

Major cuts in court fees proposed

Anindya Sengupta in Kolkata

DRAFT BILL

Dec. 9. — The lawyers' agitation over the court-fee hike has led to a drastic scaling down of rates, it is learnt.

The court fee Ordinance, which is to be introduced in the ongoing Assembly session in the form of a Bill, has been amended to a significant extent, sources told The Statesman.

The amendments have been incorporated in a draft Bill that's going to be circulated to legislators tomorrow.

A downward revision has been effected with regard to court fees for plaint written statements pertaining to civil suits, barring suit values of above Rs 20,000.

Major reductions have been made in ad valorem fees leviable on the institution of suits.

However, court fees relating to writ petitions under Articles 226 and 227, under the jurisdiction of the High Court, have been left untouched at Rs 500 and Rs 200, respectively.

No change has been brought about in fees relating to criminal cases and *vakalatnamas*, it is learnt.

The Bar Council's meeting with the chief minister, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, and its decision to continue with the lawyers' strike are learnt to have forced the government to give a rethink on the issue.

Plaint written statement:

Suit value
Rs 1000
Rs 7,500;
Rs 10,000;
Rs 20,000;

Ad valorem fees:

Between Re 1 and Rs 100:
Between Rs 101 and Rs 200:
Between Rs 3000 and Rs 3100;
Between Rs 5000 and Rs 5100;
Between Rs 10,000 and 10,500;
Between Rs 1 lakh and 1.05 lakh;

Proposed	Current
Rs 10	Rs 40
Rs 16	Rs 75
Rs 30	Rs 110
Rs 50	Rs 150
Rs 10	Rs 40
Rs 20	Rs 80
Rs 288	Rs 1240
Rs 420	Rs 2040
Rs 610	Rs 3860
Rs 8750	Rs 12,518

10 DEC 2002

UK lends hand to Bengal's lay-off scheme

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, December 4

NARENDRA MODI may not be the model Chief Minister but the Left Front has found enough merit in his Government's formula for compensating dismissed workers of the State's sick units.

If the formula is borrowed from Gujarat, the money will come from the UK. Industry Minister Nirupam Sen today formally announced the State's acceptance of £20 million (about Rs 150 crore) from the UK's Department of International Development. The money will help the Government meet the golden handshake packages in restructuring of 17 public enterprises.

Each worker/employee will be paid 45 days wage for each year of the service completed and 15 days for each year of the remaining service. Each worker/employee retiring early would be given a free health insurance scheme (covering the spouse also) with a compensation limit of Rs 50,000 till retirement age and an accident insurance policy.

The decision to provide the golden handshake was taken by the Cabinet Standing Committee on August 6. The formal announcement has come much later because of the Central Government's delay in giving the go ahead to the deal. Central nod is a must for foreign grants and assistance.

Of the 17 loss-making units targeted in the first phase, three will be closed down, four will function with a leaner workforce and the remaining restructured after divestment of shares of up to 74 per cent.

Hope for the poor

THE UK may grant Rs 650 crore for West Bengal over the next seven years for the development of poor, Clare Short said on Wednesday.

The grant would come under the project, Kolkata Urban Services for the Poor and cover 39 municipalities in the KMDA area. The funds will be channeled through the DFID programme in India. Short visited a Titagarh slum on Wednesday.

HTC, Kolkata

The units to be closed are Indian Paper Pulp, Sunderbans Sugarbeet Processing and one unit of the West Bengal Ceramic Development Corporation. While all 928 employees of the first two would be paid off in accordance with the package, 94 of the 96 employees of the third unit will be absorbed in other units of the corporation.

Units that will remain under the State's control are Durgapur Chemicals, Westinghouse Saxby Farmer, Britannia Engineering and Gluconet Health. The remaining 10 units, with a workforce of 2,500, are to be taken up under DFID's "business optimisation" programme.

Bearing in mind that even the slightest misjudgment in selective trimming of the workforce may prove dear, the Government will hire experts, who would have the final say in the staff to be retrenched.

4,000 to lose civic body jobs

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Dec. 26. — The ills of overstaffing civic bodies, mostly Left Front-controlled ones, have come to the fore and the government has ordered retrenchment of 4,000 civic staff illegally appointed after 1991. The government admits that their appointment was "politically motivated".

KMC recently announced a voluntary retirement plan for its excess staff.

Municipal affairs minister Mr Ashok Bhattacharya said: "Many municipal

boards have appointed staff without taking the government's approval. These men used to work as casual employees in different municipalities."

He added: "We have slashed allocations for wage bills of civic bodies guilty of appointing employees illegally. One of them is the LF-controlled Rajarhat municipality in North 24-Parganas."

The municipal affairs department has threatened to retrench 235 staff in Howrah Municipal Corporation's conservancy department who were appointed without government approval. It has also slashed funds to HMC. The

Statesman had carried a report on illegal appointments in the civic body.

Mr Bhattacharya said the municipalities employ excess staff who are paid for virtually no work. "We want to utilise these staff by re-deploying them in departments where there is work. For instance, these staff may be transferred to the tax collection department."

The government has asked the civic bodies to generate more revenue by increasing tax collection. Hence, the need for more staff in this area. The minister said a large number of the 50,000-strong KMC workforce is also excess.

THE STATESMAN

27 DEC 2002

Three held for Nadia church attack

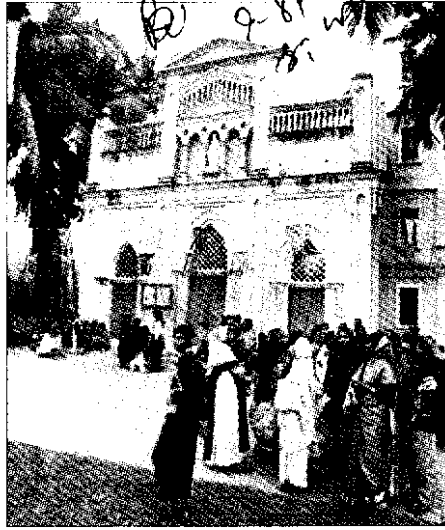
Rejib Chatterjee in Krishnagar

Dec. 26. — Three criminals have been arrested for attacking a church in Maliapota, but police suspect the other attackers have fled to Bangladesh with the loot.

The SP, Mr JP Singha Roy, today denied that the attack was in retaliation against the conversion of villagers to Christianity. "The attack was intended to loot the money and valuables... Police haven't found any relation between the accused and any religious outfit," he said.

Latif Sheikh and Chhunat Meer, he said, were picked up from Somepukur and Subal Ghosh was arrested from Sutia. Some others who were detained yesterday were released today. Police are raiding Maliapota and adjacent areas such as Ichatta, Nakashipara and Chapra.

But police feel most of the criminals have managed to cross the Indo-Bangla border, just five km from the church.



The church that came under attack. — The Statesman

The SP said: "Vigil along the border needs to be intensified to stop criminals

from escaping... We've discussed this with the BSF's deputy commandant." The border was reportedly sealed today. The police picket outside the church would remain.

Why was Christmas-eve selected for the attack? Mr Singha Roy said: "The church and the priest's house are very secure and villagers usually deposit their valuables there. But security was a bit lax on Christmas-eve and the criminals took advantage of that." A probe into the alleged police inaction has been started, a police officer said. The alleged assault on Father Francis Biswas by some policemen will also be probed.

DIG (BSF) Mr AK Ghosh, local MP Mr Satyabrata Mukherjee and panchayat sabbhadhipati Mr Raghunath Biswas today met the chief priest and condemned the attack. In Kolkata, the DIG (HQ), Mr Narayan Ghosh, said: "The three accused were wanted in dacoity and arson cases."

Another report on page 6

Buddha offers to free KLO suspects

Carrot & stick policy rolls

PROBIR PRAMANIK
IN SILIGURI AND
AVIJIT SINHA IN JALPAIGURI

Dec. 22: Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today laid out his government's carrot and stick policy to curb the rising militancy in north Bengal.

He offered to release the jailed activists of the Kamtapur Liberation Front but said he would not talk to the militants unless they gave up arms "unconditionally".

Wrapping up his two-day, whirlwind tour of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri, Bhattacharjee told reporters in Siliguri that his government was thinking of releasing some 100 suspected militants lodged in jails in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. "We will set them free if they promise to snap all links with the militant organisation and return to the mainstream."

The chief minister said some top KLO militants had communicated their willingness to surrender, but made it clear that the government would not talk to them unless they laid down arms, without condition.

One of the militants, Tarzan, had already turned himself over to the security forces. "These militants are a bunch of cowards. They must drop their guns on their own if they want to talk to us," he told a rally in Jalpaiguri.

Bhattacharjee did not say when or where the other "willing" militants would surrender. Nor would he give details of the modalities the government had worked out with them.

A police official said Tarzan or Himadri Das, a KLO deputy commandant, had turned himself over to the forces last month, but the surrender had been kept

under wraps so as not to alert the militant organisation. "We had hoped that a few top KLO men would follow suit and any leak of the news would deter them," the official said.

It is not clear whether Tarzan is still in custody or has been set free. It is also unclear what prompted the chief minister to break the news today. The so-called deputy commandant was believed to be the No. 11 in the KLO organisation after Jeevan Singh, the commander-in-chief.

Bhattacharjee accused the Kamtapur People's Party of being "in cahoots" with the militant organisation. "Though the KPP projects itself as a political party, both the KLO and the KPP have a common financial backer," he said, hinting at their alleged links with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence.

He said the KLO could not have sustained as a militant organisation without ISI's backing. "ISI is helping the KLO spread terror in north Bengal."

Bhattacharjee said the KPP leadership had never condemned the KLO, a charge the CPM had made earlier but was hotly denied by KPP chief Atul Roy.

"By day, they operate as KPP, but as KLO by night. The KPP is nothing but the political wing of the militant KLO," he charged.

Earlier, the chief minister, inaugurating a bridge over the Siltorsha river in Jalpaiguri, lambasted the KPP for taking up cudgels on behalf of the ethnic Rajbanshis. "The KPP claims to be the party of Rajbanshis, but it is the CPM which has always worked for them." Referring to the militants hiding in Bhutan, the chief minister said he had asked the Centre to take it up with the Bhutanese government.



Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee inaugurating the bridge over the Siltorsha in Jalpaiguri. Picture by Avijit Sarkar

Bridge in place, Basu missing

ANIRBAN CHAUDHURI

Alipurduar, Dec. 22: He crossed the bridge after dreaming about it for over three decades but would have liked to do so with Jyoti Basu.

For Sambhu Pal, an 81-year-old doctor from Alipurduar, the inauguration of the Siltorsha bridge today by Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is the culmination of a 34-year-old struggle that found recognition following the intervention of the chief minister's predecessor.

"Although I am happy that the bridge

has finally been opened, my mind is heavy that Jyoti Basu is not present," said Pal, a founder-member of the Siltorsha Bridge Sangram Committee that has been spearheading the movement for the bridge since 1968.

In 1994, at the Jalpaiguri Circuit House, Pal met Basu, then chief minister, who promised to look into the matter. "The following year, at the Holong Tourist Lodge in Jaldapara, Basu told me that Siltorsha bridge would definitely be constructed and that he would cross it with Pal on the day of its

inauguration," Pal said.

Pal did cross the bridge today, but had Bhattacharjee for company instead.

The old bridge was washed away by a devastating flood in 1949 and since then, there has been no link between Sonapur and Falakata. "Government officials had often told me that there was no way a bridge could be built on the dragon-like river," Pal said.

The doctor has only one wish: the bridge be renamed Sangram Setu to recognise the struggle of the people of the Dooars.

Regulator prescribes single power rate

Subsidy ghost confronts govt

OUR BUREAU

Dec. 16: In the eyes of the independent commission that fixes power tariff in Bengal, all consumers are equal.

It issued an order today fixing one rate, forcing the state's communist government to decide if it is prepared to live with this equality.

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's government would now have to choose if it would accept the order that comes laden with political trouble or would take upon itself the burden of subsidy which power utilities — CESC Ltd in Calcutta and the West Bengal State Electricity Board in the rest of the state — now bear through cross-subsidisation.

Cross-subsidy means one section of consumers pays more for another section to pay less. Traditionally, farmers and domestic consumers have paid less than the cost of electricity and commercial customers more.

"I have not heard of such a tariff rate in India that provides for a single price for all consumers," said a Central Electricity Regulatory Commission member.

Earlier, power minister Mrinal Banerjee had indicated the state would move court if the commission ended cross-subsidy.

Following the order of the West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission issued in connection with a court case involving CESC, all consumers will

POWER EQUITY

One rate for all consumers

- For 2000-01 — Rs 3.81 per unit
- For 2001-02 — Rs 3.90

What does it mean?

All consumers, mostly domestic, paying below this rate will have to pay arrears for the two years. Commercial consumers will get refund

When do the rates take effect?

- You will have to pay at Rs 3.90 per unit from February 2003
- You will have to start paying arrears from April 2003
- Refunds will also begin in April
- Both arrears payment and refunds will be spread over two years

have to pay at the same rate of Rs 3.90 per unit consumed from February next year unless the government decides to subsidise any category/categories of consumers.

The total subsidy runs into several hundred crores of rupees, which the government — unable to pay additional dearness allowance to its employees — would find hard to swallow.

On the other side, an association of consumers has threatened to call a strike next month.

"The tariff can be challenged in court if the state government wants to intervene," sources in the Union power ministry said.

CESC managing director Sumantra Banerjee was not hopeful that cross-subsidisation would end in a hurry. "Once anyth-

ing goes to court, it takes a long time to settle the issue," he said.

In March 2001, all states had agreed in principle to bear the cost of subsidy. Addressing that meeting of chief ministers, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee had said: "Subsidies in deserving cases should be provided explicitly through budgetary support. They cannot be sustained by irrational cross-subsidisation or at the expense of the viability of the state electricity board."

An extent of the subsidisation is available in the tariffs now charged. The highest rate of tariff charged by CESC is Rs 6.61 and the lowest Rs 1.73. The rates in SEB areas are Rs 3.66 and 99 paise (agriculture). Although only CESC was involved in the court case, the principle followed by the commission here will apply to SEB too.

The commission's order came after a Supreme Court directive asking it to fix the tariffs for 2000-01 and 2001-02.

In setting a single rate, the commission cited the court's observation that under the Electricity Regulatory Commission Act, consumers should be charged only for the power consumed on the basis of average cost of supply without discrimination. The commission has fixed Rs 3.81 as the tariff for 2000-01 and Rs 3.90 for 2001-02. As the tariff for the current financial year has not been worked out yet, Rs 3.90 will be the rate. (See P 10)

17 DEC 2002

Unplanned eviction

Left cannot hide its embarrassment

The question is whether eviction of nearly 30,000 people along the Beliaghata canal would have taken place had it been without the assurance of a several hundred crore assistance from the Asian Development Bank on augmenting Kolkata's water supply and improving drainage. No one disputes the fact that these families living in shanties are creating serious problems for the civic administration by off-loading garbage into the canal. But who put them there in the first place? The answer: the Left Front itself when it needed to augment its vote banks. It is ridiculous for Ashok Bhattacharya, urban development minister, to claim they are "outsiders". Of course they are, but they consist of migrants from North and South 24-Parganas and Midnapore as well as refugees from Bangladesh all in search of a living and who in the early eighties, received the state government's patronage to the extent of being granted ration cards and voter identity documents. That the CPI which controls these pockets is faced with serious embarrassment is of no concern to those whose immediate concern now is to grab ADB funds.

That raises the crucial question of whether any planning preceded the Beliaghata evictions. The Khal Bachao Committee headed by a former mayor as well as the CPI would say no. The committee has been writing to the government on the need to improve the navigability of the canal to pave the way for water transport — without success. Now the lure of foreign assistance has caused both government and corporation to sit up and use force against which the settlers could offer feeble resistance for lack of political support. The noise made by both Left Front and Trinamul are hypocritical; this has been a joint operation in which both stand to gain while the affected families have to be content with "compensation coupons" promising a measly Rs 2,000 as "shifting cost". All they have done is to shift to locations safely outside the Kolkata municipal area and not affected by conditions laid down by the ADB. Whether the development programme itself will get off the ground is of less concern than the arrival of ADB's bonanza. Who will ensure that following established practice drainage and water supply recede into the distance while officials and contractors get paid and promoters promptly take over the vacated areas. The other lesson is that, when it comes to the crunch, eviction by force can prevail over the Left's rhetoric on the poor. Understandably, Alimuddin Street maintains a deafening silence.

16 DEC 2002

THE STATESMAN

Suspect student Naxalites picked up

9-8 57 61
OUR BUREAU 12/12

Dec. 13: Five students — all members of the Bandimukti Committee that is demanding the release of political detainees — were arrested in front of the office of the West Midnapore superintendent of police today.

The arrests, apparently made after the students insisted on a meeting with police superintendent K.C. Meena, mark a reversal in the state's policy of not arresting any student not directly associated with a terrorist organisation.

Meena said the students were arrested for "provoking villagers against the government and police. They were campaigning for the MCC and the PW".

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's signal to police not to net anyone on the basis of ideological leaning was followed immediately by the release of Rajabazar Science College lecturer Kaushik Ganguly and Bidhannagar College student Shampa Dasgupta. While Ganguly was picked up from his Dum Dum residence, Dasgupta was arrested from Murshidabad where she had gone on a political assignment.

The five arrested today claimed they are students of Jadavpur University and a college in New Barrackpore. Their names are Sangeeta Ray, Jayanta Chakraborty, Benoy Bhattacharya, Projit Ghosh and Diptaneel Ray.

Police arrested them soon after they left their impromptu sit-in in front of Meena's office to make a call to leaders in Calcutta. "We have been going around villages in West Midnapore collecting signatures for the immediate release of all political prisoners in the state and seeking donations," Sangeeta and Diptaneel said before their arrest.

They alleged that policemen tailed them wherever they went, forcing them to seek an audience with Meena. "We have not been allowed to campaign freely," Diptaneel said. "Whenever we protested, we were told they were there for our security."

The students today came to meet Meena but were told that he was "busy in a meeting". They squatted in front of his office and were picked up when they left to make a call.

Officials said leaflets recovered from them exhorted villagers to demand the release of all political prisoners as the state was "deliberately ignoring" the Supreme Court's 11-point charter. The leaflets claimed that the chief minister was behaving like Siddhartha Shankar Ray.

THE TELEGRAPH

14 DEC 1972

Assembly passes Court Fees Bill amid protests

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Dec. 12. — The West Bengal Court Fees (Amendment) Bill 2002 was passed in the Assembly today amid protests from the Opposition and even some Left Front partners. Law minister Mr Nisith Adhikary moved the Bill ignoring the requests of the Opposition and the Forward Bloc, CPI and RSP to move it only after necessary revisions. The Trinamul, Congress and SUCI MLAs walked out in protest.

Opposition leader Mr Pankaj Banerjee said it was unfortunate that the CPI-M had passed "the anti-people Bill just on the basis of their strength". The arbitrary hike of court fees will affect common people and it will be difficult for them to go to the courts for justice, he said.

Mr Atish Sinha (Congress) and Mr Deba Prasad Sarkar (SUCI) said any sensible government shouldn't have placed the Bill before sending it to the Select Committee.

Opposing the Bill, Mr Arunava Ghosh (Trinamul) said in late 60s when the then law minister, Amar Prasad Chakraborty,

had proposed to hike the ad valorem of the Original side of the Calcutta High Court, two CPI-M stalwarts — Snehangshu Acharya and Harekrishna Konar — had opposed the move and forced the government to withdraw the proposal. "It's most unfortunate that the law minister has taken a move which his predecessors had opposed."

Mr Haripada Biswas (Forward Bloc) urged the government to withdraw the Bill

while his RSP colleague Mr Nirmal Das said it should be placed only after careful revision.

The law minister said the court fees had

to be increased due to an "inevitable situation". In 1970, only Rs 3.75 crore were required to meet the expense of judiciary as against Rs 153 crore now. He claimed that the hike would not affect the common people.

The Speaker, Mr HA Halim, said steps should be taken to deliver judgment on time. He urged the law minister to take steps to expedite the pending cases. Appealing for an end to the lawyers' strike, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee sought suggestions from lawyers and retired judges for better running of the judicial system.

The FB wants the Bill to be withdrawn, while the RSP is for revisions

THE STATESMAN

13 DEC 2002

Squatters leave... only to set up homes in suburbs

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Dec. 12. — The Beliaghata canal has been cleared of encroachers. But where have those evicted gone? Hundreds of them have set up new homes — rows of illegal settlements — at Dunlop, Sodepur, Baranagar, Ghola and New Barrackpore. And most of them on government land.

Kolkata's fringe areas are witnessing an influx of sorts. The North 24-Parganas district administration may soon have a major problem on hand. The countdown seems to have begun for another eviction drive, this time in the suburbs.

The people evicted from either side of the Beliaghata canal are leaving the KMC area so that they cannot be driven out again.

"We are looking for vacant land in the suburbs. It is not easy to settle wherever we please because local goons demand money," says Babu Garai. He, like many others, had come to pick up his belongings from Canal West Road and move to the new settlements.

"We start at night or else the police will catch us. The KMC has already started dumping the remains of the shanties at



NEW SET-UP: An evicted family cooks food at Rajarbagan in Baranagar on Thursday. — The Statesman Dhapa", said Garai.

Shyamali Pal, who had been living by the canal for 20 years, said: "Local clubs and neighbours are helping us a lot. They have kept our furniture and belongings which were not taken away by KMC people".

Asked how they came to know that some pockets in North 24-Parganas are "safe", she said: "We have relatives living in roadside shanties at Dunlop Bridge, Sodepur and Baranagar. They will accommodate us and help find places to set up homes."

Hundreds of these evicted people are trying to settle down at Rajarbagan, Satin Sen Nagar, Ghola and Sodepur and on either side of Dunlop Bridge.

One such settler said: "We have nothing to lose. We can at least stay here for a couple of days before being driven away again. We can put up a resistance once we have the manpower. At least that will delay the eviction."

A police officer at Baranagar said: "We removed some shanties from railway property at Rajarbagan a few months ago. But most of the shanties in Baranagar have come up on PWD land. We have heard that more people are coming in."

Mrs Anuradha Roy, chairman of Baranagar Municipality, said: "Some illegal settlers were evicted recently. New settlers can take over the vacant land. If the problem continues, a fresh eviction drive will have to be launched. Local people too will resist illegal settlement".

CPM plea to lawyers to resume work

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Dec. 7. — The CPI-M today appealed to the striking lawyers to immediately call off their agitation and help the courts resume their normal work.

Mr Anil Biswas, party state secretary, said there was no logic for lawyers to continue their strike after the chief minister's assurance that anomalies in the new court fees, hiked through an ordinance, would be rectified before a Bill for the purpose was moved in the Assembly.

He accused the sponsors of the strike of "politicising" the issue and working at the behest of anti-Left Front forces. "Anybody can find out

the political affiliation of the striking lawyers. But we would like to appeal to all lawyers, whatever their political allegiance, to end the impasse in the courts, for which both the litigants and 80 per cent of the lawyers, especially the young ones — who get their daily bread from the profession — are suffering," Mr Biswas said.

The CPI-M has condemned the use of force for preventing "willing" lawyers from resuming work. "What kind of movement is it to lock the Barasat court?" Mr Biswas asked and urged the agitating lawyers to open the court.

Mr Biswas justified the ordinance saying it was a way by which the govern-

ment was tapping revenue sources. "While doing so it has acted with an open mind.

The chief minister and the law minister have met the Bar Council representatives and all other related bodies, so that any anomaly in the new fees structure can be removed before a Bill is moved," Mr Biswas said.

Asked whether the government could have waited for the Assembly session, which begins on 9 December and properly moved a Bill without promulgating an ordinance, Mr Biswas said the ordinance was brought on 28 October, about a month-and-a-half before the Assembly session.

8 DEC 2002

THE STATESMAN

Striking lawyers dig in heels

OUR LEGAL REPORTER

9.6.57
91
112

Calcutta, Nov. 30: A day after chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee softened his stand on the court fee hike, lawyers rejected the government's proposals and called for continuation of the **ceasework** till the Ordinance is revoked.

The West Bengal Bar Council, which is spearheading the agitation, is expected to endorse the decision at its meeting on Monday.

Amiya Chatterjee, council chairman, said: "We will decide on our next course of action on Monday on the basis of opinions expressed by the bar associations' representatives. We have been informed that most are in favour of continuing the agitation till the government agrees

to put on hold the court fee hike."

Only one of the 161 bar association representatives at today's meeting felt that the lawyers should respond to Bhattacharjee's plea to withdraw the agitation.

The rest opposed the idea. As many as 15 representatives even wanted to call a statewide bandh on the issue. The meeting decided to organise dharnas in front of the bar association offices at different courts on Monday and also proposed a "march to the Assembly" on December 10.

The CPM-controlled Democratic Lawyers' Association has, however, decided to oppose the **ceasework**, lending a political dimension to the protests.

"Our members will attend court from Monday to ensure their normal functioning. That the **ceasework** has taken a politi-

cal colour is evident from Trinamul Congress leader Pankaj Banerjee's presence at the bar council's meetings. Attempts are being made to deprive the people of their democratic rights on the plea of fighting the administration. We will resist this with all our might," said Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya, vice-president of the association.

The chief minister had signalled a rethink on the court fee hike at his meeting with bar council representatives yesterday. He said the government was ready to include a provision of refunding the excess court fees — being collected now after the promulgation of an Ordinance — through a Bill during the winter session.

This is, of course, subject to a revision of the hike when the

Ordinance comes up for discussion in the Assembly.

The second phase of the lawyers' **ceasework** is scheduled to end on Tuesday. But bar association representatives feel it should continue till December 10 when a Bill, incorporating the court fee hike, will be placed in the Assembly. Chatterjee said lawyers intend to continue their protests in a democratic manner.

"We are hearing the grievances of the bar association members on the issue and will act according to their wishes. The bar council has no intention to impose any decision on them," he said.

The state administration is worried about the overcrowding at subdivisional and district jails as no bail petition could be moved in the absence of lawyers.

THE TELEGRAPH

RAW tips off cops on Huji fugitives in Kolkata

9.8.02 MB

Sourmen Datta
Kolkata, November 28

SEVERAL TOP-GUNS of the ISI-backed Bangladeshi outfit Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam have taken refuge in Kolkata and its suburbs. According to RAW reports, many of them have connections with al-Qaida and Asif Reza Khan Commando Force.

RAW sources said a number of Huji terrorists have sneaked into Bengal for subversive activities. The RAW has forwarded to the police a list of 150 Huji activists hiding in the State and

another list of 50 who arrange shelter for Huji men here.

The RAW list is corroborated by Mohammed Nasim, former Home Minister in the Sheikh Hasina regime, who had handed over a list of 150 Huji members to the Indian Government.

"Many names are common to both lists," said a RAW official.

According to RAW sources, these terrorists were involved in a series of ISI operations in Bangladesh. They masterminded the killing of Kaji Arif, a top Leftist ideologue of the Awami League, attack on noted poet

Shamsur Rehman, another attack on a programme of cultural troupe Urdubi, a bomb blast in Ramna, the attack on Sheikh Hasina in Kotallipara in 2000 and

the blast at the Awami League office in Narayanganj in July 2001.

I-G (Law and Order) Chayan Mukherjee said he could not recollect off-hand whether the police have received such a list.

"I will have to look up the records," he said. ADG of Intelligence Branch, SK Dutta, refused to comment.

RAW had earlier tipped off the police about the movements of Mufti Abdul Hannan Munshi, the prime suspect in the Seikh Hasina attack, who had taken shelter in the city in August 2000. But he managed to

give a slip because of the lack of coordination between Kolkata Police and Bengal Police.

The RAW list contains details about Huji operators. It mentions that Mohammed Abdus Mannan, principal of the Gauhardanga Madrassa in Dhaka's Gopalganj and secretary-general of Sarbodaya Ulema Parishad is in Huji's advisory council and frequents the city.

"We informed the Kolkata and Bengal Police about the movements of Maulana Manir ul Islam Madani of the Viana village in Jessore, Abdul Karim,

leader of the Bangladesh-based Taliban Mujahids, who was trained in Afghanistan, and 15 Bangladeshi Taliban Mujahids whom he recruited and trained in Bangladesh's Brahmanbaria.

According to RAW, Huji is close to al-Qaida and is funded by the ISI and al-Haramine Foundation.

The Bangladesh Government recently arrested seven members of the foundation from Uttara under pressure from New Delhi. They were later deported instead of being put behind bars.

FACT FILE

CADRE STRENGTH: 2,500

TRAINED IN AFGHANISTAN: 450

NO. OF TRAINING CAMPS: 20

POINTMAN: Maj Javed Akhtar,
Second Secretary in Pakistani High Commission at Dhaka

Lawyers take fee fight to CM's door

Bar council team asks Halim to intervene

Sailen Sil
Kolkata, November 25

THE BAR Council of India (BCI) today stepped in to do its bit to resolve the lawyers' stir across the State.

Voicing support to the striking lawyers, the council decided to send a delegation to the Chief Minister to discuss the ordinance on hike of court fees and press for its suspension.

Meanwhile, members from the council's State unit today met Speaker Hashim Abdul Halim and sought his intervention to break the deadlock.

At a meeting today, the BCI passed a resolution supporting the cause of the lawyers of the State who have ceased work protesting against the hike in court fees.

BCI vice-chairman Adish C Aggarwala said he had not been able to contact the Chief Minister at Delhi a few days ago as he was busy at meetings.

In a letter sent to the Chief Minister today, Ag-

garwala requested him to suspend the ordinance and form a committee to negotiate with the lawyers.

"The BCI has decided to request the Chief Minister, Governor, Law Minister and Chief Justice of West Bengal to suspend the ordinance announcing an enormous hike in the court fees," Aggarwala said.

A delegation of the BCI's West Bengal unit, led by chairman Amiya Kumar Chatterjee, met Speaker Hashim Abdul Halim and asked him to intervene to solve the standoff in the court.

Litigation was pending in courts across the State with the lawyers showing no signs of withdrawing the cease-work, he said. The Speaker assured the delegation that he would take up the issue with the Chief Minister soon. He also sought suggestions from West Bengal Bar Council on reducing the hike in court fees.

"We will send the suggestions to the Speaker in two days," he said. "We have also resolved to send representations to the Chief Minister, Governor and Law Minister".

Chatterjee said Law Minister Nisith Adhikari had telephoned him, calling for an end to the stir at the earliest.

"The law minister said he would send a letter to the BCI tomorrow and invite a team for talks to sort out the issue," he said.

"We are ready for talks but poor response from the State Government has shocked us."



CASE IN POINT: Bar Council members meet Speaker Hashim Abdul Halim in Kolkata on Monday.

SUBHANKAR CHAKRABARTY/HT

Stir draws battlelines in Siliguri

HT Correspondent
Siliguri, November 25

THE STATEWIDE strike has sparked tension at the court here, dividing lawyers into two rival camps. The Left Front-backed Democratic Lawyers' Association (DLA) today held a procession protesting against the strike while the Siliguri Bar Association held a press conference supporting the cause.

The striking lawyers have branded the DLA's protest as politically motivated and an attempt to sabotage the people stir.

The DLA refused to support the stir even as it demanded that the ordinance be suspended. The association had called upon lawyers to join work even as it suggested the hike be reconsidered in a Bill in the forthcoming Assembly session.

DLA's North Bengal zonal convenor Milan Sarkar said the strike is illegal as it has deprived litigants of their judicial rights.

The DLA had earlier threatened that its lawyers in Siliguri would join duty from today. Sarkar said DLA supporters were blocked on their way to work by strik-

ing lawyers. "We will submit the list of those lawyers willing to join duty to the judge," Sarkar said.

Executive member of West Bengal Bar Council Arun Sarkar said the DLA's protest against the strike is politically motivated and against the interests of the common people affected by the ordinance. The DLA is protesting against the strike in Siliguri to fulfill its narrow political interests, he said.

The State Government has increased the court fees from five per cent to 500 per cent, Arun Sarkar

said, placing judicial help above the reach of the majority. This would encourage settlement of disputes outside the court and only lead to further loss of revenue for the Government.

Siliguri Bar Association president Swadesh Ranjan Sarkar said the State Government should withdraw the ordinance first for the strike to be called off. He denied allegations that the striking lawyers had opposed those willing to join duty.

Arun Sarkar said the Bar Council could take action against DLA members for opposing the strike.



Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee
Arbitrator

Seize-and-seal blow to tanners

OUR BUREAU

Nov. 22: The Supreme Court today ordered the Bengal government to seize and seal tanneries, if they continue to refuse to shift from eastern Calcutta.

"It will be open to the authorities to stop operation of the tanneries in these areas (Tangra, Tiljala and Topsis) and evict the tanners. If they do not close their units, the authorities would be open to seize and seal their premises. They will not be entitled to any form of stay from the courts," the court said.

Citing pollution, the court had issued a directive in 1996 to relocate around 600 tanneries to the Bantala Leather Complex, India's first integrated facility for the purpose. The transfer deadline, twice renewed, expired on February 28 this year.

The tanners, however, blame the government for not completing the effluent and waste man-

agement centre at the complex, as a result of which many of them have not been able to shift.

The government has snapped power supply to the units in Tangra. But the court said the government was showing "some laxity".

The judges refused to hear the representations of the tanners and directed them to file affidavits in 15 days, stating voluntary closure of their units, the effluents of which were polluting the Hooghly. The next hearing will be held on December 3.

Calcutta Leather and Tannery Manufacturers' Association spokesman Javed Khan said in Calcutta an emergency meeting would be convened on the issue.

Mayor Subrata Mukherjee has said he would write to commerce and industry minister Nirupam Sen, proposing an assessment of the Bantala site by leaders of the big trade unions.

23 NOV 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

ISI genie in defence bottle

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Behrampur, Nov. 22: Suspicions of the involvement of defence personnel in activities of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence deepened today with military intelligence picking up a jawan from Domkol in Murshidabad district for questioning.

The jawan, Nazrul Islam, was picked up from his residence in Kuchiamora village, the same location where police had arrested Ghulam Murtaza last Sunday on suspicion of him working as an ISI "agent".

Islam was questioned by intelligence officials and has been asked to report back tomorrow.

Police and military intelligence have so far questioned 30 personnel belonging to the army,

navy, air force and the Border Security Force following information gathered during the interrogation of some ISI "agents" — Ziauddin Biswas, his wife Ismatara and brother-in-law Hasan Habib. All were arrested from the Jalangi area of Murshidabad on Sunday.

Army and air force intelligence officials are camping here. They are also on the lookout for Ismatara's absconding younger brother Shamsuzzaman Biswas.

In Calcutta, home secretary Amit Kiran Deb said the developments were being relayed to Delhi. "It is true that some people have been arrested but the situation is not that alarming," Deb said.

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is scheduled to

hold talks with deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani in Delhi tomorrow. Bhattacharjee's party, the CPM, agrees with Advani that ISI activities have escalated after the ascendance of Khaleda Zia to power in Bangladesh.

The current wave of arrests of alleged Bangladeshis and ISI agents in Bengal started after Advani's statement that al Qaida and ISI operatives had stepped up their activities under the Khaleda government.

According to the police, during interrogation, Biswas and the other arrested "ISI agents" named defence personnel who have allegedly passed on military secrets. Biswas admitted that he had been working for the ISI since 1992.

A civilian, Rinku Ahmed (22),

was arrested from Jalangi for involvement with Aufan Ukil, the air force data operator who air force police nabbed in Pune yesterday based on information sent by Murshidabad police for his alleged involvement in the ISI information network. Earlier, the police had said Ukil had been arrested from Bhuj in Gujarat.

"Ukil used to pass on vital information concerning the air force to Rinku who in turn passed them on to ISI agents," Birendra, Murshidabad's SE said.

"We are also getting information that ex-armymen, too, were being paid by the ISI as they can enter cantonments and collect information from those still in service," he added.

■ See Page 6

Nadia a safe haven for ISI agents

Statesman News Service

BEHRAMPORE, Nov. 22. — Nadia is becoming a safe haven for ISI agents, say intelligence officials. Some Army jawans here have reportedly helped ISI agents in collecting classified information.

Police are trying to track down the jawans. Murshidabad SP Mr Virendra said: "We've got the names of the jawans who live in Nadia. Some of them are absconding." Nazrul Islam, reportedly a Maihar Regiment jawan, has been held for questioning. Army officers are helping police in the exercise. "Nazrul is yet to be enrolled as an ISI agent. His phone calls suggest he was ready to serve the ISI. Army authorities are interrogating him," Mr Virendra said.

Rinku Ahmed, suspected ISI agent arrested today, is a neighbour of Jiauddin Ahmed Biswas who was nabbed along with three others from Jalangi and Domkal recently. Rinku had allegedly recruited Irfan Ukil, an IAF data entry operator, arrested from Bhuj, Gujarat, yesterday. Ukil had passed on vital security-related information to Rinku, police said.

Ukil used a pseudonym — Arun Chakraborty — to write to Rinku, and he posted them from outside his unit, the SP said. Ukil used to get between Rs 10,000 and 35,000 for each piece of information from ISI, police said. "We plan to seek Interpol help. Documentation and filing of information to authenticate the identity of the suspects is on," the SP said.

India, Bangla to discuss terrorism, page 5

Long-haul sign in lawyer strike

OUR LEGAL REPORTER

Calcutta, Nov. 20: The lawyers' ceasework, originally envisaged as a 10-day affair, appears to be turning into a more protracted one with an overwhelming majority of bar associations urging the West Bengal Bar Council to carry on the strike till the state government bows to its demands.

All 568 courts in Bengal have remained non-functional since last Wednesday following the bar council decision — prompted by widespread discontent among its member councils and associations — to oppose the state government's move to make legal battles much more costly.

Apprehending that the decision to raise every category of

9.87 m) court fee would turn away litigants — already frustrated by the slow road to justice in most cases — the associations representing an overwhelming majority of the state's 26,000-plus lawyers voted for a 10-day ceasework with the caveat that any decision to return to the courts would depend on the government's "attitude".

Lawyers' representatives met today and appeared intent on following up their threat to the letter. Presidents of more than 150 bar associations — out of the 175 in the state — met West Bengal Bar Council chairman Amiya Kumar Chatterjee and urged him not to give in to any coercion, especially CPM moves to get members of the party-affiliated Democratic Lawyers' Association back to the

71 2/11 courts.

Almost all of them agreed that the 10-day strike, scheduled to end on Friday, should stretch beyond that day as there was no signal from the government that it was amenable to a climbdown. The bar council will announce its formal decision tomorrow after a meeting.

"We have to respect the sentiments of our members," Chatterjee said after today's meeting. Thursday's gathering — barring a major development — looks set to be a mere formality where the stamp of approval will be put on the sentiment expressed by everyone today to carry on the ceasework.

Chatterjee said most members were hurt by the attitude of the government. Lawyers had requested law minister Nisith Ad-

hikari to impress upon others in the government and the ruling party the need to withdraw the "ill-conceived" Ordinance hiking court fees by today.

"We are disappointed that no signal came from the government's side till late this evening," Chatterjee said.

Adhikari's explanation — that an Ordinance could not be withdrawn after it had been passed by the Cabinet — came in for flak. Constitutional experts were invited to today's meeting to assess the legal implications.

All of them agreed that Rule 213-2B of the Constitution empowers a state government to withdraw an Ordinance, irrespective of whether it has been passed by the Cabinet or not.

THE TELEGRAPH

21 NOV 2002

The tannery scandal

When we say move, you move!

The misery and gross injustice suffered by the leather tanneries located in Tangra, Topsia and Tiljala are not something that could not have been foreseen and prevented. It has been known for a long time that they would have to move outside city limits for ecological reasons; it is no one's case that they were taken by surprise. A huge area in Bantala, barely five kilometers away, was identified but then the usual sordid story unfolded, although it has not yet been fully exposed. The party out in front was ML Dalmiya & Co, owned by Jagmohan Dalmiya, better known as presiding deity of the game of cricket. It was a given that the new area would have to be developed, necessary infrastructure put in place and that was where the government headed by Jyoti Basu came in. The rest was entirely predictable. Somewhere in the background, it is alleged, was the presence of the younger Basu and the former Advocate-General of the state, NN Gooptu, albeit in a different capacity. The Supreme Court was not told any of this, presumably because the Government of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee would not dare just as they do not dare to do anything about Jyoti Basu's cavalcade which unkind people characterise as the only shatabdi express to run on roads instead of on railway tracks, even as they search frantically to raise more revenue and control expenditure. With great skill the two appendages have been removed from the project but the hapless Dalmiya remains. Their Lordships were only told that the Bantala project was ready and the tanneries were going to move. Repeated hearings later, the Court understandably lost patience and fixed a final date for the move — 31st October 2002.

There are 323 tanneries involved. It was the state government's responsibility to see to it that all facilities like adequate effluent treatment plants, water and drainage facilities, electric supplies and other arrangements were in place and that the tanneries did not face more difficulties than would be inevitable in a major operation of this kind. If, for whatever reason the facilities were not ready, it was the duty of the state government to go back to the Supreme Court and say so, accept responsibility and obtain further time and complete the work or see to it that it was completed before asking the tanneries to move. They did not. Listen to Nirupam Sen, the Minister for Industries. He concedes that Bantala lacked the basic infrastructure but in the same breath says that if the tanneries tried to operate in the city they would have to close. To add insult to injury, he gives it as his opinion that the tanneries can start operations from tomorrow even as he admits that the leather complex as a whole isn't complete. Here is an utterly spurious concern for the letter of the Supreme Court's Order. And an amazing unconcern for the unfair and unreasonable treatment meted out to citizens who are tannery owners. Again the familiar effort to shield those, visible and invisible, involved in this extremely profitable enterprise for no better reason than that they apparently wield considerable clout.

The dominant concern of the Marxists is skeletons; on no account must they be allowed to tumble out of the closet! And they must be supremely confident that scandals of this kind will be useful to bring a flood of investors to this state, an activity, which Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, at least, is pursuing with sincerity. More's the pity.

20 NOV 2002

THE STATESMAN

Calcutta haven for Bangla fugitives

AVIJIT NANDI MAJUMDAR

Calcutta, Nov. 19: A mir "Bangladeshi underworld" is emerging on the city's crim canvas.

Within 48 hours of the arrest of nine Bangladeshis — two of them suspected ISI agents and "subversive elements" — from the New Market area, police picked up four more from the same region today. One of them, Sayyed Hussain, is an ISI operative, the police claimed.

The police said Sayyed's name figures on the list of 23 underworld dons of Bangladesh. Dhaka had sent the list to the Union home ministry, which has forwarded it to the Bengal government.

The criminals have over 120 cases of murder, rape and extortion against them. Most of them are believed to have taken "shelter" in the city, the police said.

While Sayyed has been booked under the Arms Act and a case registered at the New Market police station, the other three have been let off for the moment. Confirming the arrest, Zulfiqar Hasan, deputy commissioner, central, said: "Sayyed has been in the city for several months and his sole purpose was to spread terror in the city."

Sayyed was picked up in a joint drive. Acting on information, Hasan and Soumen Mitra, deputy commissioner, detective department, cordoned off certain areas around New Market and Park Street and then selectively began raiding places. Sayyed was hiding in one such place around New Market.

The police said Sayyed is the rival of Liaquat Hussain Liakat, who was arrested on Sunday. "Both the dons had taken shelter in the city and both got arrested," an official said. "The frightening aspect of the entire thing is that there are a whole lot of other people — from the list of 23 dons — sheltered here, but we don't know precisely where."

He said Bangladesh authorities had informed Delhi that the criminals had crossed the border. "Calcutta gives them safe cover as Bangladeshis are frequent visitors, speak the same language and can get lost in the anonymity of the city," the official said.

THE TELEGRAPH

20 NOV 2002

ISI 'pay dirt' claim after year's digging

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Bhramapore, Nov. 18: Four suspected ISI agents were picked up by the Intelligence Branch and the district police as a dragnet spread over a year closed in on them on Tuesday night, prompting the police to claim that those arrested gave startling details about their contacts in the military establishment.

Three "agents" of the Pakistani intelligence agency were arrested from Durlabherpara village in the Jalangi police station area while the other was picked up fr-

om Kunchiamora in Domkal.

Several documents were seized from the spies who confessed to having ISI links during interrogation. Fax and telephone numbers of ISI agents stationed in Dhaka were recovered, the police said. Maps of the Pune and Balha (in Gujarat's Bhuj district) airbases and detailed information about key army personnel, ammunition depots, weapons, troop movements and pipelines were also seized, they added.

Inspector-general of police, law and order, Chavan Mukherjee said at Writers' Buildings of-

9.50 AM 11.10
1971
ficials from the Central intelligence agency have arrived to interrogate those arrested.

Murshidabad superintendent of police Birendra said the sleuths had set up a trap in the area for about a year. Last night, they were finally able to arrest Ziauddin Biswas, 50, his wife Ismatara Hasan Habib, 35, Ismatara's cousin, Ghulam Murtaza, was arrested from his father-in-law's residence at Kunchiamora.

Murtaza, who used to pass on information through his telephone booth, stays at Bilashpur vil-

lage in Domkal. Incidentally, animal resources development minister Anisur Rahaman comes from the same village.

"The ISI recruits agents from its office at the well-known Banani area of Dhaka. These agents subsequently access classified data through informers within the Indian armed forces. The network in the region has been in operation for some time now," said the police superintendent.

"Ghulam Murtaza took me to Dhaka where I was recruited by the ISI in 1997. With time, I became an important agent and mai-

ntained direct links with a key agent, Amir, who stays at Banani," said Ziauddin, in lucid English.

"Amir" replaced Mehmod about a year ago. Another senior agent, Barabhat, used to issue instructions at meetings and then left for unknown destinations. I never managed to learn about his whereabouts or his real name," he told the police.

Ziauddin had recruited Arpan Ukil of the Indian Air Force and Lance Naik M.K. Asan Ali Biswas of the Signals Regiment. They used to send sensitive military information to Dhaka.

"Army informers used to receive Rs 50,000 per piece of information while we got Rs 25,000-Rs 35,000. Asan Ali committed suicide a couple of months ago while still in service but his last rites were performed in full state honours because it was officially made known that he was killed in a mine blast. Both Ukil and Biswas visited Dhaka twice without passport," claimed Ziauddin.

Asan Ali killed himself when he was caught red-handed while passing on military information, said Ajay Thakur, the subdivisional police officer of Domkal.

THE TELEGRAPH

19 NOV 2002

Mystery Thai trawlers give BSF the slip

Sukumar Debnath
Raidighi (S 24-Parganas), Nov 10

A DAY after eight Thai trawlers sneaked into Indian waters off the Sunderbans and spread panic by shooting at local fishermen, the BSF and the Coast Guard brought in a Dornier and a hovercraft to scan the delta's maze of islets and creeks for the intruders.

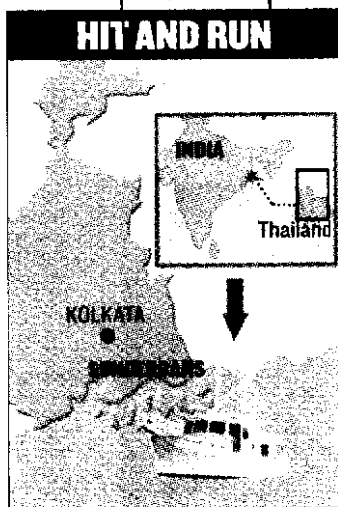
But despite hours of search backed up by armed personnel on motorcraft — the incursion remained wrapped in mystery, with the authorities still clueless about the foreigners' identity, motive and whereabouts.

"There are numerous islets and channels in the region," BSF deputy inspector-general RP Singh said. "We have been searching across a 30-nautical mile stretch. We have no information about the intruders other than what we were told by scared fishermen who heard gunshots while returning to the shore yesterday."

A Coast Guard combat ship has left Haldia and is expected to reach the Sunderbans tomorrow morning to help in the search, said CG Commandant Rajputaran at Haldia.

The fishermen say the intruders are "pirates" who came in eight fishing trawlers and fired at them off the remote Kendua island. But they weren't sure how many attackers there were or whether they had anchored at the tiny island.

"We'll continue looking for the intruders," Singh said. "If they are still hiding within our



GRAPHIC: SANJAY CHAKRABORTY

boundaries, we'll flush them out. They can't evade us for long — Thai trawlers are bigger than our country-made fishing boats, and so they are more difficult to manoeuvre in low tide."

After the fishermen reported the intrusion to the Raidighi police station, the district authorities had moved slowly, wasting precious hours before they succeeded in contacting the BSF and the Coast Guard, an officer said asking not to be quoted.

The fishermen are furious with the district administration's decision to withdraw a police camp in Haldibari near the Kendua island. Sunderbans Tiger Reserve authorities said that the search operations could have begun earlier had the camp not been closed down.

11 NOV 2002

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Soft loan from Japan, exit Malaysian firm

Soma Mookherjee in Kolkata

Nov. 10. — The state government has dropped plans of roping in a Malaysian firm for construction of the 65-km Kolkata-Uluberia-Haldia Expressway after the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation offered a soft loan for the project. The obvious quid pro quo being that a Japanese firm should be given the contract.

Earlier, the government had asked a Malaysian firm to conduct a feasibility study, for which an MoU was signed last November. But the government, citing a financial crunch, had so far held back the payment to the Malaysian firm for the feasibility study it had conducted for the Kolkata-Uluberia-Haldia Expressway. Now, almost as a consolation, the Malaysian firm will be asked to conduct a feasibility study for the 56-km Kalyani-Kulpi Expressway instead.

The decision to hand over the contract to the Japanese firm was taken at a meeting on 17 September of the chief minister and a seven-member

experts' team from that country. The firm will also construct a bridge over the Hooghly connecting Raichak, in South 24-Parganas, with Kukrahati, near Haldia.

On 8 November, a task force of eight drawn from the two governments met chief secretary Mr Sourin Roy. It was then decided to have the Kalyani-Kulpi feasibility study done by the Malaysians, and a draft agreement was drawn up with them the same day at a meeting attended by Mr Subhas Chakraborty.

It was further decided that if the government approves the feasibility study of this ring road, the Malaysian firm will be awarded the 25-year BOT (build, operate, transfer) contract.

The Japanese would carry out another feasibility study for the Kolkata-Uluberia-Haldia Expressway and submit a report to the government by January. The chief minister had earlier said the entire cost of the feasibility study would be borne by Japan's ministry of international trade and industry. The actual project cost is about Rs 2,800 crore.

1 1 NOV 2002

THE STATESMAN

Mufti allocates portfolios, promises more

Statesman News Service

JAMMU, Nov. 3. — The PDP-led coalition government in J&K held its first Cabinet meeting and the chief minister, Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, allocated portfolios to the ministers.

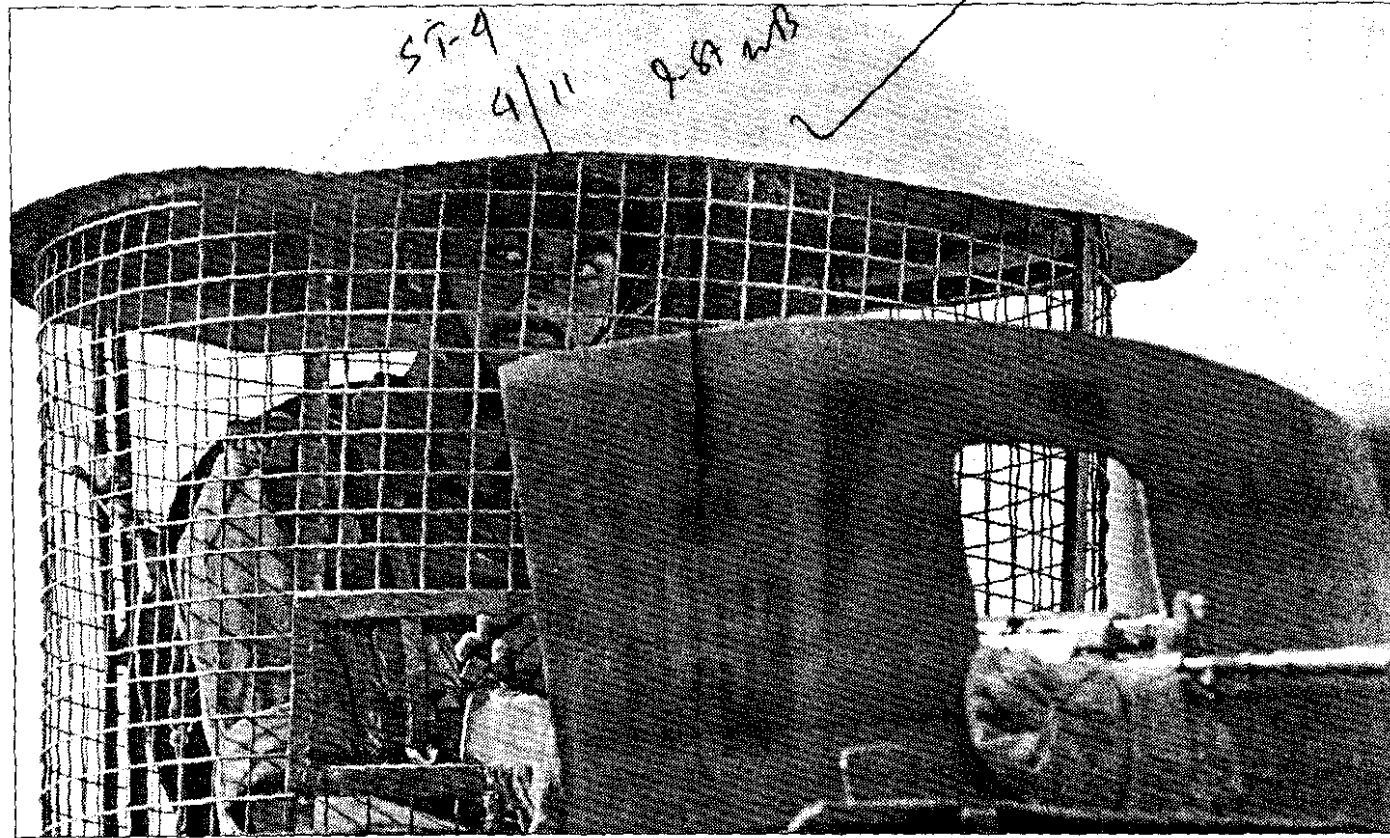
Later the mufti and his deputy, Pandit Mangat Ram Sharma, addressed their first press conferences after assuming charge. While the chief minister talked to the press at Srinagar, Pt Sharma chose to talk to reporters at the Congress headquarters in Jammu this evening.

The mufti said he hoped the NDA government at the Centre would extend full support to his government in restoring peace in the state. "We shall be guided in governance by our common minimum programme. We shall stand firm and steadfast on our oath of office. We shall endeavour to usher in an era of hope and happiness, peace and honour, prosperity and justice to people living in all three regions of the state," he said and appreciated the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee on conducting free and fair elections in the state.

The chief minister would be moving to Jammu tomorrow and would celebrate Diwali at his new high security official residence at Wazarat Road which was earlier occupied by Dr Farooq Abdullah who himself is currently in London.

Pt Sharma, who was given a rousing reception after he landed at the Jammu airport after returning from Srinagar and taken to the party headquarters in a huge colourful procession, said Congress MLAs did not get full representation in the Cabinet, adding the state Cabinet would be expanded soon and Congress will get proportionate representation in it.

"Had the people given the Congress adequate mandate, they would not have taken support from other parties," he said, adding, however, there was no anger in the party, that the party high command was satisfied and the allocation of portfolios among



A BSF jawan maintains vigil atop an armoured car at the venue of the chief minister's press conference in Srinagar on Sunday. — AFP

the ministers would be balanced in the next expansion.

Pt Sharma also said the new MLAs will take oath on 18 November and a joint session of the Assembly would be held on 23 November which would be addressed by the Governor Mr GC Saxena.

He said the Cabinet which met at Srinagar in the morning, had decided to reduce the power cut from existing nine hours to four-and-a-half hour for a month. "We have directed the chief secretary to present a detailed report regarding the power scenario before the Cabinet at the earliest. We hope to improve the situation soon," Pt Sharma said.

Commenting on the apprehensions that terrorists with dreaded records would be released by the government, Mr Sharma said they have repeatedly said that only those prisoners who are innocent or had hardly any charges against them would be released. "But the door of dialogue would always remain open," he added.

Earlier, the mufti retained charge of the crucial Home department and allotted portfolios to his Cabinet colleagues giving Industries, Commerce and Transport to Pt Sharma, and Finance and Planning to PDP's Muzaffar Hussain Beigh. Beigh, a leading Supreme Court lawyer has also

been given additional charge of Law and Parliamentary Affairs.

Pirzada Mohammad Sayeed, vice-president of state Congress, has been allotted rural development. Mr Ghulam Hassan Mir has been given housing and urban development and additional charge of revenue, relief and rehabilitation. Mr Mula Ram has been allotted social welfare, while Mr Harsh Dev Singh has been given school education. Ministers of state Mr Nawang Rigzin and Haji Nissar Ali get works and rural development, respectively. An official announcement said that all other departments would remain with the chief minister.

4 Nov 1987

Bomb plant 4 km from police post

AVIJIT NANDI MAJUMDAR

Calcutta, Oct. 28: The Sunday night blast in a Rampurhat village has thrown open a Pandora's box with initial investigations revealing that local crime-lord Basir Sheikh, supposedly close to a section of local police, was piecing together explosives that went off.

Basir was among the 14 killed in the explosion.

The special operations group of the CID, headed by Manoj Malviya, reached the blast site with a bomb disposal squad this evening to probe the incident.

Director-general of police D.C. Vajpai said the ganglord and his associates were piling

stocks and manufacturing crude explosive devices.

Preliminary investigations showed that Netai Das, who worked as a daily labourer, had rented out the ground floor of his house to Sheikh.

The CID spoke to about 50 villagers who unequivocally said that Sheikh was close to senior officers of the Rampurhat police station. Of late, he was forced out of the gang world by rivals.

There are several groups operating in the area, about 8 km from Tarapith. With pilgrims coming in from all over the country, Tarapith and its surroundings are considered "lucrative zones" for the gangs involved in dacoities and robberies, the police said.

Investigators said three of Sheikh's accomplices were shot dead in encounters with rival groups in the last month. "He was chased out of the area by his rivals and was regrouping to stage a comeback," a villager said.

CID officials added that Netai's brother Sanat, a trolley puller at the local railway station, was a close Sheikh associate.

According to records available with the Birbhum police, Sheikh was wanted in several cases of murder, extortion and dacoities. He had been staying in Netai's house for the past six months.

"Basir was paying a lump sum to Netai as rent," the Rampurhat police said.

They added that yesterday, both Netai and Sanat were with Sheikh, putting together the explosives.

"The two-storied mud house was devastated in the blast and we have recovered several bombs from the surrounding areas," a senior officer said.

CID sleuths and other senior police officers are now tying up the many loose ends in the case.

A senior CID officer in Birbhum questioned how Basir had gathered such a huge amount of explosives in the house.

"Netai's house is a little more than 4 km from the police station. Villagers have told senior officers that a section of the police was close to Basir and was in

regular touch with him," the CID officer said.

He added that considering the impact of the blast and the subsequent investigations, it was evident that Basir was stocking the explosives for well over a month.

"How is it that he has been stocking explosives without the knowledge of the local police?" he asked.

The Rampurhat police argued that officers have to patrol sensitive areas with scant resources and it was virtually impossible to keep track of every criminal activity in the area.

A chunk of the investigating officers, however, refused to buy this excuse.

98 ✓✓
29/10

CPM braces for bloody panchayat poll run-up

ASTAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, Oct. 28 : With pockets of stiff resistance sprouting in Bengal's rural mosaic, the ruling CPM appears to be preparing for the first time in 25 years for a bruising showdown in the panchayat elections coming up in May.

The sixth panchayat polls, covering nearly 75,000 seats in the three-tier rural administration, would be a turbocharged event set against the current backdrop of violence in the villages, state CPM secretary Anil Biswas indicated today.

Biswas and others in the CPM leadership reckoned that the polls would be a far tougher battle than it appeared to be as a result of the emergence of "competitors" like the People's War Group, the Maoist Co-ordination Centre, the Jharkhandis and the Kamtapur People's Party.

Sunday night's blast in a Birbhum village off Rampurhat, in which at least 14 people were killed, and the continuing violence at Jamboni in West Midnapore in which four persons, including a CPM functionary, were murdered are pointers to the possible nature of the May elections, they said.

"We do not believe in violence and we will not be found wanting in maintaining law and order," Biswas said. "But the same cannot be said about these violent anti-Left forces which do not baulk at mounting attacks on our leaders and supporters. No one will be surprised if such attacks are stepped up before the elections."

According to the CPM's standpoint, maintaining law and order is not its sole responsibility and as far as the ruling communists are concerned, "others

(the Opposition) should realise that they are equally responsible for keeping violence out of the elections".

"It is evident from the Rampurhat blast that the Congress had engaged people to manufacture bombs that would have been used to attack our men," Biswas alleged.

The CPM would move into top gear and unveil the campaign for the May elections at a rally on the Brigade Parade Grounds on January 12. The rally would be followed up by another organised in the same venue by the Left Front early March.

The state CPM leadership will be present on January 12 in full strength.

For the organisers, the Brigade event would also serve as an occasion to mark the return of the CPM led-Front to Writers for a record sixth time last year.

29 OCT 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

McKinsey sows superpower seeds

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Oct. 22: Perceived a laggard in most fields, Bengal looks set to become an Asian powerhouse in agribusiness by 2010. At least, so says a report by global consultant McKinsey.

Unfurling Bengal's 2010 Agribusiness Vision in a summary report—a copy of which is with **The Telegraph**—McKinsey said Bengal is set to assume a leader's role in a multitude of crop areas in India as well as Asia.

Rich in natural resources, and enjoying a stable government, the state has achieved a strong growth in agriculture, the report says. "Bengal has achieved self-sufficiency in critical food crops and assumed leadership across a wide range of agricultural produce. Its comprehensive and sustained land

reforms programme lie at the heart of this progress."

McKinsey reckons the "vision", if implemented well, could create 10 lakh jobs and attract investments worth Rs 18,000 crore, apart from enhancing farmers' incomes and bolstering growth in Bengal's rural economy.

Apart from the agro-based industry, the report also points out what the government should do to woo investors in Information Technology.

McKinsey, which worked for 10 months to ready the report, made a presentation before chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at Writers' Buildings this afternoon.

Asked about the prospects of investments in the agro-industry and the IT sector, Bhattacharjee said: "We are hopeful and have already received responses from seven to eight companies."

McKinsey is expected to submit its final report to the government by this week. Official sources said the government has accepted the McKinsey recommendations in principle. However, it will have to be formally ratified by the state Cabinet.

Industry minister Nirupam Sen said while drawing up the report, the global consultant had talked with potential investors abroad—to gauge their attitude towards investments in the agro and infotech sectors in the state.

Some of the companies that have shown interest in participating in these two areas include Pepsi, Dabur, Wipro, Tata Consultancy, Cognizant, Technology and Samsung.

"The response received (from the investors) has been very positive. Now, we will have to take initiatives to meet the demands

of the willing investors and, in the process, go through some structural adjustments," said Sen.

