CHAPTER 8

COVERAGE OF 1983 PANCHAYAT ELECTION BY SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS

INTRODUCTION

The 1983 panchayat election was significant due to various reasons. The primary of them being that it would testify the successes and point out the failures of the existing panchayat boards mostly headed by the ruling Left Front. The mandate of the people of West Bengal in the Assembly election held in the previous year favored the Left Front but that was not an assurance to the Front in this election. The resounding victory in the first panchayat election in 1978 seemed an uncertain prospect in 1983 due to several reasons. There were fissures in the Left Front coalition and the strife between partners had reached a fever pitch. The CPI (M) was not willing to share power with the other smaller constituents while the RSP and FB were determined to seize every opportunity to reinstate their place in the Front and maintain their political existence. The outcome was constant friction between CPI (M) and these smaller constituents. The entrapments of power made existing panchayat members reluctant to leave their posts and that was the reason for further conflict between the Front constituents. The local leaders were not willing to abide by the dictum of the Left Front Committee or the state leadership and vacate their seats in favor of another Left candidate. The result was direct contests between Left partners sometimes with the consent of the helpless leadership. Wherever such consent was denied, discontented members filed nominations as independents or stood as dummy candidates to queer the pitch of the official Left candidate. The Left Front also had a difficult task at hand of convincing the voters that it was the best alternative for them after five years at the helm of the panchayats in the state with rampant charges of corruption and discrimination against the incumbent panchayat members and boards and the failure to implement development projects and provide relief. The work done by the panchayat bodies did not commensurate with the funds allocated for development and relief purpose or with the huge expectation. People were disappointed with the lack of development under the panchayats and peeved that the funds delegated for development was misused to fill the coffers of the panchayat
members. The CPI (M) leaders’ feared that as most of the panchayat members in the three tiers were from their party therefore the ire of the electorate was bound to be against them more than any other party.

The other significant point of the 1983 panchayat election was the participation of a resurrected Congress (I). The Congress (I) was divided in the 1978 and many Congress (I) candidates fought as independents. This time the Congress (I) was united and the factionalism was restrained. This was in sharp contrast with the conflict in the Left Front. The general observation was that the challenge thrown by the Congress (I) would be tough considering the awkward predicament of the Front as well as lapses of its members. The 1983 panchayat election was set to be a close electoral battle between the CPI (M) and Congress (I) and the press coverage of the electoral fight would give a detailed indication of it. It would be interesting to see whether the coverage was restricted to the political fight or extended to include the voice of the grassroots.

**DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS’ CONTENT ON 1983 PANCHAYAT ELECTION**

My survey in 1983 include newspaper content on the panchayat election in sample newspapers – the Statesman and Amrita Bazaar Patrika, (both English dailies) Anandabazar Patrika and Jugantar (both Bengali dailies). The election was held on the 31st May, 1983. The sheer volume of content on the 1983 panchayat election proved the importance assigned by the sample newspapers to the issue but the perspective of coverage did not favor the grass-root audience and mostly embodied the views of the handful people – the political leaders. The content mostly revolved around the activities and outlook of the political parties, inter and intra party strife preceding and following the election procedure and the fate of political parties post election. The few exceptions were the reports carrying the byline of correspondents like Barun Sengupta or Bikash Singha. The sample newspapers repeated the same reports of political equation, strife and truce in their columns, and rarely included the grass-root perspective. The study of news items and reports in the sample newspapers in the aftermath of the panchayat election revealed a preoccupation with the implications of the results for the various political parties and their prerogative in the formation of panchayat boards. The discussion of newspaper coverage of the 1983 panchayat
NEWS ITEMS PUBLISHED BY THE SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTION DURING 10TH MAY, 1983 AND 6TH JUNE, 1983

10th May, 1983
The Statesman (1 column 14 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) – Jharkhand clash: 1 killed
Reporter / Correspondent

The item reported a clash between the supporters of the CPI (M) and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in Purulia district. The report said a CPI (M) supporter was killed and the house of the CPI (M) gram panchayat candidate was set ablaze in the incident.

10th May, 1983
The Statesman (1 column 68 lines)
Headline: Rift in Front to help Cong (I)
Reporter / Correspondent

This news item commented that the Congress (I) would do well in the panchayat elections in Midnapore. But infighting among the party leaders in Nadia, Bankura, Burdwan, Purulia and the North and South 24 Parganas would not allow it to exploit the people’s resentment against the ruling party there. The report stated in most districts the Congress (I) did not have the infrastructure to match the CPI (M)’s organizational strength. It informed the main issue of the Congress’s campaign was corruption in the existing panchayat bodies dominated by the CPI (M). The CPI (M) countered these charges with the claim that it has taken action against the erring panchayat members who were few in number. The report observed that the Congress (I) would be handicapped in its campaign by the absence of a proper election manifesto containing alternative suggestions for better functioning of the panchayats. The report said the Congress (I) leaders hoped to benefit from the rift between the Left partners, for example between the CPI (M) and CPI in the Midnapore district, the CPI (M) and Forward Bloc in the Coochbehar district and the CPI (M) and RSP in...
Murshidabad. In all these districts, the report informed the allies were locked in direct contest. The report stated that the Congress (I) was expected to do well in the North Bengal districts as the minority support was with them unlike in the districts of the South. The report said the Congress (I) leaders admitted the campaigning by CPI (M) was better organized than that of their party.

10th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 122lines)
Headline: Problem due to increase in seats in Coochbehar
Reporter / Correspondent
This news item stated that increase in zilla parishad seats in Coochbehar has proved damaging for Front unity in the district. The controversy surrounding the two additional zilla parishad seats reached such a point that there was no adjustment between CPI (M) and FB in the entire district. The report specified that the two parties were loggerheads with each other in the district in the last panchayat election as well. The reporter commented that the internal struggle in the Front left the opposition Congress (I) overjoyed but the party organization in the district was not strong enough to capitalize on the Left trouble. The Congress (I) was hopeful that the public disapproval of nepotism and corruption in the Left led panchayats would tilt the scale in their favor. The reporter informed the Left leaders and workers, however, disagreed with this contention of the Congress. They were of the opinion that the people of Coochbehar would choose any of the two Left allies but definitely not the Congress (I) as they did not forget the oppression during the Congress rule. The report elaborated on the allegations and counter allegations of the two warring Front partners for the lack of seat adjustment.

11th May, 1983
The Statesman (1 column 44 lines)
Headline: Police help from Centre sought
Primary Source: Administration
This item informed that the state government has requested Centre for additional police force during the panchayat elections. The report said the government has asked the district police to identify sensitive pockets under their administration requiring additional deployment. This report also informed that the
state government would request the Railway ministry to spare a section of its employees in the state to man the polling booths. In this report the administrative measures undertaken by the state government for the smooth conduct of the panchayat polls was elaborated. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika (Column space: 1 column 24 lines: Headline: 31st May to be a holiday) and Jugantar (Column space: 2 columns 35 lines: Headline: Holiday on the day of the Panchayat election) also published a report on this matter on the same day.

11th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 94 lines)
Headline: Unity and conflict in Coochbehar
Reporter / Correspondent
The article focused on the bickering in Coochbehar. The report said that the bone of contention was a remark by a CPI (M) minister that the party would go all out to win this zilla parishad. The report said the FB alleged that the Left Chairman’s plea to the allies to continue efforts of resolution till the last moment was being ignored by his own party. The pre-poll conflict between the two parties was vividly described in the report. The report quoted a FB minister that his party would successfully fend off the CPI (M) and blamed it for lack of unity in the Front. The report described the campaigning of the various political parties in the district. It stated that the CPI (M) was well ahead of the others with regard to election meetings at different blocks but the others were trying to compensate through door-to-door campaigns and small gatherings in villages.

11th May, 1983
Jugantar (2 columns 105 lines)
Headline: Tension in Burdwan over Panchayat election
Reporter / Correspondent
The news elaborated on the tension in Burdwan over the forthcoming panchayat election. The report mentioned there were frequent clashes between political parties during campaigning. The CPI (M) and Congress (I) traded charges against each other for pre-poll violence in the district. The reporter informed Congress (I) said it could not campaign in many areas out of fear. The Burdwan district administration, the report said was impasive to the complaints of the opposition. The
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district police head said they have kept a close vigil over the trouble-prone areas and 
would initiate strict action against offenders. The report discussed the campaigning of 
the various political parties in the district in detail. While the CPI (M) complained that 
the Congress (I) government at the Centre did not provide enough funds to the state to 
build resources, the Congress (I) alleged the CPI (M) led panchayats were corrupt and 
missed the funds allotted by the Centre. The concluding remark of the report was 
that all political parties were set for a close contest.

11th May, 1983

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 184 lines)

Headline: Power remains in the hands of the village heads in West Dinajpur

Reporters / Correspondents

The problems of the existing panchayat system were highlighted in this report. 
The report indicated in West Dinajpur, the political party who had the majority 
members in a gram panchayat dictated development policies and the panchayat 
Pradhan was the most powerful man in the village. The report said that the pradhans 
decided the fate of projects as well as that of the villagers. The report narrated how 
the internal strife in the Left Front has affected its prospects in West Dinajpur. The 
report pointed out the bickering between RSP and CPI (M) was so bitter that the two 
parties have stooped to the level of personal attacks on each other’s candidates. The 
report specified that there was some understanding at the gram panchayat level but at 
the upper levels the two parties were at each other’s neck. The report specifically 
mentioned that the concepts of decentralization and participation of the grassroots in 
governance were not a reality in the existing panchayat system. It remarked that the 
lists provided by panchayats indicating the projects undertaken by them for the 
improvement of living conditions of the villagers were mostly inflated. There were 
problems of drinking water, roads and electricity. The panchayat members cited 
paucity of funds as the reason for their failure to implement development works but 
they were unable to give information on the status of the allocated funds. The report 
also pointed out the allocation of funds for drought relief and other purposes have 
been optimal after the announcement of election date.

12th May, 1983

Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 170 line)
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Headline: Conflict between RSP-CPI (M)
Primary source: Grass-root members

The report described the pre-poll scenario in North Dinajpur. The report elaborated on the village feuds emerging from political hostility. The report pointed out political enmity was prominent not only between the Congress (I) and the CPI (M) but also between the CPI (M) and the RSP. The report said it was worrying that communal overtones were part of the political campaigning in some of the villages. The report reached the conclusion after interaction with several villagers that the Left Front’s claim that political awareness of the grassroots has increased after the introduction of the panchayats was misleading. The report stated that the grassroots were far removed from the decision-making process in various initiatives. They were at the mercy of the political parties for improvement in their economic and social existence. The other conclusion that the report threw up was that the political hostility was the outcome of enmity between political parties for their own gains and had no relation to grass-root issues. The grassroots were pawns at the hand of the political parties. The report highlighted the strife between RSP and the CPI (M). The report said the leaders of the warring parties were aware that lower levels questioned the implication of direct contests between coalition partners. The RSP leaders blamed the CPI (M) for the lack of understanding and identified cross-over from the CPI (M) to their party as the reason for its anger. The report held conflict between political parties responsible for hampering development in the villages.

12th May, 1983

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 112 lines)

Headline: Difference in Panchayat elections of 1978 and 1983 (Editorial)

This was an editorial which pointed out the differences of circumstances of the 1978 panchayat election and that of 1983. It emphasized it was not possible for the urban people to realize the significance of panchayats in the lives of the rural people. The funds allocated for rural development as well as relief were spent through the panchayats. The editorial pointed out that some panchayats, especially the ones controlled by the CPI (M), have taken up administrative responsibility of the areas under their control. Many panchayats played an active role in the management of police and enrolling the names of ‘bargadars’ (sharecroppers). The editorial commented that if the Left Front won the forthcoming panchayat election then it was
likely that more administrative powers would be bestowed on the panchayats. It also stated that if the panchayats were purported to be so powerful then it was not surprising that political parties and their leaders were eager for a share of that power. The editorial hinted political control over panchayats also implied control over the purse strings of the panchayats which could be used to garner support and more power.

The editorial made observations like one of the main reasons for tension in this year's panchayat election was internal strife within the Left Front. It commented that the smaller Front constituents were worried about their political future and decided to contest the bigger partner - CPI (M), wherever they had a strong presence ignoring the diktat of the Left Front Committee. The smaller parties were eager to increase their influence in the Front and to limit the control of CPI (M) in the Front. It observed the fight was tougher for the CPI (M) this time as the Congress (I) realizing the importance of gram panchayats for strengthening the rural vote bank have plunged head-on in the election battle. The editorial stated with such hostile factors against it the ruling party was forced to adopt unfair means like distribute money and food through the panchayats in the name of relief just before the election to remain in contention. It was of the opinion that it would be difficult for the CPI (M) to indulge in manipulation or other malpractices to sway the voting in its favor as the coalition partners would raise a hue and cry and that cannot be shrugged off as easily as the Congress (I) accusations in this regard.

It tersely pointed out that all was not against the ruling party as in the last five years it had distributed plenty of money and food supplies through the panchayats and created a band of followers in many rural areas. The report said most of the panchayats were controlled by CPI (M) and the party has taken the maximum benefit of the panchayati raj whether to create a rural vote bank or to gratify party loyalists.

At the end of the long editorial three probable results of the forthcoming panchayat elections were enumerated. The first was the total dominance of the CPI (M) and the near obliteration of the three other Front constituents namely CPI, FB, and RSP and the Congress (I). The consequence, the editorial suggested, would be miserable for the three Front allies. The second was the decline of CPI (M) supremacy, the comparatively better result of the three Front constituents and the much better performance of a resurrected Congress (I). This result would force CPI (M) on the back foot and compel it to lay more stress on Front unity and give more importance to the partners. The third probable result was the reduction of seats of all
the Front constituents and the relatively better performance of the Congress (I). The consequence would be a more united Front and more equitable relationship between the Front partners while there would be major fights in the Congress (I) regarding who should be credited with this major win.

12th May, 1983
Jugantar (1 column 38 lines)
Headline: Three Congress leaders in election campaigning
Primary source: Political party leader

The report discussed the campaigning schedule of Congress (I) leaders and Union ministers – Pranab Mukherjee, Gani Khan Chowdhury and C. M. Stephen and other state level leaders. The report informed that the state Youth Congress (I) President has demanded the deployment of army men to stall violence in the state during the panchayat election. The report quoted him that the continuous attacks on Congress (I) men by ruling party members was an indication of the situation before the election and if the army was not called in then the election was likely to turn into a farce.

12th May, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 45 lines)
Headline: Panchayat poll clashes
Reporter / Correspondent

The report referred to the review of the law and order situation in the state before the panchayat election by the West Bengal police. It informed that 6 persons were killed and 97 persons injured in 44 clashes over the panchayat election till then. The clashes mainly took place between the chief contenders in the election - the Congress (I) and the CPI (M).

12th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 112 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) is hopeful in Birbhum
Reporter / Correspondent

The report stated in Birbhum agricultural workers and tribals comprised the main vote bank and were set to determine the fate of the political parties. The report
hinted that the voters were politically very conscious and has already decided their vote but political parties were relentlessly framing strategy for garnering votes in their support. The local Congress (I) leaders informed that there were several incidents of violence in the district and the victims were mostly from the Congress (I). The Congress (I) leaders alleged that the voters were being threatened and the tribal voters were being allured with money but in spite of these odds they were hopeful that the party would do well in this district. The CPI (M) leaders denied the allegations leveled against their party and said most of the voters were their supporters as they knew them as the party of farmers and workers and the party has worked for the development of the district and the improvement of the living standard of the people.

The report stated the CPI (M) campaign in the district emphasized the progress of the CPI (M) led panchayats in the last five years was phenomenal compared to the inactivity during the previous 31 years under Congress (I). A district CPI (M) leader said only workers who were dedicated to the cause of panchayats and their duty were given nomination in this election to win the trust of voters.

13th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 81 lines)
Headline: Stephen fears Panchayat elections set to be unfair
Jugantar (2 columns 127 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) wants to win by rigging: Stephen
Statesman (2 columns 105 lines)
Headline: Stephen’s allegation against Left Front
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 122 lines)
Headline: Stephen fears poll rigging
Primary source: Political party leader

The above reports gave detailed account of the statements of the Congress (I) general secretary C M Stephen during his campaigning for the party and the response of the Left chairman to his allegation. Stephen alleged that the Centre had allotted 900 crores to West Bengal in the past 4 to 5 years for the implementation of various rural development schemes through the panchayats but the Left Front government did not account for the money. He denied the charges leveled by the chief minister and his party that the Congress (I) government at the Centre did not provide adequate financial assistance for rural development and said that the Congress (I) workers
would collect all information regarding the development work initiated by the panchayats under the various rural development schemes initiated by the Centre and challenge the state government’s lies.

The Congress (I) general secretary said that the CPI (M)’s announcement to form volunteer squads to maintain peace in and around the polling booths was an attempt to resort to booth capturing and violence in the pretext of assisting the voters. He warned of serious repercussions from the Congress (I) workers in the event of transgression by CPI (M) workers. He said voters would resist any attempt of the ruling party to win the panchayat election in an unconstitutional manner. He alleged that 7 Congress (I) workers were murdered till now in violence related to panchayat elections. The report quoted the leader that the political turmoil in the state was palpable from the apprehensions expressed by the Police Association in the state regarding the law and order situation in the villages and the risk to its members from electoral violence. He also said that fair and peaceful panchayat election was not possible as a cabinet minister in the LF government, Jatin Chakrabarty, has expressed concern over the law and order situation in the state a few days ago.

The Statesman report included the views of the Left chairman who reacted sharply to the allegation of booth capturing and violence with the aid of the volunteer squad members. He said that the Congress (I) secretary was not unaware that during past elections too every party including the Congress (I) formed volunteer squads to help the administration conduct the election smoothly. The LF chairman termed the accusations of the Congress (I) secretary baseless and a sign of the party’s impending electoral defeat. Mukherjee defended the formation of volunteer squad in reports published in the Jugantar on 15th May and Amrita Bazaar Patrika on the 16th May too.

The Jugantar said that Congress (I) leader Subrata Mukherjee alleged that the CPI (M) has send anti-socials as volunteers in villages to disrupt the election proceedings. He said there were specific complaints that these goons were preventing the opposition parties from campaigning in Midnapore and North 24 Parganas. The report added Mukherjee said during his campaign in these districts he has received several complaints that the police and administration not only turned a blind eye to the atrocities on villagers but were more inclined towards the outsiders than the residents. He cited two such incidents to the reporters’ - one in Kulpi and another in Hasnabad. He said he would meet the CM and apprise him about these matters and request him to ensure that the police and administration do not interfere in the electoral process.
The Amrita Bazaar Patrika informed responding to the apprehensions of the West Bengal Police Association, Left Front chairman Saroj Mukherjee said that the association represented only a section of the police force in the state who were patronized by the Congress (I) and was opposed to the Left government and its comments found little favor with the rank and file in the state police. The report said the Left chairman claimed that the money allocated by the Centre under various rural development schemes was fully utilized. He also commented that four of the seven people killed in the recent political clashes belonged to the CPI (M) and not the Congress (I) as claimed by the Congress (I) General Secretary.

The Anandabazar Patrika report informed Stephen had addressed election rallies in various parts of Hooghly and North 24 Parganas and observed that more than the electoral battle between the Left Front and the Congress (I), the bickering between the Front constituents stood out. Stephen said this would benefit the Congress (I) and if party members avoid internal squabble and if the election was fair then LF would be in serious trouble.

13th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 62 lines)
Headline: Bickering in the Front to benefit Congress (I) in Siliguri
Reporter / Correspondent

This report specified that in Siliguri the Congress (I) would benefit from the quarrel between the LF constituents. There were seats where even three Front allies were in the fray. There was detail of the Front bickering in the report. It informed no public meetings of the Front allies except the CPI (M) was held till date and the focus was on street meetings and door-to-door campaign.

