

Massacres that shook Bengal

Sainbari massacre
On March 17, 1970, just before the scheduled visit of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, two Congress supporters and brothers Pranab Sain and Moley Sain were murdered and their mother Mriganayani forced to eat rice smeared with her excrement.

Marichjhapi massacre
In January 1979, just after Left Front came to power, between 500 and 1,000 Bangladeshi Dalits, who had fled Pakistan Army's genocide in East Pakistan, were massacred allegedly by state police in the Sundarban island of Marichjhapi after the refugees refused to evacuate the island. Most bodies were never found and were feared to have been eaten by crocodiles.

Netai massacre
In an event that escalated...

Bijon Setu massacre
On April 30, 1982, 17 Ananda...

West Bengal saw 97% decline in industries since 2010

West Bengal: CBI calls NSG commandos to unearth 'huge cache of bombs and weapons' in Sandeshkhali

UNDER LEFT REGIME
1977 - 2011

West Bengal: The Marxist horror story

Left rules West Bengal for 34 years and ruins the state

In 1960, West Bengal's per capita income was approximately 105% of Maharashtra's, but by the mid-1990s, West Bengal's per capita income had declined to about 69% of Maharashtra's.

UNDER TMC REGIME
2011 - ONGOING

NOTHING HAS CHANGED

GOVERNANCE FAILURES IN BENGAL : AN ANALYSIS

বাংলার শাসনশক্তির ব্যর্থতা: একটি বিশ্লেষণ



Public Policy Research Centre

UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF

Dr. Sumeet Bhasin

PREPARED BY

Rahul Kumar Dubey
Prerana Meher
Muskan Yadav

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PREFACE

It is with a profound sense of duty and commitment to the welfare of our nation that I present this research report on the governance challenges plaguing the state of West Bengal. As the Director of the Public Policy Research Centre, it has been our ongoing endeavour to scrutinize governmental actions and policies with a critical eye, aiming to foster informed discourse and advocate for meaningful change.

This report explores the complex network of mismanagement that has ensnared West Bengal, stalled its socio-economic advancement, and obstructed the comprehensive well-being of its people. Through thorough examination and tangible data, we uncover a distressing reality: the successive governments in West Bengal have failed in their responsibility to elevate the lives of their constituents, and succumbed to the perils of political expediency and administrative inefficiency.

This report sheds light on the alarming deterioration of fiscal indicators, a trend indicative of systemic mismanagement and neglect. Furthermore, the rampant political violence and the erosion of law and order have cast a shadow over the state, undermining the very fabric of its social cohesion.

We are indebted to Dr. Ashok Kumar Lahiri, Member of West Bengal Legislative Assembly, and former Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India who has provided invaluable insights for the report. His expertise and guidance have enriched our understanding of the complex dynamics at play, lending credence to our findings and recommendations.

It is our sincere hope that this report serves as a catalyst for change, sparking constructive dialogue and prompting decisive action. The challenges confronting West Bengal are formidable, but they are not insurmountable. With concerted effort and unwavering resolve, we can strive towards a future where governance serves as a beacon of hope, empowering every citizen to realize their fullest potential.

Dr. Sumeet Bhasin
Director,
Public Policy Research Centre

INTRODUCTION

Bengal is a 4,000-year-old civilization that thrived between the banks of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra and sustained itself with the riches of the Gangetic Delta. Bengal has always been the gateway to the eastern parts of the Indian subcontinent. It is the shortest and easiest route from the Bay of Bengal to the Himalayas. Such a geographical advantage made Bengal a commercial hub that connected the sea to the famous Silk Route.

During the colonial era, owing partly to the early interaction with the colonisers, the Bengali community became the most advanced in modern science and literature, which gave rise to the Bengal Renaissance. The Bengal Renaissance saw the rise of extraordinary personalities and visionaries from the Bengal province in the 19th and 20th centuries. Free thinking was encouraged among students, caste discrimination was condemned, and literature and science were seen as the agents of progress. Consequently, Bengal played a pivotal role in the Indian freedom movement. However, the rich cultural heritage could not be sustained for long. The state was overwhelmed by the demographic deluge of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan as well as the faulty Freight Equalization Policy of the Congress government at the center. The Freight Equalization Policy which subsidised the transportation cost of minerals from the mineral-rich eastern region during 1952-1993 deprived the eastern states of West Bengal Bihar, and Odisha of their natural comparative advantage.

In 1960, two of the three richest states in India were Maharashtra and West Bengal. Maharashtra was the third richest state in India, with a per capita income that was about 5% lower than West Bengal's. Over the next three decades, however, the two states' economies diverged as West Bengal underperformed relative to Maharashtra. This decline started with the coming to power of the Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPI(M)), which portrayed a vehement anti-business mindset for the next 35 years.

Moreover, with the CPI(M) coming to power in West Bengal, the use of force and violent means to challenge the long-held dominance of the Indian National Congress became a routine affair. Violence since then has been mainly used to capture political power and maintain an iron grip on the key levers of state power. Such violence here has involved tactics of intimidation of voters and election officials to manipulate elections, as well as booth capturing by muscle power, not allowing voters supporting rival parties to cast their votes, or forcibly casting proxy votes in favour of specific party symbols to influence

electoral outcomes. The more obvious reasons for continuing everyday political violence in Bengal include cutthroat political competition and tussles over control of resources and crucial democratic institutions.


In the 1970s, as a consequence of violent politics and vested use of state power and institutions by the CPI(M), West Bengal witnessed the tumultuous and violent extreme Left Wing Naxalite movement, which gave rise to divisive politics and breakdown of the state machinery, further deteriorating the state's growth potential. By 1993, West Bengal's per capita output had fallen almost 35% below that of Maharashtra. The manufacturing sector's share in West Bengal's output dropped sharply during this period from 22% to 15%, while Maharashtra's manufacturing share increased.

Since then, the state has been marred with a slow growth rate. Currently, its economy produces merely Rs. 17.01 lakh crore in comparison to Maharashtra's Rs 38.79 lakh crore. Given that both states have had similar business opportunities on account of their geography and almost the same population size, this stark difference between the two states is shockingly notable.

One of the major causes for West Bengal's slow economic growth is that under the rule of CPI(M) and Trinamool Congress (TMC), the state has long grappled with the "Syndicate Raj" and "Cut Money Culture", processes termed as an 'organised illegal extortion racket'. In 2011, when the 34-year-old Left rule collapsed against Mamata's fake promises of '*Poriborton*' (change), the 'Syndicates' became even more powerful with some of the prominent TMC leaders heavily involved in corruption¹.

Moreover, TMC workers have been accused of taking cut money for people to avail benefits of state-run welfare schemes with rates. There are also allegations of cut money being charged for infrastructure projects, adding to their cost. The '**cut**' is usually taken in cash, to prevent any records of the money coming on the taxman's radar. It is called 'cutmoney' since the bribe is like a cut or charge on the total money given by the government department or the customer.

The legacy of cut money is believed to be a carry-over from decades of Left rule in the state. According to political observers, it was the 'cut money' issue that caused a major loss for the TMC's vote share in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. It resulted in BJP's victory in 18 seats in the state, a massive improvement from its previous performances.



This report depicts how the rule of CPI(M) followed by that of TMC ruined the political, economic, social as well as cultural fabric of West Bengal, hampering the growth, progress, and well-being of its people.

CHAPTER 1

ON THE BRINK: INFRASTRUCTURE IN WEST BENGAL – A STORY OF CONTINUOUS DECLINE

In the 1960s, West Bengal, with Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) as its capital, had a strong manufacturing sector. With the benefit of the social and physical infrastructure inherited from its colonial past as the capital of British India for more than a hundred and fifty years, Kolkata continued as a major center for trade, industry, and administration for the first two decades of the post-independence era. The state was also overwhelmed by the demographic challenge of rehabilitating millions of Hindu refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan. Despite its historical advantages and economic potential, the state could not face the challenges in maintaining and upgrading its infrastructure, and hence in retaining its ability to attract investment and foster industrial growth.

A. Physical Infrastructure

Poor infrastructure can deter investment, limit economic opportunities, and hinder the overall quality of life for residents. Among the various states of India, West Bengal's ranking in terms of physical infrastructure has declined almost continuously from 1970-71 to 1990-91. In 1970-71, West Bengal was ranked 8th among the various states in India, demonstrating a modest level of infrastructure compared to other states. By 1980-81, its ranking deteriorated to the 9th position, suggesting some deterioration in infrastructure quality in the state or faster improvements in other states.

The most significant decline occurred by 1990-91, when West Bengal fell towards the bottom of the ranking, ahead of only one state, Assam. Inadequate outlays on infrastructure were a major cause of the decline. The share of expenditure on physical infrastructure, which includes energy, industry and minerals, transport, science technology & environment, and general economic services, as a proportion of total expenditure deteriorated from an already low 5.27% in 2018-19 to 2.95% in 2022-23. Several factors other than inadequate outlays on physical infrastructure that could have also contributed to this decline include inefficient

maintenance of existing infrastructure, and mismanagement or corruption within the bureaucracy responsible for infrastructure development.ⁱⁱ

The administrative hurdles and regulatory inefficiencies may have compounded the challenges faced in West Bengal. Excessive bureaucratic processes and regulations delay project approvals, increase costs, and deter investors, thereby stifling economic growth and exacerbating the state's infrastructure deficiencies.

The decline in infrastructure ranking had significant implications for West Bengal's economic development and industrial growth.

Deterioration of Roads Infrastructure

During the 34-year rule of the Left Front led by the CPI(M), West Bengal experienced various leakage and negligence in the development of roads and bridges, leading to a deterioration of the state's infrastructure. The lackadaisical approach of the left-front government resulted in highways being perceived as potential death traps due to safety concerns. This negligence also extended to national highways, exacerbating issues of road connectivity and safety for the people of West Bengal.

After the instances of negligence under the left-front government, in 2011, when Mamata Banerjee won the Bengal election, she promised to transform physical infrastructure including the fantastic promise of making Kolkata into a modern city like London.ⁱⁱⁱ Alas, it proved to be all false promises.



Figure Source: Deccan Herald


For example, while the promise was of transforming Kolkata into London, what the city witnessed was a string of bridge collapses in recent years. For instance, in 2013, a section of the Ultadanga Flyover collapsed, followed by the collapse of an under-construction bridge in the Girish Park area three years later. Again, on 31st March 2016, the under-construction Vivekananda flyover in central Kolkata's Posta area collapsed, resulting in the tragic loss of 26 lives. Additionally, the collapse of the Majerhat Bridge in West Bengal in 2018 resulted in casualties and injuries. This incident was attributed to negligence on the part of the TMC government in maintaining and repairing the bridge, as well as taking bribes from the contractors leading to low-quality construction.

