

NEW DEMOCRACY

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VOTE

BENGAL BEFORE THE VERDICT

Power, people, and the politics of 2026

New Democracy

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West Bengal's political scenario is gradually tilting towards the caste-based narratives and agendas. Every party is trying to gain favour and trying to appease them in many ways. The upcoming Elections in West Bengal are Scheduled for 2026.

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All the Eyes are on the Pasmanda voters

Indian Muslims are socially divided into three main groups: 'Ashraf' – who constitute approximately 15% of the population and are considered high-caste; 'Ajlaf', who represent lower-caste converts; and 'Arzal', who represent the untouchables.

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Unsafe Women in the Land of Durga Devotees

Bengal has historically been a region of Shakti worship, where Durga and Kali are revered. However, this picture seems to be changing in recent years.

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Editorial

Jan, 2026

As the new year approaches, West Bengal's political landscape is also entering a phase of transition. There was once a popular saying that what Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow. Today, however, that adage seems to be acquiring a new meaning. Instead of setting trends, Bengal's politics is increasingly beginning to resemble the patterns long visible in other parts of the country.

Caste and religious identities, which historically played a limited role in Bengal's political imagination, are now becoming central to electoral calculations. On one side are Dalits and Adivasis, who together constitute nearly 30 percent of the population. On the other is the Muslim community, which also accounts for roughly 30 percent. Every major political party is attempting to consolidate these substantial vote banks, making identity-based mobilisation unavoidable.

In this shifting scenario, the emergence of new political players has added further complexity. The Social Justice Party (SJP), formed by Humayun Kabir after his expulsion from the Trinamool Congress, has introduced a new variable. At the same time, Asaduddin Owaisi is expected to contest elections in Bengal, while Pirzada Abbas Siddiqui's Indian Secular Front remains active. Together, these developments raise the strong possibility of a split in Muslim votes, an outcome that could directly benefit the BJP.

This fragmentation becomes even more significant when viewed alongside the presence of Pasmada Muslim voters, who are largely concentrated in districts such as Murshidabad, Malda, and North Dinajpur. Humayun Kabir, himself from Murshidabad, has attempted to mobilise sentiment through symbolic acts such as laying the foundation for a Babri Masjid. Under such circumstances, political polarisation appears inevitable, and the role of Pasmada voters may prove decisive. Compounding this uncertainty is Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's shifting stance on the Waqf Amendment Act. While she was initially seen opposing it, her later position on its implementation has created confusion and unease within sections of the Muslim community.

Simultaneously, developments beyond India's borders could influence domestic political alignments. Reports of mob violence against a Dalit Hindu youth in Bangladesh have the potential to polarise Hindu voters in Bengal. Dalits make up nearly 24 percent of the state's population, and opposition parties are already raising this issue aggressively to mobilise sentiment.

Bengal's electoral outcomes have also historically been shaped by women voters, alongside Muslim voters. The Trinamool Congress's return to power owed much to female electoral support, reinforced by welfare schemes such as Lakshmi Bhandar, Kanyashree Prakalpa, Rupashree Prakalpa, and Anandadhara. However, women's safety has emerged as a deeply troubling national concern in recent years. Cases such as Nirbhaya, Hathras, and Unnao have underscored the scale of the problem. In Bengal, the horrific rape case at R.G. Kar Medical College has raised serious questions about the safety of women and the effectiveness of the state government. With elections scheduled for 2026, a crucial question remains: which issues will women voters prioritise when casting their ballots?

Regional dynamics further complicate the electoral equation. Districts such as Jhargram, Purulia, Bankura, and Midnapore, along with large parts of North Bengal, have a significant tribal population that often plays a decisive role. In recent years, the BJP has strengthened its presence in North Bengal, a trend reflected in its performance during the last Lok Sabha elections. This growing influence poses a challenge for the Trinamool Congress.

Among Dalit groups, the Matua community, descendants of refugees who settled in Bengal during and after Partition, holds particular political importance. Their influence extends across nearly 40 assembly seats. The recent removal of approximately one lakh Matua voters from the electoral rolls has added to political tensions. Traditionally inclined towards the BJP, it remains to be seen whether their loyalties will shift under the new circumstances, especially as both the Trinamool Congress and the BJP intensify efforts to court them.

Political violence has long been an unfortunate feature of Bengal's elections. Incidents of violence surface repeatedly during polls at every level, providing the opposition with a persistent line of attack against the ruling party. Ensuring free and fair elections will therefore be a major challenge for both the state government and the Election Commission. Relations between the ruling party and the Election Commission have been strained, with public protests and sharp exchanges becoming increasingly common.

The recent Special Summary Revision (SSR), which led to the removal of approximately 5.8 million names from the electoral rolls, is bound to alter the political landscape. Which party will ultimately benefit from this shift remains unclear. What is certain, however, is that conducting peaceful, transparent, and credible elections is a collective responsibility, one that rests with the Election Commission, the central government, and the state government alike.

As Bengal moves closer to the 2026 elections, the convergence of identity politics, voter realignments, governance challenges, and electoral integrity will determine not just the outcome of the polls but the future direction of the state's political ethos.

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Dalit and Adivasi Are In The Centre Of Attraction

Dr. Deepak Kumar

Jan, 2026

West Bengal's political scenario gradually tilting towards the caste based narratives and agendas. Every party trying to gain favor and trying to appease them by many ways. The upcoming Elections are scheduled to be held in West Bengal in 2026. All parties are seeking alignment in their own way. This time, all parties are focused on the state's Dalit and Adivasi voters. After the Muslim community, if there is one community with the largest population in West Bengal, it is the Dalits. West Bengal's Scheduled Caste (SC) population was 21,463,270 according to the 2011 Census of India, accounting for 23.5% (or roughly a quarter) of the state's total population. However, some sources report that West Bengal's SC population is approximately 11% of all SCs in India, distributed across 60 sub-communities with a notable presence in districts like North 24 Parganas, Nadia and Coochbehar. However, there is no recent data available so far (post- 2011) from the government. So, we cannot estimate the exact figure. If we added up the tribal population in this force. The total stand as almost 30 percent of the total population of West Bengal. Because the tribal population in West Bengal is approx 5296963, accounting for 5.8 percent. They are major decisive factor in the region of Purulia, Bankura, Medinipur, birbhum and North Bengal in combined.

In the West Bengal assembly 84 seats are reserved for the SC and ST communities. In 2021 Assembly elections, half of the BJP's final total of 77 members came from reserved constituencies. The saffron camp won 38 of the 84 seats set aside in the state for SC and ST candidates. Eighteen of the Dalit seats that the BJP won are from north Bengal region, where the party gained significant ground in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and won the

highest ever 18 loksabha seats. From the total figure of reserved seats 31 SC-dominated seats and seven ST-dominated seats were won by the BJP. Mostly in the areas where Matuas, a Hindu religious sect made up of immigrants from Bangladesh, control a large number of seats. In fact, the Matua community has an influence on at least 40 of West Bengal's 294 assembly constituencies. These seats are primarily concentrated in North 24 Parganas, Nadia, and South 24 Parganas. Additionally, there are 20 other seats where the Matua community has an indirect influence. These seats are located in the Hooghly district and in Cooch Behar and the surrounding areas of North Bengal. They constitute 17 percent of West Bengal's total population.

The controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), which West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee vehemently opposes, offered them citizenship. Previously, many members of the Matua community had doubts about the CAA and NRC. Then BJP announced that it will open more than 700 CAA camps in West Bengal. The Matua community consists of Hindu refugees who migrated from East Bengal and present-day Bangladesh. Ethnically, they are classified as Scheduled Caste (Namasudra). 2021 assembly election CAA and NRC proved to be a double-edged sword for the saffron brigade. Where, trinamool congress managed to convince the majority of people that it subjugate there citizenship because of they don't have any proper documents other than the voter card and adhar card.

In the Matua influenced region bjp won only 10 seats comparising Gazole in Malda, Krishnaganj, Ranaghat (South), Ranaghat (North-East), Kalyani and Haninghata in

Nadia and Bagda, Bongaon (North), Bongaon (South), and Gaighata in North 24 Parganas are among them. In the north Bengal region, where the Rajbanshi group makes up a sizable portion of the voters, the saffron camp appears to have managed to hold onto their Dalit vote-bank. However, the saffron movement was rejected by the Dalits in Junglemahal region, which includes Purulia, Jhargram, West Midnapore, and portions of Bankura district. Where they managed only three of the twelve Dalit-dominated seats. Rest of the majority of seats go to the Trinamool Congress.

In the 2021 assembly elections, the CAA and NRC were significant issues for the Matua community, leading to a division of their votes. The Trinamool Congress had strongly raised these issues. This time, the SIR (Special Identity Register) has emerged as the main issue in the elections. Approximately one lakh members of the Matua community have reportedly been excluded from the voter list. This has led to tension between the BJP MP from Bongaon and his own brother. If these names remain excluded from the list, the BJP could suffer a direct loss, and the Trinamool Congress could capitalize on the situation.

Despite the tension and concerns are growing regarding the votes of the Matua community due to SIR, BJP leaders are enthusiastic about the SIR (Special Identity Registration) bill. But some voices within from the main opposition party are questioning the process. Asim Sarkar, the BJP MLA from Haringhata in Nadia district, has himself warned the party. Asim Sarkar is a representative of the Matua community, and his victory in 2021 was largely due to the support of this vote

bank. He says, "If there is any tampering with the citizenship of the Matua community, the BJP will not be spared also."

Meanwhile, the prominent face of Matua community and BJP leader Shantanu Thakur trying to calm the rising waves. Shantanu Thakur is the Member of Parliament from Bongaon Lok Sabha seat since 2019 and esteemed member of the Thakur family. His father manjul Krishna Thakur is a respected leader of matua community and ex-minister of Bengal. Shantanu Thakur claims that if any member of the Matua community is left out of the SIR voter list, they will be granted citizenship again through the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act). No Hindu refugee from Bangladesh will have their citizenship revoked. Regarding the CAA camps, BJP state president Sukanta Bhattacharya said, "The BJP is atoning for the sins committed by the Congress during and after the partition of the country. We are in favor of Bangladeshi Hindu refugees. This is our declared stance. We will set up camps for them, we will provide financial assistance. As long as the BJP is in power, no one will be able to harm a single hair of any refugee Hindu."

While the BJP is in a dilemma regarding the CAA and the Matua community, the Trinamool Congress is also seizing the opportunity. According to Trinamool's state general secretary Kunal Ghosh- "The Matua community will suffer the most from the CAA. Shantanu Thakur has understood this. This is a futile attempt to cover up the truth. We are completely with the Matua community. The Chief Minister is with them. The BJP is directionless; it has ignored Bengal's funds and dues. If you speak up in

in Bengal, you face retaliation. This time they will manipulate the voter list. They are trying to show that they are targeting Muslims. But this time, Hindus are also at risk."

The Leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari come into the aid and says, "If the SIR bill is passed, the names of illegal Bangladeshi Muslims will be removed. Only then can the Trinamool Congress be removed from power." While Leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari and Shantanu Thakur are trying to assure the matua people, the Gaighata MLA of BJP Subrata Thakur, brother of Shantanu Thakur and Haringhata MLA Aseem Sarkar are taking an aggressive stance. Subrata Thakur launched a new wing of All India Matua Mahasangha. Matua Mahasangha already had the two wings- one headed by the Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha MP Mamatabala Thakur and the second by Shantanu Thakur. Subrata was the joint head of the second wing along with his brother. After the rising tensions between the brothers he launched the third wing. Where he included Suwendu Adhikary the leader of opposition, Aseem Sarkar Bjp MLA from Haringhata, Ashok Kirtaniya mla from Bongaon north and Bongaon South MLA Swapan Majumdar in the advisory board of his wing.

On one hand, the BJP is trying to win over Dalit voters in Bengal, while on the other hand, the ruling Trinamool Congress wants to capitalize on the confusion created by the situation. Both sides are making strenuous efforts to woo Dalits and tribal communities, which is indicative of the changing political landscape in Bengal. Like the Dalits in Bengal, the tribal population is scattered across different regions.

Despite this, they play a decisive role in many constituencies. On one hand, there are the tribals of Purulia, Jhargram, Bankura, and Midnapore – areas bordering Jharkhand and Odisha. Their problems are distinct. However, the tribals in the North Bengal region face different challenges. They are primarily tea garden workers for whom land ownership rights and minimum wages are the core issues.

Although the total number of tribal people in the state is not large enough to make a significant difference, they can still have an impact in certain areas. The regions bordering Jharkhand and Odisha, and the North Bengal region, are particularly important. The tribal communities in areas like Purulia, Bankura, Jhargram, and Midnapore appear divided. In 2019, the BJP achieved considerable success in this region, winning all four seats. However, they were unable to replicate that success in 2021 and 2024. The influence of Jharkhand politics is also visible among the tribal communities here. Conversely, the BJP has managed to maintain its position in the hilly and sub-Himalayan regions of North Bengal, for reasons of its own. The hills and plains are primarily covered with tea gardens, and the long-standing problems of the people working there remain unresolved. When Mamata Banerjee's government came to power, there was initial enthusiasm among the people here, but that enthusiasm gradually faded. The demand for a separate Gorkhaland state, along with the demands for land ownership rights and minimum wages for tea garden workers, remain crucial issues.

A new political movement emerged in the hills under the leadership of Bimal Gurung, which intensified the demand for Gorkhaland.

However, the tribal communities of the Terai region did not support this demand as vociferously, fearing that they might become second-class citizens in the new state. But the movement was so powerful that the then government was forced to compromise, and on March 14, 2012, the Gorkha Territorial Administration was established. However, the problems of the Terai tribals remained unresolved. They do not have ownership rights over the land they have inhabited for generations. As a result, tea garden owners treat them like bonded laborers. They neither receive minimum wages nor timely bonuses. One member of each family is forced to work in the tea gardens; otherwise, they are served with eviction notices. Furthermore, the government's Tea Sundari Scheme and Tea Tourism Scheme have raised questions about their very existence. In this situation, the opposition has adopted their issues as its own and strengthened its position in the region. The Terai tribals have no political allegiance; they stand with whoever stands with them on their issues. The ruling party faces the challenge of finding a way to resolve this problem.

