

## 6 DECISION 2019



## TAKING STOCK

Congress president Rahul Gandhi with (from left) senior party leaders Ahmed Patel, Mallikarjun Kharge, K C Venugopal, Sonia Gandhi, and Manmohan Singh at the Congress Working Committee meeting in New Delhi on Saturday. *Tashi Tobgyal*

## In Bengal, man killed in Nadia as post-poll clashes go on

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, MAY 25

A TWENTY-FOUR-YEAR-OLD man was shot dead on Friday night in Nadia district of West Bengal as clashes between BJP and Trinamool Congress continued after elections, with both sides accusing each other of leading the attacks.

While both BJP and TMC claimed that the deceased, Santu Ghosh, was associated with them, the police are yet to confirm it as a political murder. Ghosh's family has said he was not affiliated to any political party.

Reports of clashes and vandalism were reported from some other pockets of the state.

Governor Keshari Nath Tripathy has appealed to the people to maintain peace.

Ghosh worked at a jewellery shop in Burrabazar and was the family's only earning member. After he was found dead in Gorpara area, BJP supporters blocked the national highway and railway tracks in Nadia, demanding police action.

"We are clueless who could have killed him. As far as I know he was not associated with any political party, although earlier he was close to TMC Councillor Pintu Nag," Santu's father Sadhu Charan Ghosh said.

TMC's Nag said, "Santu was our active party worker."

But local BJP leaders said Ghosh had recently joined the saffron party.

## Mamata: My offer to quit as CM rejected, will focus more on TMC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, MAY 25

STILL COMING to terms with the huge electoral inroads by the BJP in West Bengal, winning 18 of 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state, Mamata Banerjee on Saturday said that she wanted to quit as chief minister but after Trinamool Congress (TMC) leaders objected, she will continue — provided "we all stand together and protest".

She also accused the Election Commission (EC) of working in a partisan manner in West Bengal, and the BJP of playing communal politics to woo voters in the state.

Addressing the media after holding a meeting with TMC leaders at her residence in Kolkata to introspect on the election results, Banerjee said she will now devote more time to party work.

West Bengal is scheduled to hold Assembly elections in 2021.

She also announced major changes in party positions and said that candidates who lost in the Lok Sabha polls will take over as TMC district unit presidents and chairpersons of different development boards.

The TMC won 22 seats this time, 12 fewer than its 2014 tally.

Banerjee said: "I have fulfilled commitments made in our (2016 Vidhan Sabha election) manifesto — from good roads, rice at Rs 2 per kg, Sabuj Sathi bicycles (distributed to students of class IX to XII), to free treatment for the poor, it has all been implemented. I have



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee addresses the media in Kolkata on Saturday. *Partha Paul*

## EXPLAINED BJP in backyard, a little change in focus

West Bengal CM and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee's announcement that the party will be her priority from now is a telling sign of the inroads the party feels the BJP has made in the state's politics. Two years before West Bengal heads for Vidhan Sabha polls, the BJP is a force to reckon with — a force possibly much bigger than what the Left Front-Congress combine appeared to the TMC leadership in 2016. With Banerjee making it clear that an increase in vote share is the only way to take on the BJP, it appears the TMC chief feels it's time to bring back her feisty avatar from the Opposition days and hit the streets.

(so far) been busy with government work; from now I will give more time to the party."

On her offer to step down as chief minister, Banerjee told the media: "I have told my party leaders that I have been unable to

work for five months - I was a powerless CM under the mercy of the Election Commission (EC). I cannot accept that. I do not want to continue as chief minister — the chair is of no importance. For me, the party symbol is important."

But, she said, TMC leaders "objected" to this offer. "I told them I can continue, but (only) if we all stand together and protest. Our vote share has increased by 4 per cent. If it increases further, we need not worry about BJP or the Left."

Taking on the EC, Banerjee said that she could not work as the chief minister for two months "unofficially", and that the EC did not let her work for three months officially. The BJP, she maintained, has been successful "only through communal politics — they divided Hindus and Muslims, Bengali-speaking people and Hindi-speaking people... I can never stoop to that level."

Asked whether she will cooperate with the Narendra Modi government at the Centre, Banerjee said, "If they take constructive steps, we will cooperate. We have always done so. But if they take destructive steps, we will not cooperate."

## ‘2014 election was one of hope — the 2019 polls are about trust’

TWO DAYS after the BJP returned with an impressive performance in Odisha, winning 8 of 21 Lok Sabha seats in the state and 23 of 146 in Assembly polls, senior party leader Dharmendra Pradhan, who was the party's Odisha in-charge, tells **LIZ MATHEW** that politics in the state has become bipolar, with BJD and BJP being the main players and the Congress a fringe participant. Excerpts from an interview:

## How has this General Election been different from 2014?

The 2014 election was one of hope; the 2019 election is of trust. The trust in (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi that he will do things, will give us our pride, jobs will be increased, and (country's) security will be improved. People from the lowest strands of society started having this faith in him. They started believing politics is not just about speeches, and that Modi will deliver.