He, however, added that McKinsey's report on the prospects of agribusiness had nothing to do with the state's agriculture policy. "There is no need to change any policy of the government while implementing it."

McKinsey has suggested close co-ordination among officials and ministers of the departments associated with agribusiness. "In case of IT, they (McKinsey) have emphasised that the chief minister should be directly involved and review the situation regularly," Sen said.

Officials said the chief minister's direct initiative had led to the rising interest of infotech giants like Wipro and industrialists like Ratan Tata in Bengal's IT sector. McKinsey feels Bhattacharjee's direct involvement will

show the government's seriousness on the issue. "In agribusiness, Bengal is rich in raw material and resources. But, in the IT sector, there is severe competition across the country and the chief minister's direct involvement is a necessity," an official said.

The transition from agriculture to agribusiness is central to the "vision". McKinsey has suggested five factors that will underpin the triumph of this transition.

■ **Focus on select areas:** Need to focus technical and administrative resources in select areas—horticulture, fisheries, rice, poultry and dairy. Within each focus area, aspirations and targets for individual crops should be set.

■ **Market-oriented approach:** So far, the state has adopted a production-driven approach and make commendable improvements in yield and productivity. The

next natural progression is a market-driven approach. Establishing domestic and international market linkages will ensure steady evacuation of produce, avoid gluts and reduce the need for subsidies.

■ **Crop diversification:** Need to implement a crop diversification plan in line with the choice of focus areas. Should adopt a masterplan that defines geographic agri centres, which specialise in particular crops and food sectors. This plan should take into account the requirements of food security and allow farmers to choose from a range of viable options.

■ **Formation of integrated value chains:** The private sector will play a lead role in providing farm inputs and extension services, primary and secondary processing, distribution and logistics and retailing.

Gram panchayat push to McKinsey diktat

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, October 22

WHATEVER MCKINSEY says has to be followed. Making this clear to Front partners today, the Chief Minister has said that there would be no room for compromises.

The proposals for land and agro sector envisage a greater role for panchayats. "There are a lot of misconceptions about McKinsey and its role," Budhadeb Bhattacharjee said today. "McKinsey was hired to show us the path to success in agro-business. And they are doing just that. Talks of the Left Front Government compromising on their diktats at the cost of its agricul-

ture policy are wrong."

The CM and Industries Minister Nirupam Sen, who had earlier drawn flak from the partners for toeing the McKinsey line, are now ready to implement the recommendations of the US consultant.

The two have convinced Front leaders that the McKinsey's recommendations wouldn't affect the State's agriculture sector. Panchayats and the State Government are to act as go-betweens farmers and MNCs according to the recommendations. "If agriculture has to reach the optimum level of production, it should have a proper retail market," said Sen.

"The producer has to produce

price of his product and the market its profit. So how does the question arise of disturbing land and agriculture policies?"

"There is going to be no change in land-owning pattern, there is going to be no corporate farming. McKinsey won't set the terms and conditions for farmers. But since we have a successful panchayat system prevailing here, it is the panchayat and the respective Government departments which will act as a catalyst to ensure that farmers get the best price and the buyers a free market."

The agro-business policy, as suggested by McKinsey, will be implemented in the State in consultation with the agriculture

and panchayat departments. The panchayat, along with the agriculture department, will involve farmers through kishak sabhas to go for products that will bring higher returns.

"Use of bio-fertilisers, change in crop pattern, use of more hybrid seeds and storage facilities will ensure that farmers are able to compete in the free-market economy," said the CM. "To ensure that there is no corporatisation of farming, the panchayats will play a major role. The basic idea is to enhance the production and protect our small and marginal farmers from the market forces."

The State's new agriculture policy is to be drawn up soon.



Nirupam Sen
For Change

and the marketer has to sell it at an optimum price. The two should have a symbiotic relationship. Producer has to get the

23 OCT 2002

We will crush MCC and PW: Buddha

HT Correspondent
Midnapore, October 6

9-11-02

CHIEF MINISTER Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today said though the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) and Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) were trying to foment trouble in North and South Bengal, the State would eventually win, and emerge stronger from the crisis.

West Bengal has seen the Naxalite movement at its peak in the 70s, he said. "Eventually the Naxal movement fizzled out in Bengal. The same thing will happen to Naxalite outfits like the MCC too." Bhattacharjee told a gathering at Debra in West Midnapore after inaugurating a dairy plant at Palasi.

"Though the KLO and MCC are trying hard to create disturbance in the State, the administration is alert and we will tackle these elements sternly," he said.

The Chief Minister warned the people against the "nefarious designs" of subversive outfits, such as the PW and the MCC who have been raging across parts of Midnapore. Bhattacharjee said the Naxal outfits were preying on the minds of some disgruntled



Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee
We shall overcome

youths in the community and urged them not to fall prey to their machinations.

There was an unprecedented security at Debra in view of Bhattacharjee's visit with the police on the overdrive after Howrah cops found landmines and a revolver on a Midnapore-bound bus yesterday. A few weeks ago, 15 live bombs were found in Debra itself.

Bhattacharjee wouldn't comment on the discovery of landmines in Howrah.

More than 150 armed policemen were deployed at the meeting site. Senior police officers including IG(Western Range) Jeet Ram Bhagat, district SP K C Meena and DIG(Securi-

ty) A K Maliwal were at the venue, supervising security arrangements.

With the rise in militancy, the State Government had turned its attention to development in the districts. The Chief Minister took it one step further today, saying the underprivileged sections of the society would be given extra attention. The Government will introduce a card for people whose monthly income is below Rs 234, he said. This card would allow the poor to get free health care and education till graduation, and food grains at subsidised rates.

Bhattacharjee accused the Trinamool Congress of creating hurdles in the path of the State's development. "The Trinamool is also trying to create instability in the State," he said. "But what else would you expect from a party like Trinamool that allowed a communal party like BJP to have its base in West Bengal."

On the industrial front, the CM said the gloom of four years back had dissipated and investors were flocking to the State. "The Ambani Group has come forward with a proposal to invest Rs 600 crore in the State while Mitsubishi has come to Haldia," he said.

Panic rains from the skies again, in N Dinajpur

Statesman News Service

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RAIGANJ/KOLKATA, Oct. 3. — A plane "dropped some sacks" in a pond at Makhdumganj in North Dinajpur near the India-Bangladesh border this afternoon, creating panic among the villagers and sending the state in tizzy.

The water in the large hyacinth-covered pond in the Chopra area turned a murky white after what villagers feared was a repeat of the December 1995 Purulia armsdrop. Initially, they refused to go anywhere near the pond, fearing the sacks might contain explosives too. Some even

claimed to have heard an explosion.

But till late tonight, neither the government nor the Indian Air Force confirmed that any foreign plane had violated the Indian airspace. A PTI report from Delhi said no IAF radar had picked up an intrusion into West Bengal. But it isn't possible for radars to monitor the entire length of India's border, some IAF officers said.

An Eastern Air Command team, however, has been rushed to Chopra to find out if any low-flying foreign plane had violated Indian airspace. Some IAF officers have reportedly reached the spot.

Kolkata airport's Air Traffic Control

too hadn't detected any intrusion. The Airports Authority of India's regional executive director, Mr NK Puri, said

In a throwback to the 1995 Purulia armsdrop, an unidentified low-flying aircraft reportedly dropped sacks in a pond in North Dinajpur

that though the area fell within Kolkata's flight information region, no plane was detected by the ATC radar.

But witnesses said an aircraft, flying

very low, dropped the sacks between 12.30 p.m. and 1 p.m. One person said there were two, not one, planes.

Unconfirmed reports quoted some Eastern Command officers as having said that an IAF plane could have dropped the sacks accidentally during an air-drill. The "object", which villagers fear to be explosives, could actually be coloured flares, used by IAF aircraft during special air-drills.

Villagers alerted police immediately after the "airdrop", Ms Namita Roy, panchayat sabhapati, said. Senior police officers soon reached the spot, and along with their BSF counterparts cordoned off the area after a search in

which "nothing could be found".

Mr Chayan Mukherjee, IG (law & order) said: "The plane or planes flew over the house of one Nazrul Islam and dropped a ball-like object. The colour of the pond water may have changed because the impact of the falling object could have brought the muck to the surface."

Mr Narayan Ghosh, DIG (HQ), said: "The plane flew towards Bagdogra... It was probably a MiG". But he insisted he was "not quite sure" about that. North Dinajpur SP Mr Arun Sharma said the "ball-like device" caused an explosion that was heard even 10 km away.

4 OCT 2012

THE STATESMAN

Austerity axe on phones, cars

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Sept. 30: Seeking to lift Bengal out of a financial black hole, the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee government today unveiled a slew of measures to check profligacy in the state.

Finance minister Asim Dasgupta, who will oversee operations to tide over one of the gravest economic crises in post-independence Bengal, announced that the measures would be effective from tomorrow. He said better housekeeping would mop up an additional

Rs 750 crore in six months.

"We are confident (we will be able) to mop up the additional Rs 750 crore in the remaining part of the current fiscal if we are able to economise or curb revenue expenditure on certain heads as planned," he said.

Soon after, chief secretary S.N. Roy issued a circular intimating scores of departments, local and civic bodies, state-run or autonomous corporations and undertakings, as well as institutions receiving financial aid, of the state's latest policy initiative to curb wasteful expenditure.

The government will start by targeting areas (see chart)

where expenditure has ballooned to unimaginable levels thanks to unbridled misuse of facilities, lack of monitoring and accountability.

At one level, the government initiative is a wide one as it covers establishments spread across Bengal. But at another, it is narrow because it has only the bureaucracy in its gunsight and leaves ministers — no less wasteful — outside its purview.

"That is one issue, which will have to be addressed by the chief minister and none else," said Dasgupta, aware that several ministers were heavyweight politicians of non-CPM parties,

capable of taking him on.

"But compared to other states, our ministers do not indulge in wasteful expenditure. They travel by air or rail in the economy class, without attendants. I have no doubt they will rise up to the occasion," he said.

The cost-cutting initiative comes a day after chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee travelled to Malda on Sunday in an ordinary air-conditioned chair car. The usual practice is to reserve an entire compartment.

Dasgupta, however, appears to be coming under pressure from a section of the CPM, which feels that the government's

measures — the bonus cut, for instance — will cost it in terms of goodwill and popular support.

Going by indications from the Alimuddin Street headquarters, (this section feels the party could have managed popular sentiment better had Dasgupta hinted at the crisis in the state budget a few months ago.

"The budget, which reflects the health of state finances, did not offer any clue," a senior CPM leader said. A section of the leadership is also questioning why the government did not initiate early measures to control wasteful expenditure by top govern-

ment officials.

BENGAL TIGHTENS BELT

- Restrictions on use of car and consumption of fuel
- Three joint secretaries to share one pool car
- No new phone connection
- No residential phones below joint secretaries
- ISD facility only for secretaries and above
- STD facility limited to special secretaries and heads of directorates
- Only tea, coffee and biscuits at meetings. Food packets are the norm now
- No foreign trips
- Curb on participation in fairs

THE TELEGRAPH

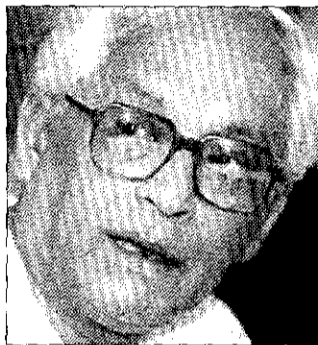
Buddha climbdown on assessment report

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, September 11

CHIEF MINISTER Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, under pressure from the Left Front-affiliated coordination committee, today dropped the idea of introducing an Annual Confidential Report (ACR) for assessing the overall performance of State Government employees from Group B to Group D.

But for the first time Group A employees, with a monthly income of over Rs 10,125, would be required to maintain a minimum attendance of 70 per cent to be eligible for promotion. The same condition applies to the promotion of Group B, C and D workers as well even though they were being judged on the basis of their former assessment report.

The Chief Minister had in the last Assembly session mooted the introduction of an ACR for all categories of employees to ensure better work culture and transparency in judgement. He had announced that employ-



Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee
Giving in to pressure

ees (from Group B to Group D) — henceforth judged by Open Performance Report (OPR) — would also be covered under the ACR. The coordination committee opposed this, saying this would leave the employees at the mercy of the whims and fancies of their immediate bosses. Bhattacharjee now has to be happy with changes in the nomenclature and format of the OPR. The new assessment report will be called Annual Per-

THE NEW BREAK-UP

	Gr B/C	Gr D
Attendance	25	35
Performance	60	50
Integrity	15	15

formance Report (APR), where 85 marks will be allotted for open assessment and only 15 for confidential judgment of the worker's accountability and integrity by superior authorities.

While reports on performance and attendance — comprising 85 marks — would be an open secret, the accountability and integrity of the employee would be confidentially scanned. The new format allows only 15 marks for the second category. A lot of importance is being attached to attendance and punctuality. The State Coordination Committee has welcomed the proposal. Joint secretary Jyoti Prasad Basu said the APR would help in the objective and specific assessment of the employees.

Name mix-up over baby's blood

Subhendu Maiti in Kolkata

Sept. 8. — It seems personnel at BC Roy Hospital just don't want to learn lessons even after the spate of deaths there.

One more child died at the hospital today. And yesterday, the hospital issued a requisition form for blood for a baby's mother when it was the baby who actually needed the blood.

The hospital had asked relatives of an 11-day-old baby, down with jaundice, to collect blood for him from Manicktala's Central Blood Bank. A blood requisition form was issued for the baby, but the form had his mother's name on it.

When the baby's relatives went to CBB with the form and a sample of his blood, the authorities there refused as they were confused over the name mix-up.

After all, the blood sample bore the tag "baby of (the mother's name)". But the requisition form had the mother's name indicating that the

mother was the patient.

The relatives managed to get the CBB authorities to give them the required quantity of blood after much persuasion and waste of time.

The CBB, while delivering the blood, wrote a note saying they were confused over the discrepancy between the requisition form and the sample but had issued the blood on the relatives' request.

The relatives returned to the hospital with the blood around 1 p.m. and requested the attending nurse to transfuse it to the baby. But to their utter surprise, the nurse refused on the plea that the doctor would do so. They also found three ampoules of a prescribed injection lying on the baby's bed.

The first of the three doses was supposed to have been injected by noon. When they questioned the nurse about the injection, she again pleaded that the doctor would inject the dose.

The parents and relatives complained to the ward master who immediately informed the superintendent, who was then at a meeting with the director of health services, director of medical education and the hospital's newly-appointed principal, Dr Meena Basak, in the hospital premises.

On hearing the complaint, Dr Basak reportedly apologised to the relatives for the discrepancy between the blood sample and the requisition form as well as for the injection ampoules lying on the bed.

Relatives said the blood transfusion was carried out and the baby given an injection at around 5 p.m., five hours after the prescribed time.

A senior health department official present at the meeting in the hospital premises admitted the hospital had erred on these counts. But he said the principal had apologised to the baby's relatives who didn't protest further.

Two more deaths at BC Roy belie govt claims

SUBHENDU MAITI
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Sept. 7. — Notwithstanding the government's assurances, reality hasn't changed at BC Roy Memorial Children's Hospital. Two more children died at the hospital till 2.30 p.m. today while 17 patients were admitted to the hospital.

And doctors there are still having to tell patients' parents to agree to admit their children only if they are willing to have them share beds with two others.

This is exactly what happened today when a 10-year-old girl was brought there from Hooghly in an ambulance of the CPI-M affiliated Non-gazetted Police Karmachari Samity at about 1.45 p.m. She was referred to BCRMHC from Tribeni.

When the ambulance stopped in front of the emergency ward, this correspondent saw the girl gasping. A saline bottle was fitted to her right arm. Her swollen legs were seen tied to the stretcher.

Relatives took her to the emergency ward seeking admission. After giving her a check up, a doctor told the relatives that the patient would have to share a bed

HOSPITAL ATTACKED

KOLKATA, Sept. 7. — The death of a 23-year-old pregnant woman this evening at a private hospital in Ariadaha sparked violence today.

Police said Ms Mithu Ghosh (23) had been brought in a serious condition to Ramakrishna Matri Sadan hospital. She died soon after admission.

But before her relatives came in to claim the body, a mob attacked the hospital, beat up the hospital staff and damaged property. Policemen later arrived and lathi-charged the mob, injuring 11. — SNS

with two other children if they wanted an emergency admission.

One of the relatives said: "She would have developed another contagious disease if she shared a bed with two others. We are compelled to admit her to another hospital."

This correspondent enquired about the status of the free and paying beds around 3 p.m.

The emergency ward staff said that the sole paying bed was lying vacant. All free

beds are booked.

The hospital's X-Ray unit is an example of how thoughtless government decisions translate in practice.

The unit has been ordered to function round-the-clock. But it has only three staffers — a medical officer and two technicians. The government apparently never thought how three people could run the unit 24 hours a day.

No wonder the move has created resentment among some doctors.

"How could they run the X-Ray unit round the clock. The health department should appoint at least one more MO and two other technicians before taking such a decision," a doctor said. "One more X-Ray machine is also required for emergency patients."

The hydrocele operation of a two-year old child was deferred today because the ECG unit did not function. His attending doctor wanted to see the ECG report before going ahead with the operation.

Dr Prabhakar Chatterjee, director of health services, Dr CR Maiti, director of medical education and Mr RS Shukla, joint secretary, health department visited the hospital this evening.

Mishra tastes Basu ire

ASTAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, Sept. 6: Nearly two years into retirement, Jyoti Basu today played the arbiter in the CPM as he reprimanded health minister Surjya Kanta Mishra on his response to the baby deaths.

Basu chose a meeting of the CPM state secretariat to articulate the party's sentiments, telling Mishra that his initial reaction struck people as "cold and inadequate".

"You are a very senior leader of our party and also an efficient physician," Basu said, turning towards Mishra. "Given your qualities and stature, our party and government expected a more sensible response from you."

But chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and CPM state secretary Anil Biswas came in for praise. "Thanks to their intervention, we could get a grip on the issue of hospital deaths three days after it broke. We could have done without the controversy," Basu said.

The words of solace came only after Basu ticked off Bhattacharjee's government for the slow response. "For the life of me, I still don't understand why the government didn't initiate early measures to check the deaths," he said.

Bhattacharjee and Biswas, who flanked the patriarch, and the rest of the 14 member-secretariat sat almost silently while Basu made his unequivocal comments.

Basu's criticism of Mishra was also shaped by the minister's dependence on reports from health officials. "You could have gone to the hospital as soon as you heard about the deaths, instead of waiting for reports from your officials," Basu said.

Basu's tough words were also meant to sensitise the party to the need for extending greater support to Bhattacharjee and Mishra to break the resistance from an influential section of health officials, doctors and workers.

The party secretariat asked Mishra to move ahead with his reforms programme and assured him of "full support for any action" to streamline the administration of government hospitals.

Midwife to quack to BC Roy

SUNANDO SARKAR AND
PRONAB MONDAL

Bhangor (South 24-Parganas)/Calcutta, Sept. 6: Rehana Bibi gave birth to a son "about four weeks ago" at Bhagabanpur. It was her mother, Khudejaan Bibi, who brought the child out with an unsterilised knife. The knife served another purpose that evening; it was also used to shave off the little hair on the child's head immediately after it had severed the umbilical cord.

Her in-laws at neighbouring Gabtala got the cheerful news a few hours later. The news brought so much cheer that the family spent more than Rs 2,000 buying clothes for the new entrant and in celebrations.

When Ashrafal was born, he weighed "about 3.5 kg". When he was admitted to B.C. Roy Memorial Hospital for Children — after 10 days of ignorant bliss and then of "cheap" treatment from his grandfather (the local quack) — with infection at the places the unsterilised knife had been used, he weighed 2.2 kg.

Rehana's tale is repeated al-

most everyday at villages like Gabtala, about 20 km from Calcutta, where the health network is still primitive.

Retracing Rehana's steps from Bhagabanpur to B.C. Roy Hospital in Calcutta and speaking to her, her husband and her father-in-law, **The Telegraph** tried to piece together the circumstances that force people like her to land up at B.C. Roy.

Rehana's family was not aware of what they had done to her son till her father-in-law, Abdus Samad, visited them five days later. Samad said he recognised what had happened to Ashrafal "immediately" after he saw the five-day-old baby.

Told the baby was fast losing weight and suffering from repeated convulsions, Samad first tried his brand of treatment.

A *mala* was arranged for, some *mantras* were chanted and *jharan* (driving away the evil spirit) was attempted. Five days later, the baby had grown thinner and weaker.

It was then that Samad found his confidence in his treatment wavering. "I rushed to the near-

Centre where nurses advised me to go to B.C. Roy Hospital," Samad said.

The family — left poorer by the celebrations it could not afford — still hired a cab and rushed Ashrafal to the hospital where he was admitted on August 19.

Yesterday, Rehana said it was no use blaming the family for its "callousness". "We just try to go for the cheaper alternative first," she added.

Her father-in-law now pedals to the hospital everyday. It takes three hours one way, but there is no other way. "We don't have the money to travel by bus everyday," he said, after spending a few thousand — by selling two of the four milch cows — on his grandson's treatment.

"We paid Rs 1,300 for a brain scan at the Medical College and Hospital — B.C. Roy does not have such a facility — as well as at least Rs 2,000 more on medicines and the cab fare the first day," he said. Today, their menu consists of snails — there was a bucket teeming with those creatures kept ready for dinner — and "some other things, besides

rice", the 55-year-old grandfather said apologetically.

A visit to the Jirangachha Primary Health Centre revealed why B.C. Roy gets so many referred cases. It has two doctors to treat the 500-plus patients who turn up at the outpatients' department on some days. Today, there was only one (Dr Sikdar). "Divide the number of patients by the number of minutes the doctors get and you have the average time spent on a patient," a hospital official said. It comes to less than a minute.

The centre has only three types of diagnostic equipment; one is a microscope, the other two are kits to measure haemoglobin-count and blood pressure. "Given the patients we get, we urgently need kits to ascertain a patient's urea-content, sugar-level, bilirubin-count and a colometer," an official said.

"I'm sorry I've forgotten to mention blood-grouping kits," he added, admitting that they did not have the wherewithal to ascertain even a person's blood group.

■ Twin suicides at hospital, Page 7

TEN CHILDREN DIE IN BURDWAN HOSPITAL

BC Roy hospital loses surgery unit

Subhendu Maiti and Soma Mukherjee in Kolkata

Sept. 6. — The state health department has announced a package for BC Roy Memorial Hospital for Children but decided to shift its paediatric surgery unit to BC Roy Polio Hospital. Doctors at BCMHC fear the move would cripple their patient care system.

The technical team probing the crib deaths will speak to the victims' parents. The members will find out whether there was any "system failure" at BCMHC or whether any death could have been prevented, said Mr Asim Burman, health secretary.

Unofficial sources said one more baby died at BCMHC around 1.05 a.m today, taking the toll since Sunday morning to 19.

A doctor at BC Roy hospital said: "We've 175 beds in the general medicine unit. Some of the patients may have surgical problems. How will we treat them if we don't have any a surgery unit?"

The health department also decided that the BCRPH's general medicine unit will be shifted to BCMHC. A BCMHC surgeon said: "The situation at BCRPH will only worsen if its general medicine unit is shifted to our hospital. Surgical patients too require general medicines."

He said: "We'll request the health department to retain at least two resident paediatric surgeons for emergency cases. BCRPH too will need two resident doctors of general

medicine."

The package for BCMHC comprises a neo-natal intensive care unit, intensive treatment unit, CT scan machine and a pulmonary care unit. Besides, the doctors would be trained in neo-natal intensive care at SSKM Hospital.

The health secretary said the technical probe team will go through the

Doctor attacked after patient's death

KOLKATA, Sept. 6. — A mob attacked a doctor and some medical staff of Calcutta Medical College and Hospital tonight after the death of Prakash Rajbanshi (16). He fell off the roof of his house at Baitakhana Bazar, Sealdah, while flying a kite and was admitted in a serious condition to the hospital.

Amina Bibi (22), an AIDS patient, killed herself at the School of Tropical Medicine this evening by tying a noose around her neck. — SNS

treatment chart, case history and details of the victims' records. The government, he said, is considering the proposal of supplying piped oxygen to teaching hospitals. Now, only some wards of SSKM Hospital has this facility.

Will the probe team talk to the families of all victims? The chief minister said: "I've given some specific points to the team to investigate. I'm waiting for the report. I can't tell you what I've asked them

to do before I get the report."

The health secretary said Mr Budhadeb Bhattacharjee, during his visit to BCMHC, had enquired about food, stock of medicines and use of disposable syringes. He had spoken to some employees, including doctors, and families of some patients and was satisfied with their replies.

Why was autopsy not conducted on the dead children? Dr CR Maiti, medical education director, said autopsy was done only when a patient died a mysterious death or of a disease that doctors failed to diagnose.

Burdwan deaths: Ten babies have died at Burdwan Medical College and Hospital over the last two days. The state government has started a probe.

For the second consecutive day today, the hospital remained tense as Congress supporters gheraoed doctors at the paediatric department. The director of medical education, Dr CR Maiti, told The Statesman this morning: "I just spoke to the hospital authorities. The head of the paediatric department will submit his report to me today."

The 10 children, he said, died of dehydration and other neo-natal complications. "One had infection in the respiratory tract, and the other suffered from dehydration. The paediatric head told me their cases were complicated and they couldn't be saved despite the best of efforts."

More reports on Kolkata Plus 1
Editorial: Not really, surprising,
page 4

GOVT ABOLISHES SUPERINTENDENT'S POST IN MEDICAL COLLEGES

Patients flee 'death hospital'

551
699
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Sept. 5. — No deaths were reported from BC Roy Memorial Hospital for Children today but the exodus of patients continued. Twenty children left today after their parents signed bonds to release them. They have not been officially discharged.

Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's visit to the hospital yesterday seems to have served as a wake-up call to the doctors and staff. Mr Asim Kumar Bose, a resident of Entally, said the doctor attending on his two year-old relative Subhadip Das had deferred the child's operation for an indefinite period. "The doctor had told us that Subhadip did not require an early operation as his case was not serious. Today, he said Subhadip needed to be operated on by tomorrow ... I think he changed his mind after the chief minister's visit."

Besides the relatives of patients, no one was allowed to enter the hospital premises today. Journalists were stopped at the gate. Police allowed one relative of every patient to go in after verifying the visiting card issued by hospital authorities.

This correspondent managed to sneak in. Very few relatives were seen in front of the usually-crowded enquiry office. About 150 patients had come to the outdoor departments, a hospital staff said. Normally, the number is more than 1000 on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. X-rays of seven patients were done till 1.30 p.m today. More than 40 X-rays are usually done here on weekdays.

A large police contingent from Phoolbagan, Narkeldanga and Beliaghata police stations were deployed at the main gate and in the hospital premises. Locals led by Mr Paresi Pal, Trinamul MLA, demonstrated outside the hospital's main gate protesting against the children's death.



CRY OF THE INNOCENTS: Children demonstrate on Thursday against the deaths at BC Roy Hospital. — The Statesman

Medical supers & vice-principals

The state government today abolished the superintendent's post in teaching hospitals. The health secretary, Mr Ashim Burman, said now medical superintendents would be in charge of the hospitals and vice-principals, of the colleges.

The medical superintendents will be recruited from among professors.

The three-member team probing the deaths at BC Roy Memorial Children's Hospital will inquire whether the deaths

could have been prevented, and whether there was any negligence on part of the doctors or the hospital staff, Mr Burman said.

The chief minister today signed an order to appoint on ad hoc basis Dr Meena Basak as principal of BCRMCH and BC Roy Polio Clinic hospital. Dr Basak is a senior professor at BCRMCH. Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said: "I'm waiting for the final report of the probe committee."

Dr Suryakanta Mishra evaded questions on the issue. "Am I to brief you

daily? ... It hardly matters whether I brief you or not. You write even if I do not say anything," he told reporters at Writers' Buildings. Would he resign? Dr Mishra said: "Sorry, I cannot make you people happy by resigning." The BCRMCH would be upgraded to tertiary hospital, Mr Burman said. The number of beds at the hospital will be increased by 200 after the surgery units are shifted to the BC Roy polio hospital, Mr Burman said.

More reports in Kolkata Plus 1

(Continued from page 1)

Even those who can manage the money would have to sign a bond, saying they are taking their children at their own risk and the authorities can't be held responsible for any eventuality.

But even then, most of the parents said they would wait for a few hours for their children's condition to improve. "Then we'll take the baby elsewhere for treatment", said a man whose child is in BC Roy hospital.

Yesterday the hospital had 280 patients, the figure today was 220, though officially, only 36 had been were "discharged".

A young woman from Joynagar, whose 10-day-old baby is in the hospital said: "The doctor comes only once a day -

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CHILDREN:

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I've been waiting all day for him to come and see my child but only in vain," said the woman who did not want to be named."

Ms Namita Pandey, aunt of a 50-day-old child alleged that doctors had refused to treat the baby because she had told the electronic media that the equipment and treatment in the hospital were poor. Doctors didn't attend to the child even after his condition deteriorated. They did so only after the family "signed a bond". The child's mother and grandmother kept waiting in front of the emergency

ward throughout the afternoon.

The health minister had said yesterday that there were more than enough oxygen cylinders in the hospital, a truck-load of cylinders were brought in today. With the sorry state of the only government referral child hospital and widespread criticism, hospital authorities were tight-lipped today. Dr Anup Mondol, who had even conceded on Monday that he was helpless and had appealed to the government to provide more equipment, said: "I will not comment on anything." He repeated this to every question,

including "are you under pressure from the higher authorities". The ward master said: "We have been told not to talk to the press."

Security has been tightened in the hospital. "Anyone could walk into wards without a card during visiting hours on other days - but today they are not allowing anyone without a card," a visitor said. Despite the furor, the scene in the wards has changed little. Two or three mothers continue to be crammed on a bed with their babies.

The authorities insisted that on an average, four children died every day in the hospital. But a doctor said: "Eight to ten deaths a day is no big deal here. Once I wrote out six death certificates on a night shift."

'GIVEN THE AVAILABLE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL, EVEN GOD CAN'T SAVE THE CHILDREN'

10 more babies die, ⁵⁹⁻¹ govt still unfazed

ROUTINE DEATHS?



■ No. of child deaths at BC Roy Hospital since 1 September 18

■ Last 24 hours 03

Yes, BC Roy Memorial Hospital for Children is the only dedicated state-run children's hospital in the city. Yes, many of those who can't afford treatment in private hospitals rush here. Yes, many critical cases are referred to the hospital. But the justifications the administration has come up with to explain "over 200 deaths in two months" as normal or routine, miss the point. For, it is not — tragic as it is — that critically ill children will not die at a hospital. The point is why did they die? As far as the 14 deaths reported between 10.30 a.m. on 1 September and 4.30 p.m. the next day are concerned, the complaint is that children needed oxygen and it wasn't provided to them, and the medical superintendent conceded that the hospital was ill-equipped and under-staffed. If the government thinks this is inaccurate — that doctors who complained of a lack of the basic infrastructure required to run a children's hospital were ill-informed, that the superintendent was fibbing when he said he had complained repeatedly to the government asking for help, that parents our reporters spoke to were lying about the deaths of their children — it should order a judicial probe. Not go by the 'preliminary findings' of a three-member government probe team, or the conclusions of a joint director of medical education who was 'asked to inquire into the complaints'. It is the bare minimum a so-called sensitive administration, led by a reportedly humane individual, must do. If for nothing else, at least to prove that the government is right when it says it has nothing to hide. Beginning today, The Statesman will carry a daily update on the number of child deaths at the BC Roy Memorial Hospital. Why so many are dying, only a judicial probe with the broadest terms of reference can ascertain. — SNS

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Sept. 4. — Ten more children died in city hospitals in the past 24 hours — seven in Nil Ratan Sircar Hospital and three in BC Roy Memorial Children's Hospital.

Doctors of NRS Hospital's paediatric medicine and paediatric surgery departments blamed "severe lack of infrastructure" for the deaths. Given the available facilities, "even God can't save these children," said one.

But NRS Hospital superintendent, Dr Shyamal Kumar Rudra, repeated the government's "nothing abnormal" phrase, saying: "Why is there so much noise over this?"

In the medicine department, Rahul (28 days old) died of cardio-respiratory failure and the cause of death of 45-day-old Halima Khatun was broncho-pneumonia and septicaemia, said Dr Sasanka Hembram, department house physician.

Four-year-old Narayan Saha of Murshidabad, admitted in an unconscious state with hepatic coma and jaundice died in the afternoon. Around 6.30 p.m., Joy Bose (8 months) died of meningitis, Dr Hembram said.

In the surgery department, Babu Laskar (3 days old) died of complicated abdominal infection, house surgeon Dr Subhashis Saha said. Mrs Sanchita Kayal's two-day-old baby died of intestinal obstruction and Tabassum Ara (4 days old) of ano-rectal malformation.

In BC Roy hospital, a two-day-old baby died of septicemia, and a 9-month-old child succumbed to bronchopneumonia late last night. This morning, a two-year-old child died of respiratory trouble. This takes the toll in the hospital since Sunday morning to 18.

The condition of NRS Hospital is no different from that of BC Roy Hospital. A bed/cot is shared by two and at times three children even in the surgical department, exposing them to infection.

"The patients' number has more than doubled in the ward because children below 12, instead of the earlier seven, are now treated here, but the number of doctors has fallen in the past six months," said Dr Saha. "The department lacks basic requirements for tertiary care, though this is the only department in state-run hospitals which offers round-the-clock emergency surgery services. The emergency OT is defunct and provisions for emergency ultrasonography, electrolytes, and arterial blood gas analysis is not available."

"The only ventilator is defunct more often than not and there is no cardiac monitor. No neo-natal unit in the world runs like this," he said. The department has informed the health minister about the lacunae, and remedial measures reportedly have begun, said Dr Saha.

Dr Hembram said: "On an average, the department has 150 children but it has only 63 beds. We have only one incubator for the whole ward and... not enough oxygen cylinders and emergency medicine in stock." The average mortality rate in the ward is about two children a day. Dr Rudra ruled out the possibility of negligence on behalf of hospital staff. "No hospital in the world saves all its patients," he said.

Parents whose children are admitted to BC Roy hospital are at a loss. For, most don't have enough money to get private medical treatment for their children.

Turn to page 6



JUSTICE, LEFT FRONT-STYLE: The mother of a child admitted to the BC Roy Memorial Hospital breaks down after the authorities refused to treat her child because her family had dared to tell the truth to the media. — Sailendra Mal (More reports on page 6 and Kolkata Plus I)

Nothing to hide but hospital off bounds

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Sept. 4. — If the state government afraid of making public the facts on the children's death at BC Roy Memorial Hospital for Children?

The chief minister visited the hospital this evening, two days after 14 children died. He avoided a question on ordering of a judicial probe. "An administrative inquiry by a three-member committee has been ordered. Let's wait for its report."

Though "there is nothing to hide", Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said journalists and political workers would be debarred from entering the campus from tomorrow. Security will be strengthened in the hospital, Mr Sanjoy Mukherjee, DC (Eastern Suburban Division), said. How credible is the administrative

inquiry conducted by joint director (administration), deputy director (planning) and assistant director (nursing)? Not very, going by the "preliminary findings".

National Human Rights Commission has sought a report from the government on the children's deaths; the state rights panel too has taken suo motu cognizance of the tragedy

The report is just an exercise in picking on the hospital superintendent, Dr Anup Mondal. Among other things, it slams him for speaking on the "negative aspects only" to the press.

This isn't surprising. For, the team members are all health department officials and can hardly be expected to be objective in their assessment. More so, when their minister, Dr Surya Kanta Misra, and the health services director asserted that there was nothing unusual about the number of deaths.

A judicial commission would have been independent. It has to be ordered under the Commission of Inquiry Act and headed by a sitting or retired judge of the High Court. The Act empowers such as the commission to summon witnesses and have them testify on oath. The commission's findings, though non-binding, would have exerted pressure on the government, some city lawyers said.

But while the health minister rules out a judicial probe and the chief minister is

Turn to page 6

Rebel staff under action cloud

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29/9
A STAFF REPORTER

Stern administrative measures will be taken against workers who had participated in an anti-government demonstration at Writers' Buildings on Friday, finance minister Asim Dasgupta told reporters on Saturday. The agitation took place during a pre-lunch pen-down strike at the behest of nine employees' unions.

According to Dasgupta, special secretary to the finance department Bikash Majumdar will inquire into Friday's "happenings" at the state secretariat and submit his report to the government by October 7. Disciplinary action will be taken on the basis of his report, the minister said.

Nine trade unions, under the banner of the West Bengal Gov-

ernment Employees' Union (Navaparjai), went for a pen-down strike at Writers' Buildings on Friday to protest the government's 50 per cent slash in Puja bonus and advance for state government employees. They shouted anti-government slogans and displayed posters. In course of the day, members of the CPM-controlled Co-ordination Committee of the State Government Employees also got into a scuffle with reporters.

Addressing a press conference on Saturday afternoon, the finance minister said a government order would be passed on Monday, detailing plans for curtailment of non-plan expenditure and ways to raise revenue. Such measures would help save over Rs 500 crore for the state excheq-

uer in the current year, he said.

Dasgupta claimed that the funds crunch the state government has been facing is "solely because of certain Union government policies".

"Everybody should appreciate that despite severe financial constraints, we are offering festival bonus and advance," the finance minister added. He dismissed as "false propaganda" the claim made by Navaparjai that many states, like Goa, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Assam, were paying bonus to their employees.

Dasgupta ruled out any immediate meeting with staff representatives as the atmosphere was "not conducive for any such discussion".

Commenting on the Centre's

announcement of the Rs 878-crore mid-term loan, Dasgupta said it would not result in any major relief to the government unless the interest was reduced from 12 per cent to eight. He said West Bengal had neither received the loan nor any communication from the Centre on its request for reducing the interest. He, however, conceded that the loan would help ease the state's financial crisis.

Dasgupta said one of the major reasons for the financial crisis was the additional burden the state had to bear for the enhanced pay recommended by the Fifth Pay Commission. "We were compelled to raise the salary of state government employees as the Centre had done the same," the minister added.

29 SEP 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

Asim cracks down on Writers' protesters

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Sept. 28. — The state finance minister, Mr Asim Dasgupta, said today that the special secretary (finance) will submit a report on the demonstration yesterday staged by some employees of his department inside the premises of Writers' Buildings over bonus cuts on 7 October.

Mr Dasgupta said necessary action would be taken against the employees following the report. No other state government in the country gives bonus to its employees, he said.

"The state government will enforce discipline among the employees not only at the Writers' Buildings but also at other government offices as well," Mr Dasgupta said, adding that the government will reduce the burden of non-plan expenditures.

The state government will also ask the Union government for powers to collect service like the Centre. But some rules in this connection need to be changed, the finance minister said. He added that the Centre was raising about Rs 600 annually as service tax.

Trinamul flays Asim on bonus cuts: The Trinamul Congress has expressed its solidarity with employees protesting against curtailment of Puja bonus this year announced by the state finance minister a few days ago.

The party leadership believes that the finance minister has failed to manage the state finances and is now passing the burden on to the employees in the form of reduced bonus.

Leader of Opposition Mr Pankaj Banerjee said today that Mr Asim Dasgupta never gave out any signals regarding the financial bank-

ruptcy the state is into while presenting this year's budget.

"The finance minister didn't spill the beans and hence kept the entire Opposition in the dark on the miserable condition of the state's economy. Instead, his budget indicated that all was well with the economy and that budgetary provisions made would be fulfilled. The people of Bengal were made to believe that everything is okay. Therefore, the government does not have any right to reduce the amount of Puja bonus," Mr Banerjee said. "It's strange that the government's arrogant stance is followed by the setting up of a one-man committee to inquire into the matter," he said.

Miss Mamata Banerjee left for Dhanbad to attend a rally organised jointly with Mr Shibu Soren of the JMM to protest against the ER bifurcation issue.

29 SEP 2002

THE STATESMAN

Blood on Keshpur paddy fields

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Keshpur, Sept. 23: As reinforcements reached Keshpur and witnesses began to piece together a three-pronged armed invasion, police recovered two bodies from paddy fields that have again become Bengal's political killing fields.

One of the dead has been identified as 35-year-old Shaktipada Mondal, a Trinamul activist. The bodies — one clad in black trousers and the other in a lungi — bore bullet marks in the stomach and were found near Kota and Piyasal villages, about 25 km from Keshpur.

Deputy inspector general of police (headquarters) Narayan Ghosh said the bodies were found around midnight. "It appears that Shaktipada and his associate were hiding in the jungle after the clash on Sunday. Maybe, they wanted to escape after sundown but they were spotted and shot," he added.

The CPM chief in Keshpur, Entaj Ali, hedged questions on whether it was his party supporters who shot the two. "They were killed when people tried to stop the attackers," he said. Late tonight, Trinamul said its party office in Garbeta was attacked by CPM supporters.

In the renewed battle for control of Keshpur, armed groups attacked the CPM-dominated villages from three sides and fired about 200 rounds. The CPM had alleged that a combined force of Trinamul and the People's War led the assault.

With tension running high, prominent Trinamul workers and panchayat members in Keshpur are trying to mask their political affiliations. Sheikh Sarwardi, owner of a video hall and a gram panchayat pradhan who won on a Trinamul ticket, said: "I am neither Trinamul nor CPM. I am not in politics."

But Sarwardi said a group of about 22 armed men had gone to his house. "Yes, they told me to join in the *gram dakhla* (village grab) programme. When I refused, they abused me and left."

Witnesses said the group shot at a villager and was about to open fire on another when a police patrol arrived. "They tried to escape but were soon surrounded by the police and villagers. Several of them were caught and guns were seized," said Sheikh Abdul Gaffar, a villager.

The police took 33 arrested persons — all identified as Trinamul supporters — to Midnapore town to produce them in court. Jawans of the Eastern Frontier Rifles and the Rapid Action Force marched in Keshpur.

THE TELEGRAPH

24 SEP 2002

Battle for control of Keshpur flares again

OUR BUREAU

Keshpur, Sept. 22: Guns boomed before the first light of dawn today, signalling the start of another round of battle for control of this region with a bloody history of fierce feuding between the CPM and the Trinamul Congress.

For the first time after the 2001 Assembly election, Trinamul — allegedly with active support of the People's War — mounted an armed offensive around 2 am in a dozen CPM-controlled villages to wrest lost ground, police said.

Unconfirmed reports said at least four bodies were lying in the fields in a village about 20 km from here. Seven CPM supporters were injured and one was reported missing, as were six of Trinamul, a district police officer said.

"They launched the attacks in groups, chanting Trinamul-Janajuddha (People's War) *zindabad*," said Nandarani Dal, CPM legislator from Keshpur and

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minister for mass literacy.

In Calcutta, Trinamul leader Mamata Banerjee said her supporters — some of who were returning home for the first time since the 2001 polls — merely fought back after being attacked despite assurances to the contrary made on Saturday in an all-party meeting.

After speaking to deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, Mamata said she would fax a detailed message to Delhi (as sought by Advani) and send a Trinamul probe team to the affected villages tomorrow. Six Trinamul supporters were missing in the joint CPM-police offensive against "public resistance", one-time Trinamul hero of Keshpur Mohammad Rafiq said from Midnapore town.

Police reports said a band of about 100 men — appearing to be a combined Trinamul-PW force — swooped on the villages in the

first really serious attempt at recapturing the belt in more than two years.

The police said the attackers rained bullets and bombs on the sleeping villages. In three groups, they launched their operation a little after 2 am, dragging sleeping CPM supporters out of their homes.

"They were wearing black dresses and were armed to the teeth," Dai said. CPM supporters — along with police officials — regrouped and fought back, leading to a gun-battle of the sort that Keshpur had last seen in mid-2000, local CPM leader Intiaz Ali said.

The gun-battle continued till well after daybreak, in which Saiful Chaudhuri (he was later brought to Calcutta) and Rezzak Ali were injured.

Twenty-four of the attackers were arrested and five rifles and dozens of cartridges were recovered, West

Midnapore superintendent of police K.C. Meena said.

The rest of the gang took shelter in the neighbouring forests where a police team assisted by CPM activists was looking for them.

Meena did not appear surprised at the joint raid as there were intelligence reports of a local-level alliance between Trinamul and PW in the past, too, there have been allegations of the two parties joining hands to fight the CPM.

West Midnapore district magistrate M.V. Rao, however, said the attack had caught the administration off-guard. "This was wholly unexpected, especially after Saturday's peace meeting to bring back Trinamul supporters who had been forced to leave home," he said.

CPM leaders did not share his sense of surprise. "With the panchayat polls due in 2003, we had information that Trinamul Congress and PW activists were trying to resurface in the area," West Midnapore district CPM secretary Dipak Sarkar said.

QUOTE

It is the CPM which flooded the area with arms...

MAMATA BANERJEE

23 SEP 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

Everything's fine except the super, says probe report

Romita Dutta & Tapan Das
Kolkata, September 18

THE PROBE report on the BC Roy Hospital infant deaths is set to nail the super and transfer him to an obscure hospital in North Bengal for failing to mobilise his resources and lead his team in tackling the crisis.

A doctor, who did not turn up despite being on duty, is facing suspension. The same fate awaits a nurse found guilty of dereliction of duty, while some Group D staffers could face disciplinary action.

The two-member team probing the crib deaths is learnt to have concluded that better managerial abilities, coordination with all categories of staff and, above all, keeping one's cool during the crisis would have prevented some deaths.

But the team gave a clean chit to the infrastructure, which covers medicine, equipment, oxygen cylinders and human resources.

It accepted that the hospital had adequate stocks of oxygen cylinders, one for every bed, but questioned the way patients had been made to share them. Since

BC ROY HOSPITAL CRIB DEATHS

there were more than three patients per bed, there was less than one cylinder per patient, it pointed out, questioning the super's managerial acumen.

The team ascribed the deaths to a managerial failure to mobilise and orchestrate all available hands in an emergency situation. The "system was in place" but collapsed because of

this managerial failure, it said.

The report incorporated the allegations of Subham Dutta's parents, "prime" witnesses in the case. Another patient party from East Midnapore appeared before the investigation team today. The views of the aggrieved parties will be incorporated in the main report.

Asked if he was satisfied with the report, Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said he would not comment because the Health Minister would hold a news conference tomorrow on the subject.



ASHOK NATH/DEVI/HT

THE FINDINGS

- Poor coordination among doctors, nurses and Group D staff
- Hospital had adequate equipment and oxygen cylinders. Super did not put them to proper use
- Super failed to mobilise resources and lead staff in tackling crisis

19 SEP 2002

Child death inquiry report reaches Buddha

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Sept 17: The report on the inquiry into the deaths of 14 children in 48 hours at the B.C. Roy Memorial Hospital was submitted to chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today.

"I have received the report just now and the action taken report (ATR) will be finalised tomorrow," Bhattacharjee said after health minister Surjya

Kanta Mishra and health secretary Asim Barman submitted the report to him. "I can tell you this much that Surjya will brief you about it on Thursday," added the chief minister before he left Writers' Buildings this evening.

Bhattacharjee, however, refused to divulge the kind of action the government intends to take on the deaths, which took place since the morning of September 1, on the basis of the report. "Nobody will come to

know the contents of the report since only I and Surjya are working on it," he added.

Barman later said the ATR would fix the responsibility and role of doctors and nurses on duty at the hospital on the two days. "The ATR will include everything from fixing of responsibility to suggesting what kind of action should be taken against those found guilty," he explained.

In the 30-page report, the probe team of health services di-

rector Prabhakar Chatterjee and medical education director C.R. Maity recommended that disciplinary action be initiated against hospital superintendent Anup Mondal and nearly half-a-dozen doctors and nurses on duty at the hospital when the children's deaths took place, say health department sources.

Mondal has been indicted for going public on the lack of infrastructure in the media. The report also pointed out that Mon-

dal had violated norms by allowing mediapersons into the hospital, to the disadvantage of other children undergoing treatment. The report also reveals that there was no dearth of oxygen as was reported to the media.

Both Chatterjee and Maity visited the hospital again this morning and interrogated some more patients and their relatives on the state of affairs there. There was tension in the hospital when a two-and-a-half-year-old child

died during the day. The bereaved parents were reported to have approached the media to complain that the death was due to doctors' negligence. However, the situation came under control when the two intervened.

Chatterjee later said the probe team would question the parents of three more children as they had failed to turn up yesterday despite a radio message sent to them earlier. "We will have to wind up the interroga-

tion by tomorrow and that is why we have once again asked the police to get in touch with the parents of three children who had died on September 1," he added.

Police officials of North 24 Parganas have already informed the health department that the family of two-year-old Subham Dutta was not found at the address in Belghoria given in the hospital records. It was protest against Shuvam's death on September 2 morning by his family

that had brought to the fore the deaths of 14 children at the hospital in two days.

Buddha security

The CPM high command will ask deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, who also holds the home portfolio, to upgrade security arrangements for chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee in the light of the People's War attacks on Left leaders and activists in the state.

13 SEP 2002

Govt prescribes blackout pill

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Sept. 3: Betraying little remorse and reeling off cold statistics, the Bengal government today drew up a stiff regimen to treat vocal hospital managers — not the system in which the death of as many as 14 children in 48 hours in a single institution is considered "normal".

As Bengal woke up with revulsion to the death-spiral at the state-run B.C. Roy Memorial Hospital for Children, the government put hospital officials off-limits to the media to check the flow of "adverse" information about the institution.

The tone of the government's campaign was set by health minister Suryakanta Mishra, who attributed the deaths to the logical culmination of critical diseases that afflicted the children who had been brought to the hospital in a moribund condition.

Contesting the charges against the ill-equipped hospital, Mishra said the annual average death rate there was 3.39 per cent of the patients admitted, which was less than that in the paediatric wards of other hospitals in the city.

"So, it is nothing abnormal. It is not something which happened suddenly," he said, citing the findings of a preliminary report that was submitted to the government this morning by health officials. He also said the hospital had "enough infrastructure and staff" to deal with its patients.

But the authorities at the hospital maintained that it was ill-equipped and that the infrastructure there was "woefully inadequate" to cater to the large number of patients (see chart). Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee asked Mishra this morning how the superintendent of the hospital Anup Mandal, could brief the media about the "inadequate infrastructure"

without permission from his department.

Following this, the director of health services, Prabhakar Chatterjee, admonished Mandal for briefing reporters and instructed him to stay away from the media. It has also been decided that a circular will be issued prohibiting superintendents of government hospitals and heads of departments from interacting with the media without permission from superiors.

"There is no shortage of oxygen at the hospital," Mishra said. "Mandal may have become nervous and said so under pressure from political leaders who surrounded him."

During the day, at the behest of Mishra, a three-member committee, comprising Manohar Pal, joint director (administration), Anrudha Kar, deputy director (planning), and Machhab Das, assistant director, nursing, visited the hospital and prepared a report on the quality of infrastructure and support systems. The report will be submitted to Mishra on Wednesday.

Echoing Mishra's line, state health bosses like Chatterjee, the director of health services, said families with critically ill children would invariably throng B.C. Roy hospital, instead of other institutions where fully equipped paediatric wards offered comprehensive treatment.

The chief minister did not make any comment on the deaths. Asked whether he would like to say a couple of words, Bhattacharjee dismissed the question with a shrug.

But Mishra conceded shortage of space in the hospital. He said the children's hospital would be merged with the nearby B.C. Roy Polio Clinic and be turned into an institute for child health care. "The surgical ward would be transferred to the clinic which will increase the number of beds at the hospital," he added.

See Metro



WHO WILL CURE THIS MALADY?	
Government says	Hospital says
✓ We have ventilator	✓ It is locked up with no technician to operate it
✓ We have more nurses — 91 — than the sanctioned strength of 83	✓ Only on paper. Actual patient-nurse ratio works out to 50:1
✓ Oxygen cylinders are always in stock; of the 244 sanctioned, 80 in use, the rest in reserve	✓ Babies often have to share the same cylinder, though they may be in a critical state
✓ In neonatal wards, where chances of infection are high, extra patients not taken	✓ Newborn babies often have to be kept with older children in general wards for lack of space
✓ Some extra patients have to be taken in low-risk wards	✓ There are only neonatal, surgery and medicine wards, which means no separate high/low-risk wards
✓ We have supplied incubator	✓ No incubator in hospital
✓ Govt trying to bring down child mortality rate with better care by providing essential equipment	✓ We have repeatedly asked for essential equipment without success

A father and child leave the hospital on Tuesday.

Picture: Pradip Sanyal, Graphic: Niraman Maity

When death knocks, show babies the door

STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, Sept. 3: The state's only paediatric referral hospital, mauled because of the recurrence of multiple deaths in a day, today sought to reverse the situation by desperately trying to scale down the number of patients under its care.

On a day when releases — rather than deaths — were the order of things, the B.C. Roy Memorial Hospital for Children discharged more than 30 children till late this evening. Starting the day with 302 children on the patient-rolls, the hospital had, by the evening, brought

down the number to 282. There were 14 new admissions and one death. Thirty-three children were released.

While hospital superintendent Anup Mandal maintained that the number of releases was not "abnormal," some doctors said they had been "advised" to release "improving patients".

"Usually, we keep back a child for a day or two as the condition of children is prone to sudden improvement or deterioration," explained a senior physician. "But, now, we have been asked to keep the number of patients to manageable and non-controversial levels

at least for the next few days," she added.

Even some parents of children admitted to the hospital are surprised at the "swift rate" at which patients are being released. Sunita Mandal, mother of two-and-a-half-month-old Manisha, had admitted her daughter only yesterday with asthma and infection in the respiratory tract and was told that Manisha would have to be kept for "some more days at least".

She was surprised when doctors told her that she could take her daughter home today. Asit Kumar's father, Asit Kumar, was another doubting

parent. "The doctors could not say why they were releasing him so soon (Asit was admitted on Sunday)," he said. "They only told me they were acting under orders," he added.

Hospital superintendent Mandal, however, used the same logic to explain the spate of releases.

"It's pointless keeping a child back when the demand for space is so acute," he said. "I can't take the moral responsibility of letting fast-improving child occupy a bed when an emergency case is knocking at the doors of the hospital." The hospital is also encountering

parents to take their children to other government hospitals that are less crowded. "Many other government hospitals are also providing the kind of treatment that we are, but still children are being brought here since this is the only referral hospital for paediatric cases," a doctor said.

"Some of the children being brought here are those that have been turned away from hospitals like R.G. Kar Hospital and Medical College," said Mandal. "But the fact is that they could have been treated there as well. This unnecessarily leads to trauma for the children."

Govt still insists it's not unusual

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Sept. 3. — The government today remained steadfast in its stand that there is "nothing unusual" about 14 deaths over 36 hours at BC Roy Memorial Hospital for Children.

Dr Surya Kanta Misra, health minister, ruled out a judicial probe and said the annual report (2001-02) of the hospital showed that 3.39 per cent of the patients died. But he was quick to add that the deaths were neither caused due to "hospital acquired infection" nor due to negligence of doctors and nursing staff.

A three-member probe team visited the hospital today. It'll examine the staff strength and infrastructure.

He said the mortality rate in this hospital is much low compared to the paediatric wards of other teaching hospitals.

Another child, Puja Gupta (5), died of meningo-encephalitis today. With this the toll has risen to 15 since Sunday morning. Dr Misra maintained that the hospital didn't lack infrastructure, considering it was a 250-bed one.

Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee held a meeting with the health minister, health secretary and director of health service and director of medical education.

It's learnt that the chief minister wanted to know why Dr Anup Mondal, hospital super, had told the press that there was a dearth of equipment.

The minister said the hospital had 26 doctors, two more than

the sanctioned strength. There were 18 professors of paediatric medicine and surgery, along with some post-graduate students, who have completed DCH.

But Dr Mondal, said: "We've urged the probe team to increase the number of doctors, nurses and staff, including sweepers." He said there were 24 doctors and 24 more were needed. The minister said the number of nursing staff was 91 against the sanctioned strength of 83. But he admitted that there were 146 group D staff against the sanctioned strength of 179.

Dr Misra said there was no dearth of oxygen cylinders in the hospital. The hospital had 244 cylinders, of which 80 are being used, 124 are in stock and 44 have been sent for refilling. Then why was one cylinder being used for more than one patient?

An agitated Dr Misra said: "You can't expect that one oxygen cylinder will be used for one patient. In all other hospitals a cylinder is used by more than one patient." He said some people were politicising a very usual incident. When told that the hospital super himself had made such a complaint, he said: "Some political leaders were creating pressure on him."

Asked if there was no lack of infrastructure, why was a single bed shared by three patients, he said: "We can't turn away any emergency patient."

Youth Congress activists gheraoed the super for more than three hours demanding a judicial probe. Admission of patients to the hospital has resumed.

Health secy: What can be done?

KOLKATA, Sept. 3. — There was no shortage of oxygen cylinders at BC Roy children's hospital yesterday. This is the stand the government has decided to take.

When The Statesman contacted the health secretary, Mr Asim Barman, today he sounded rather annoyed. "Who has told you that the children died because of shortage of oxygen cylinders?" The otherwise polite health secretary's first sentence was even

more harsh. "What right have you to call up at home?"

When asked what steps were being taken after the death of 14 children in three days at the children's hospital at Beliaghata, Mr Barman said: "What can be done about it?... There were enough oxygen cylinders at the hospital. The children didn't die because of non-availability of the gas."

Then why did they die? Mr Barman had no answer.

The death of so many children

has obviously caught the government on the wrong foot.

"At a time when the health minister is trying to improve the image of the health service, yesterday's incident has come as a big blow to the government," said a health official.

"A probe panel will be set up — but no one will get to know about its report. And nothing will be done to improve hospital services," a superintendent of a city medical college said. — SNS

14 children die as city hospital turns into gas chamber

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Sept. 2. — Fourteen children have died during the past 36 hours at Dr BC Roy Memorial Hospital for Children at Phoolbagan in east Kolkata.

The victims, aged between a day-old and two years, died of asphyxiation, thanks to the shortage of oxygen cylinders in the hospital. It's common to share one oxygen cylinder by rotation between three and four patients.

The deaths sparked trouble, with parents and relatives of the dead gheraoing the superintendent, Dr Anup Mondal. The parents of two-year-old Shuvam Dutta, who died of "empyema thoracic" said the hospital authorities didn't take an X-ray of his lungs to determine his illness. Shuvam was suffering from a lung inflammation that led to septicaemia.

The director of health services, Dr Prabhakar Chatterjee, said a joint director of medical education has been asked to inquire into the complaints. But only a preliminary report has been submitted till now. The superintendent said 12 children had died in 24 hours. Two more deaths have not been recorded.

Distraught parents and relatives, waiting for news of their little ones, were aggrieved by the attendants' misbehaviour.

Some parents and relatives wanted to meet the superintendent to ask him for better treatment. But their request was turned down. Mrs Mira Debnath, grandmother of a two-year-old, said doctors refused to put her grandchild on a respirator, though "he was on the verge of being asphyxiated".

The health department apparently sought to pass off the deaths as routine. Dr Chatterjee conceded that the average daily death rate in the hospital was about six. Most deaths occur because the children admitted are in a very serious condition.

Dr Mondal said: "At least 98 children died in the past 30 days, and about 200 in two months."

Among the victims from Sunday night till this afternoon are: Rajesh Baij (three months), Najma Khatoun (two-and-a-half months), Sanjeet Das (two years)



HEARTSTOPPING: A grieving mother with her child who died at Dr BC Roy Memorial Hospital for Children at Phoolbagan in Kolkata on Monday. — Rajib De

Sheikh Mahidul Islam (six months), Surathi Karmakar (eight months) and a two-month-old baby. They were suffering from diseases like bronco-pneumonia and mango-encephalitis.

The DHS said most victims had been referred by the district hospitals and "were critical and had very little chance of survival".

This correspondent saw at least three children sharing beds. Each had only one oxygen cylinder used by patients in rotation.

Dr Mondal conceded that the hospital was ill-equipped and under-staffed. It has 220 beds — though it now has 300 patients. "I had repeatedly complained to the government and sought

help to run it properly," he said. The chief minister has expressed concern over the deaths and has sought a report from the health department.

To check overcrowding in the hospital, Dr Chatterjee said, the government is planning to set up another one with the private sector's help.

KLO: Buddha ticks off Bhutan King

SUBRATA NAGCHOUHURY
DHUPGURI, SEPTEMBER 1

WEST Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya today warned the Royal Government of Bhutan that Kamtapur Liberation Organisation camps operating from the "King's soil" would not be tolerated for long. "The King has to take necessary steps to remove the camps," Buddhadeb said during his visit to Dhupguri in North Bengal. Addressing a rally to protest against the killing of five CPI(M) men inside their party office on August 17 by KLO militants, Buddhadeb said the Kamtapur militants were using Bhutan for shelter and training.

Buddhadeb said he had an informal telephonic conversation with the King recently when an invitation to visit that country was extended. "We have got every bit of information about them, the kind of arms and ammunition they have collected and how KLO has tied up with ULFA and Naga militants there. The camps are about three km inside Bhutan after one crosses a river that divides the two country," he said.

"There is no doubt that Bhutan is a friendly country to India," the Chief Minister said and pointed out that the King has to do something to stop these camps.

Buddhadeb said he had urged Prime Minister Vajpayee and Deputy Prime Minister Advani to take up the issue with the Bhutan King during his visit to Delhi last week. "Even I would like to meet the King to sort out the problem," Bhattacharya said.

North Bengal is the lifeline for land-locked Bhutan and hundreds of Bhutanese pass through Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri and Siliguri every day for all kinds of supplies and support.

The West Bengal government had provided crucial help to the Royal Kingdom when several thousand Nepalese ousted from Bhutan were trying to organise demonstrations against the King by using the territory of North Bengal in the nineties. Hundreds of Nepalese refugees were arrested in Siliguri and put in jail when they threatened a march to Bhutan.

"No KLO militant should be spared and allowed to escape should there be another Dhupguri in future," Buddhadeb warned. Evidence of the state's firmness can be seen in the two alleged "encounters" between police and the KLO last week in which three militants were shot dead.

Health directorate antidote to KLO

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Aug. 27: To take the wind out of the Kamtapuri sail, the state government today decided to set up a separate health directorate in Siliguri, a first in the state.

Director of health services Prabhakar Chatterjee said a post of an additional director of health services had already been created to head the directorate, which would work in tandem with the North Bengal Development Council.

The new directorate will look after the six north Bengal districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda.

"The new directorate will be able to take decisions and action much faster," Chatterjee said. "Handling emergencies from Writers' Buildings always took time."

The decision to set up the directorate came close on the heels of the KLO strike on the CPM party office in Dhupguri, which killed five party workers. The Kamtapuri movement, which

had given birth to the militant KLO, had been born out of a perceived sense of neglect in the region. The new directorate is the first government move to combat the KLO's terror tactics through development.

He said the north Bengal directorate would control the health administration and planning in the six districts. "It will also have financial autonomy."

With around 10 employees, the Siliguri-based directorate is expected to get rolling in November after a formal approval from the finance department.

Chatterjee said a special team of doctors, formed jointly by the new directorate, the North Bengal Medical College and Hospital and the North Bengal Development Council, would monitor outbreaks of epidemics and infectious diseases in the tea gardens and the tribal belts.

