

THE BYELECTIONS POINTERS

THE IMPRESSIVE VICTORY scored by the Congress in the byelections to the Sabarkantha Lok Sabha constituency and also the Sabarmati Assembly segment in Gujarat may not have any serious impact on the national political scene as such. Yet the poll outcome is bound to send ripples within the BJP's Gujarat unit. And the Gujarat Chief Minister, Mr. Keshubhai Patel, cannot escape trouble from within his own party in the coming days. Apart from having lent a lot of importance to the byelections by way of leading the poll campaign, Mr. Patel and his partymen (including, Mr. Madan Lal Khurana, in charge of the BJP's Gujarat unit) had raised the stakes high by declaring that the polls were a referendum on the performance of the Patel Ministry in the State. And the trouncing that the party suffered in both the places (the Sabarmati verdict assumes additional significance for it falls within Mr. L. K. Advani's Lok Sabha constituency) could be the beginning of a move within the BJP that could crystallise in a demand for Mr. Patel's ouster from the Chief Minister's post. That the BJP in Gujarat is even otherwise ridden by faction feuds is a fact that becomes relevant in this context. Mr. Patel and his party will find it difficult to make light of the reverses, for the byelection results only confirm the trend witnessed in the elections to the rural and urban local bodies in Gujarat less than a year ago.

There are, indeed, other reasons too for the Congress to rejoice. Apart from Gujarat, the party's victory in the two Assembly seats in Assam, including that of Mr. Tarun Gogoi from Titabor, found the party's leaders affirming their faith in Ms. Sonia Gandhi's leadership and some of them holding out the Congress victory in the Sabarmati Assembly segment as a "moral victory for Ms. Sonia Gandhi and a vindication of her leadership". While it may be true that the results from Gujarat reflect popular sentiments against the

BJP in the State, the Congress cannot ignore such simple facts that its nominees were trounced so badly in some other parts of the country where byelections were held the same time. As for instance, the BJP could better its performance in the Tonk (Reserved) Lok Sabha constituency in Rajasthan. Similarly, the fact that the Biju Janata Dal could retain the Raikhol Assembly seat in Orissa despite the alienation of its leader, Mr. Naveen Patnaik, from the harsh realities — the incidence of starvation deaths in parts of the State and the insensitivity shown by the State administration — is certainly a reflection of the sad state in which the Congress is in Orissa. And this is what must concern those around Ms. Sonia Gandhi in the Congress.

Yet another important aspect of this round of byelections is the outcome in Siddipet in Andhra Pradesh. The large victory margin secured by Mr. Chandrasekhara Rao is a reflection of the extent to which this former member of the Telugu Desam has succeeded in whipping up passions for a separate State of Telengana. Mr. Rao will now enter the Andhra Pradesh Assembly as a representative of the Telengana Rashtra Samiti to constitute a three-member group (along with Mr. R. Pappa Rao and Dr. R. Ravindranath Reddy who were expelled from the Congress and the BJP for voicing the demand for a separate State) and this could give an impetus to the agitation. While the Telugu Desam chief will now be faced with the spectre of dissension within his own party at least in the Telengana region, the Congress too cannot escape significant erosion of its support base. The bad show by the Congress — its nominee lost the security deposit polling just about 3,300 votes from Siddipet — is clearly an indication of the party's decimation in the region. And this indeed is a message that the mainstream parties in Andhra Pradesh — the Telugu Desam and the Congress — cannot ignore.

THE HINDU

26 SEP 2001

THE HINDU

The poll panel's power & wisdom

By Era Sezhiyan

IN THE election to the Council of States from the Tamil Nadu Assembly, six candidates were elected unopposed, giving the AIADMK four members, and the TMC and the DMK one each. As the parties confined their nominations to their respective strength in the Assembly, the electoral process was smooth and uneventful but for an objection raised by the Speaker, Dr. K. Kalimuthu, about the appointment of Dr. Mrutunjay Sarangi as the Returning Officer. He is already the Chief Electoral Officer for Tamil Nadu. I wish to make it clear at the outset that I am not casting any reflection on the competence or credibility of Dr. Sarangi as an officer in the election machinery. Now that the election is over, I feel that we should consider objectively the objection from the Speaker.

The duties of the CEO are defined in Section 20 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. "Subject to the superintendence, direction and control of the Election Commission, the Chief Election Officer of each State shall supervise the conduct of all elections in the State under this Act." Regarding appointment of a Returning Officer for an election to the Rajya Sabha, Section 21 provides that "the Election Commission shall, in consultation with the Government of the State, designate or nominate a returning officer who shall be an officer of Government or of a local authority."

In this regard, it has been the normal practice that on recommendation of the State concerned, the Election Commission appoints the Secretary (or the Principal Secretary) of the Assembly as the Returning Officer. This is so as the MLAs alone constitute the electorate and the Assembly Secretary can identify them easily. Never has a person other than a Secretary of the Legislature been appointed Returning Officer in any State for Rajya Sabha elections.

For Presidential and Vice-Presidential elections, the law provides that the Election Commission shall appoint a Returning Officer in consultation with the Central Government. So far, the tradition has been to appoint the Secretary (or the Secretary-General) of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha alternatively.

Section 21 specifies that the returning

officer should be "an officer of Government or of a local authority". A question may be raised as to why the State Government should be consulted in appointment of the Assembly Secretary, as the latter is an Officer of the Assembly Secretariat, not under the control of the State Government. The propriety of appointing a Secretary of Parliament or Assembly was gone into by the Supreme Court in the Pasupathi Nath case (AIR 1984 SC 399). In the election to the Rajya Sabha from Uttar Pradesh in 1980, the Assembly Secretary, Mr. S. P. Singh, was appointed the Returning Officer. An election petition contended

ment of the Polling Officers is based on the assumption that the Assembly Secretary will be the Returning Officer.

Dr. Kalimuthu has observed that as per the practice in the past, the Principal Secretary, Mr. C. S. Janakiraman, should have been appointed the Returning Officer. He presumed that the Election Commission might have been prompted not to appoint Mr. Janakiraman as he, after his retirement, was reappointed Principal Secretary on contract. It is understood that in Andhra Pradesh, Mr. C. Venkatesan, who was reappointed Special Secretary of the Assembly after four years of retirement, was

Already the Centre-State relationship is surcharged. Let it not be worsened. The Election Commission should not only act impartially but also appear to do so.

that the election was void, as the Assembly Secretary, not being an officer of the State Government, was not qualified to be the Returning Officer. The Allahabad High Court accepted the plea and set aside the election as having been conducted by an unauthorised officer.

The Supreme Court, however, set aside the High Court decision, holding "He (Secretary of the State Legislature) has to be treated as an officer of Government for the purpose of Section 21 of the Act also qualified for being appointed as the Returning Officer for an election held under the Act. It is not disputed that after the commencement of the Constitution, the Secretaries of the State Legislature almost as matter of rule are being appointed as Returning Officers for election to the Rajya Sabha and for election to the Legislative Councils of the States and Parliament thought it fit to amend suitably Section 21 of the Act."

In the Handbook for Returning Officers — 'For Elections to the Council of States and Legislature Councils' — the Election Commission has given instructions about appointment of polling officers in the election to the Rajya Sabha: "Those polling officers should normally be drawn from the Secretariat of the Legislature." (Para 5.2, Reprint 1996.) This shows that appoint-

ment of the Polling Officers is based on the assumption that the Assembly Secretary will be the Returning Officer.

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appointed by the Election Commission as the Returning Officer in 1996. If so, appointment of Mr. Janakiraman should not have raised any problem. Even if the Election Commission was not prepared to consider Mr. Janakiraman, it could have appointed Mr. V. Rajaraman, who continues to be the Secretary of the Assembly, as the Returning Officer.

In the election machinery, the CEO occupies the top position at the State level as the Chief Election Commissioner at the national level. The CEO has to supervise all elections in the State and has the responsibility to guide and direct the returning officers and decide on issues raised by the other officers in the State. The Election Commission has no independent electoral machinery in the States. The officers to be appointed as CEO, District Officer, Returning Officer, Presiding Officer, Polling Officer etc. are necessarily to be drawn from the State Government. The Election Commission gets from the State Government a panel of names of senior officers and appoints one of them as the CEO. The head of the district administration — 'Collector', 'Deputy Commissioner', or 'District Magistrate' — is normally appointed the DEO.

If there is confrontation between the

State and the Election Commission in appointment of election officers, it will affect conduct of elections on the whole. In 1993, the West Bengal Government refused to spare the services of an officer appointed as CEO. The Election Commission appointed another officer who declined on health grounds. Thereafter, the Election Commission declined to make any appointment and the preparations for elections came to a grinding halt. Eventually, on a petition, the Calcutta High Court intervened to make the State Government agree to spare an officer on full-time basis.

The Election Commissioner, Mr. T. S. Krishnamurthy, told the press that there had been no ulterior motive in the appointment of the Returning Officer in Tamil Nadu. I fully accept his statement. There is no need or room for any biased motivation in this appointment. Still, the action of the Election Commission is inexplicable.

While giving its judicial decision, a Court makes public the reasons for its decision. Impartiality and transparency are the prime factors for judicial decisions. The Election Commission is a constitutional authority with quasi-judicial powers. If there had been any valid reasons for not accepting the State Government's recommendation and for departing from the well-established procedure, the Election Commission should have given the reasons. A small slip in the decision-making process may raise a huge controversy, as a small spark may cause a huge forest fire.

Already the Centre-State relationship is surcharged. Let it not be worsened. The Election Commission should not only act impartially but also appear to do so. It is true that the Election Commission has a reservoir of powers under Article 324. Having power is one thing and taking a sound judgment to use the power wisely is another thing. Edmund Burke argued in the British Parliament against the imprudent and inconsistent attitude of imperialistic powers towards the American Colonies. The orator said pithily, "It is easy to give power, but it is difficult to give wisdom."

The Election Commission has enormous powers, but it will be desirable if it has enough wisdom to use them properly.

THE HINDU

- 8 AUG 2001

Kalraj, Manmohan set to enter RS

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW, June 1. — The Uttar Pradesh BJP chief, Mr Kalraj Mishra, is all set to win the Rajya Sabha by-election unopposed on 4 June, the last day of withdrawal of nomination papers. He filed four sets of nomination papers, the only person to file nomination today.

The seat fell vacant after Mr Rajnath Singh resigned on his election to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly. Mr Mishra filed the papers in presence of Mr Singh and other senior party members. Mr Surendra Nath Awasthi, who had Mr Singh's backing, was conspicuous by his absence.

Mr Awasthi had vacated the Haidergarh Assembly seat for Mr Singh. The chief minister, naturally, was keen for Mr Awasthi's nomination. But this did not find favour within the party at the Centre and the state level.

Most state leaders, particularly the Brahmin lobby, was against nominating Mr Awasthi — a rank outsider — for the Rajya Sabha.

Mr Awasthi joined the BJP from the Congress after the Haidergarh election in April.

The Awasthi camp was peeved at Mr Mishra's nomination. "The BJP leadership should have honoured the commitment made to Mr Awasthi," his supporters said.

Following Mr Mishra's nomination, an embarrassed Mr Rajnath Singh said there was no deal with Mr Awasthi. He asserted that there were no differences in the party over Mr Mishra's nomination.

Mr Mishra will be the party chief even after his election to the Rajya Sabha. There is complete coordination between the organisation and government, Mr Singh said.

In political circles, however, Mr Mishra's nomination is being perceived as a setback for Mr Singh.

Asked if Mr Awasthi's name would now be considered for the Legislative Council seat which Mr Mishra will vacate, the chief minister said the party

leadership would choose the candidate.

Manmohan to win in Assam: Senior Congress leader, Dr Manmohan Singh, and Assam BJP leader, Mr Indramoni Bora, are poised to be elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha from Assam, adds SNS from Guwahati. No other candidate filed nomination papers today.

The Assam Assembly secretary and returning officer, Mr Dibakar Talukdar, said there were only two candidates in the fray and hence no need for an election. The two candidates would be declared winners if their nomination papers are found valid after scrutiny tomorrow, he said.

Elections to two Rajya Sabha seats were necessitated by the expiry of the terms of Dr Singh and Mrs Jayashree Goswami Mahanta, Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta's wife.

The Congress re-nominated Dr Singh as the party's candidate for the third time in a row. The AGP ignored Mrs Mahanta and allowed BJP to put up a candidate.

For the BJP, candidate selection was difficult. The party unit shortlisted the names of four candidates and sent the list to Delhi yesterday for the final word. The central leadership chose Mr Bora, a former president of the state unit. Mr Bora filed his nomination papers today.

SC notices to Jaya, Centre & A-G

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, June 4. — The Supreme Court today issued notices to the Tamil Nadu chief minister and AIADMK supremo, Miss J Jayalalitha, the Centre and the attorney-general of India on a bunch of petitions raising the question whether a person disqualified from contesting elections could be appointed as the chief minister.

Terming the issue raised in the petitions as "important", a Bench comprising Mr Justice SSM Quadri and Mr Justice Doraiswamy Raju referred it to a three-judge Bench and directed the matter be placed before the Chief Justice of India "for constitution of an appropriate Bench".

Miss Jayalalitha, who was disqualified by the returning offi-

cers from contesting elections in view of her conviction in a corruption case, was appointed as the chief minister on 14 May by the Governor, Ms Fathima Beevi, after her party won majority.

However, the Bench dismissed as withdrawn a petition challenging the constitutional validity of Article 164(4) of the Constitution which provided that "A minister who for any period of six consecutive months is not a member of the legislature of the state shall at the expiration of that period cease to be a minister." The Bench said the interpretations could be different, but it didn't mean that an original provision of the Constitution would become unconstitutional in view of such differences.

The Bench also dismissed all applications seeking stay on

the decision of the Governor appointing Miss Jayalalitha as the chief minister.

Arguing for the petitioner Mr Pratap Singh Chautala, brother of Haryana chief minister Mr Om Prakash Chautala, senior advocate Mr Anil Dewan submitted that the appointment of Miss Jayalalitha, whose conviction had not been stayed by the Madras High Court, has opened a new chapter in the Indian legal as well as political history.

Terming the Governor's decision as "wholly unconstitutional, arbitrary and subversive of the Rule of Law forming the basic structure of the Constitution", Mr Dewan said it would encourage corruption and empower a "convicted person to occupy the chief minister's office".

"The precedent set by the deci-

sion of the Governor leads to the following consequences - A convicted murderer or a dacoit can be appointed not only as a minister but also a chief minister or even a Prime Minister of India," he said.

The other petitioners who challenged Miss Jayalalitha's appointment as chief minister were Mr BL Wadhera, Mr ML Sharma and Mr BR Kapoor.

Mr Dewan said, "If the logic of this appointment is upheld, the same person may resign office a little before six months and then again may be invited to occupy the office of the chief minister if the majority party so decides." At this point, the Bench said if this was the position it has to be decided how to tackle the question and a reference by the President could be an answer.

Mulayam Singh Yadav, Jyoti Basu, HS Surjeet and AB Dal...

People's Front closes ranks for UP elections

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 29: In a move to harness forces of the incipient third alternative, the People's Front today decided to fight the Uttar Pradesh polls together. After the five Assembly elections, it is Uttar Pradesh, the largest and politically the most crucial state, which is now holding the front's attention.

At a meeting of the front at CPM general-secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet's residence, the Samajwadi Party proposed that the front fight the polls in Uttar Pradesh on a united platform. For the embryonic third front, the elections will be a window to the future of the NDA-led government at the Centre — whoever wins will have an upper hand in deciding the political course in Delhi.

"The Shahjahanpur election has shown that we can defeat the BJP if we are united," said Mulayam Yadav. His party re-

cently won the byelection, defeating the BJP, the Congress and the Bahujan Samaj Party. Left leaders have been saying the poll results in Uttar Pradesh will drive the final nail in the NDA government's coffin.

The front is banking on former Prime Minister V.P. Singh to swing the Thakur votes to their side. Though the Samajwadi has claimed that it has won a fair share of the Thakur votebank in the Shahjahanpur polls, Singh, himself a Thakur, is going to be a much more effective vote-catcher.

Much of the success of this unity will depend on Mulayam's readiness to accommodate his partners in seat-sharing. In the past, Mulayam has proved to be a ticklish ally reluctant to part with seats. If the seat-sharing formula does not work, then the People's Front will run into the same rough patches as in the past.

The Samajwadi has made it clear that it will treat both the BJP and the Congress as adversaries — the Left Front which, for some

time, had distanced itself from this view, is once again veering to the same opinion. The common programme the front has finalised spells out this line of equidistance from the two major parties.

"The Congress cannot be an alternative since it had initiated the economic reforms in 1991 for which the people are suffering," states the programme. It goes on to say the party's record in corruption while in power does not inspire the confidence of the people, who want to see the end of the BJP government.

Since the common programme is going to guide the front's political strategy in the future, it is clear that the Left will go along with Mulayam's stand-off attitude towards the Congress. The Left was cut up with the Congress' decision to ally with the Trinamul Congress in the recent Bengal elections, though the CPM leaders after the poll outcome said it was up to the Congress to decide what kind of relations it wanted to have with the third front.

THE TELEGRAPH

DAY, JUNE 14, 2001

Lyngdoh takes over as CEC

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 13. Mr. James Michael Lyngdoh today took over as the Chief Election Commissioner, reiterating the Election Commission's commitment to carry on efforts to strengthen the electoral democratic system.

Mr. Lyngdoh, 62, who will be the CEC till February, 2004, took over from Dr. M.S. Gill who retired today after an eventful five-year term. Mr. Lyngdoh has been



an Election Commissioner since March 1, 1997. A former IAS officer of the 1961 batch of the Bihar cadre, Mr. Lyngdoh, who hails from Meghalaya, is the first person from the North-East to assume the high constitutional post. Mr. Brij Bihari Tandon, Secretary (Personnel), joined the Commission today and will now be Election Commissioner along with Mr. T.S. Krishnamurthy.

Lauding his predecessor for taking several steps to improve the functioning of electoral democracy, Mr. Lyngdoh said: "The system has been strengthened in a number of ways and is working better now. But, a lot still needs to be done."

In another development, Mr. A. K. Agarwal, was named the new Secretary, Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension. He succeeds Mr. B. B. Tandon.

THE HINDU

Jayalalitha's appointment challenged

By Our Staff Reporter

9-8-2005
107/205
CHENNAI, MAY 22. A public interest litigation petition seeking to restrain the AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, from functioning as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, following her disqualification to contest elections to the State Assembly, will be heard by the Madras High Court in the first week of June, after the court's summer vacation.

A vacation bench comprising Mr. Justice K.P. Sivasubramanian and Mr. Justice A.K. Rajan, directed the writ petition filed by a Chennai advocate, Mr. V. Selvaraj, — which came up for maintainability — to be posted for hearing after the vacation.

Mr. Justice Sivasubramanian, who said that he could not bear the petition "for personal reasons", however held that the petition was maintainable and directed it to be posted before another bench. The judge had handled cases against Ms. Jayalalitha while he was a government advocate. The petitioner contended that when a disqualified person could not be member of the Legislature, she could not be appointed Chief Minister. Hence, Ms. Jayalalitha's appointment was illegal and not tenable, besides being injurious to the democratic system and the rule of law, he submitted.

Listing the cases pending against Ms. Jayalalitha, the petition said it would also be difficult for the Special Judges to hear the cases when the Chief Min-

ister herself stood before them as accused. The petitioner contended that Articles 173, 190, 191 and 164 of the Constitution made it clear that a disqualified person could not be sworn in Chief Minister on the pretext that she had a gestation period of six months to become an MIA.

The convention of a majority party leader being invited to form the government could not be applied in the case of Ms. Jayalalitha since she had been convicted and sentenced by a court and hence disqualified from being elected MIA under Section 8(3) of the Representation of the People Act.

Merely because she had been elected leader by members of the AIADMK Legislature Party, the Governor could not in violation of law and the Constitution appoint Ms. Jayalalitha Chief Minister. The AIADMK could not compel the Governor to do so.

Contending that the Governor's action had created a constitutional and legal crisis, the petition said the State could not be administered in accordance with constitutional provisions when a person convicted and disqualified was Chief Minister. The Central Government had failed to intervene and protect the Constitution.

The petition sought a direction to Ms. Jayalalitha to show cause under what authority she claimed to have use, enjoy, perform the rights, duties and privileges of the office of Chief Minister.

Sorabjee's view: Page 13

THE HINDU

2 MAY 2005

110-17 21/5 'Charisma not enough for poll victory'

KOLKATA MAY 20. The West Bengal PCC chief, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, today attributed the defeat of the Congress-Trinamool Congress combine in the Assembly elections to lack of organisation and said that personal charisma of any individual leader was not enough in ensuring victory.

"These are the lessons that we must learn from the results of the elections," Mr. Mukherjee told the CLP's first meeting here which elected Mr. Atish Sinha as its leader.

Saying that the Congress was keen on playing the role of the 'classical Opposition by opposing, exposing and isolating the Government' in the Assembly, the PCC chief said that it would not indulge in any rowdism inside the House.

"There may be some media limelight on rowdism, but it sends wrong message to the people." Later, he told reporters that the Congress was not apprehensive about the Trinamool returning to the NDA, but said that his party would act 'accordingly' if such an event, however, took place.

Pointing out that his party began talks with the Trinamool chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, only after she withdrew from the NDA, Mr. Mukherjee said the Congress was still firm on

the stand that it would have no truck with the Trinamool as long it was part of the NDA.

To a question, he said that a joint programme between the Congress and the Trinamool outside the Assembly was possible and it would be decided only after talks between the leaders of the two parties.

'Check malpractices'

The former West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Siddhartha Shankar Ray, today demanded setting up of an inquiry commission to probe into the 'unusually' high and skewed polling pattern in a large number of booths during the Assembly elections in the State.

"There are reports of unusually high poll percentage in a large number of booths. If the reports are found to be true, a commission of inquiry should be set up under the Commission of Inquiry Act 1952, to probe into possible electoral malpractices," Mr. Ray told newsmen here.

He also demanded repolling in all the booths where over 75 per cent of the votes had gone in favour of one candidate. The polling percentage has been over 85 per cent in about 40,000 of the total over 61,500 booths in the State, Mr. Ray said. — PTI

THE HINDU

Debarred candidate Jaya is CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHENNAI, MAY 14

IN an unprecedented and controversial action, AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha was today sworn-in as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, a day after her party stormed back to power in elections which she was barred from contesting.

The 53-year-old stormy petrel of Tamil Nadu politics was back in power within hours of being unanimously elected leader by her party's 132 newly-elected members in the 234-member Assembly although her nomination papers in the elections had been rejected in view of her conviction in a corruption case.

Governor Fathima Beevi, a former judge of the Supreme Court, invited Jayalalitha to form the government shortly after she staked her claim during a meeting between the two at the Raj Bhavan.

Out of power for five years, Jayalalitha lost no time to resume her office, taking oath along with



AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha waving to party workers outside their headquarters before leaving for Raj Bhavan in Chennai on Monday to stake claim to form government - PTT

five ministers, all belonging to

AIADMK, even as delirious supporters burst crackers and danced

the Governor before she administered the oath of office and secrecy to the AIADMK leader and other

ministers at a simple ceremony. Those who were sworn in along with Jayalalitha were C Ponnaiyan, M Thambidurai, D Jayakumar, Aiyaru Vandayar and R Saroja, who all took the oath in Tamil.

Even as legal opinion was divided about inviting a convicted person, who could not contest the elections, the AIADMK legislature party unanimously elected her the leader.

Immediately after that, she drove to Raj Bhavan and staked her claim. As results poured in yesterday, Jayalalitha, whose party has got an absolute majority on its own, said she would not share power with allies, who have backed her claim to be the Chief Minister.

As opponents objected to her being invited to form the government, Congress and her other allies termed the Governor's decision 'legal'. While Ponnaiyan is a party senior who had worked in the Cabinet of late MGR and returns to the ministry after a gap of 13 years, Thambidurai is a former Lok Sabha Speaker.

RARELY does Trinamool Congress leaders show the guts to speak up against the party chief, Mamata Banerjee. But after the crushing defeat in this week's Assembly polls, one of them did when Mamata showed up almost after 40 hours of self confinement to announce that she would like to step down from her post. One of the MLAs shot back at her: "It has almost become a habit with you to resign on any issue." The MLA probably hit the nail on the head. It is precisely her pressure politics of resignation that culminated in Trinamool Congress walking out of the NDA coalition. While it is still debated if the decision was politically correct, there is no doubt whatsoever that her image as a responsible leader suffered in public perception.

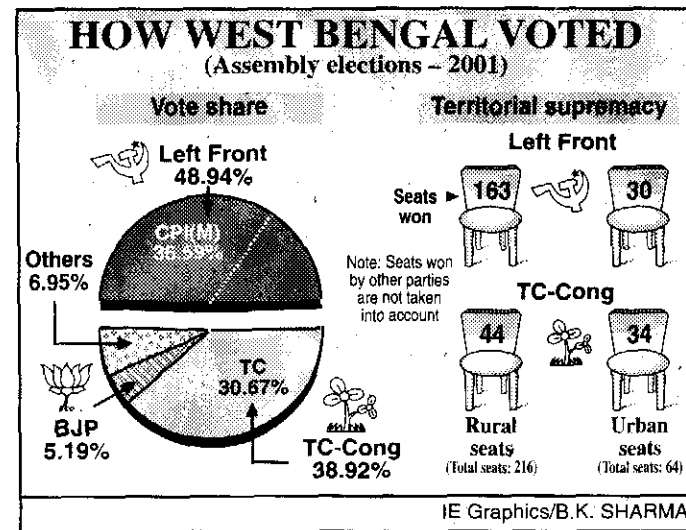
It had taken years of hard toil and labour for Mamata to establish herself as a true crusader against the Left. But she seemed to have stopped short of acquiring the stature for voters at large to identify her as a possible head of state. The steps she had taken in the months prior to the polls — starting from her threat to resign on oil price hike, her threat to resign if she was not granted a railway budget of her choice and finally the resignation on the Tehelka issue combined to paint her as one who is "honest but irresponsible, a fighter but whimsical".

In Kolkata, a large section of non-Left voters were thoroughly disillusioned and did not even cast their votes. It partly explains why some of the constituencies within the city registered an all time low voter turn out. For instance, of the 14 constituencies which recorded between 50 per cent and 60 per cent polling, eight were in Kolkata. Four constituencies of Burrabazar, Chowringhee, Jorabagan and Bowbazar recorded less than 45 per cent polling. Of these,

Gone with the wind

The Marxists have got a fresh lease on the Writers' Buildings. **Subrata Nagchoudhury** says it was Mamata Banerjee's inability to present a cogent and convincing political agenda that failed the Trinamool in its fight against the Left Front in West Bengal

J. Bhattacharya
95-9



Burrabazar registered only about 32 per cent, the lowest turn out in the entire state. One such voter who didn't cast his vote rued: "CPI-M was not the party we would vote for, but then Mamata Banerjee also failed to live upto our expectation. We decided to skip the polls this time." Mamata will have to project herself as a more responsible leader if she is to compete with Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, he added.

The lack of any political content in her election speeches is being cited as another reason for her failure to convince the voters. As she criss-crossed the state, covering more than 25,000 kms by road during the campaign, not for once did she explain why the Trinamool has come out of the NDA. Or, why she has joined hands with someone whom she not too long ago had described as the "B" team of the CPI-M in



West Bengal. She also failed to outline a definite programme for the government should she be voted into power. Instead, it was all emotion and sentiment. Her rallies certainly received rousing reception but they obviously did not translate into votes. One driving force behind her decision to snap the ties with BJP was said to be the 24 per cent Muslim vote in the state. But a

preliminary scrutiny shows that the Muslims did not respond the way she had expected, may be because of her total silence about the BJP during campaigning. The CPI-M on the contrary took full advantage of her unexplained silence about the BJP and harped on the theme that the "divorce between TMC and BJP is only superficial and temporary. The two will join hands

soon". It worked. In the four heavily Muslim-populated districts of North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Malda and Murshidabad, the Trinamool won only one seat out of a total of 42.

The Trinamool's handling of the Kamtapur agitation in north Bengal, mainly Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri districts, seemed to have backfired, too. First, the TMC went into an electoral understanding with the Kamtapur People's Party and dismissed it later.

But by then, CPI-M had picked up the threads, launching a sustained campaign saying that Trinamool supports the Kamtapuri cause who are out to divide Bengal once again. The result was a total wash out of the Congress-Trinamool combine in the region. Out of a total of 26 seats in Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts, the TMC-Congress combine won just one seat.