13th May, 1983
Jugantar (2 columns 43 lines)
Headline: Vote boycott in Taherpur
Reporter / Correspondent

The item reported that the residents of Taherpur in Nadia have decided to boycott the forthcoming panchayat polls to protest against the government’s decision to not declare the area a municipality. The political parties were not prepared to invite the wrath of the voters and restrained from fielding candidates in the area.
The newspaper considered the boycott of election as news but did not point out the adverse effects of boycott with respect to grass-root participation in the decision-making process.

14th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 162 lines)
Headline: Electoral battle in parts of Burdwan restricted to wall writing
Reporter / Correspondent
The article described the pre-electoral scenario in areas of Burdwan adjoining Bankura. The reporter pointed out that electoral campaigning was limited to graffiti writing. The report stated that the voters were more or less satisfied with the work done by the panchayats whether distributing relief at the appropriate time or giving employment to one person in each family. The report pointed out the ruling party claimed that the panchayats in these areas have implemented the bargadar system and have spent the entire amount allocated by the state government towards development. The opposition, the report said however, alleged that most of the land distributed through the system was infertile and therefore the farmers were unable to till those lands. They accused the existing panchayats failed to create permanent assets.

14th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 68 lines)
Headline: Congress would not send workers from Kolkata to the districts like the CPI (M)
Primary Source: Political party
This report said Congress (I) leadership asserted that the party would not send volunteers from the city like the CPI (M) as the panchayat election was wholly an affair of the rural people. The other issue discussed in the report was CPI (M) leader Saroj Mukherjee’s assertion that the volunteer squad had no relation to law and order and the Congress (I) was creating a ruckus on the issue out of fear of defeat was a repetition of the content in the earlier reports.

14th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 249 line)
Headline: Drought will affect poll prospect in Purulia
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Reporter / Correspondent

The report noted the pre-electoral situation in Purulia. The report said CPI (M) was definitely the favorite in this district due to its organization. The report informed the party has started its electoral campaign while its main opponent Congress (I) struggled. The report said Congress (I) could still revive its prospects if it made an all-out attempt. The ruling party had another significant opponent in this district - the Jharkhand party who had the support of the tribals who constituted 1/3rd of the population in this district. The report commented the chances of the opposition have brightened due to the drought in the district which has pointed out the inadequacies in the villages like the lack of proper irrigation facilities, shortage of drinking water and loss of employment to about 4 lakh agricultural labors. The report informed that the panchayats have been allotted 5 crores to facilitate drought relief and another 1.5 crore under the national rural employment scheme. This allocation could prove beneficial for the ruling party as well as detrimental if the funds were misused. The report observed that even after 5 years under the panchayati raj there was no proposal for drought resistance or provision for employment or food during the lean months for the farmers and agricultural laborers. It questioned the work done by the panchayats in the last five years in view of the reports of starvation and dearth of food. The report pointed out the discrepancy in the money spent and the work accomplished in several cases. The report stated that corruption was widespread which has hurt the image of panchayats.

One significant feature of the 1983 panchayat election was election related violence. Not only was the occurrence of violent incidents greater than in 1978, the number of casualties was also more. It would be pertinent to mention that incidences of violence increased in the subsequent panchayat elections especially in 1998 and 2003.

15th May, 1983

The Statesman (1 column 15 line)

Headline: Panchayat candidate injured

Reporter / Correspondent

The news item informed a Congress (I) candidate was seriously injured when a procession of the party was attacked in an area under Sabong police station in the
Midnapore district. The procession was organized to protest the forceful confinement of a Congress (I) panchayat samiti candidate.

15th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 column 36 lines)
Headline: Political clashes in different districts
Reporter / Correspondent
The news emphasized that political clashes in the districts were on the rise. This report informed in Murshidabad a Congress (I) worker was injured when some CPI (M) supporters attacked a procession of the party. Two clashes were reported from West Dinajpur between the supporters of CPI (M) and RSP. The incident reported in the Statesman in the previous news report was also included in this report.

15th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 159 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) cornered in Midnapore
Reporter / Correspondent
The article reported on the pre-electoral scenario in Midnapore. The report specified CPI (M) was criticized by the other Left constituents and found itself on a sticky wicket in this district. To make matters worse for the ruling party the Congress (I) was actively involved in the electoral fight. The CPI (M) was desperate to win and the report stated that its supporters were intimidating and threatening the candidates and workers of the other political parties to win seats. The report commented desperation of political parties stemmed from the fact that a win in the panchayat election would ensure control over the funds allocated to them for rural development. It is to be observed here that time and again the sample newspapers have pointed out that the interest of political parties in the panchayat election was two-fold – consolidation of the rural vote bank and control of the funds delegated to the panchayats.

The report elaborated on the various instances of CPI (M)’s assault on candidates and supporters of other Left Front constituents. The smaller allies – CPI and FB - alleged that bigger partner was worried over the desertion of its loyalists and adopted such grim measures. The CPI (M) leaders countered that all the allegations against them were false. The CPI (M) alleged that FB and CPI have sheltered the
culprits who were expelled from the CPI (M) on the charges of corruption. The bigger partner also accused the smaller partners of allying with the Congress (I) to defeat it. As with most reports on the pre-electoral situation in the various districts this report also concentrated on the bickering between the Left Front allies, the allegations and counter-allegations of the political party leaders and the prospect of the parties.

15th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 36 lines)
Headline: LF constituents have warned of strict measures on alliance with the Congress
Primary Source: Political party

The news informed that RSP and FB have warned their party nominees that if they were found to strike a deal with Congress (I) they would face strict action. The report elaborated that in 1/3rd of the panchayat seats there was no understanding between the Front constituents and in many of these seats there were allegations that a Front constituent has teamed up with the Congress (I) to defeat another Front constituent. The report stated that FB secretary Ashok Ghosh said he was not aware that his party members were involved in any such accords but at the same time he did not rule out such agreements at the grass-root level. The report said the RSP and CPI spokespersons ruled out any pact with the Congress (I).

15th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 82 lines)
Headline: Why volunteer squad? Pranab
Primary Source: Political party leader

This news informed that Union Minister Pranab Mukherjee in an election meeting criticized the CPI (M) initiative to organize volunteer squad for peace-keeping during the elections. He asserted that this was the job of the police and the security forces. The report said Mukherjee also commented in the meeting that the role of the panchayats in rural development was significant as they have been given both financial and administrative powers.

16th May, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 124 lines)
Headline: Volunteers enrolment not a new thing – Saroj Mukherjee
Primary Source: Political party leader

The report stated that the Left chairman has accused the Congress (I) of indulging in malicious propaganda during campaigning. He was, however, confident that the people were with the Left Front and the Congress (I) was isolated. The LF chairman strongly condemned Union Finance minister Pranab Mukherjee’s allegation that funds allocated by the Centre for rural development were not properly utilized. He gave a detailed description of the work done by the panchayats in the last five years and claimed that if these development projects were not undertaken by the panchayats with the support of the state government then it would have been difficult to prevent the migration of rural people to the cities. The report said he denied any discrimination in the distribution of relief aid to the Congress (I) controlled panchayat bodies and claimed that though Central assistance reached late the state government left no stone unturned to provide relief and assistance to the poor in the drought-hit areas.

16th May, 1983
The Statesman (1 column 35 lines)
Headline: Rural electorate will be coerced
Reporter / Correspondent

The report cited unnamed administrative sources to inform that the formation of volunteer squads for the purpose of ensuring a peaceful panchayat election would actually precipitate trouble in many areas. The report said that these sources were apprehensive that the rural electorate would be coerced by these squads and though the Congress (I) was not in a position to revive its moribund volunteer forces yet it could organize formidable resistance in some pockets leading to violence. The report also cast a doubt over the ‘role’ of police and polling officials and informed that in Murshidabad district, for example, CPI (M) panchayat functionaries at the zilla parishad and panchayat samiti level had so much clout over the officials that they acquiesced even to their illegal acts and so it was unexpected that they would be impartial to the woes of the opposition parties or prevent ruling party atrocities.

16th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 146 lines)
Headline: Leaders enjoy privileges of the Panchayats
Reporter / Correspondent

This article reported on the lack of development in a panchayat area in Maheshpur, close to Midnapore town. The report commented that while there was rapid development in the urban areas of Midnapore, the villages were neglected and underdeveloped. The concern of the report was short-lived as it veered to the political contest in the forthcoming panchayat election. The report quizzed the current panchayat members on the lack of development to which they provided a list of the development works that had been undertaken by the panchayats. The reaction of the villagers was that development was carried out on paper only and the money allocated for development was pocketed by the panchayat members.

16th May, 1983
Jugantar (1 column 70 lines)
Headline: 100 expelled from CPI (M) for corruption
Primary Source: Political party

The report stated that CPI (M) has admitted to corruption in the panchayat bodies in the last five years. The report commented that chief minister Jyoti Basu himself wrote in Ganashakti, the CPI (M) mouthpiece, that there were reports of corruption which, however, was promptly dealt with – some tainted members were expelled from the party while some were facing lawsuits. The report said the chief minister was of the opinion that the number of cases of malpractice was negligible and wherever panchayats have been indicted they were governed by opposition parties, most of the LF led panchayats have submitted their accounts. Basu, the report said, wrote that during the Congress (I) reign there was no transparent system but now the Congress (I) leaders were insisting on one. The chief minister announced that the Left front intended to organize rural development work under the panchayats and ensure decentralization in the true sense. Basu related the success of the panchayats in the last five years. The report said in the same issue of Ganashakti the party’s leader Anil Biswas elaborated on the number of actions initiated against corrupt party members.

The use of statements of leaders in party mouthpiece as information did not give an impression of an objective and balanced mass media.
17th May, 1983

Jugantar (2 columns 67 lines)

Headline: There is nothing new to volunteer squad during elections

Primary Source: Political Party leader

The article reported that the chief minister objected to Congress (I) leader C M Stephen’s comment that the CPI (M)’s volunteer squad was in effect an assailant squad. He, like Saroj Mukherjee, (whose comments on the issue was reiterated in this report) saw nothing wrong with volunteer squad as they were unarmed and it was common for political parties to appoint volunteers for mobilization of voters on the Election Day as well as campaigning before the election. On the same day the Statesman and Anandabazar Patrika reported that the chief minister rubbished the apprehension of the opposition parties that the volunteer squads would disturb peace in the villages and hinder the function of the police and administration. All the concerned newspapers reported said he was also critical of the Police Association that feared violence in the state during the panchayat elections. He said the Association was sympathetic to the Congress (I) and therefore indulged in such comments.

17th May, 1983

The Statesman (2 columns 103 lines)

Headline: Central police help sought

Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 20 lines)

Headline: Meeting on Panchayat vote today

Primary Source: Administration

The reports informed readers that the state government feared trouble in a few pockets in the state during the forthcoming elections and has asked for 8 companies of Central Reserve Police Force. It was reported in these items that the chief minister has alleged that the discriminating approach of the Centre against West Bengal when it came to development initiatives was based on political reasons. The report elaborated on the chief minister’s allegation of various ‘discriminations’ faced by the state in the hands of the Congress government from the sanction of industrial projects to the allocation of drought relief funds.

The newspaper reports functioned as tools for political campaign of the chief minister. There were several such reports on the statements and propaganda of political leaders.
17th May, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (4 columns 132 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) bags 42 Midnapore seats uncontested
Primary source: Political parties

The report informed that in the Midnapore most of the uncontested wins were registered by the CPI (M). The report described the political scenario in Midnapore especially the relation between the CPI (M) and CPI before the panchayat election. The CPI (M) wanted to frustrate the attempts of the CPI to win a substantial number of seats in the district and retrieve its position in its erstwhile stronghold. The rest of the report dealt with the history of CPI’s downfall and its effort to emerge as a potent Communist force. A CPI leader was quoted by the report that there was erosion of mass support for the CPI (M) as it was more concerned with the interests of the rich peasants than the distribution of vested land to agricultural laborers. The CPI leader was also quoted by the report that there were complaints of widespread corruption against CPI (M) panchayat functionaries, discrimination in the distribution of relief material and wasteful expenditure of panchayat funds. The CPI (M) district secretary dismissed allegations of corruption against party functionaries and said that the lapses of the members were mostly due to inexperience as most of them were agricultural laborers who were initiated to political power for the first time. He described the various development projects undertaken by the panchayats. He denied the claim by other LF constituents that demoralized by the CPI (M)’s failure to check corruption in the panchayats, many of its supporters have switched allegiance to them. The CPI (M) blamed the unreasonable demand for seats by the other Left parties as the reason for the failure in seat adjustment. The Congress (I), the report predicted, would improve its performance due to the infighting in the Left Front. It pointed out the candidates set up by the Congress were mostly from poor and underprivileged families.

17th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 204 lines)
Headline: Forceful withdrawal of nominations in Burdwan
Reportor / Correspondent

The report discussed the pre-electoral scenario in Burdwan. The report informed that the ruling party was in a fix over the several uncontested wins. Though CPI (M) leaders said the people had faith in the party and has withdrawn nomination
in its favor, the report indicated coercion and intimidation were the main reasons for the withdrawal of nomination. The report alleged that ruling party workers actively prevented other candidates from filing nominations. Congress (I) and other opposition parties alleged that the police and administration turned a deaf ear to their accusations against the ruling party. The report referred to several incidents of forceful withdrawal of nomination and acts of terror. The report proceeded to comment that despite these occurrences the position of CPI (M) was quite strong in this district while the Congress (I) was struggling due to its internal strife. The report elaborately described the political battle between the various parties in the various areas of the district. The report then explored the charges of corruption against the existing panchayat members. The first observation was that plenty of funds were allocated to the panchayats in this district for flood relief in 1978 and drought relief in 1979 but the work done did not correspond to the money allotted. The CPI (M) district secretary was quoted that the villagers need to come forward and actively participate in the development process if they wanted to hasten up the process of development as it was not enough to depend on the panchayats only.

18th May, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 160 lines)
Headline: Congress (I) contesting 7085 seats in Midnapore
Primary source: Political party leaders

This item reported Congress (I)’s prospect, CPI (M)’s status and the Jharkhand party’s objective in Midnapore. The performance of the Congress (I) in the last panchayat election was highlighted. The report specified that the Congress (I) has alleged that its candidates could not file nominations in a number of gram panchayat and panchayat samiti seats due to intimidation by CPI (M) and Jharkhand party members. The CPI (M) and the Jharkhand party however denied the allegations and blamed Congress (I)’s internal squabbles for its failure to file nominations. The report mentioned that both the Congress (I) and the CPI were confident that the CPI (M) would not be able to retain its strength in the panchayats in the ensuing elections. But while the Congress (I) predicted major reverses if the polling was free and fair, the CPI did not see a landslide defeat for the CPI (M). The CPI said it was very difficult to dislodge the CPI (M) from a large number of seats as it will not spare an effort to draw popular support by intensifying relief distribution before the election and pose a

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veiled threat to the voters in the form of the volunteer squad members. The CPI (M), however, dismissed the charges as a slander campaign against it and said that the members of the volunteer squad would be used to strengthen the campaign of the party through house visits and for organizing meetings. The report stated CPI (M) members highlighted the achievements of the panchayats in the last five years in their campaign. The report specified that CPI (M) had an edge over the opposition in the tribal dominated areas of the district as votes would be split between the Congress (I) and the Jharkhand Sangharsh Morcha comprising the CPI (ML) and the Jharkhand party. The report mentioned that like the CPI (M), the Morcha has also fielded candidates in all the seats in this area and indicated its strong presence through activities like detention of government official or prevention of government work to protest against the partisan allotment of relief material by the CPI (M). The Morcha alleged that false cases were being registered against its members to force withdrawal of nominations. It was apprehensive of violence engineered by the ruling party during polling. The district administration ruled out the possibility of violence during elections but the report pointed out incidents of violence has already occurred in the district like the attack on a CPI leader and a CPI candidate allegedly by CPI (M) workers in separate incidents and clashes between the two communist parties over wall writing.

18th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 21 line)
Headline: Holiday on 31st May
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 98 lines)
Headline: 1.35 lakh personnel for Panchayat poll
The Statesman (1 column 52 lines)
Headline: 10 companies of armed forces for West Bengal
Primary source: Administration

The reports quoted the chief secretary and the Director General of Police about the administrative arrangements and security measures for the panchayat elections respectively. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika said Panchayat minister Binky Chowdhury reacted sharply to the brouhaha over the creation of volunteer force by the ruling party and said that all political parties formed such squads before elections and Congress (I) had one such permanent squad. The reports stated that he vehemently opposed the
claim of the Union Finance minister that the state government failed to utilize the funds dispensed by the Centre for drought relief. Chowdhury’s reaction was also highlighted in the Anandabazar Patrika and Jugantar in the following day.

18th May, 1983
The Statesman (1 column 48 lines)
Headline: Congress (I) fears trouble during polls
Primary source: Political party / Political party leader

The report stated that Congress (I) leader Pranab Mukherjee informed that leaders of his party in Nadia, Burdwan and Birbhum district did not apprehend large scale violence during the polls though the party workers held opposite views. The newspaper informed Mukherjee campaigned vigorously in the remote villages of Birbhum to boost his party’s electoral chance. He countered the claim of the state government that the Centre discriminated against the state in the allocation of funds for development. He alleged that the state was unable to spend the entire funds allocated in the stipulated plan period. The Anandabazar Patrika report (2 columns 46 lines; Headline: Congress fears trouble during Panchayat election) on the issue on the same day contradicted the contents of the Statesman report. It said Mukherjee stated that his party workers feared major chaos during election. The report added that West Bengal Congress (I) President commented that the chief minister and his cabinet colleague Jatin Chakrabarty’s anxiety regarding the peaceful conduct of panchayat election indicated there would be trouble on the Election Day. He said CPI (M) has resorted to violence and terror sensing trouble but he emphasized people cannot be tamed by these reprehensible acts.

18th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 180 lines)
Headline: Discord due to lack of political consciousness at some places
Primary source: Political party leader

The news quoted LF chairman Saroj Mukherjee that the friction between the LF allies regarding seat adjustment reflected developed political consciousness. Mukherjee said there was maximum utilization of the funds allocated for rural development by the panchayats in the last five years. He said natural calamities and lean period notwithstanding people stayed put in the villages indicating there were timely and adequate relief as well as employment opportunities there. He said the
panchayats keenly pursued asset creation and described the various works undertaken by the panchayats in the last five years. He said during the Left rule at least some work was executed by the panchayats but during the Congress (I) rule money allocated to the panchayats was pocketed by middlemen and other vested interests. The report informed he said the hue and cry over corruption in the panchayats was uncalled for as the cases of corruption was negligible compared to the phenomenal work done. He said that decentralization of power became a reality under the Left Front regime and though the Congress (I) supported decentralization it was merely a lip-service as it did not hold panchayat election in the state for 18 years and hardly gave power in the hands of the people. The report quoted him that the people were self-sufficient and more politically conscious after decentralization of power and this had far reaching impact. He refused to admit that a new type of vested interest has emerged during the Left rule.

18th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 130 lines)
Headline: When will Ranigunj reap the benefit of panchayats?
Primary source: Grass-root members

The article reported on the previous panchayat’s work in Ranigunj, a colliery area. The report interacted with the grassroots to point out the lack of employment, electricity and drinking water in the area.

19th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 46 lines)
Headline: LF smaller partners wary of rigging
Primary source: Political party / Political party leader

The report specified smaller Front constituents’ feared rigging during the upcoming panchayat election. The report informed they were busy discussing ways to counter rigging and have sent necessary instructions to their workers in the various districts. They suspected that the ballot papers printed in private printing presses have been duplicated and kept aside and would be used in the wee hours before the end of the election time in favor of CPI (M) candidates. The smaller constituents of the LF were apprehensive that the ruling party would create a ruckus in front of the polling
booth and scare away genuine voters. Allegations and counter-allegations abounded in the report.