A Tribal Advisory Council (TAC) has been formed in Bengal, yet the problems of the tribal communities here remain unresolved. Meetings are held repeatedly, but the situation remains unchanged. Under the guise of tea tourism, the government has agreed to give 30 percent of the plantation land to private organizations, but those who have lived on and cultivated this land for generations have still not received land titles. Meanwhile, in the neighboring state of Assam, the government has agreed to grant land titles for 23 decimal plots to tea garden workers. Naturally, the tribal communities here are also looking

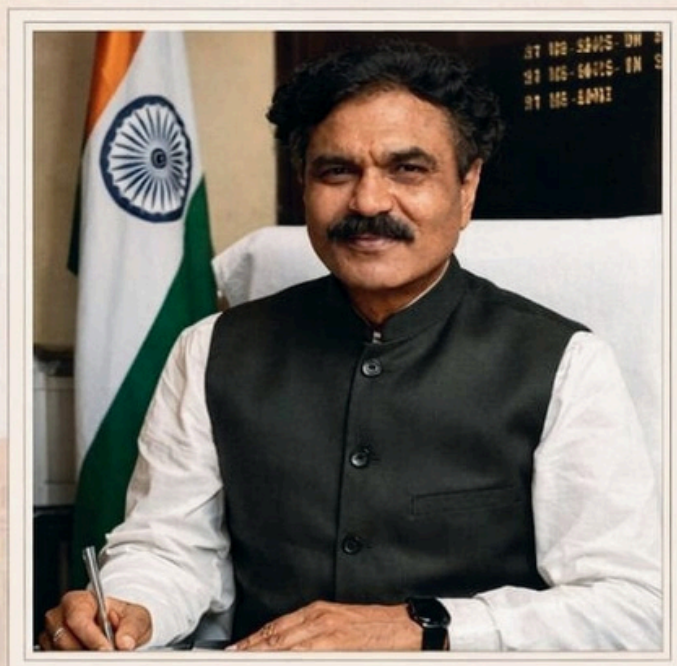
towards that example, wondering when their demands will be met.

Whatever the case, in the current political landscape of Bengal, Dalits and tribals have collectively demonstrated their importance, and this is why both the ruling party and the opposition are leaving no stone unturned to win their support.

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INDIA AT 76

Celebrating the Spirit of the Constitution



Kishor Makwana

Chairman, National Commission for Scheduled Castes

As India marks 76 years of its Republic,
we renew our commitment to *justice, equality,*
and opportunity for all.

Happy Republic Day

— Jai Hind. —

West Bengal Assembly Elections: Tug of war in Bengal

Om Prakash Ashk

Jan, 2026

By providing various schemes for women, Mamata Banerjee has kept them on her side so far. This is why she has consistently achieved success in elections. It would not be surprising if, keeping her core vote base in mind, Mamata announces some more attractive schemes for women in the new year. BJP's strength lies in its Hindutva ideology and Narendra Modi's image. By winning 77 seats last time, the BJP had signalled its growing strength in Bengal. The hatred towards Hindu minorities in Bangladesh, the intensive voter revision (SIR), and the success of the BJP in the Haryana, Maharashtra, Delhi, and Bihar elections have not only boosted the BJP's morale but could also have an impact on the Bengal elections.

There is not much time left for the West Bengal Assembly elections. The elections are likely to be held in March-April of next year, 2026. The term of the current assembly will end on May 7, 2026. This time, in addition to the Left parties and Congress, several other parties such as Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM, Humayun Kabir's proposed new party (after his expulsion from the Trinamool Congress), and ISF will be in the fray. However, the main contest appears to be between the TMC and the BJP. Last time, the BJP won 77 seats, becoming the second-largest party in the assembly after the TMC. Mamata Banerjee formed the government, but the BJP's growing stature is a major challenge for her. The Left Front, which once ruled Bengal, and the Congress were left empty-handed in the last election.

PM's visit increases political activity in Bengal
Speculations have already begun about what will happen in this election. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Bengal.

He was scheduled to address a public meeting in Taherpur, Krishnanagar, a Matuadominated area. Due to bad weather, his plane could not land in Taherpur. A plan was then made for him to travel by road. However, due to time constraints, the PM addressed the rally virtually from Dum Dum airport. Union Home Minister and BJP's election strategist, Amit Shah, is also scheduled to visit Bengal this month. If all goes well, he may also visit Bengal on December 29-30. This makes one thing clear: the BJP will contest the Bengal elections with full force this time as well.

BJP's rise is causing tension for Mamata In the context of the Bengal elections, it is important to understand the strength of the BJP and the TMC in Bengal. Why has the Trinamool Congress been continuously successful in Bengal since 2011? The Left parties, which ruled for more than three decades, have virtually disappeared from Bengal. The Congress also ruled Bengal for a long time, but now, like the Left parties also vanished from the assembly. Their representation in the Lok Sabha is also zero. Frustrated with the Left Front, people blindly trusted Mamata Banerjee. However, due to the looting of public funds, corruption, and Muslim appeasement, the TMC's power has weakened. In 2021, Mamata succeeded in forming the government, but the BJP's upward trend, which began with the Lok Sabha elections, continued in the last assembly elections as well. The BJP, which was once limited to 1-2 seats, saw a tremendous surge in its strength, and its seats in the assembly reached 77. This is a danger signal for the TMC.

Mamata Banerjee is following in Nitish Kumar's footsteps Mamata Banerjee ha

became the Chief Minister of Bengal for the third consecutive time. If she succeeds, she could become CM for her fourth time. If this happens, she could come close to the record of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. Moreover, just like Nitish Kumar, Mamata has also cultivated her vote bank in different segments. Since coming to power, Mamata has been working to secure the votes of half the population (women), a strategy that mirrors Nitish Kumar's approach. Nitish Kumar has done several unique things for the empowerment of women in Bihar. He has been implementing schemes like reservations for women in local body elections and jobs, creating a force of nearly 1.5 crore women self-help group members and providing bicycles, uniforms, and scholarships to schoolgirls since he first became Chief Minister in 2005. Mamata Banerjee has been following in his footsteps.

Understanding Mamata Banerjee's Political Strategy In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, West Bengal had approximately 7.60 crore voters. Of these, male voters numbered around 3.85 to 3.90 crore, and female voters numbered approximately 3.70 to 3.75 crore. This means the number of female voters is only slightly less than that of male voters. This number is likely to decrease after the delimitation exercise, but the ratio of male to female voters is expected to remain similar. Keeping the number of female voters in mind, Mamata started wooing them from her very first term. Looking at Mamata's schemes for women, she launched the Lakshmi Bhandar scheme in February 2021. This scheme benefits approximately 2.2 crore women aged 25 to 60 years. The government provides financial assistance of ₹1,000 per month to women from the general category and ₹1,200

women from the SC/ST category. Payments have been ongoing since September 2021. These women, who are beneficiaries of the Mamata government's schemes have been her saviors in three consecutive elections.

