INTRODUCTION

The birth of Trinamul Congress in 1998 gave a new dimension to politics in Bengal. It was the year of panchayat election in the state and the Left Front was looking to establish its dominance in rural politics for the fifth consecutive time. The main opposition party since 1977, the year the Left Front came to power, Congress (I) had failed to overcome the Left supremacy in the last 21 years. It cannot be said that the presence of Congress (I) in the state was insignificant during those 21 years as the description and discussion in the news reports on the successive panchayat elections made it amply clear that the Congress (I) was the second largest party with regard to seats occupied and was the main opposition of the ruling Front though the extent of its occupation may vary. The main weakness of Congress, it appears from the content of the news reports on the panchayat elections of the last four terms, was that it was faction-ridden and disorderly. The organizational weakness of the national party in the state stuck out as an eyesore when compared to the Left Front and its principal constituent, the CPI (M). The Congress had a following, voters who traditionally rooted for the Congress and those who were anti-CPI (M) or anti-Left and had no other choice. But in spite of this the Congress only managed to play second fiddle to the Left in the last 21 years because the popular support did not translate into seats in the elections whether it was the panchayat election or the Assembly or Parliamentary elections.

1998 saw a significant change in this set order. The decadent Congress was relegated to the third spot and the newly formed Trinamul Congress emerged as the chief opposition party to the Left in the state. It may be that the new generation of anti-Left voters identified with the TMC rather than the century-old, fading Congress party. The prospect of the Trinamul Congress was bright in the panchayat election because of its alliance with the BJP which, though it did not have a significant presence in Bengal, was at the helm in the Centre. The other obvious factor which improved the chances of the Trinamul Congress was the anti-incumbency factor
against the Left rule for over the last 21 years in the state and 20 years over the panchayat system. The ills associated with uninterrupted power had affected the image of the Left Front and we saw the manifestation of this in the various reports in the panchayat election coverage of 1983 as well as 1988. There were rampant allegations of corruption and nepotism against Left panchayat functionaries. People were disgusted with the preferential treatment for the ruling party supporters in the allocation of relief materials or selection for employment under various schemes for rural development or for other financial benefit. They wanted a vociferous opposition party to vent their grievances and give a platform to non-Left voices. The Trinamul Congress provided an appropriate platform to these voters.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS’ CONTENT ON 1998 PANCHAYAT ELECTION

We can say that the need for an active and involved opposition party was promoted by the press in 1998. Some of the sample newspapers repeatedly emphasized the insecurity of the Left parties and especially of the CPI (M) at the emergence of the Trinamul Congress. They predicted reversal in the fortunes of the ruling party in their coverage. But the outcome of the panchayat election later showed that they had erred in their judgment. Over the years the sample newspapers’ coverage of the panchayat election included several predictions which proved erroneous. Like in 1988, ten years ago, some sample newspapers predicted during their coverage of the panchayat election that the Left Front was staring at an obvious split after the panchayat election due to the irreconcilable differences between the Front partners during the campaigning. Nothing like that happened and the LF after demolishing its opposition put to rest possibilities of split. In 1998 the mainstream newspapers narrated the various incidents of atrocities and discrimination by the Left Front and repeatedly predicted an end of the Left Front reign over the panchayats. The situation was perhaps grave, people were possibly disoriented and disgruntled and there were tell-tale signs of impending change but in a democratic system the mass media’s role is not to offer judgment but present the facts and let people take the decision. The propaganda against the ruling party had preoccupied some sample newspapers so much that they wrote little about the improvement or the lack of it in the panchayat areas or about the involvement of the grassroots in the process of development or in
the decisions of the panchayats. They were interested in the outcome of the election and the fate of the ruling coalition and the opposition parties. The recurring references to the statements of political party leaders, whether ruling or opposition proved the sample newspapers’ interest in them. The perspective of the sample newspapers in the election coverage thus remained the same as the previous years. The newspapers focused predominantly on the bickering between political allies, the opposition’s chances and the ruling party’s invincibility and on violence associated with the panchayat election process. While there is no denying the need to make readers aware of these details associated with the process of election, this kind of discussion could hardly enhance grass-root participation in the panchayats. Interestingly, the perspective of all the sample newspapers was the same in this regard.

The sample newspapers included in the study of the coverage of 1998 panchayat election were Anandabazar Patrika, Statesman, Telegraph and the Aajkaal. The election was held on the 28th May and 16 districts in the state voted to elect representatives in the three-tiers of the panchayat. News items, editorials and feature articles on the panchayat election from 10th May to 5th June, 1998 are part of the sample survey.

NEWS ITEMS PUBLISHED BY THE SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTION DURING 10TH MAY, 1998 AND 5TH JUNE, 1998

10th May, 1998

The Statesman (3 columns 51 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 64 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 50 lines)

Headline: Basu’s attack on RSP kicks up storm in LF / Disunity in 5 districts due to RSP: Basu / Basu blames RSP for lack of unity in panchayat elections

Primary source: Political party / party leader

The reports highlighted chief minister Jyoti Basu’s remark blaming the RSP for jeopardizing Left Front consensus on seat sharing in the panchayat polls that sparked off a war of words among the Front partners. Basu’s comment in a Left Front rally was made in the presence of RSP leader Kshiti Goswami. The CPI (M) sources said RSP’s refusal to give up seats in five districts where it had a strong presence led to the comment. The report stated Basu said that though there was greater cohesion in
the Left Front in this panchayat election compared to 1993, complete LF unity was needed to keep the Trinamul-BJP combine at bay. Basu credited the Left Front government for increasing the importance of the panchayats, implementing land reforms policy and devolution of power and empowering the grassroots. He admitted corruption has crept in the panchayat bodies and promised stringent measures against panchayat functionaries implicated for corruption.

10th May, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 26 lines)
Headline: Jharkhand party wins 5 seats unopposed
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed that Jharkhand party candidates have won uncontested in 5 gram panchayat seats in Jamboni, Jhargram. The CPI (M) candidates who were the only opponents withdrew their candidature out of fear. The report said it was a reversal of roles in an area which was once considered a CPI (M) stronghold. The report said in the last panchayat election 198 gram panchayat candidates, 24 panchayat samiti candidates and 2 zilla parishad candidates of the Left Front were elected unopposed from this area. This time, the report informed, 35 CPI (M) gram panchayat candidates wanted to withdraw nominations fearing for their lives. Eventually however, only 5 candidates withdrew their nominations but others confirmed that they would not campaign for the elections.

10th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 88 lines)
Headline: Basu fails to generate enthusiasm in Left bastion
Reporter / Correspondent
The report predicted that the Left Front and the CPI (M) may not get it in a platter in this panchayat election. This inference was drawn from the reaction of the people to a public meeting in Haroa, a CPI (M) stronghold, addressed by none other than Jyoti Basu, the chief minister and CPI (M)’s key campaigner for the panchayat election. The report observed that in his half hour address the veteran leader harped on the LF’s achievement in liberating cultivable land from the clutches of the vested interests twenty years ago and creating a people’s government.
10\textsuperscript{th} May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 70 lines)
Headline: Biman Bose challenges Mamata Banerjee in panchayat election
Primary source: Political party leader

The news item informed that CPI (M) leader Biman Bose has challenged Trinamul Congress and its leader Mamata Banerjee to win the trust of the rural voters in the forthcoming panchayat election. He said people would disregard the campaign of the main opposition party. He harped on the Left’s achievement in the panchayats and said the rural people would definitely vote for the Left Front as they knew what it has done for them.

The sample newspapers widely disseminated statements of political leaders and relayed public spats between political opponents. The content of the next paragraph and several other paragraphs throughout this chapter would validate this observation.

10\textsuperscript{th} May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 64 lines)
Headline: Seat adjustment required but would not succumb to pressure
Primary source: Political party / party leader

The news reported Union minister Tapan Sikder has asked BJP workers not to concede to the demands of the Trinamul Congress, its ally in the West Bengal panchayat election, and hold on to seats where they were sure of victory.

10\textsuperscript{th} May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 23 lines)
Headline: 82 candidates win without contest
Reporter / Correspondent

The report said 82 candidates have won without contest in South 24 Parganas. The report specified that most of the wins were at the gram panchayat level and were recorded by the ruling CPI (M).

10\textsuperscript{th} May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 8 lines)
Headline: Clash in Bankura, Trinamul worker arrested
Chapter 11

Reporter / Correspondent
The report said small clashes during campaigning were on the rise in the districts. One such clash took place in Bankura between the supporters of Trinamul Congress and the CPI (M). The incident left a CPI (M) worker injured and led to the arrest of a Trinamul worker.

10th May, 1998
Aajkaal (3 columns 64 lines)
Headline: All political parties demand RAF and more police personnel in Basanti
Primary source: Political parties
The situation of Basanti in South 24 Parganas was worrying 20 days before the election. All the three major political parties of the area – CPI (M), RSP and TMC have demanded additional security. The report informed that the police have requested the political parties not to organize meetings and procession after dusk without the permission of the administration. The tension was the result of allies - CPI (M) and RSP as well as Trinamul and BJP - locking horns.

Here it can be pointed out that this report was a forewarning of the gruesome incident after the declaration of the results where 4 RSP supporters would be hacked to death allegedly by CPI (M) supporters.

10th May, 1998 and 11th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 19 lines) / The Statesman (2 columns 88 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 96 lines)
Headline: RSP hurt and angry at Basu’s comment / Basu’s remarks on seats deal unwarranted, says RSP / It appears from the statements of Basu that the CPI (M) wants to corner us: Kshiti
Primary source: Political party / leader
The Statesman report on 11th May pointed out that RSP and FB were upset with Basu’s adverse comment on RSP’s role in seat sharing for the panchayat polls. The report said RSP remarked that Basu’s comment was unwarranted while FB leader Ashok Ghosh said that such public observations by a leader of Basu’s stature was bound to upset the unity process of the LF. The two constituents criticized Basu for failing to adhere to Left Front Committee’s agreement not to make any public statements before the election on the Front’s unity efforts.
Chapter 11

The Aajkaal report on the 10th May said that the RSP felt Basu’s comment was a body blow to the unity efforts initiated by the Left Front but assured LF members that RSP will continue to campaign jointly for the Left candidates.

The Anandabazar Patrika report on 11th May informed that Kshitir Goswami, the RSP leader who was present during Basu’s adverse comment about his party in the public meeting felt that it was an attempt to marginalize the RSP within the LF. He said CPI (M) was equally to be blamed for the failure to reach an agreement on seat sharing. The report commented when there was a clear indication that the TMC-BJP combine and the Congress was set to close ranks against the Left Front in the forthcoming panchayat elections then it was imprudent for the Front constituents to take on each other in over 9000 seats and to issue public comments against each other.

11th May, 1998

The Statesman (1 column 13 lines)
Headline: 3 Trinamul leaders hurt in CPI (M) attack
Reporter / Correspondent
The news item informed that 3 Trinamul Congress leaders were seriously injured when CPI (M) supporters allegedly attacked them.

11th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 84 lines)
Headline: Front bothered by Trinamul in Jalpaiguri
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed that the LF and the Congress were both startled by the ascent of the Trinamul Congress in the Jalpaiguri district. The report informed that hoards of supporters owing allegiance to the smaller Front constituents were deserting their party to join the TMC in this district. The report commented that more than the CPI (M), the Congress stand to lose more from this new development. It further informed that the Trinamul was organized in this district to such an extent that in all the three tiers the party has nominated the maximum number of candidates. The report said a section of the CPI (M) admitted that feud between the Left constituents have led to this outcome and the joining of opposition ranks pose a big challenge to their domination.
11th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 12 lines)

Headline: Some leaders of CPI (M) are not ready to give importance to disunity in Front

Primary source: Political party leaders

The report pointed out all CPI (M) leaders were not ready to accept that lack of seat adjustment in several districts would affect the fate of the LF in the coming elections. They were optimistic that a resolution of the problem would be found soon. The report expressed doubt how a resolution would be achieved after the date for withdrawal of nomination has already past.

11th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 62 lines)

Headline: Panchayat seats won without contest in Arambag through terror: Trinamul

Primary source: Political party / party leadership

This report said TMC has alleged that the LF has occupied 7 gram panchayats in the Arambag block through terror. The report pointed out that in the last panchayat election in 1993 the Congress, the main opposition party then, could not field candidates. The report said TMC alleged that people in these gram panchayats who left the CPI (M) to join the TMC were mercilessly attacked, beaten and had their houses burnt. The TMC also alleged that CPI (M) cadres went to the houses of Trinamul candidates the day before the withdrawal of nominations and warned them to withdraw nomination or face dire consequences.

11th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 38 lines)

Headline: Congress, Trinamul and BJP in a pact in Contai

Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that though the Congress leadership has repeatedly asserted that the Trinamul Congress was an opponent, in many seats there was unofficial agreement between the TMC and Congress especially at the grass-root level. The report pointed out the contest in the Contai block in Midnapore was a proof of the above contention. The BJP was also part of this alliance, the report informed.
11th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 34 lines)
Headline: Pankaj: No agreement at zilla parishads due to the stubbornness of Tapan
Primary source: Political party leader

In the report TMC leader Pankaj Banerjee was quoted that there was no agreement between the TMC and BJP in the zilla parishad seats due to the obstinacy of BJP leader Tapan Sikder.

11th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 25 lines)
Headline: Left Front united in Hooghly
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed Left Front unity remained intact at all levels in Hooghly and Malda. The main opponent of the Left in Malda was the Congress but the Congress has failed to put up candidates in all the seats. In Hooghly the chief opponent was the TMC-BJP alliance. The report stated that they were murmurs of dissent in the Trinamul-BJP camp in Hooghly.

11th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 35 lines)
Headline: Howrah: CPI (M)-FB tussle in 40 seats
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that CPI (M) and Forward Bloc were set for direct contest in several seats in Howrah. The FB, the report said, demanded that CPI (M) take action against party members who have defied the Front directive and filed nomination against the official Front candidate.

12th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 42 lines)
Headline: Independents, dummies would not be tolerated in Howrah: CPI (M)
Primary source: Political party leadership

The report informed that the CPI (M) Howrah district secretary has warned dissidents that anyone who has filed nomination as independent or as a dummy candidate would be expelled from the party as the CPI (M) was keen to maintain the
Left Front unity in the district. The report informed all the Front constituents were holding joint meetings and rallies to alienate the dummy candidates.

12th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 22 lines)
Headline: BJP would be mistaken to alienate the Trinamul: Pankaj
Primary source: Political party leader

In this report TMC leader Pankaj Banerjee warned the BJP that it would commit a mistake if it demeaned its ally. The report said Banerjee declared that the Trinamul would demand votes for the alliance wherever there was one and for its own candidates where there was none.

12th May, 1998
Aajkaal (3 columns 30 lines)
Headline: 200 illiterate candidates in Birbhum
Reporter / Correspondent

The item gave an interesting piece of news. The government has declared Birbhum as a completely literate district yet there were 200 candidates in the district at various levels from the various political parties who were illiterate. The report commented that after the declaration of results there were bound to be some illiterate pradhans and upo-pradhans.

12th May, 1998
The Statesman (5 columns 60 lines)
Headline: Opposition alleges CPI (M) terror in Arambag
Primary source: Political party members

The report informed about the allegations of CPI (M) instigated terror in Hooghly's Arambag subdivision. The report stated that the Trinamul, BJP and Congress' allegation had heated up the panchayat election proceedings in the region. The report said the region was simmering for the past 10 days after reports of attacks on opposition candidates who refused to withdraw nominations poured in. The report informed about 50 Trinamul and BJP candidates have pulled out from the contest out of fear. The report said the proof of the allegation lay in the fact that over 74 gram panchayat seats have been won unopposed by the CPI (M) alone. The report narrated
tales of how Trinamul, BJP and Congress workers were being terrorized by CPI (M) workers.

12th May, 1998
The Telegraph (3 columns 81 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 28 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) swings axe on rural poll rebels / 17 CPI (M) members expelled for not conforming to party instructions
Primary source: Political party leadership

The news reports informed just weeks before the panchayat election the ruling CPI (M) was going through a harrowing time as its leadership was compelled to sack 17 party members, one of them an erstwhile gram panchayat pradhan, for sabotaging the Left Front’s attempt to field consensus candidates for the panchayat elections. The CPI (M) state secretary Anil Biswas confirmed that his party planned to carry out similar actions in six districts to promote the interest of the Left Front. The report pointed out that many supporters of the ruling party were against such a drastic step against party workers for contesting as ‘independent’ candidates against official LF nominees. The report added that the RSP leadership’s claim that not a single member of their party was standing against any official Left candidate disregarding the party directive put the bigger partner on the back foot.

12th May, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 18 lines)
Headline: Left yet to reach agreement for rural polls
Primary source: Political party leadership

The report pointed out that despite all efforts the Left was yet to arrive at a seat sharing agreement for the panchayat polls. The report stated that talks for unofficial withdrawal of candidates in disputed seats were on. The report commented RSP still smarting under the comments of the chief minister appealed to the Left constituents not to make public statements that would give a chance to the opposition to mislead voters. The RSP leadership hoped that a cautious approach would help resolve the issue.

12th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 41 lines)
Headline: RSP to boycott Basu’s meetings in the districts where there was no seat agreement

Primary source: Political party leadership

The report gave a different interpretation from that of the Statesman referred to in the previous paragraph. It said that the RSP has refused to take part in meetings addressed by the chief minister as part of the LF’s campaign for the panchayat election in districts where there was no seat agreement with the CPI (M). The report said that RSP was not in favor of holding joint meetings in districts where there was no seat adjustment between Front partners. The party was of the opinion that a joint meeting would entail asking support for all candidates of the LF parties who may be in direct contest with each other. The report repeated that RSP has not taken kindly to the chief minister’s comment against it and the process of negotiations that were underway between Front constituents has received a jolt.

12th May, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Trinamul-BJP make headway over seat deals
Primary source: Political party leadership

The report informed that seat adjustment between the Trinamul and BJP have made considerable headway after initial hiccups. The leaders of both parties informed that near total understanding was reached in case of the gram panchayat and panchayat samiti seats and talks were on for adjustment in zilla parishad seats. The report said that adjustments have sparked off withdrawals through leaflets and handbills.

12th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 38 lines)
Headline: Front troubled by dummy candidates, LF constituents’ meeting in Howrah
Primary source: Political party leadership

The report informed that troubled by dummy candidates the Howrah Left Front has called for discussion among Front constituents to solve the problem. The district Front has noticed that in some gram panchayats all the constituents have fielded candidates against each other. The smaller constituents blamed the CPI (M)
for the dismal condition. The LF disunity in Howrah was reported in the Aajkaal on both 11\textsuperscript{th} and 12\textsuperscript{th} May as illustrated above.

12\textsuperscript{th} May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 17 lines)

Headline: Power of observers reduced in panchayat polls
Primary source: Election Commission

The news item informed that poll observers were stripped of several powers in this panchayat election; the most vital being the power to stop counting at a booth.

13\textsuperscript{th} May, 1998
The Telegraph (2 columns 68 lines)

Headline: BJP, Trinamul to use nuclear card in polls
Primary source: Political party / party leaders

The report specified that the BJP-Trinamul combine has decided to use India’s successful nuclear test as an election plank in the West Bengal panchayat polls as it was well accepted by the masses. The report added BJP and Trinamul were part of the government at the Centre and decided to use the national event to draw votes in the local elections in West Bengal. The report quoted the local Trinamul leaders that this issue should be used in the election campaign as it aroused the patriotic feelings of the voters. This was the ‘politics of vote’ exploited by the political parties that has stripped politics of its ethical values and alienated the common voters from the political process. The report further informed that the CPI (M) planned to counter the Trinamul-BJP on the above mentioned issue by telling voters that the nuclear tests were not the success story of the present Central government.

13\textsuperscript{th} May, 1998
The Statesman (3 columns 84 lines) / Aajkaal (3 columns 34 lines)

Headline: Injured candidate dies, Hooghly bandh called / Trinamul has called Hooghly bandh today
Reporter / Correspondent

The reports informed that the death of a Trinamul Congress candidate in Goghat Hooghly, allegedly after being beaten up by CPI (M) cadres, would be protested through a bandh in the district. The report said the incident happened when
a procession of the Trinamul in support of panchayat candidates clashed with that of the CPI (M).

