CHAPTER 12

COVERAGE OF 2003 PANCHAYAT ELECTION BY SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS

INTRODUCTION

The people’s verdict in the 2003 panchayat election would have significant implications for the LF government as well as the opposition parties and coalitions. The LF government was banking on people support for its new agrarian and industrial policies. For the Trinamul Congress led by Mamata Banerjee it was chance to prove itself as a strong contender in state politics. The political observers were eager to see whether her party would be successful in turning the tables against the Left Front or at least cause a dent in the dominance enjoyed by them in the last 25 years or the dominance of the CPI (M) led Front in rural areas would continue unabated.

The 2003 panchayat election was different from the previous years from the perspective of the mass media too. The electronic media while present in the previous years was not omnipresent as it was this year. The reason was the newly launched satellite television channels in the regional language which gave wider access to audiences and multiple news and information option especially related to local incidents. The voters finally had access to varied news, more news items and varied interpretations of news. Previously the government-controlled Doordarshan almost single-handedly provided news on all events. Its news representations were not always free of bias but the numerous satellite channels with different political inclinations gave the audience opportunity to explore channels that subscribe their views. It would not be impertinent to say here that it was time for the print media too to change its perspective based on this new development in the electronic media. It was not the sole disseminator of news anymore. Moreover the previous monopoly it had over the detailed description and analysis of news items was lost to the 24X7 news channel that had ample air space to vividly discuss the event. The broadcast media may be expensive in terms of the start-up cost but thereafter the cost is negligible. The advantages of community viewing and advantage for the unlettered made the audio-visual media more appropriate for the rural audiences. The newspaper coverage needed to be more insightful and analytic to retain their efficacy in this age
of pervasive audio-visual presence. This chapter would give us an idea of how different was the news coverage by the press or the coverage remained the same with similar perspectives and pattern.

**DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS CONTENT ON 2003 PANCHAYAT ELECTION**

The 4 mainstream newspapers from where items referring to 2003 panchayat elections were included are The Statesman, The Telegraph, Anandabazar Patrika and Aajkaal. The sample period is from 21st April to 17th May. Election was scheduled on 11th May, 2003.

**NEWS ITEMS PUBLISHED BY THE SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTION DURING 21ST APRIL, 2003 AND 17TH May 2003**

21st April, 2003
The Statesman (2 columns 37 lines) / The Telegraph (3 columns 81 lines)
Headline: Mamata takes battle to Delhi / Atal assures Advani scan after Mamata cry
Primary source: Political party leaders

Both the reports informed that BJP and Trinamul planned to raise the issue of prevention of opposition candidates from filing nominations in the West Bengal panchayat polls in Parliament. The reports specified Mamata Banerjee met Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and BJP President Venkiah Naidu and agreed to put up a united front against the CPI (M)’s “reign of terror” in the forthcoming panchayat election. The reports also said that Banerjee stated “Marxists goons” have not allowed the opposition to file nominations in 20000 seats in the forthcoming panchayat elections but wherever her candidates have filed nominations they had good chances of winning. The report quoted the BJP chief “the chief minister’s appeal to his party cadres to allow opposition candidates to file their nominations showed that opposition parties are at the mercy of the CPI (M) workers in West Bengal.”

In the Telegraph report Banerjee claimed that houses of opposition candidates were set on fire, they were threatened and assaulted and women candidates were paraded naked to force them to withdraw their candidature. The report said the Prime
Minister assured the TMC leader that the Union Home minister L. K. Advani would supervision the law and order situation of the state in the coming days.

21st April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 20 lines)
Headline: Opposition platform by Radhika
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that rebel CPI (M) leader Radhikaranjan Pramanik, announced a united "opposition stage" with Mamata Banerjee to uproot CPI (M) from the state. The report informed Pramanick in a public meeting in Diamond Harbour vowed to stop CPI (M) terror in the panchayat elections.

21st April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 78 lines)
Headline: Opposition candidates forced to withdraw nominations
Reporter / Correspondent

The report specified that after threats to the opposition candidates to refrain from submitting nominations now there were threats to withdraw nominations even before the last date of submitting nominations ended that day. The report said though all parties made allegation against each other in this matter the maximum allegation was against the CPI (M). The report referred to incidents in Pursura in Hooghly and Daspur in Midnapore. In South 24 Parganas LF constituent RSP alleged that CPI (M) has abducted two candidates.

21st April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 64 lines)
Headline: Two parties clash at Kashimpur, attack in a meeting in Gaighata, BDO gheraoed in Masat
Reporter / Correspondent

The report observed as the date of the panchayat election neared collision between opponents was on the rise. This report informed about collision between Trinamul and CPI (M) in South 24 Parganas' Kashimpur, the attack of a Trinamul leader during a political meeting at Gaighata and gherao of a the BDO in Masat, Hooghly by BJP supporters claiming irregularities in nomination submission.
21st April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 34 lines)
Headline: Congress wants Mamata to apologize for jibe at Pranab / Primary source: Political party
The report informed that Congress and Trinamul Congress were again at a tussle with each other before the panchayat election with Congress demanding apology from Mamata Banerjee for her jibe at Pranab Mukherjee. The report said the dispute between the two opposition parties can facilitate the CPI (M). The report added BJP has complained to the Election Commissioner that after submission of nominations, CPI (M) workers were forcing their candidates to withdraw nominations. Trinamul spokesperson Pankaj Banerjee also complained that in about 20000 seats BJP and Trinamul candidates were not allowed to file their nominations. He appealed to the Election Commissioner to postpone the election process in seats where opposition candidates failed to submit nominations.

21st April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 78 lines)
Headline: 60000 nominations submitted on the last day Reporter / Correspondent
The report said a record 60000 nominations was submitted in the last day, many more than the nominations submitted in the last few days. Majority of these nominations, the report informed were submitted by opposition party independent candidates. CPI (M) state secretary Anil Biswas informed that CPI (M) workers have been advised to help opposition candidates to submit their nominations taking cue from chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya’s request to ruling party members to allow opposition nominees to file nominations. The report said the opposition, however, feared that the CPI (M) may field dummy candidates in the name of helping them. The report added there was apprehension among the opposition members that most of the 60000 nominations filed on the last day may be disqualified and many ruling party candidates would be elected unopposed as a result. The report said the Election Commission also held a similar view.

21st April, 2003
Aajkaal (Hard copy not available)
Headline: LF parties to contest each other in 4000 seats / CPI (M) activists killed in Murshidabad and Nadia

Reporter / Correspondent

The first report pointed out that only in 4000 out of the 58000 panchayat seats Left Front could not put up a united candidate against opposition parties. The report attributed the comment to LF chairman Biman Bose.

In the second news item it was informed that a CPI (M) activist was murdered in Murshidabad and another activist of the party’s youth wing was murdered in Nadia by anti-socials. The report said the party alleged these were political murders before the panchayat polls. The report informed 6 political activists were murdered in last nine days in clashes between political parties.

22nd April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 78 lines)
Headline: Threat to withdraw nomination, violence, kidnapping

Reporter / Correspondent

The report stated 24 hours before the last date for submitting nominations in Panchayat election every party complained against each other. Each party complained that their party men were being compelled by the opposition to withdraw nominations. There were several reports of kidnapping of candidates before they went to file nominations. The majority of the complaints were made against the CPI (M). In other cases the main opposition Trinamul Congress was also accused. The report pointed out in Hooghly the Trinamul Congress complained to the District Magistrate and Police Super that houses of their supporters were burned by CPI (M) men, in Midnapore, the Trinamul Congress as well as the Congress made similar complaints against the CPI (M), in Howrah a Congress leader said that party candidates for panchayat samiti seats have been forced to withdraw their nominations, in South 24 parganas, RSP complained that its candidates were abducted by CPI (M).

22nd April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 53 lines)
Headline: Mamata wants Delhi’s help to tackle CPI (M) terror

Primary source: Political party leader

The report informed Mamata Banerjee again appealed for Central intervention on the issue of CPI (M) terror before panchayat election in Parliament. The report said
she met the Union Home minister and submitted a report on the state of affairs in West Bengal. The Home minister assured her that he would look into the matter. BJP president Venkiah Naidu proposed that wherever candidates were forced to withdraw nominations, the election should be postponed and the last date for submitting nominations extended to allow willing candidates to file nominations.

22nd April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 122 lines)
Headline: What kind of election is this? (Editorial)

The editorial said the panchayat election in the state has turned into a farce. The editorial said this was unfortunate as the panchayati raj system in the state had gathered the praise of the country and even beyond the shores of this country. The editorial said corruption and nepotism have turned the system almost defunct. The editorial said the CPI (M) and the Left Front has become almost obsessive about winning the elections so much so that opposition candidates were resisted from filing nominations and that’s the reason why opposition could not file nominations in 18,000 seats. The editorial said it cannot be said the opposition claim of terror was without any basis as the chief minister himself made a request to the CPI (M) supporters to allow opposition members to file nominations. The report also questioned the authority of a political party leader (Anil Biswas) to facilitate the other political parties in filing nominations in a democratic society. The editorial pointed out the election of record number of ruling party members unopposed also pointed to stifling of opposition voices. The editorial also questioned the approach of the opposition parties and concluded that election in the state has denigrated to competition between political organizations.

Here we need to point out that the party-dominated panchayat election held little relevance for grass-root participation. Most of the candidates were political nominees and the so-called ‘independent’ candidates were either dissidents from political parties with personal grudge or grievance. Others were not serious contenders as news reports later on revealed that many school teachers have filed nominations to avoid poll duty. The issue of grass-root empowerment was overshadowed by these perspectives and intrinsic analysis by the mass media would have pointed out how much actual grass-root participation was involved in the panchayat election process or the work of the panchayat bodies.
22\textsuperscript{nd} May, 2003

The Telegraph (1 column 28 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 112 lines)

**Headline:** CM assures Advani of violence-free polls / Election would be held peacefully, Buddhadeb assures Advani

**Primary source:** Chief Minister (Administration)

The reports informed that the West Bengal chief minister has assured the Union Home minister that the panchayat election will be conducted peacefully. The reports said Bhattacharya stated that it was opposition nature to complain against the ruling party. He said he was always in touch with opposition party men and if there was any problem he would ask the police to take immediate steps. The reports said he denied the allegation that ruling party men have forced others to withdraw nominations and prevented filing of nominations in many cases. He said if nobody submits nomination there was nothing that the administration can do. The report stated the other Left allies supported the chief minister’s stand on the issue but Trinamul Congress leader Pankaj Banerjee complained that though Bhattacharya claimed he was in touch with opposition members they could not find him when they went to file complaint. The Anandabazar report said he alleged, on one hand, the chief minister expressed concern for the wrongful activities of his party, on the other hand terror by his party members continued unabated.

22\textsuperscript{nd} April, 2003

The Telegraph (1 column 47 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 54 lines)

**Headline:** Bloc retreat for ‘greater’ Left unity / Forward Bloc leadership instructs district leaders to resolve differences with CPI (M)

**Primary source:** Political party leadership

The news items informed Forward Bloc leaders have sent order to the district leadership to end confrontation with CPI (M). Ashok Ghosh, the state secretary of Forward Bloc said wherever there was a pact with the CPI (M), party members have been ordered to withdraw nomination. The reports said in response to Ashok Ghosh’s statement, Biman Basu, Chairman, Left Front said that at places where there was agreement all Front partners were expected to withdraw candidates in favor of official nominees.

The Telegraph report added that CPI (M) State Secretary Anil Biswas told reporters that his party had given a number of seats to other Front constituents, which it had won during the 1998 panchayat election for greater unity among partners.
22nd April, 2003
The Telegraph (4 columns 17 lines)
Headline: CPM-babus versus CM-babu versus Mamata
Reporter / Correspondent

The reporter Ashis Chakrabarti commented that the chief minister cannot shut his eyes from the strong arm tactics in large parts of the state as not only the opposition members but even partners have accused the Marxists of terrorizing them out of poll battle. The reporter said CPI (M) state secretary Anil Biswas’s statement that the opposition could not find candidates in 20000 seats is a lie as panchayat politics have created conflicting interests and deep divisions in the village societies and there was bound to be opposition. The reporter commented that the reason for dearth of opposition candidates was the presence of terror machines in pockets of Midnapore, Bankura and Hooghly and the state government failure to reign in ruling party excesses.

22nd April, 2003
The Statesman (2 columns 22 lines)
Headline: Trinamul wants 2nd shot
Primary source: Political party / leader

The report stated TMC leader Pankaj Banerjee in a letter to the state Election Commission complained that CPI (M)'s terror tactics has forced Trinamul to stay away from filing nomination in as much as 20,000 seats. Citing this as murder of democracy, Banerjee demanded notification for fresh nominations in all these seats and the panchayat polls in these declared null and void. He added about 4000 Trinamul candidates had been forced to withdraw nominations by armed CPI (M) goons. The report stated that TMC chief Mamata Banerjee was happy with the way BJP leaders at the Centre had reacted to her complaints against the state administration. Miss Banerjee alleged that a reign of terror had been unleashed to disrupt the process of filing nomination by opposition candidates.

22nd April, 2003
The Statesman (Not available in Hard copy)
Headline: South 24 Parganas ready for polls: DM
Primary source: District Magistrate (Administration)

In this news item the district magistrate of South 24 Parganas interacted with reporter Imran Ahmed Siddiqui and apprised him about the preparedness of the
district administration for the panchayat election. He said the police was assessing the situation in all sensitive areas along with the need for armed military forces for a peaceful election.

22\textsuperscript{nd} April, 2003
Aajkaal (Hard copy not available)
Headline: Buddha informs Advani, EC to take action against ruling party excesses
Primary source: Chief Minister (Administration)

The news report stated chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya in a message to Lal Krishna Advani, the Union Home Minister regretted the fact that opposition parties could not submit nominations in some panchayat seats because of the terror unleashed by ruling party members. The report said he clarified if the District Magistrates send any report about the violence of CPI (M) then election commission will take necessary action.

22\textsuperscript{nd} April, 2003
Aajkaal (Hard copy not available)
Headline: RSP-FB must initiate efforts to establish unity at the lower levels: Biman
Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported Biman Bose has asked alliance parties like RSP and Forward Bloc to make efforts to establish unity and integrity at the lower levels during the panchayat election. The report said RSP and Forward Bloc have reportedly directed their district leadership to unite with other Left Front partners during the panchayat election. The report said Bose alleged that CPI (M) candidates were compelled not to submit nominations in three gram panchayat seats in Jambani under Jhargram Block due to the threat and violence by Jharkhand party.

23\textsuperscript{rd} April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 42 lines) and (2 columns 94 lines)* / The Telegraph (2 columns 37 lines) / The Statesman (1 column 96 lines)
Headline: No more nominations, Commission rules after talks with District Magistrates and Allegation against commission to the Centre / Law and order fine: poll panel / Rural polls on schedule
Primary source: Election Commission
Reporter / Correspondent (in case of the * marked news item)

The news items informed that the state Election Commission has declared that the last date of submitting nomination for the panchayat elections cannot be changed. The report said the Election Commissioner informed that the law and order situation in the state was satisfactory so the last date of submitting nomination cannot be postponed. The report informed the Election Commissioner said that he was satisfied with the talks with the district magistrates on the law and order situation besides though the opposition parties complained in the media that they could not file nominations in 20000 seats, there were no specific complaints from any of the district heads in this regard. The report said he informed, the election schedule will proceed as notified.

The Telegraph report said though the Trinamul Congress and the BJP was demanding postponement of panchayat election over “terror tactic” of the CPI (M), the Congress distanced itself from the claim. Congress leader Somen Mitra was quoted, “CPI (M) always terrorizes the opposition that means the election can never be held.” The CPI (M) state secretary Anil Biswas was quoted “there was no need to postpone polls or extend time-frame for filing nominations.” The Aajkaal also reported this information.

The Statesman report said the state Election Commissioner specifically asked for comments from District Magistrates of sensitive areas and asked all DMs to ensure that candidates abided by the model code of conduct at all circumstances.

The second report in the Anandabazar indicated that opposition parties in West Bengal, BJP and Trinamul Congress were offended by the role of State Election Commission and they have decided to approach the Centre on this matter. Pankaj Banerjee of the TMC said that Election commission was helping the ruling party with its terror activities.

23rd April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 83 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) win unopposed in 5 blocks in Arambag

Reporters / Correspondent

The report informed that in the forthcoming election there will be no vote in 5 out of 6 blocks in the Arambag subdivision. The report explained the CPI (M)
candidates were elected without contest as opposition candidates failed to file
nominations against them or withdrew nominations before the final date of
submission. The report observed that there were many complaints from several
districts of South Bengal that opposition candidates were threatened by CPI (M)
workers. The report elaborated in different areas of Hooghly, the two Midnapores,
Bankura, Birbhum and two 24 Parganas opposition candidates were forced to
withdraw their names by the ruling party members. The report added CPI (M) leader
Biman Basu, said that it was all false allegations against his party.

23rd April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 74 lines)
Headline: Nomination withdrawn under pressure in the last day too
Primary source: Political party representatives

The report stated many opposition candidates in the various South Bengal
districts were forced to withdraw nominations on the last day. The report said the
accusations were mostly against the CPI (M). The report said CPI (M) leader Biman
Bose rubbished the allegation and said that the opposition could not find candidates
and are blaming the CPI (M) wrongly. The report informed that Trinamul Congress
alleged that three of its party men were kidnapped from Baruipur in South 24
Parganas because they had filed nominations. The news pointed out that despite the
assurance of the chief minister, threat and intimidation of opposition members
continued unabated. It informed in Garbeta in West Midnapore out of the 122 gram
panchayat seats, opposition candidates were forced to withdraw their names from 108
seats. The Congress complained that the women candidates were particularly forced
to withdraw their nominations. The report informed that Venkaiya Naidu, the BJP
president has asked Mamata Banerjee to submit a list of the panchayat areas in West
Bengal where the opposition has been forced to withdraw names. Answering this
Banerjee said that the Trinamul Congress will prepare the list overnight and will
submit it to the Central government the next day. The report said opposition parties
claimed that the ruling CPI (M) has adopted few strategies to threaten the opposition
candidates and force them to withdraw their nominations. The strategies were
enumerated by the newspaper report as
a) Threatening women candidates that if they file nominations their husbands will be
killed.
b) Threatening to kill them.
c) Threatening to destroy their crop in their agricultural land.
d) Threatening to ostracize them from the society.

The report said the opposition claimed owing to the above reasons, many CPI (M) candidates won without any contest in the three tiers.

23rd April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 37 lines)
Headline: TMC demand imposition of Article 356 in West Bengal
Primary source: Political party leadership

The news reported that Dinesh Trivedi, Trinamul MP in the Rajya Sabha demanded the implementation of Article 356 in West Bengal for smooth conduct of the panchayat election. He criticized the Congress as they did not protest against the terror of CPI (M) before the panchayat vote. The report specified Surinder Singh Ahluwalia, BJP MP from Bihar complained about 18000-20000 opposition candidates were not able to file nominations and the state Election Commission and police remained mute spectators. Nilotpal Basu of the CPI (M) MP protested and said that there was no proof of the above allegations.

23rd April, 2003
The Statesman (Not available in hard copy)
Headline: CPM brings terror charges against Trinamul
Primary source: Political party leadership

The first report highlighted the pre-electoral situation in Nanoor, politically the most disturbed area in Birbhum. The report observed that the most interesting contest of the upcoming rural polls is likely to be held here, especially as according to the locals both the major parties were equally balanced. The CPI (M) alleged that their supporters and candidates were spending sleepless night or have fled from their homes due to the terror tactics adopted by Trinamul. Responding to these allegations Anubrata Mondal, district Trinamul leader said that CPI (M) has realized that it was going to lose power in the area and was hence leveling false charges.

23rd April, 2003
The Statesman (Not available in hard copy)
Pre-poll crackdown on Naxalites

The second report disclosed that in an attempt to combat Naxalite activities in the district before the panchayat polls, police of Krishnanagar, Nadia arrested two CPI (Maoist) activists from the Faltala area.

23rd April, 2003
The Statesman (1 column 37 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 48 lines)

Government reviews poll security measures

The news items reported that 1, 90,000 police personnel have been appointed for the panchayat polls. The reports further stated that the State government has demanded 70000 more policemen from the Centre for the smooth conduct of the panchayat polls.

23rd April, 2003
Aajkaal (Hard copy not available)

Weak organization and slackness led to failure to nominate candidates in panchayat election: Sikder / Kisan sabha helped us strengthen our party base

The first news item informed that Tapan Sikder, the Union BJP minister from West Bengal criticized the Trinamul and BJP coalition in the state. He commented that Trinamul and BJP have failed to nominate their candidates in most of the panchayat seats due to the weak organization and negligence.

The second news item referred to the general belief in the CPI (M) party ranks that Congress and Trinamul Congress have no Kisan (Farmer) Front, a proactive organization of the farmers who constituted the majority voters in the panchayat elections, like the CPI (M) and hence their fight in the panchayat election was designated to be ineffective.

23rd April, 2003
Aajkaal (Hard copy not available)

Gani frustrated with factionalism in Malda Congress / TMC threatening our workers (East Midnapore)
Primary source: Political party leader

The first news item reported that Congress leader Gani Khan Chowdhury was frustrated with the bickering between the various factions and weak organizational capacity of his party in Malda district. The report went on to elaborate on the factionalism in the district Congress and its prospect in the strife-ridden state.

The second news item referred to the Congress allegation that the Trinamul Congress resorted to violence in Contai, East Midnapur before panchayat election to threaten away Congress workers and supporters.

24th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 65 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) candidates win 31 zilla parishad seats unopposed
Reporter / Correspondent

The news item informed that in a record of sorts the CPI (M) has won 31 zilla parishad seats without contest this time. The report said in the previous 5 elections, no zilla parishad candidates had won without any contest and there were many candidates from other parties also who won without any contest but this year it was only CPI (M) candidates who had won uncontested. The total number of candidates who have won without any contest was 5128 this year, an increase of 9 times from 1998. The newspaper commented that was a glaring anomaly between the intention of participation and empowerment in the panchayats and the actual implementation of the ideology.

It is heartening to see that a sample newspaper pointed out the disparity in intention and reality. The newspaper did not provide any opinion on how to reverse the trend and involve the grassroots in the political process.

24th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 74 lines)
Headline: Terror reigns supreme in all districts
Reporter / Correspondent

The news referred to complaints by opposition parties’ that even after the last date of submitting nominations, ruling party members forced their candidates to withdraw nominations in about 830 gram panchayat seats. There were complaints from South and North 24 parganas, Nadia, Purulia, Dinajpur, Coochbehar, and
Jalpaiguri in this matter. The news further reported that the allies Trinamul and BJP walked in a procession against the terror of CPI (M) and campaigned for panchayat election. But at the end of that procession there was a disagreement between them about the issue of applying section 356 in West Bengal. The report referred to an incident in Purulia where a woman Trinamul candidate was picked up by CPI (M) members. There were other accusations of terror against the ruling party by the Trinamul and BJP as well as the FB in Nadia. The report said the charges ranged from threat to murder, to that of theft of irrigational pump. The report said there were allegations of CPI (M) strong arm tactics from various places of North 24 Parganas. The report said there were allegations from North Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri too with regard to forceful withdrawal of nominations. The report said respective CPI (M) district heads denied all allegations raised by the other parties.