19th May, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 230 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-FB feud in Coochbehar to help Cong (I)
Reporter / Correspondent

The news focused on the feud between the Front constituents – CPI (M) and FB in Coochbehar. The report stated that though 2.5 crores have been pumped into the villages through the panchayats there was no visible change in the lifestyle of the people. It said the villagers were in a dilemma as the contest was mainly between the two Front partners. The situation was so grim that the supporters of the two parties were not on talking terms. The report commented that the quarrel between the two partners undermined the other aspects of the election such as the development works executed by the panchayats. The report described the development initiatives in one gram panchayat and the response of the voters. The report quoted a voter that the development work would be stalled if the ballot is not cast in favor of the ruling party.

The report commented the zilla parishad's failure to utilize funds due to bureaucratic clutches and the ignorance of the grassroots on the allocation of funds to the gram panchayats suggest that people’s panchayat was a myth. In practice it was a political system controlled by political parties especially the ruling party, dependent on the state government’s policy and dominated by the bureaucratic decision. The report said that local people alleged ‘veiled threats’ by the CPI (M) but there was no reference to any source in this matter. The report described in detail the tussle between the two Front partners and but remarked the Congress (I) would not be able to utilize the differences in the Front for its sluggish approach. The report said Congress (I) claimed ‘intimidation’ by CPI (M) workers has forced it to adopt a measured approach. The grim situation of the Congress (I) candidates and workers was marked in the report.

The campaign of the Congress (I) leaders was also described in this report. The report briefed how the CPI (M) was pulling out all stops to defeat the FB leader and its principal detractor in this district, Kamal Guha and establish its supremacy. The report mentioned that tension was palpable in the district as 16 political clashes
have been reported so far. The report also described the administrative and security arrangements in the district before the election.

19th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 48 lines)
Headline: Fear of violence and infiltration in the border areas
Jugantar (2 columns 52 lines)
Headline: Strict vigil in the border areas during elections
Primary source: Administration

The reports informed that the state government has instructed the Border Security Force to maintain strict vigil along the international border before the panchayat election to prevent infiltration from Bangladesh and avoid trouble. The report stated the Panchayat Minister informed police have been instructed to identify the trouble-prone areas in Nadia and West Dinajpur bordering the neighboring country. The reports quoted the panchayat minister that there was no possibility of any major chaos during the election and the Congress (I) was spreading rumors to upset the election process. Both reports informed about two separate incidents of violence in Midnapore where Congress (I) gram panchayat candidates were attacked and CPI (M) workers were allegedly involved. The reports also wrote in Debra, 4 Congress (I) workers were reportedly abducted from a public meeting.

19th May, 1983
Jugantar (2 columns 91 lines)
Headline: Nowhere near Gandhi’s dreams
Primary source: Political leader

This report related the reactions of prominent mass leader Prafulla Sen on the present panchayat system in West Bengal. He commented that political panchayats interfered with the process of decentralization. He remarked the political parties were more interested to establish their control over the panchayats for control over funds allocated for rural development. He indicated that grass-root empowerment in the sense of political power sharing with the people remained largely elusive due to the dominance by the political parties.
Headline: Prime Minister informed of possibility of electoral malpractice
Primary source: Political party

The report informed the state Congress (I) has intimated Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on the possibility of booth capture by the CPI (M) volunteer squad. The state Congress (I) President met the PM to inform that the ruling party was conspiring to turn the election into a farce and requested her to prevent such an occurrence. The clippings of various newspaper reports on CPI (M) atrocities were attached for her reference. The report narrated his experiences during campaigning in 4 districts – Burdwan, Birbhum, Nadia and Murshidabad. He said in all these districts the Left Front constituents were each other’s adversary. The report stated he admitted if in these circumstances the Congress (I) cannot win then it would be a big failure. He alleged the LF did nothing to improve the living condition of the rural people and failed to utilize the funds allocated for drought relief and rural development by the Center.

20th May, 1983
The Statesman (3 columns 95 lines)
Headline: Coochbehar: CPI (M)-FB rift widens
Reporter / Correspondent

Dissension in the Front was the subject of this news item. It reported the rift between the CPI (M) and FB in Coochbehar. The two parties were contesting each other in many seats to strengthen their mass base in the district. The report elaborated on the causes of the bitter confrontation between the allies. The details of the causes of dispute were disclosed in previous reports like in the Amrita Bazaar Patrika on the previous day, the Jugantar on the 10th and 11th May as cited in the earlier paragraphs. The report observed that the organization of the CPI (M) in the rural areas and among the rural electorate had strengthened since 1978 while the FB neglected its organization in rural Coochbehar. The Congress (I), the report added, riding on its success in the recently concluded elections in colleges in the district and possible split in the Left votes hoped to emerge as a powerful opponent.

20th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 221 lines)
Headline: Ally candidates against CPI (M) in 963 seats in Nadia
Chapter 8

Reporter / Correspondent

This report described the bickering between the Left constituents in the Nadia district. The report commented electoral battle has reached fever pitch with direct contest between blood relations as well as coalition partners. The report observed that the district was already infamous for daily incidents of dacoity and murder and with the approach of the panchayat election the law and order situation worsened. The administration was anxious about the clashes between political parties and has identified the sensitive areas of the district to take extra precaution before and during the election. The report analyzed the status of the various political parties in this district. It said that last time the LF had trounced the Congress (I) but this time due to the conflict between the various Front constituents and the presence of dissident members in the electoral battle, the Congress (I) was upbeat about win. There were detailed accounts of the wrangling in the CPI (M). The report said the dissidents were of the opinion that the existing CPI (M) leaders were more concerned with the interest of the bourgeois than the working class while the party members said that those charged with corruption were denied ticket and have therefore turned dissidents. The report said the CPI (M) district secretary refused to speak to the newspaper correspondent. It remarked if representatives of political parties refused to interact with the media then it would be difficult to write reports with the perspective of all concerned. The report specified the situation of Congress (I) was no better. There were reports of squabbling between Congress (I) leaders from various pockets of the district. The report stated that people in this district was disenchanted with the panchayats after seeing the corruption of the panchayat heads. The report observed of the three tiers in the panchayat system the power lied with the gram panchayats and zilla parishads while the panchayat samitis were reduced to agencies supervising the working of the BDOs.

20th May, 1983

Jugantar (3 columns 150 lines)

Headline: Huge success but no escape from corruption

Primary source: Political party leader

The article conveyed the view of FB leader Ashok Ghosh that though there were reports of corruption and discrimination those were overshadowed by the success of the panchayats. He said the disagreement of the Front partners regarding
seats would not cause any subsequent harm to the Left coalition as all partners were aware of the importance of the Left Front for keeping at bay the vested interests.

The sample newspapers attached great importance to the opinion of political leaders and seemed to take their answers as those of the grassroots.

Ghosh emphasized the utilization of funds by existing panchayats proved that in proper hands panchayats were bound to succeed and warned the voters that the comeback of Congress (I) would lead to dominance by new interest groups. He pointed out even in remote places like Bagmundi in Purulia the participation of grassroots in the development process was noteworthy. The panchayats’ endeavor and the effort of the people were able to create assets in the area.

20th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 150 lines)
Headline: Drought is the bigger question in Bankura
Reporter / Correspondent

The report discussed the pre-poll scenario in Bankura where drought posed a major problem. The report stated that the ruling party has claimed that it has taken several steps to alleviate the problem while the Congress (I) alleged misappropriation of funds allocated for drought relief. The report stated the role of the panchayats was important in the drought-prone, poor district. The report informed there were no industries in the district and people were dependent on agriculture and small-scale industries. The report observed the irrigation facility was inadequate and there was need to develop employment opportunities for the lean period. The District Magistrate said some measures were initiated by the panchayats to prevent flood and drought. The reporter specified that interaction with the people made it clear that the panchayats actively engaged the grassroots in development and relief work. The report commented that the panchayats in this district has successfully altered the power equation in favor of the poor and underprivileged. They have done commendable job in the areas of land distribution for the landless, houses for the homeless, creation of assets during the lean season to employ the unemployed and needy, and provide financial assistance during the cultivation season. The District Magistrate related the steps initiated to develop irrigation in the parched lands. The CPI (M) leadership in the district claimed that the reduction in the number of migrant workers point to the creation of adequate workdays in the district. The report said one
major problem in this district was that of purified drinking water. The report commented discrimination in the distribution of relief material to increase political clout notwithstanding, the panchayats were regarded highly by the people to escape bureaucratic strangle and prevent the return of the vested interests. The report concluded that the campaign for the panchayat elections was on a full swing and there was no report of any disturbance and chaos.

21st May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 134 lines)
Headline: The topics of discussion in Nadia - a stern DM and absolute corruption.
Reporter / Correspondent

The discussion in this report veered on the issues of corruption and the uninterrupted attempts of the District Magistrate to stem the corruption in Nadia. The report said the proactive administration has brought to book many errant panchayat pradhans and sabhapatis of panchayat samitis. The report gave details of several instances of corruption and misappropriation of funds allocated for development by panchayat heads and the inquiry of the administration in that regard. The report commented that the ruling party could not restrain its members from being involved in dishonesty.

20th May, 1983
The Statesman (1 column 32 lines)
Headline: Cong (I) infighting decreased
Primary source: Political party leader

The report informed that the infighting within the Congress (I) has decreased in this panchayat elections as most aspirants were accommodated. The report attributed the news to a Congress (I) leader but did not name him. The report quoted the leader to state that no conflict was reported among the different factions of the party, a complete opposite to the continuous squabble among the Left partners. The Congress (I) leader observed that the CPI (M)'s policy of putting up candidates against the smaller parties may help Congress (I) candidates.

21st May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 30 lines)
Headline: Clash between two partners in Midnapore

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed about skirmishes between CPI (M) and CPI supporters in Midnapore. It was alleged that CPI (M) supporters attacked a CPI procession and injured seven CPI supporters. The report also informed that in Beharampur, Murshidabad Congress (I) gram panchayat candidates demonstrated in front of the DM office to protest against CPI (M) attacks on party workers during campaigning.

21st May, 1983
The Statesman (3 columns 190 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) has upper hand in Jalpaiguri

Reporter / Correspondent

The report said there was no agreement on seat sharing between the Front partners in Jalpaiguri district. It added people were not indifferent to the election campaign but were confused over the chasm in the Left Front. The CPI (M), FB and RSP were fighting each other in almost all the seats in the district. The report stated this was not unusual as in 1978 too there was no seat adjustment in this district and the Left parties contested one another in almost all seats. The Congress (I), sensing its opportunity amidst the rivalry in the Front, has put up candidates in all the seats in the three tiers. The report informed that Congress (I) said it will campaign against the deteriorating law and order in the state and the corruption in the erstwhile panchayat bodies. Its candidates were trying to win over the middle class peasants warning them that a Left victory could doom them as peace in the rural areas would be disturbed and more importantly their land would be seized. But the report said the primary consideration of the rural electorate was likely to be performance of the previous panchayat bodies. In this regard the CPI (M) was ahead of the opposition parties in the Jalpaiguri district as the panchayats dominated by its members had done better work than the rest. The report then elaborated on the activities of a gram panchayat with a vivid description of the most striking image that struck the reporter on his visit to the gram panchayat office namely, the statement of accounts on different projects sanctioned by the Central government. This communication on the work of the gram panchayat not only gave the concerned rural electorate the opportunity to make an informed choice but also gave other readers a chance to explore the role and function of panchayats. The report documented the reactions of
the local people on the performance of the panchayats. There were both admiration and criticism of the work done by the panchayats especially on the dispersal of relief funds. The complaints about the biased dispersal of funds were fewer compared to those in Coochbehar. The report said the CPI (M) intended to consolidate its position in Jalpaiguri following the success of panchayats controlled by it. The report concludes with the detailed analysis of the Left bickering in the past and the present election in the district.

21st May, 1983
The Statesman (2 columns 88 lines)
Headline: Lower rungs of CPI (M) bypassing orders
Reporter / Correspondent

The report observed that the lower level party members of the CPI (M) did not abide by the decisions of the state leadership on electoral adjustments with other Front constituents. Although the CPI (M) explained it was the fallout of democratization in the party, the reporter held lack of control of the leadership over the local leaders responsible for the circumstances. The report cited the example of West Dinajpur where the state leadership’s instructions to share seat with the RSP was ignored by the district leaders. The report commented the leadership in the districts mostly comprised younger members who did not share the spirit of accommodation and understanding of the elder state leaders. The young leadership, the report commented, was of the opinion that the other Front partners were basking in CPI (M)’s reflected glory and without its support they were of little consequence.

21st May, 1983
Jugantar (2 columns 94 lines)
Headline: It is not important to win seats
Primary source: Political party leader

The report published the views of CPI leader Biswanath Mukherjee in response to the same questions that were put to CPI (M) leader Saroj Mukherjee and FB leader Ashok Ghosh in its previous issues. He dismissed the proposition that the battle between the Front partners would benefit the Congress (I) as the Congress (I) nominees would also have to fight against all Left contestants to win. He said his party has instructed workers and supporters to vote for the most eligible LF candidate.
where there was more than one LF candidate. He admitted that the decentralization efforts were not successful everywhere but hoped with conscious effort and efficient management the panchayat system would be entrenched in the rural areas. He said there was always the scope for the emergence of vested interests and the LF needed to be vigilant to prevent their growth.

22nd May, 1983
The Statesman (3 columns 132 lines)
Headline: Drought major issue in Bankura
Primary Source: Grass-root members

The news focused on two gram panchayats in Bankura and the work done by them in the last five years. The grass-root members of one of the panchayats specifically said that their village was neglected as far as development work was concerned because of the absence of CPI (M) representative in a CPI (M) controlled gram panchayat. The report quoted one of the villagers that the common people did not have any stake in the elections.

After five years of working of the elected panchayats, the resentment, disillusionment and disappointment among the rural electorate and grass-root members regarding the role and function of the panchayats was not unusual in a democratic set-up. The sample newspapers, however, rarely projected the loopholes and grievances of the grassroots against the system. The news reports highlighted the efforts of the political parties to woé the voters and mobilize their support for electoral gains. The real issues of poverty alleviation, development and grass-root empowerment were lost in the electoral battle.

The main problem in the Bankura district was drought and it featured significantly in the election campaign of all the major parties as the condition had not improved. The report reviewed that the panchayat work mainly focused on roads and schools with little emphasis on irrigation of cultivation lands or storage of water in this drought ravaged district. The grassroots pointed out in the report that if the priorities of the panchayats in the district were chalked out correctly then they would have benefitted more. The investigation and findings by the report gave pertinent information to the electorate. The opposition leveled charges of corruption (though it was itself not free of corrupt panchayat members) and discrimination in the distribution of relief material and employment against the ruling party but they
admitted that the panchayats prevented people from being starved to death. The report commented that the ruling party flaunted this achievement with great pride. The problem of corruption was discussed in great detail with the newspaper blaming some vested interests within the political parties for the various corrupt practices.

After the discussion on the social scenario of this district, the report moved on to the political setting. The focus was on the Left infighting over seat sharing and the consequent benefit to the Congress (I). The Front partners were critical of the dominating attitude of the CPI (M) while the CPI (M) complained of ungratefulness of the partners. The report commented that the Congress (I) with a weak organization matched the Left Front’s strength due to the chasms in the Front but at the same time it would be difficult for the Congress (I) to ensure a remarkable victory because the Left parties were firmly entrenched in the villages. The tribal areas, the report commented, would see dominance of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha.

22nd May, 1983
The Statesman (2 columns 70 lines)
Headline: Fraternal skirmishes (Editorial)

The editorial commented that one of the reasons for the state government’s request for additional police force could be the law and order problem due to the infighting within the Left Front. The LF failed to reach an agreement in about 16000 seats, The editorial elaborated on the reasons for disagreement among the allies - six years in power, induction of a new partner, CPI and the realization that more seats was equivalent to more power and influence over the rural electorate. The editorial also commented that the clamor for more seats on part of the smaller parties may have stemmed from their fear that the lack of substantial opposition to the bigger party would result in inroads into their strongholds. The Left parties, especially the smaller ones felt a need to assert their distinct identities in the elections to the local bodies to strengthen their positions in the Assembly elections. The editorial concluded that theoretically such dissension in the Left ranks should benefit the Congress (I) but in reality the multiple factions in the opposition party bent on undermining each other rather than defeating the Front would resist such a possibility.

22nd May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 126 lines)
Headline: Allies also allege purchase of votes with relief material
Primary source: Political party / Political party leader

The other Left Front constituents alleged that the CPI (M) was trying to buy voters by distributing relief funds just before the panchayat election. The LF constituents were worried over the erosion of their support base in the rural areas due to this action of the ‘big brother’. The fear and anxiety of the smaller LF partners regarding their political survival was narrated in detail in this report. The report pointed out that in rural areas adjoining towns votes were divided between the Congress (I) and the CPI (M). The existence of the smaller LF parties in other areas was also turning out to be difficult because of direct conflict with the bigger partner or the presence of a dummy candidate. The report commented that though publicly the CPI (M) leadership proclaimed that Congress (I) was their opponent it was clear to FB, RSP and CPI who was their real adversary. The report narrated the details of the opposition faced by prominent leaders of the three smaller constituents from the CPI (M) local units. The problem has become acute due to CPI (M) induced terror and coercion in rural areas. The report gave instances of the smaller allies’ disenchantment with the bigger partner. RSP reported in its mouthpiece that there were reports of violation of LF norms even before the start of panchayat election. It claimed at places there was tie-up with the Congress (I) to marginalize a Front partner and accused some LF parties of buying votes. Though the party did not name anyone, the news report asserted it indicated the CPI (M).

22nd May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 169 lines)
Headline: No sign of development in villages
Primary source: Political party / Political party leader

The West Bengal Congress (I) President remarked there was no existence of the LF and all the constituents were fighting a separate battle against the Congress (I). He said the LF was staring at defeat and planned to take the help of the police and administration to salvage the situation. The LF’s prospects were further dimed by its failure to implement development schemes. The report pointed to the inadequacies of the LF dominated panchayats. The Congress (I) alleged that the fund allocated by the Centre was spent but there was not much improvement in the people’s plight. The progresses of the state in the fields of irrigation, employment generation as well as
relief distribution did not conform to the funds spend for the above purposes. He alleged the Left dominated panchayats were not interested in creating assets and infrastructure as they wanted the poor to remain dependent on it. He said people have realized the scheme of the Front and was set to desert it in the forthcoming elections. He said the CPI (M) realizing its danger has organized ‘voluntary squad’ to perpetrate terror and win elections. The report said he stated that discontent and disillusionment with the CPI (M) have also driven the other Left constituents against it and there were many Left contestants against CPI (M) nominees. He rejected the claim that the LF has done more for the panchayats than the Congress (I) as the funds allocated by the Congress (I) government in the Centre was only forwarded by it and if this was done with honesty then the development of the panchayats would have been much spectacular. He said allegations of nepotism and corruption was rampant in the villages. The Congress (I) President also alleged that criminal activities like murder, rape, and loot and property destruction of Congress (I) supporters by ruling party members went unpunished due to the support of police and administration. The electoral speech of the Congress (I) President was underlined in this report.

23rd May, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 25 lines)
Headline: CM to campaign for panchayat election
Reporter / Correspondent
The campaign details of the chief minister for the Left Front candidates were elaborated in the report. The news also repeated the administrative preparations of the state government prior to the panchayat election.