"When an outbreak of diarrhoea was reported in Kalchini, it took (us) over two days to take a decision and send teams of specialists across because of the sheer distance," Chatterjee said. "Quick decisions are often nec-

essary to combat outbreaks of malaria and unknown fevers in north Bengal districts," he added.

The official said monitoring the situation had become difficult from Writers' Buildings. "The new directorate will be effective in such respects."

The additional director, in charge of the north Bengal directorate, will closely monitor the performance of chief medical officers of health of the six districts and the superintendents of all government hospitals. Chatterjee said the new directorate would help run the hospitals smoothly in the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong.

Health officials said the directorate would assist the North Bengal Medical College and Hospital in sending serious patients to Calcutta hospitals when necessary. They said the complicated cases were now often referred to Calcutta.

"But it's not always necessary. Once the new directorate starts functioning, this problem will be taken care of once and for all," a senior official said.

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Aug. 27: At least 25 Kamtapur Liberation Organisation militants are believed to be involved in the August 17 strike on the CPM office in Dhupguri that left five dead and 13 wounded.

Inspector-general of police (law and order) Chayan Mukherjee said the attack must have been the handiwork of an organised gang comprising over a couple of dozen well-trained KLO and Ulfa extremists.

"We have come to know during the course of the interrogation of those arrested that the KLO activists have regular contacts with the Ulfa extremists and many of them have been intensively trained on the use of sophisticated arms in the Ulfa camps," he said.

Mukherjee said West Bengal police have contacted their counterparts in Assam for joint raids at suspected hideouts in both states. "We are regularly interacting with senior police personnel of Assam so that those who have taken shelter

Jalpaiguri, only two persons, who were picked up yesterday, were directly involved in the August 17 strike, said sources.

According to officials, Subhas Roy, arrested from Raiganj in Jalpaiguri, is a KLO activist while Mritunjay Rava, picked up from Barobhisa on the Assam border, is an Ulfa cadet.

"Both the militants were produced in court today and have been remanded in custody for 10 days," Mukherjee said. A team of intelligence officials from Calcutta will question them, he added.

"We are convinced that marathons interrogation of the two extremists will provide us with major leads," the inspector-general said. Eleven police stations in Jalpaiguri and four in Cooch Behar have been identified as major hideouts of KLO activists in the state. Security has been reinforced in these areas after the Dhupguri attack, added Mukherjee.

Security around Jalpaiguri has been stepped up in connection with chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's rally at Dhupguri on September 1.

Probe zeroes in on Ulfa links

there after the Dhupguri killings can be nabbed without delay," he added.

According to state home department sources, training camps of the Ulfa militants in Bhutan are being shifted to a different base despite assurances from the government of the Himalayan kingdom that they are withdrawing from the country.

"The number of camps where training is imparted to these KLO militants by Ulfa cadres is actually not coming down. Only a joint operation by security forces from Bengal and Bhutan can yield positive results," the sources added.

Out of the 15 arrested from

Buddha to PM: Rise above politics

KAV BENEICT

New Delhi, Aug. 26: Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today pleaded with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to rise above petty politics on the issue of bifurcation of Eastern Railway and set up an expert committee to study the rationale for creating new zones. But the chief minister did not receive a positive response from either the Prime Minister or deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani.

The refusal of the duo to make a commitment also rules out the chances of Manmata Banerjee's return to the Cabinet. Bhattacharjee had separate meetings with Vajpayee and Advani. He told them that he was not asking for scrapping the new zones. "Let the new zones start functioning but at the same time set up an expert committee to go into the issue," he said.

The committee could consist of former rail board chairmen, economists and other experts.

Sources said both the Prime Minister and his deputy gave the impression that the matter had gone too far and the government could not now backtrack on the Cabinet decision.

Pointing out that the government could review the Cabinet decision, Bhattacharjee told Vajpayee that it was a political issue.

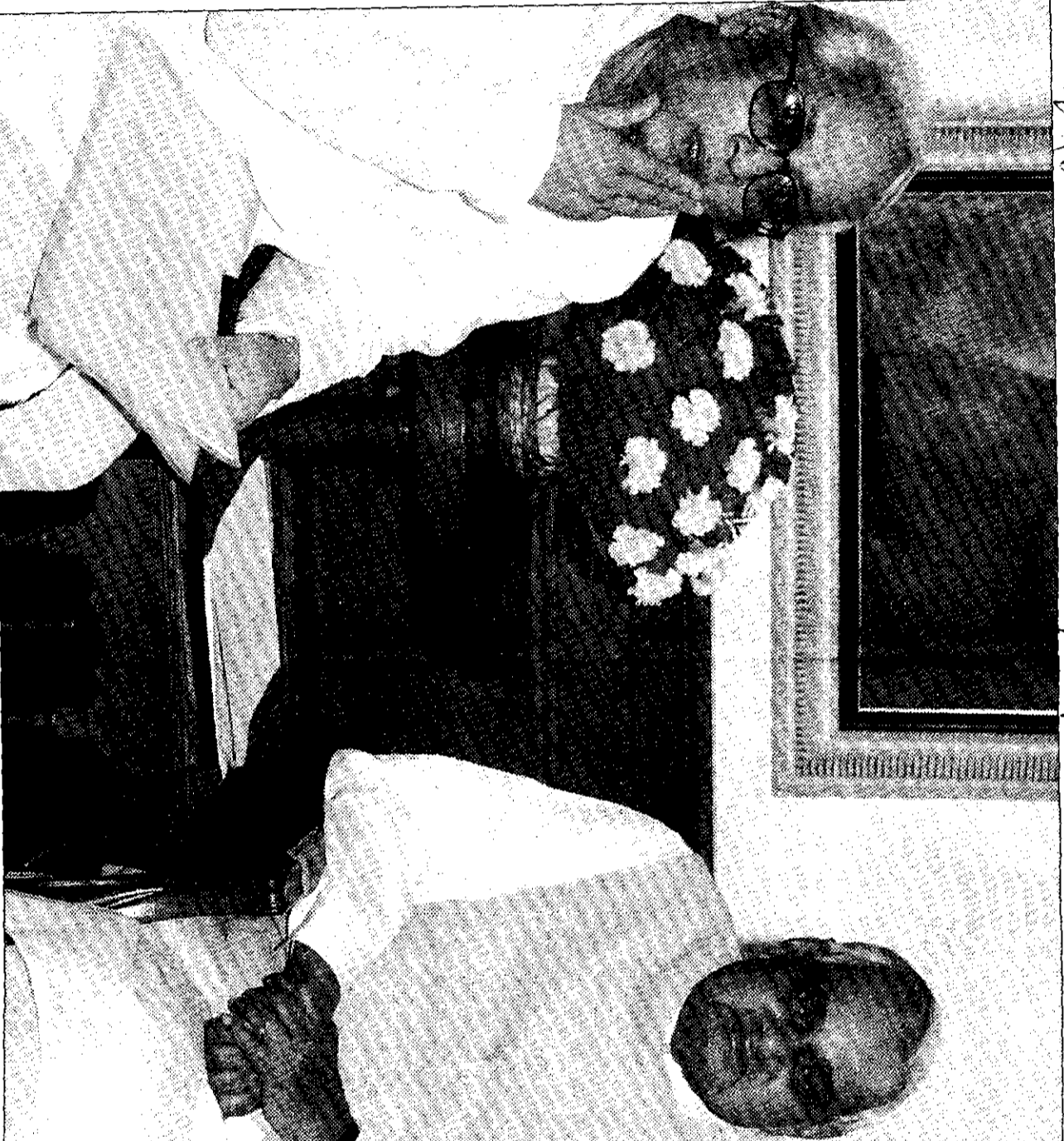
Vajpayee responded, saying: "I am a political personality." The chief minister added: "Fine, but you are the Prime Minister of the country. Rise above petty politics. Take the opinion of the Planning Commission, CAG, Rakesh Mohan committee and other experts. Nobody suggested bifurcation."

After his 35-minute meeting with Vajpayee and 40-minute talks with Advani, Bhattacharjee did not say whether he received an assurance of a review of the bifurcation from either.

"He (Prime Minister) gave me a patient hearing," the chief minister told reporters.

Bhattacharjee said he "questioned the basis of not only the concept of bifurcation, but also the creation of new zones".

The chief minister told the duo that he opposed the stand



Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee with AB Vajpayee at the Prime Minister's residence in New Delhi on Monday (PTI)

taken by the Trinamul Congress and the railway ministry. "It is not a Bengal versus Bihar issue. It has to be seen in a national perspective," he said.

Bhattacharjee told the leadership that in this age of information technology there is no need to create new zones and the railways can be run from the headquarters.

"The basic issue for the railways is to ensure safety and se-

curity of passengers. We want new trains, but they are spending crores on creation of new zones. The Prime Minister should intervene."

KLO promise

Bhattacharjee look up the threat from the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation with Vajpayee and Advani.

He pointed out that the militant group was running training

camp in Bhutan. Advani assured him that he would ask foreign minister Jaswant Singh to take up the matter with Bhutan. The home ministry will take a decision on sending more paramilitary forces to north Bengal after the Kashmir elections, he added.

"This cannot continue. The government of India should tell Bhutan in clear terms that it must stop ULFA and KLO from

killing people and dismantle their camps in Bhutan," Bhattacharjee had told Advani.

The chief minister also called on President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and invited him to visit the state in November. Describing his 20-minute meeting as a "courtesy call", the chief minister said he had asked Kalam to visit some educational institutions and the President had agreed.

Terror in Bengal, confusion in Kolkata

MANY IN New Delhi, especially in the home ministry, are presumably waiting to see how the West Bengal government responds to the latest attack by the Kantipur Liberation Organisation on a CPI(M) office in Jalpaiguri. Saturday's attack has claimed five lives and is unlikely to be the last time the state government will face this kind of menace from the insurgent group. Which is why it is important for the CPI(M) to devise a policy to fight the KLO threat. Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's solution is to bring in the long-pending Prevention of Organised Crime Act (POCA). Many of his party colleagues, however, are cagey about this as they know that the Act's similarities with the much-criticised Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) stretch beyond the fact that they rhyme.

The KLO is no popular resistance movement. Its actions spur from the notion of recreating a 'sovereign' state out of areas in north Bengal and Assam — the 'historical' Kamptapur, which may well be a figment of its imagination. What is very real, though,

is the trail of blood that the KLO has left in its wake since May 2000. Since then, leaders of the Left Front (CPI(M) and have been regularly gunned down. Most of the state's leadership favours calling in the army to crack down on the rebels. The police have been accused of ignoring intelligence reports about impending KLO attacks on Marxists. On August 5, the chief of the Kamptapur Women's Rights Forum — and fiancée of the self-styled KLO 'commander-in-chief' Tamir Das — was arrested by the police. They should have seen the 'reprisal' coming.

According to intelligence sources, it is likely that the KLO has links with the ULFA. Killing 'common targets' could be a strategy to take on the state government. But what will be Mr Bhattacharjee's strategy? POCA may continue to have the bad odour of POTA for his critics. But with more KLO attacks and the police a mere spectator, can the chief minister convince his colleagues that what is considered dangerous in the hands of Delhi may be the only way to halt terror in its tracks in Bengal?

All-party meet demands rail split panel

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Aug. 19: An all-party meeting chaired by chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today strongly opposed the bifurcation of Eastern Railway and demanded from the Centre an expert panel to look into the issue.

The meeting at Writers' Buildings urged the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government to put on hold railway minister Nitish Kumar's decision to implement the bifurcation from October 1 till the proposed panel submitted its recommendations.

All political parties but for the BJP attended today's meeting. The party's state leadership had accused the government of "trying to make an issue out of a non-issue" while announcing its decision to boycott the meeting.

The chief minister said he would meet the Prime Minister in Delhi over the issue either on August 26 or 27.

"I will urge the Prime Minister to review the situation arising out of the bifurcation decision and its financial aspects, to appoint an expert committee and to stall the bifurcation till the panel submits its report. Several expert committees had opposed the bifurcation. The Rakesh Mohan committee, the CAG and the Planning Commission were against it. The bifurcation is a wastage of money and a threat to the unity and integrity of the country," he said.

The railway ministry has got its priorities wrong, Bhat-



The all-party meet in progress at the Writers' rotunda on Monday. Picture by Pradip Sanyal

tacharjee said. "The bifurcation will cost Rs 3,500 crore. This expenditure is unnecessary when we require funds to improve the railway's safety measures and services, augment revenue and increase the number of trains."

Bhattacharjee also maintained that there would not be any problem if the railway wanted to centralise its administration through a computer network. "But a carve-up is not necessary. The bifurcation is not a Bengal

versus Bihar issue. It is a national problem," he said.

Trinamul Congress' all-India general secretary Mukul Roy and state general secretary Partha Chatterjee represented the party at the meet. Mamata Banerjee's men said the outcome of the all-party meet vindicated the Trinamul chief's stand.

"She (Mamata) was the first to urge the chief minister to convene an all-party meeting and had also urged the Prime Minis-

ter to form an expert committee to go into the contentious issue," they said. The Trinamul leaders slammed Bhattacharjee's "failure to initiate a move to pressure the Centre to stall the bifurcation" and described today's meeting as an "eye-wash".

CPM MP Basudeb Acharya, who attended the meeting, said, as chairman of the Railway Standing Committee he had opposed the proposal to bifurcate Eastern Railway in 1996.

Asked about the possibility of an "all-party Bangla bandh" over the issue, Acharya and Left Front chief whip Lakshi Dey said: "It depends on the Prime Minister's response to our demand for a review committee."

State Congress vice-president Pradip Bhattacharya urged the chief minister to lead an all-party delegation to the Prime Minister. "But Buddhadeb, told us he would meet Vajpayee/alone," he said.

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20 AUG 2002

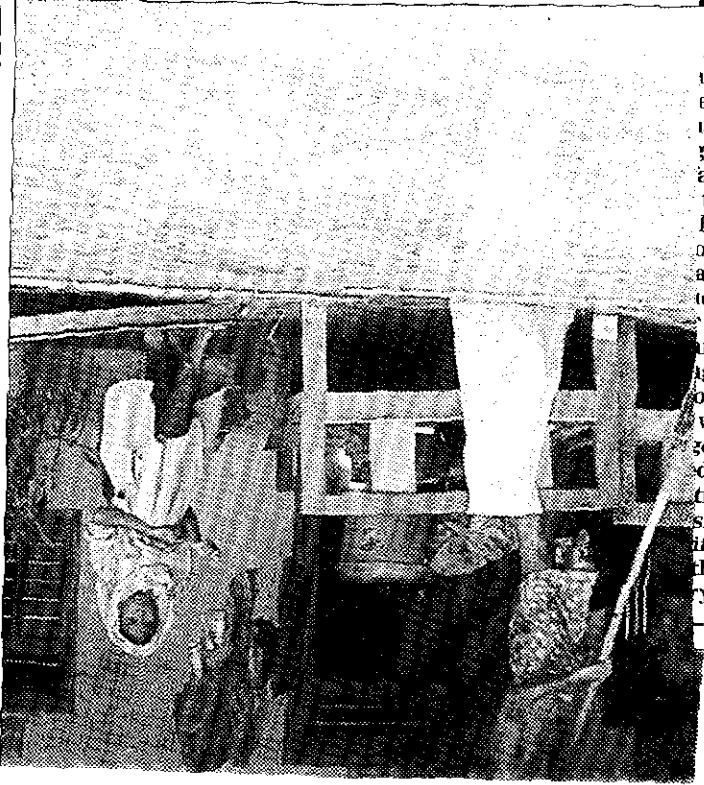
The ongoing crisis is the out-
 come of the industry's decision
 to indefinitely delay the prom-
 ised hike in daily wages. The
 Consultative Committee of Plan-
 tation Associations (CCPA) had
 signed an agreement with the
 ACMS on July 17 this year prom-
 ising to hike the daily wage of a
 permanent worker by Rs 5.45.
 However, in a letter to the
 ACMS on August 12, it said the
 industry did not have the funds
 to honour its commitment. "In
 view of the precarious situation
 it is in, the industry cannot
 shoulder any additional cost
 burden," CCPA secretary gener-
 al D. Chakrabarti said.

At least three high-profile
 labour unions - Citu, Aituc and
 Intuc - are reportedly rallying
 round the ACMS, which has
 threatened to move court if the
 industry does not implement the
 wage-hike agreement.

A source in the ACMS said
 the organisation's leadership
 was in "no mood to listen to the
 same song" on the issue of pay-
 ment of variable dearness al-
 lowance. "The CCPA had entered
 into an agreement with us.
 Therefore, it cannot take a uni-
 lateral decision not to imple-
 ment it," he added.

Fish inside his flooded house at Thoubal Moirang
 in Manipur on Monday (PTI)

He said deforestation in the
 water levels of Iru, Imphal and
 Thoubal though the rivers were
 still flowing below the danger
 level. In the catchment areas,
 causes of flash floods.



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CPM no to KPP's call for talks with KLO

Niraj Lama in Siliguri

Aug. 19. — The Kamtapur People's Party president has asked the state government to hold talks with the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation, the armed organisation suspected to be behind the Dhupguri killings.

Mr Atul Roy attributed the rise in militancy in North Bengal to the "exploitation of indigenous population under 25 years of LF rule". Mr Roy "condemned the killings" and said the KPP wasn't "linked" with the KLO. But the government would be making a mistake if it tries to tackle the problem as a law and order problem, he said.

"If the Centre can talk to the Hurriyat and the NSCN leadership, why can't the state talk with the KLO? The government shouldn't deal with the militancy problem by force. Efforts are needed to uplift the the region's socio-economic condition."

But CPI-M state secretary Mr Anil Biswas said all extremist groups tried to justify their acts through such demands. He told journalists in Kolkata that such attempts would not succeed.

Mr Roy alleged that the CPI-M was "using" police to harass Rajbansis in the districts. "About 500 of our supporters are in N Bengal jails since November 2000; many of have been re-arrested." The KPP's allegation was corroborated by a Association for Protection of Democratic Rights team that visited Jalpaiguri in June. Mr Abhiranjan Bhaduri, APDR central committee member, said during his team's visit to the area he found "rampant violation of human rights by police... It does not matter which party the person belongs to; being a Rajbansi is enough for police to harass you."

Citing cases, Mr Bhaduri said police visited the house of a poor peasant, Mr Benoy Roy, at Munshipara village in the Salkumarhaat area. Accusing him of sheltering KLO militants, police threw all his belongings outside in a heap and set it on fire. Policemen allegedly beat up his wife, Aloka Roy, and even threatened that she would be raped if her husband "didn't mend his ways". Mr Bhaduri said police didn't have any prior complaints against Mr Roy.

On 12 April 2002, police reportedly tied 11-year-old Prasenjit Roy to a tree at Sitabari, he said, and beat him with the butt of a gun. At Haldibari, police told those arrested for their alleged links with the Kamtapur movement that they could be "freed" if they identified themselves as CPI-M or Forward Bloc cadres, the APDR team said.

Mr Debaditya Chakrabarti, Jalpaiguri divisional commissioner, didn't rule out cases of human rights violation. "In some pockets, it may be occurring. But it would be a bit unfair to say police are prejudiced against any community. The administration is sensitive to the issue of human rights and we've been taking steps to sensitise the lower ranks too."

20 AUG 2002

North Bengal tense as KLO kills 6 CPM men

SABYASACHI BANDOPADHYAY
KOLKATA, AUGUST 18

THE CPI(M) today called a 12-hour bandh tomorrow at the three districts of Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar and Darjeeling in north Bengal in protest against yesterday's killing of CPI(M) members by suspected Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) militants.

The militant outfit is demanding a separate state in north Bengal. Six CPI(M) members including a member of the party Jalpaiguri district committee were killed and 13

injured when the militants attacked the party local committee office at Dhupguri in Jalpaiguri late yesterday evening.

This is the second major terrorist operation in the state this year after the attack on the American Center in Calcutta on January 22.

The KLO have always made the CPI(M) its target in this area. In the last two years 13 party workers had been killed by the militant outfit.

As a result of the attack, measures are being taken to provide security at key party offices including the party state headquarters at Alimuddin Street. "So far these offices in-

cluding the Alimuddin one were unguarded. Anybody with mischief in mind could get away after committing a crime. We will have to be more serious about this," an SB official said.

"Out security is the people," CPI(M) state committee secretary Anil Biswas said. "But if the administration thinks security has to be provided somewhere they can always do that," he added.

Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya ordered DG (Police) Dinesh Bajpai to visit the place tomorrow. "Search operations are being conducted there. The administration and police are alert," he said.

19 AUG 2002

Attack ammo for Buddha law

ASTAFF REPORTER

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Calcutta, Aug. 18: A day after suspected Kamtapur Liberation Organisation activists shot dead five persons in a CPM office in north Bengal, chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee asked the party leadership to accept his long-pending proposal for the Prevention of Organised Crime Act.

Countering the CPM leadership's demand for deployment of the army in Jalpaiguri's Dhupguri, where yesterday's attack took place, Bhattacharjee talked about measures like the legislation to fight militant organisations. His comments were made at an emergency secretariat meeting at the party headquarters on Alimuddin Street.

The CPM has called a 12-hour bandh in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar tomorrow to protest the killings. "However, long-distance trains will be exempt from the purview of the bandh," CPM state secretary Anil Biswas said.

The two-hour CPM meeting in Calcutta witnessed scathing criticism of the Jalpaiguri police by a section of CPM leaders who accused senior officers of ignoring intelligence reports on the activities of the KLO.

Bhattacharjee shared the concern but declined to seek help from the army. He told the meeting that director-general of state police D.C. Vajpai would reach Dhupguri tomorrow to lead the investigation.

"We had reports from intelli-

gence agencies that KLO activists had targeted CPM leaders. But I am really astonished how the district police remained idle even after receiving such reports," Bhattacharjee said.

After the Dhupguri incident, the CPM's critics of the tough legislation will find it difficult to stick to their position. During the meeting, many senior party leaders felt that such a law was needed to tackle organisations like the KLO and People's War.

Expressing solidarity with the CPM, Forward Bloc state secretary Ashoke Ghosh accused the police of inaction. "There is a police outpost near the CPM party office and there were also a lot of policeman in the marketplace. What were they doing? Why couldn't they fire a single

shot?" he asked. "However, forces like the KLO will have to be tackled politically. Only police and administration will not be able to control them," he added.

Asked whether the time was now ripe for the law, Ghosh said it was up to the chief minister and the government to gauge the situation and frame such a law. He, however, asked Biswas to immediately convene a meeting of the Left Front to discuss problems like the KLO.

Bhattacharjee has also asked the administration to seal the Indo-Bhutan border immediately as he feels it is being used as an escape route by KLO militants.

Security arrangements in the party headquarters will be beefed up.

■ See Page 10

19 AUG 2002

KLO ultras storm CPM office, kill 5

Pramod Giri and
Tarun Chakraborty
Siliguri/Jalpaiguri, August 17

SUSPECTED KAMTAPURI Liberation Organisation (KLO) militants stormed into a CPI(M) office near Jalpaiguri during a meeting on Saturday and shot dead five party members.

Eleven others were injured in the well-planned attack at Dhupguri that came around 7.15 pm during a routine power failure. As the militants sprayed bullets from sophisticated weapons, the first to fall was Gopal Chaki, a district-level leader. Fifteen of the 20 party members present were seriously injured. Eleven of them were rushed to Jalpaiguri Sadar Hospital where Dulal Roy, Tushar Basu, Manotosh Basak and Shahid Ali died of their injuries.

CPI(M) sources said a meeting of the party's Krishak Sabha was on when the attack came. "That is why so many people were present," a senior party leader from Siliguri told *Hindustan Times*. "And like other evenings, there was a power cut. A group of three or four militants came on two motorcycles, barged into the office and began shooting."

The police reached the scene within ten minutes, but by then the militants had sped away towards Panitanki on their motorbikes, hurling a grenade to prevent anybody following them.

The attack is being seen as a major intelligence failure. There

9 870 - NB IV
were no alerts about a renewed spurt of activity by the KLO. That the militants could plan and execute such a daring strike on a CPI(M) party office has caused deep embarrassment to the police and intelligence officers.

The CPI(M) has called a 24-hour Jalpaiguri bandh on Monday. A tight security cordon has been thrown all over the district as well as neighbouring Darjeeling and Cooch Behar.

Intelligence officers said the operation was definitely carried out by the KLO. "The KLO is the only militant group active in the region, and also the only one to bear a grudge against the CPI(M). It has killed many schoolteachers associated with the CPI(M)," said a senior intelligence officer.

Some other officers, however, feel that the KLO could not have carried out the operation without help from the United Liberation Front of Asom. "The Ulfa must have helped at least with the planning and strategy," an officer said.

"The operation was a well-planned one. The attackers knew that a meeting would be on at the CPI(M) office and they had been observing that the area witnesses power cuts at that time every evening. They must have carried out reconnaissance runs."

Incidentally, the KLO's Darjeeling district commander Chandan Singh and his accomplice Shyamal Singh were arrested at Batasi near the Nepal border early on Saturday.

1 8 AUG 2002

Pratichi report rattles govt

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Aug. 17. — The state government appears to have been rattled by the charge that children belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are discriminated against in state-run primary schools, as outlined in the survey report of Prof. Amartya Sen's Pratichi Trust.

State ministers for finance and school education, Mr Asim Dasgupta and Mr Kanti Biswas, said in separate press statements today that they would treat the charge very seriously.

"When a person of his (Prof. Sen's)

stature says such a thing, I just can't refute it. Such things have been happening for thousands of years in Indian society," said Mr Biswas.

Mr Dasgupta said: "One doesn't normally hear about such discrimination in West Bengal. But if it exists even in one school, we will treat it with utmost seriousness."

The finance minister referred to legal provisions which declare such discrimination as a cognisable offence.

On the Pratichi report's criticism about the teacher-student ratio, which stands at 1:58 in state primary schools, Mr Dasgupta said it was absolutely

necessary to ensure that this comes down to 1:40.

Both ministers agreed with Prof. Sen that poor infrastructure in primary schools was a problem but the finance minister said money had been allocated in the last budget for repairing school buildings.

On the report's suggestion to provide children with cooked food under the mid-day meal scheme instead of a monthly quota of foodgrain at present, the finance minister said he had recommended involving women's self-help groups to serve cooked food in schools. No policy has been framed though.

PRINTED IN INDIA

18/8/68

Govt mum on PW website

9/8 1.51.11
Statesman News Service 57-1

KOLKATA, Aug. 8. — The government today was indifferent to a report on the existence of a People's War website, which outlines the outfit's programmes, tactics and strategies.

Officials at Writers' Buildings, who learnt of the site from The Statesman, refused to say whether the outfit should be banned even after being told about its contents.

The water resources minister, Mr Nandagopal Bhattacharya (CPI), said he was collecting information on the PW to present it at the party's national executive meeting in Nagpur next month. Only then can his party spell out its stand.

As of now, he iterated his party's official stand: The government should be open to unconditional talks with the Naxalite outfit.

"I'm hearing of it from you," said the IG (law and order), Mr Chayan Mukherjee. But it's for the government to decide on the ban.

City sheriff Sunil Gangopadhyay said the state shouldn't try to stifle the voice of even self-proclaimed extremists, for freedom of expression must be respected. The site's authenticity should be checked and the government ought to clamp down on extremists resorting to violence.

Dr Shibaji Bandyopadhyay, Jadavpur University teacher, said: "The question of censoring the site doesn't arise because... that's technologicaly impossible." The PW has chosen the Net to propagate its ideology because that is perhaps the only region beyond the nation-state's grip.

Seession on PW Net agenda, Kolkata Plus I

THE STATESMAN

12/5/11

Drought tag on Purulia, Bankura

STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, Aug. 7: Purulia and parts of Bankura were today declared drought-hit.

The government made the announcement after a meeting at Writers' Buildings where a report of the agriculture department team that visited the districts was discussed.

"It is worse than the drought of 1980," said finance minister Asim Dasgupta.

"I will raise the issue with the Union finance minister when I meet him on Friday. We have already decided to release Rs 5 crore towards tackling the situation," he added on the eve of leaving the capital.

Only 10 per cent of the crop in the 20 blocks of Purulia will survive, said agriculture department secretary N.K.S. Jhala who, along with director of agriculture N.K. Trivedi, had gone to the affected areas four days ago.

"Seven blocks in Bankura are in a similar condition. Reports are coming in from Paschim Midnapore which indicate that four blocks there have been similarly hit," Jhala added.

8 AUG 7 1982

THE TELEGRAPH

29 blocks in state drought-hit

218 511
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Aug. 6. — The state Cabinet today decided to declare 29 blocks in three South Bengal districts as draught-affected.

After discussing reports from the DMs of Purulia, Bankura and Midnapore West, the Cabinet decided at a meeting that all 20 blocks in Purulia, five blocks in Bankura and four blocks in Jhargram sub-division of Midnapore West would be declared draught-hit.

The state agriculture minis-

ter, Mr Kamal Guha, told The Statesman, that the government would send a report to the Centre tomorrow stating the conditions of the draught-hit districts and asking for its assistance.

Mr Guha said rainfall had been scanty in Purulia, Bankura, and Midnapore East and West since 15 July. He said though Aman plantation had been affected almost all over the state, Purulia was the worst-hit.

Purulia DM Mr DP Jana said he had sent a report to the principal secretary, state agriculture department, stating that all 2687 moujas in 20

blocks in Purulia had been affected by drought.

According to the minister's estimates, the net Aman plantation won't exceed 40 per cent of the state's capacity and the exchequer will stand to lose Rs 1,600 crore if it does not rain within a week.

In some blocks in Purulia, the rate of plantation is already less than two per cent.

Mr Guha said his department had decided that farmers in draught-hit areas of South Bengal would be given seeds, pulses and other vegetables — crops which grow easily in arid belts — before

the Rabi season in October.

The Cabinet also reviewed the flood situation in Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri.

Earlier, the chief minister held a meeting with state irrigation and minor irrigation ministers.

Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee told the ministers to control erosion of the Ganga and the Padma in Malda and Murshidabad, and to install shallow and deep tubewells where necessary in Purulia.

Jharkhand: The Babulal Marandi government today declared Jharkhand as drought-prone, adds SNS from Ranchi.

7 AUG 2002

THE STATESMAN

Six suspended for Malda lock-up deaths

IT Correspondent
Malda, August 5

FIVE POLICEMEN and one court inspector were suspended on Monday for the death of the two undertrials in the Malda court lock-up on August 1. The step was taken on the SP's report. The local police force, however, is angry that only lower rank personnel were punished.

Those suspended are general registered officer H C Roy, ASI Tejnarayan Mishra, court inspec-

tor I B Talukdar, head constable Anil Saha and constables Tarakeswar Chatterjee and Dulupada Kundu. However, they are yet to receive the suspension order.

The local police force is furious that senior officers were let off. "Lower level policemen alone are not to blame for the lapse. The senior officials and the judiciary cannot shrug off their responsibility in this matter," said Md. Ilias, the president of Malda Non-Gazetted Police Association. He refused to say

what they planned to do next against the suspension.

There was drama in the Malda court today as 34 undertrials refused to enter the court lock-up when they were taken for their hearing. "We will not enter the *andhakoop* (dungeon)," they shouted in unison, as policemen tried to take them to the lock-up. They did not budge from the vans for 30 minutes and were finally escorted back to Malda jail on the orders of a court official. They were not produced in court.

The local police force says they are being made to pay for lapse of the administration. Chanchal was declared a subdivision on January 2001 but it doesn't have a court yet. The entire pressure of the district thus comes on Malda court. It is significant that both victims of August 1 — Nimai Ghosh and Anesh Das — were from Chanchal subdivision. The police have help from the Trinamool Congress, District Trinamool chief K. N Choudhury says the judiciary should

be held accountable for the lapse too. "Punishing these policemen will only send a wrong message to the people," he said. The district Left Front wants the Malda SP removed from his post.

The Malda court hasn't been altered much since it was built by the British in 1771. And what serves as the court lock-up was originally used as a torture chamber for "native criminals" and later for Freedom fighters.

In these 55 years after independence, no one thought of

making a ventilator in the one-time torture cell. Little surprise then that it turned into a gas chamber.

A High Court judge had visited the Malda court two months ago. He was appraised of the situation but nothing came of it. Court officials and the police had met on May 31 and decided to do something immediately about the lockup but whatever it was they planned, it couldn't come soon enough to save two lives.

Outrage in Malda

Buddhadeb must match words with action

It makes no sense for Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee to use harsh words against the incompetence and callousness on the part of the Malda police that resulted in the death of two undertrials — rounded up for petty reasons like drunkenness — if it is not followed up with exemplary punishment for the guilty. This embarrassment is the last thing he needed after the incident in which a young lecturer was picked up from his residence late at night and was alleged to have been given third degree treatment in custody — a matter that has now reached the state human rights commission. The case in Malda is an equally cruel reflection on the police administration as well as the judicial system. The chief minister's desperate efforts to give the police force a human face come to nought when the ranks are incapable of shedding their horrible excesses. The direct result of this was that 250 people rounded up in a special drive were herded into a room that could barely accommodate 100 — without the basic necessities of electricity and drinking water — and were said to be literally gasping for breath. The state law minister's excuses of the court room being small only reinforce the impression that while the Marxists have done a great deal to consolidate their organisational strength, they have left large areas of public concern untouched.

The law minister tries to confuse the issue of whether or not policemen had asked for bribes to provide drinking water when the real questions on the horrible conditions in custody and the inadequacy of the district courts to cope with such situations are unanswered. It is up to the chief minister, also in charge of the home (police) department, to set things right after owning up to the mistakes the Left Front have made in the past. To begin with, the Malda outrage deserves an independent inquiry — certainly not by the police themselves when they are the principal accused. The Malda Bar Association has done well to take the lead to create a concerted and credible public response that may help when everything else has failed to move an insensitive administration.

16 AUG 2002

THE STATESMAN

Fear forces people indoors

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Aug. 5. — Life was paralysed in the state today following the 24-hour Bangla bandh called by the Trinamul. The bandh was peaceful except for reports of road and rail blockades from some parts of the state. In all, 1,907 bandh supporters were arrested for disruptive activities.

It was called to protest the Centre's decision to divide Eastern Railway, but some people alleged that a "disgruntled" Trinamul leader was actually protesting denial of a Cabinet berth.

In the city, there were no reports of major violence. Shops and business establishments, however, remained closed out of fear with Burrabazar, College Street, Hatibagan, Lindsay Street, Park Street, Shakespeare Sarani, Bhowanipore, Rashbehari Avenue and Gariahat wearing a deserted look.

Stray incidents of violence and stone pelting by bandh supporters were reported from New Alipore, Chetla Central Road, Phoolbagan and Port areas this morning. But no one was injured.

The chief minister admitted that attendance was poor at Writers', but claimed the bandh had no impact on industries, tea gardens, mines and ports. There was 50 per cent attendance at Writers'.

Trinamul workers damaged three state buses and one private bus and deflated their tyres at Chetla and Moulali. Some bandh supporters threw bombs to scare people who had ventured out on Narkel-

678 511 118
danga Main Road. The less than required government buses, trams and a handful of private buses, which plied today, weren't a problem for the commuters as most citizens preferred to stay indoors apprehending trouble. Police and RAF contingents were posted and seen making rounds of sensitive parts of the city and at Metro Railway stations.

Trinamul leader and president of Progressive Taximen's Union Mr Madan Mitra said: "We have ensured that taxis stayed off roads even when our rival unions were trying their best to defy the bandh."

Most of the flights arrived and left NSC Bose airport on time and without any disruption. All national and international airlines operated as usual except Bangladesh Biman. There were, however, fewer taxis at the airport. Train services, too, were disrupted at several places in Howrah and Sealdah sections. Kalika Mail, Danapur Express, Doon Express and Kamrup Express reached Howrah much later than their scheduled time. Dn Rajdhani Express had to be re-routed through the Howrah-Burdwan main section. Trains were stopped at 44 stations in the Sealdah main and south sections.

Metro Railway authorities ran trains at an interval of 15 minutes instead of the usual 8-minute and 10-minute interval due to paucity of passengers. A container of explosives exploded on the platform of Netaji Bhavan station around 12 noon. Although no one was injured, services were disrupted by 15 minutes, he said.

More reports on Kolkata Plus I

Front targets Malda SP,
no probe order from govt

Left cry for lock-up police scalp

DEBARATI AGARWALA

Malda, Aug. 4: The protest pitch against the lock-up tragedy soared with the district Left Front committee demanding action against the superintendent of police and other policemen blamed for the deaths, but the Malda administration said it had received "no official orders" from the government for an investigation.

Three days after chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee announced a probe into the deaths of two persons in the local court lock-up, deputy inspector general of police (Malda) A.K. Sarkar said he was yet to receive the order.

"I have been in Malda since August 1, overseeing everything. But I have not received any orders from the government to investigate the two deaths," Sarkar said. The district police had conducted an inquiry "on its own" and sent a four-page report to the government on Friday, he added.

District magistrate Ashok Bala said he has not received any order for an inquiry either. The district administration had, however, investigated the entire episode as required by law.

"We have not been asked to investigate the deaths. What we are doing is routine. In the event of any lock-up death, a magisterial inquiry is necessary. So two magistrates are doing the job," Bala said.

Condemning the casualties for the first time in a meeting at the CPM office, the district Left Front committee demanded the immediate transfer of Malda superintendent of police Pankaj Dutta and action against the

other policemen on duty at the lock-up on Thursday.

"What happened in the lock-up is shameful. The superintendent of police cannot evade his responsibility for the two deaths. The policemen on duty at the lock-up that day are equally responsible. We cannot let them go unpunished," district Front chairman Jiban Moitra said.

The Front had kept quiet when the BJP and the Trinamul Congress took to the streets on Friday to protest against the deaths. A groundswell of opinion against the police might have prompted the Left demands sources said.

Moitra said the Front has demanded "exemplary punishment" for those responsible. The district committee has sent its report containing the demand to the state committee.

The Left leader also castigated the judicial department for the "prevailing unhealthy" atmosphere in the court lock-up. "I hope the judicial department takes note of what's been happening there since it's located inside the court and does something about it," he said.

The district Congress called for a CBI inquiry into the custody deaths. Its president, Abu Haseem Khan Choudhury, an MLA, said the party was also considering taking the police superintendent to court.

The sources said the deputy inspector general visited the lock-up this morning, additional superintendent of police Manoranjan Saha in tow. Dutta was conspicuously absent during the visit. The district magistrate said the magisterial inquiry would "take time".

Probe ordered, police under rights fire

HT Correspondents
Malda/Kolkata, August 2

THE GOVERNMENT today assured that the guilty would be brought to book for the death of two undertrials in an overcrowded court lock-up in Malda, where police continued to try and hush up the incident.

When Sankar Das today went to the Englishbazar police station in search of his father who was arrested on Tuesday, he was told that Anesh Das had run away from the court yesterday. It was from the reporters hanging around the station that Sankar

learnt that his father and another undertrial, Nimai Ghosh, had died of suffocation.

The result of the post-mortem has not been released yet but sources said that it confirms death due to suffocation. Nimai and Anesh were crammed into a tiny cell on the court premises with more than 200 others. Six other undertrials taken ill are in the hospital.

Law Minister Nisith Adhikary tried to pass the buck, saying the incident took place in an extended lock-up, and not a proper lock-up. He admitted the lock-up was cramped but had nothing to say

for the poor ventilation and unhygienic conditions. The Malda court, he said, was not decentralised and so was always overcrowded. The State is trying to extend the lock-up and courtroom.

The Government has ordered a magisterial inquiry while the human rights commission has sought reports on the incident from the SP and the district judge. The Chief Minister has dubbed the incident "callous" and sent DIG (Malda) Anil Sarkar to the spot. The Malda Bar Association has decided to lodge an FIR against police on behalf of both victims.

Whether rights bodies will conduct a suo moto inquiry would be decided after the submission of the SP's report. DIG (headquarters) Narayan Ghosh said the rights body could go ahead with an independent probe. The commission is planning to ask for video recording of the incidents and the magistrate's report.

President of the Association of the Protection of Democratic Rights Goutam Chowdhury has urged the DM for a judicial inquiry and Rs 1 lakh compensation for the victims. He said the APDR might bring criminal

charges against the SP for negligence. HRC member D P Sarkar said the commission has a committee to study if police lock-ups were adhering to the Supreme Court's guidelines and may form a similar panel for court lock-ups after this incident.

The 242 undertrials were picked up on Tuesday in district-wide raids conducted at the end of every month to make up for "arrest quota". Sources said that the DM was considering putting a stop to such a practice. The Congress has called a bandh in Malda town tomorrow even as a strike was observed today.

Mamata bandh for Bengal, notice for Delhi

9 8 40 11 18 ✓
BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, July 31: Mamata Banerjee has served a 12-day notice on the National Democratic Alliance, threatening to quit the ruling coalition for the second time on August 13 if Eastern Railway's bifurcation is not stalled.

The Prime Minister's Office has asked for "some more time to reconsider the matter", she said, explaining the notice.

Mamata announced a string of protests, including a 24-hour Bangla Bandh on August 5, for the interim period. The Trinamul Congress leader will abstain from voting in the Vice-President's election on August 12 to highlight the Centre's "unilateral, unconstitutional, undemocratic and unethical decision". On the same day, her party's MPs, MLAs and councillors will stage a dharna in front of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's residence.

The CPM reacted with alacrity to Mamata's dawn-to-dawn bandh call, saying it would oppose it tooth and nail. "The bandh will not help resolve the issue. Instead, it will create animosity between Bengal and its neighbouring state and encourage provincialism," former chief minister Jyoti Basu said after a meeting of the party's state secretariat.

The CPM has also decided to organise a public rally at Brigade Parade grounds on August 11 in protest against the bifurcation.

Mamata told reporters after her party's working committee meeting that Trinamul's continuance in the NDA has become uncertain because the Prime Minister "does not seem to be in control of things in Delhi".

"We had joined the NDA to support Vajpayeeji. But we have doubts if he is now in a position to take decisions on his own.

However, we are prepared to give him some more time to stall the bifurcation. Let him assert himself and show that he is the Prime Minister of the entire country," she said.

Mamata said Vijay Goel, minister of state in the PMO, had called her this afternoon urging her not to quit the alliance as the PMO was trying to "work out something to resolve the issue".

"I told him we would wait till August 12 and quit the next day if the bifurcation is not stalled," she added.

Mamata had quit the NDA before the Bengal Assembly elections in May last year demanding the resignation of defence minister George Fernandes, who was facing corruption charges. But she rejoined the coalition soon after.

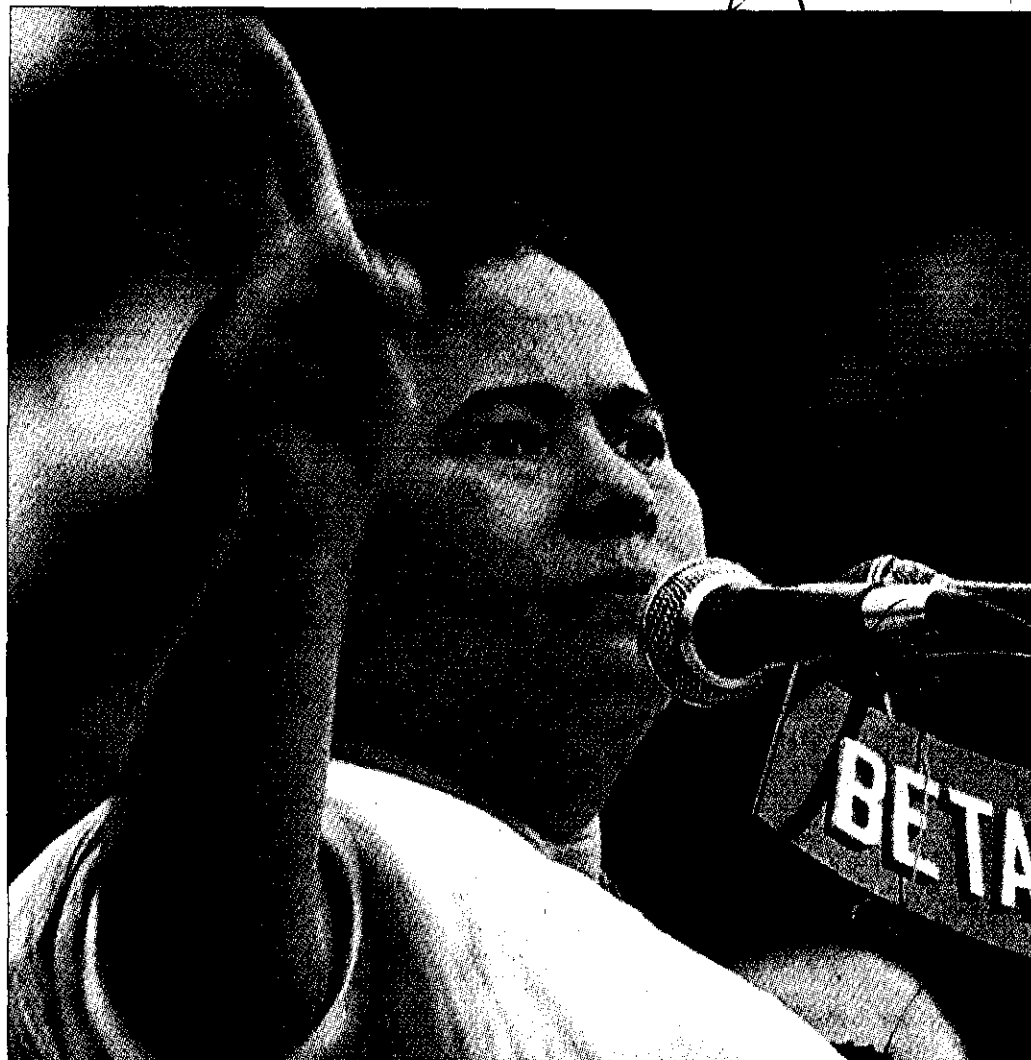
Asked if her party would reconsider its decision to abstain from voting in the vice-presidential election if the Centre came up with a solution, Mamata said: "Of course, we will rethink the matter if an acceptable solution is in sight".



Mamata Banerjee announcing the decisions in Calcutta.

Picture by Amit Datta

Mamata brings battle to Bengal



Mamata Banerjee at the rally. (AFP)

BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, July 21: Mamata Banerjee's fight is with Delhi, but she has made Bengal her battlefield.

At a huge rally in the centre of Calcutta, choking the city's main north-south corridor on a rain-washed afternoon, the Trinamul Congress leader thundered an ultimatum towards Atal Bihari Vajpayee. If the division of Eastern Railway and South-Eastern Railway is not stopped within 48 hours, she will shut Bengal down for 72 hours.

"*Rakto debo, rail debona* (we will give blood, but not railway)," Mamata, the former railway minister, cried. Taking the cue, her supporters started chanting the new slogan.

"We will wait for two days. If there is no response, I will announce a 72-hour *Bangla bandh* at a press conference (on July 24)," she said, adding that she would not visit Delhi until the issue is settled in Bengal's favour.

To whip up passion, Mamata compared the bifurcation of Eastern Railway to the partition of Bengal as she said Trinamul saw in the plan a move to split the state for a second time.

"We are resisting the conspiracy to carve up our state and will continue to do so."

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was the epitome of reason. He criticised Mamata

for seeking to pit Bengal against the Centre on a complex issue like the creation of new railway zones and asked her to desist from milking it for personal interest.

"We must give the Prime minister and the deputy Prime Minister time to examine the complex issue in the Cabinet," Bhattacharjee said. "Bengal does not need a conflict with the Centre at this point."

For Mamata, the slogans — *rakto debo, rail debona* and *Banga bhanga rukhchhi, rukhbo* (we will stop the division of Bengal) — are aimed at dispelling the perception that the objective of her current campaign is to force the Centre to create a situation in which she can return honourably to the Cabinet.

"We have shown enough restraint for a month and seven days. We will now launch a statewide agitation against the bifurcation. There is a limit to being deprived. Now is not the time to join any ministry, it is time to fight for our rights."

Mamata sought to co-opt Bengal's mainline political parties, especially the ruling Communists and the Opposition Congress, as well as the states of the Northeast into the anti-Centre campaign and demanded that the zonal headquarters of North-Eastern Frontier Railway be created in Siliguri.

"We will have to fight together to destroy the conspiracy against Bengal," she said.

Lambasting railway minister

Nitish Kumar (without naming him) for his decision to bifurcate the railway. Mamata called upon the Prime Minister to stop the move or else, she said, the unity of the country would be threatened.

"I urge Vajpayeeji and deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani to immediately ask the railway minister to stop acting according to his whims. Ask him not to play with fire."

She arrived in the city from Delhi yesterday with no assurance of stopping the bifurcation. Mamata announced at the rally — organised by the party's youth wing every year on this day to commemorate the death of 13 workers in police firing a decade ago — that Trinamul workers would demonstrate against the bifurcation at every railway station in Bengal on Wednesday.

Mamata presented former cricketer and BJP MP from Bihar, Kirti Azad, in an attempt to drive home her point that she was not against Bihar but only against the railway minister's move.

"We also want development of Bihar but not at the cost of Bengal's prestige."

Occasionally slipping into Hindi, Mamata asked those in the audience who hailed from Bihar and were against the bifurcation to raise their hands. After a number of hands shot up, she said: "Look, our friends from Bihar too don't want a bifurcation, so the message is clear."

Police play truant with court orders on PWG suspect

1977 ST-1
Statesman News Service

MIDNAPORE, July 18. — Mr Kaushik Ganguly, Mr Tinku Ghosh and Mr Parashar Bhattacharya, arrested for suspected PWG links, have not been sent by police for tests of their injuries to SSKM Hospital or CMCH. This, despite two court orders. The health department and police are passing the buck.

DIG (HQ) Mr Narayan Ghosh said Midnapore Police were supposed to bring Mr Ganguly to SSKM Hospital today. But he had not arrived till midnight. Dr DD Chattopadhyay, SSKM Hospital superintendent, said he had no information on when Mr Ganguly would be brought here.

The first order was issued by the CJM Midnapore West, on 11 July. On 16 July, the Judicial Magistrate-II, Midnapore West, issued a similar order. In a peti-

tion filed in the Judicial Magistrate's second court on Tuesday, Mr Arun Maji, counsel for the accused, said his clients should be sent to Kolkata for tests of their injuries as ordered by the CJM on 11 July. The judge said the CJM's 11 July order should be carried out.

Threat to CPM

KOLKATA, July 18. — Ali-muddin Street yesterday received a letter written with red ink threatening to kill several Left Front leaders. The letter follows the PWG's offer for talks with the government if the CPI-M surrenders its "stockpile" of arms. Mr Anil Biswas said the party often receives such letters, and that this one was unsigned. "We are against politics of threat, violence and killing," he said. — SNS

Midnapore Jail officials said they received the two court orders yesterday. "We can't do anything about shifting the accused to Kolkata unless the police directs us to do so," officials said. Police said the accused have not been sent to Kolkata since the health department has not given a "fit certificate" to Mr Ganguly.

The Midnapore Sadar Hospital super said X-Ray, ECG and other reports of Mr Ganguly were okay and the police had been informed of this.

SP Mr KC Meena, however, said he was yet to receive Mr Ganguly's reports.

Buddha mum on PWG talks offer

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, July 17. — The chief minister was today non-committal on the PWG's conditional offer for talks with the state government. "I won't say anything on that right now," he said in the afternoon. And at the end of the day, he said: "I have no comment", apparently waiting for Alimuddin Street to react first.

Mr Anil Biswas stopped short of ruling out talks with the Naxalite outfit, but described its conditions as "meaningless."

The PWG yesterday issued a statement saying it was willing to sit across the table with the government, as suggested by CPI-M state secretariat member Mr Benoy Konar, provided the party dismantled its "arsenal" in Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia and the outfit was allowed to hold rallies at all villages. It also demanded that it be allowed to prove in "people's court" the charges against those who had been killed and against whom it had issued chargesheets.

The statement condemned Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee for unleashing "terror" against the Naxalites and also for the recent arrest and alleged torture of people suspected of having links with the outfit.

Reacting to the demands, the CPI-M state secretary said: "PWG should know that people's courts

are impossible under the Constitution" and "the CPI-M has no arms". On the talks offer, he said he "couldn't say" that talks were being ruled out.

Mr Biswas didn't specify what political initiatives were being taken to counter the PWG and refused comment on charges of police torture on those arrested for alleged Naxalite links. "The chief minister has made a statement in the Assembly." CPI-M insiders,

however, are not giving much importance to the PWG's offer because it has "strings attached."

"How can anyone hold talks when there are preconditions?" a leader asked. "If they demand that CPI-M cadres must surrender arms before talks, we too can set our conditions. But negotiations aren't conducted that way."

Besides, the leaders said there couldn't be any talks with an outfit that brands the Left Front government as "political heir to the fascist Siddhartha Ray regime".

Most officials at Writers' too preferred silence. "It's a political matter," a police officer said. Some feel the outfit's offer

indicate police operations are yielding results.

Police in Bankura and Midnapore, however, showed no sign of going soft on the PWG. The Bankura SP, Mr Basudeb Bag, said: "I'm not sure if the PWG will sit for talks. Even if it does, we must remember that it had fooled the Naidu government. It didn't keep its word on ceasefire."

Suspect held

SURI, July 17. — Rahim Seikh, a suspected PWG activist, was arrested last night from his house at Joypur village in Rajnagar, Birbhum. The SP, Mr JK Basu, said police had seized some leaflets and donation receipts from Rahim. He had reportedly confessed his links with the PWG in Bankura. An MCC activist was arrested in the district on Monday. — SNS

THE STATESMAN

1 5 JUL 2002

PW lays down terms for talks with State Govt

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, July 16

THE PEOPLE'S War leadership today said for the first time that it is ready to hold talks with the State, but attached some stiff conditions to the offer.

At the same time, the Naxalite group launched a scathing attack on Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, holding him responsible for the Statewide crackdown on its activists and leaders "reminiscent of the Emergency days".

PW politburo member Kishan said in a signed statement that as a pre-condition for talks, all arms should be taken away from CPI(M) leaders in Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia and from the party offices. Also, public meetings by the PW must be allowed in all villages, even at those which are CPI(M) strongholds.

"We should be allowed to prove in people's courts the charges against those who have been killed and against whom the PW has issued a chargesheet."

According to political observers, the State Government will find it difficult to agree to the terms. Many of them felt that the offer — which follows CPI(M) State secretariat member Benoy Konar's statement that his party is not against a dialogue with the PW — is a pressure tactic by the Naxalites before they intensify their confrontation with the State Government.

The PW today alleged that the Left Front Government had brought to Midnapore two CRPF companies, which had gained experience in counter-insurgency operations in north Telengana,

TWIN RIDERS

- All arms should be taken away from CPI(M) offices and leaders in Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia
- The PW should be allowed to hold public meetings and people's courts in every village

only to harass the local people. The CRPF jawans, the PW alleged, had gone on the rampage — arresting, torturing and beating up people while carrying out regular combing operations.

Since last September, over 200 persons have been arrested and all of them have been refused bail, the PW said. "The police have taken 26 of them, suspected to be PW activists, to Siliguri just to harass them, a method adopted by Siddhartha Shankar Ray in the 1970s."

The current crackdown, the PW leadership said, had begun with the arrest of a State committee member, Gautam, and another person on June 20. The next day, the police arrested four former PW activists, including the ex-State secretary of the outfit.

In the past 10 days, 75 people have been arrested and many more harassed and threatened during midnight raids, the Naxalites alleged. "Those arrested have been brutally beaten and tortured and even those not arrested are being continuously harassed."

Related reports on Page 4

Rural healthcare thrown open to private sector

BY A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, July 14: For the first time in Bengal — possibly even in the country — a private organisation will run healthcare centres in rural areas.

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee announced the initiative under which WestBank Hospital, set up and managed by doctors who had trained and practised abroad, will use public infrastructure to establish and operate primary and secondary healthcare centres in South Dinajpur and nine other districts.

Bhattacharjee said the government has almost cleared two of WestBank's proposals, a reconstructive microsurgery unit at its Howrah headquarters — stated to be the first of its kind in the country — which will also attend to cases from the state-run SSKM hospital, and a healthcare centre in Balurghat, South Dinajpur.

The government-WestBank venture for rural healthcare is a pointer to the emergence of a new partnership that has the potential of rescuing a system that has for long ap-

peared incurably sick.

Rural health centres often do not have doctors or medicines or both. There are over 1,000 primary health centres at the block level all over the state. Each is supposed to be manned by two doctors with the right to dispense basic medicines. Secondary centres are located in sub-divisional and rural hospitals.

The initiative is an acknowledgement of the government's inability to invest, organise trained and committed specialised manpower and introduce advanced technologies in rural Bengal, where popular demand for improvements in the quality of life is increasingly putting the administration under pressure.

Waking up from slumber, the CPM dropped its earlier opposition to the entry of private capital into primary and secondary healthcare. The leadership made changes to the policy document at its state conference in February and prepared the ground for the government to tie up with the private sector.

Opening a neurosurgery department at WestBank, Bhattacharjee said his government had received a number of joint

venture proposals from privately-run hospital groups.

"You are welcome to go ahead with your plans for setting up healthcare units. The government will provide you with all the support you need and I will see to it that all the proposals lying with us are speedily cleared," he said.

WestBank approached the government in May with plans for 10 healthcare units, each costing Rs 60 lakh, fully equipped with beds, modern diagnostic gadgets and doctors.

The government-private sector partnership has already found limited application in Bankura, where heart specialist Dr Devi Shetty's company, Asia Foundation, has set up a cardiac unit. It proposes to establish a similar one in Siliguri.

Bhattacharjee said he intended to "rectify some of the mistakes" of the past. Referring to the WestBank experience, the chief minister said he was hopeful more renowned doctors would return to Bengal and set up hospitals and health centres. "The government will provide all the support they need."

■ Picture on Page 10

THE TELEGRAPH

15 JUL 2002

CPM men prepare to take on PWG

Statesman News Service

BANKURA/MIDNAPORE, July 12. — The district CPI-M and the police are in a tizzy over the murders of CPI-M leader Ajit Ghosh and police constable Rajkumar Sardar.

The CPI-M in Midnapore has realised that the security provided by armed guards would not be enough to prevent PWG attacks. The party plans direct confrontation with the outfit. Mr Dipak Sarkar, district CPI-M secretary, said party workers would "take on the PWG cadre as they had done with Trinamul workers in Kespur, Pingla, Sahang and other parts of the district before the last Assembly elections".

Mr J R Bhagat, IPG (Western Zone), said: "Armed security guards won't be able to provide full-proof security. We need to train them." Armed security cover was given to

CPI-M leaders in Bankura and Midnapore after Rampada Majhi, a local CPI-M secretary, was murdered in Bethoala village on 10 February. "Several leaders had appealed for

Midnapore CPI-M leaders are not happy with the security cover. The party has asked them to buy licensed guns

security. We provided them with armed policemen," said Mr BD Bag, SP Bankura. In Midnapore, at least 30 CPI-M leaders have received threats from the PWG.

The Goaltore killings have forced the po-

lice to look for alternative steps. Police have not been able to introduce hi-tech surveillance in forest hideouts due to paucity of funds, Mr Bag said: "We have strengthened intelligence network and increased raids in jungles in Bankura and Midnapore."

The CPI-M is not happy with the security cover provided to their leaders. Mr Amiya Patra, Bankura district CPI-M secretary, said: "We need to be more cautious and ensure an effective information service in the jungle villages." The Midnapore unit has asked its leaders to buy licensed guns. Mr Patra said: "Bankura CPI-M leaders are poor and would not be able to afford guns. We are planning to install traditional bugles in jungles to alert our men during PWG attacks."

The security guards are also not happy

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CPM ON PEOPLE'S WARPATH:

(Continued from page 1)

with their assignments. Mr Ajit Maity, who was assigned to protect Mr Parin Patra, left the job midway and returned to the police lines.

Mr Bhakta Pan, Bankura police association secretary, said: "Maity was disgusted. He had to wait for hours outside the school where Mr Parin is a teacher." The security guards are jittery because they are not provided with sophisticated weapons, Mr Pan said.

Members of the Non-gazetted Police Karmachari Samiti, Midnapore West district, are perturbed over the murder of Rajkumar Sardar who was a Samiti member. Samiti members are shaky and scared to take on their assignments, said Mr Hatadhan Bag, NGPKS district secretary.

Many members are unwilling to do as escorts for district leaders. They will discuss the issue. They work in a department where refusal to do any job is treated as "indiscipline", the NGPKS district secretary said.

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Three held for CPM leader's killing

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Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, July 10. — Police today picked up three persons from the Salboni forests, Midnapore West, in connection with the killing of Goaltore CPI-M leader Ajit Ghosh and his guard.

Ghosh and Raj Kumar Sardar were killed yesterday by six persons who the CPI-M alleges are PWG activists. The CPI-M observed a bandh in Goaltore today. Police raided the forests of Metela (Midnapore West) and Serenga (Bankura), too, in search of the killers.

Police have claimed to have traced the Naxalite corridor between West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.

The IG (western range), Mr JR Bhagat, today said several Naxalites are hiding in Kolkata and operations would be launched soon to arrest them.

He said Sardar's revolver and Ghosh's two-wheeler couldn't be traced. Three of the assailants fled on the two-wheeler towards Bankura and the rest fled on foot. Sardar fell to the bullets after firing four shots.

Besides Ghosh, four other CPI-M leaders of Midnapore West had been killed by the PWG. Three leaders of the outfit's Bankura unit had been killed during the period.

Sardar's weapon was the third police firearm to be snatched by the Naxalites in three years. In 1999, two rifles were looted from a police camp at Bel-

phari. Two more licensed guns were looted from villagers of Raipur, Bankura, in 2000.

Mr MK Mukhopadhaya, DIG (Midnapore), said raids would continue against PWG cadres in Midnapore West and Bankura. The raids have been intensified over the past five months, resulting in the arrest of 170 PWG cadres. Raids are being conducted in Jharkhand and Orissa too. Police are even planning to conduct air-raids because most PWG hideouts are in inaccessible areas.

'Suicide out of fear'

DURGAPUR, July 10. — Police today said Abhijit Sinha may have killed himself out of fear. "He was not tortured or asked to give any undertaking," said IG (western range) Mr JR Bhagat. But why did he kill himself? "I suspect fear. He realised his activities had forced us to suspect him. It may have mounted pressure on him."

Miss Mamata Banerjee has demanded a judicial probe into the suicide. — SNS

An APDR team today met Hooghly SP Mr Ajay Kumar and lodged an FIR against the Midnapore West policemen who raided some houses in Uttarpara a few days ago and arrested three youths for their alleged PWG links. The group alleged that police were targeting its members unnecessarily.

Forward Bloc and CPI leaders joined an APDR rally in Hooghly to protest against the police action.

In Midnapore, the Youth Congress submitted a memorandum to the district magistrate and demanded the chief minister's intervention to stop "torture" on intellectuals like Mr Kaushik Ganguly.

Mr Snehendu Bikash Bhattacharya, father of Mr Parashar Bhattacharya who was arrested along with Mr Ganguly, said: "The way police barged into our house and behaved with us was quite shameful. Our telephone line was snapped by the policemen. Till now I have no information about my son".