24th April, 2003
The Statesman (1 column 54 lines) / The Telegraph (2 columns 50 lines)
Headline: LF bickering over seats persists / Front grapples with rebel nominees
Primary source: Political party leadership
The news reported the Left Front has failed to reduce the differences among partners over sharing of seats for the forthcoming panchayat poll even after the last date for withdrawal of nominations expired. The report pointed out that LF chairman Biman Bose could not specify the number of seats where unity could not be reached but RSP, a Front partner, put the figure at about 7000. The report said RSP leaders told the media soon after attending a LF meeting during the day that wrangling over seat sharing persisted. The report reminded the readers that in the last panchayat poll in 1998, LF partners fought among themselves in about 4500 seats. The report commented this time LF leaders have been claiming that unity would be better, but the ground reality was different. The report quoted Ashok Ghosh of the Forward Bloc “the LF controlled panchayats has to be run not by the dominant partner, but LF as a whole for better understanding between the partners.”

The Telegraph report on the dissension in the Left Front observed that LF partners were concerned over the failure to reach a consensus on seat adjustment for panchayat election. A majority of partners pointed out that it was embarrassing for them to address a public meeting in a place where they were fighting each other. The
report said Biman Bose, the LF Chairman urged official candidates to campaign more vigorously in disputed seats to prevent a division of votes.

24th April, 2003

The Statesman (1 column 28 lines)

Headline: Mamata for Article 356

Primary source: Political party leadership

This news was often referred to in the newspaper coverage of 2003 panchayat election. It stated that Mamata Banerjee has asked for Central intervention to improve the law and order situation in the state. The report also specified that Banerjee was set to address a joint rally with Venkiah Naidu, the BJP President at Shahid Minar in Kolkata to highlight how the run up to the panchayat polls was affected by Left terror.

24th April, 2003

Aajkaal (Hard copy not available)

Headline: CPI (M) gram panchayat member absolved of siphoning charge (1) / LF unity in tatters in 4 districts (2) / Opposition lack organization and resource: CPI (M) (3)

Reporter / Correspondent (1st and 2nd news items)

Primary source: Political party (3rd news item)

The first news item informed that a former gram panchayat member belonging to CPI (M) was released from the charge of misuse of panchayat funds.

The second news item in this newspaper informed that there was no unity among Left Front in four districts of South Bengal. The report said the ruling coalition struggled to keep its forces intact in these districts.

The third news item reported the claim of the ruling party that the opposition failed to nominate candidates for most seats where it blamed the terror and violence of the ruling party was due to the lack of organizational capacity. It pointed out such was the dearth of candidates that in Bhangar, South 24 parganas, Trinamul Congress has nominated a gram panchayat candidate who actually hailed from another gram panchayat area.

25th April, 2003

Aajkaal (Hard copy not available)
Headline: 8 party activists murdered: Anil / TMC rank divided in Hooghly / Political violence cause of failure to nominate / Congress candidates allege conspiracy in Kakdwip

Primary source: Political party leadership

The first news reported Anil Biswas, state secretary of CPI (M) alleged that 8 party activists were murdered before panchayat election.

The report also referred to a bickering in the Hooghly Trinamul Congress where the district secretary of the zilla Trinamul Congress submitted nomination as an independent candidate to contest in the forthcoming panchayat election.

The Trinamul Congress MP from north 24 parganas claimed that the party has adequate mass base but failed to nominate panchayat candidates in many areas due to political violence.

The report said in another incidence of internal bickering, this time in the Congress, some candidates of the party in Kakdwip, south 24 parganas complained that they were denied the party symbol due to the conspiracy of district leadership. They informed that they have reported the incident to the south 24 parganas police.

25th April, 2003
The Statesman (5 columns 34 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 83 lines)

Headline: 11% seats in LF kitty already / No opposition in 11% seats, Election Commission says petty incident

Reporter / Correspondent

The reports pointed out that the Left Front has notched up uncontested victories in more than 6,000 panchayat seats, nearly 10 times more than that in the last panchayat poll. The report sarcastically commented that it was indeed an indication that “democracy” in West Bengal has matured over the years.

The Statesman report further informed that the Union Home Secretary, N, Gopalaswamy called state election commissioner to ask why opposition candidates were being prevented from filing nominations.

The Anandabazar Patrika report said the Election Commission referred to the unopposed wins as “insignificant” though it was observed that uncontested wins were maximum in districts where the opposition alleged terror threats and strikes and attacks. The districts were Burdwan, Hooghly, West Midnapore and Bankura where 30% of uncontested wins happened.
The discussion about uncontested wins would make readers (and the voters) aware about the implications of such uncontested wins for democratic institutions.

25th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 87 lines)
Headline: Terrible fights in different districts
Reporter / Correspondent

The report commented that with the beginning of the countdown to the panchayat election, the conflict between different political parties has also started.

There were reports of collision from Burdwan and South 24 parganas. 18 people were injured in a clash between ruling party members and the opposition in Burdwan. The report said Mamata Banerjee claimed in Garia, South 24 Parganas, a TMC candidate was shot by CPI (M) goons. The report said Biman Bose on the other hand, claimed that 8 candidates of the party have been killed after the announcement of panchayat election in the state.

The report said Anil Biswas, complained that Trinamul and BJP have combined to murder CPI (M) men. He also added that the opposition aimed to create a situation where people will be less interested to participate in the election process.

The newspaper pointed out the electoral scenario in South 24 Parganas. In Mograhat which was one of the strong bastions of CPI (M), the ruling party was not able to nominate any representative against the Trinamul Congress. The district secretary of CPI (M) said that local problems were responsible for such a predicament. The report pointed out the friction in the ruling coalition was evident in this district as in 7 zilla parishad seats in Gosaba, Basanti and Canning RSP was contesting against the CPI (M).

25th April, 2003
The Statesman (Not available in Hard copy)
Headline: Divided they stand ... in Muraroi II
Reporter / Correspondent

The report pointed out that Left Front has won uncontested in two gram panchayats in Birbhum’s Bolpur sub-division. But the Left unity was in deep trouble in Muraroi II Block, where two major left parties, the CPI (M) and Forward Bloc, were fighting against each other in almost all the seats. The report elaborated that both
the Left parties apprehended that the Congress may exploit the situation. The report said picture of this block was totally different five years ago. The CPI (M) won almost 75% seats in this block in the last rural polls. But CPI (M) district leaders had chosen a panchayat samiti pradhan who was reportedly not the choice of the grass-root workers. As a result, majority of the winning gram panchayat candidates left the CPI (M) and joined the FB with a huge number of workers and supporters. Since then the FB has developed a strong foothold in the area.

The newspaper did not remark on the implications of forceful intervention of the district or state level leadership of political parties in the affairs of gram panchayats. This incident proved that there was myriad causes to deter the participation of the people in the panchayat process and strengthened the belief that panchayats were a platform for the political parties to secure their rural base.

25th April, 2003

Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 116 lines)

Headline: Threat to behead candidate’s husband if fine is not paid

Reporter / Correspondent

The report stated that a Trinamul Congress candidate, Sankari Bauri was forced to leave her village in Bhagawanpur II block after she was threatened with dire consequences by CPI (M) workers if she failed to withdraw nomination. The reporter Sanjay Singha wrote her husband complained that CPI (M) workers have forcefully cut the grains from their agricultural field and threatened to behead him if a fine was not paid to the CPI (M) for standing in the election. The report said CPI (M) local Committee secretary denied such an incident.

25th April, 2003

The Statesman (Not available in hard copy)

Headline: Congress’ prospect bleak in Birbhum

Reporter / Correspondent

The report observed that though the Pradesh Congress leaders repeatedly claimed that the Congress would emerge as the main opposition party in this year’s rural polls, it was not feasible in Birbhum, the Congress president’s own district. The Congress has fielded only 18 candidates in 181 gram panchayat seats in Nanoor block here. It fielded just two candidates for 31 panchayat samiti seats. The CPI (M) leaders
said that the situation was pathetic for the Congress because of its mahajot with the Trinamul and BJP in these areas. The district president of the Congress denied the charges of forming any mahajot.

26th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 78 lines) and (4 columns 104 lines) / The Statesman (1 column 12 lines)

Headline: Opposition form “Super-Front” to save lives / Congress, Trinamul, BJP form alliance at grass-root level / CPM to face tough fight in Jhargram

Reporter / Correspondent

The first report in the Anandabazar informed no one wants to fight against CPI (M) at Khejuri, for reasons of threat and fine. For the record only 2 independent candidates stood in 2 seats out of the 15 seats in the block, in the rest 13 seats the CPI (M) won without any contest. Sanjay Singha, the reporter related how the people of 7 gram panchayats under Patashpur block decided to oppose the CPI (M) and so have formed a ‘Mahajot’ in the gram panchayat as well as in the panchayat samiti. The report informed the ‘mahajot’ comprised the Congress, Trinamul Congress and the BJP. A local Trinamul leader and member of gram panchayat said that it was a ‘Super Front’. He said seats were divided keeping two things in mind union power and the most preferred candidate of the area according to the grassroots. The reporter informed like in Patashpur, Super Front has been formed in many areas of Midnapore district.

It was interesting to see that the political parties were taking into account the will of the grass-root voters while nominating candidates for election and the newspaper observing such a change. The report quoted Sudhir Giri, district secretary of East Midnapur CPI (M) who said that his party knew about this kind of ‘Jot’ but there was no reason to panic as people were with them.

The second report in the Anandabazar observed after the date of nomination filing and withdrawal have ended the three significant political oppositions to the Left Front have now concentrated on forming an unofficial alliance to survive defying the state leadership. The report said in many areas these candidates were fighting as independents. The report said the understanding was evident at the gram panchayat and panchayat samiti level where the grassroots had freedom to decide their candidates. The report mentioned the alliance at Patashpur and also in some seats in
Pashkura. The report mentioned many other such instances in other districts like Burdwan, several blocks of Birbhum like Dubrajpur, Saithia, Siuri, and also in Coochbehar and Malda.

The Statesman report pointed out that the Left Front was likely to face a tough fight in Gopiballavpur-I and Binpur in Jhargram against the ‘Mahajot’ candidates.

26th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 66 lines)
Headline: Bengal not afraid of threat, says Anil
Primary source: Political party leader

The report included the comment of the Left Front secretary Anil Biswas who said that the Left did not want to win without contest. He claimed that the Left candidates were killed by opposition party members. He also said that there was no quarrel within the Left coalition like in the opposition ‘jot’.

In the same report Tathagato Roy of the BJP claimed that before the election ‘rape’ has become one of the greatest weapons of the CPI (M). The report said he alleged the ruling party also threatened women who stood in the election with the warning that they will kill their husband or her family members if she did not withdraw nomination. The report added he stated Left Front members were murdered due to internal squabble within their coalition.

26th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 30 lines)
Headline: Kamal demands reduction of financial powers of the panchayats
Primary source: Political party leader

The report said Kamal Guha, state agriculture minister and Forward Bloc leader was of the opinion that if monetary power is not taken away from the hands of panchayat pradhans (heads) and upo-pradhans (assistant heads) then misuse of funds will continue. The report said he also commented as there was huge money in the hands of panchayats everyone wants to become a panchayat candidate.

26th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 24 lines)
Headline: Two parties clash in Bishnupur, 7 injured
Chapter 12

Reporter / Correspondent

This news item revealed that in Bishnupur, South 24 Parganas there was a clash between CPI (M) and Trinamul Congress. The report said 7 were injured, 4 houses were attacked and a rice granary was set on fire. The report said both the parties claimed that the police knew everything but did nothing. The police claimed the clash started off from a tiff during campaigning. The villagers went to solve the situation but they were also injured. In Dumuria, a Trinamul supporter was killed. The local Trinamul leader said that the murder happened with the help of CPI (M) members while the CPI (M) claimed it was the result of conflict within the Trinamul.

26th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 89 lines)

Headline: Allies upset with CPI (M) hightandedness in West Midnapore

Primary source: Local political leadership

The report said smaller Left Front partners, CPI, RSP and Forward Bloc, expressed their disappointment with CPI (M) for one-sided distribution of seats for panchayat election in West Midnapore. The report said the allies complained that CPI (M) has forced them to obey its opinion. The report said allies were, however, aware that public dissent may give advantage to the opposition and therefore decided to campaign for the most suitable candidate where there are several nominees.

26th April, 2003
The Statesman (5 columns 13 lines)

Headline: The other side of coercion

Reporter / Correspondent

It was yet again repeated in this report that Trinamul and local BJP leaders have complained to BJP national President Venkaiah Naidu that CPI (M) workers have stopped at least 20000 candidates from filing nominations for the panchayat polls. The report observed that opposition parties in general and Mamata Banerjee in particular may have been crying themselves hoarse about CPI (M)'s alleged use of terror to prevent opposition candidates from filing nominations, and calling for central intervention to defer the panchayat polls but the police did not encounter a single complaint in this regard. The police said against specific complaint a Trinamul candidate from Jangipara in Hooghly was provided police escort for submitting
Chapter 12

nominations. In response to this Pankaj Banerjee said “our men were terrorized lot and were not allowed to approach the police stations in most cases.”

26th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 60 lines)
Headline: 157 observers appointed to ensure peaceful polls
Primary source: Election Commission

The report specified the steps taken by the Election Commission to conduct the election procedure peacefully like the appointment of 157 observers. The report said the commission said if any problem rose anywhere these observers will go and handle the situation. The report narrated 17 observers have been appointed in the Zilla Sadar of each district, 3 will stay put at the office of the election commissioner, 2 will stay in Siliguri and 135 observers were designated to different areas of the state. The report said the state Election Commission has asked the district officials and police to remain alert.

26th April, 2003
Aajkaal (Hard copy not available
Headline: LF bickering in Nadia lead to division of zilla parishad seats; all’s well at Coochbehar (1) / Development key to ballot box in Hooghly (2) / 22 injured in clash between CPI (M)-Congress (3) / SUCI reject Trinamul Congress as alternatice to CPM (4)
Reporter / Correspondent (1 and 3)
Primary source: Grass-root voters (2)
Primary source: Political party (4)

In the first item it was informed that in Nadia there was no coalition between the Left Front parties in zilla parishad but in Coochbehar Left Front was united in panchayat election.

In the second item it was pointed out that the inhabitants of Chinsurah, Hooghly wanted developmental works in their locality and not false promises of political leaders during their campaigning for panchayat election.

In the third item it was reported in Itahar, West Dinajpur chaos broke out between Congress and CPI (M) supporters regarding setting up of a deep tube well in the panchayat area. Twenty two activists of both the political parties were wounded in the violence.
In the fourth item it was said that SUCI claimed the TMC was ineffective in fighting the CPI (M) and SUCI was capable of fighting the CPI (M) on its own.

27th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 58 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-FB team up with Congress, Trinamul Congress in Coochbehar
Report / Correspondent

The news reported that without the permission of state and district leaders the Front partners were making agreement with each other according to their wish. In some places Left parties have made agreements with Congress, Trinamul Congress and BJP to fight against other coalition partners. The report gave an example in Madhupur block it was decided that 18 gram panchayat seats will be shared by CPI (M) and Forward Bloc. But local FB party men have tied up with Congress, Trinamul and BJP in all seats. The local FB leader was quoted, “here our aim is to defeat the CPI (M) by any means.” In Patchara gram panchayat, the report informed, the situation was reversed with the CPI (M) teaming up with the Congress and Trinamul Congress against FB. The report observed there was nothing unusual about the crack in Left Front unity as since 1978 the CPI (M) and FB could not arrive at seat adjustment in Coochbehar. The report, however, referred to the district leaders of both Left parties who denied the occurrence of such an aberration.

27th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 71 lines)
Headline: Bulton-close Ashim CPI (M) candidate, revolt in CPI (M)
Report / Correspondent

The report informed in Machlondopur in South 24 Parganas a CPI (M) candidate was set to fight against CPI (M) supporters in the locality. The report said the CPI (M) has nominated an antisocial in the gram panchayat seat in response to which a powerful local leader of the party nominated himself as an independent. The report informed that the district secretary of the party said that the party nominated candidate was not at all an antisocial and so there was no harm in nominating him.
27th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 90 lines)

Headline: District Magistrate asks for report on how the nomination of Rauf was accepted

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed in Kaliachok Block No.1, Malda CPI (M) candidate Abdul Rouf was alleged to be a traitor. The report said the state Election Commissioner has asked Malda district administration to submit a report in this regard. The Commission further stated that the nomination of candidates with past criminal backgrounds would be rejected. The report said the commission stated unless a candidate is implicated the candidature cannot be cancelled but if the candidate is found to be tainted then his election would be cancelled.

Mamata Banerjee commented that CPI (M) has always claimed TMC members were anti-socials but now they are nominating anti-socials and traitors. Anil Biswas, state secretary of the CPI (M) said that there was no report about the dubious distinction of the concerned candidate.

27th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 89 lines) / The Statesman (2 columns 34 lines) and (1 column 12 lines)

Headline: RSP warns CPI (M) / ‘Even a minister is not spared’ / Mamata demands CBI enquiry

Primary source: Political party leaders

The news items reported on the internal strife within the Left Front. The reports informed Biswanath Chowdhury, prison minister in the state cabinet and RSP leader complained that CPI (M) forcefully ended his meeting in support of his party candidates for the panchayat polls. He also said that though the area was not far from the police station, but the police intervened very late. The reports said chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya commented he has asked the DGP to take necessary step in the matter. The report said Debabrata Bandopadhyay of the RSP criticized this kind of activity. The RSP announced the organization of a “Protest Day” to demonstrate against the incident. The reports said Anil Biswas, state secretary of CPI (M) however said that the problem arose due to RSP’s internal strife and CPI (M) workers were not involved in the incident. The report said the Left Chairman Biman Bose termed the incident as a ‘sad development’. The report stated Mamata Banerjee
commented that RSP was a partner of the CPI (M) in the Left Front and yet faced opposition by CPI (M) during campaigning so it was obvious the opposition parties had to face more violence and terror in the hands of ruling party.

She expressed her concern at the safety and security of opposition candidates in the second report of the Statesman referred here. This report said frustrated with the role of the state Election Commission in the panchayat polls she demanded a CBI enquiry in the matter.

27th April, 2003
The Statesman (2 column 47 lines)
Headline: Uncontested wins for opposition too
Reporter / Correspondent

The report said not only the ruling party but all the opposition parties like Congress, Trinamul Congress and the BJP have notched up uncontested wins. The report, however, added the figure was negligible when compared to the number of such wins by the ruling party. The report quoted the state Election Commissioner that the maximum number of uncontested wins happened in Hooghly and the least happened in Nadia and North and South Dinajpur. This report gave details of the arrangements made by the Election Commission to conduct the panchayat election including details about total seats, counting centers and counting personnel and observers and their location.

27th April, 2003
The Statesman (2 column 28 lines)
Headline: No reason for Article 355 in state: Pranab
Primary source: Political party leader

The report said Pranab Mukherjee, Congress President said there was no reason to demand imposition of Article 355 or 356 in West Bengal. He admitted that his party failed to nominate candidates in several seats due to organizational weakness. The report said Mukherjee was critical of many unopposed wins by the ruling party.

27th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 column 47 lines)
Headline: RSP too victim of terror along with Trinamul (South Dinajpur)
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported on the terror unleashed by political parties, the ruling party in particular. The report said RSP claimed that their party men were forced to withdraw nomination by CPI (M) workers in South Dinajpur and had to campaign that they have willfully withdrawn nomination. The report observed that the miserable condition of the opposition was clear from the reports available with the district administration. It stated several Trinamul Congress candidates were forced to go to the police station and state that there was no terror when the ground reality was different. BJP claimed their nominees were forced to withdraw nomination and cross over to Bangladesh to save them. The CPI (M) denied all charges and said that people did not want the other parties.

27th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 42 lines)
Headline: Mamata to address meeting defying Police
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed the police have disagreed to arrange meetings of both CPI (M) & Trinamul on same day at Polba, Hooghly. Mamata Banerjee said that they were opposed by CPI (M) at the time of filing nominations but if police now oppose them for holding meeting the result will be disastrous. The report said she was resolute to start her campaigning for panchayat election from Polba. The district Police Super said that the OC of police station was right in not permitting the Trinamul meeting as CPI (M) had first applied for holding a meeting at the place.

27th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 39 lines)
Headline: 3 CPI (M) leaders join Trinamul before election
Reporter / Correspondent

The news pointed out that three leaders from CPI (M) have joined the Trinamul Congress at Chanditala, Hooghly. The report said local CPI (M) leaders told that they had no problem if these men left the party as they were supporters of corrupt policies.
27th April, 2003
Aajkaal (Hard copy not available)
Headline: LF will distribute leaflets announcing coalition in panchayat areas: Biman (1) / Unity eludes RSP-CPI (M) (East Midnapore) (2)
Primary source: Political party leadership (1)
Reporter / Correspondent
The first report informed that Left Front chairman Biman Basu has said that the coalition will distribute leaflet with the message of Left Front unity in panchayat election as in about 4000 seats there was no unity among the Front constituents.

The second report informed in three blocks in Purba Midnapore there was no unity among CPI (M) and RSP. The CPI (M) local leaders alleged RSP has violated the Left Front guidelines in panchayat election.

27th April, 2003
Aajkaal (Hard copy not available)
Headline: LF would work for the poor: Buddha
Reporter / Correspondent
The news reported that Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya announced in an election rally in South 24 Parganas that CPI (M) will act on behalf of the poor and marginalized people in the panchayats. The report said the chief minister repeated the Left Front endeavors in rural development and unveiled a slew of programs for progress of villages.

Whether such an announcement by a political leader required highlighting by a mainstream newspaper is a question that can be asked specially considering the fact there was a scarcity of space in the mainstream newspapers what with advertisements and other type of news vying for space and development news rarely getting opportunity to appear in print.

28th April, 2003
The Telegraph (3 columns 31 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 90 lines) and (5 columns 97 lines)
Headline: RSP minister skips Buddha rally in Hili / CPI (M) meeting disrupted by RSP / CPI (M) did not want unity in South Dinajpur for its own interest
All the reports highlighted examples of Left Front rift. The Telegraph report informed Forward Bloc stayed away from chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya’s rally in Hili, in North Dinajpur. Though present in the meeting RSP was critical of the CPI (M). The report informed the prison minister who was not present in the rally accused the CPI (M) of disrupting his rally few days earlier. The report informed the RSP minister said he will not lodge complaint with the police and wait for the response of the people of the area. The report said CPI (M) and RSP are fighting in many gram panchayats in North Dinajpur.

The first report in the Anandabazar Patrika (Headline: CPI (M) meeting disrupted by RSP) referred to CPI (M)’s attack on the RSP’s meeting and informed that RSP members also interrupted the proceedings of a meeting held by a CPI (M) MLA, Minati Ghosh at Moynaguri. The report said police was on alert to avoid any trouble between CPI (M) and RSP. The report described the tense relations between the two Front partners. RSP claimed the CPI (M) feared their increase of power in 5 districts and resorted to terror. It alleged the bigger partner has created an environment of terror in Basanti, Gosaba and Canning in South 24 Parganas prior to the panchayat election. In response of these allegations CPI (M) South 24 Parganas district secretary said he will abide by the rules of the Left Front and not say anything against the Front partner.

The second report in the Anandabazar Patrika (Headline: CPI (M) did not want unity in South Dinajpur for its own interest) elaborated that in neighboring South Dinajpur too there was no unity as big partner CPI (M) had broken the Front rule and nominated candidates without discussing with the other important LF constituent here – the RSP. The report projected the remarks of the two Front partners. While the CPI (M) said the RSP was not trustworthy, the RSP branded the CPI (M) as harmful.