The political community makes speeches, but Modi-ji had told the people, "I will be back in 2019 to seek your support and if you are happy with me, vote for me. I will give an account for everything." Even in his speech after the election, he made it clear that every ill will be put behind — that he will not do anything for himself, nor will do anything with bad intention; that no one would be victimised...

## How important is the role of eastern India in the BJP getting such a massive mandate?

The BJP leadership had stated in 2013 that the country will not progress as long as East (India) is not developed. In my experience as a minister in Modi-ji's cabinet, whenever there was a discussion on rolling out welfare schemes or big projects — be it rail, or road, or airport — states in eastern India were given priority. For example, in Ujjwala (Centre's scheme to provide LPG connection to the poor), the largest number of beneficiaries are in West Bengal, Odisha and in Assam. Similar is the case with other schemes.

Priority in schemes, projects and even in the narrative for the eastern part of the country has been the Prime Minister's approach. Our party president believes that only a strong organisation can take advantage of this and he started focusing on (BJP's) organisation in these states in 2014 itself. He has visited Odisha on at least 30 occasions, and must have visited West Bengal more. This has helped the party earn the trust of people, and the results were shown in the electoral outcome — of 88 seats (in eastern India), the NDA won 44.

## How do you see the Odisha result?

People in Odisha have faith in Prime Minister Modi. The Prime Minister did not approach these states with only a political ambition; he tried to be a part of the social life there. There was no festival on which he did not greet the people of Odisha; for the first time, artisans from Odisha got Padma awards. There had been no nominated Rajya Sabha members from Odisha until the Prime Minister made Raghunath



Mohapatra. He visited (Odisha) many times (and) gave a number of projects to the state.

## But BJP's performance in Odisha was not like that in West Bengal.

How can you say that? Of 42 (LS seats), we won 18 in West Bengal, and won 8 of 21 in Odisha. We got 40 per cent votes in West Bengal and in Odisha we got 38 per cent. The Prime Minister acknowledged that. There is no Mamata Banerjee in Odisha.

## Would the results have been different had the BJP been more aggressive against Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik?

I don't think so. My Prime Minister was very aggressive during the campaign; my party president has been aggressive in Odisha for a long time. Every leader who visited Odisha contributed to building BJP as a force there.

## The BJP's vote share was 38 per cent for Parliamentary polls but the party got 5 per cent less votes in the Assembly elections. Do you think projecting a chief minister candidate would have made a difference?

We fought election aggres-

Some people refuse to appreciate the magnetic personality of Modi — even after this victory, they have a pathological hatred against Modi. This kind of people — the Khan Market crowd — created this impression that it's a one-time wonder. The BJP has created a strong organisation in all states."

## Why did you not contest the election?

I had to plan and coordinate for every part of the state.

## There is a view that the BJP's gain in eastern India is because of steroids from the Central government, and that it will crumble later.

Some people refuse to appreciate the magnetic personality of

Modi — even after this victory, they have this pathological hatred against Modi. This kind of people — the Khan Market crowd — created this impression that it's a one-time wonder. The BJP has created a strong organisation in all the states. The BJP has a clear-cut methodology for building the party (in these states).

## Two Lok Sabha constituencies in Odisha drew a lot of attention — Puri, where Sambit Patra was the candidate, and Kendrapara, which had Bajijayant Panda. While Patra lost by a small margin, Panda, party vice-president, lost by a huge margin.

Both (of them) fought well. Odisha's coastal areas are a stronghold of the BJD and has a strong Biju (Patnaik, the former chief minister) legacy. Panda was our best candidate in the coastal belt — had he not fought there, the BJP's overall performance in the region would have been affected. Voters felt that the BJP was fighting to enter the state. In Puri, Sambit narrowly missed it.

## Has this win in Assembly polls reaffirmed the invincibility of Naveen Patnaik in Odisha?

Statistics says it all. Where is the invincibility? In Lok Sabha (2014 election), the gap between number one and number two (BJD and Congress) was around 18 per cent. This time, it is only 4 per cent — between BJD and the BJP. (In Assembly polls also) it was 18 per cent between the BJD and the Congress; now it is 12 per cent between BJD and BJP.

Still, we have to accept the people's verdict. Due to lack of a proper alternative, the swing vote always goes in favour of BJD. Things are changing now.

## Talking of the Ujjwala scheme, in Odisha, like in many states, we have seen only a small percentage of people opt for refilling the cooking gas cylinder. Do you have any plans to improve it?

Accessibility was the challenge. People were not taking (gas) connection earlier because the upfront cost was too high now the government has taken care of it. Regarding refilling, I am encouraged by the statistics on it. It is increasing, but there is a behavioural issue. Now women are realising that it is healthy and clean. I am optimistic.

## Unlike in Bengal, where the third force has virtually melted away, in Odisha, the Congress still has about 15 per cent votes. Will it continue to be a triangular fight in the state?

I don't see that. We were a distant third in the last two elections. We parted ways with BJD in 2009, but the Congress has become weaker than us (this time). Gradually, it is heading towards a bipolar politics.

