The CHANGE that Bengal needs

Burdened with huge expectations and equally weighty problems, Mamata Banerjee’s real test lies ahead. MIHIR S. SHARMA traces the challenges in Bengal that need immediate attention.

ECONOMY

GDP at constant prices, 2007-08, Rs 1 lakh

West Bengal: 21,354,840
Gujarat: 19,888,669
Maharashtra: 38,024,752
Karnataka: 20,369,431
All India state-wise: 5,484,035
SOURCE: CSO

J O B S

Average annual growth rate in employment in primary sector, 1990-2005

West Bengal: 0.9
Kerala: 4.6
Maharashtra: 2.7
Andhra Pradesh: 1.8
SOURCE: Economic Census, 2005

EDUCATION

Number of teachers per 100 students, 2004-05

West Bengal: 1.9
Kerala: 2.7
Maharashtra: 2.7
Andhra Pradesh: 4.1
SOURCE: NSO

INVESTMENT

Investment in the state, 2004-05

West Bengal: 171,839
Kerala: 504,237
Maharashtra: 411,159
All India: 108,481

Dealing with high hopes

“Something good should happen,” says V.K. Balasubramanian, after 14 years of CPI rule. “Nothing is right in the state and so anything seems better than what we have.” His optimism is contagious.

The schools don’t work

The number of middle-schools in West Bengal attending tuition classes is estimated at around 75 per cent. That’s more than twice the national average. It’s a colossal failure, the second-highest in the nation. (The highest is Tripura.) The main competition comes from Bihar—and that’s around 50 per cent.

The schools have failed, he said. A toto, or a cobbler, of teacher activism, la regulation, and heavy-handed politicisation—a teacher, who has been suspended after two years is expelled for his views.

The teachers do work. The children are happy, the parents are happy, and the school is running smoothly.

The political system is personal

In a party system, the party and the state is...