Bankrupting Tramways in Kolkata

Criticism against tramways in Kolkata dates back to the early 1990s, during the tenure of the Left Front government. Despite being the first in Asia and the sole operating tram system in the continent, Kolkata's tramways faced neglect over the years. Established in 1880 by the Calcutta Tramways Company (CTC), it was effectively taken over by the Left Front Government in West Bengal in 1976. Successive governments, including the incumbent TMC government, failed to improve the tram system. Instead, they followed the trend of their predecessors in hastening the process of completely shutting down the tramways.

The CTC no longer exists as an independent entity and has been integrated into the West Bengal Transport Corporation (WBTC), which now oversees tram operations in Kolkata. The official website of WBTC says, *“Environment-friendly transport solutions would not have been so enjoyable as through ‘Trams’ in the streets of Kolkata, which has become the identity of the city of Kolkata.”* However, over the years, successive governments failed to take significant initiatives to preserve the unique identity of Kolkata by revitalizing its tram network. While there have been some superficial efforts, concrete plans to modernize and enhance the 140-year-old tram system have been lacking. Consequently, authorities have allowed the tram network to become inefficient, pushing it to irrelevance in one of the world's most populous metropolises.

The trams in Kolkata hold not just heritage and iconic significance but also serve as an emission-free mode of public transportation that runs with overhead electric lines. In an era where global warming and climate change are becoming concerns, and Kolkata along with its bordering districts are facing untimely torrential rains and waterlogging, it's perplexing why the state government continues to phase out tram routes. Despite the awareness of these



issues, little has been done to revitalize the existing tram network. On the contrary, more tram routes have been closed citing various reasons. Surprisingly, the Electric Vehicle Policy 2021 introduced by the West Bengal government's power department doesn't mention the word 'tram' even once in its eight-page document.

In 1980, the World Bank provided a grant of Rs 46.20 crore to the CTC for a transportation improvement project. With this funding, the CTC acquired 169 new steel-body tramcars from Burn Standard and Jessop, and approximately 25 tramcars were rebuilt at the Nonapukur tram depot. However, this grant from 1980 marked the last significant investment received by the CTC aimed at upgrading its utility as a mode of transport. In the 41 years since the World Bank's grant, successive West Bengal state governments have neglected towards Kolkata's tram system, nearly bringing it to a standstill. The current government views trams primarily as elements of heritage tourism. Occasionally, tramcars are repurposed into restaurants, libraries, or museums. However, there has been no effort to modernize any tram or track. Instead, any funds allocated to the Calcutta Tramways Company after the 1980 grant, were solely used for maintaining existing infrastructure rather than upgrading it.

In 2004, the Left Front government invested approximately Rs 110 crore in the CTC. The majority of this amount, about 80-85%, was allocated for the de-reservation of tram tracks and their concretisation. The remaining funds were utilized to purchase one tramcar from BEBSCO, modify and rebuild 10-20 trams with Vista dome-like features, and maintain the tracks. However, the de-reservation of tram tracks resulted in two significant issues. Firstly, it allowed other vehicles to utilize the tracks originally designated for trams, consequently slowing down tram operations. Secondly, as most tram tracks are situated in the centre of roads, de-reservation compromised passenger safety. Previously, there was designated space on both sides of the tracks for passengers to board or alight from trams. However, with the de-reservation, this space became part of the roadway, forcing passengers to embark and disembark from trams amidst speeding traffic.

In 2011, Kolkata's tram network comprised 37 trams operating across routes covering a total distance of 67 km. However, as of today, trams are only operational on three routes, covering a reduced stretch of 15-17 km. Over the period from 2011 to 2021, the number of operational tramcars significantly dropped from 180 to just 20. Moreover, in 2001, Kolkata had seven tram depots and four sub-depots. However, the city has seen a decline in tram infrastructure, with only two depots and one sub-depot remaining operational today.

The operational daily tramcars experienced a significant drop from 107 in 2011 to only 20-23 in 2021, with only a marginal decrease in fleet strength from 270 tramcars to 258 tramcars as of March 2019, as per information obtained through the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005.

Furthermore, the number of permanent workers in the Calcutta Tramways Company was drastically reduced from 7,300 to 2,300 during the tenure of the TMC government. Eventually, in 2016, the CTC ceased to exist as it was merged with the West Bengal Transport Corporation.

Also, over 78% of the current staff employed by the tramways are allocated to bus services. The remaining tramway employees are stationed at the Nonapukur tram depot, where they reportedly have no assigned tasks and remain idle for seven and a half hours each day.

According to information obtained through the RTI Act, between 2014 and 2016, the state transport department sold approximately 5.7 acres of land, equivalent to 349.01 cottahs, from the city's five tram depots for a total of Rs 229.31 crore. The largest portion of this land came from the Tollygunge depot, where approximately 3.98 acres, or 249.51 cottahs, were sold for Rs 180.82 crore.

In May 2019, the West Bengal Transport Corporation began operating single-coach tramcars to alleviate traffic congestion. However, many of these single-coach tramcars have since ceased operations. Workers at the Nonapukur tram depot argue that this decision lacks financial sense. They point out that for the same cost of Rs 20-25 crore, 80-90 tramcars could operate for the next 10 years, providing a more sustainable and efficient solution.

The TMC-led West Bengal government's lack of concern for Kolkata's tram system can be traced back to 25th May 2011, just five days after Mamata Banerjee assumed office as the chief minister. On this date, the Joka-Behala tram route was closed down.^{iv}

Water Shortage

The TMC government focused on the word "water" in its manifesto, mentioning it 26 times. Nevertheless, even after 13 years of rule, West Bengal faces a serious problem with a lack of clean drinking water. There is not enough tap water available, and areas are affected by arsenic and salty water. Also, the government has not taken any big steps to resolve this issue. In 2019, only 1.22% of households in West Bengal had tap water connections.^v

News / India News / Residents of West Bengal struggle to access safe drinking water

Residents of West Bengal struggle to access safe drinking water

Kolkata, Hindustan Times | By [Joydeep Thakur](#) X

Figure Source: Hindustan Times

Rapid decline in Ground Water - The rapid depletion of groundwater in Kolkata and South 24 Parganas under the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC government has sparked alarm, with experts warning of a potential 44% decline by 2025. The Central Ground Water Board's data for 2017-21 shows a significant drop in groundwater levels, with Kolkata experiencing a 2.1m decrease (18.6%) and South 24 Parganas facing a 2.5m decline (27.8%). This alarming trend, exacerbated by unchecked withdrawals primarily from residential areas in Kolkata and agricultural sectors in districts, raises serious concerns about heightened arsenic contamination and salinity. The government's failure to implement corrective measures promptly further exacerbates the looming water crisis and environmental risks, leaving communities vulnerable to subsidence and health hazards.^{vi}

Degrading Drinking Water Quality - A recent study conducted by scientists from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur, has revealed alarming levels of pesticides and toxic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) in both groundwater and river water across the western Bengal basin. This contamination, exceeding permissible limits, poses a significant threat to the region's drinking water supply, particularly from the Farraka Barrage to the Sunderbans. The presence of high concentrations of arsenic in groundwater further exacerbates the environmental risks. This study holds national significance as it marks the first instance where an entire region in the country has documented the presence of pesticides and PAH in its natural water sources and surface sediments. The levels of pesticides found in drinking water were recorded to be as high as 46 times the permissible limits.^{vii}

Poor Sanitation Condition^{viii}

During a ceremony presided over by President Droupadi Murmu and attended by many important figures, the winners of the Swachh Survekshan Awards for 2023 were announced.

This massive cleanliness survey involved 4,447 urban local bodies and received over 12 crore responses from citizens, making it the largest of its kind globally.

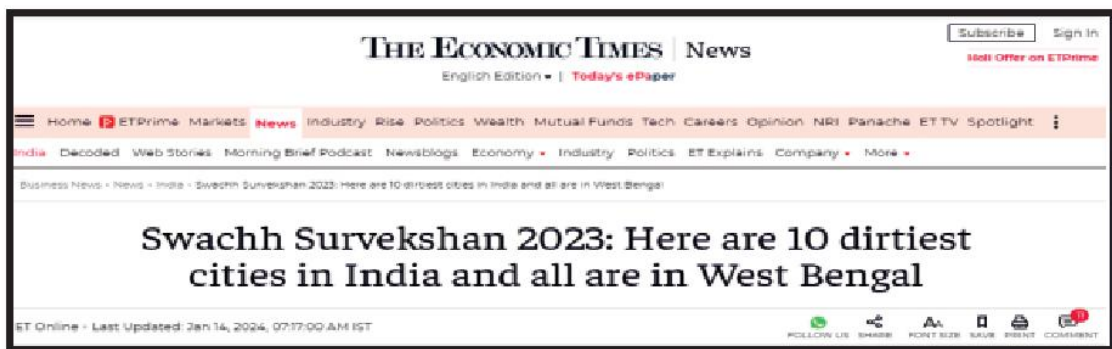


Figure Source: The Economic Times

In the recently released annual cleanliness survey, Howrah, a city in West Bengal, was declared as the dirtiest city in India. What's striking is that all ten of the dirtiest cities in India, each with a population exceeding one lakh, are from West Bengal.



Figure Source: The Indian Express

Following Howrah, cities like Kalyani, Madhyagram, Krishnanagar, Asansol, Rishra, Bidhannagar, Kanchrapara, Kolkata, and Bhatpara were listed among the worst in terms of cleanliness. Except for Kolkata and Bhatpara, the remaining eight cities from West Bengal scored below 1,000 in cleanliness ratings.



Figure Source –The Print

B. Social Infrastructure

The decline in social infrastructure in West Bengal refers to the deterioration in sectors such as health and education in the state. West Bengal has been known for its rich social infrastructure, which was built over generations. The recent decline is due to various factors, including the ability of the state to fund its social infrastructure. The state needs to continue to prioritize social infrastructure development to ensure its development as well as the well-being of its citizens.

i. The Ailing Health Sector

The Mamata Banerjee-led TMC government in West Bengal has presided over a healthcare sector that has languished in a state of neglect and mismanagement. The health sector is ailing. Thousands of patients are going to places such as Vellore, Hyderabad, Chennai, Bengaluru, and Mumbai for treatment.

Despite its rich legacy and resources, the healthcare system in the state has been marred by systemic inefficiencies, chronic underfunding, and rampant corruption of the TMC government. Hospitals and healthcare facilities suffer from dilapidated infrastructure,

inadequate medical equipment, and shortages of essential medicines, severely compromising the quality of care provided to patients. Moreover, the dearth of skilled healthcare professionals due to poor recruitment policies and inadequate training exacerbates the crisis, leading to prolonged waiting times and substandard treatment for those in need. The TMC's failure to address these critical issues has resulted in a healthcare sector that is unable to meet the burgeoning healthcare demands of the population, leaving vulnerable citizens in a dangerously precarious state.



