

Bengali chauvinism on display



Sunil Gangopadhyay and members of the Bangla Bhasha Shahid Smarak Samiti forcibly put up Bengali signboards at a shop in Chowringhee on Wednesday. (Below) Samiti members doing more of the same. — Shyamal Maitra

KOLKATA, June 23. — Linguistic chauvinism, overtly displayed by certain pro-Bangla associations in the heart of the city this afternoon, spread panic among the unsuspecting and "apasanskritik" traders who were "arrogant" enough to defy "appeals" made by "honourable men" and self-professed language cops.

Led by celebrities such as Sunil Gangopadhyay, Surajit Sengupta, Pratul Mukhopadhyay, Tapan Mitra and Ashok Dasgupta, activists of Nabajagaran, Bhasha O Chetana Samiti and Bhasha Shahid Smarak Samiti painted slogans in Bangla on the walls and windows of shops sporting "Anglicised" signboards.

The agitators assembled at the foot of Lenin's statue at Esplanade. Slogans of "Banglay chai (we want signboards in Bangla)", blaring from microphones, startled the "culprits" (shopkeepers), who had allegedly ignored "pleas" made by the associations at a similar gathering on 19 May: that

the shops must put up signboards in Bangla along with other languages.

After playing a couple of songs apparently to promote their cause, the language cops proceeded towards the KC Das confectioners. Near-violent by now, the mob painted "Banglay chai" on the walls and glass windows. Pamphlets, demanding immediate inclusion of the "ignored language" on signboards, were

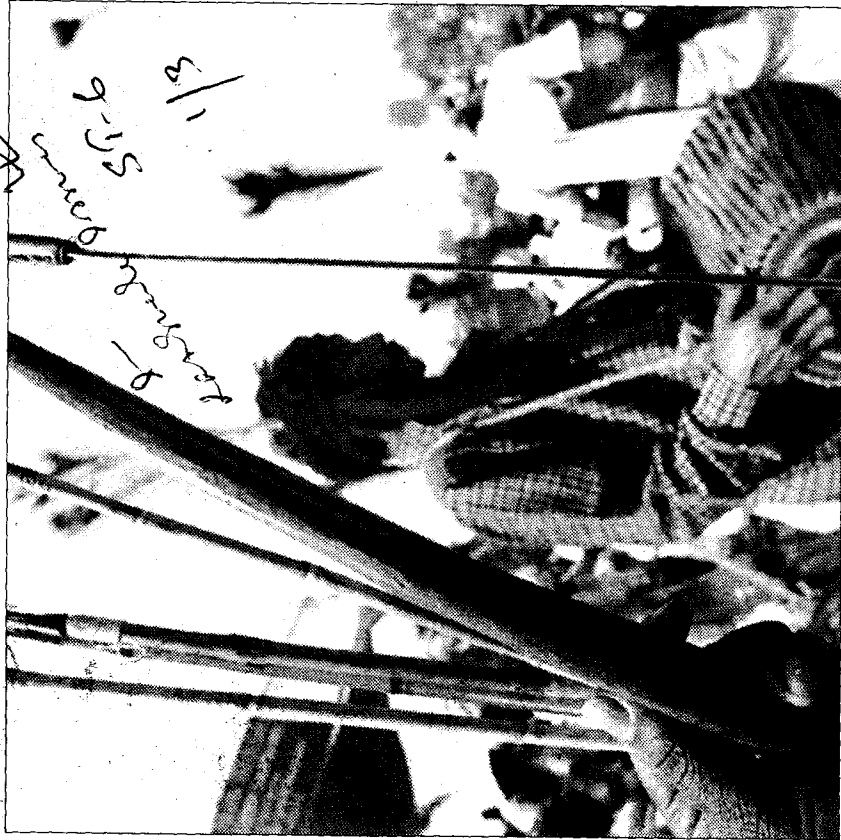


past all over. Sunil Gangopadhyay himself tried to stick some posters as well. Shops alongside JL Nehru Road were not spared blotches of red paint either, red symbolising "the blood of martyrs confronting the social evil of language hierarchy".

The same author had some years ago condemned the blackening of non-Bangla billboards at Kolkata Book Fair by another group.

Mr Santanu Sen of VIP World, one of the shops targeted, looked shaken. The activists threatened to ransack the shop if he failed to put up a Bangla signboard in three days. "Well-known personalities were rude to us. They wanted to know why the name of our shop was in English," he said. Similar grievances were expressed by other shopkeepers. Many wanted to know whether there was a law that makes putting up of multilingual signboards mandatory. Mr Rajiv Kumar, DC (central) said: "There was no violence. Therefore, no arrests were made." — SNS

Govt takes credit for Santhali inclusion



Tribals practise before participating in a victory rally celebrating the inclusion of Santhali in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. In Kolkata on Sunday. — The Statesman

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Feb. 29. — Not one to be outdone by the Centre in wooing tribal voters, the state government today virtually took to the campaign trail, zeroing in on the tribal population.

While the backward classes minister, Mr Upen Kisku, in the course of a *Bijoy michhil* this morning, gave the CPI-M full credit for inclusion of Santhali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, the chief minister this evening claimed the state had done a lot to ensure access to justice for the tribal population.

"The West Bengal government has in a recent notification, made tribals, retrenched workers and economically backward classes exempt from paying court fees. This is to ensure equal opportunity for all in securing justice, as directed by the Constitution," Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said. He was speaking at the inauguration of the fourth All India Meet of State Legal

Services Authorities. Mr Bhattacharjee claimed that Lok Adalats and Legal Services Authorities were very active in the state and enjoyed the confidence of the people.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Justice of India, Mr VN Khare, said the concept of Lok Adalats should be spread to the remotest corners in order to reduce pressure off the courts.

At the *Bijoy michhil*, Mr Kisku claimed that Santhali language will be introduced in higher secondary level also. However, the Higher Secondary Council said it has no plan to introduce Santhali as a medium as it does not have enough experts for the purpose. Obviously, the minister was eyeing the thirty lakh tribal population in the state.

The minister who was speaking at a rally organised by the Adibasi Socio-Educational and Cultural Association, said: "The language has already been introduced at the primary level and the first batch of students using Santhali as a medi-

um will appear in the Madhyamik examinations to be held this year. In case of Higher Secondary, the syllabus is being drawn up."

However, queries at the Council revealed Santhali already exists as a second language. At the same time the Council president Prof. Jyotirmoy Mukhopadhyay added: "We do not have any formal request for introducing question papers in Santhali. Even if there is a request, we are not in a position to do so because we do not have enough experts on different subjects in the language to set up questions and correct answer scripts." He said that the council was thinking of revising the existing syllabus. ASECA had organised the victory rally on the occasion of inclusion of Santhali in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Mr Kisku went on to claim that that the ruling CPI-M was the only party that had led the struggle for the recognition of the Santhali language. He also claimed that the state government was doing its utmost for its progress.