

# Bereft of ideas

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## Trinamul bandh plan is self-defeating

**T**hat there is no end to the problems confronting the Trinamul Congress is evident from a proposal to call a bandh some time in January apparently to protest against the "anti-people" policies of the state government. The Left Front's abject failures in key areas like health, education, industry, employment and improvement of infrastructure has produced a considerable degree of disenchantment in both rural and urban areas. But the question is whether the answer lies in a Trinamul-sponsored bandh that will again cause hardship only in terms of a day's production and to those deprived of a precious day's earnings.

Trinamul has been in sorry shape for some time and its pathetic performance in panchayat and municipal elections has served to throw its cadres into disarray. Mamata Banerjee normally takes it upon herself to hold the party together but in recent months she has been more than concerned about her own position in the Union cabinet. It cannot be of any help that she functions without a portfolio when there is strong speculation that parliamentary elections may be advanced to April-May.

The bandh idea may be one way of injecting new steam into the party. But surely Trinamul has sensible leaders to convince her that it would be more rewarding to strengthen the party in the districts where the Left Front, especially the CPI-M, is firmly entrenched with Trinamul virtually absent and Congress offering no real challenge, except in Malda and Murshidabad.

It is still a mystery why Mamata has failed to extract any political mileage from the prevailing disillusionment. While Anil Biswas loses no opportunity to mock her efforts to mend fences with the NDA in order to find a cabinet berth, Trinamul has of late lost the will to assert itself on issues of popular concern. On the contrary, it allows Subrata Mukherjee to run the KMC on his whims — dropping the water tax on his leader's orders but claiming that the Kolkata Gate proposal is still alive whether or not J.K. Advani comes to inaugurate it.

Now the mayor has engaged in a running battle with the state government by suggesting that it is depriving the KMC of its financial dues. Promptly the municipal affairs minister, Ashok Bhattacharya, produces figures to prove that Subrata is indulging in a mindless duel. The KMC elections are just over a year away and Subrata may find it necessary to engage in some brinkmanship to conceal his embarrassment at being conspicuously unpopular in his own party. At the same time, the figures produced by the minister are no proof that the Left Front's financial dealings with the KMC leave no room for complaint. The Left Front's financial mismanagement that has taken the state to the brink of bankruptcy is no secret. Now it is merely a matter of damaged egos at the minister not being invited to inauguration of ADB-funded projects. Subrata Mukherjee and Ashok Bhattacharya may reduce all this to a petty quarrel.

All this does no harm to the Left Front while emphasising that Trinamul may be losing the only opportunity it has been given in the last five years to prove its worth with sheer performance and organisational competence. A bandh in January can only be self-defeating.

# Karun of my fans will re

Cho Ramaswamy

TO BE or not to be in the... was the question agitating... mind of Karunanidhi, the... leader, for quite sometime... Ever since the defeat of the... in the state assembly polls... had started getting convin... that the DMK had no elect... future unless it got back the... nority vote, which it had for... ed because of its alliance... the BJP.

He had tried all tricks to... the cake and have it too... went to the extent of plead... that the DMK was part of... NDA, and that it did not m... there was an alliance with... BJP, which was just anot... partner in the larger allianc...

A few days before the no-c... fidence motion moved by the... position, he declared that... was considering whether... vote for or against it. He star... sharing public platforms w... the Congress and the two Co... munist parties and claimed th... the people welcomed this ce... ing together of secular partie...

All these postures wi... struck by the DMK months e... fore the official divorce, wh... has now been announced.

The BJP, which was not s... whether Jayalithaa would h... for an alliance with them, or... alone, was trying to explain a... all the needling by Karunanid... as positions forced on him by... politics of the state. The fa... straw was the agitation launc... by the DMK against both... Central and state governmed... The demands included droppy... of the Ayodhya issue and sc... ping of Pota. The BJP had tis... act and Venkaiah Naidu... id

agrees to compose music for the film.

**What else are you working on?**

I do a lot of things at the same time. Soon, I will start shooting for my film *Beauty Queen*. I am looking out for a really beautiful girl to star in it. The film will be a tribute to women and will take a stand against male chauvinism. In our country a lot of girls do not participate in beauty contests either because they are scared of their parents or they do not have the means to come to a city like Mumbai. There is a lot of beauty in smaller towns that never gets exposed.

**You experimented with negative roles at the height of your career. Do you feel the Hindi film industry today is working enough on new ideas?**

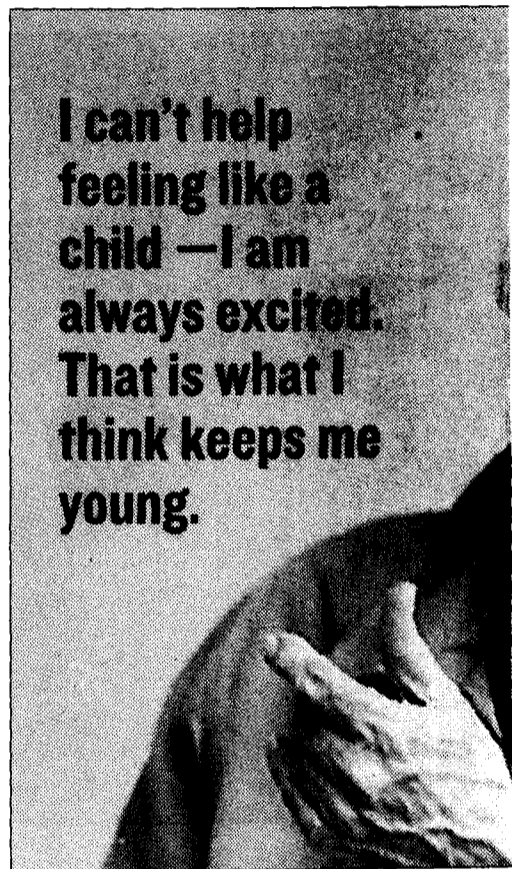
Sadly, in the last three to four years, the biggest hits in the industry have come from the same genre. It is the same set of stars and stories with different permutations. But the films I make are contemporary unlike the usual Bollywood fare that is dished out nowadays.

**But the films you have made in the recent years have drawn a lot of criticism. The audience does not seem to like them**

*Nahin chalti hain.* That's because people's minds have become conditioned to the mindless fare dished out to them. If you notice, my films are based on current topics and are very contemporary, for example, my film *Censor*. But these are subjects that do not affect the common man and so they reject my films.

**Yet you continue making films. How do you deal with the rejections?**

When you are a film-maker, you need to have a heart of steel. No one can forecast the fate of a film. I never get depressed and believe that if



I can't help feeling like a child — I am always excited. That is what I think keeps me young.

DEV ANAND: Moving with life

I do not agree. Even though there are major studios in Hollywood today, it is the stars who rule.

When a star becomes big, he will want to break away all shackles. That is what had happened in the early 50s in our industry too. The studios gave way to the star system.

**That is when you, Dilip Kumar and Raj Kapoor became the big three of the industry. Your manner of acting and dressing was copied by thousands of your fans**

(Laughs) It was all a part of self.

who was... down to... standing... him gettin... decided th... actor. Whe... in *Ziddi*, I... when *Jeu*... cided to ca...

**At 80, and rarit... cret behi... I can't h... am alway...**

# SC ruling on Pota a blessing for Vaiko

G.C. Shekhar  
Chennai, December 17

VAIKO MAY have lost his war against Pota in the Supreme Court but could have scored a significant victory in the battle against its misuse. The SC, while rejecting his contention that Section 21 of Pota militated against freedom of expression had, however, held that mere moral support in the form of speeches to a banned outfit would not constitute an offence.

Vaiko, from the beginning, had claimed he had only extended moral support to the LTTE in the form of speeches and had not aided or abetted in any of its militant activities to invite action under Pota. The Supreme Court has now upheld that line of his.

Since the Supreme Court has said the Pota court should keep this interpretation in mind while pronouncing its verdict, Vaiko's lawyers are confident he will be acquitted in the Pota case. "So far, the prosecution has nowhere come up with proof of any

criminal intent and has merely sought to prove that Vaiko spoke in support of a banned outfit. That alone would not suffice to convict him after the SC verdict", pointed out one of his lawyers.

Now that the SC has eased the bail procedures for those held under Pota for more than a year, Vaiko could be convinced to come out on bail, as well, sources said. "He has made his point in not applying for bail, so far, but it's time to take full advantage of the relief provided by the Supreme Court," said a senior MDMK functionary.

Bail makes greater sense since it would be a while before the Pota review committee can take a decision on the Vaiko case. It has to deal with the objections raised by the Tamil Nadu government challenging its powers to interfere with the judicial process before the Pota court. The SC's latest interpretation could also lead to the revival of pro-LTTE propaganda in the state, which had been on the wane ever since Vaiko was arrested.

# Pota court rejects Vaiko's plea

9. P.P. ~  
MDMK 57-5  
18/12

**Statesman News Service**

CHENNAI, Dec. 12. — The Pota court today rejected an application filed by the MDMK chief, Mr Vaiko, seeking permission to participate in the debate and voting on the Pota Amendment Bill in Parliament, on the ground that the plea was beyond the jurisdiction of the court.

Mr Vaiko and eight party colleagues were detained under Pota by the Jayalalitha government in July last year, for speaking in support of the LTTE at a public meeting.

The designated judge, Mr L Rajendran, dismissed Mr Vaiko's application, saying that "the comprehensive relief called for by the petitioner is beyond the ambit of jurisdiction of the special court." The Special Court was set up to try cases under Pota and the relief sought by Mr Vaiko did not fall within the ambit and scope of Pota, the Criminal Procedure Code, Prison's Act or Tamil Nadu Prison rules, he said.

The court noted that Mr Vaiko had on two prior occasions obtained

permission from the Madras High Court in similar circumstances. "Without specially assigning any reason and provision of law, the petitioner chose this forum, which professes no jurisdiction," the judge said, adding that Mr Vaiko, moreover, had not substantiated his claim within any provision of law.

Later, advocates for Mr Vaiko said that they would discuss the option of moving the Madras High Court for relief.

Mr Vaiko was brought under heavy police escort to the high security court at Poonamallee, in the city suburbs.

Meanwhile, hectic preparations are on in the DMK camp for the state-wide agitation on 15 December to demand repeal of Pota. In a statement here today, the DMK president, Mr M Karunanidhi, said the party MPs were exempted from participating in the picketing programme.

The MPs were required to be in New Delhi as the Bill to replace an Ordinance giving more teeth to the Pota Review Committee was coming up for discussions in the Parliament.

# Elusive portfolio

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Mamata can only blame herself

It is customary on the part of Trinamul leaders to describe Mamata Banerjee's meeting with the Prime Minister over the weekend as "just routine" on the eve of Parliament's winter session. But everything points towards growing restlessness in her party over her failure to secure a Union cabinet portfolio of her choice three months after being sworn in as a minister. For the record, Mamata Banerjee claims that cabinet berths are of little consequence as long as Trinamul continue to be a force to be reckoned with as the main opposition party in West Bengal.

However, in the context of the latest results in the municipal elections, even this claim is likely to be questioned in several quarters. There are differences between municipal, assembly and parliamentary elections but that does not explain the washout for Trinamul which comes close on the heels of several poll defeats in the recent past. All this can only lead to considerable demoralisation in the ranks which can only be strengthened if she succeeds in getting a portfolio of her choice. Sadly, this has eluded her.

With the prime minister now scheduled to leave on a foreign tour on Thursday, it does not seem likely that Mamata Banerjee's her meeting with Atal Behari Vajpayee will yield a positive result in the immediate future. In any case, the BJP must now be totally absorbed in the prospects of government formation in four states. This cannot be the best time for the BJP leaders to think of accommodating the Trinamul leader who does not appear to enjoy the confidence of all sections of the BJP leadership.

A bigger problem is that Mamata's options are becoming fewer. She could not have bargained for such a long wait. At one point there must have been the need to keep the NDA flock together under all circumstances. Now if the BJP does better than expected in the assembly elections, it may have other calculations in mind rather than promoting a coalition partner whose stocks are rapidly sinking in West Bengal and where the BJP can only have few political ambitions. To that extent Mamata may regret that she didn't accept what she was offered by the prime minister because there can be hardly anything more embarrassing than going into next year's parliamentary poll campaign as what may be perceived as being an unwanted member of the cabinet.

Mamata makes it worse with a style that has become unpredictable. It does no credit to her or to Trinamul to produce speculation of "drastic action" after a meeting of the parliamentary party in Delhi. Or to cancel a trip to North Bengal to address party workers so that George Fernandes can drop in for a "social visit" laced with tender inquiries about her fate in Delhi. Mamata can only blame herself for all the wrong moves since the last assembly election which have cost her and the party dearly. She can only strive to renew the confidence she had enjoyed in the NDA and with the people. Given the Left Front's record of misrule, opportunity still beckons. The questions remains as to whether she can use the cabinet portfolio — if and when it comes — to bring out a much-needed revival.

THE STATESMAN

4 DEC 2004

# PMO freezes Mamata foray

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Nov. 28: Mamata Banerjee's foray into national politics in the heart of power has come unstuck, courtesy the BJP and the Prime Minister's Office.

The Trinamul Congress chief failed to show up today for two public meetings scheduled in Delhi. The party has fielded Devdas Sonkar from Karol Bagh and Bhai Mahinder Kumar Bala from Paharganj here.

The pullout and the resultant washout occurred after the PMO rang her up, asking her not to address the rallies. The BJP had earlier failed to get Mamata to withdraw her candidates.

Sonkar, a meat and fish trader originally from Bihar, was hoping "crowdpuller *Didi*" would do the trick for him. Last night, he had said: "I have made all the arrangements. If Mamata Banerjee does not come, I will get the boot."

Today, however, he appeared reconciled. "Because of some fire in Calcutta, she is not coming. But it is my job to fight whether he comes or not," he said. "I know Bengali, too," Sonkar added.

Party MLA Tapas Pal, who is an actor, was also scheduled to address the meeting, but backed out on the excuse that the flight he was to take got cancelled. No party MP turned up either.

Without Mamata, who was to arrive here last night, the public meetings were converted into *padayatras*, led by party general secretary Mukul Roy and youth

wing chief Madan Mitra.

It appears Mamata, who received the fateful call from an aide of the Prime Minister, was never serious about the Delhi polls. She was apparently trying to get even with the Marxists as the CPM had decided to field three candidates from the national capital.

Trinamul, however, did not put up any candidate from Bengali-dominated areas in Delhi such as Chittaranjan Park, Kalkaji, Geeta Colony and Gandhi Nagar.

Asked why Mamata did not come, the party's poll in-charge, Chandranath Mukherjee, said she had to visit a colony ravaged by fire. Trinamul MPs, he added, were busy campaigning for the civic elections in Bengal.

Roy explained the party's difficulty in pulling out its candidates at the eleventh hour. The last date for withdrawal of candidates is over and any move now would flout the model code of conduct, he said. "We will contest. The CPM also has fielded two or three candidates. We are in the NDA at the Centre," Roy said.

Senior BJP leader and Union minister Tapan Sikdar and Bengal BJP chief Tathagata Roy were both irked by Trinamul's attempt to poach their territory in Delhi and wanted Mamata to withdraw her candidates.

Roy, however, wondered what the fuss was about because other NDA allies such as the Samata Party, the Janata Dal (United) and the Shiv Sena were also in the fray.



Mamata

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2003

25/11 **MURASOLI MARAN, 1934-2003** pg-10

FOR SOMEONE REGARDED as the quintessential backroom strategist, Murasoli Maran found himself pitch-forked on to centrestage on quite a few occasions. Television clips of an incensed Mr. Maran challenging the Tamil Nadu police during the notorious midnight arrest of his uncle, the former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M. Karunanidhi, remain fresh in public memory. When the former Commerce and Industry Minister returned from Doha, where he represented India in the Fourth Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, it was to a hero's welcome. His clear-sighted and non-nonsense bargaining strategy in favour of India and other developing nations was a wake-up call for the developed countries. It seemed to herald a new balance of power within the 140-odd-member organisation. Much earlier, Mr. Maran was detained for a year as a prisoner of conscience during the Emergency under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). He handled this experience coolly and with aplomb, drawing attention through his writings to the unjust and draconian nature of preventive detention, detention without trial. However, for the greater part of his political life, which saw him serving the last 36 years as a Member of Parliament, Mr. Maran was notable for his reticence and shyness. His relatively low public profile was at odds with the tremendous clout he enjoyed within his party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, and the influence he wielded from time to time on the course of national politics.