Schemes for female voters Mamata Banerjee first took oath as Chief Minister in 2011. In 2013 she launched the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme for school-going girls. On an annual basis, approximately 1.8 million girls receive scholarships under this scheme. 350,000 girls also receive a one-time grant. In addition, Mamata Banerjee launched the Rupashree Prakalpa scheme in 2018. In 2024-25 approximately 208,000 girls benefited from the Rupashree scheme. While Nitish Kumar named the women's self-help groups in Bihar "Jeevika," Mamata Banerjee named them "Anandadhara" in Bengal. This scheme has been running in Bengal since 2011 under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission. Millions of women in the state are directly or indirectly associated with this scheme. Mamata Banerjee also launched the Kishori Sashaktikaran Yojana - Sabla in 2011, which is still ongoing. The beneficiaries of this scheme are adolescent girls aged 11-18 years

Mamata's Real Strength: Women By providing various benefits through different schemes for women Mamata Banerjee has kept them on her side so far. This is why she has consistently achieved success in elections. It wouldn't be surprising if Mamata Banerjee announces some more attractive schemes for women. It's possible that the financial assistance they receive will be increased. To capture Mamata's stronghold, the BJP will first have to win over the women voters. If they succeeded in doing so. Then there is a possibility to halt the Mamata's regime.

BJP's strength Mamata Banerjee has left no stone unturned to appease minority voters. Whether it's fixing salaries for imams or organizing religious processions. Mamata has always stood by them. But now the situation has changed. Humayun Kabir- an MLA from Mamata Banerjee's own party has created trouble for her by raising the Babri Masjid issue in Murshidabad. Mamata is already under fire from minorities over the SIR and Waqf laws. Now, Humayun Kabir has taken it upon himself to weaken her support base. Clearly, a division of Muslim votes will only benefit the BJP.

Mamata Banerjee in a Difficult Situation
Mamata Banerjee is facing the most difficult situation of her political career in West Bengal. She is caught between a rock and scissor. She can neither swallow nor spit it out. Hindus had already started abandoning her and now her politics of Muslim appeasement also seems to be failing. Hindu voters have turned towards the BJP. The election of 77 BJP MLAs last time was a clear indication of the growing attraction towards the party in Bengal. Firstly, the intensive voter revision (SIR) has severely damaged her image among those Muslims who had come from Bangladesh and Myanmar and made West Bengal their safe haven. Secondly, her suspended MLA Humayun Kabir has emerged as another crisis. If Kabir's plan succeeds, Mamata Banerjee's entire political game could be ruined. Kabir claims that Mamata Banerjee has been in power for 15 years thanks to minority votes. This time the minorities will teach her a lesson. Humayun Kabir is keeping a close eye on the 90 seats in the state with a significant minority population.

However, Mamata has now backtracked on her stand. She has easily allowed its implementation in Bengal. She has given permission to upload details of Waqf properties on the portal created by the Indian government for this purpose. This has become a major reason for the growing resentment towards her among the Muslims of Bengal. They now feel that Mamata is no less dangerous to them than the BJP. During the Bihar elections RJD leader and Mahagathbandhan's chief ministerial candidate Tejashwi Yadav also spoke of consigning the Waqf Act to the dustbin. Perhaps the disastrous performance of the Mahagathbandhan in the elections influenced Mamata's change of stance.

Mamata's Game Spoiled by SIR As soon as discussions about SIR (Special Investigation Report) began in Bengal. Mamata Banerjee raised a huge hue and cry. She employed various tactics to stop it and continues even now. She is reassuring the infiltrators fleeing to Bangladesh out of fear of SIR telling them that they need not worry and that she will bring them back. Mamata Banerjee had even previously claimed that there were no infiltrators in Bengal. It is surprising how she is now saying the opposite of what she said exactly 20 years ago in the Lok Sabha regarding the increasing population of infiltrators. In fact Bangladeshi infiltrators have been the backbone of Bengal's politics. They are abundant in border districts like Malda and Murshidabad. The key to winning a legislative or parliamentary seat lies in the hands of these Bangladeshi infiltrators. However, the Election Commission has thwarted Mamata's attempts to obstruct the process. Mamata could do nothing. Mamata Banerjee now faces a challenge from Humayun Kabir.

The Foundation of Communal Politics in Bengal According to the 2011 census the Muslim population in Bengal was 2.47 crore (approximately 27 percent) out of a total population of 9.13 crore. The Muslim population is now estimated to be around 30 percent. Humayun Kabir, who has pledged to rebuild the Babri Masjid is relying on these Muslim voters. Kabir claims that there are 90 Muslim-majority constituencies in Bengal where Muslims constitute more than 35 percent of the population. The BJP practices Hindutva politics in Bengal, while Mamata Banerjee advocates secular politics. In this context, Humayun Kabir has laid the foundation for communal politics. Clearly, this will divide the Muslim vote, directly benefiting the BJP. Meanwhile, Asaduddin Owaisi's party AIMIM is also exploring opportunities in Bengal. He has consistently faced accusations of aiding the BJP. If the Muslim vote is split or diverted from the TMC due to Humayun Kabir and Owaisi the consequences are predictable.

(The author has served as an editor for Prabhat Khabar, Hindustan, Dainik Jagran, and Rashtriya Sahara. He has worked as a journalist in Bengal for a long time.)

Happy Republic Day

*May the spirit of our Constitution
continue to guide India
towards equality, dignity, and justice for all.*



Ramdas Athawale

Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment
Government of India

In West Bengal, We Need a Population That Asks For More

Dipanjan Sinha

Jan, 2026

Thankfully, we have now entered an era when air quality is a political issue. People step out on the streets of a city like Delhi and even face attack from the government in power. It is a different story if the protests are big enough to impact an election, but just becoming a part of the discussion indicates a shift from a period when concern about air quality, toxic water or unwalkable roads were seen as an elite hobby. We can be cynical about politics but it is undeniable that things have changed across the world. People demand more and obey less. Social media, mobile videos and other faster ways of communication have brought the world closer and people see how their lives could be better

But West Bengal and its capital, Kolkata, seem to be caught in a trap of demanding less from their leaders. It is as if the state has internalised a kind of resigned acceptance, where civic failures – the choking air, the poisoned rivers, unchecked crime, local lumpenism – are treated not as scandals demanding accountability, but as inevitable accompaniments to life.

In Delhi, hazardous air triggers protests, court interventions and endless political blame games. In Kolkata, even when the air turns severe or hazardous, as it did repeatedly in December 2025 with AQI spiking to over 300 in places like Motilal Colony or the US Consulate area, and real-time readings hitting hazardous levels multiple times, the response is muted. A few environmental groups raise alarms, some headlines appear, but the streets remain quiet. No mass marches, no sustained campaigns forcing manifestos to promise clean air. Why this silence in a city that once prided itself on its intellectual ferment and political consciousness?

Comparisons with poorer states like Bihar only highlight the futility of low expectations. Despite resource constraints, some poorer states like Odisha and Bihar pushed infrastructure drives and governance reforms that have improved roads and reduced migration pressures in parts. In West Bengal, with its historical advantages in education and industry, settling for "better than Bihar" normalises stagnation.

One can see no escape in the chief opposition either. BJP's rise has polarised politics around identity, Bengali vs non-Bengali, Hindu vs Muslim narratives, border anxieties spilling from Bangladesh unrest and more. This has only peaked in 2025 with much of the year's political energy spent in voter roll revisions, accusations of demographic shifts, infiltrator debates and communal tensions rather than governance failures. Civic issues like pollution, flooding or crime get sidelined because they do not fit neatly into this binary. The other option of the Left, once a force for mass mobilisation, has withered, leaving little organised push for accountability.