THE STATESMAN

1 1 JUL 2002

The midnight knock

Wheel turns full circle for CPI-M

No one misses the irony of the CPI-M being at the receiving end of public outrage over police action that is widely believed to have driven a young excise inspector to end his life on the railway tracks earlier this week. Back in the sixties the Marxists had raised their voice against what they considered a repressive Congress regime, which clamped thousands of political workers in jail. Their constant refrain was that the police had become an instrument of oppression in the hands of government and ruling party.

Now the wheel has turned full circle and nothing can embarrass Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee more than the fact that even some CPI-M partners have expressed shock at the way Abhijit Sinha, the excise inspector, and a college lecturer were picked up at dead of night without arrest warrants on the basis of suspected PWG links. In Abhijit's case the interrogation failed to establish anything and he was let off but the sheer indignities meted out to an innocent victim and the horrors of spending a night in a district left him shattered.

The college lecturer was produced in court with injuries pointing to third degree methods in jail for which his family has no other form of redress than an appeal to the state human rights commission. The chief minister's explanation that his police are on the trail of killers and subversive elements is disingenuous. Where he maintains a deafening silence is who ordered the police to go overboard. That the inquiry will soothe public opinion and everyone will forget is a vain hope.

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is obviously in a serious dilemma. On the one hand, there are dangerous signals of extremist violence in Midnapore and other districts in West Bengal which have large pockets of tribals who are discontented on account of the years of neglect they have suffered and among whom the Naxalites have influence; local leaders of the CPI-M are being targeted as they were in North Bengal when the Kamtapuris ran amuck. On the other hand, it seems injudicious to allow the police to deploy a repressive machinery on suspects violating all norms of a civilised society — the very norms and human rights that the Marxists supposedly cherished when they were in the opposition. West Bengal has a miserable record of custody deaths, often involving poor people against whom the police want to settle personal scores.

This assumes frightening proportions when the police, acting on orders from above, seek to create a climate of terror recalling the worst days of the Emergency. The midnight operation disgraces the West Bengal police, more so when it transpires that the young man driven to suicide had been picked up "mistakenly". Law and order must be removed from political influence if not control. Professionalism is the need of the hour. Is Alimuddin Street ready?

1 2 181 2002

PARTIES AGAINST BAN ON NAXALITE GROUP

PWG heat turns on Buddha

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, July 9. — Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's government has come under attack from within the CPI-M and its three major Left Front partners not only over Abhijit Sinha's "suicide" and allegations of police torture on him and three others, but also over the handling of the problem of extremism. Almost all Left parties are against banning the PWG. The Opposition, too, is gearing up for a fight.

On Monday, while announcing a probe into the suicide by special secretary (home), the chief minister had said the crackdown would continue.

Mr Biman Bose, Left Front chairman, had made no secret of his displeasure at the developments while urging the government to hold an inquiry. His colleagues in the CPI, Forward Bloc and RSP were even more outspoken.

Today, Mr Jayanta Roy, Forward Bloc state secretariat member, said the matter was too serious to be probed by a joint secretary. "We want an inquiry by a High Court judge or by the human rights commission."

Police, he said, must take action against those involved in criminal offences. But they must also follow certain guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court. Under the guidelines, Abhijit's family ought to have been given a memo mentioning details such as his state of health when he was being taken into custody and where he was being taken to. This was not done, Mr Roy said. "The manner in which Abhijit was arrested doesn't take place in civilised societies."

He said his party was, in general, opposed to

banning any group. But if the government wished to ban the PWG, "it must prepare a comprehensive report justifying such a step."

Mr Kshiti Goswami, RSP leader and former PWD minister, wondered whether West Bengal was becoming a "police state". Groups such as the PWG had to be fought politically, he said, because they're taking advantage of the fact that the poor in certain areas didn't benefit sufficiently during the Left Front rule. "If the Front stands by them, the extremists' influence will decline." He said several incidents in the recent past, the firing at Chandmani Tea Estate being one of them, showed that police were becoming highhanded.

He thinks banning the PWG would be counterproductive. "Police must take action against its cadres in specific cases of murder or violence."

PWD minister Mr Amar Chaudhury, also of the RSP, accused police of torturing his party workers after they had clashed with CPI-M cadres. "You can quote me on this. I had received several complaints from my party members that they had been given electric shock at Sandeshkhali

police station after the recent clashes with the CPI-M." He, too, demanded a "high-level" probe into the circumstances that led to Abhijit's suicide.

Mr Satya Bhattacharya, CPI state council member, said his party was opposed to the practice of arresting people without warrants. Furthermore, the arrested person must not be presumed guilty, and ensuring his or her safety was police's responsibility. "We want those responsible for Abhijit's suicide to be punished."

'LF attack fascist'

KOLKATA, July 9. — The PWG today condemned the "Left Front government's fascist attacks" on its cadres, sympathisers and democrats. Abhijit Sinha's death is a "police murder", the outfit said in a statement.

Mr Kaushik Ganguly, Calcutta University lecturer, was arrested on "cooked up" charges, it said. How can the government allow parties such as the Trinamul and BJP to function and deny the same rights to the PWG, it asked. — SNS

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THE STATESMAN

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Heat on Buddha:

(Continued from page 1)

Another CPI leader and minor irrigation minister, Mr Nanda Gopal Bhattacharya said: "The officer handling Abhijit's case should be punished. The Left government isn't the same as the Congress government of the Seventies. But people have started questioning its image."

Ruling out banning PWG, Mr Bhattacharya said if it created law-and-order problems, police could take action within the ambit of law.

Mr Saifuddin Chowdhury (Party for Democratic Socialism) today demanded an "independent inquiry" into every case of "rights violation" related to the present crackdown. He also demanded compensation for the victims and their families.

Mr Asim Ghosh, BJP's state president, condemned the way in which police had violated constitutional norms while dealing with Abhijit. Reacting to the statement of Mr Justice Mukul Gopal Mukherjee, state human rights commission chairman, that his organisation couldn't probe a "suicide case", Mr Ghosh said: "He ought to consider the circumstances which led to the suicide. The commission scope must be widened if necessary."

The Trinamul believes PWG doesn't exist in the state. "The government's stand is aimed at labelling Trinamul workers as PWG activists. The chief minister wants to create an illusion by saying the PWG would be firmly dealt with. But where is the PWG in the state? How can murders resulting from family feuds and personal feuds lead to the branding of the accused as PWG activists," said Mr Pankaj Banerjee, Opposition leader in Assembly.

Mr Banerjee, accompanied by Mr Partha Chatterjee, Mr Dipak Ghosh, Mr Biplab Roy Choudhury, Mr Subrata Bakshi, Mr Ajit Bhuniya and Mr Arjun Singh (all MLAs), left for Saiboni this afternoon to probe the veracity of the government's claims that the PWG had spread its wings across the state. On banning the PWG, he said: "We aren't in favour of banning any political party".

The CPI-ML (Liberation) will wave black flags at Mr Bhattacharjee at government functions to protest against Abhijit Sinha's suicide and the arrest of Mr Kaushik Ganguly. Mr Kartick Pal, party's state secretary, said the stir would continue till the chief minister stopped his "uncompromising fight" against PWG.

Naidu blamed: The PWG blamed Mr N Chandrababu Naidu for the collapse of the peace talks and accused him of trying to kill the organisation's leaders, SNS adds from Hyderabad. The outfit has called a state bandh on 11 and 12 July to protest against the killing of a senior leader, Padmakka, in an encounter last week.

10 JUL 2002

THE STATESMAN

Nitish five-zone card to isolate Bengal

Vinod Sharma
New Delhi, July 6

IN A move aimed at isolating West Bengal in its standoff with Bihar and Jharkhand over the creation of a new railway zone at Hajipur, Railway Minister Nitish Kumar has given the issue an all-India dimension. On Friday, he notified five other zones the Deve Gowda and Vajpayee Cabinets had cleared in 1996 and 1998.

As the new zones, in addition to those notified on July 14 at Hajipur and Jaipur, would be located in seven different States, the Minister, who hails from Bihar, wouldn't be alone now in opposing the Left's and the Trinamool Congress' demand for putting the reorganisation plan in cold storage.

West Bengal's high political stakes in the controversy can be gauged from the fact that under the proposed scheme, two Kolkata-based old zones — Eastern and South Eastern — would have to cede control of a total of seven rail divisions to



Advani at his office with Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee on Saturday.

the new administrative and operational entities.

Henceforth, the South Eastern Railway's Khurda Road, Waltair and Sambalpur divisions would be part of the East Coast Railway headquartered at Bhubaneswar. The Bilaspur division it administered till now has simultaneously been earmarked for the new South East Central Railway.

In other words, West Bengal's dispute with Jharkhand and Bihar, over the creation of the Hajipur-based East Central Railway, could snowball to include Chhattisgarh and Orissa.

In fact, the Orissa lobby has been demanding notification of East Coast Railway ever since the 1996 inauguration of its headquarters at Bhubaneswar. "West Bengal has no case....All

these years, Orissa's share in the country's rail assets had been minimal despite its big contribution to the Railways' revenue," remarked the Congress' Srikant Jena, who was a member of the Gowda Cabinet which cleared the reorganisation plan.

Consequently, to carry out her reported threat of stalling Parliament's Monsoon Session opening July 15, Mamata Banerjee might have problems searching for support even among the Opposition parties. Even if isolated within the NDA and without, she would feel compelled to match the intensity of her protest with that of the Left.

Ironically, the remaining five new zones were notified on the eve of Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani's meeting today with Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. Their territorial jurisdiction was made public around the time the CPI(M) leader was pleading with Advani to have the matter studied by a committee of experts.

THE TELEGRAPH

7 JUL 2002

RE-MAPPING RAILWAYS

New Zones Notified on June 14

North-western Railway

HQ: Jaipur

Divisions: Bikaner, Jodhpur (from NR),

Ajmer, Jaipur (from WR)

East Central Railway

HQ: Hajipur

Divisions: Sonapur, Samastipur (from

NER), Danapur, Mughalsara (from ER)

Zones Notified on July 6

East Coast Railway

HQ: Bhubaneswar

Divisions: Khurda Road, Waltair,

Sambalpur (from SER)

South-western Railway

HQ: Hubli

Divisions: Bangalore, Mysore (from SR)

Hubli (from SCR)

West Central Railway

HQ: Jabalpur

Divisions: Jabalpur, Bhopal (from CR)

Kota (from WR)

North Central Railway

HQ: Allahabad

Divisions: Allahabad (from NR), Jhansi

(from CR), Agra (New division)

South-East Central Railway

HQ: Bilaspur

Divisions: Nagpur, Bilaspur (from SER),

Raipur (New division)

After his talks with Bhattacharjee, the Dy PM did promise to discuss the State's demands with Vajpayee.

Police beat up lecturer held for suspected PWG links

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA/ MIDNAPORE, July 6. — West Bengal returned to the turbulent seventies with the arrest of a chemistry lecturer of Calcutta University, Mr Kaushik Ganguly; a college student, Mr Tinku Ghosh; and Mr Parashar Bhattacharya for "conspiring" against the state with PWG activists in Midnapore West.

The three were arrested in Kolkata early on Friday by Midnapore police. The chief judicial magistrate, Midnapore West, remanded them in police custody for five days. They have been charged under Sections 120, 120 B, 121, 121A, 122, 122B, 123 of IPC.

Mr Ganguly told the court that he and the other two had been tortured in custody. He had a bandage on his left upper arm and injury marks on the right leg. Mr Ghosh too had injury marks on his hands and legs. The CJM asked police to submit a medical report within five days.

Mr AK Maji, Mr Ganguly's lawyer, said he would pray to the court for action against police

and bring the matter to the notice of the human rights commission. "They were not produced before the court within 24 hours of arrest and were tortured in police custody. This is illegal." Police told the court that they



Kaushik Ganguly outside Midnapore CJM court on Saturday. — The Statesman

had got the telephone numbers and addresses of the three from a

diary seized from Mr Partha Banerjee, PWG's state committee secretary. Mr Banerjee and three others were arrested from Belghoria, North 24-Parganas, on 23 June.

Mr Ganguly's father, Mr Narayandas Ganguly, is a retired professor of IIT Kharagpur and his mother a former lecturer of Sanskrit of Calcutta University. He was picked up from his house at Mothijhil in Dum Dum. The other two were arrested from Baguati and Sovabazar. Police are conducting raids in North 24-Parganas and other districts, an officer said.

Mr Ganguly's brother, Souvik, told **The Statesman** today: "My brother received two crank calls around 12.15 a.m. on Friday. Soon we heard a loud knock on the gate." RAF personnel had surrounded their house. "When my father asked them why they wanted my brother, they said he'd be taken into custody for interrogation."

The police team was headed by Mr Mrinal Banerjee, Midnapore West DSP, Mr Souvik Ganguly said. "The cops didn't produce

■ See PWG: page 5

PWG:

(Continued from page 1)

any warrant. They said my brother's name had been found in the diary of a person charged with anti-national activities."

Was Mr Ganguly involved in politics? His brother said: "He believes in Left politics. But he has never been associated with any party. He has many friends who work for various parties."

But police are convinced that Mr Ganguly has links

with the PWG. The North 24-Parganas SP, Mr Hari-sen Verma, said: "Incriminating documents have been found in his possession."

Police allege he was the brain behind several PWG operations in Midnapore West, Bankura and Purulia.

The CPI-ML (Liberation) has condemned Mr Ganguly's arrest. The charges against him were false and were part of the government's strategy to victimise political opponents.

7 JUL 2000

THE STATESMAN

Buddha hits Advani wall

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 6. — The chief minister today failed to extract an assurance from the Deputy Prime Minister on the division of Eastern Railway even as the railways minister went on an overdrive with his restructuring plans. Mr Nitish Kumar's notification of five more railway zones and eight divisions, reported by **The Statesman** yesterday, was announced officially today.

But Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee got a positive response from Mr Advani on other issues, including Haldia Petrochem, problems plaguing state coalmines, and KLM's withdrawal of flights from Kolkata.

Mr Advani had invited Mr Bhattacharjee. But after a "very patient 30-minute hearing" on ER's restructuring, Mr Advani only said he would speak to the Prime Minister about it. Mr Bhattacharjee reportedly spoke in measured tones in contrast to Miss Mamata Baner-

jee's strident stand. He suggested a committee of experts to study the issue and the need to defuse "growing tensions" with Bihar.

Mr Advani said: "I spoke to the railway minister yesterday... I will speak to the Prime Minister about it." The government is convinced

by the railway minister and Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee is due to inaugurate the South-west Railway headquarters at Hubli in Karnataka on Thursday. Bihar's Left parties too support ER's division in the interest of the state.

Mr Bhattacharjee said he "urged Mr Advani to set up an experts' committee to study the Kolkata-based ER's division, for it was a serious matter... (and) pending its report status quo should be main-

tained. It is not a simple matter... If wrong decisions are taken, parochial forces will take over."

The chief minister said: "It's a two-way traffic. He asked for my support... I too need his support". He said Mr Advani gave him no other assurance except a very positive hearing.

■ More reports on page 10

Mamata's no

KOLKATA, July 6. — Miss Mamata Banerjee won't accept a ministerial berth till the Centre reviews the ER decision. — SNS

(Details on page 10)

THE STATESMAN

7 JUL 2002

CPRM leader killed, Hills bandh today

HT Correspondent
Siliguri, July 5

COMMUNIST PARTY Revolutionary Marxist (CPRM) leader Deochandra Lama was hacked to death in Alharo Golai in Darjeeling last night. The CPRM accuses the CPI(M) of plotting the murder.

The CPRM has called a 12-hour Darjeeling bandh on Saturday demanding the immediate arrest of the murderers. There was a spontaneous bandh in

Bikanbari today. Deochandra Lama was returning home from a marriage party last night when he was attacked near Atharo Golai in Chungtung, hardly 3 km from the Pool Bazar police station. The attackers hacked Lama's face, head and hands with khukris, the police say. His fingers were also chopped off.

Lama (48), a primary school teacher by profession, was a central committee member of the CPRM and a panchayat member in the Poolbazar-Bikanbari area.

He is the son of former CPI(M) Rajya Sabha MP, Dawa Lama, who is one of the co-founders of the CPRM. Dawa Lama alleges that the CPI(M) killed his son to "create terror" among CPRM supporters in Chungtung.

"The CPI(M) is desperate for a comeback in the area and they killed my son because he was a very popular leader," Dawa Lama said.

The CPRM has issued a Press statement accusing the CPI(M) of plotting the murder. The

CPI(M), however, denies the allegation. CPI(M) leader Nirmal Baraily said the incident was unfortunate but they had no hand in it. Darjeeling SP Sanjay Chander says the murder was probably committed in the heat of the moment. It was not planned, he is reported to have said. Two people named in Dawa Lama's FIR have been arrested but officers say they don't have any political connections.

Chungtung had remained the Red bastion in the Hills till 1996,

when the CPRM was formed. Even during the 1986-1988 Gorkhaland Movement led by the GNLF, Chungtung still remained the CPI(M) stronghold.

But after 1996, when the break-away faction of the Hills CPI(M) formed the CPRM under the leadership of former CPI(M) Lok Sabha MP R B Rai and Dawa Lama, Chungtung became the stronghold of the CPRM.

The CPI(M) has been trying to get a foothold in the area since then.

5 JUL 2002

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Panel report pulls up wakf board for land scams

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kolkata: The judicial commission report on the state wakf scam tabled in the West Bengal assembly on Monday showed that the transfers, sales and corruption involving community properties of the Muslims which began during the Congress rule increased "manifold" under the Left Front rule.

According to the report, the number of transfers of wakf properties sanctioned by the successive state wakf boards in the form of sale, lease, tennacy, development or exchange was 159 during 1947-1977. This increased three-folds to 495 between 1978 and 1995 before the nominated board was superseded and election held for the board under a new act.

The state government's action taken report (ATR) which was tabled in the house along with the three-volume report of Justice G.R. Bhattacharjee commission expressed "serious concern" over the the commission's observation on the board's sanctions in transfer, sale or lease of wakf properties. The number of proposed transactions in wakf properties "increased manifold" during 1986-95 'in comparison with the earlier period of 39 years from 1947-1985', it said.

The report of the commission made a mention of the grabbing or encroachment of wakf properties by "influential political leaders" or musclemen close to them. The report revealed that the post-partition mismanagement of huge wakf properties all over the state made it more vulnerable to the politician-bureaucrat-promoter nexus who had connived at with corrupt members of the nominated state wakf board like Hamidul Huda and Asadur Rahman.

Numerous wakf properties at prime loca-

- Number of transfers of wakf properties rose between 1978-1995
- Members of wakf board like Huda connived with political leaders to sell land.
- Land in prime Kolkata locations sold to developers

tions in Kolkata were sold to 'developers'. Huda, now in police custody, ruled the state wakf board between 1982 and 1996 while the rest of board was relegated to a position of insignificance, said the report.

Among others, the commission noted the role of prominent politicians like former wakf minister and CPM MP Mehboob Zahedi and CPM leader Mohammed Nizamuddin in some questionable moves by Huda. They in their submissions, however, denied any wrongdoings by the board.

While the commission pulled up the board members and commissioners for failing in "their collective as well as individual responsibility," the ATR maintained that such lapses and failures were neither "deliberate" nor for "personal gain".

Minority affairs minister Mohammed Salim maintained that the Left Front pioneered the moves to clear the mess in the wakf management and promised more action to stop recurrence of similar scams. "We have shown our political will by arresting Huda. A survey and valuation of the wakf properties have also been ordered. Now the Opposition should help us to recover the sold properties."

However, Trinamul and Congress leaders reiterated their demand for a CBI enquiry to expose what they called the "CPM mentality" of Huda and his accomplices.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

1 JUL 2002

Report confirms irregularities in Wakf Board

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, July 1. — The Justice GR Bhattacharjee Commission's report on the Wakf scandal, tabled in the Assembly today, confirmed widespread irregularities committed during Left Front rule, but stopped short of pointing fingers at CPI-M bigwigs. 2/2 5/1

Mohammed Selim, minister for minority affairs, also placed in the Assembly the government's action-taken report.

The Bhattacharjee Commission report indicted Mr Hamimul Huda, former member of the state's Wakf Board who was taken into custody recently.

The action-taken report "strongly condemned the contemptible actions" of Mr Huda and the "nepotism and misuse of power and influence" by Mr Asadur Rahman, commissioner of the board during improper transfer of Wakf properties.

The Commission noted how another former Board member, Mr Mehboob Zahedi, seemed to be working at cross purposes with the then Wakf commissioner, Mr CA Rahim, who was trying to stop the irregularities. Mr Zahedi is now the CPI-M MP

Turn to page 6

WAKF: 9-87

(Continued from page 1) WFB

from Katwa. The report also mentioned that other Board members are not freed from blame.

The irregularities probed by the Commission pertain to transfers of Wakf property through sale, lease, development (construction), tenancy, mortgage, gift or exchange. The law required the Wakf Board's prior approval for such transfers by the "mutawallis" (caretakers), but the committee found that in many cases, the Board had failed to protect the Wakf's interest.

Mr Zahedi's role, as described in the report, seems curious. He presided over a Board meeting which took away the powers of Mr CA Rahim, then Wakf commissioner. Mr Rahim left the Board in 1985. The report said Mr Rahim's letter to the editor was published by The Statesman in August 1996.

While the terms of the Bhattacharjee Commission covered the period from 1947 to 1995, the report shows that the number of tenancy and leasing/development transactions shot up after 1985. A typical case relates to the premises on a six-cottah plot at 15, Abdul Hafim Lane.

In 1990, the Board's development sub-committee approved a lease for a rent of 85 paise per sq ft, a security deposit of Rs 1 lakh and a donation of Rs 30,000. The Board approved the sub-committee's decision. Mr Zahedi and Mr Huda were present for both meetings. The report noted that the prevailing price of flats in the area was Rs 250 per sq ft. The Board, it added, had not issued any directive for obtaining competitive offers through newspaper advertisements.

The government is exploring the possibility of "initiating criminal proceedings" against Mr Huda, as "there is no provision in the old or new Wakf Act to initiate legal proceedings against Wakf Board commissioners or members for their acts of omission or commission". The government has agreed in principle with the Commission's recommendations.

BJP for CBI probe: Mr Asim Ghosh, state BJP president, said a team would meet Mr LK Advani to "insist on" a CBI probe into Wakf transactions.

7 JUL 2002

THE STATESMAN

Hospital fee hike has helped: State

9.8%
WB
HF-4
27/6

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, June 26

THE HIKE in hospital charges has worked well for the State, Health Minister Suryakanta Mishra said today.

It has not only increased hospital income but also helped Government hospitals compete better with their private counterparts. The minister told the Assembly that two private diagnostic centres plan to reduce their rates to match the Government's.

Replying to the debate on the health budget, Mishra brushed aside Opposition allegations that the increase in the number of free beds — 3,000 in nine

years — did not match the population rise. He said 70 per cent of hospital beds are free against a required 45 per cent.

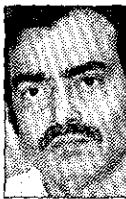
The Opposition criticised the Government's decision to shift an emergency BPL patient from a free to a paying bed if he or she fails to produce a BPL certificate within three days of admission. Mishra said the Government would ensure that BPL cards reach the target group so that they would be spared such problems.

Mishra is happy with the performance of private agencies in medical colleges. "We engaged them a year ago to handle outdoor conservancy and maintenance. The experiment has shown results. We may extend the system to medical colleges in Burdwan and Bankura," he said, but ruled out the abolition of approved posts. "We are looking for a balance between the two systems. Government employees at present manage indoor units."

On the State's performance, Mishra said it would be wrong to write it off. "We don't claim we have done a lot, but that does not mean we have done nothing."

Even Left Front MLAs Nirmal Das and Shibaprasad Malik criticised the Government for neglecting primary health centres. Mishra cited a report of the National Council of Applied Economics Research to show that 100 per cent of Bengal's rural population are treated in Government hospitals. He reeled off more statistics to show that West Bengal compared well with other States on combating neo-natal deaths and various diseases.

In pipeline



- Three new medical colleges to be opened either on the joint sector or by the

Government in Midnapore, Malda and PG Hospital.

- Second campus of Chittaranjan Cancer Hospital to come up at M R Bangur hospital. Proposals floated on revamping and modernising of School of Tropical Medicine.

- State health department's decision to tie up with IIT to set up an Institute of Medical Science and Technology, a centre of excellence, and a medical university in pipeline

27 JUN 2002

Assembly unites against ERly division attempt

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, June 26

TREASURY AND Opposition bench members united in the West Bengal Assembly today against the move to divide Eastern Railway and create a new zone, East Central Railway.

They agreed to send an all-party delegation to Delhi to lodge a protest with the Prime Minister.

Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee also wrote to the Prime Minister seeking his immediate intervention. He termed the proposal "completely unrealistic and financially non-viable" and pleaded that status quo be maintained.

Drawing the Prime Minister's attention to the "rightful resentment throughout West Bengal" against the proposal, Bhattacharjee contended that the new move "will lead to complete

and permanent crippling of Eastern Railways, both financially and administratively."

In the Assembly, Trinamool Congress member Saugata Roy moved a motion proposing that an all-party delegation go to Delhi. Transport Minister Subhas Chakrabarty then made a statement supporting the proposal. The Chief Minister had already requested the Centre to abandon the move, Chakrabarty said, adding that he too had spoken to the railway authorities. He said the proposed move would lead to large-scale transfer of staff from the Eastern Railway headquarters here to Hajipur and urged all legislators to resist it.

Roy said Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee had already taken up the issue with the Prime Minister who, he hoped, would do something about it. Roy referred to Trinamool Chief Whip Shob-

handeb Chattopadhyay's earlier suggestion that an all-party delegation be sent to Delhi to protest against the bifurcation.

Leader of the Opposition Pankaj Banerjee criticised the move and thanked Chakrabarty for backing his party's suggestion. Congress Legislature Party leader Atish Sinha described the move as dangerous and also supported the proposal to send an all-party delegation.

Senior Congress legislator Abdul Mannan moved a motion on the Transport Minister's statement for passing an all-party resolution opposing the move. CPI member Purnendu Sengupta urged all members to unitedly oppose the Centre's move.

Left Front chief whip Laxmi De said the House would adopt an all-party resolution, on the basis of which a delegation would go to Delhi.

Opposition snatch forces Speaker to remove mace from House

Raj relic buried after brawl

BY A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, June 25: After surviving for 68 years, the Speaker's mace, one of the remaining relics of the British period in the history of legislative politics, today disappeared from the Bengal Assembly for good.

Speaker Hasim Abdul Halim announced the decision to put away the mace, the symbol of his authority, because it was repeatedly coming under Opposition attack.

"Opposition party MLAs often try to snatch the mace and carry it outside the House. Yesterday also, some Trinamul Congress MLAs tried to take it away and, in the process, several Assembly staff, including our marshal, sustained injuries as they put up resistance. I have, therefore, decided to remove it from the House," Halim said.

For the first time since 1934, the Assem-



The mace being carried away.

9.8. ND 21 26/6
bly sat without the mace, which was taken away in the second half of the day's session.

The 14-kg mace will be kept in the Assembly building and will ultimately find a home in the House museum, which will be constructed at a new complex, Halim told reporters.

He said the mace was introduced on January 31, 1934, when Manmatha Nath Roy was the president of the then Bengal Legislative Council.

The ceremonial staff is carried into the chamber everyday, not in the Bengal Assembly alone, but in the British Parliament and parliaments all across the Commonwealth. In all these Houses, business cannot be conducted unless the mace is around.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Mace

FROM PAGE 1

"The mace has no constitutional sanctity. Since 1934, the proceedings of the Assembly have started after the staff carried the mace and placed it on a table in front of the Speaker's chair. It became a custom and there is no rule in the Constitution to conduct the proceedings of our Assembly in the presence of the mace."

The original mace, introduced during British rule, was stolen. Later, the P.C. Chandra group of jewellers made the mace that was being used until today. "In the original mace, there was a crown on top. But the Ashok Chakra was engraved on it by the P.C. Chandra group when they recreated it," Halim said.

Historically, the practice of using a mace dates back to medieval England where the bishops carried it with the royal crest of arms engraved at the bottom of the shaft when they accompanied soldiers to the field of battle.

Which is why, the taking away of the mace is seen as a loss of authority. Speaker Halim will, however, hope not.

After the question-answer session was over in the first half today, he informed the MLAs of his decision to remove the mace following yesterday's incident and sought their opinion. Not a single MLA opposed his proposal.

THE TELEGRAPH

26 JUN 2002

Bold policy decision

SR Marxist U turn on sick and closed PSUs

The recent announcements by Nirupam Sen and Bangsagopal Choudhury, the former, minister of industries and the latter of small-scale and cottage industries, to close down two heavily losing government undertakings — Indian Paper Pulp and Sunderbans Sugarbeet — and showrooms of government handloom and powerloom products, sounds incredible. This is not all. Shares of six other loss-making undertakings will be disinvested, followed by more disinvestment. The reason, according to both ministers, was that government had no money to run them. The welcome announcements signify not only U turning their industrial and employment policies but also saying things which were hitherto considered heresy in ideological parlance. Telling unpalatable truths like PSUs were not for “squandering” public exchequer and their employees, like their private sector counterparts, will have to earn their salaries by the sweat of their brow, have come as a rude shock to employees of the 64 PSUs run by government.

They had been led to believe that work culture and accountability were unimportant. Whether they worked or idled they were assured timely payment of salaries. This perverse rationale was stretched to such ridiculous length that even enhanced salaries and allowances were paid to the employees of sick and closed units whose revival was always unlikely. Marxian commitment to chart out an alternative economic path came in the way of selling some of the PSUs whose book value now is almost zero and have no buyers.

No real effort was made to turn around units like Gluconate and Lily Biscuits some of their products had a captive market. Political control of management made corruption and inefficiency endemic. The French Hotel group — Accor Asia Pacific — lost interest in taking over the loss making Great Eastern Hotel when it realised that there was no political will to push through the deal. Sick units with no hope for revival like the Indian Paper Pulp, which still has 900 workers, were taken over with the specific purpose of satisfying the personal whims, fancies and ego of leaders like Jyoti Basu who liked its river bank guest house for rest and recreation. The IPP is a typical example of how a taken over unit has bled the public exchequer white without any recompense. Nirupam Sen must be complimented for his bold decision to close down IPP and put a stop to profligacy that his “great party leader” initiated.

Nowhere has Marxist hypocrisy come in to sharper focus as on the issue of sick PSUs. While they organise strikes over the closure of sick central PSUs and condemned the BJP-led NDA Government for its anti-labour policies they said nothing for having misspent, in the name of job protection and ideological purity, hundreds of crores of rupees on worthless PSUs which have placed the state's finances deep in the red. For this leaders like Basu owe an explanation. Once they had dourly resisted trade and industry for being anti-labour. Now Basu says it was a big blunder. Will he pay for West Bengal's missed opportunities?

THE STATESMAN

25 JUN 2012

Mamata kicks up Wakf storm

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, June 23

THE TRINAMOOL Congress is determined to create a ruckus in the Assembly tomorrow over the Wakf scam and threatened to move court if the State Government delays submitting the report.

Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee has asked party legislators to go full throttle with its demand for the one-person judicial committee report on irregularities in transfer of Wakf properties.

Banerjee has little faith in the State Government and wants the CBI to initiate a probe based on the 1,300-page report submitted by Justice Gitesh Ranjan Bhatnagar to the Chief Minister six months ago.

"Why is the Chief Minister sitting on the report? I fear he is trying to hush up the scandal. Former Wakf



Hamimul Huda being taken to court on Sunday.
SUBHANKAR CHAKRABORTY/HINDUSTAN TIMES

Board member Hamimul Huda used to wield his clout in the Wakf Board till he was removed in 1995. "He was on excellent terms with the CPI (M) top brass. The arrest has opened a can of worms," said Ahmed. He cast aspersions on Huda's proximity to a person called Hasim Abdul Halim.

During Ahmed's earlier

stint in the Assembly, former Judicial Secretary P K Sengupta had pointed out not less than 160 cases where Wakf properties had been leased out to promoters at throwaway rates. "The scam adds up to about Rs 1,300 crores," the Trinamool leader said.

Mamata Banerjee reminded that she had moved the Supreme Court on this issue. "I lodged a PIL on this matter when the Congress, then the main Opposition in the Assembly, backtracked on its demand for a CBI probe in a tacit understanding with the ruling party. The State set up the judicial probe panel in 1996 at the SC directive based on my PIL. I will again move the court if the State delays the report."

"We will raise our demand as we have been doing on Minister Narayan Biswas," Parkaj Banerjee, leader of the Opposition, said.

Huda remanded in custody till July 5

A CITY court on Sunday remanded Hamimul Huda in police custody till July 5. Huda was produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate amid tight security. Huda was charged under IPC's Section 420 (Cheating) and 120 (B) (criminal conspiracy).

Huda's family alleged that he was being framed. "Everyone knows that any member on his own cannot sell or lease out Wakf property. There was a tacit understanding among others and Huda is being made the scapegoat," said one of them.

"There could be a few others. We will not confine ourselves to Huda's interrogation alone," a police officer said.

HTC, Kolkata

24 JUN 2002

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

New-look LF after 25 years

Ritwik Mukherjee
KOLKATA 22 JUNE

A typical brand manager of a corporate entity would know what a "product life cycle" is all about. A brand has to be re-launched or re-positioned after the completion of a life cycle.

As the ruling Left Front completed 25 years on Friday, the communist brand managers (yes, they are a new breed at party HQ on Alimudin Street) are set to prove how the same exercise can be successfully carried out for a political party too.

For the present chief minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, these 25 years have been apparently a journey from Ibsen to investment. But for his party, it has been a history of change of tracks. From a party of the proletariat to a strong protagonist of labour reforms, from opposing entry of computers to implementation of the McKinsey recommenda-

tions — however long-winded it may sound, the Left Front, over these 25 years, has made it look easy! Without the reds having to pay a political price for turning pink. The "new improved" Left Front was a best-seller. Polls over the years showed that with the Opposition pushed to the

fringes. From revolution to reforms. What started off a minority voice within the party is now becoming part of the official doctrine. And reforms are not just economic. It is the

reforming attitude towards political opponents — accommodating and tolerant.

Instance one: A delegation of the Trinamool Congress, led by the state's Opposition leader, Pankaj Banerjee, met chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at his Writers' Buildings chamber. Coming out of the CM's chamber, a visibly upbeat Mr Banerjee minced no word in explaining

before the waiting newsmen how fruitful the meeting had been. The reason was simple. The CM had supposedly promised to meet most of the demands of his party.

Instance two: The state agreed to postpone the date of the municipal polls in Haldia, much to the delight of the Trinamool.



Mamata Banerjee's party had long been demanding postponement of polls in Tarikul.

Instance three: West Bengal Congress sought to bring a "no-confidence" motion against

the ruling Left Front in the state legislative Assembly. Who would have been happier than Mamata Banerjee, the TMC supremo, to grab the slightest opportunity to land the ruling party in any trouble? This time, however, it was Mamata's party, which bailed out the Left Front. The motion was not even accepted on numerical strength, thanks to

TMC's reluctance.

All the three instances narrated above are hardly a week old and they are not uncorrelated. If everything goes right, in another fortnight, the chief minister will be seen inaugurating a private 1,000-bed state-of-the-art hospital, 25 km off Kolkata, promoted by a TMC legislator.

The events have a common significance (and that's no minority). Those who have been following the state's political developments closely for two-and-a-half decades now, will admit that the Left Front during Jyoti Basu's time was not the same. Before Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee took up the reins, the Left Front was run with arrogance and a "who cares" attitude. And if morning shows the day, in the years to come, it will be steered with the new-found political tolerance! In politics, simple gestures often yield better results and it has started paying off already.

Ready for change: Left Front

By Malabika Bhattacharya

KOLKATA, JUNE 21. Ringing the bells for reforms, West Bengal's ruling Left Front said today that they would embrace change so long as it ensured protection of the poor and downtrodden.

"We are realists. We know that we cannot grow unless we initiate change in the economic order," the Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, said addressing a gathering at the Netaji Indoor Stadium auditorium on the occasion of the silver jubilee of the Left Front's rule in the State. "But the change should be brought about in such a manner that the poor man's interest is safeguarded."

The Left Front leaders today went back to their roots while reaffirming the commitment to quality governance and pursuit of ideological goals. The old and new generation leaders relived the memories of 1977 when the Front first came to power and of the intervening years when it entrenched itself in the national consciousness.

West Bengal today wore a fes-

sive look as Left supporters celebrated the completion of 25 years of the coalition in office. Red flags fluttered at street crossings and processions, meetings were organised and exhibitions mounted chronicling the pre-1977 Congress regime and its aftermath.

The 88-year-old Jyoti Basu, principal architect of the Front's marathon rule, backed his successor, Mr. Bhattacharjee, saying the Front had no option but to grow in this technology-driven age. Mr. Basu created history in 1994 when he forced a drastic change in the CPI(M)'s views on private participation in industries in the State without which, he said, it could never hit the road to industrialisation. "We realised then the role private investment can play in changing the contours of the economy."

The bulk of the soccer-crazy Bengal remained indoors to watch the Brazil-England match. Yet a large number of men and women assembled at the stadium.

One of the highlights of to-

day's celebrations was the harping by the leaders of the CPI(M) and its allies on the need for regarding the agenda for reforms in the context of the overall Front's unity as well as the existence of the common man.

From Mr. Basu to Biman Bose, Front chairman, to Anil Biswas to Ashok Ghosh, Forward Bloc leader, to Manju Mazumdar, CPI secretary, all espoused the factors of unity and the reforms for the good of the common man.

Mr. Bhattacharjee assured the rural Bengal that the agriculture would always figure high on his Government's list of priorities.

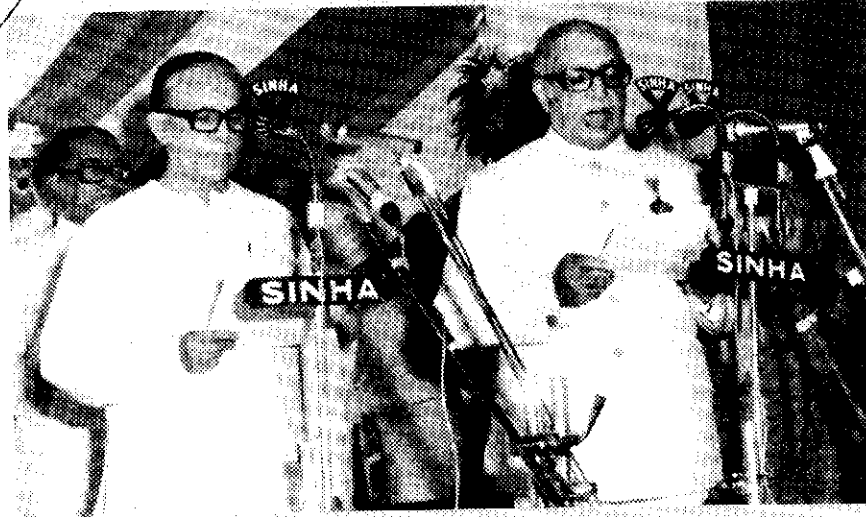
The Front had remained in office for so many years mainly because of the land reforms and the panchayat system it had introduced after coming to office, he said.

When the event was unfolding itself in the stadium, Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress staged demonstrations against what it described as the Leftists' misrule in the past 25 years.

22 JUN 2002

FROM OPERATION BARGA TO PROJECT MCKINSEY: 25 YEARS OF THE LEFT FRONT

7.8 21/5 9 6/23



June 21, 1977

Jyoti Basu takes over as chief minister (picture above) in the first Left Front government

1978

- In its first thrust towards an "agrarian revolution", the government launches Operation Barga that registered the rights of sharecroppers
- Panchayati raj introduced with the setting up of a three-tier system; elections to local bodies held for the first time



- All political prisoners, mainly those detained during the Naxalite movement, freed
- Waiver of agricultural loans and tax

1979

LF government scraps Rabindranath's *Sahaj Path* from the primary education level for "misrepresenting" prevailing social condition; creates controversy

1982

- Retains power. Basu becomes numero uno, not just in the government but also in the party, with the death of Pramode Dasgupta (picture on right)
- Education made free up to class XII in government and government-aided schools
- Teaching of English scrapped from the primary school level on the recommendation of the Ashok Mitra commission



1985

The first departure from Marxist doctrine: Basu steers through his proposal for private capital and joint venture despite opposition from party hardliners at the 12th congress of the CPM

1986

- Once again marking a departure from the Marxist line, Basu makes his first trip to the West to woo investments; visits US and UK

1987

- Third successive term begins. Another controversial venture of the Marxists gets underway: "blood for Bakreshwar" power plant; the plant is finally commissioned in 1999
- After setting the hills ablaze, GNLFC leader Subhas Ghising signs an accord with the government; Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council is set up

1989

Foundation stone of Haldia Petrochemicals laid by Rajiv Gandhi

1991

Back for fourth time

1993

The state's future chief minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, resigns as minister of information and cultural affairs, citing differences with the government; he returns a year later

1994

- Basu announces his new industrial policy, saying that the industrial climate in the state cannot be rejuvenated without private investment and a more liberalised approach to business
- But, also in the same year, the government's bid to privatise Great Eastern Hotel and hand it over to Accor Asia Pacific fails in the face of opposition from CITU and Intuc

1996

- Basu begins his record fifth innings. The government launches Operation Sunshine to clear the city's pavements of hawkers and encroachers
- Basu's hopes of making it as the country's Prime Minister

1997

British Prime Minister John Major arrives for CII's Indo-British Partnership Summit, this is one of the first international meets where West Bengal was packaged as an investment destination

1999

- After 17 years, English reintroduced at the primary level

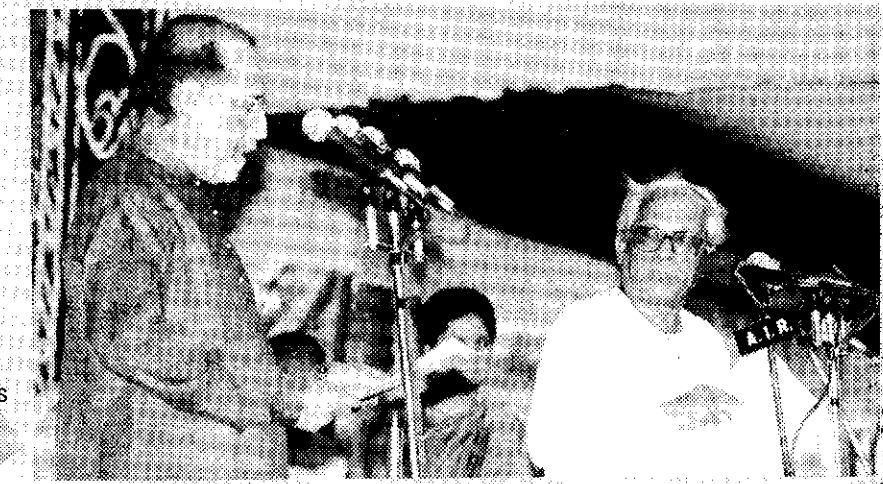
- At an investors' meet, Destination West Bengal, consultancy firm McKinsey presents its study on the state's industrial scenario, says militant trade unionism a stumbling block to investments

2000

Basu steps down, paving the way for Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee

2001

- Bhattacharjee humbles Mamata Banerjee and leads the Left Front to its sixth consecutive victory. Sworn in chief minister (picture below)
- Haldia Petrochemicals finally launched
- Emergence of the collective leadership of the quartet: Bhattacharjee, CPM chief Anil Biswas and senior ministers Nirupam Sen and Suryakanta Misra
- Misra spearheads hospital reforms as health minister; fees hiked
- Bhattacharjee cracks whip on militant trade unionism



2002

- Bhattacharjee suffers first setbacks: forced to backtrack on Ordinance on organised crime and madarsa reforms
- Government bans private tuition by teachers of government and Government-aided schools and colleges
- The latest controversy: Smaller Left Front partners criticise government for accepting McKinsey's recommendations on agricultural and labour reforms

New order pains, but reality rules for CPM

BY TAMAL SENGUPTA

Calcutta, June 20: On the eve of the silver-jubilee celebrations of the Left Front government, one of the men on whose shoulders rests the responsibility of running the CPM for the next three years was worried.

Anil Biswas, state CPM secretary, grappled with the question that many braver comrades would shy away from: where does the Left Front go from here?

Like the rest of the world, the CPM — a party quick to grasp changing political equations and sniff issues that would appeal to the lower-middle and middle-class voters — is dazzled by

changing technology, rapid globalisation and liberalisation of the economy, breakdown of old orders and, above all, the disappearing frontiers that used to make India — and the Left in India — a little assured of the world and its contours.

The CPM, now at the crossroads, is trying to make sense of the new order. As Biswas himself explained, the CPM had changed. The outcome of the last few party congresses — and the documents — would make it clear that the party was now more flexible, more amenable to pluralism and deeply entrenched in electoral politics.

It also chases private capital and, most important, woos McKinsey in-

stead of booing Macnamara and has learnt to accept that an urban vote-bank was out there along with the agrarian and rural class.

But the CPM does have worries: the search for a strong ideological magnet — no one can beat the BJP at playing the nationalism — and the search for brilliant, young faces that seemed to dot the party when it had not yet attained power.

The modernisation of the party — and the government — is also a long way off, despite the shrill and, now monotonous, cries for a "New Left", admit sources close to Biswas.

There has been some pain, they admit, and a continuing battle against

heavy odds. "We have not succeeded in making everyone smile," Biswas admitted. But there has been much more relief. "We have restored the self-respect and dignity of people, missing during the erstwhile Congress regimes," he said.

But one worry — large enough to appear almost insurmountable in the form of the global economic scenario and the policy of economic liberalisation being followed by the Union government — remains. "It is very difficult for us to ignore the international situation and the open-economy policy being followed by the Centre," Biswas said. He added that the Centre's policy, in particular, was respon-

sible for "gobbling up our industries". Biswas referred to the pangs felt by the party — and the front — while trying to adapt to the vastly-changed national and international scenarios. "Many in our party and the government find it painful to adapt to the new reality," he said. But they also realised that it would be impossible for the party or the government to keep aloof from that reality, he added.

There were also situations which forced the Left Front government to turn away from many of its policies introduced earlier, Biswas said.

He cited the example of the failed attempt to introduce "barefoot doctors" for the rural and neglected

areas. "That policy has now given way to primary health centres," he said. "But you must admit that both were designed to benefit the maximum number of people," he added.

But the biggest of the forced changes, perhaps, had been the decision to encourage industrialists and others from the private sector and invite them to undertake projects jointly with the public sector, Biswas said.

Commenting on the success of the front in staying together for so many years — an achievement in itself given the political climate of newfound alliances and broken fronts in the country — Biswas said it was possible only because the Left Front was

formed on the basis of a mass movement and not for the purposes of political expediency.

There was another achievement — not being the victim of President's rule in 25 years — and another objective, that of bringing about social changes "peacefully" in and outside Bengal, he said.

"But we operate in a constitutional setup which leaves us very little space to manoeuvre but, still, we are trying our best to palliate people's suffering," he added. "We have never hidden our failures from our voters and have, instead, tried to explain to them the reasons for those failures," the CPM leader said.

Writers' bolts doors against ISI strikes ✓

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, June 9

WARY AFTER the latest ISI threat to plant explosives at the Writers' Buildings, top State officials held a three-hour emergency meeting this morning. They decided to beef up overall security at the building, strictly enforce photo-identity regulations for each of its 6,900 employees, instal metal detectors at all six entry points, barring the two permanently sealed ones, and build two bunkers at the VIP entrance.

Attended by chief secretary Sourin Roy, home secretary Amit Kiran Deb, CP Sujay Chakraborty, SIB joint-director Partha Sarathi Bhattacharya and IB ADG Shyamal Dutta, the meeting decided to augment force strength from the present 70-odd uniformed men to over 100 and raise the number of plainclothes personnel from 50 to 80. More Special Branch personnel would be on duty, it was decided.

This arrangement will be matched by similar stepped-up security at other vital installations across the city.

The chief secretary said there had been no further tip-off from the Centre since yesterday's intimation, but R C Sharma, DG IB, who had left for New Delhi, would brief the Chief Minister on his return.

Sources said the administration had been alerted against attempts by ISI-backed militants to infiltrate from across the Indo-Bangladesh border and in view of this development the State might renew its demand for deployment of more BSF personnel along the border.



HOLES IN THE SECURITY NET

- Tough to keep eye on 6,900 employees and 4,000 visitors
- Bandobast at key entry points only, security lax elsewhere
- Metal detectors only at six gates. Security lax at 11 gates to protected area
- High security at VIP lift, lax in four others
- No one to keep tabs on PWD employees and others who live inside the compound
- Outsiders frequent canteen and co-operative society
- Central dispatch section handles thousands of letters and parcels; no monitoring

The State feels that while it has 23 battalions manning the stretch, the latest threat calls for at least eleven more battalions.

Saddled with the task of ensuring foolproof security, the police held several meetings through the day, devising ways to keep tabs on the 6,900 employees and the 4,000-odd people who visit Writers' every day.

That security at the building has been breached several times in the past proves how vulnerable it is.

Mamata bandh snub to Buddha

BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

916
9.87 - MB

Calcutta, June 6: An obdurate Mamata Banerjee today spurned the state government's offer of talks and decided to go ahead with tomorrow's 12-hour bandh, snubbing into silence partymen who tried to dissuade her.

Her obstinacy provided chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee with a ready weapon to lash out at the Trinamul Congress. "It is now for the people to judge," he said at Writers' Buildings. "On my part I did all I could to change their mind. (But) They did not comply with my request and stood rigid."

Bhattacharjee wrote to leader of Opposition in the Assembly Pankaj Banerjee with the request to call off the bandh

and an invitation for talks on issues over which the strike has been called. "If the bandh is withdrawn then all sections of people will be benefited," he wrote, inviting Trinamul leaders for a meeting at 4 pm today or any time at the Assembly tomorrow.

But Mamata refused to budge, saying the offer had come "too late in the day". "We are going ahead with our bandh tomorrow... The issues over which the bandh has been called are all people's demands and we called it nine days ago. (The) chief minister ... could have called us at least 24 hours earlier..."

Some of the issues over which the bandh has been called are the increase in electricity tariff, distress sale of paddy, delay in teachers' salaries and the state government's failure to

publish an accurate list of those living below the poverty line.

On Mamata's instructions, Banerjee wrote back to Bhattacharjee informing him that Trinamul would sit with him at a meeting any time between June 8 and 10.

Former state Congress chief Somen Mitra said Mamata had already committed "political harakiri" by calling the bandh. "Her announcement came only hours after the Congress called a bandh on June 14 on the same issues. Trinamul is on a path of self-destruction," he added.

Trinamul insiders said some leaders tried to persuade Mamata to call off the strike in view of the high court's condemnation yesterday of Bengal's bandh culture. "After the court's comments we realised that the public

mood will be against bandhs. Bhattacharjee's letter offered us a golden opportunity to call it off. We requested Mamata but she remained resolute. It is nothing but suicide," a party leader said.

Sources in the party revealed that Mamata turned down repeated pleas. "If I call off the bandh now, the Congress will say it is I who is the CPM's 'B' team," Mamata told her aides.

Mamata reacted angrily when asked if going ahead with the bandh, especially after the court's observations, could affect her party's image. "Why are you asking this question?" she bristled. "You know Trinamul does not like to call bandhs. The high court has not rejected our bandh. On the contrary, it has dismissed a petition against it."

■ See Page 10

THE TELEGRAPH

07 JUN 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

Mamata should watch out

Sr. A Civic polls send danger signals *g. S*

Not much significance should be attached to the outcome of five West Bengal municipal elections. They are unlikely to change the state's political configuration. While the Left Front retained the Durgapur civic body and bagged two new ones, Panskura and Dhupguri, the Congress retained Cooper's Camp and got the newly created municipality, Nalhati. The Trinamul Congress drew a blank, which should prompt Mamata Banerjee to do some serious soul-searching. The Congress has no cause for elation since the municipalities won fall within their traditional areas of influence. The established local leaders of Congress at Cooper's Camp and Nalhati swung the outcome in their party's favour. So when Pradesh Congress leaders claim that the poll outcome indicates restoration of public faith in their party they are politicking. Congress in terms of votes, lagged far behind Trinamul in the three other municipalities where the CPI-M won and in the municipal by-elections held simultaneously. The state Congress leaders continue to suffer from a serious credibility problem. They still doubt the anti-CPI-M credentials of their leaders. Mamata, despite her whimsical attitudes is still perceived to be uncompromisingly anti-CPI-M who won't betray the cause. This is also the reason why the 14 Congress MLAs, who switched to Trinamul before the last assembly poll, are still with her.

But the results have driven home to Mamata the rude message, as in last year's assembly election, that for Trinamul to win against the formidable CPI-M, her personal popularity is no substitute for Trinamul's organisational strength specially in the districts. She is still unable to comprehend the simple truth that unless she and Trinamul are able to match the massive Marxist mobilisation on the eve and the day of election her ambition of defeating the CPI-M and coming to power will remain a pipe dream. Surprisingly there is no change in her style of functioning as her continued neglect of organisation. Her latest Bangla bandh call was given without any discussion. She is still largely ignorant of the organisational style and functioning of the Marxists and prefers to surround herself with sycophants. If this does not change, she should watch out.

03 JUN 2002

THE STATESMAN

Stray violence marks civic polls

Around 75 per cent turnout was recorded in an otherwise peaceful municipal elections, says our reporter in Kolkata

May 26. — Polls in five civic bodies and by-elections in 13 wards of nine others in the state, passed off peacefully today barring stray incidents of violence in Durgapur, Howrah and Dum Dum.

On an average, 75 per cent voters exercised their franchise. Polling started at 7 a.m. and continued till 3 p.m. There were reports of violence in Durgapur, where a new civic board is being elected. Both Trinamul and CPI-M accused each other of rigging.

While results of some by-polls were declared this evening, counting of votes for the remaining seats will be done on Tuesday.

Cooper's Camp Notified Area in Nadia recorded a turnout of 94 per cent while Dhugguri and Nalhati municipalities witnessed 90 per cent polling each. Turnout in the by-polls varied from 80 to 87 per cent in Chandernagore Municipal Corporation, KMC, Dum Dum and Jhalda municipalities.

By-polls in other municipalities witnessed more than 75 per cent polling barring ward number 20 of

Ward victories

KOLKATA, May 26. — Results of by-polls in three municipal wards declared so far show CPI-M retaining all three wards under Chandernagore, Budge Budge and Jhalda municipalities.

In Chandernagore, CPI-M candidate Mr Swadesh Sengupta defeated the Trinamul candidate Mr Moloy Chowdhury, by 1,279 votes in ward no. 33.

In ward no. 20 of Budge Budge municipality, Mr Bindeswar Mall, CPI-M, defeated his nearest rival, Mr Fagu Majhi, Congress, by 115 votes.

Mrs Albela Goswami, CPI-M, defeated her rival Congress candidate, Mr Saroj Mukherjee, by 52 votes in ward no. 1 of Jhalda municipality. The Trinamul candidate bagged only 16 votes.

In ward 22 of English Bazar municipality, Mr Nandu Tiwari, Congress, defeated his nearest rival, Mr Asim Pal, RSP, by 462 votes. The result, however, is unlikely to affect the Trinamul-BJP-run civic board. — SNS

Budge Budge municipality where polling was only 55 per cent.

State election commissioner Mr Anish Majumdar said he had received no reports of booth capturing or false voting from anywhere except Durgapur.

Mrs Niva Das, Trinamul candidate in Durgapur, alleged that

the CPI-M had indulged in massive rigging and appealed to the returning officer for withdrawal of her candidature.

Trinamul leaders from Asansol and Durgapur, Mr Kalayan Banerjee and Mr Apurba Mukherjee, alleged random false voting in the presence of police in at least 23 booths. Mr Majumdar said: "I have ordered the DM to take necessary action against the errant policemen."

By-polls to ward number 8 of Dum Dum was necessary after the murder of Sainen Das, former municipality chairman. The contenders here were Mr Bijoy Ghosh (CPI-M), Mr Biplab Biswas (Congress) and Mr Chandan Chatterjee (Trinamul).

In ward number 10 of KMC, the polling was "absolutely peaceful". Mr D Sarkar, returning officer, said. Due to an internal feud the LF constituents contested the elections separately. While the CPI-M contested in all 16 seats, the Forward Bloc contested in eight and the RSP in two. A keen contest is anticipated between the CPI-M and the Trinamul-BJP combine, with the latter trying to cash in on the split in the Left vote.

Security in Dhugguri was beefed up after some wards were declared sensitive. The KPP withdrew from the contest alleging police atrocities on its supporters during the run up to the elections.

THE STATESMAN

27 MAY 2002

Remote-controlled terror enters Bengal

FROM PROBIR PRAMANIK

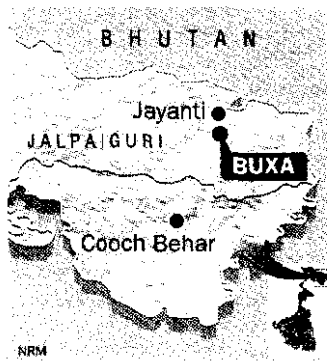
Siliguri, May 26: Instruments of terror usually seen in the extremist hotbeds of Kashmir and the Northeast made their first foray into Bengal today as militants used remote-controlled explosives to blow up a vehicle carrying paramilitary forces.

The attack occurred deep inside the insurgent-infested Buxa Tiger Reserve, injuring six CRPF jawans. Two of them are said to be in a critical condition.

After the blast, suspected militants of the Ulfa, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation battled the reinforcements rushed to the spot for six hours till noon.

The extremists also torched the century-old Bhutan Ghat forest bungalow, barely half-a-km inside the border, while retreating to their camps in Bhutan.

The bungalow was being converted into a CRPF camp in the wake of heightened insurgent activities in the area. The force was to have taken possession of the bungalow today and police



suspect this could have triggered the attack.

Jalpaiguri superintendent of police Siddh Nath Gupta said the militants used powerful "remote-controlled" explosive devices for the first time in the state. State home secretary Amit Kiran Deb confirmed that the daring strike was the first on paramilitary forces in the state using such explosives.

Gupta and several other senior police officers, including Alipurduar additional superintendent R. Shivkumar, have gone with more forces to the site, about 14 km from Samuktala po-

lice station.

The incident happened around 8.30 am when a detachment of CRPF personnel — two officers and 16 jawans — stationed at the Turturi tea estate set off on a routine patrol towards the Bhutan Ghat hills.

The jeep had just crossed a narrow wooden bridge close to the border deep inside the Turturi forest. A mini-truck was about to follow when the bridge blew up, smashing the vehicle and injuring all its occupants, said CRPF commandant Navin Chandra Bhatt.

"Fuse wires and battery cells were recovered some 30 metres away from the bridge. A letter in Bodo language threatening the police strengthens suspicion that the militants belonged to the NDFB-Ulfa combine," Gupta said. Deb pointed fingers at the KLO.

Ulfa, Bodo and Kamtapuri militants have relocated their camps across the border in Bhutan Ghat from the jungles in southern Bhutan following the December 31 deadline set by the Bhutan government for them to move out.

THE TELEGRAPH

27 MAY 2002

Railway eviction hits Mamata hurdle

OUR BUREAU

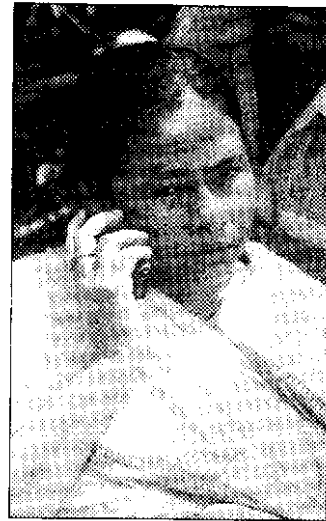
Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee on Saturday pulled the plug on the railways' efforts to clear shanties along a stretch of tracks from Dhakuria to Tollygunge by urging her supporters to stop the drive "at any cost". She sat on a dharna and even called up Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, urging him to intervene in the matter.

Railway officials, accompanied by a contingent of armed policemen, had assembled there since morning, but as sporadic incidents of violence began to take place, the authorities called off the drive "for the time being", possibly on instructions from "higher authorities".

Besides the fact that the presence of the settlers was slowing down the movement of trains along this stretch, the high court had also directed the railways to remove the shanties as the settlers were polluting the Dhakuria Lakes.

The Trinamul Congress chairperson, who had reached the eviction site straight from the airport on her arrival from Delhi on Friday night, accused the railway authorities and the state government of "singling out" her constituency to undertake the drive.

Sporadic violence marked the administration's preparation for eviction. A shanty and a bus were set on fire and the police resorted to "mild lathi charge" against a stone-throwing mob. Trinamul workers, led by MP Sudip Bandopadhyay and legislators Nayana Bandopadhyay and Tapas Roy, also put up blockades at important crossings in central and south Calcutta on Saturday morning to protest the drive.



Mamata Banerjee in conversation with Delhi during her sit-in. Picture by Alok Mitra

Railway officials remained tight-lipped about the reasons behind postponement of the drive. The order came from "the higher-ups" is all they would say around noon.

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, too, washed his hands of the matter, saying it was up to the railways to evict the settlers. "We had urged the railway officials to persuade the settlers to leave the stretch and agreed to help them. Obviously they could not do so and decided to postpone the drive," he told reporters in Midnapore on Saturday afternoon.

Asked whether the drive could not be undertaken due to pressure from the Trinamul camp, an angry chief minister said: "You should address the question to the railway authorities."

State CPM secretary Anil

Biswas, however, blamed the Trinamul leader for frustrating the railway authorities' move to clear the stretch. "She has resisted the move as the area belongs to her constituency. Why did she not object when illegal settlers were evicted from Kalyani?" he asked.

