

Reasons that helped Left Front regain power

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writes from Kolkata

THE results of the Assembly Elections in West Bengal has come as a surprise to quite a few including some of the senior CPI(M) leaders. Amongst them are the present Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya and his predecessor, Mr. Jyoti Basu. They just did not believe that the Left Front would come back to power with 198 seats. But that has happened.

Since Sunday afternoon, the Trinamul Congress leaders including Mamata Banerjee have been trying to find out the cause of such a down slide. The Trinamul Congress supremo had calculated and had informed all her close associates that the party in alliance with the Congress would finish with 165 seats. From where did she get such an idea? As one Trinamul Congress leader said on Monday, "It is a criminal error to judge the fate of elections by the crowd following."

So what have been the faults of the Trinamul Congress or for that matter where did it all go wrong for the opposition? If one were to analyze each and every aspect on a point by point basis then the picture would become crystal clear.

a) The organisational set up of the Left Front was far more active

than the opposition. The Trinamul Congress candidates did not have the ability to match their opponents at the grassroots level. As a result in most of the constituencies, the agents of the Trinamul Congress and the Congress had to beat a hasty retreat from the polling booths. A senior Trinamul leader on Monday said, "We lacked the determination to win an election. At most of the places, our agents were forced to leave the booth by two in the afternoon. The Left Front then resorted to false voting. However, I am not giving this as an excuse. Had our base been stronger in the rural areas, we would have definitely won quite a number of seats. We tried to win an election on emotion. But then polls are won by the better organised side." He probably could not have made a better analysis.

b) The image of Buddhadev Bhattacharya and the personal attacks that Mamata Banerjee made on him while campaigning has been another factor. During his entire campaigns, Bhattacharya refrained from personally attacking the Trinamul Congress supremo. He attacked the policies of the Trinamul Congress. There were a number of times when reporters had asked him as to why he did not make any comments on Mamata Banerjee herself. The West Bengal

Chief Minister always said, "My fight is against the Trinamul Congress and not with Mamata Banerjee." On the other had Ms. Banerjee called Bhattacharya a 'mafia don', a stooge and puppet of Jyoti Basu. On Monday, while travelling across the city, one could frequently hear remarks, "She had to pay for throwing mud on Bhattacharya personally." In fact, people of this state could never accept Mamata Banerjee for her loose talk. A much more dignified Bhattacharya was a better Chief Minister for them. This was reflected in the votes of the urban and semi-urban areas. The CPIM managed to win 12 out of the 28 seats in Kolkata. A month before the elections, even Anil Biswas the CPIM secretary, had said, "We would, if we, win in five constituencies in Kolkata."

c) The alliance with the Congress definitely had its effect. The floating voters shifted their allegiance to the CPIM and their allies. It is a debatable matter whether the BJP-Trinamul Congress combination could have fared better. What it is without any doubt that at many places, the chances of Trinamul Congress candidates were sabotaged by Congress workers. And the same occurred with the Congress candidates at a number of constituencies. The Assembly seat of Malda

is just a proof. Here the Trinamul Congress and the Congress had a 'friendly fight'. The Trinamul Congress was represented by Krishnendu Banerjee while A.B.A. Gani Khan Choudhury of Congress nominated Gautam Chakrabarty. The net result was that the CPIM nominee Samar Kundu scraped through by a margin of 2378 votes. The Malda constituency has always been a stronghold for the Congress. The CPIM this time won it after a gap of 15 years. Similarly in a number of other places, the Congress and the Trinamul Congress have failed to work together even though, their leaders had formed an understanding. This communication gap prevented them from putting up a good show. On the other hand, if the BJP and the Trinamul Congress would have fought the elections together then this communication problem would not have existed. The BJP, for their own survival in West Bengal, would have never acted as a hindrance to the Trinamul Congress.

