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## THUMPING VICTORY FOR SDF IN BYE POLL

### Candidates of opposition parties nowhere closer to winner's margin



HM Report

**Gangtok, Apr 15:** D. R. Thapa, the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) party candidate has emerged victorious in the 28-Upper Burtuk constituency by poll with a margin so huge that it overshadows even the mark of 'existence' of any other candidates who were on the fray. The fact that Thapa secured a whopping 8,406 out of the total 9327 valid votes being casted, is sufficient to mark the 'almost complete decimation' of his competitors, be they the independent candidates or from other opposition parties like the BJP and INC. One out of the 16 postal ballot papers was rejected. The seat to the constituency fell vacant after its erstwhile SKM MLA P.S. Golay was found guilty by the Court here in a cow distribution scam. The SKM party since then has cried foul over what it observes to

be a 'hurried' call for the by poll contending that it was being held within less than 3 months from the date of the seat falling vacant, instead of the mandatory gap of 6 months as mandated by the constitutional norms. The party decided to boycott the bye-election as a mark of protest and hence abstained from fielding its candidate.

The result today has been most disheartening for the only female candidate of the INC's Sikkim chapter Sumitra Rai who bagged only 98 votes—two lesser than even the 100 NOTA registered. A tad solace has come for the BJP (which hitherto having not much of a visible existence in the state politico) candidate Suresh Khanal Sharma for grabbing, though, a paltry 374 votes—the second highest number of votes from the constituency. Meanwhile, among the independent candidates, Wang Tashi

Bhutia fared the worst with 27 votes while Shekhar Chettri, Navin Kiran Pradhan and Shanti Kumar Basnet secured 168, 148 votes, and 106 votes respectively.

The counting of votes began at around 8 am in presence of the Observers, Candidates and their counting agents in the Counting Hall of the District Administrative Centre, Sichey, East Sikkim where the counting of postal ballot paper was done first. The counting of votes ended in the 3rd round in presence of the Returning Officer. After the completion of counting the Returning officer for 28-Upper Burtuk Assembly constituency declared D. R. Thapa of the SDF as the winner to be duly elected as the member of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly from 28-Upper Burtuk Assembly constituency and awarded the certificate of election. The Returning Officer has also thanked all the con-

### Here's what the candidates had to say:

**D. R. Thapa, (SDF):** "All credit goes to the SDF party president and party workers. I thank party President Pawan Chamling for giving me a second opportunity to serve the constituency. Thank you Burtuk residents for choosing me as their MLA. My immediate action will be towards the development of my constituency and guide the youth towards their better future. I also thank the other six opposition candidates for contesting the election as without them, this election would not have been more competitive and interesting".

**Suresh Khanal Sharma, (BJP):** "I am fully satisfied with the voting proceedings; however, I still feel that democracy is yet to flourish in the state, hence my loss in the by poll. I will fight the next elections too. My sincere gratitude to the people who voted for me and I am happy to get the second highest number of votes from the constituency. I hereby congratulate SDF candidate D.R. Thapa for his win".

**Sumitra Rai, (Congress):** "I thank the people who voted for our party. Sikkim Congress will not stop here as every action of the MLA will be under our scanner. I have personally visited the constituency and there is serious problem of road infrastructure. I request the winning MLA to solve the issue at the earliest. I would like to congratulate Thapa for his win.

Meanwhile, **Navin Kiran Pradhan**, one of the independent candidates who contested the by poll and who had repeatedly foretold of his thumping victory could not be contacted by this HM Reporter as calls to his number to get his reactions couldn't get through.

testing candidates for their participation in the Bye-election which concluded peacefully.

After the victory, D.R. Thapa met Chief Minister and SDF party supremo Pawan Chamling at his official residence in Mintokgang and exchanged pleasantries.

People's decision is ultimate and the people of Upper Burtuk have decided in our favor. Congratulations to our candidate D. R. Thapa. Now, we will fulfill our prom-

ises made prior to the run up to the election. All the demands put forth by the people of the Upper Burtuk constituency will be fulfilled soon. First priority will be given towards building better roads and other developmental works will also be subsequently taken up. The SDF party will field its candidates in all Panchayats seats across the state scheduled to be held later this year, the Chief Minister said after the victory.

## Darjeeling goes the digital video surveillance way for effective policing

HM Correspondent

**Darjeeling, Apr 15:** In a step towards more effective policing the Darjeeling police have installed close circuit cameras at all vantage locations in Darjeeling.

"We have started with 65 cameras. More cameras will be installed by the end of this month. This move is for more effective policing. It will definitely act as a deterrent and is an effective tool to probe cases of accidents, hit and run and crime against women etc.," stated Amit P Javalgi, Superintendent of

Police, Darjeeling.