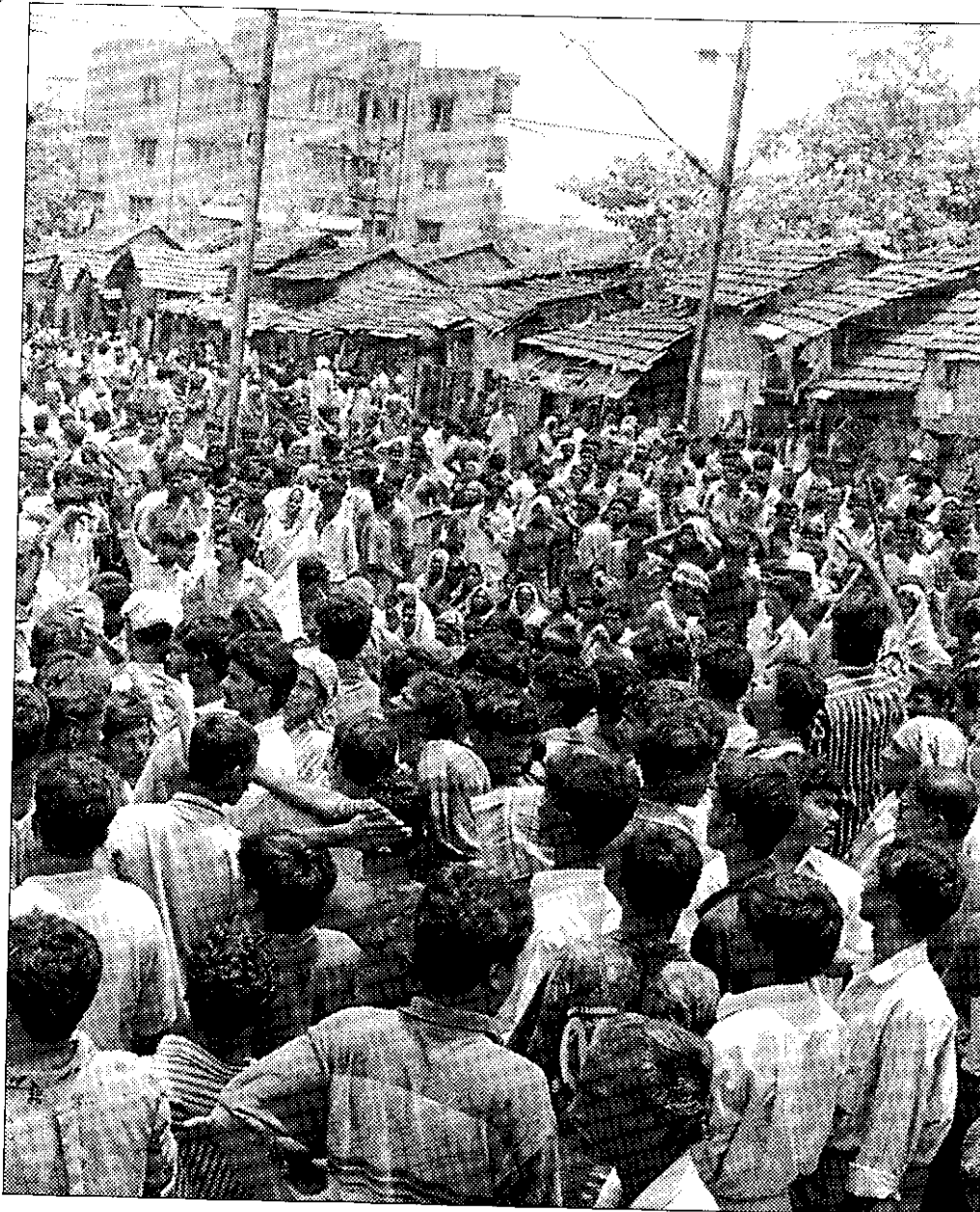
Local police also shrugged off their responsibility for the failure of the mission. "We were all ready with our men. The onus was on the railway authorities to carry out the drive. They decided to call off the eviction at the last minute," was how deputy commissioner of police (south) Kuldip Singh summed up the situation.

Around 9.30 am, the first signs of resistance from the settlers became apparent after police allegedly beat up a taxi driver. Agitated locals hurled bricks at the policemen who responded with a mild lathi charge. The mob, which was now growing in numbers by the minute, hurled a few bombs at policemen at Dhakuria.

A few yards away, a shanty, located beside the railway track near Dhakuria station, was on fire. While policemen claimed that a bomb had exploded inside, the mob alleged that the police had set fire to it.

Meanwhile, Mamata announced that she would sit for an indefinite dharna if the government decided to go ahead with the eviction.

The word going round the area, however, was that the eviction had been called off. "Didi pradhan mantrir sathe katha boleche, rail uchched korbe na (Didi has spoken to the Prime Minister, the eviction has been called off)," said a member of the Railway Colony Uchched Sangram Committee.



Illegal settlers gather beside the railway tracks at Panchanantala, near Dhakuria, to protest the eviction drive on Saturday. Picture by Pabitra Das

America annoys CPM again

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, May 4: The CPM today reacted sharply to the visit of US officials to the Calcutta Madarsa yesterday calling it "an unnecessary act of interfering in our affairs".

Party secretary and politburo member Anil Biswas said the US team had "kept the government totally in the dark about the visit". "They had made enquiries about the syllabus that is taught at the madarsa when it hardly concerned them. Who are they to enquire about the syllabus? It is entirely our matter," Biswas said.

Minister-counsellor of the US embassy in Delhi James Callaghan had visited the Cal-

cutta Madarsa yesterday with a team of officials. They had interacted with the madarsa authorities, enquiring about the syllabus and placement of students.

Madarsas have become a sensitive issue for the state government after chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's comments on unauthorised institutions had triggered a controversy.

The visit seems to be snowballing into another controversy after an earlier trip of officials from the US consulate here to Nandur in Birbhum district to enquire about the killing of 11 peasants. Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee had claimed that the victims were ac-

tivists of her party and had been hacked to death by CPM cadres. The then chief minister, Jyoti Basu, had sought an explanation from US consul-general Christopher Sandrolini.

School education minister Kanti Biswas, who is also in charge of madarsas, said tonight he had not been informed about the visit. "I got to know about the visit only from the media. However, I shall enquire into the matter," Biswas said. Bhattacharjee, who is away in Madras, was not available for comment.

Officials of the Calcutta Madarsa, one of the oldest such institutions in the city, seemed "satisfied" with the visit of the US diplomats. The officer-in-

charge of Calcutta Madarsa, Professor Moniruzzaman, said the interaction revolved around the madarsa system of education in Calcutta, its syllabus and curricula, its prospects and plans for future development.

"The US officials had informed us four days earlier about the visit and a number of our senior teachers were present when they visited us," Moniruzzaman said. "It was a very lively interactive session and there was a frank exchange of views on the madarsa system of education."

Moniruzzaman said he found no "deeper political motivation" behind the visit and did not feel the need to inform state officials about it.

THE TELEGRAPH

5 MAY 2002

NARAYAN BISWAS NEED NOT RESIGN: BUDDHA

Minister gives up in murder case

Statesman News Service

MALDA/KOLKATA, April 26. — Mr Narayan Biswas, minister of state for transport, today surrendered in the district judge's court, Balurghat, in connection with an attempt to murder case.

The minister had been chargesheeted after a clash between Congress and CPI-M men in 1983. Though he had procured an anticipatory bail, he missed court appearances on several occasions. Police, which had declared him an absconder, issued a "warrant with proclamation of attachment" (of assets).

Apart from the attempt to murder (No. GR 163/83/2-3-1983/section 307), two more cases had been filed against the minister.

The minister arrived in the court this morning in a government car. The special judge, Mr M Ghosh, granted him bail. The next date of hearing has been fixed for 2 May.

CPI-M leaders from Gangarampur said Mr Biswas had surrendered following the party's instructions. They said Mr Biswas had been forced to retaliate when Congressmen attacked the CPI-M party office.

A police officer of South Dinajpur apprehended trouble in Gangarampur following the surrender.

The chief minister said Mr Biswas need not resign. Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said allegations against a person didn't prove that he was guilty. "We should wait for the judgment. No one can be punished before he is convicted."

Asked why the minister didn't surrender before, Mr Bhattacharjee said: "Police will be able to say that. Moreover, Mr Biswas never knew that the case was pending against him till police filed the chargesheet. So we have asked him to surrender before the court and he was granted bail."

Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, said: "I asked the minister to surrender in view of the charges against him... Since Mr Biswas' guilt is yet to be proved, the question of his resignation does not arise."

The Trinamul Congress demanded that Mr Narayan Biswas be dismissed. The surrender should prompt Mr Bhattacharjee to resign on "moral grounds as he had inducted a criminal into the Cabinet".

Mr Pankaj Banerjee, leader of the Opposition, today sent a letter to the chief minister, urging him to request the Governor to sack the minister.

Mr Banerjee said the minister was involved in criminal cases, including murder and rioting.

Mr Banerjee's letter states: "The police had submitted a chargesheet against the minister under various sections of the IPC and the Arms Act which are non-bailable. Mr Biswas was aware of the gravity of the crimes he had committed and that's why he did not surrender in court till yesterday, fearing that he won't be granted bail. The police never complied with court orders and never attempted to arrest him..."

According to some Trinamul MLAs, the arrest of CPI-M zonal committee member Mr Dulal Banerjee and the minister's involvement in criminal cases are instances of the "growing nexus between the CPI-M and criminals".

The Congressmen who had filed FIRs against Mr Biswas are now with the Trinamul. The then Youth Congress president and now state vice-president, Mr Biplab Mitra, said: "Today's surrender proved that Mr Biswas was not above law. But it's an irony that the police, who had declared Mr Biswas an absconder and issued a warrant, had to escort him as a minister."

Mr Mitra and Mr Biswas contested the Gangarampur seat last year.

Subhas reaction

KOLKATA, April 26. — Reacting to Mr Narayan Biswas' surrender, Mr Subhas Chakraborty said: "Even I was accused in a murder case in 1971-72. But later the political party that filed the case against me withdrew it." The transport minister said there were several cases against him, Mr Jyoti Basu and the Marxist leader, Mr Ganesh Ghosh. But these cases were political and different from the one filed against Mr Biswas.

Mr Chakraborty said his deputy's surrender would neither tarnish the image of the government nor that of the Left Front. — SNS.

THE STATESMAN

27 APR 2002

Left dismisses BJP's Rule 184 threat

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, April 25. — Left parties today dismissed the BJP threat that the party would move motions under Rule 184 to discuss the law and order situation in West Bengal and Bihar.

The Left Front partners in West Bengal condemned the party's attempt to equate the "barbarity" in Gujarat with the situation in these two states.

Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said the law and order situation in Gujarat cannot be compared with that in West Bengal. The

BJP's statement is politically motivated, he said.

CPI general secretary Mr AB Bardhan said: "This shows the BJP does not have any common sense. The Opposition motion on Gujarat is not to discuss law and order but the state-sponsored terrorism and genocide that is going on there. In his ruling, the Deputy Speaker elaborated the difference between a law and order problem and the situation in Gujarat. If BJP leaders do not understand the difference, they are being deaf and dumb."

Mr Abani Roy of the RSP said: "Is there a Gujarat-like sit-

uation or a major law and order problem in West Bengal? Has the Governor sent any report to the home minister or the President? Action should immediately be taken against the Gujarat Governor, who did not send the report about the exact situation in the state."

Yesterday, the BJP had said that if the Gujarat law and order — a state subject — can be discussed in the Lok Sabha under Rule 184, the law and order situation in West Bengal and Bihar merit similar discussion.

They had hinted they would support the Trinamul if it moves such a motion.

Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, said: "Even the Ahmedabad police commissioner pleaded his inability to guarantee security to the Lok Morcha team that visited Gujarat yesterday. This contradicts claims by the BJP that there is peace in the state."

Mr Manju Majumder, CPI state secretary, said: "Only an irresponsible party like the BJP can make such a demand. Mr Sunil Sengupta, RSP central committee member, said the party had made such a preposterous demand to save Mr Narendra Modi, who had "aided and abetted" the communal carnage in the state."

26 APR 2002

THE STATESMAN

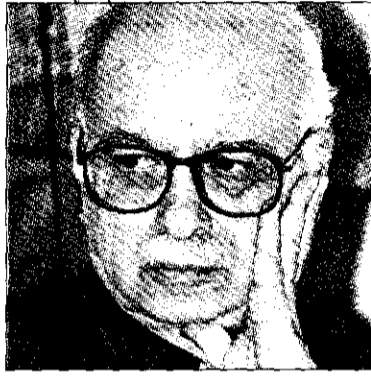
BJP plans revenge with Bengal

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, April 24

THE BJP is seething in anger at Deputy Speaker PM Sayeed's ruling permitting a discussion on Gujarat under Rule 184, but is unable to say so. It now plans to get back at the Opposition by joining hands with the allies to move similar motions for debate on the law and order situation in Bihar and West Bengal.

In doing so, the BJP is unwilling to accept the incongruity of its scheme of things. The NDA, which is the ruling combine, will be seen as using a parliamentary provision to criticise other State Governments when censure vote is essentially a tool made available to the Opposition in a parliamentary democracy.

"The Deputy Speaker's ruling has set a precedent and there should be



L K Advani

a level-playing field. So we will move a motion under Rule 184 on Bihar in the Lok Sabha next week," BJP parliamentary party spokesman VK Malhotra said today.

He said the party "respected" Sayeed's ruling but was not pleased with the wording of the ruling. "The Chair's ruling has to be accepted but our objection is that the issue cannot be discussed under Rule 184."

The BJP's predicament is highlighted by Parliament's rules that forbid criticism of the Chair's ruling, the reason why the party finds its hands tied and unable to react against the Deputy Speaker's action. Home Minister LK Advani had told a BJP parliamentary party meeting earlier in the day — before the Deputy Speaker's ruling — that all members had to accept the Chair's ruling without protest "even if we do not agree". Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan reached the Lok Sabha before it assembled to tell NDA MPs that they listen to the ruling in silence.

Minister defends unrecognised madrasas

Former Governor
AR Kidwai hinted
that the review
committee had no
intention of making
it mandatory for
madrasas to seek
state recognition,
says our reporter
in Kolkata

April 11. — The Kidwai committee reviewing madrasa education has no intention of recommending mandatory recognition for all madrasas in the country.

West Bengal, which has 100-odd unrecognised madrasas, is prepared to go along. In fact, its minister for minority affairs, Md Selim, defended these unrecognised madrasas and objected to their students being branded

"anti-national". "I object," the minister said, while reacting to allegations about unrecognised madrasas serving as breeding grounds for anti-national activities.

It's not fair to say that those studying in recognised madrasas are rational and their counterparts in the unrecognised ones are anti-national, he said.

It may be recalled that a controversy had raged over the chief minister's charge that unrecognised madrasas were serving as bases for anti-national activities. Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had made the statement after the January attack on the American Center and even his party mouth piece, Ganashakti, had quoted him saying so. But later, under pressure from his party, Mr Bhattacharjee said he had been misquoted.

Both the committee and the state government agreed on the need for inducements to bring unrecognised madrasas into the

mainstream. Mr AR Kidwai, who heads the review committee, cited Article 30 of the Constitution which guarantees the right of minorities to run their own educational institutions. Hence, such institutions need not be recognised by the state.

After a talk with the chief minister this morning, he indicated that the committee, which is to submit its report in June, had no intention of recommending amendments to the Constitution making it mandatory for minority educational institutions to seek state recognition. Mr Kidwai hoped that unrecognised madrasas would come forward and seek recognition in their "own interest".

Md Selim, too, hoped that after the review and modernisation of madrasa education by the committee, unrecognised madrasas, "either out of suspicion, fear or for historical reasons," will come forward and have themselves recognised.

12 APR 2002

THE STATESMAN

Mamata, Samir join hands to attack govt

Mamata Banerjee is back to bashing the Left, and this time she has a former CPI-M leader for company, says our reporter in Kolkata

April 10. — In what could be described as a major re-alignment of forces, Miss Mamata Banerjee and Mr Samir Putatunda today shared a rostrum to launch an attack on the CPI-M and the Left Front government over the spate of killings in the state and the CBI report on the Chhoto Angaria massacre.

Today's development is being interpreted as a boost for the Trinamul and PDS as the parties will be able to share their votebanks. The PDS has significant presence in South-24 Parganas as Mr Putatunda was the district secretary of the CPI-M prior to its split.

Following a request by the Trinamul, Mr Putatunda, PDS general secretary, arrived at the demonstration organised by Trinamul MLAs at Esplanade and expressed solidarity with the Trinamul in its fight against "red terror" in the state.

He was accompanied by Mrs Anuradha Putatunda, Mr S Choudhury, Mr H Mukherjee and Mr H Sanyal, PDS leaders. He said the need of the hour is to launch a united fight against violence in politics and for that, political differences should not stand in the way. "We may have ideological differences with the Trinamul. But as far as our fight against terrorism is concerned, we are one and will continue to be one."

Miss Banerjee expressed happiness at the PDS's presence at

the dharna and invited the party for the 20 April Trinamul rally that will be organised here.

Miss Banerjee, besides other Trinamul MLAs, spoke on what she described as "state-sponsored terrorism" in West Bengal, labelling it as the worst of its kind in the state. She came down heavily on the chief minister, saying that he was the one who had instigated party cadres to take it out on Trinamul men with the help of long-range rifles.

Miss Banerjee announced that her party would write to the President for an inquiry into state-sponsored terrorism here as per the Commission of Inquiry Act.

"As home minister, he has failed miserably and as chief minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is silent on the Chhoto Angaria massacre. This indicates how blatant a chief minister can be when it comes to an incident like the Garbeta one where CPI-M men killed 11 Trinamul workers," Miss Banerjee said.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee, Leader of the Opposition, referred to

the Caveat published in *The Statesman* today to elaborate on the Garbeta case. He said the column pointed out that women had been outraged and their menfolk brutally murdered because they were Trinamul supporters.

Mr Putatunda took up the Chhoto Angaria issue, saying the chief minister and his party should come up with an explanation as to what really happened at the place of the massacre. "How can the party secretary say Pankaj Banerjee had commented on an incomplete CBI report? That means he has seen the report. If that be so, he and his government have the responsibility of stating as to how 11 people were killed," Mr Putatunda said, also referring to the Nanoor killings a year ago.

A few months ago, Mr Putatunda invited all political parties, barring the BJP, to protest against the CPI-M's terror in South-24 Parganas. Mr P Banerjee represented the Trinamul at the meeting.



Mr Samir Putatunda and Miss Mamata Banerjee at the sit-in on Rani Rashmoni Avenue on Wednesday. — *The Statesman*

DNA lead on Angaria massacre

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 3

DNA TESTS confirm that at least two of the 11 Trinamool Congress workers, who reportedly went missing in Garbeta in the run-up to the 2001 Assembly elections, were killed.

The tests were conducted on the bloodstained soil samples collected from the spot in Chhota Angaria where the Trinamool workers were said to have been massacred by CPI(M) cadres on the night of January 5.

A senior CBI officer said: "Since we have not found their bodies, it would be difficult to confirm their murder, but in all probability they had been killed," a senior CBI officer told *Hindustan Times*.

The CBI is now likely to question some CPI(M) functionaries, including senior leaders allegedly involved in the arson and its "cover-up".

The CBI began a probe after the Calcutta High Court directed the case be transferred to the agency as the State police failed to make any headway.

A CBI officers said: "We are yet to ascertain the fate of nine others who are reported to be missing. It would be premature to say that all the people reported missing had been killed as their bodies have not been found." The agency's attempt to trace them with sniffer dogs came a cropper.

Senior CBI officers said the DNA results were a major step in the investigations as the local police and the administration had not extended any cooperation. "Instead, we have faced hurdles at every step," said an officer. The probe also suffered as the State CID tried to take back the case from the CBI.

"Progress in investigations are slow because of two reasons:

FLASHBACK

JANUARY 4, 2001: A traumatised Abdur Rahman Mondal walks into the Garbeta police station and narrates a 'massacre' at Chhota Angaria that he claims to have witnessed

JANUARY 5: News spreads that 14 Trinamool Congress supporters were shot and hacked to death at Mondal house and there is no trace of the killers or the bodies

JANUARY 6: Mamata Banerjee rushes to Chhota Angaria, by now completely deserted. Bloodstains and thousands of empty cartridges found at the 'massacre' site

JANUARY 6: Mamata demands an immediate CBI enquiry and Article 356 imposed.

JANUARY 7: A team of five NDA MPs rush to Chhota Angaria

JANUARY 8: The State Government asks CID to take up the case

people are scared to talk or reveal anything and the State machinery is not keen to help us unearth the truth," said an officer associated with the investigations.

Earlier in the day, an agency report that DNA tests had linked all the 11 missing persons to the "massacre", generated intense political heat with the Trinamool promptly demanding Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's resignation and the CPI(M) shooting down the demand, saying it had never tried to come in the way of justice.

More reports on Page 4

4 APR 2001

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

State cool to Tokyo guest

Manash Ghosh in Kolkata

April 3. — The apparently Bengal-friendly Japanese government — the largest single foreign investor in the state — has now turned unfriendly towards the Left Front. Or so it seems, after the state home secretary refused to meet Mr Hideo Fujita, counsellor in the Japanese embassy in Dhaka.

According to officials, the Japanese consulate in Kolkata had informed the state that Mr Fujita would be coming to the city to verify the extent and nature of the exodus of persecuted members of the Bangladeshi minority community to West Bengal and other border states in India.

But home secretary Mr AK Deb's office conveyed a message saying due to "unavoidable circumstances" the secretary would be unable to meet Mr Fujita.

The state had sent the communique well before Mr Fujita's visit, perhaps recalling the diplomatic row that had broken out

between Alimuddin Street and the US consulate over an allegedly "clandestine" visit by two consulate officials to Suchpur in Birbhum in July 2000. The US officials went there to find out what had led to the killing of 12 Trinamul Congress workers allegedly by CPI-M supporters.

Wary of antagonising Dhaka and with a firm eye on the minority vote, the Left Front aborted the home secretary's meet with a Japanese official, who was in the city on a fact-finding mission on Bangla refugees

Alimuddin Street had termed the visit a direct interference in the internal affairs of the government, and had demanded action against the US consulate. Eventually, the then US ambassador, Mr Richard Celeste, had expressed regret over the incident.

Officials say the home secretary's refusal to meet Mr Fujita is inkeeping with the Left Front government's policy not to sour its relations with the ruling BNP-Jamat-e-Islami combine in Dhaka or get into any diplomatic wrangling over it.

It is because of this decision — not to displease Begum Khaleda Zia's government in any way — that the Left Front has studiously ignored the issue of persecution of Bangladeshi minorities across the border and instructed the police to speedily detect those who have illegally sought refuge in Bengal and arrange for their deportation.

Taking cognisance of the issue, as in the case of the government's move to reform madrasas, will surely result in alienating minority voters in West Bengal, particularly in the run-up to the panchayat elections. The Left Front in the state can hardly afford that sort of a risk.

Turn to page 6

51-6 JAPAN: 4/4

(Continued from page 1)

Mr Fujita's three-day visit to the city — which ended yesterday — was unprecedented, since he was to be here on "instructions from his government". Japan, in fact, is concerned about the plight of Bangla minorities since their general elections. Japanese scholars and aid agencies in reports from Bangladesh had highlighted the "systematic persecution" of minorities and Awami supporters.

Scholar Mr Masahiko Togawa is professor with the Graduate School of International Development of Hiroshima University. He had last November extensively toured Bangladesh, Kolkata and the 24-Parganas to gauge the nature of this persecution.

Mrs Miyeko Nishemeeju, Japanese vice-chairman of the World Bank and also co-chairman of Bangladesh Development Forum, at a recent aid consortium meet in Paris had asked the Zia government to move to stop the exodus.

During his stay in the city, Mr Fujita had visited the office of Bangladesh Udbastu Kalyan Parishad and other refugee organisations to ascertain the number of Bangladeshis taking shelter this side of the border. Parishad officials said it is difficult to quantify the number as most were staying with relatives along the border, but even by conservative estimates the figure would "certainly run into several thousands".

KMC firm on taxing govt bodies

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, March 30. — The KMC will not spare state government organisations in the city from paying property tax and service charges. Central government organisations will have to pay service charges only.

Though these organisations owe property taxes and service charges to the KMC, the civic body till now had been lenient about collecting dues from them.

However, mayor Mr Subrata Mukherjee announced that the KMC would strictly enforce provisions on property tax and service charges on these organisations from now on. The KMC will serve notices for payment of service charges and property tax on Central government organisations that have been recently corporatised. These have been carved out of dif-

ferent union ministries. Notices are being sent to BSNL and VSNL, he said.

Tax and service charge collection from government organisations has remained an unexplored area, Mr Mukherjee said. "We want to increase collection of taxes and service charges from more organisations and people rather than increase rates," he said.

Dues owed by the KMC to the state should be adjusted against the latter's tax and service charge dues to the civic body, the mayor said.

The KMC realised about Rs 10 crore today from erstwhile tax defaulters who paid up under its waiver scheme. Mr Mukherjee said a number of firms, hotels and individuals were among the defaulters.

The LIC paid its dues yesterday, he said. Defaulters include the Oberoi Grand on

Chowringhee Road, with dues worth more than Rs 4 crore, he said. But an Oberoi Grand spokesperson said: "All outstanding municipal taxes had been paid."

The KMC had shortlisted about 487 individuals and organisations as defaulters. It had threatened to snap their water connection if they failed to clear dues by 31 March. The threat yielded results, the mayor said. Water connections of those who remain defaulters will be snapped from 1 April.

Some people alleged that they had received notices about the total amount of outstanding taxes only in the last few days. This made it impossible to arrange for the money, with banks closed for a number of holidays in a row. Mr Mukherjee said he had been informed about this and will "look into the matter".

THE STATESMAN

31 MARCH 2002

Four votes that made Mamata cross

After victory begins the witch-hunt

BY OURSPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, March 27: Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee today got her nominee through to Rajya Sabha, but not before suffering a major humiliation with the Congress igniting a mini rebellion in Trinamul by getting four of her legislators to cross-vote.

Despite the success in the Rajya Sabha election, the scoreline signalled a setback for Mamata whose authority on her party was expected to weaken in the days ahead in the face of the likely increase in poaching on her turf by the Congress.

Till yesterday, Mamata had asserted that all her 60 legislators would vote for her nominee, Dinesh Trivedi, Trinamul's all-India general secretary, a lightweight who is known to be her pointman in Delhi.

Late in the evening, Mamata and other Trinamul leaders claimed they had identified the four legislators who cross-voted for the Congress, defying the party whip. "We would take appropriate action at the appropriate time," Mamata said.

As expected, the ruling Left Front won all the four seats it contested, though three votes cast in their favour stood cancelled for technical reasons. The winning Front candidates were Prasanta Chatterjee, Tarini Kanta Roy, Sheikh Khabiruddin Ahmed (all from CPM) and Debabrata Biswas (Forward Bloc).



Left Front winners (from left): Prasanta Chatterjee, Sheikh Khabiruddin, Tarini Kanta Roy, Debabrata Biswas. Picture by Aloke Mishra

camp was leader of its legislature party Atish Sinha who is undergoing treatment at a nursing home for a cerebral attack.

The Trinamul chief, however, tried to put up a brave front when asked to comment on the cross-voting. "I am happy that our nominee has won by the highest number of votes. It does not matter that four of our legislators voted for the Congress. After all, the Congress has been

trying to engineer a split in our party by resorting to horse-trading," she told reporters.

Party sources, however, said the Trinamul chief could face organisational problems as a fallout of the cross-voting and rebel MP Aji Panja's decision to defy the party whip and vote for the Prevention of Terrorism Bill that was passed at a joint session of Parliament yesterday.

The total number of voters in the Rajya Sabha polls was 293

BY OURSPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, March 27: After her poll defeat last May, this was a victory that Mamata Banerjee could well have celebrated, but it was a victory that left a bitter taste in her mouth.

Mamata says she has identified the four "betrayers" though the Rajya Sabha election was held through secret ballot.

But she may find it difficult to act tough as the seeds of rebellion sown by the Congress may begin to germinate, and this Mamata will have to handle with care.

Agitated over the cross-voting, Mamata loyalists pointed accusing fingers at Congressmen who broke ranks with the parent party to secure a Trinamul nomination during the last Assembly polls.

"We cannot imagine that anyone can go against Mamata's clear orders to cast all votes in favour of the party candidate. We, who are with Mamata since the early 1990s, have always obeyed her. We feel those who cross-voted today do not belong to our party even if they are our MLAs," said a senior Trinamul leader.

Sources within Trinamul said that though it is next to impossible to pinpoint the cross-voters, a witch-hunt appears to already begun and those named Trinamul immediately before the Assembly polls

check-rime suspects. Observers said this is for the

first time after Aji Panja's rebellion that cracks appeared in Trinamul and Mamata's leadership was challenged within the party. "The challenge has come not from any small-time local leaders but from MLAs. Mamata should now introspect on why things have come to such a pass," a senior party leader said.

Mamata's detractors, however, saw nothing unusual in today's poll outcome. "It is she who had put up Jayanta Bhat-tacharya as the Trinamul-backed Independent candidate against official Congress nominee D.P. Roy two years ago and engineered the cross-voting which resulted in the former's victory. So, now that it has boomeranged this time it should not upset her. She should face it sportingly," said a party leader.



Dinesh Trivedi.

Picture by Pradip Sanyal

today's cross-voting has sent a signal to the NDA partners, particularly the B.J.P. that all was not well in the Trinamul under Mamata's leadership.

The Rajya Sabha results may also bring down by a few notches her chances of getting a berth in the Union ministry.

Mamata's loss of face comes at a time when she is facing flak from B.J.P. ministers in the Union Cabinet for her criticism of the Union Budget. She is also under attack for keeping her flock away from the joint session of Parliament called to pass the Prevention of Terrorism Bill.

Haldia control goes to IOC

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 26

27/3
9.51 MB

THE FINAL round of the battle for Haldia Petrochemicals Ltd seems to have gone to the IOC. The Haldia Petrochemicals board has accepted the IOC proposal in toto — the same one that had been rejected as unacceptable a few months before.

The board of directors of HPL today resolved to hand over management control to Indian Oil Corporation which comes in as a strategic partner in the company with a 26 per cent stake. IOC will contribute around Rs 460 crore for the equity.

This will be a major boost for IOC, giving it control of 22 per cent of the Indian petrochemical market that is controlled by HPL. This development virtually negates all the efforts of The Chatterjee Group to retain management control of the company, get a better deal from IOC and keep government holding below 50 per cent.

Purnendu Chatterjee, TCG chairman, said he was happy with the deal and is not exiting the company at this stage.

Chairman of Haldia Petrochemicals, Tarun Das, said it has been decided that IOC would come in with a 26 per



PURNENDU CHATTERJEE

cent stake and bring in Rs 460 crore as equity capital for the company.

An agreement between the current shareholders — the State Government, The Chatterjee Group and the Tatas — will be signed in early April. The promoters and IOC will then prepare a fresh proposal to restructure the company's debt. The promoters had signed an agreement on January 12 that envisioned a buyout of the Tata stake of 14 per cent by the State Government. This would have been shared by TCG and the State with TCG holding 51 per cent and the State holding 49 per cent.

Das said: "That agreement about the Tata stake stands but the new agreement will take over from the old one. However, who will have how much stake in the final picture is yet to be decided."

G Goswami, the IDBI nominee on the HPL board, said that Rs 460 crore is the basic minimum that the equity holders have to bring in. The FIs were insisting on Rs 1,000 crore additional equity, but Goswami said, "First let this amount come in and then we will work out the rest."

Possible scenarios

- TCG may not raise stake to 51%
- IOC+Govt stake pegged at 50%
- HPL buys 100% naptha from IOC
- Possible TCG, Govt exit
- FIs to acquire equity

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 MAR 2002

IOC gets 26% stake in Haldia Petro

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, March 26. — In what appears to be a total reversal of policy, the board of Haldia Petrochemicals Limited (HPL) decided here today to offer IOC management control with 26 per cent stake in HPL.

The decision to rope in IOC as strategic partner follows the cash-starved company's bid to restructure its worrisome burden of debt with financial institutions.

According to company officials, the decision was taken after strenuous efforts and protracted negotiation.

It will be recalled that the West Bengal government had refused to concede to the IOC's terms, and had awarded management control to Mr Purnendu Chatterjee.

Earlier, IOC had appointed the consul-

2913
tants KPMG to carry out due diligence, following which the oil PSU sought management control in the company with 26 per cent stake. This involved an investment of Rs 468 crore. Company sources say this is now immediately needed.

Though details are awaited, today's decision clearly indicates that IOC has been able to get the terms it had sought, and as such, is a slap on the face of the state government, say corporate circles.

They said Mr Purnendu Chatterjee has also gained since he had explored all possibilities before allowing IOC control at the best possible terms over his company.

The IOC chairman-designate, Mr MS Ramachandran, when contacted, said he was happy, but refused to elaborate because of other preoccupations. A fresh proposal for recasting of debt would be submitted to the

9.8x m3
financial institutions soon, HPL sources said.

With the IOC being chosen as HPL's strategic partner, all speculation regarding other companies seeking a strategic partnership has come to an end.

This is because IOC is cash-rich and has enormous experience in petrochemicals, said a CII official.

Earlier at a press conference, replying to a question on stakes in Haldia Petrochemicals Ltd, Mr MA Pathan, the current IOC chairman who is due to retire on 1 April, said: "We have opened a fresh dialogue with the Chatterjee Group. Our taking of a stake in HPL is conditional to the promoters giving us 26 per cent and management control, besides sourcing the entire requirement of naphtha from IOC", adds PTI from New Delhi.

THE STATESMAN

27 MARCH 1997

States may rob Centre of Poto glory

CL Manoj and Niloya
Roy Chaudhury in New Delhi

March 25. — Getting a comprehensive piece of anti-terrorism legislation enacted is vital for the government to fulfil its international commitments. But it remains unclear if this legislation will be effective on the domestic front, given that law-and-order is a state-controlled subject.

For India, at the forefront of the international anti-terrorism campaign, enacting a law like the Prevention of Terrorism Bill — which encompasses all the ramifications of modern-day terrorism — is necessary to ratify the vari-

ous international treaties it has signed. The UN Security Council resolution 1373, adopted after the attacks in New York and Washington, makes it mandatory for all member-nations to help combat terrorism.

In a report dated 24 December submitted to the Security Council, the government sent details of existing laws and those that it would enact to ratify international anti-terror legislation. It cited Poto as a measure to strengthen its armoury against terrorism. Poto "specifically aims", the government said, "to deal with all aspects of prevention of terrorism".

Also, having initiated the Comprehensive Convention against Interna-

tional Terrorism, not having domestic legislation to match the same would be an embarrassment.

Going by mere arithmetic, the government will manage to push the Poto Bill through at the joint session tomorrow, but its implementation on the ground appears unlikely.

The Bill has to be implemented by state governments with no legal provision for the Centre to force it on them. Given the current political bitterness that the Bill has generated both inside and outside Parliament, most of the states may not implement it.

Mr Digvijay Singh had recently said categorically that Madhya Pradesh will not implement Poto. He had met Mrs

Sonia Gandhi at the outset of the controversy and conveyed his decision. Resistance is also being lined up by other states. Adding to the woes of the NDA is the fact that 14 states are now ruled by the Congress.

States including Maharashtra and Karnataka already have their versions of anti-terrorism Acts. The Left Front governments in West Bengal and Tripura have also decided not to implement Poto.

With Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav at the forefront of the anti-Poto fight, Bihar is also likely to shun it. The Centre can hope to implement the Bill in Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh.

THE STATESMAN
26 MAR 2002

Deuba, CM in terror talks

BY A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, March 25: Security concerns, especially the activities of Nepal's Maoist guerrillas and their possible links with the state's radical groups, dominated talks between Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today.

The two leaders were closeted for more than 45 minutes at a city hotel this morning before Deuba left for Kathmandu.

Both the leaders expressed concern over the growing activities of the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), which has joined hands with the People's War Group (PWG) in some parts of Midnapore, Burdwan and Bankura.

Bhattacharjee briefed the Nepalese Prime Minister, who was accompanied by minister of state for foreign affairs Arjun Jung Bahadur Singh, on how the MCC-PWG combine is "killing innocent people, especially CPM supporters and leaders, and creating trouble in the state".

Though neither Bhattacharjee nor Deuba briefed reporters on the outcome of the meeting, it



Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba with chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at a Calcutta hotel. Picture by Pradip Sanyal

is learnt the meeting was confined to militant activities in Bengal and Nepal and efforts taken by the two governments to curb it.

The two leaders agreed that the recent spurt in Naxalite activities is a matter of concern for both Bengal and Nepal.

Bhattacharjee urged Deuba to strengthen security along the Indo-Nepal border to prevent the militants from crossing over.

The government of Nepal has taken several steps to curb the subversive activities of the MCC. In the interest of both countries, a joint effort needs to

be made, Deuba told the chief minister.

Bhattacharjee gave Deuba a detailed picture on security arrangements made by the state and Centre along the border. Home department sources said several MCC activists have already sneaked into Bengal.

THE TELEGRAPH

26 MAR 2002

CM puts Poto on backburner

Arindam Sarkar & PTI
Hyderabad, March 23

SEEING THE fire over Poto, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has decided to put his pet Poca on the backburner for the time being.

"Since Poto has created so much problem, I should not rush it through. I have to wait," the Chief Minister said during a Press conference here today. Though Poca has a limited purpose of checking hijacking, kidnapping and armed insurgency, it is being put on hold keeping in view the controversy over the Central ordinance, he said.

Making the distinction between Poto and Poca, Bhattacharjee said the former was "dangerous for the country" as it lacked adequate safeguards. "While Poto authorises ban on any organisation and arrest of anybody, our law has limited purpose and the nature of crimes are clearly defined," he said, adding that Poca was adopted long before Poto came into the picture.

Bhattacharjee replied in the negative when asked if he would take the initiative to convene a meeting of non-BJP Chief Ministers on Poto. "As far as West Bengal is concerned, we will not use Poto. We do not need it. Other State Governments should take their own decision since

law and order is a State subject."

He expressed concern about the flow of illegal funds into the hands of such elements in Bengal as the Bajrang Dal, VHP, Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and the Jamaat. "Majority communalism is more dangerous than minority communalism. We have discussed this in the party congress and we will make no compromise on this," Bhattacharjee said.

On the madrasa muddle, the Chief Minister reiterated that he only wanted that apart from teaching Arabic language and theology, madrasas should teach modern sciences. "I have already set up a one-man committee, which will give its report in June and then we will go with the recommendations to improve the quality of teaching in madrasas. All right-thinking minorities will agree with me."

"The Ayodhya crisis, the Godhra incident and the riots that followed have substantially added to the communal tension in the country, Buddhadeb said. "But in Bengal, I arrested all VHP activists who tried to create trouble over Ayodhya. As for Godhra, I don't even want to comment on it. In Bengal, communal harmony is intact. The credit should not just go to the administration but to the politically-conscious people of the State."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 MAR 2002

State to move SC in DGP case

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, March 19. — The state government will file an appeal before the Supreme Court on the High Court order quashing the appointment of Mr Dinesh Vajpai as the DG, IGP.

Chief secretary Mr Sourin Roy said today the state would file the appeal within the requisite time. "We are taking steps accordingly," Mr Roy said, adding that he had spoken to the chief minister on the issue.

Asked whether the government was considering the order as a "setback" for the administration, he said: "We won in the lower court, now we have the High Court order and we will further appeal to the apex court." Mr Roy, however, refused to say who will be the next DGP.

The High Court yesterday ordered the state government to go for a fresh appointment within three months from the date of issue of order.

It also asked the government to select the new incumbent

from among the existing DGs, giving due regard to seniority.

Following the order, the Trinamul Congress today demanded the resignation of Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee as the home minister.

Trinamul MLA Mr Tapas Roy, who had criticised the chief minister in the Assembly for having "politicised the police force by appointing Mr Vajpai," said that the verdict has exposed the Left Front government's "policy of favouritism."

State Trinamul president Mr Subrata Bakshi said: "The chief minister should hang his head in shame and quit as the home minister".

Yesterday's order is being viewed as a shot in the arm for the Trinamul Congress and the party is not willing to let go of the opportunity to lambast Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee in this regard.

The High Court order came after CAT last year turned down an appeal by Mr Manash Chakraborty, DG (homeguard), who had prayed for setting aside the appointment of Mr Vajpai.

THE STATESMAN

20 MAR 2002

HC sets aside DGP's appointment

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 18

9.8r MB

A TWO-JUDGE Bench of the Calcutta High Court today set aside Dinesh Vajpai's appointment as the State Director-General and Inspector-General of Police. The Bench also directed the State Government to make a fresh appointment for the post within the next three months.

Delivering the landmark judgment, Justice Altamas Kabir and Justice Alope Kumar Basu observed that the senior-most DGP should replace Vajpai till such time as a fresh appointment was made for the post.

The court, however, stayed operation of the order for two weeks on the prayer of the State Government counsel to appeal before the Supreme Court.

The court passed the order on a writ petition filed by Director-General and Commandant General (Home Guard) Manas Chakraborty, challenging Central Administrative Tribunal's order, which had upheld Vaj-



DINESH VAJPAI

pai's appointment as DG and IGP. Chakraborty had moved to CAT last year when Vajpai was promoted to the post of DG and IGP by two notifications dated May 5 and July 10, 2001.

Outside a packed courtroom, Chakraborty told reporters he hoped the Chief Minister would abide by the court order. Vajpai refused to talk to reporters. State Law Minister Nisith Adhikari and Chief

Secretary Sourin Roy said they were yet to receive the court order.

Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee promoted Vajpai soon after assuming power following the Assembly polls. Vajpai was then the city Police Commissioner and held the rank of an Additional Director-General of Police. Bhattacharjee, who left for the Hyderabad party congress, was unavailable for comment.

Chakraborty had argued in his petition that Vajpai was a CP when he was promoted to DG and IGP in violation of the Supreme Court order in the 1999 C Dinakar case. His counsel Siddhartha Shankar Ray said while Vajpai could be promoted as a DG, he couldn't be made the senior-most DG superceding others. The Supreme Court, Ray contended, had specified that a DG and IGP had to be found from the present DGs. State counsel Shaktinath Mukhopadhyay said the post of DG and CG (Home Guard) was in no way below that of DG and IGP.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 MAR 2002

Buddha blames Advani for border woes

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 14

CHIEF MINISTER Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee slammed Home Minister L K Advani for not taking the problems along the Bangladesh border seriously and held the Centre responsible for the influx of terrorists and Bangladeshis by not providing adequate security personnel.

He said that despite repeated letters and reminders to Advani, the State was yet to get the required strength of BSF battalion for the borders. The State has the quota of 34 battalion, whereas only 20 battalion of BSF personnel are guarding the 1,464-km stretch of the Bengal-Bangladesh border.

"Mr Advani is concerned about Jammu and Kashmir and the west, but I have told him that the situation along the Indo-Bangla border cannot be ignored," he told the House, when asked on the security measures in the border districts.

According to him, the Centre is primarily responsible for the battalion and for chipping in for border fencing. But the Centre was not giving any financial assistance for fencing the border. Even though funds are trickling in for construction

of border roads, which has showed 70 per cent progress, no fund has been provided for fencing.

The State has gone ahead with major plans for beefing up security along the borders. It has set up six police stations, many outposts and investigation centres in the areas prone to terrorist and insurgent activities. It has set up a special task force along the India-Nepal border and has plans to intensify vigil along Bengal-Bhutan border.

Bhattacharjee said that the State is more concerned about the insurgent activities along the borders than on the routine cases of cross-border smuggling and other petty crimes.

Replying to a question from Trinamool Congress MLA Jyotipriyo Mallik, Bhattacharjee said that new police stations are coming up in Purnea in North Dinajpur and Bulbul Chandi in Malda, Toofangunge and Kumargram in Jalpaiguri, Pundibari in Cooch Behar. The Government is also planning to set up three additional police stations in Siliguri. Special attention is being given to areas prone to infiltration and terrorist activities. Bhagabangola, Lal-gola and the bordering areas of Murshidabad are also being considered.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 MAR 2001

Buddha sets up direct talks with district heads

BY A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, March 11: Concerned over delay in implementing rural development projects and poor health services in rural hospitals as well as lack of initiatives in introducing e-governance, chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has summoned all district magistrates and sabhadhipatis.

Bhattacharjee will hold a meeting with them at the Great Eastern Hotel tomorrow to review on-going projects and ascertain the causes of delay.

This is the first time the chief minister will have a one-to-one interaction with the district magistrates. He had held meeting with them in July where, in the presence of his senior Cabinet colleagues, Bhattacharjee described the plans and policies of the sixth Left Front government and directed them to make all efforts to implement them.

Sources in the chief minister's office said Bhattacharjee is not happy with functioning of

most district authorities, as many development projects are either excessively delayed or lying incomplete for years.

The chief minister has also expressed displeasure for lack of initiative of some district administration in gathering speed in different sectors, especially in improving the healthcare system in rural Bengal, taking up employment-oriented projects and giving priority to e-governance, sources said.

According to Writers' Buildings officials, the chief minister's office is flooded with letters, most of which are on poor health services, appeal for employment and inaction of a section of policemen to provide security to the people. The chief minister held a meeting with his senior officers last week, and made it clear that he wants prompt work.

"I am not ready to hear any excuse. If any project takes off, it must be completed within the stipulated period and if there is fund crunch then do not start the work. I know the government

has several constraints and limited funds but we have to work within this. Do not forget, we have promised the people to provide better services," he reportedly told them.

The chief minister, who has been promising a better and corruption-less administration and making all efforts to speed up development projects, want a clear picture from the district heads on how many projects are in progress, how many are in the pipeline, fund status, the causes of delay and move to ease it. Health and rural development minister Suryakanta Mishra, finance minister Asim Dasgupta and chief secretary S.N. Roy will also be present in the meeting.

"The chief minister will speak to the district magistrates and sabhadhipatis, take their views and give his directives," officials said. Guidelines have been framed on the quick implementation of development projects, restoring work culture and stopping misuse of funds, the officials added.

THE TELEGRAPH

12 MAR. 2002

Ansari admits involvement in Burman case

C. B. S. S. W.
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, March 11. — Aftab Ansari today confessed he was involved in the abduction of Mr Partha Roy Burman. He was interrogated by CID sleuths at Bhawani Bhavan today.

Aftab was brought to the city yesterday and remanded in police custody on charges of being the prime accused in Mr Roy Burman's abduction and the January terrorist attack on the American Center.

Aftab told his interrogators that the abduction and the terrorist attack didn't go according to plan. The terrorist attack ~~on~~ side USIS had in fact jeopardised other subversive actions he had planned, he said.

He admitted having telephoned five prominent city businessmen from Dubai and demanded ransom worth crores from them. He wanted to kidnap these businessmen also, he confessed. But his aide, Asif Reza Khan, had opposed it and wanted to stick to telephone threats alone.

Three of the businessmen had agreed to pay the ransom but police action after the Roy Burman abduction jeopardised collection of the money.

Aftab admitted having links with most of the accused in the Roy Burman case. Some of these accused are also in custody. Aftab was shown photographs of these men during interrogation.

The CID is expected to make public the broad outcome of the interrogation.

An overenthusiastic CID inspector was pulled up today after he interrogated Aftab without authority from his chief, Mr Partha Bhattacharya, I-G (CID), said. The IG had reportedly directed special superintendents to interrogate Aftab.

CID sleuths will take Aftab to different hideouts in and around the city.

Mr Soumen Mitra, DC-DD I, said the city police will also question Aftab on the terrorist attack.

The CID today supplied painkillers to two of the three Simi men in their custody. They were arrested from Howrah station last week.

THE STATESMAN

12 MAR 2002

Holes in police version on Taldi

Statesman News Service

TALDI/KOLKATA, March 11 – Even as the BJP-VHP bandh passed off peacefully at Taldi in South 24-Parganas today, the police version of yesterday's firing appeared to be riddled with as many holes as were found on the body of the victim, Tapas Halder. The 30-year-old man took eight 7.62 mm bullets in the chest and abdomen fired from a semi-automatic rifle.

While this could be considered an achievement for policemen who are often pulled up for bad marksmanship, local people and district officials have other things to worry about.

First, police say they fired following orders from the executive magistrate, Mr Ramkrishna Mondal. But Mr Mondal told The Statesman that he was in Harisabha, a few hundred metres away, when he heard the first shot. "I did not issue any order to open fire - written or verbal," he said. The police report, however, said that it was on Mr Mondal's orders that the shots were fired.

12/3
Asked about this discrepancy, Mr Alapan Bandopadhyay, district magistrate, told The Statesman: "I am hearing this for the first time. I will immediately inquire into it."

Secondly, local people and those admitted to Kolkata hospitals with bullet injuries allege that the police fired without any "provocation". In fact, local people mobbed reporters today for reporting "only the police version". "Who said the police used seven tear-gas shells before firing? There was no tear-gas. Policemen stormed into the party office and beat us up," said Mr Niranjan Mondal, a Trinamul supporter.

Thirdly, policemen are accused of shooting indiscriminately. "The police said they fired only 15 rounds, but how can that be when eight of them hit one man, four hit others and one grazed my back. At least 10 more bullets hit trees and houses," said Nimai Halder, a villager. Admitted a senior police officer on condition that he would not be quoted: "The police did over-react. But, given the situation, what could we do"? He also conceded that the police fired more rounds

9.8x w
than had been shown on record.

The DIG (HQ), Mr Narayan Ghosh, however, said the firing at Taldi was not unprovoked. "The crowd that had gathered at the temple attacked the police with bricks and stones." Mr Ghosh denied that the police fired without first resorting to a lathi-charge and using tear-gas. He said in a situation where law and order breaks down it is not possible to aim only for the legs. "After all, the targets are not static. There is no rule that we must aim only at the legs", he added.

Four of the injured are in hospital. They claimed they had nothing to do with the *yajna*. Tapan Pal (35), a vegetable vendor, was at National Medical College and Hospital with a bullet lodged in the chest. Manab Mondal (17), a cycle-rickshaw puller, is at MR Bangur Hospital with an injury on the left arm. He was shot at "while walking with his hands raised", said his mother. Dilip Biswas (25), a paan shop owner, recalled: "I was trying to leave the place when a bullet hit me."

Killing has upset kar sevaks, page 6

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RAJYA SABHA NOMINATIONS

Road to RS clear for Dinesh Trivedi

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 11

TRINAMOOI. CONGRESS today collected nomination papers from the Assembly for Rajya Sabha candidate Dinesh Trivedi, whose name will be announced after the party's all-India working committee meeting in New Delhi tomorrow. Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee will preside over the meeting.

The Trinamool will not give a formal whip to its legislators to vote for their candidate, but Mamata has told leader of the Opposition Pankaj Banerjee and Chief Whip Sovandeb Chattopadhyay to ask all 60 MLAs to be present on the day of filing of nomination on March 14.

"I have collected the nomination forms. Each form with the name of Dinesh Trivedi will be proposed by 10 MLAs of the party on March 14. To avoid confusion, our leader will propose one candidate for the Rajya Sabha polls," said Trinamool MLA Jyotipriya Mallik.

Party legislators such as Pankaj Banerjee, Saugata Roy, Nirbed Roy, Arunava Ghosh, Partha Chatterjee and Arup Bhadra feel that

even if the Congress fields a candidate, Trivedi will not have any problem in making it to the Upper House. "We won't be surprised if Trivedi gets more than 60 votes," Partha Chatterjee said.

State Congress chief Pranab Mukherjee will meet his party MLAs tomorrow to discuss the party's stand for the Rajya Sabha elections. "One name doing the rounds is that of former Planning Commission member and economist Arjun Sengupta. But so far there has been no green signal from Sonia Gandhi. And if the indications are right, Pranab is unlikely to nominate any candidate, because there is no point contesting with just 30-odd votes, when you need at least 49 first preference votes to make it to the Rajya Sabha," a Congress MLA said.

Congress legislators said nominating a candidate at this stage would be suicidal because time is too short for manipulating cross-voting from the Trinamool camp. "On the other hand, if the Congress leaders make the mistake of nominating Samir Chakrabarty as their candidate, then the Trinamool candidate would get at least 20-odd votes from the Congress," said a Congress MLA. "If



MAMATA BANERJEE

Samir contests as an Independent without the party's clearance then he will not get 10 proposers to file his nomination paper."

Mamata, however, has made up her mind to send Trivedi to the Rajya Sabha. "What tilted the balance in Trivedi's favour is his experience in the Rajya Sabha, his good contacts with the NDA leaders and the Congress in Delhi. And also the fact that he has been most non-controversial leader of the party," Nirbed Roy said.

"All clouds about his chances have been cleared," said Arunava Ghosh. Pankaj Banerjee, Nirbed Roy, Jyotipriya Mallik and others who have been invited by Mamata to participate in tomorrow's working committee meeting left for Delhi today.

CPI (M) candidates Prashanta Chatterjee, Tarini Ray and Kabiruddin Ahmed filed nomination papers for the Rajya Sabha elections today.

Snubbed CPI accepts Big Brother diktat

HT correspondent
Kolkata, March 11

THE CPI is willing to hurt, but afraid to strike. As such, nothing surprising emerged out of its much-awaited State committee meeting today. The party decided to take in its stride the CPI(M)'s snubbing in denying it a Rajya Sabha ticket and resolved to stay on in the Left Front "under the overall socio-economic and cultural compulsions of the country".

On a day when three CPI(M) candidates filed their nomination for the coming Rajya Sabha election, the CPI State committee deliberated on what it felt to be the Big Brother's breach of trust. "We in the leadership are deeply aggrieved, as are the rank and file over the CPI(M)'s going back on its word on letting our party contest one Rajya Sabha seat this time. Their action will damage the Left Front no doubt, but the CPI cannot play a role that might harm the Front", said party

State secretary Manjukumar Majumdar.

The CPI had temporarily withdrawn its two Ministers from the State Cabinet two years ago to protest against the denial of a Rajya Sabha ticket. The crisis was resolved at the intervention of the Central leadership of both parties.

In a Press statement, the State committee said a decision was taken at the Left Front meeting on March 8, 2000, to allot one of the seats to the CPI from the CPI(M)'s quota in the coming poll. The decision was also endorsed by CPI(M) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet, through a letter to his CPI counterpart AB Bardhan.

The State committee called into question the CPI(M)'s contention that no seat could be given to the CPI "in the changed circumstances" and that the matter had been discussed between the general secretaries of the two parties. "We want to state on behalf of the State party that there had been no

bilateral discussion between our general secretary and the CPI(M)'s general secretary. They (meaning the CPI(M)) have only conveyed their decision. As such, whatever has been said by the CPI(M) is totally untrue", the State committee resolution said.

The resolution went on to say that the CPI had never thought that the CPI(M) would make any promise and break it. "We have also said in the mean time that the CPI(M)'s taking other partners for granted will damage the Left Front. We cannot share this view. We have also said the Left Front cannot be strengthened if an impression gains ground in the public mind that the Front is run by a single party". Having said this, the State committee said the CPI "was, is and will be in the Left Front because of the compulsions of the country's overall socio-economic and cultural situation." The State committee adopted the resolution unanimously. All except two of the 35 members were present.

House condemns Godhra carnage

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, March 9. — A resolution condemning the Godhra carnage and the following communal violence in Gujarat was unanimously passed in the Assembly today. Speaking in support of the resolution, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said the Centre must "immediately clarify" its stand on the VHP's plan for a puja at Ayodhya on 15 March.

The chief minister said the gathering of kar sevaks at Ayodhya for the VHP's temple construction plan was responsible for the "prevailing communal situation". Therefore, he said, the Centre's clarification would help in reducing the "country's apprehension" of whether "they (the VHP) will enter the disputed area or not".

Urging the Centre to en-

sure the safety and constitutional rights of the citizens, the resolution stated that the Centre should curb the communal disturbances, especially in Gujarat, and work to preserve the country's unity and secular and democratic character.

Mr Saugata Roy, Trinamul MLA, said the chief minister should intervene "to overcome certain hurdles" that had come up in the way of the resolution. Initially, the Left Front had wanted to blame only the VHP for the communal situation, but the Trinamul had insisted that a condemnation of the attack on the Sabarmati Express should be included.

Mr Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay, Trinamul MLA, protested when Mr Tapan Hore of the RSP hinted that the NDA partners were not criticising the delayed deploy-

ment of the Army in Gujarat. This, Mr Chattopadhyay said, was against the spirit of the all-party resolution. Mr Hashim Abdul Halim, Speaker, supported him. He pointed out that the resolution was not of any particular party, as it had been moved by the Chair.

Anil plea

Mr Anil Biswas today urged political parties to join hands to fight the communal forces. He was addressing a gathering in the memory of Sadhan Chatterjee, a former CPI-M MLA of Nadia, adds our reporter from Krishnagar.

Parties which had formed the NDA should now come together to remove the BJP from power as "it is responsible for the present crisis in the country", he said.

THE STATESMAN

10 MAR 2002

(Continued from page 1)

Budget:

and 200,000 from self-employment schemes.

This reflects on the dull industrial scenario of the state and raises questions on whether at all it would be possible to generate 200,000 jobs through self-employment schemes, given the state government's charge that commercial banks are extremely reluctant to sanction loans for such schemes.

The finance minister has announced tax concessions for consumer items like *alta*, *sindoor*, raw jute, work relating to printing, hosiery goods, telephone sets, cellular phones, pagers, electronic calculator, cooking range, rice cooker, coffee machine, music systems, gramophone and franking machines. The Budget also exempts silk yarn from the purview of luxury tax, while imposing the same on imported paper and converted paper products.

The minister has been quite harsh on property transactions, raising the stamp duty by one per cent to six per cent on the deed of conveyance. However, this increase would be restricted to municipal areas only.

In regard to motor vehicles, the Budget has a major pinch in the form of a hike in the existing annual rate of additional tax by Rs 1,000 per year. This would be applicable to

owners of private four and two-wheelers only.

He has been extremely charitable to the cinema industry, bringing down entertainment tax on Bengali, Nepali, Santhali and other language films and thus throwing up the possibility of a reduction in the prices of film tickets.

As for admission to musical soirees and theatre performance centres, the government has raised the exemption limit on entertainment tax on tickets from Rs 25 to Rs 40. However, Mr Dasgupta has hit out at the affluent class by slapping an entertainment tax of 20 per cent on tickets required for entry into amusement parks, aqua parks, theme parks, pool games and bowling complexes.

Plan outlays for the irrigation, agriculture, cooperation, roads, education, public health engineering and urban development have been raised. Three-hundred new State Transport Corporation buses would be purchased.

An additional sum of Rs 100 crore has been provided for augmenting rural electrification, while special steps will be taken to provide loan-based assistance of Rs 125 crore for the

reopening of closed units in the state.

As for the Banglar Karmasanshan Prakaipa, Rs 150 crore will be provided as government subsidy.

The education sector will undergo private initiatives, if necessary, while the Budget promises to set up an additional 4,000 child education centres.

The Budget envisages a 17 per cent rise in plan expenditure, up from Rs 5,796 crore to Rs 6,797 crore, while the non-plan hike has been projected to be only one per cent, thus explaining the thrust on employment generation.

Of the Rs 376 crore additional revenue the government expects, Rs 220 crore is to come from a 10 per cent sales tax surcharge, Rs 50 crore from a 0.5 per cent turnover tax, Rs 50 crore from stamp duty, Rs 46 crore from motor vehicles tax and Rs 10 crore from entertainment tax. This means that nearly 60 per cent of the Budget's additional revenue is to come from sales tax surcharge.

If Mr Dasgupta manages to collect this much, he will still have to bother about whether he will be able to reduce wasteful expenditure by Rs 60 crore. If that doesn't happen, the Opposition will certainly have an opportunity to label him as a finance minister high on promises but short on performance.

Wait against

THE STATESMAN

9 MAR 2002

CPM ignores allies, declares RS list

Ignoring murmurs of protest from allies, the CPM today named three candidates for the RS polls. The fourth LF candidate is from the FB, says our reporter in Kolkata

March 8. — Brushing aside sharp criticism from the CPI, Mr Biman Bose, Left Front chairman, today announced the names of three CPI-M candidates for the Rajya Sabha polls scheduled for March 27. Mr Bose said the names had been approved by the party politburo and by general-secretary Mr Harkishen Singh Surjeet. The CPI had demanded one of the seats, citing an assurance given in the year 2000 by the late Sailen Dasgupta, then LF chairman.

Mr Bose also announced the name of the fourth LF candidate, who is from the Forward Bloc. The Front is putting up candidates for four of the five seats that are falling vacant, because its strength in the Assembly can ensure victory for four. The fifth seat is likely to go to the Trinamul.

The CPI-M nominees are Mr Prasanta Chatterjee, former mayor of Kolkata, Mr Khabiruddin Ahmed, former Nadia MLA, and Mr Tarini Roy, literacy campaigner and trade unionist from Cooch Behar. Mr Debabrata Biswas, former minister, is the Forward Bloc candidate.

Mr Bose declined comment on the state CPI's charge that Mr AB Bardhan, its national council chief, had been merely informed of the CPI-M's decision and that no discussion had taken place between him and Mr HS Surjeet.

"The meeting was held between Mr Bardhan and Mr Surjeet," Mr Bose said. "Since I was not present there, it would not do to ask me about it, nor the state CPI leaders." The LF chairman suggested that the media contact Mr Surjeet and Mr Bardhan to ascertain what had transpired at the meeting between the two leaders.

Reacting to the sharply critical statement on the issue by the state CPI yesterday, wherein the CPI-M is accused of establishing one-party rule, Mr Bose said he "did not know why such a complaint arose" because chief minister Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee "is in the habit of taking his ministerial colleagues into confidence ... and they belong to different LF constituents".

As for the CPI's plan to form a pressure group within the LF with the Forward Bloc and RSP, Mr Bose said the Front "could not be strengthened if a particular party is weakened". He said the LF's present task was to bring under its banner those sections of the people who are still opposed to it.

Darjeeling CPM

Four names from among the CPI-M in this district are being considered for the Rajya Sabha polls, adds our reporter from Siliguri.

Among the frontrunners are Mr BB Thapa from Mirik followed by Mr KS Hamal, who was re-inducted to the district committee from Kurseong in January. The others in the reckoning are Mr Suraj Pathak, whose candidature to the last Lok Sabha elections could not materialise because of internal bickering, and former Siliguri MLA Mr Biren Bose.

A fifth name — that of former Kurseong MLA Mr Tulsi Bhatnagar — surfaced during talks but was forgotten, party insiders said.

The party has convened a district committee meeting tomorrow to decide on the issue.

The CPI-M's last Rajya Sabha member from the district, Mr Dawa Lama, whose term ended yesterday, deserted the party in 1996 to join the breakaway CPRM.

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CPM nominates three candidates for Rajya Sabha Partner seat snub to CPI

BY A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, March 8: Rejecting ally CPI's claim for a seat in the Rajya Sabha from Bengal, the CPM today fielded three of its nominees — Prasanta Chatterjee, Khabiruddin Ahmed and Tarini Roy — for the elections slated for March 27.

Debabrata Biswas, all-India secretary of the Forward Bloc, will contest the elections as a Left Front candidate. Biswas is the sitting Rajya Sabha member.

Two of the three nominees, Chatterjee and Ahmed, have recently suffered electoral defeats. Chatterjee, former mayor, had lost to the Trinamul Congress in the last municipal polls.

Ahmed ended his reign as

MLA from Nakashipara in Nadia district since 1977 when he lost to the Trinamul in the Assembly polls.

Roy, the third nominee, is an influential member of the party's Cooch Behar district secretariat. He was nominated in place of Tamang Dawa Lama who recently completed his term as Rajya Sabha member.

Roy is expected to work for the development of north Bengal districts after becoming a member of the Rajya Sabha.

Ahmed was selected to counter the growth of the BJP in Nadia district. Though not a single BJP candidate won the Assembly elections this time, Satyabrata Mukherjee, Union minister of state for chemicals and fertilisers, has put the CPM

in a tight spot in the district.

Mukherjee, popularly known as Joluda, was elected to the Lok Sabha from Nadia. He has launched a number of schemes for the development of his constituency, using the MP fund.

The CPM is banking on Ahmed's image as the son of the soil and the support he has garnered in the 24 years that he was MLA.

The CPM today stuck to its stand of not giving a ticket to the CPI though former Left Front chairman Sailen Dasgupta had promised tickets to the party during the 2000 Rajya Sabha polls.