Figure Source: The Telegraph

As a result, West Bengal continues to lag behind other states in key healthcare indicators, reflecting the dire consequences of the TMC's neglect of the state's healthcare sector.



Figure Source: The Telegraph

The per capita public expenditure on health was only Rs 1,083 in 2022–2023 (BE). It was still grossly inadequate. As per Rural Health Statistics 2021-22, West Bengal has 915 functional Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs), but only 229 out of them, that is merely 25% were functioning on a 24x7 basis. To date, 13,194 sub-centers have been sanctioned, but only 10,357 are in position, marking a shortfall of 22%. Similarly, 2,171 PHCs have been sanctioned, but less than a half (915) are functional. So is the case with Community Healthcare

Centres (CHCs), with the number of sanctioned CHCs at 542 but only 348 in position, marking a 36% shortfall. As per established norms, in rural areas, a PHC is to be established for a population of 30,000 (in plains), but West Bengal has just one PHC covering an average rural population of 50,000. ^{ix}

In one reported case, a patient who had suffered a cardiac arrest was taken to a medical college. The patient was taken within the golden hour, which means he could have been revived with medical intervention. However, the 50-year-old man was referred to another, yet another medical college. He died by the time a third medical college agreed to admit him. The man was the sole earning member of his family. ^x

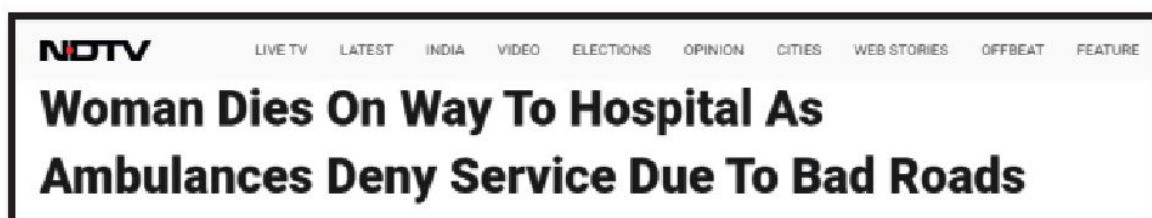


Figure Source: NDTV

In another appalling incident, a 25-year-old woman died while being taken to a rural hospital on a charpoy by her family after ambulances and local vehicles denied service due to the poor condition of a road connecting her village in West Bengal's Malda district with the medical establishment. ^{xi}

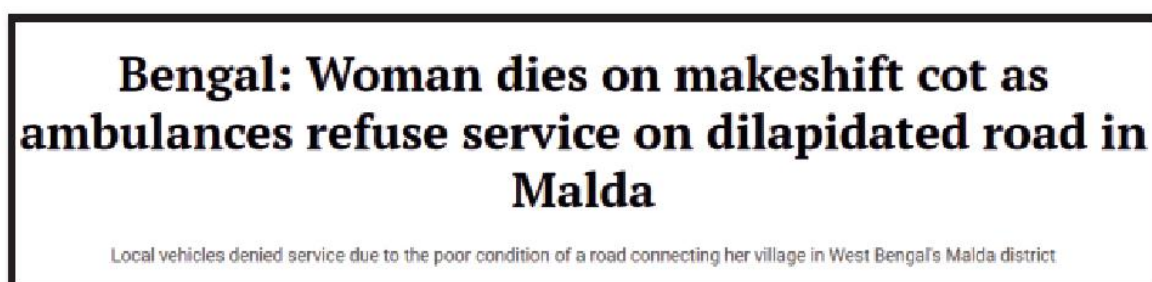


Figure Source: The Telegraph

On 10th December 2023, 14 children died in Baharampur's medical college hospital in the Murshidabad district sending shock waves across the state. ^{xii} There are 986 government hospitals, dispensaries, and health centers, including three super specialty hospitals in the Murshidabad district. Despite being tagged as "super specialty," these hospitals lack an

adequate number of doctors, health staff, and medical equipment. Unable to administer proper treatment, the doctors at these hospitals are forced to refer patients to the medical college hospital. Even the medical college hospital does not have proper treatment infrastructure for complex cases. The extremely low weight of newborns also raised the issue of malnutrition among the mothers in the Murshidabad district. ^{xiii|xiv}

The National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) [2019-20] data has noted that 55.4% of the women aged 20-24 were married before 18. Alarming, 20.6% of the women of the 15-19 age group were mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey. Only 52.8% of mothers consumed iron folic acid for 100 days or more when pregnant. Less than 50% of mothers received postnatal care from a doctor/nurse/LHV/ANM/midwife/other health personnel within two days of delivery. About 32% of children had not received postnatal care from a doctor/nurse/LHV/ANM/midwife/other health personnel within two days of delivery.

According to the NFHS-5 data, 32.4% of children under five were underweight. Alarming, 72.1% of children aged 6-59 months were anaemic. The NFHS-5 also reported that 66.7% of pregnant women aged 15-49 were anemic, and 77.6% of all women aged 15-49 were anemic. The data pointed to a crisis in the health sector. But, no comprehensive step was taken to change the situation.

Similarly, West Bengal's dengue case count for 2022 was the highest in the country. The rates of dengue infection continued to spike into 2023 in West Bengal, revealing a grave shortage of adequate preventive healthcare facilities in the state. In recent years, there have been several notable cases of doctors and medical staff being assaulted by the relatives of patients, leading to injuries and, in some cases, serious harm. Such violence not only endangers the lives of healthcare professionals but also disrupts the delivery of medical services to those in need as frequent strikes by doctors have become a routine affair.

The troubling trend of violence against doctors in hospitals in West Bengal has led to widespread concern and condemnation. Violent incidents often stemmed from a combination of patient dissatisfaction, misunderstandings about medical procedures, and the high-stress environment of healthcare settings. The Mamata Banerjee-led government has been repeatedly urged to take stronger measures to protect healthcare workers, including the implementation of stricter laws against perpetrators, enhanced security measures in hospitals,

and the promotion of awareness campaigns to foster a culture of respect and understanding between healthcare providers and the public.

119 doctors in West Bengal resign over violence

1 min read • 14 Jun 2019, 10:08 PM IST

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[ANI](#) (with inputs from ANI)

Figure Source: Mint

Despite the serious problems in the healthcare sector, the state recently withdrew from the Centre's Ayushman Bharat Scheme, reportedly affecting over 60 lakh families. While the Ayushman Bharat Scheme has had a wide coverage of 1.11 crore families, West Bengal's health insurance scheme 'Swasthya Sathi' has benefited merely 50 lakh families or 55% of the state's families.^{xv} Under the state's health insurance scheme, the rates fixed by the TMC government for treatment of beneficiaries at private hospitals are abnormally low and only a fraction of what they charge. Such low rates have forced the private healthcare facilities in the state to keep only a small number of beds reserved for 'Swasthya Sathi' patients. The reserved beds are almost always full, and most 'Swasthya Sathi' patients are turned away from the top private hospitals. Also, most doctors and surgeons refuse to treat or operate on 'Swasthya Sathi' patients because of the very low consultation fees and other charges fixed by the state government. Given the very low rates for treatment and surgeries of patients under the 'Swasthya Sathi' scheme, the top private hospitals of the state were reluctant to empanel themselves with the state government and treat 'Swasthya Sathi' patients.

According to a report published in the Times of India, there were no beds available in most of the top private hospitals in Kolkata in September 2021. These much sought-after private hospitals have stopped admitting 'Swasthya Sathi' patients. The treatment of patients under the 'Swasthya Sathi' public insurance scheme is cashless, which means that the private hospitals raise the bills and send them to the state government for reimbursement. Reimbursement used to take 21 days before the Assembly elections; which in September 2021 increased to 45 to 60 days. Long waiting times for the reimbursement and the interest expense on working capital deter private hospitals from participating in the Swasthya Sathi scheme.

Mamata Banerjee launched the health insurance scheme in February 2017. But she made it universal in 2021 with an eye on the Assembly elections. The insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh per annum per family was extended to all. Also, all members of a family, including the parents of both spouses, were brought under the scheme. As a result, crore of people enrolled in the scheme, and the number of those seeking treatment in private hospitals went up manifold. The private hospitals demanded that the rates be enhanced, but that plea went unheeded.

With everyone, even the middle classes and the affluent enrolling themselves under 'Swasthya Sathi', the poor are being pushed out of admissions in top private hospitals. The middle classes and the affluent, who have enrolled under Swasthya Sathi have contacts and can pull strings to get themselves or their family members admitted in beds reserved for Swasthya Sathi patients. This means denial of this subsidized treatment to the poor who really need it. This is why income should have been a determinant for enrolment under Swasthya Sathi. West Bengal's poor and disadvantaged who have been enrolled under the Swasthya Sathi are forced to rely on government hospitals for treatment. This, in effect, means that they have not benefited at all under Swasthya Sathi and they have to continue flocking to the ill-equipped, overcrowded and poorly managed state hospitals.

Another major drawback of Swasthya Sathi is that beneficiaries can avail treatment only in healthcare facilities in West Bengal. The only hospital outside Bengal to which Swasthya Sathi beneficiaries can go is the Christian Medical College (CMC) at Vellore, which treats the poor at highly subsidised rates. But there is a long queue of patients seeking treatment there. With the ridiculously low rates for treatment offered for the scheme beneficiaries, none of the much-sought-after private hospitals in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, Mumbai, or Delhi, where tens of thousands from West Bengal go for treatment every year, are empanelled under Swasthya Sathi

For Swasthya Sathi to have been effectively equal to, or more, than the Modi Government's Ayushman Bharat (Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana or PM-JAY), it ought to have been limited only to the poor. But for Mamata Banerjee, immediate gains triumph over long-term benefits. In the final analysis, like many populist welfare measures rolled out by Mamata Banerjee, her Swasthya Sathi scheme is also turning out to be a hollow one for the poor and disadvantaged millions in Bengal.

Explained: Why Mamata Banerjee's Health Insurance Scheme Does Little To Help Bengal's Ailing Millions

JAIDEEP MAZUMDAR

Sep 17, 2021, 07:12 PM | Updated Sep 19, 2021, 06:17 PM IST



Figure Source: Swarajya

ii. Worsening Condition of the Education Sector

Bengal, known for its rich history and intellectual legacy, is witnessing a grim decline in its educational system. Once celebrated as the intellectual capital of India, West Bengal is now grappling with a severe crisis in its academic institutions. In the pre-independence era and for several decades thereafter, Bengal stood as a beacon of industry and intellect. The state produced a multitude of intellectuals with diverse talents who excelled in various fields. But today, West Bengal is caught in a rapid state of decay and a mere shadow of its former self.

