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# Jai Shri Ram to Jai Maa Durga: Amit Shah finds new means to exhort crisis-ridden Bengal BJP

*The Union Home Ministry issued an unusually lengthy press release in Hindi dedicated to the minister's visions of Durga and her mythical powers.*



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Union Home Minister Amit Shah and State BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari leave after meeting the deceased BJYM leader Arjun Chowrasia's family members, at Kashipur near Kolkata. (Photo | PTI)

By Chandan Nandy

NEW DELHI: Faced with a seemingly invincible Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamool Congress, which crushed the BJP in the 2021 Bengal Assembly elections, Union Home Minister Amit Shah appears to have found in Goddess Durga a new means to exhort his partymen in the state, where infightings are

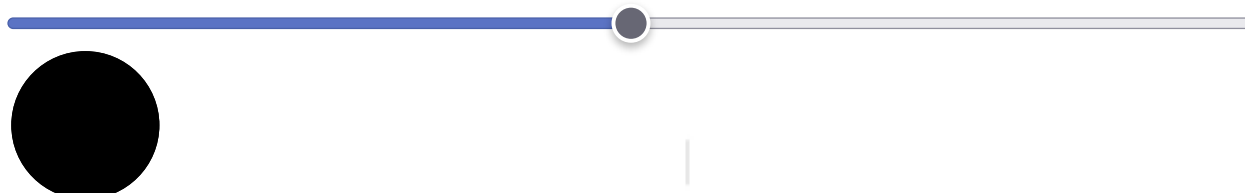
sapping their energy.

Following Shah's two-day visit to Bengal, the first since the BJP's drubbing, the Union Home Ministry issued an unusually lengthy press release in Hindi dedicated to the minister's visions of Durga and her mythical powers.

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Speaking as the chief guest at a culture ministry-organised programme on Unesco having given 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' tag to Durga Puja, in Kolkata's iconic Victorial Memorial, Shah said "the entire country has deep respect for Bengal's Durga Puja", that "for thousands of years India has been flowing like one cultural river" and that "for thousands of years our cultural has been eternal".

The Victoria Memorial event was marked by BCCI president and former Indian cricket captain Sourav Ganguly's wife Dona Ganguly's dance and vocalists Surendra and Soumyajit's recitals.

The home minister's effusive praise for India's cultural heritage and the attempt to link Durga with it is akin to the BJP's appropriation of Ram Navami celebrations soon after it assumed power at the Centre in 2014.

Observing and celebrating Ram Navami, which was always a non-event across Bengal, has assumed militant proportions over the years.

Reacting sharply to Shah's speech, TMC Rajya Sabha MP Jawhar Sircar told this newspaper:

"They tried to use the Victoria Memorial on Netaji's birthday last year. My

sources tell me that crores were spent that day. It was an attempt to appropriate Netaji at a hallowed spot which is being sought to be used as a party den. Not even the Left Front had misused the Victoria Memorial.”

Sircar said Shah’s speech on Durga Puja is “yet another attempt by the BJP to appropriate a symbol of Bengal”.

“It is a festival of Bengal and has always been above politics and religion. It is much too participative a festival. It has never been a deeply religious, sacramental ceremony. Hinduism is not a cow for them to milk”.

In the past, the Trinamool Congress has alleged that the BJP has been seeking to use the Durga Puja for political-electoral ends.

In October 2020, PM Modi had virtually inaugurated a few puja marquees across Kolkata and addressed the people of Bengal.

### **Close to Didi, says Dada after hosting Shah**

After hosting Amit Shah, BCCI president Sourav Ganguly on Saturday disclosed his close relation with Mamata Banerjee, who is a strident critic of the BJP.

“I know chief minister Mamata Banerjee for long time. She is very close to me. I had approached her to help to build up this healthcare institute,” said Ganguly at the inauguration of a private hospital in Kolkata.

Analysts say Ganguly is trying to maintain good terms with the Centre and state governments.

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