In line with some other leaders who belonged to the Dravidian movement, Mr. Maran was also a journalist and scriptwriter for films. But he had the vision to venture into the satellite television field and was the spirit behind the Sun Network, his family's major stable of news and entertainment channels in Tamil and other South Indian languages. He shot into political

prominence when he won a byelection to the Lok Sabha from South Madras in 1967. He was victorious in four more Lok Sabha elections, was a member of the Rajya Sabha for three terms, and was a Cabinet Minister during the V.P. Singh Government (1989-90), the Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral Governments (1996-98) and the NDA dispensation from 1999. Mr. Maran was exceptionally close to the DMK chief, Mr. Karunanidhi, but unlike his uncle he did not enjoy working up crowds or mass campaigning or building up a grassroots base. He made up for this through his political acumen, his studious and reasoned style, and his intelligence — attributes that helped him become the DMK's foremost ideologue and (as he has sometimes been described) a one-man think-tank. He was also the party's face in national politics, a task he undertook by projecting and guarding its interests at the Central level and, in the era of coalition politics, by shaping the direction it would take.

At a national level, he will be remembered most of all as an efficient and resourceful administrator and a strong and unapologetic votary of economic liberalisation. His final tenure as Commerce and Industry Minister was marked by a number of initiatives to give a new thrust to exports. His international reputation was built around the positions India staked out at Doha, where he led the developing countries to their first real success at the WTO. The positions Mr. Maran adopted at Doha were vindicated recently at the Cancun meeting of the WTO, where more than 70 developing countries successfully resisted European Union pressures to bring certain sensitive areas relating to investment and competition under the umbrella of the WTO. His passing, after a long and multi-stage illness that he fought robustly before it finally overcame him, leaves a void not only in the DMK but also in the sphere of national politics and governance.

THE HINDU

25 NOV 2003

# Murasoli Maran dead

By R.K. Radhakrishnan

**CHENNAI, NOV. 23.** The Union Minister and senior DMK leader, Murasoli Maran, died here this evening of multiple organ system failure.

He was being treated at the Apollo hospitals here on his return from Houston, U.S., where he was flown for advanced treatment of a fungal infection he contracted after a valve replacement surgery. The end came a little after 7 p.m. He was 69.

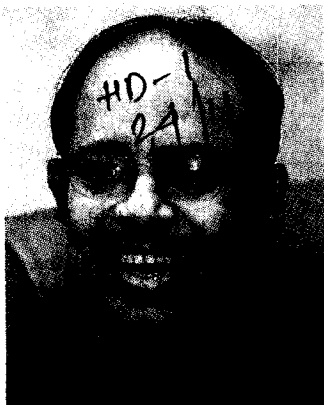
Mr. Maran was flown back to Chennai on September 7 from the U.S. by a special air ambulance and had been receiving treatment at the Apollo hospitals.

The body was first taken to his house and later to the residence of his uncle and DMK president, M. Karunanidhi, at Gopalapuram later in the night and kept for public homage. The funeral with full state honours will take place on Monday evening.

The Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was on an election campaign, called up Mr. Maran's sons and conveyed his condolences.

Apart from his long political innings, Mr. Maran donned different roles as journalist, filmmaker and the man behind the first regional cable TV channel, Sun TV.

Born in Tirukkuvalai (Thanjavur district) in 1932 to Shanmuga Sundaram and Shanmugasundari (Mr. Karuna-



nidhi's sister), he rose from humble beginnings to become one of the pillars of the DMK, its veteran parliamentarian, besides a Union Minister. An articulate person who never hesitated to speak his mind, Mr. Maran was inducted into the National Front Government of V.P. Singh in 1989 as Minister for Urban Development.

He represented the DMK again at the Centre in the United Front regime from 1996 to 1998 and joined the NDA Government in 1999 as the Minister for Industries and Commerce.

When Annadurai vacated his Lok Sabha seat (South Madras, in 1967) to become Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, he selected Mr. Maran to contest the seat. His nomination was proposed by the three political giants of that time — Rajaji, Anna and Quaid-e-Milleth.

The imposition of internal Emergency was a testing time of political loyalties. Mr. Maran

stood solidly behind Mr. Karunanidhi, and was jailed for a year under the provisions of the draconian Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA).

Both as a parliamentarian and then as a Minister, Mr. Maran travelled widely abroad and never hesitated to look at the right models for India to adopt. Despite his 'pro-reforms' tag, Mr. Maran did not hesitate to take on the developed countries at Doha to defend the rights of the developing countries under the WTO. Ultimately, some of India's views were accommodated in the consensus.

In November 2000, Mr. Maran was hospitalised in Chennai following complaints of chest pain. Cardiac specialists then used the alcohol ablation technique to bring him back from the brink.

On July 22, 2002, he was again admitted, this time to the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, where he underwent a valve replacement surgery.

A fungal growth in the replaced valve led to the third serious hospitalisation again at the Apollo hospitals here on September 23 the same year.

After a partial recovery, he was taken to the Methodist Hospital in Houston in November 2002 for special treatment.

He is survived by his wife, Mallika, two sons — Kalanidhi and Dayanidhi — and a daughter, Anbukkarasi.

**Leaders condole death;  
PM coming;  
photos: Page 13**



**CHANDRABABU READY TO FIGHT EXTREMISM, OBSTRUCTIONIST OPPOSITION**

# Naidu decides on early polls

Our Hyderabad Bureau  
13 NOVEMBER

ANDHRA Pradesh will go to the hustings much ahead of schedule, with the ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) deciding to seek a stronger mandate to counter what it calls the "twin threats" of extremism and obstructionist Opposition parties. TDP chief N. Chandrababu Naidu and other top leaders finally articulated the decision, first at a party politburo meeting and later in a political resolution moved at an emergency meeting of the party general body on Thursday afternoon, after month-long speculation on early polls.

The state Cabinet, which is expected to meet on Friday, will discuss the issue and decide to meet the governor on the same day or on Saturday, seeking the dissolution of the Assembly. The political resolution moved by Andhra Pradesh home minister T. Devender Goud was unanimously passed by the 5,000 odd party delegates. It did not specify the timing, but it appears to be preparing to face the electorate in February next year.

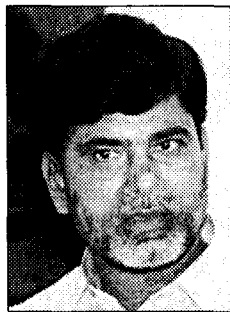
Besides the political resolution, the general council of the party passed two other resolutions. One condemning the attack on the party president, Mr Naidu, in Tirupathi on October 1 and the other condoling the deaths of 104 TDP leaders and activists at the hands of Naxalites, rivals belonging to the Congress, and due

to natural causes.

Replying to a three-hour long debate on the political resolution, Mr Naidu said he had no other choice but to go the people's verdict, as both the Naxals and the Opposition parties, particularly the Congress and TRS, were blocking the government's gameplan.

In fact, he went to the extent of accusing the Congress of being more dangerous than the extremists. He enunciated what his government had done over the last eight years for the development of the state and the welfare of poor, the down-trodden, women and farmers.

After the general council's meeting, the strategy is now clear. First, it wants to highlight the Naxals' violence and how it is disturbing the law and order situation in the state. It also wants to highlight their abortive attempt on the life of the "development-oriented" chief minister like Mr Naidu, of course to gain sympathy. Second, it wishes to project the main Opposition party, the Congress, and the fledgling Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) as being hand-in-glove with the Naxalite movement, citing their demand for the government to hold talks with the extremists. And third, it wants to seek a fresh and decisive mandate from the people so that a fitting reply is given to both the Naxals and the Opposition parties, thereby facilitating the TDP to continue with its developmental and welfare programmes.



CHANDRABABU

## TDP stand upsets Cong

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 13 NOVEMBER

THE announcement of the TDP's intention on Thursday to advance the poll schedule in Andhra Pradesh, has put the Congress in a quandary over the touchy issue of statehood for Telangana. This is despite the decision being a widely expected one.

The sounding of the poll bugle in the state has forced the Congress to shed its ambivalence on the issue — which the party had been avoiding so far for fear of antagonising the rest of the state. The party had been walking the tightrope on the subject, fanning hope to Congressmen from the region by saying that the issue would be taken up in due course. However, it was reassuring partymen from the rest of the state by avoiding any definite position on the issue.

Senior leaders, who have been camping in the capital, have been unable to get an audience with Sonia Gandhi so far. But Thursday's development in Hyderabad makes it clear that the party cannot afford to continue to be ambiguous on the issue and will have to take a position on the issue soon.

The problem before the party is how to fashion a stand that will address the sentiments of the people of Telangana and, at the same time, will not turn the rest of the state hostile towards the Congress.

# Naidu rings

## poll bell

## for party

G.S. RADHAKRISHNA

Hyderabad, Nov. 9: The Andhra Pradesh chief minister today announced his intention to go for early polls, coming clean for the first time since he hinted at riding the "sympathy wave" generated by last month's Naxalite attack on him.

N. Chandrababu Naidu, however, did not disclose the schedule while addressing workers of his Telugu Desam Party via satellite on the TV programme, *Dial Your President*.

He told them to be prepared for early polls to face fresh challenges posed both by extremists and the Congress-led Opposition. "It is time for you to act and galvanise support from all sections of society," he said.

Naidu also told party workers to complete scrutiny of the electoral rolls. A decision and "other actions" will follow soon, he said, citing a discussion on polls at the last cabinet meeting.

The Congress, however, appeared irked by the Desam's "delay tactics" and called off its bus *yatra* in the state's coastal districts.

The party's Mahboobnagar legislator, G. Chinna Reddy, said the Desam was delaying a decision for fear of extremist threat. Most ruling party legislators, he said, were touring their constituencies under police escort in Karimnagar and Nizamabad districts. "The police also advise them on the routes they should take to avoid unnecessary risk," he said.

The change in plans followed yesterday's announcement by the Congress' Telengana legislators, who have formed the Telengana Congress Forum, that they would quit the party and tie up with the Telengana Rashtra Samiti. "The Congress leaders are delaying a decision on Telengana due to compulsions of certain groups in the PCC opposing

our demand for a separate PCC and a state," Reddy said.

The forum members warned the party leadership that "though we are Congressmen, we will oppose and also place obstacles in the way of the *yatra*" if it entered the Telengana districts.

Another reason cited for the cancellation was "the rift in the Congress groups in Krishna and Guntur districts... as the high command wanted to avert a public display of groupism in the party ahead of (likely) early polls", a senior leader from Krishna district said.

Naidu's statement to party workers caught many senior leaders napping. Yesterday's emergency cabinet meeting had fanned rumours that he was apprehensive of holding polls after the sympathy wave had given way to

a surge in anti-incumbency feelings.

Today, however, Naidu harped on the state's growth rate and improved socio-economic conditions with the execution of a Rs 35,000-crore World Bank programme for power, economic reconstruction and infrastructure development.

Political stability for the last eight years was the key to success, he told the workers. "People look at the TDP for continuation of political stability and peace to promote industry and education in the state." He urged them to revive contacts with all self-help groups for women and promote awareness of the state's programmes for them.

The chief minister also urged the people to interact with extremists and bring them back to the mainstream. "Let the extremists face us politically rather than attack and kill political activists at random."

Extremist groups, he said, had killed 330 political leaders, including 140 of the Desam's elected representatives, in the last 10 years.



Naidu

SUBRATA SEEKS 48 HRS TO DECIDE ON CONTINUANCE

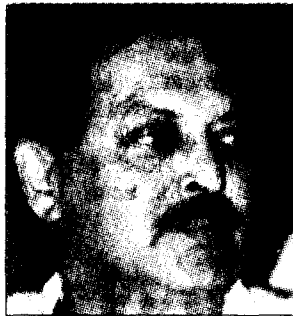
# Mamata reverses mayor's decisions

9-P.P. TMC 57-1

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Nov. 9. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today gave a veiled warning to Mr Subrata Mukherjee that he should either implement Trinamul's policy decisions pertaining to Kolkata Municipal Corporation or quit as mayor. At today's stormy meeting of the party's Kolkata MPs, MLAs and KMC councillors, major decisions taken by the mayor were reversed by Miss Banerjee.

■ The first relates to the party's demand that the mayor will have to maintain status quo in regard to the slapping of water tax and that he will not be allowed to impose additional water tax. The mayor has also been asked to keep domestic consumers using 10 mm and 15 mm ferrules beyond the purview of water tax.



On a collision course

■ The second is on whether owners of market stalls will have the right to bequeath property to their heirs. Though the mayor had decided against this, today's meeting rejected the idea and asked the mayor to retain the heir's right of inheritance of a stall owner's property.

■ The party decided to form a review committee to look into the huge escalation in trade licence fees and underscore the need for the committee being

represented by party members and trade associations.

■ Whether Mr Debasish Som, KMC commissioner, should be allowed to continue. The party felt that there was an immediate need for his removal. Having sensed the vehement opposition from the Trinamul chief and party MPs and MLAs, Mr Mukherjee said he would need 48 hours to decide on whether to continue as mayor.

That the Trinamul chief is bent on making the

mayor toe the party line could be seen in the manner in which she gave him a polite dressing down in the presence of the party's MPs, MLAs and councillors. A senior Trinamul MLA told The Statesman that Miss Banerjee had made up her mind against Mr Mukherjee's continuance as mayor. The mayor had his back to the wall, with the majority of councillors, MLAs and MPs raising their hands in favour of an immediate reversal of his policy decisions.

Mr Sudip Bandyopadhyay, MP, said the KMC's policies had not increased Trinamul's vote-bank.

At this, the mayor said: "Mamata has gone mad. She is not talking sense." An enraged Mr Tamonash Ghosh, MLA, shot back at the mayor, saying: "You are overstepping your limits. Try to maintain decorum."

# Didi tries to break ice between Subrata, Mala

HT Correspondent  
Kolkata, November 8

IT TOOK Trinamool supremo Mamata Banerjee's intervention to sort out the problems delaying the completion of the Southern Avenue Drainage Pumping Station project. She asked the mayor to sit with ward councillor Mala Roy and sort out the objections raised by her.

Speaking at the foundation laying ceremony of the Kasba semi-underground reservoir-cum-booster pumping station at Kasba Utsav Ground on Saturday, the Union minister directed Subrata Mukherjee to complete work on the project fast, but after consultations with the ward councillor, Mala Roy.

"I visited the place today and have seen what's happening. I know what the problems are. It's

not fair that people of one area should be made to face unnecessary problems to facilitate people of another area. Discuss the problem with the local councillor, sort out the matter and finish the project," Mamata told the mayor.

Earlier, the minister visited the spot on Sadhu Taracharan Road in ward no 88 and spoke to residents about the problems they would face if the project was completed and the delivery pipeline was laid under the Sadhu Taracharan Road.

Roy had objected to the laying of the delivery pipeline under Sadhu Taracharan Road because the construction work would prevent 5,000 people from coming out of their houses situated on the road for three months. She suggested an alternative route for the laying of the pipeline. But the mayor rejected the sug-

gestion. There are two schools on Sadhu Taracharan Road and a math that is frequented by hundreds everyday. Roy wrote to the mayor explaining the problems if digging WORK was carried out on the road and sought a discussion on the matter.

But the mayor did not reply to her letter. Then, Roy forced the company involved into the project to stop work on the stretch. The result: the project was delayed. Mamata's directive to the mayor to consult Roy on the matter is bound to please her camp. Residents hope the mayor would now consider Roy's suggestions.

Laying the foundation of the 3.5 million gallon Kasba water reservoir project, Mamata made it clear that the mayor would have to ensure that this project, which falls in her parliamentary constituency, gets complet-



Mamata Banerjee  
Troubleshooter

ed on time. "It's not a big thing to lay the foundation for any project, but what's important is that the project is completed on time," she said.

The Kasba water reservoir

will be built at a cost of Rs 18 crore and is likely to be complete by December 2004.

The reservoir cum booster pumping station would supply filtered drinking water to over 2.14 lakh people living in ward nos. 65, 66, 67, 91, 107, 108 and 109 in Kasba and its adjoining area.

Mukherjee announced that the project, being built by L&T, would be completed by December 2004 or else the company would be penalised.

Left: Front councillors of the KMC boycotted the programme to protest against the Trinamool board's decision not to invite local CPI(M) MLA Robin Deb and urban development minister Asok Bhattacharya.