The Aajkaal report added that 10 TMC supporters were injured in this incident.

13th May, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 23 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 36 lines)
Headline: LF unity: Chairman steps in / Left Front partners should not take in expelled members from CPI (M): Biman
Primary source: Political party leader

The reports updated its readers on the CPI (M) – RSP squabble over seat adjustment. The report wrote that the Left Front chairman will intervene to end the stalemate over seat adjustment. The reports stated that Biman Bose said that Basu’s statement would not make a significant difference as of the 5 districts mentioned by Basu where the CPI (M) and RSP failed to strike a deal, the situation was complicated only in Jalpaiguri.

The Aajkaal report on this issue added that Biman Bose has asked other Front partners not to shelter expelled CPI (M) members. Bose stated there was no understanding between the Left allies in about 4000 to 5000 seats though the allies were still trying to sort out differences at all levels. The report stated he also said that the Trinamul Congress, Congress, BJP and even the Jharkhand party have formed a grand alliance against the Left and therefore it was important for the Front partners to unite.

13th May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Bhakti Bhushan: Unity still at large even after the efforts of Biman
Primary source: Political party leader

The report informed FB leader Bhakti Bhushan Mondal was of the opinion despite the best efforts of Biman Bose, unity eluded the Left Front in Birbhum. The reason, the report said, he alleged was illogical demands of the district CPI (M).

13th May, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 50 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 48 lines)
Headline: Trinamul and BJP half-way down deal / Left enough seats for BJP: Mamata
Reporter / Correspondent (in case of 1st news item)
Primary source: Political party leader (in case of 2nd news item)

This report informed how the alliance between the Trinamul and the BJP was also in trouble. It stated that the TMC-BJP was yet to decide on unanimous panchayat candidates in over 40% seats. The report added that the BJP Central leadership has urged both parties to maintain cordial relationship. There was concern in the two camps as unity in the zilla parishad seats eluded the alliance and the seat adjustment in the other tiers was also not total. The report stated TMC chief admitted to the above fact and added that withdrawals were consistently taking place following continuous dialogue between the two parties at every level.

The Aajkaal report informed that Mamata Banerjee has said that the scope for alliance with the BJP was still there but the Trinamul Congress have left enough seats for the BJP and cannot do so anymore.

13th May, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 34 lines)
Headline: Governor looking into complaints
Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted the TMC chief that the Governor of West Bengal was looking at the TMC-BJP complaints about CPI (M) atrocities in the run-up to the panchayat polls. She reported continued attacks by CPI (M) cadres on her party nominees. She also said that during the last panchayat elections in 1993 the incidents of violence and bloodshed were not as numerous or gory as this time.

13th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 58 lines)
Headline: South 24 Parganas burn due to CPI (M)-RSP clashes
Report / Correspondent

The report informed that that the situation in South 24 Parganas was tense with intermittent clashes between the RSP and CPI (M) which has affected the law and order situation in the district. The report put the total number of clashes between the two warring Front constituents in the past three months at 25 and the death toll at
11. The report predicted such incidents were likely to rise with the panchayat election at the doorstep. The increase was attributed to the breakdown of seat adjustment between the two Front constituents in this district.

13th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 53 lines)
Headline: Biman wants to continue discussion with RSP on seat adjustment
Primary source: Political party leader

The report informed CPI (M) leader Biman Bose wanted to continue dialogue with the RSP on seat adjustment. The report informed Bose said that a state-level meeting between the two parties will be called to resolve the matter.

13th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 34 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 12 lines)
Headline: Congress fails to nominate candidates in half of the panchayat seats / No Congress nominees in 3015 seats in Bankura
Reporters / Correspondents

The Anandabazar Patrika report stated that Congress was successful in fielding candidates in only half of the total seats in the three-tiers of the panchayat system.

The Aajkaal on the same day related, in Bankura the Congress was successful in fielding candidates in only 10% of seats in the three-tier panchayat election. The report commented that the party never faced such a predicament in the district post-independence.

13th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 29 lines)
Headline: If the CPI (M)'s dummy candidates do not withdraw nominations, detain them: Ashok Ghosh
Primary source: Political party leader

The report informed that Forward Bloc leader Ashok Ghosh has instructed his party men to confine the CPI (M) dummy candidates in their homes if they refuse to withdraw nominations. The report said at the same time he also asked his party men to ensure that there were no dummy candidates from their side.
Aajkaal (3 columns 33 lines) and (1 column 14 lines)

Headline: Trinamul is ruining the prospects of Congress: Pranab in Bolpur / Congress halved (Editorial)

Primary source: Political party leader (in case of the 1st news item)

The first news reported that Congress chief Pranab Mukherjee admitted that the Congress has lost the panchayat election even before polling having failed to field candidates in all seats. He commented that Congress workers would do well to unite behind their candidate at places where the party was successful in fielding candidates. He alleged both CPI (M) and TMC-BJP combine were adopting terror tactics to win the elections.

In the editorial Mukherjee was again quoted that Congress was able to field candidates in only half the seats and would not be very successful in the forthcoming panchayat election. The editorial analyzed at great length the reasons for the miserable condition of the Congress and its failure to put up candidates in most seats. The primary reason identified was the understanding with the TMC-BJP at the local level. The editorial added prominent Congress leader Gani Khan Chowdhury was, however, not ready to accept that Congress has been wiped out from the state and has repeatedly said that the CPI (M) was its main enemy. The editorial said he reasoned that the Congress was unable to nominate candidates in all seats due to lack of time.

14th May, 1998

The Statesman (1 column 19 lines) Aajkaal (1 column 12 lines)

Headline: CPI (M)-FB seat adjustment / There would not be any disruption in agreement with the CPI (M): FB

Primary source: Political party (in case of 2nd news item)

The reports informed CPI (M) and FB held crucial talks over seat sharing in the ensuing panchayat polls. The reports informed the talks have narrowed down the difference between the two parties to just one zilla parishad seat in Birbhum and Coochbehar respectively.

14th May, 1998

The Statesman (1 column 8 lines)

Headline: Trinamul nominee killed

Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that a Trinamul gram panchayat candidate was stabbed. His wife who came to his rescue was also stabbed in a feud with opponents.
14th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 70 lines)
Headline: Mamata Banerjee’s campaign starts, signs of collapse in Left’s citadel
Reporter / Correspondent
The news reported that Mamata Banerjee started her campaign from a remote village in Sunderban in South 24 Parganas. She was hopeful that people would support her in the forthcoming panchayat election. She announced the Trinamul Congress wished to establish rural autonomy if it occupied power in the panchayats.

14th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 19 lines) and (1 column 7 lines)
Headline: BJP out to ruin our member-base: Pankaj / TMC-BJP to fight it out in 166 seats in at the zilla parishad level
Primary source: Political party leader (in case of 1st news item)
Reporter / Correspondent (in case of 2nd news items)
The reports emphasized the strife between the Trinamul and BJP. In the first item TMC leader Pankaj Banerjee alleged that BJP was trying to woe his party workers with offers to contest as candidates and make inroads into its domain.

In the other news item it was pointed out that there was practically no agreement between TMC and BJP at the zilla parishad level, only 75% understanding at the gram panchayat level and 65% understanding at the panchayat samiti level.

The misunderstanding between the TMC and BJP was reported extensively by the Aajkaal throughout the coverage period.

14th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 23 lines)
Headline: Cannot provide additional force in the panchayat vote: Aneesh
Primary source: Election Commission
The reports informed that the state election commissioner expressed its inability to give additional security to maintain law and order during the ensuing panchayat election. The opposition parties had asked for additional security fearing rigging and other unfair practices by the ruling party during elections.

14th May, 1998
Aajkaal (4 columns 58 lines)
Headline: Campaign: Voters speaking about various problems, Asim listening
Primary source: Campaigning of Political party leader

The report elaborately discussed the campaigning of the state finance minister Asim Dasgupta. The report stated Dasgupta met people in election rallies and listened to their grievances and demands. He reminded the voters that the panchayat election was a battle between the rich vested interests in the villages and the poor peasants and workers. He said that vested interest groups were trying to gain a foothold in the villages through the Trinamul-BJP combine. (This point was reiterated by several CPI (M) leaders and some LF leaders during the campaign and repeated by the sample newspapers.) The report stated that Dasgupta reminded voters that panchayat election was a platform to address local issues. The report added Dasgupta himself concentrated on the local issues in his election rallies. The news elaborated on the strategy of campaigning adopted by CPI (M) leader Asim Dasgupta.

It would be interesting to note that the same news item was published in the same newspaper on the 25th May too.

14th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 37 lines)
Headline: TMC-Congress pact in many seats
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that in several areas of Nadia the Congress and the Trinamul Congress have reached an understanding to nominate candidates. The report stated both parties said that they were united in their endeavor against the CPI (M). The report said that most Congress members were fighting on a Trinamul ticket and the Congress unable to find candidates were forced to support the Trinamul nominee.

15th May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 58 lines) and (2 columns 36 lines)
Headline: Trinamul out to trample BJP: Tapan / Tapan blame Trinamul for the failure of BJP-TMC to reach agreement in some seats in the publicity cassettes
Primary source: Political party leader

The first item reported BJP leader and Union minister Tapan Sikder in his first campaign meeting for panchayat election attacked both the CPI (M) as well as the
TMC. He alleged the TMC has violated the alliance norms and was bent to ruin the prospects of the BJP in the forthcoming election.

The second report informed audio cassette to be used for BJP campaign consisted Sikder’s statement blaming the Trinamul for the failure of the alliance to reach an understanding in several seats. The report said the BJP leadership has announced that there would be no further meeting with the TMC regarding seat adjustment at the state level and the party has instructed district leaders to give up 3 seats to the TMC for 1 in case of adjustment.

15th May, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 31 lines)
Headline: Mamata home attacked by disguised cadres
Primary source: Political party / leader
The news reported that TMC chief’s house was attacked by CPI (M) cadres. TMC spokesperson Ajit Panja said the CPI (M), panic-stricken by the strength of the TMC-BJP alliance, has prepared a blueprint for attacks on Trinamul leaders to create terror before the panchayat polls.

15th May, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 22 lines)
Headline: We’ll force walkover winners to quit: Trinamul chairman
Primary source: Political party leader
The report said the Trinamul chairman has announced that the TMC would organize people’s resistance to compel CPI (M) gram panchayat members elected unopposed from three blocks of Garbeta to resign. TMC leader Pankaj Banerjee alleged that 70 CPI (M) members got elected to the gram panchayats in this block by the use of muscle power. He said the CPI (M) workers terrorized opposition candidates and forced them to withdraw nominations. He alleged 40 Trinamul candidates and 50 Trinamul supporters have fled their homes since the announcement of the panchayat election here.

15th May, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 42 lines)
Headline: PCC mulls over bleak poll chances
The report discussed the fate of the erstwhile chief opposition – Congress (I). The report predicted that Congress faced a bleak prospect in the ensuing rural polls as it was set to lose about 14000 seats in the three tiers won by it in the last panchayat election. The report specified with hundreds of Congressmen including erstwhile panchayat functionaries joining the Trinamul Congress to retain their seats, the Congress failed to nominate candidates in 50% of seats in the three tiers.

15th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 54 lines)
Headline: TMC dominate walls in corruption-ridden panchayat
Primary source: Grass-root panchayat members

The report depicted the situation in a remote gram panchayat in Purulia where the reign of panchayats in the past 20 years has failed to provide two square meals, ensure health and sanitation services and improve the drinking water facility. The report stated the basic amenities were lacking in such an extent that the CPI (M) panchayat member, unable to bring any change in the lifestyle of his village people, was eagerly awaiting Trinamul invasion. The report included the interaction with villagers about their helplessness at their pathetic condition in spite of the existence of the panchayat bodies.

15th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 81 lines)
Headline: Public surge in Mamata meeting at Sashan, Khariberia set to plug a hole in CPI (M) bastion
Primary source: Political party leaders and members

The report informed about the support for the Trinamul in the Sashan and Khariberia areas of South 24 Parganas, considered to be CPI (M) strongholds. The report informed in the last two elections anti-CPI (M) candidates could not file nominations but Mamata Banerjee’s successful rally has reversed the situation. The report quoted TMC sources to highlight the adverse condition faced by TMC members in these areas. They said they were threatened not to attend Banerjee’s meeting. The report quoted them to inform that all TMC candidates in the area have fled their homes. The party members alleged there were several attempts to disrupt
Banerjee’s meeting too. The report commented it was a different issue whom the electorate would pick in the ballot papers but it was a significant development that the people of this area would be able to elect their representatives after many years.

16th May, 1998

The Telegraph (3 columns 36 lines) / The Statesman (3 columns 51 lines)

Headline: Unity eludes Left Front / Left talks over 2 seats fail

Reporters / Correspondents

The reports informed that yet again unity between CPI (M) and Forward Bloc remained elusive as the LF allies were contesting each other in zilla parishad seats in Birbhum as well as Coochbehar. The report said that Forward Bloc leader Ashok Ghosh blamed the CPI (M)’s Birbhum and Coochbehar district leaders for the failure in bilateral talks.

The Statesman report stated that the Front partners were pitted against each other in almost 5000 seats.

16th May, 1998

The Statesman (2 columns 56 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 10 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 56 lines) / The Telegraph (3 columns 48 lines)

Headline: PCC won’t tell party men not to vote for Trinamul / Saugata: If there are no Congress candidates in the fray vote for the Trinamul / Congress urges for votes in favor of Trinamul / Congress gives absentia votes to TMC

Primary source: Political party / party leader

The reports informed that Saugata Roy, a prominent state Congress leader has asked Congress supporters to cast their ballots in favor of the Trinamul Congress wherever the party failed to put up candidates in the forthcoming panchayat polls to strengthen the anti-CPI (M) fold. The report said that the Congress leadership has admitted there was unofficial seat adjustment with Trinamul and even the BJP, its ideological foe, in many places at grass-root level to put up a united resistance against the Left Front.

The Anandabazar Patrika report added the Congress in its manifesto promised voters of corruption-free, development oriented panchayats.

The Aajkaal report informed that Roy said that Mamata Banerjee would be blamed in the future for the entrenchment of the communal BJP in the state.
16th May, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 82 lines)
Headline: 2 candidates, 8 others hurt in CPI (M) attacks
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that in Midnapore at least 10 Trinamul Congress and BJP supporters including 2 BJP candidates were injured in attacks by CPI (M) cadres. They were attacked while campaigning for the panchayat election. The report added that news of violence and casualties continued to pour in from across the state with less than 2 weeks remaining for the election.

16th May, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 15 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 17 lines)
Headline: No armed guards for most booths / State government to demand 70 companies of paramilitary forces for election
Reporter / Correspondent (in case of the 1st news item)
Primary source: Administration (in case of the 2nd news item)

The reports informed that more than half of the booths earmarked for panchayat election would have to do without armed security guards. The report said that 3500 booths identified as extra-sensitive and 13500 identified as sensitive would have armed security.

The Aajkaal reported that the state government has asked for paramilitary forces for the peaceful conduct of panchayat elections. This report elaborately discussed on the security arrangements planned by the state administration.

16th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 122 lines)
Headline: Congress wants to survive holding on to Trinamul and BJP (North Dinajpur)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed in North Dinajpur the opposition parties have joined forces to defeat the CPI (M). The Congress has not shied away from supporting BJP candidates wherever it held sway and ditto for the other two opposition parties – the TMC and the BJP. The report stated that grassroots have defied the decisions of their state leaders and have joined hands to defeat the ruling party. Though it was a decision taken by supporters of political parties, it was a revelation that grassroots can
take independent decisions and disobey the intrusive political party leaders. The report stated that the Congress workers and local leaders have taken such a strong decision to maintain their existence.

17th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 115 lines)
Headline: Trinamul strike at the red bastion (Coochbehar)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report discussed the pre-election scenario in Coochbehar. The report informed there was almost complete agreement between CPI (M) and FB, the two main Front constituents in this district yet the LF could not be secure due to the challenge thrown by the TMC-BJP combine. The report commented the TMC-BJP combine have successfully invaded the 'red' fort. The Congress was almost non-existent in the district except in few selected areas.

17th May, 1998
The Telegraph (3 columns 63 lines)
Headline: Congress influx prompts TMC reshuffle
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that the Trinamul may witness enormous changes in its organization post panchayat elections due to a steady influx of Congress and other opposition party members into its fold, especially in the event of a CPI (M) debacle in the panchayat election.

17th May, 1998
The Telegraph (1 column 20 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 70 lines)
Headline: Central forces for rural polls / Paramilitary forces in Panchayat polls following the demand of Mamata Banerjee
Reporter / Correspondent

The news items reported the Centre has decided to dispatch paramilitary forces to West Bengal for the panchayat polls on the 28th May. The decision was taken at a request by the state government for extra forces to maintain law and order situation in the state on the occasion of panchayat elections.
Chapter 11

The Anandabazar Patrika report commented the BJP government agreed to dispatch paramilitary forces in accordance with the wishes of Mamata Banerjee, chief of its ally, the Trinamul Congress.

18th May, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 40 lines)
Headline: 140 elected unopposed in Hooghly rural polls
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that about 140 gram panchayat candidates in Hooghly have been elected unopposed till date. The party-wise break-up of the uncontested wins showed CPI (M) occupying a majority of those seats. There were several panchayat samiti seats too where the CPI (M) has won unopposed. The report observed the trend of uncontested wins was itself a bad omen for democracy and the ruling party/coalition occupying the majority of those uncontested seats gave rise to various apprehensions. The report concluded grass-root participation in the panchayat system was also restricted by such unopposed wins.

17th May
The Statesman (3 columns 45 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) will be routed in panchayat polls: Panja
Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted Trinamul leader Ajit Panja that his party was set to win about 60 to 70% seats in the panchayat election. He said his party would save the people of West Bengal from 20 years of CPI (M) misrule. He also said that CPI (M) hoodlums would not be given an opportunity to foment trouble during the elections.

17th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 12 lines)
Headline: We'll kick out the self-seeking
Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported TMC chief Mamata Banerjee held 4 public meetings in four corners of Bankura where she explained that the violence in the state prior to the panchayat election was an indication that the CPI (M) was frustrated on losing ground
and therefore intent to disrupt the election process. The report said she promised clean
panchayat administration if her party won the election.

17th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 21 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)'s weapon in Howrah is documentaries
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed in Howrah the CPI (M) was screening short films to get
through their messages of the success of the LF and the dangers posed by various
opposition parties.

17th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 94 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) 'lends' candidate to Congress to defeat Trinamul
Reporter / Correspondent
Opportunistic politics reigned supreme in rural Bengal before the panchayat
election. So parties with opposite ideologies joined hands and individuals changed
loyalty for a share in the power structure.

The above report illustrated how in Ketugram block the CPI (M) was
campaigning for a Congress candidate who was its erstwhile member to defeat the
Trinamul candidate and how erstwhile CPI (M) member was fighting for the Congress
and a staunch Congress member was standing in support of the Trinamul.

17th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 17 lines)
Headline: Trinamul attacks CPI (M) workers
Reporter / Correspondent
Though in most reports, terror and intimidation were perpetrated by the ruling
party [read CPI (M)] against opposition parties or its smaller allies, this report
depicted a different picture. The content revealed that in Pursura, Hooghly Trinamul
Congress workers attacked CPI (M) supporters and looted and burned their houses
and property.

18th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 22 lines)
Chapter 11

Headline: CPI (M)-Trinamul clash in Midnapore, 30 injured including 8 candidates

Reporter / Correspondent

The report commented that with the approach of the Election Day, violence was on the rise in the districts. The report stated the situation was grave in Midnapore where 30 people including 8 gram panchayat candidates were injured in CPI (M) – TMC clashes at 3 separate clashes in the district. The report said ‘red alert’ was issued by the district administration and it was considering deploying paramilitary forces in the sensitive areas soon.