d) Yes, the CPIM reportedly resorted to booth jamming and false voting at a number of places. But then, these cannot be the only reason for the poor show of the Trinamul-Congress combine. The fact remains that the Trinamul Congress made a great blunder by leaving the BJP. The latter has

always been a source of funds for the Trinamul Congress leaders. By breaking the ties with the BJP, Mamata Banerjee completely alienated herself from the business class of Bengal. Industrialists are ready to accept the BJP with the Trinamul Congress as the substitute to the Left Front. However, they are not ready to allow the Congress to come back to power. That is why when the alliance broke, the industrial hierarchy of the state had shifted back to the CPIM. There is another reason for this shift. Buddhadev Bhattacharya's call for industrialisation of West Bengal. A number of top business tycoons including the presidents of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and the Indian Chamber of Commerce on Monday said that atleast they were happy to see Buddhadev Bhattacharya in the Chief Minister's chair. "He looks far dependable," said S.K. Todi, one of the top most businessmen in West Bengal. And everybody knows that it is the business houses that play an important role in the formation and success of any government.

e) The wrong choice of candidates by Mamata Banerjee is yet another cause.

She had the last say in the final selection of a candidate and as a result she made quite a few glaring

mistakes. She nominated people who had little experience of fighting an election. She gave too much importance to a few Congress MLAs who had joined the Trinamul Congress from the Congress. Moreover, she never respected the feelings of those that had worked tirelessly to set up a Trinamul Congress base in the districts and rural areas. The result was that the Trinamul Congress failed to put up a semblance of a fight in most of the rural areas. The Midnapore district is perhaps the perfect example. The district has 37 constituencies. In 1996, the CPIM had won 28, the Congress nine. This time, the figure is 32 and five. This just shows that the CPIM has eroded into the non-CPIM bases. The Trinamul has failed to do just that where the CPIM is strong.

Finally, the voting machinery. The CPIM cadres put up a splendid show in controlling booths all over the district. The Keshpur and Garbeta constituency has always been in the news for the last two years because of the violent struggle between the CPIM and the Trinamul Congress. However, it is the only district where the CPIM candidate Mr. Susanta Ghosh has won by a margin of over one lac vote.

Left Front now has a greater responsibility

Interview of **Buddhadev Bhattacharya** by The Daily Star Kolkata correspondent **Sakyasen Mitra**

HE looked a relaxed man on Monday. At seven in the morning, one managed to catch a glimpse of him sipping a cup of tea and glancing through the newspapers. Daughter Suchetana and wife Meera were as usual busy with the usual household chores. The two-roomed flat at Palm Avenue in south Kolkata never looked like the Chief Minister's residence. But then Buddhadev Bhattacharya himself does not think that a Chief Minister should be something extra-ordinary. "I am like any other normal person and I behave in the same manner," he said. His daily quota of cigarette, however, has suddenly gone up. He smokes amidst loud protests from Suchetana who is a founder-member of an anti-smoking body in the city. "How can I continue my tirade against smokers, if you smoke continuously," she tells her father. Time was the real problem on Monday, with calls coming in, flowers arriving. But then Bhattacharya, the quint-essential media man in the last six months, had time to answer quite a few questions.

The Daily Star (DS): So now you must be relaxed after all the tensions?

Buddhadev Bhattacharya (BB): I was not tense. We had been confident about winning. However, we did not imagine such a great victory. If you ask me, I had expected a figure of around 170 to 180 seats. This victory has now increased my tension. People have expressed their faith in us. So the responsibility has increased. There are a number of unfinished projects. They have to be completed immediately. And for that we in the Government would expect the opposition to co-operate. The elections are over and so we would like the bitterness to be forgotten. Let us all work together to create a new Bengal.

DS: What is the first thought that came to your mind after winning the elections?

BB: That there are still quite a large number of people who have not been satisfied with our performance. Our aim will be to appease them. On Sunday, while I was talking to a group of cadres I told them to go back to the roots and talk to the people. We have been elected by the people and as a result we should always cater to their needs.

DS: What will be your targets?