The mayor said the LF councillors had boycotted a programme held to lay the foundation of a people's project.

# We will work for non-BJP, non-Cong. government at Centre: Jayalalithaa

By Our Special Correspondent  
**CHENNAI, NOV. 6.** The AIADMK will strive for the formation of a non-BJP and non-Congress government at the Centre, the Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, told the Assembly today.

Blaming the national parties for their "continued betrayal" of the interests of Tamil Nadu on the Cauvery issue, Ms Jayalalithaa said, "Be it a Central government headed by the Congress or the BJP or the Janata Dal, injustice has been handed to Tamil Nadu. Only a Central government, devoid of the Congress or the BJP, will render justice to the State", she said, adding parties such as the CPI (M) should help her in enabling the establishment of such a government in the post-poll scenario.

Ms. Jayalalithaa was intervening in a debate on supplementary demands when J.

AIR PAK #19-1  
Hemachandran (CPI-M) said the State Government did not hold talks with Karnataka on the Cauvery as it thought that the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance Government at the Centre would come to its rescue. He faulted the AIADMK and NDA Governments for their wrong approach to the issue.

Elaborating her point, the Chief Minister said the Congress, the BJP and the Janata Dal, because of their "political stakes" in Karnataka, had been letting down the people of Tamil Nadu. "With an eye on their vote bank in Karnataka, they do not want to do justice to Tamil Nadu". But "these parties can never come to power in Tamil Nadu. The people of the State, particularly Cauvery delta farmers, will rebuff them when they seek their mandate at the time of elections", she said, amid thumping of desks by ruling party members.

Denying Mr. Hemachandran's contention, Ms Jayalalithaa said her Government had been taking all efforts to get the State's share of Cauvery water. In fact, she had criticised the Centre and the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, so strongly on the issue that the Supreme Court passed strictures on her. So, it was not correct to say the State Government wanted to please the Union Government.

Moreover, she wondered, what purpose would be served by holding talks with the Karnataka Government, which had been functioning "arbitrarily", disregarding the orders/directives of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal, the Supreme Court and the Cauvery River Authority. Negotiations with the neighbouring State failed to yield results in the past. In this context, she recalled the attempts by the former Chief Ministers,

M.G.Ramachandran and M. Karunanidhi, to resolve the dispute through talks.

Speaking on the first supplementary demands for grants, G.Palanichamy (CPI) said both the DMK and the AIADMK, which ruled the State for about 40 years, had politicised the issue. Ms. Jayalalithaa retorted, saying the AIADMK had never politicised the Cauvery tangle; it was the DMK which sought to gain political mileage out of the issue. It was because of the AIADMK initiative that the Cauvery Tribunal and the Authority were created; it was the AIADMK Government which approached the Supreme Court, immediately after coming to power, to get the share of water due to the State. But the Karnataka Government refused to obey the orders of any forum. The AIADMK had even pulled out of the BJP-led Central Government on this issue.

# Trinamul to follow its own rally code

## OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Oct. 30: Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress, the principal Opposition in Bengal, tonight claimed the idea of a rally code as its own in a signal which suggested that the party would follow a regime of discipline.

Pankaj Banerjee and Mukul Roy, known for their proximity to Mamata, said chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's rec-

ommendations unveiled at yesterday's all-party meeting, which Trinamul boycotted, contained proposals that were an "echo of our leader's initiative taken two years ago".

These were described as "salient points" of the chief minister's draft by Banerjee, the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, with which Trinamul cannot have any quarrel because they are a replication of its own proposals.

"There is nothing new in the draft. We had decided not to hold

rallies on working days and keep our processions on one side of the road a long time back," he said.

"We had also announced that the only exception to this norm could be made on July 21 which we observe as Martyrs' Day every year. We make it a point to seek police permission for holding this particular rally long before the scheduled date."

The Trinamul leadership, however, clarified that the party would reserve the "right to organise rallies" on working days

even in the proposed no-rally areas or roads in "emergency situations".

Asked what he meant by "emergency situations", the Trinamul leader said: "The state government cannot expect us to organise a rally at Shahid Minar to protest against police firing at College Street. Similarly, we cannot go to Deshapriya Park or Park Circus Maidan to organise a protest meeting if something serious happens at Writers' Buildings."

Shahid Minar, Deshapriya

Park and Park Circus Maidan have been listed in the chief minister's draft as spots where meetings can be held.

Banerjee said the party was not going to send any formal reply to the government, conveying its views on the draft, as sought by the chief minister.

Roy pointed out that there was a difference between an organised and a spontaneous rally. "It is not very difficult to abide by rules if rallies are planned beforehand. However, this may not be possible when people bring

out a rally spontaneously to protest against any particular event or act of the administration," he said.

The Trinamul leaders felt the chief minister was talking of rally restrictions to bail out Left Front chairman Biman Bose who has been served a contempt notice for making derogatory remarks about the order issued by Justice Amitava Lala.

"Bhattacharjee has been wasting his time on a non-issue. There are far more important issues like the need to improve

health services, introduction of English from Class I, lack of relief materials in the flood-hit areas and a sharp rise in criminal activities. We will urge him to convene an all-party meeting to discuss these matters," they said.

Trinamul is now focusing on the disarray in health services. The party's youth wing today organised a demonstration in front of SSKM Hospital to protest against a patient being given blood that was past its date of expiry.

## MAMATA AND RSS

Folly based on limited objectives

THE immediate response to Mamata Banerjee's decision to shower encomiums on the RSS is understandably one of disbelief, given that she maintains that the Trinamul subscribes to the secular objectives of the NDA. That is also why her party claims a sizable minority vote-bank despite the tenuous links with the Sangh Parivar. Her own secular credentials are not in question. But Monday's function in Delhi was the first time in five years that she has interacted with RSS leaders or shared a platform with them and described them as "true patriots". There must have been two things on Mamata's mind at the release of a book that listed the "crimes" of communists in India and Nepal. One, it would reinforce her battle against the CPI-M in West Bengal. In other words, she is more interested in getting support from whatever source to fight the Marxists who, she says, are terrorising the people. Two, her presence at the function may induce a favourable rethink on her cabinet portfolio. However, her party colleagues are thoroughly alarmed fearing long-term consequences. The limited objective of her encounter with the RSS at this stage may not impress. Does ideology matter to any party contesting elections? It is winning that counts.

Anil Biswas' reaction is typically crude and heavily distorted. He makes it a point to comment on everything Mamata says and does, pointing to an unhealthy obsession and confirming that the Marxists consider her as the biggest threat. What the CPI-M state secretary also does is to draw the most outrageous conclusions from the Trinamul leader's actions to demean her before the public. "The day is not far off when Mamata Banerjee will call Mir Jafar a patriot or Gandhi an anti-national", says Biswas who knows how to play on middle class sentiments. Mamata's friends and allies will wonder whether she has played into Alimuddin Street's hands. But even her critics outside the Left Front will not be impressed by the moral position that Biswas takes. Mocking Mamata has become a regular pastime. Even while it lacks taste, Biswas is perhaps obliged to perform a ritual believing that some political mileage is to be had. What help Mamata will secure from the RSS to fight CPI-M-sponsored violence in West Bengal is far from clear. But, if it does help to land a Cabinet job of her choice, Biswas and Alimuddin Street may have to step up their ritual mockery.

THE STATESMAN

21 SEP 2003

9.P. pr.  
TMC

# Mamata seeks RSS help to fight 'Communist terror'

SR

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Sept. 15. — The Trinamul Congress chief, Miss Mamata Banerjee, and the Union defence minister, Mr George Fernandes, today joined hands with the RSS in condemning alleged "Communist terrorism" in the country.

Speaking at an RSS function here today, Miss Banerjee described Sangh leaders as "true country-lovers". "Now that I've got the chance to meet so many RSS leaders, I can say that they are really seized of the problems gripping various regions".

The function, attended by senior RSS leaders, including Mr

Mohan Bhagwat and Mr Madandas Devi, was organised to release a compilation of articles in a book form entitled *Communist Atankwad* (Terrorism) edited by Mr Tarun Vijay, editor of the RSS mouthpiece *Panchjanya*. These articles dealing with "reign of terror and violence" allegedly unleashed by the Communists, Naxalites and ultra-Left forces resulting in "barbaric killings" of thousands of people, focus on the situation in three "Communist-affected states" — West Bengal, Kerala and Jharkhand — besides Nepal. The book seeks to project "Communist terror along with Islamic and Christian militancy" targeted only against the

Hindu community.

Miss Banerjee "welcomed" *Panchjanya's* efforts from "her heart". She repeatedly sought RSS assistance to rid Bengal of Communist "misrule and atrocities". She described the CPM as a "fascist party of murderers, criminals, rapists, and anti-nationals".

She asked the RSS to organise more such programmes, offering her help to make available documents and video cassettes. The Sangh accepted her offer, saying it supports her struggle against "Left campaign of terror and hatred". She was termed as "Bengal tigress" and a "Durga taking on the Marxists" by some speakers.

THE STATESMAN

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## FOOT IN THE DOOR

<sup>10/9</sup> <sup>J.P.D.-S.M.C</sup>  
**M**s Mamata Banerjee's travails with the ruling alliance at the Centre are only superficially the story of a maverick politician; they actually expose the underside of coalition governments. Coalition politics often compels governments to take decisions which have little to do with issues of governance. Nothing else quite explains the manner in which Ms Mamata Banerjee was reinducted in the Union cabinet. Her appointment as a minister without a portfolio does no good to the credibility of either the National Democratic Alliance government or the Trinamool Congress leader herself. Her return to the cabinet had been anticipated many times since she returned to the NDA after a dramatic separation from it and a brief honeymoon with the Congress. But the fact that the prime minister, Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee, could not find a suitable ministry for her even now suggests that her return to the NDA is still bedevilled by bad faith on both sides. It is no secret that many in the Central leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party, including the deputy prime minister, Mr L K Advani, do not trust her as an ally and would have been happy to see her outside the cabinet. In reinducting her in the cabinet in this unconvincing fashion, Mr Vajpayee probably sought to repair the damage done to the NDA's unity by the desertion of former allies like the Bahujan Samaj Party, the National Conference, the Rashtriya Loktantrik Dal and the Lok Janshakti.

Ms Banerjee cannot be complaining too much though. Thanks to her flip-flop politics, the fighter of yesteryears has been reduced to a supplicant who can neither get a ministry of her own choice nor afford to decline an offer she does not like. Having lost her battles against West Bengal's ruling Marxists, she desperately needed a cabinet berth to boost her own — and her party's — declining morale. No matter what she pretends to the contrary, she cannot be excited about the way she has been taken back into the cabinet. It is also unlikely that her latest ministerial cap would add to her abilities to fight the Left Front in next year's Lok Sabha polls. On the contrary, the Marxists would surely want her to explain why she returned to the government which still has the defence minister, Mr George Fernandes, whose resignation she had demanded, following the Tehelka exposures of alleged corruption in defence deals. She would also be reminded of her own promise not to return to the Union government unless the Centre revoked the bifurcation of the Eastern Railway. Ms Banerjee will have her answers to these questions, but they may sound hollower than before.

TRINAMUL CHIEF WITHOUT PORTFOLIO ■ LAST RESHUFFLE BEFORE POLLS: PM

# Mamata sinks party troika

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, Sept. 8. — Miss Mamata Banerjee and Mr Gingee N Ramachandran today staged a comeback to the NDA government. While the Trinamul chief took oath as a Cabinet minister and chose to remain a minister without portfolio, the MDMK leader took oath as a minister of state and was allocated the textile ministry under Syed Shahnawaz Hussain. The reshuffle also effected changes in portfolios of Mr BC Khanduri, Mr Bandaru Dattatreya, Mr Sripad Naik, Mr Basangouda R Patil, Mr Pon Radhakrishnan and Mr Santosh Gangawar.

During a meeting with the Prime Minister, Miss Banerjee listed railways, surface transport and civil aviation as her preferences, but was finally offered coal which she refused and said she would prefer to be a minister without portfolio. Sources said she refused coal as the ministry had negative implications for unionised West Bengal witnessing closure of coalfields. The BJP top brass appreciated her concern and deliberations were on to zero in on a portfolio of her liking at the earliest.

Courtesy Miss Banerjee, the ministerial hopes of the troika of Trinamul MPs — Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay, Mr Akbar Ali Khondakar and Mr Ajit Panja — were dashed today.

Apprehending that her party colleagues may develop power centres of their own, Miss Banerjee preferred to keep them out of the government. That, at least, was the opinion of most Trinamul leaders who spoke to The



LONELY AT THE TOP: Miss Mamata Banerjee at the swearing-in. — PTI

Statesman today.

Though the politics of the day is to ask for more ministerial berths, she preferred to keep her MPs away from power because, said a party source, of the fear that choosing one may irk others, which in turn could eventually split her party. That's why, despite speculation to the contrary, she didn't ask for a second ministerial slot, though the BJP top brass was prepared to accede to her request, if she made one.

In fact, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee had hinted that Tri-

## New portfolios

**Cabinet minister**  
BC Khanduri: Road Transport and Highways

**Ministers of state**  
Bandaru Dattatreya (Independent charge): Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation  
Sripad Yesso Naik: Finance  
Pon Radhakrishnan: Road Transport and Highways  
Basangouda R Patil: Railways  
Santosh Gangawar: Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises, parliamentary affairs

namul may even be offered three berths when Miss Banerjee refused to join the ministry in May this year. That was indication enough of his willingness to have not only Miss Banerjee but some other Trinamul MPs as well in the government. However, she wanted to be the sole representative of the party in the NDA government, a reflection, her critics pointed out, of her desire to re-establish her grip over the Trinamul parliamentary party.

Her decision not to go in for

a second ministerial slot stymied Mr Bandopadhyay's chance of becoming a minister. As for the other two names doing the rounds, Mr Khondakar and Mr Ajit Panja, she was prudent enough to realise that making either a minister could lead to the formalisation of a "dissident" camp within the party, comprising Mr Bandopadhyay, Mr Bikram Sarkar and Mrs Krishna Bose, not to mention Mr Ranjit Panja who opposed Mr Ajit Panja's re-entry into the Trinamul.

So, she didn't allow her MPs to throw their hats into the ring and the BJP, reeling after the BSP fiasco in Uttar Pradesh, was only too happy not to interfere in her party's affairs.

And the Prime Minister, keen on a "smooth, hassle-free Cabinet reshuffle" got precisely that, thanks to the ever-unpredictable leader's latest move.

The Prime Minister described the reshuffle as the last before elections, but declined to specify whether he meant Assembly or Lok Sabha polls. "It is the last. There will be no more expansion before the elections," Mr Vajpayee said. He refused to speak about the timing of the next parliamentary polls.

The Congress slammed the reshuffle, describing it as "immoral, unprincipled and opportunistic". The party asked Mr Vajpayee to explain the circumstances under which Miss Banerjee and Mr Ramachandran had resigned in the first place, apart from the rationale behind their re-induction. Miss Banerjee must "justify" her return to the ministry, AICC spokesman Mr Anand Sharma said.

'NO TERMS FOR JOINING CABINET'

# Mamata's wait for a berth over

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI / KOLKATA, Sept. 7. — Trinamul Congress chief Miss Mamata Banerjee's wait for a Cabinet berth will be over as Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee has decided to undertake a minor expansion and reshuffle tomorrow.

(Miss Banerjee tonight met Mr Vajpayee and later said that she had put no conditions for joining the Union Cabinet tomorrow, adds PTI. "I've put no conditions. I will be joining the Cabinet," she told reporters after the 50-minute meeting in response to a question if she had discussed the issue of the portfolio being given to her.)

Earlier, following a call from the Prime Minister, Miss Banerjee left Kolkata for Delhi this evening reportedly for discussions on her reinduction into the Union Cabinet. She is learnt to have been intimated about her ministerial prospects by Mr George Fernandes, NDA convener, last night.

Former minister of state for finance Mr Gingee Ramachandran of the MDMK is also slated to stage a comeback but with a different portfolio. He had to step down following corruption charges against his personal staff in transfer and postings of revenue officers. The CBI's clean chit to him is lying with the Prime Minister, sources said.

The decision came after a meeting of senior BJP leaders, including Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani, Union finance minister Mr Jaswant Singh and party president Mr M Venkaiah Naidu at Mr Vajpayee's residence yesterday. They decided that the reshuffle should be carried out before the

Prime Minister leaves for his foreign tour on 16 September.