The selection of Trinamool candidates is now coming in for sharp criticism within the party. It was arbitrary and not befitting the ground realities of a particular constituency, party leaders admit.

Banerjee's rigidity in not conceding a large number of winnable seats to the Congress has cost the combination heavily. Dissident Congress leaders continued to be in the fray as independents and proved to be spoilers in at least 15 seats.

With CPI-M being the adversary, none can afford to commit so many mistakes and yet make a match of it. With Buddhadeb beating Mamata in her own game, she now has to repackage herself in a totally new mould.

At the same time it would be grossly erroneous to presume that this is the end of Mamata in Bengal. As the editor of a Bengali daily observed: "Mamata is the creation of a socio-economic condition. She will live as long as that condition does not change."

Mamata blames it on Gill, Centre

By Our Special Correspondent

KOLKATA, MAY 14. A day after her defeat in the Assembly election, the Trinamool Congress chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, today stepped out in public to put the responsibility of the Congress-Trinamool combine's debacle at the doorstep of Election Commission, the BJP-run NDA Government at the Centre and the State administration.

Ms. Banerjee accused the Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. M.S. Gill, of being in cahoots with the Centre and the State Government to trounce the alliance. "He played into the hands of the Centre to defeat us in the poll. He will retire in June and I will not be surprised if the Centre purchased him."

She made these observations at a packed press conference at her Kalighat residence in south Kolkata. Also present were Mr. Subrata Mukherjee, Mr. Pankaj Banerjee and a few other newly-elected Trinamool MLAs.

The Trinamool chief said she had sent countless messages to the Election Commission during the poll and even during the re-polling in 90 booths, but in vain. "He (Dr. Gill) never bothered to talk to me even once. Either he was out for dinner or busy in meetings."

What was surprising was Ms. Banerjee's volte face with regard to the position she had taken on the combine's defeat. On Sunday, when it became clear that the combine was losing the battle, she said, "I accept the people's verdict."

Ms. Banerjee also lashed out at the Vajpayee Government — for the first time since she quit the NDA — saying it had adopted a "vindictive" attitude towards Trinamool. "The NDA



The Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, addressing presspersons at her residence in Kolkata on Monday.

— Photo: Sushanta Patronobish

influenced the Election Commission, which neither paid any heed to our complaints nor took measures to check rigging by the communists in the poll."

Contrary to speculation in a section of the media, she said she would not return to the NDA-fold. "We have resigned from NDA and we will not go back to it."

The verdict in favour of the ruling Leftists was not a true reflection of the people's sentiments. They desired a change in government but the communists did not allow them to cast their votes in favour of the Congress-Trinamool combine by unleashing terror. "Even the Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, rigged the election in his Jadavpur constituency."

According to Ms. Banerjee, the results

showed that the communists had resorted to largescale rigging. For example, the CPI(M) candidates in Garbeta and Keshpur in Midnapore district won by a margin, which almost equalled the size of the electorate. "The CPI (M) is like the Nazis," she said.

Following the combine's debacle, she had expressed the desire to resign from the post of Trinamool chief owning responsibility. The party's policy-making body, however, dissuaded her from doing so, saying it would continue anti-communist movements under her leadership.

Pranab promises support

The State Congress chief, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, today met Ms. Banerjee to review the poll results. The Congress, he said, would back her in her anti-Left campaign. He advised her to concentrate on building up the organisation to counter the communists' machinery.

PTI reports:

The dissident Trinamool leader, Mr. Ajit Panja, today said Ms. Banerjee should take a "lesson" from the results and respect the mandate of the people. Speaking to presspersons, he said Ms. Banerjee, though in a state of shock, should respect her party workers as also the mandate of the people.

Door open: Fernandes

PATNA, MAY 14. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) convener, Mr. George Fernandes, today said the "door is wide open" for the Trinamool Congress chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee's return to the alliance if "she desires to rejoin us".

THE HINDU

15 MAY 2011

A K Antony elected Kerala CM

HT Correspondent
Thiruvananthapuram, May 15

CWC MEMBER A K Antony was unanimously elected the 11th Chief Minister of Kerala today belying rumours of an impending showdown on the issue. The party president would name the KPCC president afterwards. AICC observers Ghulam Nabi Azad and Motilal Vohra said. There was speculation that K Karunakaran could insist on simultaneous announcement of the Chief Minister and the KPCC president's name.

But after talking to the Congress chief, Karunakaran climbed down from his earlier position, paving way for unanimous selection of the new CLP leader.

Earlier, the newly elected members of the party met at Indira Bhawan and passed a unanimous resolution leaving it for the party chief to select the new CLP leader.

After getting the MLAs' nod, all five leaders - Karunakaran, Antony, Motilal Vohra, Azad and KPCC chief Thennala Balakrishna Pillai - went to the state guest-house for more discussions. They had separate telephone talks with the AICC chief and held another round of meetings with the legislators, it is learnt.

Kadavoor Shivadasan, a Karunakaran man, proposed Antony's name. Four other members seconded his proposal.

Reacting to Antony's election, a glum-faced K Karunakaran said: "I am always happy. I am also happy today." But sources close to him said Karunakaran was not happy with the high command's delay in naming the new KPCC president.

Karunakaran's son K Muralidharan is tipped to be the new KPCC chief.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 MAY 2001

Trinamul to boycott Buddha's swearing-in

Poll panel raps Mamata for 'base remark'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, May 15. - The Election Commission today dismissed Miss Mamata Banerjee's "despicable remarks" against the chief election commissioner as being "beneath contempt", as the Trinamul decided to boycott the West Bengal ministry's swearing-in ceremony on 18 May.

Yesterday, the Trinamul chief had accused Mr MS Gill of having failed to check rigging during West Bengal Assembly polls under the "influence" of the Atal Behari Vajpayee government.

After being routed in the polls, Miss Banerjee had said: "The entire administration and the EC worked for a particular party. The EC even changed observers on polling day... Despite repeated attempts, I couldn't contact Gill on polling day. Whenever I called up, Gill was neither in his office nor at his home." She even alleged that Mr Gill had been "purchased" and might be given some office after his retirement soon.

The poll panel issued a press note soon after the two election commissioners, Mr JN Lyngdoh and Mr TS Krishnamurthy, held a meeting with senior EC officials. Mr Gill could not be contacted for his comment because he was out of Delhi.

Criticising her "personal" remarks, the principal secretary to the poll panel, Mr AN Jha, said: "The EC is a three-member commission of equals and all decisions on the recently concluded elections have been taken by the EC, jointly and unanimously. Therefore, what-

BUDDHA QUILTS

KOLKATA, May 15. - Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya today submitted his resignation to the Governor before leaving for New Delhi to attend a CPI-M politburo meeting tomorrow.

He'll function as a caretaker chief minister till 18 May, when the new ministry will be sworn in. Mr Viren J Shah has dissolved the House and the Election Commission has constituted the 13th Assembly through a separate notification.

The post-poll political situation will be discussed at the politburo meeting. Mr Bhattacharya reached Delhi tonight to a warm welcome by CPI-M workers at the airport.

The meeting will discuss the CPI-M's debacle in Kerala and its strategy at the national level and the efforts to strengthen the People's Front. - SNS

■ Photograph on page 3
■ More poll reports on pages 3 & 4

ever despicable remarks have been made against Mr Gill are necessarily a reflection against the entire commission and are categorically dismissed as beneath contempt".

The decision to boycott the swearing-in was taken by Trinamul legislators at Maharastra Nivas in south Kolkata. The meeting, presided over by Miss Banerjee, decided that the

MLAs will play the role of a responsible Opposition.

Miss Banerjee said: "The CPI-M had rigged the polls and tried to stifle the Opposition voice. The party legislators have no right to be sworn in because the Left Front has not come to power by people's mandate."

Three years after Trinamul's formation, Miss Banerjee today talked about the need to set up a strong organisation - right from the top to the grassroots level - to fight the CPI-M. This, she said, was the biggest lesson she had learnt from the Trinamul's debacle.

"The CPI-M has money and a strong organisation and to combat that we must have a sound organisation," she said. The party will soon hold an organisational election. Till now, she had been nominating the Trinamul leaders.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee and Mr Ambika Banerjee were unanimously elected Trinamul Legislature Party's leader and deputy leader. Mr Sovandeb Chattopadhyay will be the party's chief whip. Mr Pankaj Banerjee will be policy making committee chairman.

Miss Banerjee said Trinamul leaders would form groups and visit violence-torn areas. The party will prepare a list of the votes cast in all the booths and hand it over to the press to show how the poll was rigged by the CPI-M.

"We had the blessings of the people, but we couldn't win because the CPI-M had unleashed terror on polling day... Else, its candidates couldn't have won by more than 1 lakh votes," she said.

THE STATESMAN
JUN 15 1975

'Person disqualified from contest shouldn't be CM'

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, MAY 15. The Janata Party president, Dr. Subramanian Swamy, today charged that the Tamil Nadu Governor, Ms. Fathima Bevi, had "murdered the Constitution" by swearing in as Chief Minister the AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, who was convicted in three corruption cases and barred from contesting election.

"Despite being a former Supreme Court judge, the Governor has failed to show the courage and conviction displayed by the Returning Officers (who rejected Ms. Jayalalitha's nomination papers in view of her conviction)," Dr. Swamy told reporters here.

According to Article 164 read in conjunction with the Constituent Assembly debate, only those qualified to become MLAs could be sworn in Chief Minister, he asserted.

Though the AIADMK had won a majority, the "will of the people should be within the framework of the Indian Constitution. The mandate of the people is transitory, but the

Constitution is permanent". As the slew of corruption cases against Ms. Jayalalitha was filed on the basis of the private complaints preferred by him, Dr. Swamy said he should be allowed to function as public prosecutor in these cases under Section 5 of the Representation of People Act.

The AIADMK Government-appointed counsel would not act in fairness in these cases, he maintained.

The legal wing of the Janata Party would monitor the progress of these cases, and if there were any attempts to withdraw them, legal action would be initiated, Dr. Swamy said.

Asked if there was a possibility of rapprochement with Ms. Jayalalitha, Dr. Swamy said that even if he renewed ties with the AIADMK, he would not change his stand on the corruption cases against her.

He attributed the AIADMK led Front's victory to the "non-performance" of the DMK regime and the electorate's aversion towards Chennai Mayor, Mr. M.K. Stalin, being pro-

jected as the Chief Ministerial candidate of the DMK-led Front.

The Janata Party leader claimed that if the Tamil Maanila Congress leader, Mr. C.K. Moopanar, had floated third front, both the DMK and AIADMK would have been trounced. "Mr. Moopanar has missed a life-time opportunity to usher in Kamaraj rule."

Stating that the results of the recently-held Assembly elections to four States and the Union Territory of Pondicherry were a verdict against the BJP-led Government at the Centre, he claimed that the NDA Government would fall soon.

Dr. Swamy said he would present a petition to the Union Home Minister, Mr. I.K. Advani on May 25, urging him to cancel the Indian citizenship for the Congress president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, as she had "suppressed crucial information" while applying for citizenship.

He also faulted the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, for not signing an extradition treaty with Malaysia, to facilitate extradition of Mr. Quattrocchi, an accused in the Bofors gun deal.

THE HINDU

16 MAY 2001

Repoll today in 90 booths across State

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 11

NEARLY ONE lakh voters will exercise their franchise again on Saturday at 90 polling booths across the State from 7 am to 4 pm.

Counting for all the 294 Assembly constituencies will be held on May 13 (Sunday) at 96 centres located at various places in the State, including the sub-divisional towns. Counting is scheduled to start by 10 am and all the results are expected to be out by the same evening, Sen said.

State CEO Sabyasachi Sen said the EC has ordered repoll on the basis of reports and findings of malpractices, smashing up of EVMs and other irregularities by the Returning Officers (ROs) and Central Observers.

Care will be taken to prevent lapses and a repetition of the mistakes which have warranted

these repolls, Sen said. "The repoll will be held under stringent security arrangements. The Presiding Officers (POs) are also being asked not to allow any voter to cast vote without a proper identity as has been prescribed by the EC," he said.

That the EC is firm in implementing its directive on checking the voter's identity has also been made amply clear by the instructions to the POs that any laxity on their part in this respect will be severely dealt with, and would be liable for disciplinary action, Sen said.

On the reactions of the major political parties to the repoll, Sen said his talks today with the CPI(M), Congress and Trinamool leaders revealed that none of the parties were too happy with repoll in such a large number of booths.

This was so despite the fact

RE-POLL DAY A HOLIDAY

THE STATE Government has declared May 12 as a public holiday in areas where re-polling will be held.

The leave, granted on the basis of Section 135B of the Representative of People's Act 1951, lays down that all persons employed in any business, trade, industrial undertaking or any other establishment entitled to vote for an election to the Legislative Assembly of a State shall on the day of the poll be granted a paid holiday.

A memorandum has also been released granting leave to State Government employees, who are residents of constituencies where re-polling will be held on Saturday and whose work place is far away.

HTC, Kolkata

that both the Congress and Trinamool complained of largescale rigging by the CPI(M) in collusion with the police and administration yesterday, Sen indicated.

Giving details on the repoll, which include Midnapore parliamentary constituency, Sen said the largest number of repoll

booths (18) are in Titagarh Assembly constituency in North 24 Parganas. Khardah, also in the same district, where the sitting MLA, Finance Minister and CPI(M) candidate, Asim Dasgupta is locked in a fierce fight against his Trinamool rival, Ranjit Mukherjee and the State

BJP General Secretary, Debabrata Choudhury, comes second with repoll in 15 polling booths. Jangipur in Murshidabad and Bishnupur (East) in South 24 Parganas which witnessed two deaths and some major clashes as well yesterday, also figure prominently in the list of booths requiring repoll with 9 and 8 centres respectively.

Tollygunge is the only constituency in Kolkata where repoll will take place at one booth (No.188).

Interestingly, the trouble-torn Midnapore which quite unexpectedly experienced an incident-free poll yesterday, will have repoll only in 10 booths in 5 Assembly and Midnapore Parliamentary constituencies. Others include Nandanpur, Moyna, Khejuri and Mugberia, where Fisheries Minister, Kiranmoy Nanda is defending his seat.

Referring to the percentage of

votes cast yesterday, Sen said details on 88 Assembly seats have revealed that the average was 75.69, with Sabong in Midnapore recording the highest of 90 per cent. Pingla, Koshpur and Garbeta, witnessed remarkably high percentages of voting, between 85 and 85 per cent. Palta, Dhaniakhali, Itahar, Chopra and Kaliasuni also recorded over 80 per cent polling on an average, Sen said.

Chowringhee from where Calcutta Mayor and sitting MLA, Subrata Mukherjee of the Trinamool is trying his luck again reported the lowest percentage of 42.11. Apathy of Calcutta voters has also been quite evident in their turnout, with Dhakuria and Tollygunge accounting for 67 and 66 per cent, respectively. These were followed by Bally, Gunje (57), Rashbehari (52) and Alipore (51) per cent.

TIME TO TAKE STOCK

Elections being reduced to a farce

A DAY after the most violent polls in history and before results are announced, it is necessary to take stock as to what we are about and to draw certain conclusions. It is quite clear that the political field is in the grip of those who have no other occupation and irrespective of party labels fight for dear life and with no holds barred because the alternative is a blank void, not knowing where their next meal is coming from. This is only a slight exaggeration because the goons in question have over the years accumulated enough for several generations; it is not only the political heavyweights or corrupt businessmen or sons of ministers who have managed to lever themselves above want of any kind. Every party in a position of relative strength has indulged in rigging, in observing the Manual of Election Law painstakingly put together by the Election Commission in the breach — in burning, looting, indulging in political cleansing of opponents from whole villages, in threatening poll personnel, in casting votes without identification, in manipulating even electronic voting machines and when this is difficult, breaking them or throwing them out of the window. Without exaggeration this is what passes for expression of the people's will, particularly but not exclusively in the worker's paradise known as West Bengal.

Random incidents will suffice to flesh out these contentions. The Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, lays down procedures to be followed if a voter after proper identification, finds that someone else, obviously in fraud or by force, has already cast a vote that is not his to cast. The genuine voter thus denied has to follow procedures laid down for a *tendered ballot paper* under Rule 42, and hand it to the presiding officer who is enjoined to keep it in his custody; it may add up to evidence justifying a repoll. The Chief Electoral Officer in Kolkata, Sabyasachi Sen publicly says that tender votes are a nuisance and he will not allow them. The Election Commission might like to take notice. Further the Commission have given clear instructions that Central forces sent to the states going to the polls must be deployed. There are innumerable instances where they have been held at District Headquarters or at police thanas, whose staff belong to political unions by grace and favour of the state government and can no more act independently than fly. Police officers are known to have taken Central forces to wrong booths with malice aforethought. Where flag marches are held they are restricted to main roads and not allowed to fan out into interiors where trouble generally occurs out of public gaze. Officers of these forces have openly complained and those made to our reporters have been published in this newspaper.

There are rules prohibiting MPs with security cover from being named polling agents; violations have been noted and corrected at leisure. Weapons at or near polling booths have been prohibited; we have published photographs, which prove the contrary. The short point is that there is a world of difference between breaches of the law detected by state administrations despite precautions taken and breaches inspired, planned and executed by political parties running state governments. Lapses may take place in the best-regulated states; these need to be distinguished from states where lapses are pre-planned, areas under opposition influence identified and thousands driven from their homes, maimed, threatened, fined and where possible forced to fall in line.

Enough has been said to strongly support the suggestion made by the Chief Election Commissioner, Dr MS Gill that three months before elections, state governments must give way and President's Rule imposed for the duration. Of course this presupposes that Raj Bhavans are not regarded as pinjrapols for housing discarded politicians and Governors will be worthy heads of state administrations, strong, independent and experienced. Names recently aired do not inspire confidence.

THE STATESMAN

12 MAY 2001

60% turnout in repolls, boycott in one booth

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 12

MORE THAN 60 per cent polling was recorded in 89 of 90 booths in today's repolling, which was generally peaceful barring stray incidents of violence. Voters in booth no. 47 in Bishnupur East (SC) seat boycotted the repolling.

CEO Sabyasachi Sen said these voters, 943 of them, were protesting against "non-fulfillment of some longstanding demands". Some of them, however, had voted on May 10.

Curiously, more than 60 per cent polling was recorded at booth no. 48 of Bishnupur East (SC) seat, which with booth no. 47 was located on the premises of Kashtapukur Free Primary School.

Repolling was ordered at six booths in this Assembly constituency after allegations of false voting and smashing up of EVMs on May 10. Two men, believed to be Trinamool supporters, died in poll violence on May 10.

Sen said a few scuffles took place at some of the booths where re-polling was held today in 10 districts. Police fired six rounds in the air to disperse a group of Trinamool and CPI(M) men who threw bombs in Bishnupur East, near booths 59 and 60 at Shalpurkur Free Primary School. However, no one was injured.

Mamata Banerjee visited Titagarh and Khardah, where Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta is seeking re-election against the Trinamool's Ranjit Mukherjee.

There was tension in both constituencies until the District Magistrate and SP started touring the areas with a large force.

Trinamool leaders complained that CPI(M) leaders, including Subhas Chakrabarty and Dasgupta were moving around with supporters to "intimidate and influence" the voters, Sen said.

Sen received a large number of complaints from various quarters, including individual voters from Khardah, Titagarh and Bhatpara. He said police escorted a voter in Khardah to the booth after he complained of threats from local toughs. Police also took into custody eight Trinamool supporters spotted driving around the area "suspiciously" in a Tata Sumo.

Sen also got in touch with the Home Secretary to inquire into Banerjee's allegation that the SDPO of Belghoria, Basab Dasgupta, had stopped her car and spoke to her in "ungentlemanly and filthy language."

He said that data collected by the EC on voting in 247 constituencies has shown 74.1 per cent polling on May 10. Votes will be counted simultaneously at 96 centres tomorrow.

Sen said paramilitary forces will be posted at all the centres. No one except those authorised

by the EC will be allowed inside the counting centres. EVM experts will be present at all the main counting centres. "I myself will monitor the situation till the final results are announced," Sen said.

In Howrah, repolling in the five booths of Howrah passed off peacefully today amid allegations of threatening the voters at two booths of Howrah South.

Though there were elaborate security arrangements with CRPF posted in all the five booths of Howrah South and Panchla constituency that went into repoll today, but Arup Roy, Trinamool candidate from Howrah South, said, "The CPI(M) had threatened some voters with dire consequence if they dared to vote today".

Only 26 per cent votes were polled in Howrah South in contrast to Panchla where about 75 per cent votes were polled.

But Badal Bose, CPI(M) candidate from Howrah South, brushed aside these allegations as "totally false". He said "whenever they feel that they won't win, they make such allegations and spread violence". He said the Trinamool had rigged the poll at many places on Thursday with the help of a section of the police.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 MAY 2001

g. sheet

Historic victory for UDF

By Our Special Correspondent

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 13. The United Democratic Front's victory in the 12th Assembly elections with a two-third majority is a record of sorts. Never before in the last two decades of bipolar politics in Kerala has the electorate delivered such a decisive verdict. The vehemence with which it ousted the incumbent Left Democratic Front Government, headed by the veteran CPI(M) leader, Mr E K Nayanar, has amazed even the most ardent supporters of the UDF.

The implications of the victory is unlikely to be confined to Kerala alone and as far as the Congress is concerned, the victory would reinforce its national confidence considering the fact that it was only in Kerala that the party was hopeful of keeping its appointment with victory from among the five states which witnessed Assembly elections.

Going by the election results, it is clear that the two-thirds majority would not have materialised unless the UDF had secured the backing of all social and political factors. There are clear indications that communities, which were traditionally believed to be left-oriented, had shifted their preferences this time.

What has occurred is a massive consolidation of anti-LDF votes, irrespective of political affiliations. It is difficult to accept the LDF contention about UDF-BJP understanding, tacit or otherwise, mainly because none of the candidates who contested the current elections sought votes on the basis of any political affiliation. It would be a gross insult to the electorate to compartmentalise them into segments of this or that vote bank. Besides, the CPI(M) would also have to answer why the BJP leaders, Mr. C. K. Padmanabhan and Mr. P. K. Krishnadas emerged runner-up in Manjeswaram and Kasargod.

If at all a consolidation of anti-LDF votes has taken place, it is mainly because of the arrogant styles of functioning adopted by the CPI(M), which has not hesitated to manipulate the rule of law for partisan ends. Some of the

LDF partners had strong reservations about the CPI(M)'s style of functioning. Its rather strong confrontationist attitude towards a horde of social issues, which came out in the form of the Nadapuram clashes, alienated the LDF from the Muslim community with which it had struck a chord in the aftermath of the BJP's arrival as a major player in national politics. It went on a course of confrontation with the Ezhava community by taking partisan positions in a row in a local college in Kollam. Its blatant misuse of police for narrow ends had been a matter of controversy. This only served to neutralise whatever good the LDF did through several innovative programmes like the People's Plan campaign.

In a bid to cover up the failure of its Government, the CPI(M) had even entered into what it called strategic alliances and tactical and indirect understanding with several parties like INL. Apparently, the LDF's defeat, particularly the poor show by the CPI(M), is also a vote against the kind of politics that the party has been practicing in recent times.

Karunakaran's last laugh

The Congress party's victory in 62 seats, overcoming hurdles of factionalism and backstabbing is quite credible. Mr. Karunakaran, whose rather belligerent positions regarding three seats nearly took the Congress and the UDF over the cliff, has had the last laugh because his candidates won the Vadakkekara, Aranmula, and Peravur seats he had wrested.

Mr. Karunakaran's group has won as many as 28 seats, and this gives him more elbow room in the party to stake claim for his rightful share in the spoils of office, both in the CLP and the KPCC. The Antony group has also done fairly well winning as many as 29 out of the 37 it contested.

The third group and the Vayalar Ravi group also could feel happy at the outcome as both fought amid tremendous odds. The former had to face the CPI(M) in its bastion in a majority of the nine seats it contested.

For the moment, the chief min-

istership is not being debated with both, Mr. Antony and Mr. Karunakaran keen on savouring their respective successes at the end of a rare display of unity. The LDF partners, like the CPI, the RSP, the Kerala Congress (Joseph), took one of the worst drubbings in their electoral history. This is in stark contrast to the show of the UDF partners. Of this, the IUML perhaps would have to do some soul searching as it had to shed a couple of seats it was sure of winning.

Mr. K. M. Mani is immensely happy that his party was able to increase its tally from five in 1996 to nine this time. Among the UDF partners, the JSS headed by Mrs K R Gauri, did surprisingly well, by winning four of the six seats she had been given out of turn. The two-seat victory of Kerala Congress (B) has given a boost to Mr. Balakrishna Pillai. The CMP, which drew a blank in 1996, could salvage itself with the 8000-margin of its leader, Mr. M. V. Raghavan in Thiruvananthapuram west seat.

The UDF victory also poses a question mark over the BJP's future as a political force in Kerala.

70 p.c. voting in Assam repoll

GUWAHATI, MAY 13. Nearly 70 per cent voters today exercised their franchise in 131 polling stations in 13 constituencies of Assam's Barak valley where repoll was held peacefully, election office sources said here.

Fresh elections were ordered by the Election Commission following reports of rigging and ballot snatching on May 10 Assembly elections.

Repolling was held amid tight security with 10 CRPF personnel manning each booth with the Army and police patrolling the area and the roads leading to the election centres.

Altogether 76.2 per cent voters had exercised their franchise in the repoll to the 19 constituencies of Brahmaputra valley yesterday. — PTI

THE HINDU

14 MAY 2001

40-15
14/5

A mixed bag for Left in Assembly polls

By K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, MAY 13. There was a sense of both elation and concern in the Left parties over the mixed bag of Assembly election results in the States it had major stakes — West Bengal and Kerala.

While the outcome in West Bengal where the ruling Left Front was re-elected for a record time could be a matter of elation, the rejoice of holding on to its bastion in the face of a strong attack was negated on account of the magnitude of the defeat in Kerala.

Although the loss of the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) went according to pattern in the State, it was the scale of United Democratic Front (UDF) victory that went beyond calculations. The main cause of concern was the large dip in LDF vote share, which preliminary estimates put between three to four per cent as against normal two per cent difference.

The Left leaders saw the West Bengal victory as people's rejection of the Trinamool-Congress sole "anti-Communists" plank as against the performance of the Left Front Government that has been at the helm of affairs in the State since 1977.

The ruling combine in West Bengal had been taken aback by alliance between Ms. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress and the Congress which, it felt, was more formidable challenge to beat than the projected Trinamool-BJP lineup.

"Victory of the Left Front shows the fiasco of the type of politics based on anti-Marxists, the Trinamool-Congress were pursuing. The people of West Bengal have rejected it and as for the so-called anti-incumbency, the Left parties had the credibility to counter any negative phenomenon since it was confident of its basic policies," the CPI(M) politburo member, Mr. Prakash Karat told *The Hindu*, at the party headquarters.

As for the debacle in Kerala, Mr. Karat expressed surprise over the difference in vote share between the LDF-UDF which usually stood below two per cent. He said that while the party would make a detailed study in due course two factors, political and economic, were clear.

The CPI(M) saw BJP-RSS support to the UDF as the political factor that tilted the balance against the LDF which it felt was also at the receiving end for the

falling prices of agricultural commodities mainly on account of opening up the market due to WTO. The Left campaign that it was the BJP Government's economic policies at the Centre and the Congress which signed the WTO which resulted in the farmers suffering obviously did not impress the affected electorate.

The CPI national secretary, Mr. Atul Kumar Anjan, echoed similar views to explain the loss in Kerala while maintaining that the party would critically examine the programmes and policies and deficiencies in implementation at the national executive meeting later this month.

'No obstacle for Jayalalitha'

UNI reports:

The CPI(M) general secretary, Mr. H.S. Surjeet, today visualised no hurdle in Ms. Jayalalitha becoming Chief Minister as the AIADMK-led secular front had swept the Assembly elections there.

On the Assembly results, Mr. Surjeet said the polls had spelt a doom for the ruling NDA at the Centre and urged the non-BJP partners of the alliance to review their links with the BJP as the writing on the wall clearly showed

that the NDA had "forfeited" the right to govern.

Hailing the Left Front victory in West Bengal, he said the voters had outrightly rejected the "anti-Left Front" mooted by the Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, vindicating "our earlier stand" that the electorate could never trust her.

On the Left Democratic Front's debacle in Kerala, Mr. Surjeet said they would soon hold an introspective session to find out reasons for the rout. He admitted that "some mistakes" might have been committed by the front, but hastened to add that major reason could be the anger of the farmers on the State Government's policy regarding coconut and blackpepper's prices.