Announcing the names of the nominees, Left Front chairman Biman Bose said it was not possible for his party to offer the

CPI a seat this time as the political scenario had changed completely from that in 2000.

"The all-India leadership of both the parties are well aware of the developments in West Bengal in regard to the adjustment of seats among Left Front partners. Both the leaderships of the CPI and the CPM at the national level have agreed to the present seat-sharing for the Rajya Sabha polls," Bose argued.

However, contradicting Bose's claim, CPI state secretary Manju Kumar Majumder today accused the CPM of "forcing the CPI in accepting the unilateral decision taken by the party".

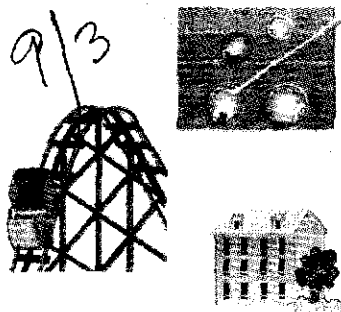
The CPI state committee, which will meet on March 11, is likely to decide over its future course of action on the issue.

THE TELEGRAPH

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UP



- ▲ Imported paper & converted paper products
- ▲ Stamp duty on property
- ▲ Tax on private cars & two-wheelers
- ▲ Entry fee for amusement parks, aqua parks, theme parks, bowling complexes and pool game centres

9-87 - W/D

HIGHLIGHTS

- 10 per cent surcharge on sales tax on all goods barring rice, wheat, edible oils, tea, matches, baby food, kerosene, petrol, diesel, furnace oil and LPG
- Revised deficit for 2001-2002 — Rs 6 crore
- Projected deficit for 2002-2003 — Rs 4 crore
- 7 lakh new jobs to be generated
- 17 per cent hike in plan expenditure
- State Domestic Product growth set at 8 per cent
- Pension for the old, widows, disabled, handicraft artisans and freedom fighters hiked
- 0.5 per cent turnover tax on resale of goods other than LPG, diesel, petrol, kerosene and furnace oil



DOWN



- ▼ Telephone sets, cellphones, pagers, electronic calculators
- ▼ Cooking range, rice cookers, coffee machines, gramophones, music systems
- ▼ Franking machines
- ▼ Cinema tickets
- ▼ Raw jute
- ▼ Alta & sindoor
- ▼ Inter-state sale of hosiery goods

A pro-middle class Budget? Not really

Anindya Sengupta in Kolkata

March 8. — Mr Asim Dasgupta today presented an "employment-oriented" Budget for 2002-2003, projecting a deficit of Rs 4 crore based on rosy estimates.

The finance minister announced a string of concessions on essential and consumer items, trying to drive home the point that his Budget was for the ordinary people and the middle-class.

But the reality is that the government will have to sacrifice as little as Rs 25 crore on account of concessions doled out to the public, while the latter will have to fork out Rs 376 crore in the form of taxes, the major part of these coming from a 10 per cent sales tax surcharge.

This explains that the government hasn't been charitable to the public to the extent it

claims, while, on the other hand, has slapped Rs 376 crore as taxes — the gap between additional revenue to be earned and additional revenue to be sacrificed being a whopping Rs 351 crore.

Furthermore, Mr Dasgupta had another trick up his sleeve as he rattled off dry statistics. The finance minister projected a deficit of merely Rs 4 crore, while the actual deficit was to be Rs 64 crore.

After having taken into account plan and non-plan expenditure and all receipts collected together, Mr Dasgupta's Budget was to have a primary deficit of Rs 415 crore. Going by this statistic, the projected deficit should have been Rs 64 crore. But, a mere stroke of the pen has resulted in the curtailment of the projected deficit by Rs 60 crore.

This could be possible because of the minister's belief that he will be able to cut down on "wasteful expenditure" by Rs 60 crore.

This way, the primary deficit comes down to Rs 355 crore, while additional revenue earned being Rs 351 crore, leaving an uncovered deficit of Rs 4 crore, thanks to the finance minister's prophecy.

Whether this statistical jugglery will have any impact on the state's cash registers could not be ascertained as the minister said that reduction of wasteful expenditure to the tune of Rs 60 crore was a "symbolic move".

Maintaining the thrust of the previous year's Budget, Mr Dasgupta announced an additional employment target of 700,000 in the next fiscal, amid the raising of eyebrows on its feasibility. The interesting part of this additional employment thrust is that the industrial sector will be able to generate only 75,000 jobs, as against 300,000 from agriculture, 125,000 from allied sectors

Turn to page 6

THE STATESMAN

9 MAR 2002

Counter terror

PWG poses threat to Marxists

The spate of killings by supporters of People's War Group continues in four West Bengal districts of Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia and Hooghly forcing the just concluded 30th state conference of the CPI-M to take note of the growing violence in districts which CPI-M leaders declared were "peaceful" before last May's assembly election. These four districts with a huge tribal population have almost one third of the 294 assembly seats and until 1997 were Marxist bastions. But the party leadership's failure to combat "capitalist vices" led to disillusionment among comrades who switched allegiance to the Opposition. That the Left Front was fast losing support became clear in 1998 and 1999 parliamentary polls and in the 2000 Panskura by poll the Left for the first time lost the parliamentary seat. What happened then forms the most sordid chapter in West Bengal politics when for months armed Marxist cadres pillaged Trinamul villages killing Trinamul supporters while the police were rendered inactive.

Choto Anguria provide the most eloquent testimony. But it has unleashed a backlash in the form of sudden appearance of PWG guerrillas and targeted killings of corrupt CPI-M leaders. The once Marxist dissidents are today's reincarnated PWG guerrillas handing down retributive justice and spreading counter-terror. Diversion of funds has resulted in the scrapping of development projects. The Calcutta High Court recently passed strictures against the state government for its gross neglect of the extremely backward Kheria-Sabâr tribe. Unless the *bhadrolok* Marxists are able to genuinely redress tribal grievances and fight the scourge of corruption and other vices, fighting the PWG menace with police force will not work.

THE STATESMAN

5 MAR 2002

Another Simi man held at Howrah

Statesman News Service

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KOLKATA, March 3. — The CID arrested an alleged ISI agent and a Simi activist, Riyazul Mushahid, alias Khushru, from Howrah station last night. Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said at Writers' today that some members of three terrorist groups were arrested from Kolkata, Howrah and Cuttack in Orissa since Friday. The chief minister said no untoward incident was reported in the state.

Two Simi activists, Sayeed Shah Haseeb Reza and Amil Purvez, were arrested by the CID from Howrah station on Friday night. Police said they intended to blow off vital installations, including the Howrah bridge. Riyazul, a resident of Shamsherpur in Patna's Shastri Nagar area, was produced at the Howrah SDJM court today and remanded in police custody till 16 March.

Mr Bhattacharjee went to the Writers' today, a Sunday, to hold a security review meeting with the chief secretary, home secretary, DGP, CP and ADG (IB). He asked the police to be on their toes.

Asked if VHP supporters were allowed to conduct their scheduled havan at Baguiati, Mr Bhattacharjee said: "I have told the police that the VHP should not be allowed to conduct any havan in the open".

THE STATESMAN

- 4 MAR 2002

SIMI men planned to blow up city offices

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

HOWRAH/KOLKATA, March 2.— Two SIMI activists, suspected to be ISI agents, were today remanded in police custody till 15 March.

Sayeed Shah Haseeb Raza (33) and Amil Pervez (27) were produced before the sub-divisional judicial magistrate court, Howrah, amid tight security around 12.45 p.m. today. They had planned to cause explosions in important offices in and around the city on 2 and 3 March and then move to Hyderabad, CID officials said.

Acting on a tip-off, CID sleuths arrested the duo soon after they got down from the Howrah-bound Danapur Express around 11.30 p.m. yesterday. About 300 gm of plastic explosives in four packets, a suitcase, detonators, some batteries and 100 ball-pens were seized from them.

Mr Akhilesh Mukherjee, Howrah assistant public prosecutor, said the ball-pens seized from the accused were



Pervez(Left) and Raza being brought to court.

— The Statesman

marked with several numbers which appeared to be a code. Raza is from Phulwari Sharif in Patna and travels extensively. Pervez lives in Ujjain. Police seized from the duo today's tickets of Hyderabad-bound Falaknama Express.

CID picked up three persons from the SDJM court premises today. They were found loitering around the Government Record Office where the accused were initially kept.

Mr Partha Bhattacharya, IG (CID), said Haseeb Raza,

who graduated from Patna University in 1986, was a founder member of SIMI and was in-charge of its West Bengal wing since 1999. He is also the leader of a banned outfit, Ahek-e-Uhmad.

Raza allegedly had links with Hizbul Mujahideen, leaders, Fida Hussain and Javed. "An arrest warrant has been issued in his name by the Madhya Pradesh police for organising violence in Jalgaon and transporting local youths to training camps in PoK and Doda, Pakistan,"

Mr Bhattacharya said.

Raza was involved in the Agra bomb blast three years ago in which three SIMI activists were killed and in the Barabanki train blast, Mr Bhattacharya said.

The accused also had links with the Lashkar-e-Taiyaba top brass including Azan Gori, deceased LeT chief of Andhra Pradesh, and with fundamentalist leaders in Aligarh, he said.

Raza operated "officially" as an agent of Al-Kalam Tours and Travels and is known to be a dealer of pens. He used these identities to move throughout the country, the IG said. He has been visiting the state since 1995-96 and had frequented several sensitive districts.

Amil Pervez is a former Harkat-ul-Ansar activist and also a SIMI member, the CID chief said. Asked if the accused had links with the Sabarmati Express massacre, Mr Bhattacharya said: "We do not have any knowledge about that till now."

State on overdrive to derail *kar sevaks*

BY A STAFF REPORTER

3/3
T-8 9.8 - WB

Calcutta, March 2: The state government was firm in its decision to prevent any *kar sevak* from leaving for Ayodhya by train or otherwise.

"We are quite aware of the plans and programmes of the *kar sevaks* and all precautionary measures are being taken to stop them," chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said at Writers' Buildings.

The chief minister, who had cancelled his Delhi trip, went to his office this morning to monitor the situation with senior government officials.

Among those present were chief secretary Sourin Roy, home secretary Amit Kiran Deb, director-general of police Dinsh Vajpai and city police commissioner Sujay Chakraborty. All of them have been asked to be present tomorrow as well. Bhattacharjee will also attend office tomorrow.

The chief minister has cancelled all political appointments till Tuesday. He briefed former

chief minister Jyoti Basu and state party secretary Anil Biswas — now in Delhi to attend the politburo meeting — about the situation in Bengal.

Talking to reporters, the chief minister said the situation in Calcutta and the districts remained, by and large, peaceful with no major untoward incident being reported till late this afternoon. He said leaves of all senior administrative and police officials have been cancelled.

As part of precautionary measures, senior officials have been camping in control rooms. The thana-level advisory committees have been asked to activate themselves.

Bhattacharjee directed Deb and the Chakraborty to keep a watch on important railway stations, particularly Burdwan, Malda and Siliguri.

The home secretary later sent an urgent message to all district superintendents of police to keep tabs on stations to stop *kar sevaks* from heading towards Ayodhya in trains. Deb said the railways had already cancelled

their block-booking system to prevent *kar sevaks* from travelling in groups.

Officials at Writers' Buildings said the police have identified Burdwan, Farakka and Malda as major railway stations from where *kar sevaks* might board Ayodhya-bound express trains. A large police contingent has been deployed at all the three stations.

They said policemen in the districts have been asked to intensify mobile patrolling in remote places and stop *kar sevaks* from even reaching the stations.

Murshidabad superintendent of police Rajesh Kumar confirmed that nearly 50 *kar sevaks* had assembled at Farakka station this morning to board Ayodhya-bound trains.

"The *kar sevaks* were waiting in small groups at the stations to avoid detection. But security forces smelled a rat and chased them away," he said.

"Our men also drove away some *kar sevaks* from the same station yesterday," Kumar added.

THE TELEGRAPH

3 MAR 2002

Simi state head trapped in Howrah station

BY A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, March 2: In a hush-hush operation, the CID last evening arrested senior leaders of the banned Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) from Howrah station.

Among them were Simi founder-member and chief of the Bengal unit of the organisation, Sayeed Shah Hasib Raza (63), and his close associate Amir Pervaz (27), also a Simi member. Raza was acting as a talent-spotter for the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen in India and handled terror assignments in the country.

The two have been charged with planning major terrorist strikes in the state. They had to drop their plans due to "last minute hitches".

Inspector-general of police (CID) Partha Bhattacharya today said the duo was picked up on the basis of an intelligence report that a three-member terrorist team had arrived in the city and was planning a "major disturbance on March 2 and 3 somewhere in the state before moving to Hyderabad."

They apparently abandoned their Bengal plans after the Godhra killings and decided to

move to Hyderabad for their next operation. They had gone to Howrah station late in the evening to purchase tickets for the Falaknagar Express when CID sleuths surrounded them. Four packets of plastic explosives, timer-device detonators and batteries were found in their possession.

Several incriminating documents and a diary containing names of important Hizb-ul-Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Toba militants were also found from them.

"We are trying to find out what exactly caused them to

change their minds and abort the operation here. They might have had plans to get off the train en route to Hyderabad," Bhattacharya said.

Sleuths are also trying to find out whether the duo had any role in the Godhra carnage in which 57 people were burnt alive inside a train.

Both Raza and Pervaz, originally from Phulbarisharif in Patna, had come to the city a few weeks ago. "They had been travelling to and fro for quite some time," Bhattacharya added.

Investigations have so far revealed that Raza, who had gradu-

ated from Patna University in 1986, opened a frontal agency called Al-Qalam Tours and Travels, which served the dual purpose of planning subversive activities and recruiting home-grown jihadis. "Raza used to recruit cadre and take them to Doda and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir for militant training in Lashkar camps before sending them to rest of the country," said Bhattacharya.

Raza developed close links with a lot of terrorist outfits in a short period. He was acquainted to militant leaders like Fida Husain and had founded outfits like

Ah-e-Umma and Falha-e-Hen, all frontal organisations of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen and Harkat-ul-Ansar.

Raza also developed close links with people like Azhar Ghouri of Lashkar and Abdul-Lah of Al-Umma who was arrested for the serial bomb blasts in Coimbatore.

He also had close ties with the fundamentalist elements in Aligarh Muslim University, Bhattacharya said.

Khadim's kidnap case
The CID brought four persons, including three Pakistanis,

from New Delhi in connection with the kidnapping of Khadim's owner Farhatullah Roy Burman. The Pakistani trio — Mohammed Naveem, Mohammed Naveed and Mohammed Dilshad — and one Bangladeshi national, Sallendra, alias Raza, are "all part of the Afab Ansari network," Bhattacharya said.

"Both Naveem and Raza were close to Asif Reza Khan. Naveem had stayed in Hazaribagh with the other accused in the American Center attack case," the inspector-general of police added.

THE TELEGRAPH

3 MAR 2002

State package for tannery shift

BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

The state industries department is preparing a fast-track, start-up package to relocate the tanneries from the city to the Calcutta Leather Complex (CLC) in Bantala for the Supreme Court's consideration.

The apex court is scheduled to take up the relocation issue again on March 5. Both the tanners and the state government are in a fix with the Supreme Court clamping an indefinite closure order on tanneries since March 1.

Faced with the crisis, the state government is expected to present a time-bound relocation plan which envisages a start of production at the CLC by October.

According to the schedule, the process will be set off on March 5. The tanneries, which had been allotted land at the CLC, are expected to apply for clearance from the West Bengal Pollution Control Board on the day.

The next steps would be getting building plans sanctioned by the urban development department, applying for power connection from the West Bengal State Electricity Board and getting the final no-objection certificate from the pollution control board. "These steps will be monitored by industry department officials. Minister Nirupam Sen has issued instructions to this effect," a senior industries department official said on Saturday.

The court will also be told that the tanners might even set up their own, temporary pollution control systems till work on the common effluent treatment plant (CETP) is completed.

The CLC plans to have four mobile chrome recovery units as a stop-gap measure till the CETP is commissioned. However, the tanners claim that the mobile units were inadequate to tackle the discharge from the tanneries.

The proposed duration has also taken into consideration the time that will be taken, on an average, for the tanners to set up the buildings. "I can set my tannery on the 2,600 sq metre plot in three months," an owner in Tangra said. Some time will be taken up to raise the level of the ground, he added.

The Union ministry of environment and forests is engaged in a brain-storming session to clear the CETP impasse. Ministry representatives have met state industries department officials, representatives of the state pollution control board and experts from Unido, which has provided the technical base for the construction of the CETP.

According to state industry department sources, the meeting on Friday was "positive". It discussed the demand of partner M.L. Dalmiya and Company that the sewers laid in the CLC to transport the effluent be included in the CETP project. The CETP will be financed in part by the environment ministry of forests and the BOT party.

THE HINDU

MAR 2002

Trinamool row threat

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, March 1

THE KOLKATA Municipal Corporation board is on the verge of collapse if the row between Mayor Subrata Mukherjee and MICs loyal to Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee continues any longer. In the past one year, instead of doing their jobs, the councillors were busy going at each other's jugular.

This has pushed the Trinamool Congress-run KMC into crisis after crisis. And today, factionalism, distrust, insubordination and one-upmanship have affected the functioning so much so that some of the MICs have decided to bring in a no-confidence motion against the Mayor, who is not in the city, for holding a function within the jurisdiction of the KMC and not consulting his MMiCs.

But Subrata is adamant. Talking to Hindustan Times today he said: "The present crisis is orchestrated against me. And if they think I will succumb when they flash resignation letters,

they are wrong. Let them bring a no-confidence motion against me, I will walk out. But before leaving I will tell all."

With Subrata aggressive, Mamata at her tethers end and the MMiCs seeing an inevitable fall of the board, the firefighting has started in full swing. "I know where these councillors are getting their support from. Let them do what they want. I will not take it anymore," Subrata said.

He believes that the crisis is precipitated by Mamata-loyalists. The crisis that has assumed serious proportions in Subrata's absence is centred round a GAIL function for which invitations were sent out by municipal commissioner Debasish Som on EM Bypass, possibly at the behest of the Mayor. This antagonised several MMiCs, including Mala Roy of conservancy department, who took it as insult as her officers were asked to attend the function without her permission.

"We should have been consulted. But I never said that I would resign. I can't talk about others,"



SUBRATA MUKHERJEE

said Roy. "Such acts are happening frequently. Now other MMiCs have also raised their voice. So have the borough chairmen. All have complained to Mamata. Now it is up to her to settle the issue."

"The councillors must understand that everything is not decided by the KMC and in certain functions corporate bigwigs are mere invitees," said Subrata.

In the past year, Subrata and

Train service

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 1

TRAIN SERVICES in certain sections of Eastern and South Eastern Railway were affected for about seven hours this morning with 13 long-distance trains detained at various stations.

Services in Khurda-Angul, Kharagpur-Bhadrak, Bhadrak-Khurda Road and Rourkela-Jharsuguda sections were hit from 5.50 am as the activists squatted on the tracks. Train services came to a halt in the Howrah-Asansol-Chittaranjan section from 7.45 am for more than six hours.

Due to the demonstrations, Coromandal Express, East Coast Express, Falaknama Express, Bangalore-Guwahati Express, Howrah-Tirupati Express, Bhubaneswar-Kacheguda, Visakha Express, New Delhi Puri Express and Howrah-Bhubaneswar Dhauli Express, Amritsar Express, Upasana Express, Patna-Tata, Poorva Express were detained at various stations. Asansol-Jhajha Passenger was cancelled.

Train services in the C...

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 MAR 2002

VHP bandh partial in city, districts

37
Kolkata

Barring a few stray incidents of violence, the state remained largely peaceful with mixed support for the VHP bandh today, say our bureau

KOLKATA, March 1. — Today's Bharat bandh called by the VHP had little effect on the state barring a few demonstrations in Kolkata, Howrah, Asansol, Krishnagar, Malda, Midnapore East & West and North & South Dinajpur.

Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today cancelled his trip to New Delhi in view of the communal situation in Gujarat. "I am in touch with the home ministry. Delhi has assured me of all help if something happens here. Our police are on the alert," he said. A massive police bandobast has been made in "sensitive areas" and RAF deployed.

During the day, 113 people were arrested from all over the state, including 40 from Hasnabad in N 24-Parganas where police fired five rounds in the air to disperse bandh supporters squatting on railway tracks. Two policemen were injured in stone-pelting. A train-driver was also injured.

Thirty-seven VHP activists were arrested from Mallickbazar, Rajakatra and KK Tagore Road in Kolkata and Howrah. They tried to block roads and persuade shopkeepers to down shutters. Seventeen kar sevaks were arrested from Jammu Tawi Express in Sealdah.

In Asansol, many shops were closed and buses did not ply. Ten VHP activists were arrested after clashes in Hirapur and Asansol South areas. VHP activists ransacked some shops at Barakar and Asansol station. In Nadia, seven VHP activists were arrested for terrorising shopkeepers and blocking roads.

In Midnapore West, the bandh was partial in Kharagpur town where 14 people were arrested. Three banks remained closed but schools and colleges were open.

In North Bengal, it was more sympathy for the Godhra train victims rather than support for the

bandh that led to most shops and establishments remaining closed and the bandh being near-total.

Police arrested four VHP activists who were picketing at the Tenzing Norgay bus terminus and on Sevoke Road. Little or no trade was recorded in the markets and traffic was thin. Attendance at government offices, too, was poor. Most educational institutions were closed. The ones that remained open went without classes as most students failed to turn up for want of transport.

Though the VHP took out rallies in major commercial areas of Siliguri town, shop-owners mostly pulled down shutters on their own accord. "Seldom has a bandh been so completely accepted by people," said a trader's organisation official.

Four activists were arrested in Malda when they were trying to force employees into closing a bank at Mangalbari. As most private buses kept off the roads, district authorities provided vehicles for the Madhyamik examinees.

The bandh affected normal life in Raiganj in North Dinajpur, with only government offices staying open. In S Dinajpur the situation was normal.

There was little response to the bandh in the three sub-divisions of Darjeeling. A VHP activist was arrested in Darjeeling town, and offices and tea-gardens functioned normally.

BJP calls bandh a success

The state BJP has all but supported today's bandh. Mr Debabrata Chowdhury, general-secretary, said BJP workers tried to make it a success in Malda, Siliguri, Nabadwip and other areas, and that the party leadership did not try to prevent them from doing so. "The boys are deeply hurt over Godhra," he said. A few workers had sought permission to work in favour of the bandh but were advised against.

Mr Ajay Nandi, state VHP general-secretary, said the bandh was a success in Siliguri, Malda, Nabadwip, Katwa, Kharagpur, Asansol, Burnpur, Durgapur, Balurghat, Raiganj, Bankura, Bishnupur, and parts of Kolkata and Howrah. He said 125 VHP workers had been arrested statewide. No kar sevak left the city today for the 15 March *Purnahuti* in Ayodhya due to the bandh.

THE STATESMAN

2 MAR 2002

Job cuts stare at tanneries

9.81 WB Sr. Kolkata
28/2
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 27. — The Supreme Court order on closure of tanneries in Tangra, Tiljala and Topsta has left both owners and workers in a state of confusion and simmering anger. The unions plan an agitation and a march to the Assembly tomorrow. There are 560 units in these areas.

Mr Chandrasekhar Das, secretary, CPI-backed WB Tannery Mazoor Union, said: "There will be no work in any tannery tomorrow. The government and Mr Jagmohan Dalmiya had signed an agreement over a new leather complex at Bantala. (But) We were never shown the agreement...."

Calling the agreement "one sided", he rued the lack of infrastructure at Bantala till date: "How can tanneries be shifted with the wetlands still there ... and with no effluent treatment facility to discharge chemicals?"

"Mr Dalmiya purchased land at Rs 80 per sq. m. from farmers and resold them at Rs 600 per unit to tannery-owners. There are no roads, no electricity, poor communication and lack of security".

Mr Sohail Javed, owner of Tiger Tanning Industry, said: "We hoped the court will give us time ... (but) electricity and water to factories will be snapped if we don't shift by tomorrow. We have not submitted installation plans to the government."

Mr Javed Ahmed, who runs a tannery on contract, said "about

Writers' in dark

KOLKATA, Feb. 27. — Writers' was groping in the dark till this evening about today's Supreme Court order on tanneries even as a cloud hung over the future of some 50,000 workers, directly and indirectly employed by the tanners of east Kolkata. The chief minister and officials sought to play safe offering the plea that they had not seen the court order.

But Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee did not hesitate to assert on the basis of hearsay that the government was on safe ground. "As far as I have heard the Supreme Court has not issued any instruction to the government," he said. This seemed **more important to him than imminent unemployment facing tannery workers.**

The CPI today urged the government to act immediately as the fate of 40,000 workers will be in jeopardy. — SNS

700,000 people will be affected if tanneries close down." Golam Sheikh, a labourer, said: "I come from Canning ... how can I travel to remote Bantala daily?"

Mr VV Raman, leather exporter, said 20 per cent of exports are from eastern India. If tanneries close down here, the export industry will be badly hit. While the state, Centre and BoT party are locked in the imbroglio, "(we) are suffering as victims", he said.

Unruly Trinamool shocks Governor

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, February 27

THE BUDGET Session began today with slogan shouting, muscle flexing and a walkout by the Trinamool legislators even as the National Anthem played on.

The proceedings forced Governor Viren J Shah to digress from his prepared speech to say: "I deviate from this and say that this is the first time in my life when the National Anthem is being played and legislators are making noise."

The ruckus started as soon as the Governor stepped into the House amid tight security. Before he could reach his chair, Trinamool Congress MLA Paresch Pal rushed to the well displaying a poster against Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. Others shouted slogans against the Government for taking Trinamool MLA Abdul Karim Chowdhury in custody. No one noticed that the National Anthem had already begun.

A few minutes later, the Trinamool MLAs walked out of the House leaving the Governor to read out his speech in peace. But they sprung to action as Shah was on his way out of Assembly. They tried to mob him but were pushed away by the securitymen. Trinamool MLA Sonali Guha alleged that she was manhandled in the scuffle.

Leader of the Opposition Pankaj Banerjee said: "Karim Chowdhury was arrested on a false charge and despite repeated requests to



Governor Viren J Shah on his way back from the Assembly on Wednesday.

SUBHENDU GHOSH/HINDUSTAN TIMES

the Speaker to take up the case with the Chief Minister, Chowdhury hasn't been released."

Speaker Hasim Abdul Halim rubbished the charge. "What am I to do if police round up a member outside the Assembly on a specific charge? As far as I know, he has been offered bail but he is not ready to accept it." Other members of the Opposition, namely the Congress and the SUCI, did not leave their seats but contributed vocally to protest against issues where they couldn't accept the official view.

SUCI legislator Debaprasad Sarkar did not agree with the Governor and the Government that political parties should desist from organising "rail roko and ras-

ta roko". He shouted against the Government's bid to take the agitators to task.

Congress Chief Whip Asit Mitra jeered when the Governor expressed satisfaction over the Government's action against extremist outfits such as the KLO and the MCC. "The activities of these organisations have been controlled to a large extent due to firm and effective action of the State Government," Shah said.

The Governor, however, expressed concern over the spurt in the activities of the People's War and the MCC in some parts of West Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia. "They are trying to forge a corridor from Andhra Pradesh through West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar

joining the Maoists in Nepal. The State Government is taking up intensive development work among the local population in these areas apart from stern police action against the extremists." Congress MLAs asked why the state was hesitant to ban these outfits.

The Opposition slammed the Government for the tall claims on the Public Distribution System. "Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee should clarify why he hasn't been able to prepare the BPL list," they said.

The rest of Shah's speech highlighted what the State Government had been doing for the past one year on development of rural infrastructure, industry and employment generation.

ASSEMBLY SNIPPETS

Out of tune

IF THE Opposition made a history of sorts by staging a walkout in the middle of the National Anthem, the Home Secretary Amit Kiran Deb came a close second by letting his cellphone play *Sare jahan se achchha* halfway through the Governor's speech. Deb managed to keep his pocket bulge from the security's scrutiny. A flushed Deb rushed out of the room: he missed only two minutes of the speech anyway.

Walking tall

HISTORY REPEATS itself and so did Governor Viren J Shah. Seeing Trinamool MLAs squatted on the roads and in front of his car, Shah ignored the vehicle and casually walked up to the south gate. Last time, however, he walked all the way home. When the Speaker was asked for a comment on this, he said there was nothing new or unnatural about the Governor's behaviour. Only that the man loves to walk.

Ego bruises

THE ASSEMBLY witnessed the security bandobast of a lifetime: sandbag bunkers, AK 47-toting commandos, sniffer dogs, special branch men — the works. There was a dress rehearsal of sorts on Tuesday but they weren't pre-

pared for an all-out Trinamool ruckus. Reflex action took over—a few injuries (among the security staff), broken flowerpots and bruised Trinamool egos. The party claims serious damages, though: manhandling and molestation.

Who wants bail?

TRINAMOOL MLAs boycotted the Governor's speech on the ground that one of their MLAs, Abdul Karim Chowdhury, was arrested without any offence and the Government was not arranging for his release. They say Chowdhury was not being freed because he was a candidate for the Speaker's post. The Speaker, however, had a different story — Chowdhury is not being released because he does not wish so. "He's not ready to be freed on bail," the Speaker says.

Carry on men

WITH THE Trinamool boycotting the speech, the Congress took up from where they left off in the name of constructive criticism. The Governor's speech had interesting interjections — slogans, *Vande Matarams* and catcalls — from the Congress. The CM kept order at the Treasury benches. While Kanti Biswas and Kalimuddin Shams needed their nap.

HTC, Kolkata

Ministers' refusal to let go of tannery issue irks Buddha

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, February 26

CHIEF MINISTER Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee felt rather piqued at today's Cabinet meeting when three of his ministerial colleagues insisted on a Government statement on the shifting of all tannery units from Kolkata by February 28.

When Water Resources Investigation Minister Nandagopal Bhattacharya raised the issue, two ministers representing city Assembly constituencies where tanneries are located, took up cudgels on behalf of the workers affected by the Supreme Court order.

Thousands of workers and their families cannot be made to starve for no fault of theirs, they contended.

More than 20,000 workers in

over 500 tannery units might lose their livelihood in case the Supreme Court turns down the State's request to extend the February 28 deadline.

Moreover, a considerable number of these workers, who are casual employees on contract, fear that they might lose their jobs if the units close down even temporarily. The employers might engage new workers when the tanneries shift to the new complex.

The three ministers were also sore over the "undue delay" in finishing the new leather complex at Bantala, in spite of all the assistance and cooperation by the State Government. The State Government needs to come out with an official statement, explaining its position and extending full support to the workers, they demanded.

However, the Chief Minister argued that since the matter was with the Supreme Court, it would be unwise for the State Government to go public with its views.

Meanwhile, Industry Minister Nirupam Sen said the State Advocate-General would urge upon the Supreme Court to defer the shifting by at least seven to eight months.

The case would come up for a hearing tomorrow. "We are hopeful that the Supreme Court would be kind enough to grant our request," he said.

While the minister would not go into the details of the reasons behind the delay in completing the new complex, he assured that all the pending work "would be done on a war-footing to facilitate early shifting of all the tanneries".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

We won't toe the Centre's line: CM

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, February 26

BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE today reassured Front partners that he would take care to keep a distance from the Centre's policies. However, he couldn't guarantee this in all sectors, given the funds constraints.

"We have been opposing these policies since long. Such protests are integral to the Left Front Government. We can't afford to give them up," the Chief Minister said while talking about the new approach his party adopted with amendments in the State conference yesterday.

Aware of the confusion raging among Left circles over the recent hike in hospital charges and tariff rates, Bhattacharjee said: "The State is being compelled to take some harsh measures. That doesn't mean that we are toeing the Centre's line. Let's be clear about our compulsions."

The Chief Minister is not in a hurry. He is ready to wait till partners approve his party's stand.

It has been decided that the big brother will circulate the proposal among the Front partners and thrash out misgivings, if any, through bipartite dialogue with the Forward Bloc, the RSP and the CPI.

Taking the cue, Finance Min-

ister Asim Dasgupta narrated how the Centre had been slashing grants to the States.

Explaining the "pressure on the State's resources", Left Front chairman Biman Bose said: "Most of the Central grants come either as tied assistance where the State has to contribute a sizeable amount to keep the schemes living or in the form of loans at high interests. This is not all. The Centre is also commanding monopoly over areas such as education, that come under the Concurrent List."

Partners were unanimous on this point. The State Left Front today decided to rake up the issue apart from its routine protest against the Railway Budget and the coming general Budget.

"We will launch the campaign with a State-level convention on Centre-State relations in the second week of April. We will carry this campaign down to the districts," Bose said.

But the Front partners had little to suggest on the budgetary proposals today because the Finance Minister had finalised the basic framework before the meeting.

"What's the use of wasting time on suggestions a day before the Budget Session?" RSP central secretariat member Kshiti Goswami said.



(From Left) Biswanath Choudhury, Manju Mazumdar, Nandagopal Bhattacharjee and Front chairman Biman Basu at a Left Front meeting on Tuesday.

SUBHENDU GHOSH/HINDUSTAN TIMES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 FEB 1982

Police to identify Ansari aides

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 12. — "Aftab Ansari's links with dreaded militant outfits are now common knowledge. What the police are trying to get from him is the identity of his associates who are stationed in several parts of the country for subversive missions," Mr Soumen Mitra, DC-DD (I), told reporters after returning from New Delhi today.

CID officials had interrogated Ansari in Delhi to ascertain his involvement in the abduction of Mr Partha Roy Burman. Ansari, who had links with *jihadi* outfits based in Bangladesh and Nepal, told police that he rented houses in Ballygunge and Beniapur. He had bought plots in other states too.

Detective department officials said the terrorists targeted the American Center, not the policemen posted outside it. "Policemen became natural targets because they were deployed to guard the building," Mr Mitra said.

He further said arms consignments arrived in Kolkata before the attack. "The arms found their way into India from a neighbouring country via Jaisalmer, Jaipur

and Jodhpur. They reached the city in July."

Ansari will be brought to the city early next month. Gujarat Police will first take him into custody. Police have found that there was a strong bond between Ansari and his local contact, Jamaluddin Naseer.

The city police today seized a revolver from an abandoned place in Jorasanko. This is the second time arms used by the terrorists were recovered.

The FBI has sought permission from the Centre to allow its sleuths take part in Ansari's interrogation, being conducted by the CBI, adds SNS from Delhi.

Officials at the US embassy were not available for comment. The FBI had requested New Delhi to allow its sleuths posted in India to be present during the interrogation, according to a home ministry official.

But the CBI spokesman, Mr SM Khan, said: "There's no question of their participation during the interrogation. The FBI would be provided with all the 'need-based' information permissible under the law."

Rajasthan Police has picked up about a dozen people, suspected to have given shelter to the terrorists involved in the American

Center attack, for inquiries from across the state, adds SNS from Jaipur. Most of them were picked from Jaipur and Jaisalmer.

"We've neither reached any conclusion nor have officially arrested anyone," said a senior Rajasthan Police officer. "We've some information on the basis of which we have conducted some raids in the state. And it's too early to reveal anything. But it could be linked to the attack on the American Centre."

Police have seized a jeep, suspected to have been used for transporting "Pak-smuggled" arms and ammunition from the border for carrying out terrorist operations, including the USIS shootout. But the person who bought the vehicle escaped before police could raid his hideouts in Jaipur.

Inquiries have so far revealed that one of the suspects, Nasir Ahmed, came to Jaipur as a tourist and stayed at a house in Jalupura area. He then went to Jaisalmer where he purchased a jeep showing his driving licence. He stayed in Jaisalmer for three days.

Ansari's associate, Raju Sharma, who was taken to Rajkot yesterday, has been remanded in custody till 21 February, adds SNS from Gandhinagar.

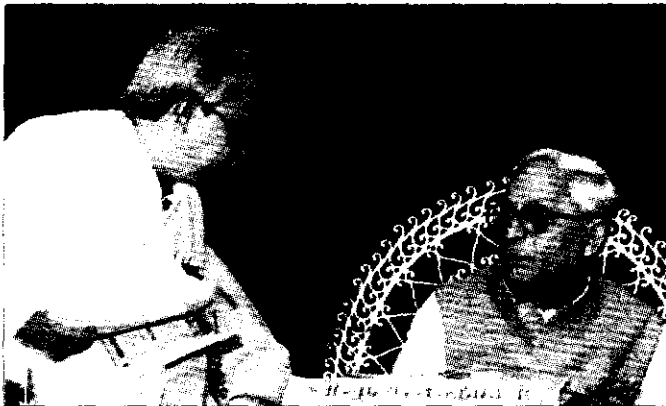
THE STATESMAN

13 FEB 2002

Buddha, Biman mend madrasa muddle

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 11. — Days after getting the chief minister off the hook on the madrasa issue, the Left Front chairman, Mr Biman Bose, today shared the dais



Biman Bose and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at the meeting. — The Statesman

with Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at the 10th state meeting of the Paschim Banga Madrasa Sikshak Samiti. Both sought to present a common stand on the issue.

The two leaders used the opportunity to soothe frayed tempers following Mr Bhattacharjee's

recent comments on madrasas.

In a bid to divert attention from the madrasa debate, they attacked Hindu fundamentalism as practised by the RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal. The chief minister had put these organisations on the same level as terrorist outfits like the Lashkar-e-Taiyaba.

Issues like saffronisation and US capitalism also came under attack.

Mr Bose wondered why a debate on madrasas was continuing. He took a swipe at the media for writing on madrasas without knowing the "meaning of the word itself". The chief minister said there had "been no change of policy towards the minority community by the Left Front government". "For 25 years, we have walked hand in hand and this will continue as long as the government remains," he asserted.

Mr Bhattacharjee had em-

barked on a damage control mission since last week because it was felt that his statements on madrasas had alienated Muslims from the Left Front.

At the meeting, which began with a reading from the Quran, the chief minister dwelt on the importance of madrasas. He said the number of madrasas should increase like other schools in the state to attain full literacy. The government is trying to raise the number of affiliated madrasas and funds allotted to them, he said.

Equating madrasas with other schools was as much the stand the chief minister chose to project today as "reaffirming" the Left policy towards the minority community. "It's unfortunate that the government is being viewed as being against madrasas," he said.

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THE STATESMAN

1980 FEB 11

Terror don proves tough nut to crack

- CBI gets more time to grill Ansari
- Interrogation being filmed

Sudhi Ranjan Sen
New Delhi, February 10

AFTAB ANSARI was today remanded in seven days' CBI custody by a Delhi court. This gives the CBI more time to interrogate Ansari. As of now, the agency has not made much headway. CBI sources told *Hindustan Times* that while Ansari is admitting all his criminal activities, he gets amnesia the moment terrorism is mentioned.

Ansari is being interrogated in a third floor chamber at the CBI's CGO complex headquarters. The sessions are being filmed, and the interrogation has been divided into 10 areas.

The CBI started with his background and moved on to his accomplices. The agency is also concentrating on his jihadi links, and, crucially, his connection with the World Trade Center bombing.

Ansari will be produced before a court at Radhanpur, in the Patan district of Gujarat by February 16 for a suspected connection to the cache of arms the CBI had seized in October. It was after this haul that the CBI started putting together a dossier on Ansari. The dossier was passed on to the Indian Ambassador to the UAE, K C Singh, late December.

Singh worked the diplomatic channels and was given updates on a "real time" basis as and when information came in about Ansari -- for instance, his hand in the American Center attack.

The UAE authorities weren't totally convinced that Ansari was guilty and were inclined to believe that the Pakistani passport he held was genuine. The scales tipped when India provided information that his earlier passport was issued in Bihar.

This information was shared with FBI Director Robert Mueller and appears to have convinced the US to also pressure the UAE into handing over Ansari.

Interrogation notes

What Ansari has so far told the CBI

Is he connected with 9/11?

As of now, Ansari is denying that he sent money to fund the WTC attack.

Who are the jihadis he was in touch with?

He admits to calling up Jaish's Omar Sheikh "occasionally". Is in regular contact with Lashkar leader Azim Chima.

What role did he play in the Kolkata attack?

Ansari says he was "involved", but "not directly". Though he admits calling up Kolkata Police after the attack to claim responsibility.

How much did he make from his kidnapping and gun-running rackets?

CBI's estimate: Rs 55 crore over four years. Ansari, however, denies gun-running charges.

How does the CBI plan to make Ansari sing?

His wife delivered a boy on Saturday and Ansari is desperate to call home. The CBI has told him it may let him call -- if he talks.

The court also granted four days' transit remand to Ansari's aide Rajendra Kumar Anandkot, who was brought along with the don yesterday from Dubai. He is also alleged to have been involved in the kidnappings of Gujarat diamond merchant Bhaskar Parekh and his friend Paresh Shah.

'It was Lashkar': Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today said Lashkar-e-Tayyeba was behind the USIS attack. "Lashkar, backed by the ISI, was behind the attack and the links have been established," he said.



Aftab Ansari being produced at a Delhi court on Sunday.

KAUSHIK RAMASWAMI/HINDUSTAN TIMES

Thrust on Aftab link with Atta

Kinsuk Basu
Kolkata, February 10

A LITTLE over 24-hours after Aftab Ansari touched down in Delhi, the Union Home Ministry issued an informal whip to investigating agencies to dig out his exact role in siphoning a part of the Khadim ransom from Kolkata to Mohammad Atta for facilitating the September 11 strikes.

Though it's not official, experts believe if Aftab's involvement is established, it would be a fillip to New Delhi's attempts at snatching the trump card over Pakistan by putting Pervez Musharraf in a spot during his US trip. This

would provide India more ammunition to mount fresh pressure on Islamabad to deport those on its list of 20. The logic: If one deportation from Dubai can bring out so much, guess what a few from Pakistan would do.

That the Centre is bent on extracting a confession from Aftab is evident from the Saturday night directive allowing all investigating agencies -- including West Bengal CID and Kolkata Police -- to conduct parallel interrogations in presence of the CBI. This is a deviation from the norm that allows a suspect to be grilled by one team at a time.

Investigating the Roy Burman

abduction case, the CID stumbled upon a link suggesting that Aftab had shared a portion of the ransom with Atta, leader of the Black Tuesday hijackers. The FBI found the Atta connection on the basis of the statement of 21-year-old Charmain Mungo, who stayed at a room at Valencia Motel next to the one where five men had been staying from late August till September 10. Mungo identified Atta for the FBI.

CID sleuths hit upon Aftab's probable link with the US terror strikes after interrogating Ansari's henchman, Asif Reza Khan, when he was brought to Kolkata from Delhi on November

14. Asif, who had developed strong jihadi links with members of the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba while in Kashmir had admitted that Ansari had planned to fund arms smuggling into India through the ransom amount from abductions across India.

This led the BSF in Rajkot to the intended receivers of an ammunition truck that was intercepted on the border. This was meant for Asif. The seizure revealed Aftab's links with terrorist outfits which he financed. It was then that the CID came across links that suggested Aftab had parted with a part of the Khadim ransom to send it to Atta.

Diplomacy behind Ansari's deportation

USIS attack mastermind in CBI net

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 9. — The mastermind behind the attack on the American Center in Kolkata, Aftab Ansari, was today deported to India from Dubai along with his associate, Raju Sharma. The CBI has arrested them.

Diplomacy seemed to have played a part in Ansari's deportation, described as an "exceptional" event. Quick to claim credit for it, the foreign ministry said a letter sent by the Prime Minister to Sheikh Zayed, UAE leader, through a parliamentary delegation had helped. The parliamentary delegation, headed by Mr Sikandar Bakht, visited the UAE in January as part of the diplomatic offensive to brief Islamic countries about the details of the attack on Parliament.

India has an extradition treaty with the UAE, signed in 1999 and ratified in 2000. But Aftab Ansari was deported on the strength of evidence India had supplied to the UAE. This was the second major deportation from the UAE since some Sikh hijackers were sent back to India from Dubai in 1984, officials said.

Ansari had been in custody in Dubai since 23 January. The CBI arrested him and his accomplice, Raju Sharma, alias Rajender Kumar Anadkot, on their arrival in New Delhi this evening. Sharma, not wanted for the attack, was Ansari's accomplice in some cases in Gujarat, where he was implicated for kidnapping, gun-running and smuggling RDX.

(Senior Kolkata Police officers feel that with Ansari's arrest, investigations will take a new turn, adds SNS from Kolkata. Mr Soumen Mitra, DC-DD (I) said: "Aftab was wanted in a number of cases. His arrest will help us. We are in touch with Delhi Police to know the recent developments."

Mr S Virendra, special superintendent, CID, said: "Ansari's arrest is very

significant. It will throw light on the Partha Roy Burman abduction case and its ramifications.")

The MEA said the "arrest has been made possible due to the close cooperation received from the Dubai authorities in tracing and apprehending them." Ansari was caught with a Pakistani passport (No. J 872142 issued at Lahore and valid up to February 2006). At a hurriedly convened briefing this evening, the special secretary (east) in the foreign ministry, Mr RM Abhyankar, indicated that Ansari was an ISI operative and that the government hoped more such deportations of wanted Indian nationals would take place soon.

A silver lining?

NEW DELHI, Feb. 9. — Aftab Ansari is not on the list of 20 "criminals, fugitives and terrorists" India has sought from Pakistan. But it is clear the government expects some movement on the list because some of those wanted are residents in Dubai from where Ansari was deported today.

The government's praise for the cooperation from Dubai on this case and Mr RM Abhyankar's exhortation to "watch this space" would indicate that some of the accomplices of Dawood Ibrahim, including Tiger Memon, wanted for the 1993 Bombay blasts case, may be sent back to India soon. — SNS

The government was specially thankful to the Crown Prince of the UAE, General Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, at whose intervention the deportation took place.

Mr Neeraj Kumar, additional CBI director, was also present at the briefing. The CBI director, Mr PC Sharma, told reporters that the agency had initially deputed one official to Dubai for assistance in handling the matter and subsequently more CBI officials, including Mr

Kumar, had flown there. Mr Sharma said Interpol had on 25 January issued a Red Corner Notice, "A-1476/12/2001", against Ansari from the Lyons Office of Interpol after the CBI provided evidence, including the telephone number, from which he had called the SP (CID) in Kolkata following the shootout. Although interrogation of the suspects has just begun, Mr Kumar said there were four main motives behind the attack on the American Center. Primarily, it was to send a message that the killing of terrorists would not go unavenged.

■ Buddha stands vindicated: page 10
■ Dilshad aide brought to state: page 5

THE STATESMAN

10 FEB 2002

Advani hands Buddha the initiative

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 9. — The Centre today asked Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee to take the initiative in curbing the activities of those madrasas found conniving with anti-national forces.

The home minister, Mr LK Advani, told the chief

Editorial: Imams in the act! page 8

minister that the Centre was ready to extend full co-operation but the onus was on the state government since the subject of curbing the activities of the madrasas was a state subject.

Mr Bhattacharjee is facing criticism in his state and from his own party-men, including Mr Jyoti Basu, for having said that some madrasas were indulging in activities prejudicial to national interest. He assured Mr Advani that

■ See ADVANI: page 10

THE STATESMAN

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ADVANI: ST-10

(Continued from page 1)

there would be no dilution in the state government's stand on fighting terrorism, sources said.

The Centre advised the state government to bring in fresh legislation, if necessary, to deal with the growing network of the ISI in West Bengal and keep a vigil on organisations, including madrasas, whose activities are suspect.

Mr Bhattacharjee told the Union home minister that the ISI network in the state was a matter of grave concern.

The state government and the Centre had agreed to

exchange intelligence inputs on the activities of the ISI and Pakistan-sponsored terrorist organisations who had been active in West Bengal.

Later, the chief minister told reporters that he had apprised the Centre of the situation in West Bengal and the problem of madrasas in some parts of the state.

Mr Advani stressed that the need of the hour was to rise above party politics in fighting terrorism.

He is understood to have told Mr Bhattacharjee that having secular credentials the Left Government should not fight shy of taking on the

ISI agents and their sympathisers.

Even when it comes to curbing the activities of madrasas, the state government was free to take action, unlike the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh which failed to enact a law to curb the haphazard growth of mosques and madrasas along the India-Nepal border.

The CPI-M Politburo, which met here today to discuss the draft political resolutions for its Hyderabad Congress, is learnt to have informally discussed the madrasa controversy. Mr Jyoti Basu and Mr Bhattacharjee were present.

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THE STATESMAN

1 4th 1987

'WE WERE BETTER OFF DURING BASU'S TIME'

Buddha has upset harmony: Imams

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 8. — Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's attempt to undo the damage suffered by his party, because of his statements on madrasas, has drawn flak from the city's Muslim religious leaders. They expressed their displeasure over the chief minister's conduct from the pulpit today.

Before the afternoon namaz at mosques across the city, the leaders gave speeches over loudspeakers criticising the chief minister. Mr Bhattacharjee was compared unfavourably with Mr Jyoti Basu and his secular credentials were questioned.

The Nakhoda mosque Imam, Maulana Mohammed Sabir, said the state's Muslims were not buying what the chief minister said yesterday before the community's leaders at Writers' Buildings.

He told The Statesman that he had asked Mr Bhattacharjee to admit his mistake before the press. "Only telling us that he had been misquoted by the media won't suffice... During Mr Jyoti Basu's tenure, the two communities lived in amity. But the situation changed after Mr Bhattacharjee took over."

On the functioning of madrasas, he said: "These are our private institutions. Suggestions are welcome, but force is not."

At Tipu Sultan masjid, a large number of people gathered for the namaz. The Imam, Syed Mohammed Mojeeddadi, said over loudspeaker: "Muslims have always stood by the Left Front and had helped it come to power. Is this the way to treat us? The chief minister seems to be working for communal forces... Let him come up with evidence

that madrasas are being used by anti-national forces. Never had we heard such things when Mr Basu was in power. This way the state's secular fabric will be lost in no time."

Academics too aren't impressed.

At a press conference organised by the All India Minority Forum, educationist and former Union minister, Dr Pratap Chandra Chandra, said terrorism had to be countered with an iron fist, but that shouldn't be an excuse for indulging in communalism. "Terrorism has no caste, creed or religion. Experience in various countries across the world has shown that militancy can stem from a strife that may be inter- or intra-religion."

On Mr Anil Biswas's statement that there was no need for religious education, Dr Chandra said lack of religious consciousness could lead to immorality.

Mr Idris Ali, Forum president, demanded a White Paper on the chief minister's stand on madrasas. "With Mr Bhattacharjee and various other leaders of his party issuing contradictory and confusing statements, the community is perplexed. We demand that the government clarify its stand through advertisements immediately."

Mr LK Advani said Mr Bhattacharjee shouldn't be attacked for his comments on madrasas, PTI adds from Jalandhar. "If the chief minister has said something he felt necessary for the state's security, his observations should be fairly reported and not distorted and he shouldn't be attacked simply for that."

Turn to page 6

77 07 1980

Text changes, content stays

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, Feb. 7: A rollback of the text yesterday. Some more today. But the sub-text is still visible.

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee met 22 Muslim intellectuals and clerics today, taking forward his "media misunderstood me" line, but giving enough hints he was standing by his comment that a section of madarsas was harbouring anti-national forces.

The chief minister discussed with the delegation the presence in the state of eight groups that had direct links with Pakistan's ISI, "not all of which were operating out of madarsas". Implicit in that statement is the message that some did operate from madarsas.

"They (the community's leaders) know what groups like the Lashkar-e-Toiba are up to and assured me every help to tackle their activities," Bhattacharjee said after the talks.

He did his best to calm the rising minority anger. Referring to comments made in Siliguri last month that kicked off the debate over madarsas, the chief minister said the media had mixed up the two issues of anti-national activity and the state of madarsa education. Asked if he was blaming the media alone, he replied: "Blame it also on me. Let us both take the blame."

Amid the damage control unrolled by the government and the CPM, two things stood out: that the objective of reforming madarsa education has not been surrendered and that the threat from anti-national forces is seen to be real — one unrelated to the other.

"Some forces are engaged in anti-national ac-

11 9/2 9.51 2/3
tivities but they are not confined to madarsas only," Bhattacharjee told the intellectuals. "Hindu fundamentalist forces are also to blame."

Former Waqf Board chairman Maulana A.M.K. Masumi and Maulana Fajlur Rahman, the imam who conducts the prayer on Red Road, participated in the discussion along with Nakhoda Masjid imam Maulana Mohammad Sabir and admitted that media reports had created some "tension". "There was a communication gap which was bridged somewhat in today's meeting," they said.

The past few days had been "very difficult" for the community, Sabir said. "I had to explain to people on the road, when I was stopped near the airport yesterday, that I was a pious man."

Sabir and the others agreed with Bhattacharjee's contention that the madarsa syllabus needed to be modernised. "The madarsas should have subjects like Mathematics, Science and English along with Arabic and Theology," was the chief minister's contention.

The chief minister explained: "When I suggested that madarsa education should be reformed, all I meant was madarsa students should not get alienated from the mainstream." He promised the Muslim leadership that the A.R. Kidwai report on madarsa reforms would be discussed with them before its recommendations were accepted.

But Bhattacharjee's exercise did not seem to have cut any ice with the Jamait-e-Ulema Hind, which runs most of the state's

unaffiliated madarsas, or the Jamait-e-Islami. Both vowed to carry on with their agitation.

■ See Page 9

QUOTE
Blame it also on me
BUDDHADEB
BHATTACHARJEE

I was misquoted on madrasas: CM

SFI 7/2 9.87 MB
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 6. — Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today accused a section of the media, including his party organ *Ganashakti*, of "erroneously" reporting his speech on madrasas and terrorism.

At the Left Front committee meeting today, the chief minister denied having ever said that some unaffiliated madrasas were involved in anti-national activities. Nor does the state government have any specific information in this regard.

Mr Bhattacharjee's clarification notwithstanding, the state minorities' welfare minister admitted that some non-affiliated madrasas were indeed infusing fundamentalist ideas into the minds of Muslim children. Mohammed Salim, addressing a gathering of madrasa students and teachers at Furfura (Hooghly), said Mr Bhattacharjee didn't blame the entire Muslim community for anti-national activities, but warned those involved in such acts.

At the LF meeting, the chief minister attributed the controversy to "erroneous clubbing in some media reports of two issues he spoke about — madrasa education and terrorism." *Ganashakti*, too, made the same "mistake" and its headline and report sought to create a wrong impression by linking the two "separate issues".

Mr Biman Bose, LF chairman, said after the meeting that the chief minister hadn't spoken about closing unaffiliated madrasas. Any group is

free to impart religious education as is done by schools run by the VHP, RSS and Ananda Marg.

Why did the chief minister and the LF take so long to clear the confusion? Mr Bose said most of the senior leaders were busy with party conferences outside the city.

Mr Bhattacharjee told LF partners that he had merely spoken about the need for some unaffiliated madrasas to modernise their curricula so that the students were better placed in the job market. He had also touched upon the activities of fundamentalists of the majority and minority communities and how the ISI was exploiting the situation. Unfortunately, some reports combined the two issues in such a way that they got mixed up, Mr Bose said.

Asked about Mr LK Advani's appreciation of the chief minister's remarks, Mr Bose said: "It's a pity that a spokesman of fundamentalist outfits... is trying to use Mr Bhattacharjee's remarks to suit his political interests." The chief minister will meet Muslim intellectuals tomorrow and address a madrasa teachers' meeting on 11 February to "clear the confusion".

The Trinamul slammed Mr Bhattacharjee for refusing to "own up his statement". Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay said: "The fear of losing support among the Muslims prompted Mr Bhattacharjee to deny what he had said."

Core committee: The LF committee today decided to set up a Cabinet core committee for better coordination between the government and LF partners.



Mr Bhattacharjee: Backtracking?

THE STATESMAN

CM seeks to clear stand on madrasas

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, February 4

THE CHIEF Minister has walked into a storm of angry protests with his crackdown on unlisted madrasas, which he says have been fanning anti-national sentiments.

On a day when Opposition parties fired salvo after salvo at Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee for his "clumsy handling of the madrasa issue" and the Jamait-e-Ulema Hind talked tough, the Chief Minister sought to clear the air. He called Muslim intellectuals for a meeting at Writers' Buildings on February 7.

Even his Left allies decided to confront him with the issue at the February 6 Left Front meeting. "We weren't taken into confidence on this. An even greater mistake was being so blunt about the whole affair. Sensitive matters such as these should have been handled with great care," a Front leader said.

As the assault got worse by the hour, the Chief Minister sought to buy peace saying, "I will meet Muslim leaders on February 7 and address madrasa teachers on February 11."

Earlier in the day, madrasa students affiliated to the Jamait-e-Ulema Hind organised a massive demonstration where speakers condemned the Chief Minister for his "confrontationist" attitude. They warned the administration against making false and sweeping allegations against their institutions of learning and asked it to furnish proof. The message: No matter what happens, not a single madrasa or mosque will be

closed down without evidence.

At a convention where the atmosphere was charged and the Chief Minister's effigy burnt, Jamait leaders threatened to launch a "mass movement" unless the Government stopped its "false propaganda".

Jamait All-India president Maulana Asad Madan forcefully rebutted the Chief Minister's comment that some private madrasas were harbouring and breeding anti-national elements. "Fine, if that's the way he feels. Let him show us a single instance of a madrasa where such activities are on. If he closes down our schools of learning it will amount to State interference in religious matters."

The Jamait got a shot in the arm when Mamata Banerjee threw her weight behind it. "It's no use making wild allegations. If there's a problem as serious as this, then the Chief Minister must come out with a White Paper. We are not against the Government's effort to weed out anti-national elements. But to lay the blame on madrasas alone is wrong. It shouldn't be a misdirected effort."

The BJP sounded a discordant note. State unit chief Ashim Ghosh demanded an all-party meeting to discuss the issue and said maulvi control over the State's madrasa system must end.

P R Das Munshi of the Congress sounded a note of caution. "The CM has sent a wrong message to the Muslims. They are a patriotic people and should be made partners in the fight against terror."

More reports on Page 3

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 FEB 2002

Police say key suspects killed

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 4. — The special investigation team of Kolkata Police, probing the American Center attack, has come across information that some of the key suspects in the case have been killed following "inner-group" rivalry. *5/11*

Police officers feel that the killings could have taken place in some of the neighbouring states recently. "The killings could be the result of a code of conduct peculiar to terror merchants who operate on a global scale," a detective department official said.

Police started suspecting this while questioning the persons arrested in connection with the attack. Although they knew the whereabouts of the Khan brothers of Phulbagan, Sadaquat (who drove the motorcycle) and two others, they couldn't say what happened to them after they left the city. From the floppies seized in Hazaribagh and a Beniapukur cyber cafe, police found that Asif Reza Khan had six e-mail accounts. These were used by others even after his death and e-mails were sent to Naseer.

A senior Lalbazar officer said: "Some recent findings point to the fact that the people Jamaluddin Naseer interacted with are eliminated. And they might have been killed for obvious reasons."

Senior Lalbazar officers today denied that Sadaquat was suffering from kidney ailments. "He could be having some minor health problems," said an official.

At present, five detective department teams are carrying out the investigation. Two teams are in Bihar to collect information on the movement of suspects in the rural belts. The state CID has also despatched a team to Bihar.

The DC-DD (special), Mr Peeyush Pandey, said: "We are yet to get substantial information from the suspects picked up so far. An intensive search is on to find the Khan brothers of Phulbagan."

Police, however, denied having got leads from 10 suspects detained yesterday. Senior CID officials said a good number of people, who played a role in the abduction of Mr Partha Roy Burman, were connected with the American Center attack. "Till now we have authentic information that Farhan Malik, alias Aftab Ansari, visited Naseer's rented flat in Tiljala," an official said.

Police have identified a few more cyber cafes in and around the city from where Naseer and his associates used to receive information via e-mail from Dubai.

CID officers are verifying the credentials of Ashadul Malik, a carpenter, who was picked up from Khaijapur village in Howrah yesterday.

Jaish to focus on J&K

Statesman News Service

JAMMU, Feb. 4. — The Jaish-e-Mohammed has decided to suspend its activities in the rest of the country and concentrate on Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

This was decided today at a meeting of the Jaish commanders, headed by its new military operations chief Shamasuddin Hyder. The meeting was held somewhere near the LoC on the Indian side. Hyder has directed his cadres operating in other parts of the country to return to their bases in Kashmir. He said his outfit would step up its activities in the near future. **Mosque siege ends:** The two-day siege of a mosque at Sopore in Baramulla district ended when the two hold-up Hizbul Mujahideen militants surrendered this evening, officials said, PTI adds from Srinagar.

Editorial: Encounter at Hazaribagh, page 4

THE STATESMAN

Fall in voters raises poll doubts

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 4. - Nearly 7 million of the state's 48.6 million voters did not exist on the day West Bengal went to the polls on 10 May 2001.

After deleting the names of these non-existent voters, and adding those who have qualified to become voters after the election, the state election authorities have concluded that the electorate has shed 7 per cent of its numbers.

This startling statistic was revealed today by the chief electoral officer, Mr Sabyasachi Sen. This is the first time since Independence that the size of the electorate has actually shrunk.

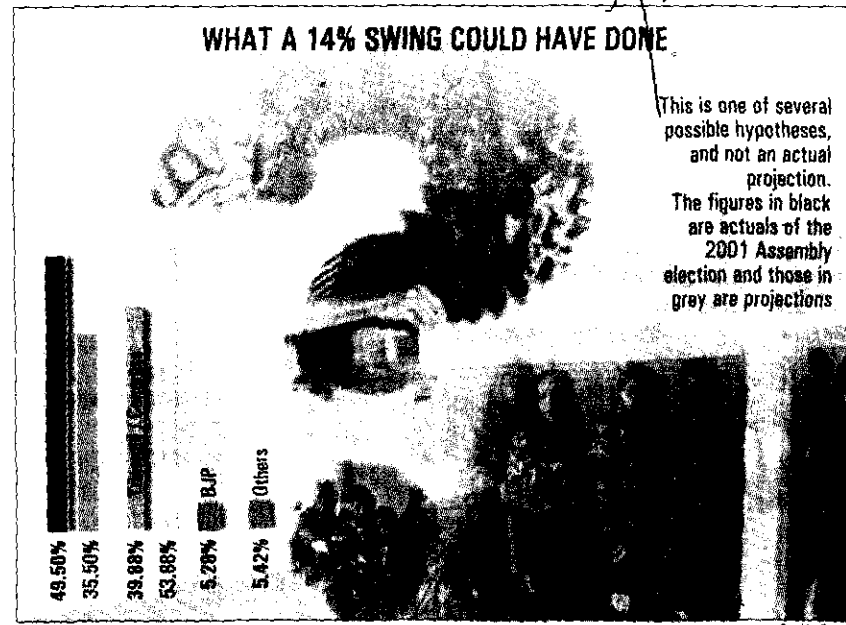
In the past, a revision of the electoral rolls always — but always — led to an increase in the number of voters. Even the last revision led to a rise of about half a million voters.

While Mr Sen was reluctant to ascribe the sharp drop in voters to the deletion of infiltrators' names, the figures speak volumes of the callousness of the state election authorities. About 6.9 million people were not supposed to have been voters. If any of them cast votes, these could only have been bogus.

This means 6.9 million people had their names enrolled as voters in the electoral list prior to the 2001 Assembly polls. Of the 6.9 million people, five million are said to have migrated to other parts of the state or country, while 1.9 million have died.