Bengal was once hailed as the beacon of intellectual prowess. Bengal's golden era saw luminaries like Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Dr. Hedgewar coming to Kolkata in pursuit of knowledge. The state's educational institutions were revered, drawing seekers from across the nation. However, the narrative has since shifted. Today, the once-vibrant landscape of academia in West Bengal wears a desolate cloak. Decades of neglect and mismanagement have led to a stark decline in the quality of education. The institutions that once stood tall are now shadows of their former selves, lacking the resources and infrastructure to compete on a global scale.

As a result, the exodus of talent has become an alarming trend. Bright minds, once nurtured in the fertile grounds of West Bengal, now seek greener pastures elsewhere. The state's failure to adapt to the evolving educational landscape has left it trailing behind, unable to provide the opportunities and facilities needed to retain its intellectual diaspora. The narrative of West Bengal's educational decline is a poignant one, marked by missed opportunities and squandered potential. The absence of high-class education facilities has become a glaring

indictment of the state's leadership and priorities. In a cruel twist of fate, the very institutions that once attracted the best and the brightest now struggle to keep their doors open.

As the tide of outmigration continues to swell, West Bengal finds itself at a crossroads. Will it rise from the ashes of neglect and reclaim its status as a hub of intellectual excellence, or will it remain mired in the shadows of its former glory? Only time will tell.



Figure Source: The Tribune

There has been a consistent decline in the number of students appearing for Class 10 board examinations. In 2023, only about 6.99 lakh candidates appeared for the Class 10 Madhyamik examination, marking a 36 % drop from 10.98 lakh in 2022 and 11.18 lakh in 2021. Out of this, over 2 lakh students had failed to appear despite registration, indicating a sharp increase in last-stage dropouts.^{xvi}

The poor condition of the state's education sector is evident by the fact that it sent up four lakh fewer students to the Madhyamik examinations. Even in the primary segment, its drop-out rate far exceeds the national average. Schools further away from home would make them inaccessible to many children, especially girls.

A recent decision by the West Bengal government to shut down these 8,207 primary and secondary schools, constituting almost 10% of government-controlled schools, due to their dwindling student populations, sparked a heated debate on the principles of universal education: access, attendance, and achievement. This move, driven by concerns of financial sustainability and the necessity to optimize educational resources, underscores the critical need to ensure equitable access to quality education for all students. Notably, over the past 11 years, around 7,000 schools vanished in West Bengal, as evidenced by the decline from 74,717 primary schools in 2012 to 67,699 by March 2022. The state is also missing out on the Central funds as it is yet to join the PM Schools for Rising India (PM-SHRI) scheme.^{xvii}

The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) framework prescribes a secondary-level pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) of 30:1. However, district-level PTRs across the state indicate significant disparities. For instance, Cooch Behar reports an alarming PTR of 52:1. The Student Classroom Ratio (SCR), another crucial metric, gives away the stark educational

inequities within West Bengal. The striking contrast between Kolkata's SCR of 35:1, and Murshidabad's SCR of 110:1, underscores the challenges in providing access to quality education across the state.^{xviii}

ASER 2023 findings: 'In Cooch Behar, 79% 14 to 18-yr olds unable to do basic arithmetic'

At 61.3 per cent, more than half of 14 to 18 year old youths in the district could not read simple sentences in English.

Figure Source: The Indian Express

According to the findings of the Annual Status of Education Report (Beyond Basics) (ASER) 2023, around 79.2% of 14-18 year-old youths in West Bengal's Cooch Behar district cannot solve simple 3-digit by 1-digit division problems. The gap in arithmetic skills in the 14-16 age group was 76.9 % and 81.5% for 17-18 years age group. At 61.3%, more than half of 14- to 18-year-old youths in the district could not read simple sentences in English. The number was 65% for students aged between 14 and 16 years and is 57.7% for students aged from 17 to 18 years. About 38.38% of the students in the 14–18-year age group could not read and understand written instructions. This marks the poor teaching and learning outcomes for the children.^{xix}

EDUCATION

18,000 teaching posts in govt-aided schools lie vacant in West Bengal

Education department files an affidavit stating details about vacancies in higher secondary, secondary and primary educational institutions

Figure Source: The Telegraph

In an affidavit filed by the West Bengal State Education Department with the Calcutta High Court with regard to vacancies in teaching posts, it was found that 13,842 posts of teachers in classes IX and X (secondary schools) and 5,527 posts in classes XI and XII (higher secondary schools) were lying vacant in 2022. Apart from these, 2,325 posts of headmasters in both

secondary and primary schools and 3,906 posts of assistant teachers in primary schools are vacant. A total of 329 posts of librarians were also vacant in secondary schools.

According to UNESCO's report, 2021, on school education in the country, West Bengal was ranked third with a total of 1,10,000 vacancies cumulatively in primary, upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary schools. The report also said that of these total vacancies, 69% were in the rural areas.^{xxi}

Accused names TMC leaders before CBI in Bengal job scam case

Figure Source: Hindustan Times

The problem is even more serious because the state government has been pulled up by the Calcutta High Court on the question of teachers' recruitment. The recruitment in primary, upper primary, and secondary sections was in question with allegations of nepotism and corrupt practices in the recruitment process. The Calcutta High Court directed the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to probe the appointment of non-teaching staff (Group C and D) and teaching staff by the West Bengal School Service Commission (SSC) and the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education between 2014 and 2021. More than Rs 100 crore was allegedly raised by TMC leaders like Shantanu Banerjee, who is also nephew of Mamata Banerjee, from job aspirants to employ them as teachers and staff at state-run schools across West Bengal between 2014 and 2021. The appointees allegedly paid bribes in the range of Rs 5 lakh to Rs 15 lakh to get jobs after failing the selection tests.^{xxii}

On 22 April 2024, the Kolkata High Court ordered the cancellation of appointments of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff made through the recruitment process of State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in West Bengal government-sponsored and aided schools, declaring the selection process as "null and void".^{xxiii}

Bengal over-reported 160 million midday meals worth ₹100 crore: Report

By [HT Correspondent](#), New Delhi

Figure Source: Hindustan Times

The nutrition and health of children were compromised by the corruption of the state government. As per the findings of a review committee of the central government, the West Bengal government over-reported 160 million midday meals worth Rs 100 crore between April and September 2022, indicating significant discrepancies in the number of beneficiaries of PM POSHAN. ^{xxiv}

West Bengal's education system in deep soup; A mockery of academic values

Bengal, a region renowned for its historical significance and intellectual prowess, now finds its educational system at a critical crossroads. In a shocking revelation, a notification indicates that a lecturer's per-class rate stands at a meagre Rs 100, casting a long shadow over the pursuit of academic excellence.

Figure Source: Organiser

CHAPTER 2

The Graveyard of Opposition

In West Bengal, a land rich in culture and intellect, lurks a history of political turmoil and administrative dysfunction for over half a century. Complex political dynamics undermined law and order in the state and resulted in a legacy of misrule under the Congress, the CPI(M), and the TMC. A democratic lens and public reports reveal systemic failures and ideological conflicts fuelling unrest. Despite being a cradle of revolutionaries and movements pivotal to India's independence, Bengal's trajectory has been marred by the British 'divide and rule' policy and subsequent communal tensions, resulting in pervasive political violence.

In 1905, the British partitioned Bengal along religious lines, sparking the Swadeshi Movement led by Bengali nationalist leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Rabindranath Tagore, who advocated boycotting British goods to oppose colonial oppression. Despite efforts to foster Hindu-Muslim harmony, tensions persisted, leading to communal violence like the Noakhali killings in 1946. This turmoil ultimately led to the creation of West Bengal. Post Independence, violent politics emerged with the Tebhaga Movement (1946-1948), pitting landowners supported by the Congress against Communist-backed peasants demanding fair harvest shares. The political complexities and administrative challenges during CPI(M) and TMC rule need a careful examination to uncover their impacts on law and order and the state's socio-political landscape.

In the annals of West Bengal's history, the presence of the CPI(M) looms large, casting a shadow of authoritarianism and violence over the state's political landscape. For decades, the CPI(M) held sway over the corridors of power, leaving behind a legacy of lawlessness and repression^{xxv}. In the late 1960s, when the CPI(M) gained power in West Bengal, violence became common as a means to challenge Congress's long-standing dominance. This led to frequent killings of party members, setting a precedent for political violence. Since then, violence has been used primarily to seize and maintain political control, thereby seriously affecting the people of West Bengal, many of whom are often uninvolved in politics. The 2007 National Sample Survey revealed that 11% of families in the state faced starvation, emphasizing the urgent need for intervention to tackle the underlying causes of hunger and poverty.^{xxvi}



Figure Source: EPW

During the 1970s, the rise of the Naxalbari movement backed by the Maoist-Leninist faction of the CPI(M), which stressed violent mass peasant uprisings and attacks against state's institutions led to further worsening of the political landscape and law and order situation in the state.^{xxvii}

The seeds of the CPI(M)'s influence in West Bengal were sown in the tumultuous years following India's independence. Riding on the wave of peasant unrest and industrial labour movements, the CPI(M) emerged as a formidable political force in the state, espousing the cause of the proletariat and promising a utopian vision of social equality. The CPI(M)'s ascent to power was marred by violence. Under the leadership of figures like Jyoti Basu, as reported by media, the party established its dominance through a combination of ideological indoctrination and brute force, crushing dissent and stifling opposition voices.^{xxviii}

After returning to power in the 1972 Assembly elections, Congress has since been widely accused of winning that election through sheer muscle power, ousting thousands of opposition party workers from the areas in which they worked, creating a reign of terror using both the police and mercenaries and, finally, by widespread rigging of the elections^{xxix}. Between 1972 and 1977, the state was under the complete domination of Congress, which did not allow any political opposition to function freely.

The CPI(M), a breakaway faction of the CPI, gained power in West Bengal in 1977, initiating a grim period in the state's history. The party resorted to repression and violence to maintain control. This led to decades of turmoil, with President's rule imposed twice. After the Congress's defeat in 1977, the CPI(M) focused on strengthening local panchayats, which became crucial for its electoral dominance. This intensified political competition and deepened societal polarization along party lines, leading to the complete politicization of

West Bengal's rural areas during the Left Front's three-decade rule. As the CPI(M) consolidated power, dissenting voices were suppressed through violence and intimidation. Opposition workers faced harassment, arson, and even murder by ruling party cadres, often with police complicity. The peak of this political violence occurred in Nandigram village, in Purba Medinipur district.

