

Mallikarjuna Kharge talks about the election situation in the state

State Congress president and former Home Minister of Karnataka says, "BJP can never form a government in the south"

SAMEER RANJAN BAKSHI

With election round the corner, political bigwigs across party lines have started a war of words. They have decided to emerge triumphant in the upcoming elections, at any cost. Former Home Minister of Karnataka and state Congress president, Mallikarjuna Kharge is no exception to this.

He could not resist sniping his political opponents. Kharge has exuded high optimism in the prospect of his party getting a majority in the state legislature without any alliance.

Q-1: Sir, with election likely to be held early next year, how do you see your party performing?

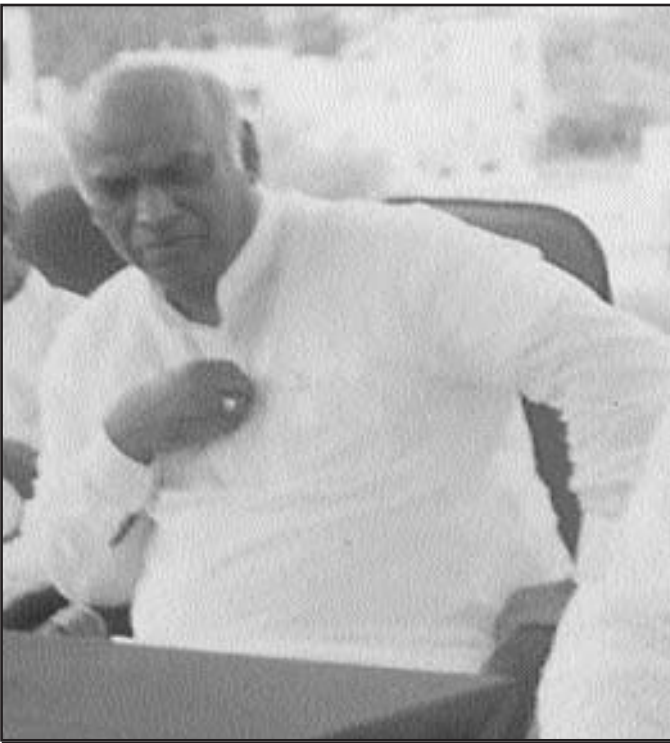
Ans- Based on the recent electoral success that the congress has achieved, the

party workers are buoyed and are zeroing in for the assembly election. The new youth congress president is ensuring that the youth of Karnataka enroll themselves in the party in as large a number as possible. The enrollment is going on in a satisfactory way. In the recently held election of Taluka Panchayat, Congress won 102 out of 152 seats and in the civic elections, the party won 1660 out of 5006 seats. We won despite being the opposition and an exorbitant amount of money being spent by the ruling party.

Q- 2: Why did your party's vote share in the last assembly election fall?

Ans- In the 1999 State Assembly election, the congress party secured absolute majority by amassing 39% votes out of the total votes polled. But in the 2004

election the party secured 65 seats in the assembly by getting 35.4% of the votes polled. Thus, there was a fall of 3.5% of votes and that was due to three major reasons - severe drought in Karnataka; elections being held in the month of April when the state was reeling under scorching heat; and the Cauvery and Rajkumar episodes.



Mallikarjuna Kharge

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Q- 3: Will JD(s) give your party a tough fight in the coming election, if yes how will you counter it?

Ans: A major section of JD(S) defected into congress or tried to float their own party, which again is a cloud in the horizon for JD(S) in the coming election. Leaders like Siddaramaiah and CM Ibrahim are definitely going to give a setback to the caste-based politics pursued by JD(S).

Q- 4: Tell us something about how you see the BJP as a potential threat to your party in the next election?

Ans: The BJP has lost its credibility by having an alliance with the JD(S) and thus was not able to provide a stable government to the state. It engaged with that party despite our advice of not getting into alliance with them.

