CHAPTER 10

COVERAGE OF 1993 PANCHAYAT ELECTION BY SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS

INTRODUCTION

The 1993 panchayat election was marked by two distinct events – the emergence of Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) as a political force of reckoning in West Bengal and the reservation of 1/3rd seats in all the tiers for women candidates. The first event was notable as since 1977 the state has witnessed electoral battles mainly between two parties – the Congress and the CPI (M). The polarized politics of the state had become an inevitable truth in the last 16 years and a third force was new to the electorate of the state. The BJP’s brand of politics with an endeavor to find favor of a particular religious sect (the Hindus) was also new to the voters of West Bengal. The party looked for support from the voters who were disillusioned with the CPI (M) and frustrated with the Congress. The general observation was that the division of the opposition votes was likely to benefit the ruling coalition. The Congress felt threatened by the BJP’s attempt to replace it as the second party in the state. The result of the panchayat election was eagerly awaited as it would make clear the extent of BJP’s appeal in the state and the status of the existing political forces. The sample newspapers were agog with the new possibility in the state and the prospect and implication of BJP’s growing influence and power. The issue was highlighted extensively in the sample newspapers and the statements of political leaders on it were discussed over and over again.

The other significant aspect of the 1993 panchayat election as already specified in the beginning was reservation of one-third seats for women candidates in the three tiers of the panchayat. While there was no doubt that the state government’s intention was noble and aimed at ensuring the representation of one half of the rural electorate, the actual job was not easy. The position of women in the rural areas was not a happy one. There were not many women involved in politics at the village level. Politics is traditionally considered a male bastion and women rarely had entry into it even in the urban areas where education and awareness were much advanced. With lesser education and awareness, it was obvious the women in the villages would not have it easy in the panchayats. Moreover the panchayats were the seat of rural power.
and the men were reluctant to step down in favor of women candidates. The subsequent reports in the sample newspapers reflected this picture. The women were hesitant entrant to the political field, leaving the men comprising their family and their party members with the campaigning. In some occasions women were compelled to file nomination against their wishes to facilitate the men in the family. In both circumstances they were mere pawns, powerless entities who would participate in the election process but wherever decision-making was involved they would be compelled to fall back on their party supporters or family members as they were inept and ignorant or overshadowed by the men who were averse to relinquish power. It is pertinent to ask then was reservation of seats the correct step towards empowerment? If one considers the fact that many candidates faced a similar predicament when the panchayat election was held for the first time and later on they became adept and proficient in handling the panchayat, matters then it can be presumed that the women candidates would with experience and time also develop the same skill and expertise. There has to be a beginning and it was correctly assessed by the administration that half the rural population was unrepresented in the gram panchayats – the citadel of rural political power in the state and the only way to rectify the anomaly was to reserve seats to bring equity in social and political ambit. In developing societies mass media is expected to promote new endeavors to lend them credence and stability. The sample newspapers pointed out the pros and cons of the women reservation policy but there was no active campaigning for its successful implementation.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF SAMPLENEWSPAPERS’ CONTENT ON 1993 PANCHAYAT ELECTION

The sample newspapers whose content was part of the survey of news items on the 1993 panchayat election coverage included The Statesman, Anandabazar Patrika, The Telegraph and Aajkaal. It must be pointed out that the set of newspapers involved in the survey of 1993 panchayat election had two changes from that of the previous years. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika and the Jugantar closed down due to labor problems. The Telegraph was the English newspaper of the Anandabazar Patrika group and the Aajkaal was fast emerging as a prominent Bengali newspaper. The fourth panchayat election was held on the 30th May, 1993. The graphical analysis of the number of news items on the panchayat election in the sample newspapers [Table
10.1(a), (b), (c), (d) (e)] along with the analysis of the primary news sources of the reports (Table 10.2) are provided at the end of the chapter.

**NEWS ITEMS PUBLISHED BY THE SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTION DURING 9TH MAY, 1993 AND 5TH JUNE, 1993**

9th May, 1993

**The Statesman (2 columns 62 lines)**

**Headline:** Congress (I) yet to chalk out campaign plan

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The news reported that the Congress was yet to chalk out its campaign plan even though only 20 days were left for the election. The report said the lack of unity among the various factions, lack of resources and the lack of interest of the Central leadership in the affairs of West Bengal were impeding the Congress’ campaign plan. The report categorically stated that most nominations filed for the Congress was not the credit of the party’s leadership but the efforts of Congress workers at the village level.

It was heartening to hear that the grassroots were actively involved in the selection process of their candidates. The friction between the state Congress President Somen Mitra and his principal opponent in the party Mamata Banerjee was elaborately described in the report.

9th May, 1993

**The Telegraph (1 column 64 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 62 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 22 lines)**

**Headline:** CPI (M) bid to ensure LF unity for polls / CPI (M) worried over lack of unity in the Front / Effort on to dissipate misunderstanding in Front

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The above items reported that the CPI (M) was worried about the conflict in the Front just days before the panchayat election and has decided to initiate several measures to reach a consensus with the other partners. The reports remarked that CPI (M)’s objective was to defeat clandestine arrangements between the Congress and the BJP. The party urged leaders of all Front partners to strive for unity as otherwise the Congress and the BJP would derive advantage from the rift. The reports added despite the instruction of the state leaders the grass-root political workers failed to reach an
understanding in many instances. The report stated it was not clear that if an understanding was reached at this stage how the voters would be informed about the consensus LF candidate. The LF chairman stated that the LF leaders would issue leaflets to announce the candidature of consensus candidates.

The Aajkaal stated that the CPI (M) leadership has identified the gram panchayat seats as the epicenter of conflict.

The Anandabazar Patrika report also informed that the BJP has published its election manifesto which laid emphasis on preventing illegal migration from across the border. The party alleged that CPI (M) has given shelter to many illegal Bangladeshi immigrants to gain political mileage which has adversely affected the West Bengal economy.

9th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 21 lines)
Headline: BJP will not succeed: Pranab
Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted Congress leader and Union Minister Pranab Mukherjee that the BJP would not do well in the ensuing panchayat election. He commented the Congress has been able to put up candidates in most seats and also ensured nomination in seats reserved for women candidates. The report highlighted the internecine strife within the Congress and its consequences.

10th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 46 lines) Aajkaal (1 column 36 lines) The Telegraph (1 column 42 lines)
Headline: 5 people including 2 candidates murdered after abduction / 5 CPI (M) workers including two candidates killed / Jharkhand men kill 5 CPI (M) nominees in Bankura
Reporter / Correspondent

The reports said that 5 people including two gram panchayat candidates were abducted and murdered in Jhargram. The Jharkhand party was blamed for the gruesome incident in the reports. The reports said the murders were retaliation of the assault on a Jharkhand zilla parishad candidate by CPI (M) activists.

The LF chairman Sailen Dasgupta was quoted in the Anandabazar Patrika that the Jharkhandis were trying to create tension and chaos before the panchayat election to frighten away voters.
10th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 40 lines)
Headline: RSP take up attacking stance against CPI (M)
Reporter / Correspondent
The report said that RSP criticized its LF ally CPI (M) for purchasing votes with money and other favors like the Congress. The report said RSP was of the opinion that the panchayat was no more what it was conceived during the framing of the Panchayat Act and that the CPI (M) dominated panchayats have become haughty and hornet’s nest for corrupt practices. The report commented that wherever there was no seat agreement between the RSP and the CPI (M), the RSP was vocal about the big brother’s damaging role in the panchayats.

10th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 30 lines)
Headline: Front would be removed by people: Pranab
Primary source: Political party leader
The report gave details of Pranab Mukhejee’s statements in a public meeting in favor of Congress candidates. The report said Mukherjee claimed the panchayati raj was the result of the Congress’ endeavor and not the contribution of the Left Front and the reservation for the backward classes and women was made possible by the Congress government at the Centre. The report said the Congress leader felt that free and fair election under the Left Front rule was impossible but if the Congress still managed a win in the panchayat election it intended to give more powers to the panchayat bodies.

10th May, 1993
Aajkaal (3 columns 103 lines)
Headline: Congress defensive, CPI (M) attacking
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed that though in the previous panchayat elections local issues held importance during campaigning, this time the emphasis of all the political parties was on the demolition of the Babri masjid (mosque) and the controversy surrounding the Ram Janamboomi (birthplace) - Babri masjid site. The report predicted that this issue would influence voting trends in the forthcoming panchayat
election especially in the border districts. The report said while CPI (M) highlighted the issue in all its meetings, the Congress was content to discuss the topic in a few of them. The report commented the CPI (M) leadership was of the opinion that communalism could have fatal impact on the unity of the country and the emphasis on this issue was required to generate public consciousness on the matter and avert any untoward consequence. The report concluded that the Left Front partners like RSP also emphasized the need for communal harmony in their election campaign especially in sensitive districts like Murshidabad.

11th May, 1993
The Statesman (3 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Basu to meet officials over Panchayat poll measures
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed that the chief minister has called a meeting of the District Magistrates and Police Superintendents for discussing strategies to combat violence during the panchayat election. The report informed that Midnapore and Bankura police has launched a manhunt to arrest the killers of 5 CPI (M) supporters including 2 gram panchayat candidates. The report stated the murder was the handiwork of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and Congress activists and among the culprits were a former gram panchayat pradhan (head) and a daha-sabhapati (assistant head) of panchayat samiti.

11th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 108 lines)
Headline: Rupali Hasda makes vociferous demand; another Rupali is dependent on father
Primary source: Grass-root panchayat candidate
This report depicted the status of women gram panchayat candidates. The 1993 panchayat election was marked by the reservation of seats for women in the three tiers of the panchayat. The report said there was both excitement at the new development and a real interest to see whether the objective of the administration to bring parity between men and women in the panchayats was successful. The report observed politics has been a male domain and the lack of education and awareness in rural areas made it all the more a male prerogative there. The report commented that
the administration hoped that the reservation of seats would obliterate the difference and give prominence to the women. The report remarked there was a dearth of women candidates as after several centuries of subjugation it was difficult to convince women in the rural society to leap into the political fray and take decisions for an entire village when many of them had no right to take decisions in their homes. In Debra block in Midnapore district this led to the selection of an 18 year old as a candidate for the CPI while a CPI (M) candidate was elected uncontested as the Congress candidate withdrew her name as, according to the report, she felt shy and afraid to come under public scrutiny after years of remaining in the house and because her party workers refused to campaign for her. The 18 year old CPI candidate confessed that she was reluctant to fight the election and her father was looking over the campaigning as well as the other nitty-gritty. The report informed that the CPI (M) candidate who was elected uncontested is a daily wage-earner who found employment for 6 months and for the rest of the year was left to fend for herself. She was peeved that she was not assigned ‘bargadar’ (sharecropper) rights like the men. The report stated she vowed to fight for equal rights for women as a gram panchayat member.

11th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 103 lines)
Headline: BJP did not pay nephew, so Kunja candidate for CPI (M)
Reporter / Correspondent
This report indicated why women candidates were considered mere pawns in the hands of their party or influential family members. The report pointed out Kunja Devi, a CPI (M) woman candidate for a gram panchayat in Howrah admitted that she was ignorant and had no political opinion. She consulted her nephew in case of any query or statement. The report commented such a candidate would just be a puppet in the hands of other people and even after she was elected the situation would not change much and the purpose of reserving seats for women would be defeated. The report underlined the purpose of seat reservation was not only to increase women representation in the panchayats but to involve them in its decisions as they formed almost half of the rural population.

11th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 55 lines)
Polling personnel, police all women

The report commented on the participation of women in the panchayat election. It stated that the participation of women in the local election process would be an exemplary case of involvement of the fairer sex in the democratic process. The report highlighted the example of a booth in Moynaguri block of Jalpaiguri where all polling and security personnel were women. The report gave an account of women candidates in contention at the different tiers in the Jalpaiguri district.

11th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 104 lines)

Election is not a show of strength and power (Editorial)

The editorial expressed concern at the increase in violence since the announcement of panchayat election. The editorial said that political differences of supporters’ reach an extreme point before elections and the conflict between party workers lead to bloodshed and mayhem. The editorial referred to the gruesome murder of 5 CPI (M) workers in the hands of Jharkhandis in Belpahari. The editorial informed there were frequent clashes between these two warring parties before the incident. The Scheduled Caste and Schedule Tribes that dominated these areas were loyal to the Jharkhand party and their friction with CPI (M) loyalists caused constant fights which took the lives of many common people. The editorial reasoned the grim side of politics or the politics of revenge and bloodshed was not prominent at other times but during elections these incidents occurred often as all are eager to show their power and muscle strength to subjugate the electorate. The editorial commented while the ruling party has an edge over other parties in this matter as it controls the police and the administration, the political parties were equally involved in the violence. It said during the first years of the panchayati raj the rural areas witnessed widespread violence but with the passing of years political stability reduced the incidence of violence. While there was no doubt that the CPI (M) should be credited for the political stability in rural Bengal, it was equally true that its veneer of goodness was ruined when it was challenged by the Congress or by other Left constituents or any other opponent. The editorial pointed out therefore political violence was inevitable in Midnapore where the Jharkhandis were a formidable opponent and in certain districts of North Bengal where the Congress was still a recognizable force. The editorial
commented that wherever one political party was dominant or was invincible the incidence of electoral violence or clashes was less. This implied that the political parties were desperate to remain in power and did not hesitate to induce violence to continue in power. The editorial indicated that since electoral success was the raison d’existence for political parties they attached much importance to elections and were ready to adopt any means to win them. They hired professional criminals to get even in the electoral politics and consequently some of those hired criminals entered the political fray and established themselves in politics which has ensured them social acceptance. This has allowed for criminalization of politics and therefore the frequent occurrences of violence before elections. The editorial emphasized the need to get rid of this undesirable trend but at the same time doubted its possibility as all political parties, big or small, was involved in this offense.

11th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 62 lines) and (1 column 18 lines)
Headline: Murder planned by MLA: CPI (M) / Congress-Jharkhand party nexus responsible for murder: CPI (M)
Primary source: Political party
These two items were on the murder of the CPI (M) candidates and supporters in Jhargram. The first one quoted CPI (M) district secretary Dipak Sarkar that the murders were planned well in advance by the Jharkhand MLA of the region. The other item quoted the LF chairman and CPI (M) leader Sailen Dasgupta that the murders were fallout of the electoral alliance between the Congress and the Jharkhand party. The report said he opined that the number of violent incidents would rise as the panchayat election came nearer.

14th May, 1993
The Telegraph (2 columns 122 lines)
Headline: 21 Jharkhandis held for killings
Reporter / Correspondent
The news informed 21 Jharkhandis were arrested for the murder of the 5 CPI (M) men. It said Bankura, Midnapore and Purulia police have been alerted to avoid more violence in these areas. The report stated that the state government has asked for
additional paramilitary forces to restrain violence during the panchayat election. The report also informed that the incident has compelled the state Congress to rethink fielding of candidates in trouble-prone areas.

11th May, 1993
The Telegraph (3 columns 69 lines)
Headline: Panchayat poll campaign takes communal hue
Primary source: Administration

The report informed that the state intelligence bureau has advised the state home department to organize special vigil in the border districts as political campaigning for the panchayat elections has taken a communal hue. The news report said intelligence report disclosed that BJP activists in the border areas of Murshidabad, Malda, Nadia and North 24 Parganas were inciting communal passions during their door-to-door campaign. The report said propaganda along communal lines overshadowed local issues like corruption at the gram panchayat level in these areas.

11th May, 1993
The Telegraph (2 columns 100 lines)
Headline: All parties now wooing women
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed CPI (M), Congress and BJP, the three main contenders in the panchayat polls were searching for suitable slogans to woo the female voters who could make or mar their electoral prospects. The report informed all three parties claimed that they were instrumental in reserving 33% seats for women candidates in the panchayat election. The CPI (M) and the Congress have nominated about 25000 women candidates in the reserved seats. The state Congress leadership said that like the concept of panchayati raj itself, the provision for having enough women representatives in the panchayat bodies was Congress' brainchild. The secretary of the CPI (M)'s women section said though the Congress was forced to nominate women candidates in seats reserved for them, the nomination was not free from class prejudice. She alleged most of the Congress women nominees belong to the privileged class while those of the CPI (M) belonged to the downtrodden sections of the society.
11\textsuperscript{th} May, 1993

Aajkaal (2 columns 22 lines)

Headline: RSP would not send speakers to Basu's meeting

Primary source: Political party

The report informed that RSP has declined to send its representatives to the meetings addressed by chief minister Jyoti Basu as part of his campaigning for the Front nominees in the panchayat election as there was little agreement with the CPI (M) in most districts except Burdwan. It pointed out that in places like Murshidabad the CPI (M) has put up posters asking voters to defeat the alliance of the BJP, Congress and the RSP and therefore the question of addressing the electorate from a common platform was out of question.