The phenomenon of "cut-money", which was widely reported in the news, emerged as a dire manifestation of the CPI(M)'s corruption, which the successor TMC followed, wherein local party workers demanded illicit commissions from government schemes. This culture of graft not only drained public resources but also perpetuated a cycle of poverty and inequality, further entrenching the party's grip on power.^{xxx}



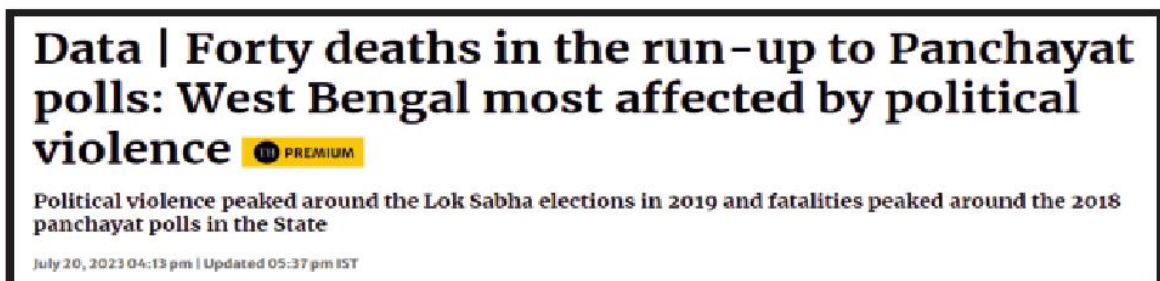
Figure Source: The Print

Under the CPI(M) rule in West Bengal, the insidious practice of "cut money" flourished, epitomizing the party's systemic corruption and abuse of power. "Cut money" involved local party workers extracting illicit commissions from government schemes, diverting funds intended for public welfare into their own pockets. This widespread corruption corroded the state's political culture, undermining transparency and accountability at every level of government.



Figure Source: The Economic Times

As per the reports, with the CPI(M) wielding centralized control over institutions and local bodies, party cadres exploited their positions to demand kickbacks from various government initiatives, such as ration card distribution and housing subsidies. This exploitation preyed particularly on marginalized communities reliant on government assistance, perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependence. Moreover, "cut money" eroded public trust in the administration, reinforcing perceptions of rampant corruption within the state machinery. The practice of "cut money" not only financially exploited the citizens but also corroded the moral fabric of society. Party cadres viewed government resources as personal spoils, fostering a culture of entitlement and impunity that deepened societal divides. Despite mounting public outrage, attempts to challenge this entrenched corruption were met with intimidation and reprisals, silencing dissent. As the CPI(M) entrenched itself in power, opposition parties seized upon the issue of "cut money" as a rallying cry for reform, galvanizing communities across West Bengal. But what happened later is yet another shocker, as the successive TMC government's rule also witnessed the same old dominance of "cut money" culture.



Source: The Hindu

As the years passed, the utopian vision of the CPI(M) gave way to a reality marred by political violence, administrative inefficiency, and the erosion of democratic principles. One of the defining moments of the CPI(M)'s rule was the infamous Nandigram massacre of 2007. The state government's attempt to acquire land for industrial purposes in Nandigram triggered widespread protests by local farmers and villagers, which was retaliated by the leaders of CPI(M) with serious human rights violations including crime against women. Following a tussle over land acquisition by the government for industrial purposes, dozens were killed in 2007-08, both due to police firing as well as clashes between CPI(M) cadres and the TMC-led *Bhumi Uchched Protirodh Committee*, or the Committee to Resist Eviction from Land, which was opposing the acquisition and was backed by the TMC. Instead of addressing the grievances through dialogue and peaceful means, the authorities resorted to brute force.



Figure Source: India Today

Moreover, the phenomenon of political violence became ingrained in West Bengal's political culture, with clashes between rival factions and targeted attacks on opposition parties becoming a common occurrence. The CPI(M) allegedly employed cadres known as "*harmads*"^{xxxix} to maintain control through intimidation and coercion, further exacerbating the atmosphere of fear and insecurity.

CPI-M using 'harmads' for killings: Mamata

"They are doing the politics of killing and terror. Let them stop it," Mamata said.

Figure Source: The Indian Express

During its three-decade reign in West Bengal, the CPI(M) unleashed a reign of terror upon the common people, particularly those who dared to oppose their political hegemony. The CPI(M) and its affiliated Communist parties clung to a culture of violence, readily resorting to brutal tactics whenever they perceived a threat to their power^{xxxii}. Their modus operandi ranged from fascist-style suppression to organized criminal behaviour, earning them a reputation as anything between a fascist party and a mafia syndicate. Since ascending to power in 1977, the CPI(M) employed violence as a political tool, orchestrating a systematic campaign to assert their dominance. Farmers, fishermen, small traders, and refugees were coerced into joining the party ranks, and toe the party line under threat of violence. A cursory glance at their rule in West Bengal, marked by bloodshed and repression, reveals a dark chapter in India's democratic history. Urban intellectuals, complicit in their silence, turned a blind eye to the atrocities until it became politically inconvenient to do so. By then, however, the culture of violence had become deeply entrenched in the state's political landscape. Many egregious incidents serve as poignant reminders of the CPI(M)'s violent legacy and underscore their fundamentally anti-democratic ethos. In some episodes, only a fraction of the countless undocumented instances of brutality epitomized the essence of Communist rule in West Bengal.

Some of the highly infamous spine-chilling incidents of violence that took place in West Bengal follow:

A. Sainbari Killings (1970)^{xxxiii}

Long before assuming power as the head of the Left Front Government in 1977, the leaders of the CPI(M) were already dabbling in the grotesque use of murder as a political tool. As early as 1970, CPI(M) cadres perpetrated a heinous act by brutally murdering two prominent Congress leaders from the Sain family in Burdwan.

CPM, Congress and the restive ghost of Sainbari

Atri Mitra writes: The wheel has come full circle in West Bengal since March 17, 1970. The two parties whose bitter rivalry led to that gory day are now bloodless shadows of their former selves, joined in an uneasy alliance of survival.

Figure Source: The Indian Express

Rekha Rani Sain, the bereaved widow of Naba Kumar Sain, vividly recalls the harrowing events of that spine-chilling morning in 1970. She recounts with anguish how a horde of several hundred CPI(M) cadres descended upon Sainbari, the family's ancestral home, unleashing a barrage of arrows and stones. Amidst the chaos, dozens of them forcibly entered the premises, embarking on a ruthless looting spree. They mercilessly gouged out the eyes of Naba Kumar before brutally hacking his two brothers, Pranab Kumar and Malay Kumar, to death in full view of their grief-stricken mother, the widowed Mrignayana Devi. The barbarity reached unimaginable depths when they forced the mother of the slain brothers to consume rice soaked in the blood of her sons. The trauma inflicted upon her shattered her sanity irreparably, condemning her to a state of mental anguish from which she never recovered, lingering until her demise a decade later. Desperate to protect her sons, she too faced the brunt of their violence. In a chilling display of brutality, Jiten Ray, a private tutor present at Sainbari to instruct Rekha Rani's daughter, also fell victim to their unfathomable cruelty, succumbing to a gruesome injury.

Shockingly, as per the reports, those Communist cadres responsible for this despicable act were subsequently rewarded with ministerial positions and parliamentary seats under the Left Front government, evading any semblance of accountability. The infamous "*Sainbari Murders*" have since become emblematic of the pervasive political violence that plagues West Bengal. It is a bitter irony to witness, that Congress, once the target of such brutal atrocities, now relying on the CPI(M) for intellectual and political support.

B. Marichjhapi Massacre (1979)^{xxxiv}

On the auspicious occasion of Saraswati Puja in 1979, the Left Front Government unleashed a campaign of unparalleled brutality against Bengali Hindu refugees from Bangladesh who had sought sanctuary in the Sunderban region of West Bengal. Before the elections, the Left

leaders had sought their votes on the promise of bringing them back and resettling them in West Bengal. These refugees, primarily Dalits, fleeing persecution in Bangladesh and numbering around 60,000, had placed their trust in the Left Front's electoral promise, and migrated from the rehabilitation centre in Dandakaranya (Chattisgarh and Odisha) to Marichjhanpi in Sunderban. In a shocking display of disregard for human life, CPI(M) cadres, in collusion with the state machinery, employed tear gas, blockades, and live ammunition to forcibly disperse the refugees. The horrors inflicted upon these desperate souls were beyond comprehension. Many, in their attempt to escape the onslaught, met a grisly fate, falling prey to the jaws of crocodiles in the surrounding waters. Others, including children as young as eight years old, women cradling their infants, and elderly individuals in their twilight years, fell victim to the hail of bullets unleashed by the authorities. To this day, the true extent of the carnage remains shrouded in uncertainty, with the exact number of casualties impossible to ascertain. Whether they perished in police gunfire or drowned in treacherous waters while attempting to flee, the refugees paid the ultimate price for daring to seek refuge on West Bengal's shores.



The marble stone commemorating the massacre is blank, like most memories of the bloody events of 1979. (Image: Mridulika Jha)

Figure Source: India Today

This heinous act of violence against innocent refugees underscores the disregard for human rights exhibited by the CPI(M) government, led by purportedly proletarian leaders. While the

party espouses rhetoric about human rights protection, their actions speak volumes about their true priorities. The selective outrage displayed by certain factions, further exposes the hypocrisy and moral bankruptcy of those who refuse to acknowledge or condemn the Marichjhapi massacre.

Marichjhapi massacre: Forgotten story of Hindu refugees slaughtered in Bengal

The chapter on the Marichjhapi massacre was torn from history books in such a way that no one even noticed it was missing. The story of thousands of Bengali Hindu refugees from Bangladesh being killed by the Left Front government in Bengal in 1979 is rarely discussed. This is how eyewitnesses recount the death and destruction.