Mr Vajpayee had called Miss Banerjee for a discussion on the portfolios and number of ministerial berths which would possibly be allotted to her party. A minister of state of her choice from the Trinamul Congress may be accommodated if she gives the name, sources said.

Miss Banerjee had refused to join the ministry when offered by Mr Vajpayee four months back. The reason for her refusal was that she had been kept in the dark with regard to BJP's decision to have Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay inducted into the Union ministry as a minister of state. Peeved at the BJP move, she had then asked the PMO, Mr Fernandes and Mr Venkaiah Naidu to drop Mr Bandopadhyay from the ministry. At this, the BJP decided not to induct both Miss Banerjee and Mr Bandopadhyay, sending the message that she should resolve her differences with Mr Bandopadhyay and come to Delhi for fresh talks on ministerial berth.

Miss Banerjee's second stint in the government may begin in the coal ministry since a new ministry of animal husbandry is likely to be created for the low profile coal minister, Mr Karia Munda, sources said. She would return to the Cabinet after 30 months of hibernation.

Miss Banerjee quit the government as railways minister on 16 March, 2001 following the *Telhelka* revelations. She pulled out of the NDA government demanding resignation of Mr George Fernandes, who along with the BJP president, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu, have been instrumental in her return.

# Trinamul for economic emergency

J-P-P-TMC

55-6 31/8

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

ASANSOL, Aug. 30. — Having failed in its efforts to persuade the NDA government to impose Article 356 on West Bengal, the Trinamul Congress today demanded that financial emergency be declared in the state.

The party leadership raised this demand at a two-day party session which began today. They said that the Centre must declare a financial emergency at the earliest, in order to protect the interests of the people.

The Trinamul leadership came down heavily on the Centre's disinvestment policy, right in front of Union minister and BJP heavyweight Mr Murli Manohar Joshi, who was invited by the party for its Asansol session. Kolkata mayor Mr Subrata Mukherjee said: "The Constitution has got provisions to declare such an emergency, as the state government is bankrupt. We have urged the Centre to declare the economic emergency and save the fate of millions." The Trinamul leadership believes that the state machinery had failed to mobilise the required revenue from civic bodies.

The mayor further said: "In 2003-'04, about 73 per cent of the tax revenue was unpaid by civic bodies. To make good the loss, the state has imposed an excess water tax, which the Trinamul had strongly opposed."

The party also questioned the state government's "hidden relations" with the "Goenka-owned CESC and the Reliance group". As regards disinvestment, the Trinamul leaders argued that the state was also toeing the Centre's line but hypocritically criticising the NDA government. In Mr Joshi's presence, the Trinamul leadership said that the party would oppose the Centre's policy of liquidation of PSUs in Parliament.

Party spokesperson Mr Pankaj Banerjee said: "We won't allow mass-scale disinvestment and will ask the Centre to reverse its stand in this regard."

Incidentally, the Trinamul session venue happens to be in a place where a good number of PSUs have closed down or are on the verge of collapse. The party has four MLAs from this Asansol-Durgapur industrial hub.



Mr Radhika Ranjan Pramanik and Miss Mamata Banerjee at the Trinamul convention in Asansol on Saturday. — The Statesman

## PM to decide on Mamata comeback

ASANSOL, Aug. 30. — The Prime Minister will decide the fate of Miss Mamata Banerjee's "comeback" to the Union Cabinet, said human resource development minister Mr Murli Manohar Joshi here today at the Trinamul's special convention.

Mr Joshi said: "The Prime Minister is to take the final decision about her comeback. We have discussed the issue several times, and let us hope for the best." Mr Joshi made a

sharper dig at the CPI-M, and said: "They have unleashed a reign of terror. Their misrule has deprived the state in all respects. The state is pushed to the corner in matters of education, health and industry." He charged the CPI-M-led Left Front government of crossing "all limits of barbarism". "The only area where the Marxists have shown excellence is in terrorising people ...I charge them with deliberately trying to keep

the people illiterate, so that they are not enlightened enough to criticise LF's activities," he said. MP, and expelled CPI-M leader Mr Radhika Ranjan Pramanik said: "We shall initiate an united movement to combat the CPI-M machinery."

The party's convention has been arranged here with an eye towards the 14th Lok Sabha polls. It has 3 MLAs from the Asansol subdivision. — SNS & PTI

## Green light for evictions

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 30. — The rail ministry has firmed up its resolve to evict some 40,000 encroachers illegally occupying railway land in Lake Gardens, Kolkata. It has asked Eastern Railway to evict the encroachers.

Efforts to clear the land had been "frustrated", officials said, in "political and legal tug-of-wars". A senior rail official said that Trinamul Congress leader Miss Mamata Banerjee had been "resisting eviction of the illegal settlers". "The settlers are part of Mamata's vote bank," he said.

Now, armed with a Calcutta High Court order, the railways is "determined" to regain possession of the land. Officials alleged that Miss Banerjee has "set up an NGO" to stop eviction efforts.

"We are under court instructions to report back in a fortnight on the progress in eviction. Therefore, the go-ahead has been given to Eastern Railways," said a ministry official.

Rail officials say they have been "assured" by West Bengal's Left Front government that "police protection" will be provided. Miss Banerjee and rail minister Mr Nitish Kumar have been at loggerheads over the railway zone bifurcation issue. They are considered political rivals. "The Marxists will not have any problem if Mamata's vote bank is demolished", is how a rail official summed up the situation.

THE STATESMAN

31 AUG 2003

# Uddhav has found his roar, exult Sena supporters

By Ambarish Mishra  
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Mumbai:** The recent Mumbai bandh has unlocked the gates for Uddhav Thackeray's bandwagon, or so it seems. The Shiv Sena executive president's baptism by fire last Wednesday is being cited by his supporters as proof of their leader's impeccable organisational abilities and his uncontested clout in the Sena.

For a party that periodically asserts itself by downing the shutters of the country's commercial capital, a well-planned bandh is like Viagra for its workers. This was not lost on Mr Thackeray who, it is learnt, was busy issuing telephone instructions to local shakhas until the wee hours of Wednesday on the nitty-gritty of the bandh.

"Uddhavji has, as they say, arrived," a Sena leader said. "Mind you, the bandh was undertaken at short notice and its fate was entirely in Uddhavji's hands. He has won his spurs."

Speculation is rife in political circles that party chief Bal Thackeray has made up his mind on installing his son, Uddhav, as chief minister if the Sena-BJP combine returns to power in the next elections.

That Thackeray Sr. should actually wake up from his hibernation to scan the bandh scene near Kherwadi junction (with Uddhav snapping up the moment on his Nikon) is an indication that the son is ready to lead the sons-of-the-soil, say Sena-watchers.

Little wonder that senior civil servants

Hemant Shirwadkar



**Shiv Sena working president Uddhav Thackeray (from left) interacts with Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Nirupam, former national table tennis champion Kamlesh Mehta, shooting ace Anjali Bhagwat and former world amateur billiards champion Michael Ferreira at the Khar Gymkhana in Mumbai on Saturday. Mr Thackeray met them to discuss problems faced by sportspeople in the city**

connection with the Kumbh mela last week. However, insiders claim that underneath the soft exterior lurks a shrewd strategist who, when it comes to the crunch, can be ruthless. "Should he become CM, Uddhavji will come down heavily on the nincompoops in the party," predicted a former minister.

But the man who is the focus of the attention claims that all this talk makes him nervous. "The common voter nurses far too many hopes," said Mr Uddhav Thackeray who is said to prefer dialogue to damnation and paperwork to pamphleteering. "The aspirational class is on the rise, thanks to globalisation. On the other hand, the state's debt has reached an astronomical figure of Rs 93,000 crore. Tough times ahead, I tell myself."

For a start, Thackeray Jr. has kicked off a series of meetings with party MLAs in a bid to draw up a balance sheet of their work. "I keep talking to them, try to know what has gone wrong and where, and how it can be set right," he explained.

Mr Right is in a hurry. He is eager to befriend Dalits as well as the D'Souzas and D'Mellos from Bandra. He wants corporate czars to team up with the chawlwallas from Lalbaug and Parel to rejuvenate Mumbai. He wants to temper the Shiv Sainiks' attitude with the scholarly outpourings of Narahar Kurundkar, the legendary socialist ideologue.

Will the real Uddhav Thackeray please stand up?

are, in their own circumspet way, piecing together a biographical jigsaw of the low-profile Sena leader who, for many in Mantralaya, continues to be an enigma. "I am told he is a decent man—a refreshing change from the Sena stereotypes—petulant, quarrelsome and petty," said a senior IPS official who was on a visit to Nashik in

## HEALING TOUCH

Panja's return suggests give and take

IT may have come as a surprise that Mamata Banerjee used the party's rally on 21 July to announce the lifting of the suspension order on Ajit Panja after a gap of two years. She made the concession in return for an assurance of good behaviour. On Panja's part, it was the only option after failing to impress the BJP leadership to make him an offer of ministership. The last straw was the drubbing received by his daughter, Mahua Mondal, as the Congress candidate in the Vidyasagar assembly by-election. Remaining in the Trinamul fold gives him the only chance to retain his Kolkata North-East parliamentary seat; any other ticket would have left him severely handicapped. Realism has triumphed.

Mamata has shown again that she is the boss and can take decisions on her own. The Marxists were openly using Panja as a tool against Trinamul, the jury is out on the question whether he was aware of it. The potential for mischief in the run up to the parliamentary elections was obvious. The point is that it is not enough for Mamata to sort out isolated problems in the party. More essential is the need to strengthen the Trinamul as a whole in the districts where the CPI-M has been striving to stamp out any semblance of opposition. Panja's return suggests the need to apply a healing touch. The bigger task is to revive a spirit of hope among demoralised party workers and re-emphasise that there can be a credible alternative to the Marxists.

**TRINAMOOOL CHIEF REGAINS UNDISPUTED PLACE IN PARTY**

# Mamata ends two-year suspension of Panja



**COMEBACK TIME:** Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee and George Fernandes at a rally in the city on Monday. — Mona Chowdhury

**Our Political Bureau**  
NEW DELHI 21 JULY

**S**HAKEN by a series of electoral reverses and intra-party upheavals, Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee has decided to embark on a peace mission. The West Bengal leader on Monday began the process of mending fences with her estranged colleagues by deciding to withdraw the suspension of former union minister Ajit Panja.

The decision to re-induct Mr Panja in the party, most political observers feel, has been necessitated by the realisation that internecine fights among the leaders of the Trinamool Congress, alongwith the frequent political somersaults undertaken by the party chief, had only served to weaken the party. As its image as a political party — serious in its mission of dethroning the Communists from Kolkata — took a beating, the Trinamool Congress found itself in the danger of losing its space to the Congress.

Ms Banerjee's woes began with her decision to sever her ties with the NDA at the Centre and the BJP in the state, in wake of the Tehelka revelations in March, 2001. With assembly elections in the state round the corner, the

Trinamool Congress chief found it convenient to ditch the saffron party in favour of the Congress to take on the might of the combined left. But the voters were clearly not impressed with her decision. In the elections that followed soon after, they made their displeasure known by returning CPI(M) party supremo Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharya with a thumping majority.

Her abrupt volte-face on the eve of the assembly elections left not just the BJP in the lurch, it had many of her colleagues questioning her decision. Mr Panja emerged as her most vocal critic. His jibes against the whimsical ways of Ms Banerjee culminated in his suspension from the party.

But this could not quell the murmurs of dissent within the party. Her decision to stay away from the Union Cabinet in protest against the Centre's decision to bifurcate the Kolkata-headquartered Eastern railway, and the imminent induction of Sudip Bandopadhyaya in the Union council of ministers without her consent, left her seething with anger. But these steps also served to increase the differences between her and the rest of her colleagues. A manifestation of this was the growing uneasiness

among her party MLAs in West Bengal against her decision to stay away from the proceedings of the state assembly.

As she continued to grapple with intra-party rumblings, the people gave vent to their disillusionment with her style of functioning by giving thumbs-down to the party in all these elections.

With the elections to the Lok Sabha just a year away, Ms Banerjee is faced with a stark choice. Unless she gets her act together most political observers feel that she'll find it extremely difficult to retain even a fraction of the nine seats her party had won in 1999. Her decision to patch-up with Mr Panja and other estranged colleagues is being seen as part of the attempt to regain the space that she has yielded to the Congress in the last couple of years so as to emerge as the principal tormentor of the Communists once again.

Announcing the revocation of Mr Panja's suspension at a Trinamool Congress rally in Kolkata on Monday, Ms Banerjee said that he had issued a statement expressing his willingness to return to the party fold and "accepting my leadership." Among those present at the rally were Mr Bandopadhyaya and other leaders.

# Mamata brings Panja back

S.P. GMC

S.P. GMC

## Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, July 21. — Mr Ajit Panja, dissident Trinamul MP, is back in the party.

Flouting a Trinamul working committee decision, Miss Mamata Banerjee today announced at the party rally that Mr Panja's suspension had been withdrawn. "I am lifting the suspension order on Mr Ajit Panja. He had been suspended two years ago. We had urged Delhi to disqualify him as an MP. But he has assured us that he will abide by the party's policies and won't indulge in any anti-party activities. That's why I am withdrawing his suspension," the Trinamul chief said.

Most of the party MPs and



Mr Ajit Panja

MLAs were taken aback by the sudden announcement. The party working committee had met on 17 July and discussed Mr Panja's case. Party MP Mr Ranjit Panja had vociferously argued against Mr Panja's return, saying that his re-induction wouldn't benefit the Trinamul. Mr Subrata Mukherjee had also questioned Miss Banerjee's pro-Panja stand, saying that she was suspending "somebody one day only to take him back the next day".

Mr Panja was contacted over telephone during the working committee meeting, and asked to send in a one-line appeal that he wanted his suspension to be lifted. But Mr Panja refused to do so. "The question doesn't

arise. I haven't received any suspension letter. So, how can I appeal for its withdrawal," he said.

The party working committee then decided to defer its decision on Mr Panja's return. After the meeting, Mr Pankaj Banerjee, leader of the Opposition, said the party's disciplinary committee had established that Mr Panja had "indulged in anti-party activities. So, his suspension remains, pending the next party working committee meeting".

But Miss Banerjee didn't feel the need to convene a working committee meeting to decide on Mr Panja's suspension. She took the decision to bring him back unilaterally, throwing the party constitution to the winds.

## Martyrs' memorial

ACTING on Mr Sudip Banadopadhyay's written proposal, Miss Banerjee today announced that a martyrs' memorial would be erected at a common location of the three Kolkata Lok Sabha constituencies represented by Trinamul MPs. She said she would speak to the mayor about this. The Trinamul chief also announced a string of party programmes that would culminate in a rally at Brigade Parade Ground in December. Several party MPs and MLAs were present at today's meeting which failed to draw a huge crowd. — SNS



# National Conference pulls out of NDA

*J.P.C. Centre*  
By Luv Puri *ND-1*

**JAMMU, JULY 12.** The Jammu and Kashmir National Conference headed by Omar Abdullah today formally severed its five-year-old relationship with the National Democratic Alliance at the Centre.

The NC has six members in Parliament — five in the Lok Sabha and one in the Rajya Sabha.



Omar Abdullah

Announcing the decision at the party's Nawai Subah headquarters to presspersons today, Mr. Omar Abdullah (Lok Sabha MP from Srinagar), said: "The decision to withdraw from the NDA was taken by the central working committee at its meeting on July 10. It should have been taken long ago when the Gujarat riots occurred and many people were killed without the authorities taking any concrete action. Now, we have unanimously decided to pull

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out from the NDA after a marathon deliberation."

The working committee meeting was attended by the former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and party patron, Dr. Farooq Abdullah. Regretting the "late" decision, Mr. Omar Abdullah said the relationship with the Centre had not done the party or the State any good. It felt let down by the BJP-led Central Government.

"Many promises were made but only to be broken. For instance, in my Cabinet meetings we were constantly told that (the) Prevention of Terrorism Act would not be used against the minorities but the reality is completely different. The law was discriminately implemented by the authorities. I can now say that I regret to have voted in favour of POTA," he said.

The NC chief said that he was pained by the Best Bakery judgment where the culprits went scot-free. "We cannot be a party to NDA when the minorities feel unsafe," he said but took credit for not participating in the voting during the discussion on the Gujarat riots held under Rule 187 in Parliament.

