Even in the 1996 general elections, the Congress (Tiwari) had struck an alliance with the PMK. Even the Congress accepted the PMK's support, in the 1997 Pudukkottai by-poll, Miss Jayalalitha pointed out. "As far as the AIADMK, Congress, and the TMC are concerned, our common enemy is Mr Karunanidhi."

CHENNAI, Feb. 13. — For Miss Jayalalitha, it is the most trying period in her two decades long political career. Thanks to the court cases, it is doubtful if the AIADMK supreme would be able to contest the coming Assembly polls.

In between her hectic activities to sew up a formidable front for the polls, the "Amma" has managed to squeeze in quick trips to temples.

Even her close companion, Mrs Sasikala, is not lagging behind. Yesterday, she visited the Kancheepuram Mutt to get the blessings of the Sankaracharyas, Shri Jayendra Saraswathi and Shri Vijayendra Saraswathi.

After performing a special puja at the Kamakshi Amma temple in Kancheepuram, Mrs Sasikala called on the acharyas. She was seen carrying a box which reportedly contained a list of probable AIADMK candidates. During the special puja, Mrs. Sasikala had kept the box in the sanctum sanctorum.

Only on Sunday night, both Miss Jayalalitha and Mrs. Sasikala had returned from Mysore after offering a special puja at the Chamundeswari temple there.

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