## As TMC bags all nine in last phase, both sides say Vidyasagar statue vandalism left mark

ESHA ROY  
KOLKATA, MAY 25

IN THE heart of Nagerbazaar, a residential and shopping district in Dum Dum, stands a big hoarding on one of Bengal's tallest reformists, Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar. The slogan states, "amader gorbo" — our pride.

Similar hoardings have been put up across the constituency in which the BJP fancied its chances. In the end, the BJP candidate from Dum Dum, Shamik Bhattacharya, lost by 52,000 votes to sitting MP Saugata Roy of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in the most closely contested election in the nine seats in Bengal that went to the polls in the last phase on May 19. The results now out, and analysis of performance

going on, BJP workers say the perception that the party was responsible for vandalising the Vidyasagar statue, during a road-show by party chief Amit Shah on May 14, cost the party.

The TMC swept all these nine seats — and barring Dum Dum, all by margins varying between 1 lakh and nearly 3 lakh.

Rupak Sheel (41), who works at a stationary shop and is a Nagerbazaar resident, said, "There was a BJP wave here. But the party lost steam at the last minute."

Residents and shop owners across Nagerbazaar expressed the same sentiment. Rajendra Bose, 75, was a toddler when his family came as refugees from then East Pakistan (Bangladesh) following Partition. A timber merchant in Nagerbazaar, Bose said he voted

for BJP, and "many more people would have voted for the party had it not been for that (statue vandalism) incident".

A BJP worker in Goalgagan agreed that the incident left an impact: "Bengali sentiment was hurt. Voters turned around at the last minute and decided to vote for Bengal pride — and the TMC."

Not far from Nagerbazaar, in Lake Town, under Barasaat constituency, district TMC Chhatra Parishad (students' union) president Rupali Dey, 29, said, "Of course we received huge traction from the incident. This area has professionals and you can't influence their vote, but when we organised a protest march in Lake Town, hundreds joined us. They were local residents. They didn't come because of us (TMC), they came because of

Vidyasagar." TMC's Kakoli Ghoshdastidar won by over 1 lakh votes from Barasat.

Meeting workers from across the constituency at Goalgagan BJP office in Barasat, Shamik Bhattacharya said Dum Dum has traditionally been at the forefront of heralding a shift in Bengal's political landscape. "When Saugata Roy overthrew years of Left dominance here in 2009, no one had any clue about such an upset," he said. Ever since, Dum Dum, traditionally a Left stronghold, has switched over to the TMC.

A similar "silent change" was taking shape this time as well, the BJP leader added.

Saugata Roy, the Trinamool leader who retained the seat, also agreed that the incident had its impact, although not in Dum

Dum. "We have gained in Kolkata city because of it, but not in my constituency," he maintained.

Political analyst and assistant professor of Political Science at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Maidul Islam noted that while BJP gained everywhere else, "There is a strong sentiment of Bengali nationalism, and this is what the TMC managed to cash in on at the last minute."

BJP's Bhattacharya had advice for his party: "There were two kinds of vote this time — 'yes Mamata' vote, and 'no Mamata' vote... But the leadership has to understand that things like loudly proclaiming 'Jai Siya Ram' is not going to work here. You can't go to Barabazar (which houses Kolkata's largest Hindi-speaking population) and decide that is how the whole of Bengal is."



The BJP office in Guna has seen more footfall than the Congress building. *Express*

early 2018. He was certain that he would get a ticket for an Assembly bypoll last year. When that did not happen, he switched loyalty to the then ruling BJP, which

fielded him from Kolaras Assembly seat, part of Guna Parliamentary constituency. He lost by a margin of 2,139 votes.

When the BJP announced

Yadav's candidature, Scindia's wife Priyadarshini dismissed the competition, describing him as someone who used to take selfies with Maharaj. She was the principal campaigner for her husband, hitting the road for days in his absence while he attended to western Uttar Pradesh too as in-charge of the Congress. If some people are to be believed, the selfie comment saw Yadav work harder. The results showed that Yadav polled more votes than the former Union minister in seven of eight Assembly segments, including the constituency from where he lost five months ago.

"For the first time, we fought to win the elections," claims Guna

BJP president Gajendra Sikarwar, adding that the two senior BJP leaders fielded against Scindia in 2009 and 2014 were not keen on winning because they wanted to become ministers in the state government. Even before tickets were finalised, the BJP and all organisations allied to the RSS got active in the region, identifying beneficiaries of Central government schemes. "The beneficiaries voted for Modi and the rest voted for him because they wanted the benefits."

"There was a Modi tsunami but it was spread by workers," says another BJP leader, Ashok Sharma, admitting that "the only factor that led to Scindia's defeat

was Narendra Modi". "For us the candidate was Modi, not so much Yadav," says BJP office manager Rohit Bhargava.

"It's beyond comprehension why he lost. Maharaj and Maharani knocked on every door and worked hard but in the end Modi, Pulwama and nationalism did us in. Congress won the Assembly polls because he was projected as the chief minister," says Congress leader Ravindra Raghuvanshi.

A Bhopal-based Congress leader says that Scindia's campaign was managed by people, at least two of them ministers, who were brought from outside and made to campaign. The local cadres had to report to them.