The high quality 360 degree cameras allow recordings to be stored for 15 days. All the access roads and roads leading out of the town are now under CC TV surveillance. "No vehicle can enter or leave the town unnoticed."

78 points throughout the district (except the Siliguri Metropolitan Police Commissionerate area) have been earmarked for setting up the cameras. Out of this 40 points have been labeled as "sensitive." The project has come up at a cost of Rs. 40

lakh. In Darjeeling it is an integrated system with the cameras being manned from a single point. "All police officers will undergo training to effectively use this system" added the SP.

At present, cameras have been set up along the Sukhia road, Lebong Cart road, Goenka road, Ghoom and Chowrasta along with Kurseong, Pansidewa, Kharibari and Naxalbari. "We have given proposals for more cameras so that the entire district is adequately covered" stated Javalgi.

## TMC organizes rally & public meeting in Kalimpong



Nisha Chettri

**Kalimpong, Apr 15:** Trinamool Congress (TMC) Kalimpong unit today took out a rally here from 10th Mile which turned into a public meeting at Thana Dara. Around 350 people participated in the rally. Chewang Bhutia the TMC Kalimpong district President in his address reminded the gathering about the district status accorded to Kalimpong recently by the TMC led state

government. He urged the district people to further strengthen the hands of Chief Minister cum TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee by casting their votes in favor of the party in the upcoming municipal elections. "It's not a matter of winning or losing the election as the TMC has given liberty to the people to cast their votes as per their free-will, unlike the Morcha which has ruled the hills in an authoritarian manner. The democracy established by the TMC in the hills is itself a win for the party and the hills people should

take cognisance of this fact. The CM has sincerely worked towards development of the hills in every possible way. In matters pertaining to addressal of unemployment here, the TMC has already shown its positive intentions by regularizing the jobs of voluntary teachers and the process will continue. The party is resolute in its fight to address issues of the unemployed youths in the hills. Hence, the TMC urges the junta to give us a chance to bring unprecedented development in the hills," Chewang stated.

## With Hindutva onslaught, TMC plays Bengali, Dalit cards

**Kolkata, Apr 15:** With the rapidly rising BJP flexing its Hindutva muscle in West Bengal, the ruling Trinamool Congress is turning more towards Bengali and Dalit identities to counter the saffron surge and in the process is attempting to portray the BJP as an essentially north Indian upper caste force, but at the same time is careful to address the majority Bengali Hindu identity as well.

While the BJP celebrated Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti as a show of strength, the Trinamool Congress not only brought out counter rallies but also celebrated Ambedkar Jayanti in every district of the State on Friday and brought out big rallies on the occasion of Bengali New Year Poila Boishakh on Saturday. All the TMC leaders claimed there were no political agendas behind the celebrations.

However, speeches and personal interviews in the rallies stated the need to protect the Bengali identity. TMC leaders also did not miss the chance to point out that Dr Ambedkar was first elected from united Bengal to the Constituent Assembly. With a sizeable Dalit presence, comprising at least 30 per cent population, mostly rural, and Bengali identity holding ground in rural Bengal, raking up the two cards may be calculated politics in the run up to panchayat polls exactly 12 months later.

"Our ground cadres suggested that politico-religious orthodoxy is on the rise among Hindus and Muslims of the State. This is why TMC has decided to counter religious extremism with Bengali identity," a top TMC leader said.

With reports that the RSS -- which has increased its strength three times in five years according to a recently released report -- is

raking up caste identities in rural Bengal in an attempt to conduct social engineering on the lines of north India, the TMC is worried to hold on to its Dalit and Muslim base in rural Bengal. However, the party also knows that it needs the Bengali Hindu upper and middle castes to hold on to power.

This may be the reason why the party is finding it necessary to play the Bengali Hindu card as well. While the party's Birbhum strongman Anubrata Mondal held simultaneous pujas at 125 Hanuman temples in the district on Ram Navami, cricketer-turned-sports minister Laxmi Ratan Shukla organised massive Hanuman Jayanti rallies in Howrah. Both alleged that the BJP-RSS has been trying to appropriate Hindu gods and festivals. Even Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said that the political colours are being painted on Hindu festivals.

Many TMC insiders said that the party fears loss of young, urban voters to the BJP in major cities of Kharagpur, Asansol, Siliguri and Howrah and is trying hard to consolidate its rural base. Sources revealed that in the run up to the panchayat polls, the TMC cadres have been clearly instructed to rake up issue of federalism and consequences of Hindutva onslaught on Bengali culture besides addressing the local issues in the villages.

