

# Huge ammo haul in Hooghly

HT Correspondents

Hooghly/Kolkata, December 24

CLOSE ON the heels of the discovery of a truckload of bullets in Kolkata's port area, the police notched up one of the biggest arms hauls in the state on Wednesday. Over 5,000 rounds of ammunition and huge caches of arms, including AK-47s, were recovered from two separate places in Hooghly, the first lot confiscated from a house in Baidyabati and the second from an under-construction house in Polba.

At Baidyabati, the police seized 3,000 pieces of ammunition of various bores, including 2,000 pieces that fit AK-47s. Also found were material used to make

grenades, spares of single-barrel guns and People's War leaflets. Preliminary investigations reveal this cache was meant for the People's War.

Special IG (Headquarters) Narayan Ghosh said the ammunition was recovered from the house of one Ajit Mondal, who had rented the premises three years ago from a local resident called Pashupati Banerjee for Rs 1,300.

Mondal is absconding. "He posed as a businessman and rented the premises from Banerjee. But soon, locals noticed suspicious characters frequenting the house," said Ghosh.

The police contingent, according to Ghosh, found the house locked and broke in. In Mondal's absence, the police inter-

rogated Banerjee. It's not clear whether Mondal was using his real name or an alias. Banerjee told the police Mondal was from Barasat and was into potato trade.

"He used to supply potato to Bankura. But he has been missing for the last two months," Banerjee told the police.

Hooghly SP Ajay Kumar said an explosive powder was also recovered in the raid. "These arms and ammunition might have been stored to be used in the rural belt," a senior officer said. The police are not ruling out the possibility of the powder being RDX.

The landlord's wife, Mithu, said they had nothing to do with the ammunition stockpile. According to her, she even fainted at the sight of the ammunition.

"We couldn't even imagine he was doing this in our house," she said.

The raid in Polba yielded 2,000 rounds of ammunition. "The cache include two sophisticated stenguns, four magazines, 8-mm revolvers, some revolvers and landmines," a senior officer said.

The owner of the building, Dulal Mondal, is absconding. The police have seized his car. Curiously, Dulal, too, is also a potato trader. Kumar said the building has been under construction for the last one year. The seven workers in the building have been detained. The house has been sealed.

But unlike the Baidyabati haul, the police are clueless on the end-use of the second lot.

# Bengal bad, Jharkhand worse

Statesman News Service 51

KOLKATA, Dec. 19. — The quality of basic health services in West Bengal is well below the desirable standard, specially when compared to Kerala. But the state can take solace on being rated better than Jharkhand.

A survey by Prof Amartya Sen's Pratichi Trust placed Bengal ahead of Jharkhand, but far behind Kerala, in terms of public health service. Pratichi's preliminary report on basic public health service is based on a survey in three blocks each from Birbhum and Dumka (Jharkhand). It highlighted closed health centres, and the absence of doctors, medicines and diagnostic services — a picture of "dismal failure for Dumka and considerable deficiencies in Birbhum," in Prof Sen's words.

The report said that while all 10 primary health centres in Birbhum

were found functioning, two of the nine in Dumka were closed and the rest functioned irregularly. The situa-

tion was worse when one considers the sub-centres, supposed to provide day-to-day healthcare. While seven of the 18 sub-centres were found not functioning in Birbhum, the figure was eight out of 13 in Dumka. Basic diagnostic services such as tests of blood, urine and stool were not available in Dumka. Patients complained in both districts that health employees charged money for "free" medicines.

Percentage of fully immunised children in the 0-5 years age group was 45 in Birbhum. In Dumka it was zero. Also, 47 per cent of child deliveries took place in health institutions in Birbhum, against six per cent in Dumka. Another crucial aspect highlighted was the lack of health information and awareness. Prof Sen said non-availability of basic health services was leading to economic ruin and leaving the field open for private practitioners and quacks.

## STATE OF HEALTH



	DUMKA	BIRBHUM
■ Number of closed health sub-centres	8 out of 13	7 out of 18
■ Diagnostic services available	None	2 out of 3 BPHCS
■ Immunisation for 0-5 years	0	45%
■ Treatment by quacks & magic healers	76%	29%
■ Deliveries in health institutions	6%	47%

Pic: Shyamal Maitra

THE STATESMAN

19 DEC 2003

# 5 SSKM docs chargesheeted for cricketer's death

9 51  
2003  
51-1  
12/12  
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Dec. 11. — Five doctors of SSKM Hospital were chargesheeted today over the death of budding cricketer Rajneesh Patel (17) on 2 June. Of them, three postgraduate trainees of the hospital — Dr Souvik Bardhan, Dr Jayanta Mondal and Dr Nirmalya Basu — were arrested and later released on bail, DCDD-I Mr Soumen Mitra said.

Professor of orthopaedic surgery Dr Dilip Mazumdar, who was in charge of Rajneesh's treatment, had obtained anticipatory bail on 11 June, soon after the incident. He is currently under suspension. The fifth person named in the chargesheet, medical officer Dr Sandip Manna of Kalyani, could not be traced, said Mr Mitra.

The doctors have been charged under Section 304-A of IPC for causing



**The doctor whom police consulted said 'criminal medical negligence' had caused Rajneesh Patel's death**

death due to negligence. If found guilty, they could be sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

A case had been started at Bhowanipore Police Station on 5 June. Later, the criminal intelligence wing of the detective department of Kolkata Police took up the investigations. The opinion of Dr AK Gupta,

professor and head of forensic science and medicine of Calcutta Medical College, was sought. He said "criminal medical negligence" by the five doctors had caused the death.

Rajneesh was admitted to SSKM Hospital with a fractured shin bone on 7 February. The witnesses said that of the five operations Rajneesh underwent at the hospital, Dr Mazumdar was present at only one. Junior doctors said they had repeatedly asked him to be present during the operations. The director of medical education said Dr Mazumdar was a non-practicing doctor.

Dr Mazumdar said he had visited the operation theatre from time to time during the operations. "Records or witnesses did not corroborate his statement," said Mr Mitra. Records of routine medical tests, mandatory before any operation, also could not be obtained.

THE STATESMAN

12 DEC 2003

2003

# Cong, CPM two-all in civic polls

HT Correspondents  
Kolkata/Krishnagore/  
Jhargram, December 1

THE TRINAMOL Cong-  
ress has lost yet another  
battle for political survival,  
trounced in all four munic-  
ipal elections held in the  
state.

The Congress once again  
emerged the main opposi-  
tion as counting headed for  
completion on Monday  
night. It retained both Kr-  
ishnagore and Behrampore  
municipalities and im-  
proved its tally, while the  
Left Front retained Jhar-  
gram municipality and had  
almost obtained an absolute  
majority in Howrah when  
reports last came in.

Till 1 am, results had been  
declared in 35 of Howrah's 50  
seats. The Left Front has al-  
ready bagged 25, one short of  
an absolute majority, and led  
in 10 of the 15 others. The

Congress has won five seats  
in Howrah till now while Tri-  
namool has bagged three.

Left Front winners includ-  
ed the CPI(M) in 17 seats, the  
CPI and the Forward Bloc in  
three each and the RSP and  
the RCP(I) in one each.  
MP Swadesh Chakra-  
borty's daughter, Sampurna  
Chakraborty, has won in  
ward 5, defeating her near-  
est rival by 5,114 votes. Sit-  
ting MMiC Mamata Jaiswal  
too retained her seat in  
ward 13.

The BJP managed to re-  
tain its only seat with Sanjay  
Singh winning in ward 17.

The CPI(M) graciously ac-  
cepted defeat in Behram-  
pore and Krishnagore. State  
secretary Anil Biswas ad-  
mitted that though the party  
had tried their best, it failed  
to win over the voters. "Our  
activists had worked hard  
but we failed to convince the  
voters, so they did not vote

that all Opposition votes are  
going to Congress," he said.

The CPI(M) leader, how-  
ever, was confident that the  
Trinamool was gradually  
losing its relevance. "The  
Trinamool is on the verge of  
extinction in this state and  
its leaders are solely respon-  
sible for this," Biswas said.

An unfazed Trinamool  
leader Parkaj Banerjee said  
the municipal poll results  
did not reflect the will of the  
people. "This election was  
rigged by the CPI(M). We are  
not surprised by the results.  
In future, our job will be to  
convince people of the need  
to resist rigging," he said.

State Congress vice-presi-  
dent Pradeep Bhattacharjee  
too agreed that the Tri-  
namool-BJP combine was  
on its way out of the state.

The Congress won 18 of  
the 24 seats in Krishnagore.  
The Left won six seats with  
the Socialist Party gaining

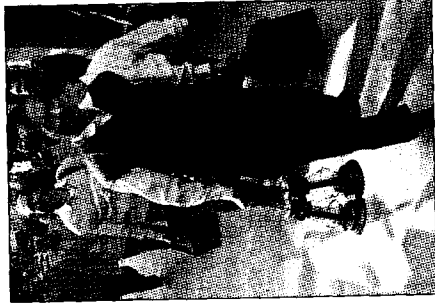
two, the CPI(M)-backed Na-  
garik Parishad one and In-  
dependents three.

In Behrampore, the Con-  
gress repeated last term's  
performance, winning all 23  
seats.

In Jhargram, the Left re-  
tained the municipality  
winning 12 seats with the  
CPI(M) alone capturing 10  
and the CPI two. The Tri-  
namool and the Congress  
got two each while a JKP(N)-  
backed Independent got one.

The Trinamool's tally in  
the zilla parishad has come  
down from 38 in 1998 to 16  
this year. In the panchayat  
samitis and gram panchay-  
ats, its tally went down from  
1,446 and 9,819 to 831 and  
6,462.

The Congress' zilla pari-  
shad seats went up from 32 to  
69. In panchayat samitis and  
gram panchayats the seats,  
its tally increased from 828  
and 5921 to 1053 and 6716.



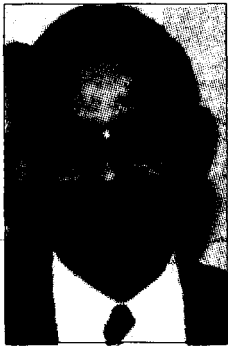
SUBHANKAR CHAKRABORTY/HT  
Polling officials head for a  
counting centre in Howrah.

for us," he said.

Biswas, however, refused  
to accept that the Congress  
was gradually emerging as  
the main Opposition in Ben-  
gal, replacing the Trinamool  
Congress. "It can't be said yet

# Ashoke Gupta takes over as chief secy

2-87  
WB  
51-1000  
1/12



KOLKATA, Nov. 30. — Outgoing chief secretary, Mr Sourin Ray, handed over charge formally to his successor, Mr Ashoke Gupta, at Writers' Buildings today.

Mr Ray, who retired from office today, told reporters he would devote his time to reading and pursuing his interest in Indian classical music.

Terming the current government as "sensitive," the outgoing chief secretary said he had always tried

his best to ensure there was no opportunity for corruption during his tenure. All praises for the government and administration, Mr Ray said he had seen substantial number of projects being undertaken during his tenure, particularly those related to industry, infrastructure and transport. "Ask those who have invested in Bengal whether our state is lacking in infrastructure," he said.

He also cited the entry of two luxury hotels in Kolkata as one of the state's achievements during his term.

Maintaining that administration and governance was a continuing process, Mr Ashoke Gupta, the new chief secretary, vowed he would fulfil tasks given to him with "all honesty." — SNS

1 DEC 2002 2003

# Bengal bans Taslima's book

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Nov. 28. — After a night of raids and seizure of copies of Taslima Nasreen's *Dwikhandita* (Split in Two), the state government today banned the book. Police said anybody found possessing a copy of the book would be arrested. But it was not clear whether those who had bought the book before it was banned would invite police action.

Chief minister Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said: "I've read the book, not once but several times. I've discussed the contents with about 25 people who matter and have finally decided to proscribe it."

"Shocked but not surprised" at the order, unprejudiced in the state's recent history, publishers of *Dwikhandita* are contemplating to move court, "more out of moral and ideological reasons than the financial loss" they would incur following the ban.

Home secretary Mr Amit Kiran Deb said the book had been proscribed because it could ignite communal tension. "An order was passed yesterday."

On 18 November, Calcutta High Court had passed an injunction, restraining the publication, sale, marketing and circulation of the book. The court acted on a defamation suit filed against the author. A Bangladeshi court too had stalled the sale of the book, titled *Ka* in that country, following a similar suit.

Recently, Kolkata Police had suspended the sale of the book (which hit the stands on 5 November) to "prevent communal tension", only to lift the restriction a couple of days later. Yesterday, a drive was launched to seize copies of the book. "We had seized 1,475 copies, 450 unbound copies, 1,400 jackets and floppies," said Mr Soumen Mitra, DC DD-1.

All documentary evidence — including microfilms, floppies and another 150 hard copies — were handed over to police by the publishers this afternoon. "The seizures have cost us about Rs 1 lakh," said Mrs Shibanu Mukherjee of People's Book Society. "A government that swears in the name of democracy curtailed the freedom of expression of an author," she said.



Seized copies of *Dwikhandita* at Laibazar on Friday — The Statesman

## 'I will not compromise, ever'

Sougata Mukhopadhyay in Kolkata

Nov. 28. — Taslima Nasreen has been 'split in two'. On the one hand, she's "shocked and dismayed by the so-called-liberal Left Front government's stand", on the other, there "is still the burning desire to reach out to readers in West Bengal through her forthcoming works".

Speaking to The Statesman from New York, she said: "While the Bangladesh government is yet to take the drastic step of banning the book, the Bengal government has gone right ahead and has set an unfortunate precedent."

Taslima asserted that the fourth volume of her five-part autobiographical sketches, *Sei Sob*

*Andhokar*, which she has finished writing, would be published by People's Book Society (publisher of *Dwikhandita*). She said she wouldn't agree to any cuts the publishers might suggest.

"I don't understand why such hue and cry is being raised about *Dwikhandita*, when *Amar Meyebela* and *Utal Hawa*, which were much more critical of Islam, had received awards in West Bengal," Taslima said. "I was under the impression that the state government is free from dogmas. The illusion lies shattered, along with my pride that nothing gets censored in Bengal."

Asked what her future writings would be like, Taslima said: "I haven't compromised with my opinions during more trying times. And I will not, ever."

## What fellow writers have to say

**Dibyendu Palit:** I think the ban is justified. Two points need to be considered. The first is that Taslima has delved into the sexual lives of eminent literary figures, both Indian and Bangladeshi. The second point is, a group of Muslim intellectuals, who are not fundamentalists, have appealed to the state government to ban the book since certain portions of it slander Prophet Mohammed and Islam, and therefore would hurt religious sentiments. The book could lead to communal tension, which is not desirable at all. You cannot hurt the feelings of others... Previously, the government had put legal restrictions on Buddhadeb Bose's *Raat Bhore Brisfi*. But I think this is possibly the first instance of the state government banning a book.

**Amlan Dutta:** I don't think the book will spread communal tension. Taslima Nasreen is a responsible and sensitive writer.

**Shankha Ghosh:** I am generally against bans of any kind, but in this particular case, I think the ban is justified... I do not think *Dwikhandita* is the first book to be banned in West Bengal. A book titled *Itihasher Sri Chaitanya* was banned in the late 1950s.

The book would have caused communal unrest

The ban won't curb an author's freedom to write

The ban betrays Left Front government's bias

Trash literature that insults the minorities

The ban is an undemocratic act

# Land tax gets Cabinet nod

**Statesman News Service**

KOLKATA, Nov. 20. — The state Cabinet today approved the proposed Kolkata Land Revenue Amendment Bill that will be tabled in the winter session of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly.

After the Cabinet meeting, state land and land revenue minister Mr Abdur Rezzak Mollah said: "Under the Bill, leasee residing in 38 municipal areas including KMC, HMC areas and Salt Lake Municipality area for more than 30 years, will have to pay *khajna* or land tax for the first time."

The minister further said that leased land would be declared as "rauths" by the state government. "The new revenue for the domestic land has been fixed at Rs 45 per decibel and Rs 200 per decibel has

been fixed for industrial land," he said.

At present those living in urban areas pay eight per cent stamp duty while purchasing a plot of land but no tax on land. After the Bill is passed, property buyers and owners will have to cough up additional land tax.

Only people living in rural areas have to pay tax on land. While the DMs will collect the *khajna* in the districts, the Director of Law Records and Survey will be deputed as the Chief Revenue Officer to collect *khajna* in Kolkata.

In the case of state-run educational institutions and state-aided institutions, the minister said: "This will depend on the state government, which may decide to levy or exempt the *khajna*." "Nearly 700 bighas of land are earmarked as *khajna* land in Kolkata and South 24-Parganas. The assessment for the rest is going on," Mr Mollah said.

THE STATESMAN

21 NOV 2003

# Mayor cut to size

5.8 It may not be the last round 9.8.11 19/11

**B**efore Mamata Banerjee stepped in to deal with unilateral decisions taken by the Mayor on a number of issues, it was clear that Subrata Mukherjee was a minority among Trinamul councillors themselves. Pressure was building up and matters must have come to boiling point when, but for his close associates, the mayors-in-council found themselves being treated with scant respect. If Mamata hadn't stepped in, something more drastic might have taken place. It is still difficult to believe that she was in the dark when the water tax, to which she had objected in the first place, was actually being collected over the last six months. The basis for collecting the tax was itself dubious; when under pressure, the mayor claimed that 75 per cent of the city's residents were outside its purview. He needed the money — to pay salaries to civic staff that was surplus by any standards — but he didn't explain how he proposed to plug the wastage of filtered water by just that section. The proposed ferrule-based water tax is more reasonable and it is not the taxpayers' fault that the corporation doesn't have the resources to install the equipment to measure water consumption.

However, two questions survive even after Subrata has had to retrace his steps. One, the supposedly "democratic" process by which the water tax has been rolled back is largely irrelevant because in this case it was clear that Mamata herself assessed the mood in the party and decided to intervene in civic affairs — something that is hardly a healthy precedent. The fact that Subrata has agreed to a committee of councillors deciding on issues like the hike in trade licence fees and inheritance rights for stall owners suggests that his instincts for survival are stronger than his concern for principles. If he had nothing at stake, he may have quit to protect his honour. Now he may have calculated that the mayor's chair fetches bigger rewards than shallow outbursts. That leads to the second question: was this the final round in Trinamul's civic battles? Subrata is experienced enough to know when opportunity beckons for another assault.

19 NOV 2003

THE STATESMAN



Chief minister makes bold claim with instances of 'change'

# Turnaround tune on Buddha lips

STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, Nov. 17: Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee made a tall claim today. "We have turned around," he said, turning around a question thrown at him from an audience of infotech executives about the "turnaround time" of his government.

Simply put, it means the time from submission of a project to clearance. But the chief minister's response went beyond answering a business query to make a bold statement about the state. "We have turned around. We admit there are still problems, but things are changing," Bhattacharjee said at the chief executives' conclave held as part of the four-day conference and exhibition, Infocom 2003, organised by Nasscom and *Businessworld*, an ABP group publication.

"We can clear any project in less than a month's time," he added while replying to a question hurled at him by Durgesh Dave of DataPro, a US-based information technology company trying to set up office in Calcutta.

In support of his claim of change, he announced that Wipro has requested for more land and Reliance has sought eight acres in Salt Lake. "We have identified the land and I have already replied to both Azim Premji (Wipro) and Anil Ambani (Reliance)."

If the chief minister was talking about change, evidence of it was also available in meetings his IT minister, Manabendra Mukherjee, was holding with representatives of some of the top companies in business on the sidelines of Infocom.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 6** ▶



Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at Infocom 2003 in Calcutta

Picture by Pabitra Das

# Turnaround

► FROM PAGE 1

Minutes before the open forum with chief executives, Bhattacharjee was closeted with Hindustan Lever chairman M.S. Banga and Oracle India managing director Shekhar Dasgupta.

He also unveiled Sunrise City — a 50-acre dedicated IT centre off the EM Bypass — and promised development of another 150 acres for knowledge-based industries, where Bengal's possible advantage was emphasised by Arun Shourie, the Union information and communications minister, yesterday.

Shourie had also set a slogan for Bengal: deliver on promises — in other words, Just Do It. The reminder about delivering on promises came from the audience today. "How fast would you roll out the new facility?" asked Frank Luksic, the vice-president of IBM India, referring to Sunrise City. Eighteen to 20 months from the day of starting work, replied an official accompanying Bhattacharjee.

Promises have a habit of co-

ming home to roost, but the chief minister had decided to be brave. "Companies from Bangalore are coming to Calcutta. Why should I go to Bangalore?" he fired back when asked if he was going to make his scheduled trip there.

If that sounded more reckless than brave, humility followed quickly. "I am willing to go anywhere to bring investments."

Humility may be in order, given the facts. IT exports from Bengal in the last financial year were around Rs 1,200 crore, while Karnataka's were over Rs 25,000 crore. Bhattacharjee may have to make that trip to Bangalore, but some companies from there were at Infocom. Mukherjee had pitched camp at the conference venue to tell their representatives in one-to-one meetings: "We are suffering because of the past but the present is different."

Mukherjee met representatives of Nortel and Infosys, and had separate sessions with Nasscom president Kiran Karnik and Harris Miller, the president of the IT Association of America.

# Buddha mum on Dalgaon,

9-11-03

**Pramod Giri**  
Naxalbari, November 16

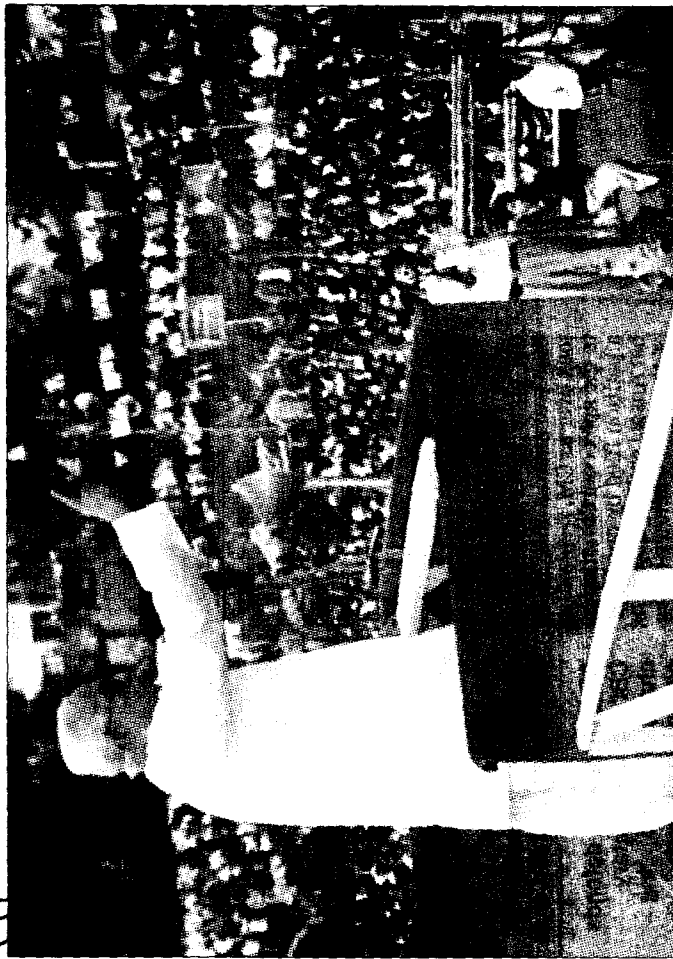
THE DALGAON massacre found no mention in the chief minister's address at a labour rally in Naxalbari on Sunday. CITU members, though, were told to discipline themselves and the tea workers.

Buddhaddeb Bhattacharjee spent the half-hour, except for 5 minutes when a diesel train engine kept hooting nearby, ticking off the trade union on protecting workers and their rights.

Bhattacharjee's choice of words was also evident when he reiterated an appeal to the KLO to return to the mainstream, but again was careful not to mention the militant outfit's name.

"Come back from the forests of Bhutan and we will take your responsibility," he said, adding that the CPI(M) was the party of Rajbonshis. Bhattacharjee also avoided naming the KPP when he accused the "Kamtapur Dal" of claiming to be the face of Rajbonshis.

Everybody present at the rally on the eve of the CITU's Darjeeling district conference had expected the CM to



Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee addresses a CITU rally in Naxalbari on Sunday.  
NEELAM GHIMEERAY/HT

focus on November 6 Dalgaon massacre as the incident had turned tea workers' anger against one particular CITU leader.

The CITU leaders had to work more seriously to safeguard the rights of the working class, said Bhattacharjee, and the state government would not compromise with the interests of workers while pursuing developmental activities.

In what could be a reference to the Dalgaon incident, Bhattacharjee said that the CITU had to ensure that garden workers do not fight with each other. At Dalgaon, most of those killed

# ticks off CITU

## Lock-out at Mirik garden

were tea garden labourers. Brushing aside reports that North Bengal has been neglected by the Left Front government, the CM said the government allocates more fund for the panchayats of North then South Bengal.

For example, interests of workers of Chandmuni tea estate were properly taken care of before the satellite township work began. But he could not deny that fact that crisis gripped 12 locked-out tea gardens.

However, he failed to announce any concrete measures to bring relief to the workers. He asked tea planters to approach him and labour minister Mohammed Amin with their problems and suggestions.

Amin said the committee formed by the government to look into the problems of tea gardens would submit its report within 10 days.

The chief minister did not forget to indulge in NDA-bashing and blamed the Centre for closing industrial units in West Bengal. A pat on the back for reserved for his own government's performance.

A LOCK-OUT was declared at Murma, a division of Bal-sun Tea Estate near Mirik, on Saturday.

Owned by the Darjeeling Consolidated Tea India Limited, the tea garden had been passing through a funds crunch with workers not receiving salaries and wages regularly for the past two and a half months. The workers have also not received rations for more than a year.

A garden staff said discontentment had been brewing among workers and a group had roughed up management officials on November 13. The management served the lock-out notice on Sunday. None of the management officials could be contacted for comments.

N. K. Kumari, Himalayan Plantation Workers Union president, said he did not receive any formal notice regarding the lock-out but the local unit of the HPWU had been intimidated.

HTC, Darjeeling

# Another patient, another victim

## YOUTH DIES AT SSKM AFTER 24-HOUR WAIT UNDER TREE

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, November 16

AFTER SUSMITA Biswas it was 25-year-old Badal Chakraborty's turn to die uncared for at SSKM Hospital on Sunday morning, after an entire night spent under a tree in front of the emergency ward, waiting for a bed.

Earlier, the hospital had made Chakraborty and his relatives shuttle between departments throughout Saturday in search of medical attention. And after the youth died, politics took over as Trinamool leader Madan Mitra — on whose word the family had kept waiting for a bed at SSKM — swooped on the dead and took out a procession inside the hospital.

Badal was rushed from Garbeta to the hospital's emergency ward around 7 am on Saturday with an acute kidney ailment. But medical attention eluded him till 6 pm, when he started gasping severely.

His brother Mohan said, "The emergency doctor referred the case to the nephrology department. A doctor there advised us to take him to the medical renal unit (MRU). But there were no beds there. We rushed back to the senior

other government hospital," said Mohan.

In desperation, the family contacted Madan Mitra, who is the president of the Progressive Employees' Union at SSKM. "Madanbabu promised us that he would arrange his admission. So, we spent the night under a tree with Badal. The promised admission never came, nor did Madanbabu. Around 9.15 in the morning, my brother started gasping and we again rushed him to the emergency ward. This time he was admitted, but it was too late. Badal died 10 minutes later," said his brother, Mitra de-nied the charge saying, "They contacted me seeking help. I merely asked them to contact the superintendent."

A senior doctor of the hospital admitted that the delay in treating Badal had proved fatal. "We are trying to ascertain why the doctor took such a long time to attend to him," a senior health official said.

Badal's relatives lodged a complaint with Bhowanipore police station demanding a probe. Trinamool workers led by Mitra, meanwhile, went on a protest lap, with Badal's cold body as the day's trophy.

See also Kolkata Live



ASHOK NATH DEY

**BODY POLITICS:** Relatives with Badal Chakraborty's body at SSKM on Sunday.

medical officer on duty in the emergency department. It was around 4 pm when he advised the MRU nurse to admit Badal and asked us to get his ECG done." Around 5.30 pm, the family returned to the emergency ward again and re-

quested the doctor for admission as Badal's condition was worsening fast. The family members told the doctor that he wasn't even being able to drink water because of breathlessness. "The doctor prescribed two injections. We got it from a local shop and he was administered the injections. Around 7 pm, the doctor wrote in the emergency ticket that there was no bed, not even floor space, to admit Badal and we should rather take him to an-

9.8.2003

# SARS suspect discharged

SIR 1674

**Statesman News Service**

KOLKATA. April 15. — Mr Shriram Nigam, the first suspected Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) patient in Kolkata who was admitted to Beliaghata ID Hospital on 9 April, was discharged from the hospital yesterday.

His relatives stay at Sudder Street. Mr Nigam was held back immediately after he landed at the NSC Bose International Airport from Bangkok. He was sent to the ID hospital since he was showing some symptoms of the fatal disease.

Later, however, after scrutinising his chest X-ray report, doctors concluded Mr Nigam was no longer at risk. Dr Swapan Biswas, ID Hospital superintendent, today said: "We have released him after checking the test reports."

The state government had sent samples to be tested at five different institutions throughout the country — the School of Tropical Medicine, Kolkata, National Institute of Virology, Pune, National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Disease, New Delhi, National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Disease, Kolkata and Indian Council of Medical

Research in Kolkata. Asked if all five reports had been received, Dr Biswas, said: "How can we release him without the results of the reports? Moreover, we had already been informed by NICED, New Delhi, and the National Institute of Virology, Pune on Sunday that the report were negative."

Dr Biswas said the decision to release Mr Nigam was based on both the report and the prognosis.

Mr Nigam's relatives have been also asked to keep a watch on him. They have been asked to inform the ID Hospital authorities if he had further fever, Dr Biswas said.

16 APR 2003

# Bravo Buddhadeb!

Anil and poll commissioner should follow

It must be said to Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's credit that unlike Anil Biswas and other party apparatchiks, he did not take a partisan view of the recent killing of a CPI-M leader of Khanakul. He insisted that Trinamul Congress was not to blame and that the killer did not have any political affiliation. What he did the next day was unprecedented. In a written statement he rebuked ~~party comrades for~~ preventing Opposition candidates from filing their nominations. He asked them to behave and cautioned the administration not to overlook Opposition complaints. This was in sharp contrast to the stand that the party had taken on the Khanakul killing. While Trinamul was accused of the killing, *didis*' "inability to field candidates because of total loss of mass support" was trotted out as the reason for her inability to file nominations. For a Stalinist party like the CPI-M it takes courage and conviction to disagree with the party line.

Buddhadeb spoke directly to Trinamul MLAs. The chief minister also refused to comment on Anil Biswas's accusations insisting that as head of the administration he was conveying the official finding of the killing. For someone who in the past has been forced to eat "harsh" words about unregistered madrasas and "shirking" government doctors because of Alimuddin Street, his clean chit to Trinamul for the Khanakul murder is an indication that he is trying to avoid the path charted by Jyoti Basu who disdainfully rejected Opposition complaint with the dismissive remark "Manage the affairs of your party first."

But this alone will not restore confidence in the Opposition before the panchayat poll. And also some of the Left Front partners like the RSP many of whose candidates have been targeted by the Marxists. Already Anil Biswas by his inflammatory statements after the Khanakul murder has signalled his cadres to go after the Opposition. The Marxists have proudly proclaimed some areas as "Opposition free zones". Any opposition attempt to file nominations from these areas has resulted in unleashing more terror. While Opposition candidates are being physically prevented from filing nominations, Anil Biswas says people are not interested in contesting on Opposition tickets! On Friday, 68 Trinamul candidates were prevented in Hooghly alone. In Midnapore west the Marxists are poised to get a walkover in 70 per cent of 4,868 seats as the Opposition has not been allowed to file nominations. In Burdwan former Naxalites, who have joined the political mainstream and are sitting panchayat pradhans, have been arrested while filing nominations. Clearly Alimuddin's strategy is to get as many candidates as possible elected without contest. Unfortunately the state election commissioner Ajoy Sinha's role has been dubious raising doubts about the fairness of the 11 May election. He is refusing to entertain complaints which forced the Opposition to stage an unprecedented walkout from a meeting. Buddhadeb understands his responsibilities and wants to play it fair, his party and the Coordination Committee-controlled government apparatus refuses to follow suit. The party should understand that he is the greatest asset they have; they will work against him at their peril.

If at last, Buddhadeb is asserting himself, this can only help the party although the apparatchiks may take time to see the light.

15 APR 2003

Opp must be allowed to file poll papers: CM

# Buddha rebukes partymen

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 12. — In an unprecedented gesture, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has delivered what amounts to a sharp rebuke to his party bosses by officially condemning acts of the CPI-M to prevent Opposition parties from filing their nomination papers for the panchayat polls. This comes on the heels of state secretary CPI-M Mr Anil Biswas insisting that "such allegations (by the Opposition) are baseless... nobody is being prevented from filing nominations."

And the chief ministerial rap on the knuckles for the party has come in writing — unheard of during his predecessor's regime. What's more, sources close to the chief minister said, he seems to have risen above party interests and sent a not-so-veiled message to Alimuddin Street. His comrades there also need to exercise restraint while reacting to Opposition allegations that their candidates were being threatened and prevented from filing their nomination papers.

The chief minister's written statement goes like this: "I have received complaints that candidates of Opposition parties are not being able to file their nomination papers in some seats and areas. We never support incidents and acts of this nature. I appeal to Left workers to ensure that such incidents do not occur, no matter what the situation is. I have cautioned the police and administration and told them that they will have to intervene in such cases. In the interest of free and fair polls, meaning in the interest of democracy, this is

## CPI nominee, hacked to death

BEHRAMPURE, April 12. — Sirajul Islam (40), a CPI party worker was hacked to death early this morning while he was asleep at his residence in Murshidabad's Baipur area.

Islam had filed his nomination as the CPI candidate from Hariharpara's Raipur gram panchayat yesterday.

**BJP nominee injured:** Mr Prosenjit Bag, the BJP nominee of Jangipara's Mundalika gram panchayat in Hooghly, was injured this afternoon when hoodlums allegedly backed by local CPI-M leaders attacked him when he was coming to the block office to submit his nomination papers. — SNS

absolutely necessary".

While Miss Mamata Banerjee today described the chief minister's official statement as a "hoax" — "with only a day left for the filing of nominations, the chief minister's statement rings hollow", Mr Anil Biswas affected a combination of stout denial and bluster in response to what is being widely seen as an attempt by the chief minister to show him and the other denizens of Alimuddin Street their place. "The chief minister had taken the right step... there isn't any confusion about his role. Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has shown that he is a democratic chief minister. He responded to

■ See BUDDHA, page 5

# ADB slaps 'negative' tag on rollback

19/11 OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, Nov. 13: The Asian Development Bank (ADB), funding a Rs 1,245-crore infrastructure project in the city, said today it was "deeply disappointed" at the rollback of water tax.

Yesterday, Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee had announced the rollback, though she does not have the authority to do so, as she publicly displayed that she is the one who calls the shots at Calcutta Municipal Corporation and not mayor Subrata Mukherjee.

Seeking an early meeting with Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's government, Alex Jorgensen, head of the ADB's Delhi-based development wing, said the decision came as a surprise because every city with which the bank was dealing charged for filtered water.

"It will be a very negative thing to do if they really have to call off the water tax. There is no point in cutting down on revenue while building infrastructure," he said.

"Our covenant with the CMC requires them to effect certain reforms to generate revenue and we have spoken of the water tariff increase because it costs money to operate a water system," Jorgensen said.

"We just want the CMC to be self-sufficient in this area by 2008 and don't care how they do it," he added.

Mukherjee admitted that international agencies would now be sceptical of the civic body's intentions. "I am extremely disturbed over this forced rollback," he said.

It was not explained why he agreed to it and, if it was forced on him, why he did not resign in protest.

"I shudder to think what is going to happen to this city in terms of development. We have managed to portray ourselves as capable of being disloyal to international contractual norms," Mukherjee said.

The ADB said it had sought a meeting with the chief minister, urban development minister Asok Bhattacharya and the municipal authorities. "Now that we have heard about it, we shall visit Calcutta earlier than planned," Jorgensen said.



# Mamata, mayor in water sport

9.8.03 MS

9.8.03

**OUR BUREAU**

13/11

G-1

pose any great difficulty.

**Calcutta, Nov. 12:** Mayor Subrata Mukherjee today unveiled a full rollback of water tax under pressure from party leader Mamata Banerjee, paving the ground for a showdown of the civic authority with the Bengal government and jeopardising a huge loan from an international funding agency for the city's improvement.

Mamata did not even allow Mukherjee the chance to make the announcement, claiming the privilege herself, though she does not have the authority to do so as she is not an elected member of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation.

The mayor admitted that the civic body would lose revenue because of the rollback, but claimed bravely that it would not

because it is part of a legislation.

"The decision to impose water tax was taken in a meeting last year where all the mayors and chairpersons of different corporations and municipalities were present. Subrata Mukherjee was a signatory to the minutes of the meeting," Bhatnacharya said.

A bill was passed in the Assembly to levy the tax. "So, the mayor has no authority to revoke the water tax. He cannot do whatever he or his party leader likes. He is bound to follow legislation."

The government had asked all municipalities to impose water tax after the law was enacted.

Last March, the civic body decided to impose water tax on house owners paying a property tax of Rs 500 quarterly. There is no one in the city proper who

pays less than Rs 500.

A senior legal officer of the civic body said the mayor's announcement has no meaning because on paper the water tax is still on as a legislation was passed in the Assembly.

Mukherjee said the matter was "very complicated". "It is the responsibility of two of my mayor-in-council members Anup Chatterjee and Sobhan Chatterjee to look into the rollback," he said.

Mamata had cornered the mayor last Sunday at a meeting of Trinamul councillors, MPs and MLAs from Calcutta on the water tax and other decisions. She also accused the mayor of not taking any initiative to remove municipal commissioner Debashish Som after he had got five members of the mayor's council arrested in June.

# Blaze kills patient, bidi blamed

CP 12/11

## OUR CORRESPONDENT

Habra (North 24-Parganas), Nov. 11: Gauranga Pal was admitted to a hospital on Friday to be treated for diarrhoea and anaemia. He died this morning of burns suffered while lying on his hospital bed.

With the death of the 60-year-old at a government-run hospital in Ashoknagar, about 50 km from Calcutta, the state's health horror tale began unfolding again. But health minister Surjya Kanta Mishra was unfazed. "Shab thik-thak cholchhe (Everything is fine)," he said.

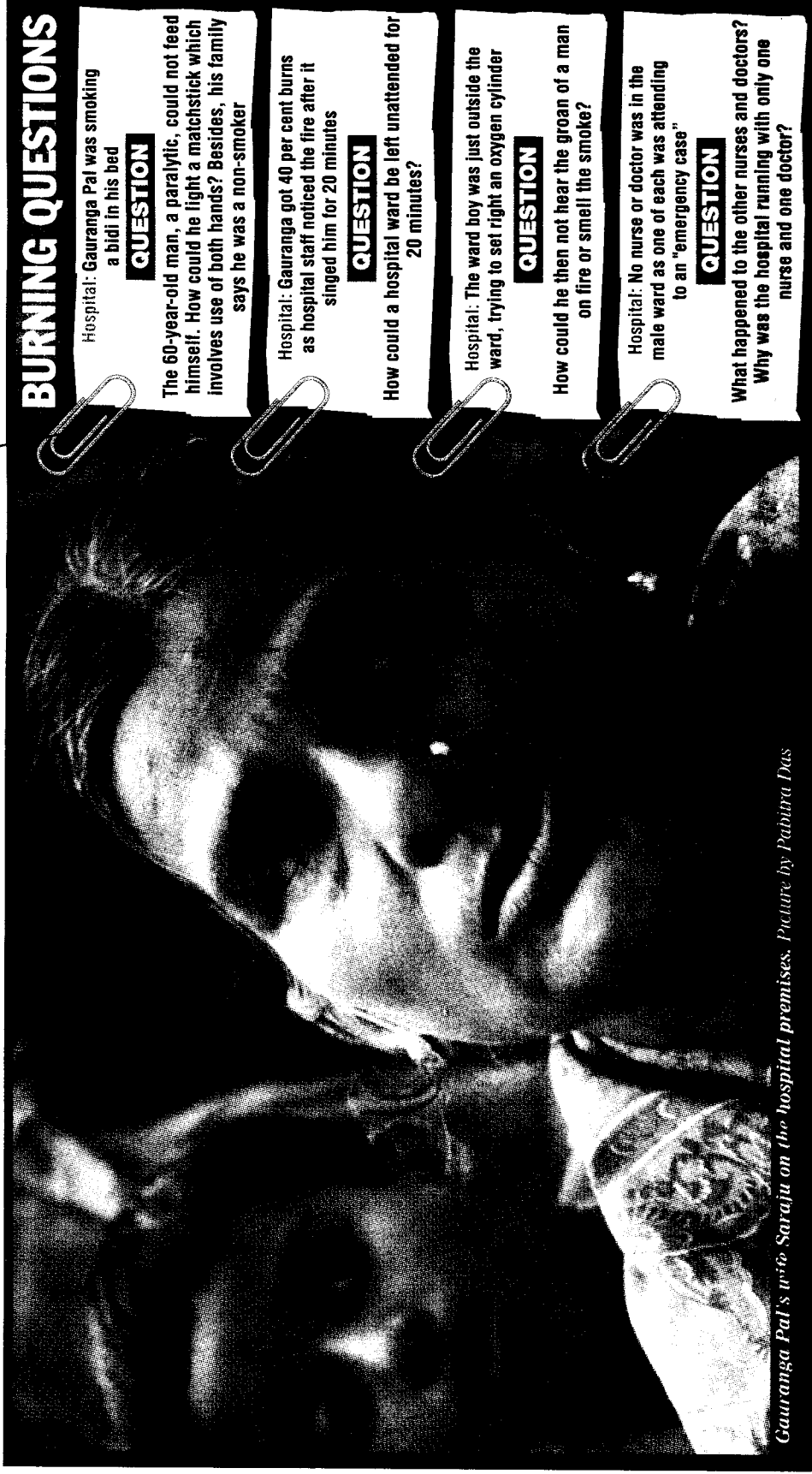
Other patients in the ward woke up at 11 pm yesterday to Gauranga's groans. Seeing him on fire, they started shouting for help. But, according to hospital superintendent Pushpendu Sengupta, it was 20 minutes before any member of the staff heard them.

"The wardboy was repairing an oxygen cylinder and the nurse and doctor were attending to an emergency case," Sengupta explained, matter-of-factly.

When help reached the ward, a charred Gauranga was entwined in his mosquito net and blanket. He was extricated, some stools were lined up for him to lie on and a drip was started, the superintendent added. Gauranga died at 7.30 am.