Prior to the revision, the state electorate was 48.6 million. The deletion of 6.9 million accounts for 14 per cent of the original electorate.

The CEO informed that the recent revision has resulted in the inclusion of about 3.5 million voters. Therefore, the net decline is about 3.4 million — meaning a seven per cent drop in the size of the



electorate. As things stand now, West Bengal has about 45.3 million voters.

Today's announcement throws up the question as to whether electoral arithmetic could have gone for a six had there been a thinner electorate prior to the 2001 Assembly polls.

If 6.9 million people wouldn't have had their names enlisted in the electoral rolls, there would have been an average of about 23,000 voters less per Assembly constituency, the number being 294.

Going by this, the spotlight gets shifted to Assembly seats where the ruling and Opposition party candidates won by wafer-thin margins. Life would have been different for them if these 23,000 voters weren't there.

Consider the Speaker of the West Bengal Assembly. He won from the Amdanga seat by a margin as low as 64 votes. There

were allegations that he won because of sheer musclepower and rigging. Is it that a majority of these "bogus" voters cast their votes in favour of the Speaker?

The Baruipur Assembly seat is also a case in point. The Trinamul Congress won the seat by five votes. Today's announcement raises the question of whether Miss Mamata Banerjee's party could have managed to win the rest, but for the presence of about 23,000 bogus voters.

At least 15 constituencies witnessed a close finish, the margin of victory being less than 1,000 votes. Had the size of the electorate been lower by 23,000 in these seats, fortunes of the victors and vanquished may well have been different.

Of these, eight were won by the Trinamul and Congress combine while the Left Front won seven.

The chief electoral officer said the revision

sion resulted in a decline in the electorate in each of the state's 21 electoral districts.

He attributed it to a different method followed during the revision exercise that began in November. Earlier, intensive revision of rolls was conducted without referring to the existing rolls. But this year, enumerators went on a house-to-house survey deleting names of those who've either died or migrated from the existing rolls.

While names of new voters were included in the revised rolls, the deletions outstripped the additions leading to a net decrease in the size of the electorate.

The decline was more significant in the urban areas. The three city Lok Sabha constituencies showed a decline of 19 per cent for Calcutta North West, 18 per cent for Calcutta North East and 21 per cent for Calcutta South.

Other significant decreases were 12 per cent in Burdwan, 11 per cent in Howrah and 10 per cent in Darjeeling. Mr Sen attributed this to a large floating population of these urban areas.

Only 37 of the 294 constituencies recorded an increase in their electorates during the revision exercise. These are spread across the state, the bulk being in Midnapore East and West districts. The remaining constituencies now have smaller electorates.

The CEO said the election authorities would invite claims and objections to the draft rolls published today. Voters can walk into their local polling booths between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. till 18 February and apply in Form No. 6 for inclusion, in case of wrongful deletion. A voter can also file objections in Form No. 7 demanding deletion of a person's name whom he or she thinks is wrongfully included in the rolls.

These applications will be processed after 18 February and the final voters' list published on 26 March.

Opp critical, CPM calls it preliminary

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 4. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today said the seven per cent drop in the number of voters reflects the "politically motivated enumeration process of electoral rolls".

According to the Trinamul chief, Opposition parties have been targeted and the names of their sympathisers dropped. "One can well imagine the extent of false votes cast by the CPI-M in the Assembly polls".

Trinamul Congress will examine the matter in detail, Miss Banerjee said.

Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, said it would be wrong to read too much into the drop in the number of voters.

"It's a preliminary list and preliminary enumeration normally shows a drop in the percentage. The real picture will emerge only after house-to-house enumeration is complete and the final list is published," Mr Biswas said.

The Congress will file a complaint with the Election Commission and the state's chief electoral officer against "faulty enumeration which led to a sharp fall in the percentage of voters."

The former PCC president, Mr Somen Mitra, said the enumerators did not do their job properly. "They did not visit the homes of the voters. Most of the enumerators were CPI(M) cadres and they carried out the task of enumeration in a callous manner".

Mr Asim Ghosh, state BJP president, said he would not comment until the draft electoral rolls were published. They were scheduled to be published on 4 February, but the date had been postponed to 4 March. Once the rolls were available, Mr Ghosh said, it would be clear who had been excluded — illegal immigrants and other bogus voters, or the CPI-M's political opponents.

Meanwhile, 10 polling stations of Manikchak and Kaliachak II blocks in Malda have been identified as "depopulated" for the past five years following erosion by the Ganga. These stations have been deleted from the electoral part roll.

THE STATESMAN

Bhawani Bhawan was the original target

Soumen Datta
Kolkata, February 3

Feb 4 2002

THE AMERICAN CENTER was an afterthought. The January 22 attackers' original target was Bhawani Bhawan; but security in front of the State police headquarters and the difficult terrain were coming in the way, Mohammed Waqar alias Mohammad Idris disclosed in his dying declaration.

Intelligence Branch detectives, who are part of the investigation team, have confirmed that Waqar did make

this disclosure in his dying moments. They have also confirmed that the attackers carried out repeated dry runs at various locations in Kolkata.

On why the assailants ultimately decided against Bhawani Bhawan, an investigator said: "The geography came in the way. The building is located in a densely populated locality and the road in front wouldn't allow a quick getaway. That's probably why they decided against striking there."

The pre-attack surveys, the he said, was carried out with the

on a guided tour of the city. But the investigators aren't sure if Naser personally knew the attackers, or whether he was only doing as told by Aftab Ansari. The SIB believes that Mohammed Ghayas and Mohammed Ghazi, two Kashmiri militants, were part of the team when the dry runs took place.

It was apparently on Ghayas and Ghazi's advice that they dropped the Bhawani Bhawan plan. Aftab was persuaded that it would be near impossible to escape after striking at the police headquarters, Naser told

interrogating policemen. Naser has also apparently mentioned a map he had sent Aftab showing how difficult the terrain around Bhawani Bhawan would be. The Tiljala contact's brief was limited to organising logistics in the city. He was not taken into confidence on the escape plan. "We have made considerable progress in the case," CID special SP Rajiv Kumar said. "We have the printouts of all e-mails sent and the telephone numbers called from Hazaribag. We are following these leads."

WHY THEY CHANGED THE PLAN

- The attackers carry out repeated dry runs in Maruti car seized from Jamaluddin Naser's Tiljala home
- They realise it would be much too difficult to get away after striking at Bhawani Bhawan
- Jamaluddin Naser sends a map of the area to Aftab Ansari, detailing why getting away from the area would be difficult

Maruti recovered from Jamaluddin Naser, who was arrested from Tiljala. As many as five people travelled in the car during these surveys. It was Naser who took the strike team

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

4 FEB 2002

10 more suspects in net

9.81 MS SH 9/2
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 3. — A special investigation team of the city police raided some areas at Beniapur, Rajabazar, Tiljala and Metiaburj last night and detained 10 people in connection with the attack on the American Center.

Another team was sent to Hazaribagh last night to inquire about Salim and Sadaquat. The members will interrogate Zafar Imam, who was an aide of Idris (alias Zaheed) who had fired at the policemen in front of the Center. Zafar was arrested on Tuesday night from Gaya.

Idris and Salim were killed in an encounter with police at Hazaribagh. Sadaquat is still at large.

The CID detained Ashadul Malik, alias Chanchal, from Khajipur village in Howrah on Friday. An officer said Ashadul had a furniture shop at Tiljala.

The CID has reportedly learnt from its Hazaribagh counterpart that Ashadul used to make calls from a booth near his shop to Idris and his associates at their Hazaribagh hideout.

The sleuths wanted to know whether Ashadul had passed on any information to Jamaluddin Naseer, local linkman of the attackers. Mr Partha Bhattacharjee (IG-CID), however, said they had failed to get the "required" information from Ashadul.

Police have seized some floppies from a Beniapur cyber-cafe where Naseer used to receive messages from Dubai-based Aftab Ansari on e-mail. Police have been able to get the chat names of Naseer, Aftab and Asif Reza Khan.

An officer at Lalbazar said: "We have received some floppies from Hazaribagh too. We're try-

ing to decipher what messages Idris and his associates received about the operation." Police hope some "fresh documents" seized from Naseer will help the probe.

Police are, however, still in the dark on the whereabouts of the Khan brothers of Phoolbagan. Mr Partha Bhattacharjee said: "Raids are being carried out in some parts of the city."

The CID may send more teams to neighbouring states soon. The team that had recently returned from Hazaribagh has reportedly provided crucial details on the people who were part of the crime chain. "We need to know more on the background of the terrorist act," a CID officer said.

The police commissioner, Mr Sujay Chakraborty, said: "We expect to get vital clues from those picked up since yesterday."

THE STATESMAN

4 FEB 2002

State's Still Coming To Terms With The Events

Not all madrasas are anti-national

Kolkata
31 JANUARY

THE WEST Bengal government, on Thursday, sought to end the controversy over chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's comments on madrasas, saying all of them could not be blamed for harbouring anti-national elements. However, the Opposition parties and a religious group slammed the chief minister for targeting the madrasas.

The state minister for minority development and welfare, Mohammad Salim, on Thursday said activities of all madrasas cannot be generalised. He said the government will monitor their activities and not hesitate to take action against erring madrasas. Mr Salim, who held a meeting with members of the West Bengal Minorities Commission and Muslim intellectuals on Thursday, regretted that terrorism and fundamentalism were being portrayed



BUDHA

in certain quarters as religion specific, after the attack on the American Center.

"It is sad that the whole community is being painted in one colour," he said. The state government will not allow seeds of partisanism to be sowed on its grounds, he added. Mr Salim's remarks came on a day when the two main Opposition parties, Trinamool Congress and Congress assailed the chief minister for his "sweeping" statement.

A leading Muslim organisation, the Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Hind fired off a letter to the State Minorities Commission, drawing its attention to the "highly irresponsible" remarks of the state chief minister. The group urged the Commission to protect the rights of minorities. The controversy erupted after attack on American Center, when Mr Bhattacharjee said the government would crack down on madrasas allegedly involved in "anti-national activities." — PTI

American Center attack toll rises to 5

Kolkata
31 JANUARY

THE TOLL in the terror attack on the American Center went up to five on Thursday with another policeman succumbing to injuries. A Delhi police team arrived in the city to examine Jamaluddin Nasir, arrested for giving back-up support to the terrorists involved in the strike.

Police constable, Ashraf Ali, injured in the terrorists' firing in the January 22 attack, died on Thursday morning, raising the toll to five. Four policemen had died on the day of the attack when the motor-cycle borne ultras sprayed bullets on them.

DC (DD) Soumen Mitra said the Delhi policemen will interrogate Nasir to ascertain information they had received from terrorists arrested in Delhi. "This case has national and international ramifications. Policemen, from states where terrorist activities occur, will come to pursue leads. Law-enforcing agencies are working in a tandem in matters involving terrorism," he added. — PTI

The Economic Times

Buddha seeks co-operation from Assam

Terror binds east cousins

FROM OUR
CORRESPONDENT

Guwahati, Jan. 31: Jolted by the American Center attack in Calcutta, West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today vowed to crack down on the ISI-backed rebel network in his state, seeking co-operation from Assam against the common enemy.

Addressing a huge gathering of party workers at the Lataasil playground, the CPM leader said: "The ISI is actively helping militant outfits of the region. Or else, how would one explain the possession of sophisticated arms by KLO militants in West Bengal?"

He said West Bengal is now seized with a problem that has plagued the Northeast for decades. Today's rally was part of the 17th Assam state conference of the CPM.

"The people of West Bengal were always with the people of Assam and will remain so in the fight against militancy," the CPM politburo member said.

Buddhadeb was scheduled to meet Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi this evening to discuss the possibility of joint offensive against the Ufa and Kamatapuri Liberation Organisation.

However, the meeting had to be called off as Gogoi could not leave Delhi for here because of "official work". Bhattacharjee called on Assam Governor Lt. Gen. (retd.) S.K. Sinha at Raj Bhavan, saying it was a courtesy call.

"Had the meeting with Gogoi materialised, we could have discussed something specific," Bhattacharjee told **The Telegraph**.

The West Bengal chief minister accused both the US and Pak-



RED ADDRESS: West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee addressing a CPM rally under the shadow of guns in Guwahati on Thursday. Picture by S.H. Paigiri

istan of backing militants outfits in the eastern part of the country. Speaking in Bengali, Bhattacharjee said his government would not tolerate any kind of violence and would act tough on rebels of all hues.

He blasted Pakistan president Pervez Musharraf and his policies but said, "India cannot afford a war at this moment".

Instead of a military solution, he said he favoured political and diplomatic measures to

put pressure on Islamabad to stop meddling in India's internal affairs.

Holding the US responsible for militancy in the world, Bhattacharjee said, "Laden was the creation of the US."

Stating that both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalism was dangerous for the country, Bhattacharjee denounced attempts by Islamic militant outfits and Hindu fanatics to divide the nation in the name of religion.

He also accused the BJP of trying to divide the Hindus and Muslims in Uttar Pradesh in the name of "temple construction" only to win the ensuing elections.

"A section of BJP leaders are favouring war against Pakistan just to gain mileage in the run up to the elections," he said.

He also attacked the BJP-led government for its economic policies. Tea prices in both West Bengal and Assam have drastically fallen because of such faulty policies, he said. "Globalisation has affected the economy on all fronts. Though our state has become self-reliant in rice production, the farmers have been adversely affected due to import of rice from countries like Taiwan and Thailand at a lower price."

Bhattacharjee said West Bengal needed more industries to do away with unemployment. Stressing the need to strengthen unity among the people of the two states, the veteran CPM leader said: "Bhupen Hazarika belongs as much to Assam as to West Bengal."

Highlighting the achievements of the Left Front government, the CPM leader said there might not be too many five star hotels in Calcutta, but the infant mortality rate is certainly the lowest there.

THE TELEGRAPH

Kolkata guide of attackers in police net

Hazaribag investigations lead to city contact's arrest

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 30

THE EXTREMISTS involved in the Tuesday strike reached the city from Hazaribag six days before the grisly killings and put up at a renovated house on 1 Tiljala Lane. Police Commissioner Sujay Chakrabarty said today. The revelation came after Jamaluddin Naser — a key Kolkata contact of the gang — split the beans. He was nabbed from Darga Road early today.

A resident of 46 Tiljala Lane, Naser was a schoolmate of Asif Reza Khan — an Aftab Ansari henchman. Ansari planned and coordinated the abduction of Khadim boss Parthapratim Roy Burman from Dubai.

Naser went to Beniapurur High Madrasa with Asif. Sleuths claim Naser would be a key link in getting to the bottom of the American Center case. Though today's catch was significant, the Commissioner did not sound content. "We have found enough evidence to believe that several other militants with ISI links are holed up in the city. The names are with us, but certain details can't be revealed because confidentiality is important in this case."

The planning for the attack started with an e-mail to Naser on January 14 by Zahid from Hazaribag. It urged Naser to arrange accommodation for Sadaqat, Salim and Jahid, who would reach Kolkata on January 16 by Jodhpur Express.

Accordingly, Naser took them to a renovated house on 1 Tiljala Road that Asif had bought years ago with his help. The visitors asked Naser to get them a Maruti. A car, they said,

would be necessary for their "business movements" across the city. Naser acquired the car and kept it in the garage of the Tiljala Road house.

Two days after the trio came to town, Naser said, another man joined the team from Hazaribag. He came riding a motorbike — a black Suzuki Shogun. "Naser says that for the next few days he didn't keep in touch with the group. Late on January 22, he got to know of the American Center attack and rushed to the Tiljala house suspecting the gang's involvement," Chakrabarty said.

He found the house locked and headed for Hazaribag in search of the gang. On January 26, Naser found the group at the Khirgaon house. They told him they were behind the attack.

Sleuths used leads from detective chief Soumen Mitra, who called up from Hazaribag to tip his men off that the killers had engaged a Kolkata man, and provided his phone number. Acting on the tip-off, police in plain clothes reached Beniapurur High Madrasa, where Fatehuddin, Naser's father, told them that his son was in the city. Later, he was picked up from Darga Road.

Immediately after the arrest, the police raided the Tiljala Road house and found a car there. A witness to the strike had informed the police about this car. It was the same car, but had a different colour. Sleuths also recovered a number of documents and the cover of a cricket bat. Investigators now suspect the cover was used to carry the AK-56 used in the attack.

Related report on Page 3



Jamaluddin Naser being produced in a city court on Wednesday after his arrest from Darga Road.

Beniapukur madrasa: Where the twain met

Saibal Sen
Kolkata, January 30

284-6918. It was this tip-off that finally led city police sleuths to unravel the American Center attack. This telephone number of Beniapurur High Madrasa, has been inaccessible since this afternoon, since the police divulged that Jamaluddin Naser's father Fatehuddin taught in the 'junior school' and it was here that Asif Reza Khan and Jamal first got to know each other as children.

The madrasa, on Anjuman Road, bears a deserted look ever since police in plainclothes

whisked away Fatehuddin yesterday for information on his son. "Even the guard has left," said the owner of a leather shop just opposite the madrasa.

The elderly man said an uncanny fear descended on the locality as the news spread this morning. "It was very surprising, for Fatehuddin Sir is very soft-spoken and never utters anything about his son. Their relation is apparently strained. He never even told us where he stays."

Police Commissioner Sujay Chakrabarty said the police would not divulge much about Fatehuddin as it would invite

trouble for him. "He was approached by police to enquire about his son Jamal. He said his son would be back in a day or two and that he was unaware of his present whereabouts."

Sources said it was Fatehuddin, a double MA and B.Ed, who gave the police his son's in-laws' address of Darga Road, where Jamaluddin was first trapped. Fatehuddin told police his daughter-in-law was in her advanced pregnancy. It was this marriage — against his wishes — that caused the rift between the father and the son.

Jamal admits that he first

NASER'S CONFESSION

JANUARY 14: I received an e-mail where I was told to receive a group reaching Howrah by Jodhpur Express on 16th. It was signed by Zahid. Took Zahid, Sadaqat, Salim and two others to the 1 Tiljala Road house, which I recently acquired and renovated at their behest. A couple of days later, a Suzuki Shogun (WBOIP 2144) was brought from Hazaribag. I was told it would be used for 'business'.

JANUARY 22: I got to know of the attack late in the evening. I reached the Tiljala Road house, but they were gone.

JANUARY 24: I left for Hazaribag on January 24, met Zahid, Salim and Sadaqat at Khirgaon. They admitted they had carried out the attack.

■ I knew Asif Reza Khan from childhood. He gave me a job. It was through him that I met Zahid and others. Asif Reza is a key aide of Aftab Ansari who operates from Dubai

State shops for guns

Tapan Das
Kolkata, January 30

WISER AFTER the American Center attack, the State has decided to immediately purchase 1,000 INSAS and 1000 SLR rifles.

This is for the first time that such a massive arms procurement has been undertaken to modernise the police force. The quantum jump in the State's firepower could cost well over Rs 100 crore, said Home Department sources.

The purchase has been sanctioned by the Union Home Ministry. Necessary orders have also been issued for delivery of these rifles to the State Government from the central depot of the CRPF in Rampur, Uttar Pradesh.

The State police already have over 150 AK-47 rifles, acquired over the last three years. However, the dismal inadequacy of the police to counter Tuesday's attackers has jolted the slumbering Government into a frenzied modernisation drive. Reversing its earlier programme of phased arms and ammunition acquisition, the Government has thus decided to embark on substantial upgradation of the police force in six months, sources said.

The Home and Finance departments are drawing up concrete schemes for acquisition of sophisticated arms, ammunition and equipment for recce, telecommunication and intelligence gathering, including night vision cameras. This is being done with utmost urgency so that the entire amount of Rs 62.5 crore towards grants and loans by the Centre for the police modernisation can be fully utilised in the current fiscal

Hunt for rider after dawn death

FROM ANUPAM SHESHANK

Hazaribagh, Jan. 29: After **Mohammad Idris, alias Zahid, Sadaqat is the man police want.**

In his so-called confessional statement before dying yesterday, Idris had said Sadaqat drove the motorcycle as he, riding pillion, opened fire on a group of policemen outside Calcutta's American Center on January 22.

In an early morning raid conducted on Monday jointly by

Delhi and Hazaribagh police on a house at Khirgaon here, Idris and an accomplice, Salim, were killed. Police here say they have evidence to suggest Sadaqat — said to be from Mumbai — was also in the house until Sunday afternoon and left in one of two vehicles the group was known to use — a black Suzuki Shaolin motorcycle or a blue Maruti 800.

Neither of these was recovered from the house but a third one — a Zen — was found with a Delhi registration number (DL6C B9329) etched on the

windscreen. In possibly another link between the group that mounted the January 22 attack and the gang that kidnapped Parthapratim Roy Burman last year, Calcutta police suspect that this blue Maruti was used in despatching the Khadim's owner home after the ransom was paid. Idris is believed to have driven that car.

"Yesterday, we had the specific location of Sadaqat but before we could reach the destination, he was tipped off and fled. Two police teams are on the lookout

for Sadaqat," the SP of Hazaribagh, Deepak Varma, said.

The police are also searching for Jamaluddin Nasir, alias Emam Hassan, who had taken on Idris and Salim were found.

Idris had said in his confession that he had fired from an AK-56 in front of the American Center, the same rifle that was recovered yesterday after what the police call an "encounter" outside the Khirgaon house.

Varma today clarified that the statement taken from a wo-

unded Idris was not a legally tenable recorded confession but information that came out through interrogation. "We did not have sufficient time, so we extracted the maximum possible information from him," Varma said.

"The dying terrorist was speaking in chaste Punjabi that the Delhi police officers understood. We asked him about his identity and residence and then about the Calcutta shooting. He told us he and Salim were from Pakistan and he was the main shooter while Sadaqat was driv-

ing the motorcycle." A difference of opinion has arisen here between the visiting team of Calcutta police — which had no inkling of Monday morning's operation — and the local police. The Calcutta team has gathered information that a motorcycle-rider handed over a long sports-kit bag to the occupant of a Maruti some distance from the Khirgaon house when the raid was in progress. The team was told the bag might have contained weapons.

Hazaribagh police deny this, saying they had placed policemen in every corner of the locality and such an exchange could not have taken place without their knowledge. "Not even a bird escaped our attention," Varma said.

He said Calcutta should submit a written requisition if they want to take back the rifle. The request will be filed in a court, which would decide whether the recovered items can be handed over. "The bodies will be buried if no one claims them," Varma added.

Khadim trail to Hazaribag

American Center attackers had held Parthapratim in Jharkhand

Amitabh Srivastava
Hazaribag January 29

INVESTIGATORS FROM Kolkata who rushed to Hazaribag to pick up the threads of investigation in the American Center strike case have concluded that there's a direct link between the Tuesday attack and the July 25 abduction of Khadim boss Parthapratim Roy Burman.

The shoe baron, police officers said, was kept in a Hazaribag hideout before being shifted to Haroa in North 24 Parganas. Two teams, led by Soumen Mitra, deputy commissioner of police, and Shivaji Ghosh, special superintendent, CID, are in the Jharkhand town. *Hindustan Times* had earlier reported that Roy Burman had been taken to Jharkhand and was released for a Rs 4 crore ransom.

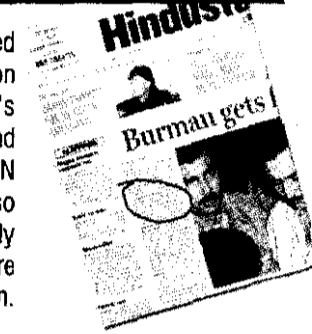
In a significant breakthrough, the investigators here zeroed in on a cybercafe at Kallu Chawk, from where the slain militants sent e-mails to their contacts in Pakistan and elsewhere. They have recovered records of mails sent and received by these men.

Mitra and his men today picked up around a dozen suspects, including Nurain and Saji-

HT REPORT VINDICATED
Hindustan Times had reported on August 3 that shoe baron Parthapratim Roy Burman's abductors took him to Jharkhand after picking him up from C N Roy Road in Tiljala. It was also reported that he was freed only after he coughed up Rs 4 crore as ransom.

da Khan, for interrogation. Nurain is the son of Block Development Officer Mansoor Alam. The Alams live in a house adjacent to the Khirgaon house where the alleged ISI agents lived. Sajida is the daughter of Majid Khan, owner of the house where the duo lived. Khan is a well-off businessman based in Rourkela and he too has been detained. Sleuths from Central Intelligence agencies are grilling him.

The officer, however, conceded that the process of identifying the American Center attack-



ers was yet to be over. "But we have some vital clues that will lead us to the perpetrators of the crime. These will come very handy in cracking the network."

The Kolkata Police Deputy Commissioner said that the network used by the terrorists included young women, who were used to infiltrate sensitive places. In this connection, he mentioned Imam Hassan, who fled the house four days before the encounter took place. "This man too had a woman with him and introduced her to neighbours as his wife."

It has come to light that at least four accomplices of the slain duo - Zahid and Salim - had left the Khirgaon hideout some hours before the police encircled it. "The possibility of their being holed up somewhere in Hazaribag still is not being ruled out," a senior Jharkhand Police officer said.

But the whereabouts of the black Suzuki motorcycle that was reportedly used by the American Center attackers isn't known yet.

Returning to the Khadim-American Center link, sources in the investigation team confirmed that it was Mohammed Zahid, alias Mohammed Waqar, had extracted a bullet from Roy Burman's body. The abduction was masterminded by Aftab Ansari, alias Farhan Mallik.

The IB team led by Ghosh has been put up at a BSF camp at Meru where the suspects who have been picked up are being interrogated. "This is a hypersensitive case and we don't want to take any chances with the security of the probe teams here," said a senior police officer.

More reports on Page 4

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 JAN 2002

Delhi police kill Kolkata gunmen in Hazaribagh

Times News Network
NEW DELHI: Two alleged Pakistani nationals reportedly involved in the attack outside the American Center in Kolkata last week were killed in an encounter at Hazaribagh in Jharkhand on Monday morning.

Union home secretary Kamal Pande said this revealed a new trend in Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in the country. Earlier, the ISI used "Indian agents or sleeping partners", but now there was the direct involvement of Pakistani nationals in espionage and subversive activities, he said.

Mr Pande cited at least five cases, including the attack on parliament and the one in Kolkata, in which Pakistani nationals were directly involved.

He said an inter-state probe had led the police and intelligence agencies to the terrorists' hideout in Hazaribagh. When the police

team surrounded the safe house, the terrorists opened fire with AK-47 rifles and attempted to escape. The police returned fire, killing one person on the spot and injuring another. The deceased was identified as Salim and the injured as Mohammad Idris. Idris was rushed to the Hazaribagh sadar hospital, where he said in his dying declaration that he was the main shooter in the Kolkata attack. The motorcycle was driven by one Sadaquat, who is still absconding.

Mr Pande said Dubai-based underworld don Farhan Malik alias Aftab Ahmed Ansari, who has already claimed responsibility for the Kolkata shooting, was running the Hazaribagh terrorist module. He said investigations had revealed that Malik operated his terrorist module in conjunction with two Pakistan-based militant outfits, the Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami and the Lashkar-e-Toiba.

Earlier, the Kolkata police said the house that the terrorists used as their hideout belonged to one Mohd Majid, who works in Rourkela. In September last year, he had let out the house to one Mohd Nafeer, who stayed there with his wife, child and sister-in-

law. Nafeer, who had introduced himself to neighbours as a shoe merchant, mysteriously disappeared a month ago after allowing the two Pakistanis to occupy the house. The landlord, however, continued to receive his rent regularly, the police said, adding they were now on the lookout for Nafeer.

The police have also detained a youth from the minority community after finding out that the two Pakistanis used to communicate with their contacts in Pakistan from his cyber cafe.

An AK-47 rifle, 47 live cartridges, Rs 22,200 in cash, a Howrah-Gaya railway ticket, dated January 23, 2002, a consumer card of a Hazaribagh-based gas agency and a driving licence issued from Nalanda were seized from the hideout. A Maruti Zen with a West Bengal registration plate was also seized.

Our Kolkata bureau adds:

Although the Union home secretary has alleged that two Pakistanis were behind the January 22 attack, Kolkata police chief S u j o y Chakraborty said that the

identity of the attackers was still not known. Mr Chakraborty said in Kolkata that the city police were still in the process of reconstructing the crime and had not proceeded "physically" in any direction. "We are still in the theoretical stage. We don't know about the group that was responsible for the incident," he said. "We are certain that they were terrorists, but the group involved is not all that relevant. We have just begun a murder inquiry," he said.

He said Monday's killings were a setback to the ongoing investigations, but claimed they would not affect the reconstruction of events.

It was a Delhi police team that had given the tip to security agencies in Jharkhand, he said, adding that the Kolkata police had no role in the entire incident.

He said Hazaribagh DIG Ashok Kumar Singh had briefed him about the incident on Monday morning. "I don't know any details. I was just told that Md Zahid alias Idris and Md Salim, both from Pakistan, had been killed by a police team from Delhi and Hazaribagh."

KOLKATA CONUNDRUM

- Kolkata police chief denies knowledge of killers' identity
- Union home secretary says killers were Pakistanis
- Delhi police team carried out raid in Jharkhand

THE TELEGRAPH

29 JAN 2002

Joint police team raids Hazaribag hideout, shoots dead American Center attacker

Centre claims breakthrough, but...

Khadim shadow over the dead

Soumen Datta
Kolkata, January 28

SLEUTHS PROBING the Khadim case have stumbled on the name of one Mohammed Waqar, who they say, treated shoe baron Parthapratim Roy Burman's bullet wound. Waqar is said to have plastered the injury at a house in Haroa, North 24 Parganas, where Roy Burman was taken from Tiljala.

Waqar was at the wheel of the getaway Maruti 800, which the abductors used to take the Khadim vice-chairman away on July 25. "The same Waqar was among the two men gunned down at Hazaribag today," said Rajiv Kumar, special superintendent of police, CID.

Waqar, he said, was the one who fired at the policemen in front of the American Center on January 22. "He was the pillion rider and was carrying the AK-47," Kumar said.

Sadaqat, who was driving the two-wheeler that day and Waqar, who also goes by the alias of Mohammed Idris alias Zahid and alias Wajed, formed the two-man team who carried out the strike at the American Center.

A resident of Khanewala in

Pakistan's Multan province. Waqar joined the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba in 1998. He was the one who introduced Aftab Ansari to the Lashkar leadership in Dubai. "We are now more than sure that Waqar had solid links with the ISI," Kumar said.

It was he who put together the team which carried out the Roy Burman abduction. He personally led the Khadim operation in July and slipped out of the city soon after the Khadim chief was released. He returned some time in early January to take part in the American Center strike. Waqar apparently knew the city well and was sent back to the city for this reason. "His brief was to get in touch with others who were already in the city for the January 22 attack," Kumar added.

Having landed in the city, he got in touch with Mohammed Ghazi and Mohammed Ghyas, two Kashmiri militants, in the city on reconnaissance missions. They advised him to get in touch with Sadaqat, a Lashkar man present in the city, a top Intelligence officer said. A CID team left today for Hazaribag. The CID also intensified raids across the State pursuing further leads.



The body of one of the Pakistanis shot dead in Hazaribag on Monday.

Amitabh Srivastava and
Chandan Nandy
Hazaribag/ New Delhi, Jan 28

A JOINT team of the Hazaribag and Delhi Police this morning gunned down two Pakistani nationals, including the main accused in the shooting in front of Kolkata's American Center. The encounter took place in Khirgaon, a densely populated part of the town.

Both men, Md Zahid alias Md Idris and Md Salim, were in their early twenties and members of the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and had been staying in a rented house for the last four months at Khirgaon posing as shoe-traders from Kolkata.

Police also seized the AK-47 used in the Kolkata attack. An AC 2-tier ticket from Kolkata was found inside Zahid's wallet, suggesting that mission accomplished, the man had travelled back to Hazaribag on January 23.

Today's operation began at the crack of dawn when policemen surrounded the locality and asked everyone to come out of their homes. "Around 6 am, we told everybody to surrender. Everybody, including the BDO's family, came out. At 6.45 we decided to use stun grenades and smoke the militants out. It seemed to work. They emerged from a side-door, shooting indiscriminately from their AK-47," SP Deepak Verma said. However, "they were overwhelmed by the volley of fire from police guns," he added.

Idris revealed in his dying declaration that he was a resident of Khanewala in Multan, Pakistan,

UAE PLEDGES COOPERATION

THE UNITED Arab Emirates has assured India of all cooperation on Aftab Ansari's extradition, sources said here on Monday. "At this stage we are only exchanging information. The suspect has to be located first on the basis of our inputs," a Ministry of External Affairs official said. CBI Director P C Sharma too is in touch with his counterpart in Dubai.

HTC, New Delhi

while Salim, who died on the spot, was a resident of Pakistan's Punjab province, Verma later told *Hindustan Times*. Idris admitted that he was involved in the attack and reportedly provided vital details, including the names and hideouts of others involved in the attack. He died in the local Sadar Hospital.

Police said his driving licence, issued by district transport officer Biharsharif on March 10 last year, 43 AK-47 cartridges, a Maruti Zen with a West Bengal number plate, Rs 22,200, and a consumer card (no-609329) issued to Md Zahid from the local Dixit Gas Agency were among the leads the police would like to pursue.

That Idris' driving licence was issued from Biharsharif and the fact (reported in *Hindustan Times* today) that Farhan Mallik, the self-proclaimed brain behind the Kolkata attack managed a passport from Biharsharif in November, might put the Biharsharif officials under the

scanner, sources said.

In Delhi, the Centre claimed a breakthrough in the January 22 Kolkata incident. Home Secretary Kamal Pande told a hastily-convened press meet that the Jharkhand Police had gunned down two men responsible for the Kolkata January 22 shooting. An AK-47 assault rifle had been recovered from them, he said.

But sceptics have found loopholes in the claim. Pande claimed, for instance, that Zahid had said in his dying declaration that both Salim and he were Pakistani nationals. Zahid was from Khanewala in the Multan district of Pakistan. Curiously, there were no details about Salim's origins.

Despite Zahid's revelations, the Home Ministry was at pains to explain when the two entered the country and when they moved to Kolkata from Hazaribag.

Pande also did not mention where the two men lived in Kolkata, before January 22. Neither did he specify which terrorist outfits they belonged to.

The ministry said the Dubai-based Farhan Malik alias Aftab Ahmed Ansari ran his terrorist module in league with the Harkat-ul-Jihari-Islami and the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba.

If there was any evidence on links between Zahid and Salim on one end and the Dubai-based Farhan Malik on the other, the Home Ministry preferred not to elaborate on them. Yet Pande noted the emergence of a "new trend" of using Pakistani nationals in terrorist activities in India.

More reports on Pages 3&4

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 JAN 2002

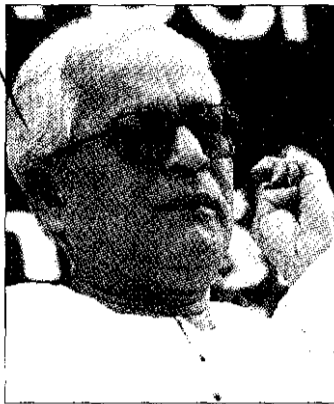
No getting around the FBI for Buddha

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 25

TERROR ANALYSTS, who came to the city from the FBI, have exposed once again the Hamletian dilemma of the Left Front in the State. It is all about what the Leftists say they do and don't do and end up doing as men in power.

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is no exception. His ideology prompts him to say no to such foreign interference. But as Chief Minister, he can't avoid receiving inputs on cross-border militancy collected by the Centre from the FBI and passed on to the State Intelligence wing.

Take for instance the FBI alert on honey shipments from Yemen. It believes that these honey containers have arms, explosives and money for terrorists in India. After a thorough investigation in the US, the FBI alerted the CBI in India that then passed on the information to the CID, State Intelligence and the police. Accordingly, the Intelligence wing stepped up vigilance on for-



BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE

eign consignments at the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport and Kolkata Port.

After September 11, the FBI has also been sharing information with India over the various terrorist groups that have a presence in Bangladesh and West Bengal.

The Chief Minister's hostility to the FBI has little grounds given similar Intelligence coordination between the US and the

Centre. He may consider it beneath his dignity to take help from a foreign agency, but that is what his Government has been doing albeit indirectly. Bhattacharjee may not like the foreign probe but he couldn't prevent FBI agent John Timothy Dowyer's coming to the city.

Home Secretary Amit Kiran Deb sounds more rational when he says, "the State would have been happy if the FBI didn't meddle here... But the State can hardly do anything if the Centre doesn't object". That reflects the political will of the LF and the constitutional constraints of the State Government.

The Chief Minister is aware of the reality especially when the world has gone unipolar. The Left, therefore, has espoused a via route theory to suit its ideology. The Centre, of late, is to the Left Front Government, the cherished medium for Intelligence coordination with the US. Bhattacharjee is ready to accept advice and assistance from the Centre knowing that some of it comes from the FBI.

There is hardly any point in the Chief Minister's denying to supply facts to the FBI when he knows the FBI will get through once he passes it on to the Centre.

The LF constituents, however, appreciate the limitations of the Government. "I share Bhattacharjee's will, but our Government is being drawn into some national and international dangers we can't ignore. We should be more cautious and diplomatic while responding to such a situation," RSP leader Kshiti Goswami said.

The same dilemma applies to the economic activities of the Left Front Government. It refused soft loans from the World Bank meant to upgrade the road network in the State on the plea that the Bank wanted to insert some revenue proposals in the Budget.

CPI(M) State Secretary Anil Biswas can express his displeasure against the US agencies recalling their role in countries like Chile and Indonesia. But the Chief Minister is left with few options if the Centre throws its gates open.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 JAN 2002

Focus on Simi members

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 25

THE STATE Government today cracked down on the banned Students' Islamic Movement of India (Simi) and madrasas and mosques that encourage subversive activities, detaining and arresting several Simi members and people with links to Islamic radical and terror groups.

Scores of people from Howrah, North 24-Parganas, Murshidabad and Malda were held. Four persons suspected of links with terrorist groups were held in Howrah and five persons with ISI and fundamentalist connections arrested from Murshidabad.

The Special Branch and Intelligence Bureau have trained guns on a number of Islamist organisations and institutions in certain parts of the city. Known activists of Simi have been put under the scanner. More arrests and detentions will follow, said police sources.

The police have unearthed some "definite clues" about Tuesday's massacre, said Kolkata Police Deputy Commissioner (Detective Department-

No FBI role, says Advani

L K ADVANI on Friday played down FBI's role in the American Center attack probe and refrained from criticising the West Bengal Government on its response to Tuesday's strike. Though maintaining that FBI has no role in the investigation of terror cases in India, he admitted Indian and US investigative agencies exchange intelligence inputs. He said the CBI today issued a 'red corner' notice against Aftab Ansari, alias Farhan Malik, believed to be the mastermind of the attack. Ansari, he said, had been "recruited" by the ISI, which also facilitated his activities in Dubai.

Advani emphasised that when it comes to terrorist incidents, State Governments conduct the probes. The Centre provides assistance if it is sought. He said Special Secretary A K Bhandari's report, submitted to him yesterday, was "factual" in nature. "It relates more to the State Government and the steps it can take so that these things are handled appropriately."

Asked if he was satisfied with the way Kolkata Police handled the case, Advani said he had "no comments to offer", adding that police in the "whole country must equip themselves with modern weapons for which Central grants are given".

HTC, New Delhi

Special) Piyush Pandey. The police are scanning more than 10,000 calls made from cellular phones in the city between 6 am and 8 am on Tuesday and are working on possible escape routes of the assailants.

Two of the five arrested at Murshidabad are Abdul Salafi and Habibur Rehman, a Bangladeshi. Salafi is a Simi

member and is said to have links with the ISI. The police have also identified a few madrasas and mosques in the district that harbour anti-nationals. Four such madrasas are in Behrampore, the district headquarters, said Sub-Divisional Officer Ashish Mukherjee. He said a few other mosques have also been identified. The police are soon expect-

ed to take in some maulvis for questioning.

The Republic Day-eve saw unprecedented security bandobast in the State today as a host of Intelligence agencies, including FBI, continued the hunt for Tuesday's assailants. Security was beefed up particularly along the border. Additional police and paramilitary forces have been deployed at Republic Day parade venues across the State, including Red Road. Sandbag bunkers and watch towers have also come up along the arterial road.

Checking has been intensified at bus terminals, airports, railway stations and highways. A special alert was issued by the Civil Aviation Ministry for the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International airport today. Howrah and Scaldah stations saw unprecedented security, with sandbag bunkers erected and RPF commandos stationed at vantage points. All trains and passengers were checked with RPF sniffer dogs and metal detectors. Checking was particularly intense in North Bengal highways.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Stay off FBI, leave it to us: Buddha

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 24

TOUCH ME NOT

IT'S BEEN three clueless days since bike-borne gunmen went on a killing spree at the doorsteps of the American Center in Kolkata. The Government has no idea yet who the killers were, where they had come from, and most important, who their real targets were. But the Marxist Chief Minister won't have anything to do with America's FBI — though his own bumbling policemen have done more than their permissible bit to destroy vital evidence at the site.

The Chief Minister admitted today that his police had still not made any concrete breakthrough in the case. But he said in the same breath that the FBI men "have no constitutional right to be here. It's an independent country. What sort of a Government is it that calls in foreign investigators? I have self-respect. I never called them. My people won't cooperate with them. We won't share any information with them. "Terrorism is our problem. We have to handle it ourselves. We are good enough," he said.

Really? Somehow, forensic experts don't agree. One of them told *Hindustan Times* today that even senior police officers hadn't done enough to protect evidence at the site.

"They should have promptly sealed off the area. Instead, they trampled the ground and let others to do the same," an officer from the State Forensic Science Laboratory said. The evidence thus destroyed could include tyre marks left by the gunmen's motorcycle or motorcycles, empty cartridges and other vital ballistic clues. "Even senior officers didn't think twice before handling empty cartridges with ungloved hands and blotting out crucial evidence by walking over the whole place," the officer added.

An American Center employ-

JAN 22: The Union Home Ministry and FBI initiate probe on the strikes separately. State officials deny reports.

JAN 23: An FBI officer calls on Chief Secretary S N Roy and Home Secretary Amit Kiran Deb at the Writers'. Deb didn't divulge what transpired, but said the State would be "happy if the FBI didn't meddle here... But the State can hardly do anything if the Centre doesn't object".

JAN 23: "FBI has been working in close coordination with the Centre," says Special Secretary to the Union Home Ministry.

JAN 23: "The State is in touch with the Centre. It is ready to take assistance and advice from the Centre too. This is enough. FBI shouldn't probe our internal matters," says Anil Biswas.

JAN 24: "I didn't call the FBI officer. Neither do I know why he had come to Writers'. It hurts my self-respect to invite a foreign agency to solve our problems. I don't know if an independent country can allow such things," says Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

ee, who reached the spot within minutes of the incident, reportedly requested some officers to seal off the area and wait for the forensic experts to arrive. He was ignored.

"When we reached the scene, we saw media people, inquisitive passers-by and police officers milling around the whole place. Only a part of the pavement had been sealed off with plastic tape. But there were police officer strolling about inside the taped-off zone itself. When we got down to collecting evidence from the road next the pavement, we found there was no evidence left. A police officer casually handed us an empty cartridge after examining it,

observing that it looked like SLR ammunition. We were aghast," the officer, who refused to be named, said. "It's absolutely necessary to sensitise the police about this. It's us forensic experts' job look for clues. Ordinary policemen must stay out of it till we are through," he said.

The Chief Minister was less averse to seeking help from the NDA-ruled Centre. "I've asked them to send reinforcements. And they have responded to my request."

He had bad news for unaffiliated madrasas and sounded a strong warning, saying those still outside the Madrasa Board's jurisdiction must immediately enlist or face closure. "We've specific information of the anti-national activities in these free-wheeling institutions. We won't allow this anymore."

About the probe, he said investigations were on, though no specific clues had been found yet.

The CM admitted that policemen on duty outside the American Center had failed to rise to the occasion. But then, "even I couldn't imagine such a strike would actually take place. Just think of the hour. It was time for change of guard. There were no commandos. The cops were caught unawares. If you call this a lapse, then..."

But the Union Home Ministry has taken a far less charitable view of the botch-up. The three-and-a-half-page report submitted this evening by Special Secretary AK Bhandari to Home Minister LK Advani hasn't minced words to say that the Kolkata Police's "response" to the shooting was poor and not up to the mark.

The report, accessed by *Hindustan Times*, points out that not only could the policemen not return fire, Lalbazar too had failed to react to the post-incident developments within a satisfactory period of time.

The police detained 20 persons today for interrogation.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 JAN 2002

State goes for joint probe with Centre

HT Correspondent
Aizawl, January 23

LESSON learnt the hard way. And now, the Government is taking no stone unturned to ensure that the agency's mistakes are not repeated.

A day too late, but nevertheless, the State Government is going for a joint operation — Cooperation and Coordination — to exchange ideas with the Centre to tackle terrorism in the State. Home Secretary Amit Kiran Deb said efforts were on to improve coordination between

the Centre and the State Government on security and fighting terrorism and hinted that the State would not hesitate to take advice and assistance as would be coming on from the Union Home Secretary to the Union Home Ministry Asok Bhattacharya who was in the city and held a meeting with the Chief Secretary Home Secretary and senior police officers — said he had come to synchronise the efforts at the Government level and expedite the investigation.

The State, however, is not yet ready to accept FBI intervention in the case. Though an FBI official met the Home Secretary today at the Writers' Buildings, but the latter would not divulge what they discussed. The State would be happy if the FBI does not come here as the only what he said. But the State cannot do anything if the Centre doesn't object, he added.

Alimuddin Street too doesn't like the FBI to get involved. "The State is in touch with the Union Home Ministry. This, we think, is enough for the probe. We don't want the FBI to meddle into our

internal matters," said EPI(M) State Secretary Anil Biswas. However, meanwhile, said though the FBI had already been working in close coordination with the Government, he had no objection if the FBI meet here in Ranchi or would investigate this

matter. He said, "What was lacking was 'mental preparedness' and 'stepped up'". Asked whose alertness was he referring to — the Government's or the security guards' on duty — the Home Sec.

etary gave no specific reply. However, despite the joggery with words, what both the Chief Secretary and Home Secretary mentioned was that the security personnel were not equipped to tackle such a terrorist attack. What was needed was updating and modernising the arms and gear used by the army.

The State has checked in with the security officers with equipped heavy arms and ammunition and beef up the strength of commandos at vital installations. The Home Secretary said the Centre would have to make easy avail-

ability of consignments of arms and ammunition. He added that it has been a year or more since the State had asked for a consignment of modern arms like AK-47 and AK-56 from the Centre, but the latter is yet to clear it.

Meanwhile, the Special Secretary to the Union Home Ministry and the State secretaries held discussions on the security measures for the State. The State has been taking more security measures at important installations such as railway stations, bridges, power generation houses.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 JAN 2002

Police detain 66 for inte

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 23

THE POLICE moved fast today, detaining 55 men in the city, eight others in North 24-Parganas and three Afghans in Howrah for interrogation in connection with yesterday's shooting in front of the American Center in midtown Kolkata.

The police are armed now with TV footage of yesterday's attack provided by the US authorities in the city. Among those detained was Altaf Reza Khan, younger brother of Asif Reza Khan. Incidentally, a terror outfit bearing the latter's name has claimed responsibility for the attack. Altaf was picked up from his 30B Mofidul Islam Lane home and whisked away to Lalbazar. Later, he was taken to an undisclosed location for interrogation.

The Barasat GRP tonight detained 12 Indians of a minority community from a Sealdah-bound local train. The GRP had information that the men, hailing mostly from South 24-Parganas and Asansol, had gone to Bangladesh to attend a religious conference near Dhaka on 18 and 19 January. All of them were carrying valid passports. Senior railway and CID officials had already left for Barasat to interrogate the men in



SPOT THE GUN: A day after poorly-armed policemen fell to a hail of AK-47 bullets, things are back to normal with lathi pro

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connection with yesterday's shooting, the GRP said.

In Kolkata, the police coordinated their investigation with FBI officials who reached the city last night. Thanks to the TV footage,

the police now have a fair idea of what the stout, medium-height and shawl-draped gunmen look like. "The footage has given us vital leads — both about the assailants and the their vehicle,"

DC (DD-I) Soumen Mitra said.

Meanwhile, commandos took position today behind sandbag buffers at the American Centre. The State is also thinking of providing security officers with

TV grab shows one bike & two ultras

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 23

CITY POLICE detectives are certain now that the gunmen who carried out yesterday's attack in front of the American Center in midtown Kolkata had come on a lone motorcycle and used the latest AK series rifles.

The police top brass today dismissed the theory floated by some leading city dailies that the killers had used two motorbikes with a white Ambassador following from close behind.

The double-bike theory was rejected, because a reconstruct of the incident, pieced together from statements by policemen injured in the shooting and descriptions provided by the Wireless Department sergeant, who lodged the FIR, had failed to support it, some detectives said. The footage from the close-circuit TV at the American Center was a bigger help, they added.

Detective chief Soumen Mitra, who is heading the probe, said, "I have seen the tape. It appears there were two assailants on a single motorcycle. That's what we have gathered so far from the video". The

three-minute footage reportedly includes a frame that shows the bike's registration plate. The sleuths themselves are tightlipped, but Special Branch sources said the number was MI 1300.

The lone-bike claim conforms to Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's statement that the attackers had come on a single motorcycle and a similar statement made by police chief Sujoy Chakraborty hours after the incident.

The police blamed the initial confusion on contradictory statements by those questioned shortly after the incident. "Some of the injured came up with conflicting statements, possibly because they still hadn't got over the shock," Deputy Commissioner Banibrata Basu said. The haze cleared after six teams from the detective department fanned out across the city at night to gather details of the incident.

"An inspector was around when the incident happened but we decided to go by the sergeant's view while recording the FIR. We felt he would have a better view of the attack," Mitra said. The sergeant's report conformed to the footage, he added.

Bush condemns attack, not sure about target

S Rajagopalan
Washington, January 23

THE US has declined to characterise the attack on Kolkata's American Center as a terrorist strike directed at US interests. The predominant view here for now is that it may have been an "anti-police action".

President George W Bush promptly condemned the attack, though. On a tour of West Virginia, he said information was still being gathered, but commented: "Terror is terror; however, it doesn't matter whether it is an attack on us or an attack on other people. You have got to work together to fight off terrorists."

The State Department, however, was unprepared to even categorise it as a terrorist attack. Spokesman Richard Boucher said he "can't say one way or the other", and referred to reports suggesting that the attackers were looking for a "clump of policemen together".

"We've seen reports that...the attack targeted the West Bengal Police in retaliation for police actions against a group that is active on the Indo-Bangladesh border, but we are unable to verify the claim," Boucher said. The attack received a passing mention on the TV networks here.

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AJ Air India, BA British Air
Airlines, BI Royal Brunei
KB Druk Air, KL Royal Di

TRAIN RI

Earliest date on which
Train No. Train/Ex

NORTH

3021 Mithila Express
2301 Kolkata Rajdhani
2313 Sealdah Rajdhani Exp
2381 Poorva Express
2311 Howrah-Dubai

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ASHOK NATH DEVI/HINDUSTAN TIMES
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Secretary to express satis-
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ments at the American Center and the US Consulate. He also held a meeting with top State officials and promised all help from the US Embassy in New Delhi.

In a daylong operation, the police raided a number of hide-outs in the city's eastern suburbs, but made no breakthrough. DC (DD-1) Soumen Mitra said he was expecting to "crack the case" in the next couple of days. Detectives also raided some hotels and guest-houses across the city.

Late at night the CID detained three teachers of Bithani Jamia Islamia Senior Madrasa from Swarupnagar in North 24-Parganas. Police suspect they could have provided shelter to some militants. A bike was seized from one of them.

The five were being interrogated at a Salt Lake police station, but police were still not certain if they were involved in yesterday's shooting, CID sources said.

The State is in touch with the Centre and has drawn up a scheme for joint operations to tackle terrorism. Union Home Ministry's special secretary Asoke Bhandari today met the chief secretary, the home secretary and the police top brass to coordinate anti-terror efforts.

Related reports on Pages 3 & 4

Buddhadeb points finger at Pakistan

HT Correspondent
Amta, January 23

THE CHIEF Minister today blamed Pakistan and the ISI for yesterday's attack on the American Center.

Speaking at a public meeting in Amta to flag off the 18th District Conference of the CPI(M), Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said. "Some days ago, the terrorists attacked Parliament and now they have attacked the American Center. We never imagined anything like this in our State. Our policemen at the Center were prepared only to prevent untoward incidents from political agitations. We never imagined that terrorists would come down and start spraying bullets from AK-47s."

According to him, "behind all these attacks, be it in Delhi, Kashmir or in Kolkata, the military rulers of Pakistan and the ISI are responsible. They won't let us live in peace. They are the ones who were behind the World Trade Center attack". But in the same breath, he held America responsible for helping in creation of outfits like Taliban and then bombarding innocent civilians in Afgha-

BOMB IN CINEMA

THE POLICE recovered a powerful bomb on Tuesday from a local cinema at Domkal, where the Chief Minister is to address a meeting on Monday. The 'time-bomb' lay hidden at Jyoti Cinema at a stone's throw from the town hub. In the middle of a show of *Gadar*, a section of the audience raised an alarm at the sound of something ticking. A large police contingent soon reached the spot and detonated the bomb.

HTC, Murshidabad

nistan to find bin Laden. "But only bombing can't destroy terrorism."

Bhattacharjee said: "Pakistan and ISI have now turned to West Bengal. In the North, the Kamtapuri Liberation Organisation (KLO) is demanding a separate State and is threatening to create an Assam-like situation in the State. In the South, the People's War Group has become active and is threatening a war against the police."

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55 detained, spy camera to provide clues

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Jan. 23. — Fifty-five people were today detained in connection with yesterday's terrorist attack in front of the American Center.

They have links with militant groups, it was alleged. But they have not been arrested. The detained have leads, police said, adding they were confident that investigations would yield results in a couple of days.

A spy camera, fitted atop the American Center, has recorded the firing and police will rely on the footage. It's going to be a major help in identifying the terrorists.

A two-wheeler was seized from Subedpur in Swarupnagar village in North 24-Parganas tonight, police said. Asked if the vehicle was used by the terrorists in yesterday's attack, police said this could be confirmed only after the forensic report was available.

The two-wheeler was kept at the residence of one of the three madrasa teachers detained last night. The three were interrogated in Salt Lake today.

An FBI official arrived here this morning and visited the American Center.

Many among the 55 people, picked up from various parts of the city, have alleged links with terrorist outfits in the country and abroad. Most of them are from Beniapukur, Narkeldanga and Entally.

Police have found some clues after interrogating them, the DC-DD said. "We are expecting a major breakthrough in the case within a couple of days. I'll not divulge the clues for the sake of the investigation," Mr Soumen Mitra said. Several hotels and guest houses in the city were raided.

there. The calls made from Dubai yesterday are also being verified."

The DC-DD said he had met the FBI official and discussed the attack with him.

The city police may take help from international intelligence agencies if necessary, senior police officers said.

Neither the senior police officers nor the home secretary gave any reason behind the policemen's failure to retaliate yesterday.

Mr Mitra said: "We are not yet sure about the Harkat-ul-Jehadi Islami's claim that they were responsible for the attack. We are checking on several other terrorist outfits."

CID officials said Harkat-ul-Jehadi Islami has hideouts in Park Circus. Asked if the state administration had any specific news of yesterday's attack, the home secretary said: "We had no specific information or hard intelligence."

Mr Ashok Bhandari, special secretary in the Union home ministry, discussed the attack with the state government today. He held meetings with the chief secretary, the home secretary, the director-general of police, and the commissioner of police at Writers' Buildings.

Later, Mr Bhandari told reporters: "We've discussed so many clues. We are hopeful about detecting the whole thing in a short time."



A detained man being taken to Bidhannagar North police station. — Shyamal Maitra

The state government has admitted that it was taken aback by yesterday's attack. The home secretary said they didn't anticipate such an incident.

The government isn't certain about the target of the attack. Is it the American Center or the city police?

Mr Amit Kiran Deb, home secretary, said at Writers' Buildings: "We are not yet confirmed about the target of the attack. It may be the USIS building or policemen posted

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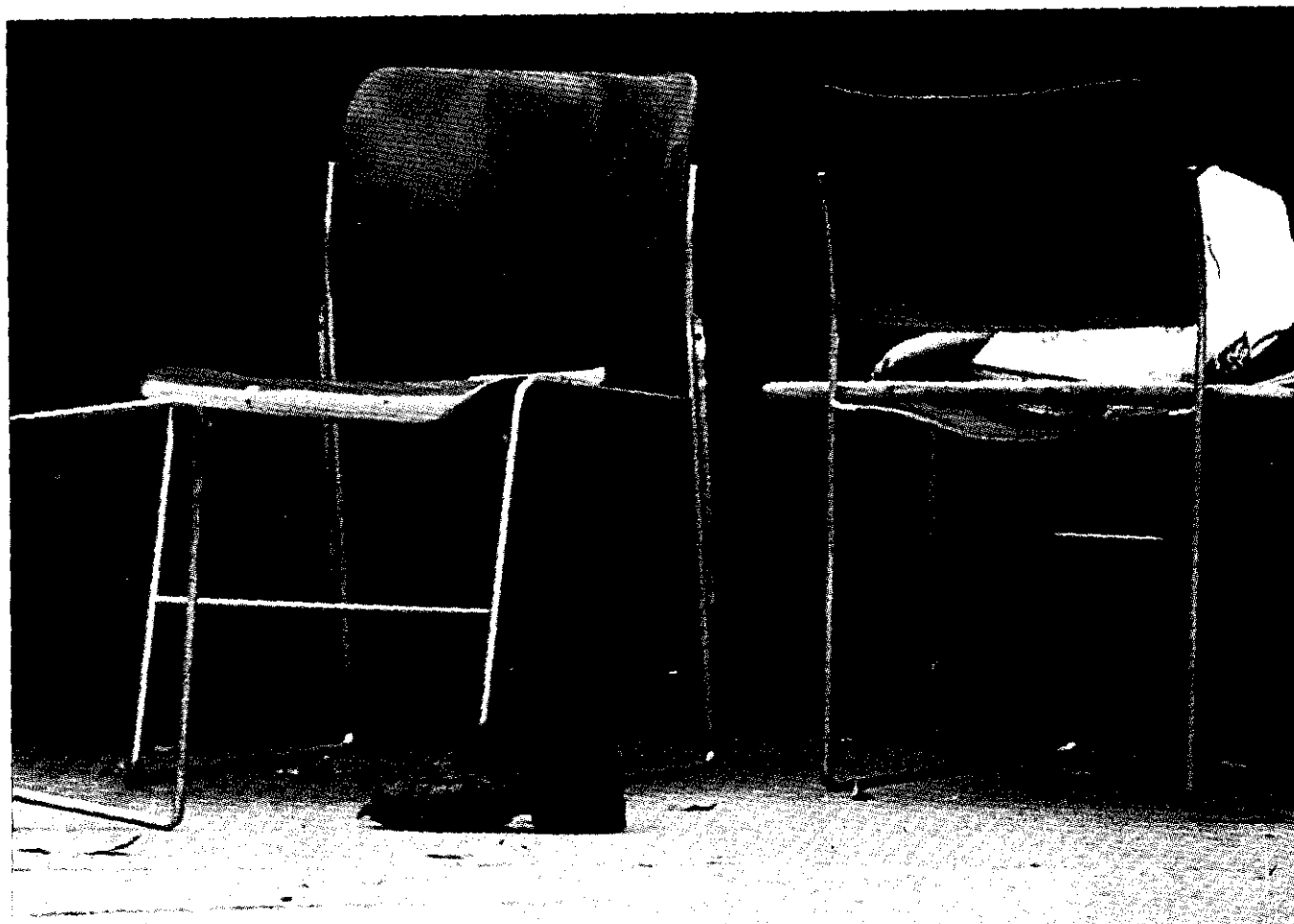
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The Star

20 pages (Includes Kolkata Plus, Business Standard and S&L)

KOLKATA WEDNES

Terrorists strike



The remains of terror: Security personnel guarding the American Center fled in panic leaving even their shoes, caps and lathis behind. — Bijoy Sengupta

Bomb hoax

KOLKATA, Jan. 22. — There was a bomb scare near Metro Plaza on Ho Chi Minh Sarani this afternoon. Police got a call that a bomb had been planted near the shopping arcade. The police went to the spot but found nothing. Another report from Suri says the headmaster of Birbhum Zilla School has received an unsigned letter which threatens to blow up Visva-Bharati and the Bakreswar Thermal Power Station on Republic Day. — SNS/PTI

Pak stand on list

ISLAMABAD, Jan. 22. — Pakistan today changed stance and declined to give details of terrorists alleged to have taken refuge in India. Instead Pakistan called for detailed discussions to sort out differences arising out of the Indian demand for extradition of 20 terrorists. — PTI

Harkat office sealed

ISLAMABAD, Jan. 22. — Police today sealed the Islamabad office of Harkat-ul-Mujahideen. Harkat was not part of the five militant groups banned by President Pervez Musharraf but was declared a terrorist outfit by the USA. — PTI

Juggle over semantics

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 22. — The attack in Kolkata has forced Delhi to get embroiled in a battle of semantics. To wit, whether to term the incident a 'terrorist attack' or a 'criminal shoot-out'.

American concerns, diplomatic caution, Centre-state politics, and investigative details seem to have contributed to this most unusual of dilemmas. Each factor, sources said, contributed to the absence of a clear government statement condemning the attack in Kolkata as 'terrorism'.

American representatives, resident and visiting, apparently conveyed that Washington was "not keen just now" to see the incident as a terrorist act. Sources said this was based on

USA's compulsions in its ongoing 'balancing act' in South Asia. With the ISI and other terrorist links of the group claiming responsibility being 'clear', sources said that an American statement describing the attack as 'terrorist' would've required "proper diplomatic and security responses" as it was an American government establishment that faced the attack.

"complicated USA's Pakistan policy". US officials here avoided the terms 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' in their media releases and briefings throughout the day. Sources said this was "to buy time" keeping "Pakistani sensitivities" in mind. Indeed, home ministry officials were earlier today preparing to term the incident as another 'Pakistan-sponsored terrorist attack'.



Bullet marks on the police van. — The Statesman

ISI, L

H Bula Devi and Anupam Dasgupta

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, Jan. 22. — The masterminds of the attack on the American Center in Kolkata have direct links with the ISI and were in touch with Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami (or Huji) leader, Omar Sheikh. Omar, involved in the attack on World Trade Center, was released in December 1999 in exchange of the passengers and crew of the hijacked IA flight IC-814.

Sources said the Huji, a Pakistan-based terrorist outfit, has claimed responsibility for today's attack. Led by Shawkat Osman alias Sheikh Farid, the outfit was set up in 1992 with Osama bin Laden's help. It has about 15,000 cadres and six camps in the Chittagong hills. The cadres, drawn from madrasas, were mostly trained in Afghanistan.

The attackers' outfit was also involved in the kidnapping of Mr Partha Roy Barman, owner of Khadim's Shoes.