As the 2026 state elections approach, breaking this trap requires more than cynicism. It needs a reawakening, citizens refusing to accept patronage as substitute for rights, opposition forces prioritising governance over polarisation and leaders held to account not just for festivals or doles, but for breathable air, drinkable water, walkable streets, safe neighbourhoods, jobs and a state poised to lead.

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potholed, congested, and nothing like the smooth, wide approaches to Delhi's Indira Gandhi International. This is the first impression visitors get of Kolkata, not of a thriving global metropolis but of neglect.

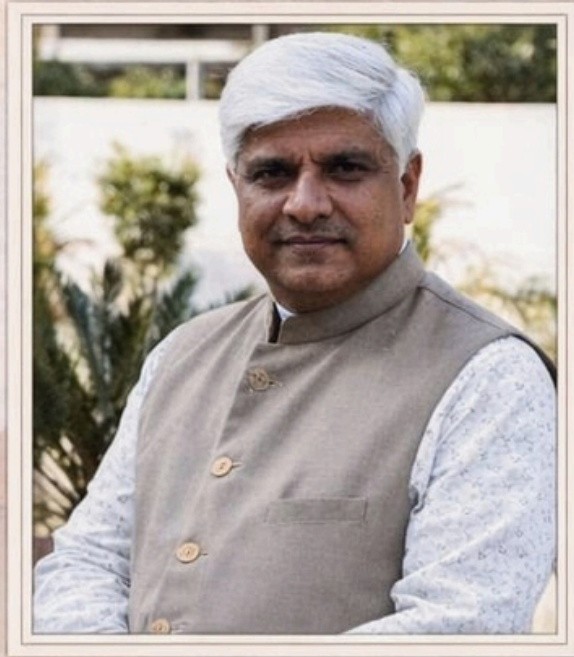
Beyond infrastructure issues, what has now become a malaise almost identifiable with Bengal is unchecked crime and local lumpenism. While official statistics claim Kolkata has low crime rates among major cities, incidents of political violence, crude bomb blasts and strong-arm tactics by local elements are common and often tied to party affiliations. Political murders (though underreported) and a culture where local enforcers operate with impunity contribute to a quiet intimidation that discourages public outcry on civic issues.

But why this low demand for better? There are many historical reasons and blaming a single party is too weak an argument. But it is irrefutable that part of it lies in the political culture that has taken root under prolonged Trinamool Congress rule. West Bengal's politics has shifted towards a decentralised patronage system, what some scholars call the "franchise model." Local TMC leaders act as gatekeepers, controlling syndicates for construction, contracts and distribution of welfare benefits. Clubs and neighbourhood organisations, especially during festivals like Durga Puja, receive generous grants, binding them into networks of loyalty. Voters, particularly from lower socio-economic strata, remain tied to the party through gratitude or fear of losing these allowances. Demanding systemic fixes like better drainage, stricter emission controls, wetland protection or safer streets risks disrupting this web.

As of late December 2025, Kolkata's real-time AQI hovered around 200-300, often categorised as severe or hazardous, with PM2.5 levels crossing 130-200 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ – far above the WHO's safe limit of 15 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. The city's annual average for 2025 stood at around 126, an 11.9% deterioration from previous years, with zero days of good air quality in the entire year, much like Delhi's grim record. Yet Delhi's crisis dominates national discourse: GRAP restrictions, odd-even schemes, Supreme Court strictures, protests at India Gate. Kolkata's pollution, driven by vehicular emissions (the city dubbed India's "diesel capital" with outdated fleets), construction dust, industrial outflows and waste burning, barely registers as a political flashpoint. Even when Kolkata briefly overtook Delhi in pollution rankings on certain winter days, the outrage was fleeting.

This is not just about air quality, which is now a headline. Urban West Bengal generates massive sewage with only partial treatment capacity. And then there are the roads, often potholed, unwalkable, flooding catastrophically with every heavy rain. The September 2025 deluge, with over 250 mm in a single day, submerged streets waist-deep, collapsed houses, claimed lives through electrocution and drowning and disrupted Durga Puja preparations. Yet, even that extreme event faded quickly from political conversation, overshadowed by identity debates or electoral mechanics. Potholes persist year-round, turning commutes into ordeals even in areas near VIP Road near the airport, where ongoing metro construction has left roads cratered and dusty. Travellers landing at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport emerge onto access roads that are far from welcoming: uneven,

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A **Republic** is not built by laws alone.
It is shaped by conscience.
Strengthened by compassion.
Sustained by the belief that **every citizen counts**.

Happy Republic Day

— *Jai Hind.* —

Rajendra Pal Gautam

Ex. Cabinet Minister, Delhi

All Eyes Are On The Pasmanda Voters

MD. Asin Ansari

Jan, 2026

Indian Muslims are socially divided into three main groups: 'Ashraf' – who constitute approximately 15% of the population and are considered high-caste; 'Ajlaf', who represent lower-caste converts; and 'Arzal', who represent the untouchables. The marginalized 'Pasmanda' include socially, economically, and educationally deprived individuals from both 'Ajlaf' and 'Arzal' backgrounds, including Dalit and backward caste Muslims. The term 'Pasmanda' refers to those who have been left behind and come from lower castes and economically disadvantaged groups within Indian Muslim society. The Pasmanda movement emerged in the 1990s in response to the discrimination faced by lower-caste Muslims following the Mandal Commission. This community has been a vote bank for the Congress party since independence. With the emergence of regional parties after the 1980s, this vote bank shifted its allegiance to them with new hopes. But even after years, they stand at the same marginalized position they were in before

Since the rise of the BJP, the Muslim community has been largely opposed to it. However, this perception is changing in recent elections. The BJP's internal structure itself is changing with regard to Muslims, especially Pasmanda Muslims. During the BJP's national executive meetings, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasized the need to discuss the discrimination faced by Pasmanda communities, citing historical oppression within their own religion. Prime Minister Modi has highlighted the discrimination against various Pasmanda communities such as Mochi, Bhathiyara, Jogi, Madari, Julaha, Lohar, Teja, Lahari, and Haldar, stating that these communities have faced unjust prejudices for generations.

Muhammad Yunus, CEO of the All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz, has praised the Prime Minister's focus on Pasmanda Muslim welfare, sparking a political debate. While the BJP is incorporating them into its electoral strategies, the opposition considers it divisive. Although Muslims constitute 20% of India's total population, with approximately 80% being marginalized Pasmanda Muslims, the BJP advocates for their representation in democracy. The All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz supports the Prime Minister's decisions and urges inclusive policies for Pasmanda communities. Azim Ahmad of the Delhi School of Economics views the BJP's efforts positively, as they are bringing Pasmanda issues into electoral discussions. However, due to the BJP's polarizing politics, Pasmanda Muslims remain hesitant about voting for the party. Nevertheless, the BJP's efforts and welfare schemes could potentially sway Pasmanda votes in their favor. In BJPruled states, continuous efforts are being made to win over the Pasmanda community through various government projects, such as the Ujjwala Yojana, free rations, and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.