23rd May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 134 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) to play defensive in Bankura
Reporter / Correspondent
The report described the pre-poll scenario in the Bankura district. The report observed panchayats were the foundation of political power for parties in West Bengal. The report said the ruling party was aware of the above fact and therefore tried to counter the numerous allegations of corruption and nepotism with examples of work done by the panchayats in the last five years to impress the voters. The report
narrated the predicament of the people in the district. About 40% of the population was farm laborers who were forced to look for employment in other districts in the lean season. The report specified that relief for drought was being distributed through the panchayat bodies. The Congress (I) protested the disbursement of relief funds through panchayats just before the election as ruling party members were using it to persuade voters to cast the ballot in their favor and reward its supporters. The report commented that the farm laborers were the mainstay of LF support base in the district while the middle and lower-middle class thronged the meetings of Congress (I). The CPI (M) district leaders admitted that instances of corruption of panchayat functionaries were not unusual but the guilty was summarily punished. The report then gave a detailed account of contestants at the three tiers from all political parties.

23rd May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 52 lines)
Headline: Battle between Front candidates in 1111 seats in Birbhum

Reporter / Correspondent

This report on the electoral battle in the Birbhum district emphasized the direct contests between the Front constituents. The report elaborated on the administrative arrangements by the district authorities for the panchayat election. It remarked that while the LF has fielded more candidates than the total number of seats in the district, the Congress (I) was unable to field candidates in all the seats due to the lack of candidates.

23rd May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 45 lines)
Headline: Battle between Front constituents in 95 seats of Diamond Harbour block

Reporter / Correspondent

The report said there was great excitement in the Diamond Harbour block regarding panchayat election. The report said there was no seat adjustment between Left constituents and there were direct contests in several seats. The blame game between the LF constituents during campaigning was in full swing while the Congress (I) workers were united at this phase. The CPI (M) campaigning emphasized the development initiatives by the Left Front boards while the Congress (I) protested the
misappropriation of funds by the CPI (M) panchayat heads. The report corroborated the Congress (I) standpoint informing that embezzlement of panchayat money was rampant and police arrested several errant panchayat functionaries in this block. The main fight was between the Congress (I) and CPI (M) but there were many independents in the fray were erstwhile members of these two opponents and took part in the contest to protest the denial of their candidature.

23rd May, 1983
Jugantar (2 columns 35 lines)
Headline: 25 people including panchayat candidates arrested
Reporter / Correspondent
The report asserted there was tension in Chatna, Bankura over the attack on the Congress (I) legislator. While the Congress (I) traded charges of attempt to murder its MLA against the CPI (M), the CPI (M) said the villagers mistook the MLA for dacoit and attacked him.

23rd May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 114 lines)
Headline: Need to be cautious to avoid danger in Future
Primary Source: Political Party leader
The report summarized the response of RSP leader Makhan Pal to the same questions put by the newspaper to other prominent political party leaders. The RSP leader was of the opinion that political consciousness of the people has not developed even after the implementation of the panchayat system which could result in the panchayats being reduced to mere relief distributing agencies. Pal said the Left Front was the first to attempt to empower the grassroots politically and make them a part of the governance process as well as integrate them with the development of their resources. He was of the opinion that the greatest ill plaguing the present panchayat system in West Bengal was not corruption but inexperience which prevented the grass-root panchayat members from taking the right decisions at the opportune time or implementing the same with flair. The RSP leader felt the vested interest groups were perturbed by the rise of grassroots and understood their danger and therefore they have decided to hold the hand of Congress (I) and gain political power. Pal said the disunity among the LF partners would not be a problem if the allies adhere to the LF
code of conduct. He commented that to hasten the process of development in the villages there was need to create permanent assets but the lack of political consciousness hindered that process in the last five years.

23rd May, 1983
Jugantar (4 columns 150 lines)
Headline: Battle of 4 Left parties in Nadia
Reporter / Correspondent

The report said an unprecedented event took place in Nadia where all four major Left Front allies were on the war path. The district was a Left stronghold and in the Assembly election last year the partners fought the Congress (I) together. This time, however, the partners were adamant on pursuing ‘friendly contests’. The report threw light on the campaigning of the LF allies. The animosity between the Front partners was described in great detail. The report pointed out that misappropriation and under-utilization of funds have given rise to resentment among voters.

23rd May, 1983
Jugantar (3 column 134 lines)
Headline: The fight in Jagathballavpur is futile
Reporter / Correspondent

The report was on the electoral battle in Howrah’s Jagathballavpur block. The report specified the conflict of political parties was evident from the wall-writings. People were happy with the work of the panchayats though there were many charges of dishonesty against panchayat members. While the CPI (M) supporters claimed their party has done optimum, ally FB and Congress (I) gave a list of incomplete and unsuccessful work by the panchayats. The report predictably narrated the squabble between the Front partners regarding seat sharing. The report commented that the politically conscious people of this block were of the opinion that the Congress (I) could win by a narrow margin in this conflict. But the CPI (M) local leadership was confident that the party’s strong organization would not allow such a predicament.

24th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 106 lines)
Headline: Different battle in Tebhaga land
This report was on the pre-electoral scenario in the blocks of Namkhana, Canning, Sagardweep, Kakdweep, Hatkhola and Bakkhali in South 24 Parganas. The report informed political parties were campaigning extensively through posters, graffiti and meetings and processions but the voters were indifferent. There were allegations of discrimination in preparing the list of benefactors. The report commented the productivity from land was not sufficient to generate income for the tillers who had to fall back on fishing and without adequate equipments often put their lives under risk to pursue fishing in the mid-sea. People were bitter with the lack of development and apathy shown to them. The Congress (I) has done some work in the area and hoped to reap the benefits but the CPI (M), the report said, eager to control the panchayats were not ready to let go without a tough fight.

24th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (3 column 159 lines)
Headline: Gandhian dream takes a Marxist form in Hooghly

The report narrated the political scenario in Hooghly before the panchayat election. The people were indifferent to LF bickering and considered it as common as village feuds. The report commented that people were unanimous that CPI (M) would retain its status as the biggest party. The report gave details of the number of contestants from the recognized political parties in the three tiers of panchayat. The report stated that the inflow of funds for the development of the district in the last five years surpassed the fund allocated in the previous 31 years after independence. The result was disastrous as the report said the Gandhian dream of ‘panchayati raj’ christened as democratic decentralization by the communists had served to fill up the coffers of a few individuals. The report observed the financial powers of the gram panchayats were envious and the powers of the zilla sabhadhipati would make a member of the State Legislative Assembly ashamed. A local leader of the ruling party admitted irregularities in the wake of such unbridled authority and the existence of a new class of vested interest.

24th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 107 lines)
Headline: Experiment in apolitical panchayat in Malda
Reporter / Correspondent

This report described the work of a village panchayat in Malda. The report pointed out that the District Magistrate was all praise for the gram panchayat of Kedpukur as it proved that it was not difficult to develop the panchayat area with the proper utilization of the funds allocated for the purpose. The report pointed out political opponents CPI (M) and Congress (I) was united in the effort to develop the gram panchayat. This was a significant aspect in the development of any gram panchayat as friction between political parties and their members was one of the primary reasons for the lack of development initiatives in many gram panchayats. The report elaborately described the endeavor of the panchayat in irrigation, drinking water facility, building of roads and schools, providing employment through the development of infrastructure as well as dairy and fish-farming. The report said this gram panchayat was actively involved in the creation of assets which was important for its self-sufficiency. The panchayat head was an independent candidate and most of the gram panchayat members were also independents. The report summarized that the success of this independent dominated gram panchayat has raised questions on the efficacy of political parties in the panchayat system.

24th May, 1983
The Statesman (3 columns 162 lines)
Headline: Excitement over poll in Burdwan
Reporter / Correspondent

This report was on the pre-election campaigning in Burdwan. The opening statement of the report that all political parties were excited about the elections gave an idea that the panchayat election did not mean grass-root participation in the political process but was a platform for political parties to strengthen their electorate base in the rural areas. The report highlighted the allegation that thirty thousand rupees has been doled out by the ruling party to each gram panchayat in the district to woe voters. This was an aberration of free and fair election process and the Congress (I) and the Left partners vehemently protested this act. The report informed that the CPI (M) was way ahead of the others in campaigning. The main issue as far as the opposition was concerned was the corruption in the panchayat bodies. They alleged that the CPI (M) would not be able to account for the expenditure it claimed. The
ruling party, however, defended itself and said that the work undertaken by the 
panchayats would justify the expenditure. The report said the other LF partners were 
also not convinced and were of the opinion that the panchayats were controlled by 
vested interests and their functioning was not satisfactory. The LF partners also 
observed that while the panchayats have realized the concept of decentralization of 
power the real authority remained with select functionaries in all the tiers. They were 
of the opinion that panchayats under such circumstances functioned as bureaucratic 
odies and the grassroots were rarely involved in the development process. The report 
said the smaller LF partners confessed that the panchayats failed to secure productive 
growth in most villages and the poor condition of the villagers did not commensurate 
with the huge amount of funds allocated for their development.

The report pointed out the difference in the campaigning approach of the CPI 
(M) and the other allies in the run-up to the election. While the CPI (M) chose to 
highlight the achievements of the panchayats, the other parties concentrated on the 
prospect of the panchayats. The report then elaborated on the existing status of the 
various political parties and their chances in the forthcoming elections. The report 
projected the dominant position of the ruling party and the bitter infighting between 
the various factions of the Congress (I) in the district. The organizational weakness of 
the Congress (I), the report stated, was evident from its inability to put up candidates 
in almost half the gram panchayats in the district.

24th May, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (6 columns 300 lines)
Headline: Changes in Darjeeling since last panchayat poll
Reporter / Correspondent

The report depicted the scenario in the Darjeeling district prior to the 
panchayat election. The report mentioned Darjeeling was the only district in the state 
that gave the LF a miss in the last panchayat election as a result of the alliance 
between the Congress (I) and the Gorkha League, a local political outfit. This time the 
League was divided and the division in the ruling coalition was elaborately described 
in the report. The report referred to the statement of the incumbent chairman of the 
zilla parishad that panchayats did little to utilize the money at their disposal. The 
reporter independently observed that there was little evidence of development work in 
the villages of this district. The report quoted the chairman who blamed the tardy
progress on the failure to understand the responsibility and working of the panchayat bodies. The problems of the district as well as the failure of the panchayats to address development issues were highlighted in great detail in the report.

The plains had given mandate in favor of the LF, or more specifically the CPI (M) last time. The CPI (M) workers were all praise about the achievements and initiatives of the panchayats in building infrastructure like roads, canals and drinking water but that was not the uniform response of all the grass-root members. Development initiatives were lacking in many villages as pointed out by several panchayat members in this report. The friction between two Left constituents – CPI (M) and RSP was also illustrated in the report. The CPI (M) charged the RSP with accommodating ‘opportunist Congress (I) supporters’ while the RSP alleged that the bigger partner denied it seats in accordance with its strength. All the other Left parties were aligned against the CPI (M) and the CPI (M) in response has also launched an all round offensive against the opposition parties as well as the other Left constituents in the district. The report highlighted the problems of the local people from the various parts of the district as well as the views and perspectives of the supporters of the various political parties and the common man on the role of the panchayats in alleviating these problems. The report gave the administrative viewpoint too with the SP of the district predicting keen contest but negating fears of law and order problem in the district. The local Congress (I) leaders were apprehensive that as the tea gardens remained outside the purview of the panchayats, the plantation workers would be used by the ruling party to spread fear and terror among the voters on the Election Day.

25th May, 1983
The Statesman (2 columns 150 lines)
Headline: Panchayat rule a mixed blessing
Reporter / Correspondent
The report discussed the boon and bane of panchayat rule through the study of a typical gram panchayat in the Midnapore district. There was a description of the fairly moderate development work done by the panchayat. It was brought to the notice of the readers that initially the panchayat made a faltering start and there was confusion with regard to the proper utilization of funds but the panchayat improved with time. The report elaborated on the rivalry between the Front constituents in
Midnapore evident from the direct electoral fights between contestants belonging to the various LF constituents. The report also mentioned the bitter campaigning by the partners against each other. While elsewhere in the district there was keen contest between CPI (M) and Congress (I) candidates or between LF candidates, in Jhargram the contest was between CPI (M) and the alliance of CPI (ML), a naxalist outfit and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), a separatist outfit. The thrust of the JMM’s campaign was that the previous panchayats controlled by CPI (M) neglected the interests of the tribal population.

25th May, 1983
The Statesman (2 columns 51 lines)
Headline: Naxalite response to elections varied
Reporter / Correspondent

The news item highlighted the varied response of the different naxalite and separatist groups to the panchayat election. The report specified that while some groups were actively participating in the elections, some remained nonchalant. The spokesperson of an active group justified its participation in the panchayats as its objective of power to the people was the same as that advocated by some ultra-communist groups too. The same spokesperson alleged that the ruling party had transformed the people’s panchayat into a part of the state machinery but it would be proved in no time that people’s representation was more vital to the panchayat system rather than officialdom. The report specified the participation details of the various naxalite groups. The report also elaborated on the reason for non-participation of several other groups.

25th May, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 30 lines)
Headline: Cong (I) poll meetings disturbed
Primary source: Political party / leader

In this report the Congress (I) General Secretary alleged that the party’s election meetings at various places were being disturbed by CPI (M) workers. He gave various examples in support of his allegation and also described the atrocities suffered by the Congress (I) candidates at the hands of the CPI (M) workers. The report said the Secretary alleged incidents of assaults on candidates, ransacking of...
houses and damaging of crops. He claimed that the ruling party did not want a peaceful panchayat election in the state. The report quoted the state Police headquarters to inform that 7 people were killed till date in violence related to panchayat elections.

25th May, 1983

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 51 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) wary of defeat is resorting to violence: Indira

Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was hopeful that Congress (I) would be victorious in the West Bengal panchayat polls. The report informed she was concerned with the volatile condition in the state prior to the second panchayat election. The report repeated that the General Secretary of her party was concerned over the security of Congress (I) workers in the face of constant attacks by CPI (M). He pointed out CPI (M) was insecure about the results of the election and has therefore resorted to violence and connived with other Front partners to rig the elections. The report specified the details of the violence in the state before the panchayat election based on the information of Congress (I) supporters.

25th May, 1983

Jugantar (3 columns 170 lines)

Headline: Panchayat without political parties for 5 months

Reporter / Correspondent

A gram panchayat in West Dinajpur, Patirajpur, set an example of running a panchayat board disregarding political differences. The report informed conviction of the CPI (M) panchayat pradhan (head) on charges of corruption and the subsequent fleeing of the upo-pradhan (assistant head) led to a redundant board for many months. The distribution of relief funds and materials was stalled and the funds allocated for development was lying unused. The CPI (M), Congress (I) and independent panchayat members decided to form a new board free from political trappings to take up the development of the village. The report specified decisions were taken unanimously and there were fervent efforts by the apolitical board to develop permanent assets. The report informed the announcement of elections has dissolved the panchayat and the major political opponents – CPI (M) and Congress (I) - have
jumped into the fray. The existing panchayat members were not given nominations to
assert political enmity. The report commented political parties considered cooperation
of their members with the members of the opposition camp sacrilegious and thought
best to drop them though they had done a commendable job in their previous term.

The news added reports of corruption and discrimination have prompted mass
exodus from the CPI (M). The news item also informed that the conflict between CPI
(M) and FB was severe in this district and there was only partial agreement with the
RSP. Factionalism plagued the Congress (I) too but the report stated the Congress (I)
district leadership denied it.

25th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 176 lines)
Headline: Prayers precede campaign in Nadia
Primary source: Political party members

In this report the reporter interacted with the CPI (M) panchayat member of a
gram panchayat who rattled off the various projects undertaken by the panchayat but
the Congress (I) claimed that the CPI (M) panchayat pradhan as well as the panchayat
members were guilty of discrimination in dispensing development benefits and
pocketing a share of the largesse. This report described the political rivalry, work of
the previous board and the expenditure incurred therein and also narrated the
statements of the various political party representatives in the district.

26th May, 1983
The Statesman (3 columns 65 lines)
Headline: Panchayat poll campaign peaceful
Reporter / Correspondent

The report stated that despite tension and occasional clashes, the panchayat
poll campaigning in Nadia and Murshidabad was more or less peaceful so far. In
Murshidabad 3 people were killed in campaign related violence and the
administration feared outbreak of violence during the election too, but no major
incident was reported since 2nd May. The report opined that the only cause of concern
was that in some areas in both the districts the political parties were out to exploit the
religious sentiments of the people to strengthen their vote banks. The report also
informed that the ruling party was plagued by internal squabble. The report
commented that intra-party strife was new to Left politics. Another aspect which harmed the image of the CPI (M) was the charges of corruption against its panchayat functionaries. The report pointed out that in the Murshidabad district alone 40 functionaries of the party including 2 zilla parishad members and 1 panchayat samiti pradhan was expelled from the party on account of corruption. The report commented, on the basis of information gathered from the rural voters, that the panchayats have played a pivotal role in the expansion of the CPI (M)'s organization at the grass-root level and widening its rural electorate base. The support of the sharecroppers and landless laborers in the wake of the Land Reform policy which initiated distribution of surplus land over and above the ceiling limit for the purpose of cultivation to these poor and marginalized farmers was assured. What was unexpected was the support of the rich landlords in the villages who joined the majority party to avoid harassment and trouble during the distribution of land. The report concluded with the observation that the Congress (I) was the primary opponent of the CPI (M) in these two districts but while the workers of the party hoped to cash in on the grievances of the people against the CPI (M), the infighting between the leaders was set to harm its electoral chances.

26\(^{th}\) May, 1983

The Statesman (1 column 19 lines)

Headline: 4 killed in pre-poll clashes

Primary source: Administration

The report informed that police 'sources' revealed 4 people were killed in pre-poll clashes. Most of the clashes occurred over tearing of posters in the villages. The 'source' also revealed that the Border Security personnel might be deployed to maintain law and order.

26\(^{th}\) May, 1983

The Statesman (1 column 36 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 64 lines)

Headline: Cong (I) trying to discredit Front / Some bureaucrats, police in Nadia is colluding with the Congress: Saroj

Primary sources: Political party leader

The report quoted CPI (M) leader Saroj Mukherjee that some Congress (I) leaders were out to discredit the Left Front government with constant allusion to an
atmosphere of terror in the state before the panchayat election. Mukherjee said that in 1978 the number of clashes before the panchayat elections were 100 compared to 20 such incidents this year. He said the Congress (I) leaders were aware about this data and also the fact that election related clashes were fewer in this state compared to other states. Mukherjee dared the Union Finance minister Pranab Mukherjee to provide evidence that relief material was selectively distributed to CPI (M) supporters.

The Anandabazar Patrika reported that Saroj Mukherjee has alleged that the Nadia District Magistrate and a section of bureaucrats and police officials were favoring the Congress (I). This report said Mukherjee asserted that the damaging publicity of the Congress (I) leaders notwithstanding the Left Front would be victorious in the panchayat election. On the Congress (I) accusation that the LF would make attempts to capture booths, rig the elections and adopt unfair practices, the LF chairman responded that the LF was sure of winning and therefore there was no question of such occurrences. Mukherjee said the Congress (I), sensing an impending defeat was attempting to malign the Front. It is evident the report was in essence the LF chairman’s response to the allegations leveled by a political rival.

26th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 96 lines)

Headline: Let the ballot boxes be opened to reveal the poll result

Primary sources: Political party leader

The news informed that the CPI (M) has formed village Committees in Bankura to supervise the work of the elected party panchayat members in the three tiers in the district. The party said its panchayat members would seek the suggestion of the Committee before the implementation of development programs, or giving relief. The district head of the party said that this step was taken to exercise control over panchayat members and prevent them from misusing powers. He admitted that the other reason for the formation of such Committees was to increase the influence of the party over the rural voters. The district head admitted that the dominance of the Left among the poor and the marginal was in danger and people were irate with the discrimination in developmental grant. The opposition Congress (I) also alleged preferential treatment and questioned why there was no attempt to put an end to the supremacy and domination of the powerful few in the ‘people’s government’. The
Congress (I) was also livid at the sanction of abundant funds for drought relief as well as for various schemes of the Centre and State just before the election. The report commented except the party workers who were involved in meetings, processions and door-to-door campaign few were interested in the election battle.