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Figure Source: India Today

C. The Bijon Setu Massacre (1982)^{xxxv}

On 30th April 1982, a horrific massacre unfolded in broad daylight near Ballygunge in south Kolkata, where 16 monks and a nun associated with the Hindu organization *Ananda Marga* were ruthlessly slaughtered and then set on fire. These innocent victims, on their way to an educational conference at their headquarters in Tiljala, Kolkata, were violently yanked from

their taxis, and their lives were snuffed out in a blatant display of barbarism that defied belief. Shockingly, this brutality occurred simultaneously at three different sites, witnessed by thousands of horrified onlookers. Despite the glaring public spectacle, not a single perpetrator has faced justice to date for this heinous crime. It was not until 2012, three decades later, that the West Bengal government reluctantly formed a single-member judicial commission to investigate the bloodshed, a damning testament to the previous government's utter disregard for the principles of justice and accountability. In the aftermath of the massacre and in the subsequent years, the CPI(M) regime shrouded the truth surrounding the incident in a cloak of secrecy. Even when the National Human Rights Commission launched an inquiry in 1996, their efforts were stymied by the refusal of Jyoti Basu and his cohorts to cooperate. Despite repeated reminders until May 1999, the state government brazenly maintained its silence, complicit in perpetuating a culture of impunity that allowed such atrocities to go unpunished. Meanwhile, Sher Singh, an IAS officer from West Bengal, courageously came forward to expose the truth, armed with damning evidence implicating the CPI(M) government in the massacre. Singh, who served as the Additional District Magistrate of 24 Paraganas at the time, faced suspension for daring to defy the CPI(M)'s narrative. Bound by the Official Secrets Act, Singh, in his petition to the Central Administration Tribunal (CAT), hinted that the *Ananda Margis* were targeted due to a land dispute with the CPI(M). The CPI(M), fearing the erosion of their dominance in the Kasba belt, a bastion of communist influence, resorted to unspeakable violence to maintain their stranglehold on power.

D. Nanoor Massacre (2000)^{xxxvi}

On the ominous date of 27th July 2000, nearly two and a half decades ago, Suchpur, near Nanoor and under Nanoor police station in Birbhum district bore witness to a harrowing episode. It epitomized the depth of depravity within the West Bengal political landscape under the iron grip of the CPI(M). This anniversary passes with a deafening silence, revealing the growing helplessness in the state towards the brutal atrocities. The 11 victims, hailing from minority and Scheduled Caste communities, reportedly fell prey to the onslaught orchestrated by CPI(M) cadres, laying bare the party's hollow claims of championing the cause of the marginalized. Astonishingly, all the victims were fervent supporters of the opposition party. During their reign of terror, CPI(M) functionaries spared no effort in targeting and terrorizing these vulnerable communities. It took over a decade for justice to catch up with 44 CPI(M) loyalists and local leaders, who were finally held accountable for

their roles in the heinous events of that fateful day. Notable figures within the CPI(M) ranks, including Nitya Narayan Chatterjee and Ramprasad Ghosh, were served with life sentences for their leadership roles in the massacre.



Figure Source: The Economic Times

Despite overwhelming evidence implicating the CPI(M), the party had refused to acknowledge its complicity, resorting instead to finger-pointing at the TMC in a feeble attempt at deflecting scrutiny from their wrongdoings. Former Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, instead of owning up to the atrocities committed under his regime, diverted attention by highlighting the alleged deaths of CPI(M) workers. The Nandigram Massacre stands as a chilling testament to the unchecked aggression of the cadres in the district, a grim truth conveniently ignored by mainstream narratives. While self-proclaimed 'intellectuals' hypocritically castigate certain parties and politicians for past transgressions, they conveniently turn a blind eye to the atrocities and bloodshed committed by the Left Front.

E. The Nandigram Massacre (2007)



Figure Source: India Today

In Nandigram, purportedly championing the cause of the downtrodden, the government led by the CPI(M), aiming to expropriate 10,000 acres of vital agricultural land for a foreign entity, embarked on a path of tyranny and oppression. In response, farmers, organized under the *Bhumi Raksha Committee* valiantly resisted this egregious land grab. However, their defiance was met with brutal force orchestrated by the CPI(M)'s *Harmad Bahini*, who torched their homes, paving the way for a massacre that claimed the lives of many farmers. The height of political violence unleashed by the Left Front government was in Nandigram village of Purba Medinipur district.

Following a tussle over land acquisition by the government for industrial purposes, dozens were killed in 2007-08, both due to police firing as well as clashes between CPI(M) cadres and the *Bhumi Uchched Protirodh Committee*, which was opposing the acquisition and was backed by the TMC. The true extent of the carnage remains obscured, with witnesses recounting harrowing scenes of bodies strewn haphazardly. The government, purportedly representing the proletariat, betrayed its roots by callously disregarding the lives of those it claimed to champion. This ruthless display of power exposed the intentions of the CPI(M), which callously mowed down the very farmers and labourers it cynically derived its legitimacy from. This pattern of aggression transcended geographical boundaries, manifesting wherever the CPI(M) held sway, or even where its influence extended. The CPI(M) and its ideological kin consistently employed violent tactics to silence voices advocating for India's progress. Despite their rhetoric on governance and ethics, their actions revealed a dark reality of conflict, bloodshed, and regression within the country's democratic framework.^{xxxvii}

In West Bengal, the perpetuation of political violence by the CPI(M) exemplified a distressing trend that has marred the political landscape of the state ever since. Precise figures are not available, but former Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's admission in 1997 that there were about 28,000 political murders between 1977 and 1996 provides a chilling glimpse into the magnitude of bloodshed under CPI(M)'s rule. Subsequent reports, such as the Leftist weekly *Mainstream's* account in 2010^{xxxviii}, alleging 55,000 political murders from 1977 to 2009, further underscore the alarming reality.

The infamous 2007 Nandigram incident epitomised the brutality sanctioned by the CPI(M) regime. In a bid to seize land for industrial endeavours, the state machinery orchestrated a

ruthless campaign, culminating in the tragic loss of 14 lives and numerous injuries during the clash between law enforcement and aggrieved villagers.

It not only served as a testament to the disregard for human life but also heralded the catalytic moment for Mamata Banerjee's ascension and the eventual downfall of Left in West Bengal. The rise of the TMC in 1998 injected fresh vigour into the political arena, marking the emergence of a formidable challenger to the entrenched CPI(M) hegemony. Despite years of sustained opposition, it was not until the 2011 Legislative Assembly elections that the CPI(M) was dethroned, signaling the denouement of their decades-long reign. However, the transition of power failed to stem the tide of violence that had become deeply entrenched within the fabric of West Bengal's political culture. The CPI(M)'s legacy of violence not only tarnishes its image but also undermines the democratic principles upon which governance should be predicated. Such wanton brutality not only stifles dissent but also erodes the very foundation of civil society, perpetuating a cycle of fear and intimidation. As custodians of public trust, political entities bear a sacred inherent responsibility to uphold peace and security, yet the CPI(M) stands indicted for negating this solemn duty through its reign of violence.

During its electoral campaign in 2011 to oust the Left Front government that had held power for over three decades, the TMC, under the leadership of the current Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, pledged to break away from the vindictive politics practiced by the Left. But, upon assuming power, the TMC resorted to the same extreme violent tactics as its predecessors. Their tale of violence, in terms of brutality, targeting and eliminating opposition party members on a remorseless scale, threatened to exceed that of its predecessor Left Front. The 2013 and 2018 panchayat elections witnessed a very organized form of violence, enabling the party to secure rural bodies without facing genuine competition. Political violence in this context encompasses tactics such as voter intimidation, manipulation of election processes, and muscle-powered booth capturing, all aimed at influencing electoral outcomes. The persistence of political violence in West Bengal can be attributed to intense political rivalry and battles for control over resources and vital democratic institutions in a state that lags behind in development.

F. Transition To The Trinamool Congress

Amidst mounting dissatisfaction with CPI(M)'s governance, to the people, the ascent of Mamata Banerjee's TMC appeared as a promise of change, with a narrative of a new era of

advancement for West Bengal. However, the aftermath of their takeover in 2011 revealed a stark departure from transformative governance, descending instead into an authoritarian regime intolerant of dissent. In just five years under TMC rule, commencing in 2011, 183 CPI(M) cadres met gruesome fates, marking a chilling shift towards violent suppression and political dominance.

As the ballots fell, so did the cadres, in a grim reminder of power's ruthless grip!^{xxxix}

The TMC, led by the state's current Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, dislodged the three-decade-long Left Front government in 2011. In its election campaign, the TMC had emphasized that it would not continue the "*politics of retribution*" practiced by the Left. However, once the TMC won power, its cadres pursued the same violent methods as its predecessor government, attacking and killing opposition party workers. A stark illustration of this was the horrific *Kamduni* gang rape and murder case in 2013, which highlighted the glaring lapses in law enforcement and the protection of women under TMC rule. The mishandling of the case, coupled with allegations of political interference, only deepened public mistrust in the justice system. Furthermore, political violence and intimidation persisted unabated, with opposition party members and activists frequently targeted. The 2018 Panchayat elections were marred by widespread reports of violence, rigging, and voter coercion, casting doubt on the fairness of the electoral process.^{xlxi}

West Bengal's chargesheet rate third highest in country: NCRB data

Source: The Indian Express

Data | Forty deaths in the run-up to Panchayat polls: West Bengal most affected by political violence

Political violence peaked around the Lok Sabha elections in 2019 and fatalities peaked around the 2018 panchayat polls in the State

July 20, 2023 04:13 pm | Updated 05:37 pm IST

Source: The Hindu

Instead of its end, the proliferation of "cut money" schemes further tarnished the TMC's image, as party members demanded illicit kickbacks from government initiatives, fostering a culture of corruption and cronyism.^{xlii}



Figure Source: The Indian Express

West Bengal's struggle with law-and-order issues is a multifaceted problem stemming from political ambitions, administrative shortcomings, and societal complexities. At the root of it is a developmental deficit that frustrates the ambition of its people in pursuing honest means to earning a decent standard of living. From the tumultuous CPI(M) era to the turbulent TMC reign, the state has grappled with systemic deficiencies that have eroded trust in governance.

In the annals of history, West Bengal once stood as a beacon of prosperity, unity, and global economic prominence, celebrated for its diverse cultural landscape and hallowed heritage. But, the present narrative paints a starkly different picture, as the land now lies dormant, shackled by the mismanagement and malpractices of successive administrations. Media reports indicate that under the stewardship of Mamata Banerjee, the current state government has resorted to the alleged divisive tactics of vote-bank politics, fomenting discord and fracturing the social fabric through calculated manoeuvres. Despite lofty assurances of peace and communal harmony, West Bengal simmers with the fires of communal strife, betraying the Chief Minister's proclamations. The regrettable reality is that Mamata Banerjee's administration has steered the socio-political discourse towards a perilous path of communalization, sacrificing the state's unity.^{xliii}

65 cases of communal violence in WB between January 2021–June 2022, reveals RTI query

A large number of communal flare-ups go unreported in media, rues RTI activist

April 13, 2023 03:59 am | Updated 08:32 am IST - Kolkata

Figure Source: The Hindu

Now, the majority populace finds itself marginalized, and relegated to the status of second-class citizens. In Bengal, dissent is suppressed through oppression and brutality, discouraging opposing views. Bengal, once a symbol of a vibrant democracy, has sadly become a scene of violence and coercion.