12\textsuperscript{th} May, 1993

Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 104 lines)

Headline: Women candidates nominated in all seats; history in the making at Kultikri

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed in Kultikri block, the CPI (M) has nominated women candidates in all 11 gram panchayat seats. The report stated if all the nominees win it would be history as it would be an all woman panchayat. The report commented that 1/3\textsuperscript{rd} seat reservation for women have jolted the social fabric in rural Bengal. The report informed of the 11 candidates only one was from lower middle class; others were all daily wage-earners. It further added that of the 11 members two were newly literates while the others were involved in literacy programs. The report said local CPI (M) workers were actively involved in the campaigning for these candidates.

12\textsuperscript{th} May, 1993

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 64 lines) Aajkaal (2 columns 36 lines)

Headline: Many panchayats still subservient to bureaucracy: RSP / Panchayats in the hands of rich farmers and businessmen

Primary source: Political party

In the Anandabazar Patrika report it was said that the RSP leadership has alleged that in many cases panchayati raj merely followed the directive of the bureaucrats. It credited the political perspective of the Left Front for the successful implementation of rural development schemes. The report said there were major
differences between the CPI (M) and the RSP regarding seat distribution in the panchayat election. The RSP blamed the CPI (M) for the stalemate as it was the bigger partner and had considerable influence in the rural areas while the CPI (M) leadership claimed that RSP was not ready to compromise.

The Aajkaal also reported the RSP’s observation regarding the changing scenario of gram panchayats in the last few years. The party alleged in its election manifesto that most of the gram panchayats at present were in the hands of big businessmen and affluent farmers. This was a sea-change from 1978 when about 85% of the gram panchayats were in the hands of poor and marginal farmers. The change in the class structure of the panchayat bodies signified that vested interests like the rich farmers now occupied the power centers in the village. The report said the party identified the lack of political consciousness at the grass-root level as the cause for the present hopeless condition in rural areas.

12th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 90 lines)
Headline: State government to train the newly elected
Primary source: Administration

The report informed that the state government will train the newly elected panchayat members. It commented this was essential as most of the elected members were novice and inexperienced in the panchayat system and that may impair its functioning.

12th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 27 lines)
Headline: Congress not ready to give importance to the BJP in the campaigning
Primary source: Political party / leader

The report pointed out that in the first campaign meeting in the border areas of North 24 Parganas, the Congress leadership criticized the 16 years of anarchy and corruption in panchayat administration. The Congress President Somen Mitra alleged that there was rampant misuse of funds allocated for development of the panchayat areas. He said the Congress wanted to set-up people-oriented panchayats against the present set-up of party-oriented panchayats. The report said the Congress leaders were of the opinion that the BJP would be able to fare well.
12th May, 1993
The Statesman (1 column 23 lines)
Headline: Congress denies hand in Midnapore killings
Primary source: Political party
The report informed that the Congress denied its involvement in the incident in Jhargram and alleged that the CPI (M) has unleashed a reign of terror in the area.

13th May, 1993
The Statesman (6 columns 146 lines)
Headline: Another road, another mile and the tired, familiar wile (Howrah)
Reporter / Correspondent
The report described the condition in a gram panchayat in Howrah. The report said that there was hardly any development of infrastructural facilities. There were problems of motor-able roads, irrigation and electricity though about 2 lakhs was allocated annually. The party-wise nomination in the district with emphasis on women contestants were detailed in the report. The report pointed out there were several instances of uncontested wins in this district.

13th May, 1993
The Telegraph (3 columns 63 lines)
Headline: LF infighting over seat sharing still on
Reporter / Correspondent
The report stated the infighting over seat sharing between the Left partners continued despite relentless efforts to reach a consensus. The LF planned to bring out its election manifesto as the differences over seat sharing showed no signs of waning. The LF, the report revealed would bring out a joint manifesto to avoid confusion among its rank and file and further harm its unity. The report informed that FB and RSP have already brought out separate manifestoes where they have blamed the CPI (M) for corruption in several LF controlled panchayats. The report concluded though there was the picture of quarreling coalition, there was no doubt that the LF was ahead of both the Congress and the BJP in election campaigning.

13th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 72 lines)
Headline: Sisters-in-law Rekha and Chanda are unaware why they are fighting each other

Primary source: Grass-root candidates

The report gave yet another example of the distraught condition of women who were nominated by the various political parties as candidates. This report gave details of a contest between two sister-in-laws on the tickets of CPI (M) and BJP respectively. The report said they were personally on good terms and stood in the election for the sake of their husbands. The party members were campaigning on their behalf. They hoped that if elected their respect would increase manifold if not in the village community but in their families. It was a revelation that candidates anticipated that their win in the gram panchayat would elevate their status in the village society and in their families.

13th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 87 lines)

Headline: A Picture of contrast: Phalakata thriving from blessing, Salkumar reeling under discrimination

Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported how the panchayat's role can create a great difference between two adjoining villages. The CPI (M) dominated Phalakata gram panchayat was systematic and has done sufficient work in the panchayat area while the Congress dominated mostly tribal inhabited Salkumar panchayat was barely able to carry out any work due to paucity of funds.

13th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 130 lines)

Headline: Literacy, an issue in Panchayat election; Congress-CPI (M) equally unsuccessful

Reporter / Correspondent

The news pointed out literacy was one of the important issues in the panchayat election this year as the panchayats were entrusted with the work of the literacy program. The report commented that the failure of the initiative was the responsibility of political parties, especially the CPI (M) and the Congress as conflict between the political foes caused the letdown in the successful implementation of the program. The report said it was often observed that development initiative proved futile in the
face of political wrangling and posed a question on the participation of the political parties.

13th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 110 lines)
Headline: Different scenario of Congress, Left Front in two Dinajpurs
Reporter / Correspondent
The news reported the political scenario in North and South Dinajpur was completely different. While in North Dinajpur the Front partners were able to reach an adjustment and the Congress projected a divided house, in the South Dinajpur the Congress was united while the Front partners were at loggerheads. The report described the nature and extent of the discord in the two districts with regard to the political opponents highlighting once again that political parties were the most important players in the panchayat election game.

13th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 34 lines)
Panchayat vote: Police alerted in different districts
Reporter / Correspondent
The item reported on the pre-emptive measures adopted by the state administration to ensure a peaceful panchayat election. The news stated there were several incidents of violence in the districts including murder, clashes and abduction in the run-up to the panchayat election. The report informed that police throughout the state have been instructed to conduct special raids to curb criminal activities in the districts.

13th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 22 lines)
Headline: 1904 candidates have won without contest
Reporter / Correspondent
The report pointed out that the number of uncontested wins has reduced this year compared to 1988. The report said the contest this year would be tougher. It added that though there was apprehension about the availability of women candidates in reserved seats, after the filing of nomination it was clear that adequate number of
women candidates was up against each other. The report informed that most of the uncontested wins were expectedly registered by the ruling CPI (M).

14th May, 1993
The Telegraph (1 column 36 lines)
Headline: Congressmen join BJP on Panchayat election eve
Primary source: Political party

The report quoted the state BJP leaders that there was a serious erosion of Congress support base as many Congressmen were joining it before the panchayat election. The report said the party alleged that the CPI (M) and the Congress leaders have reached an understanding against them.

14th May, 1993
The Statesman (6 columns 142 lines)
Headline: A village in the doldrums while the juggernaut rolls on
Reporter / Correspondent

The news described an incident in a village in Hooghly that revealed the hollow nature of the panchayat system. A CPI (M) candidate filed her nomination with her thumb impression though Hooghly was declared as a fully literate district. The village of this candidate had no primary school or health centre. The irrigation and drinking water facilities were also poor. The report pointed out the ineffectiveness of reserving panchayat seats for women as the men have vacated their seats in favor of women family members who could be easily coerced and the panchayats would be ruled by them on behalf of their women. The report further informed that a woman nominee clearly indicated that she was not comfortable in politics and her brother (who was the previous member) was supervising campaigning. The report quoted the brother, a Congress member, that the CPI (M) was conspiring against the Congress and the reservation of seats for women candidates was a ploy to defeat his party. The report went on to point out that Hooghly was a CPI (M) stronghold and it has improved its tally in this district with each passing term. The report commented absence of understanding with LF ally, FB in certain blocks and the increasing influence of BJP in others, would not hamper CPI (M)'s poll chances in this district. The report said Congress complained of strong-arm tactics and threats to its candidates to withdraw nominations by ruling party members and also accused it of campaigning along communal lines.
14th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 129 lines)
Headline: No challenge to the Left bastion
Reporter / Correspondent
The report described the political situation in Sabong, Midnapore. The report said it was difficult to upset the Left applecart here and the popularity of the local Congress MLA Manas Bhunia would not be very useful. The report commented that the election to the three tiers of panchayat was not as important as the fact it created a connection between the grass-root leaders and the administrative topnotch with regard to development issues though the funds for such initiative may be scarce. The report said the process of decentralization and people's participation in governance may be complicated but it was certainly a necessity.

14th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 142 lines)
Headline: New leadership in panchayats due to reservation of seats
Reporter / Correspondent
The report stated that the reservation of seats for women in 1/3rd of seats in the three tiers and the reservation of seats for SC and ST according to their population would bring along a radical change in the panchayats this year. The report said the reservation for the above categories has kept out almost 60% last time panchayat members. This implied that new leadership comprising many women leaders would dominate the new panchayats which has given the traditional vested interests a body blow and would hopefully change the structure of rural society.

14th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 29 lines) / Aajkaaral (1 column 38 lines)
Headline: Congress demands adjournment of poll in Jhargram / Same
Primary source: Political party
The reports informed Congress has demanded the postponement of panchayat election in Jhargram due to unprecedented terror. The state Congress President was quoted that the Congress could not nominate candidates in the area due to violence and terror. The reports stated that CPI (M) had earlier rubbished the Congress claims
but after the murder of 6 of its supporters it too was apprehensive of peaceful and fair elections there.

14th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 72 lines)
Headline: Villagers set to get more rights in the amended Panchayat Act
Primary source: Administration
The news informed that after the panchayat election villagers would be given the responsibility of village development through the gram sabhas. The villagers would be able to give their recommendations and suggestions on the development of their village in the biannual meetings of the gram sabha which would be binding on the respective gram panchayats. The report informed all future development plans and the audited accounts have to be ratified in the gram sabha. The report commended the LF government for giving autonomy to the villagers through the panchayats.

14th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Conflict of Left Front partners in Panchayat election rare this time: Buddhadeb
Primary source: Political party leader
The report quoted CPI (M) leader Buddhadeb Bhattacharya that the unity in the Left Front was prominent in this panchayat election. The item elaborated he said the difference in Coochbehar with the Forward Bloc has been resolved and an amicable settlement has been reached in Haldibari after the intervention of FB leader Ashok Ghosh. The report said withdrawal of nominations following resolution of conflict through leaflet distribution was common as the day of election approached.

15th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 148 lines)
Headline: Audacity of the lone opposition candidate the topic of discussion in Jamboni
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed that in Jamboni, Midnapore barring one seat in the zilla parishad all other seats were won by the CPI (M) without contest. The report stated the local CPI (M) was aghast how the lone Jharkhand party nominee, who was a local,
could get away by filing a nomination. The report said there was no campaigning in Jamboni due to the largely one-sided contest. The local CPI (M) claimed that the party has done exceptional work in the area and therefore there was no public support for other party candidates in the panchayat election and hence they did not file nominations. The report elaborated throughout Midnapore there were several uncontested wins registered by the ruling party.

15th May, 1993
The Telegraph (1 column 32 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 10 lines)
Headline: Left Front apologizes for failing to unite / LF’s appeal
Primary source: Political party

The news said in an unprecedented move the LF leaders have issued a public apology for failing to reach a consensus over seat distribution in the forthcoming panchayat election in the state. The report said the move was interpreted as an attempt to warn grass-root workers who were not taking the constituents’ unity bid seriously despite requests from the state leaders. The LF leaders warned supporters that dissension within the LF would pave the way for the victory of the Congress and the BJP.

The Aajkaal report added in the absence of an election manifesto the joint statement of the Front was seen as an initiative to strengthen unity efforts and reduce disagreement between coalition partners.

15th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 60 lines)
Headline: Congress-BJP has forged alliance: Left Front
Primary source: Political party / leader

The report informed LF leaders including Jyoti Basu has stated there was a tacit understanding between the Congress and the BJP in this panchayat election. The other contents of this report repeated those in The Telegraph referred to in the last news item. This report said there was every attempt at LF unity but there was little possibility that the attempt would be successful.

15th May, 1993
The Statesman (3 columns 156 lines)
Headline: Way of the gun in temporary abeyance (Murshidabad)

The news said the benefits from the three-tier panchayat system were not on the minds of the people in Murshidabad. They were preoccupied with the fear of criminal activities which were widespread in the district. The villagers knew that a sizeable portion of the panchayat funds were utilized to procure arms illegally for the protection of the vested interests but they remained quiet in the fear of repercussion in this crime-prone district. The report stated panchayat funds were utilized for other purposes, mostly illegal. It said the reluctance of the gram panchayats to submit their accounts confirmed the misuse of funds. The report said development work by the panchayats of the district in the past five years was nil. The report emphasized there was no protest from the villagers over the malfunctioning of the panchayats as over the last two years 15 men have been killed in violence. The report stated the fate of this election was also likely to be decided by gun power. It said political leaders did not attach any importance to the panchayat’s achievements as they knew other factors (muscle and money power) were active and would determine the election result. The report also said there was widespread corruption in the three tiers of the panchayat. The report informed about the major differences between LF constituents – CPI (M), FB and RSP – who were locked in direct contest in several seats. The other Left constituents accused the CPI (M) of flouting the basic principles of LF.

15th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 110 lines)

Headline: Chance to do something for the neighbors excite Jayanti

Primary source: Grass-root panchayat candidate

The report described the orientation and outlook of a woman candidate in Bagnan, Howrah. The CPI (M) candidate Jayanti Pakhira was happy that she would be able to address the issues of her neighbors after her election to the gram panchayat. She was aware of the problems faced by women in their families and in the society and hoped that she would alleviate those problems when her voice would be heard as a gram panchayat member. The report said Jayanti represented the emerging face of Bengal’s women who would in the near future be independent from social strictures.

15th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 114 lines)
Headline: Binoy hopes Left base would strengthen new Panchayats
Primary source: Political party leader

The report projected the opinion of CPI (M) leader and state minister Binoy Chowdhury on the panchayat system in West Bengal. The report quoted him the Left Front was striving to establish the sovereign rule of the people at the grass-root level. The rural people have got autonomy and confidence through the panchayats. The report state Chowdhury said the inclusion of women and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the panchayats would reduce the inequalities and flaws in the existing system. Chowdhury opined the new members needed sympathetic guidance which the state government would provide through training post their election. The report added the leader admitted the CPI (M) was well entrenched in the rural areas through the panchayats.

15th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 46 lines)
Headline: Police being used to threaten workers
Primary source: Political party / leader

The report said Congress has accused CPI (M) of taking the help of police to frighten away its candidates, supporters and polling agents' before the election. The report said biggest opposition in the state pointed out that the ruling party knew without creating terror in the minds of the electorate and the opposition members it would not be able to win this panchayat election. The report informed in an election meeting in Nadia, the state Congress President urged party supporters to counter CPI (M) wherever it attacked them. The report said other Congress leaders present in the meeting alleged that funds allocated for development of the panchayat areas were floundered for the ruling party's gains. The Congress leaders hoped the police would act independent of political influence during the election.

15th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 14 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-Jharkhand party members clash
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed in Khejuri, Midnapore there was violent clashes between CPI (M) and Jharkhandi supporters. The report said CPI (M) district president has
alleged that the attack was jointly planned by the Congress and the Jharkhand party to disrupt panchayat elections in the area.

16th May, 1993
The Statesman (6 columns 190 lines)
Headline: Debt the great leveler among villagers of few returns (Jalpaiguri)
Reporter / Correspondent
This report drew attention to the status of villagers in Jalpaiguri, North Bengal. The report said the panchayats were not active in alleviating their economic problems. They were trapped by the money-lenders. The report stated that even after 15 years under the panchayati raj, the stranglehold of the mahajans (moneylender) over the poor was strong as ever. The report specified that this was the reason for the lack of enthusiasm of the villagers in the panchayat election which was just a fortnight away. The report categorically stated that the decision of the state government to reserve one-third of panchayat seats for women was unlikely to change the gender equation in rural politics. The report referred to Anjali Biswas, a CPI (M) candidate who said she was confused at the sudden turn of events. She was aware she was about to enter a domain long considered to be a male preserve and confessed she has filed nomination out of compulsion (motivated by a male member of the party and her family) rather than interest. The report specified that the intention of the administration to bring gender equity in the power structure may not be successful under such circumstances. The report said the miserable condition of the villagers in many villages in this district was due to flooding by river Teesta which traversed these villages. The report informed though the authorities made clear their intention to actively involve the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and women in local politics, in this district a large chunk of the SC and ST population have not been given the right to exercise their franchise in the coming polls as their area of residence in and around forests and tea-gardens were outside the purview of panchayats. The report concluded each panchayat election was an opportunity for the political parties to strengthen their hegemony over the rural areas and the issues of participation of various sections of the society and their empowerment was not important for them. This statement pointed out the flaw in the much-hyped panchayat system but the sample newspaper was content in pointing out the fallacy. It did not go beyond to mobilize the participation
of the grassroots in the panchayat process or induce their involvement in the system through spreading consciousness.