26th May, 1983
Jugantar (2 columns 98 lines)
Headline: The Congress should not return to power
Primary sources: Political party leader
The news reported chief minister Jyoti Basu was elated at the crowd gathering in his first public meeting for the panchayat election and commented that this proved the political consciousness of the people to defeat a reactionary political party like the Congress (I) and support the CPI (M). He said news from various sources made it amply clear that the ruling party candidates would win big time in this election. The report highlighted his remark that some newspapers were bent on defeating the CPI (M) and emphasized corruption in the panchayat bodies but that will not harm the prospect of the ruling party. He stated the dissension in the Left Front was not unusual as there were several parties in the coalition. The report narrated the chief minister's tirade against the Congress (I) who alleged its only intention for contesting the panchayat election was to get control over the funds allocated to the panchayats.

The sample newspapers continuously highlighted the allegations and accusations of political leaders against opponents though newspapers which were means of public communication should not be used as platform for political propaganda and vendetta.

26th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 153 lines)
Headlines: Todetangta: Highest polling station in the state
Reporter / Correspondent
The news reported on Todetangta, a panchayat located at the highest altitude in West Bengal near the border with Bhutan. The report pointed out though the CPI (M) was present in this remote area along with the Gorkha League, the benefits of panchayat did not reach the residents and was limited to those who came down a few altitudes. The report narrated the miserable condition of the hill people and the lack
of adequate facilities, the rampant existence of corruption. The report stated it was
clear from a tour around the Darjeeling district that Congress (I) was not interested in
the hills while in the plains its two factions were fighting it out. The report discussed
the number of seats and candidates contesting the elections for the different political
parties.

27th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 163 lines)
Headline: Keen contest in Naxalbari
Reporter / Correspondent
The report discussed the political scenario in the Naxalbari area of Darjeeling
district. The report commented that the electoral fight would be tough. The status of
the political parties and their prospect, the difference from 1978 all were elaborately
discussed but there was no mention of the work done by the panchayats or the
initiative taken by the zilla parishads. That would have given an idea of the capability
and competency of the panchayats and assist the electorate in terms of the most
appropriate choice. The sample newspapers limited their coverage to the depiction of
contest between political rivals.

27th May, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 350 lines)
Headline: Malda: Loyalties shuttle between Cong (I) and CPI (M)
Primary source: Grass-root members
This report described the pre-election scenario in Malda. The distinctive
feature of this report was informing about the ground reality in interactive language.
The description of the village scenario and the references to the common people
convinced us that the interface was not limited to the members of the political parties
but involved the grass-root members of remote areas. The report specified the
situation in the villages was grim. The apathy of the voters to the panchayat election
was a consequence of their abysmal plight. The report elaborated on the details of the
electoral contest between the Left Front partners. The CPI (M) leadership specified
that issues rather like the performance of the incumbent panchayats decided the
preference of the voters. The report stated that the party asserted political
consciousness of the villagers required for the realization of the significance of the
panchayat election was actually their contribution. The party was of the opinion that lack of electoral understanding between the Left constituents would not affect its chances though the Congress (I) felt LF bickering would prove advantageous for them. The report said Front partners, FB and RSP, too believed that disagreement over seat sharing would not affect LF's unity or their prospect. The report observed that though the Congress (I) was still influential in certain pockets; its weak organization has eroded its vote bank and decreased victory margin in the Assembly and Parliamentary elections. The Congress (I), the report indicated, was greatly dependent on the popularity of the Union Railways minister Gani Khan Chowdhury and his contribution to the development of the district but factionalism in the party may jeopardize its chances as some leaders doubted the influence of Chowdhury and suspected it would actually boomerang. The polarization of the political forces – CPI (M) and Congress (I) - was distinct. The report referred to unnamed observers and cited posters and graffiti in the campaigning to conclude that panchayat election in Malda was the confrontation between the stature and popularity of Khan Chowdhury and the organization of the ruling party. The report highlighted the glaring lacunae of the panchayat system as it pointed out as many as 30 panchayat pradhans were removed from their posts on charges ranging from misappropriation and misuse of funds to the theft of food grains and other commodities earmarked for the villagers.

27th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 158 lines)
Headline: Wheat in exchange of vote offered in Murshidabad
Primary source: Grass-root members

The report informed there were rumors of vote purchase in exchange of relief material in Murshidabad. The report quoted an elderly villager who alleged that in the last five years not a single grain of rice was offered to the poor but now after the declaration of the election date there was open invitation to take home 4kgs of wheat in exchange for one vote. The report elaborated, a young man alleged that though there was no development of the village yet the panchayat head has built two houses and there were numerous other instances of pilfering of panchayat money. The report pointed out that cases of corruption were not uncommon as then there would not be so many expulsions from the ruling party. The villagers gave specific instances of siphoning of government funds and adoption of fraudulent techniques by panchayat
functionaries. The report said political parties may expel the corrupted but they were absorbed by political opponents and did not suffer any actual penalty.

27th May, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 175 lines)
Headline: Some bureaucrats, policemen helping Cong (I) in panchayat poll
Primary source: Political party leader

The CPI (M) secretary Saroj Mukherjee alleged that a section of policemen and bureaucrats was colluding with the Congress (I) to defeat the Left in the panchayat elections. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika reported this news in its 27th as well as 30th May edition. Mukherjee said he had documents to prove that the Nadia DM overtly and covertly supported the Congress (I). The Anandabazar Patrika on the 26th May carried the same news. The report said the CPI (M) secretary’s comment came in the wake of Union Railways minister, Gani Khan Chowdhury’s accusations that some government officers were partial to the Left Front. The report informed Saroj Mukherjee predicted bright prospect for the LF coalition in the forthcoming election based on the feedback of the party activists, the party leaders and the MPs and MLAs. He was confident despite ‘friendly contests’ the politically conscious rural people would chose the most appropriate Front candidate rejecting the Congress (I) nominee just like in 1978 when the opposition could only capture 37% of seats despite ‘friendly contests’. He emphasized election would be peaceful proving wrong the concerns of the Congress (I) leaders on the deteriorating law and order situation which he said were based on frustration as they knew they would be severely mauled in the elections. He pointed out the Congress (I) leadership organized about hundred public meetings in the run-up to this election and only a handful of them were disturbed and so the specter of state-wide terror was fabricated. The report said the CPI (M) secretary was convinced that Congress (I)’s anticipation that LF defeat in the upcoming panchayat election would result in the downfall of the LF government was highly ambitious. Many points in this report were repetition of those highlighted in the reports of Statesman and Anandabazar Patrika on the 26th May.

27th May, 1983
The Statesman (1 column 19 lines)
Headlines: Cong will do well in panchayat polls

220
Primary source: Political party leader

The report elaborately discussed a press meet held by Union Finance minister Pranab Mukherjee to reflect on Congress (I)' electoral opportunities in the 2nd West Bengal panchayat election. He was quoted that if the election was peaceful the Congress would do well. He commented that after attending a series of election rallies he has reached the conclusion that there was political consciousness among the people which would help Congress (I) to regain power at the local level. Mukherjee was quoted by the report as saying though a Congress win in the panchayat election would not change the political situation in the state, it would add new dimension to the rural political setting.

27th May, 1983
The Statesman: 1 column 39 lines
Headline: Panchayat Poll: Deployment of Police begins

Primary source: Administration

The news informed that the state government has begun deployment of the security forces to ensure a free and fair poll. The report also informed that the administration has identified the trouble prone areas and taken stringent measures to maintain law and order.

28th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 column 182 lines)
Headline: LF constituents contest each other in most seats in Jalpaiguri

Primary source: Political party leader

The report gave a detailed account of the scenario in Jalpaiguri district before the panchayat election. The contest, the report summarized from the graffiti in the walls, was between the CPI (M) and the RSP while the Congress (I) was a distant third. The intensity of the campaign against each other increased during the door-to-door campaign. The report opined that direct contest between the Front allies have eroded its image at the grass-root level. There was strife between the allies in this district in the last panchayat election too. But the report underlined this time the fight was more pronounced as the panchayats especially the gram panchayats have become more powerful both politically and economically and all the local leaders wanted to have a share in the power structure. The report pointed out in 1978 a gram panchayat
in Jalpaiguri received an annual grant of 15 to 20 thousand but that amount in 1982 was around two lakhs. The report commented that the Front partners attacked the CPI (M) in the same way as the Congress (I). Whenever the Congress (I) pointed out inefficiency or malpractice of a CPI (M) panchayat board or its members, RSP and FB were quick to restate the lapses. But the report commented the CPI (M) seemed unmoved by these acts of the allies and recognized the Congress (I) as its only opponent. The ruling party, the report said, has conceived of a spiteful way to get even with the small partners wherever they had a strong presence. Since the CPI (M) controlled the Jalpaiguri zilla parishad they regulated the flow of development funds to the various panchayat samitis and the gram panchayats in the district and the report revealed that district officials admitted the CPI (M) zilla parishad discouraged development grants in the RSP-dominated panchayat samitis. The ministers of the government were also involved in this embittered scenario. The report said they did not utter a word against Left unity during their campaign in the district but their supporters tweaked their speeches in such a manner that it was enough to incense the supporters of the other parties. The report informed that the Congress (I) hoped to get advantage from such a situation and it was not impossible for it to form the panchayat board in places where both the CPI (M) and RSP were equally strong and would nullify each other’s vote count. The report elaborated on the fight between partners in the various blocks in the district. The report observed that the CPI (M) knew that a resounding success in this district would strengthen its influence in the Front and the RSP knew that a good result would establish it as the second important party in the LF and hold the ‘big brother’ at tenterhooks.

28th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 105 lines)
Headline: Battle between allies in 24 Parganas
Primary source: Political party leader
The report depicted the squabble between LF allies in 24 Parganas. The report said the Congress (I) was facing similar trouble within its rank there. The RSP had a prominent support base in Basanti and Gosaba blocks. The report said the grassroots were firm in their standpoint to vote for the political outfit that would solve their problems and would distribute relief without discrimination. One significant purpose of all political parties in this district was to secure the support of migrants who crossed over from Bangladesh. The migrants said they would support the party which
ensured relief and loan. The LF district secretary said the LF government has implemented various development programs for all sections – farmers, industrial workers as well as the middle class in the last five years and hope to reap the benefit in the forthcoming election. But the Congress (I) campaign emphasized that the funds allocated by the Center was deposited with the CPI (M) party offices throughout the state or used by panchayat functionaries of the ruling party for their own benefit.

28th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 150 lines)
Headline: Handbills to disclose about corruption in Namkhana block
Reporter / Correspondent

The report concentrated on the Namkhana block in the South 24 Parganas district. The report wrote this block could be the nemesis for the CPI (M) in South 24 Parganas. The charges of corruption against a panchayat head confirmed through an investigation by the gram panchayat accounts Committee and the protests of panchayat members against despotic CPI (M) leaders were referred by opposition leaders in every public meeting in the block. The report said there was uproar against the present panchayat board and the Congress (I) has joined hands with dissident CPI (M) members to form a public welfare Committee to monitor its work. The report informed, the CPI (M) forced on the back foot, was distributing handbills to update the voters that the tainted panchayat members have been ousted from the party. The report elaborated on the dissidence in the ruling party and highlighted the allegations of CPI (M) workers. They alleged that the panchayat members were not involved in the decision of the panchayats and it was decided by the local Committee of the party. The report commented that this was proof that the actual empowerment of the grassroots was a far cry. The report further emphasized that only 30% of the allotted money was utilized by the panchayats and the rest 70% was siphoned off.

28th May, 1983
The Statesman (1 column 36 lines)
Headline: 10 companies of BSF for panchayat poll
Primary source: Administration

The report referred to the security arrangements made by the government for the panchayat polls. It informed vulnerable spots have been identified and adequate police posting would be made on the day of polling to avoid trouble.
28th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 171 lines)
Headline: No political party is sure in Malda
Reporter / Correspondent

The report described the pre-poll scenario in Malda. The report gave a detailed description of the conflict between the Left parties and the reasons for it. The other Front partners blamed the bigger partner for the disunity and announced they have jointly reached a pact to defeat the ‘boastful CPI (M)’.

28th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 164 lines)
Headline: Conflict in Front but still no hope for Congress in Jalpaiguri
Reporter / Correspondent

The report on the pre-poll situation in Jalpaiguri was not much different from that on Malda or for that matter other reports in the sample newspapers on the political scenario in the various districts prior to the panchayat election. The same preoccupation with political parties, the discord between Left parties, the disagreement of the smaller Left parties with CPI (M) regarding seat allocation, the mud-slinging between the coalition partners, the prospect of the main opponent Congress (I) under such circumstances, the internal relation between Congress (I) members were the subjects of discussion in these columns. This report emphasized in Jalpaiguri in spite of the internecine strife in the Front, the Congress (I) had little chance as the people were Left-oriented and would choose from among the Left Front candidates in the fray. The report specified the reason for such orientation of the voters was the deplorable state of the Congress (I). The report commented that the Congress (I) would get some seats as there was a certain section of committed voters who would chose it irrespective of its state. The report described the contest between the coalition partners - especially between RSP and CPI (M) - in great detail along with statements of the leaders.

29th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 33 lines)
Headline: All concerned about the impending result of panchayat election
Primary source: Political party members

The report highlighted the anxiety of the different political party leaders regarding the result of the forthcoming panchayat election. The report said the leaders were either busy touring the different districts to assess the last-minute situation or were rooted in the party headquarters urging reporters to give them objective perception of their party’s prospects. The report remarked the Congress (I) had nothing to lose in this election but the Front constituents had reason to worry. The report explained though LF leaders claimed seat adjustment, the real situation was different. The report underlined and I quote ‘the grass-root situation was beyond the control of party leaders at the headquarters.’ The comment was in perspective of the influence of the state Left leaders over the grass-root leaders and workers. The continuous struggle between the partners culminated in clashes in many places throughout the state which increased the tension of the administration. The appeal of the leaders through the party mouthpieces – Ganashakti [CPI (M)] and Kalantar (CPI) - to abstain from violence and maintain peace fell on deaf ears.

29th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 80 lines)
Headline: Left’s image would suffer a setback in Murshidabad

Primary source: Political party members

The report described the political scenario in Murshidabad before the election. The main focus of the report was, as usual, on the strife between LF partners. The report said RSP and FB have put up candidates against the CPI (M) at many places in this district. The report commented this has ruined the image of the Left Front and the Congress (I) was set to gain from this internecine strife in the Front. The CPI (M) leadership, however, dismissed the competition between the allies and asserted that the Congress (I) was the main opponent. The report stated FB emphasized that the CPI (M) was irate at its supporters joining the FB in hoards fed up with the corruption in their party. The report elaborately described the quarrel between the CPI (M) and FB district leadership. The RSP’s grievances against the bigger party were also prominently reported. It is another thing whether such reporting helped the grassroots in Murshidabad in the process of democratization. Congress (I) leader Abdul Sattar, who was the opposition leader in the West Bengal Assembly, commented if election was held peacefully and there was no electoral malpractice the Congress (I) would
capture the Murshidabad zilla parishad. The report informed there was tension brewing between land tillers in the district which could be a major stumbling block in the way of peaceful polls. Sattar claimed that the ruling party was stoking this tension to gain undue advantage in the election. Sattar said that a huge amount was allocated by the Central government for the development of the panchayat areas in the state but the funds were misused by the CPI (M) functionaries for their personal development. The report concluded that CPI (M) leaders when confronted with Sattar’s allegation dismissed it as baseless.

29th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 column 122 lines)
Headline: Prospect even in Murshidabad
Reporter / Correspondent
This report informed that though the Congress (I) fared poorly in 1978 in Murshidabad, a CPI (M) local leader admitted there would be stiff competition this year. The political scenario in the district before 1978 and thereafter was discussed in the report. The report termed the internal strife in the Left Front as intense. The partners were campaigning independently. The report commented it belied the existence of a Front while the Congress (I) was united in its election endeavor. The report stated the electorate in this district was politically conscious and though the Congress (I) has alleged that the ruling party was trying to buy votes it was unlikely that the people will be lured by money or food. The report also stated that the electorate was aware of the funds allocated and the expenditure made thereof. The grassroots were satisfied with the relief work during drought. The Congress (I) doubted that voting would be peaceful but the administration was vigilant and hoped that the peace would prevail during polling.

29th May, 1983
The Statesman (2 columns 40 lines)
Headline: Keen contest likely in Howrah panchayat poll
Primary source: Political party representatives
The article said a keen contest was likely between the CPI (M) and Congress (I) in the Howrah district. The FB has also put up a large number of candidates. It claimed seat adjustment with the CPI (M) could not be implemented due to the latter’s
uncompromising attitude. It, however, categorically denied backing Congress (I) candidates anywhere and pledged its support for CPI (M) candidates where there were no candidates of its own. The CPI (M), the report said, complained FB has set up some of its members as independent candidates against the official LF nominated CPI (M) candidate to defeat them. The district Congress (I) pointed out that CPI (M) had become isolated from the other Left partners. The report concluded that in spite of the differences between the political parties the campaigning has been peaceful till date.

29th May, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 18 lines)
Headline: Two held for refusing poll duty
Primary source: Administration

The news described the problems of several district administrations with regard to shortage of polling personnel.

29th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 130 lines)
Headline: Campaign ends today
Reporter / Correspondent

The news said the campaign for the panchayat election on 31st May ended that day. The report mentioned the various campaign initiatives by the different political parties. It said both the Congress (I) and CPI (M) leaders held innumerable public meetings in the last few days. In 24 Parganas only the CPI (M) held more than 2000 meetings before this election. The Congress (I) Union ministers pointed out the failure and corruption of the panchayats and urged voters to choose Congress (I) for development. The CPI (M) leaders criticized the Left Front allies along with the Congress (I). The CPI (M) leaders Saroj Mukherjee, Jyoti Basu and Binoy Chowdhury alleged that the Congress (I) government at the Centre neglected the state and the two Union ministers made false indictments against CPI (M) panchayat members. The same report elaborated on the administrative preparations for the election. The report also informed that in Baruipur, South 24 Parganas there was clash between Congress (I) and CPI (M) supporters.

29th May, 1983
Jugantar (5 columns 91 lines)
Headline: RSP is a major challenge to CPI (M) in Jalpaiguri
Report/Correspondent

The report, as usual, referred to the activities of political parties in the Jalpaiguri district before the election process. The CPI (M) concentrated on door-to-door campaigning. It emphasized informal interaction with the electorate on various political and social issues rather than speeches in public meetings would win over the voters. The report said a CPI (M) leader revealed it was not worried about Congress (I) but RSP, another LF constituent. The report asserted the relation between the Left constituents was strained; both considered the other as the opposition. The Congress (I), the report said, believed that voters were annoyed with the atmosphere of fear and violence created by the ruling party and the numerous instances of embezzlement of funds allocated for development. The report concluded that Congress (I) hoped bickering of the Front allies would give it an advantage but it was apprehensive of malpractice on the Election Day.

30th May, 1983
The Statesman (2 column 44 lines)
Headline: Friendly contests among Front partners
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 110 lines)
Headline: Panchayat poll: Left Front call to maintain peace
Primary source: Political Party
Jugantar (2 columns 91 lines)
Headline: Campaign ends, everybody ready for vote tomorrow
Report/Correspondent

The reports specified that Saroj Mukherjee, the LF chairman insisted that there would be ‘friendly contests’ among the LF partners in some seats. He alleged that the Congress (I) had put up several candidates who were expelled or removed from the Left parties on corruption charges showing its indifference and opportunistic mind set. The report carried his appeal to all Left parties to forget their differences and allow voters to cast their ballot freely. He also urged the opposition Congress (I) to maintain peace and asked the government to adopt necessary measures for a peaceful election. He warned Front workers that the Congress workers might create trouble on the Election Day out of sheer frustration and asked them to restrain themselves to avoid any untoward incident.
In the Jugantar report he was quoted that there was no chance of any violence on the Election Day and if there was any such incident the onus would be on the Congress (I) as they were apprehending loss and would create trouble out of frustration.