The BJP has also shown proactivity regarding the political representation of the Pasmanda community. In the 2023 Uttar Pradesh urban local body elections, the BJP fielded 395 Muslim candidates, reflecting a shift in the BJP's engagement with Pasmanda Muslims. Questions are being raised about the representation of Pasmanda Muslims in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. According to one analysis, out of 7,500 representatives elected from the first to the fourteenth Lok Sabha, 400 were Muslims, of whom 340 belonged to the Ashraf (upper caste) community. Only 60 Muslims from the Pasmanda community were elected across fourteen Lok Sabhas.

elected across fourteen Lok Sabhas. According to the 2011 census, Muslims constitute approximately 14.2 percent of India's population. This means that Ashrafs would constitute about 2.1 percent of the country's population, but their representation in the Lok Sabha was approximately 4.5 percent. On the other hand, the Pasmada community constituted approximately 11.4 percent of the population, yet their representation in Parliament was only 0.8 percent. Assembly elections are scheduled in West Bengal in 2026, and three districts in the state have a Muslim population of 50 percent or more, comprising 27 percent of the state's total population. The majority of this population belongs to the Pasmada community. Until now, the Muslim community in Bengal has largely stood united behind the Trinamool Congress, a fact reflected in the 2021 assembly election results. However, this equation appears to be changing following Humayun Kabir's formation of a separate party and his decision to contest elections in nearly a hundred seats, and AIMIM's Asaduddin Owaisi's announcement to contest all seats in the state.

The BJP seems enthusiastic about the Pasmada community. It is trying to win them over through national schemes, while Mamata Banerjee is attempting to consolidate their support by highlighting the issues of the CAA and NRC. The ongoing Special Investigation Report (SIR) in the state has given Mamata Banerjee another tool to maintain her relevance among Muslims. Meanwhile, the BJP is trying to reach out to the Pasmadas through the Waqf Amendment. BJP Minority Morcha National President Jamal Siddiqui has stated that the Waqf (Amendment) Bill passed by Parliament is designed to improve the lives

of economically weaker Muslims. He emphasized, "The opposition parties, which have long used the Muslim population as their vote bank, are once again trying to mislead poor Muslims with this bill. However, Muslims living in economically and educationally backward conditions can no longer be deceived."

In his statement Jamal Siddiqui explained that the campaign would be executed by Minority Morcha functionaries from various sections of the Muslim community. He also cited a recent initiative during Eid, where "Saughat-e-Modi" kits containing food and essentials were distributed to impoverished Muslims. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi is genuinely concerned about the development of poor Muslims. He wants prosperity for everyone, regardless of their caste or creed. The Prime Minister is dedicated to lifting poor Muslims out of poverty and addressing the educational challenges they face by promoting education and providing economic empowerment. The opposition, on the other hand, has nothing in its agenda but to mislead the Muslim community for electoral gains," he said.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, keeping in mind the backward Pasmada community of the state, has revised the OBC list and included 76 new communities in it. These mainly include Ansari, Momin, Muslim Mandal, Muslim Biswas, Gaen, Piyada, Muslim Dafadar, Muslim Darzi, Muslim Sardar, Dhali, Sarkar Muslim, Mistri Muslim, Paik Muslim, Mal Muslim, Dhabak Muslim, Naiya Muslim, Siuli Muslim, etc. This is likely to directly benefit the Pasmada community.

All political parties and alliances are trying to

Jan, 2026

woo Pasmada voters in the upcoming elections. While the BJP is trying to make inroads into this vote bank at the national level, the Trinamool Congress is busy trying to protect its traditional vote bank. But this tug-of-war has made it clear that Pasmada voters will be at the center of attention for all parties in this election.

(The writer is an Assistant Professor of History, Kalimpong, West Bengal)

THE SPIRIT OF THE REPUBLIC



Ram Chander Jangra

Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, Haryana

On this Republic Day, we celebrate the vibrant democracy that unites us, the freedoms that empower us, and the ideals that guide us.

Happy Republic Day

— Jai Hind. —

The Playground Turned into a Battleground

Ms. Vandana

Jan, 2026

The game in which people who once played barefoot defeated the British, a game whose undisputed king is Lionel Messi, the Argentinian magician who has captivated sports fans worldwide with his skills. He landed on Indian soil and first arrived in the city where teams like Mohun Bagan, Mohammedan FC, and East Bengal FC have dominated. A city known for its fervent love of football. People had spent their entire month's earnings to see their favorite player. But all they saw were the same faces they saw every day under one pretext or another. No one in the crowd could even catch a glimpse of Messi's face. A player like Maradona had visited this city before, but that Bengal was different. This is today's Bengal.

The organizers were given more importance than the sports fans. Big names and influential figures obscured the face that people had come to see at the Salt Lake Vivekananda Yuva Bharati Krirangan. After a long wait, when people couldn't see Messi, their anger reached its peak. They became violent, and it was understandable. The negligence of the organizers and the arbitrariness of the influential people turned the sports field into a battlefield.

The city of Kolkata is known for its intellect and culture. This incident presented a completely different picture of the city to the world, one that no civilized person can accept. Now the question arises: whose fault was it? Were the organizers to blame, or were those who, intoxicated by power and influence, forgotten that they received this power from the very people whose rights they were trampling upon? V.S. Naipaul once said that Bengal has committed intellectual suicide. This seems to be proving true in today's times.

The opposition also tried to corner the government over this issue. Considering the seriousness of the matter, Sports Minister Arup Sarkar resigned from his post. DIG of Bengal Police, Rajiv Kumar, said that the main organizer of the event, Satadru Dutta, has been arrested. In this matter, Rajiv Kumar himself, Bidhan Nagar Police Commissioner Mukesh Kumar, and Principal Secretary of the Sports Department Rajesh Kumar Singh have also been issued show-cause notices, and some people have been suspended. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee also apologized to Messi and the sports fans on her X handle, writing that "the committee will investigate the incident in detail, determine responsibility, and suggest measures to prevent such incidents in the future."

People who came to see Messi told the media that they had bought tickets ranging from Rs. 1500 to Rs. 5000 to see their favorite player. But they saw nothing but politicians and government officials. It is known that Messi was supposed to be present at the event for 45 minutes, but he left after only 20 minutes. This angered the crowd, and they started throwing whatever they could find onto the ground. A chaotic situation ensued. It is being reported that government property worth approximately two crore rupees was damaged.

The commission, appointed by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and headed by a former judge of the Calcutta High Court, has yet to summon a single influential person for questioning a week after the incident. This has raised questions about the effectiveness of the inquiry committee headed by Justice Asim Kumar Roy. This is particularly worrying given that these powerful figures, including former sports minister Arup Biswas and his

family, have been accused of preventing spectators from seeing Messi. It also raises the question of whether Arup Biswas will be immune from any investigation simply because he resigned as sports minister while continuing to serve as energy minister. But state officials said Saturday that the state took a tough stance after the incident, making clear that no one is above the law. The roles of ministers, police executives, and bureaucrats will also be subject to administrative investigations as necessary. The committee is expected to submit its second report to the Prime Minister within the next 15 days based on information received from the inquiry from four sub-committees and the SIT, officials said. There are also indications that additional staff may be assigned to the SIT to accelerate the discovery of the truth, if necessary. However, there are no specific deadlines or deadlines set for SIT. A senior government official said there is no deadline for the investigation process, but efforts are being made to submit a report as soon as possible. The official said the administration is currently focused on maintaining transparency in the investigation.