18th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 138 lines)

Headline: Pranab shunted out of his bastion in Birbhum after expelling Mamata

Reporter / Correspondent

The report discussed the pre-poll scenario in Birbhum. The report stated that the Congress was literally on the back-foot in its once stronghold. The report remarked there was a time when people were eager to fight on a Congress ticket but this time the party could not find candidates in 65% of seats at the grass-root level. The report said Pranab Mukherjee whose home was in Birbhum was literally shunned in the district as there was a campaign that the Congress and the Left were set to align at the Centre and Mukherjee was a strong supporter of the cause. The report said CPI (M) and the Left was not also campaigning against the Congress and Pranab keeping in mind the alliance at the Centre and therefore the suspicion against Congress and Mukherjee has increased.

18th May, 1998 / 19th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 24 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 28 lines)

Headline: Debabrata Biswas: CPI (M) has set up dummy candidates in 70% seats where FB is contesting in Bankura / Dummy candidates against FB? Baseless Allegations: Bankura CPI (M)

Primary source: Political party leader / Political party district unit

The first news item reported that FB leader Debabrata Biswas has said that unity of the Front partners in the panchayat election was becoming impossible in the wake of political irresponsibility of the district CPI (M) leaders. He said an example of CPI (M)’s unqualified behavior was the fielding dummy candidates in 70% seats in
the three tiers in Bankura. The report observed that administrative power for the last 20 years, supremacy over the panchayats and the power to decide people’s fate with regard to relief material distribution or employment has made ruling party members reluctant to vacate their seats. The report cited an example of the ruling party members’ penchant for power. In North Dinajpur a CPI (M) panchayat samiti member who was refused nomination by the party has filed his nomination as an independent candidate at the zilla parishad level. The report said Biswas commented it was not possible to achieve LF unity as the CPI (M) has established one-party reign in the panchayats in the last 20 years.

The newspaper published CPI (M)’s reply to the FB leader’s charges in its next day edition. The second news item informed the CPI (M) district leadership said it was surprised by the allegation and warned such baseless charges would harm the Left unity in Bankura.

18th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 18 lines)
Headline: Number of uncontested wins of the CPI (M) on the decline this year
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that though the CPI (M) led the tally of uncontested wins in this year’s panchayat election too, the figure was negligible compared to that of the last year. This year the number of uncontested wins recorded by the ruling party was 1/3rd of the last year’s tally. The report said this indicated that the party was set to face stiff competition in the forthcoming election. The report added that in seats where opposition or ally members were unable to put up candidates the last time, this time was set for close contest.

19th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 144 lines)
Headline: TMC and BJP forge alliance, CPI (M) troubled by backstabbers
Reporter / Correspondent

This report on the pre-electoral scenario in Purulia district informed that grass-root supporters of Trinamul, BJP, Jharkhand and other political parties have struck a grand alliance against the ruling party in this district. The report commented that the CPI (M) was feeling helpless under such circumstances. As the day for the poll was
nearing the anti-Left alliance was gaining in strength. The report remarked the internal strife in the ruling party further complicated matters for them. Then there was little adjustment with the FB, the other significant Front constituent in the district. The report concluded the opposition had a good opportunity under these circumstances.

19th May, 1998

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 48 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 28 lines)

Headline: TMC assaulting CPI (M) workers: Anil / TMC talking about terror as they are aware of defeat: Anil

Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted CPI (M) leaders Anil Biswas and Biman Bose that the attacks on CPI (M) workers by Trinamul Congress, BJP and the Congress have killed 19 party workers so far. They said that as their party was certain about victory there was no reason why they should attack others. The report added they said that in many areas the three opposition parties have secretly joined forces to defeat the CPI (M) but in spite of their endeavor CPI (M) was set to outshine others in the fifth panchayat election in the state.

The Aajkaal content on this matter added that Anil Biswas was of the opinion that the opposition was feigning foul play as they were staring at certain defeat. He alleged the opposition was creating havoc and blaming the ruling party for the mess.

As pointed out earlier, such news item comprising the statements of political leaders, which can at best be termed as campaign material, was definitely unrelated to the grass-root interest.

19th May

The Telegraph (2 columns 76 lines)

Headline: TMC-BJP in security blanket pitch

Primary source: Political party leadership

The news reported that the Trinamul-BJP combine has called for the effective deployment of the paramilitary forces sent by the Centre to ensure free and fair polls in the state. They said that they feared that the paramilitary forces may be kept idle at the police stations while the police assist rigging in the booths. The report said the alliance demanded that the paramilitary forces man the booths for unbiased elections. The report stated that Mamata Banerjee termed the pre-poll violence unleashed by the
CPI (M) a sign of frustration at the growing support for her party. She alleged that CPI (M) workers were resorting to indiscriminate political killings to terrorize rural voters and people’s resistance to such terror attempts was making the ruling party members all the more desperate. The BJP leadership was also quoted in the report who said deployment of paramilitary forces may not be effective if the state government decides to use them in a partisan manner.

19th May, 1998
The Statesman (3 columns 90 lines)
Headline: TMC, BJP gives LF jitters
Reporter / Correspondent

The report emphasized that the stiff challenge posed by the TMC-BJP combine has raised the brows of many Left Front leaders. The report said this was the first time in many years that the Left Front leadership was unsure about retaining its near complete control over the three tier panchayat set-up. The report elaborated that the direct contests between nominees of LF constituents and anti-Front activities by CPI (M) dissidents were causes of concern for the Front leaders. The report also indicated that the bitter relationship of the CPI (M) with other two Front partners, FB and RSP was also a cause of concern to the LF leaders. The report was of the opinion that a gradual mistrust of the Left in the last 20 years has alienated sections of the voters, like the tribal voters, which was a cause for anxiety among the Left leaders.

19th May, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 36 lines)
Headline: Left without unity (Editorial)

The editorial deliberated on the strained relationship among the Left Front allies and its probable impact on the panchayat election results. The editorial wrote public statements against one another was a confirmation of the tension between the partners. It commented that tension was not palpable as long as the LF held unquestionable sway over the voters and treated the Congress dismissively. The editorial said the challenge posed by Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamul Congress has made the CPI (M) jittery and the smaller partners defiant. The editorial wrote that dissidence within the CPI (M) have intensified and was on the verge of revolt in several places with the dissidents who have been denied ticket contesting as
independents or switching sides. The editorial pointed out that two issues that would haunt the LF in the panchayat elections were a near breakdown of the health service in the rural areas and the abolition of English at the primary level in state-aided schools dominating the panchayat areas. The editorial emphasized that rural disenchantment was evident and the chief minister was therefore obliged to talk tough on corruption and admit negligence in primary health centers and promised to review the policy on English education at the primary level. The editorial was uncertain of the possibility of hitting out at the vested interests which have flourished in the last 21 years of Front rule. The editorial opined the Front has got away with all its failures till now because of the lack of a competent opponent but the emergence of the Trinamul Congress has creased the forehead of the complacent Left.

19th May, 1998

Aajkaal (2 columns 124 lines)

Headline: Left Front ahead in zilla parishads and panchayat samitis but are certain to lose some gram panchayats

Reporter / Correspondent

The report pointed out this panchayat was the first for several things including the participation of tea gardens in the panchayat election process, and the BJP and Trinamul fighting the election while in power at the Center. The report like the others observed that though the Left was comfortably placed it was uneasy with the misunderstanding between the partners while the TMC-BJP combine was happy with the conflict in the LF. The report stated like in the previous panchayat elections there is no unity between LF allies in the three tiers and the two biggest partners, CPI (M) and RSP blamed each other for the lack of unity. The Trinamul Congress-BJP alliance also failed to put up unanimous candidates in all the three tiers and the predicament of Congress was miserable to say the least. The report said the Congress has never fielded so few candidates in the panchayat election. The overall summary of the 1998 panchayat election, according to this report, would be - the LF would retain its supremacy in the panchayat samiti and zilla parishad but was likely to lose some seats in the gram panchayat level. The conclusion was not unique with respect to those drawn by the other sample newspapers or by this daily before or after this report. Homogenous and repetitive content was common in the coverage of panchayat election by the sample newspapers not only in 1998 but in all the survey years.
19th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 76 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) assaulted in its strong bastion in Midnapore
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported on the pre-poll election scenario in Midnapore. The report stated that as the day for the panchayat election was approaching nearer incidents of violence was on the rise. The number of injured had crossed 30 in this district. The report commented that such was the turn of events that places where CPI (M) had controlled the reins for the last 20 years were now places where CPI (M) leaders were being attacked. The report said that the support base for the CPI (M) was gradually waning away.

19th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 128 lines)
Headline: FB campaigning fervently against CPI (M) corruption
Primary source: Political party leaders

The report described how in the border areas of North Bengal the two LF constituents FB and CPI (M) were up against each other in the panchayat election. The report said the Bloc claimed that the bigger partner’s rigid stand on seat adjustment has forced them into direct contest. The CPI (M), on the other hand, declared that it would strive till the end to achieve unanimity though the smaller partner’s ego was responsible for the electoral clash.

19th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 43 lines)
Headline: Congress would get zero: Subrata
Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted a senior Congress leader, Subrata Mukherjee that the party was bound to fare poorly due to lack of candidates in 30% seats and organizational mismanagement.

19th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 25 lines)
Headline: BJP, Trinamul both claim: We’re only fighting
Primary source: Political party leadership

The report gave details of direct contests between Trinamul Congress and the BJP in the three tiers of the panchayat. The report said there was no initiative to resume discussion to resolve the impasse between the two parties at the zilla parishads.

19th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 23 lines)
Headline: Congress, Trinamul has fielded dacoits as candidates

The report pointed out that both the Congress and the Trinamul Congress have fielded candidates with criminal records in Harishchandrapur block of Malda.

19th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 43 lines)
Headline: The dispute between two Front partners yet to resolve

The report informed that RSP has blamed the CPI (M) for the failure of seat adjustment in South 24 Parganas. The party said 'the big brother' has fielded many dummy candidates in seats won by the RSP in the last panchayat election violating the LF norm. The RSP leadership also alleged that the CPI (M) was trying to create chaos and confusion to disrupt polls in this district.

20th May, 1998
The Statesman (4 columns 120 lines)
Headline: BJP, Trinamul inroads in tribal Purulia

The report discussed the pre-electoral scenario in Purulia. The discussion as usual concentrated on the political parties in the contest and their prospect in the election. The report underlined the status of the tribals in the district. A significant number of seats were reserved for the tribal population who the report said was not ready to accept the diktat of the political parties any more. The CPI (M) and FB have fielded candidates against each other while Trinamul and BJP have made significant inroads, the report informed.
20th May, 1998
The Statesman (3 columns 78 lines)
Headline: LF fields more candidates than total panchayat seats
Reporter / Correspondent

This news informed that the Left Front has fielded more candidates than the total number of seats in 14 districts indicating that in several seats two LF constituents were in direct confrontation. The report elaborated on the number of additional Left candidates in each of the district.

The Statesman (2 columns 50 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 31 lines)
Aajkaal (2 columns 12 lines)
Headline: Mamata calls bandh on 25 May/ Can slap Article 356 on LF government: Mamata / CPI (M) afraid to fight and therefore has resorted to violence: Mamata
Primary source: Political party leader

This news item informed that TMC has called a state-wide bandh on the 25th May to protest against the killings of its party workers in the run-up to the panchayat elections. The TMC chief, the report wrote, said she was forced to call a bandh as the number of attacks on her party's nominees has increased manifold.

The Anandabazar Patrika on the 21st May informed that the TMC chief said imposition of Article 356 in the state would silence the state government. She urged the voters to vote for her party to protest against CPI (M) terror.

The Aajkaal also reported this news on the 21st May where Banerjee was quoted that CPI (M) fears losing the electoral contest and wants to occupy panchayats through terror.

20th May, 1998
Aajkaal (3 columns 69 lines)
Headline: Trinamul likely to spread out in some areas but still opposition has little chance
Reporter / Correspondent

The report discussed the pre-poll scenario in Bankura. It stated that the district referred to as the 'red citadel' would prove impregnable for the opposition parties at the panchayat samiti and zilla parishad level this time too but there may be some
losses at the gram panchayat level. The report said the reason for this change in fortune was that for the last 20 years opposition meant a weak and decadent Congress but the emerging Trinamul Congress was giving the ruling coalition some competition. The report added the LF can at least take solace in the fact that unlike last year there was unity in at least 95% of seats in the three tiers while there was discord in the TMC-BJP combine at the zilla parishad level.

20th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 20 lines) and (1 column 15 lines)
Headline: Clash between Trinamul, CPI (M) supporters in Midnapore village; police firing / Trinamul attack damage CPI (M) worker’s eyes
Reporter / Correspondent
The news items reported violence in two different districts. The first item reported in Midnapore there was intermittent skirmishes between CPI (M) and TMC supporters in several villages. The administration was forced to deploy forces to control the situation. The second report informed in Katwa, Murshidabad the TMC-BJP attack on an erstwhile CPI (M) panchayat pradhan blinded his vision.

20th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 103 lines)
Headline: Indifference of Surjya towards people’s misery has led to Trinamul emergence
Reporter / Correspondent
The report described the pre-election scenario in the constituency of state Panchayat minister Surjya Kanta Mishra. The report stated once considered a Left bastion, the area now mainly demonstrated wall writings by opposition parties. It informed several erstwhile CPI (M) supporters have joined the Trinamul Congress.

The next comments in this report questioned the conduct of the democratic election process. It said the wall writings notwithstanding it remained to be seen how many voters voted with their eyes open. This was a question on the voters’ ability to make the appropriate selection and an attempt to sway their preference. The mass media’s responsibility was to provide the electorate with information on the available choices so that they were able to make the most of their democratic rights and not to guide their preferences. The mass media cannot stoop to campaign for political parties or run propaganda for them as they have political interests and agenda. Another
comment suggested that the panchayat election in the last 20 years was a mockery of the democratic process. The allegation was that voters were forced to enter the polling booths with the representatives of the ruling party and cast their ballot in its favor or face its wrath outside. The polling officials were mute spectators to this illegal action. The report does not elaborate on these serious breaches of democratic procedures nor give any circumstantial evidence of the incident or prod the grassroots in this matter. The report went on predict that despite the obstacles faced by the opposition parties, it would not be surprising if they increase their tally in this election. The reason the report identified was lack of development despite the iron-grip of the ruling party over the daily affairs of the villages. The report commented the discriminations faced by opposition members were also distinct. It said, for example, lack of electrification specifically in the houses of opposition members though a little effort on the part of the gram panchayat could have resolved the matter. The report concluded that though Surya Kanta Mishra could not be held responsible for such fallacies but his initiatives for development as the panchayat minister certainly fell short of expectation and was responsible for the disenchantment of the voters in his constituency with the ruling party.

20th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 column 130 lines)

Headline: Sabhadhipati is not standing in the election; his wife has filed nomination

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that in 6 districts the zilla sabhadhipati’s post, the highest administrative post in a district, has been reserved for women candidates. In Coochbehar the present zilla sabhadhipati was set to be replaced by his wife. The report said it was a huge development in the social sphere. The report informed its readers that in the last panchayat election itself 1/3rd of the seats in all the three tiers were reserved for women. This time the legislation has been augmented to reserve 1/3rd of sabhapati (chief) seats in all the three tiers for women.

20th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (3 column 48 lines)

Headline: Terror yet to subside in Khanakul village
Chapter 11

Reporter / Correspondent

The report narrated how in Khanakul, Hooghly, hours after the killing of a TMC supporter in the hands of CPI (M) cadres, villagers were still fearful and apprehensive of the political situation. The report informed 3 persons were injured in the incident and the villages chose to remain silent on the issue when questioned.

20th May, 1998
The Telegraph (2 columns 84 lines)

Headline: District rots on pile of unused funds

Reporter / Correspondent

The report pointed out a significant shortcoming of the panchayat system. The talking point of the report was the Bankura district where there was no paucity of funds for development but few takers for those funds. The report stated that while village after village lagged behind, the District Magistrate lamented that over three crores meant for different development schemes were lying unutilized with him for the last three months. The report said he was surprised that the panchayats did not take initiative to utilize the funds to complete development projects. The report quoted other district officials to confirm that most panchayats have failed to utilize allotted funds in this poor district. The report commented the main reason behind this glaring lacuna was inefficiency. The report added besides rural development funds, funds allocated for various social security schemes was also lying idle with the district office as the panchayats have failed to send the list of probable beneficiaries to the District Magistrate’s office within the stipulated time. The report commented that most of the gram panchayats and panchayat samitis were controlled by the LF whose members were busy quarrelling among themselves over selection of projects and pocketing pay-offs. The report indicated that though the panchayats were expected to involve the grassroots in the decision-making process especially with regard to development projects, their implementation and fund allocation, in reality political party leaders took those decisions. The failure of the panchayats in utilizing funds and the lack of involvement of the grassroots in the development process were two serious drawbacks of the existing system.

21st May, 1998
The Telegraph (2 columns 78 lines)
Headline: Begging bowl to food bowl

Reporter / Correspondent

This news item confirmed that there were more than just failures of the panchayat system. There were success stories too though those may be few in number. The report described how Phul Malancha, a poverty stricken area has evolved into a pocket of prosperity under the panchayati raj in the last two decades. The area was once infested with dacoits and thugs. In 1978 at the time of the first panchayat election it was usual for villagers to set out for the city in search of employment. In 1998, twenty years later, Phul Malancha has transformed into an economically self-sufficient rural belt. The main reason for its success was the digging of irrigation canals totaling a length of 45 kilometers which has turned many barren lands fertile. Bank loans were easily available to the farmers as the repayment rate was 80%. The report credited the CPI (M) controlled panchayat for ensuring that farmers adhered to the repayment schedule. This has enhanced the possibility of soft loans from banks and other financial institutions for agriculture, fish-farming, animal husbandry and cottage industries which have benefitted many. The report aptly concluded that the combination of dedicated leadership and a participatory grassroots in Phul Malancha has ensured maximum development and all-round empowerment. The sample newspaper does a credible job in highlighting this news as it gives the right message of edification and motivation.

21st May, 1998 / 24th May, 1998
The Telegraph (2 columns 84 lines) / Anandabazar (4 columns 107 lines)

Headline: Parched throats in Basu land / Anti-CPI (M) wave in Jyoti Basu’s stronghold (South 24 Parganas)

Reporter / Correspondent

The Telegraph report pointed out that the success of panchayats as described in the previous news was not a frequent occurrence. In a panchayat under the Satgachia Assembly constituency, represented by the chief minister Jyoti Basu, two decades of panchayat rule has failed to ensure safe drinking water for the residents. The CPI (M) gram panchayat, the report commented, owed explanation to the voters not only for the lack of safe drinking water but also for the lack of other infrastructural facilities. The roads were literally a tight rope walk for the residents, electricity was mostly unavailable and life was dismal in every way. The report stated
lack of collective efforts in the gram panchayat and ineffective leadership was responsible for a near defunct panchayat body.

The Anandabazar report on the 24th May focused on the panchayat battle in the chief minister’s constituency. It stated that the TMC-BJP combine was set to improve its tally in this region despite initial hiccups in their understanding. The report described the friction between the anti-Left allies – the BJP complained that the TMC members considered them and not CPI (M) as their principal enemy while the Trinamul said that if they consented to BJP’s demands for seats then they would have to leave over 50% of seats. A CPI (M) worker, however, said whatever their differences the allies will mend their relation and fight together in the election. The report said the fact that CPI (M) cannot take advantage of the squabble in the anti-Left coalition was evidence of its crumbling support in this area. The report said opposition parties have made lack of development in the chief minister’s own constituency an issue in the panchayat election.

21st May, 1998
The Statesman (4 columns 144 lines)
Headline: Mohanpur: Nothing rural about it
Reporter / Correspondent

The report highlighted the unique problem of residents of Mohanpur in North 24 Parganas. They already possessed amenities found in urban or at least semi-urban set-up yet they were under the jurisdiction of rural panchayats. The report stated that the change into municipality was resisted by the Left Front as they feared loss of political and financial control over the area. The report said the residents were irked by the administration’s decision to consider it as a panchayat area.

