

'Job-eater BJP': Mamata Banerjee's jibe after court scraps recruitment of nearly 26,000 teachers

PINGLA/ GARBETA, APR 26: Taking a dig at the BJP, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday dubbed it a "job-eater" and said the people of West Bengal would not forgive its leaders for "conspiring to snatch" the livelihood of nearly 26,000 teachers.

Addressing an election rally in support of TMC's Ghatal candidate Dev, Banerjee also attacked the CPI(M) and Congress in the same breath, calling the two parties "eyes and ears" of the BJP in the state.

"You have heard about man-eater tigers, but have you heard about the job-eater BJP? Did you see the glee on the face of the leaders of the BJP, CPI(M) and Congress after so many people were rendered jobless by the court?" she asked the people at the rally.

"I don't want to comment on the judgement or say anything about the judges. But after taking away the jobs of 26,000 youths, you are asking them to return the salary along with 12 per cent interest. Can you take jobs like that? Give them a chance to rectify. How can 26,000 people be treated in such a way?" she asked.

The Calcutta High Court on Monday ordered the cancellation of appointments of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff made through the recruit-



ment process of State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in state-run schools, declaring the selection process as "null and void". Banerjee said the "conspiracy" was evident from the reactions of the leaders of BJP, CPI(M) and Congress after the court gave its verdict.

"The people of West Bengal will not forgive these parties for their roles. They also filed PILs in the court and stalled any new initiative by the state government to fix the anomalies," she said.

Banerjee alleged the opposition BJP was again "conspiring" to stall the state government's decision to recruit 10 lakh people. "They don't want to wipe the tears from the faces of the unemployed youth, but want to use them for winning the elections," she claimed.

"If 26,000 teachers go,

who will teach in the state-run schools? Will RSS now take over?" she asked.

She called the CPI(M) and Congress "eyes and ears of the BJP" in West Bengal.

"The INDIA bloc does not exist in West Bengal. Voting for the CPI(M) and Congress will strengthen the hands of PM Narendra Modi. It is the TMC, which is fighting the communal and undemocratic BJP here," she claimed.

Banerjee also criticised the BJP, alleging that it forced the EC to hold a seven-phase election in West Bengal without caring about the scorching heat.

"If Tamil Nadu with 40 seats can have a single-phase poll, why should Bengal with 42 seats be subjected to such a grueling schedule? BJP does not care about the people," she said.

Banerjee accused the

Centre of depriving West Bengal of funds for social welfare schemes, and said that her government would arrange the money.

"What happened to the promise of giving Rs 15 lakh in people's bank accounts?" she questioned.

She also alleged that the BJP was attempting religious polarisation.

Bengali superstar Dev is seeking re-election from the Ghatal seat for a third consecutive term. This time, he is up against BJP's Hiran Chatterjee, another film star who became an MLA in 2021 by winning the Kharagpur Sadar seat. The CPI fielded Tapan Ganguly in Ghatal.

Later in the day, Banerjee addressed a rally in Garbeta for the party's Jhargram candidate Kalipada Soren.

She said leaders of the BJP never came to the region when blood-shed was a daily affair because of Maoist activities.

"It was me as the opposition leader who would come to stand with the people during those times. Now, they are talking big," she said.

Banerjee said she always believed in the slogan of 'badla noy, badal chai' (want change, not revenge) that she gave during the 2011 assembly elections in which her TMC ousted the CPI(M)-led Left Front.

LS polls: UP records over 35 pc voting in 8 constituencies till 1 pm

LUCKNOW, APR 26: A voter turnout of 35.73 per cent was recorded till 1 pm in the eight parliamentary constituencies of Uttar Pradesh in phase two of the Lok Sabha elections on Friday, according to officials.

The polling began at 7 am and will continue till 6 pm.

Voting in Uttar Pradesh in the second phase is underway in Amroha, Meerut, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Bulandshahr, Aligarh and Mathura constituencies.

Election Commission (EC) officials said 40.67 per cent votes were polled in Amroha, 38.33 per cent in Meerut, 34.17 per cent in Baghpat, 33.99 per cent in Ghaziabad, 36.05 in Gautam Buddha Nagar, 35.35 in Bulandshahr, 35.55 per cent in Aligarh and 32.70 in Mathura till 11 am.

There are more than 1.67 crore voters, 7,797 polling stations and 17,704 polling booths in these eight Lok Sabha constituencies.

Among the 91 candidates in the fray in this phase are actor-turned-politician Hema Malini, seeking a third term from Mathura on a BJP ticket, and actor Arun Govil, who portrayed the role of Lord Ram in television serial "Ramayan".

The ruling BJP has fielded Govil from his native place Meerut, Atul Garg from Ghaziabad and Mahesh Sharma from Gautam Buddha Nagar. Danish Ali of the Congress is contesting the polls from Amroha.

In Mathura, voters of four villages are boycotting the polls alleging indifference of representatives to-



wards their basic problems. "The villagers are being persuaded to cast their votes with assurance that their problems would be given top priority," District Magistrate Shailendra Singh said.