16th May, 1993 / 26th May, 1993
The Telegraph (1 column 20 lines) / The Telegraph (1 column 38 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) rebels warned not to contest election / CPI (M) to take action against rebel candidates
Primary source: Political party leadership

The news reported the CPI (M) leadership has warned party activists not to contest against official LF nominees in the forthcoming election. The report said CPI (M) district secretaries all over the state have been directed to take action against errant party members after the election. The party has instructed leaders campaigning in the district to highlight the issue at public rallies too.

The other report in the same newspaper on the 26th May informed that the CPI (M) has decided to take strict action against dissidents and party workers who have defied the orders of the leadership and filed nominations against official Left candidates in the panchayat election. That report specified that intra-party differences apart, the CPI (M)'s relation with the other Left constituents have deteriorated and though the state leaders made efforts at unity, the grass-root workers were in no mood to relent and coordinate with the other LF allies.

16th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 100 lines)
Headline: BJP's trump card - Greed and Hindutva
Reporter / Correspondent

The report traced the ascent of the BJP especially in the border areas of West Bengal. The report observed everywhere the BJP has made significant inroads through its workers who were erstwhile Congress supporters. The Congress President of Nadia, one of the border districts, admitted that the crossover from his party to the BJP was a usual affair. The report identified the reasons for Congress supporters joining BJP - resentment over the older party's inept approach and tickling of Hindu sentiments. There were some middle level entry to the BJP from the CPI (M) too who said that the organizational set-up of both these parties were almost the same and the support for Hindu sentiments and the greed of prominence in the relatively new
organization pushed them towards BJP. The report predicted whatever the political scenario with the rise of the new party it would not affect the prospect of the CPI (M) hugely though the Congress was set to lose some ground.

16th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 138 lines)
Headline: Answer them back by winning more seats and not killing
Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported that chief minister Jyoti Basu campaigning for the Left Front has urged the electorate not to let the Congress and BJP take advantage of the Left disunity. He alleged with the announcement of the panchayat elections the murder of Left supporters had began and it would be appropriate to give a fitting reply to these atrocities by winning more seats. The report said the chief minister regretted the lack of unity amongst the Front partners and criticized the BJP for spreading communal sentiments and alleged the party did not have any plans for development of the people.

Political statements of party leaders regularly featured in the sample newspapers as the two following news item in the Aajkaal on 16th May proved.

16th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 26 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) has seat understanding with Congress: BJP
Primary source: Political party

The news quoted the BJP leadership that there was a secret pact between the CPI (M) and the Congress. It said the confirmation of this claim was that the CPI (M) has left seats for the Congress.

16th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 15 lines)
Headline: CPI wants seats according to Left Front norms
Primary source: Political party leadership

In another item the LF constituent CPI was said to voice its resentment against the bigger ally, CPI (M) as it had put up candidates in seats where the CPI came second in the last panchayat election and according to LF norms was supposed to file
nomination this time. The report said CPI leadership hoped that the CPI (M) leaders would convince its lower level nominees to withdraw from the contest at those places.

16th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 37 lines)
Headline: Three-tier Panchayat election to decentralize power: Buddhadeb
Primary source: Political party leader

The news quoted CPI (M) leader and state minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya that the LF always wanted decentralization of administrative powers and have given powers to the grassroots through the panchayat election for the realization of the said purpose. The report said the leader claimed powers have been extended to the rural interiors and were accessed by all concerned.

17th May, 1993
The Statesman (4 columns 136 lines)
Headline: A poet’s village reflects a district’s stagnation (Burdwan)
Primary source: Grass-root panchayat members

The report commented after an analysis of the Burdwan district that benefits of development works by the panchayats has not reached everybody. The report spoke to the rural people of the district who were of the opinion that the literacy drive spearheaded by the panchayats has not helped them because though they could write they were unable to read what was written in a leaflet or a circular. The report said though the CPI (M) panchayats made tall claims about development works in the district, in reality the condition of the villages was miserable especially the medical facilities with acute shortage of both trained medical professionals as well as medicines. The report cited the example of Churulia village, birthplace of revolutionary poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. The report said though the CPI (M) gram panchayat member rattled off the development initiatives of the panchayat there was very little progress.

17th May, 1993
The Telegraph (4 columns 56 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 154 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 90 lines)
Headline: Congress, Jharkhandis trying to destroy Bengal: Basu / Basu shown black flags on his way to a meeting in Diamond Harbour / Have to stop terror to conduct free and fair polls

Primary source: Political party leader

The news items reported the chief minister was shocked by the murder of 6 CPI (M) workers in Jhargram and has asked the district officials to be cautious and ensure the peaceful conduct of polls in the area. The reports said he expressed dissatisfaction over the role of the police in the incident. He assured the political parties that strict vigil would be maintained to ensure peace and meetings and demonstrations in support of the panchayat election would not be interrupted. He accused the Congress and the Jharkhand party of inciting violence before the election. The Anandabazar Patrika report besides the points referred above added Basu criticized BJP and the Congress for their lack of political ethics.

The Telegraph report on Basu's electoral speech informed that state government was mulling over a proposal to give gram panchayat leaders additional responsibility of raising funds for development. The report did not analyze the implications of his comment or else it would have pointed out that the gram panchayat leaders would generate funds through subscriptions or service charges from the panchayat members and that would be an additional burden for the poor families. It could have pointed out that the state government did not give emphasis to the creation of permanent assets by the village panchayats in the last three terms and therefore the burden of development work in the panchayats has become unbearable. The report said the fact that the government did not bother to restrain corruption in the panchayat bodies as most of them were represented by ruling party members resulted in the wastage of the funds allocated for development which added to the woe of the panchayats. The report added that Basu apologized for the LF's failure to unite during the polls and asked the voters to vote for the 'better' LF leader where there were direct contests between the Left parties.

The Aajkaal report on the chief minister's electoral speech referred to his concern over violent incidents before the panchayat elections and the repercussions they might have. This newspaper said the chief minister commented that though the opposition was critical about the LF's failure, they did not mention that under the LF controlled panchayats the rural areas made phenomenal development in the sphere of agriculture, small-scale industries. The report stated Basu stressed on the need of
corruption-free panchayat bodies and advised periodical gram sabhas to stave off corruption.

17th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 162 lines)
Headline: Rush to change political colour in Birbhum
Reporter / Correspondent

The report commenting on the political scenario in Birbhum pointed out that craving for political power through the panchayats has reached such a level that many candidates have changed their political loyalty to contest the elections. The report said erstwhile panchayat members of the ruling party were contesting as BJP candidates due to their reluctance to give up power after their seats were reserved for women or the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The report said there was erosion of Congress’ support base in the district and the party was unable to give candidates in 20% seats. The report stated that the Muslim supporters of the Congress in Birbhum were of the opinion that the CPI (M) was inciting communal passion through continuous reference to the Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid issue with the hope to gain the votes of the community. The report stated the betterment of the rural areas under the panchayats was true but so were corruption, political wrangle and show of muscle power to retain control over the panchayats.

17th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 89 lines)
Headline: Congress has covered its face with lotus (the BJP’s symbol) in Bankura
Reporter / Correspondent

The news commented on the political scenario of Bankura. The report said the most striking trend in the district was the enrolling of grass-root Congress supporters with the BJP in overwhelming numbers to fight the ruling CPI (M). The report said despite this situation the district Congress president was of the opinion that the Congress’ prospect was better in this election and the main contest would be between the Congress and the CPI (M). The report went on to point out that the unity of the Left Front was in tatters in this district. The final observation was that though the
opposition was united and there was bickering between the LF partners yet the discrepancy in the strength of the CPI (M) and others was marked in this district.

It was evident from the report that it was interested to depict the political conflict before the panchayat election rather than the problems of the people or their status under the panchayat administration.

18th May, 1993
The Statesman (4 columns 128 lines)
Headline: Selective benefits, grinding poverty (Birbhum)
Reporter / Correspondent
The report described a campaign meeting of the ruling party to underline the extent of influence of the ruling party in Birbhum. The report stated the local leaders were reminding the voters that their village would benefit if they elect CPI (M) candidates as the party was in power and can get things done quickly. The ruling party members claimed that the quality of lives of the people have improved in the CPI (M) reign. But the report asserted after interaction with the villagers there was no truth in the claim of the ruling party. The development work done by the panchayats was inadequate when compared to the needs of the people and employment opportunities were provided to those who were close to panchayat members, the others had to reel under poverty. The report said though the CPI (M) members disowned claims of bias in giving work to villagers the villagers’ alleged discrimination in the implementation of Operation Barga and said distribution of surplus land which they said was designed to facilitate the ruling party members.

18th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 119 lines)
Headline: State wants more security forces from Centre to conduct panchayat election
Primary source: Administration
The news informed that the state government has requested the Central government for additional forces for deployment along the borders and the sensitive pockets in the various districts during the panchayat election fearing untoward incidents. The report said the state government has asked the district officials and the police to adopt precautionary measures to avoid trouble during the panchayat election.
The report identified Midnapore, Malda and Jalpaiguri as the most sensitive districts and offered three reasons for it – widespread participation of the BJP in the electoral contest, presence of CPI (M) dissidents in huge numbers and the direct contests between various Left partners.

18th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 171 lines)
Headline: Women’s interest could not be ensured totally
Primary source: Political party members

This report proved reservation of seats was the only guarantee for the participation of women in the panchayats. The FB had urged the LF parties to nominate all women candidates to the gram panchayat seats in Bagmundi block in Purulia. But the local male leaders were unwilling to give up their seats in favor of women candidates. The local women had taken initiative in the development of their village where the panchayat had failed but still there was obstacle to the nomination of women candidates in unreserved seats which underlined the gender bias. The local leaders when confronted by the correspondent cited two specific reasons for the preference towards male candidates – the women were not adept in running the panchayats and the bureaucrats would interrupt the smooth functioning of the panchayats taking advantage of their inexperience.

18th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 168 lines)
Headline: Not much difference likely in the results of the two districts
Reporter / Correspondent

The report compared the pre-poll political scenario in Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar. In both districts the presence of the BJP was a new aspect. While in Jalpaiguri, the RSP maintained its independent presence, in Coochbehar the Forward Bloc retained its separate identity. In Jalpaiguri there was no unity in the Left Front ranks while in Coochbehar, for the first time agreement in seat sharing was possible due to the crack in the FB. The report said the situation of the Congress was ambiguous but the CPI (M) alleged the party has joined hands with the BJP in both districts.
18th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 134 lines)
Headline: Anti-CPI (M) alliance at many places in Midnapore
Reporter / Correspondent

The news pointed out that at many places in Midnapore the Congress, dissident CPI (M) members, Jharkhandis as well as the other Front partners have formed alliance against the ruling party. The district Congress denied the existence of such a grand alliance and accused the CPI (M) of assisting the BJP candidates at many places. The report said it opined that barring BJP all other democratic political parties were against the CPI (M).

18th May, 1993
Aajkaal (3 columns 51 lines)
Headline: Open understanding between Congress-BJP
Primary source: Political party

The report stated that the ruling CPI (M) has alleged that the BJP and Congress have joined forces and were even campaigning together for the forthcoming panchayat election. The report said both the Congress and the BJP have denied the allegation. The CPI (M) said that the contest in Moynaguri block of the Jalpaiguri district would underline the bonhomie between the two opposition forces. The report stated Congress and BJP have both denied the charge.

18th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 27 lines)
Headline: There will be 4% increase in LF seats: Anil Biswas
Primary source: Political party leader

The news said CPI (M) spokesperson Anil Biswas has claimed that Left Front’s seat would be increased by 4% in the ensuing panchayat elections. The report informed in 1983 LF secured 69% seats and in 1988 it won 74% seats. The report said Biswas alleged that some forces were bent on creating a support base for the BJP from the beginning of the panchayat election while the BJP was trying to win support by luring voters with money and campaigning on communal lines.
Headline: CPI (M) leaders attacked by FB
Primary source: Political party

The report highlighted the sensitive situation in the districts prior to the panchayat election. It informed in Midnapore two prominent CPI (M) leaders were attacked by FB supporters.

18th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 21 lines)
Headline: Want strict action: Basu to District Magistrates
Primary source: Chief minister (Administration)

This news item said the chief minister expressed concern over the tense situation in Jhargram, South Dinajpur and South 24 Parganas where several incidents of violence have occurred in the last few days. He instructed the district administrations to take stringent measures against all attempts to disrupt the electoral procedure. He urged them to maintain peace and see that no one interrupted political campaigning or spread communal messages. Most parts of the report appeared in The Telegraph and Anandabazar Patrika on the previous day. It goes to prove that the sample newspapers procured news from the same source and the content was identical and even repetitive.

19th May, 1993
The Statesman (5 columns 105 lines)
Headline: Decadence, privation and politicking
Reporter / Correspondent

The report described the condition of a village in North Dinajpur to point out that the panchayat did little to improve the condition of the villagers. The villagers were always insecure about work and food and the various Central government schemes for giving employment to the rural poor did not reach them. Moreover the infrastructure facilities were abysmal – there were hardly any proper roads, or adequate drinking water facility and no primary or secondary schools. The Congress gram panchayat pradhan’s only concern was that his party should win the gram panchayat thwarting the Left attempts. The report hinted that the village close to the Bangladesh border witnessed regular infiltration and the political parties were keen to utilize the services of the migrants during the election in exchange for favors.
19th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 118 lines)

**Headline:** Political parties eager to take women from voluntary welfare organization

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The report highlighted how the political parties were eager to rope in women who were involved in voluntary social service as candidates for the panchayat election in reserved seats. The preference for these women was obvious as they were conscious of their rights and had a voice in the rural society. The report said the social organizations, on the other hand, were concerned with the weaning away of their volunteers by the political parties. They had prepared their volunteers after a long ordeal against the vested interests and the local political leaders for community service but now political parties sought to utilize these women for their own interests.

19th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 168 lines)

**Headline:** Bow-arrow and Lotus (symbols of Jharkhand Party and BJP) dominate Purulia and Bankura

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The report remarked the rural electorate in Purulia has shifted their allegiance to the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) as the primary rival of the CPI (M) instead of the Congress. The report wrote the graffiti and posters were proof of the reality. The Congress has allied with JMM in several seats and elsewhere it will participate in friendly contests with it. The CPI (M) was worried over the spread of the JMM network in Purulia at such a rapid pace. The JMM, the report predicted, would be the second force in Purulia after the CPI (M) replacing the Congress. The report added in Bankura the Congress was set to be replaced as the second force by the BJP.

19th May, 1993
The Telegraph (2 columns 48 lines)

**Headline:** CPI (M) campaign communal: opposition

**Primary source:** Political parties

The news informed the opposition parties have charged the CPI (M) and the chief minister, Jyoti Basu of campaigning along communal lines. The opposition parties – Congress and the BJP accused that Basu at a recent electoral meeting in a
border area of North 24 Parganas where Muslim population were dominant commented that CPI (M) was their only friend while the other political parties were their foes. The report said they said such communal propaganda would harm the political stability of the state and disrupt the peaceful electoral process. The report indicated that in 1993 panchayat election the issue of communal harmony was more important than local issues.

19th May, 1993
The Telegraph (1 column 16 lines)
Headline: Congress-FB pact for polls
Primary source: Political party leaders

The news quoted Congress leaders of Howrah district to inform that several gram panchayat candidates were forced to withdraw their nominations by armed activists of the CPI (M). The leaders admitted that there was electoral pact with Forward Bloc, a LF constituent in many areas of this district as the grassroots thought it as the only way to keep out the CPI (M) and prevent CPI (M) atrocities.

19th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 108 lines)
Headline: Election ticket strains personal relation
Primary source: Grass-root members

The news reported how political affiliations have strained relations within a village. The CPI (M) had suspended some of its members from this panchayat area who later formed a separate political outfit. The report illustrated how the contest between the ruling party and a party born out of dissident members of the parent party have bifurcated the people of a neighborhood.

19th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 120 lines)
Headline: Teenbigha is the trump card for Kamal Guha in Coochbehar
Primary source: Political leader

The news reported in Coochbehar the main issue was the ‘Teenbigha’. (The Teenbigha corridor in the district was leased to the Bangladesh government on the long-standing demand of the neighboring country to improve bilateral relations.) The
dissident FB leader Kamal Guha was quoted in the report that the above mentioned issue would be used to fight the panchayat election and win it. He made it clear that the panchayat election was a prestige fight and had to be won to maintain political existence. The report did not make any observation on the fact that political parties keen to win the panchayat election could go to any length to fulfill their objective. Guha announced the Teenbigha issue would be helpful to counter the political opponents like Congress, CPI (M), official FB and the BJP.

