



**FULL STOP:** Calcutta on the day of the bandh

ed to her house. And she did not merely stop at dissociating herself from the day's proceedings. That evening, speaking to newsmen, Mamata went on to blast the PCC for calling a *bandh*. She said that the attack on the party office was too trivial a matter to justify the PCC's decision to paralyse life in the state and inconvenience the common man. Further, the firebrand leader who has earned some notoriety for calling *bandhs* and organising rallies at the drop of a hat, went on to say that *bandhs* as a political instrument had lost their impact.

Mamata Banerjee then went on to question the authenticity of the PCC report alleging the involvement of Left Front workers in the ransacking of the Congress party office. She even demanded that a "proper official enquiry" be conducted to find out what had actually happened.

Mamata Banerjee's stance has obviously won her no friends in the PCC. Zainal Abedin said that no Congress worker can question the decision of the party secretariat. Replying to Banerjee's demand for an enquiry over the ransacking of the party office, Somendra Mitra said that a team of police offi-

cers had already nabbed the men who were said to be involved in the incident. So, the question of conducting any further enquiry just did not arise.

However, internal bickerings aside, the success of the *bandh* did not go unnoticed in New Delhi. The PCC was even congratulated by the Congress party spokesman V.N. Gadgil. He apparently told the WBPC that the success of the *bandh* was an indication of the growing popularity of the Congress in West Bengal and that the people supported the Congress' attempts to focus on the deteriorating law and order situation in the state. This reaction on the part of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) is in sharp contrast to its indifferent attitude towards the PCC in the past.

In fact, ever since the civic polls results, the AICC has started taking special interest in the activities of the WBPC. It seems that the AICC has finally woken up to the fact that if the PCC is able to keep up its momentum through the coming months, the Congress could well storm the red bastion in the Assembly and Lok Sabha polls next year. •

**Arindam Sarkar/Calcutta**

## Ominous signs

*The Sinar Mas paper project in Pune might just go the Enron way*



**MAHARASHTRA**

With the Enron drama reaching its climax, a new drama seems to be unfolding in Maharashtra now. And next on the hit-list of the *swadeshi* brigade is the Rs 625-crore Sinar Mas Pulp and Paper (India) Ltd project which has acquired 345 hectares of land in the Indapur taluka of Pune.

The project, promoted as a 100 per cent subsidiary of the US \$6 billion Indonesian Sinar Mas group, is slated to produce two lakh tonnes of paper annually. Due to start production by June 1996, this massive project has run into trouble now. Despite the fact that chief minister Manohar Joshi has assured the project of all possible support, various lobbies — both political and environmental — have raised serious objections against Sinar Mas.

And the case has taken on a political hue because Sinar Mas had received clearance from the Sharad Pawar government on 10 March — only four days before the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alliance rode to power. Moreover, the project is located only 35 kms from Baramati, Pawar's constituency, and the former chief minister's son-in-law was, till recently, a director of Sinar Mas.

All this has fuelled speculation that Sinar Mas may well go the Enron way. Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray has apparently announced that the project ought to be scrapped as it is 'anti-farmer'. The powerful *swadeshi* lobby within the state BJP unit has also made it clear that it would like the project to be reviewed.

And what could be another serious cause for concern for Indonesia's second-largest industrial group is the fact that the case of the environmentalists against the Sinar Mas project seems



to hold some water. At the forefront of the agitation against the project are farmers of the area who have two main objections:

- A huge amount of water from the Ujani Dam in this drought-prone area will be used up by the plant as paper production is extremely water intensive.
- Paper production will pollute the Neera and Bhima rivers in the catchment area of the dam.

Local farmers first approached state Janata Dal president Sambhajirao Kakade two months ago. Kakade promptly took up their cause and launched an agitation — Sinar Mas Hatao, Bhima Neera Bachao Andolan. According to Kakade, "The water situation in the area

Most plants use between 200-250 cubic metres per tonne of paper. Sinar Mas will use only 37.6."

The agitating villagers also allege that the paper mill will discharge 2.25 crore litres of effluence into a nullah flowing into the Neera river, which is the main source of drinking water for the people in the area. Besides this, farmers are apprehensive that the project, which is within six kilometres of the backwaters of the Ujani Dam, may contaminate the water which is used for agricultural purposes.

Anand defends Sinar Mas saying, "The pollution in the paper industry is primarily at the pulp-making stage. We will be importing ready pulp and even in the rest of the process we will not use acidic materials. Whatever waste water there is, can be re-used for agriculture



**DEJA VU:** former chief minister Sharad Pawar

is entirely dependent on the Ujani Dam. If Sinar Mas is going to lift tonnes of water every day, for its paper production, then all agriculture in the area will have to be stopped."

"As it is, this summer the water level was so low that three sugar factories were affected and had to close operations for 81 days. Once Sinar Mas is operational, they may have to close down permanently."

D.V. Anand, general manager, corporate affairs, Sinar Mas (India) Ltd, retorts, "Ninety per cent of the water will be recirculated in the plant. In fact, amongst all the paper plants in the country, we will use the least water.

because effluent discharge will be very low — even fish will be able to live in the discharged water. We are a very eco-friendly project."

All this has made Anand "completely confident" that Sinar Mas will not go the Enron way. But he should be aware that merely negating objections raised on the grounds of environment and socio-economic factors might not be enough to save the project.

For it is apparent that the agitation has taken on definite political overtones and the ruling Shiv Sena-BJP might just decide to use Sinar Mas as its next electoral plank to embarrass Sharad Pawar. •

**Lyla Bavadam/Bombay**

## Follow me

*Chief minister Digvijay Singh orchestrates a bid to consolidate his own position*



MADHYA  
PRADESH

That chief minister Digvijay Singh is determined to consolidate his position in the state was amply demonstrated at a three-day conclave held earlier this month.

Christened *chintan shivir*, the meet was conducted at Panchmarhi from 11 to 13 August. Attended by over 300 Congress(I) workers, including 60 MLAs and ministers, the camp was held under the aegis of the little-known Mahatma Gandhi Shikshan, Prastikshan, Shoudh Sansthan (educational, training and research institution).

The Pachmarhi camp, organised with an aim to critically analyse the achievements of the one-and-a-half-year-old Congress(I) government of Digvijay Singh, assumed immense political significance.

The manner in which the camp was held suggested that Digvijay Singh had decided to build up the Sansthan as a sort of alternative to the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC). Originally formed to undertake educational, training, research and social service projects, the Sansthan seems all set to play an important political role in the days to come.

The Sansthan has been asked by the chief minister to conduct a survey of the Panchayati Raj system in the state. Madhya Pradesh is the first state to implement this system and it is the chief minister's pet project. At a state-level conference of *sarpanchs* held in Raipur recently, even such known detractors of Digvijay Singh as Union water resources minister Vidya Charan Shukla and ex-chief minister of MP Shyamala Charan Shukla, lauded the chief minister's efforts to empower the rural youth in the state.

Thus, Digvijay Singh's decision to involve the Sansthan in the implementation of the Panchayati Raj system, indicates that he envisages a greater political role for the organisation in future.

Digvijay Singh used the Panchmarhi