Both the hospital and the government that runs it blamed the fire on Gauranga, claiming he had lit a bidi that started it. But their accounts did not match.

Sengupta said this morning that the partially paralysed diabetic died after the bidi he was smoking fell on the blanket and set it alight.



Gauranga Pal's wife Saraju on the hospital premises. Picture by Pabura Das

But while the health minister quoted other patients in the ward as saying they had seen Gauranga lighting up a bidi, the superintendent claimed that another patient lit the bidi for him and helped him puff it.

Gauranga's family asserts that he was a non-smoker. The extent of injury that the 60-year-old suffered, too, changed between Ashoknagar and Wr-

iters'. The hospital said Gauranga died of "40 per cent burns". But inspector-general (law and order) Chayan Mukherjee and special inspector-general (headquarters) Narayan Ghosh declared he suffered 30 per cent burns.

Gauranga was admitted last Friday but was advised discharge on Sunday because the hospital did not have the infrastructure to deal with his ail-

ments. His wife Saraju and sons Ritam and Suman demanded that he be referred to NRS Medical College and Hospital, but the superintendent said he could only refer the patient to the hospital at Barasat, one step up the health-system ladder. Gauranga's family asked for time till today.

They continued to come to the hospital to feed and bathe him. Last evening, the Pals were denied entry because they were late.

They passed his dinner through a window — to an able patient so that it could be handed over to the nurse on duty. The family was summoned to the hospital around midnight and when they arrived, Sengupta was waiting for them. He pulled out a discharge certificate and asked Suman to sign on it.

## BURNING QUESTIONS

Hospital: Gauranga Pal was smoking a bidi in his bed

### QUESTION

The 60-year-old man, a paralytic, could not feed himself. How could he light a matchstick which involves use of both hands? Besides, his family says he was a non-smoker

Hospital: Gauranga got 40 per cent burns as hospital staff noticed the fire after it singed him for 20 minutes

### QUESTION

How could a hospital ward be left unattended for 20 minutes?

Hospital: The ward boy was just outside the ward, trying to set right an oxygen cylinder

### QUESTION

How could he then not hear the groan of a man on fire or smell the smoke?

Hospital: No nurse or doctor was in the male ward as one of each was attending to an "emergency case"

### QUESTION

What happened to the other nurses and doctors? Why was the hospital running with only one nurse and one doctor?

# Another virus: injection swap

## OUR CORRESPONDENT

Malda, Nov. 11: The family of a patient today claimed he died after being administered an injection meant for another person at the district hospital here.

The doctor concerned said though he had no confirmation yet whether or not an injection was administered to Bhabes Basak, the drug prescribed for a patient on an adjacent bed was Traxol, a harmless antibiotic.

Nurse Sutapa Pal admitted Basak was given an injection meant for Makhan Das, a stomach-ulcer patient, but was silent on which nurse pushed the syringe. "I will tell the name only to the superintendent," she said.

Basak's son filed an FIR at Englishbazar police station. An autopsy will now be conducted.

Basak, 54, of Nunbohi in Englishbazar police station limits, was admitted to the medical ward on Thursday with high fever and severe chest congestion.

His wife, Draupadi, who was at his bedside, said a nurse came in with an injection and administered it to Basak.

"He began feeling drowsy and I called for the doctor, Himachal Das, who arrived and said he was all right. But my husband passed away a few hours later," she said.

Amal said his father seemed

all right when he visited at 3 pm. "I spoke to him for about 30 minutes and left. After 5 pm, I heard he had passed away," he said, after filing the FIR.

The injection was apparently meant for Makhan. Himachal was his doctor as well.

Soon after the news spread, several BJP supporters led by Malda district chief Adhir Kar-makar barged into the crowded ward and confronted the doctors and the nurses.

Himachal tried to explain as he sat surrounded by the shouting agitators. "The patient who expired had a very bad lung condition. Pus had formed in his lungs and he could have sunk any moment," he said. "Even if the antibiotic (Traxol) was given to him, it could not be the cause of his death."

Karmakar demanded an autopsy by a doctor unattached to the hospital. "We want a high-level inquiry."

The hospital's acting superintendent, Pradip Chakraborty, said: "I have to speak to all concerned to know what has actually happened."

Bimal Sarkar, district secretary of the CPM-dominated West Bengal Association of Health Service Doctors, said: "How do we know that Basak was not administered the right injection? This is not something for the patient party to know."

# Marauding motorcyclists mock invest-in-Bengal plea

## Factory attacked despite plea to chief minister

Kanchan Sankar in Bishnupur

Nov. 11. — Hoodlums on motorbikes attacked a factory that had sought the chief minister's intervention as a last resort to survive. They trashed the office premises and thrashed workers after dragging them out of the plant site. Production at the factory collapsed and a police picket was posted in the area. But no arrests had been till this evening.

Rohit Ferro-Alloy factory, an industry installed in Bishnupur industrial growth centre, first suffered a setback on Saturday when the CPI-M-backed Dwarika panchayat officials sealed the factory alleging insufficient local employment. The factory officials had sought the chief minister's intervention soon after the incident saying that the local CPI-M-controlled panchayat's unruly behaviour was damaging the Rs 20-crore unit's production.

The unit had started production only three weeks ago. The panchayat demanded that the factory should recruit unskilled labourers following a list of names it had drawn up and that skilled labourers be recruited through the Bishnupur sub-divisional employment exchange. The factory had recruited 150 skilled labourers and 60 unskilled labourers. Mr PN Khan-deyal, executive director, Rohit Ferro-

Alloys said, "We had employed these 60 men from adjoining areas, but the panchayat leaders are now saying our recruitment is biased and that we allowed Congress supporters a major share of jobs in



Mr Bhattacharjee: Is anybody listening?

the unskilled sector. They want fresh recruitment and the current labourers sacked... after top district administrative and political hierarchies intervened, the factory could resume production the next day. But today armed hooligans raided the factory premises around noon and

stormed the office. They beat up the men engaged in production and dragging out the labourers from the site, they drove them three km away from the industrial growth centre. The managerial staff escaped from being assaulted as they hid in their chambers." Telephone cables were snapped and furniture ransacked.

The SDO, Bishnupur, Mr Kaushik Halder, rushed to the plant soon after reports of the violence came in. It took police two hours to bring the situation under control. The ADM, Bankura, and the district CPI-M secretary, Mr Amyo Patra, met the factory officials in a closed-door meeting at the Bishnupur sub-divisional office and local CPI-M representatives were invited to try and get assurances. Mr Madan Majhi, panchayat pradhan, Dwarika, insisted: "The men on motorbikes were not from our party, though they may be representatives of the area's frustrated, unemployed youth. We are yet to identify them." He added: "We have a one-point agenda. When the factories are set up of locals have to be employed and cannot be deprived? We won't allow it here."

Mr Patra, however, said: "We have to improve the situation at the earliest. Militancy has no room here. We have to rectify our traditional practice of dealing with outsiders in this high-handed fashion."

# But Bangalore motors on, with GM power

Statesman News Service

BANGALORE, Nov. 11. — The automobile giant, General Motors, has set up its first global technological lab, outside the USA, in Bangalore with an initial investment of over \$21 million. The move comes in the wake of intense competition in the auto sector worldwide coupled with the need to reduce costs, improve products and research and development.

General Motors' intention is to remain in the forefront through its second technological lab as the centre would complement its capabilities, a key element in its strategy for exploiting the growing Asia-Pacific market.

This was stated here today by Mr Alan Taub, executive director, science laboratories, for GM Research and Development. He said that they are able to tap into these science-rich societies and involve the world's best technical talent.

Accordingly, General Motors' research centre at Bangalore will have over 100 software, electronics and materials experts, to start with.

Working in partnership with GM's R&D science lab at Warren, USA, the Indian laboratory will conduct new exploratory research in math-based tools and vehicle development, lightweight materials, agile manufacturing processes and automotive electronics and control systems.

At present, the US company has over 30 research projects, being conducted at various universities in India and the national laboratories, including the Collaborative Research Lab, set up at the Indian Institute of Sciences, Bangalore.

Mr Aditya Vij, president and managing director, GM India, said that GM's second laboratory outside the USA reiterated the company's commitment to India and the Asia-Pacific region.

# Red flags on graves of disowned

AVIJIT SINHA

Jalpaiguri, Nov. 10: Tarakeshwar Lohar is to Citu what Citu at times is to chief minister Buddhadeb Bhat-tacharjee — difficult to live with but hard to part with.

Red flags, bearing the hammer and sickle, fluttered atop the mounds of earth where the 19 people who were burnt to death in Lohar's house in Dalgaon tea estate on Thursday have been buried. But that has not settled the question if they were Citu activists.

Labour minister Mohammad Amin, travelling in the region, denied knowledge of their identity. "I can't say who they were."

"They were our people," said Manik Sanyal, the Jalpaiguri district secretary of Citu and CPM, who has changed his version several times since the morning when Lohar's house was attacked by a mob of several hundreds and set afire.

First, the district leadership said the dead were innocent labourers, then described them as criminals and now recognises them as Citu supporters.

Labourers of the tea estate, about 70 km from Jalpaiguri town, have called them members of the Cha Bagan Mazdoor Union, a Citu affiliate, from the first day and police have agreed.

Three members of Lohar's group who were present at the spot that morning have surfaced, reinforcing this view. George Kuzur, Etoa Indowar and Jongin udhu returned to their homes and gave themselves up to their fellow labourers, seeking for-

giveness for past cruelties.

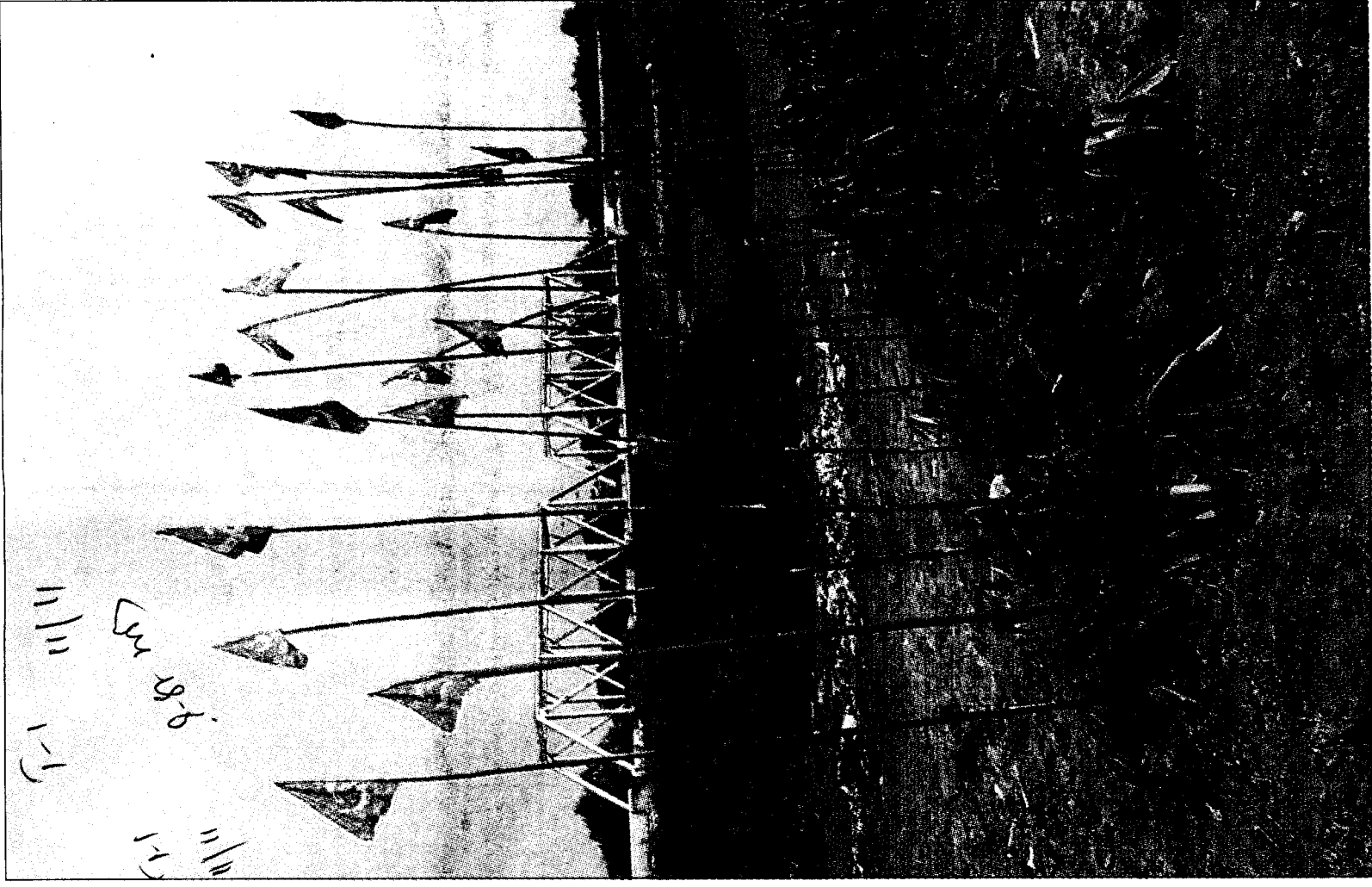
Thursday morning's attack has been described by some labourers as retaliation for the torment they had suffered at the hands of Lohar and his gang.

Kuzur was in Lohar's house on the morning of November 6, having been called there by one of his associates, Munshi Marandi. "As I went inside, Marandi handed over a pipe-gun, asking me to keep a watch as a meeting was going on in the nearby football field. As the mob started rushing towards Lohar's house, Marandi asked me to shoot. I fired in the air and dropped the gun as the mob was entering the house. Then I ran as fast as I could."

The accounts of the other two, who said they were members of Lohar's group, were similar, though Indowar, a chowkidar in the garden, fled before he reached the house. "I was carrying a *kalamchuri* (a long knife used to cut tea bushes) and a stick. Suddenly, I saw thousands of people rushing towards Lohar's house. I also heard gunshots." He fled.

Among the dead, there could be known troublemakers who had been arrested for being involved in a murder. A member of the Dalgaon gram panchayat might also be dead.

Labourers said they had seen senior police officials and Citu leaders at the burial of the 19 charred bodies on the bank of Birparajhora. Asu Toppo said: "We have seen people thronging here on Saturday afternoon. Along with the family members and labourers of the garden, Citu leaders were present."



Graves of the 19 carnage victims on the bank of Birparajhora. Picture by Biplab Basak

# Mamata sets up showdown with Subrata

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, November 9

MAYOR SUBRATA Mukherjee threatened to put in his papers after the Trinamool leadership on Sunday gave him 48 hours to sort out some "key" issues, paving the way for a fresh showdown between him and party chief Mamata Banerjee.

The party asked Subrata to withdraw the new water tax Bill, form a committee to review the trade licence fee hike, withdraw Corporation Circular 40 that seeks to abolish the automatic ownership of shops by heirs once the owner dies, and ensure coordination between himself, the councillors and the municipal commissioner.

Subrata didn't comment on the proposals in public, saying the party should give it to him in writing. Mamata told reporters that the mayor had asked for 48 hours to "see what he can do about it".

In private, the mayor told *Hindustan Times* he wouldn't buckle under pressure and if pushed to the wall, would quit. "Let me go through their demands. If I can fulfil them, fine. If I can't, I will step down. Let them find someone who can run the KMC according to their whims," said a fuming mayor.

"Can you name a country where water tax is not imposed? Besides, 70 per cent people are exempt from it. If the government doesn't give me enough funds, how do I fill my coffers and provide water from March? As for the trade licence hike, it's only Rs 10. If people can't pay that, they might as well go out of business. These demands are ir-

## MAYOR'S WATERLOO?



- ▶ The new water tax Bill must be withdrawn
- ▶ A committee must review the hiked trade licence fees
- ▶ Mayor must withdraw Corporation Circular 40, which abolishes automatic ownership of a shop by heirs when the owner dies
- ▶ Mayor must ensure there's no dispute between him, the councillors and the municipal commissioner

responsible. Let them find a new mayor, I won't take this any more," he said.

Subrata is also annoyed with allegations that he is not giving councillors adequate funds for development work. "What are they trying to say? Am I taking the money home?"

An equally livid Mamata retorted: "The party had decided not to impose the water tax. But he is adamant. Moreover, the councillors are constantly complaining that he doesn't give them freedom and his municipal commissioner interferes in their work. Why can't he look into these? He can't compromise the party's interests."



# Biman

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Nov. 7. — The contempt petition against Left Front chairman Mr Biman Bose for passing derogatory remarks against Mr Justice Amitava Lala was not dismissed when it came up for hearing before the Division Bench of Calcutta High Court today.

Mr Bose, present in the court following summons, was exempted from personal appearance by Mr Justice Ashok Ganguly and Mr Justice SP Talukdar. He was directed to file an affidavit in 10 weeks. The matter will come up for hearing after 12 weeks. The Bench di-

# Biman asked to file affidavit

rected that notices be served on newspapers whose copies were submitted before the court in support of the contempt petition.

Mr Bose's counsel Mr Bikash-ranjan Bhattacharya submitted that the criminal petition was not maintainable as it was not in accordance with the Contempt of Court Act. Approval of the advocate-general, solicitor-general or attorney-general was not taken, the counsel said.

Petitioner Mr Idris Ali submitted that there was no need for the advocate-general's consent as the contempt rule had been issued in terms of the order of a Special Bench.

## SC to review strike order

NEW DELHI, Nov. 7. — The Supreme Court (coram, Khare, C.J, Sinha, J) today agreed to reconsider the 6 August order of another two-judge Bench of the court (coram, Shah, Lakshmanan, JJ) completely banning strikes by government employees.

The court issued notice to the Centre in this regard on a petition filed under Article 32 challenging the order of the earlier Bench, after hearing the views of the attorney-general, Mr Soli Sorabjee. "A total ban on strikes is unwarranted and unjustified," Mr Sorabjee said.

The court was in two minds on whether to reconsider the issue because the earlier verdict too was delivered by a two-member Bench. Technically, a review of the judgment can only be carried out by the same Bench. The petition was filed by two members of the Andhra unit of the All India Trade Union Congress and another member of a teachers' association of the State. — CNS

# Dogs feast on Dalgaon dead

109 ARRESTED, GARDEN LABOURERS NOT REPENTANT FOR MASSACRE

Rahul Das/Pramod Giri  
Dalgaon (Jalpaiguri), November 7

FIRST THEY were hacked to death, then burnt. Now, they are being feasted on by dogs.

A day after the Dalgaon Tea Estate massacre, in which 19 people were charred on Thursday morning, dogs are scavenging on whatever remains of the victims. The police said the dogs had fled when the mob attacked Lohar's house.

"We managed to salvage portions of the bodies, but body parts are still scattered around. Some of these dogs were owned by Tarakeswar Lohar himself. They are now biting the same hands that fed them," said Jalpaiguri ASP R. Rajashekharan.

Lohar, secretary of the local Citu unit, had incurred the wrath of the local labourers when he got three "outsiders" appointed as clerks in the tea garden. The labourers wanted their children — qualified enough for the posts — to be appointed.

Among the dogs that have returned to the house is Lucky, Lohar's own dog. "It was injured in the leg during the mayhem, but managed to flee. It is the one having the most fun," said a police officer.

The village in Dhobi Line bore a deserted look. Most villagers have fled the area fearing police action and retaliation by Lohar's sympathisers. "Only 20 of us are still in the village," said one of the labourers. Some 109 people, including 27 women, have been arrested so far.

"I am not sorry for what I have done. That's why I didn't flee after the massacre," said an unrepentant Nili Murmo at the Alipurduar Court. Murmo is not alone. Many like him



SUBHENDU GHOSH

Lohar's dog Lucky nibbles at the hands that once fed him.

surrendered after committing the heinous crime for the same reason. Lohar is a much-loathed man for the way he minted money by compromising the labourers' interests. All those arrested, including Lohar, were produced in court on the day. Other than Lohar, all were sent to judicial custody. Lohar has been remanded in police custody.

A large number of villagers gathered outside the Alipurduar Sadar Hospital to claim the bodies of the victims. "Identifying the bodies is a problem. Most of them have been burnt beyond recognition. Cremation has thus been deferred to Saturday," said Jalpaiguri SP Siddhi Nath Gupta.

The 24-hour Jalpaiguri bandh called by the CPI(ML) Liberation had little effect in the district. The factory remained open, but nobody came for work.

Another report on Page 3



# Doctors protest, do not strike

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, Nov. 6: Junior doctors today handed a lesson to politicians by choosing to protest without disrupting work as the government's pursuit of punishment of four interns took another step forward.

Despite attacking the government's decision to penalise six of their colleagues from RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, an overwhelming majority of junior doctors and medical students refused to respond to a strike and boycott call.

In every medical college, they lodged their protest against the suspension of the four interns and dismissal of two junior doctors after classes and outdoor duty. Only at RG Kar, where unruly incidents on Saturday night

have led to the punishment of the six without trial, did the call for a student strike and boycott of outpatients' department evoke some response.

RG Kar principal Basudeb Baberjee issued a one-liner today, announcing that Biplab Chandra, Subhajit Ray, Subhankar Chatterjee and Rakesh Sharma were being suspended with immediate effect.

Confronted with the punishment without trial, the first three interns — members of the All India Democratic Students Organisation, which is affiliated to the Opposition SUCI and called the strike — said they were exploring legal avenues.

"This government seems to have lost its senses," a spokesperson said. "The judiciary is our only hope."

The majority of medical students and junior doctors, who do not belong to any political group, are highly critical of the "soft stand" taken by the CPM fronts like the Students' Federation of India and the West Bengal Junior Doctors' Council.

"(But) we would not like to see patients suffer in a fight that is essentially between the government and the medical community," said a junior doctor at Nil Ratan Sirkar Medical College and Hospital where a deputisation was made to principal Purnima Sau Mandal, decrying the government's "vindictive and partisan" attitude.

"Why should a patient, who has come all the way from Bongaon (North 24-Parganas), suffer for what the government has done?" he asked.

"As it is, all the teaching hospitals in the city are having to function with a strength severely depleted by many of our colleagues going off to Delhi for the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences entrance test," said an intern at Medical College and Hospital.

"We felt the hospitals, already under the scanner for the wrong reasons, should not attract more negative coverage," he said.

With pressure growing on it, even the SFI admitted that the government and its parent party had failed in the health sector. State secretary Apurba Chatterjee also demanded that the government revoke its "death sentence" on the four interns and wanted an inquiry to precede any action.

## WORKERS SET FIRE TO UNION LEADER'S HOUSE

# 19 burnt alive in Bengal tea estate violence

By Marcus Dam

9-87 MD  
110 1 2/11  
**KOLKATA, NOV. 6.** Nineteen people were burnt alive when a mob of nearly 400, mostly tea garden workers, set ablaze the house of a trade union leader in the Dalgaon tea estate in north Bengal's Jalpaiguri district this morning.

The bodies of the persons trapped indoors were charred, making it difficult for police to initially determine the number of the dead.

The West Bengal Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, said the incident was gruesome and raised serious concerns. The police were investigating the incident and senior police officials were at the spot, he said.

The violence was a sequel to a dispute between two sections of the estate's 1,500 or so workers over the filling of three vacancies for the posts of clerks.

An associate of Tarakeshwar Lohar, secretary of the Chabagan Mazdoor Union (the only union in the estate), fired at a 22-year-old youth, Sanik Kachua, as a group of people approached the former's house in the labour lines, the State's IGP (Law and Order), Chayan Mukherjee, told *The Hindu*.

As news of the attack on Mr. Kachua spread,

tea workers emerged from their homes and, after converging outside the factory gates, headed for Mr. Lohar's house and set it on fire. Mr. Lohar was not at home then but 19 others who were indoors were trapped in the flames.

According to Mr. Mukherjee, the officer-in-charge of Falakata reached the spot around 8.30 a.m. and finding the house ablaze summoned the fire brigade. Soon the fire tenders reached the estate and doused the flames.

The police are trying to find out why the workers assembled in front of Mr. Lohar's house. Mr. Lohar is one of the 106 so far arrested. Mr. Kachua has been admitted to the Jalpaiguri hospital. Three others were also injured.

Sources in Jalpaiguri said that tension had been simmering among the workers over the past few days following differences between two sections over the filling of the posts.

While one group insisted that appointments be given to those from the families of garden workers residing in the labour lines, the other, led by Mr. Lohar, said that people from outside should also be considered. The bitterness among the rival groups had turned acrimonious recently, climaxing in today's incident.

**CPI(M) demands probe: Page 11**

# Junior docs will strike work today

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, November 5

SUCI-BACKED JUNIOR doctors and medical students will boycott classes and the outpatient departments in all teaching and non-teaching government hospitals in the state on Thursday in protest against the suspension of six R.G. Kar doctors.

The Trinamool and the Indian Medical Association will support the boycott called by the SUCI-backed Junior Doctors' Federation and Medical Students' Action, both of which have demanded withdrawal of the suspension.

But Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has taken a serious view of the matter. "Let's see," he said when reporters told him about the boycott. Health Minister Suryakanta Mishra was evasive. "I have no information on the boycott," he said. On the doctors' demand for a regular inquiry into the suspended doctors' role in Saturday night's trouble, Mishra said, "First, the doctors should prove that they are not guilty."

The government has suspended four junior doctors and terminated the service of two house staff for involvement in the ruckus and negligence in treatment of Nityagopal Banik, whose death at the hospital provoked the violence.

Members of the Junior Doctors' Federation threatened that they would stop work in all hospitals if the government fails to meet their demand. The CPI(M)-backed West Bengal Junior Doctors' Council and Association of Health Services Doctors (AHSD) will oppose the boycott, but urged the government to reconsider the suspension. The hospital authorities, too, will request the government to reconsider the decision.

# Doctors' stir claims another life

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, November 2

THE NIGHT before, Bhabani Majumder died waiting at the gates as R.G. Kar doctors were too busy rioting inside and beating up journalists. On Sunday morning, Asutosh Majumder died inside the hospital as his attendant's frantic pleas to doctors in his final hours fell on deaf ears. The doctors were too busy holding demonstrations against the government's apathy to their "problems".

Bhabani, a woman from Baranagar, had tried to hang herself and was saved by her family in the nick of time. Writhing in pain inside the ambulance, she died at the gates after being made to wait for half an hour as the rampaging doctors sealed off the entrance and converted the hospital into a war zone following a row with the kin of a patient who had died at the male medicine ward.

The journalists who rushed to the hospital to cover the story were targeted by the rioting doctors, who held the media responsible for their problems by highlighting the cases of medical negligence. Many critical patients were turned away from the gates as the doctors unleashed a reign of terror, Bhabani being one of the more unfortunate ones.

Nothing much changed on Sunday morning. The air was still thick with tension and patients still turned away, except the very critical ones. Security at the hospital was beefed up. The police also put the hospital out of bounds for journalists.

But as the day wore on, the doctors changed tack and embarked on a more peaceful mode of protest, going on an indefinite hunger strike. They even claimed that it was not them but the police who had roughed up reporters and smashed cameras. This continued till late into the night, when the authorities

9 (a. m)



A man (left) is turned away without treatment to his sick child as junior doctors strike work at RG Kar on Sunday.

ASHOK NATH DEV/HT

## Fatal shot that started the fire

Subhendu Maiti  
Kolkata, November 2

THE DEATH of Nitya Gopal Banik at the male medicine ward of RG Kar — the spark that set off Saturday night's runaway violence in the hospital complex — was a glaring instance of doctor's error.

Some senior doctors of the hospital said Banik, the 60-year-old patient of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), had been brought to the sixth-floor ward of the casualty building on October 31 with signs of acute breathlessness. But around 6 pm on Saturday a house staff gave him a pethidine injection — a sedative that is also a respiratory depressant, and therefore potentially fatal for someone like Banik.

When the patient began to sink after the injection and his anxious relatives asked the doctor the name of the drug, the doctor refused to answer them and a scuffle broke out. Around 9 pm, when Banik's condition started to deteriorate, his relatives raised an alarm. But the doctor refused to attend to him.

Doctors attached to the medicine departments of several city medical colleges said the injection could be responsible for Banik's death.

"We usually avoid giving sedatives to patients suffering from COPD," an R.G. Kar doctor said. "The disease is a form of bronchitis. All kinds of sedatives should be avoided in such cases. How a house staff could give him such a strong sedative without instructions from a senior physician is a mystery. An RMO was informed when the patient's condition turned critical. But by then, it was too late."

The incident has outraged many senior doctors of the city who have urged director of medical education Dr Chittaranjan Maiti to probe Banik's death and the allegations of negligence. Maiti, who visited the hospital on Sunday and reportedly discussed Banik's death with the doctors, told *Hindustan Times*, "I haven't yet received any report relating to his treatment. I will look into this aspect after I get all the details." Dr Pradyut Sur, secretary of the CPI(M)-backed Association of Health Services Doctors, also demanded a probe.

patient's death. As these attendants get a ringside view of the wards and are privy to cases of negligence, many of the squabbles between doctors and patients' kin are triggered by them.

The other problems cited by doctors were the poor doctor-patient ratio, lack of round-the-clock pathological tests and scarcity of senior doctors among others. True to style, the authorities promised to "look into" the complaints.

### In Kolkata Live

- Politicians, intellectuals condemn attack on journalists
- Burdwan nursing home in the eye of a storm



ing doctors as one of their "problems". In most cases, the attendants are family members who, alleging doctors, often raise a stink after the

managed to get them back to work. By then, Asutosh — a renal failure patient and admitted to the urology department — had paid with his life for the doctors' strike. Early in the morning, his condition deteriorated. His personal attendant ran out to fetch the doctors, but not one turned up, exhausted as they were from all that rioting the night before and the burden of carrying out a peaceful demonstration.

Several doctors from other departments privately confirmed that Asutosh's attendant had indeed pleaded with his doctors to examine him but was turned away.

Incidentally, the practice of allowing personal attendants for critical patients was cited by the agitat-

W Buddha's twin twists to state politics

# Nod for English, prod for *babu* rule

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Nov. 1. — The chief minister today dropped two political bomb shells at one go. First, he indicated that English would finally be taught from class I by categorically stating for the first time that teaching the language from that stage was necessary for the state's progress.



**A right move and a wrong?**

Secondly, he virtually gave government employees the authority to decide on their promotions and pay hikes by giving in to demands of an association of state employees for introducing a system of self-appraisal reports in lieu of the existing annual confidential reports for officials of all state services.

This is the first time that Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has categorically come out in favour of teaching English, as he puts it, "throughout a child's school career". He thus echoed the stand of Mr Jyoti Basu, who too had stated that English should be taught from class I.

Addressing the special annual general meeting of the State Service Associations and its associate, the State Secretariat Service Association, the chief minister said the demand for self-appraisal reports was legitimate

## KANTI'S VIEWS

KRISHNAGAR, Nov. 1. — While the chief minister expressed his intent of teaching English from class I, his primary education minister said the government may not after all accept the proposal for now, even if it came from the CPI-M.

The government, he said, will continue till next year with the Pabitra Sarkar model of teaching English "formally" from class III. If English is introduced from class I, then teachers will have to be better trained, he said.

Mr Kanti Biswas was delivering the inaugural address of a seminar at Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswa-Vidyalaya, Mohonpur. The seminar was on New Paradigm of Policy Planning in Higher Education across Countries: Challenges Before the Management and All India University Officers' Convention.

— SNS

since IAS and WBCS officials already had it, and that he was accepting the demand.

Under the system of annual confidential reports, superior officials prepare reports assessing the work of their subordinates. All pay-hikes and promotions depend on the ACR. The self-appraisal report would entitle subordinate employees to assess their own performance, thus casting a shadow of doubt over its authenticity and

credibility.

The chief minister's acceptance of the demand was followed by his iterating the need for instilling a positive work-culture in the administration. "State government employees are as much responsible for the development of the state as any of the ministers, so you have to be more responsive and patient in your dealings with the public. Many do not understand how you are supposed to function and come with unreasonable requests, but listen to what they have to say and explain to them why their request can not be entertained," Mr Bhattacharjee said.

Ironically, most members of the audience left the auditorium to grab their lunch packets as soon as Mr Bhattacharjee was through with his speech and left, much to the dismay of the speakers on the dais who kept coaxing them not to leave till the end of the function. If that was any indication of the direction in which work-culture was headed, introduction of the self-appraisal system could prove to be detrimental.

The chief minister also said a member of each of the eight services represented in the convention would be placed in the joint consultative committee in order to facilitate co-operation between the state government and the services.

The eight state services are commercial tax, excise, agricultural income tax, food and supplies, employment, co-operative, labour, and audit and accounts.

# Rioting doctors take out anger on scribes

## AS RG KAR TURNS WAR ZONE, PATIENT DIES AT THE GATES

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, November 1

AT A convention on Saturday morning, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee admitted that discipline in city hospitals has taken a beating. He couldn't have been closer to the truth. Later in the day, journalists took a heavy beating from doctors at R.G. Kar Hospital for doing their job.

Over the last few weeks, the media has tirelessly worked to expose the pathetic state of the health care system. Saturday was no different. As reports came in that a ruckus had broken out between junior doctors and the kin of a patient who had died in the male ward around 11.30 pm, a reporter of *Hindustan Times* rushed to the spot, and paid with his blood for doing so.

The hospital had already turned a war zone, with doctors and the patient's kin fighting pitched battles. The police had reached the spot and managed to separate the warring groups. But that only precipitated matters.

The doctors, angry with the police for preventing them from getting even with the patient's kin, pounced on the cops. By then, the doctors had been joined by their juniors in the hostels, who arrived with iron rods.

The doctors and the students went on the rampage in their own hospital, smashing window panes and breaking furniture. They then sealed off the gates and blocked the ambulance.

As the doctors were converting the hospital into a fortress to prepare for a violent showdown, a critical patient reached the gates. Bhabani Mazumdar of Baranagar had tried to hang her-



self and had been saved in the nick of time. Writhing inside the ambulance, she died after being made to wait for half an hour.

As the HT reporter reached

the spot, the rioting doctors chased him down, shouting slogans against the media. They pinned him to the ground and started beating him mercilessly.

By now, the doctors had clearly marked their prey — the police and the media. Anybody with a camera or in khaki was a target. While TV cameras were smashed, doctors seized Armed Police constable Sk Farooqudin's rifle and broke it to pieces.

Meanwhile, patient after patient — most of them critical — were being turned away. Till reports last came in, some 300 doctors and students were battling an equal number of cops.

### Rampage roster

▶ **OCT 30** Mob vandalises superintendent's chamber at Bongaon Subdivisional Hospital as a woman, Suli Biswas, dies after delivering a stillborn baby

▶ **OCT 29** NRS Hospital superintendent manhandled after rats nibble bodies in the hospital morgue

▶ **OCT 19** Relatives rough up a doctor at RG Kar after a patient, Nikunja Das, dies because of alleged negligence

# CM acts, over to Mamata

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Oct. 29: Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee made his move today by unveiling a set of proposals to hold rallies without — he hoped — inconveniencing the citizen. It is now the turn of Mamata Banerjee to make the rally code work.

Her party, the Trinamul Congress, boycotted the all-party meeting Bhattacharjee had called to discuss his proposals that seek to restrict meetings to three spots in central Calcutta and one each in north, south and east and suggest that big rallies should be held only on Saturday, Sunday and holidays.

Bhattacharjee's draft is being sent to Mamata for her response.

Routes have been laid down for processions and Bhattacharjee said after the meeting that there was consensus on marching along the left flank of the road, allowing flow of traffic. Religious processions will also have to abide by the rally code.

The proposals (details on Page 9) stop short of Justice Amitava Lala's order prohibiting rallies on weekdays between 8 am and 8 pm, but the chief minister said the effort would be to hold meetings on holidays.

An "effort" such as this cannot succeed without the main Opposition

party's cooperation. Bhattacharjee said: "I wanted Trinamul and SUCI (which too stayed away from the meeting) to join the

deliberations today, and with this in view I called their leaders and urged them not to boycott."

Neither responded. Mamata's spokesman, Mukul Roy, denied that the chief minister had spoken to Trinamul.

But Subrata Mukherjee, a senior Trinamul leader, said: "He had asked me to ensure Trinamul's attendance and promised to provide us with a copy of the draft proposal at the meeting. But I don't know whether talking to me was the same as talking to the party."

Trinamul had announced the boycott on the excuse that it had not received a copy of the draft.

Bhattacharjee said: "I told them that they may have contrary views, but they should come and place them in the meeting. They did not come. Nevertheless, we will send them a copy of the draft and seek their opinion in writing within a week."

"The chief minister always reacts late. We had sought the draft earlier. What was the harm in sending it to us a few days ago? Anyway, we can only comment after we receive it," said Pankaj Banerjee, the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly.

Bhattacharjee stressed that organisers of rallies would have to mandatorily acquire police permission — a requirement that exists but is not honoured.

He said if rallies are to be held on weekdays, the organisers will have to seek permission much in advance.

The Congress and the BJP attended the meeting but did not raise any major objections to the proposals.

## QUOTE

What is the UN going to do on the roads which are meant for the common people?

GEORGE FERNANDES

## SICKENING DEFENCE

It is difficult to say which is more sickening — the rottenness of West Bengal's government hospitals or the arrogance and insensitivity that mark the ruling Marxists' attempts to cover up their failures. Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's defence of his health minister, Mr Surjya Kanta Mishra, whom he called an "asset" of his government, would ring scandalously cruel to the parents of Susmita Biswas or six-month-old Shabana Parveen, whose lives were snuffed out by a sick system. His defence mocks the sufferings of people who have little choice but to go to government hospitals for treatment. This is not the first time that the maladies of the state's healthcare system have come to light so painfully. The rot was out in the open when more than a dozen children died within a few days at the B.C. Roy Memorial Hospital in Calcutta last year. The picture is even grimmer in the districts where the absence of medical staff and medicines has long reduced the system to a mockery. But, worst of all, it is the absence of a work culture that seems to be the bane of the system. Even Mr Mishra admitted as much when, in his budget speech last year, he blamed the mess more on mismanagement than on the lack of infrastructure at the district health centres.

The recent events have once again proved beyond doubt that Mr Mishra is not up to his job. Mr Bhattacharjee seems to be deluding himself, and the people, by refusing to see the obvious. He has sought refuge in half-hearted measures like the transfer of a hospital superintendent or suspension of some erring doctors and employees. He has cried foul over agitations on hospital premises. Given the nature of official inquiries, it would be safe to predict that once the public outcry dies down, the guilty will be let off without much ado. Unless the tyranny of their trade unions is put down firmly, the errant employees too would continue to hold hospital administrations to ransom. An incompetent and insincere government would be unable to persuade unwilling doctors to go to the villages or attend to their duties. Mr Bhattacharjee knows that nothing short of drastic, unpopular measures can stem the rot. But so deep is his government stuck in the mess that he has taken the half-measures in the hope that they would deflect public criticism. What he has done so far is worse than inaction; it is a brazen attempt to cheat the people. He has only one way of proving his sincerity in tackling the challenge — by asking Mr Mishra to quit. That alone may not bring the system back to health, but it could give the people some cause for hope.



# Mamata's time of rally reckoning



Ashraf and Naseema, the parents of Shabana, cringe at all the attention at Writers' Buildings where they had gone to meet chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee on Tuesday. Six-month-old Shabana died a fortnight ago without medical attention and after being stuck because of a rally on the way to hospital (See Metro). Rallies and hospitals have become inseparable since. Picture by Pradip Sanyal

## Every July 21, Trinamul holds mammoth meetings. Families of that day's victims can't any more tell why

Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee has decided not to attend Wednesday's all-party meeting called by chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee to reach a consensus on imposing rally discipline in Calcutta's streets. Without Mamata's support — Trinamul being the main Opposition — a code of conduct on rallies will not work. When the court restricted rallies, the government opposed. When the government wants to do the same, the Opposition opposes. "If the common people and the Opposition don't hold rallies, who will?" Mamata is asking. (See Page 10)

SUNANDO SARKAR AND  
SANJAY MANDAL

**Calcutta, Oct. 28: Remember July 21, 1993, when 13 men died in police firing on a rally?**

The families that lost their men — often the only earning members — remember, only too clearly, the day they were bereaved 10 years ago. The anger

— against a "heartless" police force — is not yet spent but, somewhere down the line, rallies have ceased to appear like a vehicle to voice that anger.

Three of the four families — among the total of 13 — living in the city proper were spoken to and all said they were yet to forgive the government that "took away" their men. But, simultaneously, the families that contributed standard-bearers for the Trinamul's annual rally view the organised shows of strength as "soulless phenomena achieving nothing".

Ask Kalyan Banerjee's mother (Juthika) or elder brother (Bikash), who survive him since the July 21 of a decade ago. The family bridged the political gap between the Left and the Opposition — then represented by the Congress and its youth wing that Mamata used to lead. Bikash was a regular at every big CPM do whereas Kalyan would make it a point to respond to every one of Mamata's calls.

Kalyan died. But it was not

only the Opposition that lost a regular at its rallies. Bikash, too, stopped going to them. "I cringe at the sound of the word 'rally'," he said.

"The very word brings back so many emotions I would rather not feel," he said, expressing his fear of "sarbanasha (destructive)" political programmes.

Arun Ray and his mother, Ashalata, are another set of people for whom rallies conjure up unpleasant associations. The family, staying at an address on Swinhoe Lane, lost Pradip — Ashalata's younger son — to the rally that tried to move towards Writers' Buildings and was fired upon by a police force then described variously as "on the edge" and "trigger-happy".

"Even now, when I hear someone from my neighbourhood going to attend a rally, I start praying," the elderly Ashalata said. "If it was within my powers, I would have stopped every single rally called by self-serving individuals now called leaders," she added.

The family of Shrikanta Sharma is, perhaps, even worse off. After his death in the Youth Congress rally, the household — comprising four daughters and Shrikanta's wife Renu — eked out a living on their neighbours' sympathy.

One of the daughters has married a neighbour, Purnendu Mridha, but things have not changed much. Purnendu is the only earning member — he teaches students at home — and the family is left ruing what happened at a rally 10 years ago. In Renu's words, that rally "took away everything and gave back only suffering and poverty".

She added that she had heard about "a controversy" over the right to rally which started over a court order.

But she does not know that Mamata is declining to enter into a compromise with the ruling party over imposing rally discipline — one Trinamul argument questions how the party can surrender the right to hold its July 21 rally.

## Hospital baby in cat's mouth

A STAFF REPORTER

**Calcutta, Oct. 28:** A nurse intervened in the nick of time to prevent a cat from carrying away a two-day-old infant from the nursery of the state-run Bongaon sub-divisional hospital in North 24-Parganas last night.

Swati Biswas, 23, had given birth to a boy on Sunday. As the baby developed jaundice, he was placed in an incubator in the hospital's nursery.

On Monday night, around 8.30, the attending nurse met with a bizarre sight: a cat moving stealthily in the room with the baby clasped in its mouth.