'NDA lost mandate'

The NDA Government at the Centre has lost the "political" mandate to remain in the power after its defeat in the Assembly elections to five States, the CPI general secretary, A.B. Bardhan, said today.

The Government had lost the moral right to rule the country after the Tehelka expose, Mr. Bardhan said.

THE HINDU

10 MAY 2001

Anti-incumbency wave sweeps LDF away

By C. Gouridasan Nair

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 13. The decimation of the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala has much to do with a strong anti-incumbency wave which turned violent on account of a strong undercurrent of casteist and communal sentiments.

The CPI(M) and its allies had all along considered this a difficult election, in itself a surprising conclusion after all that they claimed to have done during the last five years, but the humiliating defeat they have suffered has left them in a state of shock. The magnitude of the defeat and its implications for the constituent parties would become clear only in the days to come.

The parties which have been hit hardest by the LDF's poll debacle are the CPI(M), whose seats have been reduced from 40 to 24, and the CPI, which now has just seven seats against 18 in the outgoing Assembly. Several prominent leaders of the two parties, including the CPI(M) central committee member, Mr. P. K. Gurudasan, the Speaker, Mr. M. Vijayakumar, the Revenue Minister, Mr. K. E. Ismail and the Agriculture Minister, Mr. Krishnan Kaniyamparambil, have been defeated. And there is little to rejoice in the CPI(M) politburo member, Mr. V. S. Achuthanandan's win from Malampuzha because his victory margin is a low 4,703 votes, a sharp fall from the 18,000-odd victory margin of the LDF in the constituency in 1996.

The CPI(M) general secretary has attributed the LDF's defeat to factors such as "connivance between the UDF-BJP" and the sharp fall in the prices of cash crops. The CPI(M) politburo member, Mr. V. S. Achuthanandan, has attributed it to the "machinations of the liquor lobby" and the UDF-BJP nexus.

The LDF has the consolation that though it has lost the election so miserably, its vote share of the LDF has dipped only by a shade,

from 45.88 per cent to 43.70 per cent. The UDF has apparently gained from the 2 per cent swing away from the LDF coupled with another 3 per cent swelling its share, allegedly from the BJP kitty. As a result of this twin process, the UDF's share of votes has gone up from 44.84 per cent to 49.05 per cent. The BJP's share, it should be noted, has fallen from 8.1 per cent in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections to 5.04 per cent.

LDF gesture to UDF

The results show that even in defeat the LDF had to sacrifice much to prevent the BJP from opening its account in the State Assembly. In Manjeswaram and Kasaragod constituencies, where the BJP seemed to be in with the chance to score wins, the LDF transferred votes to the UDF to prevent such an eventuality. This has been happening in successive elections, but the UDF has never cared to acknowledge the LDF gesture. No different has been the case this time.

The Assembly elections had seen a confluence of communal interests reminiscent of the Liberation Struggle days. Almost all communal outfits in the State, save the Nair Service Society (NSS), had come out in support of the UDF during the run-up to the election. Although the calls issued by these organisations themselves may not have ignited the groundswell against the LDF, they did contribute in no small measure to the wave against the ruling alliance.

The Left parties would now have to think how to break the jinx that the BJP can cause every time it goes to the people. The answer may lie in re-evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the LDF in its present form. The LDF had made a tentative bid in this direction, although with considerable confusion, by roping in the Indian National League (INL) as an unofficial ally.

The CPI(M) had a tough time explaining the nature of the LDF-INL relationship. Initially, the at-

tempt was to forswear any tie-up, but eventually it was conceded that there was an electoral understanding between the LDF and the INL. However, as the poll outcome shows, it was too little and too late and the tie-up could not produce the desired result.

The poll outcome also holds some disturbing trends in the voting pattern. The middle class seems none-too-impressed by the LDF, despite its efforts to make the State self-sufficient in power generation and a trail blazer in decentralisation of power to the grassroots. The reasons may lie in the general perception, cultivated by the media as well, that the CPI(M) is hand-in-glove with the liquor mafia, that there was large-scale corruption in the sanctioning of Plus Two courses and that the CPI(M) had a role in the violence in Nadapuram. The LDF could not also catch the public imagination with either its manifesto or the kind of leadership that it offered the people.

Party yet to decide on CM: Antony

NEW DELHI, MAY 13. The senior Congress leader and a strong contender for Kerala chief ministership, Mr. A. K. Antony, today said the 'misrule' by the Left Democratic Front (LDF) was responsible for the United Democratic Front's spectacular electoral success.

Mr. Antony, perceived as the chief ministerial candidate of the UDF, which is set to form the Government in Kerala, told a private TV channel that the party had not decided about the leadership issue. Replying to a question about allegations against the senior Congress leader, Mr. K. Karunakaran, that had he tried to sabotage the UDF chances in the elections,

Mr. Antony said he did not subscribe to such a view.

Meanwhile, another senior Congress leader, Mr. Vyalari Ravi, today said Mr. A. K. Antony was the "obvious choice" for chief ministership. "I am not expecting any problem. Mr. A. K. Antony is the obvious choice. Mr. Karunakaran is sensible enough to understand the sentiments of people of Kerala," he told *Star News*.

Asked about the reported statement by Mr. Karunakaran that he had the support of 27 MLAs, Mr. Ravi said that it did not amount to staking claim for the chief ministership.

'Sonia will decide'

In Thiruvananthapuram, the

senior Congress leader, Mr. K. Karunakaran, said the AICC president, Sonia Gandhi, would decide the Chief Minister of Kerala, in consultation with the MLAs and other senior party leaders.

The high command would decide the date and venue of the first meeting of the Congress Legislature Party, he told reporters here.

Stating that the poll verdict was "the reflection of anger of the people of Kerala" against the "misrule" of the Marxist-led LDF, he said "all peace-loving people of Kerala are extremely happy about the result". -- UNI, PTI

THE HINDU

14 MAY 2001

Landslide for AIADMK; Co leading in Assam; Left Fr



WINNERS! In Tamil Nadu, Ms. Jayalalitha, in Kerala, Mr. A.K. Antony and the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

LOSERS... The Trinamool Congress

'I was voted to become CM' ^{9-11/15} LDF sw

By Our Tamil Nadu Bureau

CHENNAI, MAY 13. The AIADMK-led secular front, headed by Ms. Jayalalitha, today secured a landslide victory in the Tamil Nadu Assembly election with 196 of the 234 seats. The AIADMK, which contested 140 seats in alliance with the Tamil Maanila Congress, the Congress, the Paataali Makkal Katchi and the Left parties, obtained a majority of its own by winning in 132 constituencies.

Ms. Jayalalitha, who is expected to be elected leader of the party legislature group tomorrow, will meet the Governor, Ms. Fathima Beevi, and stake claim to form the next government.

Despite her disqualification from the electoral contest, Ms. Jayalalitha indicated that she was not inclined to step aside from the race for chief ministership. "People voted to make me chief minister. If I don't become the chief minister, it would amount to disrespect for the people's mandate," she said.

While an AIADMK-led front win had been on the cards, the near-sweep came as a surprise. In many places, the AIADMK romped home by huge margins. Most of the DMK victories, contrastingly, were on the basis of slender leads.

The DMK appeared to have paid the price for its alliance with the BJP. The TMC-Congress combine and the Left parties were driven into the arms of the AIADMK by the

DMK-BJP tie-up. Eventually, the sheer strength of the secular front proved too much for the DMK-led NDA. For the Congress, whose votebank was under threat from the BJP, the results came as a big boost.

Tamil Nadu party position	
Total seats	234
Results declared	233
AIADMK front:	196
AIADMK	132
TMC	23
PMK	20
Congress	7
CPI(M)	6
CPI	5
AIFB (Biswas)	1
INL	1
AIADMK-backed independent	1
DMK front:	36
DMK	27
BJP	4
MGR ADMK	2
TMC (Democratic Forum)	2
DPI	1
Independent	1

(Results for Cuddalore withheld due to re-polling in one booth)

The DMK president and Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, attributed the defeat to the "sympathy" created by the "false propaganda" of the AIADMK that the DMK was responsible for the rejection of Ms. Jayalalitha's nomination papers. As the rout of his party became clear in the afternoon, Mr. Karunanidhi sent in his resignation to the Governor.

Significantly, Ms. Jayalalitha, while accepting the electoral ver-

dict "in all humility", ruled out any "confrontationist attitude" towards the Centre. Talking to reporters at her residence after the results poured in, Ms. Jayalalitha said: "Nothing can be achieved by pursuing a policy of confrontation. I will try to extract the maximum from the Centre for the development of Tamil Nadu."

The AIADMK leader attributed the party's victory to the "non-performance" of the DMK Government. There was also a perception that the DMK was behind the rejection of her nominations. Besides, there was "massive corruption" during the DMK rule, she said.

Although there is controversy over whether Ms. Jayalalitha, as a person disqualified from the electoral contest, could be sworn in, the AIADMK found support on this issue from its allies, particularly the TMC president, Mr. G.K. Moopanan. "She sought a mandate stating that she is the chief ministerial candidate of the AIADMK-led front. And the people have overwhelmingly voted in favour of her becoming chief minister," the TMC leader pointed out.

The Governor should act without bowing to any "political pressure" on the issue of swearing in Ms. Jayalalitha. The question of an alternative chief ministerial candidate in the event of the Governor refusing to swear in Ms. Jayalalitha was for the AIADMK to decide.

By Girish Menon

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 13. The Congress-led United Democratic Front has swept the Assembly elections in Kerala, securing a record two-thirds majority. The victory was as emphatic as it was consistent across the State, with the UDF winning 99 of the 140 seats to which elections were held. The tally would have been a hundred, but

for a UDF rebel winning a seat in Thiruvananthapuram district.

The Left Democratic Front had to be content with 40 seats, a result which saw some of the coalition partners being virtually decimated. The Congress secured the most creditable victory, coming up trumps in 62 of the 88 seats it contested.

The CPI(M)

was dealt a huge blow with only 23 of the 77 candidates, including Independents, victorious. The party retained some seats in Kannur and Kasargod, with comparatively reduced margins, but in areas such as Palakkad, Kozhikode, Kollam,

Kerala party

Total seats:	140
United Democratic Front	99
Congress	62
Muslim League	1
Kerala Congress	1
JSS	1
RSP(B)	1
Kerala Cong.(Jac)	1
Kerala Congress	1
CMP	1
Left Democratic Front	40
CPI(M)	23
CPI	1
JD(S)	1
RSP	1
NCP	1
Kerala Congress	1
Independent	1
Congress rebel	1

Cong-TMC tops in Pondy

By S. Nadarajan

PONDICHERRY, MAY 13. The Congress-TMC combine emerged as the largest group in the Pondicherry Assembly elections, but fell short of an absolute majority. The front won 13 of the 30 seats up for grabs in the Union Territory, largely because of the three-way split in the vote.

The DMK-BJP-PMK front emerged second, taking 12 seats, while the AIADMK by itself bagged three. Independents captured two seats, while the PMK drew a blank. Despite breaking away from the AIADMK, with which the Congress struck an alliance in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, the party secured 11 seats — five in Pondicherry, four in Karaikal and two in Mahe. The Tamil Maanila Congress bagged two of the seven constituencies it contested, but the CPI failed to win a single seat though it was assigned two in the front. The DMK won seven seats — five in Pondicherry and two in Karaikal — while its new ally, the Puducherry Makkal Congress of former Minister, Mr. P. Kannan, emerged victorious in four seats. The BJP won a seat taking the front's total to 12. In Chennai, the TMC president, Mr. G. K. Moopanan, told reporters the Congress and the TMC would discuss with the AIADMK, on forming a government.

AGP-BJP combine gets a

By Barun Das Gupta

GUWAHATI, MAY 13. It is the Congress all the way in Assam. Till 8.30 p.m., the party had won 25 seats and was leading in 42 others, heading for a decisive majority, while the AGP-BJP-ABSU-ASDC(U) alliance had won 9 seats and was leading in 32.

There was jubilation at Rajiv Bhavan, State Congress headquarters, with party workers dancing and bursting crackers.

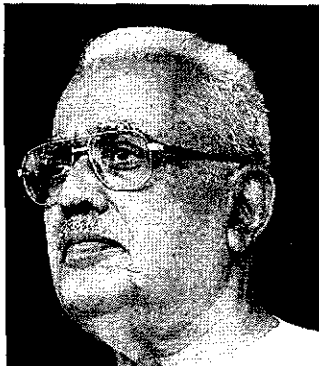
The APCC president and Congress choice for chief ministership, Mr. Tarun Gogoi, however, did not think the party was a beneficiary of

the negative vote against the AGP. He pointed to the result in Guwahati, where the Congress bagged all the four seats.

"If the highly educated and politically conscious voter of Guwahati has voted for the Congress so decisively, it is a positive vote, not a negative one," he said.

The Congress would form the government on its own. The newly elected MLAs would meet here on May 15 or 16, to elect him formally as leader of the ACLP. The date will be decided in consultation with Mr. Kamal Nath, AICC general sec-

ong. wrests Kerala, ont retains Bengal



Assam Chief Minister, Mr. P.K. Mahanta, the Kerala Chief Minister, Mr. E.K. Nayanar, the West Bengal Chief Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, and the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi.

Left out

Allapuzha and Thiruvananthapuram, where the Marxists have deep roots, it took a severe beating.

The only consolation for the CPI (M) was the victory of its politburo member and LDF convener, Mr. V. S. Achuthanandan, and its nominee in the Nayanar Cabinet, Mr. K. Radhakrishnan, in Malampuzha and Chelakara. So severe was the drubbing that several LDF Ministers and other functionaries lost the elections.

position	140
Left Front	99
CPI(M)	63
BJP	16
UML	9
Other	4
State Congress	2
Other	2
Front	1
Other	40
Other	23
Other	7
Other	3
Other	2
Other	2
Other	2
Other	1
Other	1

The BJP failed to secure a breakthrough yet another time, and had to be satisfied with its State chief, Mr. C. K. Padmanabhan, placing second to the IUM's Mr. Cherkulam Abdullah, in Manjerwararam.

The Kerala Congress(B) leader, Mr. R. Balakrishna Pillai, won

his verdict at "the people's court" in Kottarakara constituency after surviving legal wrangles over his candidature. His victory was reinforced by the success of his actor son, Mr. Ganesh Kumar, in nearby Pathanapuram.

A drubbing

retary in-charge of Assam, who is coming here tomorrow.

Mr. Nath had recently said that if the Congress came to power, it would first seek the removal of the Governor, Mr. S. K. Sinha, "who is acting more as a BJP man than as a governor".

Bengal bucks the trend

By Malabika Bhattacharya

KOLKATA, MAY 13. After 24 years in office, one of the world's longest-serving communist governments in West Bengal, the CPI(M)-led Left Front, bested its electoral performance securing its sixth five-year term. Bucking the anti-incumbency trend which caused the demise of Governments in four

other States, the ruling Front clinched 200 (at the time of reporting) of the 294 Assembly seats, defeating Ms. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress alliance. Ms. Banerjee's alliance, which went into the election riding a largely media-created wave, could

muster only 87 seats.

"I accept the verdict of the people," Ms. Banerjee said. The Bharatiya Janata Party which fielded a large number of candidates hoping to cut into the Congress-Trinamool combine's vote-share, lost the only seat it had in Ashoknagar in the North 24-Parganas. Its overall share of ballots, too, shrunk from

the 1996 position. Besides the CPI(M), which won 144, among the Front partners, the Forward Bloc secured 25 seats, followed by the RSP 17, the West Bengal Socialist Party four, the CPI seven, DSP two and the Forward Bloc (Marxist) one. The Front apart, the GNLF secured three seats, the SUCI two and Independents two.

Ms. Banerjee's slogan, 'Badle din, palte din' (replace this Gov-

ernment), did not seem to have worked to the desired extent as the more substantial demonstration of change effected by the ruling combine, namely the installation of a mobile, younger Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee as Chief Minister, caught the popular fancy.

Among the key winners, the Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb

West Bengal party position

Total seats	294
Seats Declared	294
Left Front	199
CPI(M)	143
CPI	7
RSP	17
FB	25
WBSP	4
DSP	2
FB (M)	1
Bangla Bachao Front	86
Trinamool Congress	60
Congress	26
NDA	5
GNLF	3
SUCI	2
Independents	4

Bhattacharjee, retained Jadavpur defeating Trinamool's actress-candidate, Ms. Madhabi Mukherjee, by a margin of over 30,000 ballots. The highlight was the Left's performance in Kolkata, where it bettered its record, taking its tally to 12 from nine (out of 24).

The Trinamool-led alliance had not been able to make a good enough dent in rural Bengal, a Leftist bailiwick. Interestingly, Midnapore, considered a theatre of violence, overwhelmingly supported the Leftists as was evident in the way they retained 27 of the 37 seats there.

The Congress-Trinamool alliance suffered in Malda as well, where the Left Front gained wrested three seats from the Congress which had eight out of 11.

Mamata 'quits'

PTI reports:

Stung by the stunning setback, Ms. Mamata Banerjee quit as Trinamool chief owning moral responsibility but the party said its alliance with the Congress would continue despite louder criticism from within.

2001, A 1996 STORY

COOCH BEHAR (9)			JALPAIGURI (12)			DARJEELING (5)			N DINAJPUR (7)			S DINAJPUR (5)			MALDA		
1996	2001		1996	2001		1996	2001		1996	2001		1996	2001		1996	2001	
LEFT	7	LEFT	11	LEFT	2	LEFT	4	LEFT	5	LEFT	5	LEFT	5	LEFT	3	LEFT	3
CONG	1	TMC+CONG	1	TMC+CONG	0	TMC+CONG	3	TMC+CONG	0	TMC+CONG	3	CONG	0	TMC+CONG	0	CONG	0
OTHERS	1	OTHERS	0	OTHERS	3	OTHERS	0	OTHERS	0	OTHERS	1	OTHERS	0	OTHERS	0	OTHERS	0
BANKURA (13)			BIRBHUM (12)			BURDWAN (26)			PURULIA (11)			HOOGHLY (19)			HOWRAH		
1996	2001		1996	2001		1996	2001		1996	2001		1996	2001		1996	2001	
LEFT	13	LEFT	9	LEFT	22	LEFT	10	LEFT	14	LEFT	14	LEFT	14	LEFT	8	LEFT	8
CONG	0	TMC+CONG	3	TMC+CONG	4	TMC+CONG	1	TMC+CONG	5	TMC+CONG	1	CONG	5	TMC+CONG	0	CONG	0
OTHERS	0	OTHERS	0	OTHERS	0	OTHERS	0	OTHERS	0	OTHERS	1	OTHERS	0	OTHERS	0	OTHERS	0

Figures in brackets indicate total seats in the district

Home alone with defeat

Hopes shattered, didi offers to resign

BY SUNANDO SARKAR

Calcutta, May 13: She rose early all right — at 6 am — but didn't follow the doc's other orders for a healthy, wealthy and wise life; after a light breakfast, she chose to fill herself with cups of tea and only two biscuits till late evening.

Mamata Banerjee was crestfallen in defeat, ashamed to show her face to the media; she shut herself in with the idiot box and the constantly ringing telephone and didn't come out of her 30B-Harish Chatterjee Street residence after a brief glimpse early in the morning.

She was also sullen in defeat, dishing out yet another resignation threat — this one to her party; she threatened to resign from the chairpersonship of her party, owning responsibility for the defeat. But like other threats, this one was not entertained as well; her party's "policy-making body" asked her to reconsider her decision. She was doing so till late tonight.

But the morning didn't begin like that. Before 9 am she showed her face to the television camera, smiled and went back to her room. This was to be her day, the day she expected to know that people had EVM-ed their approval for her anti-Left fight.

But this was one morning which didn't show the day. The scene had changed three hours later. "Even I am not entering her room easily," a gentleman, clad in a white kurta-pyjama, said before steering clear of his leader's room and entering the party office. And, for once, the "even" wasn't a Trinamul hyperbole; the speaker was Gautam Basu, who usually knows in advance every step Mamata is going to take. And that, when said about Mamata, is saying a lot.

"She's glued to the TV and the phone," said one of her sisters-in-law around 2 pm. The television, however, offered her little solace. As the hours flowed by, the scene in front of her house reflected that on the television inside her home and those put up outside for her followers' benefit; if they showed some silver linings in the morning, when news came in that Ashok Bhattacharyya and Subhas Chak-

raborty were trailing, the afternoon had only dark clouds that forebode ill for the lady and her party.

But there were others who came to give — and get — solace. There was Pankaj Banerjee who entered his leader's lair after a hard-fought victory in Tollygunge. He came out in a few minutes to say that people hadn't been allowed to vote.

There was Tapas Pal, victor from Alipore who hadn't got Mamata's vote on Thursday but still managed to win. He was feeling 20 years younger, he said; he made a similarly triumphant debut on the silver screen two decades ago. Accompanied by wife and daughter, he left after visiting his leader.

There was Madhabi Chakraborty who lost to the chief minister without putting up much fight. She didn't remember the gap between her and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, she said; a month ago, she predicted she would win Jadavpur by "lakhs and lakhs" of votes.

There were Subrata Mukherjee, who won Chowringhee in the same style Madhabi had lost Jadavpur, and Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay who retained Rashbehari. "Ar bolar ki achhe (What's left to say?)" the mayor asked reporters but then went on to say much more than others in the "hoy ebar, noy never" party: "There's no room for despair in politics. The fight will go on."

There was also Sonali Guha who came in late in the afternoon after her giant-killing act; she defeated Gokul Bairagi, former chief minister Jyoti Basu's Man Friday in Satgachhia. But she knew where her preferences lay; she saw her leader but only after seeing "her mother" at the nearby Kalighat temple.

Trinamul activists tried their best to make up for their leader's still-unfulfilled dream of becoming chief minister by cheering the woman who'd bagged the former CM's constituency. But the lengthening shadows — and the somewhat muted response to the "Ek, doi, teen, char, CPM puncture" slogans — showed it would be five more years away from the sun for the party that hoped to deflate the CPM balloon.



Trinamul supporters outside Mamata Banerjee's house. Picture by Anil D.

Pat on back & advice for

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, May 13: Amid the restrained celebrations of a victory that also surprised the victors by its margin, one man in the CPM apparatus stood out for being himself: "It is time someone gifted Mamata an untorn sari, a hairband and a bottle of 'Eleen' shampoo. Maybe she could even aspire to be an athlete, given the speed at which she fled from the TV cameras today!"

That man is Biman Bose, easily the most outspoken of the top CPM leaders in the state. Unable to conceal his delight, unwanting, in fact, to restrain his euphoria, Biman Bose was feeling vindicated.

"When I told this comrade and that, that we will win 200 seats, it was dismissed. Even Jyoti Basu was given to understand that I was being over-optimistic."

Industrialist Harshvardhan Neotia had just drifted into the party secretariat room where Bose was watching television. Neotia was accompanied by Rajesh Shah of Mukund. Both stayed on till the evening, congratulating the party's leading figures. Both were effusive in their congratulations to "Bimanda".

Across the corridor, bouquet after bouquet of yellow and red roses were brought in with increasing frequency.

In the evening, only Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and Jyoti Basu did not have *abir* sprinkled over them. "I requested the boys not to put *abir* on me. I don't like it," Bhattacharjee said. Nobody dared ask Basu if he liked *abir*.

Bhattacharjee carried over the tone and tenor of his campaign speeches to his first news conference after the victory. "We", not "You", he replied

when asked "Do you think you turned the election around for the Left Front?"

"The Left Front is not an electoral alliance alone. It has a definite programme that it has been implementing. Bengal stands out in this country for that reason. Remember, of all the cities in this country, you still get the cheapest meal in Calcutta hotels," said Bhattacharjee.

From 10 in the morning, supporters gathered in front of Muzaffar Ahmad Bhavan. Television crew took positions on the ground floor parking lot. In a first floor room, activists worked the phones, calling first, counting centres, and then — after Anil Biswas, Bhattacharjee and Bose instructed them — the districts committee offices.

Biswas, Bose and Bhattacharjee locked themselves in a room for about half an hour. Loud-

LS flock in unity chorus as Panjas turn up heat

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, May 13: With the exception of the brothers Panja, Trinamul Congress MPs rallied behind Mamata Banerjee in her hour of crisis, pledging to stand by her despite her failure to dislodge the Left from Bengal.

Ajit Panja, who had fired the first salvo against Mamata shortly before the Assembly elections, launched a fresh offensive against the Trinamul leader today, saying her "dictatorial attitude" had led to the defeat of party nominees in many constituencies.

"The party would have gained had our leader rectified her mistakes, but apparently it was too late," he said.

The brothers Panja, however, stopped short of trying to engineer a split, saying they have no intention of leaving the party. Ajit Panja claimed that Trinamul had not taken any official decision to withdraw from the NDA.

Other Trinamul leaders like Akbar Ali Khondekar, Sudip Bandyopadhyay, Krishna Bose and Bikram Sarkar said they stood firmly behind Mamata in the hour of crisis and there was no question of deserting the party. "I will be with *didi* whatever the outcome of the Assembly polls," Khondekar said in Srirampur.

Krishna Bose said there was



Panja: Upping the ante

no possibility of her joining the NDA and pledged her support to Mamata.

Bikram Sarkar, who was backed to the hilt by Mamata during last year's Panskura bypoll, said: "I will be with Mamata irrespective of the party's electoral performance." He, however, did not rule out the possibility of a review of the party's political strategy in the post-election scenario.

Ajit Panja, who had forecast the party's poll debacle in the wake of its electoral alliance with the Congress, said Mamata could have faced the elections without seeking the Congress' help.

"It is time she realises her limitations and behaves in a democratic manner. CPM general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet and PCC

chief Pranab Mukherjee have apparently finished her political career," he said.

Asked to comment on Mamata's decision to step down as the party's chairperson, Panja said: "This shows that she has conceded defeat."

He kept the pressure up on the Trinamul leader, saying: "I hope I will get a new Mamata by my side to re-construct the party."

Ranjit Panja shared his younger brother's view, saying Mamata's decision to quit the NDA and join hands with the Congress was "somewhat hasty". "She also appeared to be in a hurry to select candidates without much consultation," he said.

He felt the Trinamul leader should have given due weightage to Ajit Panja's views on political issues instead of ignoring them. Asked to comment on Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's open invitation to Trinamul MPs to return to the NDA after the Assembly elections, Ranjit Panja said: "We have not considered the issue. I don't think a split in the party will serve any useful purpose."

Nitish Sengupta, Trinamul MP from Tamluk, was away in Delhi. State Trinamul leaders, however, claimed he stood solidly behind Mamata. "We have seen him campaigning for our party candidates and have no reason to question his integrity," they said.



Jubilant CPM workers. Picture by Debasis Palit

MONDAY, MAY 14, 2001

DECISIVE VERDICTS IN THE STATES

THE PEOPLE'S VERDICT in the May 10 round of Assembly polls, despite the varied political and other divergences of the States involved, has been remarkably forthright and unequivocal. There is absolutely no ambiguity about the mandate, barring perhaps in the Union Territory of Pondicherry, which has a history of unstable governmental equilibrium. And, as it turned out, their preference has swung decisively away from the incumbent governments in Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In fact, the outcome could in a way be seen essentially as an anti-establishment vote, an emphatic one at that, if one were to look for and identify a single common feature in the big picture. The solitary exception is of course West Bengal where the Left Front has won the mandate for a historic sixth successive term, proclaiming its political supremacy authoritatively in the face of what was billed as the 'biggest ever challenge'. Whatever anti-establishment sentiment there was vis-a-vis the unbroken 25-year-long Left Front regime has obviously been swept away by the surge of popular disapproval of the crassly opportunistic alliance Ms. Mamata Bannerjee had forged with the Congress(I), after snapping ties with the BJP, in her desperate search for a 'winning combination'.