28th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika(4 columns 90 lines)
Headline: Dissident CPI (M) forced to leave village for standing as independent

The news reported in Midnapore erstwhile CPI (M) supporters had to flee his village after their brother filed nomination as independent. The dissident protested the
CPI (M)'s 'immoral' activities like giving land ownership rights and BPL cards in exchange of money and was even prevented from campaigning. The report said Sudhir Giri, CPI (M) district secretary however remarked there was no truth in these allegations. He assured if there was any complaint on the above grounds then necessary steps would be taken. The report narrated few cases where dissident supporters have fled for their life or have retreated to the background.

28th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 90 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) supporters to be punished if found to support independents
Primary source: Political party leader

The news quoted Anil Biswas that if any CPI (M) local units or local leaders were found to support independent candidates instead of the official party candidates they will be expelled from the party. The report informed that the Biswas published a booklet to reiterate that CPI (M) believes power of the panchayats resided with the common people and underplayed the party's uncontested wins in 5500 seats. The report said the trend of uncontested wins is same in all the districts. While the opposition complained that it was a result of terror tactics of the ruling party, the CPI (M) termed it as the opposition's inability to put up candidates in the respective seats. The report added there was a long-time grievance against corruption in the panchayat bodies especially against CPI (M) members. The party decided to carry out regular audits to stem corruption and the booklet announced the party's intention to audit the gram panchayat accounts by CAG.

28th April, 2003
The Telegraph (4 columns 34 lines)
Headline: Basu steps into rural ring
Primary source: Political party leader

The news reported standing against the background of growing political clashes in the run-up to the panchayat elections, Jyoti Basu, the CPI (M) patriarch asked his own party members to devote more time and energy to improving relations with partners in the Left Front. He said it was disturbing to know about the attack on RSP minister's meeting in North Dinajpur. The report gave details of his campaigning schedule for the panchayat election.
28th April, 2003
The Telegraph (1 column 55 lines)
Headline: Mamata trains terror gun on CM
Primary source: Political party leaders

The report informed that Mamata Banerjee reacted strongly to Buddhadeb Bhattacharya’s comment at Patharpratima and Mandirbazaar that he would break the heads of those who try to “let loose terror and communalism.” Banerjee said as head of state Bhattacharya cannot make such comments and incite his party workers and the police against opposition parties. The report said CPI (M) state secretary Anil Biswas refuted Mamata’s charges and said that the chief minister only declared that strong steps would be taken against those who foment communalism in the state.

The information in this report was repeated in the report in the Anandabazar Patrika headlined CPI (M) supporters to be punished if found to support independents as pointed out above.

The Telegraph report informed the Hooghly administration was tensed over the following day’s public meeting of TMC and CPI (M) at Polba.

28th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 58 lines)
Headline: Both Angaria silenced by ‘red terror’
Reporter / Correspondent

The report described how the two villages by the name of Angaria in West Midnapore and Bankura face similar fate. The report said the people remain silent spectator to the excesses of the ruling party in both the villages. The report informed that CPI (M) has won all seats in the gram panchayat without contest in Angaria (West Midnapore). The reporters Rahul Ray and Swapan Bandopadhyay interacted with the villagers who responded that it was futile to say anything against the CPI (M) as it will kill them. The reporters observed it was not as if no development work happened in the two villages but the fear was pervading. The reporters said there was no sign of opposition while the local CPI (M) leader in Choto Angaria (Bankura) said the opposition had no presence or organization in the area and therefore could not put up candidates.
29th April, 2003

The Telegraph (2 columns 58 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 75 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 58 lines)

Headline: Mamata brush with Biswas / Campaign on the same day, Anil’s car overtakes Mamata’s convoy / Mamata, Tathagata claim at public meeting, Anil Biswas’s convoy about to kill us; Nothing really to say! Anil

Reporter / Correspondent

The reports stated both Mamata Banerjee and Biman Basu addressed meetings at Polba. Banerjee alleged that CPI (M) goons attempted to heckle her while she was on her way to the meeting place. The reports said Tathagata Roy, BJP state secretary and Akbar Ali Khondkar, TMC MLA supported her claim. Banerjee said that CPI (M) was frightened to fight the election for the fear of losing it and was therefore forcing opposition candidates to withdraw nominations. The reports added Banerjee emphasized that CPI (M) have lost the support of people and its end was near. Anil Biswas, the report said, told voters not to pay heed to the TMC leaders’ comment. The reports stated that Anil Biswas denied the charge that his convoy intentionally hit Mamata Banerjee’s convoy.

The Telegraph added CPI (M) MLA from Bansberia said that the police made way for Biswas’s convoy as he was in a hurry to address a rally at Pandua, 40 kms from Polba where Banerjee’s meeting was being held. He dismissed Trinamul’s allegation of intentional accident.

29th April, 2003

Aajkaal (4 columns 90 lines)

The sight of Bengal from the perspective of a Bengali

Primary source: Grass-root voters and panchayat candidates

The reporter Ushashi Chakrabarti visited Rohini village in West Midnapore where she met a descendent of the erstwhile zamindar and a Trinamul leader. The leader was confident that the development that eluded the people in the last 25 years under Front rule would be a reality if the Trinamul came to power which he felt was not impossible under the circumstances of the formation of a grand alliance of all the opposition parties. The reporter went on to describe the scant development of the villages won by opposition members. The reporter also said that the salient feature of Sankrail block in West Midnapore was the dominance by women who were more efficient than men. The reporter cited example of two women panchayat members,
one who was thankful after being elected as a panchayat member as it gave her the opportunity to participate in social activity and freedom from the boredom of her household chores and the other who explained to the correspondent the importance of decentralization of power and the need for making way for new members for its realization. The correspondent met the CPI (M) local leader who said his party was confident of winning all the seats in the gram panchayat as the supporters who had left to join the Jharkhand have all returned.

29th April, 2003
Aajkaal (4 columns 90 lines)
Headline: We've formed mini-Writers in villages
Primary source: Political party leader

The report by Avijit Chaudhuri was coverage of the chief minister’s election rally in Chachol, Malda. The chief minister, on behalf of his party vowed to give more powers to the panchayats as well as give more money to them for village development so that the villagers can decide their own fate. He said villagers have to understand that which party will provide more power to the panchayats and asked them to choose Left Front. The reporter stated he also said a lot of development works in the villages have progressed because of the panchayats. The reporter said the chief minister insisted on regular gram sansad meetings to ensure transparency in the village bodies.

29th April, 2003
Aajkaal (2 columns 34 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (6 columns 112 lines)
Headline: Congress, Trinamul workers tell state leaders not to come to Contai for campaign / Trinamul leaders unwanted by party workers (East Midnapore)
Reporter / Correspondent

The Aajkaal report said there was alliance between the two opposition parties in the two lower tiers in the block and contest between them at the zilla parishad level. The report also said the supporters of both the parties did not find any efficacy for state leaders to come and queer the pitch for them. The local leaders were quoted by the report that the state leaders were unaware of the reality and the terror in the locality. The CPI (M) leadership said the terror stories of the opposition are not to be believed.
The Anandabazar Patrika report (reporters, Sanjay Singha and Subrata Guha) informed barring Contai, Trinamul and other opposition party supporters do not want to antagonize CPI (M) and therefore do not want Calcutta-based leaders to campaign against the CPI (M). The report quoted Trinamul workers at Tamluk “we do not want to take CPI (M) head-on at any stage.” The report said in the Contai block the influence of Trinamul’s Sisir Adhikary is too much for comfort. The report said the Congress leaders there alleged that Adhikary did not allow others to file nominations. Adhikary denied the allegation against him and related incidents of CPI (M)-inflicted torture in various places in East Midnapore. The report said opposition forces hoped that wherever they were united against CPI (M), the ruling party would have it tough but the CPI (M) local leaders scoffed at the idea. They said the ruling party members have mingled so well with the local people during the various development programs that no other alternative to the CPI (M) was known to them. The CPI (M) leaders also described the various development initiatives that will stand them in good stead during elections. The report stated the opposition was trying to challenge the ruling party by putting up humble and educated candidates.

29th April, 2003
Aajkaal (1 column 14 lines)
Headline: Grand alliance upset in Habra
Reporter / Correspondent
The report pointed out how the grand alliance between the Congress, Trinamul Congress and the BJP was over in Habra. The local Trinamul leaders who could not contest due to the alliance have fielded themselves as independents. The report said the Left Front was confident of winning ill this area this time too as there was unity in two but all seats.

29th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 42 lines) / The Statesman (2 columns 19 lines) / Aajkaal (3 columns 51 lines)
Headline: Buddha too blames RSP for disagreement / Buddha blames RSP for crisis / RSP to sit in discussion with CPI (M) again
Primary source: Political party / leaders
The rift in the Left Front was elaborately discussed in the reports. The reports said RSP claimed that CPI (M) was responsible for differences in at least three
districts. Debabrata Bandopadhyay, secretary of RSP said that if the CPI (M) had been flexible there would have been better understanding between the Front partners. The reports said chief minister and CPI (M) leader Buddhadeb Bhattacharya claimed that CPI (M) gave up winning seats to accommodate the other Front partners but in several districts the last moment demands of the RSP made things difficult. The news items informed that both the parties wanted to end the imbroglio and have arranged a meeting for the purpose.

29th April, 2003
The Telegraph (1 column 101 lines)
Headline: Contest election, escape poll duty
Reporter / Correspondent
This interesting news item informed that the ruling party may not have offered tickets to schoolteachers to discourage them from contesting the panchayat election but the fear of poll duty has driven them to the fray in the two Midnapores. About 2000 teachers are contesting the election as independent candidates in this district alone defying the CPI (M) diktat to avoid the onus of election duty. The teachers admitted of contesting the election to “avoid hassles of poll-related duties.” The report said the administration was facing much problem due to the lack of polling personnel for the above reason.

29th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 75 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) charged with communal campaigning (Howrah)
Primary source: Political party leaders at the block level
The news reported in the wall writings in Amta block, Howrah CPI (M) has appealed to the voters to ignore the BJP and Trinamul combine, who wanted to ban the killing of cows. The report said Trinamul protested strongly in writing to the concerned authority against this kind of communal campaigning. The report said Trinamul accused the CPI (M) of depending on the minority vote to see them through the panchayat election. The report informed a CPI (M) leader of the area, however, said that they were fighting against the communal energy through this kind of campaigning. The report commented the CPI (M) was cornered by the TMC-BJP combine in this block and was playing the minority card to win the election. The
report cited the example of Udang-2 gram panchayat where about 500 villagers decided not to support any party at first but later was convinced by the CPI (M) to vote against the TMP-BJP combine picking up the issues of destruction of the Babri mosque and the Gujarat riots. The report said a CPI (M) panchayat samiti candidate in the area acknowledged such kind of campaign was on in the area.

29th April, 2003

The Telegraph (2 columns 35 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 35 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 86 lines)

Headline: Candidate's wife bombed at home / Congress candidate's wife murdered at Ketugram / Wife bombed and killed in the absence of Congress candidate

Reporter / Correspondent

The news items informed unknown miscreants raided the house of Congress gram panchayat candidate at Ketugram (Burdwan) and not finding him killed his wife. Villagers said that the candidate was forced to flee the village after filing his nomination to contest the poll as a gram panchayat candidate. The gram panchayat was headed for a straight fight between the CPI (M) and the Congress. The police said they were yet to ascertain the motive behind the killing of the woman. The report said putting the blame of the murder on the CPI (M), Congress MLA from Katwa Rabindranath Chatterjee said that the candidate used to be a Forward bloc supporter before joining the Congress. He was under constant CPI (M) threat to withdraw his nomination but did not do so and to 'teach' him a lesson his wife was murdered.

29th April, 2003

Aajkaal (5 columns 66 lines)

Headline: Intense fight between three brothers

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that in Basirhat subdivision, there was an electoral contest between three brothers of one family. The reporter interacted with the three brothers who were aware they were political opponents but maintained cordial relationship. The contest between people with familial ties was an interesting subject for the sample newspapers. The report stated in Chapapukur gram panchayat in Bashirhat block, North 24 Parganas there was a fight between two sister-in-laws of a family. In Kashipur gram panchayat the contest was between three sister-in-laws.
29th April, 2003
Aajkaal (2 columns 15 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-Trinamul clash at Bagda
Reporter / Correspondent
The report informed of a scuffle between CPI (M) and Trinamul party members at Bagda. A Trinamul leader was injured and some of its members were arrested by police. The report said Jyotipriyo Mullick, a TMC leader claimed that the police did not arrest any CPI (M) party members in the incident while the police said that TMC members were solely guilty.

29th April, 2003
Aajkaal (2 columns 8 lines) / The Statesman (Internet edition)
Headline: 10 Jharkhandi arrested, Jamboni tense / Violence feared in Jamboni polls
Reporter / Correspondent
In these news related to the law and order situation in the state prior to the panchayat election, it was reported that Combat forces will march through the Jamboni gram panchayat of Jhargram because the political atmosphere there was very volatile following the campaign of opposite forces.

29th April, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 98 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) challenged in Dhantala by the popular Subal
Reporter / Correspondent
It is surely interesting to note how the newspapers highlighted the plight of politicians rather than the grass-root people in their news on panchayat election. An erstwhile CPI (M) member Subal Bagchi who was arrested on charges of anti-social activities and released on bail and claimed the CPI (M) tied up with the police to trap him was the focus of this report. The report revealed that opposition parties were very happy to hear this as Subal Bagchi could be a weapon against the CPI (M) during campaigning. The CPI (M) candidate in the area was quoted that “Subal was loved by all and would not turn his back on the communist party.” The report stated that without organization or money this man was out to destroy the ruling party’s chances in this area by his popularity.
30th April, 2003

The Telegraph (3 columns 41 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 65 lines) / Aajkaal (3 columns 30 lines) / The Statesman (Internet Edition)

Headline: Mamata cry for 356 / President’s rule is the way, feels Mamata / If Congress is beside us we would impose Article 356; the pact between BJP-TMC is permanent: Mamata / Parties must unite against CPI (M)

Primary source: Political party leader

The reports stated that Mamata Banerjee reiterated her demand for immediate central intervention to counter what she described as ‘state – sponsored violence unleashed by the CPI (M)’ in rural Bengal. She said that if the Congress backs the Central government in promulgating President’s rule in the state, she will see to it that it was imposed. The reports also said that Banerjee drew Deputy Prime Minister L. K. Advani’s attention to the state’s deteriorating law and order. The reports informed she urged the other Front constituents and the Congress to voice a united protest against the CPI (M) terror tactic prior to the panchayat election. The Telegraph report said she termed the previous day’s brush with Anil Biswas’s convoy an example of CPI (M) highhandedness towards opposition parties.

The Statesman report said she spoke about how the CPI (M) was not only terrorizing the opposition members but harassing ministers of the RSP and the FB.

The Aajkaal reported Mamata Banerjee claimed that Trinamul Congress had the political support of Muslim population in the state and the CPI (M) was bent on creating riot-like situation in the state. It said Anil Biswas rubbished the allegation of Banerjee that his convoy tried to ‘dangerously’ cross her convoy when they were both heading for a rally in Hooghly. A Statesman report separately covered this news (Anil rubbishes allegation on 30th April, 2003.)

It seemed that the newspapers were only keen to publish the allegations and counter-responses of the political leaders and the political statements of party spokespersons during their coverage of the panchayat election. There was rarely any reporting of the actual occurrences in the panchayat areas from the perspective of the grassroots or the analysis and interpretation of the situation and development by the reporter himself with inputs from grass-root voters.

30th April, 2003

The Telegraph (1 column 87 lines)

Headline: CM shifts to attack mode on ‘terror’
Primary source: Political party leader

This news item justifies the statements made in the previous paragraph. It reported that Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya dismissed allegations by the Trinamul Congress and the BJP about the CPI (M)'s terror tactics in the run up to the panchayat polls. He said that he had information that the Trinamul members were unwilling to contest with their party symbol and so the party could not field candidates in Arambag, Khanakul and Goghat in Hooghly. The Chief Minister also squarely blamed the RSP for yawning fissures in the ruling coalition. The report informed that he told journalists in Malda that the RSP has refused to accept alliance's formula on distribution of seats. The Anandabazar also reported this news and added that the CPI (M) said it would try to solve the problem but if it remains unresolved then there would be direct contest between the RSP and CPI (M) in many seats in this panchayat election.

30th April, 2003

Aajkaal (3 columns 51 lines)

Headline: CPI (M) fighting against Forward Bloc (East Midnapore)

Reporter / Correspondent

The report reflected the tension between the various Front constituents in East Midnapore. For instance Sudhir Giri, CPI (M) district secretary had announced that in Nandakumar Block the party would withdraw nominations from 2 gram panchayat seats and from all the seats in the panchayat samiti in support of Forward Bloc nominees but Gopal Maity, the Forward bloc district secretary complained that CPI (M) only withdrew from the 2 gram panchayat seats. In the other seats the candidates were either fighting as CPI (M) candidates or as independents.

30th April, 2003

Aajkaal (3 columns 33 lines) and (2 columns 44 lines)

Headline: 4 Congress candidates in two zilla parishad seats / Grand alliance at all three tiers

Reporters / Correspondence

The first report said in Chachol in Malda 4 Congress candidates were contesting in two seats in the Malda zilla parishad. While two were nominated by the district Congress, the other two were nominated by the Chachol block Congress.
Congress leader Priya Ranjan Das Munshi expressed his dissatisfaction over the development and added that handbills would be distributed to make known the final nominees.

The second report informed that there was grand alliance in all three tiers in Gajol in Malda. The even distribution of seats between the opposition forces, the report said, was the centre of attraction in the entire state. The chief minister who came here for election campaigning in the region was reported to be surprised by the common poster of the Congress, Trinamul Congress and the BJP. While CPI (M) leader Sailen Sarkar said they were shocked to see Congress unite with the BJP, a local Congress leader was quoted the party was forced to form the alliance to resist CPI (M) abuse. The Congress district leader Rubi Noor, however, feigned ignorance about the issue.

30th April, 2003
Aajkaal (3 columns 38 lines)
Buddhadeb in Dankuni: People run panchayats in Bengal; anti-socials in UP
Primary source: Political party leadership

The report quoted the chief minister that the panchayats in the state have seen unprecedented development under the Left Front rule with 72% land in the hands of the farmers while in UP most land remain in the hands of zamindars and jotdars. He said in West Bengal people were associated with the panchayats which was not possible in other states. The report said he reminded the whole country and even the foreigners look up on the panchayat system in the state. The report said he termed the BJP-TMC alliance as ‘terrible’ and promised more development program in the future.

30th May, 2003
Aajkaal (6 columns 87 lines)
Headline: No signs of blood in Keshpur, only development
Reporter / Correspondent

The reporter Amitav Siraj visited the “once strife-ridden” Keshpur to find that all the bloodshed has given way to development through numerous self-help groups. The reporter observed how much Mamata Banerjee may cry herself hoarse about ruling party violence responsible for withdrawal of opposition nominations the truth
here is that her own party members willingly did not file nominations as they were
more interested to reap the benefits of development. The reporter also informed that
the Trinamul found it impossible to field candidates because of factionalism in the
party and lack of organization. The reporter elaborated on the various initiatives by
the self-help and self-employment groups mostly spearheaded by women of the
villages. The report said there were almost no opposition candidates in the two lower
tiers and the CPI (M) won without contest. The local CPI (M) leadership challenged
the others to lodge specific complaints about violence and terror. The reporter’s
observation was the villages were peaceful and he indicated that Trinamul’s
complaint of terror was fabricated here. The reporter commented CPI (M) was
prevailing here due to the development works undertaken by it.

1st May, 2003
The Statesman (Internet Edition)
Headline: Observe polls, don’t intervene
Primary source: Election Commission

The news report declared state Election Commissioner made it clear to the
state government officials who will be observers for the 11th May panchayat polls that
he and his office would intervene if reports were received from presiding and
returning officers about rigging and intimidation of voters. The report said this
comment came from him when some of the observers wanted to know what they
should do if they saw the polls were being rigged or voters were turned away from
polling centers.

1st May, 2003
The Statesman (Internet Edition)
Close contests on the cards in Nanoor
Primary source: Political party leaders

The report commented as the rural polls were approaching, Nanoor is
gradually becoming the most trouble prone area of Birbhum. Both Trinamul and CPI
(M) leveled allegations of creating terror in the area against each other. The problem
has become so acute that CPI (M) and the Trinamul have both demanded the
intervention of the administration for stopping terror in the area. Samir Bhattacharya,
CPI (M) district leader said that since 22nd April Trinamul goons have repeatedly
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threatened CPI (M) candidates and supporters and their party office was ransacked. They have complained to the authorities in this matter but nothing has been done yet. Anubrata Mondal, Trinamul district leader, said that terror was created by the CPI (M) and now it was trying to suppress the voices of innocent people. He said the TMC has repeatedly requested the authorities to take steps to stop the terror created by the CPI (M) but no action has been initiated in this regard. The report informed the Congress has fielded candidates in only 18 out of 181 gram panchayat seats in the area. The report informed that locals felt that Trinamul would give a stiff fight in at least five to six panchayat areas in Nanoor.

1st May, 2003

The Statesman (1 column 48 lines)

Headline: Bankura gears up for naxalite threat

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that Bankura administration is seeking the help of specially trained forces from Andhra Pradesh to combat the Naxalite menace during the panchayat elections. Andhra police have been invited to deal with any insurgency. The report added the state police feared attack by naxalite outfits like Peoples’ War Group or MCC during the panchayat elections in Bankura and Purulia districts.

1st May, 2003

The Statesman (Internet edition)

Headline: Trinamul man seeks protection

Primary source: Political party leader

The news item reported Sailen Sinha, the leader of the opposition in the CPI (M) controlled Hooghly Zilla parishad and chairman of the district panchayat council has sought police protection fearing a bid on his life. Sinha, who is also a local leader of the Trinamul Congress said that CPI (M) cadres have attacked him twice at Chatrasal and Mandipore villages after Trinamul won in Khanakul in the last rural polls.

1st May, 2003

The Statesman (Internet edition)
Headline: What’s in a name?

Reporter / Correspondent

This was news regarding fraudulent means adopted by a panchayat candidate. The report informed the saha sabhapati of the caretaker Salanpur panchayat samiti board Paresh Nath Mondal’s official age contradicted with his actual birth date. His school certificates say he was known by the name Paresh Chandra Mondal but his LIC policy bears his name as P N Mondal. The district administration was confused with this name game. Political leaders from his enemy camp as well as from his own party appeared disgusted with the trick. The TMC has lodged an official complaint with the state government against Mondal saying that his disguise was confusing the masses and was creating certain administrative crisis.

1st May, 2003
The Statesman (4 columns 60 lines)

Headline: The politics of poles

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that electric poles have become the most important issue in panchayat election in many areas in East Midnapore. The report stated many voters have categorically informed the candidates of political parties that they would only vote when electric poles were fixed in the villages and the candidates of all parties’ have conveyed to their leaders that voters have turned their back unless the installation of electric poles is done. The report said the situation has come to such a pass that CPI (M) and Trinamul MLAs were issuing electric poles for the same area to get votes.

1st May, 2003
The Statesman (2 columns 22 lines) / Aajkaal (4 columns 51 lines)

Headline: Exercise restrain Basu advises CPI (M) and RSP / CPI (M)-RSP call for conscience vote

Primary source: Political party / leadership

The reports informed that Jyoti Basu has advised the top leadership of the CPI (M) and the RSP to exercise restraint and stop fighting amongst them during the run up to the panchayat poll. The report informed the relationship between the two parties became strained after CPI (M) cadres allegedly heckled an RSP minister,
abused him and did not allow a RSP election meeting at Hili. The Left Front chairman, Biman Bose issued a circular to the LF partners appealing them to maintain unity in majority of the seats and take part in ‘friendly’ contests in the seats where a common candidate was not fielded.