The NC had "weakened" at the State-level after allying with the Centre.

"We cannot strengthen the NC and remain part of the BJP-led Government at the same time".

The party had also been alienated from the people. Accusing the Centre of seeking third party intervention for a resolution of the Kashmir issue, he said the Government must make up its mind on the issue.

# Trinamul MLA suspended

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**KOLKATA, June 30.** — Mr Dipak Ghosh, rebel Trinamul MLA and retired IAS, was suspended by the party today on charges of "challenging Miss Banerjee's Assembly boycott decision and maligning her".

The Trinamul disciplinary committee met at Mr Subrata Bakshi's office today and took the decision to suspend him today. The suspension, according to the disciplinary committee, takes immediate effect, that is 30 June. How long he will remain suspended and from which party forum wasn't made clear.

The party will frame charges against him at an appropriate time. By suspending Mr Ghosh, Miss

Banerjee has tried to send a tough message to her MLAs.

In his 29 June reply Mr Ghosh had clearly told Mr Pankaj Banerjee that his arguments should be heard out, prior to taking action against him. But it wasn't done. Mr Ghosh said in reply he was surprised if a Opposition leader can ask him, in writing, why he had violated discipline.

Copies of the disciplinary committee's decision are being sent to Mr Pankaj Banerjee, leader of the opposition, Mr Sovandeb Chattopadhyay, Opposition Chief Whip, and the Assembly Speaker. The immediate provocation for Mr Ghosh's suspension was his move to circulate letters among MLAs challenging Miss Banerjee's decision. In fact, he sent

a copy to Miss Banerjee also.

Reacting to the party's decision to suspend him Mr Ghosh said today: "Mr Ajit Panja frequently says that he is yet to receive the suspension letter which the party claims to have sent. So, if I get my suspension letter, I'll go through it and try to find out whether procedures have been properly followed and provisions of the party constitution adhered to. I had asked for a copy of the party constitution and other documents but those were not given to me. I think there's always a scope for appeal. I'll do whatever necessary to defend my case."

It is learnt that Mr Ghosh is being advised to move court against the suspension order.

# Show-cause notice to Trinamul MLA

**Special News Service**

KOLKATA, June 26. — Trinamul MLA Mr Dipak Ghosh has been served with a show-cause notice by the party leadership, while Mr Arunava Ghosh, another party MLA, today shot off a letter to Miss Mamata Banerjee, urging her to reconsider the Assembly boycott.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee, Opposition leader, and Mr Subrata Mukherjee, mayor, today said at a press conference that Mr Dipak Ghosh's yesterday's letter in regard to his appeal to MLAs to lift the boycott went against the party spirit and of course was an attack on the Trinamul chief. Issuing the show-cause letter, Mr Banerjee has asked Mr Dipak Ghosh why action shouldn't be taken against him for violating party discipline and maligning the party leader. The mayor said: "Dipak Ghosh has challenged Miss Mamata Banerjee. He should resign as an MLA and do that. Mamata's biggest blunder

was to make Dipak Ghosh an MLA".

As for Mr Arunava Ghosh, the party has decided to take a soft stand at the moment as he has asked for a reconsideration of the boycott decision only.

Despite being asked to be at the party office for discussions in this regard, Mr Saugata Roy, senior Trinamul MLA, stayed away as he is totally against the boycott decision. Only a handful of party MLAs were present today, the general mood in the party being that the boycott should be lifted.

Reiterating that the Trinamul Congress will continue with the boycott, Mr Banerjee said: "After the completion of the extended budget session, we will think about our next course of action. The boycott decision had been taken at a meeting of the party MLAs and MPs and was ratified at a party working committee meeting. So, we can't go back on our decision," said the leader of the Opposition.

Mr Banerjee, however, refused to comment on Mr Arunava Ghosh's letter.

# Trinamul woes

No one has won, the party has lost

g.p. 59-8 16/6  
Two signals emerge from the theatre of the absurd at Kolkata Municipal Corporation. One, lack of discipline among elected representatives pointing to inability to bring about civic improvements. Two, while Mamata Banerjee is the final arbiter in Trinamul's conflicts, she has a problem controlling the Mayor from acting as a loose cannon. Citizens are appalled at the sight of Trinamul mayor-in-council members coming to blows with the Commissioner, whatever the issue. If the simple question of who the Commissioner should take orders from — MMICs or only from the Mayor — cannot be established and results in verbal and physical assaults; with the spectacle of Mamata in legal robes pleading for bail for her colleagues, re-inducting them but allowing Subrata to change their portfolios to make his point, makes a mockery of administration. The Mayor has flown off to Naples to hand over Kolkata's key to his counterpart and formalise the status of "sister cities". That exercise is to take till the 18th June! It is difficult to say who has won — Subrata or the MMICs. What is certain is that Trinamul's credibility is affected

Why Subrata Mukherjee is allowed to act with impetuous arrogance is a question only Mamata Banerjee can answer. The induction of his loyalist in place of Mala Roy in the conservancy wing allows the Mayor to begin negotiations with the Australian company for the KMC's lucrative solid waste management project and whose hospitality Mala Roy declined. She had every reason to refuse a junket to Sydney but now in her new charge is left to take the blame for the waterlogging in the city just when the monsoon is round the corner. It is to her credit that she has accepted the challenge while the MMICs are at war with the commissioner during the Mayor's absence. All this has helped the CPI-M to emphasise that if Trinamul makes a mess of civic administration, what confidence can it inspire in the larger sphere of assembly and parliamentary elections? Trinamul's performance at Nabadwip where it conceded the seat to the CPI-M suggests that the Marxists' rigging machinery is at full throttle. Mamata can at best develop an organisation to confront this challenge. For the moment she needs badly to concentrate on controlling her flock including, in particular, Subrata before readying herself and her party for the battle at the hustings. More easily said than done but the effort must be made if she is not to allow Subrata to embarrass her again. Parliamentary elections are just over a year away; time is running out.

# Mamata forces Mayor rollback

g.p. p. g.m.c. 4/11

## Debashis Som to be removed

Arindam Sarkar & HTC 11/6  
Kolkata, June 10

A DAY after backing Subrata Mukherjee's decision to dissolve the Mayor-in-Council (MiC), Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday made the Mayor eat humble pie by forcing him to reinstate the MiC and in the process take back all the seven members of the council who had manhandled Municipal Commissioner Debashis Som.

The reinstated MiC will take oath at 11 am on Wednesday.

Subrata even agreed to remove Som, but in exchange he has demanded that the departments of some MMiCs be changed. The seven MMiCs have firmly declined this compromise formula.

There were early signals that Mamata was tilting towards the arrested MMiCs when she appeared at the Bankshall court to move bail on their behalf. As the day progressed, the Trinamool chief's tilt became more pronounced and at one point she even asked Subrata over the phone to either resign or take back the seven MMiCs.

Later in the evening, when Mamata dropped in at the home of MMiC Sovan Chatterjee — who was not in the group that assaulted Som and is a Subrata loyalist — to attend the *sradh* ceremony of his father, party leaders asked her to soften her stand towards Subrata.

Mamata agreed to meet Subrata, who was promptly summoned to Chatterjee's house. After a long closed-door meeting between the two leaders, Subrata offered to take back six, but not Pradip Ghosh, whom he sees as the main instigator behind the assault on Som.

When Mamata conveyed this to the seven councillors, they put their foot down, saying it would have to be all seven or none. Mamata then forced Subrata to reinstate the dissolved council in its entirety. Not only that, she made it clear that Subrata would also have to bring down the water tax.

Mamata had earlier given a patient hearing to the seven MMiCs at her Kalyan house. At one point, she even considered appointing Anil Mukherjee, the Trinamool chairman in the KMC, as the Mayor if Subrata failed to fall in line.

Talking to the media after the meeting, she said: "Som is the state government's mole to destabilise the Trinamool board. He is out to humiliate the board and our party as well."

"I had initially agreed with Subrata Mukherjee's decision to dissolve the council as it was necessary to discipline the councillors. But I never realised my consent would be used by vested interests in the party to settle their own scores. By touching my councillors, the administration has insulted the party and me," said a furious Mamata.

She made the turnaround when party leaders told her that Subrata was trying to repeat what he did as municipal affairs minister in the Siddhartha Shankar Ray Cabinet — he made Ray topple the Prasanta Sur-led Left board.

Meanwhile, Som called on chief secretary S. N. Roy on the day and submitted to him a report on Monday's violence. Subrata was to leave for Naples on Wednesday. But the Leader of the Opposition, Pankaj Banerjee, cancelled the trip in view of the KMC "deadlock".

Related reports in Kolkata Live



Mamata Banerjee appears in court to plead for the arrested councillors.

ASHOK NATH DEVI/HT

# Goons and gown grip court

Ganesh 11/6 G.P.O. G.M.C. 1

STAFF REPORTER

It was the Mamata Banerjee of old in a new garb. But the effect she had was all too familiar — turning a courtroom into a cauldron of chaos.

Accompanied by hordes of unruly supporters baying for mayor Subrata Mukherjee's blood, black-gowned Mamata hit Bankshal Court on Tuesday afternoon, where her seven 'unruly' party members were produced after being arrested on charges of assaulting municipal commissioner Debasis Som.

The chaos that accompanied Mamata — and the administrative bungling — left chief metropolitan magistrate S.C. Mishra fuming. The afternoon session began at 2 pm and the judge, on being told that the seven accused — Mala Roy, Shamsuzzaman Ansari, Pradip Ghosh, Anup Chatterjee, Javed Ahmed Khan, Moinul Haque Chowdhury and Swapan Samaddar — had been brought to the court, took his chair. None of the seven, however, was there and the judge left the courtroom.

The accused arrived a few minutes later, along with a few hand-picked Trinamul activists. They all invaded the court campus and some even managed to sneak into the courtroom. Some raised slogans against both mayor Mukherjee and municipal commissioner Som, forcing judge Mishra to declare to officials in his chamber that he would not attend court if order was not restored.

Some Trinamul leaders suggested that he grant the seven mayoral council members bail without seeing them. "The court must see the accused," the judge insisted. He even offered to hold court in the balcony. "Bringing the



Trinamul Congress activists descend on Bankshal Court to defend the seven mayoral council members arrested on Tuesday. Picture by Amit Data

accused here," he ordered officials. Senior Trinamul leaders, sensing that things had gone too far, then pleaded with the judge to come back to the courtroom.

"We will ensure normalcy," assured Saugata Roy and Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay.

Mamata, however, was not to

be placated. Confining herself to "advising" Trinamul MLA

Arunava Ghosh, who appeared for the seven mayoral council members, she sat in the second row and limited her courtroom activities to commenting against the "injustice" being meted out to her party colleagues.

Insisting that the seven be produced without passing through the caged entrance, Ma-

mata hollered: "They will not run away... They are, after all, janapratihiti (people's representatives)." When the seven trooped in through the 'cage', their leader sighed: "Esh, oder

dekhe koshto hochhe (I feel so sorry for them)."

In the end, Mamata's black gown, given by one of the Trinamul legal cell members, turned out to be rather unnecessary, as the seven were granted bail on a bond of Rs 1,000 each.

Later in the day, judge Mishra

wrote to police commissioner Sujoy Chakraborty drawing his attention to the force's failure to control the "unruly" scenes inside the court. "Terminating the day's proceedings as unprecedented, he asked Chakraborty to ensure that the court's sanctity is never violated like this again.

# DMK AT CROSSROADS

## Family Above Party, The Preferred Option

By SAM RAJAPPA

Of all political parties in the country, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam can take legitimate pride in holding organisational elections regularly. How democratic, free and fair these elections are another matter. Key office bearers are elected by 'consensus', a method developed by Congress under Indira Gandhi and copied elsewhere. Woe betide any aspirants in the party who insist on a free ballot.

### All in the family

The just concluded twelfth organisational elections of the 54-year-old DMK is no different, particularly those held after Muthuvel Karunanidhi captured the party leadership and the chief ministership of Tamil Nadu in 1969 following the death of Annadurai, who founded the party in 1949. Since then, the presidentship has remained firmly with Karunanidhi, somewhat like a democratically elected constitutional monarchy. Karunanidhi decides who should be general secretary, treasurer and district secretaries of the party. VR Nedunchezhiyan, groomed by Annadurai to succeed him, was given the number two slot of general secretary till he deserted the party in 1977 to join the breakaway AIADMK led by MG Ramachandran.

One of the founder-leaders of the DMK, K Anbazhagan, became general secretary in 1977, a post he still holds. Though both president and general secretary have crossed their 80th birth days, dramatic advancements in health-care have kept them on their feet.

In keeping with geriatrics holding the two top posts, Arcot Veerasamy, not lagging far behind in age, was re-elected treasurer. The only change at the top was the induction of the youth wing leader of the DMK, MK Stalin, himself a grandfather and son of Karunanidhi, as the senior deputy general secretary, a post lying vacant since the death of Nanjil Manoharan more than two years ago. Ever since Karunanidhi became DMK president in 1969, he has been assiduously grooming Stalin as his political heir. Though his additional post of deputy general secretary ranks only fourth in the DMK hierarchy, Anbazhagan and Veerasamy have already conceded the number two spot to Stalin.

If Karunanidhi takes pride in claiming that he has experience, both in power and out of power, for the last 44 years, it only means that he had one year of experience repeated 43 times. He has grown old and has to depend on a walking stick to move about, and has not been able to shed antediluvian

*The author, a veteran journalist who retired from The Statesman, is based in Chennai.*

ideas about politics. Nothing illustrates this better than the new national council of the DMK adopting a resolution urging the government of India to go back to the policy of non-alignment enunciated by Jawaharlal Nehru. Non-alignment is not relevant in a unipolar world.

Under Karunanidhi's leadership, the DMK has become a family concern. To take the place of film star MGR, the main vote cat-



cher of the undivided DMK, Karunanidhi tried to promote MK Muthu, his son born of his first wife, Padmavati. He was made to dress up like MGR with dark glasses, topi et al and act in films scripted by Karunanidhi. Muthu failed miserably both as an actor and as a politician. Instead, he blossomed into a Bacchanalian and crossed over to Jayalalitha's AIADMK, the ultimate political rival of his father.

### Out of bounds

After the death of Padmavati, Karunanidhi married Dayalamma who bore him Azhagiri, Stalin and Tamizharasu, besides Selvi. Tamizharasu shunned publicity from his early age. Stalin fell in line with his father's ambition, but Azhagiri, his elder brother, too wanted a fiefdom of his own. In order to keep the brothers from fighting each other, the state was carved into two. Madurai and the districts south of it were entrusted to Azhagiri. Poaching into Azhagiri's territory by supporters of Stalin led to frequent clashes, leading to the recent murder of the former DMK minister and strong man of Sivaganga district, Tha Kiruttinan.

Such is Karunanidhi's concern for senior party leaders outside the family that the newly elected general council of the DMK which met in Chennai this week neither

passed a resolution condoling the death of Kiruttinan nor observed the customary two minutes silence. But it did pass a resolution condemning the Tamil Nadu police for arresting Azhagiri for allegedly conspiring to murder Kiruttinan.

Murasoli Maran, a nephew of Karunanidhi, has long been functioning as the plenipotentiary of the DMK in Delhi. He was an important minister in all the non-

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minal, has preferred to stay out of politics and instead inherit her father's literary mantle. She has already carved out a name for herself in the Tamil literary firmament.

Karunanidhi's single-minded objective of making Stalin his political heir has driven many a talented party worker out in search of pastures new. While some joined the splinter AIADMK, Vaiko, who had all the makings of succeeding Karunanidhi, was driven out of the party 10 years ago, after accusing him of plotting to assassinate Karunanidhi.

Vaiko launched the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in 1993. A sizable chunk of the younger generation of party workers joined him. Though the exit of Vaiko and exodus of youthful workers considerably weakened the DMK, the MDMK failed to make any waves in Tamil Nadu politics. However, it could take partial credit for driving the DMK out of office in the 2001 Assembly election. Vaiko's exit drove home the point to aspiring DMK men that the top post was out of bounds for anyone outside the Karunanidhi family.

### Rising sons, setting sun

The excessive in-breeding has left the DMK bereft of fresh thinking and new strategies to cope with the aggressive entrenchment of the AIADMK under the dynamic Jayalalitha. She has no immediate family to pass on her political mantle. Therefore she can draw on the best talent available to fill key positions.