The stray cat had entered the nursery, climbed into the incubator and attacked the infant. When the nurse chased it, the cat dropped the baby on the floor and jumped out of a window.

This morning, Ashoke, the father, and his relatives found an

open wound on the baby's right thigh. They reported the matter to the doctors and nurses on duty.

"They tried to hush up the matter and explained that it is a minor incident and we should not make a hue and cry about it. They also assured us free treatment for the injury," said a relative.

Hospital superintendent Hirenath Dutta said authorities were probing how the cat managed to find its way in. "The cat had tried to pull the baby out of the nursery, but could not manage to get away with it," he said.

Director of health services Prabhakar Chatterjee dismissed the incident as "nothing major".

"In the visiting hours, stray cats often venture into the hospital wards. But the hospital staff should see to it that the patients are safe," Chatterjee said at Writers' Buildings.

# Death masks death blame

20/10 9-8x ms

SUNANDO SARKAR AND  
BAPPA MAJUMDAR

Where does the buck stop for Susmita Biswas' death? With four doctors and a Class-IV staff of a hospital touted as the best state-run medical unit, but whose emergency ward is equipped with only one oxygen mask? Or does the blame go further up and stop only after reaching the headquarters of a government that cannot equip its hospitals to take the load they must bear?

Days after chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee read out the transfer orders for the "terrible negligence" at SSKM Hospital that claimed the life of the 20-year-old girl, several questions continue to do the rounds of the corridors of hospitals and state health department offices, over the crime and the punishment.

And one name that keeps cropping up is that of Santosh Sau, in the news for the past few days for yanking an oxygen mask off Susmita's mouth and causing her death.

A probe by The Telegraph on the state of the infrastructure at SSKM Hospital on October 17 (the day Susmita died) has thrown up one curious fact — that there was only one oxygen mask at the state's no. 1 hospital's emergency wing throughout the day.

"So what should Sau have done, when confronted with a situation in which the emergency wing of the state's 'best' hospital is left without even a single oxygen mask?" an SSKM administrative official asked on Sunday. "Should he have kept the lone

## PROMISE AND PERFORMANCE

When Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's government came to power in 2001, its leaders slapped a tag of "utmost priority" on certain sectors — health was one. With one tragedy after another in hospitals, The Telegraph revisits the promises

- **Promise:** Group-D staff will be disciplined; like doctors and nurses, they will be transferred
- **Reality:** Nothing has happened. Large in number and unionised, Group-D still controls hospitals, where doctors form the lowest rung
- **Promise:** Break the back of touts who control admissions
- **Reality:** It's still much easier to get a bed through a tout
- **Promise:** Free basic drugs for non-paying patients (70% of all patients)
- **Reality:** Free patients still buy an overwhelming number of drugs. Government does not have money
- **Promise:** Rapid decentralisation so that hospital superintendents don't have to run to Writers' Buildings
- **Reality:** Superintendents have been relegated to being deputies to principals of teaching hospitals
- **Promise:** Self-appraisal diary for every doctor to record classes taken or operations conducted
- **Reality:** Not a single doctor has got a diary
- **Promise:** Every hospital to be equipped with electronic signboards showing the number of patients admitted and the number of vacant beds
- **Reality:** Most hospitals have boards but they are blank
- **Promise:** Patients can order food of choice and pay for it with private caterers taking charge
- **Reality:** Private caterers have entered but quality of food is generally worse than before



ishment?" a senior physician attached with Medical College and Hospital asked. "If anyone, it is those who control things from Writers' Buildings who should be asked to explain the state of affairs."

Neither the showcaused Sau nor the transferred SSKM brass would speak to the media on Sunday. But Sau had said before the government announced its punitive measures that he was only following "long-standing hospital rules" when he ripped the oxygen mask off Susmita.

"I am an uneducated person," he admitted. "What I did might be inhuman, but what should I have done? Should I have allowed the only mask in the emergency out of the ward?"

And if you thought that lessons had been learnt from the October 17 tragedy, guess how many life-saving masks the emergency wing had on Sunday, nine days after the college-going girl died? It had none.

"We are asking patients to buy oxygen masks if they need them," said a member of the emergency ward staff. What about those who cannot afford one? "We push the pipes down a patient's nostrils and then use the same on another patient," came the answer.

Director of health services Prabhakar Chatterjee admitted that there was a severe shortage of oxygen masks in the city's teaching hospitals. "I have, in the past few days, toured the hospitals extensively and some lacunae have come to my notice," he said. "The government will buy the emergency wards adequate oxygen masks, so that such cases are not repeated in the future."

were carried out.

So, was Sau, a little-lettered SSKM Class-IV staff, to blame if he felt that the lone oxygen mask was vital for the emergency department and the department could not do without one for the next three days?

And how are the officials managing a hospital or a depart-

ment to blame for the inadequate infrastructure when there is an overwhelming consensus that it is no use asking a "cash-strapped" government to replenish infrastructure?

"How can people who are responsible for fitting its busiest hospital's emergency wing with one oxygen mask, dispense pun-

mask back — it could have been needed for several other moribund patients — or allowed it to go to another ward with the patient?" he went on.

Investigations also revealed another fact of life in the red tape-bound government-run hospitals — if the oxygen mask had been taken away to another

ward, it would not have come back there for at least the next 72 hours. That's the "usual time" things take at SSKM Hospital, say its officials. "Records have to be maintained to keep track of hospital infrastructure," one of them said, explaining that the hospital would lose "everything" it had unless stringent checks

had been taken away to another ward, it would not have come back there for at least the next 72 hours. That's the "usual time" things take at SSKM Hospital, say its officials. "Records have to be maintained to keep track of hospital infrastructure," one of them said, explaining that the hospital would lose "everything" it had unless stringent checks

# Buddha parades steps to discipline rallies

T-1  
29/10

9-85 MB

② C.P.M.

## OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Oct. 26: Rattled by last month's Calcutta High Court order, chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today took the first step towards evolving a political consensus on disciplining Calcutta's disruptive rally raj.

Ahead of October 29's all-party meeting called to define a rally code, Bhattacharjee unveiled a draft that seeks to regulate the time and place for rallies, processions and meetings in a more than hour-long session with constituents of the Left Front.

"We have to evolve an approach to the issue," Bhattacharjee is learnt to have informed the meeting.

"Please try and not hold processions and rallies on weekdays on Park Street, C.R. Avenue and Shakespeare Sarani. Try organising the smaller meetings at Deshabandhu Park and Deshapriya Park so that processions don't have to pass the central business district."

From the initial reaction, the chief minister will have a hard time getting the Opposition to agree to his proposals. Both the Trinamul Congress and the Congress described nearly all his proposals in one word, "unworkable". (See Page 9)

Even some front partners agreed with this view, though no one raised objections at the meeting as the CPM had already bilaterally discussed the propos-

LALA'S ORDER	CM'S PROPOSAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Public meetings can be held in three areas — Brigade Grounds, Rani Rashmoni Avenue and Shahid Minar but only before 8 am and after 8 pm on weekdays</li> <li>* Restriction not applicable on Sundays and other holidays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Big processions to Brigade Grounds and Shahid Minar only on Saturdays, Sundays and other holidays</li> <li>* Small and medium rallies to be held at Tala Park and Deshabandhu Park in north Calcutta, Subodh Mullick Square in central Calcutta and Deshapriya Park in the south</li> <li>* Small and medium rallies not allowed from 9 am to 11 am and from 4 pm to 6 pm</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Processions that do not end in meetings can only be allowed on one side of the road</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Processions will move along one side of the road, acquiring only one lane space</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Traffic police will have to be adequately armed to control processions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Processions will have to abide by the traffic signal at every intersection</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Organisers to pay security deposit to compensate rally victims</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No mention of provision for compensation</li> </ul>

als with them.

In at least one aspect, Bhattacharjee's draft proposal (see chart) goes beyond Justice Amitava Lala's September 29 order in which he said rallies cannot be held on weekdays between 8 am and 8 pm at the city centre.

The chief minister is suggesting keeping the central business district free from possible disruption at all times on weekdays.

Bhattacharjee in the meeting

and Left Front chairman Biman Bose at a news conference said the government's exercise was independent of Justice Lala's.

Observers will find that claim difficult to digest because the government had done little in two years since Calcutta High Court first asked it to discipline rallies.

"We had started an exercise to ensure smooth flow of traffic in the city in 2001. This has got nothing to do with any order

passed in 2003," said Bose.

Bhattacharjee told the front meeting that certain restrictions on processions and rallies would have to be imposed so that traffic flow was not hindered.

Explaining the travails commuters have to suffer, he said it takes an hour and a half for a big rally to cross a major intersection.

"It is very normal for someone to get stuck in a rally for long hours. I may also get stuck in such processions one of these days," he told the meeting.

Underlining the need to discipline Left-sponsored rallies, he wanted top party leaders to act as volunteers to ensure that no ailing person on way to hospital got stuck.

"Volunteers with prominently displayed badges should immediately intervene and make smooth passage for the ailing, the disabled, the old and any other person in an emergency situation," he said.

According to Bhattacharjee, sometimes the chain of a big procession will have to be broken at intersections to let vehicles pass. "I hope that front leaders will not differ from me and the entire exercise involves public interest," he said.

Front chairman Bose said the government had taken an initiative two years ago and stopped rallies at Esplanade East.

"Today's meeting is just an extension of what we had discussed earlier. However, we will have to further discuss how to go about rallies during election time," Bose said.

# Buddha taps Opp on rally curbs

Aloke Banerjee  
Kolkata, October 26

ARMED AT last with unqualified endorsement within the Left Front, Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee on Sunday moved to secure the agreement of the Trinamool, the Congress and the SUCI to his proposed restrictions on rallies and urged them to support his move at an all-party meeting on October 29.

The Trinamool did not immediately respond, but the SUCI rejected his call. The only positive response came from the Congress.

At a special meeting of Front leaders on Sunday, Bhattacharjee said he had urged Trinamool MLA Saugata Ray to persuade



Mamata Banerjee to send delegates to the all-party meet and accept the proposed curbs on rallies. He would also speak to leader of the Opposition Pankaj Banerjee, Bhattacharjee said. He made a similar appeal to SUCI MLA Debaprasad Sarkar to accept his proposal.

Front chairman Biman Bose had spoken to SUCI state secretary Probhas

## MIXED SIGNALS

- **SUCI**  
Rejects CM rally roadmap
- **TRINAMOOL**  
No response yet
- **CONGRESS**  
Hints at acceptance

Ghosh on Saturday but was told that the SUCI would reject the government's proposal. However, former state Congress president Somen Mitra and general secretary Manas Bhunia have reportedly signalled their party's support to restrictions on rallies.

The most significant support to the Chief Minister's initiative came

from within the Front. One clear sign came in the markedly different tone adopted by Bose, who went to great lengths after the meeting to justify the proposed curbs on rallies.

Bose, who had launched a virulent attack a month ago on Justice Amitava Lala's ruling on weekday rallies, said on Sunday that some measure of control on rallies was imperative in view of Kolkata's burgeoning population and traffic, and the city's rapidly shrinking road space.

He hastened to add that the Front's altered stand had nothing to do with the High Court order. "Lala gave his order in 2003. But we have been thinking of regulating meetings and processions since 2001."

# Patient dies as doctors doze

Rajib Chakraborty  
Basirhat, October 26

9 88 253

AFTER BHATPARA, it's Basirhat. Aman, the child who died on Friday night after being denied treatment at the Bhatpara State General Hospital, was a seven-year-old with high fever. Gobinda Das, the man who died on Sunday at Basirhat, was a 40-year-old with acute pneumonia. Both died amid allegations of medical negligence.

The only significant difference is that Das's death sparked a mob fury in which a doctor and another staffer of the Basirhat Sub-divisional Hospital were beaten up after Rita, Das's wife, alleged denial of treatment. She said the doctors had been asleep on duty and showed no inclination to attend to the patient. They ignored repeated requests to arrange for an

## DISTRICT DEATH TRAPS

HC 1

**PURULIA** Ruma Chakraborty dies after delivering a child at Purulia Sadar Hospital on Saturday night, allegedly due to a doctor's negligence. Hospital staff confirm complaint by patients' relatives that the doctor didn't attend to her when she was having convulsions

**BHATPARA** 7-year-old Aman Singh dies after being refused admission at Bhatpara State General Hospital on Friday night

oxygen cylinder even though Das had been gasping for breath.

His relatives said Das, a resident of Basirhat's Colony No 3, had been taken to the hospital at 1 am with acute respiratory trouble. But the

27 10

doctors and nurses took the matter lightly. They ignored him for 20 long minutes before one of them gave Das an injection immediately after which he died. The death sparked a backlash in which Dr Debendra Deb-nath, who had prescribed the injection, received a merciless beating.

"Someone from the crowd tried to throttle him; somebody else tried to stab him with a piece of broken glass. His life was saved because one of the staffers jumped to his rescue," a fellow doctor said. The mob ransacked the hospital and destroyed all furniture.

The hospital has lodged a complaint with the police. Hospital super Dr Mihir Chakraborty, however, said there was no negligence on the doctors' part.

See also Kolkata Live

27 OCT 2003

# Turned-out child dies as state reads riot act

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Oct. 25: On a day the health minister hauled up hospital heads and other officials for the series of negligence-related incidents in government hospitals, seven-year-old Aman Singh died of acute gastro-enteritis shortly after being refused admission by a state hospital.

The sky was still dark when a nurse in the emergency wing of Bhatpara State General Hospital told Arun Prasad Singh there was nothing they could do to save his son as two doctors in the medicine department were on "indefinite leave".

They have been on leave for a month after one of them was beaten up by local residents, the nurse informed.

"Take him to the Jawahar Lal Nehru Hospital in Kalyani, where he can possibly be saved," the nurse yelled as Arun Prasad, holding his dying son in his arms, rushed out towards a waiting ambulance.

As the vehicle sped down

## HEALTH CHECK

- Salary of doctors and healthcare staff to be deducted for coming late to work and not displaying I-cards
- Forty-bed observation ward to be set up in emergency departments of hospitals to check if patients need immediate admission
- Emphasis on patient care and training of healthcare staff in state-run hospitals
- Fully computerised networking of government hospitals to help check availability of beds and condition of patients
- Surprise checks and vigil to monitor activities of hospital staff

Kalyani Expressway in the pre-dawn darkness, Aman slowly sank. One-and-a-half hours later, around 4.30, when Arun Prasad carried his son into the Kalyani hospital, doctors pronounced him "brought dead".

The latest blot on Bengal's healthcare system came hours before health minister Surjya Kanta Mishra warned hospital superintendents and senior officials what doctors would face if found negligent in their duties.

At the four-hour meeting at Writers' Buildings, where director of health services Prabhakar Chatterjee and director of medical education C.R. Maity were

present, Mishra said: "Slackness in duty will be dealt with firmly and we will not tolerate callousness on the part of doctors in their treatment of patients."

The tough talk came in the wake of incidents involving negligence in state-run hospitals. On Thursday, four doctors of SSKM Hospital, including the surgeon superintendent and his deputy, were shifted for the death of 20-year-old Susmita Biswas, who died on October 17 after lying unattended for hours.

Yesterday, a pancreatitis patient of the same hospital, Asis Jana, walked out after being told to relieve himself in his bed. On

Tuesday, 27-year-old Santosh Hela was found dead next to a garbage dump in the Howrah State General Hospital.

Mishra said the incidents clearly showed hospital employees were not doing their work well and warned that in such cases, not only would the doctors be penalised but also the superintendents and principals of the hospitals and medical colleges.

"The message was that officials and doctors, right from the top to the bottom, would be accountable," an official said.

Mishra said a day's salary would be deducted from the pay of all doctors reporting late, while those found guilty of dereliction of duty would be transferred or suspended.

Mishra also announced the government's plans to introduce 40-bed observation wards in emergency departments of all government hospitals.

"The idea is that no one coming to the emergency departments will be turned away," Chatterjee said.

THE TELEGRAPH

26 OCT 2003

# Malaise runs deep!

9.10  
ND

## Mess in our health care system

5.6  
29/10

It has been announced with considerable fanfare that the West Bengal government have acted with all available despatch in the series of fatalities in government hospitals and that heads have rolled. Neither heads nor feet have rolled. Only a day ago the chief minister asked for a day's time to enable him to talk to the health minister on his return to the city and take action. True to his word, the government have acted. The dispute is not over the timing which is exemplary but over the merit of the so-called action. All those involved have only been moved to other hospitals; cynics will say, out of harm's way. That is all. At the other end of the scale one individual has been moved merely on suspicion. What kind of code of reward and punishment are the government following? The answer is simple and wrong. If transfer is a punishment, then in one case punishment has been awarded merely on suspicion. Surely this is unfair. Unless the transfer is an eyewash in which case it does not matter anyhow. And what about the responsibility of the Superintendent of the SSKM hospital? This cannot be so lightly decided. Was he given a chance to defend himself? Is it not true that he has long ago given up imposing discipline, in common with heads of all other government institutions because this is frowned upon by party stalwarts and he gets no protection if he does his duty. We have neither knowledge of the full circumstances of this particular case nor is the individual known to us. We are proceeding only on the basis of the law which government and party twist out of shape with impunity in every department of governance.

The malady lies much deeper. It is well-known and well-understood that the unionised staff, whether doctors, nurses, para-medical or subordinate staff are immune. This is the dictate of Alimuddin Street and none may ignore it. It was the same thing in the Bapi Sen case. Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya announced that if such cases were repeated the government would take action. We pointed out at the time that the implication necessarily was that one offence was free! And it was only out of fear of the Police Karmachari Union. As long as Alimuddin Street allow indiscipline and worse in the interests of protecting the lumpen elements who bring in the vote at election time by fair means or foul, mostly foul, there will be no improvement. And let there be no nonsense about the poor and the deprived. Atrocities are perpetrated mostly against these. The recent tragedies in hospitals have not touched the rich and powerful. Nor has His Excellency the Governor exerted himself on behalf of a rich man.

We make these points to suggest that the age-old mantra of concern for the poor and downtrodden is long past as far the comrades in Bengal are concerned. Executive power is used selectively in all cases, without exception and in abuse of power not in defence of it. If this means we charge that the level of hypocrisy is unacceptably high, then you would be right.

# CM punishes hospital guilty with transfer

T-1 29/10

D of MB

**ASTAFF REPORTER**

Calcutta, Oct. 23: A week after 20-year-old Susmita Biswas died without medical attention at the government's showpiece SSKM Hospital, the chief minister today announced the removal of its chief and three other senior doctors.

Shaken by a series of tragedies at hospitals over the past fortnight, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said SSKM surgeon superintendent Debdwaipayan Chattopadhyay, his deputy T.K. Ghosh and medical officers Debasish Roy and C.H. Sikdar were being shunted out to mostly desk-bound jobs for what he had earlier described as "terrible negligence".

Susmita, a college student, died on October 17 after spending almost the entire day at SSKM waiting to be admitted.

"A transfer is a punishment. It means the government no longer has faith in them. They are being removed," Bhattacharjee said at Writers' Buildings,

with health minister Surjya Kanta Mishra seated by him.

As the minister in charge of hospitals which have seen one tragedy after another this month, starting with the death of six-month-old Shabana Parveen and capped by the mysterious disappearance and death of Santosh Hela, Mishra, however, received full support.

"He is an asset among my senior colleagues," the chief minister said. "We decided on removing them from SSKM on the basis of the report filed by our fact-finding team," Mishra said.

A non-medical employee, Pradip Dhar, who had reportedly asked Susmita's parents to take her to the hospital but was nowhere to be found that day, has

been suspended.

The probe report by and large confirmed the version of events narrated by Susmita's father. On Tuesday, her parents had recounted their nightmare to Bhattacharjee, after which the chief minister had vowed to punish those responsible.

To those who have suffered at the hands of hospitals and, in cases like the present one, paid with the lives of relatives and friends, transfers may not seem to be punishment enough.

But even this would, perhaps, not have happened had it not been for the public outrage the recent incidents have caused. Chattopadhyay, once a favourite of the government, will now be installed in an office in Salt Lake

which, ironically, runs the state health system development project funded by the World Bank.

The irony does not end there. Santanu Tripathy, the vice-principal of Calcutta Medical College and Hospital who was also appointed its superintendent only a few days ago, was given charge of SSKM in the evening. It was Calcutta Medical from where Shabana's parents had turned away on October 13.

In Shabana's case, the chief minister said, there was a communication gap because the two sides spoke different languages.

"Her parents were told that admission wouldn't cost them anything but they might require Rs 800 for medicines. The admission was registered but they did not understand it. This is an exceptional case, though that too is unfortunate," he said.

There was no explanation as to how a critically ill child, accompanied by unlettered parents, could simply be taken away from a hospital after admission is registered. Nor was responsibility pinned. (See Metro)

## All-party meeting on rallies

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has convened an all-party meeting at Writers' Buildings on October 29 to discuss sites where rallies will be allowed to be held. A draft prepared for it is now being circulated within the Left Front before discussions on Sunday when suggestions from the side of the ruling combine will be given shape.



# Collapsing health care

9/8/03 Alimuddin's policy to blame 5/6 2/9/10

There is nothing new in Kolkata's government referral hospitals failing to respond swiftly to medical emergencies. But the rapid pace at which such "failed responses" are being reported because of doctors and other hospital staff refusing to attend and properly treat critical cases engenders serious alarm. The tragic manner in which the critically-ill 20-year-old undergraduate, Sushmita Biswas, died almost unattended at the SSKM hospital on Friday, only proves how inhuman the doctors and health staff of Kolkata's leading referral hospital, and that too of its emergency ward, have become to the city's sick and dying. Sushmita was rushed to SSKM for "immediate admission and blood transfusion". But she was left unattended for eight hours.

What was worse, the staff at the hospital misbehaved with her parents and told them to get the superintendent's permission for her admission. The hospital superintendent was not available until 2 pm. Only when Sushmita's condition started deteriorating were attempts made to attend on her. But by then it was too late. She was taken off oxygen which hastened her death. The question that naturally arises is why should emergency staff of the state's premier government hospital, whose only job is to provide life saving treatment to the critically sick, behave so irresponsibly and inhumanly? Since when has the hospital superintendent's permission become mandatory for admitting a critical patient? By asking Sushmita's distressed parents to get permission that ought really not to have been necessary, weren't the hospital staff hinting at hassle-free admission by paying a bribe?

That admission into SSKM is also done by paying bribes is an open secret and the matter had even been discussed by the Left Front Cabinet. Sushmita died three days after six-month-old Shabana paid with her life because of refusal by doctors, also of a leading referral hospital of Kolkata, to treat her as her parents could not cough up the fees asked for at the time of admission. The doctors who were on duty did not care to arrange for an ambulance to shift the dying Shabana to another hospital in an attempt to save her life.

The deaths of Shabana and Sushmita clearly indicate that both the emergency and the life care systems in the state government hospitals are collapsing. They are going the Bihar way. This is because of the Marxist government's refusal to enforce work accountability among the hospital staff which has encouraged indiscipline and recklessness. But to Alimuddin Street enlarging its following among doctors and the health staff is more important than ensuring the quality of health care and hospital service. Affiliation to unions controlled by Alimuddin Street ensures that all acts of omission and commission are overlooked. The destructive politics of the Marxists lies at the root of the state's rotten and collapsing health care system. It is this politics which is also defeating the very purpose of upgrading the state's health care system carried out with Rs 760 crore of World Bank assistance.

# Baby 'missing' from RG Kar

SF 23/10  
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Oct. 22. — Mrs Moujhuri Ghosh, resident of 1 Indra Biswas Road, gave birth at RG Kar Hospital on the night of 13 October. But she and her husband Mr Bacchu Ghosh are yet to be handed over their baby, dead or alive.

The hospital authorities told Mr Ghosh on 14 October morning that his wife had given birth to a stillborn. Mrs Ghosh, however, said she had heard her baby cry soon after birth.

"Nine days have passed but we've not yet received



Mr Bacchu Ghosh and Mrs Moujhuri Ghosh at their home.  
— The Statesman

our baby. When we approached the hospital authorities with a letter from the local councillor, they told us that the baby's body would be handed over to

us soon," Mr Ghosh said.

Though the hospital authorities claimed to have begun an investigation, the couple is planning to move court. "We have heard enough excuses. We want our baby soon. Or we will approach the court for justice," Mr Ghosh said.

The health secretary, Mr Asim Burman said: "How is it possible? The woman should know whether the baby she had delivered was stillborn or not. We will look into the matter and take necessary steps."

**Editorial: Collapsing health care, page 6**  
**24 hours to hit on dead Hela, page 8**

# Rally ban, at least in hospitals

A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, Oct. 20: Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today made a start with disciplining rallies and demonstrations by banning these "democratic rights" in hospitals.

"Hospitals are not places to shout slogans, place demands, hold rallies, demonstrations and meetings, nor for exhibiting muscle power," the chief minister said.

Although the decision may sit uneasy together with the state government's challenge to Justice Amitava Lala's ruling that had the same intention of imposing rally discipline in the streets, this is the first time the Left Front regime has recognised the need to protect hospitals from the "democratic right to protest" and acted on it.

The Supreme Court already prevents shows of protest on hospital premises.

Bhattacharjee said all political parties, associations, trade unions and individuals would have to follow the ban.

The directive came a day after blows were exchanged between doctors and other hospital staff and members of the family of Nikunja Das, the 19-year-old who died at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital yesterday amid allegations of neglect.

"Brawls cannot be justified even as a 'reaction' to death caused due to alleged negligence. No circumstance can give anyone the licence to pick a fight in a hospital," Bhattacharjee said.

"The doctors might or might not have erred, but it is for the government to conduct inquiries and punish the guilty. No allegation can be reason enough to bash up doctors or junior staff of hospitals.

"We have taken action against doctors in the past. For example, against those who neglected their duties during the child deaths at Murshidabad some months ago. Any negligence will be followed by inquiries and action will be taken," he added.

As the chief minister announced that he had "asked the police to carry out firmly" his

instructions, action had started at SSKM Hospital where Susmita Biswas died on Friday without receiving medical attention for 10 hours.

Nearly 50 Congress protesters had gathered inside the hospital and started shouting slogans. The police tried stopping the protesters, but they refused to budge. The deputy commissioner of police (south), H.P. Singh, echoed the chief minister: "It's a hospital, stop your *tamashabaazi*". After a lathi-charge, the police rounded up all 50.

Responding to a question on Susmita's death, Bhattacharjee asked: "Do you know whether she was lying unattended for so many hours? That is for the inquiry committee to find out. And the government will act on the basis of the inquiry report."

The report is expected by Wednesday.

"Any death is unfortunate. But, remember, there are also those who are being treated and discharged from hospitals. I can give you these figures," Bhattacharjee said, refusing to react to the circumstances of Shabana Parveen and Susmita's deaths, saying he would speak only after getting the reports.

Six-month-old Shabana died after his parents turned away from a hospital on allegedly being asked for Rs 1,000, which they did not have.

State CPM secretary Anil Biswas, who had strongly defended the right to hold rallies without restrictions, claimed that the party had always been against protest meetings and slogan-shouting in hospitals, nursing homes and schools.

It's strange that it has taken so many years for it to enforce this stand.

"There should not be any protest inside hospitals and nursing homes where critical patients are treated and in schools where children go to study. A hospital is not the place where anarchy should be allowed," he added.

If there is anarchy in the streets, critical patients — like Shabana — may find it difficult to reach hospitals and children schools.

■ See Metro



Police break up the rally organised by the Trinamul Congress' women's wing. Picture by Pradip Sanyal

## Tough yesterday, real test today

A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, Oct. 20: Police did it today: stopped rallies from disrupting traffic in central and north Calcutta.

But can they do an encore tomorrow when a Left Front constituent takes over the busy five-point crossing in Shyambazar?

For the first time since Justice Amitava Lala's ruling on rallies, police intercepted two processions this afternoon before they could hit the roads.

The Trinamul Congress and the Krishak Goraksha Samity were to march around noon — neither had sought police permission.

After standing mute spectator when Justice Lala's ruling was violated with impunity by Left Front constituents on the excuse of not having received a copy of the order, the police today acted first around 11 am when over 100 members of the Krishak Goraksha Samity began assembling in front of the College Street market before their planned march to the Tahgra slaughterhouse.

"We kept watch on them and as soon as they stepped on the street, we stepped in," said a senior police officer. "We did not

allow them to take a single step and arrested 35." The rest of the group dispersed. "We could not allow them to obstruct traffic," the officer said.

The second piece of action came around 2.30 pm in front of Writers' Buildings when a group of Trinamul Congress supporters set off in a procession to protest the death of baby Shabana Parveen. The police chased the 200 protesters away.

The Trinamul activists regrouped and started to march from Lalbazar Street towards Calcutta Medical College and Hospital. But the police were equally firm this time, too, and arrested 39 of them.

At the end of the day, almost 75 had been arrested and two attempts to disrupt traffic foiled. For the record, the police maintain that today's action was a "routine affair".

"We cracked down because we did not want disruption of traffic," said Kuldip Singh, DC, headquarters.

This resolution will be tested tomorrow when the Forward Bloc takes out a procession, along with a tableau, from Hedua Park to the five-point crossing in Shyambazar on the occasion of 60 years of the provisional Azad Hind government.

### QUOTE

Hospitals are not places to shout slogans..., hold rallies

BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE

# Susmita dies as Shabana did

OUR BUREAU  
 9.10.03 18910

Calcutta, Oct. 17: Susmita Biswas died today after lying unattended for hours in a corridor of SSKM Hospital's emergency ward, four days after six-month-old Shabana Parveen died without medical care.

The student of East Calcutta Girls' College was brought to the hospital — among the better hospitals that Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's government runs and not far from Writers' Buildings — at 7.30 am. Suffering from a debilitating blood disorder and breathing trouble, she was allegedly refused admission because there was no bed available in the general ward.

After Susmita's condition started deteriorating last night and red spots appeared all over her body, the family physician had advised a shift to a city hospital. "We arrived early in the morning from our Baguiati residence and repeatedly pleaded with the doctors to treat her. But they turned a deaf ear. After a lot of persuasion, we placed her on a trolley," said Samir Biswas, Susmita's father.

"We were ready to donate blood but the doctors said she had to be admitted first. She was not even treated by the doctors in the emergency ward till 1.30 pm, when her condition grew worse and she had to be put on oxygen," added mother Kajole.

Finally, around 4.30 pm — nine hours after the girl was rushed to the hospital — the doctors at SSKM decided to shift Susmita to the new emergency ward in the next building. But the trolley she was lying on had no wheels, so she would be taken in a taxi. Susmita's family said this is

## STATE OF BENGAL'S HEALTHCARE: AILING AND ON THE MAT



Patients on the floor of Howrah State General Hospital on Friday. Twenty-nine diarrhoea patients — one of them baby Khatoon, from Shabana Parveen's family — were admitted as a mini epidemic appeared to have broken out in Howrah. Picture by Amit Datta

when the doctors committed a fatal error: they took off the oxygen mask, saying she would not need it for the short distance. As soon as the tubes were removed, Susmita died.

"I shall conduct an inquiry tomorrow as I was on leave today," said hospital surgeon superintendent Debdwaipayan Chattopadhyay.

The inquiry will mean little to Samir and Kajole Biswas, who have lost their daughter to the health system administered by the Left Front government, just as the inquiry at Howrah State General Hospital means little to Ashraf and Naseema who lost Shabana to the same health system and a rally.

Baby Shabana died on Mon-

day. The Howrah hospital where she was admitted first had sent her away to Calcutta Medical College and Hospital, but could not spare an ambulance that just might have squeezed through the traffic snarl. "*Daktar-babu ne bola ki bachchi ko taxi mein leke jao* (The doctor told me to take the baby in a taxi)," Ashraf said.

Another patient, Mohammad

Shakil, who was admitted yesterday with a deep gash on his head, was also referred to Calcutta Medical College and Hospital and was to leave at 3 pm today. Again, there was no ambulance. Finally, the Howrah Municipal Corporation sent one. Shakil left at 5 pm.

But superintendent H.K. Chanda felt the hospital did not

have "any scope for improvement". "The infrastructure is absolutely all right," he said.

The health department has asked the Howrah hospital to explain why doctors allowed Shabana's parents to leave on October 11; what attempt was made to control diarrhoea and convulsions; and why doctors did not mention septicæmia and men-



Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee told The Telegraph on Friday: "The photograph (showing him on a cycle van) published in your newspaper today is good."

"It would be even better if a photograph showing any of my post-election visits — to either Murshidabad during the outbreak of a disease, the child deaths at BC Roy Hospital or Howrah during a diarrhoea outbreak — is published tomorrow with mention of the date of visit."

"It is not true that I rush to people's houses just for the sake of elections. I have visited houses before and after the elections — in fact, more so after the elections," he added.

Asked on Thursday why he hadn't visited the house of Shabana Parveen, he had said: "Whoever thought that I might go there?"

ingitis in the reference slip.

But health minister Surjya Kanta Mishra's deputy, Pratyush Mukherjee, has fixed the blame: on Shabana's parents' "lack of consciousness". As for the ordeal at Calcutta Medical College and Hospital, someone must be "making them" conjure up the details.

■ HC summons Biman, P 13

## 20-YEAR-OLD SUSMITA LAY ON A STRETCHER UNATTENDED FOR 10 HOURS



SUBHANKAR CHAKRABORTY/HT

The body of Susmita Biswas at the SSKM Hospital, where medical negligence killed her on Friday.

# Patient left to die at SSKM

**HT Correspondent**  
Kolkata, October 17

SABINA PARVEEN'S parents couldn't afford the money that a hospital tout demanded. Money wasn't a problem for Susmita Biswas' parents. But Bengal's horrific health care system proved a great leveller, killing Susmita by refusing her medical attention for 10 hours.

A resident of Baguiati, the 20-year-old developed a mild respiratory problem because of purpura, a blood disease, on Thursday and was taken to SSKM

around 7.30 am on Friday. Her family members ran from pillar to post to get her admitted, but all she got was a stretcher to die on.

The emergency doctor referred her to the medicine department around 10.30 am. Till then, she seemed to be doing fine, reading a newspaper and munching on biscuits. But medical treatment eluded her as she was shunted from doctor to doctor, department to department.

Finally, the outdoor physician referred her to a medicine department 'visiting physician', who recommended 'immediate

admission'. But there were no vacant beds in the medicine department and she was taken back to the emergency ward around 1.20 pm.

Susmita's father Samir said: "I ran to the superintendent pleading for a bed. He wasn't in, neither was his deputy. I waited till 4 pm. When the super finally showed up, he arranged for admission in the emergency ward. I ran back to the ward, but the doctor refused admission saying there were no beds. By then, my daughter was vomiting blood. But the doctor said there

was no reason to panic."

Finally, she was allotted a bed in the medicine ward. But since there were no trolleys, the family hired a taxi. While she was being taken there, the doctors pulled out the oxygen mask despite her father's frantic appeal not to do so. By the time Susmita reached the ward around 5.30 pm, she was dead.

SSKM super Debdwaipayan Chattopadhyay said: "I don't understand how she was denied admission when I sanctioned it. It's also a mystery why they took her off oxygen."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES 18 OCT 2003

# REGRET FOR SHABANA'S DEATH, BUT ROAR FOR CHOKER RALLY

## OUR BUREAU

**Calcutta, Oct. 15:** Sorry, but not sorry.

That is how the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee government and his party, the CPM, reacted today to news of six-month-old Shabana Parveen's death.

And, yes, there was the regulation rally. It was not a march of mourners wearing black bands and holding their silence. It was not a procession to Calcutta Medical College and Hospital, from where a dying Shabana turned away on Monday, to question why.

It was not a delegation to Writers' Buildings to ask the chief minister how the government's healthcare system fails again and again.

They marched through Calcutta's streets in their thousands under banners of the CPM's women's wing.

These mothers, sisters, daughters were sorry to hear of Shabana's death. But not sorry to hold another rally.

"Our sympathies are with Shabana's parents. But for the greater cause of the people, we will have to take out processions. People will suffer a little inconvenience, too," said Shyamashree Das, a leader of the Paschimabanga Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti. Not one of them visited a one-room home in the slum of Howrah's Noor Mohammad Munshi Lane where a young father and mother grieved the death of their daughter.

At Writers' Buildings, some officials were arguing that it was

not Monday's rally that killed the child. "It is a blatant lie. The child did not die because of the rally," said advocate-general Balai Ray, who argued in court that day against Justice Amitava Lala's ruling restricting rallies.

After a meeting with the chief minister, he said rally or not, the road (Canning Street) — where Shabana's parents, Ashraf and Naseema, got stuck in their taxi while on their way to the medical college — is a place of perennial traffic jams.

Whether he said this with Bhattacharjee's sanction is not known because the chief minister has again receded behind a veil of silence. "You are being childish by asking me about a matter pending in the court. You have lost your common sense," Bhattacharjee said when asked if he had discussed Shabana's death with Ray.

But there are answers to be given, if not for the rally, then for the traffic jam. Whose responsibility is it to see traffic flows and that parents bearing dying children have a smooth passage to hospital? And once they get to the hospital, who is to take care of an unlettered, impoverished couple and see that their sick child gets admitted?

Medical college principal Jayashree Mitra conducted a probe. On the basis of that inquiry, the director of medical education, C.R. Maity, said no nurse had asked for money from Shabana's parents, as alleged.

Yesterday, Ashraf had said they had turned away because they did not have the Rs 1,000



**A Left women wing's procession at Esplanade on Wednesday.** Picture by Pradip Sanyal

sought for admission.

"When the sick baby was referred to the paediatric ward, the doctors had prepared the bed and rigged up the saline pouches. The doctor asked Ashraf to go and get the admission papers from the emergency. Shabana's father enquired and found that investigations could cost around

Rs 1,000. That is when he left and never returned," said Maity.

If this sounds like a whitewash, it cannot be denied that the death has momentarily shaken up at least the medical establishment. There seems to be realisation that the doctors should have taken the responsibility of admitting Shabana.

"We will issue a circular asking doctors not to let critical patients go out of the ward once they come in," said Maity.

Sensing the public anger, CPM state secretary Anil Biswas said: "We feel sorry."

"It is an unfortunate death but let me say that it was in no way connected with Monday's



**The child did not die because of the rally. This is a blatant lie. Vehicles get caught up in traffic snarls daily at that particular place (Canning Street)**

**BALAI RAY,**  
advocate-general

## Poser for party of the poor

### SUNANDO SARKAR

**Howrah, Oct. 15:** A six-month-old girl's death has taught her father, an unlettered van-puller of a Howrah slum, a lesson: "Kache je bistor, baje se kache (One who speaks a lot speaks nonsense)."

It's a lesson chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was giving the day the high court stayed the rally-curb ruling in response to a question why he had kept silent since Justice Anilava Lala's order.

Twenty-four hours after burying baby daughter Shabana, Ashraf Khan was asking if the party that protested the most for the poor really meant all that it said.

The chief minister had brooked into poetry in apparent welcome of the stay that restored the "right" to hold rallies any place, any time. At Ashraf's cramped central Howrah home, the mood was very different but the talk kept coming back to meeting-mitchhil.

A "natural" supporter of the CPM, Ashraf lost his daughter after getting stuck on a way to hospital because of a rally brought by the party's youth wing on Monday.

Several members of the extended Khan clan — an old mother, siblings and their immediate families — have voted for the CPM in election after election.

"I myself have voted for the Lal party (the CPM) or any other Left Front partner in its absence) several times," Ashraf said, adding that only once had he voted for "phool" (the Trinamul Congress).

Neighbours say the Khans have snarled out because of their pro-Left stance in debates in a neighbourhood that has consistently voted for anti-Left Front candidates in the past few elections. The local M.L.A., Ambica Baturjee, belongs to Trinamul and the councillor is a Congress member.

Ashraf and some of his neighbours voted Left as he thought it "represented people like him".

Despite being unwilling to discuss politics, Ashraf said: "Woh to garibon ka party kehlaite hain (They are called the party of the poor)."

Ashraf has not heard the chief minister say empty pots make the loudest noise. He is wondering all the same.

■ See Metro

9507157

11/10/03

# Rally on!

## But the judiciary mustn't be diminished

It took the Government of West Bengal one day to get a stay on the order of Mr Justice Amitava Lala of the Calcutta High Court that banned rallies and processions on weekdays. So what was the fuss about? More important, was it necessary for Left Front chairman Biman Bose to have been quite so intemperate? After all, he targeted both the order of September 29, as well as the judge. As has been stated in this newspaper, recourse is, and has always been available to those inconvenienced by judicial pronouncements, and to those who feel they have been wronged. Such recourse in the case of an order of a single judge of a High Court lies with a Division Bench. The State Government followed this route, and that was legal and proper. It is, however, improper for functionaries of the ruling party to take potshots at judges for such actions belittle the judiciary in the minds of citizens. Mr Bose's advisors could not possibly have taken the view that theirs was an indefensible proposition for such a thing is not possible in our judicial context for two reasons. One, the weight of precedents that often balances the odds on either side of a proposition and, two, the willingness of our judges to chart, whenever necessary, a new course. Mr Bose may well get off posing as the democrat to television chat show hosts. Marxist dogma to which he must subscribe as chairman of the Left Front, though, does not see democracy as a necessary pre-requisite for empowerment of people. So, to return to our question, why the fuss?

There is a pattern to how West Bengal's rulers deal with anything that could conceivably be seen as an impediment to their way of administering the state. Thus, if political opposition must be checked, they pull out all the stops — from altering demographics to controlling who votes and who doesn't. If media needs to be tamed, they are similarly relentless, willing to use every device to try and bring it to heel. A strong judiciary is the worst nightmare of any politician, but especially of the Marxists. They cannot afford to be like Laloo Prasad Yadav, who is as immune to judicial stricture as he is to criticism. The reason is that Bengal's Marxists, unlike Laloo, have pretensions to intellectualism and they would hate to be perceived as having modelled themselves on him, even if that is in some respects a fact. But the last thing Bengal's Marxists want is judicial activism, and this must have been the reason both for Mr Bose's oratorical excess and for Mr Jyoti Basu's candid admission of a fear of approaching the Supreme Court. It wasn't enough to get Mr Justice Lala's order reviewed; it was necessary to send a message and that is what Mr Bose did.

Two final observations. It must be an amazing coincidence, if true, that functionaries of the State government could not lay their hands on Mr Justice Lala's order in the period from 29 September to 11 October, when it was flouted by several organizations, but managed to find it in sufficient time for an appeal to be filed and for orders to be issued. Second, the stay granted by the Division Bench ought not to be seen as mitigating the contempt. Respect — or contempt — for judiciary is as much a matter of public perception as it is one for the court's consideration. The Left Front last fortnight forgot an essential courtesy of our legal system — that utmost respect must be shown to those with whom there is the greatest disagreement.





# Appeal in court, contempt on street

9-Consolidation

## OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Oct. 12: Tomorrow, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's government will move court for the second time, contesting Justice Amitava Lala's ruling restricting rallies.