19th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 35 lines)
Headline: “Party will tell what to do if I win”
Primary source: Grass-root panchayat candidate

The report projected the statement of a woman zilla parishad candidate of Kuchilibari area near the Teenbigha corridor. The candidate representing Kamal Guha’s FB admitted that she did not understand politics and would tail the party policies as stated by its leaders if she won. The candidate said her family and many others like it fled the area after the handover of the corridor to the neighboring country but returned soon after seeing normalcy prevail in the area. So it was clear from the contents of the report that Kamal Guha and his party was propping up the issue of “Teenbigha” for political gains and the villagers were being used by political parties to gain votes. The news item also pointed out the consequence of the lack of political consciousness among people as the woman candidate could not take up an appropriate stance on the “Teenbigha” issue.

19th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 column 36 lines)
Headline: Panja to visit Satgachia in helicopter
Reporter / Correspondent

The news clearly pointed out that panchayat election was not a process of empowering the grassroots; it was a battle of the political parties to show their strength and derive a share of power in the local political units. The news item informed that Union minister and Congress leader Ajit Panja has decided to land in the electoral meeting at Satgachia, the chief minister’s Assembly constituency, in a helicopter to boost the morale of the party workers and overwhelm the voters.
report further informed that chief minister Jyoti Basu was also using a copter for electoral campaigning to cover as much ground as possible in the little time before election.

The incidents of pre-electoral violence continued unabated. The Aajkaal reported two such incidents on the 20th May.

20th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 28 lines) and (1 column 23 lines)
Headline: Headless body of Congress worker recovered in Sonarpur, Mamata visits the site / CPI (M) office set ablaze by Jharkhandi supporters
Reporter / Correspondent
The first report informed in Sonarpur in South 24 Parganas a Congress supporter was abducted while returning home from a meeting and was later on found dead. The second report said in Binpur, CPI (M) supporters attacked a procession of Jharkhand party who later retaliated by setting the local CPI (M) party office on fire.

20th May, 1988
Aajkaal (2 columns 96 lines)
Headline: Goal: Success of the Panchayats (Howrah)
Reporter / Correspondent
The report on the development in the panchayat areas in the Howrah district gives us some reason to cheer about the functioning of the panchayats. The report specified that the trend of people deserting the villages for the cities to gain employment was reversed here. The panchayat has been successfully generating new jobs through various small scale industries. The report commented that any political party may emerge victorious in the Howrah panchayat election but the political parties were unanimous that whatever the result development would be the first priority. The report observed that the voters were not eager to know about the unity in the LF or the bickering in the Congress or the influence of the BJP; they were just interested in the development initiative. But the report remarked as it was election time politics was bound to be an integral part of the discussion. The report went on to elaborate on the status of LF unity which according to CPI (M) district chairman was better than the last time and the Congress’ status would deteriorate as a result of it. The report said that the Congress alleged that development initiatives undertaken by the panchayats
have mostly benefitted the panchayat members themselves. The report added the Congress projected a broken house due to the squabble between its leaders.

20th May, 1993
The Statesman (3 columns 147 lines)
Headline: Languishing in isolation (Nadia)
Reporter / Correspondent
This was a report on the pre-poll scenario in Nadia. The reporter visited a gram panchayat dominated by tribal population in the district. The initial observation was that from the appalling living condition it was evident that there was no semblance of panchayat administration in the area. There was no electricity or connecting roads and so during the monsoon the village became inaccessible and isolated, the lack of medical facilities caused the death of 10 inhabitants in the last 2 months, the only primary school was on the verge of closure due to lack of renovation. The report said people were disgusted with the non-functioning and indifferent panchayat. The report commented a striking feature of the panchayat election in Nadia was nomination filing by about 5000 women candidates. The report also said that the people of the district were generally dismayed with the Congress as well as the CPI (M) but the lack of an alternative political force has left them without any other option.

20th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 20 lines)
Headline: Mamata to campaign wherever Basu does
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed Youth Congress leader Mamata Banerjee has decided to campaign in areas where the chief minister held electoral meetings to give fitting reply to the chief minister’s propaganda against the Congress.

20th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 35 lines)
Headline: Unity stronger than the last time
Primary source: Political party spokesperson
The report quoted the spokespersons of LF constituents RSP and FB that LF unity was stronger in this election than the previous panchayat elections. The report
observed that statistics available on the bickering between the CPI (M) and RSP in the four important districts of the state was contrary to the claims made by these partners that the situation was better this time as the total number of discordant seats was 7000 though this was better than the last year when the figure was 10000. The partners said that for the first time in the last 15 years there was Left Front unity in Coochbehar. The report said the partners felt participation of the BJP in the electoral contest has proved beneficial as while campaigning against the BJP the Front’s ideals and principles were reaching the grassroots.

21st May, 1993
The Statesman (5 columns 130 lines)
Headline: Robbed of Opportunity (Malda)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report described the condition in the three villages in Malda district that were separated from the mainland by a turbulent river Ganga. The report stated that the living conditions were primitive and the only sign of modernization was the politics of the day. The report described the living conditions as similar to what it was about 50 years ago. There was no electricity, drinking water, health centre or proper communication within the villages or to the mainland. The report informed there was absence of the familiar political bustle usually associated with a poll. There was rarely a graffiti or poster in these villages to inform about the candidates, except the rare placards attached to the houses of candidates themselves. The villagers expressed their disdain against political parties and their corrupt panchayat members in the report and blamed them for the lack of development. But the report pointed out the political parties was inane to the reactions of the people and were engaged in the game of one-upmanship. The report informed the main battle was between the CPI and the CPI (M). The report stated that not only in these three villages, the situation in the Malda district on the whole was pathetic. There was a lot of importance attached to tribal votes and the essence of the campaign of the political parties was to ensure these votes through feasts and tari - the local country liquor. The report said the internal strife between the Front partners was prominent in the district with the CPI (M) failing to reach an understanding with the CPI, RSP, or FB. The report commented dissidents in the ruling party were a major cause for its worry.
21st May, 1993
The Statesman (2 columns 38 lines)
Headline: Congress (I) panchayat poll prospects bleak
Reporter / Correspondent

The article announced Congress' poll prospect in the forthcoming panchayat election was bleak due to its own organizational and financial incapability as well as wrangling between various factions in the party. The report said the party leaders were aware that a tough challenge to the ruling party was not possible under these circumstances. The report commented that the Congress had an excellent opportunity to upset the LF in this election as there was no understanding between the Left allies in almost 7000 seats and there was widespread grievance against the Left for the lack of development that would have promoted its cause.

21st May, 1993
Aajkaal (3 columns 51 lines)
Headline: No place in the party for those who hobnob with the BJP: Somen
Primary source: Political party leader

The news item highlighted the statements of Congress President Somen Mitra warning Congressmen about the fallout of alliance with the BJP. He was quoted in the report that supporters or units risked expulsion from the party if they were found to form a coalition with the BJP. He accused the ruling party of assisting the BJP with both money and resources and alleged that the police were hand-in-gloves with CPI (M) supporters in spreading terror.

21st May, 1993
Aajkaal (3 column 27 lines)
Headline: BJP amused at the talks of alliance with the Congress
Primary source: Political party leader

The news informed that the BJP leadership was amused with talks of Congress-BJP alliance and was not worried about it. They were more interested to reap the fruits at the expense of Congress.

21st May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 100 lines)
Headline: 2 Muslim women members of CPI (M) candidates for other parties in this election
Primary source: Political party leader

The report informed that two Muslim women candidates in North 24 Parganas district have shown the courage to change their parties to protest against the corruption therein. This certainly marked the courage of women panchayat members as well as gave an indication of the rampant corruption charges in the panchayat bodies of the state. The report said both candidates were attached with social work and wanted to participate in development initiatives for women.

21st May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 177 lines)
Headline: Gani Khan starts campaign, CPI (M) relieved
Primary source: Political party leader

The report commented that the Malda CPI (M) was relieved that Congress stalwart in Malda Gani Khan Chowdhury has finally entered the election campaign trail. The reason was that his entry was sure to cause dent in the BJP campaign. The CPI (M) was anxious that the BJP’s campaign in Malda eclipsed the Congress and was neck-to-neck with it. The report specified that the Congress was no match to the BJP’s endeavor as the latter had much more money at hand. Moreover there was the additional pressure of bickering in the Congress rank and file. But the report said CPI (M) was confident that the influence and the control it has gained in the last 15 years was adequate to win this election and the BJP’s invasion into Congress votes which implied division of opposition votes was another reason for its certain victory.

21st May, 1993
The Telegraph (4 columns 56 lines)
Headline: Mamata to counter Basu’s campaign
Primary source: Political party leader

The news informed that the state Youth Congress President Mamata Banerjee though initially reluctant to campaign for the party in view of the state Congress’ refusal to involve her in the nomination of panchayat candidates would do so at last. The report said she had to relent under the pressure of the rank and file to campaign in the face of increase in the spurt of attacks on Congressmen. She said she would appeal
to the voters to defeat the CPI (M) to prevent corruption in the panchayats. The report gave an elaborate account of her and her accomplices' campaign plan. The report also informed that the Congress would counter the CPI (M)’s slanderous campaign against it blaming it for the Babri mosque demolition especially in Muslim-dominated areas. (It has been mentioned previously too that the Babri masjid – Ram Janambhoomi issue was one of the important issues in the panchayat election, more important than the local issues. The political parties and their leaders gave their perspective on the issue in the various public meetings as well as through door-to-door campaign and wall writings.)

21st May, 1993
The Telegraph (4 columns 136 lines)
Headline: Murshidabad’s tryst with peace
Primary source: Political party leader
The news stated the situation in Murshidabad was under control. It said the administration was successful in crushing the political party backed gang-war. The report informed that the anarchy in the district for the past two years has been reined in and the district was set for a trouble-free panchayat poll. The report observed that the CPI (M) symbol was prominent in the rural areas. It commented the CPI (M)’s organization has given it an early lead and there were areas where its candidates faced no opposition. The report observed that the Muslim population of the district who were the majority has traditionally voted for the ruling party. Before 1978 they voted for the Congress then onwards they voted for the CPI (M) for practical rather than ideological reasons. The report said there was no understanding between the CPI (M) and the RSP and there were likely to be direct contests between the two parties in most areas where the RSP has a strong presence. The report also added all kinds of local alliances were evident.

21st May, 1993
Aajkaal (3 columns 90 lines)
Headline: Conflict in the Left Front, Congress troubled by dummy candidates
Reporter / Correspondent
The report illustrated the pre-poll political situation in the Jalpaiguri district. The report specified that the Congress was united in most of the blocks and the zilla
parishad seats but there were many bogus candidates in the gram panchayats which was a bad omen for the party. The report informed there was fissure in the LF too. The report gave elaborate description of the squabble between LF partners.

21st May, 1993
Aajkaal ((3 columns 162 lines)
Headline: BJP worse than witches (Malda)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report discussed the political scenario in the Malda district threadbare. The report stated the condition of the Congress was 'pathetic' as it has surrendered its fortune to the BJP in the midst of factionalism within the party. The BJP, on the other hand has concentrated in increasing its seat count in this district to replace the Congress as the second political force. The report cited one example to point out that many CPI (M) leaders have left the party in search of greener pastures in the BJP.

22nd May, 1993
The Statesman (6 columns 162 lines)
Headline: Seeking rain since votes are no guarantee of succor (South Dinajpur)
Primary source: Panchayat members

The report explored the condition of the villages in South Dinajpur. The report said the dominant reaction of the voters was that they had neither the time nor the inclination to be dragged into electoral politics. They were more concerned with their livelihood and complained that even after 15 years under the panchayat system they were yet to receive the fruits of development – there were virtually no roads repaired or tube-well sunk or mini kits distributed in the majority villages. The report said the villagers complained only those who had political connections or were close to panchayat leaders irrespective of party affiliations received benefits from the panchayats. The report informed that seat adjustment between the Front partners has failed in this district. The RSP was of the opinion that the people will resist the CPI (M)'s design of unleashing a reign of terror to win votes. The report observed whatever the campaign against the ruling party it already has an edge in this district as elsewhere because of its superior organizational strength.

23rd May, 1993
The Statesman (4 columns 100 lines)
Headline: Hope not worth the wait in Mr. Basu’s constituency

Reporter / Correspondent

The despair of the rural people even in the reign of panchayati raj was evident from their reaction in the chief minister’s Assembly constituency Satgachia. The report stated that for 15 years people in the rural areas expected that their life would change but in vain. Now they suffer a sense of betrayal. The report commented that the quality of life in the villages where the leaders of the ruling party lived were comparatively better. The discrimination in the status of ruling party and opposition members was stark. Drinking water and electricity was unavailable and the lack of employment forced the local people to disregard the panchayat election and deride its significance.

24th May, 1993
The Statesman (6 columns 132 lines)

Headline: Fighting over marginal issues in no man’s land

Reporter / Correspondent

The article reported on the plight of the people living near the Bangladesh border in Coochbehar district. The report said the place was like a no man’s land with no facilities for education, drinking water, irrigation, electricity or roads. But there was no dearth of political leaders. The report commented that the BJP has emerged as an alternative to the CPI (M) in this region and was set to give the communist party a tough challenge but whatever the political fight there was doubt whether the life of the common people would change. The pessimistic reaction of these people indicated that a section of the electorate had little faith on the panchayat system and its ability to cure the ills in the rural areas.

24th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 130 lines)

Headline: BJP unable to raise hue and cry over the issue of infiltration

Primary source: Political party / Political party leaders

The news reported that BJP was unable to cause uproar on the issue of infiltrators before the panchayat election. The report informed that the party leaders have decided that the identification and evacuation of Muslim infiltrators would be bestowed on the panchayats if the BJP came to power. The party was of the opinion that both the Congress and the CPI (M) have encouraged infiltration from across the
border to gain political advantage. The Congress, however, denied its role in the issue and blamed the ruling party for infiltration from neighboring Bangladesh. The report commented that the BJP’s attempt to highlight the infiltration issue may not have gained importance but the BJP was in the discussion and contention in the panchayat election in every district.

24th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 72 lines)
Headline: No opposition unity in Hariharpara; CPI (M) relieved
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed there was no unity among the opposition in Harihartala in Murshidabad where about 7 months back the joint standpoint of the opposition parties had creased the foreheads of CPI (M) leaders. The report pointed out the public show of discontent and upheaval against the ruling party had made headlines but in the time of the election the opposition forces were fighting each other and the CPI (M) was placed at a very comfortable position.

24th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 24 lines)
Headline: Expenditure of panchayats likely to be reduced in the hands of women: Basu
Primary source: Political party leader
The report said chief minister Jyoti Basu was of the opinion that women panchayat members would successfully control the misuse of funds allocated for panchayat development. The report said Basu said it was important to not only elect women members but increase their consciousness for better governance of the panchayat bodies.

24th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 27 lines)
Headline: There is doubt about the survival of CPI in this state: Buddhadeb Bhattacharya
Primary source: Political party leader
The report quoted CPI (M) leader and state cabinet member Buddhadeb Bhattacharya who said that despite efforts by his party, unity of the Front was not
possible due to the non-cooperation of the other allies. In Midnapore he blamed the CPI for the lack of accord.

24th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 54 lines)
**Headline: Abstain from bitterness: Basu to Front partners**
**Primary source: Political party leader**

The report stated that the chief minister has urged the Front partners not to loathe each other after it was evident that there would not be unity in about 7000 seats. The report said the chief minister advised Front partners to concentrate on campaigning and leave the right to decide with the voters.

25th May, 1993
The Statesman (5 columns 140 lines)
**Headline: A hamlet of explosions, uncertainty and fear**
**Reporter / Correspondent**

The report on the situation in Midnapore before the election focused on the violence and terror in the tribal dominated Jhargram region. The residents blamed the ruling CPI (M) for the violence and bloodshed and suggested that the ruling party was bent on intimidating voters and candidates from opposition parties before the election. The report observed that the CPI (M) dominated the gram panchayats in the area and the benefits of the panchayat was reserved for the party functionaries and henchmen. The people protested the discrimination but the report said they were threatened with dire consequences by the CPI (M) gram panchayat functionaries. Even the Left Front constituents were not spared and a CPI woman candidate was forced to withdraw her candidature. The news continued there was also a report of withdrawal of a Jharkhand candidate from a zilla parishad seat as his proposer withdrew support after his son was abducted allegedly by CPI (M) activists. The report indicated an atmosphere of fear dominated these areas and deterred grass-root participation.

25th May, 1993
The Telegraph (4 columns 104 lines)
**Headline: Politics kills a crusader's dream**
**Primary source: Grass-root Panchayat candidate**

The article depicted the soulful tale of a woman candidate who was forced to participate in the panchayat election and give up on her dream and passion. Ekadashi
Mondal, the Congress candidate in Adharmanik gram panchayat in Bishnupur block was a voluntary in Bengal Rural Welfare Service (BRWS) and had participated in many literacy and health campaigns as a dedicated social worker. She was widely respected and accepted in all the villages in the Bishnupur block as her apathy to political parties was well known. The article elaborated Congress had occupied this gram panchayat last time and it was the only winning seat of the party in the whole block as all the adjoining villages were occupied by the CPI (M). This year the seat was reserved for women by the government’s new directive and the Congress, to retain control over it sought to encash on the popularity of Ekadashi. Her family including her husband was Congress activists who forced her to file nomination for the gram panchayat. The report observed not only was she forced to desert her passion of pursuing voluntary service but she was a reluctant entrant in politics and the fact that she has no interest in the field would deter her from actively pursuing the activities of the panchayat. The report continued the control of her family over her was so overpowering that it would hamper independent decision-making. The much-respected Mondal now faced attacks of her political adversaries. The CPI (M) activists campaigned that her social work was a ploy to make a political career. They have declared that she would be prevented from carrying out social activities in future. The report concluded that even if Ekadashi wins the election it was a personal loss for her, a loss that was more heart-breaking than the victory wreath for the electoral contest.