1st May, 2003
The Telegraph (8 columns 168 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 136 lines) / The Statesman (Internet Edition)

Headline: Thirsting for revenge, mob finds journalists / CPI (M) leader killed, protest, firing, 3 dead / CPI (M) men die in North Dinajpur firing

Reporter / Correspondent

All the mainstream newspapers reported fierce clashes between CPI (M) and Congress supporters in Chopra where 4 CPI (M) men were killed including Akbar Ali, the CPI (M) district Committee member. The reports said Ali was attacked by armed Congress activists when he was holding a meeting at the party office in this small tea town. The reports informed about 20 CPI (M) supporters were injured in this incident in North Dinajpur. Five of those injured were said to be serious. The reports stated the incident triggered mob fury in this violence–prone border area as a crowd gathered in front of the police outpost holding Congress activists allegedly involved in the attack. The police firing killed three other CPI (M) supporters. The reports informed Anil Biswas, CPI (M) state secretary, alleged that the opposition has chosen the ‘path of murder’ realizing that it can’t fight the CPI (M) and the Left Front in the electoral battle scheduled on 11th May. The reports quoted Biswas “the ‘murder’ of Akbar Ali outside the party office at Chopra was evidence of the conspiracy hatched by the opposition to vitiate the peaceful atmosphere during the run up to the panchayat polls.” He claimed that nine CPI (M) activists were killed in attacks by opposition parties. The reports added that on the basis of CPI (M)’s complaint against Congress activists for this murder, the police arrested Congress MLA of Chopra and Chopra Block Congress President along with 15 other supporters.

1st May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (6 columns 176 lines)

Headline: Election v/s Democracy: Panchayati raj in West Bengal

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The writer Sharmila Basu stated that West Bengal was once the role model for decentralization under the leadership of Left Front government which recognized the opposition parties as they should in a democracy. But in the 2003 panchayat election the Left Front government has violated the democratic norms during nomination filing by opposition parties. As a result, 11% panchayat seats were won uncontested by Left Front nominated panchayat candidates. The writer commented that the opposition parties protested the use of police force and the election commission by the Left Front government in favor of their panchayat candidates. The correspondent criticized the CPI (M) for putting up anti-socials or candidates who were allegedly involved in threatening the opposition. She cited some inglorious incidents like the bombing of a candidate’s wife or the threat of beheading a candidate’s husband and commented all the allegations were against the ruling party. She said there were allegations of corruption at many places but nothing has been done to rectify that. She said the development of the panchayat areas was only mentioned in publications which were closer to the ruling party. She wrote in this way West Bengal would be the pioneer of a democracy which is without opposition forces.

There were several reports in 2003 which were expression of the reporter’s opinion that were either critical or approving of one political party or the other. The byline writings had openness as they were not tied to the formal structure drawn up for in-house correspondents nor attached to the conventional picture of newspapers as neutral, objective and balanced information dissemination medium. These reports could relate to readers more candidly and vent their grievance which perhaps endeared them to the audience.

1st May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 102 lines)
Headline: Alliance of Congress-BJP-Trinamul in Nadia

It informed that Nadia district Trinamul, BJP and Congress formed a coalition to fight against Left Front in the panchayat election at the two lower levels defying the diktat of their respective leadership. The report further stated that the Left Front alliance was not united in Nadia and the internal bickering in the CPI (M) itself was marked. The district leadership of Front allies failed to unite against opposition
parties. CPI (M) and RSP were fighting against each other in 5000 gram panchayat seats the report concluded.

The report referred to the chief minister’s electoral speech in Canning, South 24 parganas where he commented the CPI (M) has to fight the opposition single-handedly in the forthcoming panchayat election.

1st May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 64 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-Trinamul united to fight RSP (South Dinajpur)
Reporter / Correspondent

The aim of the panchayat election was no more political empowerment of the people as the political parties had occupied centre stage in the panchayat election process. Political parties aligned realigned and forged ties to secure political power in the rural areas and consolidate their vote bank and the newspaper reports reflected those occurrences.

This report informed that in Tapan Block of South Dinajpur, Trinamul and CPI (M) were united to fight against RSP in panchayat election. The RSP, on the other hand extended its hand for alliance with the Congress to fight against the CPI (M). The report said that in this block there was no Left Front alliance. It also informed that RSP has alleged the CPI (M) was planting electric poles without valid permission to secure votes. The report concluded Trinamul, BJP knew the contest between the two Left parties would be fateful in this district.

1st May, 2003
Aajkaal (5 columns 115 lines)
Headline: Benchepara’s women have startled the country
Primary source: Grass-root panchayat members

The reporter Amitav Siraj gave a rare insight into the activities of a gram panchayat. He said in Benchepara gram panchayat of Garbeta block, West Midnapore 8 female panchayat members has worked successfully for the people of the village by using the panchayat platform and funds. The panchayat was involved in literacy programs, irrigation, electrification, supply of drinking water, construction of roads and drainage system, and even tried to amicably settle family conflict in this area. The report commented that these female gram panchayat members were the role models
for the country and would inspire the female community as well. The report said there was not much opposition and these CPI (M) functionaries were set to win the contest again. The reporter cited the success of another all women panchayat in Kultikri in the same district in this regard.

1st May, 2003
Aajkaal (4 columns 93 lines)
Headline: Let there be open fight with cadres: Mamata
Primary source: Political party leader

The report mentioned in Mathabhanga of Coochbehar district Mamata Banerjee in an election rally as usual demanded the implementation of Article 356 or 356 against left front government in West Bengal. She also urged the Trinamul Congress cadres to be ready for head-on fight against CPI (M) cadres in the panchayat election.

3rd May, 2003
The Statesman (Hard copy not available)
Headline: Be in the fray to beat duty ‘hassles’
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that first it was the opposition candidates who were reportedly scared away by political criminals and now the same thing was true about polling personnel. There was an acute shortage of polling officers in East Midnapore. The district magistrate said that though the number of presiding and first polling officers was adequate, there are few takers for the posts of second and third polling officials. The report said the crisis was compounded because a majority of primary school teachers who are generally posted as second and third polling officers has evaded poll duty by contesting as candidates. The report informed Block Development Officers have also received a number of applications by political parties exhorting them to exempt politically biased teachers from poll duty as they would only work as polling agents for their respective parties.
Headline: Panchayat polls 2003: Arms and the ousted men / Trinamul fears rout (West Midnapore)

Primary source: Political party members and activists

The first report pointed out the plight of the opposition party members in troubled areas like Garbeta, Sabong, Pingla, Debra and Kespur in West Midnapore. The report specified that these people were preparing to return to their villages that they were forced to leave by the CPI (M) goons after the announcement of the panchayat polls. They even planned to file nominations and contest as Trinamul Congress or Congress candidates but the terms and conditions set for their return turned out to be an obstacle. The Congress leaders said the party would make efforts to facilitate the return of these people to their villages but in return they have to hand over arms and ammunition to the Congress leadership. The Trinamul Congress activists banished from their homes in these areas since November 2000 because of CPI (M) terror were confident that once they return to their roots they will re-establish their political grip on the areas. They were quoted by the news report “Let the CPI (M) win uncontested for the forthcoming election, a tougher battle awaits them in the coming days.” The correspondent talked to several people to find out the reason for the near lack of opposition candidates, particularly Trinamul Congress candidates, as it had successfully made inroads into the CPI (M) domain. Their simple argument was, “We had to pay fines for re-entering our homes. We were with the Trinamul congress till the last polls. But it’s no use risking our lives. We have been warned of dire consequences if we contest as Trinamul candidates. We don’t trust the district administration with our security.”

The second report pointed out that the link of the local Trinamul leaders with People’ War Group (PWG) has irked the state leadership which has maintained a distance with the local leaders since then. This, the report said, enraged the local Trinamul rank and file and therefore there were no nominations on behalf of the party. The report said the opposition is in the danger of being wiped out of West Midnapore due to the indifference of the state leadership. The report predicted the CPI (M) would have a cakewalk in the district.

3rd May, 2003

The Statesman (5 columns 95 lines)

Headline: FB may turn the tables in Opposition’s favor
Primary source: Local political leaders

The report mentioned that CPI (M) was not feeling comfortable in Birbhum’s Labpur Block-I, one of its strongest bastions in the district. The reason the report said was there was going to be a one-to-one contest in about 75 to 80 per cent gram panchayat and panchayat samiti seats of this block as the opposition has formed a “mahajot” of a different kind and fielded only one candidate against every CPI (M) candidate. The “mahajot” is being called different because the Forward Bloc, one of the left partners, has entered into an alliance with the three major opposition parties - the Congress, Trinamul Congress and the BJP. The report stated although local FB leaders were tightlipped about the formation of the “mahajot”, Congress and Trinamul leaders have made it clear that they were under compulsion to form an alliance with the FB as the grass-root workers exerted tremendous pressure on them. The report informed officials also confirmed that in about 75-80 per cent seats, there was a 1:1 contest. The report quoted Abdul Mannan, local FB leader “there was no adjustment with the CPI (M) in the block. It has fielded candidates in areas where it was strong.” But he did not say anything about the mahajot. The report commented that it was clear that the CPI (M) was not comfortable with this grand alliance. It informed a CPI (M) leader of Labpur zonal Committee said that though his party expected the contest to be a hard one as the FB has joined hands with the opposition parties, people will not support this opportunist alliance. The news item assured there were more such instances of grass-root resistance against political parties where the will of the grass-roots people overruled the strategy and intention of the political parties.

Such a trend was not an overridingly dominant feature but it was heartening to see that there were some instances of self-assertion and independent opinion manifestation by the people for whom the panchayat bodies were formed.

3rd May, 2003

The Statesman (2 columns 62 lines) / The Telegraph (4 columns 124 lines)

Headline: Chopra toll eight, judicial remand for 26 / CM calls Somen for peace – Congress delegation leaves for Chopra to meet CPM leaders

Reporter / Correspondent

The reports informed that 26 people have been taken in custody in connection with the clashes between CPI (M) and Congress workers in Chopra over panchayat elections. The reports said a curfew-like situation prevailed in the area. They informed
North Bengal State Transport Corporation suspended its services to Chopra after a mob attacked a bus. The reports informed state urban development Minister Ashok Bhattacharya visited Chopra to assess the situation. He said he would submit his report to the chief minister. The reports informed he said he has urged CPI (M) workers not to take the law in their hands. The reports said North Bengal I-G has ordered an inquiry into the violence. The reports quoted Anil Biswas that the killing of four Congress Workers in Chopra was a result of ‘public outrage’.

The Telegraph pointed out the Congress leadership reacted positively to the Chief Minister’s appeal for a joint meeting in Chopra to bring back normalcy in the area before the May 11th panchayat poll. The report said the chief minister got in touch with state Congress leader and MLA Somen Mitra over telephone and urged him to rush to Chopra and hold a joint meeting with CPI (M) local leaders as the situation in the North Bengal town was deteriorating. After the call from CM, Mitra consulted senior Congress leaders and decided that a three member team will go to Chopra. The report said environment minister Manab Mukherjee had also left for Chopra to help ease tension there. The state CPI (M) secretary Anil Biswas said that the killings of CPI (M)’s popular leader and the consequent deaths of three other party activists in police firing has created a mass fury in the locality. The report said Biswas urged the CPI (M) cadres not to resort to any violence or become vengeful though CPI (M) activists were being killed in different parts of the state. Biswas also warned them not to react to any provocation as the Trinamul Congress, Congress, and the BJP will make serious attempts to provoke people by different means. CPI (M) politburo member and Left Front chairman Biman Bose stated that though the police said that they were attacked by an angry mob armed with sophisticated weapons after Akbar Ali was killed by Congress activists, his party wanted to know clearly whether the police were really attacked by an armed gang or they fired on CPI (M) activists without provocation.

3rd May, 2003

The Telegraph (1 column 25 lines)
Headline: Biman regrets Front fissures
Primary source: Political party leader

The report state LF chairman Biman Bose regretted the growing squabbles among Front partners following lack of seat adjustment. The report informed the
partners were contesting each other in 7000 seats and RSP and FB have accused CPI (M) of unleashing terror.

3rd May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 95 lines)
Headline: Bomb in Congress Workers’ meet, 1 killed
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported a bomb blast in Bhagabanpur where a Congress activist died and four were injured. The report informed the injured were admitted to the hospital and their condition was serious. The Congress claimed that CPI (M) men targeted the venue when the meeting of the party activists was being held. In response to the allegation, CPI (M) said that Congress activists’ were making bombs at the house when the bombs exploded. The report said the police statement matched the CPI (M)’s version. The report commented that the day before the chief minister’s election campaign at Contai, the blast kept the administration at Contai and Egra worried. The news reporter visited the blast site and informed that the Congress activist’s house was without roof due to the explosion. The reporter wrote women and children ran away from the house and the men of the neighboring houses also ran away and police have sealed the house.

It is interesting to note here that a reporter was sent to the site of the bomb blast but there were not many on-the-spot investigations of panchayat areas or investigation on people’s actual involvement in the panchayat process. The sample newspapers showed similar alertness in the Chopra incident too. The newspapers’ coverage suggests that sensational news would be prodded and highlighted.

3rd May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (6 columns 118 lines)
Headline: 4 Congress workers killed, Chopra bloody in revenge act
Reporter / Correspondent

This news item reiterated the last statement in the preceding paragraph. The report stated revenge killings at Chopra have instigated revenge politics in the area. The report commented after CPI (M) leader Akbar Ali was murdered and three CPI (M) activists killed in police shoot out, the circle of murder was complete with the murder of four Congress activists. The reporter Kishore Saha said 48 hours after the
incident the houses of Chopra that were strictly loyal to Congress were seen to hoist red flags. People of those houses wore black badges to mourn the death of four CPI (M) cadres. The report described how the physically weak Congress supporters were burned to death after they failed to flee like the others sensing trouble. The report described the helpless situation of the people there. The reporter hinted that 'red terror' has gripped the villagers and informed that though 7 out of the 8 panchayat samiti seats in the area were occupied by the Congress last time there were no trace of Congress supporters in the area.

3rd May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 108 lines)
Headline: Opposition plan to counter CPI (M) (Bishnupur, South 24 Parganas)
Reporter / Correspondent

The reporter Sanjay Chakrabarty pointed out at Bishnupur in South 24 Parganas a number of dreaded miscreants were part of the campaigning for the ruling as well as the opposition party. The report observed that in this situation fair election in Bishnupur subdivision would not be possible. The reporter interacted with the activists of both parties who predicted booth jam and other violent activities on the Election Day. The reporter informed that in Bishnupur the tension between the ruling CPI (M) and the opposition Trinamul Congress dates back to 2000. Since then the party cadres of both the political outfits are engaged in regular fisticuffs and quarrels to control political power in the area. The reporter added as soon as the panchayat election was announced there were repeated allegations and counter-allegations of pressure on candidates for quitting from the fray, physical assault of supporters and candidates, terror against opponent members. The report admitted that in this situation development of the people was a far cry. The report brought out the apprehensions of the common people and political leaders that in the present circumstances it would be difficult for voters to exercise their voting rights.

3rd May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 99 lines)
Headline: No sight of development; strange alliances issue in Bagmundi (Purulia)
Reporters / Correspondents

The reporters Sandipan Chakrabarty and Prashant Pal informed that at Bagmundi block in Purulia political violence and development are not issues. The main issue was tie-ups between political parties. The reporters mentioned that state leaders sitting at Kolkata may have finalized the list of candidates but members of different parties made their own tie-ups at the local level based on their need and advantage defying the respective state leadership. For example the reporters cited the example of a panchayat near Jhargram where CPI (M), Congress, BJP, and Trinamul have entered into a political understanding to demolish Forward Bloc. In yet another panchayat area Forward Bloc, BJP, Congress, and Trinamul have joined hands to defeat the CPI (M). The reporters said the common people were divided on the formation of such alliances, while some said it was example of political opportunism, others said it was the only way to resist CPI (M) excess. The reporters elaborately described the political contestants at the various gram panchayats in Bagmundi block.

3rd May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 65 lines)
Headline: Chief Minister admits police failure
Primary source: Chief minister & Election Commission (Both part of administration)

In this news item the report quoted the Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya “the concerned district police have failed in the Chopra case.” The report said the CM was also angry with local CPI (M) activists for their failure to remain calm in the volatile political environment knowing very well that adversaries were planning to upstage their strategies. The report said the state election commission also expressed anguish at the breakdown of law and order in the state before the panchayat election. The same report informed that CPI (M) state secretary Anil Biswas alleged that the Congress’ political status was weak and therefore it was trying to create a ruckus. Congress leader Priya Ranjan Das Munshi was quoted in the report that the CPI (M) was trying to prevail over different areas before the panchayat election.

3rd May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 95 lines)
Headline: Library in the name of chief minister’s daughter
Primary source: Local political party leaders

The reporter Anindya Jana discussed about the politics of the CPI (M) behind setting up of a library in the name of the chief minister’s daughter. The reporter stated while the CPI (M) leaders saw no ills in the name the opposition smelt of rat behind the ‘politically-motivated’ decision. The Trinamul panchayat samiti head claimed ignorance about the endeavor while the CPI (M) leaders said they did not want to involve the panchayat bodies and therefore did not inform the Trinamul panchayat members.

3rd May, 2003
Aajkaal (4 columns 152 lines)
Headline: Congress form grand alliance in the absence of Gani Khan
Reporter / Correspondent

The report described the political scenario in Malda where Congress has aligned with the Trinamul and the BJP and the state leadership provided the district unit with little funds. The report informed the Congress leadership claimed it was a localized formation but Trinamul leader Krishnendu Chowdhury pointed out that the Congress leadership has lost control over its workers. The report informed the opposition forces were missing the presence of Gani Khan as in the bickering between LF partners, RSP and CPI (M) he would surely ensured big gains for the opposition. The Congress’ Sabitri Mitra claimed CPI (M) was walking a tight-rope here and found it difficult to field candidates at places. But she admitted that without adequate funds workers were finding it difficult to match the CPI (M) challenge. The report informed the RSP was fighting independently in all except 2-3 blocks. It was campaigning against corruption and failure of CPI (M)-led panchayats just like the opposition but it clarified it has not joined the ‘grand alliance’. The report pointed out the CPI (M) district head Jibon Mitra was however sure that CPI (M) would win because of the development work done. The report concluded the electoral battle was alive with the alliance equation in this district.

3rd May, 2003
Aajkaal (3 columns 80 lines)
Headline: ‘Village of the dacoits’ best panchayat
**Chapter 12**

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The reporter Buddhasankar Goswami described how Phulmalancha village in Basanti once infested with dacoits was now leading a normal life. The reporter said the panchayat pradhan actively pursued development and has successfully brought back people to the mainstream of social life. The CPI (M) slogan was more developed panchayats. The report said the main contest was with the Congress as the Trinamul has fielded candidate in one seat but the RSP was fighting the CPI (M) almost everywhere. The report said the CPI (M) panchayat leaders proudly declared the development initiative in the area which has won this panchayat the award of the best panchayat in the state for three times from the state government. The reporter observed it was for this reason that though in the neighboring gram panchayats other parties held sway the CPI (M) was sure of victory here. The reporter interacted with the villagers who vowed to vote for the party that did work.

4th May, 2003 / 5th May, 2003

Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 85 lines) / Aajkaal (7 columns 240 lines) / The Statesman (3 columns 87 lines) on 5th May, 2003

**Headline**: We'll not fight in the election, candidates tell Pranab, Priya Somen to save lives (Chopra) / Congress leaders in tensed Chopra / Chopra homes abandoned

**Reporters / Correspondents**

The reports gave details of what the Congress leaders – Priya Das Munshi, Somen Mitra and Pranab Mukherjee - confronted when they visited Chopra and their reactions on the issue. The reports described how terror-stricken people had deserted the villages and they took no comfort in administrative assurances that they would not be tortured once they return. The reports said the Congress candidates in Chopra informed the leaders visiting the villages that they would not fight to save their lives. The reports highlighted the terrible condition in the area and the fear and terror in the minds of the people of the affected villages. The reports said Das Munshi alleged CPI (M) men were raiding Congress houses and Congress supporters were forced to put up red flag at gun point. The leaders stressed in this situation it was doubtful how the people would exercise their franchise.

4th May, 2003

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 68 lines)
Headline: With eves-droppers’ listening, Amarpur forced to love CPI (M) (Panagarh)

The reporter Gautam Bandopadhyay noted how though there was no improvement of their living standards and no signs of development the adivasis’ (tribals) love for CPI (M) remained intact. The reporter investigated it was all out of fear as there were few adversaries of the ruling party. The report said CPI (M) had planted eves-droppers in the villages who would report any opposing or defiant steps to the leaders who would initiate strict measures. That was the reason for the love of CPI (M). The reporter pointed out the absence of opposition members in the neighboring areas. The reporter portrayed the poor condition of the villages without medical and drinking water facilities and the Congress’ attempt to reach the voters projecting the lack of development but said it was not sure how much it would be able to withstand CPI (M) attack.

4th May, 2003  
Aajkaal (3 columns 73 lines)  
Headline: Gani not ready to accept Congress alliance with Trinamul at Malda  
Primary source: Political party leader  

The report recounted how Congress stalwart in Malda Gani Khan Chowdhury was unhappy with the pact with Trinamul Congress for the Panchayat elections.

4th May, 2003  
Aajkaal (1 column 44 lines)  
Headline: Scores leave SUCI and join CPI (M)  

The news informed that many SUCI supporters were joining the CPI (M) in the various areas of South 24 Parganas before the panchayat elections.

4th May, 2003 / 5th May, 2003  
Aajkaal (5 columns 150 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 108 lines)  
Headline: Minister rallies for Left candidate against the official Left Front nominee / FB-CPM are like two opponents (North Dinajpur)
Chapter 12

Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported how a state FB minister was campaigning for his party nominee against the official Left Front supported CPI (M) candidate in North Dinajpur. The minister alleged that the CPI (M) has teamed up with the Congress to defeat the FB. The report informed that though the other partners of the Left Front have struck a deal the FB was mostly fighting it alone in the district. The strongest opponent was Priya Das Munshi led Congress. The report projected the squabble between the two Front partners in great detail. The report also projected the CPI (M) stand point that there was grand alliance between the opposition to counter them. Congress’ Deepa Das Munshi however denied the formation of alliance with TMC-BJP and accused the CPI (M) of supporting the alliance.

The Anandabazar Patrika report stated the relation between the two Front partners was like opponents in this district and the contest was from the grass-root till the zilla parishad level. The report said the Congress headed by Priya Das Munshi hoped to take advantage of the situation. The report mentioned that FB was the bigger partner in this district and CPI (M) leaders admitted they were facing tough challenge in the district by the ally. The CPI (M) leader and state minister Manab Mukherjee, however, said Congress cannot take advantage of the situation as differences between the two partners were nothing new and the incident in Islampur and Chopra would give the CPI (M) an edge. The FB blamed the CPI (M) for the lack of LF unity in the district. The report quoted FB’s Debabrata Banerjee “CPI (M) does not want the other powerful Left constituent in districts to flourish.” The report described the contest between the Front partners at the three tiers.

4th May, 2003

Aajkaal (4 column 112 lines)

Headline: Congress-Trinamul caught in the alliance knot

Reporter / Correspondent

The report described how despite the alliance between the Trinamul Congress and the Congress there was an atmosphere of distrust between the local leaders and the workers in vast areas of South 24 Parganas. The report pointed out several instances of dissent among the workers of the two parties. The report informed there was a constant stream of people who abandoned SUCI and joined the CPI (M). It observed that the CPI (M) campaign was much hushed this time with less wall writing
and street meetings. The emphasis was on door-to-door campaign. The report went on to point out the differences in the opposition alliance. The report commented agricultural workers and fishermen were still loyal to the CPI (M) while the younger generation rooted for the Trinamul. The CPI (M) workers pointed out the development work done by the party gave it an edge and since this was rural elections, the party had a stronger opportunity.