Moving court is not really necessary because the government, its police force and, above all, its party muscle have already made the order toothless.

Tomorrow, while the government counsel respectfully argues before the judiciary, the chief minister's party — its youth wing — will mock the court in Calcutta's streets with a

rally through the centre of the city in the middle of a working day, exactly what Justice Lala had barred.

The chief minister's police, who are supposed to enforce the ruling, are silently colluding in the order's violation by pleading helplessness.

"We will try our best to keep normal flow of traffic. However, we are helpless if we are faced with thousands of people marching down the city roads. In such cases, if we try to force rallyists out of the streets, there may be a serious law and order problem," said deputy commissioner of traffic M.K. Singh.

For all the "law and order" it

maintains, the police need not be there, really, because at least the Democratic Youth Federation of India, the organiser of tomorrow's rally and a CPM affiliate, barely acknowledges their presence.

Its leader, Abdul Hai, said they had informed the police but had not yet received permission. And they are not waiting for it.

"We have told them about our rally and the police have not said no. So, the rally is on. On earlier occasions, too, the police have never said no to any rally held by us."

For holding a rally, it would appear informing the police is enough. Organisers of two other

rallies this week also seem to have informed the police.

Breaking his silence since the order was passed, Bhattacharjee today issued a statement that tried to keep everyone happy. "The government is aware that the rights of political parties and other organisations should not be curtailed and the holding of rallies should not inconvenience the public," he said.

That may not be the chief minister's order of priorities, but the statement affirmed the government's resolve to fight the order prohibiting rallies on weekdays between 8 am and 8 pm.

"We would seek justice from

the high court on the issue tomorrow," Bhattacharjee said.

His government had appealed unsuccessfully on October 2 against Justice Lala's order to a two-judge vacation bench. Tomorrow's appeal will also be heard by a vacation bench but the judges will be different.

Reflecting possibly the newfound awareness that "rallies should not inconvenience the public", tomorrow's organisers have decided not to disrupt traffic.

"We never took out processions that blocked roads or caused inconvenience to the common people. This time, too, we will not do it. We will not put anybody in trouble," Hai said.

Sources in the CPM said the procession would march in a single file, taking the left flank of the road.

The police have been "advised" to provide escorts in the rear and front of the procession and to station personnel on either side, if necessary, so that a passage for movement of traffic is open.

In keeping with the trend seen after the rally order, the ruling Left Front has taken the lead in flouting the judiciary. Nine organisations that will participate in tomorrow's rally include student and youth wings of front constituents.

■ See Page 9

## RALLY ROSTER



# Purulia raid delayed by 14 hours

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA/PURULIA/DURGAPUR, Oct. 12. — Fifteen people have been detained for yesterday's blast and the subsequent encounter between police and the PW (not MCC, police confirmed today) in the Katajora-Madhuban forests in Purulia. An O-C was killed in the encounter and seven people, including six policemen, were injured in the blast.

Combing operation, led by IGP (western range) Mr GM Chakraborty, started at 6 a.m., about 14 hours after the encounter. It could not be taken up last night for want of sniffer dogs and bomb-detection experts.

At 4.30 p.m. yesterday, PW cadres attacked a police contingent led by DSP Ms Krishnakali Lahiri. Bandwan O-C Nilmadhab Das died on the spot during the encounter.

Police came across a camera flashgun in the forests during the search. An electrical circuit was attached to

the flashgun batteries, raising suspicion that the device was used to trigger the blast. Incidentally, during the recent attempt on the Andhra Pradesh chief minister, PW cadres had reportedly used a camera flashgun to trigger blasts. When Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's attention was drawn to this, he said: "The situation in Bengal is different from that in Andhra." He ruled out seeking help from the Centre at this stage to beef up security.

Mr Narayan Ghosh, special IG, said the informers who had tipped off police about a PW meeting at a village 15 km from Katajora might have reported back to the Naxalites. "The information was received at 3 p.m, but the police team set out after more than an hour. There was enough time for the Naxalites to lay the trap." Fifteen Naxalites, he said, attacked the team of 23 policemen from both sides of the road.

Police in Bankura, Purulia and in

Midnapore West as well as in North Bengal districts have been asked conduct raids on extremists and to carry metal detectors while on patrol.

Dismissing earlier reports that the blast was triggered by the MCC, Purulia SP Mr Vineet Goel said: "The area is a PW stronghold. The MCC operates in some pockets in Jhalda." Besides, Katajora is close to Jhargram, Midnapore West, where the PW had set up a base two years ago. Another PW hub, Galudi (Jharkhand), is only 9 km from Katajora. Only a week ago, a number of PW posters had appeared at Rasik Nagar, Katajora's neighbouring village.

Some six months back, the IGP had sent a report stating that Bandwan fell on the PW corridor to Nepal that extended through Jharkhand.

The police department is considering to recommend the O-C's name for Indian Police Medal for gallantry.

Injured cops at SSKM, page 6

CHIEF MINISTER BREAKS SILENCE; STATE TO MOVE COURT TO PROTECT RIGHTS

# Rally-ban protest rallies on

9 SA MS

## Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Oct. 12. — The chief minister broke his silence today on Mr Justice Amitava Lala's rally ban order, saying: "The state will move court tomorrow on the ruling."

In an apparent attempt to reconcile what many would consider irreconcilable, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said in a press statement that the "government is aware of the rights of political parties (to hold rallies and marches) and also of the common man not to be harassed by them."

There is no word from the administration or police on how they propose to handle three days of Left Front affiliates' rally-ban protest rallies and marches, beginning Monday. While a section of the government

claimed to be trying to distance itself from Mr Biman Bose's stand on flouting the rally ban, police today preferred to be silent on their course of action to tackle rallies on weekdays.

Tomorrow, the LF's youth and student organisations, the DYFI and SFI, will organise a march from Calcutta University's College Street campus to Rani Rashmoni Avenue to protest against Mr Justice Lala's order to ban rallies on weekdays between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.

The march will start at 2 p.m. and the protesters will pass through Nirmal Chunder Street-Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road crossing, SN Banerjee, Dorina Crossing, JL Nehru Road en route RR Avenue.



A computer generated image of Mr Biman Bose, the man who started it all. (Right) A file photograph of Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee addressing a rally.

On Tuesday, all LF-backed trade unions will be on the road to protest against the ban. They'll meet at Raja Subodh Mullick Square at 2 p.m. and from there they will take out a procession through SN Banerjee Road, Nehru Road en route RR Avenue.

Dorina Crossing, JL Nehru Road to RR Avenue.

The very next day will be of LF women's organisations. They will organise a march through the same route at the same time and on the same issue.

Police fear a large number of people will take part in the marches. And since this part of the city is the business district and Diwali is approaching, businessmen will have a tough time.

Police fear north-bound traffic will come to a halt in the afternoon over a large stretch in central Kolkata on these three days.

Will Lenin Sarani be open to traffic on both ways for a particular period on these days? "I'm not sure. We'll first watch the length of the

processions," an officer said. "I fear the marches will throw traffic out of gear for three consecutive days."

When contacted, Mr Sandh Mukherjee, special additional commissioner (traffic), said: "I don't know anything. The commissioner has briefed the DC (HQ) and DC (traffic)." What are his plans to handle traffic on these days? "Please don't ask me. I know nothing."

The Statesman tried to contact the DC (HQ) and DC (traffic), both at their residences and on their mobile numbers, but to no avail.

At the end of the day, neither the government, which has a copy of Mr Justice Lala's order, nor Kolkata Police, which claims it doesn't have a copy, is ready to tell Kolkatans what to expect over the next three days.

# Big guns flag off rally week

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, October 11

THE TOP guns showed up for the curtain-raiser; the mega traffic-stoppers are lined up for next week.

The Left Front launched its parade of defiance against the High Court ban on work-hour rallies with an array of stars hitting the streets on Saturday afternoon. Front chairman Biman Bose and former health minister Partha De led a winding procession through the heart of the city — from Dilkhusha Street to Park Street, turning right at Mullick Bazar, then straight down AJC Bose Road to the Moulali Yuba Kendra. There, Jyoti Basu and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee got into the act, addressing the gathering.

The rally wasn't a typical Front show of muscle power: it was organised by the little-known People's Relief Committee and the procession, dubbed an innocuous "walk for health", was made up of barely 1,000 marchers. But the presence of the top leaders — including Bose, who had a week ago launched a tirade on Justice Amitava Lala over the rally ban — underlined the significance of the event: this was the ruling combine's show of contempt for a High Court order.

The police — who had a day earlier stood aside and watched the SUCI and CPI(ML) Liberation rule the roads — went a step further on Saturday: they virtually



SUBHENDU GHOSH/HT

**ADVANCE PARTY:** Left Front chairman Biman Bose (extreme right) leads marchers on Saturday afternoon.

## WHAT'S IN STORE

- ▶ **Oct 13 (Monday)** Rally at Rani Rashmoni Road in the evening by nine Left students and youth organisations. Procession from Calcutta University main campus on College Street to rally venue in the afternoon
- ▶ **Oct 14 (Tuesday)** Rally at Rani Rashmoni Road after 5 pm by Co-ordination Committee and Left trade unions, including CITU
- ▶ **Oct 15 (Wednesday)** 4 Left women's organisations to hit the streets to protest against the rally ban

escorted the one-hour procession along the entire stretch. The police bosses repeated their old stand: they would not intervene till the "official copy of the order reaches the Commissioner".

The Front, however, made

some concessions to pragmatism and the public mood. The marchers kept to one side of the road, allowing traffic to pass by, and the speakers avoided any mention of the rally ban. Basu confined himself to a few remarks about how the state's health care might be improved. The Left, however, has three major rallies lined up next week — on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday (see box), when the commuter is likely to feel the heat.

The tone and action was more defiant at the day's other rally. The Samajwadi Party hit Park Circus in the afternoon, disrupting traffic, to pay tributes to Jayaprakash Narayan on his birth anniversary. But party chief Vijay Upadhyay said protesting the rally ban, too, was an objective. The police admitted that the Samajwadis had not applied to them for permission, but nevertheless took no action.

# Let this be the convention

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

**Calcutta, Oct. 8: Today's Left Front convention did not hold up Central Avenue, leave alone the rest of the city. Few Calcuttans will complain against such a political programme.**

Despite the sparks that lit up the CPM-spearheaded "mass convention" inside Mahajati Sadan against the high court ruling on rallies, the streets outside were just as the citizen would like them to be — and the judiciary would approve of.

True to Tuesday's promise, the audience trooped in neat queues of small groups into the

meeting that tried to establish a link between the recent Supreme Court and Calcutta High Court orders on strikes and rallies and the BJP-led Centre.

No vehicle was commissioned by the Party to bring the faithful. Neither was there any procession of the type that prompted Justice Amitava Lala to exile rallies from work-day Calcutta.

Consequently, there was no traffic dislocation outside. At the worst of times, the south-bound lane was constricted as the convention spilled out of the auditorium, but traffic never stopped moving. Inside, speaker after speaker — none more vitriolic than Jyoti Basu — gloried the judiciary. From "weakening

democracy" to "siding with capitalists and the Union government", the judiciary was guilty of many crimes.

Basu led from the front before state CPM secretary Anil Biswas balanced things somewhat, clarifying that the Left combine was not against the judiciary or any of its members. But everyone said everything would be done to frustrate the judiciary's effort to discipline rallies.

"How can one man take away our rights to protest? And how can people go on having any respect for the judiciary after all this?" Basu asked, referring to the high court ruling and the recent Supreme Court verdict saying government employees have

no fundamental right to strike.

"Someone should go and ask this judge what's going to happen in the run-up to next year's parliamentary polls," he added, without referring to Justice Lala by name. Daring the judiciary to implement its verdict, he wondered aloud whether "Anil (Biswas) would be arrested" for contempt after newspapers reported the convention.

Despite the apparent loss of faith and "respect" in the judiciary, there were enough hints that the next battle would be legal. "We may have to go to the Supreme Court but we are frightened of the consequences," Basu said.

There was one note of worry, too, that brought into focus the

government-party dichotomy the front faces. "If we take out rallies without informing *amader sarkar* (our government's) police, they may face problems," Basu said.

Rallies planned by front organisations next week stay on course, though.

Front chairman Biman Bose tried to establish a direct connection between the Supreme Court and the high court verdicts by calling them "politically linked".

But, simultaneously, he tried to project the front as being "responsible" enough to limit its bigger rallies both spatially and temporally.

"We confine them to the Brigade Parade Grounds and the

smaller ones to Shahid Minar and Rani Rashmoni Avenue. Besides, not one of them in the recent past was on a working day," he said, not forgetting to tell his comrades to allow right of way to the "ill (even if they were not in ambulances)". But those seeking to catch a train or a plane have to start early, he said.

Biswas said: "We recognise that free movement is a fundamental right, as also the right to protest peacefully."

"One right cannot undermine another and only the government can ensure a balance with political parties' cooperation," he felt.

No one will disagree with that.

9-88-ND 9110

# Basu seeks to strike a balance

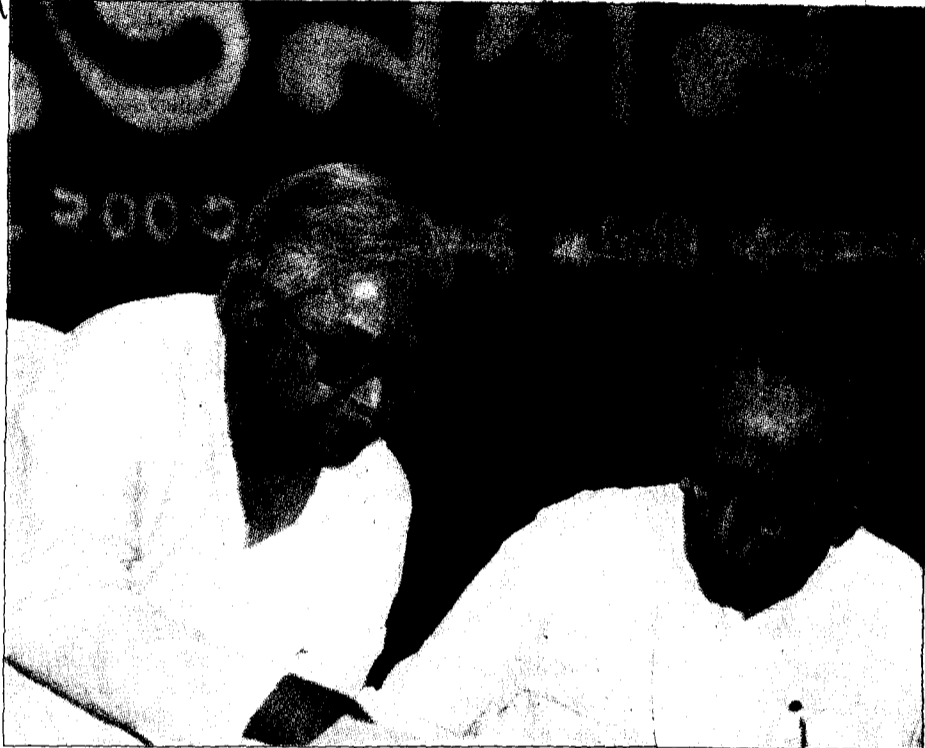
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Oct. 8. — The Calcutta High Court order banning processions and rallies is “unnatural and unrealistic”, Mr Jyoti Basu said today. “Someone should ask the judge (Mr Justice Amitava Lala) whether his order violates Article 19 of the Constitution and how it can be enforced during electioneering that continues throughout the day.”

The former chief minister, among the leaders who spoke at a Left Front convention at Mahajati Sadan today, said: “A dangerous situation has arisen. We can move a Division Bench of the HC against the order or for examining whether the curbs can be made realistic. We can move the Supreme Court too, though I’m afraid to take the matter there since the court had ruled against striking government employees.”

Mr Basu clearly tried to help the state government avoid the embarrassment of defying the law, and keep up the tempo of the protests against the ban.

The judge, he said, sought to destroy a consti-



PLOTTING THE NEXT MOVE? AND IN THE ABSENCE OF THE CHIEF MINISTER! Mr Biman Bose and Mr Jyoti Basu at the LF convention on Wednesday. — The Statesman

tutional right earned through struggles. “How can the people respect the judiciary in the face of such orders?” Seasoned politician that he is, Mr Basu even saw in the way the judiciary “has been acting” the possibility of the CPI-M being banned by court. “One day Anil (party state

secretary Mr Anil Biswas) may be dragged to court for addressing a convention such as this one”.

Going thus far, Mr Basu, however, stopped short of making a personal attack on Mr Justice Lala. All he would say of the judge was: “I don’t remember what he looks like.”

Mr Biswas said “a clever” attempt was being made to create an impression that the LF was ignoring court and instigating the people to defy it. “We consider the judiciary a part of the democratic set-up and we expect it to strengthen democracy. The independence of the judiciary, leg-

## Flout-ruling rallies on

KOLKATA, Oct. 8. — Putting at rest speculations that the LF may climb down from its confrontationist height even though today’s convention didn’t flout the rally-ban ruling, LF leaders iterated their resolve to take up a series of programmes to defy the order.

Among the prominent LF faces to lend voice to the defy-the-court chorus were Mr Biman Bose (of course), Mr Jyoti Basu, Mr Manju Majumdar and Mr Ashoke Ghosh.

The dates to watch out for are 13 October, when the DYFI and other front outfits will organise marches, and 14 October, when all Left TUs will do the same. Though the order applies to the city, Mr Bose fears it can be extended to districts as well. “Hence, there’ll be rallies and marches in all the 19 districts.” — SNS

islature and the executive should not be curbed.”

The LF, Mr Biman Bose said, organises big rallies only on holidays. He alleged the judge had flouted an SC ruling by slapping the ban suo motu, himself being a party in the case.

More reports on page 8

# Punish Bose, cry lawyers

9.8.70

## OUR LEGAL REPORTER

Calcutta, Oct. 6: Lawyers today appealed to the chief justice of Calcutta High Court to penalise Left Front chairman Biman Bose for his open criticism of Justice Amitava Lala and his ruling restricting rallies.

After a meeting of the executive committee of the State Bar Council, its executive chairman Uttam Majumdar said: "The confidence of the common people in the judiciary will be lost if Bose is allowed to go free after criticising a senior high court judge in such a fashion."

The committee also decided to approach Chief Justice A.K. Mathur with a request to ensure "expanded" hearing of the case. It asked the CPM and the other constituents of the Left Front to persuade Bose to withdraw his comments after "offering unconditional apologies".

A few hours later, CPM state secretary Anil Biswas put his signature on the raging controversy by reaffirming the demand that his party and other political parties and organisations be allowed to take out rallies as and when they like.

"Holding rallies or processions is our basic right, it cannot be curbed or restricted," said Biswas, another politburo member, imparting a boost to his party mate Bose.

"Please make no mistake, we respect the court and are not in favour of going into a confrontation with the judiciary. But the law cannot be considered more important than politics, though the former is one of the major pillars of the Constitution," Biswas said.

Although taking out rallies may be a constitutional right, it is politically abused. No ordinary person will mourn the loss of this right. Justice Lala's ruling might be somewhat extreme, but it is in response to the extreme abuse of this constitutional right. What about the right to go to work?

AMIT CHAUDHURI, author



A court order should be contested in court. However, in this case, the government should accept the order, since it has popular support. Freedom of speech can be exercised in many ways, a rally is not the only way to do it. It seems that everyone, apart from political parties, is happy about Justice Lala's order

SUKANTA CHAUDHURI, professor



Rallies must be restricted — for the man who stands with a sick child cradled in his arms, waiting to cross the road and reach a hospital; for the woman with a heavy burden on her head who is shoved aside; for those who have no voice though without them parties would cease to exist

JOY GOSWAMI, author



I am shocked and surprised at the Left Front's reaction. Earlier, *ain amannyo andolon* was against the British rulers. How can we do it against ourselves, and led by the government, at that?

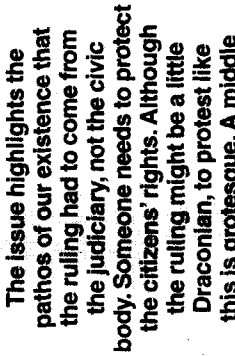
A court order should be protested in court

NABANEETA DEV SEN, author



The issue highlights the paths of our existence that the ruling had to come from the judiciary, not the civic body. Someone needs to protect the citizens' rights. Although the ruling might be a little Draconian, to protest like this is grotesque. A middle ground could have been achieved

KUNAL SARKAR, cardiac surgeon



Everyone I know cursed Mrs Gandhi for the Emergency and everyone I know thanked her for the discipline that suddenly appeared out of nowhere. I have misgivings about the ruling but I'd love to see political parties develop a conscience of their own not to become a public nuisance

VICTOR BANERJEE, actor



"But as far as the rally case is concerned, we are being forced to go into a confrontation to uphold the democratic tradition. One must realise that the laws of the land are a result of sustained struggle through demonstrations, movements and rallies."

Surprisingly, neither Bose nor Biswas has felt it necessary to even concede the existence of the other right — that of free movement — in a clear indication that they do not think it important, though many others do. So far, there is nothing to sug-

gest that Bose's announcement on Saturday of Wednesday's convention to defy Justice Lala's ruling is even being given a second thought. The police continue to take shelter behind the technicality that they have not received a copy of the ruling, though Justice Lala pronounced his directives in the presence of the deputy commissioner, traffic. They are unlikely to receive one, too, before October 8 when the vacation bench sits again and by the time they do, the convention could be over. First vio-

lators of the ruling could, therefore, walk free.

In a memorandum to the chief justice, the council, representing nearly 26,000 lawyers, suggested the setting up of a special bench of three judges to hear the government's appeal against Justice Lala's verdict.

The special bench will give political parties, various organisations and individuals, who are directly concerned, an opportunity to offer their views in a "civil manner".

Only a broad hearing of the

case can help lower the temperature, the council believes.

"The relationship between the law (administration and the judiciary) must be brought back on the rails. We have no doubt that the chief justice is the best person to take the peace initiative," said Majumdar.

On Sunday, council chairman Amiya Chatterjee had alleged that by criticising the judgment openly, Bose was trying to terrorise the court and obtain a favourable response to the government's challenge to the ruling.

# LAWLESS BENGAL

(P-1) 5/10 9.50.50

## Fine or jail for defiance

judge who refused to be named. Criminal lawyer Subroto Mookherjee said if the rally proceeds despite the police's best efforts — including lathicharge and arrests — they would have to file a criminal case against the organisers in a subordinate criminal court like the metropolitan magistrate's court.

TAPAS GHOSH

Calcutta, Oct. 4: At best, a fine would be imposed on them; at worst, they would be jailed.

This is the fate that awaits Biman Bose and other Left Front leaders who intend violating Justice Amitava Lala's order restricting rallies in the city.

According to state bar council executive chairman Uttam Majumdar, the very fact that the leaders have announced they will defy the order can invite legal action. "The court is at liberty to summon those who have stated in a public forum that they will defy the court's order and suo motu initiate contempt proceedings against them," he said. "They can be penalised in the form of having to pay a fine or even arrested and put behind bars for openly expressing their intentions."

In case the court decides to spare them, it is incumbent on police to disperse the rally. "It does not matter whether the police have received a certified copy of the order or not," Majumdar said.

"In this case, the very fact that the state government had challenged the order before a division bench of the high court is enough proof that people, including the police, are aware of the contents of the order which were read out in the court. So, the police cannot take refuge behind this plea."

Majumdar's opinion was seconded by a sitting high court

### CITIZENS' RIGHT OF FREE MOVEMENT VS POLITICIANS' RIGHT TO RALLY

Calcutta, Oct. 4: Launching a blistering attack on Justice Amitava Lala for restricting rallies on weekdays, the Left Front today decided to defy him by taking out processions to Mahajati Sadan on Wednesday for a mass convention.

The convention will finalise the date for a "massive protest demonstration" throughout the state, including a mass rally and sit-in demonstrations. This is likely to be before October 27, the day Calcutta High Court reopens after the Pujas. Till a division bench decides otherwise, the order barring rallies from 8 am to 8 pm on working days stands.

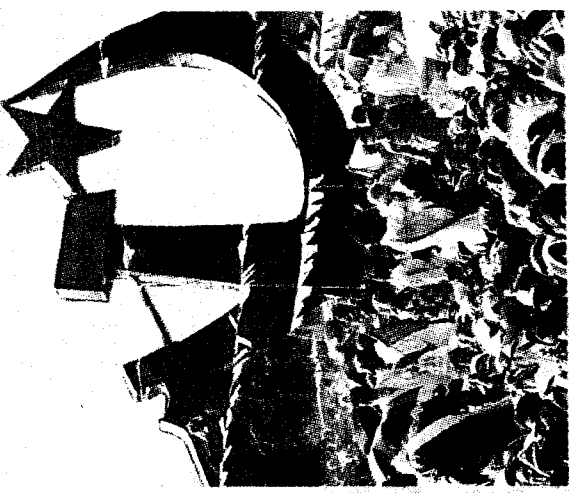
CPM-affiliated organisations like the Students' Federation of India (SFI) and the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) and similar Leftist bodies will also bring out a "huge procession" from Calcutta University to Rani Rashmoni Avenue on October 13 in a show of defiance to the order.

The protest decision was taken at an emergency meeting of the Left Front today. Announcing its plans to take on the judiciary head on, Front chairman and CPM politburo member Biman Bose said: "Let us make it very clear that we are not going to abide by Justice Lala's verdict. We are ready to go to jail for defying it. We may even raise slogans urging Justice Lala to go back."

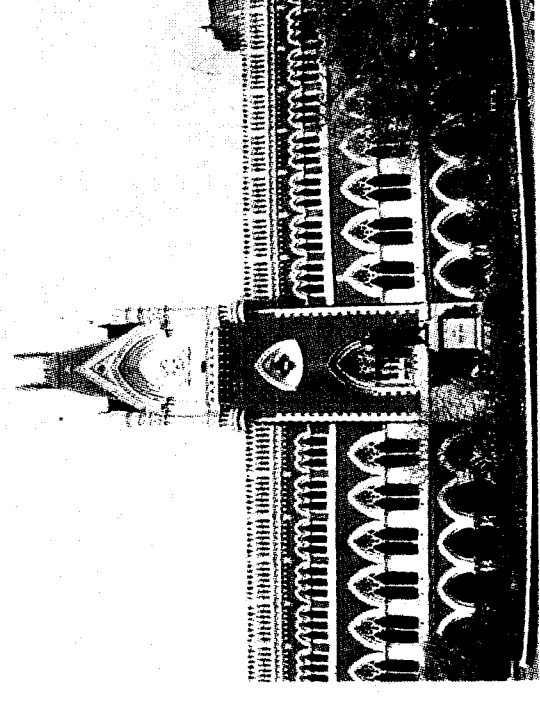
Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was not invited to the meeting, presided over by Bose. "We are announcing a political programme which does not necessitate the presence of Bhattacharjee," a member said.



Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's administration has to enforce the ruling in the face of defiance by his party and the Left Front



The Left Front announces it will defy the court and decides to hold a mass convention on October 8. The meet will set the date for a "massive protest demonstration"



Calcutta High Court restricts rallies to holidays or between 8 pm and 8 am on weekdays to protect people's right of way. On permitted days, rallies can be held only at three places

Briefing reporters later, Bose spoke up for the tribals, whose rally had held up Justice Lala on the way to court and spurred the order.

"There are 48 lakh tribals in Bengal and they are very much a part of our culture," he said, adding that an "undesirable" order was being "imposed on the people."

"The ruling implies that rallies and processions can be held in the metropolis only at night on weekdays. This is not the practice in Calcutta. I have heard that in Kerala rallies are held at night," Bose said.

He wondered why the high court had issued a directive on holding rallies on holidays only at the Brigade Parade Grounds, Shahid Minar and Rani Rashmoni Avenue when the government had already named the same spots as venues.

"I am ready to go to jail," Bose said, asked about possible contempt proceedings for his remarks today. Justice Lala declined comment on Bose's outburst.

Later in the day, the chairman of the Bar Council of West Bengal, Amiya Kumar Chatter-

jee, condemned the order. He said an emergency meeting of the council would be held tomorrow to "take stock of the situation".

"What Bose has said is condemnable and we shall not take lying down his decision to take on the judiciary," Chatterjee said. "At tomorrow's meeting, our executive committee will decide how best to counter this shameful outburst."

Today's Left Front meeting came in the wake of a Calcutta High Court division bench refusing to stay Justice Lala's order after the state moved a petition

for the order. All Left Front members attended the meeting.

While the CPM was the most vocal against the order, followed by the RSP and the Forward Bloc, the CPI felt the Front should show some restraint. "I think we should wait till we get a copy of his order," CPI state secretary Manju Majumdar said.

RSP leader Sumil Sengupta dubbed the order "draconian". Forward Bloc state secretary Ashok Ghosh said even the British raj had not dared "to curb the people's fundamental democratic rights" in this manner.

The Congress and the Trinamul Congress, both of which have condemned Justice Lala's ruling, refused comment on Bose's outburst and the Left Front's agitation programme.

"We shall decide what to do next only after Mamata Banerjee holds our party's working committee meeting," said Pankaj Banerjee, senior Trinamul member and leader of Opposition in the Assembly.

Congress spokesman Manas Bhuniya said: "We shall first have to take a look at the order before we decide on anything."

See Page 9

Arundhati Ahuja



Hit-the-streets pledge at meet

# LF to flout rally ban

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Oct. 4. — For thought that the High Court judgment banning rallies and processions on weekdays would restore a semblance of sanity to the chaotic streets of Kolkata, the bad news is that their suffering has only just begun. The ruling Left Front today vowed to hit the streets with full strength to flout the ban and asked their frontal organisations to organise meetings, processions and demonstrations to defy the "draconian" order of Mr Justice Amitava Lala.

The LF partners held an emergency meeting this morning to decide strategy in the wake of the order and LF chairman and senior CPI-M leader, Mr Biman Bose, told reporters that on 8 October — a weekday — a mass convention will be held at Mahajati Sadan in protest against the ruling. The CPI-M's youth front, the DYFI, announced later in the day that it will organise the party's other frontal organisations and take out a procession from College Street to Rani Rashmoni Avenue on 13 October — another weekday — and submit a memorandum to the chief minister.

"All Left parties will participate in the convention on 8 October. Our partners and their frontal organisations for farmers, students, women and workers will organise processions wherever and whenever possible to show that this is out democratic right," said Mr Bose.

**By Ghosh! It gets worse:** Shortly after Mr Bose's announcement, the SUCI state secretary, Mr Prabhash Ghosh, not to be left out, said that his party would organise another "protest convention" at the University Institute Hall on 10 October — weekday again — where "all parties except the BJP are welcome". He added, sounding piqued: "We decided to hold this meet on 29 September and I called up Mr Anil Biswas of the CPI-M and other Left leaders to invite them to join us on a common platform of protest. They were to get back to me but suddenly today they announced that they would organise a convention on 8 October." The result: two days of misery for citizens.

## Go back Lala: Biman

KOLKATA, Oct. 4. — Speaking to reporters after the meeting, the Left Front chairman, Mr Biman Bose, launched a vitriolic, and very personal attack on Mr Justice Amitava Lala. Of that which The Statesman can report, he said that the judge was "unsympathetic" towards the people since he "did not understand the spirit of Kolkata". "Such people should leave the city," Mr Bose said. "Even if there's somebody who is not a Bengali or is from outside Kolkata, he should understand the culture and spirit of this city," he added, apropos of nothing.



He sought to draw a parallel between the agitation launched against the Rowlatt Act during the Independence struggle and the processions and current-day rallies that stall life in Kolkata — "a 'go back' slogan was raised then... we too can raise a 'go back' slogan and lead demonstrations against the judge." Asked whether making such statements or taking out rallies wasn't tantamount to contempt of court, Mr Bose replied: "Let it be so... it is our fundamental right. We will go to jail if the situation calls for it."

# Rally ban stays, Pujas get relief

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, October 2

THE CALCUTTA High Court on Thursday refused to stay Justice Amitava Lala's order directing the DC (Traffic) not to allow any rally or procession in the city between 8 am and 8 pm on working days. But the court exempted Durga, Laxmi and Kali Puja immersion processions.

"Since the Puja is the most important festival in West Bengal, we direct that the immersion processions of Durga, Laxmi and Kali Puja shall not be affected by the ban order," the two-judge appeal bench of Justices A. Chakrabarti and S.K. Mukherjee said.

State advocate-general Balai Rai had moved the appeal on behalf of the state chief secretary and home secretary to protect the traffic cops accused of contempt from prosecution. But he had no copy of Justice Lala's order as none has yet been served on the DC (Traffic), M.K. Singh.

The judges shot back: "How can you file an appeal

## POINT OF ORDER

Why did the court decline to proceed with the appeal?

- Because the signed copy of Justice Lala's order is not yet available

What happens to the appeal?

- It will be heard by a regular bench after the puja holidays. But the state or any aggrieved party can move the vacation court in case of an exigency

without knowing the order?"

This led the advocate-general to argue that: (i) preventing a judge from attending court does not amount to criminal contempt of court; and (ii) Justice Lala had no jurisdiction to initiate criminal contempt proceedings. But the judges were not impressed by this argument.

The bench said a plain copy of Justice Lala's order should be provided to the

state as soon as possible. It also directed that the appeal by the state government against Justice Lala's order will be heard by a regular bench after the Puja holidays. The bench, however, granted permission to the state or any aggrieved party to move the vacation court in case of an exigency.

The bench told a group of Anandamargis and several advocates, who appeared privately to oppose the state's appeal, that they should file their opposition when the appeal is heard by a regular bench.

All political parties, however, stood firm in their opposition to the rally ban. The CPI(M) said that once Dashami is over, it would go all out to mobilise public opinion against Justice Lala's order and also move the Supreme Court, if it felt such a move was necessary.

Mamata Banerjee hoped the "people" would take to the streets to defeat the ban on weekday rallies. State BJP chief Tathagata Roy, too, pinned his hopes on the "people's court" to reject the court ban.

# State moves court on rally ban, hearing today

9 8r was  
\$15-1 2/10  
Hindustan correspondent  
Kolkata, October 1

THE WEST Bengal government on Wednesday moved a Division Bench of Calcutta High Court seeking a stay on Justice Amitava Lala's order banning rallies and processions in the city during weekday working hours.

The Bench, comprising Justice Alok Chakraborti and Justice Subhro Kamal Mukherjee, granted leave to the state to file an appeal, which will be heard on Thursday.

Appearing for the state, Advocate-General Balai Roy sought leave of the court to appeal against Justice Lala's order saying the state was not a party in the case and a certified copy of the order was not yet available. Asked by the judges why the government wanted to settle the matter urgently during the Puja vacation, the A-G said some

organisations were likely to organise rallies on Friday. Roy said the order was being challenged because it was preventive in nature and not regulatory. The appeal was moved by the chief secretary and the home secretary on behalf of the state government.

Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee held a meeting with Roy and Law Minister Nisith Adhikari to discuss the situation arising out of the court order.

The CPI-M said on Wednesday that the government had been trying to take preventive steps against traffic jams even before the court order. "The state government has already suggested three venues in Kolkata where public meetings can be held," CPI-M state secretary Anil Biswas said. But the "people's democratic right" to assemble cannot be taken away by saying "it was affecting traffic movement".

# State to appeal against HC order on rallies

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Sept. 30. — The state government plans to go in appeal before a Division Bench of Calcutta High Court against yesterday's order of Mr Justice Amitava Lala banning rallies and processions between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., state law minister said today.

Mr Nisith Adhikary said a possible ground for appeal could be the inability of the law enforcement authorities to enforce the ban.

There was no intention to cause interference in the administration of justice on the part of the police officers who were trying to control a huge procession which prevented Mr Justice Lala from reaching the court on time on 24 September is one of the likely grounds of the appeal being planned to be filed tomorrow, according to state law department sources.

The main concern of these officers on duty was that no law and order problem arose from the huge procession.

Since there was no intention by any one to interfere with the administration of justice, it does not amount to criminal contempt, a law official said.

Even if it is assumed that the alleged conduct of the police officers on duty amounted to criminal contempt of court, the matter cannot be heard and determined by a single judge having no jurisdiction to deal with the matter will be another likely ground for appeal.

THE STATESMAN

1 OCT 2003

# Counter punch

9/8/03 51-8 1110  
Kolkata judgment speaks up for citizens

When all political parties set their face against a particular measure, it is probably because there is a great deal to recommend it. That can certainly be said of the Kolkata High Court judgement restricting the rights of rallyists. Bengal has been brainwashed into stressing just one kind of democratic right — the freedom of assembly for anyone who wishes to disrupt traffic for the sake of any out of a plethora of causes, more often of trivial rather than cosmic import. Against that, however, must be balanced another democratic right which affects vaster numbers of citizens — the right to go where they wish, to transact commerce, to take a patient to hospital, to catch a train or a flight that one has paid for. It is remarkable that no one spoke up for the latter right before Justice Lala's judgement, although it is a matter of course in most democratic countries that rallyists cannot block the flow of essential traffic. When the CPI-M says that 'the new judgement bans rallies, it is a canard — rallies are still allowed, but only at certain times and places, which is a good balance between political parties' freedom of assembly and ordinary citizens' freedom to travel.

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, might consider himself between a rock and a hard place. Instead, he should treat this as a strategic opportunity. He must have squirmed when, in his commendable effort to bring industry back to the state, he was asked about disruptions to normal life that are routine in the state. If, however, frequent and disruptive rallies could be brought to a halt in Kolkata, that would do wonders for the state's image. He can now plead that his hands are tied by the judgement, and he has no option but to implement orders. Likewise, police officers who couldn't previously stop rallies due to fear of interference by political bosses can now plead that they will be up for contempt of court if they don't comply with the judgement. It may be just what Kolkata needed to break the logjam, in the literal sense and more. One question, though. What happens to bandhs that are called at the drop of a hat?

THE STATESMAN

1 OCT 2003

1 OCT 2003

# Ban? What ban, ask police

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, September 30

A VISIT to high court and then to a movie, Puja preparations and communication — the activity list was endless on a hectic day for the city police on Tuesday.

The only item missing was judge Amitava Lala's order banning rallies and processions on working days. The order hasn't yet arrived, police bosses say. Not that they are complaining — they aren't yet sure if they can ever implement it.

Till it arrives, there will be other things to keep top cops busy.

DC (Traffic) chief M.K. Singh went to the high court, where the judge had given him a dressing down the previous day. Later, he went to a function, where he reportedly saw a special screening of *Chokher Bali*.

Police commissioner Sujay Chakrabarty summoned top officers to discuss final arrangements for Durga Puja. And Singh, who attended the meeting, had called his assistant commissioners to an earlier meeting. They discussed the distribution of wireless sets.

There was apparently a lot to discuss about everything save the order. That can't be discussed, at least in an official forum, till it arrives.

"It would be improper to discuss or make conjectures without receiving the order," said a guarded Singh. "Once we have seen the order, we might seek legal opinion, if necessary, to understand fully its content and spirit."

He would have preferred not to make a statement at all, but he was faced by persistent queries from the media.

Not that officers didn't talk about it. Many of them admitted that they were relieved when the city saw no traffic disruptions due to rallies or processions.

Some senior police officers didn't mind admitting how difficult it would be to enforce the order, if at all.

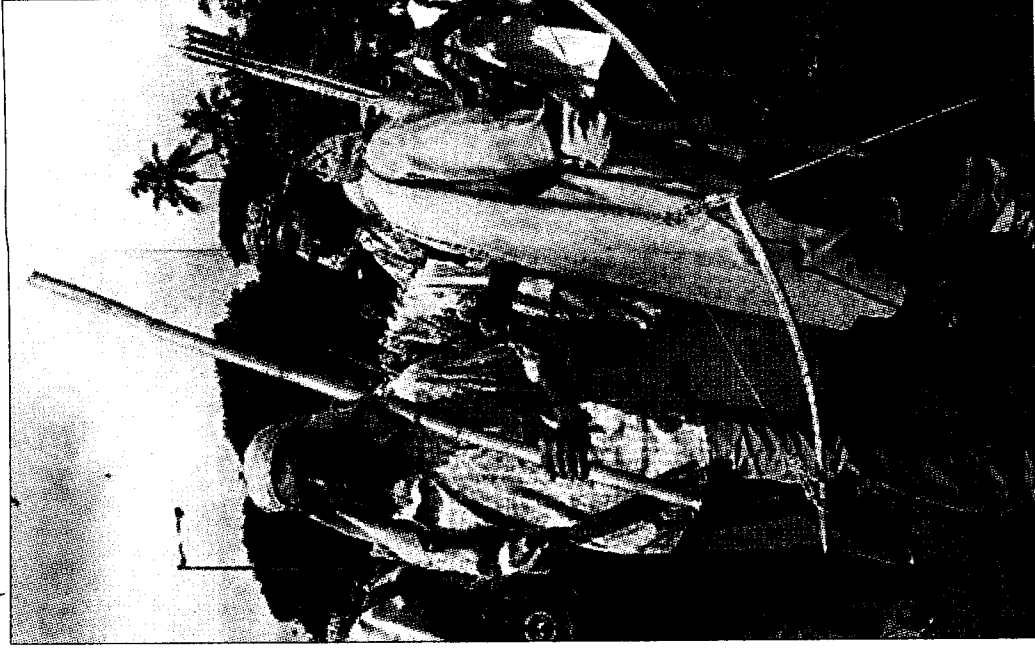
"It isn't as if the city police provide permission for every rally or procession," said a senior traffic policeman. "So many of them take place without us in the picture. Even the last major rally held by Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee went ahead without permission from the police."

If rallies continued to happen without permission, would any political party abide by the directive about making necessary security deposits? That is a question many policemen discussed, though not at any of their official meetings. "Party members would rather get arrested than make their bosses pay a deposit," guessed an officer.

He wouldn't go so far as to suggest that this meant that no policeman could hope to enforce the order. "I wouldn't like to speak about that," he said.

Another key question: could the ban cover Puja processions, marriage parties and similar activity by religious communities?

"That is why we need to see the order in full and consult a legal expert. If required, we may have to fall back on a dictionary to get the meaning of the word *procession*, and then



## RALLY RAJ

### TIME & PLACE

- **THE BAN:** From 8 am to 8 pm
- **MOST PREFERRED TIMES:** 9-11.30 am
- **MOST PREFERRED ZONE:** Central business district
- **SAMPLE:** Nearly all the 350 rallies staged in the city in the first five months of 2002, except candlelight and some religious processions, were staged in the day. A fifth — 71 — were held in central Kolkata from 9 am to 11.30 am

● **REMINDER:** The tribal rally (PTI picture, left) was held near Akashvani Bhavan in the morning, while justice Amitava Lala was on his way to court. The traffic cops felt the tribals were too heavily armed to be stopped

### MONTH BY MONTH

Till September 25, 2003:

● January:	61
● February:	96
● March:	70
● April:	69
● May:	35
● June:	30
● July:	49
● August:	59
● September:	68

the court may ask the police to implement an order that is already in place, or it might ask the state to take necessary steps. We would like these aspects clarified," Singh said.