Karunanidhi's obsession with the family is such that *Murasoli*, the official organ of the DMK, carried a headline the other day to the effect that Azhagiri and Stalin have sunk their differences as if it was headline news. Annadurai used to take pride in calling the DMK a "kudumbam" (family) but Karunanidhi had made his kudumbam the party.

The Dravidian movement which began on an anti-Brahmin manifesto during the colonial period has run out of steam. The AIADMK, stronger of the two major Dravidian parties, is now led by a Brahmin, Jayalalitha. The atheism and rationalism of the DMK have lost their sheen as Karunanidhi's own family is steeped in Hindu religious practices and superstition. An effigy with a pumpkin for head, believed to ward off evil spirits, still hangs atop the new bungalow to which Karunanidhi moved only a fortnight ago. The DMK faithfuls live in the knowledge that every sunrise is invariably followed by sun rise. The rising sun is the election symbol of the DMK. If it is the time of setting sun for the DMK now, can sunrise be far off?

Congress governments at the Centre barring the short-lived Charan Singh ministry. Though battling for his life in a hospital in the USA for the last nine months, he continues to be a senior member of the Union Cabinet, and finds his name at the top of the list of newly elected 20-member high level administrative committee of the DMK.

Karunanidhi's elder daughter, Selvi, is married to another of his nephews, Murasoli Selvam, editor, printer and publisher of the DMK's official organ. Even his prodigal son, Azhagiri, wields more power in the DMK than any leader outside the family. In order to placate and protect his jurisdictional powers, important party leaders with great organisational capacity like Karupusamy Pandian of Tirunelveli was not allowed to contest the post of a district secretary.

Azhagiri had carved out a fiefdom in southern Tamil Nadu through his politics of intimidation and kangaroo courts. He played no mean role in the defeat of the official DMK candidates in and around Madurai in the 2001 Assembly election which drove his father out of Fort St George. Yet Karunanidhi wants to give Azhagiri an important post in the DMK once he comes out of jail.

Kanimozhi, Karunanidhi's daughter by his third wife, Rajathia-

# Stalin moves up in hierarchy

Statesman News Service

CHENNAI, June 2. — The DMK unanimously re-elected Mr M Karunanidhi as the party president. It also paved the way for his son, Mr MK Stalin, to take over party reins by elevating him to the post of deputy general secretary.

At a time when a bitter power struggle is on between Mr Stalin and Mr MK Azhagiri, Mr Karunanidhi's sons, Mr Stalin's appointment to the crucial post send clear signals across the party that he would eventually succeed his father. The organisational elections, intensely fought by the factions within the party led by the two sons, has already claimed one victim, T Kiruttinan, who was hacked to death on 20 May. Mr Azhagiri, an accused in the case, is now lodged in Tiruchirapalli prison.

Parrying queries on Mr Stalin's appointment, Mr

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Karunanidhi said: "It is not a step towards succession. I consider it as an opportunity given to the younger generation." But Mr K Anbazhagan, re-elected as party general-secretary, said Mr Stalin would succeed Mr Karunanidhi eventually. "He (Mr Stalin) is the only mass leader after Mr Karunanidhi. But he did not get the post because he is Mr Karunanidhi's son."

Mr Stalin, who continues to hold additional charge of the party's youth wing, said he considered his appointment as "a responsibility given to me to encourage the youth". He hoped he would fulfil the party's expectations in tackling the "biggest challenge" ever. On the "rivalry" between the two brothers, he said: "When elections take place, there are bound to be differences, which get ironed out when the process is completed."

A 20-member high-level



Mr M Karunanidhi: re-elected DMK chief

policy making body, headed by the DMK president, was also constituted. The committee comprises Union minister Mr Murasoli Maran, Union environment minister Mr TR Baalu and several former ministers and senior leaders. Mr Arcot N Veerasamy, a former minister, was re-elected as party treasurer. Mr Durai Muru-

gan, another former minister, was appointed as principal secretary, a new post.

The DMK chief accused the media of blowing the issue of "rivalry between his two sons" out of proportion. The two brothers had sorted out their differences, Mr Karunanidhi said. He expressed the hope that the "real culprits" behind Kiruttinan's murder would be brought to justice.

Earlier, the DMK general council passed resolutions urging the Centre "to uphold the non-alignment policy followed by Jawaharlal Nehru and not fall prey to neo-imperialist countries" with regard to the Iraq issue. The resolutions demanded withdrawal of Pota which had been "misused" to arrest several political leaders and journalists and appreciated the peace initiatives taken by Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee in resolving the Kashmir issue.



# Ajit ditches Mayawati, <sup>11-1</sup> CM unfazed <sup>2015</sup>

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Lucknow\New Delhi:** Rashtriya Lok Dal president Ajit Singh on Friday withdrew support to the Mayawati government in Uttar Pradesh.

Accompanied by national general secretary of the Samajwadi Party Amar Singh, Congress UP leader Nawal Kishore Sharma, CLP leader Pramod Tewari and party MLA Kokab Hamid, Mr Singh met governor Vishnukant Sharma at 4.30 p.m. and informed him of the RLD's decision.

He told the governor that since the BSP-BJP coalition government had been reduced to a minority, it should be dismissed, and said the opposition was in a position to form the government. The governor assured the opposition leaders that he would act according to constitutional provisions.

Later, talking about the formation of an alternative government, the RLD leader said the Samajwadi Party, the Congress and Kalyan Singh's Rashtriya Kranti Party were on a common platform on the issue but evaded a direct response on who would head the coalition if and when a new government was formed.

It was left to N.K. Sharma to state that the issue would be decided once the governor called on them to form the government.

Rattled by the unprecedented opposition unity, the

ruling BJP-BSP coalition is chalking out a contingency plan to thwart any attempt at poaching on its MLAs.

An indication to this effect was given by BJP legislature party leader Lalji Tandon on Friday after speaking to chief minister Mayawati, who is currently on a five-nation tour. "We have at least seven berths left in the cabinet from our quota after the RLD pulled out of the government. Naturally, we would like to fill our quota once the CM returns from her foreign tour," he said.

Mayawati herself is unlikely to cut short her foreign trip. A senior official accompanying her told TNN that 'madam' had been briefed about the political developments, but she had given no indications of rushing back home. Mayawati is obviously banking on numbers, which seem to rule out a successful toppling game.

Had Mr Ajit Singh withdrawn the support of his 14-strong RLD party before the Congress suffered a split a few months ago, the Mayawati government could have been in serious trouble.

But the Congress lost nine MLAs from its 25-member group to the CM in the split. At the final count, the Samajwadi Party-led front—along with the backing of the remaining 16 Congress MLAs—has a tally of 188 in the 402-member assembly. In this grouping, the SP is the single largest party with 142 MLAs.

# Ajit woos Sonia to oust Mayawati

CL Manoj in New Delhi

May 28. — The Congress-Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) liaison is out in the open with Mr Ajit Singh and the five RLD ministers who quit the Mayawati government in Uttar Pradesh meeting Mrs Sonia Gandhi here today in the company of her political secretary, Mr Ahmed Patel. Mr Singh, who quit the Vajpayee Cabinet last week, has reportedly urged Mrs Gandhi for help from the Congress MLAs for his efforts, in tandem with Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav, to topple the BSP-BJP government.

Mr Singh and the Congress leadership remained tightlipped about the meeting, but indications are that the Congress will be more than willing for a joint opposition operation against the Mayawati govern-



Mr Ajit Singh & Mrs Gandhi:  
No more polls apart

ment. On paper, Miss Mayawati sans the RLD still commands a slender majority, but Mr Singh reportedly told Mrs Gandhi that he and Mr Yadav were confident that some of the ruling front MLAs could cross over if the Opposition makes a serious toppling attempt.

While the last time the confusion in the Congress camp over the UP strategy resulted in a section of its MLAs deserting ship, this time the Congress will be keen to actively back the Ajit-

Yadav combination in its bid to topple Miss Mayawati. Already Mr Singh has taken a section of his MLAs to Madhya Pradesh, reportedly with Mr Digvijay Singh's patronage, to ward off poaching attempts from the BJP and BSP.

Mr Singh's meeting with Mrs Gandhi follows Mr Patel establishing a link with him. Also the meeting took place on the eve of the death anniversary of Charan Singh. Some Congress leaders speculate that there will be a 'positive message' from the AICC on that occasion. Mrs Gandhi and Mr Singh are getting together at a time when Miss Mayawati is away abroad and also on the eve of the Congress chief ministers' conclave in Srinagar where the party is expected to outline a holistic strategy for the Assembly polls.

# Sudip lands with patch-up offer, but Didi is cold

MS

Arindam Sarkar  
Kolkata, May 26

**CAUGHT ON** the wrong foot in his own party and tossed by the wayside by the BJP since the reshuffle goof, Sudip Bandopadhyay flew down to Kolkata on Tuesday evening to patch up with Mamata Banerjee and tell his side of the story.

Sudip believes further acrimony with the Trinamool chief could compromise his position in the parliamentary party and harm his prospects in the Lok

Sabha polls. Speaking to associates on Monday, Sudip said he had no intention to split the party and would talk things out with Mamata and other Trinamool leaders. But he maintained that he hadn't done anything wrong; it was Mamata, instead, who did a volte-face when she failed to like the berth offered her by the Prime Minister. By taking her anger out on him, Mamata had only delayed the Trinamool's entry into the Cabinet, Sudip said.

"I will give my side of the sto-



Mamata and Sudip: What next?

ry, and leave it to the people to decide what to believe. But I won't immediately go public with the inside story. It's an in-

ternal matter of the party, and Mamata is my leader," he added.

Sudip's caution is not misplaced. He hasn't spoken to Mamata after the fiasco. He isn't sure either what stories she is being "fed by some senior party leaders".

"I want to clear the air. I will start with party workers in my constituency," Sudip told a close associate on Monday morning.

But Mamata isn't swayed. "He is up to some other trick. Let it be on record that he was not deputed to the PMO to fix Cabinet

berths for the Trinamool. He is lying," Mamata said.

"Sudip has exposed himself not only to the party, but also to the BJP. The matter is with the disciplinary committee. I won't talk to him," she added.

The BJP, too, has washed its hands of the mess. It is no longer willing to back Sudip at Mamata's expense. BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu con-

veyed to state party president Tathagata Roy on Sunday night that the BJP should firm up its ties with Mamata at the state

level while the NDA leadership handled the matter at the national level.

Party general secretary Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said the BJP wouldn't have anything to do with Trinamool MPs without talking to Mamata. "For us, Trinamool means Mamata. So despite the hiccup, Mamata is returning to the Cabinet; and the MoS berths for her party would be decided by the PM in consultation with her. As for Sudip, I think the chapter is closed," Naqvi added.

g.p.p - GMC

# 98.8 No derailing Didi

26/5 But Mamata's anarchic genius should not be shackled by ministerial responsibility ✓

**M**AMATA BANERJEE is ensconced in an almighty tantrum, and all is well with the world. Thank heavens. For a while there she had us worried. In the Budget session of Parliament she struck us as uncharacteristically mild-mannered. In the days following Prime Minister Vajpayee's announcement that he'd be reshuffling his ministerial pack, she struck us as shockingly accommodating. During his Manali sojourn he only had to indicate that the Trinamool Congress chief could be returning to his Cabinet—and she immediately conveyed her gratitude for his kind statement of intent and bid her travel agent to get her on a flight to Delhi. What did the lady think she was doing? Not a screech, no histrionics... what was going on? Was she sobering into political irrelevancy? In these times of vanishing certitudes, did she not know that her shrill rhetoric and theatrics were among the few constants in Indian politics?

As it happens, we needn't have worried. It was simply an aberration. Didi is back to her old, reassuring self. She is angry. She is brimming with unreason. She wants to rewrite the rules

of parliamentary democracy; the prime minister, said her spokesperson on Saturday, had no right to consider Sudip Bandopadhyay for a ministerial berth, it is the Trinamool's prerogative to decide which of its MPs is sworn into the council of ministers. Certainly, the signs are promising, this is the Mamata Banerjee we know. She will live to fight another day. The streets of Calcutta will once again witness her famous fights to stir, if not shake, the ruling Left Front. The hallowed precincts of Parliament could once again see a vintage Mamata antic — remember when she arrived in Parliament on one occasion, bandaged and stretchered? Elections in West Bengal will once again come alive with her shifting alliances and her allegations of electoral malpractice.

To smother this creativity by burdening Mamata Banerjee with ministerial responsibility and its attendant niceties would be cruel. No, she must remain free and unfettered. Unless, of course, the prime minister in his infinite wisdom decides to carve out a separate ministry for Eastern Railways just for her.

Supporters rally behind Trinamul leader

1-1 26/5 9-P.P. DMC

# Mamata feted, boos for Advani ✓

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, May 25: Many of Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee's decisions in the past have dismayed her party colleagues — quitting the Vajpayee ministry after the Tehelka revelations, teaming up with the Congress for the 2001 Assembly election only to break again.

Not this time. Trinamul supporters rallied behind Mamata as she and leaders close to her weighed the options for dealing with rebel MP Sudip Bandopadhyay.

The combative mood was summed up by Shakti Mondal, a district leader who was in the steady stream of supporters from outside Calcutta to Mamata's home or the party's new office.

"We may be small compared to them (the BJP), but we do not lack self-respect or dignity," Mondal said.

Whoever wrote the script that disintegrated into a farce last evening when Trinamul did not join the ministry — and authorship is being attributed to deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani — grossly misread the consequences.

Advani has opposed Mamata's re-entry in the past and, having given in, may have wanted to



Mamata: Pride in place

scuttle it by insisting that Bandopadhyay, who has played footsie with senior BJP leaders, would also have to be brought in — whether she agreed or not.

She did not and neither got in. If this were Advani's intention in the first place — to stop her from returning, knowing full well that Mamata would not swallow Sudip, however her desperation to become a minister — he has succeeded, though only for the moment.

But, at least in Bengal, the applause for the success cannot be heard. The ploy a section of the BJP leadership used has a stink that is offensive to all nostrils.

Mamata's supporters were today chanting slogans, urging her to "teach the BJP a lesson".

Advani and BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu were the butts of scorn for what party functionaries saw as their role in the plot to break Trinamul.

"Mamata showed us how to fight for dignity. If she had not stood up and spurned the offer of ministry, Advani and company would have broken Trinamul," said Mala Roy, the party's women wing president.

Mamata chose to savour her moment behind closed doors, in the company of relatives, sketching or crooning.

The song coming out of Delhi sounded somewhat different. Finding himself in a spot — those who have rebelled against Mamata have only melted away, Ajit Panja being one example — Bandopadhyay called for unity.

"If something has happened, it has to be repaired," he said.

It is going to take some repairing because the scramble for his plum Calcutta Northwest Lok Sabha seat, with the election due next year, has already started as the leadership considers whether to renominate him.

Calcutta mayor Subrata Mukherjee, now one of Mamata's close advisers, said about her plans: "She will first fix an appointment (with Vajpayee) and leave for Delhi." That will be after the Prime Minister returns from his trip to Europe, starting Tuesday.

# Mamata blocks Sudip's entry into Cabinet

25 MAY 2003

## STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 24. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today succeeded in preventing Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay from becoming a Union minister, but in the process had to digest the "insult" of not being sworn in as a minister too.

The Trinamul Congress had to stay away from tonight's swearing-in ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan following Miss Banerjee's faxed message to the Prime Minister that Mr Bandopadhyay be dropped as MoS. Mr Bandopadhyay was to get the railways portfolio while the coal ministry was being offered to the Trinamul chief.

Peeved at the fact that the BJP didn't bother to consult her while choosing Mr Bandopadhyay as

the second minister from the party, Miss Banerjee convened a meeting of the working committee early this morning and decided to put an end to Mr Bandopadhyay's ministerial prospects.

Party sources said her decision centred around four things: first, disgust at the fact that she had been offered the coal ministry even when she had wanted rural development or surface transport; second, her failure to have Mr Akbar Ali Khondkar as the second minister; thirdly, her heartburn because of the BJP's decision to allot railways to Mr Bandopadhyay and finally the BJP's move to keep her in the dark on the second ministerial slot.

That her political stock has hit

rock-bottom can be gauged from the fact that she had to cancel last evening's flight as she didn't receive any call from Delhi. She reportedly called up Mr Bandopadhyay last evening to tell him that the BJP hadn't offered her a berth. He then told her that he would talk to the BJP leadership.