At the same time, the government is concerned about the state of the stadium's infrastructure. The state Department of Public Works is currently investigating the extent of damage caused to stadium property by the angry crowd. However, repair or repair work cannot begin yet. The go-ahead will only be given once the necessary information and evidence is collected at the scene. The government is also working to ensure that such disruptions do not occur again at future international events. Officials said the state government has standard operating procedures (SOPs) and specific instructions

for such activities, which will be improved and strengthened following the report.

Apart from all this, what is noteworthy is that this entire incident has been covered by newspapers and news channels worldwide. This has not only tarnished the name of the city of Kolkata but has also sullied the Indian tradition of treating guests as gods.

(Writer is a Principal of Samagra Rajkiya High School, Physical Education and National Level sports Co-ordinator, Banda, U.P)

Happy Republic Day



ANIL K MAHESHWARI

Chartered Accountants (Anil Kumar Maheshwari
& Company, AKMC)

Change in Politics and Politics of Change: New Political Battlefield West Bengal

Dr. Arnab Adhikary

Jan, 2026

West Bengal's politics has always been a complex field. Since 2011, the state has been governed by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee, a tenure now spanning over 14 years. This prolonged period of rule has witnessed dramatic changes in the state's political landscape, encompassing narratives of developmental successes, corruption scandals, and social unrest.

The First Phase: A Focus on Infrastructure and Development

The initial five years of the TMC government were predominantly focused on an infrastructure-centric development model, targeting both urban and rural areas. The priority was on constructing roads, improving transport systems, building bridges, and enhancing basic civic amenities. For instance, the construction of new flyovers and the development of rural roads significantly improved connectivity, integrating remote areas into the mainstream. This tangible improvement in daily life was a cornerstone of the TMC's early appeal.

In the education sector, the establishment of approximately 18 new universities expanded access to higher education, opening new avenues for students. The health sector saw significant investment with the creation of around 17 medical colleges and over 50 general degree colleges. These projects aimed to elevate the standard of healthcare and education in rural belts, seemingly translating the TMC's core slogan of "Maa, Maati, Manush" (Mother, Land, People) into action.

Furthermore, various agricultural and rural development schemes, such as the Kisan Credit Card and irrigation projects, were

launched to improve the livelihoods of farmers. This comprehensive push for development helped the TMC consolidate its support base across a wide spectrum of society.

The Shadow of Scandals: Erosion of Credibility

However, these successes were soon overshadowed by a series of corruption scandals that severely damaged the government's credibility. The Saradha Chit Fund scam, which came to light in 2013, and the Narada sting operation, unveiled in 2016, implicated senior ministers and party leaders.

The Saradha scandal, a massive Ponzi scheme, wiped out the savings of millions of ordinary citizens, shaking the state's economic stability and eroding public trust. The Narada videos appeared to show several TMC leaders accepting bribes, leading to investigations by central agencies like the CBI and Enforcement Directorate. These events not only fuelled public disillusionment but also drastically soured relations between the state government and the central government led by the BJP, setting the stage for prolonged political and legal clashes.

Consolidation of Power and the Erosion of Opposition

Parallel to its development agenda, the TMC government systematically worked to establish an unquestionable power structure. From its early days, it employed strategies of co-option, pressure, and attrition to weaken opposition parties, primarily the Congress and the CPI(M). A significant number of opposition MLAs and local leaders were forced and pressurized to join TMC, creating a vast vacuum in opposition politics.

This strategy solidified the TMC's hegemony but also posed a challenge to the democratic framework, as a weakened opposition could not provide effective checks and balances. Critics argued that the TMC was following, and in some cases surpassing, the very playbook of political consolidation used by its Left Front predecessors.

As TMC's rule continued, political tensions in rural Bengal escalated. The 2018 Panchayat (local body) elections were marred by widespread violence, allegations of booth capturing, and intimidation, leading to casualties and injuries. This violence further crippled the opposition's grassroots presence, strengthening the TMC's control but at a significant cost to democratic norms.

The Rise of the BJP: Filling the Void

The vacuum in opposition space was swiftly filled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The party's strong presence at the Centre and its promotion of Hindu nationalist politics resonated with sections of the Hindu electorate. Allegations against Mamata Banerjee of "Muslim appeasement," coupled with the perceived handling of some communal incidents, fostered resentment among sections of the rural Hindu populace, particularly among the lower and middle classes.

The decline of the Left and Congress provided the BJP with a historic opportunity. The 2019 Lok Sabha elections marked a tectonic shift: the BJP won 18 of the state's 42 parliamentary seats, pushing its vote share beyond 40%. The Congress and the Left Front were reduced to marginal players, their vote shares collapsing. This election effectively bipolarized Bengal's politics, introducing a

potent mix of religious identity and nationalistic rhetoric previously unseen in the state's post-independence history.

The 2021 Verdict and Shifting Strategies

The 2021 Assembly elections were a fiercely contested battle. Despite the BJP's massive campaign, Mamata Banerjee led the TMC to a resounding victory, securing 213 seats. This win was attributed to a near-complete consolidation of the Muslim vote behind the TMC (fearing the BJP) and the party's retention of significant support in South Bengal and among sections of the Hindu electorate, particularly women beneficiaries of state schemes. The BJP, though becoming the main opposition with 77 seats, failed to cross the finish line. The Left and Congress were nearly wiped out.

However, victory did not simplify Mamata Banerjee's political challenges. Her government has been besieged by massive allegations of corruption and maladministration. Incidents of political violence, murders, rape cases, and communal clashes have continued, keeping the administration under constant scrutiny. Highprofile cases like the 2024 rape and murder at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital and the massive school teacher recruitment scam have exposed administrative failures and fuelled public anger, providing ammunition to the opposition.

But Mamta is a shrewd and experienced politician. She projected herself as a victim of opposition's conspiracy. She reclaims her political supremacy over West Bengal in 2024 by promoting counter narrative. In response to the BJP's Hindu nationalist push, Mamata Banerjee has subtly adopted a strategy of

"soft Hindutva"—participating prominently in Hindu festivals, overseeing temple constructions (like in Digha), and presenting herself as a protector of Hindu interests within a Bengali framework. Simultaneously, she has aggressively championed Bengali subnationalism (Bangla Asmita). By positioning herself against "Hindi imposition" and highlighting Bengali language, culture, and heritage, she has crafted a counter-narrative to the BJP's pan-Indian Hindu nationalism. This has garnered support from a section of the urban and rural intelligentsia, including liberal and Left-leaning intellectuals, artists, and writers.

External Factors and New Polarizations

On the other hand, after the regime change in Bangladesh in August 2024 (the fall of Sheikh Hasina), violence against Hindus has increased. This has had a deep impact on politics in West Bengal. Reports of riots in Murshidabad and other border areas, and frequent news about attacks on Hindus in the mainstream media, are helping the BJP gain new political ground. Senior BJP leaders are expressing concern about instability in Bangladesh and illegal infiltration, and these political messages are strengthening Hindutva politics in Bengal. At the same time, the BJP's strong stand against illegal Bangladeshi Muslim migrants is becoming popular among its target voters.

The competing narratives around the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) are central to this battle. The BJP frames them as necessary measures against illegal immigration, while the TMC portrays them as discriminatory tools that could harass Bengali-speaking citizens, including Hindus.