In private though, many police officers felt there was

nothing to clarify. "The political will has to be in place for the order to be implemented," was the consensus opinion.

Politicians have already made it clear that they have the will — to appeal against the ban.

"There are occasions when

# Politicians cut off from people

## Survey backs rally ruling

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, Sept. 30: The people overwhelmingly support Justice Amitava Lala's ruling on rallies, but politicians are moving in the opposite direction.

An opinion poll conducted for The Telegraph by TNS Mode in Calcutta showed 88 per cent of the respondents — working adults, students and housewives — back the ruling restricting rallies in the city to holidays or between 8 pm and 8 am on weekdays.

Marking a sharp difference with popular will, Bengal's administrative and political establishments scurried from one brainstorming session to another to block the order.

A copy of the order had not yet reached Writers' Buildings but the government is likely to move court tomorrow whether it does or not. Wednesday is the last day a vacation bench is sitting to clear cases before the Pujas. It will sit again on October 8.

Although law minister Nishith Adhikari was careful not to commit himself to a date, he too made it abundantly clear that the government might not wait till the reopening.

"A headache does not mean that you chop off the head," he said at Writers' Buildings, showing which way the wind was blowing there.

The Opposition Trinamul Congress moved first but failed to get permission to appeal against the ruling from a bench of Chief Justice A.K. Mathur and Justice A.K. Bannerjee. Justice Lala had a normal day in court, hearing cases and asking photographers to leave him in peace.

But, in a measure of the flutter the ruling has created in the government, M.K. Singh, the deputy commissioner, traffic, declined to act as the vehicle for its appeal against the ruling. Singh

said he had been cleared of the contempt charges Justice Lala had slapped after being stopped by traffic policemen for a rally to pass and did not wish to get involved in a legal battle.

As of now, Singh's job is to enforce the court order, which says rallies cannot be held between 8 am and 8 pm on weekdays. On holidays, they can be organised only at three points in the city.

Organisers of at least one rally were refused permission today. Until, if at all, the government gets a stay — or has the order overturned — the police will be bound to decline permission unless the conditions of the ruling are met.

A copy of the verdict is likely to reach Writers' Buildings tomorrow and the government believes any delay in appealing will be seen as "legitimising" the decree.

Several meetings were held to shape the government's response in court (see chart for likely line of argument). But the fact that few in the government wanted to mess with the court was made clear by Singh's refusal.

The ruling drove a wedge through the CPM as well. Some believed accepting a "popular" verdict would appeal to the public psyche but they were dismissed by others who reminded them of the approaching Lok

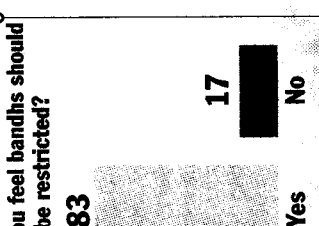
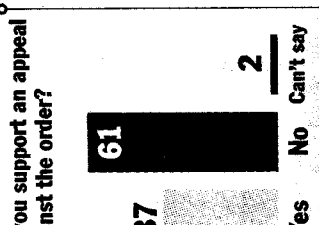
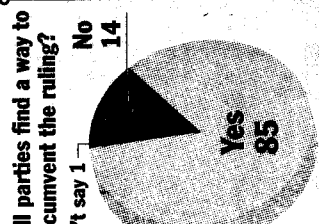
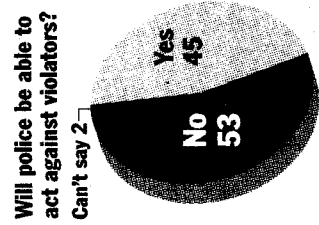
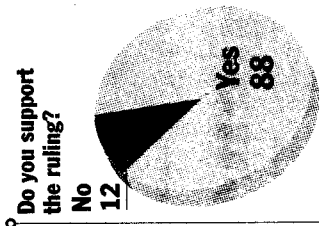
Sabha polls that would necessitate multiple rallies daily.

In the opinion poll, 84 per cent of the respondents believed that there were other ways to protest than holding rallies and meetings, disagreeing with the politicians' argument.

As many as 57 per cent felt that those who take part in rallies are often paid to do so. The same proportion thought participants join out of fear.

Faith in the police is low and in politicians even lower. Fifty-three per cent said the police would not be able to take action against violators of the ruling. Political parties will find a way of holding rallies, felt 85 per cent.

### TELEGRAPH TNS MODE OPINION POLL



All figures in per cent

### RIGHT TO RALLY

- ★ Court oversteps jurisdiction as a civil court cannot take up a criminal contempt suit
- ★ Traffic officials who stopped the judge's car were trying to ensure their security
- ★ Constitution gives citizens right to assemble peacefully without arms [Article 19 (1)(b)]
- ★ Restriction on religious processions is an infringement on citizens' religious rights [Article 19(3)]
- ★ Judicial interference in administrative matters is not desirable
- ★ The order is "unlawful"

### RIGHT TO RALLY

- ★ Civil court can take up criminal matters in an emergency
- ★ It would not have been necessary to block cars if permission for rally had not been given
- ★ Constitution also says right to move freely is a fundamental right [Article 19 (1)(b)]
- ★ No right is being taken away. Besides, many religious processions take place on public holidays
- ★ When administration collapses, judiciary has to intervene
- ★ Any rule that protects public right is lawful

pression, where will they go to protest?" he asked.

Banerjee, however, did not support the government's move to appeal. "Let the people decide what is good for them," he added.

"I feel that the opinion poll is the result of a temporary burst of emotion," said Congress leader Pradip Bhattacharya.

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was not available for comment. But he might be interested in at least one finding of the opinion poll: 75 per cent said investments would go up if the ruling was executed.

And only 23 per cent said without rallies and bands their Calcutta would be dull.

■ See Metro

Both indicate a high level of cynicism about the enforcement of the ruling. Not without reason. All three key political parties were as dismissive of the results of the opinion poll as they have been about the ruling.

CPM leader and transport minister Subhas Chakraborty said: "Such opinion polls are of no value. When political parties hold rallies, they do it in the larger interest of the people. Our party and the government have decided to appeal against the order and I support it."

Trinamul leader Pankaj Banerjee said those who are supporting the order are doing so "hastily". "When these same people are subjected to some op-

9-1 1110 MS

# Judge cries halt to rally raj

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, Sept. 24: For 30 minutes today, a Calcutta High Court judge remained boxed in his car as he saw police hold up traffic in the Maidan area to allow a rally the right of way.

Another judge of the same court chose to walk and reached office earlier.

A few hours later, the police learnt that they were wrong in giving the demonstrators the right of way and holding up life in the city's business district during peak hours.

In office around 40 minutes late, the first thing Justice Amitava Lala did was issue a suo motu contempt notice to the traffic wing of Calcutta Police, asking deputy commissioner M.K. Singh to appear in court next Monday to weed out a problem that had no place in "civilised society".

"We are far more concerned about our right but not our duty," the contempt notice read.

"Astonished" at how such a long procession (it was organised by the Adivasi Socio-Education Council) could be allowed during the peak hours, "closing all entrances" to the city centre, Justice Lala said he had taken "judicial notice of so many persons leaving their vehicles and walking towards their destination".

It is an "unfortunate situation in a civilised society", he said.

This unfortunate situation is a daily situation in Calcutta, but Singh tried to defend the police action. "There was a huge crowd and the thoroughfare was blocked. So, the officers had no option but to stop the cars," said the DC, traffic.

The incident that sparked the

judicial initiative occurred around 10.10 am. Justice Lala's car — along with hundreds of other vehicles — was stranded on the approach towards Akshvani Bhavan on its way to the high court, with a traffic sergeant stopping traffic for the rally to come and pass.

The judge's personal security guard tried unsuccessfully to reason with the sergeant that cars could be allowed to pass till the rally appeared.

Justice Lala waited till 10.40 am and then reached the court. In the process, he was beaten to office by Justice Kalyanjyoti Sengupta who got off his car and walked to the court.

After reaching court, Justice Lala penned the contempt notice, called an assistant commissioner of the traffic wing and another officer who was in charge of vehicular movement in the morning and handed over the scorcher to them.

Taking the police to task for "compromising with the situation", he noted how he had watched suffering judges, lawyers, court officials and litigants from his car.

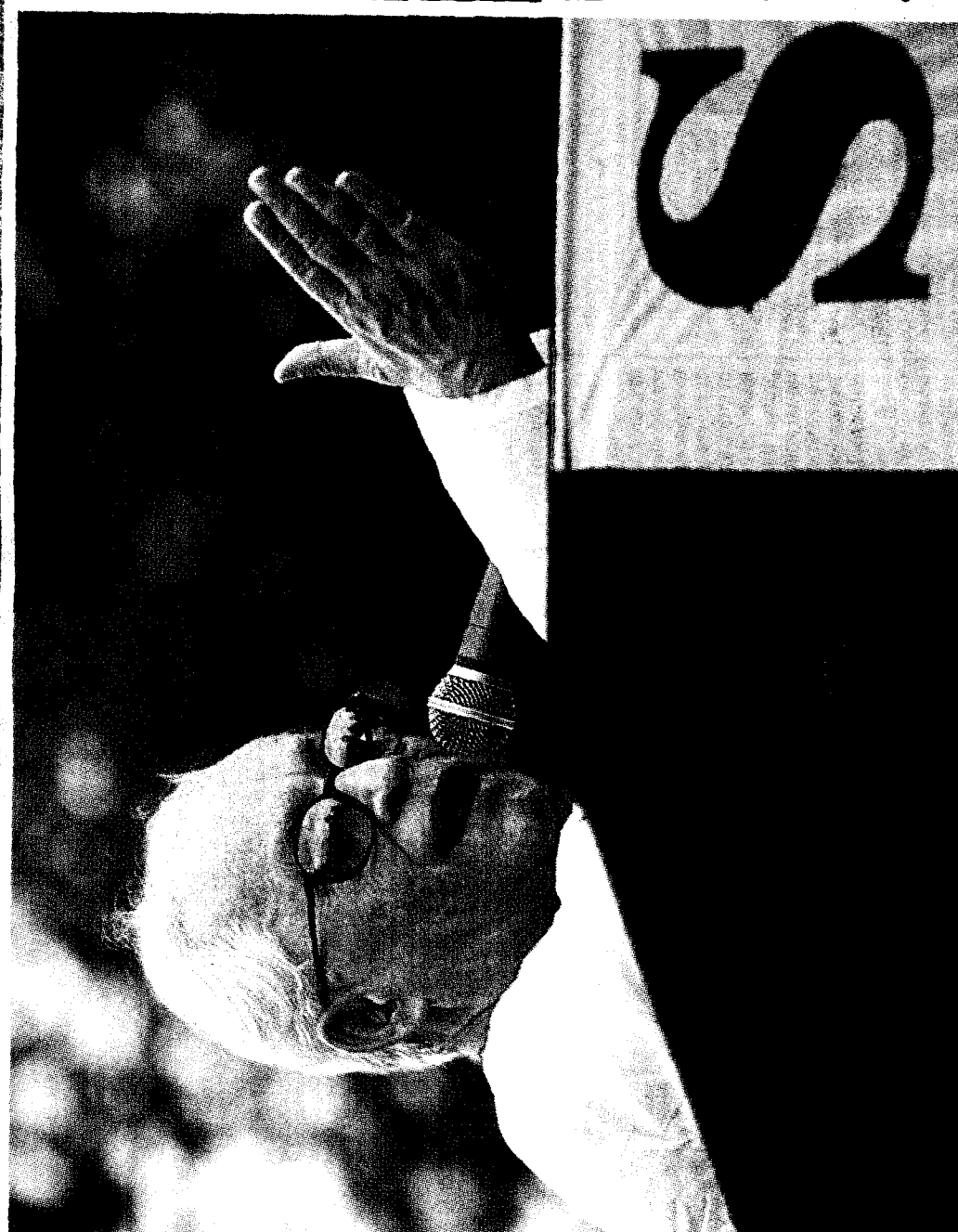
"Valuable working hours are disrupted because of political processions and, sometimes, because of bands and strikes," the missive said, adding that the judiciary could not remain a "silent spectator" to the chaos.

Even as he was admonishing the police for not dealing with the situation firmly enough, two more rallies were holding up life in the central business district.

One was by an organisation claiming to champion the rights of the scheduled castes, the other was by the Bengal Primary Teachers' Association.

Such was the chaos that two other judges — Samir Talukdar and Pronab Chattopadhyay

CHIEF MINISTER SHOWS THE WAY, OTHERS FOLLOW



DAYLIGHT HOLD-UP

●MONDAY: SFI rally in the heart of the city attended by the chief minister (left). Large parts of the city and its business hub crippled for several hours

●TUESDAY: Four rallies, including one each by a section of corporation staff and state government employees, at the city centre

●WEDNESDAY: Three rallies. The one by adivasi activists (above) held up the judges

— also sought an explanation from Singh. They let him off after telling him to prevent a recurrence.

The attempt at preventing a daily disturbance that Calcutta has been putting up with for

decades is not the judiciary's first. A public interest litigation, seeking a ban on rallies, was blocked by politicians of every hue on the argument that protest was a fundamental right.

Buddhadab Bhattacharjee

has talked often of keeping the city's streets free of rallies, at least on weekdays, but had Justice Lala been passing through Esplanade a couple of days ago he might have got caught in a rally the chief minister himself

was addressing. And Singh tried to argue as if today's crowd was particularly unruly.

"The tribals were armed with traditional weapons and we tried to control them the best we could. Some ministers and the

chief secretary were also caught up," he said.

Singh also offered this information: "Of course, we escorted the cars of the chief minister and the chief justice out of the crowd."



# Ammo truck origin traced

## N-E rebel was middleman

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, September 23

THE TRACKS made by the arms-laden truck seized from Hyde Road earlier this month have ended in Meghalaya, in the lair of rebel outfit A'chik National Volunteer Council.

The identity of the intended recipient of the ammo though remains a mystery. The only lead gathered so far is that the arms were meant for a much bigger outfit and the ANVC member was making a neat packet out of the deal.

Sleuths from the city had followed the trail to the North-east. They drew a blank in Assam and Nagaland but paid dirt in Meghalaya. They found that the truck was owned by Sirush Momin but the vehicle had changed many hands and licence numbers before it reached Bengal.

Son of Imam Ali, a timber smuggler from Meghalaya, Sirush

is a government-listed contractor. He is linked with the ANVC, an outfit founded in 1995 to push the demand for a separate Garoland.

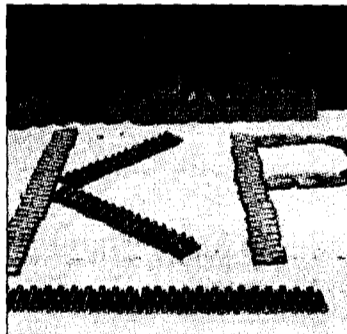
A resident of Karkutta in East Garo Hills, the 35-year-old Sirush bought the truck from Dilwar Hussain, a coal merchant from Goalpara in Assam, for Rs 2.7 lakh. DC (DDI) chief Soumen Mitra said the vehicle was registered in the name of Kearstone Momin, one of Sirush's relatives, on July 28.

Only seven days before the purchase of the vehicle, Sirush had a false ceiling erected to garage the truck on Baradmari Road in Chanduria Pathar of Goalpara. He did not own the garage though. Sirush was careful not to attract attention. He had the gearbox of the truck repaired at another garage, which was owned by Noor Islam, in Baradmari.

The vehicle's first owner was Mohan Kumar Garg of NS Road in Guwahati. Garg had bought the vehicle with financial assistance from Telco. On April 17, 1998, he sold it off to Dilwar Hussain who passed it on to Sirush.

Sirush, who is absconding, had obtained a fake registration of the vehicle from Nagaland before moving the vehicle to Meghalaya.

On its journey to Bengal, the truck passed through the Dhubri checkpost on August 5 and reached Kolkata the next day. Originally registered in the name of Ravinder Singh of Jammu with licence number NL 044-7868, it was changed to ML07-5859 in Meghalaya.



The ammunition seized from the truck.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 SEP 2003

SFS  
22/9

9 28/0 4/3

# Saving Malda

Left Front must rise above vested interests

The war against the fury of the Ganga in Malda has to be fought on two fronts. One, it is an annual scourge calling for preventive action well before swirling waters overrun hundreds of villages leaving thousands homeless every year. The fact that floods have been particularly severe this year is no excuse for lack of preparedness. Two, it involves a relentless effort to check erosion, something the Left Front calls a "national problem" while blaming the Centre for not providing adequate funds. The question remains as to whether Central funds will be used to provide work to favoured contractors who have made a mess of embankments and there is no evidence of how hundreds of crores have been spent. What guarantee is there that implementation of a Rs 900 crore master plan with largely the same bunch of contractors will protect villages on the banks of the river? Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, despite his earnestness, is not able to control the administration-contractor axis. Perhaps his predecessor can help identify the culprits. The victims were presented with a string of ritual promises when Asim Dasgupta visited the disaster site in August that the state would provide funds to build new houses. The uprooted villagers have discovered the bluff. Police and relief officials make it worse by blaming each other over breaches in the dykes — the former finding fault with the construction and the latter pointing accusing fingers at criminals who play havoc even when the police are supposed to maintain a round-the-clock vigil.

Where does all this leave the villagers? The explanation lies in the law and order problem that arises only because the government has failed in its duty. That means providing relief and rehabilitation without calculating whether it is worth helping the Congress-dominated districts of Malda and Murshidabad. This is a human tragedy of enormous proportions which by the Left Front's own estimate may have left lakhs of people without basic necessities. Is this the time to play politics with the people's distress? Fortunately, organisations like the Ramakrishna Mission and the Merchants' Chamber have arrived with supplies for stranded children. That cannot take the place of administrative action or remove tensions caused by cadres wanting to provide relief on political lines. Before more villages disappear into the waters leaving many more people dead or homeless, Alimuddin Street might ask itself whether it would have allowed the tragedy to persist in a district where its writ runs. Saving Malda is not simply about getting funds from the Centre; it is about curbing vested interests — and demonstrating the will to act.

THE STATESMAN

22 SEP 2003

# Massacre probe

## Police must cooperate with CBI investigation

It's been almost three years that the massacre of <sup>9/8/03</sup> ~~Dinamul~~ <sup>13/9</sup> Congress workers at Chhoto Angaria in West Midnapore, but the end to investigations is not in sight. Even the CBI is not sure whether the number of those killed in the CPI-M attack is five or 11 although its investigators claimed on Sunday that they had been able to trace and talk to six survivors. The local police are uncooperative on orders from above. They refused an armed escort to the CBI investigators visiting the site. This is part of the effort to stonewall the investigation. Desperate attempts to shield the culprits continue. It is even said that bones and other remains discovered at the site are not of humans but animals. Clearly the purpose is to mislead and sabotage the investigation. But is this good for the rule of law and justice in the state?

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, who is also the police minister, must realise that the Chhoto Angaria massacre is among the worst political atrocities committed during 27 years of Left Front rule. The calculated massacre, just four months ahead of the state assembly elections, was instrumental in ridding large parts of two Midnapore districts and the neighbouring Bankura and Hooghly districts of Opposition supporters and ensuring a sweeping victory for the Marxists in south Bengal. Actually Chhoto Angaria has come to symbolise Marxist terror by opposition cleansing. Nothing would have been known if the Calcutta High Court had not ordered the CBI to investigate. Buddhadeb must order the state police to cooperate with CBI in completing the investigation and nabbing the culprits. It should not be another case of Bijon Setu massacre of 17 Ananda Margis where the real culprits were never brought to justice.

THE STATESMAN

13 SEP 2003

# Truck with explosives

**STAFF REPORTER**

**Calcutta, Sept. 12:** A truck loaded with explosives was intercepted in Purulia last night near an intersection where one of the roads branch off towards the Dhanbad-Barakar zone.

The driver and the cleaner were detained. Though both claimed that the consignment was headed for an explosives-making unit near Bokaro, the spot of the seizure and the timing — hours after plates were found removed from railway tracks near Barakar — made law-enforcing agencies suspect "something amiss", police officers said.

The driver-cleaner duo told the police that the ammonium nitrate — an essential ingredient in explosives, of which the truck was carrying 18 metric tonnes — was coming from the Haldia port and was meant for

the Indian Explosives Ltd factory at Gomia near Bokaro. The unit supplies detonators and other explosives to mines in the coal-rich belt, officials said.

But the duo did not have any documents to back their claim. "We have already sent word to the Indian Explosives Ltd authorities," Purulia superintendent of police Vineet Goel said over phone this evening. "But no one has responded to our urgent missives."

The truck was seized at Chas More in Purulia, police said. This intersection has several roads, one of which branches towards the Dhanbad-Barakar belt. This was where plates were removed from the tracks last evening, a few hours before two Rajdhani Express trains — one from Howrah and the other from Sealdah — were to pass, and one person was arrested.

Officials said the truck was

asked to halt at the intersection a few hours after an alert was sounded following the railway-track incident. "The driver and the cleaner came down from the truck and were questioned by police about what the vehicle was carrying," inspector-general (law and order) Chayan Mukherjee said today. After persistent inquiry, they owned up to what was inside.

"Both have been taken into preventive custody and are being interrogated by police in Purulia," Mukherjee said. They had no valid documents, he added.

Officials said the quantity of explosives seized was "huge" and it was "unnatural" for any vehicle to be carrying it without papers. "Our suspicion has been aroused by this want of documents as well as the timing and the spot of the seizure," Goel said.

THE TELEGRAPH

13 SEP 2003

# Borough chief takes KMC battle to home ground

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, September 10

THE TRINAMOOL KMC board came under fire from the opposition and its own partymen alike at the house meeting on Wednesday. Mayor Subrata Mukherjee had his way but not before the rest had had their say.

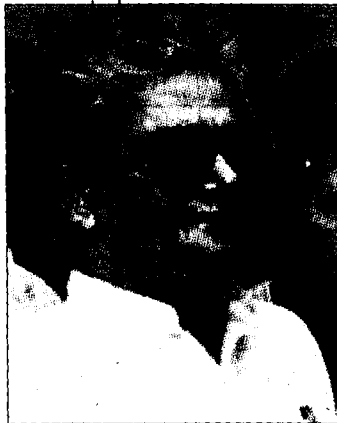
The grilling began on home ground with Trinamool borough chairman Ruby Dutta questioning Mukherjee's move to buy or rent the building at 206 AJC Bose Road to accommodate consultants of the ADB when several corporation properties were vacant.

Dutta pointed out that the KMC's building at 242 Kalighat Road had nearly 35,000 square feet floor area and would easily house the ADB team at no extra cost. Besides, there were lands at Belvedere Road where a building could be constructed at a much lower cost than the price tag on the AJC Bose Road complex. The mayor said he wanted the team in Kolkata by November as the project had been delayed already. Identification of a KMC property would take more time, hence the decision to use the readymade building on AJC Bose Road.

Dutta, however, argued that the project had already been delayed by 13 years; six more months would hardly have made a difference. "What was the need to buy the building at an exaggerated price?" said Dutta. Leader of the Opposition Nirmal Mukherjee alleged that the board had received Rs 1.5 crore kickback in the deal to fix up the building.

The proposal to buy the building was passed by 67 votes to 52.

The board's troubles weren't over yet, though. A heated argument broke out over the lease rate of a piece of land for a nursing school at Kasiabagan Burial Ground in Park Circus. At an



Anup Chatterjee  
Under fire

earlier council meeting on August 20, the rent lease for the six-cottah plot was fixed at Rs 2,32,565 per cottah. On Wednesday, MMiC (health) Pradip Ghosh announced that the locality would be considered Kasiabagan and with Rs 5 lakh lease rent for the entire plot.

"We fixed a rate at the council meeting just a month ago and all of a sudden, it comes down to one-third the amount. Is a council meeting relevant anymore? We were not even informed about the change, let alone the board seeking our approval," said an MMiC, not wishing to be named.

In another case, the board got the figures wrong on paper too. The "misprint" of the price of a plot to be given to a newspaper house was brought up by a councillor. The price had been printed as Rs 1.46 lakh in place of Rs 2.67 lakh per cottah, MMiC (roads) Anup Chatterjee told the house. But no corrigendum was issued and a councillor alleged that the board tried to sneak in a subsidised price rate while the price had already been fixed at the earlier meeting.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 SEP 2003

# Satyasadhan steers clear of Saraswati

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, September 6

STATE HIGHER Education Minister Satyasadhan Chakraborty walked out of the inauguration of a fair organised by the National Book Trust on Saturday after he came to know that the function, which was to be presided over by Union HRD Minister Murli Manohar Joshi, would begin with a *Saraswati Vandana*.

Chakraborty, the guest of honour, arrived a few minutes before chief guest Joshi. But barely had he settled down in his seat when he noticed a garlanded Saraswati idol and asked an official to find out if the organisers were planning a *Saraswati Vandana*. When his aide confirmed that they were indeed, he stomped out of the stage without uttering a word — leaving Joshi, Trust chairman Brij Kishore Sharma and other guests stunned.

Chakraborty said he left as a mark of protest against “saffronisation of education”, adding that “it is unconstitutional to start a government programme with the *Saraswati Vandana*. These are signs of the RSS streak in BJP. It was a government event and they had no business starting it with *Saraswati Vandana*.”

Joshi later told *Hindustan Times* that he was amused by the inherent fear psychosis of the Marxists. “In our culture, Saraswati signifies education. The whole of Bengal worships Saraswati, but the ruling Marxists refuse to admit this. From next year, they are removing the chapter on Chhau from textbooks as it has lines on *Ganesh Vandana*. This is ridiculous.”



M.M. Joshi (above)  
and S. Chakraborty



THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 SEP 2003

# No role for MNCs in new agro policy

P. SR  
MB  
SFA

3/9

**Tanmay Chatterjee**  
in Kolkata

Sept. 2. — Multinational companies have been kept out of the ambit of the new agricultural policy which will be implemented in the state during the next Rabi season.

The state agriculture minister, Mr Kamal Guha, was opposed to the entry of multinational companies in any research and development project in the agrarian sector.

His party, the Forward Bloc, along with the RSP, had also opposed several clauses in the draft policy over the past once year. Finally Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had to intervene to put the House in order.

Officials at Writers' Buildings said that in the first year, the department would select ten farms for a project on the development of high-yielding seeds.

However, the department will only go into joint ventures with Indian companies and have a collaboration with the Seed Corporation of India for exchange of technical knowhow.



Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee  
and Mr Kamal Guha

Officials said Mr Kamal Guha was opposed to any collaboration with MNCs or foreign companies as he felt that farm-

ers' interests would be hampered in the long run.

Under the new programme, the government will provide full financial and technical assistance to some selected farmers who will participate in research-based farming in the coming months.

Initially two technical schools will be set up in north and south Bengal for training farmers in modern methods of cultivation. Depending upon the results, eight more schools will be selected in the first year.

Here the agriculture department will impart training to farmers' children.

Since the state has attained self sufficiency in rice, the government will lay emphasis on development of high-yielding seeds for wheat, cotton, edible oil and some types of pulses, officials said.

The government has plans to revitalise its 200 odd farms most of whom are lying defunct, an official said.

The government may even produce and market seeds of superior quality to other states. Talks are on with a firm based in south India for a joint venture on seed development.

THE STATESMAN

3 SEP 2003

PUMPING TO SUSTAIN WATER TABLE

# Recharge to stem arsenic

Statesman News Service

## HIGH RISK ZONES

KOLKATA, Sept. 1. — Ground water resources in south Kolkata will have to be recharged to limit their depletion and stem the threat of arsenic contamination. Mr Nandagopal Bhattacharya, the minister for water investigation and development said today at a workshop on “artificial recharge and sustainable development in ground water”. It was organised by Jadavpur University’s department of geological sciences.

The programme needs to be implemented in other parts of the state for conserving fast-depleting ground water levels, the minister said. Pointing out to the grave situation of water levels in several parts of the state, he said the threat to the water situation could be greater considering the demands of a rising population coupled with better living standards. “Among many methods of recharging ground water, roof top rain water conservation is being used widely in the state. It has already been introduced in Purulia, Bankura and other districts where water levels

- Alipore
- Golf Green
- Golf Club area
- Naktala
- Purbachal
- Bansdroni
- Garia

are already low”, Mr Bhattacharya said.

Prof AD Mukherjee, the vice-chancellor of Vidyasagar University blamed the lack of a rational approach in combating the environmental hazard. Even with the scarcity, the Centre still doesn’t allot a budget for conserving water.

Mr SP Sinha Roy, president of the Centre for Ground Water Studies said: “The Centre has emphasised on this project... the university has extended its co-operation to expedite this programme with several organisations including NGOs. JU will play the role of facilitator while civic and panchayat bodies in the state will be the beneficiaries.”

**Ground water shrink**  
Brisk industrialisation coupled with the reckless tapping of ground water in the Haldia industrial com-

plex has led the Central Ground Water Authority to declare it a “notified area” for regulating ground water extraction, a report from Haldia says.

The CGWA has, based on a study conducted by the Central Ground Water Board, identified Haldia as a “critical area in view of the depletion of ground water resources due to over-exploitation and deterioration in ground water quality”.

After considering the need to ensure further development activities consistent with ground water protection and preservation, the central authority has advocated a number of measures to be followed in the industrial area. Apart from a ban on installing any structure to extract ground water without the body’s prior approval, owners of wells, tubewells and borewells used for domestic or industrial purposes have been asked to register with the water authority within three months failing which they will face penal action.

Environment secretary Mr Hiral Ghosh has met industry heads and Haldia Municipality authorities and urged them to save the water level of the area.



# CM, Advani talk crisis control

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Sept. 1. — The deputy Prime Minister today held a video-conference with Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee to discuss Bengal's preparedness to combat disasters. The session was held at NIC Bhavan on Rawdon Street.

The disaster management department was put under the Union home ministry after the Gujarat earthquake. The chief minister told reporters that Mr Advani had asked him to set up a disaster management committee to tackle natural disasters.

The Gujarat CM, Mr Narendra Modi, the Maharashtra CM, Mr Sushil Shinde and the Assam CM, Mr Tarun Gogoi also participated in the conference.

Mr Bhattacharjee told the deputy PM that his government had started a Disaster Management Committee comprising ministers and secretaries of the departments of home, civil defence and relief.

Mr Bhattacharjee said he was the head of the panel.

Disaster management panels have also been set up in the districts and efforts were being made to get public participation.

He said training was being imparted at the block level where villagers were taught on how to rescue people and distribute relief to disaster victims. Two disaster management teams will be set up in Kolkata and Siliguri, the CM said.

"Apart from natural calamity, your state also suffered from human disaster," the chief minister said Mr Advani told Mr Modi. "We are seriously thinking on the issue of blast-hit and human disaster hit victims," Mr Bhattacharjee said.

**Digha erosion:** The state government will constitute a committee headed by Prof. Anandadeb Mukherjee, vice-chancellor, Vidyasagar University, to render an opinion on the erosion situation at Digha and Sankarpur beaches at Midnapore.

Announcing this at Writers' today, chief minister Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said the committee would soon visit the places for observation.

THE STATESMAN

2 SEP 2003

# Transport strike off after day-long commuter woes

Our Kolkata Bureau

26 AUGUST

**T**HE three-day transport strike sponsored by all private operators, which began on Tuesday, was called off later during the day. This came following state transport minister, Subhash Chakraborty's meeting with the private operators. However, the commuters' harrowing experience on Tuesday is likely to worsen on Wednesday when city's petrol pumps down shutters for three days, effectively crashing attempts to get the transport system back on the roads.

Soon after Tuesday's meeting with 24 bodies of bus, minibus, taxi, truck and chartered bus owners, Mr Chakraborty said that the issues of collection of additional transport tax and stiff police fines would be kept in abeyance till September 10. Transport operators had called the strike protesting against these two issues. The minister did not meet representa-



**HALT-ER LINE:** Taxis and auto rickshaws parked at a city petrol pump on Tuesday. — PTI

tives of petrol pump owners, who till late evening remained steadfast in their resolve to keep their pumps shut for 72 hours.

Bengal Bus Syndicate president, Mr Swarna Kamal Saha announced that the strike had been called off after the meeting on Tuesday. He said the decision

came following assurance from the transport minister that additional tax and penalties would not be collected till September 10.

The minister had also agreed to accommodate another seven members in the committee to look into the issue, as demanded by the operators, Mr Saha said.

*The Economic Times*

27 AUG 2003

# Transporters turn down

9-8-03

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Aug. 25. — Transport operators and owners have decided to stick to their decision to go ahead with their three-day strike from tomorrow.

Transport minister Mr Subhas Chakraborty today said that the state government would, by no means, backtrack on its decision to hike road tax and other permit fees.

He said buses and minibuses in West Bengal would have to pay Rs 7,150 as tax per annum, compared to Rs 28,600 in Andhra Pradesh, Rs 20,875 in Karnataka, Rs 62,920 in Tamil Nadu, Rs 45,938 in Maharashtra and Rs

26,124 in Bihar.

The government charges Rs 9,300 as tax per annum from goods carriers and Rs 1,600 from taxis, which is meagre in comparison to other states, the minister said.

"We will take action according to the existing laws," Mr Chakraborty warned, adding: "I'll wait for a day and if the strike continues, I'll order the Regional Transport Authority (RTA) and State Transport Authority (STA) to issue temporary permits to bus owners and, if necessary, additional buses may be allowed to operate under the Calcutta State Transport Corporation banner."

"There are some buses currently operating without valid

permit," the minister disclosed.

He also gave assurances that CSTC would increase the frequency of buses between Howrah and Sealdah, Howrah and BBD Bag, Sealdah and BBD Bag for the convenience of three million office-goers who come to the city centre every day.

An additional 2,000 government-run buses would ply on the city's streets during the strike and special arrangements would be made for long-distance passengers, Mr Chakraborty said. About 100 buses would be made available on important bus routes for schoolchildren.

The minister claimed that many bus owners had said they would not object if workers ran

# Subhas plea

51. K. M. ... 26/8

he added. "We have formed a committee following their demand but members of bus, minibus and taxi associations decided to boycott the very first meeting, thereby suggesting that they have no grievances," Mr Chakraborty said.

"We have decided to go on an indefinite strike from midnight as the transport minister failed to give a patient hearing to our demands. We have 2.5 lakh truck operators as members," said Federation of West Bengal Truck Operators' Associations general secretary Mr Satyajit Majumdar, following a meeting with the minister today.

"We have decided to go for a one-day token strike on 26

August to protest against the enhanced additional road tax," said Mr Ajit Kr Das, general secretary of the West Bengal Tankers' Association. About 2,500 contract carriages will also join the 72-hour strike, according to Mr Himadri Ganguly of the West Bengal Contract Carriage Owners' and Operators' Association.

According to the IGP (law and order), Mr Chayan Mukherjee, all superintendents of police had been asked to step up vigil on National Highways and State Highways so that strikers did not stop public vehicles.

**Exam postponed:** Calcutta University has postponed all examinations scheduled on 26 August.

## WHAT WON'T PLY

- Private buses
- Minibuses
- Taxis
- Tankers
- Chartered school and office buses

## What will ply:

- State buses
- Trams
- Metro

their buses, and have even promised to provide tickets for the purpose.

Some transport unions and associations have promised to run taxis, buses and minibuses,

# Persistent poison

5/6 Bengal trapped by politics of bandhs

With the reputation West Bengal has acquired for bandhs it is not a surprise that the violence witnessed during Thursday's Bihar Bandh tended to be overlooked. Bihar is a state refusing to reform itself and Laloo Prasad Yadav making things worse with his penchant for colourful gimmicks to hide the state's backwardness. West Bengal presents a more damaging spectacle of CITU unions bringing life to a halt to protest against the NDA government at the Centre while the Left Front pretends it is committed to improvement of work culture and rejuvenation of the industrial climate. On Thursday, however, the irony assumed a different colour. This time CITU unions went all out to break the bandh sponsored by two inconsequential outfits — SUCI and CPI-ML. Contributing to the show of muscle, Biman Bose, chairman of the Left Front, made a boast of 65 per cent attendance at Writers' Building in defiance of "spontaneous rejection" of the bandh. Fighting on Alimuddin Street can juggle with instead of addressing the issues raised of steep hikes in power tariffs, the demand for higher education and permit and trade licence. Production in factories is far below normal, retail outlets do no business because they treat it as just another holiday, and normal life is disrupted despite Subhas Chakraborty's effort to run state buses with or without passengers. The political battles get the better of real issues which are lost.

West Bengal presents a tragic case where leaders of all parties stand exposed. Not one of them will endorse a move to ban strikes and bandhs for fear of disturbing their support bases in the trade union sector. They will speak in different voices depending on who has sponsored the bandh. They will cynically interpret the public's desire to escape the hassles of defying a bandh as support for the trade union cause. Or, when they need to break a bandh as on Thursday, they will compel staff to record their presence without doing any work. The political cross-currents are poison from which there is no escape. Which is also why the CPI-M takes out a massive procession to protest against the Supreme Court order on strikes but displays the ultimate hypocrisy of mocking similar protests by political opponents. When will all this end? If the public don't have a clue, neither, it seems, does the government. The Left Front has all the noise in its repertoire tuned to different occasions — none of which breaks the barren cycle of self-destruction.

25 AUG 2003

THE STATESMAN

# Bill gives more power to municipalities

Tammy Chatterjee in Kolkata

Aug. 5. — West Bengal Municipal Corporation Bill 2002, which was passed by the Assembly last week, gives power to all municipal corporations, except Kolkata and Howrah, to impose and collect taxes, and levy surcharge on residential buildings, shops and establishments.

The property tax, says Section 102 of the Bill, shall be determined as follows:

a) where the annual value of land and building does not exceed Rs 999, the tax shall be determined in accordance with the following formula— (annual value/100 + 10) per cent of the annual value.

b) where the annual value exceeds Rs 999, the tax shall be determined in accordance with the following formula— (annual value/1000 + 20) per cent of the annual value.

The above formula will come into effect provided the tax does not exceed 30 per cent of the annual value of land and buildings; provided further that the formula specified in this sub section,

shall come into effect at the time of fresh or next valuation of lands and buildings taken up in any Corporation area after commencement of this Act; provided also that in calculating the percentage of property tax, decimal figure below 0.5 shall be ignored and decimal figure of or above 0.5 shall be rounded off to 1.

Clause 103 of the Bill says that a surcharge, not exceeding 50 per cent of the total tax imposed on a holding, may be levied if such a holding is used wholly or in part for commercial, industrial or other non-residential purposes and the Corporation shall decide the rate of surcharge which shall form part of the property tax for the purpose of recovery.

Clause 104 offers a rebate, not exceeding 20 per cent of the property tax for a residential building, if the building is used exclusively by the owner for own residential purpose.

The government has offered exemption for land or buildings, or portions thereof, which are exclusively used for public

## Self-assessment of properties

KOLKATA, Aug. 5. — The new law offers scope for self-assessment of a property by the owner if the property has not been assessed or has been redeveloped/ altered after last assessment. However, the self assessment has to be certified by an enlisted valuer holding a diploma from the Institute of Surveyors and the total floor area of the new building has to exceed 400 sq. metre.

The valuation on self-assessment, where the self assessed value of land and building does not exceed Rs 2 lakh, will be one per cent. In case it exceeds Rs 2 lakh, the valuation will be 1.5 per cent. — SNS

worship.

Crematoriums, burial grounds, social welfare homes run by the state and parade grounds or open space owned by the government have also been exempted.

Clause 113 (1) says: "Notwithstanding anything contained in the West Bengal Premises Tenancy Act 1997 or any other law in force, for the purpose of assessment of property tax, the annual value of a building comprising land or building shall be deemed to be the gross annual rent including services charges, if any, at which such land or building might, at the time of as-

essment, be reasonably expected to let from year to year, less an allowance of ten per cent, for the cost of repairs and other expenses necessary to maintain such land or building in a state to command such gross rent."

The annual valuation of holdings will be made, unless otherwise directed, by the West Bengal Valuation Board and the list prepared by the board will be the assessment list of the Corporation.

A new valuation list will be prepared every five years. Anyone dissatisfied with the assessment can apply for review.

# Assembly passes Panchayat Bill

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, July 26. — The state Assembly today passed the West Bengal Panchayat Elections Bill, 2003, disregarding the Opposition's persistent demand for sending it to the select committee for a proper examination of its different provisions.

Mr Saugata Roy of the Trinamul Congress said there are some welcome features in the Bill, including the provision for appointing an assistant returning officer to examine complaints of use of force and intimidation to prevent a prospective candidate from filing nomination papers.

"The provision is a vindication of our complaints during the May panchayat poll that our party could not file nominations in about 23,000 seats because of the use of muscle power by CPI-M activists," Mr Roy said.

Mr Suryakanta Mishra, minister for panchayats, however, refused to buy Mr Roy's argument and asserted the provision was made to honour the Op-

position's demand in this regard.

Opposition members said there was no need for passing the Bill in a hurry, as the next panchayat elections won't be held before 2008.

The minister, however, justified the introduction of the Bill on the ground that it would help the proceedings when byelections are to be held.

The Opposition found a contradiction between the Left Front chairman, Mr Biman Bose's assertion that no teachers would be allowed to become a panchayat functionary and the absence of any such provision in the Bill. The minister, however, said there was no need for changing the existing provision.

**Oppn walkout:** The main opposition Trinamul Congress and Congress today walked out of the West Bengal Assembly over alleged terror tactics of CPI-M in the recent panchayat polls and resenting the "belated" action on the part of the state government to enact a stringent law to tackle poll violence, adds PTI.

VAJPAYEE SPEECH 'BADLY DRAFTED'

# CM bashes 'political' PM

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, July 17. — The chief minister today reacted strongly to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's speech at the 150th anniversary of Bengal Chamber of Commerce saying the speech was "part of the BJP's campaign for next year's general elections". Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said: "It appeared to me that he had come here to launch the BJP's campaign for next year's election as he preferred to attack my government instead of speaking on national issues."

Criticising the Prime Minister for his remarks against West Bengal, Mr Bhattacharjee said Mr Vajpayee's speech had been "wrongly advised and badly drafted". "I preferred to remain silent to the Prime Minister's diatribes against the state government because I spoke first at the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, but I felt I should give a counter-reply and a clarification today."

Mr Bhattacharjee criticised the Prime Minister for commenting on the Left Front's dogmatism. "We are dogmatic against communalism and religious narrowness. But the Prime Minister is surrounded by communal forces on all sides — the RSS and VHP." Mr Vajpayee mentioned Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Netaji Subhas



After being a silent spectator on Wednesday, the chief minister finally responds to Mr Vajpayee's barbs

Chandra Bose and Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose in his speech. All of them, Mr Bhattacharjee said, were humanists and never supported any sort of communalism.