Q- 5: Coming to women representation, do you have plans to increase the number of tickets to be given to women in the forthcoming election?

Ans: Our party is an apostle for women representation and it is manifested by our party workers owing allegiance to Ms. Sonia Gandhi, who is our party supremo. As far as this election is concerned, the decision to determine the number of seats to be given to women candidates will be taken only after the party's manifesto comes out.

Assam government in a dilemma to grant tribal status

ANIL DAS

The recent spate of killing of Adivasi students in Assam has once again raised the discomfort in the state. These Adivasi students are protesting to get a Schedule Tribe status. The protestors include the Tai-Ahom, the Moran, the Motok, the Chutia and the Koch-Rajbongshi tribes. Along with these are the 20 million tea-garden employees and ex-tea garden

labour community. The basis of conflict is that these communities wish to get patronized as recognized tribes. Till

now they are referred to as the 'ex-tea garden communities'.

The argument against this is that these tribes cannot be registered as ST, as they are migrants from various parts of the country and settled in Assam. These communities are believed to be the descendents of various tribes of central India.

The protest got worse when last week, one person was killed and about 250 injured at Guwahati. The scenes reported are beyond belief. An indefinite curfew has been imposed and red alert has been announced.

It does seem unjust on the part of the government to say that these tribes can receive ST status if they move back to the area that they originally belonged to. But it's been decades since these people had moved in. Almost one whole generation has been born and brought up in Assam. This kind of a condition on the part of government seems totally

illogical.

However, the reasons for the government's denial of ST status to these tribes seems valid because if they agree to the demands of these communities, they will eventually have to accept the conditions of various others like them. Assam already houses over 23 recognized Schedule Tribes. These are divided into two categories, The Hill Tribes and

The Plains Tribes. These tribes were recognized just after the independence in 1947.

The nation has still not come out of the violent and

cruel agitations of the Gujjar protests for similar reasons. Now the violence in the east has raised serious questions about the issue of reservation. While this matter seems to have no fair resolution, it is definite that Congress will face serious anti incumbency in Assam due to this conflict.

Quotes from political personalities:

"There was a political conspiracy to malign the government and to create a rift between the two communities (Adivasis and local people)," Chief Minister Tarun Gogi.

'Local residents armed with sticks and iron rods, besides crude implements, attacked the fleeing protesters and beat them mercilessly,' Parag Moni Aditya, a witness, said.

"A government that allows people to run amok and indulge in violence is not fit to be in power," said Assam Gano Parishad leader Chandra Mohan Patowary.

"There was a political conspiracy to malign the government and to create a rift between the two communities (Adivasis and local people)"