5th May, 2003
The Telegraph (1 column 39 lines)
Headline: 4 hurt in poll clashes
Reporter / Correspondent

The news item informed that at Canning subdivision in South 24 Parganas four persons, including a woman, were injured in clashes between supporters of the RSP and the CPI (M). The report said the injured were admitted in serious condition to a local hospital. It informed around noon, some armed men owing allegiance to the CPI (M) allegedly attacked the house of a local RSP leader when he was taking lunch. The raiders pounced on him and injured him grievously. Two of his family members were also injured in the melee. The RSP alleged another RSP panchayat samiti member was also attacked by the CPI (M). The report said the CPI (M) termed the allegations baseless.

5th May, 2003
The Telegraph (1 column 81 lines)
Headline: RSP snubs Front unity appeal
Primary source: Political party / leaders

The report said RSP has rebuffed CPI (M)’s request to jointly appeal to candidates taking on official Left Front nominees to withdraw from the fray but RSP made it clear that it would contest all the friendly fights leading to the attack. The report said Anil Biswas informed that the Front candidates should launch door-to-door campaigns along with leaflet distribution to back the official nominee. The RSP, the report said, was smarting under the humiliation of Biswanath Chowdhury at Hili where he was stopped from addressing a rally by the CPI (M) supporters. The report quoted RSP’s state secretary Debabrata Banerjee “it was impossible for the state leadership to stem squabbles among the Front partners at the grassroots.” The report
concluded with the comment that Front unity has taken a beating in at least 4500 seats in Murshidabad, South Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Malda districts where the CPI (M) and the RSP have locked horns against each other.

5th May, 2003
The Telegraph (4 columns 80 lines) / The Statesman (Internet edition)
Headline: Partners boycott Buddha rallies / Buddha mum on Left unity

Reporter / Correspondent

The first report informed that at Murshidabad the Left Front suffered another setback before the panchayat polls with three major partners, the Forward Bloc, CPI and the RSP, boycotting two rallies of chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya in the district. Justifying the decision to stay away from the rallies district RSP secretary Biswanath Banerjee argued it was not organized under the Left Front banner. The RSP, the report pointed out, was contesting against the CPI (M) in hundreds of seats in the district. Manik Mandal, the district CPI secretary echoed Banerjee. He added that his party was not informed about the meeting. The report analyzed that relations among the Front constituents have reached rock bottom after CPI (M) activists allegedly forced RSP leader and jail minister Biswanath Chowdhury to call off a meeting. The report wrote in fact since then several Front constituents have boycotted Bhattacharjee's meetings in different districts. The report added but the Chief Minister seemed unfazed as he announced a host of decisions his government was going to adopt to improve the status of panchayats. He announced that the government planned to increase the financial grant to the panchayats for their better functioning.

The Statesman report added that the chief minister was silent on the issue of Left Front unity in the rally. The news said that Bhattacharya urged the people not to elect the opposition as it would stall progress of the villages. The report said Bhattacharya described the various development initiatives of the Left government. The report stated the district CPI (M) secretary alleged that the opposition was trying to create trouble and terrorize people. The district Congress President Adhir Chowdhury was quoted “Bhattacharya’s visit would increase police highhandedness and CPI (M) terror in the district.”
5th May, 2003
The Statesman (3 columns 75 lines)
Headline: CPM straining every nerve at Nabagram
Reporter / Correspondent

The report pointed out the CPI (M) was using the administrative machinery shamelessly to reign in the Congress and win the panchayat election in Congress strongholds of Murshidabad where last time the party had almost swept the three-tiers of the panchayat. The report said the survival of the rural poor was the most important issue eclipsing the state government’s failure to control erosion of the river banks or the failure to implement various Central government programs. The report stated that the Congress has established itself as the party of the poor and due to the efforts of the district President, Adhir Chowdhury the Congress was well-organized and well-knit at the grass-root level. The report concluded by virtue of its control over the administration the CPI (M) would win this election but it needs to consider its future as the poor in the rural areas are shifting alliance to the Congress.

5th May, 2003
The Telegraph (3 columns 73 lines) / Aajkaal (4 columns 92 lines)
Headline: Push back poll: Pranab / CPI (M) nullifies Congress claim to postpone elections in Chopra
Primary source: Political party leaders

The reports said that Pranab Mukherjee demanded postponement of panchayat elections at Chopra and Islampur as the violence has not completely ebbed away. The reports stated Mukherjee wrote to the Chief Election Commission and said the situation at both Chopra and Islampur, was not conducive to holding election and holding an election at this time would amount to a farce. Mukherjee said most of the people were on the run and the villages were almost deserted and people who have returned are facing acute problems of food, shelter and security. The reports informed Left front chairman Biman Bose, however, ruled out the possibility of postponing the election. He added he found no reason why the elections should be postponed. The reports said Bose admitted that the situation was tense there but things would be normal within two to three days and there would be no problem for the people to exercise their franchise.
5th May, 2003
The Statesman (3 columns 48 lines)
Headline: Restrain violent Congress-men: Anil
Primary source: Political party leader
The report observed in a surprising political development, the Congress has replaced the Trinamul Congress as the perpetrator of violence in the run-up to the panchayat polls if the accusations of the state CPI (M) secretary are anything to go by. The report said Anil Biswas felt that the Congress leadership should restrain its party workers who were indulging in violence on the eve of panchayat polls. The report wrote Biswas said the situation harked back to the early 70’s when the Congress was accused of engineering widespread violence in the state.

5th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 134 lines) / Aajkaal (7 columns 55 lines)
Headline: Chopra-fire spread to Islampur, 10 injured in clashes / Chopra calm, now Islampur – Congress attacks CPI (M) with bombs and bullets
Reporter / Correspondent
The reports said the tension in Chopra has spread to nearby Islampur where clashes between Congress and CPI (M) workers left 5 from each party injured. The police arrested many from both parties and kept a strict vigil to avoid further untoward incident. The CPI (M) claimed the Congress was trying to spread terror in the district to disturb the election process. The party said after the Congress team visited the area and went back Congress supporters gained momentum and started attacking. The Congress on the other hand claimed CPI (M) was trying to terrorize its supporters.

The Aajkaal report pointed out that the all-party meeting to ensure peace in Chopra failed. The report said CPI (M) leader Anil Biswas stated if the Congress maintained calm then normalcy would return soon while the Congress and Trinamul leaders urged the need for an impartial police and administration.

The Anandabazar Patrika report described how Chopra was limping back to normalcy but the residents were silent and the report quoted the residents that they were told to remain silent and politically inactive to survive.
5th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 114 lines)
Headline: Win without contest for CPI (M) rare in Jalpaiguri
Reporter / Correspondent

The report said the Congress and CPI (M) are fighting head-on in this district. The report informed the CPI (M) and RSP was up against each other in many seats. The RSP alleged the CPI (M) did not want to distribute seats according to strength but cited LF norms here whereas in South Dinajpur it contravened the Left Front norm and set up its own candidates against the official LF nominees. The report said the CPI (M) was worried over alliances of the opposition parties under various fronts. It was the reason for the decrease in uncontested wins in the districts. There were also reports of some Left parties like SUCI and even RSP joining the grand alliance which has queered the pitch of the CPI (M). The alliances, the report informed, were mostly formed at the grass-root level. The report pointed out the opposition did not admit of alliances but the way the candidates were nominated for various seats confirmed understanding between these parties.

5th May, 2003
The Statesman (4 columns 84 lines)
Headline: Fissures in LF force RSP-CPM contest
Reporter / Correspondent

The report specified that for the first time in the history of the Left Front, there was a direct contest between RSP and CPI (M) candidates in 22 blocks in Murshidabad. Some of the seats were witnessing a direct contest between the two. The report said local RSP leaders blamed the high handedness of the CPI (M) for the failure to maintain LF unity. The report said the RSP was also unhappy over the fact that the chief minister instead of calling a LF meeting to resolve the issue has decided to address two rallies of the CPI (M). The report said RSP alleged discrimination in distribution of funds for Central projects. The report said the CPI (M), on the other hand, criticized RSP’s attitude and held it responsible for the break in Front unity.

5th May, 2003
The Statesman (4 columns 84 lines)
Headline: FB grassroots rebel against Left Front unity (Coochbehar)
Primary source: Local Political party leadership

The news informed in Cooch Behar panchayat poll contest had been reduced to fight between two Front constituents - CPI (M) and Forward Bloc. The report wrote on the surface there is unity but at the grass-root level the unity stands fractured. The report said the hostility among the rank and file of the FB against the CPI (M) is so intense that they have filed nominations as independents even where they have got nomination as official Left Front. The FB leadership admitted the Left unity was imposed from the top while the grass-root members of LF parties were not willing to abide by the diktat of the top. The report concluded leaders of both parties said efforts were on to reach an amicable settlement but reactions of the grassroots made it amply clear that it was not an easy task.

5th May, 2003
The Telegraph (Internet Edition)
Headline: Chopra calm but fear rules
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported a deceptive calm enveloped the violence-wracked Chopra, with the CPI (M) reining in its rampaging workers for fear of postponement of panchayat election. State election commissioner, however, turned down an appeal by the Congress to defer the poll in Chopra and parts of Islampur. He told a delegation of the same party that the situation there was under control.

The report also informed that the Election Commission held a meeting with the Home secretary and Director General of Police and expressed satisfaction over the pre-election law and order situation in rural Bengal. He added that the Divisional Commissioner of Jalpaiguri and the District Magistrate of North Dinajpur has told him the situation in Chopra was conducive for holding a peaceful election. The report also informed that the state Congress president Pranab Mukherjee has said that the violence in Chopra was fallout of CPI (M)-police nexus and was part of the Marxists ploy to wipe out the opposition in Bengal. The report said that the chief minister hit back at demands made by Mukherjee and Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee to postpone the election and argued that they always said such things before elections and they will never say that the law and order is all right during election unless all the people become their supporters.
5th May, 2003
Aajkaal (2 columns 94 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) to campaign through leaflet, over public address system for unity
Primary source: Political party
The report said CPI (M) has ordered its workers to campaign over microphone along with distribution of leaflet to reduce differences in the Left Front. The report said Anil Biswas asked CPI (M) workers to co-ordinate with any one Left Front partner and continue campaigning, the LF chairman Biman Bose advised all Front candidates standing against official candidates to withdraw immediately considering their possibility of win. He reminded that the opposition would reap the benefits of rift between the Front partners. Bose said the problem of unity was acute at the grass-root level.

5th May, 2003
Aajkaal (7 columns 145 lines)
Headline: Agricultural development ensures Jalpaiguri remain Left Front bastion
Primary source: Grass-root voters
The reporter Kunal Ghosh interacted with the villagers who spoke well of the Left Front led panchayats and their development endeavors like roads, primary schools. The CPI (M) leadership was aware that the voters could measure the visible changes in the 25 years of panchayat rule and so even if the opposition has teamed up in a grand alliance it mattered little to the ruling party. The report said though the Left constituents were fighting as a united Front yet they were campaigning separately but there was little bitterness. The report said agricultural revolution was witnessed in the entire district but the condition of the tea gardens and its workers was pathetic. The report said there was lot of enthusiasm over vote in the agricultural belt but in the tea-gardens it was just a regulation.

5th May, 2003
Aajkaal (3 columns 75 lines)
Headline: Salanpur’s handicapped Left candidate wins
Chapter 12

This was the story of a handicapped panchayat pradhan who won a third time in the trot. The candidate Sasti Bauri travelled on his knees to hear problems and solve them. The report wrote about the other uncontested wins in Salanpur as well as the contests between the various political parties.

5th May, 2003
The Statesman (Internet edition)
Headline: Taming teachers: Desperate bid to win panchayat voters

The report said Left Front’s bid to rein in primary teachers by preventing them from contesting the panchayat polls come at a late hour and would be of little help considering the poor condition of primary schools. The report pointed out this may have adverse affect as the Trinamul-BJP and other Left Front constituents may not be willing to abide by the stand taken up by Biman Bose. The report said the primary school teachers may not be willing to accept the advice of Bose.

5th May, 2003
The Telegraph (1 column 40 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-Congress clash after murder

The news informed that at Beharampur, a CPI (M) worker was killed and five Congress supporters were seriously injured in a clash between the two parties as the spiral of violence in the run-up to the panchayat poll continued to increase. Murshidabad superintendent of police informed that the CPI (M) supporter had multiple wounds in his body. His son alleged in an FIR that a group of Congress supporters had called him out and killed him later. The report said in another instance in Murshidabad, Congress and CPI (M) supporters fought with each other and opened fire. The police said four Congress supporters and one from the CPI (M) have been sent to hospital with bullet wounds. Ten people belonging to both the parties have been arrested.

6th May, 2003
The Statesman (1 column 22 lines)
Headline: Politics and Polio
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that in Khatra a doctor refused to administer polio drops to the daughter of a Trinamul activist unless permitted by the CPI (M) panchayat pradhan.

The report referred to ‘documents’ for the news. It revealed the unbridled power of the ruling party, the political excesses by the panchayat functionaries and an unwanted modification of ‘duties’ of panchayat members.

6th May, 2003
The Statesman (2 columns 115 lines) / Aajkaal (5 columns 160 lines)
Headline: Sikder attacked on campaign trail / Tapan attacked in Barasat; Firing from convoy injures villager
Reporter / Correspondent

The reports said Union minister and BJP leader Tapan Sikder was attacked by CPI (M) supporters in Barasat, North 24 Parganas. The report informed Sikder and four of his associates were injured in the attack. The report said Anil Biswas admitted of the attack but added CPI (M) men were provoked and Sikder was not the target. The report said the political row over the attack escalated as TMC leader Mamata Banerjee said West Bengal was a fit case for imposition of Article 356. The reports informed Tapan Sikder himself did not support her demand and the BJP state secretary in an election rally in Malda also opposed Banerjee’s demand.

All the sample newspapers reported elaborately on the attack on the convoy of Union Minister Tapan Sikder. While the BJP blamed the CPI (M) for this incident, CPI (M) pointed out BJP supporters had destroyed their posters, leaflets etc as a counter-reaction. The reports said Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya expressed alarm at this incident though his party chief appeared unapologetic.

6th May, 2003
The Telegraph (3 columns 73 lines)
Headline: Sounding a red alert (Editorial)

The editorial read on the eve of the first panchayat polls in 1978 rural West Bengal was on the threshold of sweeping changes: economic, political and social. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) which led the Left Front to power in the state
the year before was both the agent and beneficiary of those changes. The editorial said after 25 years of rule the party was desperate to retain its rural hold as a new challenge has emerged in the villages. The editorial found it surprising how little the new challenges in the agriculture sector and government’s new policy have figured in the panchayat poll campaign. The editorial said the focus was always on power struggles and acquisitions. The editorial pointed out there was continuous tension not only with the opposition but with the other Left partners as well. The opposition mahajot of the Congress, Trinamul Congress and the BJP have put the CPI (M) on the back foot. The editorial said the panchayats were a major source of conflict as it was seen as a steady source of funds. The editorial said there was pressing need for the CPI (M) to win the panchayat election. The editorial concluded the success of government’s policy depended on the panchayats as they were major instruments of change in the rural areas.

6th May, 2003

Anandabazar Patrika (2 column 83 lines) and (1 column 37 lines)

Headline: No one to light the lamps at the Congress office (Chopra) / Demand to postpone elections quashed

Reporter / Correspondent

The report commented that the political murder of Akbar Ali, the CPI (M) leader as well as three CPI (M) and four Congress supporters at Chopra has made it the epicenter of violence and unrest during 2003 panchayat election. The report informed that Congress was now inactive in the Chopra block. No local leader was ready to open the party office in the block. Congress gram Panchayat pradhan was missing from Chopra following political threats from CPI (M) members. West Bengal state Congress had appealed to stop the panchayat election in Chopra and Islampur block on this account.

But as the second report informed the election commission has declared there was no reason to stop election in Chopra. The commission was satisfied after talking to the district administration and other officials who ensured all necessary steps would be taken to ensure free and fair elections.

6th May, 2003

Aajkaal (2 columns 26 lines)
Headline: We’re victims of terror: Nirupam
Primary source: Political party leader
In an election campaign at Katwa, Murshidabad, Nirupam Sen, Minister of Commerce and Industry, government of West Bengal stated that though the opposition was shouting hoarse alleging terror 13 workers of the CPI (M) have been killed in election-related violence. The report said he commented the panchayat boards that are led by opposition forces suffer from extreme manhandling.

6th May, 2003
Aajkaal (2 columns 26 lines)
Headline: Trinamul terror in Amta: Congress
Primary source: Political party
In this item it was reported that Congress complained against Trinamul Congress for organizing terror in Amta block of Howrah. The report further informed that a CPI (M) supporter was killed by some antisocial in Domkal block of Mursidabad. CPI (M) complained that the Congress was responsible for this murder. The Congress denied this allegation and suggested that CPI (M) with the help of police was preparing to organize political war in this area after the panchayat election.

6th May, 2003
Aajkaal (1 column 25 lines) and (1 column 80 lines)
Headline: People’ War Group distribute leaflet to boycott panchayat vote / MCC leader abandon arms to become CPI (M) candidate
Reporter / Correspondent
The first report informed that the people’s war group and MCC, two radical naxalite outfits distributed leaflets for boycotting panchayat election in protest of domination by conventional political parties as well as terror of police force in scheduled tribe oriented Jhargram block.

A contrary picture was projected in the second report where it was informed that a former radical leader of MCC was contesting as a CPI (M) gram panchayat candidate from Bankura. The candidate Bharati Soren said she wanted to work for the development of the tribal people in her village. The report cited other examples of naxalites joining the mainstream and also projected the grim picture of opposition by some hardcore groups of the outlaws.
6th May, 2003
Aajkaal (3 columns 51 lines)
Headline: Issue in North Dinajpur: Congress terror
Primary source: Local members of political parties
The report informed the main election plank of CPI (M) in North Dinajpur was terrorism organized by Congress. The report stated that the CPI (M) believed that it had taken initiatives in Chopra for maintaining peace and normal life but the Congress was trying to upstage those attempts. The report said the CPI (M) planned to corner the Congress by campaigning with Akbar Ali [CPI (M) leader killed in Chopra] in lips. The report said the issue of development has become insignificant and the Congress supporters even in the remotest part of this district were faced with dilemma when the Chopra issue was highlighted.

6th May, 2003
Aajkaal (2 columns 120 lines)
Headline: Nobody visits villages; other party leaders give statements from the city (Burdwan)
Primary source: Political leadership
The report quoted Burdwan district CPI (M) secretary that while CPI (M) was working throughout the year for rural development, Mamata Banerjee and other Trinamul Congress and Congress leaders rarely visited villages and were busy giving statements through press conferences from Calcutta. The reporter on independent investigation found that there was no opposition campaign and though the Front had won almost 50% seats uncontested its supporters continued to campaign. The reporter said there were complaints of terror from the opposition members of the district but they were furious over their own party leaders and squarely blamed for the lack of opposition in this district.

6th May, 2003
Aajkaal (1 column 76 liners)
Headline: CPI (M) beside people throughout the year; ‘jot-mahajot has little significance (Howrah)
Primary source: Political party representative
The report informed through examples that CPI (M) has nominated common people of different professions with great public communication in this year’s
panchayat election. The Trinamul has also fielded new candidates from different fields. The reporter quoted district leaders from both parties who said they were confident of winning the panchayat elections in various areas of the district. The report discussed about the alliances and the challenge thrown by the opposition to the ruling party in the various blocks of the district.

7th May, 2003
The Statesman (5 columns 99 lines)
Headline: Trinamul terrorists produced by Red terror plot revenge
Reporter / Correspondent
The reporter Anindya Sengupta described how the Trinamul activists in West Midnapore and Bankura were driven out of their villagers by the CPI (M) and finding no support from their leaders based in the city has established links with the outlawed PWD group. The report informed that over 300 Trinamul activists have been hiding in forests of Bankura in fear of the terror unleashed by the CPI (M) cadres in the run up to the panchayat polls.

7th May, 2003
The Statesman (2 columns 64 lines)
Headline: Left versus Left (South Dinajpur)
Reporter / Correspondent
The news by Uday Basu analyzed the relationship between the two Left Front partners CPI (M) and RSP in South Dinajpur. The report said the CPI (M) accused the RSP of maligning the party and spreading rumors about CPI (M) terror. The RSP insisted on CPI (M)’s intimidation tactics and charged it with forging a ‘maha-maha’ jot with the Trinamul-BJP combine and the Congress to defeat the RSP. The bickering between the two partners was described in great detail in the report with quotes from district leaders of both the parties.

7th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 116 lines)
Headline: Riding on fear CPI (M) dominates Goghat
Reporter / Correspondent
The reporter Anindya Jana informed that in Goghat block of Hooghly district there were no opposition candidates for 293 gram panchayat seats. Trinamul and BJP
candidates were warned not to submit nomination forms due to the terror of CPI (M). The reporter informed both parties have filed a complaint letter against CPI (M) to the Block Development Officer of Goghat. The CPI (M) leaders said the opposition did not field candidates. The reporter described how the law and order situation in the block was at the mercy of political parties and their show of one-upmanship cornered the common people.

7th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 85 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-FB confrontation, opposition united at the grass-root level (Howrah)
Reporter / Correspondent

This report described alliance formation by the opposition forces, infighting between the LF partners and conflicts between political foes in Howrah. The news reported that in this district CPI (M) and Forward Block were fighting against each other and the Congress, Trinamul and BJP have formed a grand opposition alliance in many areas against the Left parties. The reporters Alok Mukhopadhyay and Nurul Absar added though some of the opposition leaders were not too keen on the alliance the grassroots acted on their own and forged an alliance. The Trinamul leadership said “If we opposed the alliance many workers would have left the party” while a BJP leader was quoted, “the alliance was against terror and corruption.” The reporters said in the rural interiors the opposition have put up a united candidate against CPI (M) while in the areas near towns there is division of the opposition votes. But the reporters concluded wherever the opposition was not challenging the ruling party its partners in the Left Front were up against it. The report then gave the details of the contest between the various political parties in the different blocks of Howrah for the forthcoming panchayat elections. The reporters added the CPI (M) wanted to ensure the minority vote in the district and therefore grass-root level workers were following minority-appeasement in their campaigning. While the district leaders admitted of such an occurrence they stated they had no hand over the campaigning at the grass-root level.

7th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 60 lines) / The Telegraph (Internet edition)
Headline: Congress-CPI (M) clash in Raigunj, 25 injured, 1 arrested / Fresh flare-up breaks North Dinajpur lull

Reporter / Correspondent

The reports informed there was a clash between Congress and CPI (M) supporters at Raigunj where 25 people were wounded. One person was arrested in this incident. Both parties blamed each other for the incident. The police, the report informed, said that a bomb was first thrown at the house of a CPI (M) supporter and on the following day a Congress meeting was attacked by the CPI (M) which started the scuffle between the two parties. The report said the BDO of North Dinajpur said the administration would ensure the safety and security of the homeless candidates in Chopra.