The chief minister quoted statistics to claim that the allegations of the state's rapid decline in all sectors of economy were incorrect.

Mr Bhattacharjee alleged that under NDA rule, the country had

failed to achieve the targeted eight per cent GDP growth, and wound up with only 4.3 per cent. "For your information, West Bengal recorded a GDP growth rate of 7.1 per cent, which is much above the national average." The state had already surpassed the national average in agriculture and industrial growth rate.

Discounting the Prime Minister's charge that unemployment was acute in the state, Mr Bhattacharjee said: "Should we

take it that this problem is less in UP, particularly his constituency Lucknow? Unemployment is a national phenomenon." He maintained that there was no flight of capital from West Bengal since 1994, and a congenial environment for investments prevailed in the state.

**LF slams PM:** In the Assembly today, LF members criticised Mr Vajpayee for his comments on the state's work culture and tardy growth.

TRINAMUL CHIEF USES PRIME MINISTERIAL EXCUSE

# Mamata to lift Assembly boycott

2 6/2/5  
5/8  
13/7  
9/8/10  
9/8/10  
TMC

**Statesman News Service**

KOLKATA, July 16. — Using a primeministerial excuse, Miss Mamata Banerjee today reneged on her Assembly boycott decision and said it's going to be lifted.

The Trinamul Congress working committee meeting is going to endorse the Prime Minister's proposal tomorrow evening and decide on the date for lifting the Assembly boycott, Miss Banerjee said today. Sources said the Trinamul MLAs might start visiting the Assembly from Friday or Monday.

Many Trinamul MLAs said in private that Miss Banerjee took the decision to lift the boycott to favour Mr Subrata Mukherjee's renomination and selection as the chairman of the Assembly's prestigious Public Accounts Committee, using the primeministerial excuse.

Miss Banerjee had been looking for an escape route to lift the boycott,

following resentment among party MLAs. She had raised the issue on 6 July during Mr LK Advani's visit but received no response.

She raised the issue once again at the meeting with the Prime Minister at Raj Bhavan this evening, only to find solace in the fact that the latter was against her boycott decision. Interestingly, Mr Dipak Ghosh and Mr Shibdas Mukherjee, Trinamul MLAs, had questioned Miss Banerjee's boycott decision and had been suspended from the party, though Mr Ghosh's suspension was lifted later. However, the Trinamul chief found nothing wrong in the Prime Minister's advice to lift the boycott.

A delegation of Trinamul MPs and MLAs met the Prime Minister this evening. Miss Banerjee told Mr AB Vajpayee that West Bengal was in the grip of terror and that adequate steps should be taken to ensure free and fair polls. At this, the Prime Minister cited the example of J&K, saying polls had

been held democratically there despite terrorism. "We lost the polls in J&K. But we could ensure the return of democracy there."

Finding an opportunity, the Trinamul chief said: "They didn't bother to ask us why we were boycotting the Assembly". Mr Vajpayee replied: "Who are they? Who are you talking about — the CPI-M?"

Miss Banerjee said the chief minister and the Speaker of the Assembly did not even request her party to reconsider the boycott decision. At this, Mr Vajpayee said: "Why will they request you? Rather, in the interest of parliamentary democracy, you should raise the issue of terror and violence in the Assembly." Having elicited such a proposal from none but the Prime Minister himself, Miss Banerjee, without wasting time, announced that her party working committee meeting would endorse Mr Vajpayee's anti-boycott stand.



Trinamul ends Assembly boycott after PM's plea

# Mamata paves capital way

OUR BUREAU

9-6 177  
Calcutta, July 16: A one-to-one meeting between Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Mamata Banerjee at Raj Bhavan this afternoon brightened the prospects of her reinduction to the Union cabinet.

At the Prime Minister's request, the Trinamul Congress chief called off her party's boycott of the Assembly.

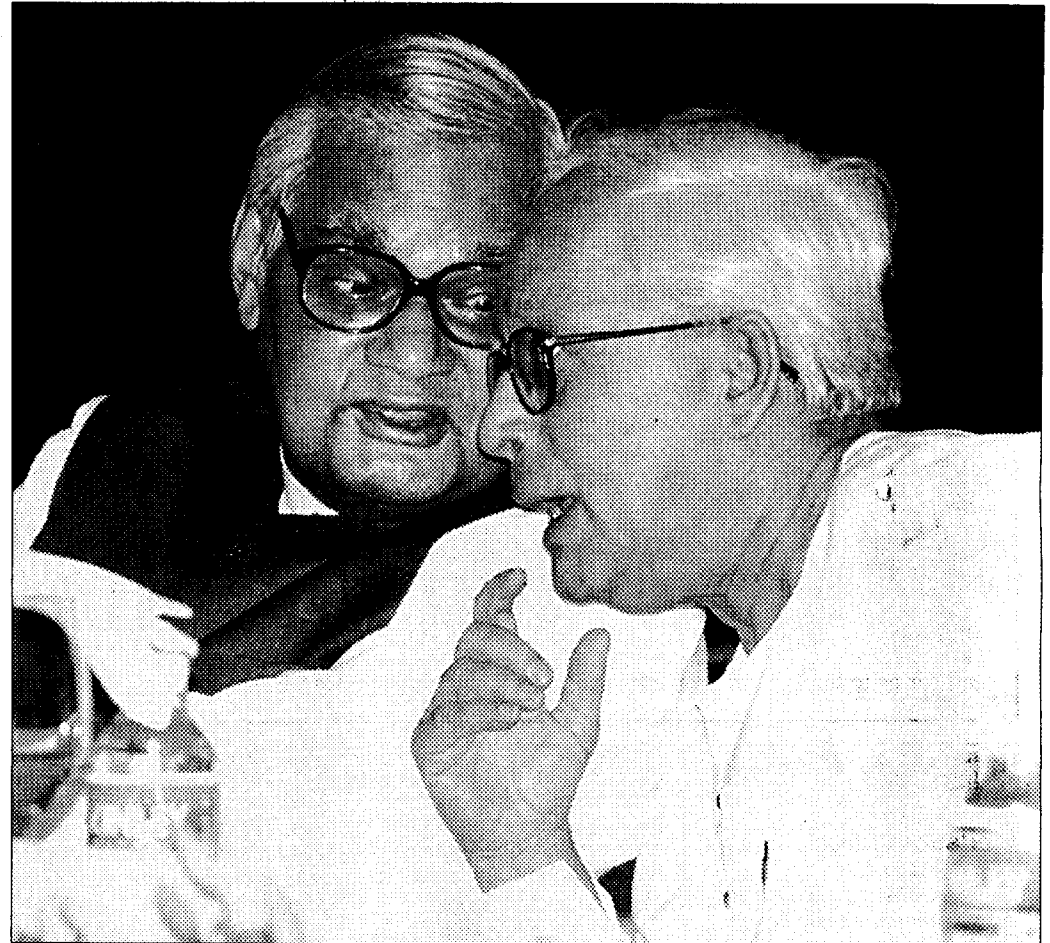
Sources said Vajpayee urged Mamata to return to his ministry. "Forget what happened in the past and come to Delhi at the earliest," Vajpayee is believed to have told Mamata. The Trinamul leader iterated her "loyalty" to the Prime Minister but said she had been hurt by attempts to "break my party". There was, however, no discussion on the former railway minister's possible portfolio at the 10-minute meeting.

Though in a more roundabout way, Mamata's return to the Cabinet also came up later, when a 38-member Trinamul delegation led by the party chief met Vajpayee.

When the Prime Minister urged the leaders to intensify their agitation against the CPM-led government, Sadhan Pande, a legislator and member of the party's working committee, requested him to help Trinamul set up an effective fight against the Marxists by "making our leader more powerful". The Prime Minister, sources said, smiled in answer.

Vajpayee's assurance to go into the party's allegations regarding "the CPM's terror in Bengal" led to the end of the Assembly imbroglio.

Mamata later told newsmen that a formal decision to revoke the boycott would be taken at tomorrow's working committee meeting. "We have decided to withdraw the Assembly boycott as the request has come from no less a person than the country's Prime Minister. We have explained to him the factors and



**TALKING TRADE?** Atal Bihari Vajpayee with Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry programme on Wednesday. Picture by Kishor Roy Chowdhury

circumstances that prompted us to keep away from the budget session of the Assembly since June 26. Vajpayeeji gave us a patient hearing and promised to look into the matter," she said.

Apart from the Trinamul delegation, the Prime Minister received several deputations from the state BJP, the Shyamaprasad Mookherji Birth Centenary Memorial Committee, Federation of Small and Medium Industries, Merchants' Chamber of Commerce and representatives of different religious groups.

Vajpayee, Trinamul leaders said, appreciated the party's

decision to register a strong protest against "the CPM's terror tactics".

"I appreciate your stand. But you must keep in mind that the Assembly, too, is a forum in the democratic set-up where you can raise your demands. Besides, you should not forget that people have elected you to voice their grievances in the legislature. You have already registered your protest against the CPM's terror by boycotting the House for a few days. Now it is time for you to withdraw the boycott and take part in the Assembly proceedings," Vajpayee reportedly said.

"We have narrated to the Prime Minister how the Marxists are exercising total political control on police and administration and have reduced the elections to a farce. The state government has denied the Opposition parties their rights and privileges. We have told Vajpayeeji the ruling party is bent on destroying the democratic system in Bengal and sought his intervention to ensure free and fair polls in future," Mamata said.

The BJP delegation led by state party chief Tathagata Roy spoke on the dangers arising out of infiltration from Bangladesh.

# Shell out 70 times more to be a doctor

## Dollar quotas in MBBS

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, July 9

FROM THIS academic year, MBBS students will have to pay a monthly tuition fee of Rs 850, instead of Rs 12.

But 35 per cent of the students will be kept out of this 70-fold hike as fees have been fully waived for 10 per cent students under the poor and meritorious category and partly waived for another 10 per cent, in the lower income category. The rest 15 per cent seats are under the reserved category.

For the first time, a quota will be introduced for NRI students, foreigners or NRI-sponsored students. The NRI quota will be introduced after the Medical Council of India approves the additional medical seats at SSKM and Midnapore Medical College.

Health Minister Surya Kanta Mishra said the tuition fee in the NRI quota would come to around Rs 10 lakh for the entire MBBS course. This will have to be paid in dollars.

Students seeking admission through the NRI quota will have to get a minimum of 50 per cent in Science to be eligible to take a merit test conducted by the government.

Apart from MBBS, tuition fee for Bachelor of Dental Science (BDS), Ayurveda and Homoeopathy has been increased. Students taking up

### STRONG MEDICINE



- ▶ Monthly fee up from Rs 12 to Rs 850 for MBBS course
- ▶ Based on economic criteria, course fee will be waived for 10% of the students
- ▶ Another 10% need pay only half the fees
- ▶ Quotas will be introduced for NRIs. They will have to pay dollar equivalent of Rs 10 lakh for the whole course

BDS would have to pay Rs 750 and those opting for Ayurveda and Homoeopathy Rs 650 every month.

Justifying the steep hike, the minister said it has become difficult for the state government to meet the education expenses under the existing financial constraints and the Centre's refusal to shoulder the financial burden.

"So, how do we maintain the cash flow?" he posed to the Assembly on Wednesday, explaining the rationale for the fee hike, to be implemented for the first time in 40 years. But he assured the House that poor students would continue to get free education.

# Politicising health

Alimuddin's policy wrecks health care

It is an irony that the CPI-M, which in 1966 was a vehicle of popular protest against the rise in food prices and in the vanguard of the food movement, now does everything to stonewall and scuttle attempts to discuss the death of over 100 children in a mystery disease in Murshidabad. The party does not think that the deaths warrant a discussion at the Left Front Committee meeting and its politburo member, also the Front chairman, deliberately seeks to black out any information on the issue. Worse, it resorts to stratagems to protect its arrogant and failed health minister Surya Kanta Mishra and blames almost everybody else, for the tragedy. Finding a scapegoat has become a persistent pastime. Now it blames government doctors unwilling to serve at the rural primary health centres for the deaths. It is too conceited to admit that its total ignorance and over politicisation of the health care system are at the root of the problem.

Will Alimuddin explain why the health and sanitary inspectors in Murshidabad did not inform the district authorities in time about the mysterious disease? As members of the Co-ordination Committee they are answerable to no one for dereliction of duty. Professionalism is allowed to die so that undivided loyalty of health cadres can be ensured. The virology department of the School of Tropical Medicine, once famous for its pioneering work, is now almost defunct as its important equipment is non-functioning. Similar departments in other government hospitals are mere signboard organisations. It is pointless to blame doctors for a dysfunctional health care system. Their refusal to go to rural health centres is understandable as most dwellings there are bereft of basic amenities. Despite being in power for 26 years, the marxists have been unable to build the necessary infrastructure to attract doctors to serve rural Bengal. Politicking is no substitute for basic health care.

THE STATESMAN

2 JUL 2003

# Buddha dawns on business

DEVADEEPUROHIT

Mumbai, June 2: A sincere chief minister, a transparent government and a state that seems to be changing — Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee boarded the flight to Calcutta this evening with a bouquet of compliments from leading industrialists.

"I am more than satisfied. It seems the attitude towards Bengal is changing," the chief minister said with a smile after spending nearly six hours with business barons.

That is an achievement in itself because Bengal chief ministers are not known for taking the trouble of visiting Mumbai to court investors. In the past, it has been left to chief ministers of other states to come to Calcutta and sign up investments.

When, after all these years, Bhattacharjee made the move, he found the ballroom at the Taj hotel — which holds around 150 people — full. By the time he finished, there was applause but not before the gathering had thrown at him uncomfortable, if predictable, questions about law and order and labour militancy.

"Are you satisfied with the law and order situation?" asked Arun Maira, head of the Boston Consulting Group, the multinational consultants. The question was tied up with trade union activism.

"Things are not that bad," the chief minister replied, defensive but not evasive. Quoting from National Crime Bureau statistics, he said the crime rate was low in Bengal. "There have been some kidnappings, but the kidnappers were from other states," he said, smiling.

This was easy compared with what Pallabi Jha, representative of a splinter Walchand group, fired at him. "Are you really investor-friendly? Do you want foreign companies to invest in Bengal?" she asked.

The question challenged the chief minister to either deny his ideological moorings or junk his ideology. Bhattacharjee did neither. "We don't have any hidden agenda. Though Left, we know



**Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee with Ratan Tata in Mumbai on Monday.** Picture by Vikas Khote ■ See Page 10

the reality and we invite investment from various parts of the country and the world," he said.

Perhaps, this quality of facing up to unpleasant facts about his state appealed to industrialists. Tarun Das, director-general of the Confederation of Indian Industry, which organised today's event with the Bengal government, said: "This kind of honesty we do not see among politicians — neither in India nor anywhere else in the world."

Adi Godrej, of the Godrej group, agreed. He had a separate meeting with Bhattacharjee in the hotel's Bell Tower Suite that was converted into a makeshift office for the chief minister.

The round of one-to-one

meetings with business leaders started at 10 when M.K. Sharma, vice-president of Hindustan Lever, called on the chief minister. "I think there will be an announcement shortly on our initiatives in the state with regard to marine food and agro-processing," Sharma said.

Bhattacharjee also met Ajay Piramal of Nicholas Piramal, Hemendra Kothari of DSP Merrill Lynch, Anand Mahindra of Mahindra and Mahindra of Ratan Tata. "West Bengal needs promotion and I think he is the chief minister who will make it happen," Tata said after a 25-minute meeting.

Mahindra, also the president of the CII, said his company was

looking at assembling farm equipment in Bengal. "We know things are changing. We are aware of the positive developments in the agriculture sector that have helped in creating a huge rural market. We think the state can emerge as a surprise mover."

Piramal said he would check out the opportunities. Pharmaceuticals, where Piramal is a leader, was one of the three areas the chief minister highlighted in his 18-minute address to the gathering. The other two were automobiles and textiles.

Industry minister Nirupam Sen will visit Mumbai later to follow up some of the "interesting proposals" that emerged. When Bhattacharjee spoke to

the local media later, the concern about Bengal's law and order and labour problems appeared more acute than what was expressed by the businessmen.

Bhattacharjee had earlier taken a sly at his host state, though. "I think the situation is worse in Maharashtra."

As Maharashtra chief minister, Sharad Pawar — then in the Congress — had sat in a Calcutta hotel and signed industrial projects one after the other in the mid-nineties. The Bengal Congress had then said the Left Front should learn from Maharashtra. The reply from a senior minister was: "Bengal has nothing to learn from Maharashtra." Things have changed since.

# Subrata-gate!

9/6/03  
5/6/03  
28/6/03  
Mayor's latest folly

**H**as Subrata Mukherjee had a premonition that his Mayoralty is coming to an abrupt and undignified end? Then why is he continuing the practice of grab as grab can? First to be noticed are his frequent and extensive jaunts abroad for which there is no accounting. He spent weeks in Italy occupying himself with the momentous activity of exchanging keys with the Mayor of Naples. Who footed the bill; surely not Kolkata Corporation! Then the scrap with Mala Roy because she upset the Mayor's plans to hand the contract for disposal of solid waste to an Australian firm without elementary scrutiny. Nothing else explains the Mayor's wrath when Mala refused to accept hospitality in the shape of a paid holiday. A little advance planning perhaps! Next the desire for a permanent and need we say it, grand residence for the Mayor of India's oldest city, never mind that the State's chief minister continues to live in his modest private house as the official residence is still occupied by his predecessor. It is time to tell the Mayor that trappings of office are no substitute for continued neglect and chronic shortages of most civic amenities like clean drinking water, sewage, drainage, clogging of public roads and dislocation of traffic, which all but the Mayor can see.

His latest flight of fancy defies belief. Subrata wants a designated entrance to the city in the shape of a perfectly hideous construction, which is anything but a gate. It is to be parked right on a very busy intersection on the Eastern bypass. First his friend in the CPI-M, Subhas Chakravarty narrows the highway allowing illegal constructions all along it, on both sides, in the approved manner in which unscrupulous contractors connive with willing ministers. Now Subrata will create a bottleneck, which no town planner, however misdirected, would dare to provide.

Listen to the minister directly concerned — Ashok Bhattacharya. *I object to such a project and have informed the chief minister about my views. He also agreed to my views.* The Chief Minister is embarrassed. He has been told that no less a personage than the Deputy Prime Minister has already agreed to lay the foundation stone. This is utterly unbelievable. LK Advani is a careful man and would not have endorsed the sketchy and thoroughly questionable proposal. In the first place, there is no clarity about where the money is coming from. **The Municipality is bankrupt; the Mayor is striking out in all directions trying to raise the wind, by fair means or foul, mostly foul. He says it is not coming out of budgeted funds. Is he aping the former Director-General of UNESCO, Amadeur M'Bow who operated large funds outside budget and outside audit, to generate support for the New World Information Order? The Americans rightly raised the alarm and eventually M'Bow had to leave. Subrata must come clean. It is alleged that he is eyeing funds earmarked for road construction; if this is not true he must disclose who is financing his latest hair-brained scheme and why? Advani is well advised to stay away unless an opportunity to embarrass Mamata Banerjee is worth more than his reputation. Buddhadeb has said the foundation laying can go ahead but the various approvals needed must be obtained afterwards. Would Advani like that? We think not. It must remind him of Indira Gandhi who laid myriad foundation stones ahead of the elections she lost. For Advani's benefit there is no proper estimate of the cost — it varies from Rs 20 to Rs 40 crores, without a shred of detail. Subrata says he will find Rs 10 crores, he does not say from where. Another Rs 10 crores is to come from private industry, no one has pledged anything so far. What happens to the rest? The location is wrong and the case for such lunacy has not been made. Besides the gateway to Calcutta has been Princep Ghat on the Hooghly, recently restored and which was used to welcome Royalty on their visits to the then capital of India.**

Maybe Kolkata as opposed to Calcutta needs another gate that is no gate at all! If Advani wants to be at the heart of a new controversy he will come on the 6th July. We advise him to plead another engagement.

CABINET TO DISCUSS THREE DRAFT BILLS NEXT WEEK

# State seeks to curb *barga* aberration

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, June 20. — The state Cabinet will, on 24 June, discuss three draft Bills seeking clampdown on cheating by agricultural land sharks, implement the McKinsey proposals to check division of agricultural plots, discipline errant teachers and protect those securing bail from exploitation by persons paying the sureties. If approved, the Bills will be tabled in the coming session of the Assembly.

A draft Bill to amend the West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1995, will incorporate the McKinsey report, which seeks to prevent division of agricultural plots in order to ensure higher productivity.

The draft amendment redefines "consolidation of land" as spelt out in the Act. The changed meaning will include "realignment of a plot of land or rearrangement of land" with the purpose of "rendering plots of land more compact".

To prevent zamindars from cheating the government with the help of women members of their families, the draft Bill seeks to prevent women *bargadars* from transferring their *pattas* to their husbands' brothers. The land and land

reforms department has come across several instances of wives or mothers of zamindars becoming *bargadars* themselves, defeating the aim of *Operation Barga*.

Plots of land originally belonging to their husbands or sons were transfer-

■ McKinsey proposal to check agricultural land division to be incorporated into the draft Bill

■ Order banning private tuition by school teachers to be given more teeth

■ CrPC to be amended to prevent exploitation of those obtaining bail by persons paying the sureties

red to the women in the course of the *barga* operations. Since the Land Reforms Act prevents women *bargadars* from re-transferring these plots to their husbands or sons, they would transfer them to their husbands' brothers, thereby ensuring that the land remained with the family. The draft amendment seeks to prevent such transfers altogether and protect genuine *bargadars*.

It was also considered necessary to amend the Act "for the purpose of resource mobilisation by re-determining the rate of revenue payable by a land owner for his land in rural areas or in any municipality area outside the KMDA area used for mills, factories, workshop or any other commercial purposes, as well as for non-agricultural purposes including homestead".

Another draft Bill — to amend the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education Act, 1963 — is aimed at disciplining errant teachers by adding teeth to the order banning private tuition. The amendment will also seek to regularise the attendance of teaching and non-teaching staff in schools under the board's control.

The Cabinet will also discuss a draft Bill to amend the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973. The aim is to check the practice, often indulged in by the persons paying sureties for those securing bail from court, "of demanding more money from the accused on the threat of surrendering them... by taking advantage of the provisions of Section 444 of Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, relating to discharge of sureties".

# Trinamool flopshow paves way for Panja's return to Congress

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, June 11

APART FROM returning a CPI(M) candidate, the Vidyasagar bypoll has done two other things: it has proved Ajit Panja's political foresight, and cemented his decision to

rejoin the Congress.

His daughter Mohua Mandal — who fought on a Congress ticket — lost to Anadi Sahu of the CPI(M) by 22,829 votes; but, more important, the Trinamool candidate lost his deposit — just as Panja had predicted.

Panja promptly said his days in the Trinamool-NDA camp was over, and his return to the Congress, only a matter of time. "Voters have rejected the Trinamool-BJP combine. I will examine the results and work out my plans after discussions with PCC leaders," he said.

Unlike Congress, Trinamool and BJP leaders, Panja didn't just dub the poll a farce. Looking beyond rigging by the CPI(M), he also blamed the Opposition's poor showing on lack of election machinery.

"The CPI(M) rigged the poll, especially in Ward No 44 where Mohua got only 35 votes against Sahu's 668. But the result says more than that. It is a clear rejection of the NDA as an alternative to the Left Front. Mohua could have done better if the Congress had the network to stop false voting," Panja said.

The scenario was different in Nabadwip where Alokesh Das of the CPI(M) wrested the Lok Sabha seat from the Trinamool, winning it by a margin of 98,800 votes. Here the Congress came a poor third.

Asked why he was so vocal about Vidyasagar, but not Nabadwip where the Congress had taken a bad beating, Panja said: "I am in no position to assess the overall trend."

# ...And, the Red flag flutters

## Mohua trounced in Vidyasagar

## CPI-M wrests Nabadwip from Trinamul

5-8-76

the news of the victory of the CPI-M

Stateman News Service

KOLKATA, June 11. — The CPI-M today retained the Vidyasagar Assembly seat with its candidate, Mr Anadi Shaw, winning the byelection by a margin of 22,830 votes.

Mr Shaw polled 42,322 votes while his nearest Congress rival, Mrs Mohua Mondal, daughter of Mr Ajit Panja, rebel Trinamul MP, secured 19,492 votes. The results were declared today at the Jessop Building where the votes were counted.

Counting began today amid tight security around 8.00 a.m. with thousands of CPI-M activists carrying their party flags waiting outside, braving the gruelling heat. Almost half a kilometre from the counting centre, the road was blocked by the police for security reasons. As the news of CPI-M candidate leading by a huge margin poured in, the supporters started shouting party slogans. The final count ended at 1.00 p.m. When Mr Anadi Shaw, the CPI-M candidate was declared victorious, the cadres smeared abir on each other. When



Mr Anadi Shaw revels in victory

Mr Shaw came out from the counting centre, hundreds rushed to congratulate the victorious CPI-M leader. Asked about his reaction, Mr Shaw said: "The residents of Vidyasagar voted for CPI-M because of the Left front's achievement in helping industry develop and other welfare work over the years. They have kept the trend of CPI-M's success unchallenged."

Stateman News Service

KRISHNAGAR, June 11. — The CPI-M candidate, Mr Alokesh Das, has wrested the Nabadwip Lok Sabha seat, defeating Mr Abir Ranjan Biswas of the Trinamul Congress by 98,800 votes.

Mr Das secured 5,20,630 votes against Mr Biswas's 4,21,830. The Congress candidate, Mr Rajoni Doloi, secured only 1,36,290 votes out of 11,07,503 votes cast.

Mr Doloi (Congress) secured the third position in most of the Assembly segments except Santipur. Here the Congress and the Trinamul had a tough fight, with 45,231 and 42,309 votes respectively, leading the Congress to the second position. The CPI-M secured 64,198 votes. Of the seven Assembly segments in this parliamentary constituency, the CPI-M has won by the largest margin (64,752 votes) from Chakdaha, where Mr Das won 1,19,389 votes against Mr Biswas's 54,637. Surprisingly, the CPI-M has won by a huge margin from Santipur, known as a Congress stronghold. Trinamul fared better



A jubilant Mr Alokesh Das

in Ranaghat East, securing 6,234 votes more than the CPI-M. The CPI-M defeated the Congress candidate in Ranaghat West, where Mr Sankar Singh of the Congress is the sitting MLA. In the last Parliamentary polls, the Trinamul candidate, Mr Anada Mohon Biswas, had won this seat by defeating CPI-M's Mr Asim Bala by a margin of over 39,000 votes. The seat fell vacant following his death. The late MP's son, Mr Abir Ranjan Biswas, failed to retain the seat.



SUBRATA EATS HUMBLE PIE: WILL REINSTATE SACKED MMICs, TURN HEAT ON COMMISSIONER

# Mamata vanquishes mayor

## Miss Banerjee, LLB, makes her move...

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, June 10. — The drama in the Trinamul just doesn't seem to end. In a deft political manoeuvre, Miss Mamata Banerjee today donned her lawyer's garb and pleaded for bail for the MMICs named in the FIR by municipal commissioner Mr Debashis Som.

The seven MMICs were arrested this morning and produced at Bankshall Court. CMM Mr SC Misra granted them bail on a bond of Rs 1,000 each. Mrs Mala Roy, Mr Anup Chatterjee, Mr Javed Ahmed Khan, Mr Pradip Ghosh, Mr Shamsuzzaman Ansari, Mr Moinul Haque Chowdhury were arrested on charges of criminal intimidation, unlawful assembly and restricting a public servant on duty. Mr Swapan Samaddar surrendered in court.

There was a melee at the court gate around 2.20 p.m. when the seven arrested MMICs were being produced. The Trinamul chief was present, resplendent in a black lawyer's gown. Earlier, the CMM left the court room when he found the accused had not been produced in the court lock-up. Later, six of them were produced in the lock-up with Mrs Roy outside.

With policemen frisking passersby and Trinamul supporters shouting slogans, there was chaos in and around the court. Trinamul workers shouted slogans against both Mr Som and the mayor, who allegedly used the former as a hatchetman. Mr Rajib Deb and Mr

TRINAMUL PRODUCTIONS PRESENT

**MAMATA BANERJEE**  
as DIDI

**SUBRATA MUKHERJEE**  
as BAD MAN

★ ING

Guest appearance by DEBASHIS SOM

Pradip Ghosh Anup Chatterjee Mala Roy S Ansari MH Chowdhury Javed Khan Swapan Samaddar

Based on the novel 'Come into the parlour, said the spider to the fly' by BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE

MUSIC: ANIL BISWAS PRODUCED BY ANIL BANERJEE

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, June 10. — In what appears to be a surrender to Miss Mamata Banerjee, the mayor is going to reinstate all the 10 MMICs tomorrow morning and then leave for Naples. He will also take steps in regard to the removal of Mr Debashis Som as the municipal commissioner.

However, there could be a change in the portfolios of the MMICs who have fallen foul of the mayor. They are going to take oath at 11 a.m. tomorrow.

At a late night meeting between Miss Banerjee and the mayor, the latter was forced to climb down from his rigid stand of defending Mr Som. The meeting was held at the residence of Mr Sovan Chatterjee (MMIC, water supply).

When the meeting was on, the Trinamul chief sought the opinion of some MMICs on whether to delay the reinstatement process. The MMICs told her that they would not mind being reinstated after the mayor returns from Naples provided the municipal commissioner is removed. At this, Miss Banerjee told the disgruntled MMICs that their proposal could delay their reinstatement by about a week. The MMICs readily agreed and told Miss Banerjee that their priority was the commissioner's removal.

A proposal was also mooted that Mr Pradip Ghosh (MMIC) be dropped. But the MMICs told Miss Banerjee that all seven of them were united and that they wouldn't accept the mayor's move to drive a wedge between them.

It appears that Mr Subrata Mukherjee had to climb down as the Trinamul chief refused to budge; on the contrary, she stood by the sacked MMICs. What Miss Banerjee had to say tonight was that all the sacked MMICs will retain

their former positions.

All of this comes after Miss Banerjee had approved the mayor's decision to sack all 10 MMICs yesterday night. But this morning, the Trinamul chief made a complete U-turn, making it clear to her confidantes that Mr Mukherjee would have to press for the commissioner's removal and ensure that the arrested MMICs were reinstated if he wanted to continue as mayor.

Party leaders said that while a stuck-on-a-lymb Mr Mukherjee was trying to negotiate a compromise with his leader wherein a few of the MMICs against him could be left out, Miss Banerjee remained adamant that she would not "buckle under pressure". Indeed, Miss Banerjee's preconditions for Mr Mukherjee's continuance as mayor, party leaders said, were conveyed to him clearly even before the meeting.

It is thought in party circles that Miss Banerjee chose to press the issue now as the resentment against the mayor due to his manner and style of functioning had peaked. For, initially, the message from the Trinamul chief got from the mayor, sources said, was that he was not inclined to quit, but on hearing this, Miss Banerjee reportedly told her aides that if the mayor refused to toe the party line, the Trinamul board could be dissolved. His attempts to buy peace throughout the evening having come to naught, the mayor finally threw in the towel late in the evening.

Though she had met Mr Subrata Bakshi, Trinamul state chief, to try and chalk out a face-saver for the mayor, she was clearly aiming for capitulation.

She said earlier that the mayor had taken the bold step to lend credibility to the party, but the insult of watching the MMICs paraded in court because of the "CPI-M's conspiracy and the commissioner's act" was unbearable.

## Look who's backing Subrata!

KOLKATA, June 10. — Mr Asok Bhattacharya, municipal affairs minister, said the government supported the mayor's decision to sack his council. MIC members should have first informed the mayor of their charges against the commissioner before assaulting him, he said. The attack on Mr Som, the principal executive of the KMC, is unprecedented in the history of any municipal body.

Mr Anil Biswas said the CPI-M would not try to "immorally" form the Board by "manipulating numbers". Mr Nirmal Mukherjee, leader of the Opposition in the KMC, said the mayor should resign as he doesn't enjoy the confidence of a number of members and call for fresh polls.

The commissioner is appointed by the government in consultation with the MMICs as per the

KMC Act, Mr Bhattacharya said. The government has no plans to transfer him, and it is for the mayor and his council to take a decision on this, he said. Government officials would feel threatened to work in such circumstances, he said.

Acting chief minister Md Amin also condemned the assault on Mr Som, but ruled out dissolving the KMC Board. Mr Som met the chief secretary and home secretary at Writers' today.

### 'Physician, heal thyself'

Even as the row between the commissioner and the MMICs simmered, skeletons tumbled out of the cupboards of two politicians at ideological odds. Mr Arunava Ghose, Trinamul MLA and a counsel of one of the accused MMICs, said LF

chairman Mr Biman Bose was not in a position to criticise the MMICs for he, as a student leader, had been involved in the ransacking of the office of Surajit Lahiri, then VC of Calcutta University.

In 1972, Mr Ranjit Gupta, then police chief, had refused to attend the chamber of then Mos for home Mr Subrata Mukherjee at Writers', claiming he was accountable only to the chief minister. Taking umbrage, Mr Mukherjee took up the matter with Mr SS Ray, then chief minister, pointing out that he was within his rights to summon the police chief. As a face-saver, Mr Ray had promoted Mr Gupta to I-G. How is it, Mr Ghose asks, that the mayor... m when the latter said he was accountable only to the mayor and not the elected members? — SNS

# Mayor sacks his full team

## Move follows attack on Commissioner

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, June 9. — The mayor, Mr Subrata Mukherjee, today sacked his entire 10-member mayor-in-council after the Municipal Commissioner, Mr Debashis Som, was assaulted and threatened by seven MMICs.

The move, Mr Mukherjee said, had been approved by Miss Mamata Banerjee. Interestingly, Trinamul leaders say the MMICs attacked Mr Som after receiving her nod at a meeting last night.

Mr Anup Chatterjee, Mrs Mala Roy, Mr Javed Khan, Mr Swapan Samaddar, Mr Mainul Haque Chowdhury, Mr Shamsuzzaman Ansari and Mr Pradip Ghosh stormed Mr Som's office around 1 p.m., heckled him and dragged him out by his sleeves.

He was then taken to the conference room and asked to explain a recent order which, the MMICs said, undermined their power. Mr Som reportedly said he could not discuss this issue with them. At this, the MMICs started abusing him and prevented him from leaving the room.

Late tonight, Mr Som filed an FIR at New Market PS naming all MMICs. Home secretary Mr Amit Kiran Deb said he had asked the police chief "to take action against the MMICs in accordance with the law".

At a late night meeting at Miss Banerjee's residence, Mr Subrata Bakshi, Trinamul state president, was entrusted with the job of looking after KMC affairs. He will file a report to Miss Banerjee tomorrow.

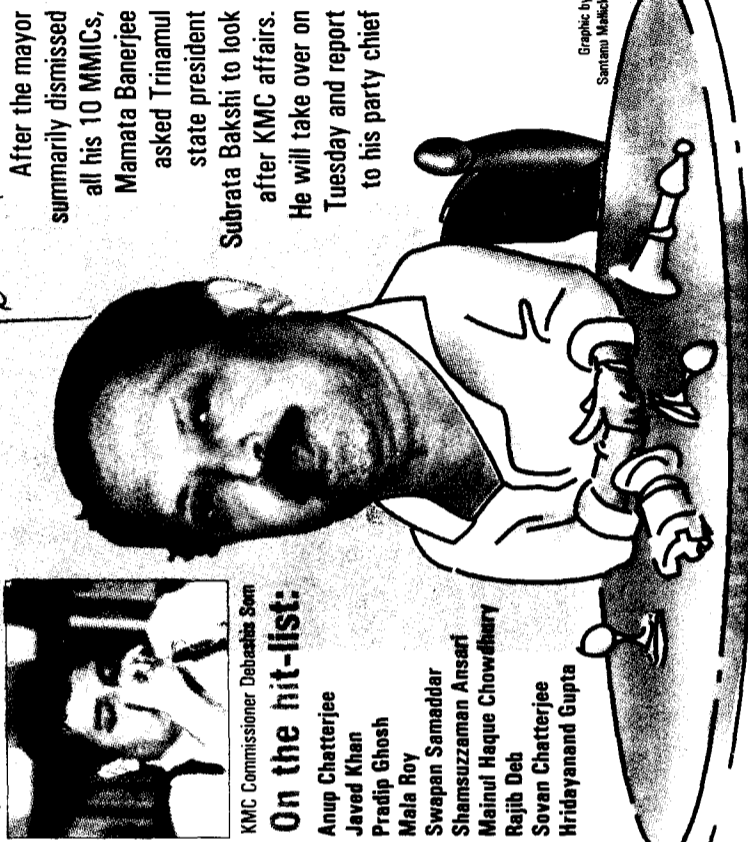
Mr Mukherjee said: "I have exercised my



KMC Commissioner Debashis Som

### On the hit-list:

- Anup Chatterjee
- Javed Khan
- Pradip Ghosh
- Mala Roy
- Swapan Samaddar
- Shamsuzzaman Ansari
- Mainul Haque Chowdhury
- Rajib Deb
- Sovan Chatterjee
- Hridayanand Gupta



Graphic by Santanu Mallick

After the mayor summarily dismissed all his 10 MMICs, Mamata Banerjee asked Trinamul state president Subrata Bakshi to look after KMC affairs. He will take over on Tuesday and report to his party chief



discretionary powers to remove all MMICs from the board and appoint new members after consultation with the party chief." Though the mayor hasn't decided on replacements, he hinted some of the MMICs might find a place in the new team. New MMICs would be appointed soon, he said.

Three of the 10 sacked members — Mr Rajib Deb, Mr Hridayanand Gupta and Mr Sovan Chatterjee — were not involved in the assault.

Mr Mukherjee said: "The controlling officials (those heading the departments) decided to boycott all MMICs. So, retaining them would have affected public services."

The immediate provocation was the Commissioner's move to disregard an official note issued by Mr Javed Khan, MMIC (Health). Trinamul leaders said the MMICs were angry because they felt Mr Som was bypassing the rules.

A few days back Mr Som had ignored an order issued by Mr Khan. He had told the mayor about Mr Khan's order, saying he wasn't going to accept it as the "MMICs could not direct him but could, at best, request". "Under the KMC Act 1980, I am under the superintendence and control of only the mayor. I draw the attention of the mayor to such notes often given by MMICs ... which is beyond their authority and they may kindly be instructed to refrain from doing so." The mayor had reportedly said: "You are right ... MMICs should follow norms". Buoyed by this, Mr Som sent a copy of the mayor's remarks to all MMICs.

The chief minister, on his way to Italy, has described the incident as shameful. Mr Asok Bhattacharya, municipal affairs minister, will take up the matter with Mr Mukherjee tomorrow.

# Vidyasagar sees 61% turnout

Kolkata  
8 JUNE

**T**HE bypoll for the Vidyasagar Assembly seat ended peacefully on Sunday with 61% of the voters exercising their franchise till 5 pm. The figure is expected to go up to 65% as long queues were seen even after closing time. The turnout was also high at the Nabadwip Lok Sabha constituency by elections.

"Polling has been peaceful. There is no report of any untoward incident from anywhere. The police and all other officials concerned have done a very

good job," state chief electoral officer (CEO) Sheikh Nurul Huq said here. Mahua Mandal, Congress candidate from Vidyasagar, escaped unhurt when she was attacked allegedly by CPI(M) cadres, party sources said.

West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee vice-president Pradip Bhattacharya told reporters that Ms Mandal, daughter of former Union minister and suspended Trinamool Congress MP, Ajit Panja, was attacked by CPI(M) workers with lathis when she was moving in north Kolkata.

Fortunately, Ms Mandal escaped unhurt, but her vehicle was damaged, he said.

Complaints were immediately lodged with the Chief Election Commissioner and the state's CEO, he added. Mr Huq said no political party had demanded any re-poll. "In fact, the EC has expressed surprise at the absence of any major complaint or demand for re-poll."

In the elections to the Nabadwip Lok Sabha seat, 70% of the voters exercised their franchise. Mr Huq said the turnout could be as high as 75% as many voters were still in queue even at closing time. He said the car in which Opposition leader Pankaj Banerjee was travelling had been seized at Ranaghat under Nabadwip

and its driver arrested for plying the vehicle within the constituency without a proper permit from the returning officer.

The CEO said during the day, he received about 50 "minor complaints" from various political parties, both from Nabadwip and Vidyasagar. All the complaints were attended to, but those were found to be without basis, he said. Deputy IGP (headquarters) Narayan Ghosh said that nine persons, including two supporters of the Congress and one belonging to Trinamool Congress, were arrested from Nabadwip for violating election code of conduct. —PTI

P-B MB  
5-5-  
W  
7/6  
P. Shek.

# No poll role for Nadia DM

**Statesman News Service**

KOLKATA/KRISHNAGAR, June 6. — The Election Commission of India today ordered the removal of Nadia's district magistrate as returning officer for Sunday's Nabadwip Lok Sabha by-election for violating the model electoral code of conduct by meeting the chief minister.

The Opposition complained that the DM, Mr Krishna Gupta, had violated the electoral code by meeting the chief minister at the Krishnagar circuit house when Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was in the district to campaign for his party's candidate in the by-election. The Election Commission of India promptly acted on the complaint. The order removing the DM as returning officer and appointing the divisional commissioner, Presidency Range, Mr SK Magan in his place, was issued 48 hours before the election. Mr Magan happens to be a former state chief electoral officer.

The chief minister was at the Krishnagar

circuit house on 4 June when Mr Gupta called on him. Mr Nurul Haque, the chief electoral officer, said he received instructions from the Election Commission last evening stating that till the election process was over, Mr Gupta should stand removed from his post too for violating the electoral model code of conduct. The commission also faxed a message to this effect to the state chief secretary.

In spite of the Election Commission's reprimand, the state government has rewarded Mr Gupta by giving him a plum posting as additional resident commissioner of West Bengal in New Delhi. Mr Haque said, some political party had written to the Election Commissioner that Mr Gupta paid a visit to the chief minister after his election campaign was over on 4 June.

The Congress today welcomed the removal of the Nadia RO while the CPI-M shot off a letter to the poll panel accusing the Trinamul of bringing in criminals to win the seat.

# PANCHAYATI RAJ-I

## Power And Pelf Are The Sole Concerns

By SUNANDA SANYAL

Recently on a TV chat show, which included phone-in, a member of the CPI-M politburo, Biman Bose, of all persons struck a moral posture by blaming the current spate of violence against women in West Bengal on "decadent values" brought on by liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. He told a questioner that he did not take the view that West Bengal used to be safer for women before the Left Front came to power. That is, during Congress rule the situation was as bad as or worse than now. This is a blatant untruth.

### Naxalite violence

True, during Siddhartha Sankar Ray's tenure as chief minister the law and order situation was pretty bad due to Naxalite violence and Siddhartha Sankar's own high-handedness, but violence against women actually diminished because the Naxalites themselves threatened to punish the teasers, although it is true that the police whom Jyoti Basu was later to indulge had brutalised the women arrested for suspected contact with the militants. But aggression on women as political strategy is entirely the CPI-M's contribution to Bengali politics.