There is, however, a lot of enthusiasm among the first-time voters of Mathura, even in the rural areas such as Barsana, the DM said.

In Bulandshahr, voting could not start at the primary school in Chhotabas village in the Pahasu area with villagers staying away over the non-construction of a road. However, after persuasion of the administrative officials, voting began there around 11 am.

SDM Shikarpur Priyanka Goyal said the villagers have complained about the road and drainage problems which will be looked into. The villagers have now started reaching for polling, she added.

BJP candidate Hema Malini, while talking to reporters, said she was hopeful that people would vote

in favour of Prime Minister Narendra Modi by pressing the lotus button on the EVMs.

"I would not have been the MP from Mathura had opposition party candidates worked even a little for the constituency," Malini said while responding to a question.

Claiming herself to be the 'gopi' (female devotee) of 'Kanha', she said, "The promises I have made would be fulfilled to receive the blessings of Kanha." RLD president Jayant Chaudhary along with his wife Charu Chaudhary turned up at a booth in Mathura to cast their votes.

"People are impressed by the performance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the past ten years and that is why BJP is getting support from them in a big way," Jayant Chaudhary told reporters.

In Baghpat, people from all walks of life preferred to vote early in the day to avoid the scorching heat after noon and also made it a point to get clicked at the

selfie points.

In Ghaziabad, Union Minister General (retd) VK Singh cast his vote in the morning. Singh, the current BJP MP from Ghaziabad, had announced not to contest the elections this time and the party in his place has fielded former state government minister Atul Garg as its candidate.

In response to a question, Singh said he was confident that the BJP would achieve Modi's target of crossing 400 seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

After casting his vote in Aligarh, SP candidate Bijendra Singh told reporters, "The country is run by the Constitution, not by emotions and the voting taking place in the country today is to save the Constitution and the truth. Therefore, I am confident that this time the BJP will lose and the INDI Alliance will win." In Amroha, Congress candidate MP Danish Ali claimed that there is a one-sided atmosphere in the elections and his BJP rival will be far behind him.

China says talks on Tibet only with Dalai Lama's representatives; rules out dialogue on autonomy

BEIJING, APR 26: China on Friday said it will talk only with the representatives of the Dalai Lama and not the officials of the Tibetan government in exile based in India but ruled out dialogue on the highest Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader's long-pending demand for his remote Himalayan homeland.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin was reacting to reports of the back-channel talks between the Tibetan government-in-exile and the Chinese government when he said China regards the Tibetan government-in-exile based in Dharamshala as a "separatist" bloc.

"The so-called Xizang's government-in-exile is a completely separatist political bloc. It is totally against the Chinese Constitution and laws. It is illegal," Wang told a media briefing here. "No country has recognised it." On Thursday, Sikyong or the political head of Tibet's government-in-exile, Penpa



Tsering, told a visiting group of journalists in Dharamshala, India, "We have had back-channel (engagement) since last year. But we have no immediate expectations from it. It has to be a long-term (one)." Insisting that the talks are "very informal," the head of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) said, "I have my interlocutor who deals with people in Beijing. Then there are other elements also trying to reach out to us." According to Wang, the Chinese government

has "two basic principles for contacts with this (Dalai Lama's) group." "First, we will only have talks with the representatives of the 14th Dalai Lama instead of the so-called government-in-exile or the so-called administrative centre," Wang said.

Secondly, the topics for talks will be only for the arrangements and not for the "so-called autonomy" of Tibet, the main demand of the 88-year-old Dalai Lama. "They should have some

self-introspection and refrain from all activities sabotaging the stability of Xizang and go back to the right way so that we can move towards the next step," Wang said without elaborating.

From 2002 to 2010, the Dalai Lama's representatives and the Chinese government held nine rounds of dialogue that did not produce any concrete outcome.

The Tibetan side pitched for genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people in line with the Dalai Lama's 'Middle-Way Policy.' No formal talks have been held since after 2010.

In Dharamshala, another senior Tibetan leader indicated that the back-channel talks are aimed at reviving the overall dialogue process as it is the only way out to resolve the Tibetan issue.

The 14th Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959 and came to India where he set up the government-in-exile at Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh.

US secretly shipped new long-range missile system to help Ukraine against Russia

WASHINGTON, APR 26: The US last week secretly shipped a new long-range missile system to Ukraine, and Ukrainian forces immediately used the weapons to attack a Russian military airfield in Crimea on April 17 and Russian troops in the country's southeast overnight on Tuesday, according to a senior US official.

The US previously supplied Ukraine with a version of the Army Tactical Missile Systems — known as ATACMS — armed with wide-spreading cluster munitions that can travel 161km.

But Ukraine has long coveted the longer-range version, with a range of about 307km, which can reach deeper into Ukraine, a hub of Russian



air and ground forces, and supply nodes for Moscow's forces in the country's southeast.

Overnight on Tuesday, Ukraine used the longer-range missiles to strike Russian troops in the port city of Berdyansk on the Sea of Azov, the senior US official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss op-

erational matters.