BB: One, to retain the agricultural growth. Secondly, to provide a more easier system of administration for the people. We have to be sympathetic for those who have voted for us. Thirdly, we are to go all out for Industrial Development. This is a sector that needs to be developed

immediately, as it would counter the problem of unemployment. We have also set targets for us in the IT industry. In the five years we would like West Bengal to be a forerunner in the IT sector. Then there is the education system that has to be improved. Every year, thousands of students from Bengal have to attend colleges and universities in various parts of India. We have to develop our system of education in West Bengal.

DS: Will you be as critical of the activities of the Left Front as you have been in the past six months?

BB: Definitely yes. Self-criticism is always necessary for improvement. If the workers of the Left Front think that by coming back to power again they have every right to enjoy themselves, then they are not needed. They now have a greater responsibility of fulfilling the dreams and aspiration of the people of West Bengal. We have to now delve deep into the problems of the people and solve them immediately.

DS: Five Ministers of the former Left Front Government have lost. Have they not been able to run their respective Ministries properly?

BB: In the Left Front we all take the responsibility of the defeats. We do not blame any individual. We feel that it is the failure of the Left Front which has led to the defeat of the five ministers. As I said a bit earlier, there is no scope for relaxation. We will have to give the same importance to all the departments.

DS: For the first time, the CPIM has failed to get a

singular majority. This time, the CPIM have got 144 seats compared to the 166 that they had in 1996. Would it influence the overall functioning of the Front?

BB: Such a thing will never happen. Our Front has lived through 24 years. There have been differences. However, everything has been solved across the table. We believe that a straight-forward discussion can find solutions to each and every problem. The Left Front does not consist of parties that quit the alliance at the drop of a hat. The CPIM has also never tried to be over-dominating. We have always tried to work jointly.

DS: No, I am asking you this simply because the Forward Bloc this time has asked for the post of the Deputy Chief Minister. How do you react to that?

BB: We have a Left Front Committee to look into all these aspects. If they want it, they will certainly raise the issue in the next meeting that will take place either today evening or tomorrow (Tuesday).

DS: So what do you think the policy of the opposition should be?

BB: It is for them to decide. We cannot comment on that. However, we would like a constructive criticism from their side. There are a number of opposition leaders who always project Bengal in poor light. What they fail to understand is that, by doing so they are also harming themselves and the state. They are turning away investors from the state and thereby depriving Bengal of development. I would like to state here that I want the full

co-operation of the Trinamul Congress and the other opposition parties to improve Bengal. After all isn't it the aim of all of us who are in the political playing field?



Buddhadev Bhattacharya

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All health information to keep you up to date

Always children first

Deafness in children

Deafness or loss of hearing is a global problem. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) there are at least 42 million people over the age of three years with at least moderate hearing disability in the world.

What are the common causes of deafness in children? There are essentially two main causes.

1. **Congenital causes:** This group consists of prenatal causes which affect the baby before birth e.g. Rubella, hereditary congenital abnormalities and parental causes which affect the baby during or immediately after delivery e.g. prematurity, oxygen deprivation.

2. **Acquired causes:** Acquired or post-natal causes afflict the child after birth. Major examples of such causes include severe jaundice, meningitis, drug-induced deafness as well as other potentially treatable causes such as fluid in the middle ear.

What are the normal hearing milestones?

It would certainly be useful for us to know what are the normal hearing milestones before we can fully appreciate what is abnormal. Although there are great variations between individuals, the following is a useful guide regarding a child's hearing milestones.

& 0-4 months, startles by loud noise

& 4-6 months, turns eyes toward sound

& 6-18 months, repeats simple words e.g. papa, mum mum, progressively follows instructions.

& Over 18 months, increasing verbal vocabulary able to speak in sentences by 30 months.

Children with hearing loss very rarely complain of hearing difficulties. These frequently present themselves in extremely subtle circumstances.

Auditory problems: The child may not respond to sounds, instructions and is unable to demonstrate the above mentioned developmental milestones.