25th May, 1993

The Telegraph (1 column 18 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-Congress clash over panchayat poll in Canning
Reporter / Correspondent

The report said at least 30 people were injured in clashes between the CPI (M) and Congress activists in Canning, South 24 Parganas. The clash started when some CPI (M) workers attacked a Congress worker in a procession.

25th May, 1993

Aajkaal (3 columns 99 lines)
Headline: Anti-CPI (M) campaign by all other contesting parties (Murshidabad)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report described the pre-poll scenario in the Murshidabad district. The report gave details of BJP’s ‘scandalous’ alliance with the Congress at the grass-root
level. The report stated one distinct characteristic of the electoral campaign in this district was the intensive campaigning against the CPI (M) by all other political parties including its Left Front allies which has jeopardized its understanding with the other partners. The newspaper pointed out that the CPI (M) was banking on the Muslims who were livid at the Congress after the Babri Masjid demolition and would fall back on it to restrict the onslaught of the BJP. The report said there was no effort on the part of Congress to campaign for its nominees or dispel the concerns of the electorate. The report also elaborated on the LF bickering and the attempt of the smaller partners to defeat the CPI (M).

25th May, 1993
Aajkaal (3 columns 75 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) ahead in work and campaigning (South 24 Parganas)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report described the pre-poll scenario in South 24 Parganas. The battle of the political parties was vividly described in the report. It underlined the CPI (M) was well ahead of the others in ‘organization and campaign’. The report specified the battle with the other Left partners especially the RSP was very keen.

25th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 16 line)
Headline: Panchayat sabhapati (head) attacked
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed a CPI (M) panchayat pradhan was attacked by Jharkhand supporters while he was addressing a public rally in Jhargram.

25th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 55 lines)
Headline: BJP may do well in panchayat vote, fears CPI (M)
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that CPI (M) leaders were apprehensive that the BJP would fare well in this panchayat election. The reasons were the inability of the Congress to prove itself as an able opposition and the agreement between Congress supporters and those of the BJP at the grass-root level in many areas. The report said the CPI (M)
was worried over the ascension of the BJP and was not so much bothered by the Congress which was gradually being displaced by the other opposition parties. The CPI (M) leaders pointed out that the Congress was being challenged in the whole country due to its nonchalant response to communalism and the new economic policy, West Bengal was no exception and the Congress failed to oppose the BJP here too.

25th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 87 lines)
Headline: Congress-BJP alliance, CPI (M) worried
Primary source: Political party / Political party representative

This item reported about the CPI (M)’s growing concern at the alliance between the BJP and the Congress especially at the grass-root level. This report stated that though neither the BJP nor the Congress admitted of their alliance but the truth was that the contest hinted at a clear alliance. The report remarked the state Congress has announced strict measures against candidates who withdraw for the sake of a BJP candidate but the BJP has used the bickering in the Congress in a clever manner and was sure to exploit it for its own gains.

25th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 80 lines)
Headline: In the stronghold of infiltration, smuggling all parties trying to focus on other issues
Reporter / Correspondent

The observation of this report on the Nadia district was interesting. The report stated that though infiltration and smuggling were the two main issues of concern in this district all the political parties were reluctant to raise both the issues for the fear of losing votes. The report remarked the livelihood of 30% people along the international border was dependent on smuggling so the political parties did not want to face the wrath of these voters by raising the issue. The report stated the people have accepted that the panchayat bodies would function but there would be no conflict with smuggling. The report said the BJP was the main contender to the ruling party in this district. Its issues were violence, corruption and nepotism of the ruling party CPI (M) while the ruling party campaigned against the communal propaganda of BJP and the unholy alliance between BJP and Congress.
25th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 77 lines)
Headline: Individual-centric rural politics shattered this time
Reporter / Correspondent

The article focused on the politics in the villages before the panchayat elections. It underlined the fact that the ruling party has nominated many new entrants (75%) in the three tiers doing away with reputed and influential candidates in this election. The reservation of seats has assisted the party in shedding away the convention of an individual-centric politics. The report commented this would auger well for the panchayat system. The change in perspective of the ruling party was evident from the absence of wall writing in favor of the candidate and focusing on the party symbol and message.

The CPI (M) and Congress’ preoccupation with the BJP continued to hog the headlines.

26th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 44 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-BJP has tacit understanding: Somen
Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported that state Congress President suspected alliance between the CPI (M) and the BJP. He said the statement of the CPI (M) leadership that the BJP would do well in the panchayat election proved it. He said that the CPI (M) knew that the Congress was its main opposition in the panchayat election yet its statements and campaign was projected in such a way as if the BJP was the main political opponent in the forthcoming elections. The report said the Congress president stated alleged that the BJP otherwise powerless in West Bengal was spreading its communal fangs in rural Bengal with the support of the ruling party.

26th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 50 line)
Headline: BJP did not give candidates at many places due to fear of me: Mamata
Primary source: Political party leader

Congress leader Mamata Banerjee was quoted in this report that the CPI (M) was involved in gross irregularities and it was time that the people deserted that party
and chose the Congress. She said BJP was afraid of her and therefore did not field candidates at many places in Sonarpur, in South 24 Parganas while addressing a meeting there. She accused the ruling party of terrorizing the voters.

As evident from the news reports allegations and counter allegations dominated reporting in the sample newspapers in their coverage of the panchayat elections.

26th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 138 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) challenged by Forward Bloc minister Chaya Ghosh in Murshidabad
Reporter / Correspondent
The report stated that ‘big brother – CPI (M)’ has understood that the FB’s political strength has increased in Murshidabad before the panchayat election. The LF ally under the leadership of Chaya Ghosh, a minister in the state cabinet, is protesting against corruption and discrimination of the erstwhile panchayats bodies controlled by the CPI (M) during campaigning and has even joined hands with the BJP and the Congress for the purpose. The result was direct fight between the LF partners at several places in this district. The report commented that the panchayats were the source of power in state politics and all Left parties were eager to strengthen their political base even at the cost of quarrel with partners.

26th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 162 lines)
Headline: Ram and Babri - focus of campaign in border areas; opponents focus on communal harmony
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed about the political scenario in Bongaon in North 24 Parganas. It informed many CPI (M) supporters were deserting their party to join the Congress before the election. The report remarked the BJP’s presence was also not to be ignored. The report pointed out that the areas adjoining the border are witnessing equal strength of the CPI (M) and the BJP. The main issue in these areas was the demolition of the Babri Masjid and its implications. The report wrote the common people particularly the Hindus favored the BJP while suggesting no trust in the
Congress and believed that the CPI (M) has taken up the cudgels against the BJP for political mileage.

26\textsuperscript{th} May, 1993

Aajkaal (3 columns 114 lines)

Headline: The indication is election result will remain as it is (North 24 Parganas)

Reporter / Correspondent

The reporter wrote about the pre-poll scenario in the North 24 Parganas district. The report observed that the enthusiasm surrounding the panchayat election was tremendous in this district. The fight in most of the district was between three or even four contestants. The reporter quoted the various Left Front parties about the contest between allies in the district. He wrote about the alleged alliance between the BJP and the Congress, and on the consequences of BJP’s participation in the electoral contest. The reporter concluded that barring a few places in the district, the dominance of the ruling party in the forthcoming election would not be altered.

26\textsuperscript{th} May, 1993

Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 81 lines)

Headline: Disparate tunes in Congress’ campaign

Primary source: Statements and Activities of political party leaders

The report observed the Congress’ disorganized state in this election was clear. Mamata Banerjee and her faction were not eager to campaign in the initial days due to differences with the state unit. The main issue highlighted by the Congress was not related to the voters’ interest. The Congress accused the CPI (M) of supporting the BJP to divide the opposition votes. It reasoned that the BJP’s strength was not noteworthy in West Bengal yet in managed to put up candidates in most gram panchayat seats because of the active role of the ruling party. The report stated though the Congress leaders were highlighting issues like corruption and misrule of the CPI (M) but as their campaign was not organized and bereft of specific goals for public welfare they were likely to find little support from voters. The report concluded that this unimpressive campaign by the main opposition can never lead to a change in the political scenario of the state.
26th May, 1993
The Telegraph (4 columns 96 lines)
Headline: Kamal Guha takes on CPI (M), FB
Reporter / Correspondent
This news reported the clash between former FB leader Kamal Guha and the CPI (M) in the border areas of Coochbehar. The report said the growing dissension in the CPI (M) made Guha’s task easy. Guha’s new party FB (Socialist) was set to challenge the CPI (M) in a big way. The report observed that the people were disenchanted with the CPI (M)’s false promises of development and planned to vote for candidates who would work for them. The report underlined the official FB has kept a low profile in the campaigning. The internal politics of the LF parties in the district were discussed elaborately in the report.

26th May, 1993
The Statesman (7 columns 154 lines)
Headline: Where unabashed CPI (M) rule stands for Panchayati raj
Reporter / Correspondent
The item reported how panchayat raj was equivalent to CPI (M) dominance in Sashan, North 24 Parganas. In the last panchayat election all the 25 gram panchayat candidates nominated by the ruling party was elected unopposed. The report said not only in Sashan but in the adjoining blocks too unopposed election of ruling party members were considered usual. The district administration refused to talk about the uncontested victories. The report reminded the area was often in the newspaper headlines in the last two years for the failed effort of Congress leaders to rehabilitate ousted supporters. Several men remained outside their homes, away from their families in this dominantly wetland area dotted with bheris (fisheries) due to threats by ruling party members. The report said ruling party members hatched criminal charges against political opponents to prevent them from contesting polls or campaigning for other candidates. The report stated this was an indication of political intolerance rather than unstinted public support. The report, however, added that not only muscle power but welfare measures adopted by the ruling party in these areas were also responsible for the defeat of its adversaries. The real picture of panchayat administration was laid bare in this report.
26th May, 1993
The Statesman (2 columns 56 lines)
Headlines: CPI (M) takes note of Congress charge
Primary source: Political party / party leadership

The report informed that CPI (M) leaders have taken serious note of the Congress allegation that the ruling party was brazenly campaigning on communal lines to win the support of the Muslim population. The Congress leaders had alleged that the CPI (M) leaders were maligning them to alienate Muslims voters from them. They said slogans like ‘do not vote for the hand (the symbol of the Congress) that destroyed the Babri mosque’ directly implicate the Congress for the mosque demolition which was not at all true.

The allegations and counter-allegations of the political parties featured prominently in the sample newspapers. They were like a public forum where the political parties voiced their complaints and accusations against each other to draw the attention of the electorate. There are two aspects of this issue that need to be highlighted - a mass medium was not the forum to address personal grievances yet the sample newspapers were used for that purpose and the sample newspapers chose to highlight the dispute and quarrel of the political parties rather than issues close to the grassroots. The media (sample newspapers) and the political parties were social institutions and dependent on each other for news and publicity respectively. It was likely that they would rely on each other but at the same time it cannot be overlooked that their goals are not the same. Political parties are limited by their self-serving intention but newspapers, especially in developing societies are expected to be driven by the welfare of the common people and not associate themselves with the views and outlooks of the opinion leaders. But the coverage of the sample newspapers held out a different picture.

26th May, 1993
The Telegraph (2 columns 90 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) afraid of Congress-BJP nexus
Primary source: Political party / party leadership

The report informed that the CPI (M) was apprehensive of last minute alignment between its opponents - the Congress and the BJP as well as the dissident members of Left Front allies. This fear necessitated warnings to the electorate from
CPI (M) leaders including the chief minister cautioning them about a covert Congress-BJP nexus. The report stated the CPI (M) had earlier expected the BJP to cut into the Congress vote bank but was now disturbed at the new development where there was tacit understanding between the two parties in many panchayats which would unite the opposition votes and endanger its dominant status. The infighting in the Left Front added to CPI (M)'s worry. The other LF allies were openly critical of the CPI (M) in public rallies and press statements. The report stated that the most dangerous implication of this lack of unity among the Front partners was its spillover effect in areas where seat adjustment has been achieved. The report noted the nature of issues highlighted by the rival sides. The CPI (M) emphasized the dangers of communalism and the unholy nexus between the Congress and the BJP. The Congress and the BJP made corruption in the CPI (M) dominated panchayat their main plank apart from the reign of terror in rural Bengal.

26th May, 1993
Aajkaal (3 columns 105 lines)
Headline: Standing as a candidate is a feeling as endearing as freedom from school as child
Primary source: Grass-root panchayat candidates

The news reported on the selection of women CPI (M) candidates in Nadia was done with the help of its women's organization in the district. The efforts to increase the political consciousness of the women by the ruling party were mentioned in the report. The report said the party representatives visited the houses of prospective candidates and explained to them the importance of participating in the election process. The report said many women considered the opportunity to stand as a panchayat candidate a liberating experience.

26th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 40 lines)
Headline: Villages under Panchayati Raj deluged by corruption: Somen
Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported that Congress President Somen Mitra has alleged that the villages have turned into dens of corruption in the last 15 years of panchayati raj rule. The report informed in a public meeting in North Dinajpur, Mitra said CPI (M) has
misappropriated funds meant for development. He alleged Congress workers were being killed in various districts to create an atmosphere of terror.

27th May, 1993
The Statesman (3 columns 51 lines)
Headline: Bose alleges Congress-BJP nexus
Primary source: Political party leader

The report informed that CPI (M) leader Biman Bose has alleged that the BJP was spending large sums of unaccounted money for campaigning. The report said he alleged that the BJP had an evil design to disrupt the atmosphere of communal amity in the rural areas.

27th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 51 lines)
Headline: Congress-BJP alliance akin to ‘Birbhum 91’ model: Biman Bose
Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported that CPI (M) leader Biman Bose was of the opinion that the Congress-BJP has allied with each other like they had done in the 1991 election in Birbhum. The tacit understanding between the two parties ensured optimum political mileage for both the parties in that election of 1991. Bose alleged in Purulia, Bankura and Midnapore the two parties were following the Birbhum model this time.

27th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Anti-socials candidates fielded by all political parties in Malda
Reporter / Correspondent

The report said criminalization of politics was proved through one glance at the candidate list for three tier panchayat election in Malda. The report informed all political parties gave tickets to criminals from dacoits to anti-socials who would represent the rural electorate if they win.

27th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 60 lines)
Headline: Congress-FB in open alliance in Murshidabad
The report said in Murshidabad the FB has aligned with the Congress against the CPI (M) throughout the district. The contest was directly between ally partners – FB and CPI (M) almost everywhere. The report gave an impression that the electoral battle in the district was only about the fight between these two.

27th May, 1993
Aajkaal (3 columns 117 lines)
Headline: RSP-CPI (M) in direct contest (South Dinajpur)
Reporter / Correspondent
The report elaborated on the political scenario in South Dinajpur before the panchayat election. Once again there was a detailed discussion of the fight between two LF allies – RSP and CPI (M). The details comprised the blame-game between the two partners - who was responsible for the failure to achieve unity. The report mentioned the strength of the Congress and BJP did not match that of the ruling party. The report stated the most significant issue of discussion in this district prior to the election was the disproportionate division of the Dinajpur district into South and North.

28th May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 52 lines)
Headline: Rajiv Gandhi also stated West Bengal’s panchayat system was admirable: Basu
Primary source: Political party leader
The report said chief minister and CPI (M) leader Jyoti Basu stated that the Congress was an unorganized force and therefore there was no doubt about the success of the CPI (M) and the Left Front. Basu was quoted by the report that the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was also convinced of the superiority of West Bengal panchayats.

28th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 76 lines)
Headline: Panchayats have evolved with time
Reporter / Correspondent
The article wrote about the evolution of the panchayats in the last 15 years. The report said the ‘mini-governments’ would be more powerful and experienced in
the ensuing term. The state government has earlier announced that the panchayats were to be bestowed with more powers after the evaluation of their work in the last three terms. The problem of the panchayat bodies formed in 1978 was the conflict with the bureaucracy. After this problem was sought out there was a radical change in the characteristics of rural development. Along with rampant charges of corruption and deceit, there were some panchayats whose accounting would give the government officers a run for their money. The report stated the road to local self-governance or the implementation of rural development plans by local bodies was not smooth but still the panchayats have made the progress in the villages more feasible than ever before. The initiative of government agencies and administrative departments in the process of self-governance of the rural people was recognized in this report.