21st May, 1998
The Telegraph (1 column 74 lines)
Headline: Same old game (Editorial)

The editorial derided Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee’s decision to call a bandh to protest CPI (M) atrocities against her party men. It regarded it as an attempt to gain political advantage. The editorial scathingly attacked the CPI (M) leaders as well as the TMC chief for tweaking ideological stand points for the sake of political gains.
21st May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 170 lines)
Headline: Priya avoids conflict with Trinamul to stay afloat in two Dinajpurs
Reporter / Correspondent

The report criticized what it termed as “political opportunism” of Congress leader Priya Das Munshi to stay afloat in the two Dinajpurs. The report stated that beside Malda, North Dinajpur was the only district where the Congress had a chance to win a zilla parishad seat. It commented that North Bengal was traditionally a Congress stronghold but with the Trinamul Congress increasing its clout and organizational strength that was fast becoming a thing of the past. Under such circumstance the report elaborated, Das Munshi, unlike West Bengal Congress President Pranab Mukherjee, has adopted a policy of appeasement of the TMC as was evident from his words and actions of his supporters. The report remarked that Das Munshi has given the Congress a solution how to avoid conflict with the Trinamul and ensure its existence. The report described the strategy adopted by a political leader to ensure the survival of his party.

21st May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 102 lines)
Headline: Adhir ‘the former god’ wants to serve the people
Reporter / Correspondent

The report described the dominance of a Congressman Adhir Chowdhury in Murshidabad. The report wholly concentrated on his influence over the Congress supporters and voters in the district and narrated how single-handedly he was the greatest threat to the CPI (M) in Murshidabad.

21st May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 86 lines)
Headline: Trinamul supports dummy Left candidates to trouble CPI (M) [Birbhum]
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported on the political scenario in Birbhum where the CPI (M) was cornered by the TMC’s ploy to support dummy candidates of other Front partners. The TMC district leaders said they intended to set up a grand alliance and
have lend support to not only BJP and Congress candidates but even to RSP candidates wherever they were strong for the purpose. The CPI (M), on the other hand, the report informed desperately sought for unity in the district but the efforts of the CPI (M) district leadership was turned to naught by the grass-root workers of the party.

21\(^{st}\) May, 1998
Aajkaal (3 columns 102 lines)

**Headline:** Left-Congress-Trinamul united to topple CPI (M) but it still has the edge (Murshidabad)

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The report described the electoral scenario in Murshidabad. The report informed the LF constituents were contesting each other and even where there was adjustment it was not unusual to confront dummy candidates. There were alliances outside the LF, between the FB and the Congress or the FB and the TMC. The report informed in this district the main opposition of the LF was Congress. Not only has the Congress put up more candidates than the TMC but the intensity of its campaign was also strong.

22\(^{nd}\) May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 97 lines) / The Telegraph (3 columns 81 lines) / Aajkaal (3 columns 33 lines)

**Headline:** Trinamul candidate raped, CPI (M) worker arrested / Trinamul panchayat candidate gang-raped / Allegation: Candidate raped after being picked up from her house

**Reporters / Correspondents**

The reports informed about an incident that took place in Bhangar in South 24 Parganas. The Telegraph and Anandabazar reports stated that opposition parties had to field dummy candidates in the last 20 years in this area to avoid CPI (M) wrath. These reports said candidates of the main opposition party Congress were browbeaten and bullied over all these years. The Telegraph report specified ‘it was a foregone conclusion that the CPI (M) would win the election in Bhangar and the polling was just a formality’. Both reports said the reason for CPI (M)’s anger which culminated in the rape of the TMC candidate was that TMC has nominated candidates in almost all the seats in the area. The reports elaborated the nomination of the woman
candidate against the sitting CPI (M) gram panchayat pradhan could have endangered the dominance of the ruling party and sparked off its violent retaliation. The reports stated that the villagers said the CPI (M) was angered by the audacity of TMC candidate to confront the gram pradhan and sought to take revenge by outraging her modesty. The victim, the three reports said, has filed complaint against five CPI (M) members including the gram panchayat pradhan.

The Anandabazar and Aajkaal reports said the CPI (M) spokesperson Anil Biswas denied such an incident has occurred and termed it an effort of the opposition to gain political mileage.

22nd May, 1998

The Telegraph (4 columns 120 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (4 column 208 lines)
Headline: Exodus cloud over ‘red fort’ / Sabhadhipati lose clout and prominence after reservation
Primary source: Political party leader (in case of the 1st news item)
Reporter / Correspondent (in case of the 2nd news item)

The Telegraph news reported that in Birbhum despite the huge majority that the ruling Left coalition enjoyed in the three-tiers of the panchayat system, it was worried over a possible exodus of functionaries to the TMC-BJP camp. The combine, the report informed, has decided to cash in on the growing dissent within the Left parties including the CPI (M). The report quoted the TMC spokesman in the district who said the influx of Left members would help them to make steady inroads into the Left bastion. The report also added that allegation of corruption in more than 70% of gram panchayats and panchayat samitis in the district has become a major plank in the TMC-BJP poll campaign. The report informed many Congress functionaries were secretly backing the combine in an effort to further dim the LF’s prospect.

The Anandabazar report on Birbhum commented that the CPI (M) sabhadhipati of this district who has remained in this post for the past 20 years has become immensely powerful. The seat was reserved for the weaker section in this election and the report remarked that the ruling party has intentionally taken this measure to curb the power of the same sabhadhipati.

22nd May, 1998

The Statesman (4 columns 160 lines) / Anandabazar (4 columns 158 lines)
Headline: All is not well in model village / Performance of 11 women has blunted Mamata’s line of attack (Midnapore)

Reporters / Correspondents

The report stated although there was much expectation from the Kultikri gram panchayat run by women only, all was not well as their male party members called the shots in reality. The report alleged that to retain the gram panchayat during the last panchayat election, the CPI (M) fielded only women candidates. Consequently, all CPI (M) gram panchayat nominees and 3 panchayat samiti candidates won handsomely and the board consisted of all women members. But when the question of making decisions came, the report informed, it was observed that the CPI (M) local male members held sway over the women board members from outside. The report opened our eyes to the reality that having villagers in the panchayat boards may not translate into their sovereign authority as the political party leaders were unwilling to let go any opportunity to exercise power.

The Anandabazar report commented that Mamata Banerjee’s campaign was ineffective in this gram panchayat as the CPI (M) women panchayat members were closely associated with the well-being and development of the people in the area and were set to be elected for the next tenure. The report elaborated on how the performance of the female panchayat members in the last five years by integrating and coordinating various rural development programs have led to the implementation of several such programs.

22nd May, 1998

The Statesman (2 columns 58 lines)

Headline: Minister blames Front partners

Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported that FB minister Bhakti Bhushan Mandal stated that the Left Front would pay for its failure to achieve unity on seat sharing in the coming panchayat election. He blamed all the Left parties for this situation. He said that the opposition parties would undoubtedly take advantage of this disunity among Left constituents.

22nd May, 1998

The Statesman (1 column 28 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) blames opposition for poll attacks
Primary source: Political party leader
The report quoted CPI (M) leader Anil Biswas who alleged that the Trinamul Congress, BJP and Congress were involved in the attacks on CPI (M) and the other Left Front activists in various parts of the state before the panchayat polls.

22nd May, 1998
The Telegraph (3 columns 78 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) wields broom for selective rebel purge
Primary source: Political party / Statements of party leaders
That all was not well in the rank and file of the ruling CPI (M) was the subject of this news item. The report said that the state CPI (M) has resorted to selective purging of members in different districts for violating party directives before the panchayat polls. The report stated the decision to take punitive action against erring members became imperative in the wake of failure of the LF constituents to arrive at seat adjustments in a number of districts. The chief minister and CPI (M) leader Jyoti Basu had assured other Front allies of penal action against CPI (M) members who defied the party whip on seat sharing. Basu had also called for similar disciplinary action against erring members of the other Front constituents. The report informed sources in the CPI (M) party confirmed large numbers of party members were served show cause notices for contesting the poll as independent candidates against the official Left nominees. It also said few ruling party members deserted the party and joined the TMC.

Dissent within the ruling party as well as the ruling coalition and its political consequences was repeatedly highlighted by sample newspapers.

22nd May, 1998
The Telegraph (2 columns 66 lines)
Headline: Poll violence on the upswing
Reporter / Correspondent
The news informed that despite the claims of the police minister, reports pouring in at the state administrative headquarters indicated pre-poll violence continued unabated. In the latest violent incident a CPI (M) worker was brutally murdered by a group of armed miscreants, allegedly TMC activists. The report
described the elaborate security arrangements that the state government has made apprehending violence on the poll day.

22nd May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Strife between Trinamul and BJP weaken the combine’s prospect in this district
Reporter / Correspondent
The report described the pre-poll scenario in Midnapore. The report stated that the LF partners were at odds with each other but the TMC-BJP combine was also not united and if there was a contest between the opposition parties the ruling party would definitely gain. The opposition parties were trying to resurrect their position by emphasizing on the previous board’s corrupt and partisan ways. One cause of concern in this district was the repeated instances of violence. The report informed unabated hostility between the ruling and opposition parties have snuffed out 4 lives, injured 300 and rendered hundreds homeless.

22nd May, 1998
Aajkaal (3 columns 67 lines)
Headline: Disagreement between Left partners less this time and the opposition would not be able to take opportunity of that disagreement: Debabrata
Primary source: Political party leader
The report stated RSP minister Debabrata Bandopadhyay has commented that the anti-Left parties would not benefit from the bickering of the Front partners in the panchayat election as it has been observed in the previous elections too that if there were two hostile Front partners in the contest, one of them won. The report discussed in detail the instances where two Left partners were locked in direct contest.

22nd May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 25 lines)
Headline: Somen: It is not possible for the TMC-BJP combine to throw out the CPI (M)
Primary source: Political party leader
The report informed state Congress leader Somen Mitra has commented that the Trinamul-BJP combine was incapable of throwing out the CPI (M).
23rd May, 1998
The Statesman (4 columns 116 lines)
Headline: Nadia: winds of change
Reporter / Correspondent

The report described the pre-poll scenario in the villages of Nadia along the border with Bangladesh. The report informed that ever since the Left Front came to power the border areas have traditionally been Left stronghold. But unbridled infiltration, rampant smuggling and unchecked criminal activities, allegedly encouraged and nurtured by the ruling party members, have caused a dent in its support base. The report commented that for the past 21 years several interest groups that include panchayat functionaries have flourished in these areas aiding trans-border movement and business. Change of power would adversely affect these groups as new set of people at the helm of these villages would mean renewed efforts to establish the same power equation. The report concluded panchayat election has whipped up extra bouts of tension in these villages.

23rd May, 1998
The Telegraph (5 columns 95 lines)
Headline: Flower twins bloom as red fades
Primary source: Political party leadership

The report analyzed the status of the Left Front in the face of the growing support for the Trinamul-BJP combine. The Left leaders have been taken aback by the support that TMC-BJP combine was gaining in rural Bengal. The report stated that the LF's strength lay in the rural areas and it has carried out several development projects in the past to keep the rural base intact. The report quoted Left leaders who admitted that in the last four panchayat elections in many areas the LF nominees won uncontested but this year its candidates were facing tough competition in the same areas. The report commented that TMC has established its presence in remote areas of most districts which could be a warning sign for the Left parties. In many areas the Congress and TMC have unofficially agreed on seat adjustment to take on the CPI (M) while the Left coalition have failed to make adjustments besides the challenge posed by the nomination of dummy candidates by various Left Front allies against the official Left candidate. The report predicted in such a situation the TMC have a fair chance of gaining upper-hand in this panchayat poll. The opinions of TMC and CPI
leaders were projected. The TMC felt that corruption in the existing Left controlled panchayat bodies has somewhat swung the support in its favor while the CPI, an important LF constituent believed that people were bending towards the TMC-BJP combine as it offered an alternative to the Left Front and Congress in West Bengal.

23rd May, 1998
The Telegraph (1 column 19 lines)
Headline: 5 districts seek security step-up
Reporter / Correspondent
The news informed that district administration of 5 South Bengal districts – Howrah, Midnapore, Murshidabad and the two 24-Parganas – has requested the Home department to ensure strict security in and around the polling booths on 28th May for free and fair election in the face of continued violence.

23rd May, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 34 lines)
Headline: Buddhadeb must quit: Trinamul
Primary source: Political party
The report said TMC has demanded that state home minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya accept responsibility for deteriorating law and order in the state before the panchayat polls and tender his resignation. The TMC leaders were apprehensive how much free and fair the ensuing panchayat election would be in the face of increasing attacks on their supporters.

23rd May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 127 lines)
Headline: Wait for retaliation to brickbats from the ‘red brigade’ through the ballot paper
Reporter / Correspondent
The report described the political scenario in Bankura before the panchayat election. The report quoted a CPI (M) party whole-timer that the ruling party had a hunch that trouble in the form of TMC-BJP combine was lurking in the forthcoming panchayat election but the extent of danger was not realized earlier. The report was of the opinion that the grassroots were fed up of the domineering nature of the ruling
party and wanted change. But the CPI (M) leaders were not ready to accept this theory and were confident of win.

Here we need to point out that the persuasive approach of the sample newspapers to convince its readers that the electorate was set to choose the Trinamul Congress over the Left Front or more specifically the CPI (M) was not expected from a mass media expected to be objective and nonaligned. The mass media’s role in political communication was to present the perspectives of all concerned and not align itself to a particular political ideology or prefer one political stance over the other. The contravention to the above line would be tantamount to propaganda but many reports in the different sample newspapers both before and after this border on propaganda.

23rd May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 112 lines)
Headline: ‘Flower’ power to spark against ‘red marauder’
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed about the electoral equation in Purulia. The report stated the district CPI (M) admitted that if 40000 agricultural workers who had migrated to Burdwan before the start of the cultivation season did not return home to cast their ballot on the Election Day, it may receive a jolt. A district CPI (M) leader said that these migratory farm laborers were a trustworthy vote bank of the ruling coalition. The report speculated that this time the Front is unlikely to repeat its feat of last panchayat election of winning 80% seats. The report remarked the Front has lost its credibility in the eyes of the voters. The report commented that the Jharkhandis faced a similar fate and the Congress was on the verge of being obliterated. The report concluded the TMC-BJP combine stand to gain in all the three tiers in the present situation.

23rd May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 65 lines) and (1 column 32 lines)
Headline: Congress and Kamal Guha form alliance to save identity / BJP worker killed in CPI (M) attack in Coochbehar
Reporter / Correspondent

The first report discussed the poll alliance of the Congress in Coochbehar. The report commented that Congress was unable to field candidates in more than 50%
seats in this district due to the steep fees fixed for submitting nominations for candidates in the three tiers. The Congress was pitted against the powerful CPI (M) on the one hand and the emerging TMC-BJP combine on the other. The report informed to maintain its identity the Congress has formed an alliance with Forward Bloc led by Kamal Guha. The report said the consequence of this alliance was tripartite contest in most seats in this district.

The other news item informed that 1 BJP worker was killed and 6 injured in an attack by CPI (M) workers. The second report indicated that there were intermittent clashes between the CPI (M) and BJP-TMC workers in Coochbehar.

23rd May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 162 lines)
Headline: Dissident Trinamul members to contest as independents to test the commitment of their leader
Primary source: Dissident political leaders
The news reported internal strife in the Trinamul was set to benefit the CPI (M) in Sripur. The report said here against every official TMC candidate there was one independent who owed allegiance to the Trinamul. The report stated that the grass-root Trinamul workers, unhappy over the nomination of Congress returned candidates in majority seats, have decided to contest as independents. They were hopeful that Mamata Banerjee who had left the Congress to form the Trinamul Congress to establish the rights of the grass-root workers would consider their cause sympathetically.

23rd May, 1998
Aajkaal (3 columns 90 lines) and (1 column 13 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) concentrate on unity between Left partners to avoid defeat and offset dummy candidates (North 24 Parganas) / Trinamul protest surrounding the car of Majid Master
Reporter / Correspondent
The first news reported fear of defeat has compelled the CPI (M) to call for Left unity in North 24 Parganas. The report said that the other LF partners were amazed at the flexibility of the CPI (M) in this district. There was understanding among Left constituents in 95% seats though there were dummy candidates from dissident groups.
The second item reported clashes during campaigning between CPI (M) and Trinamul supporters in the district.

23rd May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 104 lines)
Headline: Development and LF unity - two pillars of CPI (M) strength against allegations of rampant corruption
Reporter / Correspondent
The news reported on the pre-electoral scenario in Malda. The report informed though unity eluded the Left Front partners in this district in 1993, this time there were common nominees in 90% seats. The CPI (M) emphasized that the unity of the Front along with development were major advantages of the ruling coalition while corruption was a cause of concern. The local units of the TMC and BJP have arrived at an understanding in several gram panchayats without waiting for the approval of their district heads. The report informed that the Congress was unsuccessful in nominating candidates in all gram panchayat and panchayat samiti seats due to threats by CPI (M).

23rd May, 1998
Aajkaal (3 columns 49 lines)
Headline: ‘Hand’ covered by ‘Twin Flowers; Gani’s campaign in vain
Reporter / Correspondent
This report informed Congress leader Gani Khan Chowdhury was disappointed that over 70-80% of Congress supporters has crossed over to Trinamul Congress in Hooghly, Nadia and North 24 Parganas districts. The report observed the other similarity in these three districts was that beside Congress none of the other political parties have included political messages in their wall writings. The information in the walls just comprised the name of the candidates along with their political affiliation and party symbols.

24th May, 1998
The Statesman (4 columns 96 lines)
Headline: 7 gram panchayat pradhans charged
Reporter / Correspondent
The news elaborated that 7 gram panchayat pradhans in South 24 Parganas and 30 gram panchayat members in various districts have been charged with
misappropriation of funds. The report stated most of them have been denied
nominations in the forthcoming election. The report quoted police officials to inform
that some of the accused, mostly CPI (M) members, have been charge sheeted.

24th May, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 24 lines)
Headline: Murshidabad police worried over arms influx
Primary source: Administration (Police)

The report informed that the Murshidabad district administration was worried
over the arms influx in the district. The report said though only stray violence has
been reported so far, police were planning raids to siege arms smuggled by criminals
on the eve of the elections. The police said over 3000 people have been arrested under
preventive detention to deter violence in the district.

24th May, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 34 lines)
Headline: Mamata promises tough fight in panchayat polls
Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported that the Trinamul Congress has declared that this time it
would not let the CPI (M) grab power in the panchayat elections without a fight. The
report stated the TMC chief has urged people to vote fearlessly and asserted that a
change in the power structure was imminent. The report quoted her that “the CPI (M)
has realized that its popular support was waning and hence resorted to hooliganism.”
The report said she also stated that atrocities on Trinamul candidates especially torture
on women candidates have forced her party to call a state-wide bandh on 25th May.

24th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 102 lines)
Headline: Majid Master’s domination challenged by Trinamul (North 24
Parganas)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report discussed the possible waning away of support for the CPI (M) in
Sashan, North 24 Parganas. The newspaper had reported on the growing support for
Trinamul in Sashan despite the fear of Majid Master on the 15th May. This report
asserted the fear and enigma of the man and the ruling party was gradually fading
away and if the wall writings were anything to go by the TMC was set to contest CPI (M) upfront. The report informed that the Trinamul was aware that though the grassroots have decided to come out in their support shunning fear, the biased administration may prove to be a deterrent. The report stated that the arrest of the TMC candidate pitted against Majid Master on charges of attempt to murder proved the intention of the administration. The report commented “the improbability of the charges notwithstanding” the administration was quick to take the side of the ruling party.

24th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 44 lines)
Headline: Administration starts to send police forces to the districts
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that the administration, worried over the deteriorating law and order situation in the state before the panchayat election, have started to dispatch additional police forces 5 days before the election. The report commented in the last three panchayat elections violence was not so widespread. The report said the administration was eager to maintain security in the districts which was under threat as 17 people have died and 250 injured in poll related violence since the announcement of the date for the panchayat election.

24th May, 1998
The Telegraph (4 columns 108 lines)
Headline: Red titans’ turf under sledge
Reporter / Correspondent

The report said South 24 Parganas which was once referred to as the ‘red citadel’ was showing signs of shifting loyalty to the fledging Trinamul Congress. The sample newspaper reports on the scenario in the districts before the panchayat election did not mention the development initiatives by the panchayats or the role of the grassroots in it or even the reaction of the grassroots on the panchayat initiative in the districts. They were mainly concerned with the political equation and the prospect of the major political parties. For example this report commented that people in South 24 Parganas had never dreamt of being ruled by any other force other than the Left and the district has always been a CPI (M) – RSP stronghold. It readily identified the
reasons for the ever increasing popularity of the TMC – corruption in the existing panchayat bodies, lackadaisical attitude of the panchayat members and gagging of opposition voices. Another reason was the feud between CPI (M) and RSP which have led to direct contests between them. In contrast the TMC-BJP was not only strong in several areas but in many areas there was a secret pact of the combine with the Congress. The report concluded despite these odds the CPI (M) was confident of repeating its winning feat this time too.