By far the most sensational of the electoral outcomes is undoubtedly the comprehensive victory registered by the AIADMK-led secular front in a bitterly fought battle that was reduced to a virtual 'Ms. Jayalalitha versus Mr. M. Karunanidhi' contest; the performance, although not exactly comparable with that in 1991, is in a way reminiscent of the popular mood then. It is as positive and categorical a mandate as any can be. It is also a triumph as much of the strategic poll partnership she had struck — notably with the PMK, the Tamil Maanila Congress and the Congress(I) — as of the sympathy she appears to have succeeded in generating especially among the rural and women voters by working on the 'disqualification' factor. In this respect, her tactical campaign of juxtaposing the 'rejection' of her nomination papers with the case of the Kerala Congress leader, Mr. R. Balakrishna Pillai, (who was allowed to contest the poll despite having been convicted under the criminal law for corruption and related offences) and projecting herself as a woman 'wronged' must have helped considerably. For the DMK, the fact that its nominees have taken a severe beating in areas considered the party strongholds and that its stalwarts, including Mr. Karunanidhi himself and Mr. K. Anbazhagan, could win only with moderate or slender margins is a clear enough indicator of the voters' antipathy. Add to it the severe loss of ideological credibility the DMK suffered because of its brazenly opportunistic tie-up with the BJP, one will find the party's dismal showing quite understandable. To compound it all, Mr. Karunanidhi's shortsighted and divisive strategy of embracing a host of caste-based outfits and giving the ragtag coalition the status of 'social justice' platform failed to click. His campaign was certainly not helped by his announcement that this would be his last election, which allowed the Opposition to raise the issue of dynastic succession by Mr. Stalin.

With the AIADMK all set to form a government, one highly contentious Constitutional question that has so far remained hypothetical has shot into the centrestage, and that relates to the Chief Ministership. Having run an extremely personalised campaign and staked her claim to that position, the temptation to assume the gaddi by way of savouring the moment of her triumph would indeed be difficult for Ms. Jayalalitha to resist. Whether, as one whose nomination had been rejected by the electoral authority on grounds of 'disqualification' and who carries the stigma of conviction by a court of law, Ms. Jayalalitha could claim to become the Chief Minister via an exceptional route — whatever the strict legal or Constitutional pro-

vision — is a question that raises vital issues related to political morality. She would therefore be well-advised and would serve the wider cause of democratic propriety and the rule of law by getting the 'disqualification' issue settled through due process of law, rather than venture to strain or test the delicate Constitutional scheme affecting the formation of the government. On a different level, as the head of the alliance and as one who has accommodated an unabashedly Tamil chauvinist and pro-LTTE organisation like the PMK, Ms. Jayalalitha who has a creditable record on this front owes it to the people of Tamil Nadu and of the nation to ensure that the outfit is properly reined in.

In giving the Opposition Congress-led United Democratic Front a more than comfortable majority, Kerala has lived up to its 'tradition' of not endorsing the incumbent regime a second time. While the UDF's triumph was very much on the cards, its overall tally of seats was beyond expectations. For its part, the ruling Left Democratic Front, which found itself swept off its feet because of a strong anti-establishment sentiment that could not be neutralised by the injection of a liberal dose of new faces, has predictably blamed its sharp reverses on the large-scale transfer of BJP/RSS votes to the UDF, particularly to the Congress(I), as per an 'undeclared understanding' between the two. What needs to be noted is that the UDF's commendable showing has come in spite of the open and unseemly inter-factional squabbling during the run-up to the poll, with an old warhorse like Mr. K. Karunakaran rising in revolt only to settle some personal scores. Now that the party would be making it to the helm, the obvious candidacy of Mr. A. K. Antony to that top position cannot be ignored.

In West Bengal, the Left Front's exemplary performance, coming as it did against the backdrop of apprehensions of a likely dent in popular clout following Mr. Jyoti Basu's 'retirement', is verily an endorsement of the new Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, whose admirable style of functioning, marked by a no-nonsense and hands-on approach, would seem to have had a salutary impact on the urban as well as the rural population. The CPI(M)'s strong and deeply entrenched organisational machinery has apparently stood it in good stead and helped it in countering the challenge posed by the uneasy, opportunism-driven Trinamool-Congress(I) alliance imposed from 'above' on the unwilling cadres. Ms. Mamata Bannerjee's high stakes gamble has failed miserably.

In Assam, it is a case of the Congress(I) scoring over a tie-up between the ruling, and totally discredited, Asom Gana Parishad and a BJP that was fired by an ambition to capture power at any cost. For the BJP, which has a shared chauvinistic interest with the AGP in the much-touted and highly sensitive 'immigrants' issue, it was a repeat of its Karnataka experience not long ago when the party struck a deal with the Janata Dal (United) for the Assembly poll, only to sink together.

Politically speaking, the Congress(I) has much to feel satisfied about the outcome; the party is all set to form governments in Kerala, Assam and possibly also in Pondicherry and it is a constituent of the successful combine in Tamil Nadu. As for the National Democratic Alliance, although the BJP itself is not a dominant player in the States, there can be no denying that the national coalition as a whole has suffered a terrible loss of face, given that its key allies heading governments in Tamil Nadu and Assam — and on whom it was riding piggyback — have met with a disaster at the hustings. The political consequences of the electoral slap cannot but have a negative effect on the morale and functioning of the Vajpayee Government, even if the Lok Sabha arithmetic remains unaffected for now.

WEST BENGAL'S 294 MLAs.....

SEATS	WINNERS	SEATS	WINNERS
Alipur	Tapas Pal (Trinamuli)	Kurseong	Shanta Chetri (GNLF)
Alipurdar	Nirmal Das (RSP)	Karandighi	Gokul Roy (FB)
Amddanga	Hesim Abdul Halim (CPM)	Kallagan (SC)	P. Roy (Congress)
Anta	Prayush Mukherjee (CPM)	Kushmandi (SC)	N.C. Sarkar (RSP)
Aradanga	Sabitri Mitra (Congress)	Kumarganj	Khatun Marufa (CPM)
Arabadagh	Binoy Dutta (CPM)	Kharada	M.H. Bada (Congress)
Arsa	Not available	Kallichak	A. K. Chowdhury (Congress)
Asansol	Kalyan Banerjee (Trinamuli)	Kandi	Aish Shaha (Congress)
Ashokengar	Sharmistha Dutta (CPM)	Kharigram (SC)	Biswanath Mondal (CPM)
Aurangabad	Humayun Reza (Congress)	Karimpur	P. K. Bhownik (CPM)
Aushgram (SC)	K.C. Bag (CPM)	Kaliguni	Dhananjay Modak (RSP)
Baduria	Abdul Gaffar (Congress)	Krishnaganj (SC)	Sushil Biswas (CPM)
Balughat	B. Chowdhury (RSP)	Krishnanagar East	S. Mukherjee (Trinamuli)
Bagdaha (SC)	Kamalaksi Biswas (FB)	Krishnanagar West	S. K. Ghosh (CPM)
Barasat	Ashok Mukherjee (Trinamuli)	Kulhali (SC)	P. Purakait (SUC)
Baruipur	Undeclared	Kulpi (SC)	J. Halder (Trinamuli)
Barwan	Amalendralal Roy (RSP)	Kakdwip	Manturam Pakhira (Trinamuli)
Basanti (SC)	Subhas Naskar (RSP)	Kharadhat	Asim Dasgupta (CPM)
Basirhat	Narayan Mukherjee (CPM)	Kamarhati	Manas Mukherjee (CPM)
Bedanga Golam	Kibria Miya (Congress)	Kabirhat	Rampyare Ram (Congress)
Beldampur	Maya Rani Pal (Congress)	Kalyanpur	Asit Mitra (Congress)
Bhagabangola	Not available	Kharakul (SC)	Banshi B. Maitra (CPM)
Bhangar	Badal Zamader (CPM)	Khejuri (SC)	Not available
Bharatpur	Id Mohammad (RSP)	Keshpur (SC)	Nanda Rani Dal (CPM)
Bishnupur East	D. Mondal (Trinamuli)	Kharagpur Town	G. S. S. Pal (Congress)
Bishnupur West	S. Bakshi (Trinamuli)	Kharagpur Rural	Nazmul Haque (CPM)
Bishnupur	Jayanta Chowdhury (CPM)	Keshhari (ST)	Not available
Behala East	Parash Dutta (Trinamuli)	Keshpur (ST)	Not available
Behala West	P. Chatterjee (Trinamuli)	Kotulpur	Manasi Ghosh (CPM)
Bongson	Pankaj Ghosh (CPM)	Kulti	Maniklal Acharya (FB)
Budge Budge	Ashoke Deb (Trinamuli)	Kankasa (SC)	Ankure Saresh (CPM)
Bijpur	Jagadish C. Das (CPM)	Khandagosh (SC)	Not available
Bhatpara	Arjun Singh (Trinamuli)	Kalna	Anju Kar (CPM)
Belanganer	Amr Chowdhury (RSP)	Katwa	R. N. Chatterjee (Congress)
Belachhia East	S. Chakrabarty (CPM)	Ketugram (SC)	Tamal C. Malhi (CPM)
Burrabazar	Tapas Roy (Trinamuli)	Lalgola	Abu Hena (Congress)
Bowbazar N.	Bandhopadhyay (Trinamuli)	Lalpur	N. Mukherjee (CPM)
Ballygunge	Manab Mukherjee (CPM)	Mekhligani (SC)	P. C. Adhikary (FB)
Belghata	Rabin Deb (CPM)	Madarhat (ST)	Not available
Burda	Sadhan Pandey (Trinamuli)	Mainaguri	Bachchanmohan Roy (RSP)
Belgachhia West	Rajdeo Goala (CPM)	Mal (ST)	Somra Lakra (CPM)
Bally	Kanika Ganguly (CPM)	Manabnanga	Dinesh C. Datta (CPM)
Bagnan	Nirupama Chatterjee (CPM)	Malda	Subhendu Chowdhury (CPM)
Bansberia	A. Mukhopadhyay (CPM)	Manichak	Ashima Chowdhury (CPM)
Balagang (SC)	Dibakanta Raouth (CPM)	Murshidabad	Chhaya Ghosh (FB)
Bhagabangola	M. Rahaman (WBPSP)	Murshidabad	M. Molla (CPM)
Binpur (ST)	Not available	Mograhat West	Noorar Rahman (CPM)
Banduan (ST)	U. Hansa (CPM)	Mograhat East (SC)	Bansari Kanji (CPM)
Barhara	Not available	Mandir Bazar (SC)	N. Jatua (Trinamuli)
Barora	S. Biswas (CPM)	Mathurapur	Kanti Ganguly (CPM)
Bankura	Kashinath Misra (Trinamuli)	Manicktola	Parash Pal (Trinamuli)
Barabani	Manik Upadhyay (Trinamuli)	Moyna	Dipak K. Ghosh (Trinamuli)
Bhatar	Subhas Mondal (CPM)	Mugberia	Kironmoy Nanda (WBPSP)
Burdwan North	Nisith Adhikary (CPM)	Midnapur	Purwendu Sengupta (CPM)
Burdwan South	Nirupam Sen (CPM)	Manbazar	M. Shamyapuri (CPM)
Bolpur	Tapas Hore (RSP)	Memari	Tapas Chattopadhyay (CPM)
Chopra	Hamidul Rehman (Ind)	Manteswar	Abu Ayes Mondal (CPM)
Coochbehar North	Deepak Sarkar (FB)	Mangatkot	Sadhana Mallik (CPM)
Coochbehar West	Akshay Thakur (FB)	Manganalok	Bishnu Sen (CPM)
Chandernagar K.	Mukherjee (Congress)	Mahammad Bazar	Dhivan Let (CPM)
Chinsurah	Naren Dey (FB)	Mayureswar (SC)	Bishnu Let (CPM)
Chandrakona	Gurupada Dutta (CPM)	Murairai	Ganire Halal (CPM)
Chantal North	J. Kar (Trinamuli)	Nagrakata (ST)	Chaitan Munda (CPM)
Chantal South	S. Adhikary (Trinamuli)	Narabari (SC)	Tamsher Ali (CPM)
Chhatra	Not available	Nabagram	Nripent Chowdhury (CPM)
Dhupur (SC)	Lakkhikanta Roy (CPM)	Nadoda	Abu Taher Khan (Ind)
Darjeeling	D.K. Pradhan (GNLF)	Nakshipara	Kaljol Khan (Trinamuli)
Dinhat	Kamal Guha (FB)	Nabardwip	P. Saha (Trinamuli)
Domkal	Anisur Rahman Sarkar (CPM)	Naihati	Ranjit Kundu (CPM)
Deanga	Mid Yaquub (FB)	Noapara	Manju Bose (Trinamuli)
Diamond Harbour	Rishi Halder (CPM)	Nandapur	S. Mahapatra (Trinamuli)
Dum Dum	Arunava Ghosh (Trinamuli)	Nandigram	I.M. Sheikh (CPM)
Dhakuria	Saugata Roy (Trinamuli)	Narghat	B. Nanda (WBPSP)
Domjur	Padmanidhi Dhar (CPM)	Naryanganj	Suryakanta Misra (CPM)
Dhanlakhali (SC)	Kripasindhu Saha (FB)	Nayagram (ST)	Bhuvanath Soren (CPM)
Daspur	Ajit Bhunia (Trinamuli)	Nedanghat	Ratan Das (CPM)
Debra	Not available	Nandur (SC)	Ananda G. Das (CPM)
Dantan Nandagopal	Bhattacharya (CP)	Naihati	Kalimuddin Shams (FB)
Durgapur-I	Mrinal Banerjee (CPM)	Onda	Anil Mukherjee (FB)
Durgapur-II	A. Mukherjee (Trinamuli)	Phansidewa (ST)	Prakash Minji (CPM)
Dubrajpur	Bhaktipada Ghosh (FB)	Parashipara	Kamalenu Sarayal (CPM)
English Bazar	Samrat Roy (CPM)	Parashprotha	Jajneswar Das (CPM)
Entally	Mid Salim (CPM)	Panchhat	Nirmal Ghosh (Trinamuli)
Egra	P.B. Sinha (Ind)	Panchhat	Sailem Mondal (CPM)
Falakata (SC)	Not available	Pandua	Alli Sheikh Majed (CPM)
Farakka	Moinul Haq (Congress)	Pansurah	Azizur Rahman (Trinamuli)
Falta	Tamamsh Ghosh (Trinamuli)	Pansurah West	Nimali Mali (CPM)
Goalpukur	Harif Alam Saitani (FB)	Pansskura East	C. Dashtakur (CPM)
Goalpukur	Narayan Biswas (CPM)	Parasikura East	Chowdhury (Trinamuli)
Gajoi (ST)	Not available	Parasikura West	K.D. Mahapatra (CPM)
Gangajalhati (SC)	Mehub Mondal (FB)	Pataspur	R. J. Samanta (Ind)
Goghat (SC)	Not available	Pingla	N. Mukherjee (CPM)
Goghat (ST)	Jadu Hemrom (CPM)	Purulia	B. Sahu (CPM)
Harihschandrapur	A. Mostaq (Congress)	Purbasthali	Subrata Bhowry (CPM)
Harsharpara	Niyamat Sheikh (Ind)	Raniganj (SC)	B. G. Chowdhury (CPM)
Hanskhali (SC)	Nayan Sarkar (CPM)	Raniganj (SC)	Not available
Hanskhali	Bankim Ghosh (CPM)	Ratna	Sailem Sarkar (CPM)
Harihghata	Amilava Nandi (CPM)	Ranighat East (SC)	S. Singh (Congress)
Habra	Gautam Deb (CPM)	Ranighat West	S. Singh (Congress)
Hasnabad	Kshiti R. Mondal (CPM)	Rajarat (SC)	Tamoy Mondal (Trinamuli)
Hingalgaon (SC)	Gayen Niben (Trinamuli)	Rasbharati S.	Charitopadhyay (Trinamuli)
Howrah North	Lagan Deo Singh (CPM)	Rammagar	Not available
Howrah Central	A. Banerjee (Trinamuli)	Raipur (ST)	U.R. Bouri (CPM)
Howrah South	Badal Bose (CPM)	Raipur (ST)	Upen Kisku (CPM)
Harpal	Kaliprasad Biswas (CPM)	Ranibandh (ST)	Makar Tudu (CPM)
Hura	Avinash Mahato (CPM)	Raniganj Bansagopal	Chowdhury (CPM)
Hirapur	Moloy Ghatak (Trinamuli)	Raina	Shyama Prosoy Pal (CPM)
Hasan (SC)	Not available	Rainagar (SC)	Bijoy Bagdi (FB)
Islampur	Md Faruque Azam (CPM)	Rampurnat	A. Banerjee (Trinamuli)
Islampur	Srikumar Mukherjee (CPM)	Ratgaon	J.N. Roy (CPM)
Indas (SC)	Kiriti Bagdi (CPM)	Sitalkuchi (SC)	Sudhir Pramanik (CPM)
Jaldapuri	Nanda Dulal Majhi (CPM)	Sitilguri	Asoke Bhattacharya (CPM)
Jalpaiguri	Gobindo Roy (FB)	Sital	Nipendranath Roy (Congress)
Jalangi	Abul Hasanat (RSP)	Sulapur	Ruby Noor (Congress)
Joyndagar	Unus Ali Sarkar (CPM)	Suti	Jame Alam Miya (RSP)
Jayapur	D. B. Sarkar (Ind)	Sagaridighi (SC)	Parash Nath Das (CPM)
Jayadadai	B. Bhattacharjee (CPM)	Shantipur	Ajay Dey (Congress)
Jayadadai	Haripada Biswas (FB)	Shankrail (SC)	Sital Sardar (Trinamuli)
Jorabagan	Sudhangsu Sii (CPM)	Shyampur	Kalipada Mondal (Trinamuli)
Jorasanko	S. Bajaj (Trinamuli)	Srirampur	Ratan De Nag (Trinamuli)
Jagatbaliapuri	B. Chakraborty (CPM)	Srirampur	R. Bhattacharya (Trinamuli)
Jangipara	Ibha Dey (CPM)	Surang	Not available
Jhargram	Mina Santani (CPM)	Surabang	Not available
Jhalda	Nepal Mahato (Ind)	Sabani	Khagendra N. Mahato (CPM)
Jajpur	S. Mahato (Congress)	Sonamukhi (SC)	Sukhendu Khan (CPM)
Jamnuria	Pelab Kabi (CPM)	Suri	Brala Mukherjee (CPM)
Jumargan (SC)	Samar Hazra (CPM)	Turanganj (SC)	Pushpa C. Das (CPM)
Kumeirgan (ST)	Dasharath Tirkey (RSP)	Tapan (ST)	Khara Soren (RSP)
Kalchini (ST)	Not available	Titagarh	Praveen K. Shaw (CPM)
Karanti	Sudhan Raina (CPM)	Tollygunge P.	Bandhopadhyay (Trinamuli)
Kalimping	Goutam Lepcha (GNLF)	Taltola (SC)	Debes Das (CPM)
		Tarakeshwar	Pratim Chatterjee (Ind)
		Tamiluk	Nirbed Roy (Trinamuli)
		Taidangra	Manoranjan Patra (CPM)
		Uluberia North	Mohan Mondal (CPM)
		Uluberia South	Rabin Ghosh (FB)
		Udaynarayanpur	N. Chowdhury (CPM)
		Uttarpara	Mukherjee (Trinamuli)
		Ukhra (SC)	Madan Bauri (CPM)
		Vidyasagar	Lakshikanta Dey (CPM)

Win some, lose some..that's politics for you

It's party time for Amma

By Swati Das
The Times of India News Service

CHENNAI: The doors of the Poes Garden residence of AIADMK chief J. Jayalalitha, normally closed for visitors, were on Sunday thrown open to all. Jubilant party workers swarmed the fortress-like bungalow to celebrate the party's massive victory in the state assembly polls.

However, the smile on the faces of the AIADMK workers betrayed a sense of relief, for the contest between the party and the ruling DMK was predicted to be a close one. Indeed, the margin of victory came as a pleasant surprise to even the die-hard AIADMK supporter. "I knew we were going to win. But this is a fantastic surprise," said a partyman, bursting crackers to herald yet another AIADMK regime in the state, while his colleagues danced through the day.

Sweets were distributed to everyone visible. For once, even the usually hostile black-cats and security personnel dropped their guard, although not literally. For, they too seemed to be enjoying the spectacle of the celebrations.

Not wanting to miss out on the fun, Ms Jayalalitha came out soon. Clad in a peacock-green saree, with a broad smile being a permanent fixture on her face, the AIADMK chief was confidence-personified as she fielded questions hurled at her by the waiting mediapersons. "I accept the verdict of the people with bowed head and folded hands in all humility. I expected this landslide victory because I could feel the mood of the people wherever I went," she said, pointing out that a victory of such magnitude meant that the expectations of the people were high and that she would have to work hard to rise to that level.

Ms Jayalalitha attributed the landslide victory of her front to the "non-performance of the DMK government" and the fact that the DMK was behind the rejection of her nomination papers. Besides, she said the Karunanidhi government had indulged in "massive corruption", prompting people to look to the AIADMK to set things in order.

When asked how she would deal with the Centre, Ms Jayalalitha said, "Nothing can be achieved by pursuing a policy of confrontation. I will try to extract the maximum for the development of Tamil Nadu." She claimed that she would take up the issues of corruption, closure of hundreds of factories, water scarcity and the free run of anti-social elements in the state with the NDA government.

Certainly, it has been a crushing victory for her slogan, "Makkal Tirpe Mahesan Tirpe" (People's verdict is God's verdict).

Credit is being given to the way Ms Jayalalitha shrewdly cobbled together a formidable front and how she played her alliance arithmetic. But it is clear that, more than anything else, it is a vote for Ms Jayalalitha as a leader.

Vanquished Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi on Sunday said he was not bothered about Ms Jayalalitha taking over the mantle from him. The AIADMK leader was barred from contesting the polls after being convicted for corruption. On repeated questioning, the DMK leader, who had said that it would be his last elections, remarked, "I don't know. I am not bothered."

The AIADMK leader, who had sought votes in the name of her mentor, one-time co-star and former chief minister M.G. Ramachandran, has convinced voters that she can deliver.

Didi left licking her wounds

By Ronojoy Sen
The Times of India News Service

KOLKATA: *Hoy ebar noy never* (now or never), the hoarding at the entrance of Harish Chatterjee Street, the lane made famous by Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, said it all. As news of the Congress-Trinamul combine falling behind in the race to Writers' Building trickled in, the woman who had given her all to break the red citadel in the state was nowhere to be seen.

Trinamul supporters and media persons began gathering in front of Ms Banerjee's Harish Chatterjee Street residence from early in the morning on Sunday. But the mood turned sombre soon, as news about the Left Front emerging victorious filtered in. "We can only win under President's rule. People were not allowed to vote," grumbled Trinamul state secretary Madan Mitra, trying to console himself, and his shocked partymen.

By noon, when it became clear that there was no realistic chance of a Trinamul win, shock enveloped the entire mohalla. As if to confirm the bad news, in walked actress Madhabi Mukherjee at around 2 p.m., alleging that there was massive rigging in Jadavpur and the chief minister had personally supervised it. The mood turned slightly better a few minutes later as actor Tapas Pal, the winner from Alipur, marched in, covered in green and gulal. Some more winners came in to pay their respects to Ms Banerjee. But the Trinamul leader, downing her sorrow in endless cups of tea, had shut herself in a room and was glued to the TV. "There is no place for disappointment in politics," mayor Subrata Mukherjee consoled his leader before leaving to collect his winner's certificate.

But as the sun began to dip, it was apparent that Ms Banerjee would not meet the press as scheduled. She was reportedly in mood to talk. Party leaders Sobhandev and Pankaj, addressing presspersons, informed that Ms Banerjee had offered her resignation as party chief.

While little was being said in the Trinamul camp, at a nearby road the Left Front was taking out a procession to celebrate its victory. How times changed! Only a few days back, it had seemed like the moment was ripe for a change in West Bengal. But the moment has seemingly passed, leaving Ms Banerjee at the crossroads of her tumultuous political career.

The debacle has left Ms Banerjee with few options. Although an NDA leader had said a few days ago that Ms Banerjee could return if she wanted to, she is unlikely to go back to the NDA fold. But with a section of her party, led by Ajit Panja, certain to return to the NDA camp, a split is likely in the party. In such circumstances, Ms Banerjee might be left with no alternative but to re-join the Congress.

In the final analysis, she failed to match the image of chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya who had refused to even take her name during his election campaign. The suave Mr Bhattacharya projected the image of the quintessential well-meaning 'bhadralok' (gentleman) who meant business. Ms Banerjee, on the other hand, lost several brownie points by denouncing Mr Bhattacharya as a "mafia boss" who supervised the "rigging of the election." Her autocratic style and selection of candidates are certain to be criticised within her own party, now that she has been proved wrong.

TALE OF TWO CAMPS



J. Jayalalitha



Mamata Banerjee

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Jaya sweeps TN

NEW DELHI: Riding a sympathy wave, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) headed for a stunning landslide victory and the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) won a massive two-thirds majority in Kerala on an anti-incumbency factor which, however, bypassed West Bengal where the ruling Left Front was set to retain its 24-year hold on power.

The union territory of Pondicherry produced a hung verdict with the main contenders, the Congress-TMC combine and the DMK-PMC-BJP grouping, finishing with 13 and 12 seats respectively in a 30-member house. The AIADMK, an ally of the Congress in Tamil Nadu, now holds the key to government formation with three vital seats.

In Assam, the Congress was poised to recapture power, leading in 46 seats well ahead of the AGP-BJP combine which was in front in 26 seats in the 126-member house.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who is in Malaysia on a four-day visit, said the results were along "expected lines" but Congress president Sonia Gandhi dubbed them as a "reflection" on the functioning of the NDA government at the Centre on which there will be an "impact".

True to its reputation of swinging between extremes, Tamil Nadu

was set to vote out the DMK government giving the reins of power back to the AIADMK whose leader J. Jayalalitha ran a spirited campaign, after being disqualified, to put the party in the lead in 183 seats in a 234-member house. The DMK-led combine which was ahead in 40 seats was a distant second.

In Kerala, the UDF registered an emphatic victory by routing the LDF on the plank of "non-performance and the worsening law and order situation". The Congress led with an individual tally of 62, gaining 25 more than in 1996.

The leader of the rival front, the CPI(M) was left high and dry with 23 seats, losing 17 seats. While the UDF bagged 99 seats in all, the LDF managed 40. One seat went to an independent.

Chief ministerial prospect A.K. Antony, who won the Cherthala seat, said the leadership issue would be decided in a couple of days by the party high command and he did not anticipate any problems over it.

He said the mandate was against the LDF whose top leaders, including a number of ministers, speaker and the deputy speaker, fell by the wayside under the relentless Congress charge.

The Left stranglehold on West Bengal could not be broken by the Trinamul Congress, whose leader

Buddha smiles in Bengal

Mamata Banerjee's gamble to break away from the BJP at the eleventh hour for a tie up with the Congress did not pay off. In fact, the LF with 197 seats appeared to be heading towards its 1996 figure of 201 in the 294-member house.

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya won from Jadhavpur as the party made inroads into urban areas, including Kolkata where it had lost the civic poll last year.

Of the 143 seats for which results have been declared, the Left Front grabbed 98 while the TC-Congress alliance got 41.

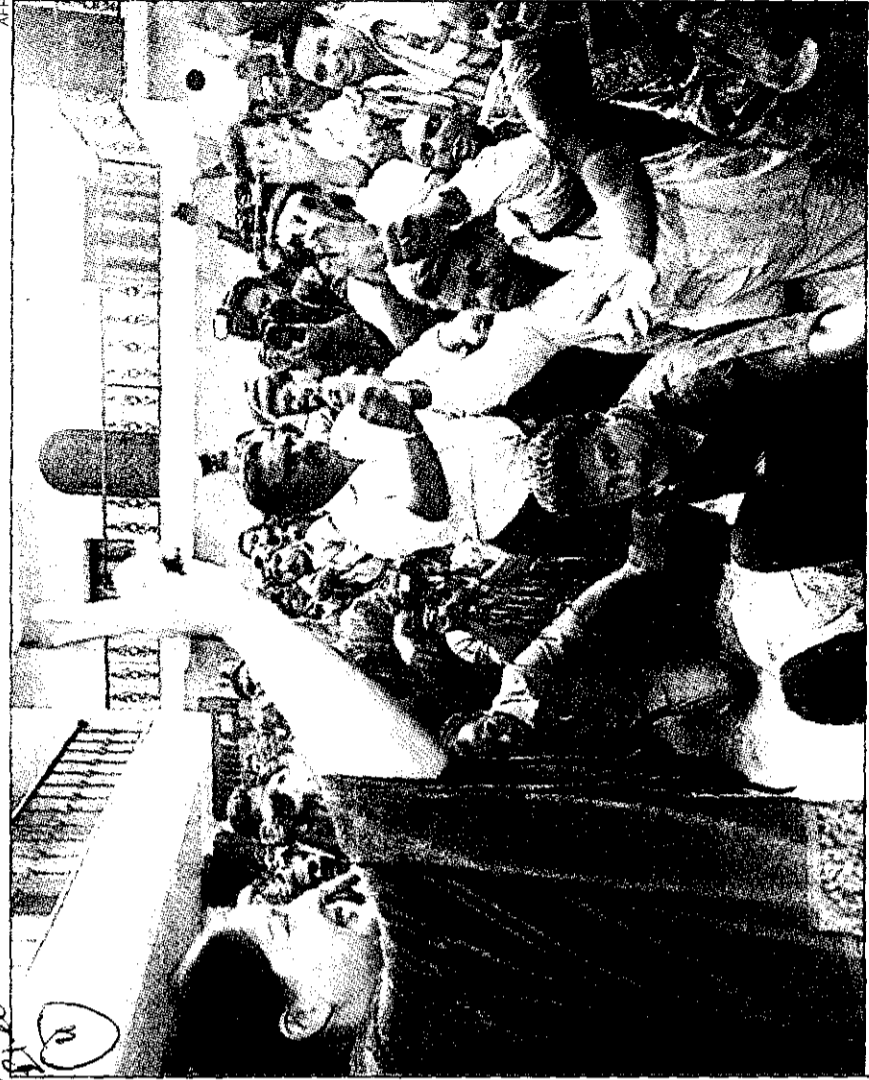
As her combine faced defeat, Mamata Banerjee offered to step down as party chief owing moral responsibility.