28th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 74 lines)
Headline: Conflict between Left Front partners regarding seat adjustment extreme this time
Report / Correspondent

The report informed that the disagreement between the Left parties over seat sharing was never so alarming in the previous panchayat elections. The report reiterated the earlier information and comments on the bickering in the LF. The report said the Left parties blamed one another for flouting the LF norm. The CPI (M) said all dissidents who have filed nomination against the official Left nominee have been expelled from the party but the other partners were not ready to buy this argument of the 'big brother'.

28th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 36 lines)
Headline: Bitter RSP happy with Basu's electoral speech
Primary source: Political party

The news informed that though the RSP was in general bitter with the role of the CPI (M) before the panchayat election it was satisfied with the comments made by the chief minister in the last few electoral meetings. The report wrote the chief minister repeatedly apologized for the discord between the partners in these meetings and requested all partners not to increase the bitterness. The RSP spokesperson
blamed the CPI (M)'s narrow interests and pride for the discord in the LF and urged it to reinforce the LF unity post the panchayat election. The other partners too said it was important to see that the disagreement between the coalition partners do not snowball into a major broil.

28th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 90 lines)
Headline: Basu urge moral support from voters
Primary source: Political party leader

The news item centered on the chief minister’s address in a public meeting where he urged the voters to extend support to maintain communal harmony and asked them to keep the Congress at bay as it was supporting the BJP.

28th May, 1993
Aajkaal (3 columns 123 lines)
Headline: The main issue of the election is not Bakreswar but water sources (Birbhum)
Primary source: Grass-root voters and candidates

The item reported the pre-poll scenario in Birbhum. The report informed that women candidates, irrespective of their party affiliation, were unanimous that reservation of seats would help them. The majority of the women candidates was first-timers and had no previous exposure to politics. The report pointed out that many of them pledged to improve the irrigation and drinking water facilities in the area as they were of primary importance in an arid region. The report informed that literacy rate of women has improved and the participation of the local people in various development initiatives was on the rise. The report stated Bakreswar power plant in the district was a major issue of conflict in state politics. It added local issues like drinking water dominated the panchayat election.

29th May, 1993
The Statesman (5 columns 185 lines)
Headline: National issues to the fore in rural Bengal
Primary source: Political party campaigning, manifestoes

The report informed with the panchayat election hours away the political leaders were wondering whether the political scenario in the country would have an
influence on the voting pattern. The powerful presence of the BJP at the national level would have a significant role on the outcome of the panchayat election but the political leaders despite their intensive campaigning were not sure of the extent of the influence. The report pointed out that the election manifestoes of all the political parties highlighted the issues of communalism and national integrity in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition. The report observed in Malda, Murshidabad, as well as the Muslim dominated areas of the other districts these issues were more important and were raised more often than the local issues. The report then informed that the CPI (M) was comfortably placed despite the challenges thrown by the Congress and the BJP and the disputes within the Left Front. The report stated the CPI (M)’s strength lay in the fact that it has successfully implemented the panchayat system in the state. So even in the face of virulent criticism for corruption and coterie rule it had a clear edge over its political opponents. The other reason for the CPI (M)’s strength was its organizational unity and discipline which was lacking in the other parties. The presence of the BJP has queered the pitch for the Congress and the report was of the opinion that it threatened to erode the vote bank of the Congress. The report informed in many areas Congress workers at the lower levels were covertly supporting the BJP to give the ruling party a tough challenge. The report also observed that an undercurrent of tension was palpable among the Left parties and in Murshidabad, South Dinajpur and some other districts it has turned out to be a bitter tussle for supremacy leading to open accusations and counter-accusations. The report, however, commented the CPI (M) was not too bothered by the differences in the Front. The report did not fail to mention that this was the first panchayat election where 1/3rd of the seats were reserved for women candidates which may dramatically change the political face of rural Bengal.

29th May, 1993
The Telegraph (1 column 38 lines)
Headline: BJP fears clashes during counting
Primary source: Political party / party leadership

The news reported the state BJP feared large-scale violence during counting of votes following threats by CPI (M) activists. The state BJP President said his party feared forcible removal of its workers from counting booths by CPI (M) agents to facilitate the win of their nominees. He also said if the police and administration
prevented unfair means then his party would win many seats. The report described the BJP President’s campaign in the various district and said he was certain of mass support in these areas. He also said the morale of the Congress workers was at an all time low and that would help the BJP.

29th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 38 lines)
Headline: Torch-procession through the village roads with a request to vote
Primary source: Political party campaigning procedure

The report gave inputs on the campaigning methods invoked by the political parties for the 1993 panchayat election in West Bengal. The report narrated a procession with torch and lanterns during the night to attract the attention of the voters. The report described how local leaders chose courtyards of houses in the village to discuss about the prevalent issues and the consequences of voting for political opponents.

29th May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Even if other Congress leaders do not come after election, I'll come: Mamata
Primary source: Political party leader

The news informed that Mamata Banerjee has assured voters of Satgachia, chief minister Jyoti Basu’s constituency that she would be beside them even after the election. The Congress leader intercepted that there would be a tumultuous situation after the election and the Congress workers would be at the receiving end of the CPI (M)’s fury. The report stated that Banerjee urged voters to avoid the BJP. She said the Congress was the only option against the CPI (M) and the CPI (M) wanted the division of opposition votes between the Congress and BJP to ensure its victory. Banerjee cast doubt over the neutrality of the security forces and alleged that the home guards appointed for election duty were in reality CPI (M) cadres. As always the focus of the report was on the allegation of a political leader.

29th May, 1993
The Telegraph (1 column 29 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 34 lines)
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Headline: Congress fears CPI (M) terror tactics / Congress wants paramilitary forces in all booths

Primary source: Political party

The news items reported that a Congress delegation called on the Governor of West Bengal to demand the deployment of paramilitary forces in all booths during the panchayat election. The party expressed concern at the CPI (M)'s strong arm tactics throughout the state. The delegation briefed the Governor on the large-scale violence and intimidation of its candidates and supporters by the activists of the ruling party. The report said the Congress president claimed that party observers were sending enthusiastic reports on its prospects in the forthcoming election. He proclaimed the Congress would do well if the elections were fair and peaceful.

29th May, 1993

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 92 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 38 lines) and (1 column 27 lines)

Headline: Police campaign, flag march to give courage to voters / Attack on CPI (M) procession at Domjur, police assaulted / Bombing at CPI (M) procession in Lalgola

Reporters / Correspondents

The law and order situation in the districts on the eve of the panchayat election was sensitive. This report informed that the police was maintaining strict vigil in the sensitive pockets and assuring the voters that all precautionary measures have been adopted to enable them to exercise their franchise peacefully. The report specified excitement and tension was palpable in many areas over the panchayat election.

The Aajkaal reported two incidents of skirmishes where political party supporters attacked the police and opposition party members respectively.

29th May, 1993

Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 232 lines)

Headline: Winning the Panchayat election is not central; BJP intends to prepare for the future

Reporters / Correspondents

The news informed in Murshidabad though the BJP was contesting in about 40% gram panchayat seats, its primary aim was not to win but to penetrate into the remote villages. The report said political observers were of the opinion that the BJP was definitely an important factor in the border district of Murshidabad. The report
elaborated though there was severe bickering between the Front partners no allies were ready to take on the CPI (M). The Congress was also unorganized in this district. The report commented there was an overwhelming interest with the BJP’s result for it would determine whether the political polarization between the CPI (M) and the Congress still holds true or there would be invasion by a new political force. The report said the CPI (M) and Congress both felt that BJP would not be able to make a significant impact in this election. It also stated all elections provide an opportunity to the political parties to showcase their ideologies and beliefs. The BJP was making full use of this opportunity. The report claimed that the BJP was able to impress upon a section of the electorate – the rich, landed class in the villages who had hoped to derive some advantage from the loyalty to Congress in the past years were set to align with the BJP this time.

29th May, 1993
The Telegraph (2 columns 84 lines)
Headline: Dissidents take on CPI (M) might
Primary source: Political party members / dissidents
The report indicated in Hooghly though the once single crop lands have been successfully utilized for multi-crop cultivation due to improved irrigational facilities, this advantage cannot be translated to electoral gains by the ruling party. The CPI (M) was having trouble to explain why a large chunk of party members was expelled from the party just before the panchayat election. The dissidents claimed they were thrown out as they had questioned the growing corruption in the local units. The dissidents highlighted the cases of corruption as well as arrogance of party leaders. The report said direct confrontation with the FB in most seats complicated matters for the ruling party. While the FB charged the ‘big brother’ with terrorizing its supporters, the CPI (M) accused the FB of hobnobbing with the Congress. The report commented that the feud between the two parties’ dated back to 1978 and the CPI (M)’s highhandedness this time has prompted the FB to urge the administration to declare several areas in the district as ‘disturbed’. The report, however, concluded that whatever the extent of the dispute between the two LF constituents the Congress would not be able to cash in on the fissures due to its own divided house.

29th May, 1993
The Statesman (2 columns 58 lines)
Headline: Repeat performance expected in Panchayat elections

Reporter / Correspondent

The report predicted a near repeat of results of the 1988 panchayat poll. The report stated that the ruling LF led by the CPI (M) would maintain its sway over the panchayats, the mainstay of its power in the state while the Congress would be a distant second. The BJP, the report said, would increase its seat count at least at the gram panchayat level. The LF, the report stated, had no achievements to its credit in the last five years but would all the same win the election due to lack of able opposition.

29th May, 1993

Aajkaal (1 column 34 lines)

Headline: Campaigning ends

Primary source: Political party leader

The news quoted Buddhadeb Bhattacharya that election would be peaceful as all necessary arrangements for its proper conduct have been made. He said at the end of political campaigning for panchayat election it was clear that the election would be held in healthy democratic atmosphere. The news item documented the various electoral facts like the number of voters and candidates in each tier and security personnel employed and time of voting.

30th May, 1993

The Statesman (3 columns 139 lines)

Headline: So much for rural feminism

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed about the actual plight of women candidates in the fray. The report observed that for most women candidates the hearth and home were more important than politics. The participation of so many women in an election contest was a milestone in Indian democracy but the report stated it was evident that this participation was restricted as the women were mostly shy or busy with domestic chores and rarely showed interest in the political fray. The report said the women candidates knew it was really a momentous event to enter an exclusive male bastion but they were also aware that their shyness about public appearance and domestic chores would prevent them from gratifying their political duty.
30th May, 1993
The Telegraph (4 columns 92 lines)
Headline: 61010 panchayats go to polls today
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that the West Bengal panchayat election was set to witness a grim battle between the Left Front, Congress and the BJP. The report gave information on the total number of seats in each tier and total number of contesting candidates. The report mentioned the number of uncontested wins in each of the tiers. The report repeated one of the main highlights of this panchayat election was the emergence of the BJP as a formidable force against the Congress as well as the Marxists. The report also reiterated the frailty of the LF unity and described the extent of difference with regard to seat sharing. The report said in the absence of specific local issues the political parties’ highlighted national issues like the dangers of communalism, the economic situation of the country etc. The report observed that organization-wise the CPI (M) was far superior to the other political parties. It made full use of its support bases to carry out its campaign and intended to use it to ensure the victories of its nominees. The report also observed that the organizational disarray of the state Congress would benefit the ruling CPI (M). There was nothing new in these comments and they were repeated in several preceding reports in this newspaper as well as the rest of the sample newspapers.

30th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 108 lines)
Headline: Jharkhandis to be forewarned by beagle sound before they come out to vote
Reporter / Correspondent

The report portrayed the situation in Jamboni, where 6 CPI (M) supporters were killed a few weeks back. The report emphasized that tension between the Jharkhandis and the CPI (M) was palpable. The local people were livid with the CPI (M)’s approach to frighten away the ordinary voters with the help of the police force. They were worried that the police would pick them up on any pretext if they went out to vote and therefore have decided to forewarn their supporters with the sound of a beagle in the jungle. The Jharkhandis alleged that the CPI (M) has filled the area with outsiders to win the panchayat seats without contest.
30th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 76 lines)
Headline: Understanding with Congress in many seats, admits Bhandari
Primary source: Political party leader

Amidst constant denial of the Congress leadership, this news report revealed that the BJP central leadership admitted to alliance at the local level between the Congress and BJP supporters. The central leadership confessed in many places BJP candidates' were fighting the election with the help of Congress members and it was equally true that BJP candidates have withdrawn from the fray in support of Congress candidates wherever they were strong. The BJP said it was a ploy to counter the CPI (M). The report specified that the CPI (M) leadership repeatedly alleged nexus between the Congress and the BJP. The BJP leadership was hopeful that the clash between the LF partners would benefit them in the ensuing panchayat election.

30th May, 1993
The Telegraph (4 columns 72 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) a non-entity in Joynagar
Reporter / Correspondent

This report zeroed in on the only place in West Bengal where the CPI (M) was a non-entity – the Joynagar-Kultali belt in South 24 Parganas where the SUCI's political strength was well-known. The report informed the CPI (M) did not field its own candidates here and was instead supporting independents. The SUCI was confident of defeating the CPI (M) despite odds. Earlier on the 27th May the Anandabazar Patrika also referred to the supremacy of the SUCI supporters in this area. The report said supporters of all other parties including the ruling party was on the run due to the terror spread by the SUCI proving how big or small the political outfit it sought to control the voters and the panchayat area through muscle power. The SUCI claimed that defying political identities all other political parties were supporting the independent candidate in the fray to defeat their nomination. The other parties including the Congress and CPI (M) has denied this allegation and pointed out that in this region of South 24 Parganas they were unable to field candidates because of the fear of terror. The report added the prominence of the SUCI was clear through the graffiti on the walls. The report also informed in two other blocks of South 24
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Parganas -- Basanti and Gosaba, the CPI (M) and RSP were up against each other. The bickering of the two parties in the two blocks was highlighted in the report.

Here it needs to be pointed out that The Telegraph and Aajkaal’s reports on the pre-panchayat poll scenario in West Bengal were wholly dominated by the electoral prospects of the political parties in the fray. The evolution of the panchayat system in the last five years, the rural development in that time period, the predicament of the grassroots under the panchayat system, the participation of the grassroots in the process of development were rarely mentioned in its reports. The general preoccupation was with the status of the political parties, the statements of their leaders, the conflict, apprehension and aspiration of the political parties as interpreted by the prominent leaders. It is not that the other sample newspapers were very different but at least there was certain investigation and description of the progress (or the lack of it) under the panchayat system in these newspapers. The Telegraph’s and Aajkaal’s reports were mostly based on information disseminated by political leaders rather than grassroots. (The graphical analysis of the news sources at the end of this chapter will provide a clearer picture.) There was seldom any information about the areas where the election was being held or reference to the people who were integral to the election process. The unilateral commentary on the electoral contest between the political parties was inadequate to reflect on the issue of participation and the involvement of the grassroots in the panchayat election process.

30th May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 133 lines)

Headline: Extensive security for Panchayat election

Reporter / Correspondent

The report gave details of the election process and described the security measures adopted for the election and gave an overview of the number of contestants in each of the tiers including women and scheduled castes and tribes. The districts of North and South 24 Parganas, Midnapore, Hooghly, Nadia, Malda, Burdwan, Murshidabad and Purulia were regarded as sensitive. Special preventive measures were adopted in Binpur in Jhargram where six CPI (M) supporters were killed at the onset of the election. It further informed about the place of counting and the process of result declaration.
30th May, 1993

Aajkaal (1 column 30 lines), (1 column 37 lines) and (1 column 16 lines)

Headlines: Congress' seats to reduce: Bose / BJP go all out / Seats will increase: Sailen

Primary source: Political party / Political party leaders

The first news item replicated the statement of CPI (M)'s Biman Bose who said the Congress’ vote percentage in the panchayat election was progressively on the decline since 1978 from 30% to 27% (1983) to 22% (1988) and would decline 5-6% further and that of the BJP would be around 10%.

In the next report BJP’s Paras Dutta was quoted that his party would supplant the Congress from the second position in the state and win about 25% of the votes. Congress’ Subrata Mukherjee refused to buy BJP’s claim and the spokespersons for CPI and RSP were of the opinion that the BJP’s vote count would decrease and if it increased then it was the failure of the other parties to convince the voters about its communal intention. The report informed the BJP leadership admitted to giving complete freedom to the leaders at the block and district level to decide on the strategy to defeat CPI (M) even by aligning with the other political parties. It admitted of alliance with the Congress at the grass-root level but pointed out the Congress stand to lose from such union.

The third report referred above quoted the LF chairman Sailen Dasgupta that the LF coalition was sure about its win and the election would be peaceful. His tirade against the BJP and the Congress was conveyed by the news item. He accused the two opposition parties of jointly attacking the CPI (M) workers.

30th May, 1993

The Telegraph (2 columns 58 lines)

Headline: Congress wave in Nadia village

Reporter / Correspondent

The report specified an ‘unusual incident’ in a Nadia village where there was a Congress’ ‘wave’ hinting at wholehearted support for the party after being disillusioned by the CPI (M). The report described the political strife in the village.