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee: A troubled man

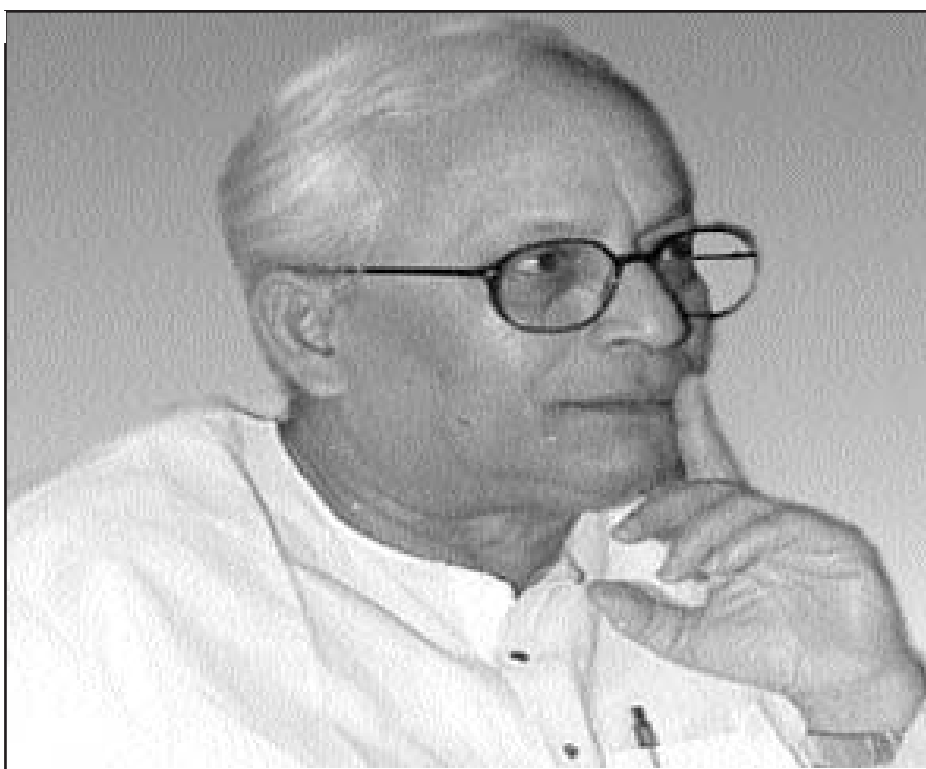
SHUBHI MEHROTRA

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's emphasis on the industrialization of Nandigram received a snub from West Bengal Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi on Sunday, December 2nd. The governor on a tour of the area said: "This place has beautiful natural resources, so many water bodies, such prospect for agriculture. I think Nandigram has a great future for sustainable agriculture and a plan must be made by the state Government with expert bodies of the Centre to make Nandigram an ideal venue for sustainable agriculture, using its resources and skills of people. You can see everywhere there's farming and fishing going on side by side."

Bhattacharjee's legacy shall best be remembered for the violence in Nandigram. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya (born March 1, 1944) has been active on Bengal's political front since November 6, 2000 as the state's chief minister. An Indian Communist politician, he is also a member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) politburo. The chief minister belongs to a family which had produced another famous son. Sukanta Bhattacharya, the revolutionary

poet of Bengal was his father's cousin. Buddhadeb's political journey began in 1977 when he was elected as a Legislative Assembly Member for the first time. His constituency then was Kashipur. It was the first time that the CPI(M)-led Left Front came to power in West Bengal. He was made in-charge of the ministry of information and culture. During his tenure he contributed to Bengali movies, theatre and music.

In 1987 his constituency changed to Jadavapur after he lost the 1982 election from



Bhuhadev Bhattacharya, chief minister of West Bengal

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Kashipur. The decision seemed to work in favour of him as he had a comfortable victory and regained his post as information and culture minister, with additional charge of municipal affairs.

The 1991 assembly election saw him win again from Jadavpur. The biggest turning point came in 2000 when he was sworn in as the chief minister of West Bengal. Since then there has been no looking back. Buddhadeb's regime has brought about significant changes in Bengal's economy. Under his leadership many new industries and IT related services have developed in the state. It is said Buddhadeb managed to arrive at what former Chief Ministers of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, S M Krishna and Chandrababu Naidu could not do; a pounding victory based on economic reforms and IT-friendly policies. Under his direction the CPI-M won a seventh consecutive term in office. However the Nandigram imbroglio brought a blotch on his smooth administration in March 2007. There was a major clash in Nandigram, a site chosen for the building of a chemical hub. Protesting against the acquisition of land, local residents, aided by Maoists and other political elements, had attacked and thrown out CPI(M) workers. His Government came under severe criticism for police action against demonstrators in

Nandigram not only by opposition parties but also by his mentor and the state's former chief minister, Jyoti Basu.

The censure for the November 11 upheaval in Nandigram has earned him an analogy with the chief minister of Gujrat by veteran Left leaning historian Sumit Sarkar. Sarkar said that Buddhadeb is like Modi as he drew parallels between the violence in Nandigram and post-Godhra riots in Gujarat.