Late last night BJP president Mr M Venkaiah Naidu telephoned her to say that she was being made a minister. In the midst of this, however, Mr Bandopadhyay too had got the Prime Minister's call congratulating him for the same thing. This prompted Miss Banerjee to convene the working committee meeting, with its sole purpose of blocking his entry into the government. Given this, Miss Banerjee decided to send a message to

the Prime Minister. It stated that Mr Bandopadhyay shouldn't be made a minister and that the Trinamul Congress chief should have been informed about a second such berth.

After more than an hour's wait, Miss Banerjee got a call from Mr Naidu. Mr Naidu told her that discussions would be made with her at an appropriate time and that induction of the Trinamul Congress into the ministry was being kept in abeyance.

Miss Banerjee visited an ailing Ajit Panja at a city nursing home, apparently to pre-empt Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay from influencing Mr Panja to split the party. Miss Banerjee, after two years, decided to call on Mr Panja, having sensed that she is losing ground in the parliamentary party.

## 'Decision damaging for party'

### STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 24. — A shocked Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay said today that the Trinamul Congress working committee decision will cause untold damage to the party.

Mr Bandopadhyay, whose hobnobbing with the BJP top brass made Miss Mamata Banerjee jittery, asserted that he will continue to maintain cordial relations with Mr LK Advani, Mr Pramod Mahajan and Mr Venkaiah Naidu even if it amounts to incurring further displeasure of the Trinamul chief. "I am grateful to them for

the solidarity they had expressed. I talked to them after having learnt about our party decision. I am happy with their clarifications," Mr Bandopadhyay said. Asked about Miss Banerjee's rigid stand against his induction, Bandopadhyay said, "It's the Prime Minister's prerogative to form his council of ministers."

Mr Bandopadhyay argued that today's decision has greatly reduced the Trinamul's credibility and the BJP leadership has taken notice of that. Asked why he didn't attend today's party working committee meeting he said he had not been invited.

Sudip Jaiswami Mananta: The feud in Trinamul Congress intensified after the Cabinet reshuffle tonight with an upset Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay during party chief Miss Mamata Banerjee to take disciplinary action against him, adds PTI.

Miss Banerjee, whose entry into the Cabinet was stalled by Miss Banerjee, because of her and order of law and order Minister's appointment to the Prime Minister's office. The Deputy Minister's appointment to anti-party activity, that it is very unfortunate. I want to know what crisis have committed."

# Crisis in Trinamool

By Our Special Correspondent ADI

**KOLKATA, MAY 24.** The Trinamool Congress, headed by Mamata Banerjee, faced a grave crisis today as Ms. Banerjee, billed as a certain entrant into the Vajpayee Government till Friday, opted out to quell a rebellion in her backyard.

Ms. Banerjee had cancelled her trip to Delhi after she learnt that the BJP leadership had mounted efforts — allegedly at the behest of the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani — to make the Trinamool chief whip, Sudip Bandyopadhyay, a Minister in the Central Ministry along with her.

Ms. Banerjee called an emergency meeting of the party's working committee this morning, which, after deliberating for three hours, faxed a letter to the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, expressing reservations about the manner in which the BJP leadership was trying to induct Mr. Bandyopadhyay into the Cabinet without her consent. "The proposed induction would go against the basic 'dharma' of coalition politics," she said.

The meeting recommended to the party's disciplinary committee to deal with the "anti-party activities" of Mr. Bandyopadhyay.

He had been lobbying for a berth for himself knowing Ms. Banerjee's reservations about him.

According to Trinamool sources, the BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, and the NDA convener, George Fernandes, later telephoned Ms. Banerjee during the day and assured her that no Trinamool MP would be inducted into the Cabinet without consulting her.

The Trinamool spokesperson, Pankaj Banerjee, told the media that the Prime Minister's office had informed Ms. Banerjee today that the induction of the Trinamool in the Cabinet would be kept in abeyance for the time being. The drama took a new turn last evening when Ms. Banerjee learnt that her *bete noire* Mr. Bandyopadhyay, too, had been offered a berth in the Government. Mr. Bandyopadhyay has been camping in Delhi ever since the Prime Minister announced the plan for a Cabinet reshuffle.

25 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

# Ajit Singh pulls out Ministers from Mayawati Govt.

By K.V. Prasad

**NEW DELHI, MAY 24.** The Rashtriya Lok Dal of Ajit Singh today decided to withdraw its five Ministers from the Mayawati-led Uttar Pradesh coalition Government, while keeping open the option of pulling out of it.

A day after his resignation as the Union Agriculture Minister, Ajit Singh, convened an emergency meeting of his 13 MLAs here which was attended by all except one, where it was decided that all the five Ministers — Anuradha Chaudhary, Babu Lal, Rokab Hamid, Tejpal Singh and Swami Omvesh — would hand over their resignations to the party chief.

Addressing a press conference at his residence, Mr. Ajit Singh said the decision on continuation of support to the Uttar Pradesh Government would be taken after a meeting of the par-



**The former Union Agriculture Minister, Ajit Singh, with his party MLAs at a press conference in New Delhi on Saturday.**

— Photo: Sandeep Saxena

ty office-bearers in the next few days.

However, reports from Lucknow suggest that withdrawal of support to the Mayawati Government was a foregone conclusion.

"In Uttar Pradesh, the Bahujan Samaj Party has an agree-

ment with the (BJP-led) alliance, if the alliance breaks there would be repercussions," Mr. Singh said.

He asserted that the Prime Minister had not asked him to put in his papers. On the contrary, he had sent in word that he would prefer to resign, if he had

to be shifted to another Ministry.

Reacting to reports that it was the criticism of Government policies that went against him, Mr. Singh said "not once" was he told by anyone about it. As regards his support for a separate Telengana, he said he had spoken in its favour even in the Lok Sabha.

On its part, the RLD has been demanding the creation of a separate Harit Pradesh, to be carved out from western Uttar Pradesh.

The former Agriculture Minis-

ter said the Government was "anti-farmer" and that he had exhausted all options of taking up their cause from within. He said the Vajpayee Government gave funds to bail out the Unit Trust of India and the Industrial Development Bank of India, but did not do enough to help drought-hit farmers.

While being in the Cabinet, he was able to secure some benefits for farmers and insisted it was his arguments that had seen the Government relax drought relief rules.

g.p.c. dok D.N.



# MAMATA SAYS NO AGAIN

24/5 HPI J.P.P. GMC  
Bid to pacify Didi insulted at PMO invitation to Sudip

Arindam Sarkar & HTC  
Kolkata/New Delhi, May 23

AFTER DECIDING to board the 9.30 am Jet Airways flight to Delhi on Saturday for the swearing-in, Mamata Banerjee late on Friday night decided against accepting a Cabinet berth since the PMO has sent Sudip Bandyopadhyay's name to the President to be inducted as minister of state for railways without consulting her.

Taking this as an attempt by the BJP to split the Trinamool parliamentary party, she said: "How can they send the name of a party MP without consulting me? Under the circumstance, it's not possible for me to accept a berth." All nine MPs, barring Sudip, are firmly behind her, Mamata claimed.

Well past midnight, Trinamool MPs were desperately trying to get NDA convenor George Fernandes to broker a truce.

The crisis in the Trinamool broke out around 9.40 pm when Sudip called up from Delhi to tell some party MPs that he had been asked by the PMO to be at the Rashtrapati Bhavan for the swearing-in.

Earlier in the day, all seemed to be going well for Mamata. She had received a call from the PMO at 9.30 am asking her to come to Delhi on Saturday. Sources said the Prime Minister might offer her civil aviation, but Mamata had expressed interest in rural development on the ground that it would help her take on the CPI(M).

At a meeting of her parliamentary party on Friday morning, she had decided against allowing any Trinamool MP into the Cabinet as minister of state (MoS) primarily because she



SUBHENDU GHOSH

**DISAPPOINTED:** Mamata Banerjee at a rally on Friday in Kolkata to protest against panchayat poll violence.

was angry with Sudip for lobbying with the BJP for a Cabinet berth.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Minister Ajit Singh put in his papers on Friday. Singh, who had been sounded to submit his resignation early in the day, finally complied only after threatening withdrawal of his RLD party's support to Mayawati.

He has convened a meeting of his party legislators in Delhi on Saturday to decide on the party's future strategy over its alliance with Mayawati and the NDA dispensation at the Centre. Ajit Singh's exit is set to pave way for the induction of BJP's UP leader Raj Nath Singh into the Cabinet.

Vajpayee had detailed discus-

sions with senior colleagues — Deputy PM, Finance Minister and Defence Minister apart from BJP president — till late into the night on allocation of portfolios to the new entrants. Sources said BJP MPs Prahalad Patel from Madhya Pradesh and Maheshvar Singh from Himachal Pradesh are among the new faces expected to be inducted as MoS.

24 MAY 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Mamata move embarrasses party MLAs

*Two copies @ 9.8x MB*

*5/5*

*18/5*

*(1) & P.P. TIME*

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, May 17. — In the belief that a mere boycott of the Budget session won't generate adequate heat in the Assembly, Miss Mamata Banerjee today directed all party MLAs not to accept pay and allowances during the boycott period.

That's not all. Trinamul MLAs will not be allowed to step into the Assembly premises during the boycott!

Anything else? Mr Pankaj Banerjee, leader of the opposition, Mr Sovandeb Chattopadhyay, Opposition chief whip, and Mr Subrata Mukherjee, mayor, MLA and PAC chairman, will have to surrender their official cars till the end of the boycott.

Financially speaking, an MLA is going to sacrifice about Rs 40,000 for boycotting the Assembly for 75 days.

All the 60 MLAs have been sent official instructions in this regard, while Mr Pankaj Banerjee, leader of the Opposition, has been asked to intimate the West Bengal Assembly Speaker about Trinamul's boycott decision.

The word in Trinamul is that a majority of the party MLAs are peeved at Miss Banerjee's move, describing it as yet another step towards "weakening the party and making it irrelevant in legislative politics". Many MLAs have expressed their reservations on the issue of whether or not they should sacrifice their pay, allowances and other benefits during the boycott period. The boycott is expected to be lifted after

## DON'Ts FOR LEGISLATORS

- Trinamul MLAs won't accept travel and medical allowances
- They will not accept House and standing committee attendance allowances
- They will not apply for reimbursement of telephone bills
- They will not stay at Banga Bhavan in Delhi
- They will not use coupons for railway travel
- They will not attend standing committee meetings

the Budget session ends on 31 July.

With today's move, Miss Banerjee has certainly embarrassed her party MLAs much more than the CPI-M as the latter is going to utilise the floor of the Assembly in a better way. Moreover, she has also put an end to her party's chances of nailing down the Marxists on the panchayat poll violence on the floor of the House.

Coupled with this, she found enough reason to cripple the MLAs financially in the belief that it would send a message to the Communists that Trinamul Congress is not after power and pelf.

A technical committee, comprising Mr Pankaj Banerjee, Mr Saugata Roy, Mr Sovandeb Chattopadhyay, Mr Kalyan Banerjee and Mr Subrata Bakshi, will supervise the legislative functions of the party.

18 MAY 2003

THE STATESMAN

# Mamata quits, party says no

State News Service

KOLKATA, May 15. — Miss Mamata Banerjee submitted her resignation as Trinamul Congress chief this evening. However, it was rejected by majority of the members at an emergency working committee meeting of the party late tonight.

Miss Banerjee was not present at the meeting which called for her continuance as Trinamul chief.

Earlier, party MLAs turned against their *Didi* in the wake of the worst-ever performance of the party in any rural poll and her tactics in its aftermath by questioning her decision to ask MLAs to boycott the Assembly. An incandescent Miss Mamata Banerjee hit back with a threat to "resign and form a new party". "There's no reason why I should continue as the Trinamul chief if I am to be questioned like this. I will resign. I will float a new Trinamul... for that, I don't need anybody."

MLAs toned down their criticism following this outburst and fell in line with her decision to boycott the Assembly, but not before Mr Nirbed Roy, Trinamul Youth president, who was one of those who had raised the issue, told her that he would resign as an MLA once the boycott is called off.

The boycott issue boiled over towards the end of the meeting. Everything was in order to begin with as the MLAs and four MPs she had asked to be present listened patiently to her post-mortem of the polls. The criticism began when she broached the idea of boycotting the Assembly as the Communists had done in 1972.

Mr Arunava Ghosh, MLA, asked her how long the boycott would continue and urged her to spell out the reasons the party could offer to the public for ending the boycott. She was about to respond when Mr Nirbed Roy questioned *Didi's* decision outright. "What of our party MPs and KMC councillors? And what about our panchayat representatives? If it's in solidarity with them... it sounds weird that they will function while MLAs won't land up."

Editorial: Bloodbath and after, page 8

# Bloodbath and after

Public opinion is Mamata's best bet

Mamata Banerjee is not the best of strategists. Current moves to reinduct her into the Union cabinet would have been unnecessary had she not insisted on the railway portfolio during the last reshuffle. Nitish Kumar has been allowed to go ahead with the railway bifurcation. She will now take what she gets as Trinamul is going through a lean patch after the assembly election and may fall apart if Mamata doesn't join forces with the NDA. She is faced with an equally tricky situation in the light of the widespread violence during panchayat elections that claimed more than 32 lives. The CPI-M has worked overtime to ensure that opposition is extinguished in the running of panchayats which are dens of politicised corruption and control substantial amounts of Central funds unaccounted for during the last 25 years. The Left Front has also made shameless use of the administrative machinery and appointed a chief electoral officer who speaks Alimuddin Street's language. The question is, what can Mamata do? There is every need to make the point that this panchayat poll was something of a joke in the sense that 20,000 seats went uncontested and large numbers of villagers watched helplessly as cadres ran amuck. But there is also the need to make the CPI-M answerable for the virtual collapse of police and administrative machinery.

The options before Mamata range from boycott of the assembly and resignation of Trinamul MLAs, to a call for another Bangla Bandh. Clearly, none of these measures will do her any good and may instead allow the CPI-M to get away easily after mounting a blood-stained hoax on the electorate. Nor does it help to appeal to the RSP and other disgruntled Left parties who have been insulted and abused by Big Brother to join a new anti-CPI-M front. Whatever the junior partners may do, they will not commit suicide and Alimuddin Street knows that. The panchayat elections have confirmed that the CPI-M has never been short on strategy to remain on power by hook or by crook, even as it needs to encourage a "friendly" Congress to get the better of Trinamul. Mamata can at best consider a counter-strategy to expose the Marxists who talk of peace in the city while cadres mount a bloodbath in the countryside. Public opinion against the cynical abuse of democratic principles is her best bet. She can make the best use of it.

# NC backs Hurriyat demand for talks

Statesman News Service

(AMMU, May 12. — The National Conference, an important constituent of the ruling NDA, today supported the Hurriyat demand of initiating an unconditional dialogue with them on the pattern of the Naga rebels talks.

Today's National Conference statement has surprised political analysts, as this party was one of the staunchest critics of the separatist conglomerate when it was in power.

Dr Mehboob Beig, National Conference provincial president, told a news conference in Srinagar today that there should not be any hesitation in talking to Kashmiri rebels, when the Centre had no problems in holding a dialogue with Naga rebels in and outside the country.

Supporting the Hurriyat stand of unconditional talks, Dr Beig said that the Centre's talks with mainstream politicians and parties would not bring about the desired peace and prosperity in the region. "The Centre has talked an umpteen number of times with Naga rebels in and outside the country. It should talk to Kashmir rebels also, using the same yardstick," he said.

Lashing out at the People's Democratic Party, which heads the coalition government in the state, Dr Beig wondered how Ms Mehbooba Mufti was criticising security forces, while her father, chief minister Mr Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, was congratulating them.

"This is a double standard. You can either be in the Government or the Opposition. You cannot fool people by your tricks. If you cannot deliver, step down. We are the single largest party and we can step in," he said, but hastened to add that his party would not topple the government, as it would fall under its own weight.

About Indo-Pak peace initiatives, the National Conference Kashmir province president said that the process, started by both the countries, was a fallout of the Iraq crisis. "Both the countries have toned down their rhetoric. New Delhi is raising cross-border terrorism for record purposes only, while Pakistan is not raising the Kashmir issue as vociferously as it used to," he said.

Dr Beig did not rule out pulling out of the ruling NDA. He said, they would think it over. "It depends upon the situation. We cannot rule out anything," he said.