The Statesman report added that Mukherjee admitted that 7 CPI (M) and 3 Congress (I) supporters were killed in pre-poll violence but at the same time pointed out the figure was negligible when compared to the other states ruled by the Congress (I).

30th May, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 127 lines)
Headline: Panchayat poll tomorrow
Reporter / Correspondent
The report specified the number of voters, candidates, seats in the three tiers along with other details of the panchayat election to be held on the following day. The report specified that the situation was more or less peaceful. The report specified the outcome of the election would be significant as the political party or coalition that wins the election would get a chance to consolidate its base at the grass-root level. The report said the polarization of the body politic was responsible for the drop in the number of independent candidates from 1978. The report asserted Congress (I) was in a better position this time due to the rivalry among the Left partners.

30th May, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 134 lines)
Headline: Vote tomorrow
Jugantar (2 columns 91 lines)
Heading: Campaign over, all set for vote tomorrow
Reporter / Correspondent
The elaborate reports informed about the number of seats in the three tiers (55,145), contestants (1, 61,866), voters (2.2 crores), and security and polling personnel involved in the voting process. The reports also wrote about other details like ballot paper printing, transportation of ballot boxes and polling personnel to polling stations, the expenditure involved in the election, the number of uncontested wins. The reports informed that residents of Taherpur and Coopers’ camp in Nadia
have boycotted the panchayat election as they were demanding to be notified as municipal areas. (Detailed information on this issue was highlighted in the Jugantar on the 13th May too.) The Jugantar report highlighted the discord between the Left Front constituents but also pointed out that the chief minister as well as other Left Front leaders was unanimous that whatever the differences in the Front it was set to win absolute majority in the zilla parishads, the highest tier in the panchayat system. The report commented the Congress (I), on the other hand, was apprehensive that the CPI (M) would leave no stone unturned - from misusing administrative power to using muscle power - to forcibly capture power. The Congress (I) believed that the other Left constituents would not be spared from CPI (M) wrath.

30th May, 1983
Jugantar (3 columns 132 lines)
Headline: Excitement over panchayat election, situation more or less peaceful
Reporter / Correspondent

The report said there was excitement about elections in Hooghly district but not much tension. The report remarked the political scenario was not much different from that in the other districts. There was conflict between Left allies. The report included the remarks of an erstwhile CPI (M) member who said discrimination in distribution of relief has forced many like him to desert the party. The report commented that polarity between the two main opponents - CPI (M) and the Congress, has increased during the recent times. The report highlighted the political contests in the different blocks like Goghat, Polba and Chinsurah.

31st May, 1983
The Statesman (2 columns 116 lines)
Headline: Panchayat election today
Jugantar (1 column)
Heading: Number of candidates, polling and security personnel in each district
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 82 lines)
Heading: Vote in the state today
Primary source: Administration

These reports elaborated on the administrative preparations undertaken to ensure that about 22 million voters were able to exercise their franchise in the
Ch...
clash between the supporters of Congress (I) and CPI (M) when a Congress (I) meeting was intercepted by a CPI (M) procession. The Anandabazar Patrika and Jugantar also reported the above incident.

31st May, 1983

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 88 lines)

Headline: LF constituents fear more conflict after polling

Primary source: Political party representatives

The report said the smaller LF allies' feared squabble between Front partners would increase once the election was over. The control over gram panchayats would be crucial for all political parties and there would be trading of independent candidates to secure votes. The Front allies, FB and RSP, said that the race to be the panchayat Pradhan or secure majority in a gram panchayat would inevitably lead to conflict. They said that their workers at the lower level have been warned to remain alert against the incitement by the Congress (I) and the CPI (M). Recognizing that the Congress (I) was a potential force this time, the Left Front had started its campaign much earlier this year. The report compared the data on LF and Congress (I) campaigning like the number Front leaders who participated in the campaign against the number of leaders for the Congress (I), the number of meetings held by both sides, the promises made in the election manifestoes etc.

1st June, 1983

The Statesman (2 columns 233 lines)

Headline: Large turn-out in Panchayat elections

Reporter / Correspondent

The article reported more or less peaceful elections in the state barring a dozen violent incidents where 2 political workers and 1 voter were killed. The police had to resort to firing in 4 districts – Nadia, Malda, West Dinajpur and Burdwan to maintain law and order although no one was injured or killed in it. The report informed that many villages wore a festive look on the occasion of election and ignoring the sultry weather people stood patiently in long queues for their chance to vote well past the scheduled polling timing. The report remarked that the enthusiastic participation of the women voters in the second panchayat polls in the state was a significant development. The report informed that the chief minister lauded the effort of the
common people in the rural areas, and the police and administration for the smooth conduct of elections in the state. The report informed that a CPI (M) supporter was killed in a clash with the Congress (I) supporters in the Purulia district. In a separate incident a voter was beaten to death in Bankura district, allegedly by CPI (M) supporters. In Purulia there was an incident of forcible snatching of ballot paper and consequently election was cancelled in the concerned booth. In another incident in this district, the report informed, the Congress (I) supporters tried to jam a booth. In Midnapore, the report informed, a Congress (I) candidate and three other party workers were arrested for assaulting CPI (M) workers. The most violent incident was reported from the North 24 Parganas where supporters of two Left constituents, CPI (M) and FB attacked each other with lethal weapons. In Murshidabad polling had to be suspended in a booth for the day after ballot papers were snatched away. The report said campaigning and canvassing continued outside the booths even on the polling day. The placards and festoons either criticized the performance of the previous panchayat members or eulogized their efforts in a last ditch attempt to influence the voters. The report informed that polling was brisk in Howrah and Hooghly with the turnout pegged at 80%. Some booths recorded cent percent attendance. But despite the brisk voting polling could not be finished within the stipulated time. In an incident in Nadia a group of people attacked a polling booth and assaulted the presiding officer and security personnel in the booth. The miscreants snatched 3 ballot boxes and threw them in a nearby water body.

1st June, 1983

The Statesman (2 columns 39 lines)

Headline: Propaganda belied Front, Booths jammed: Cong (I)

Primary source: Political party

The news recorded the response of the various political party leaders to the panchayat election. The LF chairman, for example said that the overall peaceful election in the state proved the Congress (I) leaders including the Prime Minister were involved in 'motivated propaganda' against the LF government. (This was also reported in the Jugantar.) He praised the people and the LF workers and supporters for upholding the tradition of peaceful elections in the state. The Congress (I) leaders cited booth jamming by CPI (M) workers in the Burdwan and Coochbehar districts as reasons for clashes between the CPI (M) and Congress (I) supporters there. They were
apprehensive of clashes during counting of votes in the next two days particularly where both the CPI (M) and its opponents were equally strong. The FB said the panchayat vote was a ‘political festival’ for the rural people as was evident from the huge turnout and the participation. The RSP lauded the people for peaceful polling and said the large turnout proved the democratic consciousness of the rural electorate.

1st June, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 28 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) leading in the race
Reporter / Correspondent
The report referred to the counting of votes in all the 30000 booths of the state shortly after polling for the 2nd panchayat election ended. The report specified that the CPI (M) was emerging as the single largest party while the Congress (I) followed suit. The report specified independents were also about to bag a large number of seats and gave details of the uncontested wins.

1st June, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 466 lines)
Headline: Heavy turnout in panchayat elections
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed 4 people were killed in violent incidents in Purulia, Asansol, Bankura, West Dinajpur and 24 Parganas while there were reports of several minor clashes from the other districts. 15 people were injured in 4 different clashes between the CPI (M) and Congress (I) supporters in Midnapore. Two polling officials were beaten in this district and 7 people including a Congress (I) candidate was arrested. The report also informed that several CPI (M) supporters were injured in a clash between the CPI (M) and FB supporters in North 24 Parganas. There were also reports of police firing in Nadia though details were not available. The report stated polling was suspended in a dozen booths due to attempts of booth capturing, snatching of ballot papers and forcible stamping. The LF chairman termed the just concluded election as the most peaceful election in this state despite the murder of two of his party members. The report informed voters boycotted polling to protest lack of development work in several booths of Darjeeling and Nadia. The report claimed complex voting procedure was responsible for the slow pace of polling which
continued well after the scheduled time. This report also mentioned the festive air in
the villages on the polling day and the fact that party volunteers including women
ferried voters in all kinds of vehicles from remote areas to the respective booths. The
chief minister’s statement was elaborately reported where the chief minister referred
to the two violent incidents where two of his party supporters were killed. The chief
minister’s account was absolved the CPI (M) of any misdeed and the newspaper
report reflecting his view appeared one-sided and prejudiced as a result.

1st June, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 150 lines)
Headline: 5 killed, ballot boxes looted, vote postponed at some places
The Statesman (2 columns 233 lines)
Headline: Large turnout in Panchayat election
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 466 lines)
Headline: Heavy turnout in Panchayat election
Reporters / Correspondents
The violent incidents were elaborately described in the Anandabazar Patrika
report. The reports stated that the ugly side of election was revealed through the
violent incidents which claimed at least 5 lives. The flip side of the panchayat
elections was also reflected in the Jugantar, Statesman and Amrita Bazaar Patrika.
The reports referred to various incidents of disruption and chaos quoting the chief
minister, political party leaders as well as the police.

The picture of violence portrayed by the mainstream newspapers was alarming
but there was no protesting voice against the alarming trend in their columns.

1st June, 1983
Jugantar (2columns 121 lines)
Headline: Never seen such peaceful panchayat election: Saroj Mukherjee
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 74 lines)
Headline: Left and Congress’ difference of opinion over the conduct of
panchayat election
Primary source: Political party leader(s)
The reports recorded the reactions of the political leaders on the conduct of the
panchayat elections. The chief minister and the LF chairman said it was a peaceful
election. The Congress (I) chief in the state said the election was not peaceful and
marred by several incidents of violence. The chief minister admitted to some incidents of violence and said the aim of the attacks was supporters of the ruling party. The LF chairman said the incidents of violence were caused by the instigation of Congress (I) workers. The Congress (I) claim was expectedly the opposite. It said that reports of violence came in from all districts and the ruling party indulged in massive booth capturing and violence to dominate the election. The other Left partners were of the opinion that voting was mostly peaceful with a few stray incidents of violence. The RSP feared violence during counting.

The reports of the two dailies stated that the LF chairman has alleged ‘blatant discrimination’ on the part of the local station of All India Radio in the reporting of the panchayat election. He told reporters that AIR and Doordarshan were biased in their coverage of the panchayat election and did not give adequate footage to the campaign of Left leaders including the chief minister’s and panchayat minister’s public meetings. This comment of the LF chairman was significant as it underlined the intensity with which political parties and their leaders follow the coverage of mass media. The Anandabazar Patrika report said the state Congress (I) President alleged large scale disturbances in Purulia, Coochbehar, Nadia and West Dinajpur on the Election Day. He feared these disturbances would continue till the results were announced. The report then described the polling in the North 24 Parganas where female voters outnumbered males in most booths and the excitement of the people was evident from the long queues even before the start of polling. The voters complained of inadequate booths which led to slow polling. The polling continued well past the scheduled time and the counting would therefore be delayed. The scenario outside the polling booths was described in great detail. The report emphasized that though there were grievances among people regarding the functioning of the panchayats, it did not dampen the enthusiasm to cast votes.

The Jugantar report highlighted the contradictory statements of three leaders from three political parties. Saroj Mukherjee commented he has not witnessed a more peaceful election, FB leader Ashok Ghosh said election was relatively peaceful as people have become conscious and would not allow the misuse of their franchise nor allow violence to dominate the poll proceedings and the Congress (I) general secretary said that the election was not free and fair at most places but wherever people have voted spontaneously the defeat of the ruling party was certain. The Congress (I) general secretary reported untoward incidents from Coochbehar, Nadia
and West Dinajpur. The Congress (I) chief whip in the Assembly agreed with FB's Ashok Ghosh that despite the CPI (M)'s attempt to resort to violence and disrupt the election process voting was more or less peaceful on account of the awareness of the voters. He pointed out that the collision between the Front constituents regarding panchayat elections was proof of the deteriorating relation between the partners and predicted the LF was on the verge of break-up and have no moral right to continue in the government.

The Anandabazar Patrika report described the polling in Howrah district which recorded a vote per minute in most of the booths. The report informed counting has resumed in booths where polling was complete. The report informed naxalite attack and ballot box snatching stalled poll proceedings in booths in Durgapur. The report likewise described the polling procedures in Darjeeling, and Burdwan.

1st June, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 138 lines)
Headline: Voting till midnight
Jugantar (1 column 208 lines)
Headline: Huge enthusiasm but few skirmishes
Reporters / Correspondents
The Anandabazar Patrika described the enthusiasm of the grass-root voters and informed that in many places voting went on till midnight much beyond the stipulated time. While the overall voting was about 70%, in Nadia it was about 85% and in Howrah, Haldia and Coochbehar, the figure was 80%. This was also discussed in the reports of the three other sample newspapers. The papers discussed the preliminary results in the three tiers. They specified that the contest was between the Front partners at several places. They described the voting scenario in the various districts like Anandabazar Patrika described the situation in Howrah and Malda. There were some complications in several booths regarding the voting procedure which delayed the electoral proceedings. The different news on the election process and conduct was sometimes repetitive and overlapping in the various news items under separate headlines.

2nd June, 1983
Jugantar (2 columns 95 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 48 lines) / The Statesman (3 columns 216 lines) / Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 118 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) ahead / CPI (M) leads / Victory for CPI (M); impressive gains for the Congress

Reporters / Correspondents

The one news item common to all the sample newspapers on the 2nd June was the elaborate discussion of results in all the three tiers. The Statesman stated that the results indicated an impressive win for the CPI (M) as impressive as in 1978. The report said that an analysis of the results showed an improved performance by the Congress (I), especially at the gram panchayat level. The report elaborated that in the political circles the success of the Congress (I) was attributed to the bickering in the Left Front. But it was also true that the Congress (I) extended its influence in the rural areas over the last five years and strengthened its organization there. The smaller Left parties – RSP, FB and CPI – were weakened by the differences in the Left Front and suffered great losses in this election. This view was shared by the leaders of these parties too. The report specified ‘friendly contest’ of the Left constituents turned bitter in many seats. The leaders of the smaller parties were of the opinion that the Congress (I) gained at their expense. They also felt that the non-committal voters would have preferred the Left alliance over the Congress (I) if the constituents gave a united fight. The newspaper commented that the increase of Congress (I) s’ power in the rural areas was a bad omen for the ruling party as it would attempt to unite the smaller Left constituents under its fold. The report revealed CPI (M) leaders were of the opinion that the smaller constituents made a mistake by not accepting its offer of adjustment. The Statesman report gave information on the incidents of violence that continued throughout the state. The report informed that police fired in West Dinajpur to disperse violent crowds. A CPI (M) supporter was injured when Congress (I) supporters allegedly attacked a victory procession in Nadia. In Howrah the police had to resort to firing to prevent snatching of ballot boxes during counting. There was an incident of ballot box snatching in Burdwan. In Midnapore 4 Congress (I) supporters were injured in a clash with the CPI (M) supporters. Polling officers were intimidated and attacked in many places.

Amrita Bazaar Patrika and Anandabazar Patrika also related the violent incidents post polling in the different districts in the state. The Anandabazar Patrika report stated that in several places victory processions of political parties led to violent clashes.
The Amrita Bazaar Patrika pointed out while the CPI (M) maintained its lead, the Congress (I) made substantial gains at the expense of two other Front constituents – RSP and FB. The report specified it was evident from the results of the gram panchayat elections that belying the prediction of the CPI (M) that the Congress (I) would not be able to gain from the Front bickering, the Congress (I) made inroads into several Left strongholds like Coochbehar, Nadia, Murshidabad, West Dinajpur and 24 Parganas. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika report repeated that the CPI (M) would be able to maintain its previous seat count but there would be a reduction of seats of the RSP and FB due to ‘friendly contests’ between the Front partners. The Front leaders including the chairman had hoped that wherever there were friendly contests people would choose from the Front nominees rejecting the Congress (I) candidate but the results proved otherwise. The report provided examples of Congress (I) victories because of the above mentioned factors. It noted that the voting pattern indicated that if the Front partners refrained from the ‘friendly contests’ they may well have retained their respective seats. The Front partners also admitted that unity in the LF was a necessity considering the trend of political polarization among the voters. The Jugantar commented that the small constituents were worried of their poor performance as it may affect their equation with the ‘big brother’. The report stated that the Front constituents were of the opinion that if the CPI (M) made efforts to unite the allies then the Congress (I) would not have been successful in its endeavor. They were apprehensive that the CPI (M) could now ill-treat the other partners and the result would be harmful for the Front.

2nd June, 1983

Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 80 lines) and (2 columns 70 lines)

Headline: Congress took advantage of the debacle of ‘smaller’ Left partners / CPI (M) happy with result, not partners

Primary source: Political party / Political party leader

The Anandabazar Patrika report while pointing out the convincing victory of the ruling party commented CPI (M) could not enjoy the defeat of smaller Front allies due to two reasons. The first was the reduction of its own seat count and the second as cited by the Amrita Bazaar Patrika earlier, the gain of the Congress (I) from the debacle of the smaller Left allies. The report commented CPI (M) knew that the increase of clout in the villages would make the Congress (I) proactive in uniting the
anti-CPI (M) forces that included the hurt Left allies and that could jeopardize its political dominance. The other Left allies were set to lose 50% of their tally in 1978. The report stated the acrimony between the lower level Left workers reached such a stage that it would be difficult for the Left leaders at the top to bring reconciliation. The grass-root workers of the LF constituents were already unwilling to accept CPI (M) domination and more keen to join hands with the Congress (I). The report observed that the CPI (M)’s political future will depend on whether it was successful in keeping the Left allies in its fold and segregate the Congress (I) or whether it itself becomes an isolated entity. In the latter event the political scenario of Bengal would witness a sea-change. The Anandabazar Patrika published another analysis of the results where it was noted that the CPI (M) was ahead of the other parties but its progress was not as remarkable as that of Congress (I). The inroad made by the Congress (I) was spectacular in districts like Murshidabad, West Dinajpur, Coochbehar, Nadia and Jalpaiguri. The Congress (I) gains in these districts were attributed to internal squabble between the Front partners or in the ruling party itself.

The other news item in the Anandabazar Patrika documented the reaction of the Left parties on the election results. Once again there was difference in opinion. While the CPI (M) was happy, the other significant allies like the CPI, RSP and the FB was not so enthusiastic. They felt that they have suffered major losses at the hands of Congress (I) and lack of seat adjustment between the Front partners was to be blamed for it. The CPI (M) leaders were optimistic and felt that the Left would attain majority when the results of all the seats were declared. The report added that the CPI (M) mouthpiece, Ganashakti also referred to the results as the progress of the Left Front towards a convincing win.

2nd June, 1983
Jugantar (1 column 65 lines)
Headline: In the eye of Congress
Primary Source: Political party

The report analyzed the gains and losses of Congress (I). The report said the Congress (I) has created a dent in the Left Front citadel in rural Bengal. The report pointed out that the Congress (I) state unit had confided to its leadership that the best way to confront the Left Front was to fight it politically in the panchayat election as the panchayats were the centers of power for the Front. The state Congress (I)
identified that the LF was at a disadvantage in urban and town areas but the unconditional support of the rural people have ensured their continuance in power. If there was some crack in this support base then the Congress (I) would be able to hurt the interests of the ruling party. What helped the cause more was that there was no interference from the Central leadership in the nomination process and in most cases the villagers chose their own nominees.