7th May, 2003
Aajkaal (3 columns 68 lines)

Headline: Biman fires fall-in-line notice at allies / CPI (M) is the driving force of the Left Front

Primary source: Political party leader

The news reports stated like the beleaguered head of a joint family trying to buy peace with assertive members, the CPI (M) today asked its partners in the Left Front to stop sniping at it. The report said Left chairman Biman Bose emphasized a weakened CPI (M) will mean a wobbly front. The reports said the leader said in a press meet if the CPI (M) is without the spine then the Left Front would fall. The report said Bose's comments are to be read against the backdrop of violent clashes and keen contest between the Front constituents. Bose however said in no way would the disunity in Front affect the poll results and if the Front wins the chinks in the armory would disappear. The report Bose pointed out the Trinamul claim that opposition could not put up candidates in 20000 seats was not true as only 6283 candidates in all the tiers have won uncontested.

7th May, 2003
Aajkaal (2 columns 46 lines)

Headline: LF hold meeting against the opposition grand alliance at Gajol (Malda)

Reporter / Correspondent

The news informed of a meeting against the grand alliance in the block by the Left Front. The report informed many people assembled in the meeting which
encouraged Sailen Sarkar, state minister and other LF leaders. The minister criticized the three opposition parties for forging an opportunistic grand alliance. The report stated he pointed out that the LF ministry has made provision so that the panchayats would not be depended on the panchayat pradhans but would be administered by the gram sansads. The report informed that like elsewhere in the Malda district the posters, slogans and wall writings of the Congress, Trinamul Congress and BJP was sitting pretty side-by-side but only in Gajol the LF was united against the alliance and CPI (M) and RSP have shared seats peacefully.

7th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 38 lines)
Headline: 1000 ballot papers lost from BDO office
Reporter / Correspondent
The news reported that 1000 ballot papers of Zilla Parishad election were missing from Gosaba Block Development office.

7th May, 2003
Aajkaal (2 column 78 lines)
Headline: Left Front wins heart, Agricultural growth combine with industry endeavor (Coochbehar)
Reporter / Correspondent
The report indicated that the panchayat system has changed the village life in Coochbehar. The CPI (M) District Secretary demanded the introduction of agricultural industry by his party had brought about this change. The reporter Kunal Ghosh said that while in every district the mainstay of the ruling party’s campaign are panchayats, village development and self-help groups, in this district it was industrialization which started off late but was fairly smooth now. The report stated that development in the agricultural field is complemented by various industrial set-ups. The report described the various industrial developments in the district and also pointed to a growing industrial worker population that believed in the ability of the ruling party.

7th May, 2003
Aajkaal (1 column 60 lines)
Headline: Former Congressmen are CPI (M) power in Gani Khan’s stronghold

Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that in Sujapur, Malda former Congressman Hamidur Rehman has filed nomination as the CPI (M) zilla parishad candidate. The report said his family members who were once the members of Congress were also contesting or campaigning for the CPI (M). This was also the case with several other Congress supporters in the block. The report specified Rehman said that in Gayeshpur, the Congress panchayat pradhan did little to develop the area. The report stated he said there were many allegations of corruption and nepotism against these erstwhile Congress members.

7th May, 2003

Aajkaal (1 column 39 lines), (2 columns 36 lines) and (1 column 32 lines)

Headline: MCC warn candidates with dire consequences if they venture out to campaign / Sister-in laws take on each other in Barasat / Two brothers fight out a keen contest in Katwa

Reporter / Correspondent

The first report specified in Raipur block of South Bankura many erstwhile members of naxalite groups like MCC, PWG and Jharkhand party are participating in the CPI (M) campaigning but in the neighborhood Ranibandh block which was dominated by tribals and was more underdeveloped the CPI (M) supporters are campaigning with fear.

The second and the third report dealt with contests between family members in two areas.

7th May, 2003

Aajkaal (4 columns 87 lines)

Headline: Panchayats in the plains have altered the life of the villagers in the Hill

Reporter / Correspondent

The reporter Kunal Ghosh described how the panchayats in the plain land of Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar have altered the lives of the hill residents by River Teesta. The report said though these people do not abide in the panchayat areas they were getting work for assembling and breaking stones lying beside the river. These stones were heavily used in the development of infrastructure sanctioned by the panchayats in the above mentioned districts.
8th May, 2003

The reports informed that CPI (M) activists tried to attack the PWD minister Amar Chowdhury of the RSP at Sandeshkhali area in South 24 Parganas the previous night. The reports observed that this allegation comes a day after CPI (M) men allegedly attacked Union Minister Tapan Sikder. The reports said the minister was attacked when he tried to intercept CPI (M) supporters who were assaulting RSP members. The minister was later rescued by the police. The reports said the situation in the area was tense.

8th May, 2003

The first news reported the chief minister has instructed DIGs of every district to take initiatives for maintaining peace and security on 11th May. The report said Buddhadeb Bhattacharya explained the attack on Amar Chowdhury in Sandeshkhali was nothing but a mishap caused by some anti-socials. The report said CPI (M) leader Anil Biswas was also not willing to give much importance to the incident. The report said the RSP state secretary Debabrata Bandopadhyay, however, stated the chief minister has admitted the hand of CPI (M) workers in the attack and identified the reason for the attack as CPI (M)’s growing intolerance to the popularity of the RSP. The report said the affected RSP minister has alleged terror in the various areas of South 24 Parganas in his petition.

The Aajkaal report wrote Bandopadhyay stated that the RSP is going to encounter such problems of CPI (M) aggression by staying within the Front.

The Statesman report said repeated attacks on RSP workers would affect the LF unity. The report said Bandopadhyay said he would meet the CPI (M) leaders and ask them to control their cadres during the panchayat election.
8th May, 2003
Aajkaal (4 columns 106 lines)
Headline: Tapan hold meeting in empty grounds
Reporter / Correspondent
The report said Tapan Sikder visited Khamarpara, where he was allegedly assaulted by CPI (M) supporters on his earlier visit. He had a large police force for company. The report elaborated that he addressed a rally amid tight security. Nearly 200 police personnel cordoned off the area until Sikder left. The Union minister made few references on the attack, but rallied against the reign of terror and demanded that a police camp be set up to ward off untoward incidents during the panchayat polls. The report then added that in Calcutta BJP central observer said the situation in Bengal in the run-up to the panchayat elections was alarming and demanded immediate Central intervention.

8th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 72 lines)
Headline: Crack in SUCI fortress, courtesy CPI (M) (Joynagar-Kultali)
Reporter / Correspondent
The report said the CPI (M) was successful in eroding the dominance of the SUCI from Kultali-Joynagar area in South 24 Parganas. The two areas were synonymous with the SUCI. The report informed this was the first time that the CPI (M) has won uncontested here. The report said this was also the first time that the SUCI failed to put up candidates in all gram panchayats. The SUCI MLA of the area said some candidates were forced to withdraw their names from the contest due to CPI (M) threat. The reporter Sanjay Chakrabarty visited the villages and interacted with the candidates and their families who related the same tale. The report said CPI (M) leader Kanti Ganguly denied all allegations and said that supporters of the SUCI were abandoning the party and joining the CPI (M).

8th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 60 lines) / The Telegraph (Internet Edition) / Aajkaal (7 columns 78 lines)
Headline: CPI (M)-Trinamul clash in Bhatar, 1 from each party dead / Trinamul-CPI (M) spill blood in Burdwan / Murder in Bhatar, revenge killing
**Reporter / Correspondent**

The news reported an argument between Trinamul Congress and CPI (M) supporters during a political meeting of the later triggered a clash in Nasigram and left two activists — one from each party — dead and four injured. The incident generated great anger. The report elaborated tension was simmering in the area since Trinamul failed to file a single nomination for the 12-member gram panchayat giving CPI (M) a walkover. The tension boiled over when activists of Mamata Banerjee’s party dropped in at the CPI (M) meeting. The police said during an angry exchange of words, a Trinamul supporter hurled a bomb, killing a local CPI (M) leader and injuring two others. The CPI (M) supporters retaliated by lynching a Trinamul functionary. The mob also beat his father and brother. A Trinamul panchayat member said CPI (M) had earlier threatened his party men with dire consequences if they filed nominations for the panchayat elections.

8th May, 2003
The Telegraph (Internet Edition)
**Headline: Dual-post row stings CPM leader**

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The news reported with the panchayat election barely four days away the Malda zilla parishad sabhadhipati, a senior CPI (M) leader, finds herself in the midst of a row over her appointment as principal of a school for the speech-and-hearing impaired. The newspaper cited documents in its possession to elaborate that Shefali Khatun has been serving as principal of a residential deaf and dumb school in Malda district since its inception in 2001. The district magistrate when interrogated agreed that the sabhadhipati cannot hold another job under the law. The newspaper was intrigued how it has been possible for this functionary to carry on with both jobs at the same time for the last three years.

8th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (5 columns 104 lines)
**Headline: Why will the vote not be postponed?**

**Reporter / Correspondent**

The reporters Prasun Acharya and Pritam Sarkar visited Chopra. They said like Pranab Mukherjee the question of a 13 year old boy and son of a murdered
Congress worker was whether voting can be conducted properly in the present scaring circumstances. The report said the Left chairman Biman Bose was however convinced there was no need to postpone elections. The report said the CPI (M) supporters in Chopra and Islampur held similar viewpoints. The report informed Congress was in an advantageous position in these areas and the CPI (M) knew that if the Congress supporters returned home then there could be an upset in the zilla parishad which the CPI (M) obviously did not want. The reporters related the tale of political conflict between the two parties in the area which eclipsed the issue of development or anything else.

8th May, 2003
Aajkaal (5 columns 114 lines)
Headline: Whoever wins Left Front would gain (South Dinajpur)
Reporter / Correspondent

The reporter stated the opposition was very weak in this district and the contest was mainly between the two Left constituents - CPI (M) and the RSP. The reporter Kunal Ghosh said the voters were confused as they have seen any movement in the area under the Left Front flag so contest between LF allies was something new to them. The report said both parties stated they were confident of winning and spoke against the opposition forces in the same tone. The report described in detail the strife between the two Front partners and contests in the various blocks in the district.

8th May, 2003
Aajkaal (5 columns 78 lines)
Headline: Lakshminarayanpur: Sign of women empowerment (Birbhum)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report stated if all the CPI (M) contestants are voted to power in Lakshminarayanpur it will be a unique experience as all the gram panchayat nominees of the ruling party are women. The report commented though the seats are not reserved for women, the ruling party has nominated all women candidates to give boost to women empowerment. The report narrated the bickering in the Left Front in the district. It also stated at some places the Congress and Trinamul-BJP will put up a fight but the dominance of the Left Front was unmistakable as it has already won.
many seats uncontested at the lower tiers. The report elaborated on the fight between the LF constituents in the various blocks.

8th May, 2003  
Aajkaal (5 columns 78 lines) 
Headline: Front ahead in regular development  
Reporter / Correspondent  
The report stated that the people of Bankura rarely witnessed opposition party members during the last five years. The report reminded in the last election there was a significant presence of the opposition. This time the Trinamul could not field candidates in many seats. The Trinamul leaders blamed the CPI (M) terror for such a predicament. The report dealt with the political conflicts in the district between CPI (M) and the RSP as well as the differences of between the BJP and the Trinamul Congress.

9th May, 2003  
The Statesman (6 columns 90 lines)  
Headline: Jhee Express brings polls to Kolkata  
Reporter / Correspondent  
The news informed all domestic helps hailing from various parts of East Midnapore have demanded four days leave to be able to visit their villages and cast their votes. Failing to do so will, they said, result in inconceivable loss, as CPI (M) cadres may harm their dear and near ones.

This news has the implication that threats and intimidations have become integral part of the panchayat elections in West Bengal. The panchayat election was framed to liberate the grassroots from the shackles of the landlords and vested interests. But if political parties become perpetrators of violence and coercion to secure votes then that stifles their participation and empowerment.

9th May, 2003  
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 117 lines) / The Telegraph (Internet edition) / Aajkaal (5 columns 134 lines) and (3 columns 97 lines)  
Headline: Firing on Minister’s companion, uncontrolled violence in many districts / Rivals in murder and arson / PWD minister to visit Jelekhali again
today / CPI (M) worker murdered in Joynagar, CPI (M) leader attacked in Itahar

Reporters / Correspondents

The news items reported clash between RSP and CPI (M) supporters at Sandeshkhali after the attack on RSP minister Amar Chowdhury. Seven RSP supporters were wounded by CPI (M) activists in the attack. The reports stated that Chowdhury undeterred by the incident planned to address a political gathering in the same block again.

The news items reported on other clashes and untoward incident in North and South Dinajpur, Hooghly and Nadia. They reported in Joynagar in South 24-Parganas a CPI (M) and a SUCI supporter were murdered and a string of revenge clashes followed thereafter. The reports said Joynagar and Kultali were charged with tension since the killings and exploded when supporters of both parties torched houses seeking revenge. A 24-year-old SUCI supporter was killed while returning home from a public meeting. SUCI claimed several party workers were injured as CPI (M) supporters fired upon them indiscriminately. The CPI (M) accused the SUCI of training guns on its supporters and claimed that at least one of its supporters, who were riddled with bullets, died in hospital. The reports informed that Sunderbans development minister and district secretary of the CPI (M) went to the spot. The police said as the news of the murder spread, CPI (M) workers launched an attack on the homes of SUCI supporters.

The Telegraph report on the same incident further added that the state CPI (M) secretary Anil Biswas said 16 CPI (M) supporters have been killed since the panchayat election was announced. The state Home secretary however, said nine persons have been killed in poll-related violence so far. The dead include five CPI (M) men, including three killed in the Chopra police firing, and four Congress supporters.

9th May, 2003

The Telegraph (Internet edition)

Headline: Attack on CPI (M) leader, Congress in ghost campaign

Reporter / Correspondent

The report mentioned that as the Congress resumed its campaign in violence-wracked Chopra and Islampur, unidentified youths attacked the North Dinajpur CPI...
(M) secretary when he was headed for Itahar to campaign for the rural polls sparking fresh tension in North Dinajpur. The CPI (M) leader blamed the opposition for the attack but refused to name any party or leaders. The report informed that a week after the Chopra incident, the Congress renewed its campaign in the area but in most places, the party had to carry out its campaign without its candidates, who were in hiding. (The Aajkāal report on this incident was included in the news item headlined “CPI (M) worker murdered in Joynagar, CPI (M) leader attacked in Itahar” referred to in the previous paragraph.)

9th May, 2003
The Telegraph (Internet edition)
Headline: Tension over threats on cremation
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed Nasigram, Burdwan, where a Trinamul Congress worker was lynched after the murder of a CPI (M) leader, seethed with tension as alleged threats by the Marxists prevented the cremation of the dead Trinamul supporter. The report informed that the police has picked up 11 Trinamul supporters and charged them with the murder of CPI (M) leader. The report wrote youths allegedly backed by the local CPI (M) ransacked a makeshift stage at Shaktigarh Bazaar from where Trinamul MLA Shovandeb Chattopadhyay was scheduled to address a rally.

9th May, 2003
The Statesman (2 columns 46 lines)
Headline: Teachers go by the book on poll conduct
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that State government school teachers have literally paid heed to the Left Front Chairman’s appeal to refrain from contesting the panchayat elections, and stay away from the polling process. The report said statistics show a significant drop in the number of school teachers participating in the entire poll process, from filing nominations to taking part in various administrative aspects of the poll. The number of teachers competing in the panchayat candidates is half compared to 1998 in the districts of Hooghly, Burdwan, Birbhum and Bankura.
9th May, 2003
Aajkaal (4 columns 119 lines)
Headline: Women entrusted with development (Purulia)
Primary source: Grass-root panchayat members

The report referred to the success in three gram panchayats of Purulia due to the work done by women self-help groups. The report narrated how the women led the development initiatives and participated in the various programs for economic improvement in these villages. The report said most of the gram panchayat members were women and everybody was looking with interest to the election of the women sabhadhipati which was a toss between two CPI (M) members. The report said there was development in the areas of potable water, irrigational water, roads and electrification in the district. The demand now was for schools, hospitals and work. The reporter Sabyasachi Chakrabarty put the CPI (M) ahead of the opposition. The report referred to the local Trinamul leaders who hoped to do well but knew the chances were slim. The reason pointed out by the leaders was the lack of election fund. The CPI (M) district secretary was quoted that people will vote for the party that they see involved throughout the year. The report said he admitted of the existence of alliance and grand alliance and also alleged that the Forward Bloc was part of the grand alliances in some places but he asserted that would not harm the ruling party’s interests. The report concluded that voters were silent about election and more concerned about the development process to start after the completion of election.

9th May, 2003
Aajkaal (4 columns 128 lines)
Headline: Women have found way for self-employment (Nadia)
Primary source: Grass-root panchayat members

The report narrated the various self-employment initiatives undertaken by women under the aegis of the panchayats in this district. The reporter said women have been inspired by the panchayat pradhan of Dhubulia II Archana Biswas to form self-help groups and improve their financial status. The report described the working of the numerous self-help groups in the district and the benefit reaped by the women of the area. The reporter also narrated the work done by the CPI (M) led panchayats in the areas of infrastructure development, asset creation and public welfare. The
reporter specified that this was the reason why Archana Biswas and her party were confident of repeating victory.

9th May, 2003
Aajkaal (4 columns 44 lines)
Headline: Want to do development for 365 days: Surjya Kant Mishra
Primary source: Political party leader

The report narrated the statements made by Mishra in an election rally. He emphasized the TMC-BJP combine want to impose Article 356 while the Left Front government wants to work for all 365 days in a year. The report said CPI (M) leader Lakhsman Seth claimed the Left Front supporters are being killed though the opposition was screaming murder. He stated the CPI (M) and Left Front would reply to the opposition violence in the ballot box.

9th May, 2003
Aajkaal (3 columns 39 lines)
Headline: Congress silent even when its workers are being killed: Mamata
Primary source: Political party leader

The report said TMC leader criticized Congress leaders for passivity even when there were attacks on Congress workers. The report said she also criticized the Left government for lack of development in the 25 years of panchayati rule under it.

9th May, 2003
Aajkaal (4 columns 48 lines)
Headline: Basu elated at gathering
Primary source: Political party leader

The report described the CPI (M)'s electoral meeting at Bhangar in South 24 Parganas which witnessed ‘massive gathering’. The report said CPI (M) patriarch Jyoti Basu said in the meeting panchayats formed the basis of development in rural areas for the Left Front government. He criticized the opposition and asked people to vote for Left Front to ensure increased power for the panchayats and more development.
9th May, 2003
The Statesman (5 columns 188 lines)
Headline: What more has CPM to lose
Reporter / Correspondent

The report by Anindya Sengupta highlighted the lawlessness in the state during the Left Front rule. The report pointed out the number of uncontested wins in the panchayat has increased 10 fold from 1998, the attacks on opposition members were frequent and the assaults on ministers of coalition partners were common. The reporter sarcastically observed that being a democratic party, the CPI (M) hasn’t restricted it to attacking opposition ministers; it has extended the net to include ministers of Front partners such as RSP. The reporter said people were being forced to stay away from polls due to ‘red terror’. The reporter described the panchayat leaders of the ruling party as ‘warlords’ who could be brutal to retain power conniving with the police and administration. The reporter also said that that the LF’s decision to pass on 50% of the budgetary allocation directly to the panchayats have led to corruption and nepotism. The reporter then cited examples of CPI (M) terror against opposition and partners in various districts.

9th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 85 lines)
Headline: Opposition eager to face strife-ridden Left Front (Murshidabad)
Reporter / Correspondent

The reporter narrated how the CPI (M) has instructed the other Left Front partners not to forge alliance with the opposition and continue election campaign without attacking each other in this district. The report said the clash between the CPI (M) and RSP was clear. The report stated the opposition was more organized in this district and though there was no grand alliance it was united against the Left Front at most places. The reason was by hook or crook the Congress has convinced the other opposition parties to come under its fold or more specifically under Adhir Chowdhury. The report narrated the causes of the rift between the two Front allies. The reporter also narrated the dominance of Chowdhury and the near oblivion of the Trinamul Congress whose leader accused Chowdhury of terror tactics. Chowdhury, the report said, denied such accusations. The report concluded Chowdhury was eyeing the 200 crores granted to the zilla parishads to capture and maintain his vote bank.
9th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 60 lines)
Headline: CPM won without contest; allies too unhappy at Burdwan

Reporter / Correspondent

The report pointed out that in this district CPI (M)’s uncontested win has stifled the opposition forces much before the actual election. The CPI (M) district leadership pointed out that they started scouting for appropriate candidates much before the electoral procedure started and that’s reason why there was no opposition candidates against their chosen candidate. The party described how in most cases the candidates were chosen by the gram sabhas. The CPI (M) leadership admitted the ills of uncontested wins and also said it was natural that voters would not hear political viewpoint if there was no election so all party workers have been instructed to organize processions and meetings in places where there was no other contestants to spread the message of the party as well as the work of the panchayats.

9th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 138 lines)
Headline: Opposition join ranks with dissident CPI (M) leader (Midnapore)

Reporter / Correspondent

The report narrated how in Left stronghold Gopiballavpur an erstwhile CPI (M) leader Pradip Singha has successfully organized the opposition under the same umbrella. The report said CPI (M) was cornered in this block as all the opposition forces are fighting as a single force and as independents here. Singha alleged that CPI (M) had manipulated figures of people living under poverty line in the panchayat area and forged development statistics as well. The report pointed out the CPI (M) faced tough fight in Jambani against the Jharkhand party. The CPI (M), the report said, was on the back foot in this block failing to put up candidates in all gram panchayat seats. The report asserted despite police action the impact of the People's War Group was significant here. The local Congress leadership has therefore put up former PWG men who have returned to the mainstream. The report elaborated that many villages cannot participate in the electoral process as there was no contest for which both the CPI (M) and the opposition was equally to be blamed. The report said in other areas like Ghatal, Contai, however, the situation was not that bad. There was direct contest in these areas and the atmosphere was more tolerant and people were eager to cast their votes.
vote. The report concluded that the political strife has eclipsed the lack of development in vast areas and the need for infrastructural asset-building.

10th May, 2003

Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 60 lines) / Aajkaal (3 columns 126 lines)

Headline: Attack on CPI, finger on CPI (M) / CPI leader’s nephew shot, clash in Bagda

Reporter / Correspondent

The news items reported about the political conflict between CPI (M) and CPI in West Midnapore. The CPI alleged that CPI (M) was threatening the Panchayat voters not to cast their votes in favor of CPI candidates. The CPI alleged violence against its supporters by the CPI (M). The report said even two days before voting violence continued unabated. The report informed the opposition continued to indict the CPI (M) for violence before the polls. Both reports gave detailed accounts of the political skirmishes in different parts of the state like the one in Bagda where one person was shot during a clash of political opponents.

In the same Aajkaal news Pankaj Bandapadhyay of the TMC accepted that TMC would be defeated in the 11th May panchayat election. He said this result was inevitable as fair and free election was not possible in Bengal.

10th May, 2003

The Telegraph (Internet edition)

Headline: Front chief sees Left landslide

Primary source: Political party leader

The report stated CPI (M) politburo member and Left Front Chairman Biman Bose was of the opinion that the Trinamul Congress and BJP combine would not be able to capture 30 per cent of the seats in the forthcoming rural polls. He said at a press meet at party headquarters the combine will not get a single zilla parishad and their performance will be worse this time. Brushing aside the allegations of triggering violence across the state in the run-up to the panchayat polls, the report said, Bose bragged that Left Front would put up one of its best shows ever in this panchayat election.
10th May, 2003
The Telegraph (Internet edition) / Aajkaal (2 columns 100 lines)
Headline: Curtains on campaign for Sunday showdown / Campaign ends, Panchayat vote tomorrow
Reporter / Correspondent

The Telegraph report stated the bloody campaign for Sunday’s three-tier panchayat election in 17 districts came to close but stray clashes in South 24-Parganas continued. A Trinamul MLA from Sagar Island was attacked by alleged CPI (M) cadres while returning from a rally. The report said the state Election Commissioner said it has made all necessary arrangements to hold a free and fair election.