24\textsuperscript{th} May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 16 lines)

Headline: Rogue MLA distributing cash in villages to buy votes: Buddhadeb in Nabagram

Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported that Buddhhadeb Bhattacharya, the CPI (M) police minister has warned the residents of Murshidabad that the Congress leader Adhir Chowdhury could visit them and try to buy their votes.

24\textsuperscript{th} May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 11 lines), (1 column 6 lines) and (3 column 75 lines)

Headline: Elephant for panchayat election / Death of two candidates, vote adjourned / Development work on, roads are being repaired but still a change required

Reporter / Correspondent

There were several snippets relating to the panchayat election from the use of elephants in the forthcoming election to the death of candidates under various circumstances.

The third item read that the people of Nadia was not unsatisfied with the work of the CPI (M) panchayat boards but wanted change at the helm as familiarity breeds contempt.

25\textsuperscript{th} May, 1998
The Telegraph (1 column 32 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) relaxes while opposition factions fight

Reporter / Correspondent

The report specified that in Coochbehar opposition parties could not form alliances and were fighting each other which auger well for the ruling party.
Chapter 11

report informed there was one danger and that was the Left Front's unity move has also flopped as the FB refused to sacrifice seats for the CPI (M). The FB was the rival of its Left Front ally, CPI (M) in several seats.

25th May, 1998

The Telegraph (2 columns 78 lines)

Headline: Do-little pradhan tops hate list

Primary source: Grass-root voters

Grass-root voices of discontent were evident in this report. It specified that the villagers of Banipara were dissatisfied with the FB gram panchayat pradhan who failed to implement development projects in the area. The villagers were disinterested in the polls this time as last year’s voting turned out to be a futile exercise. The other grievance, the report pointed out, was that the pradhan was earning easy money by encouraging unscrupulous villagers.

25th May, 1998

The Statesman (4 columns 84 lines)

Headline: Saldanga villagers upset with Left

Primary source: Grass-root voters

This was also a report of grass-root grievance and its consequent result. The report informed that the villagers of Saldanga have fielded four independents against CPI (M) candidates. The Congress, Trinamul Congress and BJP have supported the candidature of these four independents. The cause of discontent was that for a long time the villagers had demanded the construction of a bridge to facilitate communication but the CPI (M) gram panchayats in four consecutive terms failed to address their demands.

25th May, 1998

Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 43 lines)

Headline: Trinamul worker killed in clash with CPI (M)

Reporter / Correspondent

The news informed in an incident of pre-poll violence in Bhaktinagar (Jalpaiguri) a TMC worker was shot dead and another injured when attacked allegedly by CPI (M) supporters. Both parties were campaigning for TMC. The news item also
informed in Canning (South 24 Parganas) a RSP MP was allegedly attacked by CPI (M) supporters.

25th May, 1998
The Telegraph (3 columns 65 lines)
Headline: Left banks on enemy move for victory (North Dinajpur)
Reporter / Correspondent

In most reports on the pre-election scenario in various districts before the panchayat polls the focus was decidedly on the political parties. The report on North Dinajpur in this report was no exception. The report said the Left constituents in the district have turned deaf to their leadership’s plea to fight together against the Trinamul-BJP combine. Almost all partners have put up candidates against each other which the report predicted might prove beneficial for the opposition combine. The lack of understanding was evident at the zilla parishad level. The RSP and FB blamed the CPI (M) for the misunderstanding. The report commented the only silver lining for the Left was that the TMC-BJP combine has failed to put up candidates in all the seats. The Congress too faced a similar fate. The report predicted absence of opposition forces could improve the Left’s prospect in this district. Another cause of concern for the opposition forces was that in several seats in this district the TMC and BJP were contesting each other which would definitely benefit the Left. The report informed that North Dinajpur was a Congress stronghold but many of its supporters have joined the Trinamul Congress since its formation.

25th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 123 lines)
Headline: Left martyr’s daughter sings paeans to Trinamul, son independent candidate
Reporter / Correspondent

This report focused on the political scenario in South Dinajpur. The report said the CPI (M)’s fortune was dwindling as the offspring of the once revered communist leader of the cultivator revolution was seen campaigning for the Trinamul while another was contesting as an independent against the official Front candidate. The report commented that not only them but several other erstwhile CPI (M) supporters have deserted the party to join the TMC. The other Left constituents were also facing
similar challenges. The report said the RSP leadership was of the opinion that after 21 years of Left rule the Left was no more the preferred choice for the young generation who has not seen the Congress rule. The report said both CPI (M) and RSP admitted that the influence of the Trinamul-BJP has increased and therefore in districts like South Dinajpur where both parties were at loggerheads in the last panchayat election there was a picture of LF unity this year.

25th May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 88 lines)
Headline: Trinamul wave blow strong, some calculation set for upset
Reporter / Correspondent

The report gave an overview of the status of the political parties before the panchayat election. The report said the Congress and BJP were eager to present themselves as able opponents and the CPI (M) was eager to showcase the development under the panchayati raj in the last 20 years. The report commented “in spite of the efforts of the ruling party there was no doubt that most villages suffered from problems and disorderliness in their daily lives and was under the clutch of corruption.” The report stated that though the Left Front has announced that for the first time unity between the constituents was achieved in the panchayat election, the ground reality was different as the workers at the lower levels were doubtful of the unity. The report further observed that Trinamul and BJP may have formed an alliance for the West Bengal panchayat election but there were ‘friendly contests’ between the partners at many places. The report said the Congress was a shadow of its former self as most of its members have joined the Trinamul Congress and the party could not field candidates in all seats for this reason. There was nothing in this report which was not reported in this newspaper earlier.

25th May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 74 lines) / The Statesman (1 column 27 lines)
Headline: Left Front would occupy the Hooghly zilla parishad, TMC-BJP would make headway in the panchayat samiti / Hooghly still a stronghold of Left
Reporter / Correspondent

The reports gave an overview of the pre-poll scenario in the Hooghly district. The reports mentioned that the district was still a Left stronghold though the TMC-
BJP combine was set to cause some upset at the gram panchayat and the panchayat samiti level. The disunity within the Front in the district was nothing new and there were several dissident candidates as the local people, the report said, were unhappy with the candidates nominated by the district Left Front.

25th May, 1998
The Statesman (3 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Bandh aimed at disrupting rural polls: Basu
Primary source: Political party leader

The report informed that chief minister Jyoti Basu has alleged that the bandh called by the Trinamul-BJP combine was aimed at disrupting the panchayat elections.

25th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 76 lines)
Headline: Many leave in-between Basu’s speech
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that chief minister Jyoti Basu got little response in his last campaign meeting for the panchayat election. The report commented this tepid reaction has been a feature of Basu’s electoral meetings throughout this panchayat election.

25th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 156 lines)
Headline: FB’s stance corners CPI (M), TMC gains advantage
Reporter / Correspondent

The report stated that CPI (M) got a taste of its own medicine in 11 gram panchayat seats in Birbhum, bordering Burdwan. The seats were controlled by the CPI (M) in the last election but FB, CPI (M)’s ally in the LF, has displaced big brother from this area, allegedly by terror. The report informed that the internecine strife in the Left Front was much less this time compared to the other years. Though there were direct contests between Left partners in some seats, efforts were on to achieve last minute adjustment. The impact of the TMC-BJP combine was such that in seats where there were direct confrontation in the absence of a Congress candidate
(which was the case in 2/3rd seats) the LF faced stiff competition and the report predicted stood to lose out.

25th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 171 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-RSP in constant tussle; confrontation in TMC-BJP combine
Reporter / Correspondent
The news reported the CPI (M) – RSP strife has reached a fever pitch in Jalpaiguri and both parties have put up candidates against each other in almost all gram panchayat and panchayat samiti seats and most of the zilla parishad seats. Both parties blamed each other for the disunity. But the report said this was not unusual as in the last three panchayat elections too there was no understanding between the two parties. The report informed the principal opposition was equally disorganized as there was no unity between the BJP and Trinamul in several seats.

25th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 column 80 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-Congress unite to survive
Reporter / Correspondent
The report discussed the political scenario in Nadia district. The report remarked that the CPI (M) and Congress were united at places in this district and their supporters were spotted together in the same processions. The report said it was not a secret pact between the conventional foes but an open understanding to survive the onslaught of BJP-TMC combine. The report observed Congress was pushed to the brink and needed the CPI (M) for self-defense while the CPI (M) knew the survival of Congress would divide the anti-Left vote and ensure its victory.

26th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 65 lines)
Headline: People assured by the protesting voice of the TMC (Hooghly)
Reporter / Correspondent
The report discussed the political scenario of Hooghly. The report commented that CPI (M) supporters were being attacked in this district was an indication of the reversal of trend in the recent times. The report stated that in the poor villages TMC-
BJP combine was being welcomed with open arms as they gave hope to the people that the benefits of the panchayat system would percolate down to them and not remain confined to the villages dominated by CPI (M) supporters. The report said the CPI (M) workers allegedly forced the Trinamul-BJP candidates to withdraw their nominations in several places. The report stated people asserted that they could not voice their protest due to the lack of an able opposition as the Congress rarely stood beside them but now they were assured in the event of any atrocity Mamata Banerjee would not shy away from standing beside them and therefore have decided to stand up for their rights.

26th May, 1998
The Telegraph (2 columns 76 lines)
Headline: Where death came calling at all hours
Primary source: Grass-root voters

20 years of panchayat rule have not improved the standard of living in many gram panchayats as this report illustrated. The report described a village in North Dinajpur that lacked electricity, roads and proper health facilities. The people, the report stated, distrusted the panchayat and political parties. Villagers when approached by the correspondent emphasized that political parties were only interested in their well-being during the elections and after the completion of the election process they disregarded the voters. This was a telling remark on the intention of the political parties and an indication that grassroots believed that panchayats were dominated by political parties, whatever the noble aim of the Panchayat Act.

26th May, 1998
The Telegraph (2 columns 82 lines)
Headline: TMC storm brews in CPI (M) tea cup
Reporter / Correspondent

The news informed that despite bickering in the LF, the CPI (M) was sitting pretty in Jalpaiguri due to its organizational strength. The report stated that the district has become important for all political parties as tea gardens and forest areas have been included within the domain of panchayats. The report said the CPI (M) has effectively demolished the support bases of other Left constituents, especially the RSP which was
once strong in the area though the advent of TMC has somewhat queered the pitch of CPI (M). In one panchayat (Lalguri) in the district a CPI (M) panchayat pradhan was expelled from the party on charges of corruption. The TMC-BJP combine was making this an issue in the campaigning in the district.

26th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 120 lines)
Headline: Clashes on the rise; Jalpaiguri tensed
Reporter / Correspondent

This report also briefed the readers on the situation in Jalpaiguri. The report pointed out that Trinamul supporters were intimidated, attacked and refused essential services like irrigational water in areas ruled by CPI (M) panchayat boards. The Trinamul supporters the report said alleged that their houses were being stoned and they were being threatened with murder by CPI (M) cadres. The report commented as the day for the election neared tension and clashes between the CPI (M) and Trinamul increased. The report quoted the Trinamul leaders that CPI (M) has understood that their foothold was dwindling and therefore they resorted to violence.

26th May, 1998
Aajkaal (3 columns 75 lines)
Headline: Twin flowers emerge in ‘red fort’ but it is not possible to unseat CPI (M) in the samitis and zilla parishad
Reporter / Correspondent

In its pre-election observation on the political scenario in Burdwan the report pointed out the interest in the panchayat election in this district was centered on whether the monopoly of the CPI (M) would be hit. The report commented the BJP and TMC combine can only cause problem for the ruling party at the gram panchayat level; there was not much hope in the upper tiers. The report informed the erstwhile opponent of the LF in this district – Congress – had no existence at present. The report also informed there was almost total seat adjustment between the Front partners. The report commented that vested interest groups planned to infiltrate the panchayat system with help from the TMC-BJP combine. The report did not elaborate on the last comment and it was not clear whether the newspaper had evidence of such a scheme or was it repeating the version of the ruling party.
26th May, 1998

Aajkaal (3 columns 81 lines)
Headline: Trinamul embarrassed with independents of BJP origin; Front rejuvenated because of unity of the allies

Reporter / Correspondent

The report on the pre-poll scenario in Coochbehar stated that the common man was losing interest in elections due to violence and terror albeit the political parties continued with blame-game unabated. The report informed the Trinamul alleged that seat adjustment with the BJP was hindered due to the highhandedness of BJP district leaders. The report stated several independent candidates were BJP workers or sympathizers. The Left Front was much more organized than the previous years and FB was the lone voice of dissent in some seats.

26th May, 1998 / 27th May, 1998

The Telegraph (3 columns 63 lines) / Aajkaal (3 columns 90 lines) and (1 column 20 lines)
Headline: Round 1 to TMC / Mamata says people’s verdict clear / Mamata has harmed her own interests by calling a bandh
Primary source: Political party leaders

The reports quoted Mamata Banerjee “observance of a spontaneous and peaceful bandh at the call of the TMC-BJP combine indicated a decline in the LF’s prospects in the forthcoming panchayat election.” The reports commented the TMC President termed the successful observance of the bandh as the people’s mandate against the pre-poll terror perpetrated by the ruling party.

The Aajkaal report quoted Anil Biswas who said that the bandh failed to fulfill the Trinamul purpose of disrupting the law and order in the state as people refused to respond to Trinamul instigation.

The Aajkaal report on the 27th May informed that FB secretary Ashok Ghosh felt that Trinamul has hurt its chances in the forthcoming panchayat election by giving a bandh call.

26th May, 1998

The Statesman (4 columns 136 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 142 lines)
Headline: CITU, management unite in fear / Introduction of panchayat system cannot ward off misgivings on development of tea gardens
Reporters / Correspondents

The reports pointed out once again that not everyone was happy with their inclusion in the panchayat system. The report said that the government’s decision to bring the tea gardens under the panchayat system has made the CPI (M) and RSP trade unions as uneasy as the tea estate owners. The estate owners feared that the coming of the tea gardens under panchayat administration will strangle North Bengal’s only organized industry. The unions admitted that the panchayat system would ensure more democratic rights for the workers and mitigate the unequal distribution of money but they feared that the panchayat system would encourage more agriculture-based reforms and plantations would become secondary in importance.

The Anandabazar Patrika report emphasized that enmity between the CPI (M) and RSP have created a new area of conflict in the tea gardens.

26th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 56 lines)
Headline: State government give 38 crores to 17 districts on the eve of panchayat election

Reporter / Correspondent

The report pointed out the state government has violated election norms by granting 38 crores to 17 districts under the Basic Minimum Services’ Scheme just days before the panchayat election. The report informed that the initiative has raised questions in the administrative circles and the state election commission has promised action if any political party complained against it.

26th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 85 lines)
Headline: Dissident Leftists trying to survive by joining Trinamul

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that in South 24 Parganas expelled CPI (M) members have joined the Trinamul Congress. One of them was quoted that he was driven out of the party for daring to protest against the politics of murder in the district. The report commented throughout the district many Congress supporters who silently endured CPI (M) torture for 21 long years gained a new lease of life with the emergence of
Trinamul. The report remarked that CPI (M) was literally afraid of the evolving power of the TMC.

26th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 168 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) restrains rebel Chaya Ghosh with the inducement of Assembly seat

Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that for the first time in 21 years the CPI (M) was able to restrain the FB in Murshidabad showing the carrot of the Assembly elections. But its danger in the panchayat election in the district was yet to subside as the RSP, the other LF constituent refused to bite dust. The report remarked the RSP's indomitable attitude has irked leaders like Jyoti Basu who publicly berated the smaller constituent. But the RSP remained defiant and CPI (M)'s repeated overtures to arrive at last moment agreements were turned down. So the situation was quite bizarre in many places in the district where there was understanding between the CPI (M) and the FB while the RSP was the challenger. The report specified that besides Adhir Chowdhury, the Congress had virtually no leader in Murshidabad and many veteran Congressmen have joined the Trinamul along with their supporters.

26th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 156 lines)
Headline: 3 CPI (M) party offices closed due to party ire, campaign also stopped

Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that BJP has forced the closure of CPI (M) party offices in three gram panchayats in Midnapore. The CPI (M) district secretary admitted that the Trinamul-BJP combine attacked their party offices in their strongholds. The report said many CPI (M) candidates were not campaigning to avoid public wrath. The report observed in a place where the opposition failed to put up candidates in the last 20 years, a TMC candidate has won without contest. The CPI (M) was forced to encounter the violence of the TMC-BJP combine here.

26th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 92 lines)
**Headline: CPI (M) leader out to buy vote with cash inducement**

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The report on the Malda district informed that with votes in mind the CPI (M) zilla sabhadhipati who headed the party organization as well as controlled the government fund released about 6 crores in 7 days. The report said everywhere in the district there were spurt in development work. The report pointed out the Congress leaders who were willing to surrender to CPI (M) were also involved in this initiative. The opposition alleged this was tantamount to stealing votes with government funds and a calculated political move. The report said the only bone of contention for CPI (M) in this district was again RSP as there was seat agreement with the two other Front constituents.

26th May, 1998

Aajkalaal (1 column 42 lines)

**Headline: Trinamul on the roads for campaigning; CPI (M) visits home**

**Primary source: Political party campaigning techniques**

The report analyzed the campaigning techniques of the main political parties. The report stated CPI (M) concentrated on door-to-door campaign and street meetings while the Trinamul, Congress and the BJP convened public meetings and marched in processions to reach voters.

27th May, 1998

The Telegraph (4 columns 110 lines)

**Headline: Trinamul inroads into Left citadel**

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The report projected an incident of red terror in a panchayat area. The report said a TMC candidate’s source of drinking water was cut off and no action was initiated against the culprits. The reporter visited the scene and reported that the victim was visibly disturbed with threat calls. The report said this was one among the many incidents of intimidation and terror that the communists perpetrated to maintain their supremacy.

27th May, 1998

The Telegraph (1 column 57 lines)
Headline: Violence feared during rural polls
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that political parties' feared violence on the day of rural polls. The report termed the election crucial as the TMC-BJP combine was challenging the established view in the state that political opinion was polarized between the ruling Left and the Congress. The news included information on the counting centers for the different tiers (respective booths for the gram panchayats, offices of the development officers for the panchayat samiti, SDO offices for the zilla parishad). The report also gave details of the number of candidates contesting for all the recognized political parties in the three tiers.

27th May, 1998
The Telegraph (4 columns 84 lines)
Headline: Allies give CPI (M) sleepless nights
Reporter / Correspondent

This report specified it was not only the TMC-BJP combine that was giving sleepless nights to the CPI (M), the other Left Front allies were equally a pain in the neck of the 'big brother' at least in Murshidabad district. The report wrote TMC and BJP were contesting independently in most of the panchayat samiti and zilla parishad seats in this district but the Left Front was still not at an advantage as it too has failed to arrive at a consensus and therefore there were direct contests between the Left parties in the three tiers. The FB leadership said the LF unity was only on paper while RSP, another constituent of the Front, blamed the CPI (M) for the lack of consensus. The report said there was little understanding between the CPI (M) and the RSP in most blocks in the district. The report quoted the CPI (M) district secretary who blamed the rigid attitude of the two allies - RSP and FB - for the lack of seat adjustment in the district.

27th May, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 60 lines)
Headline: Trinamul, BJP defaming us, says BJP
Primary source: Political party leadership

The report informed the CPI (M) has accused the Trinamul-BJP combine of resorting to a slander campaign against the LF prior to the panchayat election. The
report said CPI (M) leader Biman Bose has charged the combine has given shelter to hoodlums to create tension in the villages on the Election Day. The report informed he also accused the combine of campaigning in favor of vested interest groups in the rural areas. The news informed he alleged that the Congress has also entered into a tacit agreement with the duo to defeat the Left Front. The report quoted him “despite all these odds the LF would maintain its hold over the panchayats.”