In Assam, the Congress made initial gains by establishing leads in 46 constituencies in the 126-member house. The ruling AGP and its ally the BJP were far behind with leads in 26 constituencies. Other parties are ahead in 18 constituencies.

Adding to the ruling party's poor performance was the defeat of chief minister Prafulla Mahanta in Dispur while he was leading in the other seat Barhampur.

Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi and his Kerala counterpart E.K. Nayanar resigned their posts after their defeat. (Agencies)

See Edit: Polls Apart, Page 12



AIADMK leader J. Jayalalitha greets party workers by flashing the victory sign at her residence in Chennai on Sunday.

Voter turnout in assembly polls is 65 p.c.

Violence claims thirteen lives

The Times of India News Service
NEW DELHI: About 65 per cent of the electorate voted in Thursday's one-day poll for the legislative assemblies of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, West Bengal and Assam in what Chief Election Commissioner Manohar Singh Gill termed a "satisfactory" day. Counting of votes will begin on Sunday morning.

Mr Gill had, he made clear, been prepared for far more violence than took place. Thirteen people lost their lives—six in Assam, including two security personnel, five in West Bengal, one in Kerala, and one in a stampede in Pondicherry. Dozens were injured, albeit not seriously for the most part, in group clashes.

The polls were essentially peaceful and satisfactory. Mr Gill said, commending the chief election officers of all four states and Pondicherry for an "excellent" job.

The ECI had approved repolling in 64 voter stations in Assam and 11 in West Bengal by the close of Thursday, with some more likely to be added to the list on Friday, when



Police personnel drag away a man accused of rigging in the assembly polls in Kolkata on Thursday.

all reports come in.

The approximate poll percentage turnout, says the ECI, was 58 in Tamil Nadu, 73 in Kerala, 71 in Bengal, 65 in Assam and 65 in Pondicherry, for an overall voter turnout of 65 per cent. The repolls will be on Saturday and counting of votes begins on Sunday morning. Since all, barring Assam, voted entirely through electronic voting machines, the final tallies should be out speedily, within a few hours.

Voting is for all 140 seats in

Kerala, all 234 in Tamil Nadu, all 30 in Pondicherry, all 294 in West Bengal and 125 of Assam's 126 seats. Voting was countermanded in one place after a BJP candidate was killed by insurgents. Incumbent chief ministers are seeking a fresh personal mandate in all states, except Kerala. In the latter, chief minister E.K. Nayanar and many of his senior colleagues are stepping down, although their party and its allies are vigorously seeking re-election.

The two security personnel killed in Assam were ambushed by insurgents in Karbi Anglong district and a convoy of state police and Central Reserve Police Force was attacked. In the heavy exchange of fire, a state police sub-inspector and a CRPF head constable were killed as was a civilian driver. Two other CRPF constables were injured in a separate incident at Bokajan.

As for the other three civilians killed in Assam, two were Bodo tribal teenagers who died when an insurgent group, wanting to disrupt polling, attacked voters with cutting weapons at Kokrajbar. Two other Bodos were injured and an elderly Adivasi died in a drink-fuelled clash at Gossaigaon.

Central and state poll authorities had feared there might be much more to handle than this, given the determined effort by insurgents of the United Liberation Front of Asom to disrupt all voting. More than 50,000 well-armed security personnel had been deployed all over the state to ensure against this.

The Bengal dead were all in different areas and included supporters of the ruling CPI (M) and the challenger, Trinamul Congress. Police had to open fire briefly at three places to quell threats to polling and also made a number of arrests.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

11 MAY 2001

All set for Assembly polls

NEW DELHI, MAY 9. The stage is set for polls in five States tomorrow in what is being dubbed as "mini general elections" amid unprecedented security in Assam where pre-poll violence has claimed 37 lives.

Besides Assam, police and para-military forces have been deployed in all sensitive areas in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal and the Union Territory of Pondicherry where an estimated 13-crore voters will exercise their franchise in 823 Assembly constituencies. Prominent among the 5,000-odd candidates are the Chief Ministers of Assam, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

For the first time, electronic voting machines are being used on a largescale in all constituencies — except in Assam — on a trial basis.

In Assam, unprecedented security arrangements have been made at 17,654 polling stations in view of the ULFA militants indulging in largescale pre-poll violence.

Polling will be held for 234 seats in Tamil Nadu, 294 in West Bengal, 140 in Kerala, 125 in Assam and 30 in Pondicherry.

By-elections to three Lok Sabha seats of Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu, Shahjahanpur in Uttar Pradesh and Midnapore in West Bengal will also be held.

By-elections to two Assembly constituencies, Kshetrigao (Manipur) and Banamalipur (Tripura), will be held on May 10 and May 11 respectively. — PTI

THE HINDU

10 MAY 2001

Good news for Sonia; Mamata & Jaya on tenterhooks

■ Exit poll gives UDF 100 seats in Kerala; Cong likely to sweep Assam; LF & Trinamool get equal vote shares

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 10

There is good news for Sonia Gandhi but the other two big ladies of Campaign 2001 — Mamata Banerjee and Jayalalitha — have been kept on tenterhooks by the voter if the DRS exit poll holds true to the way voting went in five states today.

The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) appears headed for a sweep in Kerala with a projected 100 seats and in Assam, Sonia's party is the runaway leader with 60 seats whereas the AGP-BJP combine is predicted to secure only 33.

The BJP wasn't meaningfully involved in today's election, but there was no cause to cheer wherever it was. In Assam, for instance, its last-minute tie-up with the AGP brought no benefit, in Kerala,

there isn't any evidence of the party securing the tiniest toehold; in West Bengal it has clearly suffered because of the rupture with Mamata Banerjee.

It is in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu that the battle is tantalisingly poised according to the exit polls, telecast simultaneously by Doordarshan and the Zee network this evening.

The Left Front and the Mamata-led Trinamul-Congress combine have grabbed identical vote-shares — 43 per cent — and in terms of seats, Mamata has been able to close the gap uncomfortably close for the Communists. DRS' verdict on West Bengal: 150 seats for the Left Front, 140 for Mamata.

Tamil Nadu, where a Jaya sweep had often been predicted during the campaign, may have a photofinish too. The ADMK alliance has been given 125 seats but the ruling DMK and its partners are not far behind with a projected 105 seats.

In Tamil Nadu, like in West Bengal, the claim of contestants on the voteshare is near equal. Challenger Jaya bags 48 per cent, Chief Minister Karunanidhi 47 per cent. In Pondicherry too, the DMK held on to 47 per cent of the voteshare.



A man raises his hands as an RPF man approaches a polling station to clear an unruly crowd in Kolkata on Thursday — Reuters

The rest was shared between the ADMK (27 per cent) and the Congress (25 per cent).

The exit polls show a distinct and consistent swing away from ruling governments, the most acute manifestations of anti-incumbency emerging in the two Left-ruled states, West Bengal and Kerala. In Kerala a five per cent swing away from the LDF and a corresponding five per cent swing in favour of the Congress-led alliance could hand the latter a landslide.

In West Bengal the swing away from the Left government is six per cent. But in terms of seats, the Buddhadeb Bhattacharya regime may sustain the loss better than his fellow travellers in Kerala because of larger constituencies and the presence of more players in the fray.

Exit polls, of course, have a chequered history and have gone notoriously wrong in the past. Even today's DRS exit poll offers no clues on the sample-size or where the poll was conducted.

Almost in every state, contestants have fairly well-defined areas of strength and weakness and the margin of error could depend crucially on where DRS pollsters went during the course of voting today.

Six killed in Assam election violence

Our Correspondent

GUWAHATI 10 MAY

POLLING IN Assam was largely violence-free on Thursday. However, in two separate incidents, six people were killed, including two security men and four civilians, while seven people were seriously injured. Over 60,000 securitymen were deployed in the state.

Assam chief minister P.K. Mahanta, who is contesting from two constituencies at Dispur in Guwahati and from Barhampur in Nagaon district told ET that the peaceful polling and enthusiastic participation by people is a vote against violence and against militant outfits like Ulfa and some Bodo units.

Mr Mahanta said he is sure of forming the next government with the help of partners like BJP, ABSU and ASDC (Holi Ram Tarang).

Assam Additional DGP (operation) G.M. Srivastava said overall, the voting in the state was peaceful because of extensive patrolling of vulnerable areas in the Indo-Bhutan border and sensitive dis-

tricts of upper Assam.

He said they were able to contain the movement of the militants groups, specially Ulfa and NDFB.

He said in Deopani area under Bokajaan police station in Karbi Anglong, three people were killed when suspected UPDS militants ambushed a CRPF patrolling party

and killed one CRPF jawan, one Assam Police constable and a civilian driver while in another incidence of violence three persons were killed in Kokrajhar district, including two Bodos and one Santhal, when clashes between the two communities started.

Officials from the Unified Command headquarters said deployment of the army and other paramilitary forces in lower Assam and some pockets of upper Assam, coupled with aeri-

al surveillance, enabled them to contain the activities of Ulfa, which had threatened to disrupt the polls, specially in areas of Nalbari. Some miscreants, with their faces covered with the traditional *gamocho*, tried to intimidate voters in Dharampur constituency of Nalbari.



OLD HABITS DIE HARD

The Economic Times

11 MAY 2001

Bengal keeps Left; Assam, Kerala vote Congress'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 10. — Despite her best efforts, Miss Mamata Banerjee appeared to have fallen short of her target to reach Writers' Buildings, exit polls indicated, with the Left Front just managing to cling to power with a projected 150 seats predicted for it.





Although they managed to garner the same percentage of votes as the Left Front — 44 per cent — the Trinamul-Congress combine was expected to manage victory in around 138 seats, of the total 294 in West Bengal legislature. Six 'others' completed the state's tally of seats.

Elsewhere, the exit polls suggested that the Congress was the party with reason to cheer, being projected as clear winners in both Kerala and Assam, and on the winning side of the combine in Tamil Nadu.

Conducted by the Development and Research Services for Doordarshan and Zee TV, the exit polls, however, are indicative of the final results, and may not be completely accurate, the conductors warned, with the possibility of a three per cent margin of error. They are, however, more accurate than pre-voting opinion polls, which have been largely predicting similar results in the past few weeks.

With key contenders in both West Bengal and Tamil Nadu running neck-and-neck in terms of voting percentage, it was possible the final results could be marginally different from the exit poll predictions.

In Tamil Nadu, the ruling DMK alliance, a part of the ruling NDA combine at the Centre, was being projected to lose power, despite having considerably narrowed the gap in recent weeks, and would manage to win 105 seats, the poll indicated; while Miss Jayalalitha-led AIADMK front was expected to win 125 seats. Percentage wise, the alliances were running very close, with 47 per cent for the DMK front while the AIADMK front managed to garner 48 per cent. Four seats are projected to go

West Bengal	BUDDHADEV STAYS	
	Left Front	150
	Cong-Trinamul	138
	Others	6
Kerala	NAYANAR OUT	
	UDF	100
	LDF	37
	Others	3
Assam	MAHANTA OUT	
	Congress	60
	AGP-BJP	33
	Others	32
Tamil Nadu	KARUNANIDHI OUT	
	AIADMK + Allies	125
	DMK + Allies	105
	Others	4

PONDICHERRY: The exit poll predicted the vote share, not seat outcome. The DMK front is likely to get 40% votes, TMC-Cong, 28% and AIADMK front 25%

to others, notably Mr Vaiko's MDMK who walked out of the DMK alliance in the state while remaining with the NDA at the Centre.

Anti-incumbency appears to have weighed heavily against the ruling LDF combine in Kerala with the exit polls predicting a sweeping two-thirds victory for the Congress-led UDF, projected to win 100 seats in the 140-seat legislature. The LDF was expected to win 37 seats, while three 'others' completed the tally.

In Assam also, anti-incumbency factor played a significant role, with exit polls showing a resurgent Congress gaining a tally of 60 seats, while the ruling AGP which recently allied with the BJP expected to win 33 seats. Significantly, in this state the number of 'others' could tilt the scales, depending on their affinities, with a projected 32 seats. There was a

12 per cent swing towards the Congress, with its percentage vote share in the state rising to 42 per cent, the polls indicated.

The Union Territory of Pondicherry brought a tiny ray of hope to the ruling NDA combine with the DMK projected to win the largest share of seats.

At the BJP headquarters in New Delhi, spokesmen appeared to be at a loss for words to explain the projected results, choosing to pass off the exit poll predictions as "indicators." According to Mr J P Mathur, "there can be differences in the projections between the regions, for example, differences in upper and lower Assam."

While the Prime Minister has recently said these Assembly elections were not a referendum on his government's performance, it was clear a rejuvenated Congress would add to the government's woes in the Monsoon session of Parliament.

THE STATESMAN

11 MAY 2001

High turnout in TN, Kerala, Pondy

HT Correspondents
May 10

ASSEMBLY POLLS in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry passed off peacefully today.

While the turnout in Kerala was 73 per cent, in Tamil Nadu 55 per cent of the voters came to exercise their franchise. Reports from Pondicherry put the turnout at 60 per cent plus.

In Tamil Nadu polling for the 234 remained by and large peaceful. However, reports of sporadic violence came in from some pockets. A State Minister was gheraoed and in a couple of places agitated party workers squatted on railway tracks.

In Thiruchirappally, a by-election was held to find a replacement for Rangarajan Kumaramangalam, who died recently.

Chief Minister M Karunanidhi, AIADMK supreme Jayalalitha, BJP president Jana Krishnamurthy, Tamil film actor Rajnikanth exercised their franchise in Chennai.

A total of 1,857 candidates, including 104 women, are in the fray in Tamil Nadu. At stake are 234 Assembly seats.

Pondicherry: The polls in Pondicherry were marred by stray violence. The Assembly has 30 members and 193 candidates are in the fray. The elections will decide the fate of former Chief Ministers R V Janakiraman of the DMK, V Vaithalingam and S Ramasamy (both of the Congress) and AIADMK's D Ramachandran.

At Sedarpet village in Osudu constituency the police chased away some people canvassing within the 100 metres of a booth. Chief electoral officer B Vijayan denied reports that an elector had died in a stampede during the police action.

Kerala: Four persons, including two women, collapsed and died in different constituencies of the State today.

At Mallappally in the Kallioopara segment, 75-year-old Mariamma Kurien dropped dead while she was waiting in the queue to cast her vote and Mary Daniel met with the same fate at Mallasser in adjoining Konni.

A similar incident happened in Mulamkulam, Kaduthurthy. Here, a man collapsed and died while awaiting his turn to vote.

Assam: Voters brave terrorist threats

HT Correspondent
Palashbari, May 10

THE SUN shone brightly throughout Assam as nearly 70 per cent of the State's population queued up at polling booths on Thursday to elect a new Assembly. Polling was generally peaceful, but a mob lynched two NDFB workers in Kokrajhar and a CRPF jawan was killed in Karbi Anglong.

Minor skirmishes were reported from Nabbari and Sonitpur districts but no one was seriously injured. "The large presence of security personnel outside the polling booths acted as a deterrent for anti-social elements and no major incident of booth capturing or rigging took place anywhere," a senior police officer said.

However, intelligence reports say that violence is likely after the polls are over. The more than 900 candidates have been told to take extra precautions in the next few weeks, the officer said.

"Polling has been very brisk since the morning and people have turned out in large numbers to cast their votes," said a polling official at Jharbari in Palashbari constituency.

The mood in the neighbouring Boko and Chaygaon constituencies was similar. By the end of polling the figures for the three constituencies stood at more than 70 per cent. "Brisk polling has been reported from almost all corners of the State and by mid-day at least 55 per cent had cast their votes throughout the



Despite threats of violence people turn up in large numbers at a Guwahati polling station on Thursday.

in west Assam 75 per cent. Morigaon in Central Assam registered more than 70 per cent and Cachar in Barak Valley 65 per cent.

Re-polling was ordered in some polling stations in Rangiya, Barpeta and Cachar.

NINE KILLED IN VIOLENCE; REPOLLING IN 75 BOOTHS

65 p.c. polling in 5 States

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 10. About 13 crore voters in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala and Assam, and the Union Territory of Pondicherry today exercised their franchise for the Assembly polls, in what is being termed as a "mini-general elections" and whose outcome is expected to influence political equations at the Centre.

The polls passed off peacefully, barring some incidents in West Bengal and Assam in which nine persons lost their lives, belying earlier apprehensions of large-scale violence.

While the poll percentage in Kerala was as high as 73 per cent, it was 58 per cent in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal recorded a 71 per cent voter turnout and it was 65 per cent in Assam and Pondicherry.

The polls would make or mar the fortunes of a number of leaders. These include the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the Assam Chief Minister, Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, the former Kerala Chief Minister, Mr. A. K. Antony, as well as Ms. Jayalalitha and Ms. Mamata Banerjee, who are not in the electoral fray.

Expressing satisfaction over the conduct of the polling, the Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. M. S. Gill, said reports received by the Commission so far indicated an average turnout of 65 per cent.

At a press conference, Dr. Gill said three persons died in poll-related incidents in West Bengal and six were killed in Assam in two separate incidents. (Reports from Kolkata mentioned five deaths while those from Guwahati said five persons died.) There was a palpable sense of relief that the Assam poll exercise passed off relatively peacefully.

The ULFA-inspired violence had claimed as many as 37 lives in the run-up to the elections. The



The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, the AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, the Assam Chief Minister, Mr. P.K. Mahanta, and the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, casting their votes on Thursday.



The Trinamool leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, talking to reporters at Midnapore... the real contestant who did not cast her vote. — AFP



The Kerala Chief Minister, Mr. E.K. Nayanar (right), and the Congress leader, Mr. A.K. Antony, cast their ballots in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday.

strategy was discerned as being predicated on a calculation that a low turnout would adversely affect the chances of the AGP-BJP combine; the 65 per cent turnout can upset many a calculation.

In other incidents, 10 persons were injured in West Bengal, seven in Assam and 12 in Tamil Nadu. "Essentially, the polling was peaceful and the people voted with electronic machines and

identity cards," noted a satisfied Dr. Gill.

After examining the initial reports, the Commission ordered repolling in 11 polling stations in West Bengal and 64 in Assam. "The entire South — Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry and Kerala — was peaceful," the CEC said. However, he said more repolls could be ordered tomorrow.

To a report about allegations

that thousands of voters in Tamil Nadu and Kerala not being allowed to vote despite having identity cards, Dr. Gill said the law was clear that only those on the electoral rolls would be allowed to vote.

The CEC was also firmly supportive of the officers who conducted the polls. He rejected the suggestion of the Congress leader, Mr. Kamal Nath, that the West

Bengal Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Sabyasachi Sen, was partial to the ruling Left Front.

"The Commission has full faith in Mr. Sen who is a very fine officer and has done a tremendous job. The Chief Electoral Officers in all the five States have done an excellent job. Please do not drag these officers into any controversy," said Dr. Gill.

More reports, pictures: Page 4

THE HINDU

1 MAY 2001

Polls peaceful, 70% exercise fr



FORGET YOUR STARS, IT'S THE HAND THAT RULES.
— Mona Chowdhury

Our Kolkata Bureau

KOLKATA 10 MAY

WEST BENGAL Poll-2001 has passed off largely peacefully, except for the few odd inevitable skirmishes — even in Midnapore, where pre-election carnage had left a trail of dead.

However, re-polling has so far been ordered in 11 booths across the state. Five deaths were reported, despite which over 70 per cent of the 48,690,870 strong electorate cast their ballot at 61,538 polling stations through electronic voting machines (EVMs).

That, by far, was the general scene — a tribute to either the Election Commission or the Left Front administration. But there is still one call that very few are willing to take head on: Will the red bastion fall or will it remain intact still? Both the CPI(M) and the TMC-Congress combine are hyping themselves up. It still seems to be a neck-and-neck fight, heading for a photo finish.

There was an unusual side to the polls too. The state CPM headquarters at Alimuddin Street was found finalising the number of booths where they could demand re-polling — a practice, so far largely exclusive to the Left's political opponents.

Mr Anil Biswas, the state CPM secretary said: "We've received reports of rigging and booth capturing by TMC-Congress activists. We'll be demanding repolling in those areas."

The chief electoral officer of the state, Mr Sabyasachi Sen, hoped that the voting percentage would rise to 74 per cent when all reports were received. The chief minister, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, also expected the total turnout to be 75 per cent.

About the deaths on the day, Mr Sen said one person was killed in Barrackpore, two in Bishnupur (east) and two in Kolkata. The state election office is yet to take any firm decision on re-polling.

At Alimuddin Street, Mr Biswas and most other political

leaders admitted that polling was by and large peaceful. Right from morning, it had looked fairly certain that there would be a fairly heavy turnout of voters everywhere.

Kolkata wore a deserted look. It was a virtual bandh in the city on Thursday with the trading community almost entirely downing shutters in anticipation of widespread trouble.

The camp offices of the political parties in front of the polling stations made it amply clear that in and around the city, there was a straight fight between the ruling party and the TMC. BJP camp offices were few and far between. The other interesting feature was possibly the active presence of the TMC booth managers till the end of the polling at 4 pm.

"The TMC-Congress alliance is hopeful of an edge over the ruling Left Front in the West Bengal assembly elections," said the state Congress president, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, immediately after the polls were over. He thanked voters for braving severe intimidation by the CPI(M)-led Left Front.

However, the Congress leader added that the Election Commission should have exercised its power more "visibly." Mr Mukherjee complained of sporadic violence, rigging and booth capturing by Left Front supporters mainly in the Kolkata, Midnapore, North 24-Parganas, Hoogli and Howrah.

The TMC candidate, Mr Tapas Roy, claimed that the state Youth Congress general secretary, Mr Tapan Agrawal, had suffered serious head injuries after being attacked by CPI(M) supporters in Chandni Chowk area at around 4 pm.

Reacting to claims that one person died in Barrackpore in a bomb attack by Trinamool supporters, the state Congress spokesperson, Mr Prodyut Guha, said the person died when a bomb planted in a municipal van, which he was driving, exploded.

Mamata prefers Midnapore to Kolkata, fails to cast her vote

Our Kolkata Bureau

KOLKATA 10 MAY

ON THURSDAY, Mamata Banerjee decided to confine herself exclusively to Midnapore — to the extent of not casting her vote in Kolkata. Although the city missed her usual belligerence, the administration in Midnapore was sure on its toes.

"My single vote wouldn't have made much of a difference when millions have voted for us," Ms Banerjee said in Midnapore. And although many felt that her strategy of stationing herself there was masterly, chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee couldn't help taking a dig at her.

"How can a person who dreams of being the chief minister refrain from casting her own vote? Doesn't that mean that she doesn't trust the mechanism of parliamentary democracy," Mr Bhattacharjee wondered.

Although Trinamool MP and party spokesman Sudip Bandopadhyay alleged large-scale rigging by the ruling party in over 4,000 booths across the state, the party was generally "upbeat" about the poll prospects. In some places, over-enthusiastic supporters even took out victory processions at the end of the polling.

Poll peaceful than s

Our Poli

NEW D

STRAY INCIDENTS of violence during polling in five states on Thursday and 3 in West Bengal, even as the Kerala and Pondicherry witnessed

Briefing reporters on initial estimates, Election Commission, Chief Elector was "more than satisfied" with the had voted "essentially peacefully."

Mr Gill said EC had ordered re-polling in West Bengal and 64 in Assam in the next five states come in," he added.

While Kerala recorded the highest voter turnout, at 58 per cent, West Bengal recorded 65 per cent polling. But voter turnout, at 58 per cent.

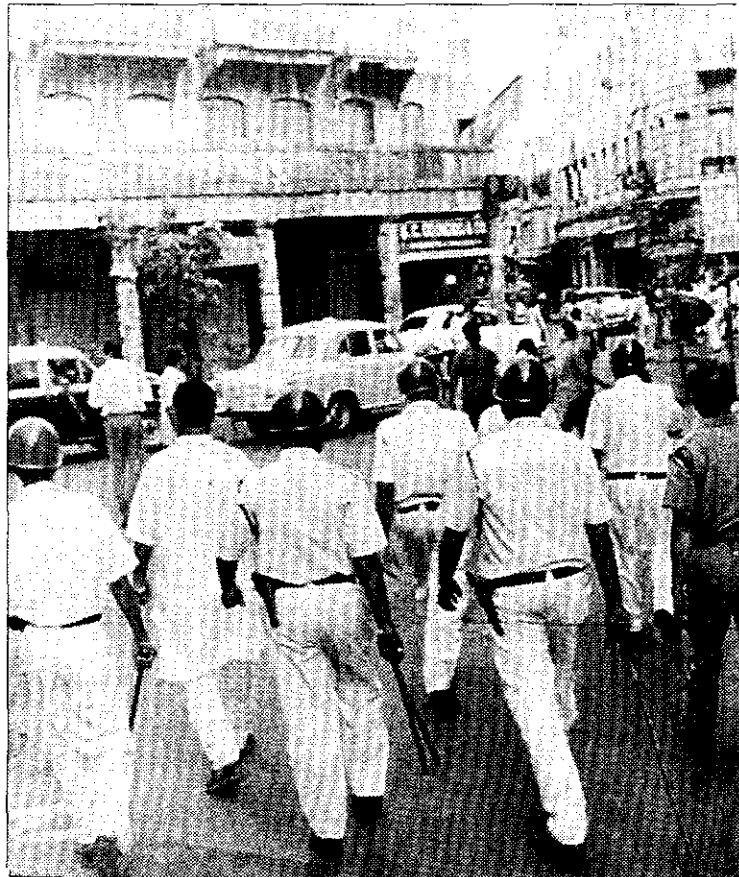
Violence broke out in the Karbi Assam where 6 were killed including a CRPF jawan, was killed in polling station in Deohari in Karbi Kokrajhar, local people are reported persons with the intention of rigging in a retaliatory attack at Gossaigaon.

Stray incidents of ballot snatching from at least five constituencies in

In West Bengal, three persons died in violence. Two Trinamool Congress workers in electoral malpractices in a bomb attack in Kumarpara in Midnapore, snatching was reported in some polling stations.

Congress, which alleged widespread rigging by CPI(M) workers in Midnapore, has Assembly constituencies falling with

AICC general secretary Kamal Nath, Thursday, complained that West Bengal acted "fairly." The CEC refuted the charge that the commission had "full faith" in Mr Sen and done a tremendous job.



GETTING THE WRONG END OF THE STICK: Police chase miscreant state Youth Congress general secretary Tapan Agrawal was attacked

Franchise in state voters 'more satisfied'

Political Bureau

DELHI 10 MAY

and 65 per cent voter turnout marked the day. Six deaths were reported in Assam and three states of Tamil Nadu, largely peaceful polling. Estimates and reports available with the Election Commission M.S. Gill said the EC conducted the polling in the five states

polling in 11 polling stations in West Bengal, a case of violence and electoral malpractice reported tomorrow (Friday) as reports from

West Bengal recorded a slightly lower voter turnout at 73 per cent, followed by Assam and Pondicherry. Tamil Nadu recorded a slightly lower

turnout in Anglong and Kokrajhar districts of Assam, where 12 were injured. Three security personnel were injured in a clash with militants near a polling station in Anglong district. In another clash at a polling station in Kokrajhar, two were overpowered and killed at the polls. Another person was killed

in a clash between voters and rigging were also reported in the north-eastern state.