The report informed Mamata Banerjee took last-minute campaign to a fever pitch at Baruipur and Canning in South 24-Parganas but the heavyweights in the CPI (M) remained closeted in the party headquarters the day before elections. This news was reported in the Aajkaal in the news referred above.

The Aajkaal report also informed Buddhadeb Bhattacharya will camp at Writers’ Buildings with chief secretary, home secretary and other senior officials on the day of polling.

10th May, 2003
Aajkaal (2 columns 196 lines)
Headline: Terror in Campaign
Reporter / Correspondent

The writer of this report Ashok Dasgupta criticized the standpoint of some media and intellectuals on the Left Front and their incapability to see the positive points of the 25 years of panchayat administration. The reporter said there were some dubious points of Left rule of the panchayats like the inequality in development and the emergence of a new class of vested interests which is corrupted and conceited and the uncontrollable local centres of power but that should not eclipse the development of the people under the panchayats and better living standards. The reporter criticized the personal attacks indulged by the opposition and a section of the media on the chief minister and his family during the campaign trail.

10th May, 2003
Aajkaal (5 columns 85 lines)
Headline: Left firmly entrenched in Hooghly

The report described the development initiatives in the district that has brought town-culture closer to the villages there. The report commented though the industries in the district faced problems, the agricultural growth saw rapid impetus. The focus of the development in the villages was the growth of small scale industries and employment of villagers through such initiatives. The all round development in the infrastructure in the various areas was vividly described in the report. The report said the CPI (M) members pointed out development was the reason for uncontested win of several party candidates before this election but TMC leaders alleged terror of the ruling party prevented the opposition from filing nominations. The CPI (M) district secretary alleged several party functionaries were killed in the run-up to the polls. The report referred to a Trinamul activist who admitted about the development initiatives of the panchayat in the various fields from relief during floods, to building bridges and concrete structures in the panchayat areas. The locals opined that they will vote for the party that works for them.

10th May, 2003

Aajkaal (3 columns 112 lines)

Headline: Fight between CPI (M)-Congress, Trinamul not in contest (Beherampur)

The report stated in Murshidabad the contest was everywhere, former Congress leader up against district Congress secretary, Adhir Chowdhury, the Left constituents fighting against each other but the Trinamul Congress and the BJP were nowhere to be seen. The report informed the main fight was between the CPI (M) and the Congress. The CPI (M) was directly campaigning against Congress and Adhir Chowdhury clarified that there was no other party in the contest here. The report commented that the CPI (M) was set to occupy the most seats in all the three seats as the development brought about by the ruling party-led panchayats in various spheres was visible, something that has not happened in Congress-ruled panchayats. The report recorded the reactions of the various party leaders regarding their prospects in the forthcoming elections. The report also discussed in detail the internecine strife in the Congress and the Left Front.
10th May, 2003
Aajkaal (4 columns 128 lines)
Headline: The 3 Front constituents are examples here (North 24 Parganas)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report pointed out that in this district the RSP was up against the other Left constituents. The report gave a detailed description of the bickering in the Front in this district.

10th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 58 lines)
Headline: Government puts toll figure at 9; political parties put the figure at 47
Reporter / Correspondent

The report elaborated on the contradiction between the figures projected by the two sources regarding the number of people killed in the run-up to the panchayat elections. The report said the opposition parties alleged the government has fabricated the numbers.

10th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 40 lines)
Headline: Internal strife and internecine strife dog South 24 Parganas
Reporter / Correspondent

The report said strife over land was the main issue in this district. The report said in the Assembly elections of 2001 CPI (M) suffered heavy defeat in the hands of the Trinamul Congress in this district. The report pointed out that the demand and perspective of the voters and political party workers in this district were hugely different depending upon their livelihood and place of residence. The internecine strife within various political parties was also more. The report discussed about the internecine strife in the CPI (M) which was likely to affect the party’s result in the various blocks adjacent to the sea (Bay of Bengal). The report said what made matters worse for the ruling party was contest with the RSP in various blocks and the strife with SUCI at the others. The reporter commented it remains to be seen how much advantage the Trinamul can take of the situation as its organization was weak compared to the ruling party here. The reporter informed there were incidences of rift in the Trinamul ranks too that may hamper its chances in the district.
10th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 48 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) field women candidates in all panchayat seats
Primary source: Political party

The news pointed out that CPI (M) has surprised everyone by fielding all women candidates in Lakshminarayanpur block. The CPI (M) said “we want women to come forward and participate in social welfare.” The opposition was, however, quoted “the CPI (M) was forced to field women candidates to bury corruption of the erstwhile panchayat body and stem internal squabble.” The opposition alleged though the Left Front headed the panchayat bodies in these areas there was no development and rampant corruption in the implementation of various schemes. The opposition, the reporter said, hoped that the grand alliance comprising the Congress, Trinamul Congress, BJP, Forward Bloc and dissident CPI (M) would be able to defeat the ruling party here.

10th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 40 lines) and (2 columns 68 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) on the verge to revolt before panchayat election (Purulia) / Human rights abused in Purulia, alleges FB
Primary source: Political parties and their representatives

The first report described how CPI (M) has started to fight for the rights of the industry workers to draw votes. The report elaborated on the tussle between the owners and workers and the changing perspective of the ruling party with the approach of panchayat election.

The second report highlighted the incident of slaughter of two FB supporters by a crowd allegedly headed by three CPI (M) local leaders. The FB alleged the CPI (M) was witness to such criminal activities in the district whether it was rape or murder but did nothing about it. FB has made it an election plank. The report said the locals of many adjacent areas were critical of the ruling party's role in such inhuman activities though its own leadership denied any hand in the abovementioned incident or any such incidents.

10th May, 2003
Aajkaal (2 columns 46 lines)
Headline: Villagers near the sea unmoved by vote (East Midnapore)

Primary source: Villagers of panchayat areas

The report described how the villagers near the sea was impassive about vote as they were faced with the grave problem of breaking of the sea-embankment and the advancement of the sea which was forcing them to recede back. The reporter Amitav Siraj highlighted the plight of the hapless villagers and their anger at the indifference of all concerned. The villagers said they have informed the Trinamul panchayat board whose head informed that the administration was reluctant to take any step as it was led by the opposition. The report described the status of the political parties in the areas near the sea. The report observed in the interiors of the district Left Front suffered from bickering but both CPM and Trinamul Congress leaders agreed as there was no terror and violence, development though slow was on its way. The CPI (M) pradhan of one such panchayat in the interior regions district pointed out though there was still some deficiencies there was development and as the district saw no political violence it was much easier to continue the development process.

11th May, 2003

The Telegraph (4 columns 106 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 62 lines), Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 62 lines) and Anandabazar Patrika (8 columns 162 lines) Aajkaal (4 columns 134 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 150 lines)

Headline: CM plea for peaceful polls (i) (ii) / Police instructed to fire in case of clashes during the election (ii) (Anandabazar I) (ii) / Unwritten pact between CPI (M) and Congress, says Mamata (iii) (Anandabazar II) (iii) / Minister heckled, apprehension of violence in vote (Anandabazar III) (iv) / Panchayat vote today, chief minister’s appeal (v) / CPI (M) candidate assaulted, Minister’s car detained in Malda, tension (vi)

Primary source: Political party leader (in case of news items (i) (ii) and (iii)

Reporters / Correspondents (iv) (v) (vi)

The news items reported that the bloody build-up to the election to the three-tier panchayats has spurred chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya to appeal to all parties to maintain peace on the polling day. The reports added that though according to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of West Bengal 9 political murders were held in the state in the run-up to the panchayat election, Congress demanded 11 of their supporters were murdered and CPI (M) suggested 17 of their supporters died due in the pre-election political conflict. The Left Front chairman Biman Bose clarified that pre-poll violence left 17 party activists dead while state Congress chief
Pranab Mukherjee put his party's toll at 11. The report summarized the political situation in the various districts and the status of the political opponents with regard to the electoral contest along with the police arrangements for the panchayat election. The reports described in detail the various uncontested wins throughout the state.

The Anandabazar I report described the security arrangements made by the state government for the peaceful panchayat election in great detail. The report said the DIG assured all the police would remain impartial and perform election duty contrary to the apprehension of the opposition parties.

It was reported the administration had made elaborate police arrangements in West Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia and East Midnapore — where the People's War Group has a strong base — and in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar, where separatist organization like the KLO and the ULFA have considerable influences. The reports said CPI (M) is already sitting pretty with its candidates having been returned uncontested from 10 per cent of the 58,357 seats. The report reminded the Front partners, however, failed to reach a consensus on seat adjustment in North and South 24-Parganas, Murshidabad, Malda, Cooch Behar, South Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri.

The Telegraph report said CPI (M) insiders, conceded the party will find it difficult to win in at least 10,000 seats where the opposition Trinamul Congress, BJP and the Congress has forged a grand alliance.

Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, the reports said, reiterated her allegation that her party could not put up candidates in nearly 24,000 seats due to the "terror unleashed by the ruling CPI (M)." The TMC leader alleged in the second report in Anandabazar (II) referred above that the Congress and CPI (M) have forged a secret pact. CPI (M) state secretary Anil Biswas dismissed her allegation as baseless and claimed the opposition parties could not field enough candidates due to their own organizational weaknesses. The report said Biswas informed that CPI (M) has fielded women candidates in 41 per cent of seats. He said that the party has taken this decision because it believed that women panchayat functionaries will work with more honesty and sincerity than men.

Anandabazar (III) and Aajkaal informed that a CPI (M) minister Sailen Sarkar was heckled by Congress supporters in Malda. The Congress alleged the minister was campaigning after the scheduled time while the minister said that Congress tried to attack him which was stalled by common people. The reports observed the state witnessed unprecedented violence in the run-up to this election and allegations and...
counter-allegations by political parties eclipsed grass-root participation. The report gave details of political violence in the state on the day before the panchayat elections.

11th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 96 lines)
Headline: Promise of industry remains unfulfilled
Reporter / Correspondent

The report specified in the absence of Gani Khan Chowdhury election in Malda centered on the activities of CPI (M) minister Sailen Sarkar and CPI (M) zilla parishad candidate Abdul Rauf against whom there were allegations of sedition. The CPI (M) panchayat candidates gave details of the work done by Sarkar during the last two years. The report said though there was development in several areas like roads, electrification there was no progress in the area of agriculture-based industry which was required in areas like Ratua where mango cultivation was the main occupation of most people. The report highlighted the political opponents CPI (M) and Congress claimed they were behind the development in the district and campaigned about it to the voters. The report gave example of how Sarkar promised about electrification 2 years ago but the project was activated during this election. The opposition, both Congress and Trinamul, trained their guns on Rauf who was said to have treacherous background. The CPI (M), the report said, clarified there was no specific allegation against Rauf but the report said controversy surrounding Rauf was the centre of discussion in this district.

11th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 68 lines)
Headline: ‘Don’ - Congress’ weapon against the Left Front
Reporter / Correspondent

The report mentioned how a contestant with criminal descendant was considered by the opposition as their weapon against the Left Front. Though the candidate Jyotish Choubey was a history-sheeter opposition parties felt it necessary to field him to counter CPI (M) organization. The report informed the Left cannot raise a hue and cry over his candidature as he had represented LF constituent CPI in the last election.
11th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 86 lines)
Headline: Land mortgaged; villagers turn agricultural laborers (Birbhum)
Primary source: Grass-root villagers

The news described how the expectation that grass-root panchayats would work in favor of the common man and involve them in the development of their own area was a wrong interpretation. The report described how the advice of the villagers was disregarded by the administration in the building of a causeway and the ineffectiveness of the construction. The report informed though a concrete pool was later constructed the previous construction was not utilized and that wasted the funds of the panchayat. The reporter Rajat Roy suggested that the grass-root panchayats have become agents of bureaucracy bereft of participation of the grassroots themselves. A panchayat member was quoted that “in the beginning the panchayat bodies did not have much power but the bureaucrats were respectful of the panchayat decision but now the power of the panchayats have increased but the running of the panchayats has become dependent on the state machinery.” He alleged the officials come and take down the requirements of the villagers but the implementation remains incomplete. The development is also affected by the partiality nowadays, he conceded. The report said at one time the implementation of ‘Operation Barga’ caused much enthusiasm in this district and the influence of the Left Front was considerable. There were successes but failures have increased and the owner-farmers unable to compensate the cost to cultivating were mortgaging their bargas and working in other fields as laborers. The report said the Land and Land Revenue minister agreed that the size of the land distributed to individual bargadars was so small that cultivation was not profitable. The report pointed out that even endeavors to establish co-operative farming have failed miserably. The report concluded the CPI (M) knew and tried to rectify the situation through the panchayats but to no avail.

11th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 80 lines)
Headline: Anybody may win in Hijal, Sayem will say the final word
Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that whoever wins the panchayat election in Hijal the panchayat board would be decided by an independent candidate Sayem Pradhan who
was very influential in the region and even all political parties abided by his mandate. This custom has been the same over the last 26 years. Pradhan has a criminal background and the report pointed out same was the case for 11 other panchayat candidates in the area. The accused represented various political parties. The report said Pradhan calls the shots here. The report observed political conflict and killings have wiped out development in Hijal. Sayem Pradhan cited inadequate funds for lack in development while the opposition claimed panchayat funds were misused for buying arms and weapons for anti-social activities in the area.

11th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 72 lines)
Headline: “If not this time, never” fight in Kumargram
Reporter / Correspondent

The report narrated how CPI (M) and RSP was against each other in Kumargram. The report stated the contest was so tough that the administration was vigilant over the situation. The report described the prelude to the contest and underlined the CPI (M) was highlighting the allegations of corruption against the RSP dominated board and its lack of development.

11th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 74 lines)
Headline: Trinamul boycott vote at Pursura village
Primary source: Political party, their representative at different levels

The report stated the Trinamul has decided to boycott the polls following CPI (M)'s continuous threats. The report said the Trinamul said they informed the administration about impending threats but to no avail. The CPI (M) said the opposition was certain of defeat and therefore spreading rumors. The reporter interacted with the villagers who made specific complaints of CPI (M) threats and attacks. The report said in Arambag the ruling party has already won in 5 out of a total of 6 blocks uncontested except in Pursura and here it was bringing in outsiders to coerce voters.

11th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 96 lines)
Headline: Pradhan distribute fertilizers to supporters breaking norms

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that CPI (M) gram panchayat pradhan illegally distributed fertilizers to CPM supporters without informing the Agricultural Marketing department in Deganga II gram panchayat. The opposition protested and the police had to be called in to restore peace. The panchayat pradhan blamed miscommunication for the act.

12th May, 2003

The Statesman (4 columns 280 lines) / The Telegraph (2 columns 140 lines) / Aajkaal (3 columns 288 lines)

Bloody rural polls leave 20 dead / 18 dead in peaceful Bengal poll – Violent run-up ends in rural bloodbath / Voting in 12 districts peaceful, violence in 5 districts – Bomb, firing result in the killing of 9 CPI (M), 2 Congress, 1 Trinamul Congress and 1 SUCI supporter

Reporter / Correspondent

The reports described all the incidents of violence (in Murshidabad, South and North 24 Parganas, Jalpaiguri and Nadia) in great detail. The incidents highlighted were again reported separately as elucidated in the paragraphs below. The reports put polling figures at 65 - 70%.

There is no doubt that the newspapers made extensive coverage of the polling day incidents especially those related to violence and political battles and the opinions of the political leaders on those incidents but participation of the voters, their reactions and responses did not occupy significant space.

12th May, 2003

Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 120 lines) / The Statesman (2 columns 65 lines)

Headline: 13 killed in bomb blast and firing in Murshidabad, 300 injured, Ballot paper and ballot boxes looted / Murshidabad bear the brunt

Reporters / Correspondents

The reports pointed out Murshidabad was the worst affected district during yesterday’s polling with violence claiming at least 13 lives. Seven people were killed in Domkal alone. The reports said 18-20 people were killed (different newspapers gave different figures of the death toll) and 25 injured in the most violent election witnessed by the state in recent years as rural Bengal voted to elect over 58,000 representatives for the three-tier panchayats. The report described the mayhem...
throughout the state in great detail and the various incidents that led to the death of the people.

12th May, 2003
The Statesman (3 columns 75 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 60 lines) / The Telegraph (3 columns 75 lines)
Headline: Chopra voters disillusioned / Chopra vote held in peace within the grip of fear / Terror north turns quiet
Primary source: Grass-root voters (The Statesman)
Reporter / Correspondents (other two)

The consequence of violence in a voters' mind was adequately represented in the reports on Chopra as they informed die-hard CPI (M) supporters, witness to the Chopra incident, where both CPI (M) and Congress activists were brutally killed for petty political stakes, lost faith in all the political ideologies and decided not to cast their vote. The reports specified the polling was peaceful but there were not many who came out to vote and more significantly the silence of the area was like that in a graveyard where the security personnel had little to do. The report stated there were 'red' everywhere and almost no sign of the opposition. The Statesman report said most voters in Chopra failed to turn due to fear, indifference, disillusionment or insensitivity of the administration.

12th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 88 lines)
Headline: Canning and Kultali turn battleground, two women killed
Reporter / Correspondent

The report specified in Kultuli and Canning in South 24 Parganas 4 died in poll-related violence. The CM expressed grief over the death of two women SUCI supporters in the violence there. The report said he admitted this was the first time that women supporters have died on polling day.

12th May, 2003
The Statesman (2 columns 36 lines)
Headline: CPM worker killed in Jalpaiguri
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed panchayat poll in Jalpaiguri was marked by the killing of a CPI (M) worker at a booth in Alipurduar, in a clash between CPI (M) and RSP
workers just before the start of polling. The report described what had transpired before the incident and the tension and fear afterwards. The reports informed there were intermittent clashes between opposition forces in North and South Dinajpur too.

12th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (1 column 90 lines) / The Statesman (Internet edition)
Headline: Clashes in Habra, Bashirhat and Bongaon, polling officer beaten / Kill, snatch and capture ........... to keep the Red fort intact
Reporter / Correspondent

The reports pointed out that North 24 Parganas witnessed violence in many parts leading to clashes, beating up of polling officials, damage of the polling booth and poll postponement. The reports informed that the body of a missing CPI (M) supporter was found with his throat slit. This held up polling in Naihati. Polling was also postponed in Habra after the presiding officer of a booth at Habra was beaten up and the ballot box snatched from the booth. The reports informed there was clash in Bashirhat too.

Trinamul Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee blamed the administration for encouraging "state-sponsored terrorism" that claimed several lives across the state. The chief minister called a meeting of the top officials and informed the press that top police officers were sent in the disturbed areas. The chief minister informed arms were seized and many anti socials were arrested on the polling day.

12th May, 2003
The Statesman (3 columns 105 lines)
Headline: Somnath visits Nanoor, party wants re-poll
Reporter / Correspondent

In this report it was pointed out that CPI (M) leaders oversaw the poll process at Nanoor block in Birbhum. The report reminded that CPI (M) had lost its support in this once Left stronghold after 11 landless farmers were killed allegedly by CPI (M) men in 2000. CPI (M) charged Trinamul with terrorizing voters in the area and demanded a re-poll in 17 out of 19 booths in one gram panchayat in this block.
Headline: Clashes mar Malda polls

Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported as the Panchayat polls came to end in Malda, the district administration recommended re-polling in 10 polling stations, following snatching of ballot papers, booth capturing and misprinting of ballot papers. The Malda DM was quoted police were conducting raids to recover the lost ballots. The administration ordered reprint of ballots for re-polling. The report also mentioned police has been deployed in sensitive areas fearing post-poll violence in the district.

12th May, 2003

The Statesman (Internet Edition)

Headline: A case of shifting identity ........... and opportunism

Primary source: Grass-root panchayat members

The relevance of the grassroots was limited to voting was hinted in this news item. The report informed the international border lies about 500 meters away from the Fulbari village. The villagers have repeatedly drawn the attention of leaders of all parties to the fact that during election time they were considered as Indians but after it was over they were again branded as Bangladeshis. The interaction with the villagers brought out the accusation that their existence was ignored by political leaders after the vote.

12th May, 2003

The Telegraph (3 columns 120 lines) / Aajkaal (4 columns 65 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 85 lines)

Headline: Allies speak in many voices, not Opposition / Result tomorrow; re-poll in 81 booths; Buddha appeals for peace / Allies say dangerous, opposition calls farce

Reporter / Correspondent

The news items reported the CPI (M) was of the opinion that the election could have been more violent and Bengal could witness more deaths if its cadres had retaliated to the attacks of the opposition even as Trinamul Congress reiterated its demand for President’s rule and the Congress voiced its support for the same. The BJP demanded fresh start to the entire poll process. The BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu described the rural polls in West Bengal as the biggest fraud played on the people of the state. CPI (M) secretary Anil Biswas held the opposition provocation
responsible for today’s death toll. The reports said though Left chairman Biman Bose and Biswas felt the poll was by and large peaceful the other sections of the Front differ. RSP leader Kshiti Goswami said “we cannot say the election was peaceful as many people have died and hundreds of booth captured by CPI (M) activists.” The reports informed Forward Bloc leader Ashok Ghosh toed the CPM line. The Statesman commented the most prized trophy in the Left Front’s 26 year rule (panchayat election) turned into a blood stained spectacle as 18 people died on the election day though the chief minister dubbed the election as largely peaceful. The report further informed that the chief minister has asked the administration to prepare a detailed report on election related violence. The report observed North Bengal was an oasis of peace amid widespread violence in the rest of the state. Two fatalities were reported from the region.

The Aajkaal report narrated the detailed statement of the chief minister on the just concluded election.

12th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 108 lines)
Headline: Polling peaceful, Election Commissioner
Primary source: Election Commission

The report vehemently criticized the Election Commissioner for his failure to ensure free and fair election. The news wrote that Ajay Singha and his administration failed to prevent pre-electoral violence, secure the rights of the voters and opposition party members, prevent attacks on ministers and leaders, avoid mistakes in the ballot paper and killing of many on the Election Day. The report scathingly commented as uncontested wins in 11% seats emanated the response of “insignificant matter” from him so official death toll of 20 derived the response “voting was peaceful.”

13th May, 2003
The Telegraph (3 columns 114 lines)
Headline: A bloody hand for future
Reporter / Correspondent

The reporter Ashis Chakrabarti commented Sunday’s panchayat elections proved to be the bloodiest that West Bengal has witnessed in a long time. He wrote, “The loss of 25 lives, the maiming of at least 30 people and huge destruction of
property has exceeded all previous records of violence.” The reporter expressed his anguish that for the first time even women were not spared. He commented “as usual the perpetrators of this unprecedented outburst in most of the districts in the state were the Marxists.” He further commented it was time to consider whether the Marxists were at all serious about the democratic process. The report pointed out in a frontal attack on the CPI (M) and its role in the panchayat poll violence, the RSP today threatened to look for alternatives and announced that it would boycott the counting of ballots. The newspaper reported that the state PWD minister Amar Choudhury wrote to the chief minister that the panchayat election of this year sounded the death knell of democracy in the state. TMC chief Mamata Banerjee said the chief minister has totally failed to maintain law and order on the Election Day and demanded his resignation on this issue. The reporter said unprecedented violence during panchayat polls looks ominously like the beginning of a particularly murky phase in Bengal’s politics. “This foreboding of a new cycle of violence is based not merely on the large number of deaths and injuries, but on dark signs of failures and frictions all around.” Two fundamental failures were writ large on the bloodbath. The Left front Government failed to ensure a peaceful poll. This administrative failure had a cause-and-effect relationship with CPI (M) leadership’s failure to rein in its cadres. The report went on to state that even the chief minister felt helpless in the face of an aggressive party as was evident in his appeal to party supporters to allow the opposition to file nominations.