The 2025 Special Intensive Revision (SIR) has become a new flashpoint, with the TMC alleging it is a disguised NRC and the BJP defending it as a routine cleanse of the voter list. This debate has turned a bureaucratic exercise into a high-stakes political war, setting the tone for the crucial 2026 Assembly elections.

The Floundering Traditional Opposition and New Entrants

Amidst this TMC-BJP duel, the traditional opposition—the Congress and the Left Front—remains in a state of disarray and irrelevance. Their presence is limited to sporadic urban protests and minimal media visibility. Talks of a Congress-Left alliance are uncertain and unlikely to alter the binary contest in the near term.

A potential new variable emerged in late 2025 with suspended TMC leader Humayun Kabir announcing the construction of a Babri Masjid in Murshidabad and forming a new party. His aim to unite anti-TMC and anti-BJP Muslim forces, possibly in alliance with parties like Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM or the Indian Secular Front (ISF), could splinter the Muslim vote in key districts, potentially affecting the electoral calculus.

Conclusion: The Stakes for the Future

In conclusion, West Bengal's politics is at a complex crossroads. The TMC administration is grappling with deep-seated issues of corruption, administrative paralysis, and widespread discontent, even within its traditional Muslim support base. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent description of TMC rule as "Maha Jungle Raj" (law of the jungle) underscores the intense political warfare.

Yet, Mamata Banerjee's political resilience cannot be underestimated. Her government's direct welfare schemes for women, like Lakshmir Bhandar, have created a formidable vote bank. The fear of the BJP continues to drive a significant section of Muslim voters towards the TMC, while her Bengali subnationalist plank retains appeal

The coming months will be decisive. The situation in Bangladesh, the management of social tensions, the implementation of CAA, and the outcome of the electoral rolls' revision will critically shape the political trajectory. In this high-decibel political conflict, pressing issues of economic development, industrialization, and youth employment risk being overshadowed, posing the most significant long-term challenge for the state, regardless of who holds power. The 2026 elections will not just be a verdict on a government, but a defining moment for the social and political fabric of West Bengal.

(The writer is an Assistant Professor at ShyamaPrasad College, Calcutta University.)

Happy Republic Day



Rajesh Ranjan urf Pappu Yadav

Member of Parliament, Purnia

*Let's cherish our freedom
and uphold our nation's values.*

Unsafe Women in the Land of Durga Devotees

Dr.Kriti Sharma

Jan, 2026

Bengal has historically been a region of Shakti worship, where Durga and Kali are revered. However, this picture seems to be changing in recent years. Whether it's the case of the female doctor raped at RG Kar Hospital or the case of the 14-year-old minor in Hanskhali, numerous such incidents have come to light, raising serious concerns about women's safety in West Bengal. Governments make many claims about women's safety, but the impact is not visible on the ground. In many cases, the police themselves harass the victims to such an extent that they prefer to remain silent rather than file a complaint. In society, too, women who are victims of rape are viewed differently. Caught between mental and social trauma, most women either choose to remain silent or commit suicide.

According to the latest reports from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Kolkata has been ranked among the safest cities for the fourth consecutive time. West Bengal government minister Shashi Panja, while speaking to the media, said that "the NCRB data vindicates our claim that Kolkata is a safe city and debunks political claims from opponents. CM Mamata Banerjee has stressed repeatedly that there should be zero tolerance to crime."

On one hand, the West Bengal government is patting itself on the back, citing NCRB data, while on the other hand, the National Annual Report and Index on Women's Safety tells a completely different story. According to a survey conducted across 31 different cities in the country, involving 12,770 respondents, Kolkata, like Delhi, is one of the most unsafe places for women.

There is a huge discrepancy between the

statistics and the ground reality. According to the NCRB report, only 83.9 cognizable offenses per lakh people were registered in Kolkata, which is the lowest among major cities in the country with a population of 2 million or more.

The father of R G Kar hospital rape victims father criticised the NCRB report, stating that it was prepared based on paperwork rather than actual conditions. He said "The National Crime Bureau released a report claiming Kolkata is the safest city in India. However, the people who made this report did not base it on ground realities; they relied solely on paperwork. In Kolkata, at least 90 per cent of incidents are not registered as FIR cases. At our local police station in Gola, a girl was brutally beaten, and no one knows about it yet. This incident occurred three months ago, and such incidents happen daily in Kolkata. Nothing is brought to light. Even a six-monthold girl is not safe here. The report made by the Bureau, sitting in their offices, is clueless about the reality. Educated people in our country are misleading everyone. No one is safe in Kolkata—not a man, not a girl,"

The mother of the RG Kar Medical College victim also expressed grief and questioned over the lack of security in Kolkata, she stated, "If there was proper security, my daughter, who was a doctor, would have been safe in her hospital. She was brutally beaten and killed, and her body was found in the hospital, yet no one knows the full truth. This kind of injustice occurs frequently. I believe around 200 such incidents have occurred in a year. It has happened in law colleges and it's happening everywhere, every day. There is no security; it is not safe. Even when incidents occur, they are not properly reported or

addressed due to widespread corruption. These issues have been ongoing for a long time. For us, it's been a year and two months of pain. Wherever such incidents happen, we try to stop them, but the system fails us."

Following the R.G. Kar incident, a case of rape of a 24-year-old female student of South Kolkata Law College came to light in June this year, which once again raised questions about women's safety. A student leader from the ruling party was named in this case. Then, the gang rape of a medical student in Durgapur further intensified the political turmoil. Addressing the media after the incident, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said that "especially girl child at night time... they should not allowed to come outside. They have to protect themselves also." She also added that "in Bengal we have zero tolerance (against such crimes) and I appeal to the boys and girls who come to study here not to venture out at night. This is because the police are not aware who is coming out (of hostels) when."

A chief minister of a state who also holds the home portfolio – such a statement from her would be considered insensitive. Mamata Banerjee made a similar statement when a 14-year-old minor was gang-raped in Hanskhali, in which the son of a leader from her own party was implicated. At that time, Mamata Banerjee said from a public platform that What has happened is not right. I condemn it. The police have arrested the accused. But the opposition parties and a section of the media are trying to give a political twist to the entire event. I have received the news that there was a love affair between the accused and the victim. So why come to a conclusion before the investigation is completed,"

These incidents raise serious questions about women's safety in Kolkata and also reflect the prevailing political climate. In all the cases, from Sandeshkhali onwards, individuals with political connections appear to be involved. The opposition has been consistently critical of these incidents, yet such events continue unabated, even in a state where goddesses are worshipped. Since Mamata Banerjee holds the Home Department portfolio, the direct question is for her: how long will such incidents continue? Why is the government's rhetoric not reflected in reality? The statements made by Mamata Banerjee herself also raise questions about whether she is truly sensitive to women's safety. These are the incidents that have come to our attention. There are countless other incidents that have never been reported. Harassment of women on the streets, in buses, and on trains is a daily occurrence. It is now becoming a common feature of this city.

(The writer is an Independent Research Scholar from Lucknow)

Happy Republic Day



Nawab Mujahid Alam Khan

(Secretary Anwar-Ul-Uloom Educational Society)

Vice President All India congress committee

Telangana State

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