Of course the CPI-M has never flinched from prevarication as a form of violence. For example, it circulated the canard that Prafulla Chandra Sen had bought Stephen House on Dalhousie Square with the ill-gotten money he had amassed as chief minister. The fact is, Prafulla Chandra died in penury. On the other hand, Jyoti Basu, a former CPI-M chief minister, continues to live in great style at Indira Bhavan at public cost. His son Chandan, an inconsequential entrepreneur, has allegedly amassed hundreds of crores of rupees during his father's tenure. The CPI-M party itself has property worth a fortune, all of which has been acquired since 1977. It pays its whole-time cadres salaries that work out at some Rs 8 crores per annum. A standard of morality such as this set by top leaders does not make for either political ethics or responsible citizenry. Indeed, the good life as perceived by a large number of partymen today, not necessarily limited to the ruling LF, but definitely introduced into Bengal's politics during the past 27 years, includes wining and womanising. And it is this that puts our women all across the state at risk.

It could have been different! In the early 1980's, Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv attended a national conference of the National

*The author is former member, West Bengal Education Commission.*

Students' Union of India, an affiliate of the Congress party, in Nagpur. Indira and her son could not discipline the delegates, who dashed for the city's red light area, molesting the women on the way. The special train that took them back home came to be called the "train of terror", as the hoodlums ran amuck at every station where

increasingly dependent on them. "The commoners lost their perception of right and wrong, and were reduced to helpless bystanders".

Kalyan Datta goes on to cite "two particularly ghastly instances" as proof of the fact that the CPI-M is lost to humanitarian values. "The first of these occurred



it stopped. The NSUI delegates deported themselves just as indecently at an international conference in Pyongyang, and earned the soubriquet "the Indian beasts" from women participants from other countries. I remember how we were all praise for another conference organised by the Students Federation of India, an affiliate of the CPI-M, where the participants deported themselves with exemplary discipline and urbanity.

### Youth wing

That is now a matter of the past, due to the compulsion to win all elections — without a contest, where possible. By the time Kalyan Datta settled down to write his notes in 1993, which were posthumously published by his admirers in 1999 under the title *Amar Communist Jivan* (My Life As A Communist), the youth wing of the party had all but lost their humanism. Wrote Datta: no longer will you find the youths of the Communist party standing by men and women in distress.

All they are concerned with is a "couple of more votes". The moral decline deepened after 1977 once they realised that their government was going to stay. Concern for fellow human beings and idealism was gone, and power and pelf became their sole concern. Corrupt bureaucrats, policemen and anti-socials gained the upper hand, with the party becoming

at about 9 am at the crowded crossing off Hazra Park, Kolkata. A small procession of Congressmen was taken out by their young leader Mamata Banerjee in support of a hartal called by the Congress. A notorious CPI-M goon, Badshah Alam, hit her on the head. Mamata fell to the ground, profusely bleeding from a deep gash. None of the onlookers came to her help. An old man finally dared, but he was stopped. Actually, the CPI-M had long decided that in doing violence it would make no exception of women.

On 30 April 1982, its cadres dragged not only 16 monks but also a nun out of taxis on Bijan Setu, Kolkata, and burnt them all alive in broad daylight. Jyoti Basu as chief minister explained away the killing as an expression of popular outburst. The second episode of comparable horror Datta reminds us of occurred at Phulbagan, North Kolkata. Some policemen out on night patrol picked up a young woman from a wayside slum, took her to their quarters, and raped her.

When told about it, an irritated Jyoti Basu commented: "It's being complained that a slum-dwelling woman has been harassed. Now what can be done? It's impossible to post police everywhere". Datta comments: "Nobody expects people like Jyotibabu to post police to look after slum-dwellers. But what kind of society of imbeciles have

they created that nobody comes to the help of someone being grievously wronged? Actually the CPI-M has destroyed the civil society on which democracy rests: so people have lost their sense of right and wrong, and their initiative, as a result" (my translation).

The CPI split in 1964, according to Datta, because of self-centred infighting among the top leaders. The "lower-level workers, who act as the bridge between the masses and the leadership" by and large joined the new party, CPI-M, whose leaders held them together by harping on the revolution to prepare for. That was the time when particularly Promode Dasgupta made no speech without singing paeans to revolution, and the leaders would bash you on the head if you talked of social change through parliamentary democracy, although what they really hankered after was power by hook or crook, says Datta.

### Deep divisions

The CPI-M started off with this fatal flaw when it broke away from the CPI in 1964. And since gaining power in 1977 it had been trampling all over the principles it had so far espoused, and began to compel obedience of the masses, including its own cadres, through "intimidation and inducements", according to Datta. Soon enough the fly-by-night businessmen and anti-socials fell over one another to please the CPI-M, which needed them both for money and muscle. In the end they created deep divisions within the rural poor, whom they were ostensibly trying to unite against oppression. Small wonder, the much-trumpeted Operation Barga, which did benefit the rural poor for a time, eventually let the nouveau riche bounce back and take care of the vote bank. The result, as Datta points out, is a "cadre raj" all across the countryside.

To quote Datta: "The actual beneficiary of the redistribution of land is not the poor. Usurers, big merchants and landlords that had ruled village society in Bengal continue to rule it. The panchayati raj is a hoax, for the decisions are made not at the panchayat meetings but in the party offices. The contention that the power that the party gains devolves in the end to the people themselves is bare, sheer self-deception. It harms all concerned".

The recent experience with the registration of people below the poverty line shows how true Kalyan Datta is. The nouveau riche now hungers for the good life, which it equates with wining and womanising.

(To be concluded)

# Buddha wants to be friends with Centre

Our Kolkata Bureau  
19 MAY

WEST Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee made it clear on Monday that he would continue to maintain a "good working relationship" with the Vajpayee government come what may. And that's not all. Mr Bhattacharjee wished Mamata Banerjee well in advance — for her likely re-induction into the Union Cabinet.

Addressing a press meet here on Monday, on completing two years in office, Mr Bhattacharya said: "I do not want any confrontation with the Centre, our ideological differences notwithstanding. I believe that our good working relationship will do more good to the state than a line of confrontation." The chief minister added that he had all along been getting "positive response" from the NDA government, particularly Union home minister L.K. Advani.

"Sometime we get what we want, sometime we do not. But I will have to admit that Mr Advani has been particularly positive to our requests."

Replying to a question on Ms Banerjee's possible re-induction into the Cabinet, he said: "I will be only too happy if

she becomes a minister again and starts doing good things for the state."

During his hour-and-half press conference, Mr Bhattacharjee responded to a volley of questions on issues ranging from violence during the recently concluded panchayat polls, rift within the Left Front and Centre-state relationship to state's financial mess and new policy prescriptions.

The chief minister said his government had decided to retain McKinsey & Company for a longer term. The US-based consultancy firm, which had originally been assigned to do some kind of a Swot analysis of the state's agriculture and IT sector and identify potential investors for these two areas, had completed its basic task. "McKinsey will now keep a small outfit here to help the state IT department sort out various pertinent issues with the actual investors on a



**CHIEF CONCERNS: Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at a press meet in the city on Monday.**  
— Mona Chowdhury

regular basis," Mr Bhattacharjee pointed out. Speaking on the state's financial mess, the chief minister said: "We have realised that we will have to find out alternative sources of revenue and increase our revenue substantially. There's no alternative to this."

"There are so many ways of advancing towards that goal," Mr Bhattacharjee pointed out.

# Former CBI officer in a spot

**KOLKATA, MAY 19.** The high-profile former CBI additional director, U. N. Biswas, landed in the thick of controversy today after officials of the Narcotics Control Bureau recovered 24 kg of a psychotropic substance, used in making a heroin substitute and valued at Rs. 5 crores in the market, from five foreigners staying in his house here with his tenants.

Acting on a tip-off from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, NCB sleuths raided Mr. Biswas' house in the Salt Lake area on Saturday and arrested two Chinese and three Myanmarese, and recovered the "controlled" substance, the NCB Assistant Director (East), N.C. Patra, told presspersons. Baiktha Kima, Laltan Puta and Lalsanga (Myanmarese), and Chen Fulun and Wen delong (Chinese), had been sent to judicial remand till June 2 by the Special Judge, Soumya Seth, Mr. Patra said adding that they possessed fake licences, fake passports, a huge quantity of foreign currency and a mobile phone.

"The five were gathering materials and raw materials for producing ATS (amphetamine-type stimulant), a heroin substitute. Initial stocking was being made at the ground floor of the house,

though it is yet to be ascertained where they set up the laboratory required for the purpose," he said.

The NCB was in touch with the Union Home Ministry.

Apart from ephedrine hydrochloride, used for making ATS, the NCB also seized equipment used for making drugs.

He said the major catch proved the presence of the powerful Myanmarese drug cartel in this part of the country.

Mr. Patra said this was the third major haul of ephedrine hydrochlorine at the international level in this year. Five kg of the substance was seized in the U S in January last, followed by a similar seizure in China. Now this controlled psychotropic substance had been found here, he said.

During questioning by NCB officials, Mr. Biswas, who had headed the probe into the multi-crore fodder scam involving the former Bihar Chief Minister, Laloo Prasad Yadav, expressed ignorance about the operation of a drug cartel from his house and denied knowing the five foreigners.

He said he had actually rented the apartment to N. Thanga, a Mizo, on the basis of a "certificate issued by

Mizoram Government" and brought to him by a lady from the Mizoram House here in February last.

Failing to recollect who the signatory was in the certificate, he said he also had no knowledge of the whereabouts of Thanga.

To a question, Mr. Biswas said he did not rule out a conspiracy in the matter. "However, I am not saying anything more since I am no longer in service." Peeved at the way the NCB conducted the raid, Mr. Biswas said he was not informed during the search in the ground floor. "After hearing some queer noises, I came down to the ground floor to find out what was on. It was only then that I was told of the matter. Those conducting the search revealed their identity only on my enquiry," he said.

## Laloo for high-level probe

In Patna, Mr. Laloo Yadav demanded a high-level inquiry into the seizure of 24 kg of ATS from the premises of Mr. Biswas. Pointing out that "a high-level inquiry alone can bring to light the truth", Mr. Yadav disputed Mr. Biswas' claim that he did not know the background of his tenants.

— PTI

T.N. link: page 11

20 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

# COURT REWRITES KOLKATA HISTORY

Job Charnock not the city's founder • Govt to change textbooks

HT Correspondents  
Kolkata, May 16

KOLKATA'S HISTORY was rewritten today in the chambers of the Calcutta High Court. At one stroke of the pen, the city lost its 'founder-father', Job Charnock, and its 'birthday', August 24, 1690.

After today's landmark judgment, history textbooks will be rewritten and the past reinterpreted.

The court today put its seal on the findings of a five-member committee, which held that the city was not born on August 24, 1690, and that Job Charnock was not its founder. The state's advocate-general, Balai Ray, told the judges that the government has accepted the committee report.

"The decision has been arrived at after a long-drawn investigation by historians and academics and we will immediately see that no textbook in the state's educational institutions contains this information (that Charnock was the city's founder) any more," Minister for School Education Kanti Biswas said.

In Delhi, NCERT director J.S. Rajput said the change would be incorporated through an official procedure. "We accept (the) judgment, but we will first ask our group of experts to study the judgment and then implement the changes as per their suggestions."

The court set up the committee after the Sabarna Roy Chowdhury Paribar Parishad, a Kolkata-based society, filed a public interest litigation in August 2001, seeking restraint on the state government, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation and the Sutanuti Parishad from celebrating August 24 as the city's birthday. The committee submitted its report to the court and the state



VICTORY AT LAST: A descendant of Sabarna Roy Chowdhury stands in front of his ancestral home in Behala.

**MEDIAeval TEXTS *Ain-i-Akbari* mentions a place called Kalkata in undivided Bengal. The city also finds mention in Bengali literature: *Mansa Mongal***

on November 11, 2002.

In its lengthy petition, the Parishad said the city was a cluster of villages before it grew into an urban growth centre and the colonial capital of the British empire.

Way back in 1495, Kolkata found mention in old Bengali literature: *Mansa Mongal*, written by

**CHARNOCK'S LETTERS All correspondence by Job Charnock and his compatriots bear the dateline of 'Chuttanurtee', not Calcutta or even Kalkata**

Bipradas Pipla, Mughal emperor Akbar's courtier Abul Fazal also referred to Kolkata in his *Ain-i-Akbari*, an authentic document on the socio-economic condition of undivided Bengal during the time. Besides, a medieval Bengali poet, Sanatan Ghoshal, had said before 1680 that he was born in Kalkata.

**UNANSWERED QUESTION Who is the city's founder? The court-appointed committee has left that unanswered, saying this leads to a problem of historical method**

To strengthen its claim, the Parishad also placed the lease agreement of Kolkata and two other villages — Govindapur and Sutanuti — between the former landlord — between the Sabarna Roy Chowdhury, and the East India Company. The lease agreement, documented in 1698, was signed by

Charles Eyre, brother-in-law of Job Charnock, and a family member of Sabarna Roy Chowdhury. East India Company bought the three villages from the family for Rs 1,200.

But it was generally believed and commonly taught that Kolkata was founded by Job Charnock when he raised the English flag at a ghat on the river bank at Sutanuti, which became a part of the city after his death in 1693.

However, the committee felt that the city does not have a date of birth and/or a founder. Charnock, the committee said, was searching for a place to establish a trading centre after a skirmish with the Mughals. He first landed at Sutanuti on December 20, 1686, and then returned again on August 24, 1690. "His main motive was to find out a suitable and strategic place from where the English trade could be conducted.... He had no idea or intention whatsoever to lay the foundation of a city in an alien country, neither did he do anything to turn the small hamlet of Sutanuti into at least something which could be called even the nucleus of a city."

They added that in all the correspondence of Charnock and his compatriots, the dateline was "Chuttanurtee", not Kolkata or even Calcutta.

A two-judge Bench of Chief Justice A.K. Mathur and Justice J.K. Biswas accepted the findings of the committee, but the final question — who was the city's founder? — remains unanswered. This, the committee said, leads to a problem of historical method. "Determination of truth in history is a question of different interpretations of either the same evidence or different sets of evidence. Historians do not act as judges."

## City evolved over time: Historians

Dr CHITTABRATA PALIT

Professor of History, Jadavpur University

WHAT THE high court has ruled is literally true. A city can't be founded on a particular day, by a particular person. But the Kolkata that existed before 1690 was actually a village (*dih*) that can be traced from *Ain-i-Akbari*. It is thus quite evident that Kolkata existed from Akbar's times, long before Job Charnock landed in this area.

But Kolkata evolved into a city when the East India Company took over. Urban Kolkata is visible from around the 1820s when Bishop Heber passed through this city in 1823 and recorded his opinion in his *Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces*.

Heber called Kolkata a city of palaces whereas London to him was a glorified village. From this point of view, the British connection or, for that matter, Job Charnock's name becomes historically significant. Therefore, it will not be unpatriotic to associate Job Charnock with urban Kolkata. This gives citizens an occasion to celebrate the city's birthday and show their concern for Kolkata.

GAUTAM BHADRA

Professor, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta

I DON'T see much point in the exercise. It would only benefit some people if Kolkata's birthday could be changed. There could be new festivals and functions surrounding a new date. You know that Sabarna Roy Chowdhury's family has been lobbying for this for a long time.

What is the point trying to find out a city's birthday when everyone knows that the three villages — Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Kalkata — had to undergo a prolonged process before it became what it is now? You can't pick out one fragment of history and ignore the other. I think that the attempt to find the date of establishment of the city is ahistorical.



# Left Front sweep total at grassroots

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, May 14. — The Left Front's winning streak continues unabated at the panchayat samiti and gram panchayat levels.

After routing the Opposition in 15 of the 17 zilla parishads in yesterday's results, the Left Front won 77 per cent of the 8,497 seats at the panchayat samiti level declared till late tonight. It also won about 72 per cent of the 24,240 gram panchayat seats declared till reports trickled in in the late hours. Elections were held to 8,498 panchayat samitis and 49,144 gram panchayats on Sunday.

Elections to two panchayat samitis, one each in Cooch Behar and Bankura, have been countermanded because of deaths of candidates. The result in one samiti seat in Birbhum was tied.

There were stray incidents of poll-related violence in Murshidabad and South 24-Parganas

today. About 10 people were injured and 36 were arrested.

Apart from Murshidabad, where the Congress managed to scrape past the CPI-M by a narrow margin of 34 samiti seats, the rest of the state showed an overwhelming tilt in favour of the Left at this level.

This was evident in Bankura, Burdwan, Hooghly and South 24-Parganas where the Opposition had made some inroads in the 1998 elections but were more or less totally routed this time.

In Murshidabad, the Congress managed to better its 1998 performance by grabbing 12 of the total 26 panchayat samitis (last time it had control over eight).

The Left Front still enjoys control over majority of the samitis.

In Malda, which comprises 15

samitis, the CPI-M won nine. Five samitis went to the Congress. The Trinamul-BJP alliance managed to wrest the Habibpur samiti from the CPI-M.

From figures available late tonight, at the gram panchayat level the Trinamul-BJP alliance stood to lose drastically compared to their 1998 performance in Bankura. The Trinamul won 270 seats this time compared to 578 in 1998. The BJP managed only 82 against 421 five years ago. Even the Front's junior partners have made significant gains at this level in the district.

In Burdwan, the Trinamul managed to retain only 251 of the 781 gram panchayat seats it won last time.

Armed CPI-M and Congress

supporters clashed at Darakath in Islampur, Murshidabad, around 9 a.m. today, Mr Narayan Ghosh, DIG (HQ), said. At least six people sustained bullet and splinter injuries and were removed to the local health centre.

Two houses reportedly belonging to Congressmen were burnt down by CPI-M cadres, he said. Police fired seven rounds in the air and some tear gas shells to disperse the mob. Some unexploded bombs were recovered from the site.

BJP supporters clashed with RSP workers at Purandar village in Basanti police station area in South 24-Parganas this morning during a RSP victory procession. RSP supporters allegedly taunted some BJP supporters while passing by their residences, Mr Ghosh said. Seven people were arrested. RAF jawans were deployed to bring the situation under control.

More panchayat reports on page 5

## PARTY POSITION 2003 Panchayat Samitis

Total Seats : 8500  
Election Held : 8498  
Declared till 1 am: 8497

CPI-M	5729
CPI	126
FB	185
RSP	224
WBSP	5
DSP	7
MFB	1
Congress	1052
Trinamul	818
BJP	161
SUCI	44
Ind. & Others	147

# Toll 19, CPM gets it left and right from RSP, BJP

**Irate ally to boycott vote-counting**

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
KOLKATA, MAY 12

**R**EPOLLING began this morning for 93 booths in the West Bengal panchayat polls even as LF constituent RSP charged ally CPI (M) with rigging of 50 booths. Toll in election-related violence also rose to 19 with CPI(M)-Congress clash claiming the lives of four, including three CPI(M) activists, in Murshidabad district.

"Barring some booths in inaccessible areas, the repolling would be completed today. The process would be conducted tomorrow in the remaining areas," state election commissioner Ajay Sinha said.

Sinha said the repoll was ordered because of printing errors and problems in distribution of ballot papers besides reports of snatching of papers during yesterday's panchayat polls. Counting of votes would begin tomorrow.

DIG (HQ) M.C. Ghosh said elaborate security arrange-

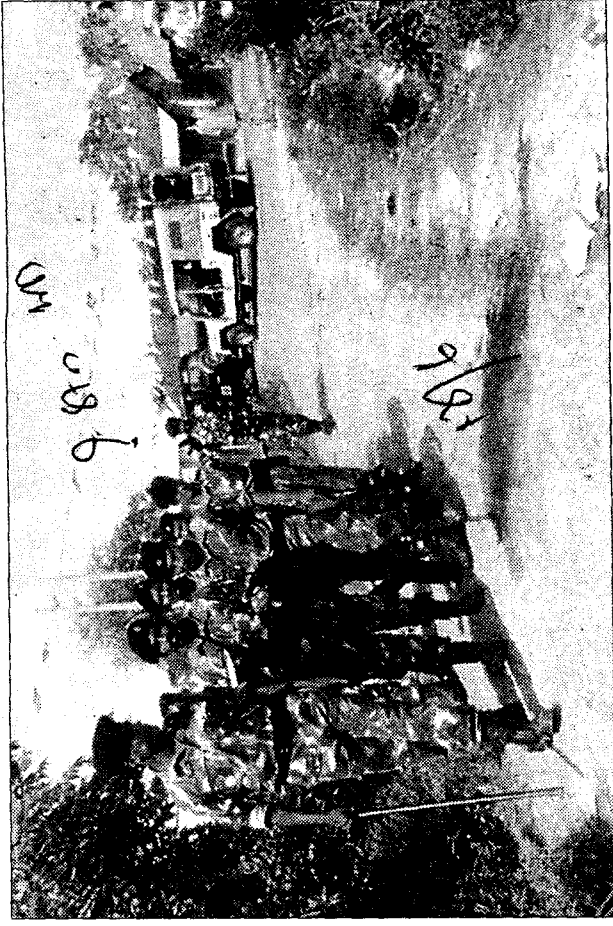
ments have been made and the situation in the state is "peaceful, except in Jamboni area in West Midnapore". Murshidabad accounted for the largest number of 30 booths for repoll, state EC sources said.

Meanwhile, the RSP said the party's continuation in the coalition would depend on whether the Marxists were in a position to control "mafia dons" who attacked RSP workers and captured booths.

An agitated RSP state secretary, Debabrata Bardopadhyay, said that in protest, his party would boycott tomorrow's vote-counting in three areas — Atharabaki, Amjhara and Charabidya under Basanti and Canning in South 24 Parganas district.

"They (CPI(M) activists) are stopping vehicles on the Sarberia-Kachuberia route on Kolkata-Basanti road, pulling out RSP workers and beating them up in police presence," he alleged.

Earlier, clashes between the CPI(M) and the RSP were reported from South 24 Parganas



**Para-military forces have been deployed in Jhargram as a precautionary measure. PTI file**

and North Dinajpur districts in which seven RSP workers were injured, sources said.

Senior RSP leader Kshii Goswami alleged that CPI(M) activists threatened his party MLA Subhas Naskar at Basanti in South 24 Parganas district while many RSP workers were driven out of the area.

Elsewhere, police sources said bodies of three CPI(M)

supporters were recovered late last night from Char-gopalpur and Rosannagar area under Islampur police station of the district.

Body of CPI(M) panchayat samiti candidate Basudev Bhakat, who was kidnapped from Pukuria village in West Midnapore district last evening, allegedly by Jharkhand Party workers, was found

**PRADEEP KAUSHAL**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

**W**HILE the ruling CPI(M) is already defenceless over large-scale poll-related violence in West Bengal panchayat polls, the BJP moved swiftly today to put it on the mat. Party president M. Venkaiah Naidu termed the elections "a big farce" and demanded their annulment, followed by fresh nominations, free campaign and fair polls.

Naidu told a hurriedly convened informal press conference that the state Election Commission had turned out to be helpless, partisan and ineffective in the face of "rigging" by the ruling CPI(M).

He sought a wider debate to evolve a consensus on the composition and powers of state EC. On his part, he favoured the idea of making state EC independent of state governments and the Central Election Commission being assigned a supervisory role over them.

**I Polls 'big farce', Venkaiah demands fresh elections**

The violence notwithstanding, the panchayat elections have proved a blessing in disguise for the BJP-Trinamool Congress combine. For one, the polls have brought them closer following Naidu's support to Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee.

Secondly, they have made the alliance the nucleus of the anti-CPI(M) politics, pushing the Congress to the margins. Moreover, they have armed the BJP with sufficient ammunition to target the CPI(M) and question its democratic credentials.

Naidu quickly took a leaf out of the CPI(M) book and charged it with "fascism and a naked display of repression". He said the CPI(M) was determined to "capture panchayats by hook or crook". So it did not allow BJP-Trinamool to file their nomination papers in 20,000 wards.

Later, the party "stage-managed the filing of 50,000 dummy candidates in the past two days to counter our charges". When asked how he

concluded that the CPI(M) had fielded dummy candidates, Naidu pointed out that 23,843 wards had no alliance nominee. "They beat up, molested, raped, attacked and intimidated our prospective candidates," he claimed.

He pointed out that the Opposition was not allowed to campaign freely. Even Union Minister Jagan Sikdar was attacked. He said: "They did not spare RSP's PWD Minister Amar Chaudhary who described it as the bloodiest panchayat election in the state."

While he agreed that the Centre had no power with regard to the holding of panchayat elections, he declared that "we would not take it lying down. We would raise the issue in Parliament during the next session."

"We would expose the CPI(M) which cries about democratic norms from rooftops in all states. We would launch an agitation to press for the cancellation of panchayat poll results," he said.

# Where violence rules

**T**HE VIOLENCE during the run-up to the panchayat polls in West Bengal and on the polling day itself is evidence of an alarming law and order situation. There is now every reason to believe in the complaints voiced earlier by the Trinamool Congress and other opposition parties that CPI(M) supporters — often an euphemism for anti-social elements — did not allow their opponents to file nomination papers. As a result, the polls this time will see the largest number of seats — as many as 6,800 — where no contests are taking place. The figure is way above last year's 600 and the year before's 1,716. Taken together with the deaths from political clashes that have marked the polls, their outcome will evidently lack legitimacy. Considering that Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had to issue an unprecedented order ensuring that all candidates were allowed to file their nomination papers, it is obvious that the CPI(M) hasn't been too keen this time on the fairness of the poll.

If the Marxists, rather than the Left Front, are facing the brunt of the accusations, it is because they have been embroiled in violent conflicts not only with the Trinamool Congress and

other non-Leftist parties, but also with their own partners in the ruling alliance. The day after BJP leader and Union Minister Tapan Sikdar was attacked, an RSP minister had to flee from a group of CPI(M) assailants. A probable reason why the violence has now affected all parties inside and outside the ruling coalition is that the Left Front parties are fighting among themselves in as many as 11,000 of the 58,000 panchayat seats — the internecine contests this time being up from 4,500 on the last occasion.

What these disturbing events indicate is that West Bengal is seemingly on the way to joining the ranks of the BIMARU states. It is not only its lowly position relating to poor infrastructure and lack of investment which has brought it closer to, say, Bihar, the ongoing insensate violence is also suggestive of a breakdown of the political and administrative systems, comparable to Laloo Yadav's fiefdom. Even before the panchayat polls led to an escalation of the violent incidents, there were frightening reports of attacks on marriage parties and on political opponents which painted a grim picture of West Bengal. Now the scene seems even more bleak.

13 MAY 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

70% turnout • RSP minister harassed again • Howrah bandh today

# Bengal bleeds in turf war

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, May 11

THE POLL was "by and large peaceful", Buddhadheb Bhattacharjee said. Only 18 people died.

The chief minister, though, put the toll at 11. And added that polling was "fair".

Never mind the large-scale booth-jamming. Never mind that an RSP minister was harassed by some CPI(M) goons and the party's candidate forced to give it in writing that it was all — what else — "fair and peaceful".

RSP's Amar Chowdhury, the PWD minister, came face-to-face with the CPI(M)'s brute cadre power again after he somehow freed his party's Basanti candidate from their clutches. As he was returning with the candidate from South 24-Parganas, some 300 Marxist cadres — accompanied by security men — stopped his car and demanded that he let go of the candidate whom they had "sentenced" to "solitary confinement".

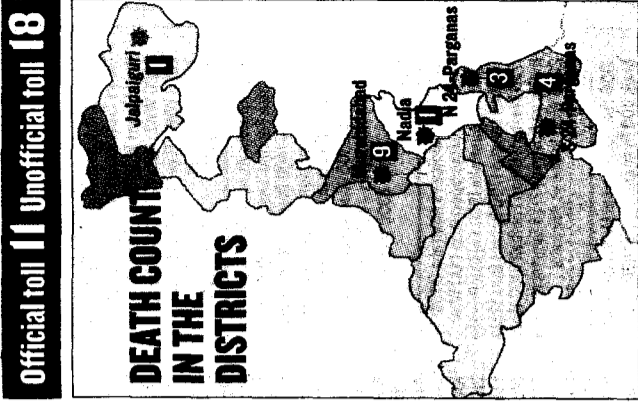
When Chowdhury refused, the cadres alleged that he was carrying away ballot boxes and searched his convoy. Finally, they let the candidate go, but only after making him sign at gunpoint a declaration that the polling was "fair and peaceful". The cadres were less kind to those in the Opposition. Seventy-one-year-old Anwar Ali Haji of North 24-Parganas' Madanpur Ghoshpara was shot dead just because he was the father of a Trinamool supporter. In South 24-Parganas, two SUCI supporters, Mordina Bibi and Marjina Bibi, were murdered simply because they were mobilising women to vote for their party.

But the CPI(M), too, bled — and badly. Some nine CPI(M) supporters were killed in the day-long violence, most of them in Murshidabad, which accounted for the highest number of deaths at nine. In Jamboni block of West Midnapore, Jharkhandi activists abducted CPI(M) strongman Basudeb Bhakti.

To the Opposition, this election was



Relatives mourn for Anwar Ali Haji, who was shot dead at Madanpur Ghoshpara, North 24-Parganas.



GRAPHICS: JAYANTO MAITRA

● Around 300 CPM supporters stopped PWD Minister Amar Chowdhury's convoy. They forced RSP's Basanti candidate, who was in one of the cars, to give it in writing that polling had been peaceful

● Jharkhandis kidnapped a CPM strongman at Jamboni in West Midnapore

because of "technical faults".

He challenged the claim that the election had been a "farce", saying more CPI(M) workers had been killed than Opposition supporters. Even in this, he scaled down the number of CPI(M) deaths, putting it at six, not nine.

State Election Commission chief Ajoy Sinha, too, described the elections as "by and large peaceful and satisfactory" even as he declared re-

polling in 100 booths. He put the voter turnout at 70 per cent and said the violence was "rather low" and "much less than what was feared" — after all,

spot and three other voters were severely injured. At Salhat in Murshidabad, the police fired five rounds to prevent booth-jamming and ballot-snatching.

At Domkal in Murshidabad, two CPI(M) men were killed trying to jam booths. Joynagar, Canning and Kultali witnessed the worst clashes between SUCI and CPI(M) workers, claiming two lives from each party.

The chief minister said only three districts had reported some "undesirable incidents". Polling, he said, had to be suspended at 18 places because of "disturbances" and at eight

the "most violent" in the state's history. The Trinamool Congress demanded the Left Front government's ouster for the "farceful" polls. The Congress and the SUCI demanded repoll, a demand not backed by the Trinamool.

The Youth Congress has called a 12-hour bandh in Howrah on Monday. Violence began with daybreak in Murshidabad, North and South 24-Parganas and Howrah. At Ranitala in Murshidabad, the police fired seven rounds to break up a CPI(M) mob that tried to scare away voters by

bursting crude bombs. Congress supporter Moirul Sheikh died on the

179 booths needed repolling in 1998.

While Murshidabad recorded the highest turnout at over 75 per cent, it was also the most violent, with re-polling ordered in 22 booths, followed by South 24-Parganas (14 booths) West Midnapore (10), Howrah (9), North 24-Parganas (5) and Purulia (5).

By Tuesday, it will be clear who won, who lost. But on Sunday, there was one clear loser — Bengal. With 18 deaths, it outdid Bihar, where 17 people had been killed in the 2001 panchayat polls.

More reports on Page 3

# Buddha calls up Advani, says sorry

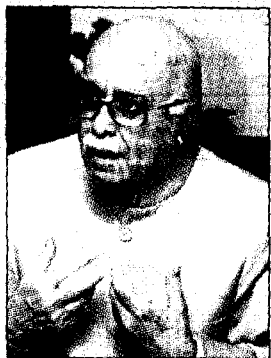
HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, May 6

AN EMBARRASSED Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee called up Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani on Tuesday to apologise for the attack on Tapan Sikdar and promised to put an end to such incidents. Unmoved, Advani asked for a report by the Intelligence Bureau.

A miffed Advani later told BJP MPs that though the attack was "a very serious issue, not just involving law and order but also the future of democracy", the Centre was constrained by the "spirit of federalism" from intervening in Kerala and Bengal.

This is the second time in less than a month that Bhattacharjee has been forced to dial Advani over the unending panchayat poll violence. Late last month, he had apologised for the attacks on Opposition candidates.

Bhattacharjee reportedly told Advani the attack on Sikdar was "unintentional" — the attackers blew their lid after BJP workers tore up the CPI(M)'s flags and festoons.



**'The attack on Sikdar is a serious issue involving the future of democracy'**

The victim thinks otherwise. "It was a pre-meditated plan to murder me," said Sikdar at a Lake Town nursing home. He said the attack was planned by North 24-Parganas CPI(M) district committee member Kalyan Mukherjee and executed by local committee member Sambhu

Ghosh. The CPI(M), he said, had assigned a Keshpur "hero" by the name of Swapan to execute the "murder".

A defiant Sikdar will lead 1,000-odd BJP workers to Koiful and address supporters on Wednesday. Both the Prime Minister and the chief minister called him up to enquire about his health. Bhattacharjee also asked him to submit the suspects' names. "I have given him a list of 15 people," Sikdar said.

The state administration may pull up North 24-Parganas SP Basudeb Bag. The government is furious that Bag, despite prior information and his personal talks with Sikdar about security arrangements, did little to avert the attack. On his part, Bag has slapped showcause notices on Barasat inspector-in-charge Swapan Pal and ASP Debasish Ghosh.

The home department has ordered all DMs to take measures against poll violence. The police conducted raids in Koiful in Barasat and arrested 32 persons suspected of being involved in the assault on Sikdar.

# Sikdar is struck, CM is sorry

MS  
A STAFF REPORTER

Barasat, May 5: Union minister and BJP leader Tapan Sikdar was assaulted this afternoon by alleged CPM supporters, compelling chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee to express "personal regret".

Sikdar, the minister of state for cottage and small-scale industries, was on the campaign trail for the panchayat polls when he was attacked at Khamarpara of Barasat Block II.

He suffered injuries on his right cheek after being hit with a sharp weapon. The minister's security men fired two rounds in the air to repulse the attackers. Sikdar was later admitted to a nursing home in Lake Town.

The chief minister spoke to

GA  
Sikdar twice on the phone. "I talked to Sikdar over phone and expressed personal regret for the incident," Bhattacharjee said in a statement.

Bhattacharjee had recently issued another statement after violence flared in the run-up to the polls, appealing to his party workers to allow Opposition candidates to file nominations.

The chief minister's phone calls to Sikdar set off a flurry of activity in the government. Transport minister Subhas Chakraborty called on the BJP leader at the nursing home and home secretary A.K. Deb spoke to him on the phone.

A clash had broken out between CPM and BJP supporters after Sikdar had left one of the campaign venues. Learning

AB  
about the violence, the Union minister had turned back when his motorcade was stopped by a mob at Khamarpara. The mob allegedly manhandled him and broke the windshield of his car.

"BJP supporters at Khamarpara reportedly tore off some CPM flags, which led to the clash," said inspector-general, law and order, Chayan Mukherjee.

After lodging a written complaint at the office of the district magistrate, the former state BJP chief came back to the city with his supporters in the same car.

The damaged Ambassador was kept on display in front of the party office in Narayantala near Baguiati on the city's fringes. Traffic was thrown out of gear as BJP supporters squat-

ted on VIP Road.

Twenty people were arrested in connection with the assault, Mukherjee said.

Director-general of police D.C. Vajpai said the Centre has asked for a report and the state government will send it as soon as an inspector-general submits it.

State CPM secretary Anil Biswas said he "does not know whether any party member was involved". But he conceded that some CPM "supporters" may have been among the villagers who ransacked Sikdar's car.

"The minister was probably injured because the broken glass of his car fell on him. But I must say the incident was unfortunate," Biswas added.

■ Picture on Page 10

# Chopra toll eight, judicial remand for 26

3/15 ✓  
Statesman News Service 5/1

CHOPRA (North Dinajpur), May 2. — Twenty-six people have been arrested in connection with the clashes between CPI-M and Congress workers in Chopra since Wednesday. Eight people were killed in the violence. The 26 were produced in the Islampur SDJM's court today and remanded in judicial custody for 14 days.

Shops and markets in Ramganj, Sujali, Daspara, Kanchakali and Haptia Gachh remained closed. A curfew-like situation prevails in these areas. North Bengal State Transport Corporation suspended its services to Chopra on Wednesday after a mob attacked a bus.

Congress workers Md Amijuddin (52) of Khalpara, Abdul Haque (60) of Zindo Gachh, Nurul Islam (65) and Nazir Hussain (55) of Dangi village were killed allegedly by CPI-M workers last night. Mr Goutam Gupta, North Dinajpur Congress secretary, said CPI-M workers had torched 20 houses of Congress cadres.

Urban development minister Mr Asok Bhattacharya, in Chopra to assess the situa-

tion, said he would submit his report to the chief minister. He said he had asked CPI-M workers not to take the law in their hands. The North Bengal I-G has ordered an inquiry into the violence.

Addressing a panchayat poll rally at Islampur today, Mr Jyoti Basu said police were harbouring criminals. Why would criminals hold a meeting with police officers before committing a crime, he said. Mr Narayan Ghosh, DIG (headquarters), said action would be taken against the errant policemen. An executive magistrate is probing whether the police firing was uncalled for.

Mr Anil Biswas today described the killing of four Congress workers in Chopra a "result of public outrage". He said: "We have asked our workers not to get carried away by any provocation." The party observed a "protest day" in the state to protest against the killings.

LF partners today said the polls should not be deferred because of the violence. Mr Kshiti Goswami (RSP) said: "The incident will have no repercussion elsewhere."

## Cong to send team

KOLKATA, May 2. — The chief minister today urged former PCC chief Mr Somen Mitra to visit Chopra. Leaders of the Congress and CPI-M should talk to one another in Chopra and help ease the tension. The Congress later announced that a team, led by Mr Mitra, would visit Chopra. Mr Jayanta Bhattacharya (MP), Mr Abdul Mannan (MLA) will accompany Mr Mitra. Mr Pranab Mukherjee will join the team later. — SNS

3 MAY 2003

THE STATESMAN

SF-1  
30/4

# Dhantala revisited in Midnapore

✓

**Statesman News Service**

MIDNAPORE, April 29. — In an incident similar to the Dhantala gangrape, five girls, all members of a marriage party, were dragged into a forest by 10 dacoits and allegedly raped in Goaltore area of Midnapore West last Saturday night.

The girls, all aged between 12 and 14, were forced down from a mini-truck they were travelling in and pulled along to Pathardoba forest around 11 p.m. after the vehicle was stopped by armed men who looted the marriage party.

While the Goaltore police apparently tried to hush up the matter, it came to light when over 1,000 villagers blocked the Ghatal-Bankura

Road for over four hours from 10 a.m. today, protesting against police inaction. Even a single criminal is yet to be nabbed three days after the incident.

Mr Madan Ahir, a resident of Omapota village, was returning home after attending his daughter's reception at Durlavgunge on Chandrakona Road when the dacoits accosted them near Pathardoba culvert. After looting and forcing the girls into the forest, the dacoits bundled the male members into a bus ferrying another marriage party, earlier looted by them.

Prior to this, one Mr Nantu Karak, 25, had a portion of his nose chopped off when he tried resisting the criminals. He was admitted to Midnapore Sadar Hospital.

After boarding the bus, Mr Ahir and his companions rushed to Ghagra, a neighbouring village, and narrated the entire incident to villagers after waking them up. The Ghagra villagers immediately made a call to the Goaltore police and also alerted a police posse patrolling the area but to no avail.

The villagers then launched a search for the abducted girls and finally rescued four of them around 2 a.m. The fifth victim had managed to walk down to a neighbouring village Kharikasuli, where villagers handed her over to the police. She was restored to her parents in the morning.

When the villagers went to Goaltore PS to lodge a com-

Turn to page 2

## MIDNAPORE:

SF-2  
30/4

-plaint, they were referred to the Chandrakona police on the plea that the site of crime fell under the latter's jurisdiction. The Chandrakona police on their part, passed back the buck.

Such bureaucratic nit-picking incensed the Omapota residents so much that they staged a road block today. The additional district magistrate, Mr ND Bhakat and Midnapore SDO, Mr Swapan Khan faced the villagers' ire when they tried to mediate.

The blockade was lifted after CI, Midnapore Sadar, Mr Satyen Dutta, assured that the culprits would be arrested within 24 hours.

The SDO Midnapore, Mr Swapan Khan, also told the agitators that he would sort out the matter with the police and take all the necessary steps.

30 APR 2003

THE STATESMAN



# RSP pullout roar after rally blow

**OUR BUREAU**  
**Calcutta, April 26:** Smarting under the humiliation of alleged CPM supporters forcing party leader and minister Biswanath Chowdhury to call off a rally on his home turf at Hilli in South Dinajpur yesterday, the RSP today threatened to pull out of the government.

"Enough is enough. Things have come to such a pass that we will have to think afresh whether to stick on with the (ruling Left) Front or not," said RSP state secretary and former irrigator minister Debabrata Bandyopadhyay. After getting the details from the jails and social welfare minister, the party has spoken to chief minister Buddhad-

deb Bhattacharjee and Biman Bose, the Left Front chairman.

"This is a very serious matter and we have convened an emergency secretariat meeting on Monday to discuss the matter. This is unbecoming of the CPM with which we have been sharing power for over 26 years," Bandyopadhyay added.

Bhattacharjee has apparently spoken to Chowdhury at his Balurghat residence to assuage his "bruised feelings". Alimuddin Street has sought a report from the South Dinajpur unit and decided to hold a bipartite meeting with the RSP at the earliest.

Chowdhury, a minister for the fifth time and senior RSP central secretariat member, called newspaper offices from

Hilli last night to complain that a group of CPM men had asked him to call off a rally or organised in support of RSP candidates.

While the chief minister sought to calm Chowdhury in private, his party publicly dismissed the minister's allegations. "As far as I know, the RSP was holding a party meeting at Hilli and the trouble started when some villagers questioned the lack of development in the area. I was told that some hot exchanges took place between the villagers and RSP workers," party state secretary Anil Biswas said.



**Chowdhury:** Crying foul against the CPM

He told a press conference at the party office that the involvement of CPM workers was beyond question "since it was not a Left Front meeting". "How can our party supporters get involved when it was only the RSP's programme?" he asked.

Sunil Sengupta, a senior RSP functionary, asserted that Chowdhury had no intention of maligning the CPM. "The CPM is desperate to prove the allegation false since last night's incident must have tarnished the party's image in the rural belt in the run-up to the panchayat elections," he said.

"If the CPM does not spare the Front constituents, imagine what is in store for the Opposition parties in the coming days. The way the CPM candidates are getting elected unopposed in a large number of seats is indicative of the party's terror tactics," he observed.