13 MAY 2003

THE STATESMAN

# #010 Togadia charged with <sup>9 minutes</sup> damaging communal harmony <sup>279</sup>

By Mohammed Iqbal

**AJMER, APRIL 19.** The much-awaited hearing on the bail application moved by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad general secretary, Praveen Togadia — who has been in judicial custody since April 14 — was postponed till Monday by a sessions court here today after Mr. Togadia's lawyer sought time demanding the transcript of his allegedly inflammatory speeches recorded by the police.

The investigating authorities have slapped additional charges of damaging communal harmony and challenging the State Government's authority on the firebrand VHP leader, on the basis of his speeches delivered during a "Dharma Sabha" here on April 13 and elsewhere.

The bail plea came up this morning before the Additional Sessions Judge, Devendra Kachawa, as the District and Sessions Judge, Hari Singh Punia, was on leave. Bail was earlier denied to Mr. Togadia by a lower court which did not have the jurisdiction to deal with the charges of offence — punishable by life imprisonment — added by the prosecution.

Mr. Togadia's counsel, Onkar Singh Lakhawat, sought the court's direction for supplying the transcripts of speeches to

his client and asked for time to submit the judgments of higher courts as judicial precedents in this connection. The VHP has been claiming that Mr. Togadia's public speeches were quoted "out of context" to frame him on false charges.

However, the Public Prosecutor, Zafar Ahmed Khan, opposed the defence counsel's contention and pointed out that an accused had no right to get copies of evidence collected by the official agencies during the course of investigation, before the chargesheet was filed in court.

The judge posted the case for hearing on April 21 and directed the Public Prosecutor to bring the case diary as well as the transcripts of speeches to the court on that date for "facilitating an appropriate order". Meanwhile, about a dozen Sangh Parivar functionaries from Gujarat — who had arrived here on Friday — returned to Ahmedabad today after the majority of them failed to meet Mr. Togadia in jail. They included the BJP MLA from Godhra and the former Bajrang Dal leader, Hareesh Bhatt, and the general secretary of the VHP's Gujarat unit, Dilip Trivedi.

"We had come here to extend our moral support to Mr. Togadia, but the prison authorities

did not allow us to meet him," Mr. Bhatt told this correspondent. He said Mr. Togadia's "struggle" would be taken to its "logical end" and a new team of VHP and BJP activists would arrive in Ajmer on Monday.

The district administration is keeping a close watch on the activities of outsiders after its crackdown on local VHP activists. The Additional Superintendent of Police, P.C. Nyola, said the law and order situation in the town was fully under control and no one would be allowed to vitiate the atmosphere.

## Ketan Parekh granted bail

**KOLKATA, APRIL 19.** Leading Mumbai stockbroker and accused in the Calcutta Stock Exchange scam, Ketan Parekh, was granted bail by the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, S.C. Misra, today. Mr. Parekh, allegedly involved in the Rs. 120-crore Calcutta Stock Exchange scam in March 2001, was granted bail as the police failed to file the charge-sheet against him during the period.

The bail was granted on two sureties of Rs. 12,000 each on condition that he should report to police once a week. — UNI

20 APR 2003

THE HINDU

# Govt. machinery geared up to tackle SARS

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 6. As the killer pneumonia infection — severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) — continued to increase its global spread, the Centre today made it mandatory for all air passengers to furnish their health and travel details in the prescribed proforma upon arrival at any international airport in the country.

Addressing a press conference here after chairing a review meeting of officials of her Ministry and the Airports Authority of India, the Union Health Minister, Sushma Swaraj, said there was no need to press the panic button as the Government health machinery was fully geared up to tackle the deadly viral infection.

The apprehensions of a SARS infection in Bhopal had turned out to be "false" and it was a case of plain pneumonia, she added.

Denying that the Government response had been slow, Ms. Swaraj said it had acted with "supersonic speed" to despatch a specialist team from Delhi, get the lab tests done and make the results available in less than a day.

"We have taken all precautions to meet any eventuality. We have time and again checked our preparedness and identified the hospitals in all major cities where an infected person can be treated in isolation."

Immigration officials have been advised to wear masks and gloves as a precautionary measure.

And health officers from the Directorate-General of Health Services would be posted at the immigration counters to go through the proformas of the passengers.

"It will help us in screening their symptoms and also getting to know which countries a passenger has been to in the past week as the deadly virus has an incubation period of about a week," she said adding that all Indian embassies and missions have been advised on the SARS. The Minister said that a set of primers, an essential item in the diagnostic kit, had been imported from Germany and would be shared by the National Institute of Communicable Diseases and the National Institute of Virology, Pune.

The Infectious Diseases Hospital here had also been asked to remain fully geared up to meet any situation.

Asked if the high-level delegations from Singapore and Sri Lanka, slated to arrive here this week, would also be asked to fill up the proformas, she said: "Anybody and everybody who arrives at any of the international airport will be required to do so".

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THE HINDU

# 'Parties must unite against CPM'

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, April 29. — Trinamul Congress chief Miss Mamata Banerjee today said that all parties irrespective of political affiliations should unite to fight against CPI-M terror in rural Bengal. She was addressing a press meet organised by the Kolkata Press Club this afternoon.

"By using brute force to win the polls the CPI-M actually proposes to set up one party rule in the state. This trend is dangerous as it will crush the democratic fabric of the Constitution. All political parties must unite to combat this," she said.

She said the CPI-M heckling not just Trinamul workers but also those of the RSP and Forward Bloc, including one RSP minister. In many areas in north Bengal, CPI-M cadre had forced RSP workers to withdraw their names from the panchayat polls. "There has never been a single incident in the state when Left Front allies could not file their nominations or were forced to withdraw themselves from the election battle."

Miss Banerjee reiterated that CPI-M leaders were scared of Trinamul Congress workers and that was the reason why 23,000-odd party workers could not file their nominations. In fact, Trinamul Congress workers were not allowed to file

nominations than in more than 70 per cent of the seats won by them in the last Panchayat polls.

She maintained that the CPI-M was ruling the state with the help of the police and the administration and without their active support it was not possible for it to win polls. Most of the district magistrates, superintendents of police, OCs and other petty officers had become party cadre and would be too happy to carry out the instructions of Alimuddin Street.



Miss Mamata Banerjee

Miss Banerjee said that she would continue with her demand to clamp internal emergency under Article 356 in the state. Commenting on Mr Pranab Mukherjee's statement that the situation in West Bengal was not fit for an internal emergency to be declared, she said that as the Congress was "a friend of the CPI-M it was not possible for the party to press this demand."

"If the Congress in Delhi assures support to the NDA government on this issue, I will be able to convince it to impose internal emergency in the state."

### Jalpaiguri visit

Miss Mamata Banerjee is scheduled to visit Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar tomorrow to campaign for the panchayat polls.

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30 APR 2003

THE STATESMAN

TRINAMUL CHIEF DOES A VOLTE-FACE

# We are part of NDA: Mamata

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 20. — Having said recently that Trinamul Congress was not a “part and parcel of NDA”, Miss Mamata Banerjee today expressed supreme confidence in the alliance, stating that her party had never left the NDA.

According to the Trinamul chief, her party had always been supportive of NDA policies and she expressed satisfaction that both the BJP and Trinamul were joining hands for the Tripura Assembly polls.

“In order to combat the CPI-M and Congress, we should strengthen the alliance and focus on its policies. Right now, there’s no option but to support the NDA. We have an alliance with the BJP and we want to decimate the ruling Communists in Tripura. The Congress has always been the CPI-M’s B-team. We will expose the Congress’s hypocrisy. It is hand-in-glove with the Communists at the Centre and is engaged in a mock battle with the CPI-M in Tripura”, the Trinamul chief thundered.



While talking to The Statesman on 18 February, Miss Banerjee said that the Trinamul would not be a part of the NDA till the Eastern Railway division issue was satisfactorily resolved

Miss Banerjee feels the party’s stand of not being a part of the NDA stems from the developments regarding the ER division. “Barring that, how can we be labelled as a party not with the NDA? Moreover, we cannot join hands with the CPI-M. Neither can we do so with the Congress, given the excellent rapport Mrs Sonia Gandhi enjoys with Mr Somnath Chatterjee”, the Trinamul chief quipped.

Reports that Mr Venkaiah Naidu, BJP president, and defence minister Mr George Fernandes would share the dais at an election rally in Tripura with her, has added to her satisfaction. The rally is scheduled for Sunday.

Miss Banerjee’s expression of solidarity with the NDA follows her assertion, few days ago, that her party wasn’t with the NDA

any longer. While talking to The Statesman on 18 February, Miss Banerjee had stated that she wasn’t in a position to change the party working committee decision that Trinamul Congress would not be part of the NDA till the ER division issue was satisfactorily resolved. Today’s remarks run contrary to what she had stated earlier.

# Uddhav heir to Sena throne

HT Correspondent  
Mumbai, January 30

BAL THACKERAY hates democracy and has said so publicly. But, succumbing to the Election Commission's directive to parties to conduct organisational elections, the Shiv Sena on Thursday elected Bal Thackeray's son Uddhav as its new working president.

Thackeray, however, continues to be the Shiv Sena chief, even if he did not face the intra-party electioneering.

The election was held at Mahabaleshwar, near Satara, as part of the party's two-day conclave. Names of other party office bearers and second rung leaders, called *up-Neta* in the party, would soon be made public through the party mouthpiece *Sqamna*.

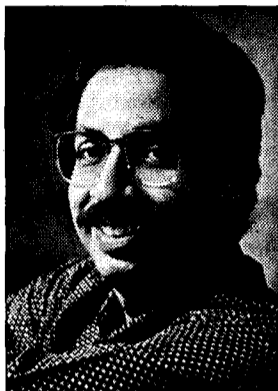
At Mahabaleshwar, however, Thackeray said there was complete democracy in the party. "There is no autocracy in the Shiv Sena. Uddhav has been named working president through the democratic procedure.

The decision was not imposed on the party but has been taken after consultations with everyone concerned. I would never force my son on the party," Thackeray said.

Uddhav's election amounts to Thackeray anointing a successor and Raj Thackeray is probably out of the reckoning.

Thackeray also said that the decision would not create any rift between Uddhav and Raj.

The power struggle within the Shiv Sena had led to bitterness between the two last year when Raj publicly expressed his



**Uddhav Thackeray**  
*Keeping the EC happy?*

displeasure over Uddhav's handling of party affairs.

Both Uddhav and Raj play an active role in the party's affairs. A majority of party workers, however, prefer Raj over Uddhav whom they consider wishy washy.

This is the third time that Thackeray has given in to the rule of the law.

The first time was during the Emergency when all non-political parties were banned. Fearing Government action, Thackeray propped up his friends as party president, secretary and treasurer. But, things returned to normal once the emergency was lifted.

He had also succumbed to the Seshan wave and published a party manifesto, almost overnight, naming a token president and secretary, days before elections to the State legislature. But, he reasserted himself after Seshan's term ended.

This time though, an ailing Thackeray seems to have become distrustful of old faithfuls like Manohar Joshi and Narayan Kane, both of whom he resents for their clout.

# Mamata cry for economic emergency

## Bid to woo front partners

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Jan. 6: Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee today urged the anti-Left forces in Bengal to unite before the panchayat polls and pleaded the smaller partners in the Left Front to desert Big Brother CPM.

Addressing a Trinamul rally on the Brigade Parade Grounds here — her first major public meeting at the venue more than three years after she unveiled the much-hyped 'Bengal package' — she asked Centre to slap an "economic emergency" on the state.

But the show of NDA support for Mamata at the rally was, at best, token. Samata Party leader and defence minister George Fernandes showed up but none of the BJP's central leaders did. State BJP president Tathagata Roy hardly made up for the absence of his high command.

Mamata took on the state government — for once without mentioning former chief minister Jyoti Basu — and hinted that she would join hands with the state BJP for the rural body polls scheduled for May.

Launching a scathing attack on the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee government, she said: "*Baam-front sharikder bolchhee. Kiser ato moho? Shorey aashun* (I urge the Left Front partners to snap out of their CPM infatuation)."

Like in so many of her public speeches, Mamata pleaded all political forces inimical to the CPM to come together.

From Bapi Sen, the Calcutta police sergeant who gave his life for an unknown girl who was being teased by drunk constables

on the night of December 31, to the government's cash crunch, water tax, higher stamp duty, unemployment, distress sale of paddy, closed factories, power tariff hike, deaths of children in hospital, and CPM "atrocities" — Mamata left nothing out.

Fernandes criticised the front for its inability "to improve the quality of life and woo investment".

The state BJP chief emphasised the need for an alliance with Trinamul to unseat the Left.

"In the panchayat polls, we will fight 1:1," Mamata said, hinting at an alliance with the state BJP. She demanded that an "economic emergency" be imposed in the state and urged the Centre to intervene.

Sudip Bandopadhyay, the former Trinamul chief whip in the Lok Sabha, was present at the rally despite his strained relations with the party chief. But, perhaps for the first time, he was not invited to speak at a party meet.

Thousands of Trinamul supporters converged on the ground from various points in the city and outside this morning. Private buses, trucks and matador vans packed with supporters triggered a traffic chaos. Mamata arrived at 1.45 pm. The ground was full by then.

Trinamul claimed 500,000 people attended the rally. The police put the estimate at around 100,000.

Front chairman Biman Bose came down heavily on Mamata for organising the rally on a working day. "She had earlier promised not to hold rallies and meetings on weekdays because they disrupt life. She failed to keep her promise."



Mamata Banerjee greets George Fernandes at the rally. Picture by Pabitra Das

## BJP ties on the brink

SUVRO ROY

Calcutta, Jan. 6: The BJP high command sidestepped Mamata's return to Brigade. Though the Trinamul Congress continues to be an ally, the signal was clear: she is on the margin and not as trusted.

Mamata Banerjee and her men jiggled their networks in Delhi many a time in the past few weeks to get central BJP leaders to address the rally but the efforts bore no fruit.

Defence minister George Fernandes was there but Mamata's efforts to show the electorate in the run-up to the panchayat elections that she was still valued in Delhi's power circles turned a damp squib.

The absence of the central BJP leaders from the rally also revealed the real position of state party president Tathagata Roy in Delhi.

The Tapan Sikdar-Muzaffar Khan combine, the rebel group in the state BJP, now appears to have a better access to the central leadership. Mamata and a section of her party had hoped that

Roy would help them secure Delhi's blessings. That did not happen.

The Trinamul chief tried hard to rope in a star BJP leader to attend today's rally. But her move was countered by the Sikdar-Khan group, which has been accusing her of "humiliating" the BJP and the NDA leadership by walking in and out of the ruling coalition in the Centre.

Through December, Mamata had tried to get either Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee or his deputy, L.K. Advani, to attend the rally. When it became clear that neither would be available, she drew up a second list, which included BJP president Venkaiah Naidu and general secretary Arun Jaitley.

When these efforts failed as well, she made a desperate bid for another BJP general secretary — and the party's most prominent minority face — Muktar Abbas Naqvi.

"The central BJP's rejection shows it has a long memory. In the past, Mamata had on several occasions played Opposition party to us and the NDA," said a state BJP leader.

## Trinamul support for PDS bandh

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Jan. 6: Mamata Banerjee today declared her party's support for the 12-hour bandh called by the Party for Democratic Socialism on January 10.

The PDS is breakaway CPM and "it is our responsibility to strengthen the outfit so that we can form a grand alliance in future with such breakaway leftist groups," she said at the Trinamul Congress rally today.

PDS general secretary Samir Putatunda welcomed Mamata's gesture. "We want support from all anti-CPM and secular democratic parties for the dawn-to-dusk bandh," he said.

"We have called the bandh to protest the government's decision to increase court fees and impose water tax, the hike in power tariff and various other issues," Putatunda added.

Mamata's offer to support the PDS-sponsored bandh came as a surprise to the political circles. Earlier, she had said Trinamul would back the SUCI call for a Bengal bandh on January 27.

Political observers said Mamata will stand to gain in the panchayat polls in the event of an alliance with the PDS as it has a strong base in South 24-Parganas. Putatunda happens to be a former secretary of the CPM's South 24-Parganas unit.

Mamata is apparently keen on roping in fringe CPM supporters who have a soft corner for the PDS.

Mamata's support to the bandh is also being interpreted in political circles as her reluctance to forge an alliance with the SUCI and a desire to unite breakaway Marxists under its banner.