27th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 18 lines)
Headline: LF’s seat count to remain the same: Anil
Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted Anil Biswas that the LF’s seat tally in the ensuing panchayat election will not fall from last year’s count. The report stated Biswas said that the Congress was not a factor in this election and the Trinamul Congress-BJP was the main opponent.

27th May, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 35 lines) / Aajkaal (3 columns 39 lines)
Headline: Siliguri clash toll upto 2 / Trinamul attack, Kanti assaulted
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported a pre-poll clash in Siliguri in Darjeeling district. The report informed the clash between the Trinamul and CPI (M) supporters left one Trinamul supporter dead and one grievously injured.

The Aajkaal report informed Trinamul workers attacked Kanti Ganguly, a minister in the state cabinet in Raidighi.

27th May, 1998
The Statesman (3 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Trinamul nominee asks CPI (M) for protection
Primary source: Grass-root candidate

The report narrated how grass-root panchayat candidates were mere pawns at the hands of the political parties even 20 years after the implementation of the panchayat system. The report elaborated a TMC candidate who wanted to withdraw his candidature has sought the protection of CPI (M) as he feared backlash from his
own party men. The report said the candidate was a poor laborer who had consented to contest as he was inspired by the Trinamul’s ideals and principles but now disillusioned he wanted to withdraw from the contest but feared the worst in such circumstances and cannot abide by his will.

27th May, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 44 lines)
Headline: State may send forces selectively
Primary source: Political party leadership

The report highlighted the BJP’s allegation that the state government planned to send paramilitary forces only in areas where the TMC-BJP combine held sway. The party alleged that areas where the CPI (M) had considerable influence would remain outside the domain of the paramilitary forces to give the ruling party cadres a free hand during the polling and counting.

27th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 104 lines)
Headline: Upset at party’s attitude, Binoy wishes to leave Politburo (Burdwan)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report commented veteran CPI (M) leader Binoy Chowdhury’s observation that grassroots could not associate themselves with the panchayats was ignored by his own party and the outcome was obvious to all. The report elaborated in many areas of Burdwan, considered to be the CPI (M) bastion, the Congress could not field candidates in gram panchayat seats in the last election but in this year’s election the TMC-BJP have equally divided the seats between them. The report said the combine was set to give a serious challenge to the ruling party as there were many complaints of corruption against the CPI (M) gram panchayat members along with lack of development initiatives. The CPI (M) members refused to comment on the issue but the report commented that common people joining the opposition ranks in the remote villages of this district has certainly cornered the ruling party.

27th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 60 lines)
Headline: Mamata criticize Buddhadeb in a public meeting in Bhangar
Primary source: Political party leader

The report commented Mamata Banerjee consciously raised the issue of the rape of a TMC gram panchayat candidate in Bhangar to point out to the largely women audience in her electoral meetings the atrocities on women during the Left rule has increased manifold. The report said in an election rally in Bhangar she indicted the state Home Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya for the lawlessness in the state.

27th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 180 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 38 lines)
Headline: Opposition united before the panchayat election; CPI (M) anxious / Three political parties with vested interest in anti-Left Front alliance: Sailen

Primary source: Political party / party leader

The reports indicated that the unity of the anti-Left parties before the panchayat election has left the ruling party perturbed. They said that the Left chairman Sailen Dasgupta's briefing to the press on the eve of the panchayat election that whatever the TMC-BJP may claim they have nothing new to offer to the panchayat system developed by the Left was a sign of the disquiet. The reports said that Dasgupta emphasized that the three main opposition parties in the state represented the vested interests and do not have people's interests in mind.

27th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 135 lines)
Headline: Twin flowers and arsenic worry drive Front to seek solace in unity

Reporter / Correspondent

The news item highlighted the political scenario in North 24 Parganas. The Front leaders in the district, the report stated, were worried over two issues - the growing popularity of the Trinamul Congress and the arsenic pollution of underground water. The villagers were irate with the lack of government initiative to redress the arsenic problem. The extent of the problem was underlined by the report – over 60000 were affected by arsenic pollution of drinking water and some have already lost their lives to the malaise. The report stated the LF constituents in the district realizing that wrath of the voters on the issue may prove hazardous have united for the panchayat elections which had never happened in the last few years.
27th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 105 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) supply oxygen to Congress ailing under Trinamul domination
Reporter / Correspondent

The report observed the political scenario in Burdwan district was such that there was literally no existence of Congress. The report informed barring the 4 Assembly members and a few leaders all the supporters and workers have en masse joined the Trinamul Congress. The Congress has consequently managed to field candidates in only 30% seats in the three tiers in this district. The report observed the situation was so bad that the Congress could not even retain the victorious candidates of the last panchayat election. The report commented that the only saving grace was that CPI (M) workers were asking voters to vote for Congress to resist the Trinamul Congress during campaigning. The report informed the TMC-BJP combine have achieved near complete seat adjustment in the district creasing the brow of district CPI (M) leaders.

27th May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 64 lines)
Headline: Impregnable fort – no sign of Twin flowers (Purulia)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report described the political scenario in Purulia before the panchayat election. The newspaper said the only significant difference from the last panchayat election was that encouraged by the Trinamul’s success in the Lok Sabha elections, hordes of Congress supporters have joined it. The report emphasized that except FB the other smaller Left constituents were insignificant in this district and the CPI (M)’s chances were strengthened by the lack of unity in the TMC-BJP combine.

27th March, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 76 lines)
Headline: Trinamul weak, few BJP candidates in fray, divided Left Front more powerful
Reporter / Correspondent

This report on North Dinajpur wrote that barring a few places the understanding of the CPI (M) with the FB and the RSP was quite strong. The report
said the plight of the Congress was much better than in the other districts but as reported in the other Bengali newspaper, Anandabazar Patrika this report too wrote that Congress leader Priya Ranjan Das Munshi has engineered an alliance with both the TMC and the BJP in this district.

27th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 55 lines)
Headline: Front on the way to victory overcoming charges of corruption
Reporter / Correspondent
This report underlined the pre-poll scenario of South Dinajpur. The report summarized the Left Front was united in this district, there was no adjustment between the Trinamul and the BJP and the Congress was a spent force. The report stated the TMC was the LF's main contender. The report wrote that though allegations of corruption in the panchayat bodies plagued the Left in the initial rounds of campaigning it was slowly eclipsed by the LF's helpful image in the minds of the agricultural workers which has given the Left an obvious advantage.

27th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 76 lines) and (1 column 39 lines)
Headline: Development in the backburner, Panchayat penniless in buying musket / 126 crores lying unused in Midnapore
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed that there were allegations against 20 to 25 gram panchayats in Murshidabad of channelizing funds meant for development for the purchase of musket and other ammunitions. The report cited the example of Khargram gram panchayat where the villagers were livid that no development has taken place.

The underutilization of funds was also highlighted in this report. It said that in Midnapore the zilla parishad and district administration could not utilize about 126 crores allocated for different projects and development was stalled.

27th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 29 lines)
Headline: Biren Moitra: Congress has hired anti-socials from Bihar
Primary source: Political party leader

The report informed that the CPI (M) MLA of Harishchandrapur, Malda has alleged that the Congress has hired anti-socials from Bihar to foment trouble on the Election Day. The report said he warned all the booths in the region were highly sensitive.

28th May, 1998
The Telegraph (4 columns 132 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 105 lines)

Headline: Mamata’s acid test in Basu base / Panchayat vote of challenge in state today

Reporter / Correspondent

The Telegraph report described the panchayat election as a battle-ground for cut-throat political rivalries. The statistical data accompanying the report were figures on the total estimated cost (42 crores), number of voters (34 million), candidates in the fray (1.78 lakhs), number of seats (60000) and number of recognized political parties (12). The report specified that the elections were important for the Trinamul Congress and its founder Mamata Banerjee.

The Anandabazar report stated that the LF was facing formidable challenge for the first time since 1977 and was apprehensive of losing a few zilla parishads to the TMC-BJP combine. The report commented even if the LF predominance prevailed in the highest tier, there would be quite a few upsets in the lower tiers.

Both the Telegraph and Anandabazar Patrika were of the opinion that the panchayat election was overshadowed by the specter of violence with clashes between political parties, murders of supporters and candidates and mayhem dominating the run-up to the elections. The Anandabazar specified 3 more persons were killed on the eve of the panchayat elections. The Telegraph report stated that political analysts were of the opinion that lack of consensus between the Left parties could prove harmful for the LF. The report said that the CPI (M) could be adversely affected in two ways – the Left vote may split and favor the TMC-BJP combine or the disgruntled Front allies may decide to cast protest votes against the CPI (M). The Anandabazar Patrika report was of the opinion that lack of development and corruption in the panchayats would be two important issues in this election.
28th May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 42 lines)
**Headline:** Battle to conquer rural Bengal today
**Reporter / Correspondent**

The report stated there was a general indication of imminent combat between political parties to occupy the rural areas and its residents in the state as if they were their fiefdom. The other contents of the report were similar to that of the Telegraph referred to in the previous paragraph.

28th May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 48 lines)
**Headline:** Front is certain to win over the zilla parishads
**Reporter / Correspondent**

The report indicated the Left Front was likely to have it easy in most districts in the state notwithstanding the change in the political scenario in some due to the overwhelming presence of Trinamul. The report said even the biggest Trinamul supporter did not foresee a drastic change in the fortunes in the forthcoming panchayat election and it was impossible to tear through the 'red bastion'.

28th May, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 51 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 59 lines) / The Telegraph (5 columns 65 lines)
**Headline:** Mamata will take to streets if polls are unfair / We'll challenge the three ministers in the street: Mamata / Mamata accuses CPI (M) of terror tactics
**Primary source:** Political party leader

The news items reported Trinamul chief Mamata Banerjee has warned that her party would take to the streets if the panchayat election was not free and fair. The BJP and the Congress also took on the state government for its failure to dispel terror on the eve of the panchayat elections. The fear of violence on the Election Day and the apprehension of disorder were not only voiced by the opposition parties.

The TMC chief was quoted in the reports that the CPI (M) has created a constitutional crisis by resorting to unabated terrorism in the rural areas. She specifically blamed three CPI (M) ministers for instigating violence in the districts on the eve of the panchayat elections. The reports said Mamata Banerjee alleged her
workers were forced to flee their homes in some areas of Midnapore and other districts.

The Statesman report quoted the TMC chief to inform that she has apprised the Union home ministry about the terror unleashed by CPI (M) activists. The report said she claimed 39 Trinamul and 11 BJP activists including panchayat poll candidates were murdered in the pre-election period.

28th May, 1998
The Telegraph (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: Violence feared during polling today
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that the opposition’s claim about the deteriorating law and order situation in the state has alarmed the state administration. The report said the anxiety had heightened after police records clarified that 17 people were killed and over 100 injured in clashes before the panchayat election. The report said the Home minister alleged that violence in the districts was unleashed by the TMC-BJP combine. It also said the minister admitted of clashes between the TMC and the CPI (M) but added that in most cases the CPI (M) was forced to retaliate to TMC attack.

28th May, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 76 lines)
Headline: Violence rocks districts on eve of rural polls
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that two persons were killed in Midnapore following clashes between CPI (M) and Trinamul Congress supporters. The report informed several clashes in various districts preceded the panchayat polls.

28th May, 1998
The Telegraph (4 columns 136 lines)
Headline: Law of Jungle in wild south
Reporter / Correspondent

It was a matter of concern that violence and political rivalry has pushed development issues to the background. This report on four remote villages in Basanti, South 24 Parganas expressed the same concern. The report claimed the enmity was
much more pronounced this time than in the previous elections. The report commented that people have lost faith in political parties and the administration due to the lack of development. The report stated there were several projects under various schemes to ensure employment for the rural people and build infrastructural assets in villages but the political parties were so engrossed in their own interests that nothing much was done to improve the status of villagers. The report suggested the root cause of violence in Basanti was the failure of the CPI (M) and the RSP on the one hand and the TMC and BJP on the other to reach seat adjustment.

28th May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 46 lines) and (3 columns 27 lines)
Headline: Gani Khan to Aneesh Mazumder: Want free and fair polls / Congress has turned around: Pradip-Saugata
Primary source: Political party leaders

The news item reported that Congress leader Gani Khan Chowdhury has urged the Election Commissioner to ensure peaceful and fair elections in Malda. The report stated he said the CPI (M) has created such a frightful scenario in the district that the residents may not come out to vote in the rural polls. The CPI (M) on its part rubbished the allegation.

The second report also quoted state Congress leaders Pradip Bhattacharya and Saugata Roy that the Congress has recovered its lost ground and will turn around in the panchayat elections.

29th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 17 lines)
Headline: Electoral Issues (Editorial)

The editorial wrote about the issues that dominated panchayat election campaign in 1998. The editorial said in the past, issues have decided the fate of political parties in elections – they have either made or undone the fortune of the political party. Contrarily, certain issues failed to have any impact on the public mind. The editorial identified the issues which were dominant during the campaigning for this panchayat election. It wrote that the Left Front was in power in the state for the last 21 years and therefore it was natural that the issues of corruption, complacency and conceit, administrative failure and law and order disruption were prominent. The
editorial commented more than any other issue, the issue of rape became significant in this panchayat election. The editorial was critical of the TMC candidate who appealed for vote against her rape and questioned the derogatory standard of politics of TMC leader Mamata Banerjee who politicized a sensitive issue for electoral gains.

28th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 124 lines)
Headline: Panchayat – A different contest (Editorial)

The editorial wrote though election was being held at the grass-root level, the preparation, hostility and political activism involved was not less than that witnessed during the General elections. The editorial stated the main reason for this was the importance of the rural voters in West Bengal’s politics. The editorial put it simply that the political party/coalition that will control the majority of gram panchayats following this election would be in a much advantageous position in the Assembly elections to be held in 2001. The editorial specified that this has been a trend in this state for many years and hence the importance of the panchayat elections for the political parties in the state. The editorial opined the reason for the long political dominance of the Left in the state was its absolute control over the panchayats and if any other political party or coalition wished to challenge this dominance then it had to dominate the gram panchayats. The editorial added these political truths were not unknown to the opposition forces who wished to take up the challenge of overthrowing the Left and so they have given adequate importance to the panchayat election. The editorial said Trinamul Congress which has emerged as the main opponent to the LF has tied up with the BJP which held the reins at the Center to form a strong opposition force. The editorial said there was no doubt that the Left Front was the pioneer of decentralization of power in West Bengal and took initiative to transfer political power to the panchayats thereby ensuring their present significance and influence. The editorial also said it was also true that LF governments over the years have helped to establish the elected panchayats as political and administrative institutions with equal importance as the state administration. The LF’s influence over the rural voters can be traced to the above reasons. The editorial opined at the same time allegations of nepotism during the distribution of largesse like surplus land, or relief material or employment under the various schemes, corruption and siphoning of panchayat funds and the numerous endeavors to suppress the opposition have
alienated the Left coalition from the grassroots in the last few years. The editorial observed, in this perspective the Trinamul-BJP alliance had a fair chance to upset the Front. It predicted the bickering of the Front partners would add to its woes. The report observed the pact between the TMC-BJP and Congress at places has increased the polarization of the ruling and opposition forces and led to the violent clashes during campaigning. The editorial apprehended that attempts to capture seats and control the panchayats may cause violence and terror on the Election Day.

28th May, 1998
The Telegraph (4 columns 88 lines)
Headline: Neglected tribals seek revenge
Primary source: Tribal panchayat voters

It has been doubted many times that development in panchayat areas was at the mercy of political parties and subjected to their interests and benefits. This report confirmed this doubt. The report informed the tribal people in Jharkhand were discriminated by the CPI (M) zilla parishad as most gram panchayats in the area were controlled either by the Congress or CPI (M) dissidents. The tribal population in the area was angry that their demand for electrification was not fulfilled in all these years. The report stated that they were looking for an alternative political force to counter the CPI (M) and were flocking to the TMC en masse. The trend was worrying the ruling CPI (M) and a district CPI (M) leader admitted that his party was perturbed at the growing influence of the Trinamul in its stronghold.

28th May, 1998
The Telegraph (2 columns 64 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) faces near revolt
Reporter / Correspondent

The report represented the reversal of fate of the ruling party. It said that after 20 years the CPI (M) faced a near revolt in Goghat, Hooghly. The report pointed out even though the organizational strength of the BJP – TMC combine was weak, the anti-CPI (M) feeling was so strong among the villagers that there was bound to be some change. The report informed the contention that the FB has helped TMC grow steadily in this area has caused tension among the local Left leadership.
28th May, 1998

The Statesman (1 column 91 lines)
Headline: Left takes on buoyant opposition today
Reporter / Correspondent

The report commented that for the first time since 1977, when the Left first came to power, rural West Bengal was likely to witness an even political battle with a new anti-Left force. The report commented in a state where political polarization has always thrived, the TMC with BJP as its partner has increased that polarized existence. The report said this was the primary reason why the state’s fifth panchayat election under the Left regime was fraught with the specter of widespread violence. The report predicted that the forging of ties between the Trinamul, BJP and the Congress at the grass-root level against the Left may upset the conventional calculations that the Left had capitalized on in the last four panchayat elections.

28th May, 1998

Aajkaal (2 columns 38 lines)
Headline: Biman: Many will be surprised at Front’s stunning result
Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted CPI (M) leader Biman Basu that the result of the forthcoming panchayat election would be in Front’s favor because of the endeavors of the Front towards the development of the people and improvement of their living standards. The report said he asserted that the corrupt party members have been thrown out and therefore there was no reason why the Front would not dominate this panchayat election too.

28th May, 1998

Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 120 lines)
Headline: Trinamul set to upset CPI (M) applecart by selecting unanimous candidates
Reporter / Correspondent

This report stated that the Trinamul Congress was set to upset the CPI (M) by supporting unanimous anti-CPI (M) candidate at many places. The report stated this has increased TMC’s trustworthiness and people’s faith on it. The report stated that the last Lok Sabha elections indicated that the rift between voters and the ruling
coalition was widening and in several areas like Keshpur and Garbeta in East Midnapore, where there was no competition from the opposition parties in the last election, the CPI (M) was finding the going tough. The report said the near obliteration of the Congress has helped the TMC-BJP combine as people were considering it as the only opposition to the CPI (M).

28th May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 68 lines)
Headline: Perplexed Congress, Aggressive Trinamul; even with hitches Front most powerful (Nadia)

Reporter / Correspondent
The report described the pre-poll scenario in Nadia. The initial observation was that the Congress was set to lose ground in the district to the Trinamul Congress and the CPI (M) would retain its previous position. The report said the LF has more or less managed to hold on its unity in 90% seats though the RSP was not a part of this unity. The RSP has put up candidates against Front nominees in most seats. The report informed the Trinamul and the BJP have formed alliance in certain areas while in others they were at loggerheads. The report ended the Trinamul also suffered from factionalism in this district.

29th May, 1998
The Statesman (3 columns 93 lines)
Headline: Trinamul-BJP makes dent; 7 killed in poll violence

Reporter / Correspondent
The report announced from the initial results of the gram panchayats trooping in it was evident that the Trinamul-BJP combine was set to make a small but significant dent in some pockets of the Left bastion though the Left Front was successful in maintaining its overall supremacy in rural Bengal. The report said the election, as apprehended, was marked by violence taking 7 lives in its trail. There were incidents of ballot box snatching and destruction of ballot papers throughout the state. The report said that the Congress was successful in retaining its toehold in many districts. The report stated that political observers were not willing to make any observations on the destiny of the political parties until the declaration of results in 30% of seats.
29th May, 1998

The Statesman (4 columns 68 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 38 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) attacked our men, says RSP / How can we say peaceful? RSP

Primary source: Political party leadership

The reports informed RSP, a LF constituent has accused ‘big brother’ CPI (M) of attacking its workers and leaders in a planned manner on the polling day to capture poll booths. The report specified that the accusation was leveled by an RSP minister in the state cabinet meeting. The report commented the party dismissed the claim of the CPI (M) top brass that the polls were generally peaceful barring stray cases of violence. The report said CPI (M) leadership claimed that rural Bengal witnessed more or less peaceful elections despite attempts by the Trinamul, BJP and Congress supporters to disrupt the polls.