## No-contest winners

The state election commissioner today said of the 6,283 candidates already elected unopposed to panchayat posts, 5,897 were affiliated to the CPM. Only 8 were of the Trinamul Congress.

The CPI and the Forward Bloc won 165 and 126 seats, respectively, similarly. The Congress has captured 12 seats un-

# BJP chief, Mamata complain of 'reign of terror' in Bengal

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 20.** The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit to Jammu and Kashmir and his peace initiative have been praised by the BJP. "The visit will hasten the process of peace and normalcy," said the party president, M. Venkaiah Naidu.

In a statement, Mr. Naidu also endorsed Mr. Vajpayee's affirmation that the Kashmir problem would be solved on the basis of 'insaniyat' (humanism), 'jamhooriyat' (democracy) and Kashmiriyat (culture of Hindu-Muslim unity). "The situation in Kashmir is certainly changing for the better," he said.

Mr. Naidu expressed the hope that Pakistan would respond to the Prime Minister's gesture of friendship, paving the way for the resumption of meaningful talks between the two countries. He referred to the situation in West Bengal and charged the ruling CPI (M) there with committing "flagrant malpractices" on the eve of the panchayat elections in the State. CPI(M) cadres had unleashed a reign of terror throughout the State to ensure the victory of party candidates.

Mr. Naidu also called on Mr. Vajpayee along with the Trinamool



**The Trinamool Congress chief, Mamata Banerjee, and the BJP president, M. Venkaiah Naidu, addressing presspersons in New Delhi on Sunday. — Photo: S. Arneja**

Congress chief, Mamata Banerjee, and apprised him of the 'pre-election malpractices' indulged in by CPI (M) cadres. Earlier, Ms. Banerjee had called on Mr. Naidu and informed him of the West Bengal situation.

In about 12,000 of a total of 56,000 seats, the CPI(M) candidates were the only ones to file

nominations. All the 'unopposed' seats should be nullified and fresh nominations called for. Alliance candidates had been beaten up and their nominations snatched away.

Mr. Naidu also condemned the arrest of the VHP leader, Praveen Togadia, by the Congress Government in Rajasthan and demanded his release.

2 1 APR 2003

INDIA

# Mahajot against LF: Anil



Mr Anil Biswas

about the formation of mahajot by the three parties. The Congress has filed about 22,000 nominations, against the Trinamul's 23,000 and the BJP's 10,000, which not only shows the Opposition is practically contesting in all the seats, but also reveals that the so-called grand alliance is at work," Mr Biswas said.

The CPI-M state secretary asked which of Mr Mukherjee's statements is to be believed. "His party manifesto decries the idea of grand alliance on the ground that the Trinamul has tied up with the communal BJP. In the same breath he tells the media soon after releasing the manifesto that the mahajot is there," Mr Biswas said.

Mr Biswas insisted the Trinamul-BJP combine had no other option but to enter into a secret understanding with the Congress, since in many places its own party activists have shied away from contesting the elections "fearing sure defeat for the party's unpopularity and absence of work for the people and also the prospect of losing their hard-earned money they have to spend for the election."

Six CPI-M activists have, so far,

## Statistics suggest 'grand alliance'

KOLKATA, April 19 — Ground realities, particularly in parts of Midnapore and Hooghly disprove Mr Anil Biswas's assertion that their had been no CPI-M attempt to prevent Opposition candidates from filing nomination papers. That notwithstanding, statistics of nominations filed by the Opposition in different districts does indicate a strategic secret alliance between the Congress and Trinamul-BJP combine, particularly at the gram panchayat level, though none of the party leaders will admit it openly. However, a grand alliance at the zilla parishad and panchayat samiti levels is not so evident, barring Bankura.

While a clear picture is yet to emerge about the number of direct, three-cornered and multi-cornered fights, figures of nominations filed in Nadia for instance, shows that while the Left Front has fielded candidates for all the 3,114 gram panchayat seats, the Congress and the Trinamul Congress have fielded 1,621 and 1,669 candidates respectively, clearly indicating an alliance between them.

In Midnapore West too, the TMC-BJP combine have 2,162 candidates and Congress 819 candidates for the 4,073 gram panchayat seats. A similar picture emerges in Burdwan, with the TMC-BJP combine leaving 120 gram panchayat seats to the Congress and contesting 3,042 of the 3,456 seats themselves. Evidence of a mahajot emerges across all three tiers in Bankura where the Congress and TMC-BJP combine contesting 16 and 18 seats respectively of the 42 gram panchayat seats. — SNS

been killed during the run-up to kul in Hooghly yesterday for not the panchayat poll "which shows allowing the leader of the Opposition to hold a meeting in their area last week. The LF's slogan pulled up his partymen at Khana-offering an improved panchayat.

# Mamata to seek redress against 'red terror'

## STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 19. — Reiterating her stand to teach the Marxists a lesson for their alleged role in preventing Trinamul and BJP candidates from filing nominations, Miss Mamata Banerjee went to Delhi today, in the hope that the Centre would hear out her grievances.

The joint panchayat poll manifesto was released by Miss Banerjee and Mr Tagathaga Roy, state BJP chief, at the Trinamul Congress office here this afternoon. After the release, Miss Banerjee held a meeting with party MLAs and councillors and assigned responsibilities for the polls.

The Trinamul chief said that she would meet the Deputy Prime Minister and would also seek an appointment with the Prime Minister, if the latter had time. Party sources said that the Prime Minister, when informed by a Trinamul MP about the "sorry state of affairs in Bengal vis-a-vis the panchayat polls," is learnt to have remarked that Trinamul should have strengthened its organisation in the state to counter the CPI-M's muscle-power. The Trinamul MP has conveyed the same to Miss Banerjee.

Repeating her allegation that her party and the BJP were not allowed by the CPI-M to file nominations in 40 per cent of the panchayat seats, Miss Banerjee said that 60 per cent of these seats had been won by Trinamul in the last panchayat polls. "They (read CPI-M) attacked our strongholds, realising that they were losing the ground beneath their feet. Our partymen have been threatened with dire consequences if they contest the polls. Our party leader of Khejuri (in Midnapore)

## 'Biman Cong' mouthpiece'

KOLKATA, April 19. — Mr Biman Bose is the new mouthpiece of the Congress.

Miss Mamata Banerjee said this today, adding that Mr Bose would be too happy to have a domesticated Congress, than the fiery Trinamul in Bengal. Mr Bose had remarked yesterday that the Trinamul would have withered away had the Congress begun its preparations for the panchayat polls early and in a proper manner.

Reacting to this Miss Banerjee said: "That shows the CPI-M-Congress bonhomie. Years of Left rule in Bengal is because of the Congress's duplicity. Both the parties enjoy an excellent rapport." — SNS



A long queue at a roadside tap in Kolkata as the city went dry for repairs in the water pipeline on Saturday. — The Statesman

## Unity still a far cry for LF in Cooch Behar

COOCH BEHAR, April 19. — Leaders of the Cooch Behar district Left Front today admitted that total unity among the partners for the coming panchayat polls was yet to be achieved. If unity efforts fail, constituent parties will have no option but to go ahead with a "friendly fight." The leaders, however, hoped that they will be able to sort out their differences by Tuesday.

To project a united face of the Front, a press conference was called today in Cooch Behar, attended by the party's district unit secretary, Mr Chandni Pal, the CPI-M MP, Mr Tarini Roy, RSP leaders, Mr Ranajit Deb and Mr Narayan Deb, the CPI leaders, Mr Surath Chakraborty and Mr Nirmal Choudhury, and the FB leader, Mr Debasish Banik.

The district Left Front convenor, Mr Pal, said dummy candidates will not be allowed to use LF election symbols. Admitting that in several seats allies fielded dummy candidates, he said that even if they won they would not be considered for office in the panchayat bodies. He said dummy candidates would be asked by the leadership of the concerned parties to stay away from the contest and the Left Front would ask the people to vote for the official candidates only. — SNS

## Parched throats for Palta-Talla pipeline

### STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 19. — As if the mounting summer heat wasn't enough, the city today had to do without water in many places and the sufferings are likely to continue through Easter Sunday.

Water supply was affected by the replacement work of a 62-inch pipeline from Palta waterworks to Talla. Supply was suspended since 9.30 a.m. today and will be restored at 6 a.m. tomorrow. In some places, the repair work may continue.

Water shortage struck areas as Ballygunge, Chetla, Topsia, Tiljala, Golf Green, Amherst Street, Bagbazar and so on. As always, Garfa, Santoshpur, Haltu and Garden Reach were worst hit.

Mr Sovon Chatterjee, M-MIC (water supply), said repair work was on at 16 places in the city.

has been asked by CPI-M goons to cough up Rs 5 lakh, as he wanted to file nomination. Red terror forced us to stay away from the process of nominations in several districts of the state. I will relate these incidents to the Union Home Minister," Miss Banerjee thundered.

Stating that there had been no misunderstanding between Trinamul and BJP in seat sharing, unlike that between the CPI-M and Front partymen, Miss Banerjee said that the alliance will be strengthened in future to fight "fascist Left rule."

Besides an appeal to the rural electorate to vote fearlessly, today's joint manifesto pointed out at the failure of the Left Front government to utilise Central funds to the tune of about Rs 1,100 crore, between 1996 and 2002.

## Cases kursi ke

Not one, but 137 cases against Mulayam: ruthless excess now marks Mayawati's political style

**A** LEGAL bonanza for Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh as Mayawati smashes not one, not two, but a 137 legal cases against him on charges of doctoring BSP tapes. The legal tu tu main main between the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party mirrors the battle of political rallies. If Maya musters a massive 400,000 for her recent pardafash rally, then the Samajwadi didn't do too badly with its 'thu thu' rally earlier this year. If Mayawati launches the 'dhikkar' rally, then the Samajwadi Party says it plans to launch its own 'cycle rally' later this month. The vast crowds that regularly turn up for the rallies, whether in bitter cold wave conditions or in searing heat, seem to indicate that in India's largest state where human development indicators are dismal, politics has come to completely dominate civil society. There have been arguments that the reasons for the dominance of politics lies in UP's mass unemployment or in the fact that the state was the cradle of the freedom movement. But, whatever the reasons, as far as UP is concerned, it's a case of satte pe satta.

In this surcharged atmosphere of personality-dominated politics, third-time chief minister Mayawati

has shown that she is today totally confident about deploying the instruments of state power. This is a power that has been used against the bureaucracy, against political rivals like Raja Bhaiyya and Mulayam Singh and it is a power that is demonstrably intended to impress her constituents. Mayawati may be opposed to the laws of Manu but makes easy use of the laws of the Indian Constitution to pummel her opponents — 137 legal cases is power as divine dharma-asthra, power as folk theatre designed to cow down rivals and stun followers by its epic scope and glittering rhetoric. While in her previous tenures as chief minister, she may have been hampered by her dependence on her allies today, the sheer size and receptivity of her vote bank, gives her a ruthlessness that she earlier did not possess.

The fact that the BJP at the Centre is simply standing by and watching, shows how wary it is of antagonising her. And the Congress, hopeful perhaps of gaining from the weakening of Mulayam Singh, is also conspicuously silent. Yet Mayawati's ruthless politics may turn out to be short-lived. Not only will it drag the state to news depths of political competitiveness, but also reduce politics itself to being a stand-up nautanki.

16 APR 2003

# SARS suspect discharged

## Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, April 15. — Mr Shriram Nigam, the first suspected Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) patient in Kolkata who was admitted to Beliaghata ID Hospital on 9 April, was discharged from the hospital yesterday.

His relatives stay at Sudder Street. Mr Nigam was held back immediately after he landed at the NSC Bose International Airport from Bangkok. He was sent to the ID hospital since he was showing some symptoms of the fatal disease.

Later, however, after scrutinising his chest X-ray report, doctors concluded Mr Nigam was no longer at risk. Dr Swapan Biswas, ID Hospital superintendent, today said: "We have released him after checking the test reports."

The state government had sent samples to be tested at five different institutions throughout the country — the School of Tropical Medicine, Kolkata, National Institute of Virology, Pune, National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Disease, New Delhi, National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Disease, Kolkata and Indian Council of Medical

Research in Kolkata. Asked if all five reports had been received, Dr Biswas said: "How can we release him without the results of the reports? Moreover, we had already been informed by NICED, New Delhi, and the National Institute of Virology, Pune on Sunday that the report were negative."

Dr Biswas said the decision to release Mr Nigam was based on both the report and the prognosis.

Mr Nigam's relatives have been also asked to keep a watch on him. They have been asked to inform the ID Hospital authorities if he had further fever, Dr Biswas said.

16 APR 2003

THE STATESMAN

# Bravo Buddhadeb!

Anil and poll commissioner should follow

It must be said to Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's credit that unlike Anil Biswas and other party apparatchiks, he did not take a partisan view of the recent killing of a CPI-M leader of Khanakul. He insisted that Trinamul Congress was not to blame and that the killer did not have any political affiliation. What he did the next day was unprecedented. In a written statement he rebuked ~~party comrades for~~ preventing Opposition candidates from filing their nominations. He asked them to behave and cautioned the administration not to overlook Opposition complaints. This was in sharp contrast to the stand that the party had taken on the Khanakul killing. While Trinamul was accused of the killing, *didit's* "inability to field candidates because of total loss of mass support" was trotted out as the reason for her inability to file nominations. For a Stalinist party like the CPI-M it takes courage and conviction to disagree with the party line.

Buddhadeb spoke directly to Trinamul MLAs. The chief minister also refused to comment on Anil Biswas's accusations insisting that as head of the administration he was conveying the official finding of the killing. For someone who in the past has been forced to eat "harsh" words about unregistered madrasas and "shirking" government doctors because of Alimuddin Street, his clean chit to Trinamul for the Khanakul murder is an indication that he is trying to avoid the path charted by Jyoti Basu who disdainfully rejected Opposition complaint with the dismissive remark "Manage the affairs of your party first."

But this alone will not restore confidence in the Opposition before the panchayat poll. And also some of the Left Front partners like the RSP many of whose candidates have been targeted by the Marxists. Already Anil Biswas by his inflammatory statements after the Khanakul murder has signalled his cadres to go after the Opposition. The Marxists have proudly proclaimed some areas as "Opposition free zones". Any opposition attempt to file nominations from these areas has resulted in unleashing more terror. While Opposition candidates are being physically prevented from filing nominations, Anil Biswas says people are not interested in contesting on Opposition tickets! On Friday, 68 Trinamul candidates were prevented in Hooghly alone. In Midnapore west the Marxists are poised to get a walkover in 70 per cent of 4,868 seats as the Opposition has not been allowed to file nominations. In Burdwan former Naxalites, who have joined the political mainstream and are sitting panchayat pradhans, have been arrested while filing nominations. Clearly Alimuddin's strategy is to get as many candidates as possible elected without contest. Unfortunately the state election commissioner Ajoy Sinha's role has been dubious raising doubts about the fairness of the 11 May election. He is refusing to entertain complaints which forced the Opposition to stage an unprecedented walkout from a meeting. Buddhadeb understands his responsibilities and wants to play it fair, his party and the Coordination Committee-controlled government apparatus refuses to follow suit. The party should understand that he is the greatest asset they have: they will work against him at their peril.

If at last, Buddhadeb is asserting himself, this can only help the party although the apparatchiks may take time to

15 APR 2003

THE STATESMAN

CPM HITS BACK WITH GUJARAT CARD

# Defer rural polls: Joshi

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, April 14. — The forthcoming panchayat polls erupted in controversy today as the Union human resources development minister, Dr Murl Manohar Joshi, demanded postponement of the 11 May elections in view of 'terrorism unleashed by the Left Front government,' which he, alleged, was preventing candidates from "even filing their nominations".

The Trinamul lent weight to the demand with Miss Mamata Banerjee claiming that her party's candidates had been prevented from filing nominations in as many as 25,000 panchayats and describing the CPI-M as "murderers" of democracy. "Can one be said to be living in a democracy if a panchayat poll is won by the CPI-M before a single ballot is cast because Marxist terror is ensuring that thousands of seats go uncontested," Miss Banerjee asked at a meeting earlier in the day.

The CPI-M hit back accusing Dr Joshi and Miss Banerjee of ganging up to try

and "scuttle democracy by demanding that the polls be postponed" and claiming that the "situation was better in West Bengal than in Gujarat".

The political storm sparked by Dr Joshi, on a day-long visit to the city, began with his description of the law and order situation in the state as "shocking" and his coming down heavily on the state government, the chief minister and the State Election Commission. He demanded that the polls be postponed altogether, and not just for those panchayats where Opposition candidates were being coerced into not contesting the polls or even filing nominations.

"The CPI-M and the government have unleashed a reign of terror. Opposition candidates could not submit their nominations and the state poll panel is only a helpless spectator. In this situation, our party's demand is that the 11 May polls be postponed altogether," he said at a press conference.

Targeting Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee,

## CPM man killed

BERHAMPORE, April 14. — A CPI-M leader, asked by the party to file nomination for the panchayat polls, was killed when five criminals threw bombs at his house at Erampur village in Murshidabad today. While Montu Sheikh died, his mother and brother were injured. Montu was scheduled to file his papers on Wednesday. — PTI

Turn to page 4

Editorial: Bravo Buddhadeb! page 8

15 APR 2003

THE STATESMAN

tel: 8  
KC  
P11  
83  
R  
LAST

575  
1841

## BUDDHA:

(Continued from page 1)

allegations of the Opposition. However, we don't have any information about Opposition candidates being prevented from filing their nomination papers," Mr Biswas said. As for Left Front unity with regard to seat-sharing, Mr Biswas said that the CPI-M will fight on its own in areas where talks have failed.

The most interesting response to the chief minister's stand has come from the LF's junior partners, who welcomed his gesture, saying he had done the right thing as this would help strengthen democracy in the state.

Mr Ashok Ghosh, Forward Bloc general secretary, was all praise for the chief minister. "I believe, the LF should also make a similar appeal. Let the people decide who should win the polls. One shouldn't prevent Opposition candidates from filing nomination papers," Mr Ghosh said.

Same was Mr Debabrata Bandopadhyay's reaction. The RSP secretary said the chief minister had taken a bold step. "I welcome it. There shouldn't be any muscle-flexing. Buddhhababu has taken the right step," he said.

Mr Manjukumar Majumdar, CPI secretary, too agreed with the RSP secretary but he condemned similar acts by Opposition parties against the CPI. "We want the Opposition to field candidates. But they should also respond well and cooperate with us to maintain law and order," he said.

Today's written statement appears to be an official endorsement of the perception in political circles that the chief minister wouldn't allow the administration to be taken over by CPI-M cadres and the mandarins at Alimuddin Street.

The West Bengal State Election Commission in a press release issued today stressed that it "continues, and will continue to play its constitutional role without favour and bias... in the conduct of the panchayat polls."

13 APR 2003

THE STATESMAN



Opp must be allowed to file poll papers: CM

# Buddha rebukes partymen

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 12. — In an unprecedented gesture, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has delivered what amounts to a sharp rebuke to his party bosses by officially condemning acts of the CPI-M to prevent Opposition parties from filing their nomination papers for the panchayat polls. This comes on the heels of state secretary CPI-M Mr Anil Biswas insisting that "such allegations (by the Opposition) are baseless... nobody is being prevented from filing nominations."

And the chief ministerial rap on the knuckles for the party has come in writing — unheard of during his predecessor's regime. What's more, sources close to the chief minister said, he seems to have risen above party interests and sent a not-so-veiled message to Alimuddin Street. His comrades there also need to exercise restraint while reacting to Opposition allegations that their candidates were being threatened and prevented from filing their nomination papers.

The chief minister's written statement goes like this: "I have received complaints that candidates of Opposition parties are not being able to file their nomination papers in some seats and areas. We never support incidents and acts of this nature. I appeal to Left workers to ensure that such incidents do not occur, no matter what the situation is. I have cautioned the police and administration and told them that they will have to intervene in such cases. In the interest of free and fair polls, meaning in the interest of democracy, this is

## CPI nominee hacked to death

BEHRAMPUR, April 12. — Sirajul Islam (40), a CPI party worker was hacked to death early this morning while he was asleep at his residence in Murshidabad's Baipur area.

Islam had filed his nomination as the CPI candidate from Hariharpara's Raipur gram panchayat yesterday.

**BJP nominee injured:** Mr Prosenjit Bag, the BJP nominee of Jangipara's Mondalkha gram panchayat in Hooghly, was injured this afternoon when hoodlums allegedly backed by local CPI-M leaders attacked him when he was coming to the block office to submit his nomination papers.

— SNS

absolutely necessary".

While Miss Mamata Banerjee today described the chief minister's official statement as a "hoax" — "with only a day left for the filing of nominations, the chief minister's statement rings hollow". Mr Anil Biswas rejected a combination of stout denial and bluster in response to what is being widely seen as an attempt by the chief minister to show him and the other denizens of Alimuddin Street their place. "The chief minister had taken the right step... there isn't any confusion about his role. Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has shown that he is a democratic chief minister. He responded to

See BUDDHA, page 5

E.T.O.

THE STATESMAN

D T O

13 APR 2003

# Kolkata mayor maange more for water

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, March 17. — Though the civic budget placed today sought to bring more people under the water tax net, mayor Mr Subrata Mukherjee took pains to ensure that the move did not hurt.

Mr Mukherjee proposed the sensitive issue of water tax in a roundabout fashion, saying the system has been "remodelled" and "linked directly with annual valuation" of private property.

Those with an annual valuation of property touching the Rs-4,000 mark will be liable to pay the water tax. Earlier this limit was Rs 10,000. There has been no change in the category of 10 mm and 15 mm ferrule connection, they will still be exempt from tax.

But for the 20 mm and 25 mm category, the system of taxation will now be linked to the annual valuation. The mayor, mindful of the effect this decision may result in, said:

"To facilitate availability of more water, 20 mm ferrule entitlement would be extended up to premises of annual valuation of Rs 4,000."

"The annual water fee would be levied at the rate of 10 per cent of the annual valuation more than Rs 4,000 with a ceiling limit on water fee of Rs 1,800. No water

## BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

- No water tax for 10 mm-15 mm ferrule category
- For 20 mm-25 mm ferrule category, the system of taxation will be linked to annual valuation
- Owners of property with annual valuation touching Rs 4,000 will have to pay water tax. Earlier this was Rs 10,000
- Night parking charges introduced for buses, mini-buses
- Proposal to wash city streets revived
- Licence fee introduced for non-political posters and commercial graffiti
- Tax structures for posters hiked
- Relief for cinema hall owners in lieu of better maintenance of their establishments



kherjee, however, claimed to have spent a "record amount" — Rs 64,328.5 lakh. This year's estimate is Rs 76,775 lakh, he said.

The mayor tried to justify the new charges and hike in existing ones, saying KMC is hard-pressed for cash as the government had not cleared its dues.

Some of the new charges include an annual car wash charge of Rs 200 per year. It is estimated that this will fetch KMC Rs 25

crore. Night parking fee of Rs 350 per month for buses, minibuses, parked within the city. Licence fee to be imposed on non-political ad-

vertisements such as cinema hoarding displayed on halls, commercial graffiti and higher permission fee for who want to construct gardens outside their proper

Only cinema halls own a sigh of relief. The charge of Rs 100 per seat now be Rs 3 per seat. This has been done to encourage the development and nance of cinema halls.

The mayor proposed the will pay a penalty to taxpayers have submitted all relevant documents but haven't got the stion order within the stion time. Also, an introduction tation processing fee of Rs

Turn to

THE STATESMAN

18 MAR 2003

THE STATESMAN

# Buddha tells House there was 'rape'

19/3  
G-10  
**ASTAFF REPORTER**

Calcutta, March 18: Buddha-  
deb Bhattacharjee finally broke  
his silence on the Dhantola and  
Ghoksadanga incidents today  
when he told the Assembly that  
women in both the incidents  
were "raped" repeatedly.

The chief minister's state-  
ment came after the CPM-domi-  
nated state women's commission  
upheld the claim that the women  
in two buses were "raped" by a  
gang of looters in Dhantola,  
Nadia, last month. The CPM, too,  
had not denied that in both inci-  
dents women were raped, but  
had contested the allegation that  
partymen were involved.

Answering questions by De-  
baprasad Sarkar of the SUCI,  
Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay of  
the Trinamul Congress and  
Abdul Mannan of the Congress  
on the outrage in Nadia and  
Cooch Behar, Bhattacharjee said  
medical reports have confirmed  
that at least six women in Dhan-  
tola and a woman at Ghoksadan-  
ga were "raped several times".

Expressing "full confidence"  
in the CID, the chief minister ex-  
pressed hope that like the six per-  
sons now serving prison terms  
for their involvement in the Ban-  
tala incident, those involved in  
Dhantola and Ghoksadanga inci-  
dents would also be punished.

"I have also instructed the di-

strict magistrate of Nadia to give  
employment to the wife of the  
bus driver, Samar Ghosh, who  
was shot by the rapists on that  
February night in Dhantola,"  
Bhattacharjee told the House.

When Mannan and party col-  
league Shankar Sinha demand-  
ed a reply from the chief minis-  
ter regarding the political identi-  
ty of the people arrested in con-  
nection with the Dhantola inci-  
dent, Bhattacharjee avoided a di-  
rect answer. He said 18 people  
had been arrested and four more  
would be arrested soon.

The Opposition parties creat-  
ed an uproar when the chief  
minister pointed out that Trin-  
amul and Congress supporters  
were also among those arrested.

"The two names mentioned  
by Sougata Roy are from the  
CPM, but there are also your Trin-  
amul and Congressmen in-  
volved," the chief minister said.

He skirted comments made  
by Opposition MLAs on the re-  
marks of state CPM secretary  
Anil Biswas that the "character  
of the woman in Ghoksadanga  
was "dubious". "Speaker Sir, a  
I bound to answer on any com-  
ment made by some body outside  
the House?" he asked.

Asked if a woman of "ill re-  
pute" could be raped, the chief  
minister said: "Character  
never be a precondition in  
case of rape."

THE TELEGRAPH

14 MAR 2003

14 MAR 2003

# Doctor who detected Dhantola mischief dead

**BUREAU** doctor at Ranaghat had said in a letter that women by the dacoits in the district were taken for medical tests to the Ranaghat hospital by an NGO, days after the incident. District chief medical officer of health Prabhush Chowdhury said: "It is a co-incidence that the women were taken to the same hospital where Sen worked. He had no links with the medical test." But why and how Sen died is still a mystery.

arjee at Writers' Buildings today and demanded an inquiry into the death of Chandan Sen. The secretary of the association, R.D. Dubey, said Sen went missing from his Ranaghat residence on February 26. His body bore marks of multiple injuries when it was fished out of a pond in the area the next day. "The (Dhantola) miscreants wanted to hide the facts. We

have informed the police station there," said Dubey. A gang of dacoits looted two buses returning from marriage receptions at Ainzamali in Dhantola on the night of February 5. The men were asked to climb on to the roofs of the buses and some of the women were dragged to a deserted building and either raped or molested. In the course of investigation,

on, police and the Criminal Investigation Department arrested 23 people, including a zonal committee member of the CPM, Subol Bagchi, and former panchayat pradhan Saiful Karigar, also of the CPM. Dubey said the IMA would investigate Sen's death. "If necessary, we will start our own movement," he added. Immediately after Sen's bo-

dy was discovered, the district police described it as an "unnatural death". Sub-divisional police officer of Ranaghat Arnab Ghosh had said: "An investigation is on to find out the cause of Sen's death." Contacted this evening, Ghosh said: "We are waiting for the forensic report. We will be able to make a comment only after getting it."

Sources said two victims were taken for medical tests to the Ranaghat hospital by an NGO, days after the incident. District chief medical officer of health Prabhush Chowdhury said: "It is a co-incidence that the women were taken to the same hospital where Sen worked. He had no links with the medical test." But why and how Sen died is still a mystery.

# CPM leader raped by party workers

HT Correspondent  
Cooch Behar, March 7

A CPI(M) activist was allegedly raped by nine party supporters at her home in Purba Cheramari village of Mathabhanga subdivision. The incident happened on the night of February 22, but the victim filed the FIR only recently as she had been in hospital till now. She was recovering from the trauma of torture.

The woman is now in the "protection" of local Trinamool Congress leaders because she is allegedly being threatened by the rapists, six of whom are still at large. The Trinamool has demanded a judicial probe into the incident.

On Friday, the 31-year-old victim, a CPI(M)-affiliated mahila samiti member, was escorted by district Trinamool president Rabindranath Ghosh and his supporters to the office of ASP Anupam Bandopadhyay, where she demanded police protection. She is now with her father Mahesh Das, a local Trinamool leader.

The Trinamool has demanded the removal of the investigating officer in the case, accusing him of going soft on the accused. Party supporters gheraoed the Ghoskadanga police station in protest against alleged police inaction and demanded that all the accused be immediately arrested.

According to police sources, the victim was alone at home when nine youths, said to be local CPI(M) activists, barged into her room and raped her. The torture continued through the night and the victim had to be admitted to hospital the next day.

She filed an FIR at the local police station after being discharged from hospital and three of the accused were arrested a few days later, Mathabhanga SDPO James Kujur said. The victim handed over copies of her hospital record and the FIR to the ASP on Friday and asked for police protection.

She is worried because the six "chief accused" are on the loose and have been threatening her to withdraw the FIR.

The issue is fast taking a political colour and doesn't bode well for the CPI(M), which is already smarting from the Dhantala incident. Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee and leader of the Opposition Pankaj Banerjee have been informed of the incident and they are keeping a close watch on the developments, Ghosh said.

Pankaj Banerjee on Friday demanded that chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee resign as home minister. "He has failed to protect women, even his own party supporters," Banerjee said. Left Front partners RSP and Forward Bloc have expressed displeasure over some CPI(M) leaders' connection with criminals. Front chief whip Laxmi De has a tough job keeping the Front partners in good mood to thwart the Opposition attacks on incidents of rape.

Cooch Behar CPI(M) secretary Chandi Pal is quoted by PTI as saying that he was "inquiring into the incident".

8 MAR 2003

THE STATESMAN

# FIR against BJP MPs after Dhantala visit

Statesman News Service

SRM  
KRISHNAGAR/KOLKATA, March 5. — Nadia police lodged an FIR on Sunday against state BJP leader Mr Rahul Sinha and BJP parliamentary team members who visited Dhantala on Saturday. The three MPs are Mr Anadi Sahu (Orissa), Mrs Jayashree Banerjee (Madhya Pradesh) and Mr Bishnupada Ray (Andamans). They were charged with indulging in rioting, attacking policemen and violating Section 144 CrPC, which was clamped around Aismali madrasa after the Dhantala incident.

During their visit to the madrasa, the BJP leaders had provoked their party workers to attack policemen deployed there, Mr Pallab Kanti Ghosh, ASP, said today. The workers assaulted Dhantala O-C Mr Subhash Roy when he requested them not to enter the madrasa premises, Mr Ghosh said. They were stopped from entering the madrasa.

The district administration had imposed Section 144 around the madrasa, where a gang allegedly molested

some women passengers of two tourist buses on 5 February. Prohibitory orders were imposed after a mob from a particular community tried to ransack the madrasa the next day. The madrasa has been barricaded and EFR jawans have been deployed there.

Mr Sinha has termed the district authorities' action as "authoritarian". He said the state government, instead of taking action against those who had committed the crime, attacked those who were protesting against the incident. Mr Sinha claimed that if he had not restrained the mob outside the madrasa, things would have gone worse. "If the government goes ahead with its vindictive move, we will speak out openly on the communal aspect of the crime," he said.

Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, declined to comment on the matter. Mr Pankaj Banerjee, Trinamul chairman and Opposition leader in the Assembly, said such action could only be expected from a "fascist, Stalinist chief minister".

6 MAR 2003

THE STATESMAN

# Dhantola trio in custody

## OUR CORRESPONDENT

**Burdwan, March 4:** Police in Kalna near here today claimed to have arrested three men who have confessed to have been part of the gang that looted and "raped" several passengers of two buses returning from wedding receptions in Nadia's Dhantola on the night of February 6.

Police sources in Kalna said Putu and Parimal Sardar were arrested on Friday when they were looting trucks on the Kalna-Pandua road. They apparently confessed during interrogation that they were part of the gang involved in the Dhantola incident that sent shockwaves across the state and generated howls of protest.

Following leads provided by Putu and Parimal, another alleg-

ed member of the gang, Kamal Sardar, was picked up from Bagda in North 24-Parganas.

Special superintendent of the criminal investigation department (CID) Ramphal Pawar arrived in Kalna yesterday. The CID wants the district police to hand over those arrested as it is investigating the Dhantola case.

The police said after the CID obtains the court's go-ahead to take the trio in its custody they will be taken to Ainsmali in Dhantola, where their statements will be recorded.

"They (Putu and Parimal) told us that they raped a woman and Cheema Sardar, who was with them, raped another woman. Their statements have been recorded before the magistrate in Kalna," said a senior police officer.

9 87 40 5-10 573  
Two wristwatches were recovered from Putu and Parimal. They also told the police that they had set off with two others on February 28 to loot about 20 trucks on the Kalna-Pandua road.

On sighting a local resistance group, two of them fled. Putu and Parimal were chased by the group and thrashed before being handed over to the police.

"While interrogating the duo, we got wind of their involvement in the Dhantola incident. They told us that they were 'hired' to commit a dacoity in Nadia. Soon we got to know that they had also raped the women in one of the buses," the officer said.

The police are on the lookout for the entire gang of 15, which "specialises" in looting buses and trucks in Nadia, North 24-Parganas and Burdwan.

Though the three arrested men are yet to point at the involvement of any political party, the police believe the details of "the total plan" may not have been revealed to them.

The police have so far arrested 21 people in connection with the incident, including Subol Bagchi, a primary school teacher and zonal committee member of the CPM in Ainsmali, and Saidul Karigar, a former panchayat pradhan of the party.

Twenty days after the incident, in its first public reaction to what happened in Dhantola, the West Bengal Women's Commission had said six women, including four minor girls, were raped or molested during the loot.

One of the bus drivers was shot dead when he recognised some of the miscreants.

5 MAR 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

# Women panel cries rape at Dhantala

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, February 26

AT LEAST 3 women were raped and 7 others molested at Dhantala. This was the verdict returned by the West Bengal Commission for Women, which launched a probe 11 days after the February 6 incident.

Two buses, with at least 24 women on board, were carrying home a marriage party when waylaid by dacoits near Aishmali in Nadia. Two CPI(M) leaders suspected to have instigated the attack have been expelled while the police in connivance with local goons have managed to shush up the victims.

The CID, which is also probing the case, has added rape to their charges.

The commission claims evidence of rape and molestation and has urged medical test on the victims. The delay in filing of the in-

FACT-SHEET	
VICTIMS MET	10
Raped	3
Molested	7
ARRESTED	19
IDENTIFIED IN TI	3

dependent report was put on the reluctance of the victims to open up to the investigating team. The team refuted reports of loss of evidence during the interim period. "The women don't want to talk about the incident, but evidence exists specially against unmarried girls. Tests can confirm our investigation," said Bharati Mutsuddi, a member of the team.

The commission had sent two teams comprising four members each on February 16 and 23 and lodged an FIR after that. It has asked urged

that those arrested be also charged with Sections 376 and 354. The commission has demanded that a full inquiry into lapses in investigation in the case and urged "speedy justice and exemplary punishment".

Investigations revealed that not only was the police arrangement in the area inadequate, but also evidence of connivance between the local police and criminals in scaring the victims from lodging formal complaints.

Jashodhara Bagchi, the chairperson of the commission, said the victims were initially reluctant to talk to the team and did so only after assurance of confidentiality. "They haven't spoken to any one before this."

The police, said sources, are sceptical whether the medical tests conducted so many days after the incident would yield much results.

27 FEB 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES



# Panel sees police-party link in Dhantola tragedy

**RABI BANERJEE**

**Dhantola (Nadia), Feb. 27:** Members of the National Commission for Women, here to investigate the February 6 incident in which passengers of two buses were looted and the women allegedly raped by miscreants connected with the local CPM, expressed unhappiness over the role played by police.

"We have spoken to the victims at Ainsmali and at Kuchiamora, where the two buses were headed, and have been told in no uncertain terms about the nexus between the police and the parties here," said Sudha Malaiya, who was part of the five-member inquiry team.

The panel, she said, had evidence that the women, especially in the bus returning to Ainsmali from a wedding at Birnagar, were "mindlessly molested".

The state women's commission, too, had met the victims.

Early this week, it filed an FIR complaining of rape and molestation with the police.

Today, Malaiya was accompanied by former Delhi police commissioner Nafisa Hussain, retired judge T.R. Kakkar, Kalyanmoy Ganguly and Jalil Ahmed.

The team spoke to the officer in-charge of the police station here, Subhas Roy. He was asked why the incident could not be prevented though there was a police camp half-a-kilometre away. The team wondered how the police did not hear the gunshots that killed Samir Ghosh, one of the drivers.

"Just bring us the policemen who went to the spot after the incident," Malaiya told Ghosh.

At the Ainsmali panchayat office, a large number of women had assembled to talk to the members. Many complained the police had been harassing the male members of their families, who had "nothing to do" with the in-

cident. The team also spoke to two of the victims at the panchayat office.

The local women who spoke to the team said they saw blood-stained clothes on the street the morning after the incident. "But all the signs were missing a few hours later. The police asked us not to file any complaints," one of the "rape victims" said.

The women told the members that the victims had been warned by local CPM leaders not to speak. One of the "molested" women told the team three minor girls were raped by the miscreants, who dragged "at least eight women" to a deserted madarsa.

The women at Kuchiamora said: "The Dhantola police sent us back the next day when we went to complain, saying we should go to the police in North 24 Parganas as Kuchiamora was in that district."

Some of them broke down before the commission.

28 FEB 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

# Didi questions women's panel on Dhantala

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 13 — Trinamul Congress chief, Miss Mamata Banerjee today lashed out at members of the West Bengal Commission for Women, for not visiting Dhantala, Nadia, where 28 women of a marriage party, were allegedly gang-raped last week.

She said that, while visiting Delhi tomorrow, she would report the "indifferent attitude" of the commission members to the National Commission for Women in Delhi.

Talking to newsmen Miss Banerjee said that the CPI-M affiliation of some members of the state commission had prevented them from visiting the area.

Without naming a commission member who was also a CPI-M MP, Miss Banerjee said "She was very prompt in highlighting women issues in Parliament, but it is unfortunate that she too did not visit the area to find out what exactly had happened."

She said: "The CPI-M has vitiated every institution in

the state. Members of the state chapter of the Women Commission could not visit Dhantala as they were asked by CPI-M leaders not to visit." The CPI-M had even tried to add communal colour to the Dhantala incident, just to divert people's attention, she alleged.

Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was, according to Miss Banerjee responsible, for the deterioration of discipline in the police force. She said: "As home (police) minister Mr Bhattacharjee has promoted some corrupt and inefficient officers because they had helped the CPI-M win elections."

Miss Banerjee announced that members of the Trinamul Mahila Samity will organise a meeting to discuss the issue, opposite the Metro Cinema

## Commission's answer

KOLKATA, Feb. 13. — In a Press release issued on Thursday, eight days after the alleged assault on women members of a marriage party in Dhantala, Mrs Jasodhara Bagchi, chairperson of the West Bengal Commission For Women has claimed that the commission in its meeting held on 11 February had condemned the Dhantala incident.

The release also states that the women in the bus, were subjected to molestation, harassment and in her words, "possible rape." — SNS

hall tomorrow. NDA meet: In what appears to be a temporary burial of hatchets with the BJP top brass, Miss Mamata Banerjee has decided to participate in the NDA meeting on Sunday. She says that her presence at the NDA meet was crucial as she would raise the Dhantala (Nadia) dacoity and molestation incident during the meeting. Her party has sought the Centre's intervention in this regard. Miss Banerjee said that the "criminal neglect" of the state administration on the Dhantala incident would be highlighted at Sunday's meet of NDA partners.

Party sources said that Miss Banerjee was initially undecided on whether to attend the meeting, as the Centre had not

conceded to her on the bifurcation issue. "Now, she feels that her participation is necessary to get the pulse of BJP leaders on Trinamul," a party MLA said.

Activists held: The Kolkata Police today arrested 78 slogan shouting Trinamul Congress activists when they tried to enter the Raj Bhavan and Writers' Buildings this afternoon.

White Paper demanded: Describing the Nadia dacoity and molestation as the handiwork of Bangladeshi infiltrators, the state BJP leadership today demanded publication of a White Paper on atrocities on women.

The BJP criticised the CPI-M saying that the party was trying to hush up the incident by labelling it as a fallout of factional feuds in the party.

## Police and LF acted promptly: Biswas

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 13. — Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, today asserted that no other party would have the courage, to expel its functionaries within 24 hours after their criminal act, the way his party had done in the case of the two party workers involved in the Dhantala incident.

Mr Biswas said the incident was "appalling". But the police had acted promptly in nabbing the culprits and the party had summarily expelled the two.

Asked why the party is still not taking action against Mr Dulal Banerjee, an influential functionary of its Dum Dum unit, Mr Biswas said: "The two cases are not similar. In the Ranaghat incident the party men were directly involved in a heinous crime, while Mr Banerjee's offence is being probed by a law enforcing agency," he added.

# Night of looting, rape on highway

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, February 6

FOR FIVE hours on Wednesday night, a village road in Nadia was taken over by a gang of 20 who robbed two luxury buses packed with wedding guests, shot a driver dead and allegedly gangraped eight women.

The police, who arrived in the morning, said they hadn't received any rape complaint, but villagers at Asiamali alleged the robbers dragged eight women passengers to a nearby construction site and gangraped them.

It was with bricks from the building site that the robbers had blocked the road off Asiamali at 10 pm. They had already robbed four cyclists, two motorcyclists and a Tata Sumo when one of the buses — travelling to Bagdah from Birnagar — arrived around midnight.

The bricks on the road aroused the suspicion of driver Samir Ghosh (38), who stepped on the gas, intending to force his way through the blockade. At this, a robber shot at Ghosh, hitting him in the head and killing him.

The gang opened the door and robbed every passenger, beating up those who tried to resist. They molested several women and dragged a few to the construction site, villagers said.

Soon, the second bus, travelling from Aauli to Purba Noapara, arrived. The passengers, terrified by the screams from the other bus, let the robbers in without resistance. Here, too, women were molested.

The victims alleged that the robbers left around 3.30 am, with Rs 2 lakh in cash and jewellery. In the morning, the villagers arrived and helped the victims lodge a complaint at Dhantola police station. The police arrived a few hours later.

The initial police probe suggests that the robbers were locals. They reportedly had their faces covered, wore *lungis*, had mud on their hands and legs — suggesting they had been down in the waterlogged paddy fields — and left on bicycles before dawn.

The police had failed to arrest even one of the robbers till Thursday night, but had detained five persons.

7 FEB 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES