

TMC sweeps West Bengal assembly polls, but BJP gains ground

A CLOSER LOOK



TASNEEM TAYEB

THE 2021 West Bengal assembly polls have been a tussle for power between the centre and the state government. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) has had to fight it out till the last second for power in the state, and in the end it was the matriarch—the incumbent chief minister of the state, Mamata Banerjee—who emerged victorious by a landslide.

While the BJP had injected money and political and financial muscle in the election campaign, drawing massive media and PR coverage, the efforts seemed to have fallen short before the popularity of the incumbent among the grassroots population, including minorities.

And there are reasons why grassroots communities and minorities have given such strong backing to Mamata Banerjee. Her welfare schemes have played a major role in supporting the economic upliftment of the people of West Bengal. From schemes targeting women empowerment such as, *Rupashree* and *Kanyashree* that support them with grants for education and marriage, to allowances for elderly people and social security measures for the unemployed youth, Didi has a financial solution for every segment. Even for the religious groups, the

TMC government has allowances, despite facing backlash on occasions. They had been heavily criticised after announcing Rs 2,500 monthly allowance for Imams and Muazzins back in 2012, including from some of the Imams themselves, who said they cannot take money from other sources except for religious endowments. Thousands of Imams did, however, register for the allowance. Although the Kolkata High Court rejected the idea, the funds are now being channelled through the State Waqf Board.

Eight years down the line, in 2020, when the TMC-led government announced a similar allowance of Rs 1,000 for Hindu priests, the government had to face another round of criticism because the amount was lower than what the Muslim Imams are being given. The State Welfare Scheme for Purohitis also supports some priests from other communities, including Christian, Buddhist, Parsi and Jain communities.

Despite occasional criticism, these welfare schemes seem to have boosted public support for the TMC government. Muslim votes and women votes in specific have significantly helped TMC's win in the assembly polls.

West Bengal has a population of around 30 percent Muslims, the majority of whom have cast their polls in favour of TMC. The Furfura Sharif shrine based-Indian Secular Front (ISF) and All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimin (AIMM) had joined hands with the Congress and CPI(M), but could not distract the



PHOTO: REUTERS/RUPAK DE CHOWDHURI

Muslim vote bank of TMC.

And the state's strong pool of 3.7 crore women voters—forming about 49 percent of the votes—have also strongly backed Mamata Banerjee. And why not? Ever since coming to power in 2011, her party has taken up more than 200 female-centric social welfare projects, including employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, which have helped to empower women.

The ultra-Hindu nationalist narratives of the BJP have also failed to resonate with the secular Bengali nationalist spirit of the people of West Bengal. The state is historically known for its pluralistic characteristics, where the majority and minorities have coalesced together. BJP's ploy of "othering" and xenophobia certainly did not give the people the confidence to vote for the party, especially in the

light of the party's strong intent to implement the controversial National Register of Citizens (NRC) if elected to power.

Even the hard-line communists—including their senior most leadership—and TMC's arch nemesis until recently, warned the people against voting for the BJP. "There is no use in leaping from a TMC frying pan into the BJP's fire. In some places, the danger is already present. Our task is to bring back the people from this self-destructive mode," said former West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, while talking to *Ganasakti* newspaper.

And there are also conspiracy theories that suggest the Congress and CPI(M) have sacrificed their votes to prevent BJP from winning over this last bastion of secularism in the country. Kailash Vijayvargya, BJP

general secretary in charge, suggested in frustration that "The Left and Congress surrendered to help the TMC win." The laidback campaigning from Congress had been apparent from the beginning. Even CPI(M) could not, or perhaps did not, push the limelight during the election campaigning. It was a tooth-and-nail fight between BJP and TMC, and in the end, it was TMC that prevailed.

The lack of leadership in BJP at the state level has been another major factor behind their loss. This void had been so apparent that Amit Shah had to say it out loud and clear, that no one from Gujarat will hold the reins of power in West Bengal if BJP is voted to power. But who could that person have been? Most of the BJP leadership in West Bengal are turncoats from TMC, CPI(M) or the Congress, with the baggage of corruption allegations hung around their neck like the albatross of Coleridge, including Suwendu Adhikari, Mamata's former protegee who managed to defeat her in Nandigram by a narrow margin of 1,956 votes.

However, the rise of BJP in the state has been consistent: during the 2016 assembly polls, BJP had only three seats while the Congress grabbed 44 seats, CPI(M) had 26, and TMC won the elections with a landslide 211 seats. This time around, while the TMC has retained its hold over the state, the BJP alone has gained more than 77 seats at the time of writing. Although the party could not cross the magical three-digit threshold, the remarkable progress made by it

is noticeable and certainly should be a concern for the TMC in the long run. Even during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP won 18 seats, while the TMC edged a little ahead with 22.

In the context of CPI(M) and Congress losing their ground in West Bengal and the steadily growing strength of BJP, the party has become the main challenger to the strength of the TMC. Mamata's party must know this is no time for complacency. In the short-run, she has to win the by-elections in six months time to retain her seat as the Chief Minister of the state. Knowing BJP's ruthless drive to gain hold of West Bengal, they will leave no stone unturned to influence the by-polls against Mamata Banerjee, because dethroning her will put the TMC in a difficult position.

In the long run, BJP will turn into a Medusa with fangs everywhere, if allowed to grow. All BJP needs to do is build a face the people can trust in the next election. With TMC embroiled in accusations of "cut-money" and other forms of corruption and irregularities, a solid opposition can easily wipe the party away, as TMC did to the once mighty CPI(M).

With BJP's position set in the centre, it will have ample resources to devote to strengthening its grip over West Bengal. The only way TMC can hold BJP at bay is by cleaning up its corrupt, minority-pleasing image. If not, then they might just as well set the sand-clock for the countdown.

Tasneem Tayeb is a columnist for The Daily Star. Her Twitter handle is: @TayebTasneem.

Bangladesh's climate diplomacy needs to take a whole-of-society approach

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

ONE can argue that the issue of tackling climate change in Bangladesh has already achieved a whole-of-government approach,

and is also rapidly moving towards a whole-of-society approach. However, our international diplomacy on tackling climate change also needs to develop both approaches.

What do these two terms mean, and how are they being rolled out? The whole-of-government approach means that not only ministries and departments, but also other branches such as local government, parliament, and even security and military apparatus, along with the judiciary, need to be involved. The whole-of-society approach means the additional inclusion of the private sector, media, academia, civil society and professional groups such as lawyers, doctors, planners and others.

Bangladesh has made great strides in involving all ministries and branches of government in tackling climate change at home. The fact that the Eighth Five Year Plan, the Perspective Plan to 2041 and the Delta Plan to 2100 have all included tackling climate change as major strategies is an example of this. At the same time, the Ministry of Finance has, for the last few years, included a climate change budget allocation for different ministries. In this year's climate change budget, over 20 ministries have been given a significant allocation of funds, which totals nearly eight percent of the national budget and is bigger than any other country in the world.

However, when it comes to climate diplomacy at the international level we are still, to a large extent, relying on the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), which leads the annual Negotiations at the Conference of Parties (COPs) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) every year. While the MoEFCC and the Department of Environment (DoE) have a number of very competent negotiators, relying on the COP is no longer enough.

Since the achievement of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in 2015 at COP21, the need for climate diplomacy has become a daily necessity for all sectors of government. This need becomes more urgent as Bangladesh, under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, is now the leader of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) countries.

The first thing that is needed, and indeed has been achieved, is for the PM herself to take this issue of climate diplomacy seriously and instruct her politicians and bureaucracy that everyone will have a role to play. This top-down focus is also necessary from the key ministers and in other

branches of government. The good news is that this has already started, but we have no time to lose, and we need to reflect on where we can improve our performance to become more effective.

We need to understand and take into account that the COP, which only takes place once a year, is no longer the only place where climate diplomacy occurs. Indeed, every diplomat in Bangladesh embassies across the world now needs to make tackling climate change a core issue of bilateral discussion with host governments. In developed countries, our advocacy will be to encourage them to fulfill their pledges made in the Paris Agreement, and in developing countries, our focus would be on exploring South-South collaboration on tackling climate change, where Bangladesh can share its knowledge on locally led adaptation (LLA) to climate change, particularly for the most vulnerable developing countries.

This would mean that all our diplomats need to learn and know about climate change. An important step in this direction has been made by the Foreign Service Academy, where a climate diplomacy course has been included in the training of all new diplomats since the last three years. The International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), based at the Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), has had the privilege of assisting the Academy in delivering that course each year.

Another key ministry that must become involved in climate diplomacy is the Ministry of Finance, which needs to understand climate finance and learn how to access climate funds, both from global public as well as private sources. This is of particular importance, as Bangladesh hopes to develop out of being a Least Developed Country (LDC) within a few years and this will stop our access to grant-based international funding, so we need to enhance our ability to access global climate finance going forward. This is not only important in accessing the USD 100 billion of annual climate finance that the developed countries have promised the developing world, but in accessing the trillions of dollars of green finance that is now available globally (but we have not been able to access yet).

The ministries overseeing local governance are also of utmost importance, particularly the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), who are spearheading Bangladesh's efforts to become a world leader in LLA. This global expertise in LLA is a knowledge export—one that we need to make more of. Unlike other traditional forms of exports such as garments, LLA knowledge is not a commodity that has to be sent abroad, but rather a source of knowledge that is best shared by inviting representatives from other countries to come to Bangladesh and observe and learn from our

experiences of LLA. At ICCCAD, over the last few years, we have hosted nearly a thousand such international visitors, mainly from LDCs in Africa and Asia, to learn about LLA in Bangladesh. With more concerted efforts, this export of knowledge could be scaled up immensely.

Going beyond key ministries, parliamentarians also have a significant role to play. They have already made a major resolution on a Planetary Emergency, which has attracted a lot of attention from parliamentarians in many other countries. Also, the armed forces are already studying the security dimensions of climate change and having to discuss this issue when talking to their counterparts in other countries. The local government of Bangladesh can play a key role in sharing our experiential knowledge of LLA as well.

In terms of non-government stakeholders, the key one is the private sector, which can play a role in accessing global climate finance and building businesses to tackle climate change, both mitigation as well as adaptation. The good news is that the private sector has been very successful in providing solar home systems to millions of households in Bangladesh and we are already exporting that expertise to other countries as well. The new opportunity that we have yet to explore is to export knowledge of adaptation to climate change, which is a more difficult business proposition.

The other major stakeholders are academia, where the successful platform of more than 50 universities and research institutions have already come under the umbrella of the Gobeshona initiative, which has become a model for LDCs through the LDC Universities Consortium on Climate Change (LUCCC). The NGOs in Bangladesh are already famous globally for their knowledge of development as well as tackling climate change. BRAC, the biggest NGO in the world, along with many other NGOs, is very active on sharing knowledge of tackling climate change globally.

At the same time, the Bangladesh chapter of the Climate Action Network (CAN), which is one of the biggest global civil society networks on climate change, is very effective. Through these different platforms, the civil society of Bangladesh has been playing a very constructive role in global advocacy to tackle climate change for many years. The latest development in this category is the efforts of the school children and youth in Bangladesh, who are a very important part of the global Fridays for Future movement led by Greta Thunberg of Sweden.

Climate change diplomacy now needs to follow a whole-of-society approach in which Bangladesh becomes more effective in our collective global advocacy, and we are able to turn tackling climate change into a positive brand for the country, which could even lead to income from

exporting our knowledge on LLA.

The initiatives taken by the PM when she became the chair of the CVF have played a crucial role, including supporting member countries to start developing Climate Prosperity Plans that will change their narratives

from vulnerability to resilience and ultimately, to prosperity. She also declared that Bangladesh would prepare the first such plan, named the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCPP), which is due to be released for public consultation very soon.

This pioneering plan has the potential to become a vehicle for Bangladesh's climate diplomacy for the next decade.

Dr Saleemul Huq is Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development and Professor at the Independent University, Bangladesh.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

কাস্টম হাউস, কুর্মিটোলা, ঢাকা

ওয়েবসাইটঃ www.dch.gov.bd

নথি নং-১(১৫)০৬/সাধাঃ/কম্পিউটার সরঞ্জামাদি/২০২০/১০৯৩

তারিখঃ ০২/০৫/২০২১খ্রিঃ

দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

এতদ্বারা প্রকৃত দরপত্রাদাতাগণের নিকট থেকে পাবলিক প্রিকিউরমেন্ট এ্যান্ড, ২০০৬ ও পাবলিক প্রিকিউরমেন্ট বিধিমালা, ২০০৮ মোতাবেক

Open Tender Method (OTM) অনুযায়ী দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।

০১।	মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ	ঃ	অভ্যন্তরীণ সম্পদ বিভাগ, অর্থ মন্ত্রণালয়, ঢাকা।
০২।	অধিদপ্তর/দপ্তর	ঃ	কাস্টম হাউস, ঢাকা।
০৩।	ব্যয়ের উৎস	ঃ	সরকার অনুমোদিত বাজেট।
০৪।	ক্রয়কারী সত্ত্বাধিকারীর নাম	ঃ	কমিশনার, কাস্টম হাউস, কুর্মিটোলা, ঢাকা।
০৫।	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারীর দপ্তরের নাম	ঃ	কাস্টম হাউস, ঢাকা।
০৬।	দরপত্রের নাম	ঃ	Procuring Computer for Official Use.
০৭।	দরপত্র তফসিল প্রাপ্তির দপ্তরের নাম	ঃ	বেতন ও হিসাবরক্ষণ কর্মকর্তা (ভারপ্রাপ্ত), কাস্টম হাউস, ঢাকা (৪র্থ তলা, কক্ষ নং-৪১৮)।
০৮।	দরপত্র সিডিউল গ্রহণের দপ্তরের নাম ও ঠিকানা	ঃ	ডেপুটি কমিশনার (সাধারণ শাখা), কক্ষ নং-২০৬, ২য় তলা, কাস্টম হাউস, ঢাকা।
০৯।	দরপত্র খোলার দপ্তরের নাম ও ঠিকানা	ঃ	ডেপুটি কমিশনার, কক্ষ নং-২০৬, ২য় তলা, কাস্টম হাউস, ঢাকা।
১০।	দরপত্র সিডিউল বিক্রয়ের সময়কাল	ঃ	০৫/০৫/২০২১খ্রিঃ থেকে ২০/০৫/২০২১খ্রিঃ তারিখ পর্যন্ত অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে।
১১।	দরপত্র দাখিলের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়	ঃ	২৩/০৫/২০২১খ্রিঃ তারিখ ২.০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে দরপত্র বাজে জমা দিতে হবে।
১২।	দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ ও সময়	ঃ	২৩/০৫/২০২১খ্রিঃ তারিখ বিকাল ৩.০০ ঘটিকা।
১৩।	কার্য সম্পাদনের সময়	ঃ	চুক্তি পরবর্তী এক সপ্তাহের মধ্যে সরবরাহ সম্পন্ন করতে হবে।
১৪।	দরপত্র দাখিলের যোগ্যতা	ঃ	(ক) বাংলাদেশী প্রকৃত সরবরাহকারী প্রতিষ্ঠান। (খ) দরদাতাগণকে উৎপাদনকারীর অনুমোদিত প্রতিনিধি/উৎপাদনকারীর স্থানীয় প্রতিনিধি/উৎপাদনকারীর অনুমোদিত ডিস্ট্রিবিউটর হতে হবে। (গ) দরদাতাগণকে কম্পিউটার আইটেম সরবরাহে কমপক্ষে ৫ (পাঁচ) বছরের General Experience থাকতে হবে।
১৫।	বিশেষ শর্তাবলী	ঃ	(ক) দরপত্র সম্পর্কিত সকল কার্যাদি পাবলিক প্রিকিউরমেন্ট এ্যান্ড, ২০০৬ ও পাবলিক প্রিকিউরমেন্ট বিধিমালা, ২০০৮ অনুযায়ী পরিচালিত হবে; (খ) দরপত্রের সাথে নিম্নবর্ণিত হালনাগাদ কাগজপত্রাদির সত্যায়িত ফটোকপি অবশ্যই দাখিল করতে হবেঃ (১) হালনাগাদ নবায়নকৃত ট্রেড লাইসেন্স। (২) হালনাগাদ আয়কর পরিশোধের সনদপত্র। (৩) ভ্যাট রেজিস্ট্রেশন সার্টিফিকেট (১৩ ডিজিট হতে হবে)। (৪) ব্যাংক সলভেন্সি সার্টিফিকেট (মুদ্রাসং ২০,০০,০০০/- (বিশ লক্ষ) টাকার স্থিতি); (৫) সমজাতীয় পণ্য সরবরাহ এর পূর্ব অভিজ্ঞতার প্রমাণপত্র (দরপত্র তফসিল অনুযায়ী)।
১৬।	কাজের সংক্ষিপ্ত বিবরণ	ঃ	কাস্টম হাউস, ঢাকা এর ব্যবহারের জন্য কম্পিউটার (বিস্তারিত স্পেসিফিকেশন ও পণ্যের সংখ্যা দরপত্র সিডিউলে উল্লেখ আছে)।
১৭।	অনুচ্ছেদ-১৬ এ বর্ণিত পণ্যের দরপত্রাদাতাগণকে দরপত্রের সাথে ১,০০,০০০/- (এক লক্ষ) টাকা জামানত যে কোন তফসিলী ব্যাংকের পে-অর্ডার/ব্যাংক ড্রাফট (ফেরতযোগ্য) কমিশনার, কাস্টম হাউস, ঢাকা এর অনুকূলে দাখিল করতে হবে।		
১৮।	সোনালী ব্যাংক, কাস্টম হাউস শাখা, ঢাকায় ২,০০০/- (দুই হাজার) টাকা (অফেরতযোগ্য) ট্রেজারী চালান কোড নং-১-১১৩১-০০০৫-২৬৮১ তে জমা দিয়ে চালানের মূল রশিদসহ নিজস্ব লেটারহেড প্যাডে আবেদনপূর্বক এ দপ্তরের বেতন ও হিসাবরক্ষণ কর্মকর্তা (ভারপ্রাপ্ত), কাস্টম হাউস, ঢাকা এর নিকট হতে দরপত্র (তফসিল) ক্রয় করতে হবে।		
১৯।	দরপত্রাদাতাগণকে Instruction to Tenderers (ITT) অনুযায়ী Tender Data Sheet (TDS), GCC, PCC, Tender and Contract form, Schedule of requirements, Technical Specifications, Drawings প্রভৃতি যথাযথভাবে পূরণকরতঃ দরপত্র দাখিল করতে হবে।		
২০।	দরদাতাগণকে Tender Qualification Criteria fulfill করে দরপত্র দাখিল করতে হবে।		
২১।	Instruction to Tenderers (ITT), Tender Data Sheet (TDS), GCC, PCC, Tender and Contract form, Schedule of requirements, Technical Specifications, Drawings প্রভৃতি বিস্তারিত শর্তাবলী ও বিষয়াদি Tender Document-এ উল্লেখ রয়েছে।		
২২।	কর্তৃপক্ষ কোনরূপ কারণ দর্শানো নাটিশ জারি ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা বাতিলসহ মালামালের পরিমাণ/সংখ্যা কম/বেশি করার অধিকার সংরক্ষণ করেন।		

মোঃ সানোয়ারুল কবির

ডেপুটি কমিশনার

ও

সদস্য সচিব, দরপত্র কমিটি

ফোনঃ ৮৯০১৪৮০

ই-মেইলঃ dhakacustoms@yahoo.com

জিডি-৮৯৪