2nd June, 1983

Jugantar (2 columns 56 lines)

Headline: Whole-hearted support for Panchayat election

Reporter / Correspondent

The report commented that whatever the result of the panchayat election it was clear that rural Bengal expressed its whole-hearted support for the panchayat process. The report remarked in the past few days there was much apprehension about the panchayats especially regarding corruption in the grass-root bodies but the participation of the people in the electoral process has confirmed the people’s faith in the system. The report asserted that panchayats must have done some constructive work for the grassroots otherwise this kind of response would not have been possible. The report further commented that it was not easy for the rural people to detect anomaly in the accounts running into lakhs; they were satisfied with the infrastructural addition in the village which was of pressing necessity and content that the panchayats were at least considerate about their plight.

3rd June, 1983

The Statesman (2 columns 178 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) still entrenched in rural areas

Reporter / Correspondent

The Statesman report on the 3rd June pointed out that despite wins in a large number of seats the CPI (M) did not fare as well as in the earlier panchayat election in 1978. The Left Front partners also did not improve on their performance of 1978. The Congress (I) won more seats than anticipated and increased its strength in the panchayats to a considerable extent. The report commented in spite of the result the CPI (M) was firmly entrenched in the rural areas of this state. The report observed that the results of this election were likely to influence the future relations between the
Front partners. The report marked the participation of more than 30000 independent candidates as a significant aspect. The report hinted that such a large number of independent participants were an indication of the disillusionment with the political parties in the last five years and that at least some grass-root members were interested in their own political and social development and not ready to comply with the wishes of political parties.

This report also included the reactions of the various political leaders on the election outcome. Saroj Mukherjee, for example, commented that propaganda by mainstream newspapers on the dissension within the Left Front had confused the voters in the rural areas. The comment of Mukherjee proved the significance of mass media opinion to the political parties. The report also recorded the reaction of the opposition Congress (I) who felt that the divisions within the Left Front had little to do with their improved results. It was of the opinion that people want it to return to power. It asserted that the votes in the just concluded elections would have been equally divided among the two main contenders – CPI (M) and Congress (I) – but for the terror spread by the ruling party and its conspiracy to offer election dole just before the election to lure the poor voters. The Congress (I) spokesperson pointed out the party’s performance was better than expected even in traditional Left bastions. The Congress (I) had done well in Darjeeling, Murshidabad, Malda, West Dinajpur, Murshidabad, Coochbehar, Nadia and the two 24 Parganas. The party had performed fairly well in Howrah and Hooghly too. The Congress (I) alleged intimidation of victorious candidates by CPI (M) workers in Burdwan and Midnapore. The CPI (M) leadership's opinion on the improved performance of the Congress (I) was that it was more organized than 1978 when it had virtually no existence. The Left chairman admitted that though the LF was winning the election, RSP, CPI and FB did not fare as expected. Most of the content was repeated in the result analysis published in the Jugantar on the same day.

3rd June, 1983

The Statesman (2 columns 88 lines)

Headline: Congress gain in Bengal (Editorial)

The editorial concentrated on Congress’s gain in the just concluded election. The report reiterated the contents referred to in the preceding paragraph. The editorial commented that there was reason for the CPI (M) to rejoice at its own performance in
Chapter 8

the panchayat election though it must be concerned with the decline in the overall Left strength. The report pointed out that the CPI (M)'s glee at the discomfiture of the other partners in the Front may be misplaced in a situation where the main opposition Congress (I) stands to gain at the expense of the Front partners and provide a formidable challenge to the CPI (M) dominated Left Front. The editorial observed that the Congress (I)' performance was all the more commendable because it suffered from internecine rivalries and factionalism within its rank and lacked an effective leadership at the helm. The editorial stressed there was need for the LF to analyze how the Congress (I) staged a comeback in rural areas where the Left was believed to be unassailable after significant efforts to implement the Land Reforms policy. The editorial pointed out the most obvious reason for the rethink on the part of the voters must be dissatisfaction with the functioning of the panchayats run by Front constituents. The editorial concluded that the panchayat election results have confirmed the increased polarization in West Bengal. This underlined the inconsequentiality of the other parties especially the smaller Front partners. The editorial was of the opinion that the smaller Front partners had an exaggerated notion of their importance in the Front as well as in the state which should perish after the recent debacle. The editorial concluded that for the survival of the Front the CPI (M) had to be more conciliatory although it was the strongest.

3rd June, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 85 lines) / Jugantar (3 columns 136 lines)

Headline: 3 killed in post-poll clashes / Violence post elections claim 4 lives, 350 injured

Reporters / Correspondents

The reports informed that 3 people (4 according to Jugantar) were killed in different incidents in Howrah, Nadia and Midnapore while 50 were injured in other post election clashes in different districts. The clashes were mainly between CPI (M) and Congress (I) supporters. In Nadia a Congress (I) supporter was hacked to death allegedly by CPI (M) supporters. In Midnapore a Congress (I) supporter was killed and three others injured when the party's victory procession was attacked by CPI (M) workers. (The Statesman also reported this news but it informed 4 Congress (I) supporters were killed and 3 grievously injured.) The Amrita Bazaar Patrika and Jugantar reported on several other incidents of violence like in another incident in

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Midnapore 16 CPI (M) men were seriously injured when they were attacked by Congress (I) supporters. In Howrah a relative of an elected Congress (I) member was brutally murder purportedly to avenge his win. The Congress (I) MLA of Howrah alleged that that CPI (M) supporters were terrorizing and attacking the houses of opposition party members throughout the district. Attacks on the relatives or properties of elected Congress (I) candidates were also reported from two areas in Hooghly. In Burdwan also there was a clash between supporters of the Congress (I) and CPI (M) over a victory procession. In another incident in Burdwan the police fired to prevent a clash between the supporters of warring groups. Minor clashes were also reported from North 24 Parganas.

3rd June, 1983

Jugantar (2 columns 48 lines)

Headline: Struggle for the pradhan post in villages

Reporter / Correspondent

The news item observed that there would be no respite in violence even after the declaration of panchayat results as there was friction regarding the election of pradhan in many gram panchayats where the ruling and the opposition party – CPI (M) and the Congress (I) was running neck-to-neck. The post of gram panchayat Pradhan was important as he/she would automatically become a panchayat samiti member. The report stated that in some gram panchayats the Congress (I) may support independents in the post of Pradhan to prevent the CPI (M) while in some cases the CPI (M) would have to bank on other LF partners whom it had abandoned before the election to elect its candidate in the pradhan seat. The report informed that LF leaders have called for unity to ensure the maximum wins in the Pradhan seat. The report underlined the political opportunism of political parties for the control of power.

3rd June, 1983

Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 159 lines) / Jugantar (4 columns 35 lines)

Headline: Congress about to surpass past record; CPI (M)'s winning spree / CPI (M) at the top

Reporter / Correspondent

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika observed the CPI (M) maintained its winning spree while the Congress (I) was about to surpass its previous record of wins in the
panchayat election. With the exception of Darjeeling where Gorkha League candidates contesting as independents swept the results, in most other districts the CPI (M) secured the maximum number of seats followed by the Congress (I). The report informed that Union finance minister and Congress (I) leader Pranab Mukherjee has stated that polarization of political affiliation in West Bengal was evident from the voting trend. The above statement was also published in the Jugantar. The Jugantar wrote that Mukherjee felt the results could have been better for the Congress (I) but for the terror of the CPI (M) workers. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika report said Mukherjee pointed out Congress (I) has gained 4 to 5 times more in Murshidabad, Midnapore, Howrah and 24 Parganas and was leading the CPI (M) in West Dinajpur. The Congress (I) leadership was however unsatisfied with the party’s performance as their win did not commensurate with the overwhelming response of the people during campaigning. The only redeeming feature in this disappointment, the report commented, was the relentless fight of the rank and file against the ouster of Front which will be an example in the years to come. The state Congress President alleged that the CPI (M) had planned to cause trouble in the Congress (I) strongholds on the Election Day through outsiders and the proof of this was the injury of several outsiders in clashes in Purulia and Asansol. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika reported that LF chairman, Saroj Mukherjee expressed dissatisfaction with the results despite the Front’s overall win as smaller constituents like the FB and RSP lost their previous seats. He said the LF will analyze the causes of the downslide. It informed though Mukherjee admitted that the Congress (I) has improved its position from that of 1978 he did not concede it was a momentous achievement. The Front chairman did not blame any constituent nor was he ready to accept ‘friendly contests’ as the reason for the unsatisfactory results. The Statesman and Anandabazar Patrika reports, however, said Mukherjee stated the ‘friendly contest’ between Front partners turned bitter in many places leading to electoral loss.

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika report provided insight into the progress made by the opposition Congress (I). In one of the Assembly seats for example the Congress (I) has occupied about 1/3rd seats of the total gram panchayat seats. The figure in the last election was zero. But the dominance of the CPI (M) could be ignored and so a separate news item in the same newspaper gave a detailed insight into the results of the three tiers which made it clear that the Congress (I) was ahead of the ruling party in two districts only – Darjeeling and West Dinajpur. In Coochbehar where there was
no agreement between the FB and the CPI (M), the CPI (M) was set to take the zilla parishad. In Midnapore the CPI (M) did exceptionally well. The report was certain that the ruling party will definitely end behind its tally in 1978.

The Jugantar reported that Mukherjee hoped that the LF allies would take a lesson from this result and would consciously strive for the unity of the Front. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika report informed RSP leader Makhan Pal was of the opinion that non-committed Left Front voters were bewildered by the contradictory campaigning of the various Left parties. In Jugantar it was reported that Mukherjee was peeved with the mainstream newspapers for reporting that CPI (M) was happy at the poor performance of the other partners.

3rd June, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 columns 62 lines)
Headline: Panchayat Poll (Editorial)

The Amrita Bazaar Patrika editorial repeated what was stated in the various reports in the newspapers - bipolar politics that surfaced in the state in 1978 became a political reality in this election. Irrespective of the number of candidates in the fray voters generally limited their choice between the Congress (I) and the CPI (M) and in its absence swerved to the other Left Front candidate in the fray. The editorial indicated that the ruling party was bound to take note of the impressive show of the Congress (I) as well as the losses suffered by the other Left allies as the voters’ consent was based on experiences of the functioning of the system. It said the deciding factor for the rural voters was which party would take more initiatives to alleviate poverty. The Left Front and especially the CPI (M) have always maintained that the rural poor were their strength. The editorial cautioned it would be prudent for the ruling party to delve into the possible causes of the mandate of the rural voters against them despite dominance over the state administration.

3rd June, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 70 lines) / (2 columns 62 lines) / (2 columns 117 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) win in three tiers (i) / CPI (M) acquire 5% less seats (ii) / CPI (M) not happy (iii)
Reporter / Correspondent (in case of (i) and (ii))
Source: Political party in case of (iii)

The Anandabazar Patrika 3 closely related news items - on the convincing victory of the CPI (M) in all the three tiers, the significant losses of the ruling party in the hands of Congress (I) at the gram panchayat level and the dissatisfaction of the party leaders with the results though it singly emerged as the majority party. The content of the items was not much different from what has already been pointed out by it in the last two days or repeated by the other sample newspapers. The preoccupation with the fate of the ruling party or the implications of the result for the ruling party or the reaction of ruling party members on the results led to several homogenous observation and analysis by the sample newspapers. One report said in Murshidabad, the Congress (I)' stride in the panchayat samiti was impressive compared to that of the CPI (M)'s. It said it was significant that the CPI (M) zilla sabhadhipatis of Murshidabad and South 24 Parganas were defeated. One report pointed out that the CPI (M)'s loss of seats was only 5% more from 1978 but if the loss is related to power and authority over the rural areas and its electorate then it was a significant loss. In the districts adjoining the state capital like the Howrah, Hooghly and 24 Parganas the loss was around 12 to 20 % and the report predicted this would be a regular trend in the subsequent panchayat elections too. (The Amrita Bazaar Patrika also highlighted the above points in a report on the 3rd June.) The CPI (M) was worried over its losses at the gram panchayat level as it was the epicenter of power in the panchayat system and was involved in distribution of surplus land as well as allocation of relief material and employment. The report predicted the ruling party would have a tough time if 25% of gram panchayat seats were won by the Congress (I). The ruling party's loss in the gram panchayats and its political significance was analyzed by the relevant report. The report pointed out that the ruling party was inconvenienced by this loss as the gram panchayats were the crux of the panchayati raj. Money for direct development of the villagers as well as relief material was distributed through the gram panchayats, so a reduction of power here would mean an overall decline of authority.

3rd June, 1983

Jugantar (2 column 24 lines) / 2 columns 48 lines / 4 columns 35 lines

Headline: Congress-Gorkha League win Darjeeling zilla parishad again / Congress gain due to anomaly in Front in Howrah / CPI (M) at the top
The Jugantar discussed the results in detail in three separate news items. One of them informed that the Congress (I) – Gorkha League alliance has emerged victorious in Darjeeling. It analyzed the results in the various blocks in this district based on unofficial records.

The second news item reported that in Howrah Congress (I) candidates have emerged victorious in many erstwhile CPI (M) strongholds. The report mentioned that despite the organizational strength of the ruling party there were major setbacks in several blocks where it was once insurmountable. The report said political observers were of the opinion that a lack of understanding between CPI (M) and FB earned fruits for the Congress (I). There was also an opinion that allegations of corruption have prompted the slide towards Congress (I). The report analyzed the block-by-block results in great detail.

The other report was a detailed description and analysis of the tide towards the CPI (M) in the various districts so far. The inferences were predictable and previously repeated. The contents of this report have been discussed in an earlier paragraph.

3rd June, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 14 lines) / The Statesman (1 column 26 lines)
Headline: More power to Panehayats / Panchayat Act to be amended
Primary source: Administration

The items reported that the state government has declared more administrative powers for the panehayats to successfully implement programs for village development. The panehayat minister the reports informed said that the experience gained by the panehayats in the last five years would be considered before bestowing the newly elected panehayats with more power. Jugantar also reported on the 5th June that the state government was thinking of bestowing the panehayats with more power even though the Congress has gained more seats this time. The fact that people have reposed their faith in the panchayati raj through their participation in the panchayat election was reason for the state government’s decision.

3rd June, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 11 lines)
Headline: Congress successful in Satgachia - the chief minister’s constituency

Reporter / Correspondent

The report remarked whatever the denial of LF chairman and the CPI (M) there was adequate proof of Congress’s emergence as the second powerful party in the state. This report underlined the emergence of the Congress (I) as an able opponent in the 1983 panchayat elections. While in 1978 the Congress failed to secure a single gram panchayat under the Satgachia Assembly, represented by chief minister Jyoti Basu, this time it has managed to bag more than 1/4th of the total gram panchayat seats in the Assembly segment.

4th June, 1983
The Statesman (1 column 97 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) win 53% gram panchayat seats

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that the CPI (M) has won about 53% of gram panchayat seats this year against 61% seats in 1978. The report mentioned that the opposition headed by the Congress (I) had wrested about 5000 seats from the Left Front in this election. In West Dinajpur and Murshidabad districts the Congress (I) was ahead of the CPI (M) at the gram panchayat level. The report identified charges of corruption against a fairly large number of panchayat bodies and the division within the Left Front as reasons for the decent performance of the Congress (I). The report was of the opinion that another reason for the relatively better result of the Congress (I) was that some well-intentioned measures of the Left government were not appreciated by all sections of the electorate. For example, Operation Barga that benefitted the sharecroppers hugely was highly resented by the landowners. This report enlisted the reaction of the CPI (M) that the Left Front was not united to face the Congress (I) offensive. The party said that it made an effort to preserve the unity of the Front but the unrealistic claims of the other Front partners jeopardized any scope for cohesion. The report stated the ruling party was, however, clear that the Left Front has received mandate in favor of the existing panchayat administration in spite of charges of corruption and discriminations against political opponents and lack of unity among its constituents. The report also reflected the views of the West Bengal Congress (I) President who said the results did not reveal the true support his party enjoyed in the rural areas. The report remarked he felt it was clear from the mandate that the Congress (I) was well entrenched in the rural areas.
4th June, 1983
The Statesman (1 column 26 lines)
Headline: Panchayat Act to be amended
Primary source: Administration

The report informed that the state panchayat minister has announced that suitable amendments to the Panchayat Act would soon be introduced to root out corruption and ensure better working of the panchayat bodies. He said that the existing system of involving contractors instead of villagers in the development work was the root of all corruption as fifty percent of the money allotted for the purpose was siphoned off by the contractors. He said that the Panchayat Act would be revised to abolish the practice of appointment of contractors by the gram panchayats and the responsibility of development of infrastructure would be taken up by various government departments and implemented through the villagers.

4th June, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 66 lines)
Headline: MPs, MLAs to have hand in the top two tiers of the Panchayat
Primary source: Administration

The Anandabazar Patrika report on the 4th June pointed out that after the panchayat election the MPs and MLAs would play an important part in the formation of the panchayat boards at the panchayat samiti and zilla parishad levels. The Panchayat Act specifies that MPs and MLAs could participate in the voting to elect sabhapatis and sabhadhipatis and wherever the outcome was neck-to-neck the votes of the MLAs and MPs was essential to break the tie. This was also indicated in reports of the other sample newspapers on the previous day.

4th June, 1983
The Statesman (2 column 106 lines)
Headline: 4 killed in clashes post election
Reporter / Correspondent

This report informed that 4 people were killed in the previous day in post poll clashes in Midnapore, Malda and Bankura. In Malda two Congress (I) supporters were killed and one grievously injured when a victory procession was attacked by the CPI (M) supporters. In another incident a CPI (M) supporter was killed and five
others injured when a group of Congress (I) supporters attacked them. A few Congress (I) workers were also injured in this incident. CPI (M) alleged that a newly elected gram panchayat member and few other supporters were missing after the incident. The district CPI (M) leadership also alleged that Congress (I) supporters were attacking CPI (M) workers in a planned manner. The report informed that the situation in Nadia was grim and Section 144 was invoked in the district following murders and clashes in different areas. In Howrah and Bankura there were clashes between victory processions and attacks on houses as well as arson and looting. In Bankura a woman Congress (I) supporter was killed by CPI (M) supporters. In West Dinajpur police fired 10 rounds and arrested 400 people in connection with a clash. The state Congress (I) President alleged that a state of civil war prevailed in the rural areas of the state. He complained that the police failed to control the law and order situation in the state. He said that the Congress (I) was compiling details on all incidents of violence against its supporters in the state and planned to inform the Central leadership and meet the Union Home minister to apprise him of the reality. The Congress (I) President said that the party would also give a deputation to the chief minister on this issue.

4th June 1983
Jugantar (2 columns 141 lines)
Headline: Violence in various districts
Reporter / Correspondent

The report concentrated on the violence throughout the state post panchayat election. There were reports of murder, looting, setting fire and a general atmosphere of mayhem. The attacks were described as in the Statesman noted in the previous paragraph. This report added that the state administration was worried over the violence and has instructed all district administrations to take precautionary measures and prevent any untoward incident. The concern of the Congress (I) leaders at the killings of 6 of its supporters was also highlighted. The report quoted the Congress (I) leaders to specify that 2 Congress (I) supporters were killed in the districts of Murshidabad, Bankura and Malda respectively. The police put the figure at one each. The other incidents of violence in South 24 Parganas, Midnapore and in different blocks of Howrah were also described vividly.
4th June, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (2 column 84 lines)
Headline: 8 killed in post poll clashes

Reporter / Correspondent

The post poll violence was highlighted in this report. It stated that 8 people were killed in clashes between the CPI (M) and the Congress (I) of whom 7 were Congress (I) supporters and 1 CPI (M) supporter. The other contents of the report were similar to that of Statesman and Jugantar. The repeated elaboration of the violence in the state reflected a major problem post election and also pointed to the administration’s failure to ensure the safety of the rural electorate. The picture of the bedlam ensuing election was given due importance by the sample newspapers.