Seven people were injured and 10 were injured in poll-related incidents. Supporters were lynched by the villagers in the 24 Parganas district when they allegedly attacked a CPI(M) supporter. A CPI(M) supporter was killed in the 24 Parganas. Rigging and ballot box tampering were reported at polling stations.

Reports of rigging and booth capturing by the Trinamool Congress demanded total re-polling in the 37 constituencies in the district.

Mr Nath, who called on Mr Gill on Monday, said the Trinamool CEO Sabyasachi Sen had not responded to the allegation, saying that the commission that he was a fine officer who had



at Chandni Chowk where
acked by rival party workers

Over-ruled!

EVEN arch electoral rivals can come to terms — when it comes to breaking rules. Both CPM and Trinamool Congress workers were seen merrily moving inside polling stations sporting party symbols and names of candidates, a strict no-no going in electoral rules. Police personnel said neither parties are complaining and therefore everything goes.

Sound logic

MANAB Mukherjee, the CPM candidate from Beliaghata and the state minister for tourism, was absolutely sure that there was no electoral malpractice in his constituency. Why? He had not heard any sound (read exploding bombs) since morning. "It's been all fair and soundless," he claimed.

Short & sweet

IT was brisk business for confectioners. Electronic voting machines ensured no long queues and less time spent at polling booths. Leaving most voters with some time on their hands. And most of them tended to veer towards the neighbourhood confectioners for a sweet interlude on the way back home.

Dead man voting

IT was dead man walking in Howrah. A voter armed with voter identity card, ration card and telephone bill entered a polling booth. Oozing confidence. But it was not to be. The electoral role showed him to be dead a year ago. The moral: Live before you vote in order to die before you live

Stage fright

ACTRESS Madhavi Mukherjee, a Trinamool candidate, ran a high-profile campaign against chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee in Jadavpur. But on D-day she faltered. And this may have just turned the tide in favour of the chief minister. Trinamool workers were a disgruntled lot. Their candidate did a disappearing act on voting day. With no pep talk from the star, activists grumbled of being

Parting of ways with BJP has not hurt Trinamool

From Page 1

BUT THE Left Front is expected to retain control of Writers' Buildings by winning 150 seats, while the Trinamool-Congress combine is expected to bag 138 seats in the 294-member Assembly.

"Others" are predicted to get just about six seats and a 12 per cent vote share.

This indicates that Mr Mamara

| Swiss-Re.

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS INDIAN ELECTOR

AJIT KUMAR JHA

IN the last quarter century Indian elections—both in the states as well as the Centre—have witnessed a public rage, a collective ire, against the government of the day. While psephologists call it the anti-incumbency factor and some of them trace its origins to 1967, in the common man's language it is simply 'throwing the rascals out.' All trends in the assembly elections 2001, scheduled to be held next week, indicate that the electorate wants to simply boot their respective incompetent governments out. The message is loud and clear enough is enough.

The anger is as palpable in the two southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, as in the two eastern states of Assam and West Bengal.

The electorate's wrath against the government of the day is irrespective of political party, its ideology, who the leaders are and their promises. Voters of Tamil Nadu and Assam, are as furious against their regional party coalitions—

the DMK-NDA alliance and the AGP-BJP alliance—as are the voters of Kerala and West Bengal, against the two Left Front governments led by the CPI-M.

In fact, the unity in diversity is the wave of rage against the rulers. Contrary to expert opinion, this is not a waveless election. Caste arithmetic is important and so is the algebra of coalitions. But, the overriding factor is the definite wave of anti-incumbency.

Consider, for example, the most elementary indicator, the negative swing factor. All the four states, according to the Outlook-CMS pre-election survey, register a negative swing of over 3 per cent against the government of the day, a unusually large one by any standards.

In fact, in West Bengal the negative swing is close to 3.5 and in Assam it touches almost 4.5. Aggregate negative swing, calculated by adding of 'others' minus the challenger, ends up either doubling the negative swing or increasing it by one-and-a-half times. The negative swing, in comparison to the last elections, is the best measure of the ire against the

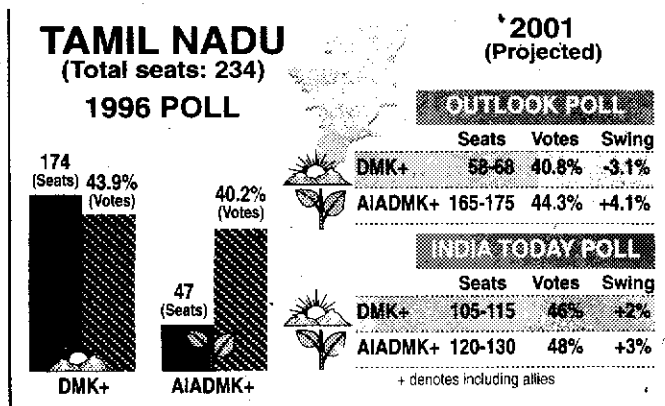
The wave



Presiding officers armed with EVMs set out for polling booths in

government. The wave is not discernably in favour of any particular political party. It is simply a wave of anger against the local government. Interest acts as the common denominator for the voters in this country.

TAMIL NADU



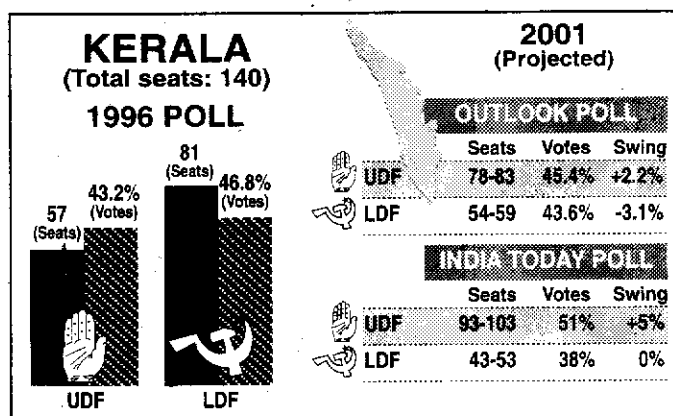
The swingin' state

TAMIL Nadu is a best case for the unique Indian electoral prognosis of the anti-incumbency factor. The joke among pollsters is that the anger against incumbents is so strong that Tamil Nadu has ended up becoming a 'swinger' state. Election after election since 1967, the voters have swung between the two large alliances led by either DMK or AIADMK. These periodic swings have been rather extreme in terms of manifestations: in 1991, the AIADMK trounced the DMK so badly that it was left with just one seat. In 1996, DMK swept the polls and Jayalalitha's AIADMK had four seats left.

National parties never had more than a foothold presence in this state ever since 1967, when the Congress lost for the first time in eight Indian states, including Tamil Nadu. In fact, after the Congress split and the Tamil Manila Congress (TMC) was formed, the Congress almost became irrelevant in this southern state. No doubt, Jayalalitha treated Dr Ramadoss' regional formation, the PMK, as much more important than the Congress. After all, the PMK's Vanniyar votebanks in the north complements Jayalalitha's strong Thevar presence in the south. It is these carefully constructed caste coalitions that are helping Tamil Nadu's *Puratchi Thalavi* in sending jitters in the DMK-NDA camp though she's been convicted by the courts and cannot contest elections until the appellate court clears her.

Most poll observers have already declared Jayalalitha the winner. However, it is important to remember that poll predictions are scientific when it comes to vote percentages, but can be tricky when it comes to the number of seats. Interestingly, there's already some confusion over that. While the India Today-ORG-MARG poll projects Jayalalitha's alliance as winning 48 per cent of votes, it estimates that she will end up with 120-130 seats. The Outlook-CMS opinion poll which forecasts the AIADMK's to secure about 44 per cent of the votes polled, ends up projecting 165-175 seats. A third poll concludes that if the voter turnout is higher than 67 per cent, then the DMK would romp home, otherwise it is advantage Jayalitha.

KERALA



Comrades in trouble

KERALA boasts of being India's model state. In terms of all indices of welfarism, whether literacy or the gender ratio, infant mortality or life expectancy. Yet, 51 per cent of the people surveyed claimed to be unhappy with the performance of the Nayanar-led LDF government. The Marxists did the unthinkable: fearing an anti-incumbency wave they changed the party leadership. Neither was Nayanar given the ticket to contest nor were important members of his cabinet.

A relatively younger generation under the leadership of V.S. Achuthanandan replaced the older set. This was also supposed to be the best medicine for the LDF's perennial problems of deep-seated factionalism. After all, Nayanar was not given the party ticket even last time. Yet, he not only managed to become chief minister but also prevented Achuthanandan from holding a cabinet portfolio. However, even the change in top leadership has not helped the Marxists much this time. They are still battling the

gussa factor. Law and order, especially political violence has been their biggest sin. So are inflation, communal disharmony and the condition of roads and transport, as surveys show.

But the biggest bloomer was made by the top leadership. The fact that Achuthanandan changed his traditional constituency of Mararikulam in and is now contesting from what is considered as a "safe seat" of Palakkad, where the CPI-M has never lost in the past, has certainly send a wrong signal among the electorate. If the chief ministerial candidate is not sure of winning his own seat, how can the Left Front romp home? On top of that the Marxists' desperation is evident as they have been forced into the biggest historical compromise. They have even joined hands with what was considered the "opium of the masses." The CPI-M has fielded Father Mathai Nooranal, a Syrian orthodox Church priest, in order to woo the Christians. No doubt, most polls predict the return of the UDF.

ATE KO GUSSA KYON AATA HAIN? READ ON...

Wave of rave



Kolkata - PTI

ngly, this *gussa* fac-
n thread that unites
lity across regions,

castes, classes, gender and belief. All political parties can be divided between two groups: the ruling parties and the opposition. And the Indian electorate, basically in an anti-establishment mood, wants to chuck the ruling parties out. It is this periodic display of public alienation from the rulers that constitute the strength of Indian democracy. It forces old governments to quit and new governments to replace them.

Is it possible that the wave of rave is a referendum against the Vajpayee-led NDA government in the Centre? Although, it might appear so, especially in a post-Tehelka scenario, it is not entirely true. Mid-term assembly polls are conventionally seen as a referendum against the Central government all over the federal world. But in this case, the incumbent government at the Centre is not the ruling party in the states. The Bharatiya

Janata Party has only a marginal presence in each of these states.

It is, however, directly tied in an alliance with the ruling party in two of the states—Assam and Tamil Nadu. By simple logic of association, an anti-incumbency wave in those states is likely to be perceived as a disapproval of the Vajpayee government in the Centre. However, the statement by the Prime Minister to this effect, right before the polls, is an open acceptance of defeat even before the verdict is pronounced.

Since the Congress is in the Opposition in all these states, is it possible to interpret this wave as favourable for Sonia Gandhi? As all the polls suggest, the Congress stands to directly gain as a result of this *gussa* in at least two states: Assam and Kerala, where in alliance with other partners it forms the main Opposition. In West Bengal, the Congress in alliance with the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress, seems to inadvertently gain from this negative swing against the Left Front government.

But the lead by the Buddhadev Bhat-

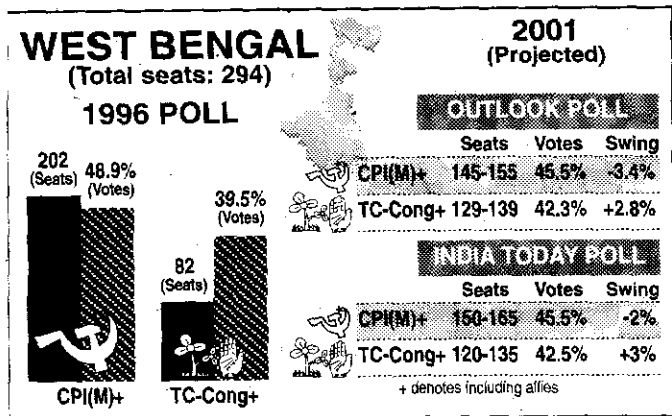
tacharya-led Left Front is simply too large. As the trends show it is unlikely to lose out to the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool-Congress alliance this time.

What causes such rage against the incumbent governments? In two words, sheer incompetence. About 60 to 75 per cent of the people surveyed in all four states are unhappy with the performance of the respective state governments. Almost a similar percentage feel their quality of life has suffered a great deal during the term of the incumbent regime. Deteriorating law and order, rising inflation, unemployment and crumbling infrastructure other than a declining public health system and education have been identified as the main culprits by most people surveyed in the states.

Corruption figures, but at the bottom of the list. The reason is there is not much to choose from between various political parties when it comes to venality: one is as corrupt as the other.

Unless governments learn to govern in the people's interest one has not seen the end of the Indian electorate's *gussa*.

WEST BENGAL



Left out of the trend

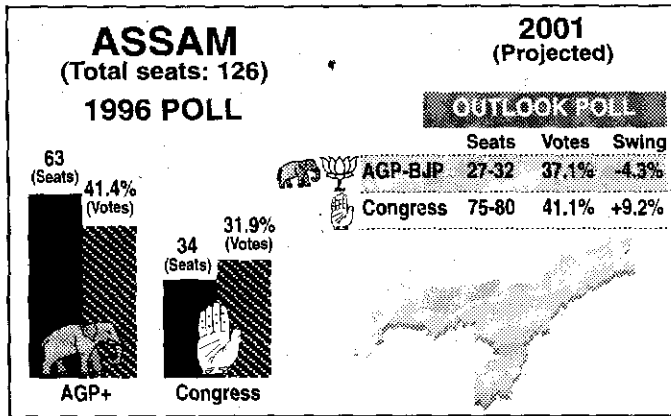
THE CPI-M led Left Front is the singular exception to the recent phenomenon of anti-incumbency. In the last 24 years, the Left Front has enjoyed an unprecedented monopoly of power, an unbeatable five terms. Riding the crest, however, of the most powerful anti-incumbency wave this country has ever witnessed, the Janata wave, the Left Front secured 230 seats out of 294 in 1977 assembly elections. By 1991, the Left Front's tally rose to 245 seats. This near absolute majority was achieved by radical policies of agrarian reforms, especially the identification of tenants and registration of their *pattas*. The regular holding of panchayat elections helped the Marxists consolidate their base in the countryside.

By 1996, the trend began to reverse. The Left Front was reduced to 203 seats. Call it incumbency fatigue, or simply being out of tune with the changing reality. The truth was that the Marxists' base was fast eroding.

By 1998, the main opposition, the Congress party split and the charismatic Mamata Banerjee formed the Trinamool Congress. The Trinamool formed an alliance with BJP and began storming rural Bengal. In a by-election in Panskura, the Trinamool candidate defeated the CPI-M, in its supposedly impenetrable bastion in India's largest district of Midnapore. Right before elections 2001, the Trinamool using the pretext of the Tehelka tapes, left the NDA to ally with the Congress. The reasons: Even after being out of power for a quarter century, Congress still retains a large percentage vote in West Bengal. Congress, including Trinamool, secured 40 per cent in the 1996 assembly elections and maintained that in the last three Lok Sabha elections. Second, Trinamool's votebanks in the south, particularly in the Hoogly, Bankura and Midnapore districts complement the Congress' strongholds in the north, especially in Malda, Murshidabad and Nadia.

The combine is attempting to trounce the Left Front in one of the most competitive elections ever witnessed in West Bengal. Whether the strength of the Left Front comes down below 150 is the million dollar question.

ASSAM



The *gussa* within

NEVER in the history of this state has it ever witnessed such a strong anger against a regional party. And that, too, a party which led the most popular movement in this entire region and brought about the biggest realignment in politics. The Congress party used to be the symbol of hate during the Assam movement. And today, as the Outlook-CMS polls estimate, the same Congress witnesses an unprecedented positive swing factor of 9.25 per cent.

About 75 per cent of the people surveyed prefer a change in leadership. Less than one-fifth wants the AGP to continue. The AGP-BJP combine faces a hostile electorate and an insurgent movement led by the ULFA, which is ready to pounce on them at the drop of a hat. While one candidate and 17 party activists have already been killed, there is fear of further violence.

What happened? Why this *gussa* against your own? A three-word reply: political ineptitude of the leadership. The deep-seated ri-

valy between the two top leaders, chief minister Prafulla Mahanta and the second in command, Brighu Phukan, led to a credibility crisis. Corruption touched unprecedented heights under the ruling AGP and so did non-performance.

In 1996, the AGP alone had secured almost 42 per cent of the votes. The BJP, which had a marginal presence in the past, had soared with a huge percentage increase, although that resulted in only 10 seats. Today that same BJP must be cursing itself for entering into a poll alliance with the corrupt and ineffective AGP. The BJP faces 60 rebel candidates contesting against the combine. The BJP state leadership is up in arms against the central leadership.

The combined vote percentage is projected by the Outlook-CMS poll to barely touch 37 per cent. That will help the AGP-BJP combine to end up with 27 to 32 seats. In 1996, the AGP had secured 63 seats, almost double that of the Congress' tally.

Post-poll possibilities

By K. K. Katyal

The game of politics does not follow constitutional rules and the reverberations of the developments in the States may well be felt in New Delhi.

11/5
49-12

WILL THE outcome of the Assembly poll in four States and a Union Territory have repercussions at the Centre and, if so, in what form? Normally, these questions ought not to have arisen, given the demarcation in the functions of the Centre and the States in our federal polity. The game of politics, however, does not always follow the constitutional rules and reverberations of the political developments in the States may well be felt in New Delhi. The State contests are being held in a political context which is indivisible. Had that not been the case, central leaders of the opposition would not have indulged in loud thinking on possible moves for an alternative setup in New Delhi after the poll. The Congress(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, for instance, would not have conveyed to the CPI(M) leader, Mr. Jyoti Basu, her party's willingness to accept him as the next Prime Minister. The inside account, which provided this information, also mentioned Mr. Basu's response that he would not like to commit a second blunder (in the reverse direction, of course). Obviously, he had not forgotten his "historic blunder", in 1996, when he at the behest of his party, declined the offer of the top post in a United Front Government. Whether Ms. Sonia Gandhi envisaged the Congress(I)'s participation in a composite government or support from outside was not clear. That the Congress(I), too, did not intend repeating the past mistake was evident from the statements from its camp that the party would not keep aloof in the event of the present Government collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions. The reluctance to join others in the search for an alternative paved the way for the elections in 1998, which brought the BJP-led alliance back to power.

The constitutional position is too obvious to need any clarification. An upset in a State to the disadvantage of the rulers at the Centre does not, automatically, affect the stability of the Government. So long as their support base in the Lok Sabha remains intact, they stay in office. The changes at the State level are reflected in the Rajya Sabha but it takes time for that impact to be felt. In any case, the compo-

sition of the Upper House of Parliament is not relevant to the majority of the ruling side.

The trends, thrown up by the Assembly elections, may or may not be reflected in a subsequent Lok Sabha poll, there being no uniformity in the past patterns. In the last two years, for instance, the ruling alliance performed well at the Centre, though in the preceding round of Assembly elections, it was ousted from power in three States. In Rajasthan and Delhi, the Congress(I) wrested control of the Governments from the BJP and, in Karnataka, from the Janata Dal. That was in November 1998. But in the Lok Sabha election in October next year, the BJP succeeded in avenging its humiliation in the first two cases. It may not be that lucky next time.

In the States which went to the polls, the biggest constituent of the ruling combine, the BJP, is but a marginal force. In Kerala, it is virtually non-existent, in Tamil Nadu, it is a small partner of the DMK front, in West Bengal, it has a limited role, the two major contestants being the Left Front and the Trinamool-Congress(I) alliance. In Assam, it has joined hands with the ruling ACP in the face of stiff opposition by its local unit and remains a secondary factor, with uncertain prospects. The outcome of the poll nowhere will, thus, be a verdict on the BJP, and the people will not be any the wiser on whether, and if so to what extent, its credibility had been damaged by Tebelka. The election result will be no index of the popular perception of its performance or of the NDA as a whole. It would be a different situation when Uttar Pradesh is required to elect a new Assembly.

The NDA partners, the BJP in particular, are themselves responsible for the perception that the Assembly poll results will be a verdict on their performance. Had the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, and other seniors not plunged headlong in the poll campaign, there would have been no occasion to read that

meaning in the State contests. Though belatedly, Mr. Vajpayee realised the political risk involved in the stance adopted by the NDA. That accounted for his repeated assertions that the Assembly poll was not a referendum on his Government's performance. The Opposition, however, will go by his campaign rhetoric and not the subsequent clarification.

A major ally of the coalition, the ruling DMK, however, is very much in the fray (in Tamil Nadu) and although State issues dominate its fight with the AIADMK-led alliance, any upset will certainly be regarded a blow to the prestige of the central coalition and a cause of embarrassment for it. In the process, the opposition will get a major talking point. Elsewhere, the Congress(I) could get a boost if the front led by it has the better of its rivals in Kerala, and (or) it improves its position in Assam. But to say that such table-turning developments in the States would, automatically, lead to the emergence of a viable opposition front is to take a simplistic view. The reasons are clear.

In two States, West Bengal and Kerala, the Left parties and the Congress(I) are locked in fierce struggles. The animosities, stirred by the clash, could not but come in the way of a joint front against the BJP at the Centre. That in a situation, where there are sharp differences between them on, say, economic policies. Whether their shared anxiety to unite the secular forces for ousting the BJP from power would have the better of their contradictions is hard to say.

Even in the absence of Assembly elections and the demonstration of mutual hostility, the Congress(I) and others in the Opposition, divided as they are by personal political and ideological factors, would have found it hard to collaborate. The Samajwadi Party supremo, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, to take one example, does not hide his allergy to the Congress(I) leader, Ms. Sonia Gandhi. Because of his hold in Uttar Pradesh, he is a major

factor among the non-BJP parties and is close to the Left. It was this contradiction that prevented the emergence of an alternative when, some two years ago, the Vajpayee Government lost majority and the President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, explored the possibility of a new dispensation — and finally ordered a fresh election.

The action of the non-Congress(I) opposition of forming a Peoples Front was meant to put itself in the reckoning in the case of the collapse of the present Government, regarded highly probable by them. They did not want the Congress(I) to arrogate to itself the non-BJP space. As Mr. Yadav often says, the Government, already in disarray, would not be able to withstand the blow of reverses in the Assembly elections and its end would be hastened. Both the Congress(I) and the Left parties may have reasons to be elated by the likely outcome of the elections. In case the Left Front retains power in West Bengal, its credibility to play the leading role in the Peoples Front would be enhanced, despite its debacle in Kerala. Likewise, a good Congress(I) performance in Kerala and Assam would help it to get over the demoralisation caused by the steady decline of its strength in the Lok Sabha. By itself, the boost in their morale will not be translated into a concrete move for a change. It could either sharpen the clash and make mutual accommodation more difficult — the pre-poll "offer" of Ms. Sonia Gandhi notwithstanding — or strengthen the resolve to work for an alternative, especially, if they see the expected "disarray" in the ruling alliance taking a concrete form.

The calculations on an alternative are based on a re-alignment of political forces, especially on the possibility of a switch by the Telugu Desam of Mr. Chandrababu Naidu, now supporting the NDA from outside, apart from one or two of its small constituents. This would take care of the numbers and offset the opposition disadvantage. But would it give a coherence, a credibility to the moves for an alternative?

In practical terms, it may not be a workable proposition. In case the present setup ceases to be viable, the only way out will be a fresh election.

The election laws

—By K. K. Katyal

Any beginning in the direction of electoral reforms, however modest, needs to be encouraged, not undermined.

10-12/11/15

THE SUSPENSE over the candidature of the AIADMK leader, Ms. Jayalalitha, ended when her nomination papers were rejected. But the acrimonious controversy that erupted soon after continues — it may well intensify, given the emotive content of the poll campaign and the heavy stakes of the rival formations. The AIADMK is making full political use of the actions, taken under the law of the land. That may be understandable, but could one take a positive view of her bid to project herself as a chief ministerial candidate? She was barred from contesting for an Assembly seat because of her conviction by a court of law. For her to bid for a position which rests on membership of the Assembly — if not with immediate effect, after six months — is to run against legal and constitutional imperatives, apart from moral factors. It also amounts to thumbing nose at the institutional framework to ensure cleanliness in elections, on which only a modest beginning has been made. Ms. Jayalalitha would have enhanced her prestige had she waited for the disposal of her appeal against the conviction. As for her allegation that the cases against her were initiated out of political vendetta, she can depend on the judiciary for justice.

Two different issues are involved in this case — one, the political developments in Tamil Nadu and the role and place in them of Ms. Jayalalitha and, two, legal and moral requirements. The two are mixed far too often and, this results in erroneous conclusions and faulty appraisals. It is much worse, when facts are allowed to be coloured by fiction.

Thanks to the turn of the political wheel, Ms. Jayalalitha and her party, the AIADMK, have, of late, increased their hold. If the pendulum had moved to one extreme — against them — in 1996, it seems to be swinging to the other side now. For the purpose of the present discussion, it is not necessary to go into details — whether it is the phenomenon of the voter preferences in Tamil Nadu alternating between the two Dravidian parties or whether or not the reality is in tune with the perception, whether or not the incumbency factor works against her opponents. There are

candidates to hide the fact of their conviction.

Over the years, unethical and ugly practices and trends had acquired formidable proportions, which, if left unchecked, would have made nonsense of our credentials as the largest democracy. A beginning with electoral reforms could not have been delayed. Most of this job was the responsibility of Parliament which did not rise to the occasion for various reasons. The political parties vied with one other in their lip-service to the cause of reform but did precious little. Non-political, non-official bodies did try to sensitize the nation on the issue but could not achieve much. The E.C. initiated certain measures which covered only a small part of the problem. The 1997 order was one such step. It was based on the premise that law-breakers could not be law-makers.

Then there were other steps which showed that its diagnosis was correct and the remedy on right lines but could not cure the malady with its deep roots. For instance, it sought to restrict the number of political parties and check their proliferation — they talked 650 some four years ago — by providing for a deposit of Rs. 1,500 for registration. It sought to discourage if not to eliminate non-serious candidates by increasing the security deposit — in the case of election for the post of President and Vice-President, it increased the number of proposers and seconders, apart from raising the security deposit. The impact, however, was limited.

In the final analysis, what was needed was collective, firm political will on the part of the political parties and leading politicians which was missing. As noted by Mr. Krishnamurthy, obviously on the basis of his experience in the E.C., corruption was not the monopoly of any political party. And we know that those who claimed to be a party with a difference have turned out to be bigger culprits. The problem is far too serious and should be tackled through drastic legislative measures, ruthlessly implemented, with the active cooperation of political parties. Any beginning in that direction, however modest, needs to be encouraged, not undermined.

claims by the rival side, by the Chief Minister, Mr. Karunanidhi, and his party, the DMK, that there is no wave in her favour. They strongly discount the theories emanating from her camp. These matters need to be kept separate from issues arising from the rejection of Ms. Jayalalitha's nomination papers.

The decisions of the returning officers disallowing her from contesting were not unexpected. They were based on the E.C.'s order issued in 1997, which barred persons convicted of offences, specified in the Representation of the People Act, from offering themselves as candidates. The order, to quote its title, was about "criminalisation of politics — participation of criminals in the electoral process as candidates — disqualification on conviction for offences — effect of appeal and bail". In its rationale, it noted that "the country is facing the serious problem of criminalisation of politics in which criminals, i.e. persons convicted by courts of law for certain offences, are entering in election fray and contesting as candidates". The operative provision read thus: "Now, therefore, the Election Commission has, after taking due note and paying due regard to the above (mentioned in the body of the order) judicial pronouncements of the Hon'ble Supreme Court and the Hon'ble High Courts, come to the considered view that the disqualification" under the election law, "for contesting elections to Parliament and State legislatures on conviction for offences mentioned therein, takes effect from the date of conviction by the trial court, irrespective of whether the convicted person is released on bail or not during the pendency of appeal." Exception is made in the case of sitting MPs and members of the State legislatures.

There is no ambiguity about the order and its effect. The appeal filed by the person affected by it may be accepted by the appropriate courts and the conviction set aside but, till then, the disqualification

stays. The operation of this bar is not to be seen as a negation of the principle that a person is to be regarded innocent till he or she is found guilty.

Ms. Jayalalitha may well win the appeal but, as of now, the bar on her candidature remains operative. She is sore with the returning officers and her camp sees the hand of her rivals in the rejection of her nomination papers. In the din of the controversy, one central fact is lost sight of — that the Representation of the People Act (providing for disqualification, among other things) was first enacted in 1950 and a major amendment which made a distinction between the sitting legislators and others was adopted some 12 years ago. The E.C.'s order, essentially a clarificatory exercise, was issued on August 28, 1997. As required by the amended law, it exempted the sitting members of Parliament and State legislatures from the operation of the bar.