13th May, 2003
Aajkaal (6 columns 194 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 143 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) leader’s throat slit body found, 30 people victim of Panchayat vote? Casualty of CPI (M) more than others / Apprehension of violence during counting today
Reporter / Correspondent
The very detailed Aajkaal report about the violence on the day of the election argued that the official figures indicated that the casualty of the ruling party surpassed the opposition. The report said the official figures was less than the unofficial because the police was unwilling to consider those killed in Murshidabad as victims of electoral violence as they may have been involved in trouble making. The news said officially of the 19 dead in poll related violence 11 were from the ruling party and of
the total of 38 injured in total 25 were from CPI (M). The report said in Jambani the body of a CPI (M) leader was leader as well as that of a worker of the Jharkhandi party. The report also described the other post-poll casualties suffered by various political parties.

The Anandabazar report said the death toll rose to 29 as 9 more people were reported dead in various violent incidents. The report informed the administration was apprehensive that more violence may follow during counting. The report said all parties have instructed their members to remain calm during counting. The report said the Election Commission maintained 80 to 85% votes were cast and there was no disturbance during recounting. The news item also discussed what the chief minister will inform the Union Home minister about the violence during the polls, the role of the police and the administration, the concern of the state government and the fact that the ruling party members were most affected in the attacks. This report also described the post-poll violence in Jambani and the death of 2 members from two parties. (The Jambani incident was discussed in detail and separately in another news item in Anandabazar Patrika [1 Column and 110 lines] with the headline – CPI (M) leader Basu Bhakat attacked by bow-arrow and found with throat slit.) The increase of the death toll in Murshidabad and the death of a RSP member in Canning in South 24 Parganas were informed.

13th May, 2003
Aajkaal (3 columns 55 lines)
Headline: Result today, zilla parishads to be declared first
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that how the counting of zilla parishad seats will proceed.

13th May, 2003
The Telegraph (1 column 49 lines)
Headline: Polling day peace punctured in North
Reporter / Correspondent

The news observed that panchayat polling day was ravaged by violence in South Dinajpur and Dinhata in North Bengal. CPI (M) workers shot and wounded five RSP supporters in South Dinajpur's Tapan while the Forward Bloc called and then withdrew a strike to protest attacks on its workers in neighboring Coochbehar. The
report said there was high drama in Coochbehar's Dinhata. The state agriculture minister and senior Forward Bloc leader, Kamal Guha, held a news conference and announced a 12 hours strike on 13th May to protest the CPI (M)'s attacks on FB supporters. The CPI (M) castigated Kamal Guha for a "hasty" decision. Guha called off the strike later as the police promised action.

The violence in the panchayat polls worried the sample newspapers. The reports and opinions in these newspapers were concerned with the violence-riddled pre-election campaign as well as bloodshed on the Election Day.

There were many news stories on the political situation in the panchayat areas and the problems facing the local units of political parties at various parts of the state and work done (or not done) by the panchayats but the focus of the reports remained on news based on the statements of political leaders and the issues of violence, terror and intimidation. Analysis I at the end of this chapter would show the total number of news items on panchayat elections during each week of the sample survey in 2003. The number was more than that in the previous years. The newspapers had become more aggressive transmitter of news and did not want to miss out on the opportunity of reaching out to the local audience on a pertinent topic. More news items are equivalent to more visibility and that made for the increased quantity. Analysis II gives an idea of how much change in perspective the journalists and proprietors underwent in 2003 with the electronic media giving tough competition. It can be seen that grass-root sources - panchayat members, voters now held more significance for the journalists. There were frequent interactions and ground reporting than in the previous years but political leaders still dominated the press coverage of panchayat elections.

14th May, 2003

The Statesman (5 columns 125 lines) / The Telegraph (4 columns 160 lines) / Aajkaal (5 columns 200 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (6 columns 131 lines)

Headline: Left sweeps zilla parishads, save in Murshidabad / Congress dent in Fortress Left – Murshidabad blow to CPM, Trinamul tally takes a tumble / LF victorious in 15 districts, Congress in 2; LF suffers a blow in Malda and Murshidabad but Trinamul secure 16 zilla parishad seats against LF’s 617 / Left Front applecart upset in 2 districts

Reporters / Correspondents

The news items reported CPI (M) led Left Front has won about four-fifth of the Zilla Parishad seats declared till then. The Trinamul, on the other hand, recorded a
huge downslide compared to its tally of 36 Zilla Parishad seats in 1998. The reports informed the districts where the Left Front secured a convincing edge over its rivals at the Zilla Parishad level include Coochbehur, Jalpaiguri, Nadia, Howrah, Hooghly, Burdwan, East Midnapore and West Midnapore. The reports said the Congress was sure of capturing the zilla parishad at Murshidabad and was evenly poised in Malda and made good headway in Birbhum and North 24 Parganas. The reports said the CPI (M) won an overwhelming 80% seats in the zilla parishads. A jubilant Buddhadeb Bhattacharya was quoted “The Congress, Trinamul Congress and BJP tried a grand alliance to defeat the Left Front but has failed miserably.” He was of the opinion that the electorate have given a befitting reply to the propaganda these parties tried to spread against the Left. He also added that Panchayats would be given more power in this term.

The Aajkaal discussed the result in detail pointing out that the Congress came up to the second spot. The report said there was enthusiasm among the workers of various political parties regarding counting. The report said it was clear that the rural people have rejected the opposition alliances and grand alliances. The report also analyzed the reasons for the downfall of the Left Front in Malda and Murshidabad. The report observed that the Congress organization in Murshidabad ensured its victory.

The Anandabazar Patrika report informed for the first time in the history of the panchayat polls, the opposition has been almost washed out from the Hooghly Zilla Parishad. In Bankura, out of total 41 Zilla Parishad seats, the Left Front gained 40 seats. In East Midnapore, the Left Front has won 50 out of 52 Zilla Parishad seats. The report informed that CPI (M) for the sixth time has regained its hold over most of the 41 Zilla Parishad seats in Nadia after leaving three seats to the opposition. It has independently bagged 36 seats while the CPI and RCPI have captured one seat each.

The Telegraph report stated Mamata Banerjee has been shown that the only force that can counter the CPI (M) is an organization that can match its strength and intensity. The report pointed out Mamata Banerjee's party was wiped out from Howrah and Hooghly.

14th May, 2003

The Statesman (3 columns 104 lines) and (2 columns 72 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 96 lines)
Headline: Left consolidates in rest of South Bengal / Red lamp blinks in Malda / Front maintains lead in North Bengal; only scar is Malda

Reporter / Correspondent

The first report described in detail the result of the Left coalition and the opposition in the various districts of South Bengal with regard to zilla parishad seats. The second report described the result in the districts of North Bengal where except in Malda everywhere else the LF was clear winner.

14th May, 2003
The Telegraph (3 columns 114 lines) / The Statesman (3 columns 78 lines)
Headline: Congress hits back, tooth for tooth / Red fort capitulates in Murshidabad – Congress wrests zilla parishad after 25 years

Reporter / Correspondent

The reports termed the victory of Congress in Murshidabad zilla parishad as historic. The reports observed the death toll was highest in the district indicating that Congress leader Adhir Chowdhury ensured victory for his party employing the same strong arm tactics that the Left Front employed elsewhere in the state. While Chowdhury reacted that the result could have been better if CPI (M) did not engage in violence a CPM MLA in the district blamed disunity in the Left Front, Congress led terror and vote-purchasing as reason for the LF debacle. The report said RSP leadership however blamed CPM’s deviation from Left Front’s norms as the reason for its defeat.

14th May, 2003
The Telegraph (3 columns 69 lines)
Headline: Victory in death, Jambani tense

Reporter / Correspondent

The news reported that the panchayat samiti seat was won by the slain CPI (M) leader Basu Bhakat in Jambani, wresting it away from the Jharkhand party. The report said the area was tense after the declaration of the result.

14th May, 2003
The Telegraph (3 columns 138 lines) / Aajkaal (1 column 66 lines)
Headline: Advani and CM talk terror but in private / The party whose supporters are being killed is to be blamed! Buddha
Primary source: Administration

The report said the Chief Minister in a detailed discussion with L.K. Advani, the Union Home minister informed the latter that the majority of the victims of violence during the Panchayat elections were CPI (M) supporters. The newspaper reports observed the chief minister commented CPI (M) supporters were victims of violence so how can they be accused of committing murders.

15th May, 2003

The Telegraph (4 columns 204 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 200 lines) / The Statesman (4 columns 104 lines)

Headline: Red juggernaut rolls on- Trinamul slips further, Congress builds on zilla parishad gains / Left dominate in the two lower tiers including Malda and Murshidabad / LF sweep total at grassroots

Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed the Congress did unexpectedly well winning two Zilla Parishads and increasing its gram panchayat and panchayat samiti tally. The report opined the Congress in West Bengal has again become a powerful opposition party overtaking the TMC-BJP combine. The report stated that it was observed in the 2003 panchayat election the Left Front has retained power in the majority gram panchayats, panchayat samitis and zilla parshads. The reports pointed out in North and South 24 Parganas, Howrah, and Hooghly the CPI (M) has performed extraordinarily well. They said both TMC and Congress blamed CPI (M) terror tactic for their poor result.

The Aajkaal reported (Headline: Result reflection of work for the people: Somen) on the 15th May state Congress President Somen Mitra expressed satisfaction with his party’s result and said that it was possible due to direct touch with the people of the district and multifarious public works.

15th May, 2003

The Telegraph (3 columns 78 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 48 lines)

Headline: ‘Big Brother’ turns heat on RSP / Disaster at Murshidabad – CPM - RSP blames each other

Primary source: Political party leaders

The reports described how the CPI (M) and RSP blamed each other for loss of seats in Malda and Murshidabad where the Congress emerged victorious.
15th May, 2003
Anandabazar (2 columns 73 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) to restrain from constituting board in Malda
Primary source: Political party

The news item reported that in Malda as no party gained absolute majority there was confusion as to who would form the district board. The CPI (M) (with 15 members) announced it would not take initiative to form the board. The report commented the Congress (15 members), TMC and BJP (both 1 member each) have decided to jointly form the Zilla Parishad after much discussion.

15th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (3 columns 74 lines)
Headline: CPM not to have absolute control over Panchayat funds
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that the Central government’s decision to form Committees at the state and district level to avoid misuse of funds in panchayat areas and observe the activities of gram panchayats have stumbled the CPM. The name of the Committee was vigilance and monitoring Committee. The Committees at district level have already started work though state levels were yet to begin their work. The report said the Central decision would prevent the CPM from controlling the funds meant for the panchayats even though it has gained landslide victory in the West Bengal Panchayat elections.

16th May, 2003
The Telegraph (Internet Edition)
Headline: Target Mamata: CPM hits where it hurts most
Reporter / Correspondent

The report wrote the Marxists’ dream of cutting to size Mamata Banerjee in her own constituency appears to have come true. The final panchayat poll score showed the CPI (M) had eaten into her South Calcutta parliamentary constituency. The Marxists’ penetration into the Sonarpur rural belt which constitutes a large part of the South Calcutta constituency represented by Banerjee was significant, the report commented. The report said the well-oiled organization of the CPI (M) helped it wrest 21 out of 27 panchayat samiti seats and 7 out of 11 gram panchayats from the
Trinamul’s 1998 tally. The Marxists’ advance into the Trinamul fort extended to neighboring Baruipur, a rural segment belonging to the Jadavpur constituency also occupied by the TMC. Running through Trinamul’s resistance, the CPI (M) mopped up 42 out of 50 panchayat samiti seats, of which 25 were acquisitions from Mamata’s party. The TMC also suffered body blow in Bishnupur and Mograhat (West), where the Marxists walked away with all four panchayat samitis. The report said a quick estimate reveals that the Left Front, especially the CPI (M), ate into 40 per cent of Trinamul’s gram panchayat and panchayat samiti seats. The TMC legislative party leader Pankaj Banerjee said that the election results were not reflective of popular will. He said “It was a farce, manipulated from the word go. We don’t accept the results.” On the other hand Biman Bose, CPI (M) politburo member and Left Front chairman said “The outcome of the poll signifies new configurations in the days ahead.” The report remarked at the end the CPI (M) and its allies have increased their gram panchayat tally from 27,587 seats in 1998 to 34,229 seats this year, mostly at the expense of the Trinamul-BJP combine.

16th May, 2003
The Telegraph (Internet Edition) / Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 98 lines) / Aajkaal (2 columns 48 lines)
Headline: Basu leads peace mission / Buddhadeb take initiative to patch up with RSP / Buddha entrusted with the job of placating RSP
Reporter / Correspondent
The reports informed led by Jyoti Basu, the CPI (M) today went to balm an ally with which the party had a spat over seat adjustments and several other issues during the panchayat poll. To placate the RSP, which had accused the CPI (M) of “terrorizing its supporters” in South 24-Parganas, the CPI (M) cut short a Left Front meeting and went into bilateral talks with the RSP leadership. Basu attended the close-door meeting with chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, Front chairman Biman Bose, CPI (M) state secretary Anil Biswas and RSP leaders to iron out differences between the two parties. The reports informed at the chief minister’s initiative, it was decided that the South 24-Parganas secretaries of the two parties will meet and help bring back the RSP supporters who had to flee from their villages under CPI (M) threat. RSP state secretary Debabrata Bandopadhyay told the CPI (M) leaders present at the meeting that about 1,000 RSP activists in Canning and Basanti
blocks in South 24 Parganas had to abandon their homes because of the terror “unleashed by the CPI (M) cadre” in the post-panchayat election period. The reports informed the Front meeting asked its constituents not to form boards at any level of the three-tier panchayat with support from opposition parties. The report informed the CPI (M) had yesterday decided not to form boards at any level in the panchayat with help from the opposition parties. Today, the party managed to convince its partners that they should follow the same principle.

16th May, 2003
Aajkaal (4 columns 96 lines)
Headline: CPI (M) seat increase by 11%, LF by 9%
Reporter / Correspondent
The report analyzed the results in the three-tier panchayat elections and the gains and losses of the leading political contestants in terms of seats in each of the tiers as well as ballot share. The increase of both CPM and LF seat count was significant

16th May, 2003
Aajkaal (4 columns 131 lines) / Anandabazar Patrika (4 columns 65 lines)
Headline: Clashes in 4 districts, 3 killed 15 injured / Clashes in several districts, 4 dead, firing, and plunder
Reporter / Correspondent
The news items reported 3 persons were killed in a string of clashes in Murshidabad and Burdwan taking the toll in Murshidabad since the election on 11th May to 20. A Congress and a CPI (M) supporter were killed in two separate incidents in Murshidabad’s Raghunathgunj and Suti. The reports pointed out in the wake of the fresh flare-up, both the parties said joint meetings could be convened in the trouble-prone areas. Murshidabad Congress president Adhir Chowdhury said he has asked Home minister L. K. Advani and chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya to help bring normalcy in the district. District CPI (M) Secretary Madhu Bag said his party was in favor of village-level talks to put an end to the violence. Earlier in the day, Bag alleged that goons led by Chowdhury were targeting CPI (M) cadres. The blame game continued as Chowdhury blamed the CPI (M) for sparking off trouble after the election reverses it faced. The same report informed in Burdwan’s Purbasthali, the
relative of a BJP candidate was killed. The reports said CPI (M) has faced poll reverses in this area as well. The police said the CPI (M)-turned-BJP supporter was attacked with swords.

The Anandabazar Patrika report said 2 political activists of the CPI (M), 1 activist of the Congress and one from the BJP died in Murshidabad and Burdwan in post-election conflict.

From the reports in the sample newspapers it was clear revenge politics was high on the agenda of the political parties. The mainstream newspapers adequately reported the incidents of violence and terror but the implication of this murderous politics on the grassroots was undesirable. Empowerment in this volatile situation was impossible and political empowerment and the subsequent social and economic development would require the integration of all social forces including the supporters of diverse political ideologies. That was becoming a remote possibility in the highly charged polarized atmosphere of the state.

17th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 66 lines) / The Telegraph (Internet edition)
Headline: CPM allege, Congress members want to ‘sell’ themselves / Malda board on fine balance
Primary source: Political party (in case of news item (i)
Reporter / Correspondent (in case of (ii)

The news reported hard bargaining between the Congress and the Trinamul Congress for the formation of the Malda zilla parishad. The CPI (M) made it clear that it will not take any opposition help to wrest control of the panchayat bodies. The report said that out of 33 seats in the zilla parishad, the Left Front has won 16 and the Congress 15. Trinamul and the BJP have won a seat each. To form the zilla parishad, the Congress will have to persuade the victorious Trinamul-BJP candidates to back it. Though the state Congress has not decided yet on whether to seek the BJP’s support to form the parishad, the Malda unit of the party is against it. District Congress leader and MLA Sabitri Mitra has informed the leadership that the party will not join hands with the BJP. Sources said it would rather take support from the CPI (M) or a front partner. However, CPI (M) state secretary Anil Biswas today reiterated the party’s stand to not align with an opposition party. The report pointed out post electoral alliances of political parties’ defied ideological differences.
17th May, 2003
Anandabazar Patrika (2 columns 130 lines)
Victorious FB candidate murdered, fingers at CPI (M)
Reporter / Correspondent

The report informed that an elected Forward Bloc panchayat member from Birbhum was killed by some criminals. Forward bloc lodged a complaint against CPI (M) in this murder case. The strife between FB-CPM and RSP-CPM in Uluberia, Howrah and Basanti-Kultali, South 24 Parganas respectively was also reported. There was news of conflict between the police and Trinamul Congress-BJP members in Malda in the aftermath of the panchayat elections. The report said 35 people including 10 policemen were injured in this incident.

CONCLUSION

The 4 week long description and evaluation of news items on panchayat election, 2003 in the sample newspapers gives an insight into the newspaper content about the panchayat elections in 2003 both during and after the election period. The first impression of the coverage when compared to the previous years is the similarity in the content. The coverage gives copious references of the activities and programs of political parties. The sample newspapers change – from Jugantar and Amrita Bazaar Patrika in 1978 to Telegraph and Aajkaal in 2003 – (Anandabazar Patrika and Statesman remain common in both these years), but the content does not show much difference. Bickering within the Left Front, the perspectives of the political leaders some of whose names recur in the content of both 1978 and 2003 – Jyoti Basu, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, Biman Bose, Anil Biswas, Debrabrata Bandopadhyay, Ashok Ghosh of the ruling LF coalition, and the names of opposition leaders, mainly belonging to the Congress party like Pranab Mukherjee, Gani Khan Choudhury and Priya Ranjan Das Munshi also remains common through the 25 years of my sample period. Another thing also remains same – the sparing references to the grassroots. In 1978 there were few references to the grassroots’ expectations from the new system or few items raising the awareness of the grassroots on their role and function in the new system. In 2003 there were few items on the nature of grass-root participation in the past years and few references on the grassroots experience of the panchayat...
system. (See Table 12.2 for the source-wise distribution of news items on the panchayat election in the sample newspapers.)

The distinct characteristic of the 2003 panchayat election was the violence associated with the election. Skirmishes and conflict before and after election were not uncommon in 1978 too. But the intensity of violence and the recurrent stories on the violent incidents and their aftermath dominated the 2003 coverage. It cannot be denied that 2003 witnessed one of the bloodiest panchayat elections in West Bengal. The sample newspapers could not avoid the coverage of the numerous incidents of violence and their consequences while reporting on the panchayat elections but at the same time it is evident that they concentrated the gory events and the reports described, analyzed and repeated such events persistently to engage reader interest. The sample newspapers overlooked their responsibility in a developing nation with an issue like panchayat election which is so closely associated with the welfare of the vast majority of the rural masses. The necessity was not only to inform and mirror the social reality but to interpret and discuss the opportunity in the system which was still unexplored and involve the masses in the system. The need to educate and motivate the masses about the prospect of the political panchayats was not pursued by the newspapers.

The second type of news items that dominated the sample newspapers in 2003 were statements by political leaders whether it was Mamata Banerjee’s almost daily refrain of imposing President’s rule in the state or the comments and quotes of political leaders of all hue and cry.

The third characteristic of the 2003 coverage was widespread in 1978 and thereafter in all the years of my study on panchayat elections – the bickering between political allies namely the Left Front allies. In fact in 2003 reports on internal squabble within the Left Front were much less especially when compared to 1983 and 1988. But still there were frequent references to the strife between the Left parties, the public disappointment of the smaller allies with the bigger partner as well as rift in the opposition forces. It was irrelevant, for the sample newspapers to discuss the internecine politics in the political parties yet the tiff between allies was readily lapped up by the media and repeated at every instance while development drawbacks or propositions to improve participation of grassroots failed to make headlines.

We can conclude that though the number of news items on Panchayat election saw almost three-fold increase (in case of Bengali newspaper Anandabazar from 36 in
1978 to 103 in 2003) and over two-fold increase in case of English daily The Statesman from 29 in 1978 to 63 in 2003 the general trend of reporting was indifference to the rural grassroots, apathy for the cause of political empowerment of the rural masses and preoccupation with political parties and their leaders. It has been already commented in the preceding paragraphs that the sample newspapers were happy to inform and did not endeavor to fulfill other responsibilities of mass media – to educate and motivate. The content was dominantly based on sources like political parties and their spokespersons, national and state level leaders and administrative officials (the chief secretary or the election commission) like before. It is therefore not surprising that the content comprised facts or stories that these sources wished to reflect or generate. The information disseminated was therefore incomplete and inaccurate.

The sample newspapers sensationalizing news is a dominant picture in 2003 panchayat election coverage by them. The reality of political violence during and after the 2003 panchayat elections could not be overlooked by the mass media. The news media’s role in disseminating information is of prime importance and that information however stark has to be communicated. The issues of political empowerment and emancipation were lost in the maze of reports on political strife and blame-game. There are at times doubts whether the newspapers were purposefully preoccupied with the grisly content given their disposition and scope to arrest reader attention.
WEEKLY ANALYSIS OF NEWS ITEMS IN SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS (2003)

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Figure 12.1 (a): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 21.04.2003-27.04.2003

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Table 12.1 (b): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 28.04.2003-04.05.2003

694
Figure 12.1 (b): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 28.04.2003-04.05.2003

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Table 12.1 (c): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 05.05.2003-11.05.2003

Figure 12.1 (c): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 05.05.2003-11.05.2003
Table 12.1 (d): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 12.05.2003-17.05.2003

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Figure 12.1 (d): Weekly Analysis of News Items on Panchayat Election during 12.05.2003-17.05.2003
Chapter 12

TOTAL NEWS ITEMS IN SAMPLE NEWSPAPERS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTION DURING 21.04.2003 - 17.05.2003

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Table 12.1 (e): Total News Items in Sample Newspapers on Panchayat Election during 21.04.2003 - 17.05.2003

Figure 12.1 (e): Total News Items in Sample Newspapers on Panchayat Election during 21.04.2003 - 17.05.2003
### Table 12.2: Source-Wise Distribution of News Items on Panchayat Elections during 21.04.2003 - 17.05.2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Reporters / Correspondents / News Agencies</th>
<th>Political Party leaders / Spokespersons / Party briefs, manifesto etc.</th>
<th>Administration including Ministers, Police, Officials</th>
<th>Grass-root voters/candidates / members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anandabazar Patrika</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aajkaal</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Statesman</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Telegraph</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS ITEMS ON PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS DURING 21.04.2003 - 17.05.2003