With hitherto unknown religion-based politics and social engineering silently underway in rural Bengal, the coming panchayat elections will be a litmus test of the saffron party's actual penetration among the hinterland of the State that will also decide who will have the big smile in 2021 Assembly elections. (Courtesy- Indian Express)

## India-Bangladesh Teesta deal: River has only one-sixteenth of water needed



**Kolkata, Apr 15:** The big disappointment during Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India last weekend was the failure to finalise the Teesta water sharing agreement between the two countries. Data available with thethirdpole.net shows this was because the river now has only one-sixteenth of the water needed for agriculture by the two countries during the dry season, from February to May. Little wonder that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee opposed the agreement tooth and nail.

In a recently prepared internal report on the Teesta, seen by thethirdpole.net, the West Bengal government states, "Two barrages on Teesta, at about 100 km from each other, in India and Bangladesh were planned to cater [to] irrigation in more than 16 lakh [1.6 million] hectares of land together; around 9.2 lakh [920,000] hectares in [the] state of West Bengal in India and 7.5 lakh [750,000] hectares in Bangladesh. According to a rough calculation, such a scale of irrigation for boro crop (dry season paddy) will require around 1,600 cumec (cu-

bic metre per second) of water; while through much of the dry period the river hardly has 100 cumec of water, i.e. one sixteenth of total water requirement in [the] two countries."

India has a barrage on the Teesta at Gojoldoba at Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal, a little upstream of the point where the river enters Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government has a barrage at Doani in Lalmonirhat district, before the Teesta joins the Brahmaputra.

In recent years, water volume in the Teesta has gone below the 100 cumec level in peak summer, April and May.

Recognising the lack of adequate water in the Teesta, a committee of the West Bengal government under Indevvar Pandey, principal secretary of the public works department, has recently decided that the state will irrigate only 52,000 hectares with the river's water, a reduction over 90% from the original plan.

The data explains Banerjee's reluctance to part with any water from the Teesta despite pressure from

prime ministers of both India and Bangladesh. "Where is the water in the Teesta?" asked the chief minister whenever faced with Bangladesh's claim for an equitable share of Teesta water.

Barrages are built to hold back water for the dry season. The West Bengal government report says there is no water in them now, because the water has been released at the wrong time by authorities in both India and Bangladesh.

"While the barrages were planned primarily to provide supplementary irrigation support to aman paddy cultivation during monsoon, subsequently both barrages were used to support boro cultivation during dry season, when there is minimum water in [the] river," says the report.

The fact that the barrages do not have any water reservoir facility, also compels authorities to release most of the monsoon water rather than keep it back for dry seasons.

All this makes a water sharing treaty even more difficult, though Bangladesh has agreed to a 50:50 split instead of seeking a guaranteed volume of water.

In Bangladesh, a recent study conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Centre for Agri-research and Sustainable Environment & Entrepreneurship Development (CASEED) also talked about the shift from monsoon to dry paddy cultivation in the region watered by the Teesta. "A few years ago, the aman rice crop used to be cultivated on 80% of the land but the trend has changed now," said an expert involved in the project.

Noted river expert Kalyan Rudra pointed out another big problem -- the large number of hydroelectric projects already commissioned or under construction in Sikkim state

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## Excise Secretary chairs meeting on liquor shop licenses in Namchi

**Namchi, Apr 15:** A joint coordination meeting pertaining to liquor shop licenses for South District was held at the chamber of Adhakshya (South), Zilla Bhawan, Namchi today.

The meeting was chaired by Excise Secretary, Yashodha Bhandari in the presence of DC (South) Raj Yadav and Adhakshya (S) C.L. Gurung.

It was decided during the meeting that as per the order of the Supreme Court (SC) concerning the recent Highway Liquor Ban, no liquor shops should be located in buildings along the national and state highways.

However, shops located in the second street buildings along the national and state highways can obtain licenses after duly fulfilling the criteria set by the Supreme Court. In addition, the officials also stated that all forms relating to issuing of licenses will be compiled by the Deputy Commissioner, South after obtaining NOCs from house owners, excise inspectors, Municipal Council and panchayats of the concerned areas which will then be forwarded to the Sub-Divisional Committee headed by the SDM of the concerned jurisdiction followed by the District Com-

mittee headed by the District Collector before finally being put forth before the Excise License Scrutiny Committee for issuing necessary licenses.

It may be noted that the SC judgement banning liquor vends along highways are also applicable to bars, pubs and restaurants.

The meeting also highlighted the rule of removal of liquor shops along the vicinity of religious places, schools or populated areas. It was also informed that, usage of signs along the national and state highways were also prohibited.

Similarly, NOC issued by the municipal bodies or panchayats is mandatory in case of relocation of the existing liquor shops and forms in this regard can be availed by the retailers from any of the three Excise offices located at Namchi, Jorethang and Ravangla.

The officials also laid down the directives which have been issued to the Secretary, Excise, and other officials for initiating action in case any liquor shop is found violating the norms.

The meeting was attended by BDO's, NJMC councillors, line department officials alongside the stakeholders of Namchi and surrounding areas. (IPR)