A central IB official, however, said the attack was masterminded by a Kashmir-based militant outfit. The state IB had recently taken note of the fact that people with "subversive missions" have taken shelter in

'They fired 54 rounds, we didn't fire any...'

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Jan. 22. — "We were sitting and chatting when a bike zoomed in... the pillion-rider flung off his shawl and started firing..."

That's all constable Nabakumar Bhattacharya of the 5th battalion of Kolkata Police could recall of this morning's strike which catapulted this 311-year-old city on the global terrorist map.

While the unloaded arms of the men on duty were racked along the wall "like hockey sticks", they themselves were trapped at the wrong end of the muzzle with no scope of retaliation worth the name. Another constable, preferring anonymity, said: "They fired 54 rounds within about 30 seconds. And we couldn't fire even a single round as none of our guns were loaded".

It's known that the terrorists came from the direction of Esplanade and went off towards Rabindra Sadan, though IB officials hinted they could also have turned left, into Middleton Street, while fleeing.

If anything helped minimise the toll, it was the presence of a number of police vehicles. The attacked hid behind them.

According to officials, the incident occurred at a time when the 4th and 5th battalions, who were on the night shift, were about to hand over charge to the 2nd and the 8th battalions.

Mr Tapan Barik, a constable of the 5th battalion, outlined the changeover routine of the guards: "During change of shifts, the previous shift

stands in a line after handing in their unloaded weapons and the next shift assumes charge".

The fact that the attack was executed in course of this shift change, shows how well-informed the terrorists were about the security's movements. This trend, officials said, is in keeping with the records of all previous attacks, including the one on 13 December.

A senior official told The Statesman: "The norm is that the battalion about to assume charge should load their guns before entering the field. But as things are generally lax here, none bothers to do that".

However, one important difference between the attacks on 13 December and 22 January is: while the Parliament attack was foiled by the efforts of securitymen, in this case, the protectors of the city were caught pathetically off-guard.

While most victims took bullets in the upper part of their bodies, some had leg injuries from bullets fired by the terrorists chasing the fleeing men.

Anup Mondal, who died in the attack, was on wireless duty. Eye witnesses said, as he was trying to flee, the men followed him on the bike and continued to fire till he dropped dead. Blood stains were found on the stairs of Kanak Building, three buildings away from the USIS.

Another victim said from his bed in the SSKM: "Four people in two two-wheelers came and started firing. They fired indiscriminately... it seemed as if thousands of crackers had all started bursting together".



A victim too many

ke at city heart

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Jan. 22. — Terrorists struck the American Center in the city early today, killing four policemen and injuring 14, including a passer-by and a private security guard. Not a single shot was fired in retaliation. About 30 policemen were present there at that time, preparing for the change in their shifts.

Four persons were detained tonight. They are residents of Basirhat and Swarnapagar, North 24-Parganas. Two are madrasa teachers.

The injured were taken to SSKM hospital where three were declared dead. The rest were admitted, of whom one died later.

Senior police officers admitted "intelligence failure" on their part. "Till now we were under the impression that the city was a safe haven for terrorists who were being hounded out elsewhere and therefore wouldn't strike here. But today's incident has got us to think afresh," an officer said.

The chief minister too admitted that the city's security needed to be tightened. A special secretary in the Union home ministry, Mr Ashok Bhandari, reached here late in the evening to take stock of the situation.

The police commissioner, Mr Sujoy Chakroborty, said it appeared two or three militants came in a two-wheeler. One of them fired 54 bullets from an AK-47. Police found 54 cartridges on the spot. The assailants came from the Esplanade side and went towards Rabindra Sadan, he said.

At the time of the attack, around 6.30

p.m., some policemen were alighting from a police van to join duty and those on the night shift were preparing to leave. Probably that's the reason why they were taken off-guard by the terrorists. Mr Chakroborty explained that during the change of shift, those who are through with their duty unload .303 rifles before handing over the charge. Those who are going to join duty

CRPF deployed at American Center

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Jan. 22. — The CRPF was deployed in front of the USIS from 7.30 pm today, said the DC (HQ), Mr Banibrata Basu. "Normally we get information from headquarters in Delhi that forces will be deployed. But till now we haven't received any such information," Mr Basu told The Statesman at 11.15 pm. He added that the city police learnt about the deployment from a battalion deployed at the airport.

load the rifles after taking charge.

Asked why 30 policemen couldn't fight back one shooting militant, he said the cops posted there were used to controlling crowds or political demonstrators. "They were not posted there to combat terrorists."

He said that Dubai-based Aftab Ansari, a leader of the Harkat-ul-Jihadi-Islami, called a senior CID officer around 10 a.m. and claimed responsibility for the attack. Ansari

told the officer that he was involved in the Partha Roy Burman abduction case. While probing the kidnap case, sleuths had traced Ansari's phone number and found it to be identical with the abductors. Some print and electronic media offices, however, received fax messages from the Asif Raza Commandos, claiming responsibility.

Asked about the discrepancy, Mr Chakroborty said Kolkata Police didn't receive any intimation from any militant organisation. He said the Asif Raza Commandos was a new outfit formed after Raza was killed in an encounter with Gujarat police in November last year. The organisation claimed today's attack was to avenge Raza's "murder".

Mr Chakroborty said this was "an act of terrorism", not an "expression of revenge". His argument: the US interest was challenged because the incident took place in front of the American Center. Earlier at SSKM, he told journalists: "Such attacks can take place. We'll catch the culprits."

Police were confused about the details of the incident. The police commissioner said till late in the evening: "There were a maximum of three persons on the two-wheeler and a minimum of two." He admitted the investigating officers were confused over the contradictory statements of the witnesses. Some senior officers, till late in the afternoon, too made confusing statements about the number of vehicles and the militants who came to the American Center. An injured told The Statesman that four persons came in two two-wheelers.

Turn to page 2

aden spectre on dawn attack

COUNTDOWN TO TRAGEDY

- 6.30 am — Policemen on duty at American Center change shifts
- Within moments two motorcycle-borne terrorists ride past the American Center firing indiscriminately
- Terrified, police run for cover without returning fire
- Four policemen shot dead and 14 hurt



ome districts, including North 4-Parganas, Malda, Murshidabad and Dinajpur.

IB reports say members of the Lashkar-e-Mohammed, Harkat-ul-Jahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiyaba, J-Badr and Ulfa are active in several districts of the state.

The attack, sources in Delhi said, indicated that some Pakistan-backed groups are targeting India through other countries.

Around 10.04 a.m., Mr Rajiv Kumar, SP CID, Kolkata, received a call from Farhan

Malik alias Aftab Ansari from Dubai. Farhan apparently owned responsibility for the shooting and threatened similar attacks by his group in Delhi and Gujarat.

It's understood that Farhan was trained by ISI in early 2000 for covert operations in India. By

March, he was settled in Dubai and was provided with a Pakistani passport.

In July 2001, he organised the kidnapping of Mr Roy Barman. In August, sources said, he was taken to Islamabad by the ISI. He was then put in touch with Omar Sheikh.

Under Omar's order, sources said, Farhan had established a network to carry out operations "through Bangladesh". He was directed to "identify potential high-value targets" in India for abduction and secure the release of some terrorists lodged in Jodhpur Jail.

About 10 militants, led by Arshad Khan (a Pakistani national), were reportedly sent to India by the ISI through Bangladesh in early 2001.

Farhan had helped Arshad settle in Agra. The gang was busted on 29 October last year and six people were rounded up from across the country. Around the same time, a consignment of weapons sent for this gang was intercepted near Rajasthan-Gujarat border. Farhan, however, continued with his operations in the city.

(The Mumbai-based agency never denied its role in the attack. Farhan, however, denied its involvement in the attack. Pakistan denied that the ISI, and in it, add agencies.)



If the constables gunned down in front of the American Center in Kolkata. At SSKM Hospital on Tuesday. — Shyamal Maitra

Police search passengers' belongings at Howrah station. Picture by Kishor Roy Chowdhury

Borders sealed in security clampdown

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, Jan. 22: Minutes after the attack on the American Center in Calcutta this morning, the state government sounded a red alert and asked district magistrates and police superintendents, particularly in border areas, to tighten security at vital installations.

The government sealed the borders with Bangladesh and Nepal, as well as all exit points from the city.

Following the attack, security has been beefed up in districts neighbouring Calcutta. The Railway Protection Force and the Government Railway Police will keep a close watch on people travelling in suburban trains from Howrah and Sealdah stations. Sniffer dogs have been engaged to detect explosives.

In Howrah, officers of the Intelligence Bureau are acting in tandem with Howrah police to tighten security at the Amta Sporting Ground where chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee will address a public rally tomorrow in connection with the CPM's district conference. A crack commando force is being deployed at the venue, said Howrah superintendent

of police C.V. Murlidhar.

All sensitive places, including the Howrah bridge, have been placed under a security blanket as they are easy targets, said Murlidhar, who reviewed the district's law and order situation with senior officials from Central security agencies.

In North 24-Parganas, district police have been monitoring security in collaboration with CISF personnel posted at the Netaji Subhas Bose International Airport. Superintendent of police M. Harisen Verma said security personnel were checking long-distance trains and buses.

Police officials in Hooghly said patrolling has been intensified on the highway and all vehicles will have to undergo intensive checking. Plain-clothes personnel are being deployed at the Bandel Thermal Power Plant.

All five districts in north Bengal bordering Bangladesh have come under the security scanner and BSF personnel guarding the border are on high alert. North Bengal inspector general of police N.R. Das met the police superintendents of five north Bengal districts to discuss security

arrangements. Murshidabad superintendent of police Rajesh Kumar said special measures have been taken by police stations bordering Bangladesh.

"We are also in constant touch with BSF and CISF officials deployed at the Farakka barrage and the NTPC office," he added. He admitted having received reports from security agencies that insurgents may target the Farakka barrage and other vital installations during the Republic Day celebrations. Metal detectors have been installed at the Farakka barrage as a precautionary measure.

A senior official attached to the district intelligence branch claimed that a section of unemployed youths recently joined the ISI and underwent training in Bangladesh. He said police were keeping tabs on the youths' families.

Nadia superintendent of police Ramphal Pawar said steps were being taken to stop infiltration across the border. He said BSF and other Central forces have been put on alert.

Malda SP Pankaj Dutta said about 75 terrorists have entered the district from across the border. "We are yet to arrest any of the terrorists," the police official added.

THE TELEGRAPH

23 JAN 2002

Terror at Random

The 'safest' city in the country took a body blow on Tuesday when terrorists chose a soft but high-profile target to make their presence felt. Kolkata will never be the same following what is described as the first terrorist strike in the city. However, it appears almost certain that the attack was intended more as an assault on the Indian state rather than American interests, or else the terrorists would not have targeted the token and virtually unarmed police force deployed at the American Center. Nor would they have chosen early morning to execute their plan. As anticipated by them, they managed to take the policemen, armed with antiquated rifles and canes, completely by surprise and sprayed them with automatic fire before escaping. No damage was inflicted on the American Center, and the timing ensured that the victims would be policemen on guard duty and not visitors or employees at the Center. It is also significant that the terrorists ignored the fortified American consulate, situated barely a kilometre away. The carefully executed operation succeeded in extracting publicity without the terrorists having to pay any price. That the attack came barely four days before Republic day could indicate that the terrorists had decided to avoid a strike on January 26 when security agencies are expected to be more alert and better prepared to take them on. It may also signal that the attack was carried out by a small group of fanatics on their own. Lacking in resources to carry out a more spectacular strike on Republic day, they may have opted for a 'high value, low risk' option.

The attack may also prove to be a turning point in more ways than one. It has been known for some time that West Bengal is being used as a conduit for the clandestine passage of weapons, funds and personnel. There are reasons to believe that criminal elements have taken advantage of the Left Front government's secular credentials and aversion to draconian measures. Typically, the Left Front's first reaction after the attack on Tuesday was an appeal to people to maintain communal harmony. The Left Front is evidently worried that right-wing hardliners may capitalise on the attack to consolidate their ranks. But while it may be too early to predict a turnaround in the state's politics, the attack will undoubtedly strengthen the arms of hardliners within the Left Front government, including the chief minister, who has been pleading for more stringent laws and a better equipped police force to deal with organised crime. Concern has been voiced for some time about increased ISI activities and infiltration from across the border with Nepal and Bangladesh. Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had earlier demanded deployment of more para-military forces to patrol border areas and funds to put up fences. His government cooperated with the Centre in executing the ban imposed on SIMI (Students' Islamic Movement of India) and has indicated an impending crack-down on 'unaffiliated' madrassas in the state. The two immediate fallouts of the attack could be closer cooperation between the communist government in West Bengal and the BJP-led government at the Centre, and a qualitative change in the status of minorities in the state.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

23 JAN 2002

Horror on Chowringhee

55 Proving exercise for a terrorist attack? 2/1

The gruesome incident outside the American Centre on Chowringhee, Kolkata at 6.30 in the morning of 22 January in which five Kolkata Armed Police personnel lost their lives and 17 others injured, appears at first sight to have been a proving exercise for a terrorist attack. No one could have been there at that hour and if the intention was merely to damage the Centre, a landmark in the city, it would have been possible for the two attackers armed with AK-47s on a motorcycle, to walk in and throw bombs or hand grenades from inside the compound. Security outside the compound is the responsibility of the State government and it is already clear that there was a major lapse on their part. Alimuddin Street will confirm that they have given carte blanche to trouble makers like the Citu or any other front organisation of the CPI-M to have the run of the whole space outside the Centre. While the entire width of Chowringhee has been blocked to traffic, it is common knowledge that police are instructed to sit on their hands and let protesters do their worst without let or hindrance. The point being made is that the police have neither been trained nor instructed to prevent any mischief outside the favourite target of the ruling CPI-M and their numerous front organisations. And old habits die hard. Innocent personnel have paid the penalty.

This has been par for the course ever since the Centre was built and if Jyoti Basu will be honest with himself, which may be a difficult exercise, he will confirm that he knew and approved of what has ceased to surprise any resident of Kolkata these past many years. Further whenever Buddhadev Bhattacharya has tried to get some sense into the party's functioning, Basu has sought to frustrate him. It was Jyoti Basu who allowed unions to be formed by policemen provided of course they were affiliated to the CPI-M. And when Buddhadev tried to curb militant trade unions he objected — *what is militant trade unionism?* He got an answer from this newspaper. One is driven to the conclusion that if the police are unionised and trained to accept only party orders, training and discipline go out of the window and inability to grapple with incidents like this come in from the same window. It will not surprise anyone that only a few days ago a policeman was changing out of his winter uniform at midday into cooler clothes on the pavement outside the American Centre.

Buddhadev is more conscious than anyone else in the party of the dangers to national security in the present scenario, of the madrasas that have sprung up along the border with Bangladesh, of infiltration from Nepal apart from Pakistan. Credible reports speak of Musharraf having conned the Americans into allowing his commanders fighting with the Taliban to return safely from Kandahar and even created an air corridor for them. Some thousand Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters took advantage of the facility with the connivance of the Pakistanis and to survey the damage they have unwittingly caused, senior American officials, the head of the FBI and military intelligence are currently in India.

The identity of the assailants has not been established but it is quite clear that Union government officials must intervene before the trail turns cold. Writers Buildings were warned that Lashkar and Jaish would try something before Republic Day. 34 Armed Police were present on the spot but not a shot was fired. There is no sign of the motorcycle, not even the number. Contrast that with Delhi's performance on 13 December. West Bengal's police and investigating functions must be insulated from politics. //

THE STATESMAN

23 JAN 2002

Christopher Sandorini and USIS administrator M Esperdy inspect the bullet marks.

Buddha admits 'apparent' failure

Home Ministry, FBI to conduct separate probes

Tapan Das
Kolkata, January 22

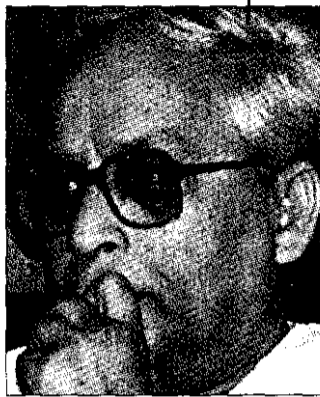
HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 22

CHIEF MINISTER Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today admitted that this morning's attack on the American Center in the city was "apparently a failure". "Neither the State administration, nor I thought such an attack could take place in the first place," he said.

He admitted that the police forces deployed at the US outpost "were inadequate and not sufficiently equipped with sophisticated arms to fight back the attack by terrorists."

The CM said one extremist group, Harkat-ul-Jihadi-Islami, had claimed responsibility for the attack. "They phoned one of our senior CID officers and called up a city newspaper office to make the same claim." This extremist outfit had bases in Pakistan and in Dubai and was responsible for Khadim owner Partha Roy Burman's abduction last year. "However, we are still verifying the identity of the group, which committed this ghastly crime," he said.

The CM also reiterated his resolve to enact Poca. "Even if this incident hadn't taken place, I would still bring it forward," he said.



BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE

Asked if the Government had any discussion with the Centre on the incident, he said, "I've spoken several times to Union Home Minister LK Advani. He asked me for details and all possible theories. I've given him my assessment."

Though it is certain now that two armed extremists had come on a red motorcycle, it was still not clear if an Ambassador was following the bike. "Some pictures recorded on a close-circuit TV at American Center are being analysed. The exact information about the car would be known tomorrow," the Chief Minister said.

DETECTIVES AND terror analysts from the FBI and Indian Home Ministry officials will conduct separate probes into today's attack despite the State Government's denial of any such possibility. The FBI, however, has not committed itself to any theory, saying it still has no evidence of a terrorist attack.

But the US crack team will go into all aspects of the security measures taken so far by the State Government to protect US personnel and property in the city. The experts will try and find out if the policemen at the US outpost were equipped enough to foil armed attacks.

They will also examine if the threat perception was correct and if the dimensions of a possible attack were fundamentally clear. The level of deployment, in terms of officers' ranks and the forces' expertise will be addressed as well.

A detailed analysis will be made of the recent history of anti-American protests in the city. Whether any specific steps or counter-measures had been taken in the light of these aggressive shows and actions against the US Government and its installations in the city will be examined too.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 JAN 2002

Madrasas face terror lash

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 22

TUESDAY MORNING'S attack on the American Centre here by suspected Islamic militants has steeled the Intelligence and security agencies' resolve to crack down on the breeding grounds of terrorism. More than 125 madrasas in the districts along the Indo-Bangla border have been identified as "schools of terror" by the State Government.

The State and Central Intelligence agencies, including military Intelligence, have compiled a list of madrasas that are concentrated in Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Malda and Murshidabad districts. "We have concrete evidence that these madrasas have been harbouring terrorists belonging to various radical Islamic groups and have been preaching terror.

They have also been encouraging subversive, anti-Indian activities," an Intelligence source told *Hindustan Times*.

The crackdown on these madrasas is expected to start within the next few days. "We have recommended that these madrasas be closed down immediately. There is no way they can be allowed to continue," said a senior officer of a Central Intelligence agency. It is learnt that the State Government is building up a foolproof case against these madrasas based on evidence provided by the Intelligence agencies just in case the closures are challenged in a court of law. "The evidence that has been provided to the State Government is concrete and stands judicial scrutiny."

These madrasas are funded by trusts based in Gulf countries.

The trusts also fund Islamic terrorism around the world.

"At least one such trust in Saudi Arabia has strong links with the al-Qaida. This trust has sponsored a number of madrasas in Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri. We have documented evidence on petrodollars routed through Bangladesh and Pakistan to build these madrasas. The names of some of these trusts figure in the lists (drawn up by the US) of those funding Islamic terrorism," said the officer.

He added that Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) has also been active through these madrasas. "We have provided the State Government with detailed transcripts of what is taught in these madrasas," the Intelligence officer said. The "lessons" in these madrasas are blatantly anti-Indian.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 JAN 2002

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FBI chief waiting for facts, ready to give assistance

By Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI, JAN. 22. The visiting Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director, Robert S. Muller, today said he would "wait and see" the facts before describing this morning's attack on the American Center in Kolkata as a "terrorist strike." However, he said, "we will be happy to provide any assistance in the probe of the incident to the Indian investigation agencies."

"The identities of those involved and the motivation behind the attack are being looked into. We will have to wait and see the full facts. It is a tragedy and an assault on the police officers. It is difficult to say anything beyond

that in the absence of full facts," Mr. Muller told a group of select newsmen at a briefing here.

Asked if he would describe the attack as a "terrorist strike" on an American establishment, he said it would be "premature" to say anything as investigations were still on by the Kolkata police.

Mr. Muller refused to reply to further queries in this regard, but said that financial linkages of some of the terrorist activities had been traced to some bank accounts in the UAE.

Asked if the outfit that owned responsibility for the strike had links with Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda, he said: "We will be following up on any leads provided

by the Indian authorities in this regard. We are interested in any information from our Indian colleagues."

Referring to the U.S. probe into the case of hijacking of IC-814, he said: "We have provided information to our Indian counterparts and expect to continue to do so both for the past attacks as well as preventing any future attacks."

The FBI chief who met the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, the CBI Director, P.C. Sharma, the Intelligence Bureau Director, K.P. Singh, acknowledged the need to establish information network on a global scale as "no one country can by itself prevent terrorism."

THE HINDU

23 JAN 2002

23 JAN 2002

Left Front's doublespeak on privatisation

Tapan Das
Kolkata, January 20

THE STATE Government's bold decision of handing over Haldia Petrochem's majority stakes to The Chatterjee Group may have hogged the headlines last week, an unmistakable proof of the change in the Leftists' mindset on the role of the private sector.

But, what escaped notice is that while the Left Front leaders took swipes at the Centre's "anti-worker" disinvestments and privatisation of public sector units, the Bengal Government was quietly courting the same policy.

The Left Front Government has been aggressively wooing private capital/investments (both foreign, and domestic) in the crisis-ridden State sector units. Privatisation of State sector units is no more anathema to the cliché-mouthing Leftist ministers. Indeed, reeling under the increasing burden of losses and rising salary/wage/bonus bills for unproductive employees and labourers, an aggressive search for better options began long back.

The cash-strapped Government has been desperately scouting for every possible form of privatisation and management control of almost all the loss-making State sector units.

The move for divestment of the State control over Great Eastern Hotel was botched last year. It was not because of the State Government's concern for the retrenched employees; an eager French hospitality chain major, Accor Asia-Pacific, backed out of the deal, as the fund-starved Government failed to clinch in time an eviction deal with about two dozen shop-owning tenants. Accor wanted the property for renovation and upgradation without any encumbrances, and on their own terms with regard to the old employees.

But this setback didn't dampen the State Government's newfound determination on the State sector restructuring and job cuts. For example, in pursuance of the State Government's policy, the Tourism Department has put on

the block several of its lodges, hotels and other facilities. The new Tourism Minister's directive says: get rid of all the legal suits/disputes involving various tourist facilities quickly, so that these can attract bids for privatisation/renovation/upgradation/management control.

And, following the new dictum — "The Government has no business to be in the business of running tourism/hospitality" — the department has been on the look out for partners for seven unviable tourist lodges. These are Kaikhali, Piyali, Mukutmanipur, Ayodhya Hills, Kalimpong Hill Top, Bethuadahari and Mecheda.

The department, according to a Cabinet decision in November 2001, has managed to land a contract for management control of the Mukutmanipur lodge-cum-restaurant with M/s A K Dutta Hotel (Pvt) Ltd. However, the lease/contract period will remain in force for 20 years, instead of 30 years as the State Government earlier insisted upon.

Sources said the West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation (WBTDC) would conclude the deal with A K Dutta Hotel on behalf of the Tourism Department. The private participant would pay Rs 1.5 lakh per annum for the first five years, thereafter Rs 1.7 lakh annually up to 10 years and Rs 1.9 lakh per year thereafter, up to 20 years. WBTDC would receive this money as fees towards the use of State Government's property and infrastructure.

However, the point to be noted is that the whole process was marked by protracted negotiations and even the interested parties threw tantrums frequently, leading to a collapse of talks. But, the Tourism Department officials never lost their nerve, claimed a beaming "match-maker".

There were as many as 10 applicants, of which six were short-listed by a scrutinising committee. Yet, only two deposited the required amount of Rs 10,000 for final selection. Besides, A K Dutta, Hotel Dreamland Pvt. Ltd. was the other finalist bidder.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 JAN 2002

Some madrasas to be under govt scanner

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SILIGURI, Jan. 19. — The state government is preparing a list of madrasas "engaged in churning out anti-national elements", Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said here today.

"All are not rotten. But we have specific information that some madrasas located in the border districts are churning out harmful elements," the chief minister said.

Without naming specific countries, Mr Bhattacharjee said some of these institutions enjoy petro-dollar sponsorship. They are not affilia-

ted with the Madrasa Board. The government has begun an investigation into the matter jointly with Central Intelligence agencies. "The corrupt ones will be shut down," he said.

The government is aware of the importance and sensitive nature of the "Siliguri Corridor" and would ensure that law and order is maintained there, Mr Bhattacharjee said. "The recent arrest of an ISI spy from Siliguri proves their presence in the region."

There is urgent need for a revision of the 1950 India-Nepal treaty for specific reasons. "I have written to Mr LK

Advani on the subject, but he is yet to respond," he said.

Mr Bhattacharjee, who had a dialogue with the Bhutanese home minister, said Bhutan has succeeded in closing down three Ulfa training camps running in that country. "The home minister told me that his government was trying to persuade the militants to leave Bhutan."

He ruled out the possibility of the militants sneaking into Bangladesh and carrying on subversive activities in India from there. Senior police officers had expressed fears to this effect.

On the contrary, militants

could entrench themselves in Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts, he said. The police have been asked to remain on high alert and deal sternly with the militants, including the Kamtapuri activists.

Mr Bhattacharjee said the Centre has sent a general alarm to the government in connection with the Republic Day celebrations.

Mr Bhattacharjee said he was "unhappy" with the progress of the Teesta Project which began in 1975. A sum of Rs 900 crore has already been spent on the project. "But even 50 per cent of the work is not yet complete," he said.

THE STATESMAN

20 JAN 2002

Govt puts tuition onus on teachers

Jaideep Mazumdar
Kolkata, January 17

THE SCHOOL Education Department is set to issue a revised order to all schools, asking them to "advise" teachers to desist from taking private tuitions. The order is part of the State Government's recent backtracking on the volatile issue. The Government now feels it would be impossible to ban private tuitions.

The present order leaves it to schools to take action "as deemed necessary" against teachers who coach students in private for monetary benefits — a climb-down from the State Government's earlier threat of taking tough, punitive action against errant teachers. "The earlier plan was to have the schools

identify errant teachers and the (School Education) Department would take action against them. This action would have been a warning, followed by deduction of salary and ultimately suspension from service. But following external pressure, we had to revise our plans and leave it to the schools to take action against the teachers," an official said.

The CPI(M)-affiliated teachers' unions were reportedly the first to protest against the School Education Department's move. "There was also pressure from the students' bodies and prominent educationists, who pointed out that private tuitions could not be banned by a mere executive order," the official said.

School Education Minister Kanti Biswas had to bow down to the pressure and revise his earlier

stand. But the teachers are apparently not happy with the present, watered-down order. CPI(M) State Secretary Anil Biswas is learnt to have counselled a further dilution. He has asked the School Education Minister and Higher Education Minister Satyasadhan Chakraborty — another votary for strong action against teachers taking private tuitions — that whether to take private tuitions should be left to the teacher's discretion.

"There is merit in the argument that instead of imposing a ban, teachers should be convinced that the prevalent practice of private tuitions is harmful for the education system and society at large. That is what we will aim to do now — take the teachers' unions into confidence and initiate a dialogue with them

so that they act voluntarily and do not take private tuitions," Kanti Biswas said.

What he did not say was that such attempts have invariably ended in failure in the past. "There is no reason why the teachers will ever agree to such a proposal. After all, they earn a lot of money from this. Talk about taking teachers into confidence and making them give up this practice voluntarily is all hogwash," an official said.

As per the new order, teachers would have to sign forms declaring that they do not take private tuitions. The school authorities

will forward the forms to the department.

The schools have been entrusted with the responsibility of monitoring the activities of teachers and taking action against any teacher found violating the declaration.

"In most schools, the headmasters themselves take private tuitions. So are they expected to take action against themselves? No school will ever initiate any action against its own teachers on this count. The revised order will just wash this whole initiative down the drain," said an official.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 JAN 2002

18 JAN 2002

IOC sulks as Chatterjee gets Haldia

Suman Layak
Kolkata, January 14

THE WEST Bengal Government has handed over the reins of Haldia Petrochemicals Ltd to The Chatterjee Group, giving it a 51 per cent stake, with the rider that the Group must bring in Rs 107 crore towards equity within a fortnight.

But the move has ruffled feathers in Indian Oil Corporation Ltd, the country's only Fortune 500 company, which was interested in a 26 per cent stake with management control.

IOC sources said: "It is coming in the way of what we were planning for HPL. We were looking forward to management control in the company."

Industries Minister Nirupam Sen said today that the State wouldn't have any more financial obligation towards the company. "It will be the responsibility of TCG to negotiate with the FIs and find a strategic partner," Sen said.

He indicated that TCG might bring in either IOC or Reliance or any one else - as it felt convenient. The State would make a

gradual exit from the company.

Sources, however, said IOC was still the first choice as a strategic partner, and TCG would now negotiate with IOC on the matter as *Hindustan Times* had reported last week.

Sen said TCG would now hold a 51 per cent stake, with the State holding 49 per cent. The Tatas' 14 per cent stake would be bought by the State.

Whether the State would transfer some shares bought from Tatas to TCG or whether fresh equity would be issued to TCG to let it acquire 51 per cent

has not been clarified. However, as a result of this, the State's exposure to the company would increase. This move has relieved the State of the responsibility of finding a partner for the project as well as the onus of financial restructuring.

Sen said, "We do not have any financial obligations now but we would be ready to offer them any other help they may need." It is now likely that Richard Saldanha would stay on as managing director of the company.

Day of chaos at Ganga Sagar

Sharmila Banerjee
Ganga Sagar, January 14

FIVE PEOPLE were killed at Ganga Sagar on a day that saw a record 500,000 pilgrims take the holy dip to mark Makar Sankranti. The movement of pilgrims came to a halt when the authorities cordoned off the gates to the fair grounds for over four hours today.

South 24-Parganas DM Alapan Bandopadhyay said: "We had to stop the movement of pilgrims last night due to heavy fog. That resulted in the block today. But had we let the pilgrims proceed, there could have been greater disasters."

The DM said the Minister State for Sunderbans Development too was asked to return. A team of 19 Rajasthan MLAs had to wait for about six hours before they could take a dip.

The authorities tonight cancelled the launch services back to Kolkata, stranding around 2,000 pilgrims on the island.

Mishaps marked the day. A



ASHOK NATH DEVI/HINDUSTAN TIMES

SALVATION SEARCH: An old man joins thousands of others in taking the holy dip at Ganga Sagar on Monday.

middle-aged woman was trampled to death when pilgrims scrambled to board Kochuberia-bound buses. A sixty-five-year-old pilgrim drowned after he slipped while boarding a launch at Doctorbari.

Five women were severely burnt when they tripped into a kadai of hot jaggery. This reportedly happened while police were shooing people, trying to make way for a passing vehicle. The driver of a trekker,

Satyaranjan Bera, was killed when his vehicle collided with a bus at Doctorbari this morning. The accident blocked traffic on the narrow 30-km stretch of road between Sagar Island and Kochuberia.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 JAN 2002

Purnendu gets Haldia control

BY SUTANUKA GHOSAL

Calcutta, Jan. 13: After two years of protracted negotiations, the Bengal government has decided to hand over the management control of Haldia Petrochemicals to the US-based non-resident Indian and its equal-stakes partner, Purnendu Chatterjee.

The deal to hand over control was signed yesterday in the presence of industry minister Nirupam Sen, finance minister Asim Dasgupta, Haldia Petro chairman Tarun Das and Chatterjee.

Confirming the agreement, Tarun Das said from Delhi: "It has been decided to hand over the majority stake to Purnendu Chatterjee. He will clearly own 51 per cent in the company. He is the right person to give leadership to the company. The West Bengal government had helped a lot to facilitate the entire process. The industry minister and the finance minister helped in the entire negotiation. (Chief minister) Buddhadebbabu was involved in the entire process."

Das added: "Without their help I would not have been able to solve the problem within three months of taking over as chairman. I am extremely happy. It is a great achievement for HPL as well as West Bengal government. I feel that the crisis will be over and it will become a healthy company. We had hectic discussions involving the West Bengal government, Chatterjee and the financial institutions."

The Chatterjee group also confirmed the development. Its officials said: "Yes, Purnendu has got the management control. But we will not divulge further details."

This will also facilitate debt restructuring by the financial institutions, without which the company cannot survive.

Haldia Petro has been seeking rescheduling of loan repayment and an interest rate cut. An



Purnendu

official of the Industrial Development Bank of India said from Mumbai that the lenders would immediately start the process of debt restructuring.

To retire high-cost borrowings, the government had earlier asked the promoters to contribute Rs 500 crore in two tranches as advance against equity. The Bengal government and the Tatas, the third and smaller partner, had brought in Rs 143 crore but Chatterjee did not. He said that unless the question of management control was settled, he would not make fresh investments.

"Every issue has been sorted out. There will be no more misunderstanding between the promoters. There will be peace in the company henceforth," Das said.

Chatterjee is now expected to take his stake up in the company from the existing 43 per cent in stages, as and when he brings in the money.

The deal puts an end to prolonged and frustrating efforts to bring Indian Oil Corporation in as the majority partner. Indian Oil had demanded management control with only a 26 per cent stake, a proposal that was strongly opposed by the promoters, mainly Chatterjee.

THE TELEGRAPH

14 JAN 2002

14 JAN 2002

LF lacks credibility in agitation: CPI

TAPAS RAY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Jan. 12. — The state CPI has said the Left Front "lacks credibility" in its agitation and propaganda against the Centre over various "scandals", as a section of Left Front leaders and workers have fallen prey to the "bourgeois vices" of bribery and corruption.

The CPI also finds hegemonistic tendencies in the LF, "which has been run-

ning according to the big partner's wishes." It says decisions are often taken unilaterally and imposed upon others.

These remarks find place in the political resolution adopted at the party's recent state conference at Barasat in North 24-Parganas. The Front, the document says, has become "a partner of the bourgeois order."

The resolution strongly criticises the LF on several issues while noting that the

political direction. Here, the resolution notes, the LF yielded primacy to the government. There appeared an increasing trend to solve problems through the government and administration, rather than through movements.

The LF is no longer a "working people's weapon," as it has become averse to struggles even in theory. The rationale extended is that it's "our government," and any agitation may lead to its

destabilisation. That the Left Front and the state government are two distinct entities, with distinct commitments, is lost sight of. The CPI resolution lists a number of government "failures", including education, health, transport, power, industry, labour and roads. "People's discontent has been rising, as requests (for redressal) and complaints have yielded no results."

The resolution blames the LF and the government (including the administration) equally for the lack of industrial development. It says the government and administration have failed to search for resources, carry out research and development, build industrial infrastructure, set up new industries and end industrial sickness. At the same time, the Left Front has lacked initiative. They together pushed the state towards despondence and a lack of direction, the resolution says.

THE STATESMAN

13 JAN 2002

Buddha faces bandh with carrot & stick

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Jan. 8: Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today indicated that the January 10 bandh called by the SUCI was based on "non-issues".

At Writers' Buildings, Bhattacharjee termed the Trinamul Congress-backed 24-hour Bengal bandh "unfortunate". "I have made it amply clear that the rise in power tariff has nothing to do with the state government's policy. We had to raise prices according to guidelines laid down by the State Electricity Regulatory Commission," the chief minister said. He hinted that those opposed to the hike should move court instead of resorting to a bandh.

Touching on another issue behind Thursday's bandh, the hike in college fees, Bhattacharjee said it was a long-pending decision. "We went for a rise in college fees only after a very long wait and I can assure all that no student coming from a needy family would be affected." In an attempt to discredit the bandh sponsors, he pointed out that students were not disgruntled.

Bhattacharjee also felt that

those who have called a bandh over the increase in hospital charges "have not done the right thing". "You have to remember that most beds in government-run hospitals are free and the charges have been raised only in some cases," the chief minister said.

He added that health minister

Suryakanta Mishra had said in the Assembly that the new charges can be reviewed, and that an announcement does not mean it is a final decision.

A determined Bhattacharjee said the government would run public transport as usual on Thursday. "My chief secretary has already spoken to the airports authority and the railways to ensure that they, too, maintain normality," the chief minister said.

Bhattacharjee added that if state employees kept away from offices without good reason during the bandh, action would be taken according to the rules.

The state BJP today decided to oppose the bandh even though its ally, Mamata Banerjee, has



Buddha

extended moral support to the strike. BJP vice-president Muzaffar Khan said tonight the party was opposed to any sort of bandh since this would hamper the state's development. "We feel there are other avenues to highlight grievances against the ruling party," he added.

State Congress president Pranab Mukherjee felt that people have the democratic right to protest the hike in hospital and electricity charges. "But to resort to bandh is not desirable," he added.

Speaking about the ISI threat in the state, the chief minister commended the police and said they have been alert in rounding up ISI agents and their accomplices. "I have said it in the past and I will say it again that the ISI is active in West Bengal," Bhattacharjee said.

The Siliguri arrests have made the state intelligence agencies more aware about the ISI network here, he added. The police have tightened security in north Bengal, where a special alert has been sounded.

THE TELEGRAPH

9 JAN 2002

Buddha admits ISI peril in State

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 8

9 8 3

ADMITTING THAT the ISI is very active in the State, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today said the police are on high alert. The recent arrest of nine ISI agents in Siliguri has provided major leads and would go a long way in tackling the menace, he added.

The Chief Minister said those arrested are "big catches" and there are more on the pipeline. Some more arrest have taken place, but will be divulged later. He said the arrests have thrown considerable light on the ISI net-

HC1

work in the State. DIG (Headquarters) Narayan Ghosh said the Centre had asked the State to deploy a special police force in border areas. The State police have initiated tight vigilance on the North Bengal-bound buses and trains and dog squads have also been pressed into service.

Intelligence agencies are zeroing in on the hawala route in North Bengal as it holds the key to ISI funding in the region. Two hawala traders were picked up today as part of this crackdown.

Intelligence sources said Dilshad has not been revealing much about his contacts and his

9/1

plans. "So we decided to turn our attention to the hawala route through which he was getting the funds. We have since picked up two persons and are sure of nabbing more soon. Through their confessions, we will be able to piece together what Dilshad was actually up to," a senior Intelligence officer said.

The 33 Corps based at Sukhna near Siliguri is conducting its own investigations into Dilshad's contacts in the forces. GOC Lt-Gen Ashok Chaki is overseeing the investigations. Dilshad's main contact was a jawan in the Army Supply

Corps (ASC) unit at Sukhna. During interrogations, he threw up names of a few more Army personnel whom he had managed to befriend and get sensitive information from.

The Army has started interrogating a non-commissioned officer over the Pakistani spy ring busted last week. Rahul Kumar of Army Medical Core is being grilled by Army officers who have flown down to Siliguri from New Delhi. "A breakthrough is expected when two ISI facilitators in Delhi and Kolkata are brought to book within a day or two," said an Intelligence source.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Tirunamul leader chooses wrong vehicle for political comeback

Bandh hit or flop, Mamata is a loser

9-8 WS 9-1

BY VASHIS CHAKRABARTI

Calcutta, Jan. 9: If bad politics is all about defending the indefensible, Mamata Banerjee has confirmed her bad patch once again by deciding to support today's bandh call. As this would be perceived as her first major offensive against Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee since last May's electoral defeat, it was crucial that she did not begin the new battle as a loser.

But there is no way the bandh can throw her up as a winner: Bandhs have become so irrelevant in the fast-changing economic and political climate that even the Marxists, the original sinners, now desperately try to avoid them. The bandh, called by small ginger groups like the SUCI and some Naxalite factions, can succeed in halting work and transport to some degree or fail to do so. Ironically, it is not her bandh - she has only lent it "moral support" - but its success

or failure will be laid at her door because the small parties are not strong enough to disrupt public life on their own. And she can gain little either way.

She has thus landed herself in another pretty mess by committing herself to the bandh. Bandhs, imposed by force and fear, have rarely been a barometer of public support. To avoid its failure, her supporters have to do precisely the kind of messy things that gave her a negative image and cost her the elections. The more she does to succeed in this first new battle, the more her disruptive image will stick. The gainer clearly is her adversary, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, who will point her as the spoilsport in Bengal's new leap forward for economic reform.

In fact, her support to the bandh has begged more questions than it has answered even for her own people.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

OPEN AND SHUT

Officially working

- Airport
- Metro rail
- Long-distance trains

- Ferry service
- Bus services of CSTC, CTC, SBSTC
- Trams
- Gas service
- CMC
- Fire brigade

*Subject to disruption

Partial service

- Private bus
- Minibus
- Auto-rickshaw
- Taxi

Closed

- New Market
- Burrabazar
- Canning Street market
- Ezra Street market
- Cinemas
- Circus

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Bandh

► FROM PAGE 1

If she felt so strongly about the issues on which the bandh has been called, they are asking: Why didn't she call it herself? If it fails, she, and not the SUCI, stands to lose. If it turns violent to succeed, she takes the blame. If the bandh once again blacklists Bengal for investors, she, and not the ruling Marxists, would be projected as the villain.

If it is difficult to see how she benefits from the bandh plunge, it is not so difficult to see why she chose to take it. Having lost the polls, her place in the Union Cabinet and also public esteem by doing another somersault to go back to the BJP, Mamata suddenly found herself in a vacuum she had never known.

The void could have been filled by a return to the Cabinet. But luck was not on her side yet. The December 13 attack on Parliament and the subsequent heightening of India-Pakistan hostilities stumped her chances of an early return to power in New Delhi.

So she decided to return to the streets in Calcutta, which made her political career once upon a time. As the principal opposition party in Bengal, she has every right — and obligation — to oppose government decisions which she found harmful to public interest.

The increases in electricity, hospital and education charges have been criticised even by some of the CPM's partners in the ruling Left Front.

Even her party had organised a few street-shows recently on these issues with no great signs of large public support. These shows should have told her that old spectator sports no longer draw large crowds. Instead of learning from these failed shows, she has committed herself to yet another old show that repels the people most, particularly in the new milieu. Not only is her timing bad, her method looks mad.

There could not have been a worse beginning for Mamata's new campaign.

THE TELEGRAPH

9 JAN 2002

N Bengal vigil stepped up



BISWAROOP BASAK/HINDUSTAN TIMES
ISI agent Mohammed Dilsad about to be produced in a Siliguri court on Saturday.

Pramod Giri
Siliguri, January 5

SECURITY AT vital installations in North Bengal has been beefed up following the arrest of an ISI agent, Mohammed Dilsad, and four of his accomplices on Friday from various places near Siliguri.

More raids are being conducted at various places in North Bengal and Delhi. Intelligence sources said one of the Dilsad's aides, reportedly arrested in Delhi, would be brought here in a few days.

Police believe more ISI agents could be arrested on the basis of information given by Dilsad during interrogation. They, however, refused to give details.

Dilsad and four others were produced in court today amid tight security, hours after the scheduled time as a mob gathered on the premises. Shiv Sena activists and lawyers raised slogans against the ISI.

Intelligence officials who interrogated Dilsad, said he was sent to North Bengal by the ISI to collect

information on civil and military installations and the movement of the army. Dilsad had already sent some information to ISI officials in Pakistan via Dubai. Sources said the man arrested from Delhi is an ISI link man and was held last night on the basis of information given by Dilsad.

Meanwhile, rumours are doing the rounds that the Army has identified some personnel as being involved in leaking information. Denying the reports, sources in the Army said Dilsad has not revealed any link with army personnel or their helping in acquiring information.

An intelligence officer, however, said the army has detained one personnel of the Veterinary Corps for interrogation. Army sources denied the report.

Intelligence sources said more ISI agents are active in North Bengal, especially Siliguri. They said the network was sophisticated in the region and the agents did not know each other.

Is Army ready for the worst?

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, January 5

AS THE leaders of India and Pakistan keep the world's attention riveted on the Saarc meeting, thousands of Servicemen back home are getting ready for action. Thousands of officers and jawans of the Eastern Command have been recalled in the past week. Forces from the eastern side are being moved to strengthen the ground forces of the infantry and artillery stationed in Jammu, Jaisalmer and Ganganagar sectors in Rajasthan. The Eastern Railway and the North-East Frontier Railway are plying special military trains from Kolkata and Guwahati to stations closest to the Indo-Pak border.

"This kind of mobilisation occurred during the 1971 War. We call it the state of highest alertness," an Army officer said. "Ground forces from Nagaland, Manipur and a few elements

from Assam, Sukhna and the reserves in the command headquarters are being deployed in RS Pura in Jammu sector and in Jaisalmer and Ganganagar. The men from the East are moving to the frontiers," he said before boarding the train for Jammu.

The Indian Army has already put in place two commands (Northern and Southern) along the border and additional forces from the three corps stationed in the Eastern Command are being deployed to provide back-up to the strike force. This is excluding the powerful Western Command that will also be deployed in case of an offensive by Pakistan.

"Many of the officers and jawans being moved from the east to the frontiers have taken part in Operation Vijay," another officer said. "The forces are trained in insurgency warfare and therefore can acclimatise easily to the hilly terrain in Kashmir," he said.

According to Army Intelligence, Pakistan has already deployed three corps in the ground force along the border. Pakistan is giving more importance to the Jammu region because with snowfall in the higher regions during the winter.

It hopes to sneak in militants and regulars while engaging the Indian Army at Punjab, Jammu and Rajasthan. The offensive will be as during the Kargil conflict, aimed at cutting off the Ladakh-Leh section.

"Pakistan has already placed AD guns and anti-aircraft missiles in all important cities like Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore and in all important military installations apprehending air-strikes," an Army official said. "Given a choice, Pakistan would have put their entire army along the Indo-Pak border, but they have to concentrate ground forces also along the Afghanistan border to contain the Taliban influx," he said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 JAN 1992

Amartya cries 'shame' at State education

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 5

AMARTYA SEN, who has always stressed the importance of education, today said West Bengal's education system is a "shame".

Somnath Chatterjee, CPI(M) MP from Bolpur, was present at the USIS lecture where Sen was speaking. He brushed off the comment when reporters sought his reaction. "He didn't say it. Do not put words in his mouth."

Sen also underlined the importance of education in a globalised economy at the lecture. He said the debate on whether to oppose glob-

alisation is outdated. "We need to make sure that the entire population benefits equally from globalisation. For that, there has to be preparedness through education."

Sen said while West Bengal has set an example for the world in land reforms, its education system is a shame. He quoted examples documented by a recent study by the Pratichi Trust to illustrate his point.

The study documents an instance where SC-ST students are made to sit separately from the rest of the class. "There are many instances where these students are treated badly."

He came down on the practice of private tuition. The Pratichi study team had met students of Classes III and IV. It found that only 10 per cent children who took private tuition could sign their names, whereas 80 per cent of those who did not could sign. Children of Classes III and IV, Sen said, should know a lot more than how to sign their names.

"This is something we are trying to do today. But Japan did this 100 years ago and China did 50 years ago," he said. "When economic reforms came to China, social and educational reforms had already prepared the people

for the opening up of new opportunities. This is something that we have failed to do in India."

India has an advantage in democracy. In China, the lack of it is proving to be a bit of a drag now and soon China will have to think about bringing in more democracy in some way, he said.

Sen stressed that globalisation has been around for more than 1,000 years. Printing technology was developed in China, decimal system in India. Modern industrial development are based on these early developments and the world has benefited from such exchanges.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 JAN 2002

... of human justice from ...

Divided district

9.8 '83 WB ST-4

Midnapore's bifurcation was long overdue

There is no reason to dispute Buddhadev Bhattacharya's contention that the division of Midnapore was necessary to streamline administration. Not that smaller districts are shining examples of good governance. What, for instance, has been done about the perennial floods in Malda and Murshidabad with the steady erosion of the banks of the Padma posing a serious threat? Nevertheless, Midnapore was an exceptional case — the largest district in the country that needed to be split in order to be manageable. The fact that electrification in Midnapore is a mere 50 per cent in the rural areas compared with 87 per cent elsewhere could well be the result of sheer size. The bifurcation should enable the state to step up the electrification programme despite the fact that power is not the only problem in what is now East and West Midnapore and the state's coffers will possibly permit development programmes only a limited scale. But with East Midnapore including the industrial belt of Haldia, the new district is perhaps better placed to sustain its own interests though agricultural performance in other parts are equally encouraging. It only deserves an efficient administration to ensure that both districts become self-sufficient.

The question survives as to why the district with so much potential was allowed to suffer. Recent efforts to set up a Rs 200-crore medical college and a string of private engineering colleges to provide for students who fail to gain admission to Kharagpur's IIT do not explain the neglect in the field of education. While Kharagpur represents the failure to become an industrial growth centre despite the location of the IIT, the birthplace of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar presents the sad story of an unfulfilled dream of taking education to the lowest level. There is also the peripheral problem of Naxalites, which though not as serious as in Bihar and Andhra, cannot be neglected considering the large population of poor tribals who are apt to become willing pawns in the hands of extremists. However delayed, the division of the district raises hopes of a new beginning — this is encouraging enough.

THE STATESMAN

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Police claim ISI catch

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The police said they had confiscated two pocket diaries that contained a host of phone numbers of ISI contacts in India and Pakistan and of link men in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"We also seized several grid maps of all the major army installations in north Bengal, including the 33 Corps headquarters at Sukhna and Bengdubi, as well as the airforce station in Hashimara and army station at Binaguri. This apart, we seized a state-of-the-art digital camera, with several floppy discs, exposed film rolls and 19 photographs of major army and public installations," Chander said.

There were pictures of New Jalpaiguri Railway station and oil installations. Dilshad may have e-mailed the photos to his Dubai contacts, the police said. A Chinese-made hand grenade and 500-gm of RDX were found at Dilshad's house.

"We also seized documents pertaining to classified movements of troop trains from the region to the western front. A list of army officials, their respective ranks and units was also seized from the spy," Chander said.

Dilshad's arrest led the police to four other members of the alleged spy ring. One of them is an army supply corps jawan and three others are residents of an area bordering the Khaprail army headquarters in Sukhna.

"We arrested a cleaner of 5033 ASC battalion posted at Sukhna cantonment, Mohammed Azad (30). Azad is a long-serving ISI operative," the police said.

The others are Azad's brother Mohammed Sajjad (24), Manish Goel (37) and Mohammed Salim (23).

"ISD call receipts seized from Dilshad revealed that he used to regularly call up his ISI bosses in Pakistan and Dubai. Occasionally, Dilshad also made ISD calls from his in-laws' house," Chander said.

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...allegedly arrested with four others for spying

Darjeeling police claim ISI catch

FROM PROBIR PRAMANIK (P-1)



Dilshad (masked). Picture by Raju Bhattacharya

Siliguri, Jan. 4: Acting on a tip-off from a central intelligence agency, Darjeeling police today arrested an alleged Pakistani national and a senior Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) operative and four of his Indian agents.

The Indians included a jawan from Siliguri. The police claimed the group had plans to blow up major army and public installations in north Bengal.

Thirty-two-year-old Mohammed Dilshad, a "master ISI agent", was paraded at a news conference here this evening. The superintendent of police, Darjeeling, Sanjay Chander, said: "On a tip-off from a central intelligence agency, we conducted a joint raid and 'ambushed' Mohammed Dilshad, a Pakistani national."

He said Dilshad was caught from Darjeeling More, on the outskirts of Siliguri town, early this morning when he was making a call to an ISI link in Dubai from a public phone booth.

"Dilshad, a resident of Hyderabad in Sindh province

of Pakistan, entered India with a proper visa through the Wagah border in August 2000," Chander added.

Intelligence agencies had been keeping a close watch on Dilshad ever since he married a local lady on June 23 last year. During interrogation, Dilshad revealed he was trained by the ISI's senior area-in-charge of Sindh province, Major Ahmad, and Subedar Gul Mohammad at Hyderabad (Sindh), along with another operative Razi Jahan.

The two ISI agents, part of a highly-trained group in the use of explosives, was given their final brief by ISI's Karachi chief, said to be Col. Khatak. Dilshad and Jahan entered India together. Jahan headed for Hyderabad in Andhra.

After spending a month in Darjeeling district and making detailed grid maps of the region with army installations, he settled in Siliguri and rented a house at Adarsh Nagar, calling himself a "dealer in leather jackets". He soon married 25-year-old Sabin Begum.

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CPI(ML) angles for LF partners' support

Liberation dismisses Mamata backing

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 4

THE CPI(M-L) Liberation, which has jointly called the Bangla bandh on January 10 together with the SUCI, has asked for moral support from the Left Front partners like the RSP, Forward Bloc and the CPI.

Liberation State secretary Karik Pal confirmed today that he had sent letters to all the three parties, seeking help to make the bandh a success. He considered it nothing unusual in view of the fact that these Front partners had been vocal against the State Government for the raise in power rates, hospital charges, educational fees in schools and colleges as well as the proposed imposition of Prevention of Organised Crime Act (POCA) in the State.

He pointed out these were the precise issues on which the bandh was being called. "They may be within the Front because of unavoidable political compul-

sions but by being publicly critical of the State Government on these issues, these three parties have already strengthened our resolve to make the bandh a success. Their sympathies are with our cause and that is a big enough gain," argued Pal.

He was confident that the issues for which the bandh was called had the support of a large section of CPI(M) supporters as well. "The measures are thoroughly anti-people and show the mental bankruptcy of the CPI(M) and its Government. There is no ground for such raise in charges and the arguments offered in defence that it would help the Government improve its services were too hollow," Pal said.

As an obvious build-up to the bandh, Liberation supporters went on an agitational programme all over the State today. Over 6,000 workers were arrested, including 300 in Kolkata. The issue is also likely to feature in the party's central committee

meeting between January 7 and 10. The meeting will also take up other issues like Poto and Poca, the forthcoming election in UP and the war threat.

The party's State secretary said it wanted a peaceful bandh but declined comment on whether cadres would block roads and trains. "We do not recognise the State-imposed ban on road and rail blockade, which we believe remain effective tools of democratic struggle. We will try to ensure the bandh's success through peaceful means and the Government will be responsible for any untoward incident on that day," he said.

Pal was dismissive of Mamata Banerjee's support to the bandh. "We have never asked for her support. People of the State do not need Mamata for keeping democratic traditions alive," he added, criticising Left Front chairman Biman Bose's "vituperative comments" against the Press as well.

CAUSES RIGHT, BANDH WRONG: PANJA

DISGRUNTLED TRINAMOOL leader Ajit Panja on Friday said he supported the causes for which the SUCI has called a State bandh on January 10, but criticised the manner of protest. Panja also refused to support the SUCI's clamour for a rollback of Poto, as he felt the present circumstances "did not warrant that the Centre should be disturbed".

Trinamool chief whip Sudip Bandopadhyay reacted to the SUCI's dismissal of its unilateral support. He said SUCI was too small a party to make such noises but as the biggest Opposition party in the State, Trinamool's support would only provide a fillip to the movement against the Government's policies.

Panja, who chaired the rebel AITC working committee meeting, was directed by it to take up the issues with SUCI president Prabhakar Ghosh. Panja said: "Objection to the core State issues are welcome. The hike in fees at educational institutions and hospital is uncalled for. We, however, do not support violation of law, for an *amshaz* or a *sayyagraha*," he said. His objection also stems from the Calcutta High court and Kerala High Court's directives in this regard. "When the Left parties in Kerala went to the Supreme Court against the ruling, the Court while upholding the ruling had termed bandhs as wholly illegal which is against the fundamental rights of common people," he said.

Panja was sharply critical of the SUCI statements expressing objections to disinvestment and enactment of Poto. "The present situation demands all possible action against terrorism and presently in the context of our neighbour," he said.

CPM condemns 'unethical' bandh

9-81 MB HC-5 4/1



Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Jyoti Basu and Harkishen Singh Surjeet at the 36th foundation day function of the *Ganashakti* in the city on Thursday.

SUBHENDU GHOSH/HINDUSTAN TIMES

BJP backs CPM on hospital rates

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 3

IN AN ironic turn of events, the State BJP appears to be moving closer towards the CPI(M) on the Bangla bandh issue, with the party virtually deciding not to be a part of the Statewide strike on January 10, called by the SUCI and CPI(M-L) Liberation and supported by the Trinamool Congress.

The party has on the contrary lent full support to the Left Front Government decision to raise power rates, hospital charges and fees of schools and colleges.

"The State Government should have hiked these charges long ago in stages," said president of the State unit of the BJP Asim Ghosh.

He wondered at the rationale behind the bandh call. "Don't they realise that the charges need to be revised in keeping with the times? If the rates are not increased, it means further official subsidy to sustain the services and further wastage of public funds, which are used to pay these subsidies," Ghosh said.

"It's a surprise that the pro-bandh groups are not aware of this basic fact when they talk of taking up the people's cause."

Ghosh said the party would take a final decision on the issue only after a meeting of the State party executive committee but indicated clearly that they would prefer to keep away from the strike.

"Let's only hope that raise in these charges will lead to a better service to the people", he said.

More forthright in his views was State BJP vice-president Muzaffar Khan, who made it clear that they would never be party to such a futile exercise.

"The bandh may be ostensibly for a populist cause, but not for a people's cause," he remarked.

Khan said that they were against any such bandhs in the State as this only gives the State a bad name. He said such moves were keeping investment back from the State.

"How can the State have economic prosperity if such strikes take place with unvarying regularity. Industrialists are already shying away from the State because of lack of work culture. It is impossible for any sensible citizen to support such a misadventure", said Khan.

Since the bandh issues are critical as well of the Central Government and its policies, Khan said BJP participation in the bandh is ruled out.

Meanwhile, the UTUC (Lenin Sarani) at a Press conference today expressed full solidarity to the bandh and asked for support from all the trade unions.

The UTUC State secretary, Sankar Saha, said that the bandh was also meant to focus on the workers' plight in the wake of anti-worker policies being pursued by both the BJP-led Centre and the CPI(M)-led Left Front.

He was not willing to give too much importance to the Trinamool support to the bandh. "Mamata Banerjee is entitled to take decisions on the issue on her own, but we are not anyway concerned with it", said Saha.

Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee has announced her support to the bandh despite the BJP refusing support.

The BJP and Trinamool have lately been trying to patch up old wounds. During Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's recent visit to Visva-Bharati University, attempts were made to revive ties between the BJP and Trinamool.

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 3

ALIMUDDIN STREET has never been so annoyed with SUCI. Party leaders spent considerable lung power condemning the SUCI bandh at the 36th anniversary celebrations of the CPI(M) mouthpiece, *Ganashakti*. And in a bid to quell the resentment that has broken out even in the Left ranks over the new hospital charges, Front chairman Biman Bose announced that the Government would reduce the hike.

State CPI(M) secretary Anil Biswas urged party workers to frustrate the "unethical bandh". He also criticised the Trinamool Congress for supporting the bandh.

"Strangely, the Trinamool Congress, that has no ethics, has lent moral support to the bandh," Biswas said.

Jyoti Basu, on the other hand, took the side of State Government employees without whose support the Front can't foil the bandh. He said the media was blowing up the "work culture" issue out of proportion.

"It appears from reports that State Government employees sit idle, as if ministers only work and the staff don't. Cite one example where Government employees' organisations other than ours have welcomed the decision to punish offending colleagues. They have urged to pull up officers also," Basu said, in a move to make peace with the staff who were hurt by Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's recent remarks.

Basu tried to tone down differences between Left Front partners on the ban on blockades. He didn't condemn the ban but argued that workers or political parties should resort to

strikes instead of blocking roads. "People put up blockades when they cannot mobilise enough people to go on strike. If they have a genuine demand, they can go for a strike."

"The downtrodden should not surrender their rights even if it is a Left Front Government here. But they should also consider the productivity of companies," Basu said.

The Front patriarch accused the media of trying to drive a wedge between the party and the Government.

"It is as if Ministers want a developed Left Front and the party does not. The media wants ministers to rise above party guidelines and perform their duties," he said. "Some people are keen to prove that the Left Front did nothing in the past 24 years. They will never succeed. We stand united and so does the Left Front," Basu said as Chief

Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee looked on.

But Biman Bose's desperation was showing. He called journalists names and said the media was entirely responsible for the bickering within the Left Front.

Cabinet meeting

The Chief Minister today called a Cabinet meeting on January 10, the day that the SUCI plans to observe a bandh. Notices have been sent to all Cabinet ministers and Government employees have been asked to attend duty on that day, failing which they will be show-caused.

The State Government will operate transport services. DGP Dinesh Vajpai said the police were prepared to meet all eventualities.

New Year, new district

Arindam Sarkar
Tamluk, January 1

WEST BENGAL got its 19th district today as Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee formally bifurcated Midnapore into East and West.

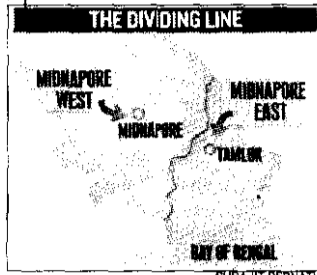
Addressing a huge gathering at the Rakhal Memorial Football Ground to mark the inauguration of East Midnapore, the Chief Minister said there have been adverse media reports against the division and many had also agitated against the step, but it was a practical necessity that led to the bifurcation of this district with over one crore population.

"The decision to bifurcate Midnapore was taken on August 18. Thereafter, I held meetings with all political parties, institutions and organisations. Many suggested that it should be divided into four parts, some said three. Some even demanded that district be kept undivided. After discussing the issue threadbare, I thought it wise to make Tamluk the headquarters of the new district. It has all the required infrastructure and logistics. But definitely more needs to be done," Buddha said.

Hinting at the boycott of the function by the Trinamool Congress, the BJP and other parties for not being invited "properly" and for not "paying respect" to the people of Tamluk, Buddha said snags are inevitable in big functions.

"It's unfortunate that such an historic function was spoilt by the highhandedness of the Government," said Tamluk Trinamool MLA Nirbed Roy.

Buddha said: "East Midnapore will have Egra, Contai, Tamluk and Haldia. In Tamluk, we already have irrigation



facilities, a municipality and hospital. I also plan to have two engineering colleges at Haldia and Tamluk. We are thinking of setting up a medical college in Midnapore that will cost around Rs 20 crore." Buddha said.

The creation of the new district and blocks, he said, was in keeping with his belief that the State cannot be developed if the administration is limited to Writers' Buildings.

"We believe in decentralisation, where districts, municipalities, blocks and panchayats will interact with people and help in the State's development. Here, I would like to say that in the last 25 years, we have achieved a lot in Midnapore, but we need to do much more. This is one district where special attention should be paid on literacy and power as about 50 per cent villages don't have electricity."

The function was attended by ministers from the district Surjya Kanta Mishra, Kiranmoy Nanda, Nanda Rani Dal, Maheswar Murmu, Prabodh Sinha, Sushanta Ghosh, Chief Secretary Sourin Roy, Home Secretary Amit Kiran Deb, DMs M V Rao and Anil Verma and SPs K S Meena and Anuj Sharma. Veteran freedom fighter Susha Dhara was also present.



Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at a ceremony in Tamluk on Tuesday marking the formal division of Midnapore.

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