The Aajkaal report added while CPI (M) leader Sailen Dasgupta claimed voting was free and fair another Left constituent RSP did not share his view. The report said the RSP leadership alleged there were several instances of rigging and malpractices. Both reports informed RSP MLA Amar Chowdhury was threatened by CPI (M) workers on the Election Day in North 24 Parganas while RSP polling agents were thrown out from several booths in Canning, South 24 Parganas.

29th May, 1998

The Statesman (1 column 37 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 18 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) rigging, violence made a mockery of polls / Districts adjoining Kolkata witnessed more election-related violence

Primary source: Political party leadership

The Congress reaction was enlisted in this report. The Congress leadership alleged large-scale booth capturing and attacks on its workers by CPI (M) cadres throughout the state. The report said the party alleged police and poll observers were mute spectators while the CPI (M) cadres made a mockery of the election. The report said Congress leader Saugata Roy also took a potshot at the Trinamul-BJP combine that after all the noise about CPI (M) atrocities on their supporters before the poll, the brunt of the CPI (M) attack was bore by Congress workers on the Election Day.

The Aajkaal report stated that Congress leadership was of the opinion that poll-related violence and electoral malpractices like booth capturing, rigging were
more common in the villages adjoining Kolkata and the other cities and towns of the state.

29th May, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 58 lines)
Headline: Booths, ballots and police belong to CPI (M)
Reporter / Correspondents
This was a scathing report on the electoral malpractices and manipulations. The report described the condition outside polling booths in South 24 Parganas. It wrote the technique across booths in the district was the same. First, bombs were hurled to frighten off the genuine voters and the opposition candidates and polling agents, the CPI (M) cadres then had complete access of ballot papers and they misused them in full glare of the police and presiding officers.

29th May, 1998
The Statesman (3 columns 54 lines) and (1 column 34 lines)
Headline: ‘Majid Master’ rules Sashan / Posse of cops keep Bhangar polls peaceful
Reporter / Correspondent
The focus of several reports in the Statesman on 29th May was the violence perpetrated by CPI (M) leaders and cadres. This news item reported that in Sashan, North 24 Parganas, the ubiquitous power wrested with ‘Majid Master’, a CPI (M) leader and a zilla parishad candidate and his supporters ran amok in the area on the Election Day. The report described how CPI (M) workers created terror in the area. It said a Trinamul MP was heckled by armed CPI (M) cadres when he went to supervise polling in the area.

The flip side of this state of affairs was observed at Bhangar in South 24 Parganas where a posse of cops kept close watch on the poll proceedings. The second report said the area was reeling under tension since a Trinamul Congress gram panchayat candidate was allegedly raped by CPI (M) cadres.

29th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 11 lines) and (1 column 31 lines)
Headline: Re-poll in some booths on 31st May / Champala fail
The report informed about re-poll in several booths in North and South 24 Parganas, Burdwan, Hooghly, Malda and Purulia due to disruption during polling or problem in the ballot paper. The report also informed that the BJP has written to the Union Home minister L.K. Advani alleging widespread violence by the ruling party during the panchayat election and fearing the repeat of such a situation during the counting process.

The other report informed about the defeat of the raped TMC gram panchayat candidate Champala Sardar by CPI (M) nominee Ishani Sardar. Here there is need to point out that the same newspaper which criticized the said candidate as well as TMC chief Mamata Banerjee for shamelessly engaging in the ‘politics of rape’ and making it an issue in the panchayat election (Aajkaal editorial on 28th May) was now highlighting the news of her defeat as if it was a significant issue thus contradicting its own views.

29th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 46 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 209 lines)
Headline: Front ahead in Panchayat election; Trinamul fighting for the second spot / Rural Bengal set to be ruled by the Left Front

Both newspapers reported that the Left Front was far ahead of the opposition parties in the three tiers. The Anandabazar Patrika report said that the Trinamul Congress has emerged as the chief opposition to the LF in the rural areas leaving the Congress a poor second. The report emphasized that Trinamul Congress could not create a dent in Left strongholds. The report said 15 lives were lost on the Election Day. Both newspapers said the Trinamul Congress has demanded President’s rule against the CPI (M)’s terror tactics during the election.

The Aajkaal report said the CPI (M) was set to sweep the zilla parishads and the panchayat samitis even where there was no unity between Left Front constituents as the opposition failed to consolidate its position. The Aajkaal said violence during the panchayat election killed 3 CPI (M) and 1 Congress supporter and injured several from all parties. It said that violence forced the temporary stoppage of election in several places yet the police minister claimed that election was peaceful. The report said 70% voting was registered.
29th May, 1998

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 62 lines) and (4 columns 132 lines)

Headline: In lieu of proper investigation (Editorial) / Those accused in the rape of the Trinamul candidate in command during polling

Reporter / Correspondent

The editorial criticized the politics over the rape of a Trinamul gram panchayat candidate in South 24 Parganas. The editorial blasted the CPI (M), against whose members there was the charge of rape as well as the Trinamul Congress, whose member was allegedly raped, for exploiting the issue to make electoral gains.

The other report specified that though the police could not arrest the two CPI (M) leaders accused in the rape, they were very much active on the Election Day and were even present during counting. The report criticized the police's failure to book the two culprits and raised question whether the defeat of the rape victim by 37 votes was the direct fallout of supervision of the counting procedure by the culprits.

30th May, 1998

The Statesman (3 columns 92 lines) and (1 column 31 lines)

Headline: Huge lead for Left Front in Panchayat polls / Setback for CPI (M) on Basu’s home turf

Reporter / Correspondent

The report pointed out that the results of the 1998 panchayat elections indicated the Left Front retained overall supremacy in the rural areas but with diminishing returns. The report said the TMC-BJP combine should be happy that it has made an emphatic entry into certain districts of the state which had hitherto remained out of reach for opposition parties. In fact that the combine has managed a toehold in most of the districts should be a cause for concern for the CPI (M)-led Front. But what was more worrying for the Left coalition, according to the report, was the fact that in some districts the combined tally of the TMC-BJP and the Congress outnumbered its tally.

There were more causes of concern for the ruling coalition as the other referred report specified. The CPI (M) suffered a setback in Satgachia, the chief minister Jyoti Basu’s Assembly seat. The report stated that the CPI (M) workers in the area attributed their poor show to the complacency of senior leaders and indifference of Basu himself.
30th May, 1998 / 31st May, 1998

The Telegraph (3 columns 70 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 48 lines)

Headline: Rise in anti-Left votes worries CPI (M) / Board: Front to sit over differences between allies

Primary source: Political party leadership

The report stated that in general CPI (M) was worried at the increase of anti-Left vote in the just concluded panchayat polls. The report said CPI (M) leader Biman Bose refused to offer any analysis of the downfall at a press meet. The report commented that the fear of the TMC, Congress and BJP coming together to form gram panchayat boards to keep the communists at bay haunted the CPI (M). The report commented that the TMC has taken over the grass-root support base of the Congress almost everywhere except in a few North Bengal districts. The report added that the state Congress was undecided on whether to join hands with the TMC to form boards, though the CPI (M) did not rule out such a possibility.

The Aajkaal report on the formation of panchayat boards appeared on the 31st May. The report said that RSP faced a precarious situation at the end of the panchayat election. It commented that it had to pay the price for taking on ‘big brother’ CPI (M) and contesting it alone in most of the seats. The report informed that RSP had alleged before the panchayat election that the CPI (M) was fast losing its popularity among rural voters and put up its own candidate to provide the voters with a Left alternative but in effect it was seen that the Trinamul Congress-BJP had won where there was a CPI (M) RSP face-off. The report said that the grass-root supporters of the LF parties were averse to adjust with one another to form boards.

30th May, 1998 / 1st June, 1998

The Telegraph (2 columns 70 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 15 lines)

Headline: Mamata product of unstable mind, says Basu / Vote count may have decreased but result good: Basu

Primary source: Political party leader

The report said the chief minister reacted strongly with the above comment in response to Mamata Banerjee’s allegation that the CPI (M) and the BJP has forged an alliance against her. The report said the chief minister was happy with the LF’s overall performance in the rural polls though there was marginal decrease in the CPI (M) and Left Front’s vote count.

The Aajkaal reported the last part of the previous news item on the 1st June adding that the chief minister congratulated the people for the peaceful polling.
30th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 10 lines) / The Telegraph (2 columns 36 lines) / The Statesman (2 columns 52 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 13 lines)

Headline: 4 polling personnel die in severe heat / Heat claims 4 polling personnel / Heat kills 6 poll officials in the state / 4 die in heat

Reporter / Correspondent

The reports informed that 4 / 6 polling personnel died of heat stroke after they were gheraoed for long hours in polling stations at Midnapore. The sample newspapers also reported in Hooghly and Murshidabad presiding officials were assaulted.

30th May, 1998
The Telegraph (4 columns 84 lines)

Headline: TMC trips in rural Bengal

Reporter / Correspondent

The report concluded that the poll results, after the second day of counting, indicated that the rural fortress of the Left Front remained invincible. The CPI (M) continued its surge in gram panchayats and seemed set to maintain its status quo in the other two tiers with no significant gains or losses. The report stated that the main opposition Trinamul Congress successfully captured several gram panchayats in South 24 Parganas and turned the tables in certain areas of North 24 Parganas where earlier ruling party members were elected unopposed. The results showed that 6 gram panchayat boards in these areas were wrested from the CPI (M) by the TMC ending as the report stated ‘the politics of gun and money’. The report concluded but elsewhere in rural Bengal the fledging Trinamul Congress found it difficult to compete with the ruling communists.

30th May, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 27 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 58 lines)

Headline: Polls prove Congress still a force in state / Congress not a signboard yet, Pradip-Saugata in front of Somen

Primary source: Political party leaders

The news reported Congress leaders have observed that the panchayat polls have proved that their party was not a burnt out force in West Bengal. The reports said they said the results clearly indicated that the party was not a spent out force in
the state and CPI (M) cannot be ousted by personal charisma as believed by the TMC and its chief.

30th May, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 22 lines)

Headline: Farmers stand by Left, workers back Trinamul

Reporter / Correspondent

Three significant points emerged at the conclusion of the fifth panchayat election in the state, according to this report. The first was that the Left Front and particularly the CPI (M) still held control over areas dominated by the farmers. The second was that the TMC-BJP combine has developed into a potent force in areas around Gangetic Bengal (predominantly industrial areas). The report inferred that the CPI (M) influence was reduced considerably in these areas. The last deduction of the report was that the Muslim dominated areas stood steadfastly by the Congress somewhat resurrecting its political fortunes in rural Bengal. The report said political observers were of the opinion that the Congress' prolonged efforts to strengthen its organization in these areas and the Trinamul's failure to develop a second line of leadership was responsible for this outcome.

30th May, 1998
The Statesman (4 columns 56 lines)

Headline: FB tells Left Front to close ranks

Primary source: Political party leadership

The report informed that FB has urged other LF constituents to bury their pre-poll hatchet and adopt a common strategy to 'honor the confidence that the people have reposed in the LF' in the just concluded panchayat polls. The report informed that as the results started to pour in the Front constituents started to assess their chance of forming panchayat boards. The FB and RSP, who were major bone of contention for the CPI (M) in the pre-election days, announced that bickering between LF partners would be a thing of past.

The report did not specify that political opportunism to enjoy the fruits of power surpassed the constituents' concern for grassroots' mandate. The report said that the Bloc leadership commented that the results indicated that the LF had fared well but it could have been better if the constituents were united in their poll initiative.
30th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 25 lines)
Headline: Defeated by ‘independent’ dummy candidates, Howrah FB
Primary source: District leadership of Political party

The report informed FB was peeved at CPI (M) for defeating it by fielding dummy candidates as independents in Howrah. The report said FB was contemplating boycott of LF meeting as a protest against this.

30th May, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 22 lines)
Headline: Majid Master loses .
Reporter / Correspondent

The report highlighted the defeat of Majid Master, the ‘infamous’ CPI (M) leader of North 24 Parganas who allegedly ruled by bullet and whose tales of threat and intimidation were referred repeatedly in the reports of the sample newspapers throughout the 1998 coverage.

30th May, 1998
The Statesman (3 columns 90 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 42 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 41 lines)
Headline: 4 more die in rural poll violence / Political clashes in various districts, 4 killed / Death toll rises to 6 in Murshidabad
Reporter / Correspondent

The reports narrated the incidents of poll-related violence in the state. They informed that 4 people have died and 50 were injured (5 and 100 respectively according to the Aajkaal report) in post-poll clashes in various district on the day after the election. Murshidabad was the worst hit with 6 people killed in 48 hours. The reports informed in Nadia one SUCI supporter was allegedly hacked to death by CPI (M) cadres while two others were seriously injured. The reports mentioned ballot boxes were snatched in three places in this district. The reports also informed in Midnapore re-poll has been ordered in several seats in all the three tiers and in Burdwan 1 person was killed and 50 injured in a series of post-poll clashes.
Headline: Have successfully resisted attack by new invader: Biman
Primary source: Political party leader

The report quoted CPI (M) leader Biman Bose that the people have resisted Trinamul’s attempt to create havoc and disrupt the voting procedure. The report stated Bose said that the voters have not forgotten that the Left has served them well during the last 21 years. The report declared he also said people were convinced that Trinamul represented the new vested interest groups and therefore chose the Left emphatically.

30th May, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 84 lines)
Headline: Front faces challenge of opposition in 5 districts
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that after 21 years of absolute supremacy over rural Bengal, the LF faced tough challenge from the opposition forces in five districts. The report further added that the result of the Trinamul Congress did not correspond to the expectation (several reports of this newspaper as well as the other sample newspapers were part of this expectation) from the party before the elections while the Congress fared much better than expected.

31st May, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 46 lines)
Headline: Left-Trinamul clashes at different places
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported incidents of violence and terror dominated the state in the post panchayat election phase. The report referred to two such incidents – one in Kakdwip, in South 24 Parganas and one in Midnapore. In the first incident a CPI (M) MLA was injured and admitted to the hospital following attack by Congress workers. In the second incident a CPI (M) candidate was killed in a clash.

31st May, 1998
The Telegraph (2 columns 48 lines) Aajkaal (3 columns 78 lines)
Headline: Left sway over grassroots / CPI (M) win 80% seats in zilla parishads
Reporter / Correspondent

The report commented that mowing down the opposition challenge the Left juggernaut rolled to sweep all the 16 zilla parishads. The report informed that the
latest counting trends indicated that CPI (M) led LF has succeeded in retaining its iron grip on the panchayats and the TMC-BJP combine managed to just survive in the rural area.

The Aajkaal also informed that the LF has claimed 86% of zilla parishad seats and CPI (M) alone has captured 80% of seats.

31st May, 1998
The Telegraph (3 columns 57 lines)
Headline: LF calls meet to thwart triangular gang-up
Primary source: Political party leadership

This report indicated that the TMC-BJP combine and the Congress could join hands to grab a sizeable number of gram panchayat boards in North Dinajpur, Malda, Nadia and Jalpaiguri. CPI (M) leader Biman Bose was quoted that intra-Front differences that led to partners contesting against each other was responsible for the shabby performances of the Left parties in these districts. The report went on to elaborate that under compulsion to halt the opposition from gaining control of the boards, the Left Front allies intended to iron out differences and bring victorious Left-minded individuals under its fold. The report described how the LF disunity, evident from the lack of understanding in seat sharing, affected its fortune and benefitted the anti-Left venture.

31st May, 1998
The Telegraph (4 columns 71 lines)
Headline: Dumdum jinx dogs CPI (M)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report narrated how the CPI (M) suffered a setback in North 24 Parganas. The report stated that political observers were of the opinion that the result in this district was more a fallout of the CPI (M)’s internal squabble rather than TMC-BJP’s inroads into the communist stronghold. The report informed that gram panchayats in Gaighata, Habra and Deganga blocks in the district was snatched by the Trinamul.

31st May, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 48 lines)
Headline: Importance of Panchayats (Editorial)

The initial notion that the editorial would discuss the significance of the panchayats to the grass-root voters is quickly put to rest as the discussion veers to the implications of the panchayat election results for the major political parties in the state. The editorial repeated certain sections of a news report published in its 30th May edition – the Trinamul Congress-BJP combine has successfully made inroads into some Left strongholds, the Congress was not reduced to an irrelevant force as projected in pre-poll reports and the Left, despite some serious opposition, held sway over majority seats. The editorial commented on the voting trend for the Left and its erstwhile principal opposition Congress in the last 20 years. While the former successfully occupied the majority of seats in the panchayat, Assembly as well as the Parliamentary elections, the latter was satisfied with a prominent share of votes and never made serious efforts to translate those votes into seats. The editorial then turned its attention to Mamata Banerjee and the Trinamul Congress. The editorial stated though this new party was designated to do well in the panchayat election that did not happen. It commented that though the TMC chief would point to the large number of unopposed wins by the Marxists and allege large-scale violence and intimidation as reasons for the poor result it cannot be denied that the elections have been more or less peaceful and held without much interference from the administration. The editorial wrote the blame for the average performance of the Trinamul Congress lies with its chief Banerjee and her followers. The editorial stated fickleness of the chief and the over dependence of the party on the charisma of such a chief were responsible for the defeat. The editorial analyzed the approach and outlook of the major political parties in the state post panchayat elections.

31st May, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 46 lines)
Headline: Left Front hold sway over samitis, suffers in gram panchayats
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that the Left Front was set to dominate rural West Bengal in the next 5 years. It said with the announcement of results in the gram panchayats and most of the panchayat samitis and zilla parishads it became clear that the performance of the TMC-BJP combine fell short of expectations in many districts. The report pointed out that the Front had retained its stranglehold only in Midnapore
and Coochbehar. The report commented everywhere else the Left support base showed signs of declining.

31st May, 1998  
**The Statesman** (1 column 24 lines) and (2 column 46 lines)  
**Headline:** CPI (M) betrayed us, says Forward Bloc leader / Infighting mars CPI (M) rural poll performance  
**Primary source:** Political party leader  

The report informed FB leader Robin Ghosh charged CPI (M) with deliberately masterminding his party’s debacle in the just concluded panchayat election. He claimed the CPI (M) betrayed the FB by fielding dummy candidates in most seats.

The other news in The Statesman identified infighting as the main reason for the erosion of the Left vote bank in rural areas. This report stated that in spite of this the Left was happy that the TMC-BJP combine had failed to upset their applecart.

31st May, 1998  
**Aajkaal** (1 column 55 lines)  
**Headline:** We’re forming 50 boards fighting the Trinamul: Tapan  

The news reported that BJP leader Tapan Sikder announced that his party was satisfied to form just 50 panchayat boards but was not to ready to sacrifice self-esteem to unite against CPI (M).

1st June, 1998  
**The Statesman** (3 columns 36 lines) **Aajkaal** (1 column 83 lines) and **Anandabazar Patrika** (1 column 80 lines)  
**Headline:** 4 RSP men killed, 90 houses burnt in Basanti / 4 RSP supporters burnt to death in Basanti / 5 RSP supporters burned to death by CPI (M)  
**Reporters / Correspondents**  

The reports informed just after the elections 4 (5 according to Anandabazar Patrika) RSP members were killed and 90 houses of RSP workers were torched by CPI (M) cadres in Basanti, South 24 Parganas. The reports said the violence was a planned one to avenge the loss of panchayat seats to the RSP in the area.

The Aajkaal report indicted the CPI (M) for fomenting violence in many places.
1st June, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 63 lines)
Headline: Opposition defeated, all zilla parishads won by Front
Reporters / Correspondents

The report commented that the Left Front has virtually wiped out the
opposition in the panchayat election and emerged victorious in all the 16 zilla parishads. The report stated the chief minister and veteran CPI (M) leader, Jyoti Basu himself took the lead to ensure LF victory in the panchayat election as this was the last panchayat election under his chief minister ship. But the report maintained there was one hiccup in this overall phenomenal election result and that was opposition inroads in 8 districts at the gram panchayat level.