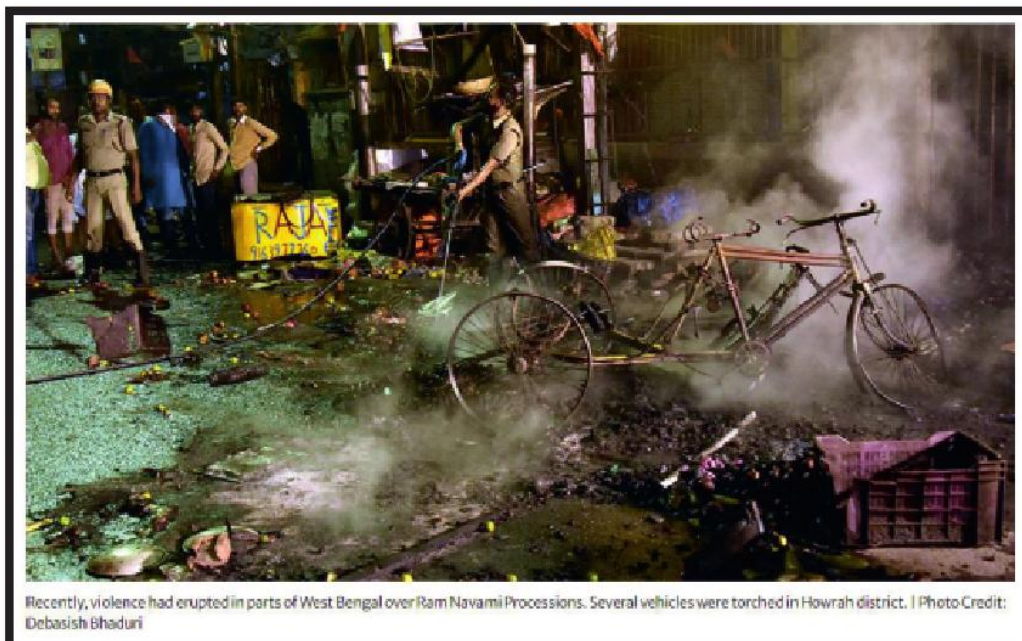


Figure Source: The Hindu

The 2018 panchayat elections serve as a grim reminder of the blatant disregard for democratic principles. On election day, the atmosphere reeked of violence, claiming the lives of dozens of individuals in the pursuit of consolidating power^{xliv}. Reports emerged detailing widespread fraud, unabashed seizure of polling booths, and the destruction of ballots, all while law enforcement agencies, mere puppets under TMC's sway, turned a blind eye.

While again in the 2023 panchayat elections, 40 deaths owing to mass-scale violence in the state revealed the intentions of the TMC government towards free and fair elections. West Bengal became infamous for poll violence which was widely reported in national and regional media.

TMC's pursuit of dominance led them to secure 34% of seats without contest, a clear indictment of their aversion to fair competition. The fear of death overpowered the will to contest the elections. Even after the dust settled from the elections, the ominous shadow of political violence continued to loom over West Bengal. The BJP, emerging as a formidable challenger to TMC's authority, became the target of the ruling party's ruthless machinery. Merely for opposing the status quo, numerous BJP members fell victim to organized campaigns of terror by TMC goons. The desecration of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's statue during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections symbolized the depths to which political discourse in West Bengal had sunk^{xlvxlvvi}. The 2019 Lok Sabha election results, while indicating a shifting political landscape with the BJP gaining prominence, exacerbated the cycle of violence gripping the state^{xlvixlviii}.

Political assassinations became all too frequent, with BJP members falling prey to the lethal machinations of their adversaries^{xlix}. The loss of lives in these acts of violence underscores the utter disregard for human life and democratic values in West Bengal's politics. The 2021 Assembly elections, conducted in an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, once again saw TMC emerge victorious, amid allegations of widespread malpractice and violence. In the aftermath of the elections, the state descended into a spiral of post-election violence, with the TMC members engaging in a deadly game of retaliation. The breakdown in communication between the two parties, vital for a functioning democracy, highlights the polarized and fractured state of West Bengal's political landscape. As the spectre of political violence continues to cast a shadow over West Bengal, voices of dissent and reason are drowned out by the cacophony of gunfire and explosions. TMC's tactics of violence have not only tarnished West Bengal's democratic fabric but have also exposed the true nature of its authoritarian rule.

West Bengal BJP MLA's body found hanging outside a shop, party alleges murder

Published : Jul 14, 2020 08:15 IST

Source: Frontline, The Hindu

West Bengal: BJP chief J P Nadda's convoy attacked at Diamond Harbour

Source: Times of India

BJP on sit-in against 'worsening' law and order in West Bengal

"The law and order in West Bengal has completely collapsed. Several incidents of land grab and sexual abuse in Sandeshkhali are glaring examples of such a situation in the state," West Bengal BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said.

February 28, 2024 01:24 pm | Updated 01:24 pm IST - Kolkata

Source: The Hindu

Contract killings on the rise in West Bengal

The frequency of such incidents highlights the changing face of politics in Bengal, from ideology-driven politics to muscle power politics.

Published : May 03, 2023 14:37 IST - 7 MINS READ


Source: Frontline, The Hindu

West Bengal tops the list of states where politics a motive for violence

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been complaining that many of its cadres are victims of political violence in Bengal, because the police simply looks the other way when its workers are attacked

Source: Business Standard

In the dark annals of Indian politics, few chapters are as morally bankrupt as the unholy alliance between the CPI(M) and the Congress. In their hunger for power, these two parties



have disregarded the graves of nearly 55,000 people who fell victim to the CPI(M)'s ruthless reign of terror in West Bengal. The mere thought of CPI(M) and Congress joining hands to thwart the Narendra Modi-led BJP government in the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections and the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections, reeks of the vilest form of political opportunism imaginable. It is a betrayal in the face to the memories of those who perished at the hands of CPI(M) cadres, their voices silenced forever in the name of ideological supremacy. For over four decades, from 1977 to 2011, CPI(M) made West Bengal a graveyard of democracy, marred by political murders, intimidation, and a culture of fear perpetuated by the CPI(M).

Families were torn apart, livelihoods destroyed, and dreams shattered as the cadres tightened their stranglehold on power through violence and coercion. The *Sainbari* victims, whose loved ones were brutally slaughtered, now find themselves forced to confront a sickening reality – the very party that sanctioned the bloodshed of their kin is now cozying up to Congress. Congress has become the political home and ally of their tormentors. The wounds inflicted by CPI(M) run deep, and the betrayal felt by those who suffered under their iron grip is unimaginable. But the atrocities committed by the CPI(M) were not limited to mere foot soldiers of the Congress; even senior leaders of the party were targeted with ruthless precision. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, the veteran leader of the Congress in West Bengal, knows all too well the price of dissent in a state ruled by CPI(M). Bombs rained down on his home in *Baharampur*, a stark reminder of the dangers faced by those who dared to challenge the CPI(M)'s stranglehold on power. Yet, despite the scars of violence etched into his memory, Chowdhury has chosen to conveniently forget the horrors of the past, embracing the very party responsible for his suffering. His actions are a testament to the corrosive nature of power, blinding even the souls to the sins of their newfound allies.

CHAPTER 3

A State Under Financial Meltdown

During the Mughal and colonial eras, Bengal stood out as one of the relatively prosperous regions in the subcontinent. Despite enduring the exploitative rule of colonial administrations and the challenges of partition, West Bengal emerged as one of the most industrialized and advanced states in India at the time of independence. However, its current standing reflects a more average performance compared to other states in the country.

After being known as a leading state of India, today West Bengal is a faint echo of what it once was. Bengal is now known for its doles, deprivation, and reliance after once being a financial powerhouse at the time of independence. The state stinks of debt and underdevelopment, and Bengal's economy has reached levels that will be a challenge for any future administration to reverse.

Despite having a glorious legacy in education, industry, and various other sectors, West Bengal has experienced a decline in overall economic and social conditions since the 1960s. The 34-year rule of the CPI(M) was a major contributing factor to the stagnation of West Bengal's economy. In 2011, the people of the state voted for a change, leading to the TMC coming into power. However, even after years of TMC's rule, West Bengal's statistics show little improvement.

The TMC government has focussed more on giving grants and subsidies to provide immediate succor than on laying the foundation for long-term sustained and robust growth. It is more interested in buying votes by using a part of the Central Government's funds under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) (and also siphoning some of it as its notorious cut money) to provide 100 days' employment to the people than to give them self-sustaining, high-quality jobs in industry and agriculture in the state. It has focused more on making grand announcements such as turning Kolkata into London, providing free treatment up to Rs. 5 lakh under Swasthya Sathi, and turning district public hospitals into super specialty hospitals than resolving the issues that result in the infrastructural – both physical and social – deficit in the state and hold back its rapid development. Like the CPI(M), it is trying to kill the aspirations of the people of this great state and turn them into TMC henchmen for their survival. Doles and nothing but doles as a means of survival are being used as the most reliable technique to win over the poor's blind

faith and gain a following. Due to the limited job prospects available in the state, youths have a moderate level of ambition. Those still left with a fighting spirit have migrated out for employment and for a decent standard of living, and done reasonably well for themselves. The vibrant and economically successful Bengali communities all over the country indicate that much of the problem lies not with their innate qualities but with the vile politics that has been pursued by the CPI(M) and is being pursued by the TMC.

A. Decline in Economic Indicators

The trajectory of West Bengal's economic journey showcases a notable shift from being one of the richest states in India during the 1960s to experiencing a growth stagnation till recent years.

In 1960, Maharashtra and West Bengal were the two rich states of India. But, over the next three decades, the two states' economies diverged as West Bengal underperformed relative to Maharashtra. West Bengal's per capita income, which is calculated by dividing the total income of the region by its population, was higher than Maharashtra. It was a richer state than Maharashtra.

In 1960, West Bengal's per capita income was approximately 105% of Maharashtra's, but by the mid-1990s, West Bengal's per capita income had declined to about 69% of Maharashtra's. Since 1960-61, West Bengal has experienced a continuous decline relative to other states. During 1970-71 and 1980-81, the state fell to the sixth place. By 1990-91, it had slipped to the seventh position, further dropping to the tenth richest in 2000-01 and the eleventh richest in 2010-11. These trends reflect West Bengal's downward trajectory in comparison to other states across India. Moreover, the annual per capita growth of West Bengal has consistently lagged behind the national average for the past two decades. In 2022-23, the per capita income of West Bengal with Rs 1.41 lakh lag behind the nation's per capita income of Rs 1.97 lakh. ¹

Furthermore, in 2010, Bengal played a significant role in India's capital formation, contributing 6.7% to the national total but by 2023-24, this figure declined to only 2.9%. Unfortunately, the state has not taken any measures to reverse this downward trend. Notably, committed expenditure from 2017-18 to 2021-22, which includes interest payments, pensions, wages, and salaries, accounts for almost 35% of the total revenue expenditure of the Government of West Bengal. A large portion of the state's total revenue was allocated

towards debt servicing and pensions, leaving limited fiscal space for the implementation of new schemes or initiatives.^{li}

B. Fiscal Imbalances and Decline in Expenditure of the State

One significant factor contributing to the fiscal condition of West Bengal has been its insufficient efforts to generate its Own Tax Revenue (OTR) to fund the state's expenditures. West Bengal's OTR-gross state domestic product (GSDP) ratio consistently ranked lowest among the general category states. This poor tax performance is evident across various components of OTR, including taxes on professions and trades, property and capital, commodities, and services. The variations in tax collection among different states can be attributed to several factors, including differences in consumption patterns, economic structure, taxable capacity, tax effort, and the size of the informal economy. In the case of West Bengal, structural factors have influenced its economy, affecting tax collection performance.