31st May, 1993

The Telegraph (2 columns 112 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 108 lines)
Headline: Marxists win 80% gram panchayats / Left Front on the path of landslide victory

Reporter / Correspondent

The news informed that CPI (M) has won 80% gram panchayats in West Bengal displaying its clear dominance in the state. It stated sporadic violence claimed at least 6 lives in the state. The report stated nearly 70% voters cast their vote in the panchayat election. The report gave detail of the seats won by the various political parties till then. While the chief minister and CPI (M) leader, Jyoti Basu termed the election as by and large peaceful, the Congress and BJP leveled charges of rigging and booth jamming against the ruling party. They complained their party nominees and election workers were harassed at many places. The report stated that there was great enthusiasm among voters and long queues in front of the booths.

The Aajkaal report wrote the dominance of the CPI (M) continued unabated and the BJP could not give much trouble while the Congress maintained its second spot.

31st May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 70 lines)
Headline: Peaceful Election: Front
Primary source: Political party leadership

The report said the Left leaders claimed the election was more or less peaceful. Forward Bloc’s Ashok Ghosh was quoted minor incidents of violence or deaths of a few could not be termed as major disruption. The report said Congress leader Subrata Mukherjee alleged rampant violence during the election including attacks on its candidates and polling agents while the BJP, the report said, thought that the main disturbance would be during counting and the political party with better organization would cause the greater problem.

31st May, 1993
The Telegraph (1 column 30 lines)
Headline: Congress reaction mixed, BJP jubilant
Primary source: Political parties

The news wrote about the reactions of the Congress and the BJP camps regarding the conduct of the election. The state Congress President said the voters
have chosen his party candidates wherever they were allowed to vote without fear. The newspaper commented that the BJP was happy that it was able to reach the grassroots level of politics in West Bengal.

31st May, 1993

The Telegraph (3 columns 126 lines) / (2 columns 104 lines) / (3 columns 117 lines)

Headline: 4 killed in statewide election clashes / Violence delays polling in Sankarpur / Bid to capture booth fails in North 24 Parganas

Reporter / Correspondent

The first report informed 4 persons including 2 CPI (M) and 2 Congress supporters were killed on the Election Day. It remarked the police had a tough time in chasing away the attacking mob in various places and prevent other unlawful activities. The report included the chief minister’s comment on the situation during the panchayat election which he described as largely peaceful except incidents of clashes between Congress and CPI (M) supporters.

The two other reports referred above described the nature of electoral violence in the state. The mayhem outside the electoral booth, the fear of the voters, the closure of the polling booth and attempt by outsiders to snatch ballot papers were all described in the reports to highlight the picture of anarchy and farce of the election process.

The last item referred here informed that in North 24 Parganas violence erupted after the end of polling and the police had to fire to dispel the mob. There were descriptions of malpractice and skirmishes during the election. The report said the border-areas of the district, however witnessed a peaceful election due to the additional deployment of forces to keep a vigil on the porous border areas. The booth capturing attempts in these areas was thwarted by the police due to stringent security measures. The political parties blamed each other for trying to resort to unfair practices but voting was completed all the same.

31st May, 1993

Aajkaal (2 columns 103)

Headline: 5 killed in the name of vote

Reporter / Correspondent

The report noted that 5 people were victims of electoral violence. The newspaper stated that compared to the number of polling booths violent incidents
were few. The report put the vote percentage at 60 and pointed out that though rain played spoilsport in many places women voters turned out in large numbers to cast their ballot.

31st May, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 46 lines)
Headline: Conflict between Front partners is a thing of past: Biman
Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted CPI (M) leader Biman Bose that post the panchayat election, pre-election bickering was a thing of the past and the Left Front partners would do good to disregard the differences during the formation of the gram panchayat and panchayat samiti boards. The CPI (M) leader said that all local units have been instructed not to form alliance with the BJP or the Congress to form boards. The FB’s Ashok Ghosh was also quoted about the same thing though the RSP leadership opined it was too early to talk about board formation. The report concluded with the observation that it was difficult for the Front partners who had allied against the CPI (M) to improve their relation with it now.

31st May, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 22 lines)
Headline: Let women be zilla sabhadhipatis: Ashok Ghosh
Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported that Ashok Ghosh Forward Bloc President said his party wanted 1/3rd seat reservation for women in the position of gram panchayat pradhans, panchayat samiti sabhapatis and zilla parishad sabhadhipatis by all the political parties to establish an example to the entire country. He said the success of the present panchayat election was the reservation of seats for women and the backward classes and effectively breaking the hold of the vested interests over 75% of the seats.

31st May, 1993
Aajkaal (3 columns 57 lines)
Headline: BJP would not cross the 1000 mark: Biman
Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted CPI (M) leader Biman Bose that the BJP’s conquest of panchayat seats would be limited to 1000. The report said the Congress President
Somen Mitra was also not willing to give much importance to the BJP. The report said that the speculations about the performance of BJP continued to dominate the political scenario of the state.

31st May, 1993
The Statesman (3 columns 156 lines)
Headline: Violence kills 4 as over 70% vote in panchayat polls
Reporter / Correspondent

The news item reported that violence claimed 4 lives (like The Telegraph) on the day West Bengal voted for the fourth Panchayat polls. The report said women turned out in huge numbers especially where women candidates were in the fray. The report predicted the trend was in favor of the ruling party. The news said there were reports of police firing from Uluberia (Howrah) and Murshidabad though no one was killed. A cache of arms were recovered from Uluberia where the district official was attacked. There were several adjournments to the election proceedings in Howrah, South 24 Parganas, Burdwan, Midnapore and Purulia due to the snatching of ballot papers during polling. These untoward incidents on the Election Day were also reported in the Aajkaal as referred in the earlier news items. The reactions of the political leaders were a repetition of what The Telegraph and Aajkaal reports have represented in the preceding paragraphs. The Statesman said the Congress condemned the assaults, threats and widespread lawlessness perpetrated by the CPI (M) activists. While the BJP said there were sporadic spells of violence but the situation was never explosive. The CPI (M) leaders including the chief minister were quoted who said the election was peaceful. The police informed that there were clashes mainly between CPI (M) and Congress activists.

31st May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 164 lines)
Headline: Ballot looted, bombing, fire, police firing
Reporter / Correspondent

This report mentioned various incidents of violence – looting of ballot paper, bombing, setting off fire and the subsequent police firing. It said 6 people were killed in political conflict.
31st May, 1993
The Statesman (4 columns 72 lines)
Headline: Peaceful, says Front, Congress (I) alleges terror
Primary source: Political party / leader

The report informed about the reactions of major political party leaders. This report reiterated the LF claim that the panchayat election was peaceful barring a few stray incidents and the Congress allegation that the election was marked by widespread violence by the CPI (M) activists. CPI (M) leader Sailen Dasgupta was quoted that Congress' fear of large scale violence has been allayed. BJP leader Paras Dutta said the election was not at all peaceful as there were clashes and attempts of booth capturing at many places. The leaders of LF allies – FB and CPI - were of the opinion that the election was peaceful but the stray incidents could have been avoided.

31st August, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 48 lines)
Headline: Voting was peaceful: Basu
Primary source: Political party leader

The reactions of the Jyoti Basu, Sailen Dasgupta and Biman Bose were noted in this report. It was the same as reported in the other sample newspapers. This report said that the other Front partners did not give statements that supported CPI (M)'s claim of peaceful election.

31st May, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 72 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) invincible in panchayats, Congress a distant second
Reporter / Correspondent

The report specified that CPI (M) was invincible and will maintain its dominant status even in this election though there was a lack of understanding with the other Left Front partners. The report said there was exemplary participation of women in the voting procedure probably to ensure women representation in the reserved seats. The report said opponents were unanimous that the BJP was successful in making a dent in the grass-root politics in the state.

1st June, 1993
The Statesman (3 columns 81 lines) / Aajkaal (3 columns 78 lines)
Both the reports informed that the LF maintained its winning streak in this panchayat election too. They confirmed that CPI (M) has consolidated its position on the second day of counting and was about to win 70% seats in the panchayat election. The reports said LF was happy that the people has yet again reposed faith in it.

The Statesman report informed a clash between CPI (M) and IPF supporters in Memari, Burdwan resulted in the death of 3 persons besides leaving 27 others injured. The newspaper said BJP’s performance was commendable given its recent entry into the state electoral politics while the fortunes of the Congress have not changed from that of the previous years. It observed the Congress camp was unhappy with the ordinary results though it held on to its traditional seats while the BJP camp was overjoyed with its performance though its hope of securing the second place displacing the Congress was not fulfilled. The Statesman report also stated there was tension in areas where the counting was on.

The Aajkaal report also referred to the creditable performance of the BJP.

News on the post-poll violence was reported in Anandabazar Patrika and Aajkaal separately.

The Anandabazar Patrika report (News space: 3 columns 96 lines; Headline: CPI (M) run riot in Memari, 3 killed) informed about the clash in Memari and added news about other post-poll clashes – in Hooghly a Congress supporter was killed, in Coochbehar police had to fire 2 rounds to stop clash between CPI (M) and FB supporters, in South 24 Parganas there was clash between Congress and CPI (M) supporters.

Another Aajkaal report (News space: 3 columns 123 lines; Headline: Scattered clashes, a Congress worker dead, police firing in 4 districts, candidate abducted) besides narrating the details about various violent incidents mentioned in the previous paragraphs pointed out that most clashes were between the Congress and CPI (M). The Aajkaal report reiterated that BJP has successfully buttressed its place as the third most powerful political force in the state.

1st June, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 18 lines)
Headline: BJP secured votes because of too much negative publicity by Left: Panja

Primary source: Political party leader

The report said Congress leader and Union minister Ajit Panja admitted his party was relieved with the results in the panchayat election which would have improved if the elections were free and fair. Panja alleged BJP did well by inciting communal passions and LF’s negative publicity.

1st June, 1993

The Telegraph (2 columns 98 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) leading in Panchayats but big gains for Congress, BJP

Reporter / Correspondent

This report stated that though CPI (M) was leading in the three tiers of the panchayat election, the Congress and BJP made big gains. It said the CPI (M) was set to win 60% seats in the gram panchayats while the Congress fared better than the last time giving the LF a tough fight in Malda, Murshidabad, South Dinajpur, Nadia and South 24 Parganas. The report observed the other Left partners have failed miserably due to a lack of seat adjustment. The report specified in Malda and South Dinajpur, which were the border districts, BJP made significant progress, better than the Congress. The report also commented the Congress was set to win a quarter of the gram panchayat seats despite the inaction of the Mamata Banerjee faction. It informed in Coochbehar the rebel FB leader Kamal Guha’s party made significant inroads. The report concluded that the CPI (M) was particularly upset with its performance in North and South 24 Parganas, Murshidabad and Howrah.

1st June, 1993

Aajkaal (1 column 12 lines)

Headline: Left did not fare well in 4 districts: Sailen

Reporter / Correspondent

The report quoted the LF chairman and CPI (M) leader Sailen Dasgupta that the nexus of the Congress and the BJP was to be blamed for the CPI (M)’s debacle in North and South 24 Parganas, Murshidabad and Howrah.

1st June, 1993

Aajkaal (1 column 22 lines)
**Headline: Results better but Somen not happy**  
**Primary source: Political party leader**

This report said West Bengal Congress President Somen Mitra complained that the results did not reflect the dissent of the common man against the ruling coalition due to the terror created by it. He said though the party's tally increased from that of the previous year it was not satisfied with the result. He alleged the CPI (M) was responsible for the BJP's noteworthy performance which harmed the Congress' prospect and dealt a body blow to the interests of the state.

1st June, 1993  
Aajkaal (1 column 28 lines)

**Headline: Wherever I campaigned the results were good: Mamata**  
**Primary source: Political party leader**

The report quoted Congress leader Mamata Banerjee that wherever she had campaigned the results were good. Banerjee said Congress workers gave a good fight and the people were also with her party.

1st June, 1993  
Aajkaal (3 columns 30 lines)

**Headline: CPI (M) has been taught a lesson: Nikhil Das**  
**Primary source: Political party leader**

The report stated RSP leader Nikhil Das remarked that the election results gave a fitting reply to the CPI (M)'s terror and highhandedness in Basanti and Gosaba of South 24 Parganas where its' seats have reduced compared to that of the RSP. The report observed this comment came at a time when all Front partners were trying to alleviate the bitterness created before the panchayat polls. The report pointed out that in Murshidabad the FB has done well despite the contest from CPI (M) though the RSP's results was poor in Murshidabad and Alipurduar where it fought the CPI (M).

1st June, 1993  
The Telegraph (6 columns 96 lines)

**Headline: Congress, BJP inroads worry Marxists**  
**Primary source: Political party**

The report said the ruling party was worried about the substantial improvement in the status of the Congress and the BJP in the just concluded
panchayat polls. The report stated that the initial dominance of the CPI (M) in the poll result was the effect of its superior organizational network. The report suggested the result would have deteriorated if there was no split in the anti-LF votes between the Congress and the BJP. The report also underlined the emergence of the BJP as the third political force in Bengal. It stated the Congress’ performance would have been better but for its poor organization in rural Bengal, unabated factional feuds and confusion of the party workers at the appeasement of the Marxists at the national level. The report asserted despite the victory of CPI (M) for the fourth successive time in the panchayat election, the BJP’s performance have kept it uneasy as the percentage of votes secured by this party was by no means insignificant. The report said the panchayat election results indicated that the main political forces in the state were CPI (M), Congress and the BJP. The report said the other LF partners – CPI, FB, and RSP have lost much of their political clout and were likely to undergo further decline in the wake of the CPI (M)’s growing trend to encroach into their territories.

1st June, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 119)
Headline: CPI (M)’s seat reducing, BJP gain in the panchayat election
Reporter / Correspondent

The report pointed out that though the ruling party was successful in maintaining its dominance over the panchayats but its seats would decrease and the seats of the other Front partners would reduce too. The report said the BJP was set to gain from this debacle of the LF constituents and despite its faction-ridden status the Congress was also set to gain some seats. The report commented that the polarization of the voters into Congress and the CPI (M) in West Bengal appears to be a thing of the past with the ascent of the BJP.

1st June, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 100 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) surprised at BJP’s success
Reporter / Correspondent

This report commented that the emergence of the BJP may not affect the balance in state politics but there was no denying that the BJP was now a force to be reckoned in West Bengal. The report observed if the state Congress did not proceed to
politically oppose the BJP then its own future would be in doldrums. It stated the CPI (M) was awestruck with the impressive growth of the BJP in the state.

1st June, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 130 lines)
Headline: Front suffered due to conflict between allies, admits RSP-FB
Primary source: Political parties’ representatives

The report stated that while the other Left Front partners admitted that the alliance suffered losses due to conflict between them, the CPI (M) was reluctant to accept the fact. The report said RSP and FB cited the case of South 24 Parganas where there were direct contests between the CPI (M) and the RSP at many places. The election result showed that the Congress and BJP gained from the fight between the two partners.

1st June, 1993
The Telegraph (4 columns 96 lines)
Headline: Congress-CPI (M) trade charges
Primary source: Political parties

The news enumerated the charges that CPI (M) and the Congress traded against each other with the declaration of the panchayat poll results. The report said CPI (M)’s Biman Bose said the BJP was successful in securing so many seats in the panchayat election as the Congress helped it to consolidate its rural base. The Congress charged CPI (M) workers attacked Congress supporters in many places after it upset the CPI (M) applecart in various areas. The Congress accused the CPI (M) of aligning with the BJP as BJP workers were not attacked though they had managed to wrest many seats from the ruling party.

Accusations and counter-accusations mark electoral contests but the sample newspapers’ preference for news items on the grousas and grievances of political parties sidelined other issues. The reactions of the newly elected grassroots, their responsibilities and requirements in the panchayat areas found no mention in the newspaper columns. Political panchayats were considered essential at one time to facilitate the representation of grassroots through election rather than the conventional method of selection of the competent men in the villages which encouraged the vested interest (like zamindars and moneylenders) to control the panchayats. The foray of
political parties made panchayat election a contest for a share in the lowest tier in the country’s political power structure. Grass-root representation in the gram panchayats was like a mere constitutional norm. The hegemony of the political parties in the rural areas depended on their performance in the panchayat election and they participated in the electoral battle with all their might. The newspaper reports too projected the panchayat election as a contest for supremacy in the rural areas. They showed little interest in the participation of the grassroots in the electoral process or the actual empowerment of the grass-root panchayat member in the midst of the political wrangling.

1st June, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 29 lines)
Headline: Work in home as well as outside
Primary source: Elected panchayat members

The report said that the first day after winning the panchayat elections most women panchayat members remained engaged with their daily chores. A few joined the victory procession organized by their respective parties or took time out to thank the people of the locality. The report, however added most women members vowed to come out of their secured homes and work for the people and address the issues in the locality especially those concerning the welfare of women.