We have it on the authority of Mr. G. V. G. Krishnamurthy, former Election Commissioner who was actively involved in the framing of measures to reform the electoral processes, that the 1997 order was meant to tackle the problem created by criminals and crooks in their bid to enter legislative bodies. In the elections held the previous year (for the 543 seats of the Lok Sabha and 4,000-plus of the State Assemblies), some 1,500 candidates, according to him, were found to have criminal records and, of them, 40 were elected to Parliament alone. They were able to sneak into the system making use of various loopholes. This led the Commission to lay down guidelines for the candidates who, among other things, were required to file affidavits that they have not been convicted of any of the offences listed in the election law. The implementation of new do's and don'ts posed problems to the returning officers who sought clarification from the Commission. Hence the three-page order. As a result, it became difficult for the

ROs interpreted EC circular correctly: Gill

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 30. Expressing satisfaction over the decisions taken by the Returning Officers (ROs) in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. M.S. Gill, today said the Commission's August 1997 circular had the legal backing and the ROs had correctly interpreted it. Replying to a query on how the nomination of the former Kerala Minister, Mr. R. Balakrishna Pillai, convicted for five years in a corruption case, was accepted, Dr. Gill said the law was "clear" on the issue.

"In this case Section 8(4) of the Representation of the People Act makes a distinction for MPs and MLAs. It says that conviction against an MP or an MLA gets

postponed for three months from the date of the trial court order and once he files an appeal, disqualification does not come into effect till disposal of the appeal," Dr. Gill told reporters here.

The CEC refused to get further drawn into answering queries regarding the controversy over the acceptance of Mr. Pillai's nomination and the rejection of the nomination of the AIADMK leader, Ms. Jayalalitha, in all the four constituencies in Tamil Nadu for the May 10 Assembly polls. Dr. Gill said that Section 8 of the RPA has been upheld by two separate orders of a Division Bench of the Madras High Court on April 20 and April 23.

"That is the law applying in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The Election

Commission is not meant to do the duty of the RO who happens to be a key functionary in the electoral set-up," he said. The Commission is facing a challenge in the Kerala High Court over Mr. Pillai's nomination.

"There is a notice to the Commission in this case. We shall file our response promptly. I can see the contradictions, but wait for our affidavit before Kerala High Court." Dr. Gill said the circular of August 28, 1997 was finalised after lengthy internal debates within the Commission and after going through all relevant judgments.

He said the circular quoted extensively from three judgments of the Madhya Pradesh, Allahabad and Himachal Pradesh High Courts. "The Himachal Pradesh

High Court order was upheld by the Supreme Court. There is no case in which any other court has taken an opposite view."

While Ms. Jayalalitha attracted disqualification under Section 8(3) of the RPA, Mr. Pillai derived benefit from Section 8(4) of the same law. According to Section 8(4): "A disqualification under either sub-section shall not, in the case of a person who on the date of the conviction is a member of Parliament or the Legislature of a State, take effect until three months have elapsed from that date or, if within that period an appeal or application for revision is brought in respect of the conviction or the sentence, until that appeal or application is disposed of by the court."

THE HINDU

1 MAY 2001

EC reviews situation in 5 States

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 2. The Election Commission today reviewed the law and order situation in the five States where Assembly polls are to be held on May 10. The Commission expressed concern over unabated pre-poll violence in Assam.

The Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. M. S. Gill, spoke to the Union Home Secretary, Mr. Kamal Pande, and said adequate security arrangements should be made in Assam. According to Commission sources, the CEC said the Home Ministry should also rush additional reinforcements of Central para-military forces to Assam if the situation demanded.

Dr. Gill is leaving for Kolkata tomorrow and will hold meetings with the top officials of the West Bengal Government. He is also scheduled to meet officials from hyper-sensitive Assembly constituencies of the State.

UNI reports:

The Commission decided to send additional 20 Central observers to certain sensitive constituencies of West Bengal, Kerala

and Tamil Nadu which have witnessed incidents of pre-poll violence and clashes.

Of the 20 observers, ten are being sent to the West Bengal constituencies of Midnapore, Hooghly, 24 North and South Parganas, Nadia, Howrah and Bankura. Two observers are being sent to the north Kerala constituency of Kannur while eight are being sent to Villipuram, Cuddalore, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu.

Samata candidate shot at in Assam

GUWAHATI, MAY 2. In a fresh bout of violence ahead of the Assembly polls in Assam, suspected ULFA ultras today shot at a Samata Party candidate and killed four others, including two AGP activists, prompting the Centre to rush paramilitary reinforcements.

ULFA militants barged into a roadside hotel and fired at the Samata Party candidate for Rangia constituency, Mr. Dipak Kalita, when he was having lunch at Goreswar in Kamrup district, police

said, adding a party worker was killed in the attack.

In a separate incident, two AGP activists were killed and another injured by suspected ULFA militants at Bilasipara in Dhubri district in the wee hours today.

Police said a group of six ULFA militants attacked the AGP office in Raniganj and shot at the three men inside, killing one. Another person succumbed to injuries on way to hospital and the third is stated to be in a critical condition.

The latest round of violence came a day after the killing of the BJP Dibrugarh contestant, Jayanta Dutta, and five others.

The Congress office at Ghogra-par in Nalbari district was set on fire. The owner of a nearby tea-stall, who was sleeping inside his shop, was burnt to death as the blaze spread. Meanwhile, the Centre is dispatching additional reinforcements of paramilitary forces. The decision to this effect was taken at a meeting the Chief Election Commissioner, Mr. M.S. Gill, had today with the Union Home Secretary, Mr. Kamal Pande, in Delhi. — PTI

THE HINDU

30 MAY 2001

A convicted democracy

By Rajeev Dhavan

Convicted criminals should not pollute the electoral process until acquittal. Indian democracy is more important than any individual politician's career.

NO DEMOCRACY can allow itself to be taken over by criminals. Yet, India has fudged this question many times over. Increasingly, more and more persons accused and convicted of serious crimes seek to be, and are, elected our legislators without inviting moral protest. The esoteric legal debate on legal reform is still in limbo. A new debate has re-surfaced over whether Ms. Jayalalitha should have been allowed to contest elections despite her conviction by a criminal court. Has she been unfairly treated? Even though convicted of a crime, Mr. Balakrishna Pillai in Kerala has been permitted to contest the election because he is a sitting legislator. Common sense militates against the logic in favour of Mr. Pillai. If correct the Pillai decision suggests that a legislature can replenish its old stock of criminality, but not induct fresh criminality in its ranks.

The Constitution permits the legislature to make rules for electoral disqualifications. Not everyone can stand for elections. There is an embargo on grounds of age, citizenship, unsoundness of mind, insolvency, holding public office and criminality. The scheme of the criminality disqualification in Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, is elaborate but not inherently complicated. Three kinds of criminality invite disqualification. In the first most serious Category-I, those found guilty of certain listed anti-social and anti-national offences are disqualified for six years from the date of conviction (section 8(1)). The second socially serious Category-II includes those sentenced to more than six months for offences relating to hoarding, profiteering, adulteration of food and drugs, dowry and 'sati'. They are disqualified from the date of conviction for six years after release from prison (section 8(2)). The third general Category-III consists of persons convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for at least two years who are disqualified in the same terms as the second category (section 8(3)). The most serious category requires only conviction. The less serious and general category requires conviction and also different levels of sentence.

Mr. Pillai was convicted for five years rigorous imprisonment in the Edamalaray corruption case relating to when he was Electricity Minister in Kerala. Mr. Pillai seeks technical refuge in a statutory immunity (under section 8(4)) that a sitting MLA or MPs is not disqualified so long as his appeal is pending. The argument is legally skewed and democratically absurd. The Section 8(4) immunity was to ensure that sitting MLAs and MPs do not get unseated following a disqualificatory conviction. It pertains to the past not to future elections. Even if the legislature is not technically dissolved, its term is over.

Convicted sitting MLAs

or MPs were not intended to have an immunity for fresh elections. Apart from the legislator's immunity, Mr. Pillai's case is similar to Ms. Jayalalitha's case. The Kerala High Court issued notice against Mr. Pillai nomination on April 27, 2001. But, his election result can only be challenged by way of election petition. However, thanks to the Returning Officer, Mr. Pillai is laughing at his good fortune all the way to his vote bank.

Ms. Jayalalitha's case stems from her conviction in the controversial TANSI land case. On November 3, 2000, the sentence of Ms. Jayalalitha was stayed. Apart from the legal argument that the conspiracy charges against her are weak, she claims that the suspension of her sentenced lifts the disqualification. Her grouse that Mr. Pillai has been preferentially treated is justified. But, two wrongs cannot make a right. So, the question is not whether she should get the same treatment as Mr. Pillai, but whether her disqualification holds good. The weakness in her case is that if Parliament wanted to lift the disqualification in all the cases where appeals are pending, it would have done so. Parliament consciously limited the 'appeal' case immunity only to sitting

MLAs and MPs for the limited purpose of not expelling them from the legislature while the appeal is pending. So, in order to qualify both Mr. Pillai and Ms. Jayalalitha one would have to read something into the statute that is, *prime facie*, not there. An appeal of Mr. V. C. Shukla's case is neither conclusive nor helpful. On April 11, 1980, Mr. Shukla's conviction and sentence was finally set aside by the Supreme Court. He was acquitted. Therefore, the election petition failed and he was deemed to be qualified at the time of nomination.

In Mr. Pillai's and Ms. Jayalalitha's case, there is no final acquittal.

The appeals are pending. The issue, therefore, is whether a suspension of only sentence includes suspending the conviction. In Rakesh Singha's case (1995), the Himachal High Court correctly took the view that where a court intends to suspend both the sentence and conviction, it must consciously be invited to do so and specifically suspend both. But, there is at least a limited legal foundation to Ms. Jayalalitha's case which rests on the distinction between the three categories of disqualification. It is only the 'most serious' Category-I that requires only conviction to sustain a disqualification. The other two categories of disqualification have the double ingredient of both conviction and sentence. It follows that if the sentence alone is suspended, the essential ingredient of two years sentence is not met. Thus, the disqualification cannot hold where one of the two ingredients is missing. This technical argument is not without legal merit.

However, Ms. Jayalalitha's case is complicated by two factors other than the invidious politics of Tamil Nadu. In the first place, the Election Commission is to blame. The Commission's order of August 28, 1997, instructs returning officers to

disqualify from the date of conviction "regardless of whether the... candidate is out on bail or not". It deals with bail not minimum sentence. The Election Commission cannot issue an ambiguous and complete order and shackle the Returning Officer with such ambiguity, it is a road to nowhere with disastrous consequences. Second, Ms. Jayalalitha preemptively moved the High Court for relief. The High Court's earlier refusal to interfere inevitably made the Returning Officer play defensively off the backfoot to follow the Election Commission order of 1997 with an inexact application of mind and the law.

Morally, those who are convicted for serious offences should sit out of the electoral process until their name is cleared. But, what happens to those who are innocent or as in V.C. Shukla's case acquitted. Sitting out of elections is not an option open to Indian politicians. Once out, a politician cannot re-thread back in. On his temporary exit, his *kursi* (chair) will be occupied. If the Returning Officer makes a mistake in law, it will not be rectified for years through an election petition. By that time, it will be too late. The politician's career will be ruined. Further, if Ms. Jayalalitha's party wins, the Governor may be justly reluctant to swear her in as Chief Minister under the six months clause for which period a non-legislator can be a Minister. The Governor may feel that she must abide by the statutory decision of the Returning Officer and await the Court's final decision — refusing to play judge, astrologer or god.

We are left with a muddle. Despite the Law Commission's recommendation that those charged with an offence should be disqualified, there is no change in the law. The law itself is tolerably clearly but has been wrongly applied in Mr. Pillai's case. The Election Commission's order of 1997 has confused the issue. A suspension of sentence is enough to lift some categories of disqualification. The Courts and Parliament must resolve the issue. But, in all this the moral issues have been totally forgotten. Convicted criminals should not pollute the electoral process until acquittal. Indian democracy is more important than any individual politician's career.

THE HINDU

4 MAY 2001

CEO apprised of Opposition campaign

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 6. - There are hardly any graffiti or banners of Opposition parties in some of the trouble-prone constituencies of Midnapore, Bankura and Hooghly, the central observers of the constituencies in these districts complained to Mr Sabyasachi Sen, the state chief electoral officer at a meeting at Writers' Buildings, today.

The CEO has instructed the district administration and the central observers to ensure that political parties can campaign freely in these areas for the last few days.

The central observers of Kespur, Garbeta and Arambagh constituencies and the district administrations were asked by the CEO to ensure that the persons who are living in the camps after fleeing their villages after political clashes should be able to return to their native villages before 10 May.

Mr Sen said the district administration should make alternative arrangements so that these men can vote if they cannot return to their village before the polling day.

Mr Sen asked Mr Lalbahadur Tewari, the central observer of Arambagh to ensure 171 men who are living in camps in Arambagh sub-division can vote on the polling day.

He said that he has alerted the district administrations of Midnapore and Bankura against PWG and MCC activists who are intimidating people.

THE STATESMAN

MAY 6 1971

It is for EC to decide, says HC

By Our Staff Reporter

CHENNAI, APRIL 23. "The Election Commission is a high Constitutional functionary, the power vested is expected to be discharged reasonably, objectively and independently, and in accordance with law," the Madras High Court observed, while dismissing a public interest petition seeking a direction to the Election Commission to implement its 1997 circular on the disqualification of convicted persons.

"...mere apprehension of the petitioner that the Returning Officers will not perform their respective duties and decide the issue as per law, is uncalled for as everyone is expected to perform his duties only in accordance with the law," said the First Bench comprising the Chief Justice, Mr. N.K. Jain, and Mr. Justice K. Sampath.

"The petition is filed by VOICE, who is not a voter or aggrieved person," the Bench said adding the court had decided not to interfere in the election process and dismissed three election-related petitions on Friday last.

Noting that it was not necessary to consider and decide the maintainability of the writ petition at this stage, the Bench said once the election process had started, the judicial remedy had to be postponed till after the elections.

"No doubt, in an appropriate case, this court can direct the authorities if there is any

violation of fundamental right, or the issue involved touches the conscience of the court. But, at the same time, public interest litigation cannot be used for publicity and political motivation," the Bench ruled.

The petition was filed by senior advocate, Mr. K. M. Vijayan, on behalf of VOICE.

Meanwhile, the Bench dismissed another petition — filed by Ms. Ilavarasi Nagarani Sujatha, seeking directions to the Election Commission on certain representations she had made regarding the former Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalitha's eligibility to contest elections.

2 more nominations for Jayalalitha

By Our Tamil Nadu Bureau

CHENNAI, APRIL 23. In a surprise development, AIADMK partymen today submitted nominations on behalf of the party general secretaries, Ms. Jayalalitha, for two more constituencies, Pudukottai and Bhuvanagiri. Already, Ms. Jayalalitha had presented her papers from Krishnagiri and Andipatti.

Although the Election Commission's handbook for returning officers disallows filing of nominations in more than two constituencies, an AIADMK municipal councillor, Mr. K.

Bhasker, and a lawyer, Mr. Durai Anbarasan, presented papers on behalf of Ms. Jayalalitha for Pudukottai and Bhuvanagiri.

Mr. Bhasker filed the papers minutes before the 3 p.m. deadline on the last date for nominations.

The returning officer in Cuddalore for the Bhuvanagiri constituency confirmed that the nomination filed by Mr. Anbarasan was in the name of Ms. Jayalalitha.

The Chief Electoral Officer, Dr. Mrutyunjay Sarangi, refused to answer any question on the two fresh nominations saying he was not to make any comment on the eve of scrutiny.

According to the Handbook for Returning Officers, a candidate's nominations can be rejected "if it is found at the time of scrutiny that the candidate has been nominated from more than two constituencies of the same class of a general election..." But, the question of rejection will arise only if the two latest nominations were found to have been filed with Ms. Jayalalitha's authorisation.

Under the chapter "scrutiny", the handbook says, "the returning officer must, however, be absolutely satisfied beyond any shadow of doubt that the candidate concerned has filed nominations from more than two constituencies, before rejecting his nomination on this ground."

THE HINDU

PRINTED

24 APR 2001

Jaya knocked out of election race

25/4

HR1

G C Shekhar
Krishnagiri, April 24

JAYALALITHA today suffered a major political setback after returning officers at Krishnagiri and Andipatti flashed the red card and threw her out of the race for the Tamil Nadu Assembly. Krishnagiri and Andipatti are the two constituencies where the AIADMK chief had filed her original nominations.

She also suffered a technical knockout when her last minute decision to file two more nominations from Pudukottai and Bhuvanagiri invited further disqualification under Section 33(7)(b) of the RP Act which bars a candidate from contesting more than two Assembly seats. The returning officers at Bhuvanagiri and Pudukottai cited the RP Act and set aside her papers. Last minute arguments by her legal advisers that the Pudukottai and Bhuvanagiri nominations had been filed by her representatives, and, therefore, were unauthorised, cut no ice with the returning officers.

The Krishnagiri and Andipatti returning officers rejected Jayalalitha's papers on two grounds: (a) she had been disqualified under Section 8(3) of the Representation of People's Act which barred anyone convicted for more than

two years, and (b) the 1997 Election Commission guidelines had clearly held that disqualification came into force from the date of verdict of the trial court.

Since Jayalalitha had been sentenced to three years' RI in the TANSI land deal case, she had come under the said section's purview, the returning officers pointed out.

The stage for her disqualification was set earlier in the morning when former Assembly Speaker and Union Minister Sedapatti R Muthiah's nomination for the Sedapatti seat was rejected on grounds that he had been convicted for 25 months for accumulation of disproportionate assets during his tenure as Speaker.

Jayalalitha's team of lawyers argued in vain before the returning officers, citing various court verdicts, including the recent one by the Madras High Court, which observed that suspension of sentence was tantamount to suspension of conviction. But the officials went strictly by the Election Commission 'handbook' that insisted on the enforcement of Sec 8(3).

At Andipatti, her lawyers were engaged in a heated verbal duel with Janata Party leader Subramaniam Swamy, who was present as a represen-



tative of State Janata president M. Chandralekha, an Independent candidate. In all four constituencies, nominees of the DMK and its ally had filed objections before the returning officers citing the two provisions that disqualified Jayalalitha.

Krishnagiri returning officer Madhivanan was spirited away by police to an unknown destination immediately after he declared the result. He and his family were provided protection after receiving threats.

Related report on Page 9

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 APR 2011

Jayalalitha can't contest elections

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

ANDIPATTI, April 24. - In an unprecedented move that is bound to have serious political ramifications, four returning officers today rejected the AIADMK general secretary, Miss J. Jayalalitha's candidature for the 10 May Assembly polls in Tamil Nadu, putting an end to a prolonged debate on the issue.

The rejection of Miss Jayalalitha's nominations in all the four constituencies - Andipatti, Krishnagiri, Bhuvanagiri and Pudukkottai - is a major setback to the AIADMK-led front which includes the Congress, Tamil Maanila Congress, the Pattali Makkal Katchi and Left parties.

While no major incident was reported in the state following the decision, stray incidents of road blockade

by irate AIADMK partymen were reported in Krishnagiri in Dharmapuri district and Bhuvanagiri in Cuddalore district in north-east Tamil Nadu. No untoward incident was reported from Theni district.

Declaring the verdict after scrutiny of the nomination papers of various candidates, all the four returning officers took refuge in the 1997 Election Commission notification. According to the notification, under Section 8(3) of the Representation of the People Act, a person sentenced and convicted for more than two years in a corruption case is barred from contesting election notwithstanding an appeal in a higher court.

The ROs also quoted Section 33(7) of the RPA, forbidding a candidate from filing nominations in more than two constituencies.

Of the four constituencies, Andipatti came in for special attention as it was expected that Miss Jayalalitha would finally contest here if her nominations were accepted. The RO for this constituency, Mrs S. Jaya, rejected all the four nominations in her name. While Miss Jayalalitha herself filed the nomination for Andipatti constituency on 16 April, her supporters filed three nominations in her name for the same constituency. "I've examined all facts and records and heard arguments of both sides. After detailed analysis, I've decided to reject all the four nominations of Miss Jayalalitha," she said.

Reading out her detailed order at Theni Collectorate at 5 p.m., Mrs Jaya, looking rather tired after a marathon arguing session with Miss Jayalalitha's lawyers, Mr Vinod Ara-

vind Bobde and Mr N. Jyoti, said her decision was based on three vital factors: one whether a candidate has been convicted by a trial court for an offence and sentenced for it; second, whether the conviction had been stayed; third, a candidate's nomination could be rejected for the reason that she has filed in more than two constituencies.

In her findings, Mrs Jaya noted that Miss Jayalalitha had been convicted by a trial court for an offence and sentenced to imprisonment for more than two years and that Madras High Court had stayed the sentence of the trial court. However, the High Court had not granted stay of the conviction. According to Section 8(3) of RPA 1951, disqualification takes effect from the date of conviction, irrespective of whether the con-

victed person is released on bail or not during pendency of appeal.

Also, in its order No. 509 (Disqualification 1997), dated 28 August 1997 the Election Commission of India clarifies that stay of sentence does not wipe out conviction, Mrs Jaya said. She quoted a few High Court judgments that upheld the validity of the EC's 1997 notification.

She said the learned judge, Mr Justice KV Subramanian, passing an order in a case, felt that it was well within the powers of the EC to issue such a notification. The judge had rejected the contention that the notification was not binding on the ROs.

There was much tension in Theni Collectorate where the RO fielded arguments by Miss Jayalalitha's lawyers, supporting her cause to contest the elections.



Miss J. Jayalalitha

THE STATESMAN

25 APR 2001

SATURDAY, APRIL 28, 2001

LEGISLATORS AND ELECTION LAW ¹¹⁰⁻¹²

ONE LAW FOR Mr. Balakrishna Pillai. Another for Ms. Jayalalitha. The disparate manner in which electoral law treats sitting MPs/MLAs and non-members of a legislature has been driven home by the acceptance of the former's nomination papers and the rejection of the latter's. The material circumstances are similar: both the sitting Kerala MLA and the AIADMK chief have been convicted of corruption, have been sentenced to more than two years of imprisonment and have pending appeals against their convictions. But while Ms. Jayalalitha is disqualified from contesting the Tamil Nadu Assembly election for falling foul of Section 8 (3) of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), Mr. Pillai's candidature is approved because he attracts Section 8 (4) of the same Act which specifically exempts legislators from the disqualification process that governs non-members.

In permitting the former Kerala Minister, Mr. Balakrishna Pillai, to contest the election in Kottarakara, the Returning Officer was only going by the letter of the law. His decision had at least one precedent. In West Bengal, a nominee of the CPI(M) who was convicted by a sessions court for murder and later released on bail was permitted to contest the 1996 Assembly election on the ground that he was already a sitting MLA. After hearing a petition which sought a declaration that the MLA's re-election was illegal and void, the Calcutta High Court dismissed it on the ground that Section 8 (4) of the RPA was enacted specifically for the "benefit" of legislators and that the MLA was entitled to avail of it. The court, while refusing to declare the provision *ultra vires*, held that convicted legislators could avail of it to retain their membership of the House as well as to contest further elections.

Nevertheless, the Balakrishna Pillai episode throws up a larger and disturbing issue — one

that deserves serious attention. The larger objective of any election law pertaining to disqualification should be to prevent the criminalisation of politics and foster probity in elections. And there is something dreadfully wrong about a legal provision which permits convicted legislators to remain in the legislature as well as fight fresh elections. In an oblique reference to the "laxity shown to sitting parliamentarians and members of the legislature" in the RPA, the Madras High Court (while dismissing Ms. Jayalalitha's plea that her conviction be suspended) recently suggested that this aspect be placed before the Election Commission. Apart from being discriminatory, Section 8 (4) of the RPA deserves to be questioned on the ground that such a provision will only foster rather than prevent the criminalisation of politics. It would appear that the Supreme Court is the appropriate forum to challenge the validity of this sub-section. ^{WA}

At a political level, the approval of Mr. Balakrishna Pillai's nomination has given Ms. Jayalalitha another handle to portray herself as a "victim of injustice" and repeat her unfounded allegation that her disqualification was a result of political pressure and manipulation. Her supporters are correct in claiming that the electoral law should not discriminate between Mr. Pillai and herself. But the conclusion they have sought to draw — namely, that Ms. Jayalalitha should have been allowed to contest too — is hardly the appropriate one. The real lesson that emerges from the Balakrishna Pillai episode lies in questioning why a legislator convicted for corruption and sentenced to five years of imprisonment should be allowed to contest an election. And any answer to such a question should involve an honest scrutiny of Section 8 (4) and whether our legislators really deserve the immunity offered by it.

28 APR 2001

THE HINDU

হাঙ্গামার আশঙ্কা তামিলনাড়ুতে

জয়ার সব মনোনয়ন খারিজ করল কমিশন

বিক্রমন নায়ার • চেম্বাই

২৪ এপ্রিল —এ আই ডি এম কে নেত্রী জয়ললিতা এ বার আর নির্বাচনে প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতা করতে পারছেন না। চারটি বিধানসভা কেন্দ্রে প্রার্থী হওয়ার জন্য মনোনয়নপত্র জমা দিয়েছিলেন তিনি। নির্বাচন কমিশন তাঁর সব ক'টি মনোনয়নপত্রই খারিজ করে দিয়েছে। জনপ্রতিনিধিত্ব আইন এবং ১৯৯৭ সালের নির্বাচনবিধি অনুযায়ী দণ্ডপ্রাপ্ত কোনও ব্যক্তি পরবর্তী ছয় বছর নির্বাচনে প্রার্থী হতে পারেন না। তানসি জমির মামলায় শাস্তি হওয়ার জয়ললিতার মনোনয়নপত্র সে কারণেই নির্বাচন কমিশন আজ খারিজ করে দিল। জয়ললিতার মনোনয়নপত্র খারিজ হওয়ার খবরে দলীয় সমর্থকরা ক্রুদ্ধ হয়ে বিক্ষোভ দেখাতে শুরু করলে তাদের নিয়ন্ত্রণে অন্তে পুলিশ এক জায়গায় লাঠি চালায়। কৃষ্ণগিরিতে রিটার্নিং অফিসারের বাসভবনের সামনে জয়ললিতার সমর্থকরা ধর্না শুরু করেছে। তাঁর প্রাণনাশের ভয়ঙ্কর ডেংগা হচ্ছে। সেখানে রাফ নামানো হয়েছে।

নির্বাচন কমিশনের রায় জানার পর জয়ললিতা বলেছেন, তিনি নিজে না দাঁড়ালেও এবারের নির্বাচনে তাঁর জোটের নেতৃত্বে তিনিই থাকছেন এবং জোটের তরফে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী পদের দাবিদার হিসাবেও তাঁকেই তুলে ধরা হবে। আজ রামনাথপুরমে এক নির্বাচনী জনসভায় জয়ললিতা বলেন, এ সবই করুণানিধির কাজ। আগে থেকেই ঠিক ছিল, আমাকে ভোট লড়তে দেওয়া হবে না। যাই হোক, ১০ তারিখ জনগণই এর জবাব দেবে। অন্য দিকে, তামিলনাড়ুর মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ডি এম কে নেতা করুণানিধি মন্তব্য করেছেন, নির্বাচনে প্রার্থী হতে না পারার কারণে জয়ললিতার পক্ষে সহানুভূতির চেউ ওঠার কোনও সম্ভাবনা তিনি দেখছেন না। চেম্বাই-সহ রাজ্যের বহু জায়গায় রাস্তায় পুলিশ টহল দিচ্ছে। জয়ললিতা যে চার কেন্দ্রে মনোনয়নপত্র জমা দিয়েছিলেন, সেই চার জেলাতেই অতিরিক্ত সি আর পি বাহিনী নামানো হয়েছে। গভর্নোরের আশঙ্কায় সরকারি বাসও বহু জায়গায় বন্ধ। তবে এখনও পর্যন্ত বড় কোনও গভর্নোরের খবর নেই।

জয়ললিতা এ বার নির্বাচনে লড়ার জন্য গোড়ায় দুটি কেন্দ্রে থেকে মনোনয়নপত্র পেশ করেছিলেন। কৃষ্ণগিরি ও আন্ডিপাট্টি। কিন্তু ওই দুটি আসনের রিটার্নিং অফিসার মনোনয়নপত্র খারিজ করতে পারেন ইঙ্গিত পেয়ে গতকাল তড়িঘড়ি আরও দুটি কেন্দ্রে (ভুবনগিরি ও পুটুকোট্টাই) মনোনয়নপত্র জমা দেন। আজ বিকালে ওই চার কেন্দ্রের রিটার্নিং অফিসারই তাঁর মনোনয়নপত্র খারিজ করে দেন। তার আগে অবশ্য কৃষ্ণগিরি ও আন্ডিপাট্টি কেন্দ্রের রিটার্নিং অফিসারদের কাছে জয়ললিতা মনোনয়নপত্র খারিজ না করার জন্য আবেদন করে শেষ চেষ্টা করেন। তাঁর হয়ে সওয়াল করেন পশ্চিমবঙ্গের প্রাক্তন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী সিদ্ধার্থস্বর রায়। কিন্তু শুনানির পর রিটার্নিং অফিসাররা মনোনয়নপত্র খারিজ করার সিদ্ধান্ত জানিয়ে দেন। ভুবনগিরি ও পুটুকোট্টাই কেন্দ্রের মনোনয়নপত্র খারিজ করে নির্বাচন কমিশন জানিয়েছে, আগের দুটি কেন্দ্রে মনোনয়নপত্র বাতিল হওয়ার এমনিতেই অন্য কেন্দ্রে মনোনয়নপত্র বাতিল হয়ে যায়। কালই ছিল মনোনয়নপত্র জমা দেওয়ার শেষ দিন। ফলে, এ বারের বিধানসভা নির্বাচনে জয়ললিতার পক্ষে আর প্রার্থী হওয়ার সম্ভাবনা রইল না।

শুধু জয়ললিতাই নয়, নির্বাচনবিধি বাধ সাধায় এ বার ভোটে প্রার্থী হতে পারছেন না প্রাক্তন কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রী সদাপতি মুখাইয়াও। আয়ের চাইতে অনেক বেশি সম্পত্তি থাকায় তাঁকে আদালত আগেই ২৫ মাসের কারাদণ্ড দিয়েছে। এ আই ডি এম কে গত বছরই তাঁকে বহিষ্কার করেছে। সদাপতি বিধানসভা কেন্দ্রের রিটার্নিং অফিসার তাঁর মনোনয়নপত্র খারিজ করে দেন। আরও দুই প্রার্থীর মনোনয়নপত্রও বাতিল হতে পারে। তাঁরা দুজনেই করলে বামবিরোধী জেটি ইউ ডি এফের প্রার্থী। কোট্টারাকারা কেন্দ্রে ইউ ডি এফের প্রার্থী করল কংগ্রেসের প্রাক্তন মন্ত্রী বালকৃষ্ণ পিল্লাইয়ের পাঁচ বছর কারাদণ্ড হয়েছে আঝামলাই বর্ধ মামলায়। কুইলন জেলার পাডালামে গৌরা আন্নার জে এস এস পার্টির কে কে সাজু দাঁড়িয়েছেন, দুর্নীতির দায়ে তাঁর আড়াই বছরের কারাদণ্ড হয়েছে। দুজনেই আপাতত জামিনে মুক্ত। পরশু বুধস্পতিবার তাঁদের মনোনয়নপত্র নিয়ে সিদ্ধান্ত জানা যাবে।

25 APR 2001

Court reserves orders on petition to enforce poll disqualification

J. Steeler
H10-1

By Our Staff Reporter M/A

CHENNAI, APRIL 20. The Madras High Court today reserved orders, without mentioning a date, on a writ petition seeking to declare that the "disqualification under Sections 8(1) to 8(3) of the Representation of the People Act cannot be stayed against the object of the Act, and should be implemented to promote the object of probity in public life.... irrespective of any pendency of appeal or suspension of sentence or stay of conviction."