4th June, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 97 lines) / Jugantar (3 columns 98 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) leads in 12 districts / CPI (M) on top at the zilla parishad and panchayat samiti level

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that CPI (M) led in 12 districts of the state and the Congress (I) maintained lead in two districts – West Dinajpur and Murshidabad while the Gorkha League commanded lead in the Darjeeling district. These report informed that from the latest results it was evident that the Congress (I) has improved its position in the gram panchayat while seats of all other parties were slashed. The CPI (M), the report informed, has improved its position in Burdwan, Darjeeling and Purulia but its overall gram panchayat tally diminished from that of 1978. The reports pointed out that from the available results of the panchayat samitis and the zilla parishads it was clear that the CPI (M) had a clear lead over the Congress (I).

The Jugantar informed that rural voters were besides the ruling party in the panchayat samitis and zilla parishads. The Jugantar report informed that CPI (M) leader and Panchayat minister Binky Chowdhury was not ready to accept that the Congress (I) had done well. He said the mainstream newspapers were not right in pointing out the Congress’s success as it has only improved its position and was yet to cross the mark of 14000 seats that opposition parties together had managed to win in 1978.
Both newspapers informed that the CPI (M) Politburo congratulated party workers for inflicting a defeat on the Congress (I) for the second time in a row in the West Bengal panchayat elections but it also stated that victory would have been more decisive if there was unity among the Front partners. It blamed the unrealistic claim of the smaller partners for the lack of understanding, an accusation leveled by other CPI (M) leaders too as reported in reports of sample newspapers. The politburo asserted the CPI (M)'s win was all the more credible in the face of fervent campaigning by the vested interests and the mass media in favor of the Congress (I). The reports added other Front partners were annoyed with the comments of the CPI (M) Politburo and counter responses included FB leader Ashok Ghosh’s statement blaming the bigger partner’s uncongenial attitude for the lack of adjustment between the partners. He said the CPI (M) did not make even small adjustments, for example in Coochbehar it broke off talks with the FB for one zilla parishad seat. RSP leader Makhan Pal emphasized that the inroads of the Congress (I) into the rural strongholds could have been averted if all the constituents had adhered to the ‘code of conduct’ formulated for the purpose. CPI leader Biswanath Mukherjee commented no effort was made to reconcile the differences between Front partners. Amrita Bazaar Patrika added it was observed that though the Front partners had vowed not to campaign against each other where ‘friendly contests’ were to take place, the vow was easily broken. It concluded that the partners were obviously distraught at the loss of seats but they did not admit the impact of the loss in public.

4th June, 1983

Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 52 lines) / Jugantar (1 column 82 lines)

**Headline:** CPI (M) majority in 6 districts / Balance sheet in different districts

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The report updated the readers that the CPI (M) singly gained majority in 6 zilla parishads and led in terms of total seat won/ahead. But the Congress (I) has caused sufficient damage to the ruling party at all levels. The report discussed the result in the various districts in great detail. The Jugantar report gave a detailed comparative analysis of the status of the CPI (M) and the Congress (I) in 1978 and 1983. The report said there was nothing surprising about the result because in 1978 the Left Front was riding on its success of 1977 Assembly win while the Congress (I) was still unorganized and facing a divided house. In 1983 there were distinct divisions
in the Front and the Congress (I) was energized after the unity of the factions. The result of the panchayat election according to the report gave an indication of the changed status of the political opponents in the state.

4th June, 1983

Jugantar (4 columns 190 lines)

Headline: Political lessons from panchayat election

Reporter / Correspondent

The political polarization in the state was the subject of this report. The report commented the panchayat election result clearly indicated political polarization that endangered the existence of smaller political parties in the state. The report stated the CPI (M) has to be conscious that it has a formidable opposition in the form of Congress (I) while the Congress (I) need to strengthen its organization to overpower the ruling party. The report also said that the CPI (M)'s vote count did not increase appreciably while the Congress (I)'s vote count remained same even in the face of political dominance of the ruling party in the rural areas. The report specified the lack of campaigning by prominent leaders of the ruling party in the rural areas was responsible for its setback. The march of the Congress (I) was also commendable as it proved that it was the second largest political party in the state. The report stated the Congress was helped by the disunity in the Front and the failure of the Front government though the efforts of the two Union ministers in resurrecting the fortunes of the Congress cannot be undermined. They not only campaigned intensively but the report said they were responsible for boosting the morale of the Congress workers. The report identified three factors for the decline of CPI (M) in its once invincible rural domain – anti-incumbency effects, evidence of corruption of its panchayat members and arrogance of power among party leaders which isolated the party from the common voters. The report said the result was an indication to the overconfident party leaders that in a democracy no party is invincible. The report also said the smaller Left parties were wrong in their estimation of their own political strength. They took on the CPI (M) almost everywhere but the result was a division in the Left vote and the consequent gain of the Congress. The report pointed out the CPI (M) was now set to dominate the Left Front more than ever.
5th June, 1983

The Statesman (2 columns 98 lines) / Jugantar (2 columns 70 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 220 lines)

Headline: District authorities told to be vigilant / All-party meeting to be held in all districts / 25 people murdered in election-related violence

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that the district authorities throughout the state have been asked to remain vigilant in view of the spurt in political clashes following the panchayat election.

The Jugantar reported that the state government was worried over the spate of violence after the panchayat election and has asked all district authorities to call all-party meetings with the representatives of political parties to maintain peace. The newspaper reported the death of 15 people in election-related violence so far. The incidents of violence mentioned in the report were those mentioned on the previous day’s reports in the sample newspapers or referred below as mentioned in the other sample newspapers.

The Statesman report stated that 11 people were killed in post poll violence while Anandabazar Patrika informed 25 people were killed in poll related violence till date. Both sample newspapers stated news on violent incidents kept pouring in from the district every day. The Anandabazar Patrika mentioned most of the incidents pointed to CPI (M) backlash against Congress (I) supporters. The reports mentioned the previous day in Birbhum a Congress (I) supporter died of bomb blast and several others were injured. The reports mentioned in Bankura a woman was killed and several houses were set ablaze during clashes between the CPI (M) and Congress (I) supporters. (This news also featured in the Statesman on the 4th June.) In Burdwan many Congress (I) supporters had fled their villages from the day before the election to escape the wrath of ruling party members. In Murshidabad a Congress (I) backed independent gram panchayat candidate who was attacked by some CPI (M) supporters died in the hospital. Several incidents of brawl were reported from 24 Parganas. In an incident in Howrah a Congress (I) supporter whose relative contested the recently concluded panchayat election was killed in an attack by CPI (M) supporters. (This was also reported on the 4th June.) Congress (I) leader Somen Mitra requested the chief minister to prevent attacks on Congress (I) supporters. The Jugantar report quoted the state Congress President that if the state government was unable to prevent
Chapter 8

the rampage of the ruling party supporters it should be prepared for people’s backlash. The Jugantar as well as Anandabazar Patrika commented that wherever the people declined CPI (M) candidates and the Congress (I) won CPI (M) was intent on vengeance which led to violent attacks, loss of lives as well as damage of property. The newspapers said the scenario was set for civil war between the supporters of two hostile parties. 11 CPI (M) supporters were injured in an attack by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in Purulia. In Midnapore a meeting of the representatives of the various political parties was held at the district magistrate’s office in view of the increase in post poll clashes in the district. The party leaders agreed to visit the troubled areas and urge the lower rungs of their organization to maintain peace.

5th June, 1983
The Statesman (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: 3 parties to seek review
Primary source: Political party

The report informed that the Left Front constituents RSP, FB and CPI have demanded a review of the Front’s performance in the panchayat polls. They said this was imperative in the view of the emergence of the Congress (I) as a strong force in rural Bengal. The three parties wanted the Front to assess the threat posed by Congress (I) and take measure to counter it. The three parties also wanted to ascertain the attitude of the CPI (M) towards them and the Front. The report said the smaller parties resented the comments of CPI (M) leader E. M. S. Namboodripad that unity eluded the Left Front due to their unrealistic claims. They countered that attempts for adjustment failed due to the over-confidence of the CPI (M) on its strength and its belief that it can alone fight the Congress (I). The unfriendly contests between the Front partners had actually benefitted the Congress (I) but the loss of the CPI (M) was the greatest. One of the Front constituent RSP elucidated that while it had lost about 300 gram panchayat seats, the CPI (M)’s loss was in about 4500 seats. The report said RSP also alleged that its members were assaulted and harassed by CPI (M) supporters in various districts.

5th June, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 79 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) victorious in 11 zilla parishads
Primary source: Political parties

The report stated that the LF chairman and the chief minister have implored all LF partners to end their animosity and strengthen Front unity. The report further informed in a LF meeting all partners unanimously agreed that they had to incur losses in the recently concluded panchayat election due to disunity. The report reiterated the displeasure of the Front allies – RSP and FB – with the comments of CPI (M) politburo blaming them for the disunity. The report also reiterated Mukherjee’s viewpoint that acrimonious ‘friendly contests’ between LF partners has benefitted the Congress (I). He said there were also other reasons for losses like the lack of intensive campaigning against Congress (I) underestimating their growing strength. He said the Front partners would do well to be vigilant of the main opponent Congress (I) and unite to form the boards in the aftermath of the elections. The FB and RSP representatives alleged in the meeting that wherever their candidates have won they were facing attacks by the CPI (M). They warned LF unity faced threat if this continued for long. The friction between the Left partners and the accusation of attacks and intimidations by the smaller partners against the bigger ally continued to occupy news columns well after the panchayat election.

5th June. 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 126 lines)
Headline: PM to be briefed on post poll clashes
Primary source: Political party

The news item informed that the West Bengal Congress (I) President would brief the Prime Minister on the post election disturbances in the state especially on the assault on the victorious Congress (I) candidates. He informed that many victorious Congress (I) candidates fled their houses and took shelter in party offices to avoid attack. The report further informed that the Congress (I) has taken a serious view of the incident in Bankura where a woman supporter was murdered and many houses of Congress (I) members razed to ground because of the electoral success of the party in the gram panchayats. The Congress (I) President urged the chief minister to take action against his party members for the ruthless attack on women and children. The CPI (M), however, denied the incident had any political implication and said it was the fallout of a local quarrel. The report elaborated on the various atrocities on Congress (I) candidates throughout the state. In Hooghly, a Congress (I) winner was
forced to flee his village while a defeated candidate of the same party was severely beaten up, in Birbhum on the 3rd June a Congress (I) supporter was killed and 4 others injured when CPI (M) workers attacked a house. There were reports of violence from other districts as well for example in Midnapore where one person was killed and several others injured in clashes between political parties. Several policemen were also injured in these violent incidents.

5th June, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (3 columns 105 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) bags 60% panchayat seats
Reporter / Correspondent
In the review of election results in this report the CPI (M) was reported to bag 60% of seats in all the three tiers but it lost the Malda and Darjeeling zilla parishads while it was a close call between the Congress (I) and CPI (M) in West Dinajpur and Murshidabad zilla parishads. The report reminded in view of the amended Panchayat Act, the MLAs and MPs were empowered to vote in the panchayat samitis as well as the zilla parishads. The Left Front would have considerable control over the panchayat bodies in this case. The report did not discuss the implications of the inclusion of outsiders in the decision-making process of the panchayats. The report, instead, discussed the election result. It emphasized the results indicated that the CPI (M) was still well entrenched in the rural areas though the Congress (I) has successfully made a dent. The report was of the opinion that it would take time to ascertain how much effective influence the Congress (I) would have over the gram panchayats. The Congress (I) alleged that wherever there was a tie in a gram panchayat the CPI (M) was trying to force Congress (I) members to resign to gain control. The Congress (I) spokesperson did not rule out the possibility of ‘horse-trading’ or buying off of members to secure power. The report stated that LF constituent, CPI felt that the reemergence of the Congress (I) was due to help from rural vested interest and other reactionary forces.

5th June, 1983
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 79 lines) / Jugantar (3 columns 82 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) win in 11 zilla parishads / CPI (M) singly victorious in 9 zilla parishads
Reporter / Correspondent

The reports generally reviewed the election result. The content of Anandabazar Patrika was similar to its contents on the previous day. The poor performance of the CPI (M) and its implications were repeated in the columns of the sample newspapers to attract the reader’s attention to its impacts. The defeat of CPI (M) leaders and zilla parishad sabhadhipatis were mentioned with incredulity though it was only a verdict of the voters in a democratic set-up. The implications, whatever they were, applied to the political party in question and certainly should not have perturbed mass media. The report then described the post electoral equations between various political parties for the purpose of forming panchayat boards in several districts. The Front partners were eager to forget their pre-electoral differences and unite to form the boards. The report did not point out their political opportunism in this matter. The report emphasized the win of the CPI (M) was inconsequential in the face of the hard reality that the LF would not be able to form boards in many gram panchayats and the Congress (I) would replace them there. The Jugantar also analyzed the results of all districts in detail. The report pointed out the status of the leading political parties in various districts in the three tiers.

6th June, 1983
Jugantar (2 columns 51 lines)
Headline: Congress benefitted from fissures in the Left Front: Basu.
Primary source: Political party leader

The report pointed out that the fight between Left constituents in 16000 seats has benefitted the Congress. The report stated the Front constituents were ready to discuss the debacle in the panchayat election and point out the cases of betrayal (alliance with the Congress during seat-sharing, campaigning or after the publication of results for the formation of panchayat boards). The other sample newspapers also reported that the defeat of the LF parties would be investigated in a meeting of the partners.

5th June, 1983
Amrita Bazaar Patrika (1 column 25 lines)
Headline: Prime Minister happy.
Primary source: Political party

The news item quoted Union Railways minister Gani Khan Chowdhury that the Prime Minister was happy with the result of her party in the just concluded panchayat election in the state. The report added he said while it was commendable for West Bengal to hold the second panchayat elections on time there was serious concern with the spate of violence following the elections.

Post-poll violence continued unabated even after a week of the panchayat polls and it was certainly one of the issues often highlighted in the coverage of the sample newspapers following the panchayat elections. A news item in all the sample newspapers on the 6th June informed that the state government has decided to retain the police and other law enforcing personnel deployed in the districts for polling purposes in view of the disturbing reports on post-poll clashes. The chief minister was quoted in this report that the district authorities have been told to convene all party meetings wherever necessary to ensure peace. The report informed that the state Congress (I) President has met the chief minister to express concern at the series of violent incidents post panchayat election. The chief minister assured him that the government was taking necessary actions to keep the situation under control. Mr. Basu admitted the Left Front suffered election reverses in areas where there was no understanding between Front partners. He emphasized on the Front unity for the smooth functioning of the government and the panchayats where the Front parties have collectively won the majority seats. The report also quoted the West Bengal Congress (I) President who said he met the chief minister to inform him that a reign of terror was let loose in areas where the Congress (I) candidates won. He said if the violence was not bridled it may lead to civil war.

6th June, 1983

Jugantar (2 columns 103 lines)

Headline: Complicated scenario in some districts post-poll

Reporter / Correspondent

The report pointed to the complications post-result as winning the gram panchayat or the panchayat samiti seat was not the end of the power struggle for the political parties, their aim was to occupy the seats of power like the gram panchayat pradhan or zilla parishad sabhadhipati. The power hunger of the political parties was reflected in the report. The report specified the advantage of the ruling party vis-à-vis
its main opponent, Congress in the selection of panchayat pradhans and sabhapatis and sabhadhipatis. In case of tie between the elected members the MLAs and MPs were allowed to participate in the selection of the above mentioned designation holders as the ruling party had a clear edge as its number of MLAs and MPs were much more.

CONCLUSION

The press coverage of the 1983 panchayat election as elucidated by the sample newspapers concentrated on political parties and their leaders, their interactions and their messages in the form of statements in public meetings or to the press and on the description of the political scenario in the various districts. The mass media like the political parties emphasized the electoral battle. There was no effort to explore the extent of grass-root participation in the election process. There was little indication of grass-root empowerment from the newspaper coverage as the funds for development and relief were concentrated in the hands of the gram panchayat pradhans and decisions regarding execution of development projects were taken by the members of the dominant political party. The other members as well as the community members were summarily ignored. The lack of co-ordination between gram panchayat members owing affiliation to different political parties was responsible for the failure to implement development projects in many cases. The domination of the gram panchayat by a few members was responsible for corruption and malpractices in the panchayat bodies. The newspapers mentioned the malaises but suggested no initiative to redress them as was expected from the mass media in a developing society. The press was the most powerful media in 1983 and while the other mass media radio and television was solely controlled by the government, the press as an independent media had a considerable opportunity to mobilize the grassroots into active participation in the panchayat system and promote grass-root empowerment and identify and campaign against ills that had crept into the system.

The proactive role of the press has been quintessential in bringing about many changes in the society and in a developing society it is imperative that the mass media play a pivotal role in ensuring that constitutional norms are implemented. The Panchayat Act (1973) made adequate provision for representation (one representative for every 500 voters at the gram panchayat level and one panchayat samiti member
for every 5000 voters) but a mere statute cannot secure the unqualified participation of the grassroots leave alone ensure their empowerment. Social institutions like political parties and mass media could have assured the same. Political parties are driven by their own agenda and interests and would not be very committed to the cause of grass-root empowerment and would be eager on grass-root participation only in the voting process. But the political and social empowerment of the grassroots in rural Bengal would have received impetus if the mass media took an active interest in the promotion of grass-root participation in the panchayat system rather than pursue the cat-fights and aspirations of political parties. The content of the sample newspapers was abundant and the coverage was extensive. Table 8.1(a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) provides the total number of news items on 1983 panchayat election in the various sample newspapers. A look at Table 8.2 would confirm news sources comprised mostly political parties and statements given by political heads and the reports filed by reporters, correspondents with information available in the common news pool. The reporters interacted with political party spokesmen and local leaders of political parties and occasionally interacted with the grassroots as well but their information was dominantly sourced from a 'common news pool'. The reporters and correspondents as news sources did not relate to the grass-root members in the panchayat system as evident from the negligible number of news items obtained from the said source during the sample period (See Table 8.2).
WEEKLY ANALYSIS OF NEWS ITEMS IN SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS (1983)

Table 8.1 (a): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 10.05.1983-16.05.1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Newspaper</th>
<th>No. of News Items</th>
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<td>The Statesman</td>
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<td>Jugantar</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
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<td>Anandabazar Patrika</td>
<td>13</td>
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</table>

Figure 8.1 (a): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 10.05.1983-16.05.1983

Table 8.1 (b): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 17.05.1983-23.05.1983

<table>
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Figure 8.1 (b): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 17.05.1983-23.05.1983

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Table 8.1 (c): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 24.05.1983-30.05.1983

Figure 8.1 (c): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 24.05.1983-30.05.1983
Table 8.1 (d): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 31.05.1983-06.06.1983

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Name of the Newspaper</th>
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Figure 8.1 (d): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 31.05.1983-06.06.1983
Chapter 8

TOTAL NEWS ITEMS IN SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS DURING 10.05.1983 - 06.06.1983

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<td>56</td>
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<td>ANANDABAZAR PATRIKA</td>
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Table 8.1 (e): Total news items in Sample Newspapers on Panchayat Election during 10.05.1983 - 06.06.1983

Figure 8.1 (e): Total news items in Sample Newspapers on Panchayat Election during 10.05.1983 - 06.06.1983

TOTAL SAMPLED NEWS ITEMS IN 1983

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### SOURCE-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS ITEMS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS DURING 10.05.1983 - 05.06.1983

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Reporters / Correspondents / News Agencies</th>
<th>Political Party leaders / Spokespersons / Party briefs, manifesto etc.</th>
<th>Administration including Ministers, Police, Officials</th>
<th>Grass-root voters/candidates / members</th>
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Table 8.2: Source-Wise Distribution of News Items on Panchayat Elections during 10.05.1983 - 05.06.1983

![Graph](image)

**Figure 8.2: Source-Wise Distribution of News Items on Panchayat Elections during 10.05.1983 - 05.06.1983**