2nd June, 1993
The Statesman (4 columns 196 lines)
Headline: Disunity within, threat without ignored
Reporter / Correspondent

The report observed subtle changes in the political canvas of West Bengal were evident from the recently concluded panchayat election. It commented the results declared till then indicated that the LF which held unilateral sway in the rural areas of the state has lost some ground to the Congress and the BJP. The report remarked while the CPI (M) would do well to do some soul searching for the disapproval of the rural voters in certain areas, the task of the other LF partners was cut out – to probe why their performance dipped from that of 1988. The report stated the Congress need not breathe easy as it had only managed to stay ahead of the BJP but there was no improvement in its position as it was unable to expand its influence
in the rural areas. The BJP was happy that it had managed a toehold in the politics of West Bengal. The report said most of BJP’s victories were at the expense of the Left parties. The report said the CPI (M) claimed its performance was commendable even after 17 years in power but conceded it had not fared as expected in Murshidabad, North and South 24 Parganas and Howrah. The Left Front leaders conceded that the BJP has made inroads into the Left’s rural bastion and eroded its traditional vote banks. The report quoted the BJP leaders who said that the election result indicated that the party has not only cut into the Congress votes and was ready to replace it as the main opposition to the LF but it has also cut into Left votes (especially those of the smaller Left parties) and was ready to throw it a formidable challenge. The report said according to Left leaders the most important factor that has led to the rise of BJP in this election was the absence of unity in the ruling Front. While this was not new during the panchayat election as the previous panchayat election was testimony to the LF discord too, this time the difference in the LF ranks was marked. The report commented the bitterness was prompted by the CPI (M)’s design to marginalize the other Front partners by putting up candidates against official LF nominations though the CPI (M) leveled charges of sabotage against the other LF constituents which reduced the Left’s seat count in this panchayat election.

2nd June, 1993

The Statesman (3 columns 143 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 106 lines)

Headline: Seven die in post-poll clashes / Other Left constituents also blaming CPI (M)

Reporter / Correspondent (in case of the 1st news item)

Political party representatives (in case of 2nd news item)

The report updated the readers on the post-poll political scenario in the districts. Violence dominated the post-poll proceedings in the rural areas with numerous clashes between the CPI (M) and Congress supporters. The report said the usual reason of the clashes was the declaration of the result in favor of one party and the demand for recounting by the other.

The Anandabazar Patrika report stated that 18 people were killed in the various districts due to political clashes. It said all political parties were involved in these clashes. The report also stated that the CPI (M) was furious over its defeat and attacked the supporters of other parties. It also stated that the other LF partners also
blamed the CPI (M) for the tension in the state following the panchayat election. They accused the CPI (M) of not only directing guns at the opposition members but also towards their supporters. The CPI (M) on its part blamed the Congress and the BJP for the anarchy and law and order problem. The report added police have been asked by the state government to maintain strict vigil on victory processions which were the reason for the trouble in most cases.

2nd June, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 157 lines)
Headline: BJP made inroads in LF bastions; Congress too took advantage of disunity
Reporter / Correspondent
The report pointed out that with the progress of counting the two main political parties' appeared visibly disturbed with the outcome. The CPI (M) leadership was flummoxed with the poor result in their strongholds. They were of the opinion that organizational weakness and failure of the local leadership to convince the voters led to the dismal performance. The report commented that the rural electorate gained self-confidence, self-reliance and political consciousness through the panchayat system. The other observation of the report was that wherever there was a tie-up between the opposition parties the CPI (M) was defeated.

2nd June, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 64 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) 3-4%, Front 5-6%
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed the LF and CPI (M) was about to lose about 6 and 4 percent of seats respectively. The report said their loss was the BJP’s gain. The report said in the border districts both the Congress and BJP have improved their tally.

2nd June, 1993
The Telegraph (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) heads for landslide win
Reporter / Correspondent
The report declared CPI (M) was set for a landslide victory at the panchayat samiti and zilla parishad level. The Congress, though it made good progress at the
gram panchayat level, could not make much headway in the panchayat samiti and the zilla parishad. The same was true for the BJP. It was the opposite with the smaller Front partners like RSP, FB and CPI. Though they could not meet with much success in the gram panchayats, they made their presence felt in the panchayat samitis and the zilla parishads. The report said this was possible because there was proper seat adjustment with the CPI (M) at these levels.

2nd June, 1993

The Telegraph (1 column 31 lines)
Headline: BJP won due to appeal with masses
Reporter / Correspondent

The report quoted BJP leaders who attributed their gains in the panchayat polls to mass appeal in the face of growing disillusionment with the CPI (M). They rejected the observations of the CPI (M) and the Congress blaming each other for their rise. The report quoted the state BJP President who said that the party’s gains in the panchayat election have been mainly at the cost of the CPI (M) and gave several examples to confirm his statement.

2nd June, 1993

Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 89 lines)
Headline: Many hung-panchayats, attempts at pact for board formation
Reporter / Correspondent

The report pointed out majority will elude political parties in most of the gram panchayats. The report stated that agreement between political opponents at the gram panchayat level would not be unusual after panchayat election but what was significant this time was the importance of the BJP in this process. Though the political parties were not ready to accept the responsibility of political alliance at the grass-root level, the report said they were also aware that such political pact with ideological opposites (like the CPI [M] and the Congress or the CPI (M) and the BJP or the BJP and the Congress) cannot be prevented or overruled in the interiors.

2nd June, 1993

Aajkaal (2 columns 90 lines) and (1 column 102 lines)
Headline: Firing at Baruipur, 2 killed; candidate killed at Dhanekhali / Cries of 5 women rent the air in Memari ruins

Reporter / Correspondent

The first report informed the latest victim of panchayat poll violence was a candidate in Hooghly's Dhanekhali and two political workers in South 24 Parganas' Baruipur in police firing. The report reiterated what has been time and again stated in the reports of the sample newspapers that the main conflict was between the CPI (M) and the Congress. The report said Police Superintendents of all the districts have been directed to take special precaution when the political parties take out victory processions and ensure vigil in the sensitive areas. The report informed paramilitary forces have been pressed into service to contain violence.

The second report in the Aajkaal on the same day pointed out the pathetic condition of violence ravaged people after the panchayat election. The democratic decentralization process has taken an ugly turn as the victorious went about attacking, assaulting and trampling the defeated party supporters without caring about the sanctity of the process.

3rd June, 1993

The Telegraph (2 columns 130 lines) / The Statesman (2 columns 64 lines)

Headline: Bangla bandh called by Congress, BJP on June 7 / Cong (I) and BJP call 24-hour bandh on Monday

Reporter / Correspondent

Violence and terror post panchayat election reached such unprecedented heights that the two opposition parties, Congress and BJP, separately called for one-day bandh in the state. The Statesman and The Telegraph reports said the two parties strongly criticized the CPI (M) for letting loose terror in different parts of the state. The reports said that the Congress' decision was prompted by the murders of its winning gram panchayat candidates. The BJP said since the objective of the bandh call was to protest the atrocities of the ruling party they gave the bandh call on the same day. The report said the Congress leadership was of the opinion that the Congress has fared well considering efforts to prevent the Congress from filing nominations and the large-scale rigging on the Election Day. The state Congress president hoped all political parties who were at the receiving end of the CPI (M)'s oppression would actively impose the bandh. The LF chairman was of the opinion that the Congress' bandh call reflected its disappointment over its defeat in the
panchayat election. He said the number of CPI (M) workers killed and injured in connection with the panchayat election was higher than that of the Congress. (The LF chairman’s opinion was reflected in one Anandabazar Patrika report of that day as well.)

The Telegraph report informed that the death toll in panchayat poll related clashes reached 18. It said incidents of violence were being reported from the districts even after three days of the panchayat election.

3rd June, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 81 lines)
Headline: Police admit widespread violence perpetrated to spread fear
Primary source: Administration

The report informed that the police was of the opinion that the aim of the widespread violence was to infuse terror in the minds of the people. It said that the state Congress leaders were of the opinion that the CPI (M) knew it was losing ground in the state and has resorted to violence to preserve their dominance.

3rd June, 1993
The Telegraph (2 columns 84 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 84 lines)
Headline: Polarization of anti-CPI (M) forces likely / Monday Bengal bandh
Reporter / Correspondent

The report wrote that terror and violence unleashed by the CPI (M) in rural Bengal will lead to polarization of political forces opposed to them at the grass-root level. The report said the Congress and BJP have cited glaring instances of intimidation and attacks on their workers by the CPI (M). The other LF partners like the RSP and the FB have also complained about the ‘big brother’s’ highhandedness and terror tactics before and after the elections. The LF partners were concerned that the CPI (M) leaders did little to stop their party workers from perpetrating violence. The report informed FB has publicly condemned political parties who failed to restrain their supporters post the panchayat election indicating the CPI (M)’s failure to do so. The RSP leadership was of the opinion that the situation would go out of hand if immediate steps were not taken at the political and administration level to stop the violence.
The Aajkaal report said the two opposition parties claimed that unrestrained violence post panchayat election was the reason behind their bandh call, the ruling Left Front identified an unholy nexus between the two in their common call.

3rd June, 1993

The newspapers wrote that the results of the fourth panchayat election indicated slight setback for the CPI (M). They also hinted that the anti-Left vote bank so far the sole privilege of the faction-ridden Congress was captured to a remarkable extent by the BJP this time.

The Statesman report wrote the CPI (M) has secured about 58% of the seats while the Congress despite the absence of any effective political campaign and inadequate financial support from the Central leadership has managed to secure 27% of the seats. The report also pointed out BJP's tally was much higher than the smaller Front partners. The report remarked the above statistics notwithstanding, it was clear from the seat count of the major political parties the CPI (M) was ahead of the rest and had complete dominance over the panchayat system in West Bengal. The report said the reduction in the seat count was a mere crack in the support for the ruling party and not a crevice that would alarm it or give hope to the opposition forces.

The first Aajkaal report said that the CPI (M) may have suffered a slight setback in the gram panchayats but its dominance was unquestionable at the panchayat samiti and zilla parishad level. The report said the seat count of the other Left Front partners reduced at these levels and the BJP has made most of the partners' lost support.

The second report stated disunity among the Front partners was responsible for the diminishing seat count while the Congress and the BJP gained due to mutual understanding between them. The report elaborated that the allies admitted there were no unity in about 10000 seats and they had to suffer due to this with losses of about 4% seat for the CPI (M) to 25-30% seats in case of the others.
There were variable reports on the extent of gains and losses of the different political parties in the different newspapers on the same day or same newspaper on different days.

3rd June, 1993
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 85 lines)
Headline: BJP wants to manage Congress to get over stalemate
Primary source: Political party
The news reported BJP wanted to ‘manage’ Congress to solve the stalemate in the formation of many gram panchayats. The report said the BJP was keen to gain ground in many of these places and therefore had no qualms about aligning with the Congress. The Congress on the other hand was more interested in aligning with the other LF partners to gain political mileage in the future.

4th June, 1993
Aajkaal (1 column 51 lines)
Headline: Permission for pact between BJP-Congress
Primary source: Political party
The news reported the Congress leadership has given its informal consent to its local units to form panchayat board with BJP support as political hue was not the only criteria for the formation of panchayat boards and the local aspirations and demands need to be fulfilled too.

4th June, 1993
The Statesman (2 columns 70 lines)
Headline: Opportunity but .......... (Editorial)
The editorial wrote that though the Congress was written off by its own Central leadership, its unexpected showing made it amply clear that the party existed not only on paper but was alive in the political scene of West Bengal. The report went on to state that the CPI (M) leadership’s attempt to neutralize anti-CPI (M) sentiments with the suggestion that the Congress was divided into two segments – the anti-BJP and the pro-BJP have gone in vain. The editorial said the barb against Mamata Banerjee, who was biggest thorn in the CPI (M)’s radar, during the election campaign that she was moving towards the BJP, had little impact on the Congress’ prospects in
the election. The editorial reiterated what the newspaper had reported on the previous
day that the Congress’ result was impressive in the face of non-cooperation of the
High Command and a debilitating organization. The editorial emphasized if the state
Congress was able to pull itself together from internal squabbling then there was an
opportunity to replace the ruling party but added considering its history of internal
bickering this was improbable.

4th June, 1993
The Telegraph (1 column 18 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) doctored results: BJP
Primary source: Political party

The news reported BJP has charged the CPI (M) with post election
manipulations to deny victory to its candidates in various districts. The party said
there were many gram panchayats where its nominees had won but the polling
officers were forced not to declare the results and issue winning certificates to them. It
alleged the results would be changed in favor of the ruling party later. The report said
BJP leaders provided evidence of such manipulations along with the allegations.

4th June, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 88 lines)
Headline: BJP got less than 4% seats in the panchayat election
Reporter / Correspondent

This report said though there was much hype over the performance of BJP the
party has managed to secure only 4% seats at all levels. The report observed though
there was much loss for the small Left partners in Murshidabad, Midnapore, South
Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri the fruits of the failure could not be enjoyed by the BJP.

5th June, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 23 lines) and (2 columns 26 lines)
Headline: Wrong calculation, admits Anil / CPI (M)'s seat count reduce by
5.35%
Primary source: Political party leader (in case of 1st news item)
Reporter / Correspondent (in case of 2nd news item)

The report quoted CPI (M) leader Anil Biswas that there was a mistake on the
part of the Left Front when it predicted that it would win 4% more seats while in
reality it ended up losing 9% more seats than 1988 panchayat election.
The other news item wrote about the loss of seats of the various Left parties as compared to the last panchayat elections. This report narrated the details of the losses incurred by the various Left parties in the just concluded elections.

5th June, 1993
Aajkaal (2 columns 16 lines)
Headline: Panchayat election: 35 killed
Reporter / Correspondent

The news gave details of the number of supporters killed from each political party since the onset of panchayat election in April till then.

CONCLUSION

The coverage of the sample newspapers in 1993 was no way different from that of the other years. Perhaps the turmoil in national politics – the Babri Masjid and Ram Janambhoomi controversy, the demolition of the mosque and the communal tension thereafter and the questions of national integrity and communal harmony preoccupied the mass media in such a way that local politics did not find much favor in their columns. In fact the issues highlighted by the media were those issues which were highlighted by the political parties too in their campaigning for the local elections. The volume of news content on panchayat election was also much less in the sample newspapers, especially the English newspapers, when compared with that of 1983 or 1988.

But the perspective of the sample newspapers did not change. It was the same pre-eminence of news based on perspectives of political parties, sensational news of allegations and counter-allegations based on statements by political leaders (see Table 10.2 for the news sources of the sample reports) and the tales of violence and terror before and after the panchayat election which indicated the mad scramble of the political parties for power and their despair for failing to secure the same. Several news reports of the sample newspapers before the panchayat election predicted the promising advances by the BJP replacing the Congress in some pockets as the second dominant political force in the state, altering the political dynamics and throwing a definite challenge to the ruling CPI (M). The election result proved that the predictions were either expectations of the press (which made their observations
slanted and unfair) or were not based on ground reality (possible as news collection was restricted and dependent on few select news sources). The other significant factor of the 1993 panchayat election — reservation of seats for women and schedule caste and scheduled tribe members — received less attention from the sample newspapers. The press did throw light on the present status of women in the rural Bengal society and the obstacles faced by them in the process of their political empowerment but it did not provide any lead to improve their participation. The observations of the press on the political reality embraced the various aspects but there was little support for the cause of grass-root empowerment or even the empowerment of weaker sections through the panchayat system.
WEEKLY ANALYSIS OF NEWS ITEMS IN SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS (1993)

Table 10.1 (a): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 09.05.1993 - 15.05.1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Newspaper</th>
<th>No. of News Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Telegraph</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Statesman</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aajkaal</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anandabazar Patrika</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10.1 (a): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 09.05.1993 - 15.05.1993

Table 10.1 (b): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 16.05.1993 - 22.05.1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Newspaper</th>
<th>No. of News Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Telegraph</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Statesman</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aajkaal</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anandabazar Patrika</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.1 (b): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 16.05.1993 - 22.05.1993
Figure 10.1 (b): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 16.05.1993-22.05.1993

Table 10.1 (c): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 23.05.1993-29.05.1993

Figure 10.1 (c): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 23.05.1993-29.05.1993
Table 10.1 (d): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 30.05.1993-05.06.2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Newspaper</th>
<th>No. of News Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Telegraph</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Statesman</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aajkaal</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anandabazar Patrika</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10.1 (d): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 30.05.1993-05.06.2003
TOTAL NEWS ITEMS IN SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTION DURING 09.05.1993 – 05.06.1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF THE NEWSPAPER</th>
<th>NO. OF NEWS ITEMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE TELEGRAPH</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE STATESMAN</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAJKAAL</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANANDABAZAR PATRIKA</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.1 (e): Total News Items in Sample Newspapers on Panchayat Election during 09.05.1993 – 05.06.1993

Figure 10.1 (e): Total News Items in Sample Newspapers on Panchayat Election during 09.05.1993 – 05.06.1993
# Source-Wise Distribution of News Items on Panchayat Elections During 09.05.1993 - 05.06.1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anandabazar Patrika</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aajkaal</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Statesman</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Telegraph</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.2: Source-Wise Distribution of News Items on Panchayat Elections during 09.05.1993 - 05.06.1993

Figure 10.2: Source-Wise Distribution of News Items on Panchayat Elections during 09.05.1993 - 05.06.1993