The senior advocate, Mr. K.M. Vijayan, appearing for the petitioner-organisation — VOICE (Consumer Care Council) — wanted the High Court to direct the Returning Officers "to strictly comply with the August 28, 1997 orders of the Election Commission, relating to the disqualification of candidates."

But, maintaining that no *mandamus* could be issued to the Election Commission, the First Bench comprising the Chief Justice, Mr. N.K. Jain and Mr. Justice K. Sampath said, "everybody is expected to act as per law".

Refusing to give orders to either side on rejection or acceptance of nomination papers, the Judges, however, sought 'assistance without notice' from the Election Commission's counsel, Mr. G. Rajagopal. He in-

formed the court that a full Commission meeting of the poll authority held on April 17 in Delhi had 'reaffirmed' its circular and decided to follow the 1997 directive.

Plea against Jayalalitha dismissed

Earlier in the day, the First Bench dismissed a petition seeking directions to the Election Commission to disqualify the former Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalitha, from contesting Assembly, parliamentary and local body elections for six years. The petition was filed by Dr. Ching Chyang Ching belonging to Cuddalore.

Noting that accepting or rejecting nominations was within the domain of the Returning Officers of the respective constituency as per law, the First Bench dismissed the petition. "No doubt, in an appropriate case this court can direct the authorities if there is violation of any fundamental right. At the same time, public interest petitions cannot be used for publicity or political motive," it ruled.

Similarly, another public interest petition, which sought to declare Section 8(2) of the Representation of the People Act as unconstitutional, was also dismissed by the First Bench. As per the Section 8(2) of the RPA, a person convicted by a court for any offence

and sentenced to imprisonment for a period not less than three years shall be disqualified for a further period of five years.

The petitioner, Mr. A. Ganesan, advocate, wanted a directive to be issued to the Election Commission to accept the nomination of "any convicted person who had preferred an appeal, particularly in Tamil Nadu". The Bench said the subsections 1 to 4 of Section 8 in the RP Act were distinct and it could not be said to be "unreasonable classification".

On that ground Section 8(2) of the RPA cannot be declared as vague and uncertain as sought for by the petitioner, the Bench held, adding that as the election process had already been set in motion no such directive could be given at this juncture.

The First Bench also dismissed a petition, filed by Mr. Arul Dhas of Kanyakumari district, seeking to debar criminals aged 18 and above from exercising their franchise. It also wanted the Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu to be held only after an inquiry into the matter by the recently-formed Constitution Review Commission.

The Bench said a PIL should not be used for publicity and with political motive, and dismissed the petition.

THE HINDU

21 APR 2001

HPD

Ensure fair polls: EC

By Our Special Correspondent

17/4

NEW DELHI, APRIL 16. As the nominations began today for the May 10 Assembly polls in Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala and the Union Territory of Pondicherry, the Election Commission asked the political parties to work towards holding a free and fair poll.

Expressing serious concern over the prevailing situation in Darjeeling in West Bengal where an indefinite general strike was in progress, the Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. M.S. Gill, said candidates were finding it difficult to take part in the poll process.

After the meeting of the full Commission, Dr. Gill said the Commission was determined to have a free and fair poll in West Bengal. He appealed to all the political parties to cooperate with the Commission. The Chief Electoral Officer had been asked to review the arrangements and report to the Commission.

The Commission's meeting was attended by the two colleagues of the CEC, the Election Commissioners, Mr. J.M. Lyngdoh and Mr. T.S. Krishnamurthy.

The poll panel also decided to appoint an additional poll observer in Kasargode, Kannur and Kozhikode districts of Kerala which have reported violence in the recent past. The Congress had also demanded deployment of enough paramilitary forces in the three districts.

Dr. Gill said he had requested the Chief Ministers of Punjab, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Karnataka to provide security forces for the coming elections. In a related development, the Kerala Government has moved out 80 returning officers and assistant returning officers from their postings in respective home districts in accordance with a directive of the Commission.

The Commission has also notified Lok Sabha by-elections in Midnapur, Tiruchi and Shahjahanpur.

THE HINDU

17 APR 2001

Jayalalitha files papers in Krishnagiri

By D. Sivarajan HV-1

KRISHNAGIRI, APRIL 16. The AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, today filed her nomination papers for contesting from the Krishnagiri constituency.

Ms. Jayalalitha, who reached Krishnagiri on Sunday night, drove to the RDO's office this afternoon and handed over the nomination to the Returning Officer, Mr. Mathivanan.

She was accompanied by her close associate, Ms. Sasikala, the party organising secretary, Mr. M. Thambidurai, the Lok Sabha member, Mr. K. Malaisamy, and her advocate, Mr. N. Jothi.

A huge crowd of supporters, including volunteers of the AIADMK, the TMC, the PMK and the Left parties, had gathered outside the RDO's office waving their party flags. Evidently enthused by the crowd, the AIADMK leader waved back. As the police presence was minimal, the crowd became unmanageable and the convoy could not move.

When reporters sought her view on the possibility of rejection of her nomination, Ms. Jayalalitha said she would be subjected to disqualification if she answered any question within the Returning Officer's premises. However, approached when she had crossed the gate, Ms. Jayalalitha merely said: "I am not making any comments today about anything."

Mr. Jothi said all factors had been taken into account while filing the papers. "I am hundred per cent sure that the nomination would be accepted."

The Returning Officer said all decisions would be taken on the basis of the manual provided to him by the Election Commission. "The moment the election notification was made, I cease to be a staff of the State Govern-



The AIADMK general secretary, Ms. J. Jayalalitha, filing her nomination papers for the Krishnagiri seat with the Returning Officer, Mr. M. Mathivanan, on Monday. — Photo: P. Goutham

ment and I am answerable only to the Election Commission," he said. He also made it clear that he was not being subjected to any kind of pressure from any quarter and that acceptance or rejection of the nomination would be done only when all the nominations were taken up for scrutiny on April 24. Ms. Jayalalitha's nomination papers were signed by four proposers, including a woman. Ms. Jayalalitha took an oath as required by the nomination process.

The AIADMK leader later left for Madurai. She is expected to file her nomination in Andipatti tomorrow.

Alternative candidate

Interestingly, the AIADMK Dharmapuri district secretary, Mr. V. Govindarajan, also filed his nomination as an alternative candidate for the constituency.

Our Madurai Staff Reporter writes:

Ms. Jayalalitha arrived here

this evening by road from Krishnagiri.

'No change in 1997 instructions'

NEW DELHI, APRIL 16. There is no change in the Election Commission's 1997 instructions that a convicted person can contest polls only when the conviction, and not only the sentence, has been suspended by a higher court, EC sources said here.

The Commission had a detailed discussion this morning on the April 11 Madras High Court judgment. Later, it was indicated that there was no change in the Commission's 1997 instructions to the Returning Officers that they should not accept nominations of people whose conviction had not been stayed by a higher court. "There are clear instructions in this regard issued in 1997 and the returning officers should go by these," the sources said. — UNI

EC to hold meeting on Jaya case

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 13. - Even though the Election Commission maintained silence on the Madras High Court judgement, on the AIADMK leader Miss Jayalalitha's petition seeking suspension of her conviction in the Tansi land



deal cases, it is likely to hold an internal full commission meeting tomorrow, sources said.

Referring to the case earlier this week, while the court order was awaited, Chief Election Commissioner Mr MS Gill had clearly stated that the commission would follow the law laid down by it with regard to disqualification of poll candidates facing court conviction.

"There is a law for this. Our stand of 1997 holds good and those instructions and guidelines still apply," he said while declining to elaborate any further.

THE STATESMAN

14 APR 2001

Gill tells CEOs to ensure poll code



Dr. MS Gill

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 26. — The Election Commission has directed chief electoral officers of states and Union territories going to polls to ensure strict implementation of model code of conduct to reduce cost of electioneering and maintaining law and order.

Expressing concern over the violation of provisions of model code by political parties, candidates, party workers and supporters during recent rounds of general elections and by-polls, the EC asked the CEOs to instruct returning officers and other officials to invoke local police, municipal acts and other relevant laws to ensure strict compliance of the code.

"Taking advantage of loopholes in the existing law, particularly in the absence of any ceiling on election expenses by political parties, election campaign by political parties, candidates and their supporters have become highly expensive, giving no

heed to limits of election expenses fixed by law for the contesting candidates," EC secretary, Mr KJ Rao said.

The commission reiterated that there shall be no cut-outs, gates and arches erected by candidates, parties or their supporters, writing slogans, pasting posters, campaigning on public and private walls, and no large procession shall accompany a candidate when he goes to file his nomination or take part in other poll proceedings.

The process should be enforced as per local laws.

The EC will severely deal with any lack of effort on the part of officials.

Private TV channels

Dr MS Gill, today cautioned private TV channels against airing programmes or advertisements which could incite violence or cause breach

of law and order during the Assembly polls in Tamil Nadu.

Talking to reporters here after a two-hour-long all-party meeting to discuss the run-up to polls in the state, Dr Gill said Sections 3, 5, 6 and 8 of the Cable Television Network Act of 1995 and the Regulation Amendment Act 2000 clearly laid down restrictions on programmes or advertisements that might encourage violence or went against maintenance of law and order.

While the designate authorities under the Act had not been identified earlier, the DMs, police commissioner and the SPs have been empowered to take action against such violations, Dr Gill said, adding that there were specific penalties under the Act.

The Act is bound to restrain private channels like Sun TV and Jaya TV, which belong to powerful politicians. While Sun TV is run by a close relative of the Tamil Nadu chief minister

and DMK president, Mr M Karunanidhi, Jaya TV has the blessings of the AIADMK general secretary, Miss Jayalalitha.

Mr Gill said while there had been complaints about political parties using TV channels rather aggressively against rivals, nothing could be done to curtail such tendencies in the past.

Dr Gill said a notification would be issued soon with regard to the elections in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam and Kerala, and the union territory of Pondicherry.

Since the term of the Tamil Nadu Assembly would be the first to end on 21 May — the election dates of the other states will be fixed accordingly, he said.

All political parties in the five states had requested that elections be held on a single day, he said.

On convicted persons standing for elections vis-a-vis the Representation of People's Act, Dr Gill said in

August 1997, the CEC had issued a clarification to all returning officers in the country. "Our clarifications stand," he said.

"I have been saying consistently and I will say it again. All laws for elections and clarifications that we have given with regard to RPA will apply."

The RPA assumes significance in view of Miss Jayalalitha being convicted and sentenced by special courts in three cases.

The CEC said he had heard the reservations expressed by the various political parties with regard to electronic voting machines and would discuss the issue with his colleagues after his return to New Delhi. Except for the ruling DMK, all other political parties were against electronic voting, he said.

He said electronic voting had been successful in the past and all political parties in West Bengal and Kerala had sought EVMs.

THE STATESMAN

27 MAR 2001

Poll panel for single-day election in West Bengal

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 11

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS across the State will be held on the same day, Chief Electoral Officer Sabyasachi Sen said today after a meeting with Election Commissioner T.S. Krishnamurthy and district magistrates.

The day has not been fixed but the Election Commission wants a single-day poll. Krishnamurthy was here in the city today to brief the CEO and district magistrates on poll preparations. The meeting at Writers' Buildings, with 18 DMs and three District Electoral Officers (Director of Panchayats, Land Acquisition Collector, DLRs), took two-and-a-half hours.

Krishnamurthy is believed to have iterated what his colleague, Lyngdoh, stressed a couple of days ago: the EC wants its rules followed for an impartial election. The EC's repeated pleas for strict enforcement of administrative machinery seem to reflect apprehensions of law-and-order problems.

The DMs have been asked to prepare a list of sensitive areas, which will influence police deployments.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 MAR 2001

Assembly polls on 10 May

571 STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE 1/4

NEW DELHI, March 31. — The Assembly elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and the Union Territory of Pondicherry will be held on 10 May. Announcing the schedule at a press conference this afternoon, the Chief Election Commissioner, Mr MS Gill, said the model code of conduct would come into effect from tomorrow. The two Election Commissioners, Mr TS Krishnamurty and Mr JM Lyngdoh, were present.

The poll notification will be issued on 16 April. While the last date for filing nominations is 23 April, scrutiny of nomination papers will be conducted on 24 April. The last date for withdrawal of candidature is 26 April. The counting of votes will be on 13 May. The entire election procedure will be over by 18 May, keeping in mind re-poll if necessary.

The term of the present Assemblies in West Bengal and Pondicherry ends on 9 June, in Assam 11 June and in Kerala on 28 May. In Tamil Nadu, the House has to be constituted by 21 May, as the tenure of the Assembly ends on that day. Mr Gill announced by-elections to three Lok Sabha constituencies — Midnapore in West Bengal (the seat fell vacant due to the death of Indrajit Gupta), Tiruchirapalli in Tamil

Nadu (death of PR Kumaramangalam), Shahjhanpur in Uttar Pradesh (death of Jitendra Prasada). The by-elections will be held along with the Assembly polls.

By-elections will also be held in two Assembly constituencies — Kshetrigao in Manipur and Banamalipur in Tripura. In Banamalipur, the schedule will be the same as that for Assembly elections. In Kshetrigao, scrutiny of nominations will take place on 25 April and the last date for withdrawal of candidature is 27 April. Here polling will take place on 11 May.

The CEC said EVMs would be used in all the constituencies of West Bengal, TN, Kerala and Pondicherry. In Assam, EVMs are going to be used for the first time. Only four Assembly seats in and around Guwahati have been selected. The constituencies are Jalukbari, Dispur, Guwahati East and West.

The voters will be required to produce photo I cards or additional alternative methods of identification as prescribed by the commission, Mr Gill said. By-election to the Sabarkantha Assembly seat in Gujarat will not be held now. Assembly by-elections in Wachi, Tral, Doru and Habbakadal in J&K will be held later.

■ Seats deal will take some more time:
Kamal Nath, page 3

THE STATESMAN

17 APR 1960

55 per cent turnout in by-polls

Police open fire in Asthawan, Ramgarh to thwart booth capture attempts

New Delhi, February 19. **VC-2** POLLING IN the by-elections to 11 assembly constituencies spread over eight states went off peacefully with an estimated 55 per cent people casting their votes.

The polls will decide the fate of Chief Ministers Babu Lal Marandi and Ajit Jogi (Chhattisgarh) among others.

The police, however, had to open fire to thwart booth-capturing attempts at Asthawan in Bihar and Ramgarh in Jharkhand.

Bihar Director General of Police R R Prasad said the police had to open fire at in Asthawan when anti-socials opened fire to grab a booth. He said RJD supporters tore around 50 ballot papers at

Nehruth village in the constituency.

In Ramgarh constituency of Jharkhand, police fired in the air to disperse a group of 12 people who stormed a booth at Kanko Badh village and pelted stones at security personnel, Chief Minister Babulal Marandi is seeking his entry into the assembly from this constituency.

An estimated 50 per cent of the electorate exercised their franchise to decide the fate of Marandi, who is pitted against CPI's Natara Begum and JMM's Arijun Ram Mahato.

In the Marwahi constituency, where Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Ajit Jogi is pitted against BJP's Amar Singh Kumar, 50 per cent

votes were cast. **20-2** Marwahi constituency had to go to the polls following the resignation of BJP's Ram Dayal Jikey who vacated the seat to enable Jogi to enter the assembly.

About 67 per cent votes were cast in the Maithia assembly constituency of Punjab. The seat fell vacant after the death of cabinet minister and senior Akali Dal leader Parkash Singh Maithia. The party has fielded RS MP Raj Mohinder Singh while Sawinder Singh will contest on Congress ticket.

Twenty-eight candidates are in play in Bhartana, Siwalkha and Sarayan in Uttar Pradesh. Rajasthan's Hindal constituency is set to witness a keen contest with

two Gujjara, Congress candidate Ram Karan Gujjar and BJP's Nathu Singh Gujjar, in a neck-and-neck race.

Shahpur in Madhya Pradesh will witness a straight contest between BJP candidate Ramdas Shivhare and Shriram Patel (Congress).

The by-poll was required due to the death of sitting Congress MLA Sanyogitadevi Deshmukh.

The constituencies that went to polls were Giddalur, Badvel (Andhra Pradesh), Aathawan (Bihar), Marwahi (Chhattisgarh), Ramgarh (Jharkhand), Hindoli (Kajasthan), Kadamtala (Tripura), Shahpur (Madhya Pradesh), Siwalkha, Saraya, Bhartana (Uttar Pradesh) and Maithia (Punjab).

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 FEB 2001

Tight security for by-elections

NEW DELHI, FEB. 18. Tight security has been provided in all the sensitive seats where Assembly by-elections are being held tomorrow. The banned Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) has called for a poll boycott in Ramgarh where the Jharkhand Chief Minister, Mr. Babulal Marandi, is pitted against Mrs. Nadira Begum, widow of the CPI MLA, Shabbir Ahmad Quraishi, and the JMM's Mr. Arjun Ram Mahato. Of the 261 polling stations, 103 have been identified as "highly sensitive" and 52 as 'sensitive'. Thirty companies of police, including paramilitary forces, have been deployed in the constituency.

A red alert has been sounded in the entire Ashthawan constituency in Nalanda district of Bihar. Shoot-at-sight orders have been issued to prevent booth-capturing. The constituency has 255 polling booths and 1,80,262 voters. The Samata party and the Lok Jan Shakti, though National Democratic Alliance partners, are in the fray as is the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). The poll here follows the death of R.P. Sharma, an independent.

Mr. Jogi will take on the BJP's Mr. Amar Singh Kusro in Marwahi where 29 of the 190 polling stations have been classified as sensitive. Mr. Ramdayal Uike had resigned from the Assembly after being elected on the BJP ticket from this seat. Eight mobile teams and two companies of special armed forces have been deployed in the constituency which has

1,30,225 voters. The Election Commission has deputed observers for Bhartana in Etawah, Siwalkhas in Meerut and Sarsawa in Saharanpur districts in Uttar Pra-

des, with a total of 711,535 voters. Electronic voting machines will be used in the 447 polling centres. The State Samajwadi Party chief, Mr. Ram Sharan Das Gujjar, campaigned vigorously to enable his son's entry into the assembly from Sarsawa, where the BJP MLA, Nirbhay Pal Sharma, was murdered. The Rashtriya Lok Dal leader, Mr. Ajit Singh, has a major stake in Siwalkhas, which will test his strength in western Uttar Pradesh before next year's Assembly elections.

In Punjab's Majitha constituency, though there are five candidates, a straight contest is likely between the Congress and the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal. The seat fell vacant following the death of Cabinet Minister and senior Akali Dal leader, Prakash Singh Majitha. The SAD has fielded Rajya Sabha member, Mr. Raj Mohinder Singh Majitha, while Mr. Swinder Singh Kathunangal will contest the seat on the Congress ticket. The campaign was high-pitched in this constituency of 1,23,000 voters. The administration has thrown a security cordon in all the 122 villages. Three companies of the CRPF have been deployed in polling stations which have been identified as very sensitive.

In Andhra Pradesh, there are about 260,000 voters in 368 booths in Giddalur and Badvel. A total of 21 candidates are in the fray in both constituencies with the main fight between candidates of the ruling Telugu Desam Party and the Congress. Elaborate security arrangements for peaceful polling are in place.

There are 1,29,000 voters in Hindoli in Rajasthan. Of the 169 polling stations, 31 are hyper-sen-

sitive and 17 sensitive. Five candidates are in the fray in this seat, considered a Congress bastion. The contest features Mr. Ramkaran Gurjar (Congress), Mr. Nathulal Gurjar (BJP) and Mr. Ramesh Chandra Meena, independent who broke away from the Congress.

The fate of Mr. Sriram Patil of the Congress and Mr. Ramdas Shihare of the BJP, among four candidates in Shahpur constituency in Madhya Pradesh, will be decided by 1,33,000 voters. Mr. Gokul Singh and Mr. Santosh Singh are contesting as independents.

The Kadamtala seat in Tripura is to witness a multi-cornered contest among the ruling CPI(M)-led Left Front candidate Mr. Subodh Nath, former Assembly Speaker, Mr. Jyotirmoy Nath of the Congress, the BJP's Karuna Nath and Mr. Sundar Mukherjee of the Janata Dal (U). There are 28,741 voters. — UNI

Ramgarh polling booths declared sensitive

RANCHI, FEB. 18. The Election Commission has declared sensitive all the 261 polling stations in the Ramgarh constituency going to bypolls tomorrow.

According to the State Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Arvind Kumar Panday, the concerned Hazaribagh district administration has been directed to ensure adequate deployment of armed police personnel at all the polling stations in the Ramgarh constituency. — UNI

THE HINDU

19 FEB 2001

Violence feared during by-polls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE 51-8

PATNA, Feb. 18. — Fear of violence looms large over Asthawan in Bihar and Ramgarh in Jharkhand — the constituencies going to the polls tomorrow.

The state governments have decided to deploy armed forces at all the polling stations and asked them to fire at anybody trying to rig the elections.

While Ramgarh has a history of Naxalite violence, all the 225 polling booths in Asthawan have been declared sensitive by the Election Commission. The MCC has already issued a poll boycott call.

The Jharkhand chief minister is seeking election in Ramgarh. Since the BJP has its high stake involved here several high-profile party leaders campaigned in the constituency. Challenging Mr Babulal Marandi is Mr Arjun Mahto of the JMM-S, a force to reckon with.

Asthawan was, otherwise, an inconsequential constituency.

19/2
But the two NDA stalwarts, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan and Mr Nitish Kumar are locked in a war of supremacy here. They have fielded candidates of their respective parties. The Samata Party has fielded Mr Satish Kumar while Mr Paswan's Lok Janshakti has fielded Mr AK Singh.

On the other hand, Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav left no stones unturned to ensure the victory of his party nominee Mr Pushpanjay. The RJD chief will try to use the Asthawan result to prove the point that he continued to be the strongest leader in Bihar.

The politics in Jharkhand influences that in Bihar and vice versa. It became evident when the BJP disowned the Lok Janshakti nominee and decided to support the Samata candidate in Asthawan.

It was because both the Mahtos and Kurmis have a sizeable presence in Ramgarh. And the Mahto votes are crucial for Mr Marandi.

The BJP realised that the Samata, with its support base

among Mahtos and Kurmis may backstab Mr Marandi in Ramgarh if it doesn't support the Samata nominee in Asthawan.

The Samata Party had already threatened to oppose Mr Marandi if the BJP doesn't support it in Asthawan. The ground realities in Ramgarh

forced the state BJP chief Mr Nandkishore Yadav — who is otherwise close to Mr Paswan — to support to Samata nominee in Asthawan.

Both the Samata and the Lok Janshakti have fielded Kurmi candidates in the Kurmi-Koeri dominated constituency. The split in the Kurmi-Koeri votes may prove dear to both the parties.

Mr Laloo Yadav has fielded a Bhumihar who banks on the Yadav, Muslim, a section of



Mr Babulal Marandi

backward votes and the votes of Bhumihars. Pushpanjay is the son of RP Sharma whose death necessitated the by-polls here.

"The police won't hesitate to fire at those trying to capture booths and rig polls," the Bihar DGP Mr RR Prasad said. The Jharkhand

administration too has deployed mounted military police in Ramgarh to deal with the Naxalites.

Cong leader held captive?: The Andhra Pradesh Congress today alleged that the TDP workers had held CLP leader Dr YS Rajashekher Reddy captive for several hours last night at Patha Tiruvengalapuram in Badvel constituency where by-election will be held tomorrow along with Giddalur. The

Congress spokesman Mr K Keshava Rao appealed to the people in both the constituencies to maintain peace during polling and exercise their franchise in a free and democratic manner. But TDP leaders today alleged that Dr Reddy was trying to create panic among the voters and urged the EC to restrain him from entering the constituency.

Liquor seized in Majitha: Forty-six people involved in distribution and distillation of liquor in Majitha Assembly constituency have been arrested in the past 24 hours. Majitha is going to the polls tomorrow. Police said over 300,000 ml of liquor meant for distribution among voters was seized from some villages in the Majitha segment. So far 101 licensed weapons had been deposited with the police here. Raids had also been conducted at the houses of 130 history-sheeters.

Marwahi security: Security has been beefed up for tomorrow's polling in Marwahi constituency of Bilaspur, where

the Chhattisgarh chief minister Mr Ajit Jogi will make his first bid to enter the Assembly in a five-cornered contest.

Besides Mr Jogi, others in the fray are Mr Amar Singh Kusro (BJP), Mr Deendayal Otti (BSP) and two Independents. The seat fell vacant when the BJP legislator Mr Ramdayal Uike resigned to join the Congress.

EVMs in Hindoli: Amid tight security, 129,000 voters would exercise their franchise through electronic voting machines in tomorrow's by-election to the Hindoli Assembly seat in Rajasthan.

The Hindoli seat fell vacant following the resignation by the Congress MLA Ms Rama Pilot who was elected to Lok Sabha.

Though the main contest will be between Congress and the BJP nominees Mr Ramkaran Gurjar and Mr Nathulal Gurjar respectively, the jumping in the fray of the Congress rebel Mr Ramesh Meena could make it a triangular contest.