1st June, 1998 / 3rd June, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 28 lines) Aajkaal (2 columns 28 lines)
Headline: LF holds its own in Birbhum / CPI (M)-expelled candidates win at 2 zilla parishads
Reporter / Correspondent

The report reflected on the Left’s fortune in Birbhum. The report stated that the TMC-BJP combine failed to upset the Left in this district considered to be Left bastion for the last 20 years. The report discussed the results in the three tiers. It mentioned that there were reverses in some pockets but the Congress emerged as the dark horse in these areas. The report specified that though the CPI (M) has neutralized the impact of the BJP-TMC combine, the danger lay within, from the Front constituents.

The Aajkaal in its report on the 3rd June stated that there was problem in Birbhum LF due to the defeat of FB candidates in two zilla parishad seats as those were won by expelled CPI (M) candidates. The report stated FB has accused the CPI (M) of breaching trust and helping its erstwhile members.

1st June, 1998
The Statesman (3 columns 75 lines)
Headline: Left suffers minor losses, retains overall sway
Reporter / Correspondent

The report was a repeat of reports on LF control over the panchayats in the next 5 years. One specific comment in this report summed up the actual power that
Chapter 11

the Left was set to enjoy – the control over funds allocated for development of the rural areas as the LF completely dominated the zilla parishad results. There was a repeat of the analysis of the TMC-BJP and Congress’s fortune as well as of the inference that the RSP and CPI had maintained their status quo while FB lost some ground. The report also informed that allegations of post poll atrocities have started to pour in at the state administration headquarters.

1st June, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 51 lines)

Headline: Trinamul result get bad to worse as we move away from areas adjoining Kolkata to interiors

Reporter / Correspondent

The report observed that the result of the Trinamul Congress deteriorated in the interior regions like North Coochbehar and South Purulia. The report stated the party fared well in districts adjoining Kolkata. This observation was also highlighted in a Statesman report on the 30th May and in the editorial in the same newspaper on the 31st May.

1st June, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 130 lines)

Headline: Panchayat: Indication of result (Editorial)

The editorial commented the CPI (M) leadership was virtually relieved that all the prophecies about the TMC-BJP alliance set to cause a few upsets in this years’ panchayat election did not after all come true. But the editorial wrote there was no need for the Left to be assured as yet as the primary analysis of the results revealed that the LF’s seat count has reduced by 9% at the gram panchayat level while the seat count of the opposition parties have increased by 12%. This, the report said, was a clear indication of the rise of anti-Left votes which can have far-fetched implications in the next Assembly elections. The editorial wrote that increase of anti-Left votes may not translate into anti-Left seats as the anti-Left votes would be divided between the Trinamul Congress, Congress and the BJP. The report wrote though the TMC has emerged as the stronger opposition party, the Congress was not totally wiped out and there were seats where the TMC was a distant third to the Congress. The other characteristic of the voting pattern was also elaborated in the editorial – anti-Left
votes were dominant in the districts adjoining Kolkata, the state’s capital, but in the remote rural areas LF was still invincible. The editorial raised doubt on the longevity of the Trinamul-BJP alliance and also pointed out that the BJP’s communal identity has alienated a section of the voters (the Muslim community) from the Trinamul and predicted this may hamper the political fate of the TMC in the near future too. The editorial concluded the shortcomings of the opposition parties notwithstanding the LF need not be elated over the results as corruption, nepotism and misuse of power would be the cause of its downfall without even much effort from the opposition forces.

2nd June, 1998

The Statesman (3 columns 72 lines) / The Telegraph (2 columns 50 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 28 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 64 lines)

Headline: RSP condemns attack / Unity at stake, RSP warns Left Front / Basanti: RSP wants independent enquiry commission / CPI (M) attacked in a planned manner: Debabrata

Primary source: Political party leadership

The reports informed RSP has condemned the ‘barbaric’ act in Basanti and warned that Front unity would suffer if CPI (M) cadres continued their onslaught against RSP supporters post panchayat election. The reports commented that the RSP spokesperson stopped short of describing the incident as a ‘reign of terror unleashed by the CPI (M)’ for the sake of Front unity. The report said spokesperson remarked “the incident exposed the brutality of a section of uncontrollable elements in the CPI (M).” The reports also said that the RSP spokesperson Debabrata Bandopadhyay commented that the party was convinced of the hand of the administration in the incident and wanted an independent enquiry into the incident.

The Anandabazar report quoted the RSP state secretary, Debabrata Bandopadhyay “the attack in Basanti was a planned one by the CPI (M).” The RSP leader indicated that as the party’s result was far better than the bigger constituent, it had to face the music. The RSP secretary also stated that his party’s claim that its influence has increased in the rural areas was justified by its increase of seats. The other details in the report resembled those published in a report in the Aajkaal.

2nd June, 1998

The Telegraph (3 columns 111 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 118 lines) / The Statesman (4 columns 92 lines)
The bloody carnage in Basanti which saw 4 RSP members hacked and 2 others’ limb chopped off and the aftermath of the butchery was highlighted in these reports. The reports informed 15 men were admitted to the hospital following the assault, two were missing and 150 houses were burnt in the incident. They wrote that villagers smoldered in anger at the gruesome murders and women of the affected families cried themselves hoarse. The report wrote villagers said RSP’s pact with the TMC and the consequent handsome result had irked the CPI (M) cadres.

The Telegraph report stated that the brutality of the incident underlined the importance of elections for political parties was restricted to their concern about the rural vote bank, the hypocrisy of political parties as coalition partners’ bayed for each other’s blood for revenge.

The Aajkaal pointed out the inclusion of CPI (M) supporters into the RSP fold before the panchayat polls was the main cause of tension between the two parties which has escalated to such a murderous height. This report further said the villagers have identified the kingpin in the incident and alleged that the police connived with the CPI (M) goons and fired at the unarmed mob. The reports concluded terror continued unabated in Basanti.

The Statesman report said there was silence of a burning ghat in Basanti and the objective behind the CPI (M) rampage was that it wanted to teach RSP a political lesson as the party had refused to reach a seat agreement with the CPI (M) in Basanti, Gosaba and Canning blocks of South 24 Parganas where it had a strong presence.

2nd June, 1998

Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 102 lines)

The report wrote the attacks in Basanti, South 24 Parganas were comparable to those executed by the notorious dacoits of Chambal (a dacoit haven in Central India). The report stated that on the fateful day CPI (M) cadres surrounded the villages and went on a looting and killing spree. The report emphasized the police did not respond
to the desperate calls of the villagers. It said some villagers even alleged CPI (M) workers took the police into confidence before carrying out the attacks. The report added RSP supporters repented if they had deserted the Front and joined the Trinamul Congress they would not have met with such a predicament.

2nd June, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 8 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) must maintain peace in villages
Primary source: Political party leaders
   The news reported CPI ((M) leaders Sailen Dasgupta and Jyoti Basu urged party leaders and workers to take active role in ensuring peace around the state.

2nd June, 1998
The Telegraph (4 columns 104 lines)
Headline: Buoyant LF plan to boost rural growth
Primary source: Political party leadership
   The report specified that buoyed by its victory the LF has decided to push through a number of steps towards generation of assets by the panchayats. The report stated that the domineering status of the Front, and particularly the CPI (M), has come as a morale booster as the Front and the CPI (M) faced their stiffest challenge in the last 20 years. The report said CPI (M) party insiders admitted that they feared substantial erosion not only because of the formation of the new alliance between TMC and BJP but also because of rampant allegations of corruption, nepotism and malfunctioning of a large number of panchayat bodies and the specter of a disunited Front.

2nd June, 1998
The Statesman (1 column 44 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) claims resounding success in elections
Primary source: Political party leadership
   The report said CPI (M) was happy that it has achieved a ‘resounding success’ in the panchayat election despite the offensive launched by the opposition parties and the slander campaign by most news dailies. The party said that the one-sided results have vindicated its stand before the Assembly polls.
Here it needs to be pointed out that the print media was the most visible mass media in Bengal in 1998. The other potent media, the audio-visual media existed in the form of Doordarshan, a government controlled electronic media, with limited airtime devoted to news as it produced different programs and catered to all types of audience. The nature of ownership forbade scathing criticism of political parties, insightful observations and discerning interpretations in the broadcasting channel. People relied on the print media for holistic analysis of an issue and the political parties and leaders were also forced to value the opinion of the mainstream newspapers with substantial readers.

2nd June, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 60 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)'s seats reduced, those of other LF constituents increased
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed that the CPI (M)'s seat count has reduced while that of the other Left partners increased. The report stated RSP registered the maximum increase. The report informed the LF's seat count decreased by 4% at the panchayat samiti level but the brunt of the losses was borne by the CPI (M).

2nd June, 1998
The Statesman (2 columns 37 lines) and (1 column 14 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) unleashes terror in Burdwan / Trinamul men attack CPI (M) procession
Reporter / Correspondent
The news reported post-poll violence in Burdwan has claimed the life of one TMC supporter and injured 20 others.

Elsewhere 20 CPI (M) activists were injured when a group of TMC supporters attacked a CPI (M) victory procession.

3rd June, 1998
The Statesman (3 columns 72 lines) / The Telegraph (2 columns 44 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 148 lines)
Headline: Basu reassures RSP leaders on Basanti / Unhappy Basu demands post-poll violence reports / Basanti murders: Buddha supports disconcerted Basu, Kshiti argue
Primary source: Political party leaders

The reports said that the chief minister was unhappy with the way the police and administration has handled the situation in Bankura, Murshidabad and South 24 Parganas post panchayat elections. The reports pointed out 12 people have died and nearly 100 were injured in violent incidents during and after the polls in these districts. The reports said Basu assured the RSP ministers of his cabinet who met him that there would not be any escalation of violence in these districts. The RSP leaders displayed the bullets used in attacks on RSP supporters in Basanti. The report added that though Basu promised action against the culprits, the CPI (M) leadership was mum on whether action would be initiated against those who were allegedly involved in the attack.

The Anandabazar Patrika reported RSP leaders repeated to Basu that Left Front unity would be jeopardized if attacks on smaller parties continued. They also reiterated the allegation that CPI (M) supporters carried out the barbaric attack unable to bear the fact that they were defeated in all 6 zilla parishad seats.

3rd June, 1998
The Telegraph (3 columns 84 lines)
Headline: Basu main culprit: Mamata
Primary source: Political party leader

The report informed the TMC chief reportedly urged the smaller Left constituents to join the opposition parties in their combat against terror. The report stated she claimed total lawlessness prevailed in the post panchayat election scenario and blamed chief minister Jyoti Basu for the state of affairs.

3rd June, 1998
The Telegraph (1 column 65 lines)
Headline: Brotherly hate (Editorial)

The editorial commented that the smaller Left Front partners have allowed the bigger ally to continue bullying and were now facing inevitable self-destruction. The editorial termed the killings as fratricide that derided the political partnership between the two parties. It described the horror of the Basanti incident in great detail. The report underlined the fact that though Front partners projected a united face before the election, the undercurrent of discontent was palpable in the lower rungs during every
panchayat election. The editorial related the brutal incident to the wrath of CPI (M) workers on the RSP after the latter supplanted it in several seats. It indicated that power change was the main reason behind the gruesome murders and expressed concern that if the taking away of power by a coalition partner had this implication then what was the nature and extent of power that panchayat functionaries were enjoying. The second reason identified by the editorial as the reason for the attack was that the CPI (M) workers had become audacious to the extent where they bullied and intimidated ordinary people at will and got away with the crime.

3rd June, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 54 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) supporter killed in Birbhum clash, road-blockade
Reporter / Correspondent
The news item reported an incidence of violence in Birbhum following the panchayat poll results. A CPI (M) worker was killed in a political clash. The report said the CPI (M) supporters put up a road blockade later to protest the matter.

3rd June, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 17 lines) and (1 column 19 lines)
Headline: 10 CPI (M) workers injured in post-poll clashes / Trinamul run amok in Khanakul police station, 5 policemen injured
Reporter / Correspondent
The news items reported several political clashes in the state following the panchayat election. The first incident was in Basudebpur where 10 CPI (M) workers were injured during clash with opposition members. In the second incident in Khanakul, Hooghly 5 policemen were injured in an attack by Trinamul and BJP activists while they tried to stave off an attack on CPI (M) workers. The report said the Trinamul and BJP workers however claimed that they were protesting the arrest of their colleagues.

4th June, 1998
The Telegraph (6 columns 96 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 32 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 42 lines)
Headline: Left seeks SUCI help to stop bigger enemy / SUCI, naxal help to be taken by CPI (M) to form boards / No boards at any level would be created with the help of dummy candidates: Basu

Primary source: Political party / leaders

The reports specified the Left Front has sought the help of smaller parties like the SUCI and some pro-naxalite groups to prevent the bigger enemy, TMC-BJP combine, from forming panchayat boards. The Left chairman admitted that the failure to reach a consensus among Front partners had led to a setback at the gram panchayat level, making it difficult for the Left Front to form panchayat boards in many districts. The Aajkaal report said that Jyoti Basu stated that boards would not be formed with victorious dummy candidates as it went against the LF principle provided all constituents abided by the Front’s decision. The Anandabazar Patrika had reported on this issue on the 3rd June. The Aajkaal report wrote that the LF Committee has adopted a few strategies to form panchayat boards in places where pre-electoral understanding eluded the Front partners. The report commented there were many pre-poll disagreements between the CPI (M) and the RSP. Even with a divided house Front partners managed victory in many seats but now they were finding it difficult to elect a unanimous Pradhan and upo-pradhan in those concerned gram panchayat areas. The reports were skeptical about the smooth functioning of the panchayat board in the future with a divided house and asserted the need to achieve a post electoral understanding between LF partners for the purpose.

4th June, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 102 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 12 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) worker dies in petrol bomb burst; 4 others injured / 5 CPI (M) workers injured in bombs made by CPI (M)

Reporter / Correspondent

The news items reported another CPI (M) worker died in a bomb attack while 4 other supporters were injured. The reports said the Congress workers were allegedly behind the attack as the CPI (M) had wrested the gram panchayat seat from the Congress.

4th June, 1998
Aajkaal (1 column 8 lines)

Headline: Unite to resist terror
Primary source: Political party leadership

The news reported Congress has invited all opposition forces to unite to resist CPI (M) terror.

5th June, 1998
The Telegraph (3 column 90 lines)
Headline: Mamata zeroes in Left renegades
Primary source: Political party leadership

The report informed the Trinamul Congress would seek help of the smaller Front partners to form panchayat boards in areas where there was a tie between the CPI (M) and TMC. The report further informed Trinamul has already forged an alliance with the dissidents of Left constituents who have won as independents.

5th June, 1998
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 23 lines)
Headline: CPI worker killed in CPI (M) attack
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported even though the chief minister condemned the Basanti incident and urged the Front constituents to observe restrain, there was another incident of murder of a supporter of another political ally. The report informed in Midnapore CPI (M) workers allegedly hacked to death a CPI supporter. The report stated the CPI spokesperson said this would be a setback for Left unity.

5th June, 1998
Aajkaal (2 columns 22 lines)
Headline: SUCI terror: CPI (M) candidate fail to return even after win
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported two incidents of violence. The first incident reported a CPI (M) gram panchayat member fled her home in fear of attacks by SUCI supporters. In Canning, South 24 Parganas a CPI (M) meeting in protest of violence was attacked by Congress workers who were later joined by Trinamul members. The report added many CPI (M) workers have reportedly fled their homes in the area.

The newspaper reports during the panchayat poll campaigning and after the panchayat election suggest that the political parties, their leaders and their statements,
allegations and counter-allegations and violence against each other were staple of the newspaper’s coverage. The participation of the grassroots, the plans of development and their implementation, grass-root expectations and grievance did not interest the media much. The panchayat system was intended for political empowerment of the grassroots in the rural areas through their participation in the process and not for the political parties and their leaders who were already the opinion leaders in the society. But the sample newspapers were so preoccupied with the activities and views of the opinion leaders that they rarely projected the grass-root perspective.

CONCLUSION

While there was a lot of expectation about read Trinamul-BJP combine’s performance in the 1998 panchayat elections, the outcome was different. The Left Front swept the polls unilaterally and the combine had to be satisfied with minor upsets in the districts adjoining Kolkata. The reports in the sample newspapers repeatedly emphasized that LF was set to experience a major jolt in the panchayat elections, the Trinamul Congress-BJP alliance was set to give a stiff challenge to the LF in rural Bengal and the Congress faced near oblivion. In fact none of these speculations came true as the Left Front experienced only minor hiccups at the gram panchayat and panchayat samiti level while at the zilla parishad level which was the decision-making body in the panchayat system and controlled the purse string, the demolition of the opposition was absolute. The TMC-BJP definitely offered some resistance to the Left domination in some districts but it was clearly not up to the expectation level or in accordance with the hype generated by the newspapers. The TMC was more vocal than the Congress and there was a definite surge of popular support for the TMC-BJP combine but the sample newspapers misjudged the extent of that support. As for the chances of the Congress the sample newspapers derided the party and gave it little chance in the elections which was again proved wrong.

It was not erroneous or unethical for the sample newspapers to offer assumptions but being mass media they should have been responsible enough to base those assumptions on factual observations. The interpretations of the sample newspapers were mostly based on opinions of political party activists or on a reporters’ individual viewpoint and guided by a newspaper’s policy and generally
excluded the grass-root perspectives. Its inclusion could have depicted facts more akin to truth and reality.

The sample newspapers relied on specific news sources like the political parties and their leaders and not the villagers for whom the panchayat system was framed. The graphical analysis of news sources invoked by the sample newspapers is reflected in Table 11.2 below which gives a more clearer picture of the discrimination. They were guilty of discrimination while selecting news items giving priority to those that related to political parties – their status and their prospect - ignoring the plight of the grassroots under the panchayat system, avoiding introspection of the workings of the panchayats as well as the grassroots’ role in the panchayat bodies. As a result information circulated by the mass media was mostly one-sided and of not much help to the grass-root voters though there was abundant news on the subject [see Table 11.1 (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e)]. The speculative assumptions that abounded in the sample newspapers’ coverage made the reports and their observations more unacceptable to the grass-root voters. It is amply clear that mass media’s influence on its audience in a democratic set-up was not binding and the election process of panchayat representatives was not dependent on mass media.
WEEKLY ANALYSIS OF NEWS ITEMS IN SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS (1998)

### Week I - Date: 10.05.1998 - 16.05.1998

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Newspaper</th>
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<td>The Statesman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aajkaal</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anandabazar Patrika</td>
<td>17</td>
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Table 11.1 (a): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 10.05.1998-16.05.1998

![Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 10.05.1998-16.05.1998](image)

Figure 11.1 (a): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 10.05.1998-16.05.1998

### Week II - Date: 17.05.1998 - 23.05.1998

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anandabazar Patrika</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.1 (b): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 17.05.1998-23.05.1998
Figure 11.1 (b): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 17.05.1998-23.05.1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Newspapers</th>
<th>No. of News Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Telegraph</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Statesman</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aajkaal</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anandabazar Patrika</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.1 (c): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 24.05.1998-30.05.1998

Figure 11.1 (c): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 24.05.1998-30.05.1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Newspapers</th>
<th>No. of News Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anandabazar Patrika</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aajkaal</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Statesman</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Telegraph</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11.1 (d): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 31.05.1998 - 05.06.1998

Figure 11.1 (d): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 31.05.1998 - 05.06.1998
TOTAL NEWS ITEMS IN SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTION DURING 10.05.1998 - 05.06.1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF THE NEWSPAPER</th>
<th>NO. OF NEWS ITEMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE TELEGRAPH</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE STATESMAN</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAJKAAL</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANANDABAZAR PATRIKA</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.1 (e): Total News Items in Sample Newspapers on Panchayat Election during 10.05.1998 - 05.06.1998

Figure 11.1 (e): Total News Items in Sample Newspapers on Panchayat Election during 10.05.1998 - 05.06.1998
SOURCE-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS ITEMS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS DURING 10.05.1998 - 05.06.1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>Reporters / Correspondents / News Agencies</th>
<th>Political Party leaders / Spokespersons / Party briefs, manifesto etc.</th>
<th>Administration including Ministers, Police, Officials</th>
<th>Grass-root members / voters / candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anandabazar Patrika</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aajkaal</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Statesman</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Telegraph</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.2: Source-Wise Distribution of News Items on Panchayat Elections during 10.05.1998 - 05.06.1998

Figure 11.2: Source-Wise Distribution of News Items on Panchayat Elections during 10.05.1998 - 05.06.1998