On April 17, social media accounts in Ukraine reported large fires and explosions at a military airfield in Dzhankoi, Crimea, which the senior administration official said was also a long-range ATACMS target.

In a major policy shift, President Joe Biden secretly approved the deci-

sion to send more than 100 of the longer-range missiles in mid-February, the senior US official said, as well as more of the cluster munition variant.

They were part of a \$300 million shipment of weapons to Ukraine in March, the first new aid package for the country since funding ran out in late December.

PM Modi slams Trinamul Congress over school jobs scam, says Bengal's youth paying price

MALDA, APR 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday lambasted the TMC over the cancellation of around 26,000 jobs following a high court order, asserting that the youth of West Bengal have suffered due to the "cut-and-commission" culture of the party, which is now "synonymous with scams".

Speaking at an election rally in Malda, Modi highlighted the plight of the youth who, in desperation, took loans to pay bribes to TMC leaders.

"The TMC indulges in scams for which the people of the state have to suffer. The party has been playing with the future of the youth of Bengal," he said.

He emphasised how the TMC's involvement in scams has not only jeopardised the future of Bengal's youth but has also adversely affected thousands of families.

"The teacher recruitment scam snatched the livelihood of around 26,000 families. The youth who took loans to pay bribes to the TMC leaders are now burdened by this situation too. The Centre is working towards generating jobs for the youth of the country," he said.

Earlier this week, the Calcutta High Court declared the recruitment process of the State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in West Bengal government-sponsored and aided schools as "null and void," ordering the cancellation of all appointments made through it.

"Under TMC rule, only one thing exists - scams totalling thousands of crores. The culprit is TMC, but the entire state is forced to pay for its deception and scams," he said.

Highlighting various scams, including the Sharada chit fund scam, the Rose Valley chit fund

scam, and the coal smuggling scandal, Modi accused the TMC of prioritizing corruption over the welfare of the people.

Addressing the women electorate, particularly in the minority-dominated district of Malda, Modi accused the TMC of betraying Muslim sisters by opposing the abolition of triple talaq.

"The TMC, which came to power by talking about Maa-Mati-Manush (Mother-land-people), has committed the biggest betrayal against the women here. When the BJP government abolished triple talaq to protect Muslim sisters from atrocities, TMC opposed it," he said.

Referring to recent incidents in Sandeshkhali, where allegations of sexual abuse against TMC leaders surfaced, Modi criticised the state government for its alleged apathy towards

the victims. "So many atrocities were committed against women in Sandeshkhali and the TMC government kept protecting the main accused till the end... Whereas the BJP government is working for the dignity of women," he said.

Slamming the Congress and the TMC for spreading canards about CAA, Modi said the Citizenship (Amendment) Act "is about granting citizenship and not snatching it." "The Congress and the TMC to appease their vote-bank politics are opposing the CAA. Why are they opposing Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist refugees, who were forced to leave their land due to religious persecution, from getting citizenship? The CAA is about granting citizenship and not snatching it," he said.

He warned against the "dangerous intentions" of the INDIA

alliance, comprising TMC and Congress, accusing them of divisive policies and appeasement politics.

"They want to revoke decisions made in the interest of the nation, such as reinstating Article 370 and repealing the CAA law for their vested political interests," Modi said.

Seizing on Congress leader Sam Pitroda's remarks amid the row on the issue of wealth redistribution, Modi said, "The Congress and the INDI alliance are planning to take the wealth that you have accumulated by working hard and enduring hardships. Even mangalsutra of the poor and Dalit woman will not be spared." Modi, while questioning the TMC's stand on the issue, said both the parties have now engaged in competition over appeasement politics.

"The Congress wants to grab your property, and the TMC is

not uttering even a single word against this. There is a competition of appeasement going on between these two parties. The TMC government is working to settle Bangladeshi infiltrators in Bengal, and Congress is talking about distributing your assets among those," he said.

The PM said the "biggest magnet" to keep TMC and Congress together is appeasement. "For the sake of appeasement, these parties can go to any level and can reverse every decision taken in the national interest," he said.

Modi said, "The Left and the TMC regime have decimated the glory and honour of Bengal and put a stop to its development." "Be it the field of social empowerment, scientific discovery, or philosophy, there was a time when Bengal used to lead in every sphere. But, unfortunately, the Left and the TMC

hit the glory of Bengal, shattered its honour, and put a stop to its development," he said.

Criticising the TMC's resistance to central projects in Bengal, Modi said the funds sent by the Centre are being looted by the TMC leaders.

"The money that I send from the Centre to the Bengal government for its development is siphoned off by TMC leaders, ministers, and tolabaz (extortionists)," he said.

The Prime Minister's remark accusing the TMC of indulging in corruption drew sharp reactions from the state's ruling party.

"The PM is making baseless allegations against the TMC. We are fighting to ensure that those who are eligible don't lose their jobs. He was speaking of corruption, but the BJP shelters corrupt people," TMC leader Santanu Sen said.