Behavioral problems: The child may present with psycho-social problems such as inattentiveness, restlessness or withdrawal symptoms.

Speech problems: Poor articulation and delayed speech may be a sign of hearing impairment.

Because early intervention holds the key to maximizing a child's learning capability and better integration into society, the importance of early diagnosis of a child's hearing impairment cannot be overemphasized.

It is for this fact that the parent of the child is undoubtedly the most important person in facilitating early intervention. Do not delay in seeking assistance from your doctor if you suspect that your child has hearing difficulties.

Who's most likely to be bitten by another person? Dentists seem a reasonable guess, but in 1977 when a doctor at the University of Miami School of Medicine simply asked people who came to the emergency room with a bite what they did for a living, the most common answer was, police officers.

Tomorrow: Around the world.

Facts about human bites

A human bite isn't as dangerous as a dog bite; wrong. Because so few people take human bites seriously, they may be even more dangerous. The human mouth is full of all kinds of microorganisms that can invade your bloodstream if the bite breaks the skin. It can be just as dangerous to hit someone in the mouth and break the skin on your knuckles against his teeth. If you ignore this kind of wound, it may quickly progress to an infection. To avoid problems, see your doctor rightaway any time you are bitten.

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resources has haunted Pakistan right from 1947, but it cannot be used as an argument for the adoption of an unsound concept. We consider, therefore, that in the altered circumstances, as outlined above, a revised strategy should have been adopted and the question of the allocation of forces consciously examined on the basis of that revised concept. This was, however, not done.

Finally, the amendments suggested by the navy, more particularly, in paragraph 9 of the Directive regarding prior government clearance for attacks on hostile merchant shipping, should also have been incorporated in the Directive. Evidence was given before us by the then commander-in-chief of the Pakistan Navy that valuable time was lost in trying to obtain govern-

ment approval for launching submarine attacks on Indian merchant shipping, and that in fact such clearance was not given as coordinated action was not taken by the ministries of defence and foreign affairs. If the relevant paragraph of the Directive had been amended as suggested by the naval headquarters, we have reasons to believe that the submarines of the Pakistan Navy were in position, on the opening of hostilities in West Pakistan, to carry out effective strikes against Indian merchant ships. However, such an opportunity was denied to them.

TOMORROW: MILITARY ASPECT - IV

Cartoon strips are held over for tomorrow.

Excerpts from the 'declassified' main report of Hamoodur Rahman Commission

MILITARY ASPECT-III

SINCE the War Directive was issued in 1967, and particularly since the commencement of the political crisis and the military action in East Pakistan in March, 1971, certain significant changes had taken place, calling for a major reappraisal of our strategy:

(a) As mentioned by GHQ itself in its letter to the joint chiefs secretariat, India had entered into a military alliance with the Soviet Union, thus ensuring substantial supplies of sophisticated weapons in all fields, and decisively tilting the military balance against Pakistan.

(b) The prolonged military action in East Pakistan had completely alienated the local population, with the result that the Pakistan Army was faced not only with the danger of external aggression, but also with the constant threat of internal subversion and sabotage from the civilian population as well as East Pakistani personnel on the defence forces themselves.

(c) India had openly started training nearly forty to fifty thousand guerrillas for infiltration into East Pakistan.

(d) By the months of October and November 1971, India had concentrated on the borders of East Pakistan a force equivalent to nearly twelve divisions (seven infantry and mountain divisions, three to four tank regiments with 35 Border Security Forces battalions, and the strength of the Indian navy and airforce allocated to the Eastern Theatre).

(e) The declared objective of India at this juncture was the establishment of Bangladesh by overrunning and capturing apart, if not the whole of East Pakistan, and

(f) The Pakistan Army was stretched in penny-packets all along the East Pakistan border with India.

In the presence of these facts and circumstances, the concept that "the defence of East Pakistan lies in West Pakistan" needed a serious fresh look by those responsible for the formulation of our defence policies. In view of the growing disparity between the war