Since the focus of the state government is more on revenue expenditure rather than capital expenditure like infrastructure development, the investors are shying away from making investments in the state.

Since 2011, the share of capital expenditure in the total expenditure has fluctuated over the years. During 2018-19, the capital expenditure as a proportion of total expenditure was 12.18%. It declined to 8.26% in 2022-23. Because of this drop in capital expenditure, the state has not grown adequately and has not been able to generate enough OTR^{lii}, Reflecting the lack of development and rapid growth, consumption expenditure in West Bengal has been comparatively low, particularly in rural areas. This in turn has affected the state's OTR.

According to the recent Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) for 2022-23, the Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) in rural areas of West Bengal was Rs 3,407, which was below the national average of Rs 3,860. Similarly, in urban areas, the MPCE of West Bengal stood at Rs 5,426 which is again lower than the national average of Rs 6,521^{liii}.

C. Rise in State's Debt

Debt accumulates when you borrow. Countries or states often borrow to finance significant developmental projects or programs. However, when a state borrows to meet non-developmental expenditures or when debt is in excess, progressively the burden of servicing

the debt can overwhelm the state's finances. West Bengal stands out as one of the most heavily indebted states in India, with its debt ranking among the highest in the country.

The West Bengal government has gone ahead and borrowed to finance revenue expenditure while ignoring its financial situation. By the end of fiscal year 2023-24, West Bengal was highly in debt, exceeding Rs. 6 lakh crore. *Under the TMC regime, since 2011, West Bengal's public debt, which was Rs 1.87 lakh crore in 2010-11, increased to Rs 6.3 lakh crore, an increase of more than 236.62% by 2023-24.*

Additionally, as per the budget documents of the state government, the West Bengal government's debt was slated to rise to Rs 6.47 lakh crore by 31st March 2024, marking a 10% increase from the figure of Rs 5.86 lakh crore as of 31st March 2023. Equally concerning is the state's per capita debt which is derived by dividing the total accumulated debt by the total population of the state, and is slated to rise to Rs 59,000 by the same period. Both the projected accumulated debt and per capita debt figures are extremely high compared to the corresponding figures as of 31st March 2011, which was the last year of the 34-year Left Front rule in West Bengal. As of 31st March 2011, the debt figure was Rs 1.87 lakh crore and the per capita debt figure was Rs 20,300.

Economists fear that unless urgent fiscal measures are adopted to arrest this upward trend, the state will slowly inch towards a debt trap situation, which is a point where the state has to go for fresh borrowings just to service the older debts. The state budget papers for 2023-24 give some clear indications of the high expenditure of the state during the fiscal under review behind servicing previous debts. As per the budget documents, during the fiscal ending March 2024, the state government will have to shell out Rs 73,303.68 crore for repayment of principal and interest on earlier borrowings, as mentioned in the budget estimates for the fiscal under review, up from Rs 69,691.79 crore as mentioned in the revised estimates for 2022-23.^{liv}

Economists believe that while the first reason for this rising total and per capita debt in West Bengal is because of the rising non-plan expenditure, the second reason is the lack of adequate avenues for improving the state's own revenues which is purely state excise-dominated.

A significant concern regarding the high debt burden in West Bengal is the interest payment of the state government. Since 1990-91, the proportion of interest payment to total

expenditure in West Bengal has steadily increased from 10% to slightly above 30% in 2003-04 which is generally considered unfavourable for the economy.

This issue of extreme indebtedness in West Bengal is not a recent development but has persisted for a considerable period, dating back at least to the beginning of the present century. Despite being a mid-level state in terms of per capita consumption, West Bengal has struggled to generate sufficient tax revenue. The consumption pattern and tax structure collectively play a crucial role in determining tax collection within the state. The crisis is primarily a crisis of development.

D. Decline in the Sectoral Contribution

Growth in West Bengal is primarily driven by the service sector, with real estate, banking and insurance, and other services being the fastest-growing subsectors. Meanwhile, the manufacturing sector's share in the GSDP has experienced a decline.

Worsening Agricultural and Allied Sector

The eastern state, West Bengal is highly dependent on agriculture which serves as the primary occupation of the people of the state. A significant portion of the state's population are cultivators and agricultural labourers.

Until the 1970s, the agricultural sector in West Bengal experienced a near stagnation or decline. The compound growth rate of food grains between 1970 and 1980 was only 0.96%. Subsequently, there was a temporary acceleration in agricultural growth, but since the 1990s, this growth once again declined. A significant proportion of landholdings in West Bengal are with small and marginal farmers. Additionally, public investment in agriculture in the state is lower than in many other states, resulting in inadequate rural infrastructure such as land development, irrigation, and electrification. Consequently, the agricultural sector has become increasingly unprofitable, leading to continuous migration of labourers to other states.

Further, the share of agriculture in both the state's domestic product and total workforce has decreased over time, this decline has not been accompanied by a commensurate increase in per capita income for farmer households. West Bengal's growth rates of Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) and per capita NSDP are lower than many other Non-Special Category (NSC) states. The nature of economic growth in West Bengal, driven primarily by the unorganized sector, is worrisome. It reveals a notable increase in informalization within the state's economy.

Despite being an agriculture-dominated state, the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC government has decreased the share of expenditure on Agriculture and Allied Sectors, including Rural Development, in total expenditure over the years. In 2015-16, the share of expenditure on the Agriculture and Allied Sector as a proportion of total expenditure was 14.09%, which declined to 6.27% by 2022-23. The contribution of Agriculture and allied sectors to the state's Gross State Value Added (GSVA) was 21.97% in 2021-22 which declined to 19.41% in 2023-24. Also, the share of agriculture in West Bengal's GSDP has fallen to 15.75% in 2014-15.

According to the NFHS-5 survey conducted between 2019-2021, over 65.2% of rural families in West Bengal do not possess any agricultural land. The most recent Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) from 2020, before the COVID pandemic, categorizes less than a quarter (24.1%) of rural households as self-employed in agriculture, indicating a slight increase from the 19% reported by the NSSO Employment Unemployment Survey (EUS) in 2011-12. Moreover, 95% of operational holdings in the state are below one hectare, resulting in significant fragmentation of land parcels, with the average size of operational holdings standing at 0.35 hectares in 2018-19, considerably lower than the national average. With the rising cultivation costs, particularly attributed to irrigation expenses, and insufficient price realization, the contribution of average income generated from crop and livestock cultivation to total household income in rural areas has significantly declined. According to the most recent round of the Situation Assessment Survey conducted in 2018-19, a typical agricultural household in West Bengal earns only Rs 1,547 per month from crop income, constituting a mere 22% of the total household income. In contrast, the all-India average for crop income stands at Rs 3,798 per month. Consequently, there exists a potential for Leftist/radical peasant movements due to the income crisis. However, despite sporadic protests in certain areas, any widespread consolidation is lacking. This may be attributed to the aging demographic profile of the self-employed individuals in agriculture, with more than half aged above 45, and the increasing significance of wage income, which now constitutes 55% of total household income for this semi-proletariat section in the state.

Despite having many rivers and water bodies, plentiful rainfall, and fertile land, per acre productivity of crops continues to lag behind many of the agriculturally advanced states of India such as Punjab, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh. What constrains the development of the agricultural sector in the state is the lack of infrastructure, which includes irrigation, transport, storage, preservation, agricultural extension, processing, and marketing facilities as well as the availability of quality seeds, feed, fertilizer, pesticide, fungicide, and weedicide at reasonable rates. Both the CPI(M) and TMC governments in the state have done little for the improvement of agriculture in West Bengal.

Rapid Decline in the Industrial Sector

At the time of independence, West Bengal was well known as one of the leading industrialized states of India. It had one of the highest shares of total industrial output in India at that time. Since the 1960s, it witnessed a significant decline in its industrial sector, marked by the departure of large-scale industries. Unfortunately, West Bengal's industrial decline has continued even to date with the contribution of the sector to the state's GSVA diminishing from 24.0% in 2021-22 to 23.1% in 2023-24.

In 1950-51, a significant portion, about three-quarters of India's total industrial production originated from just three of its coastal provinces. Among these, West Bengal was a prominent leader in industrial production, accounting for 27% of the country's output, with Bombay State (Maharashtra and Gujarat together) ahead at 33% and Madras State (roughly Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh together) trailing at 12%. At that time, thousands of people used to work in mills and factories owned by various foreign and domestic companies in Calcutta (now Kolkata) and its suburbs. The busy streets and narrow lanes of urban West Bengal were vital pathways for the state's thriving industrial sector. Today, with abandoned buildings, deteriorating walls, and inactive chimneys of numerous closed factories, it is hard to recall the prosperous times when they were crucial contributors to a nationwide industrial network. West Bengal's industrial production progressively declined behind numerous other Indian states. By 2020-21, West Bengal contributed only 3.5% of the country's industrial production.^{lv} Furthermore, even the growth rate of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) of West Bengal declined to 7.2% in 2023-24 from 17.8% in 2021-22.^{lvi}

While the state over nearly five decades has witnessed a protracted decline in its organized industrial sector and manufacturing activity, along with the manufacturing sector's contribution to the state's GSDP, with growth in its unorganized segment, its manufacturing

sector in West Bengal has absorbed an increasing share of the workforce. This has resulted in low productivity. While industries in Bengal exhibited lower productivity compared to Bombay State even at the time of independence, the gap has widened over the years. This is evident in the steady decrease in West Bengal's share in the total number of factories in India. For example, in 2014-15, with 6,105 factories out of 1,36,353 nationwide, West Bengal had 4.4% of India's total factories. By 2019-20, with 9,650 factories out of 2,46,504 across India, this share declined to 3.9%.^{lvii}

Kolkata was once a major industrial hub in Asia, second only to Japan. It had the potential to become the most vibrant industrial center on the continent. However, this opportunity was wasted partly due to political factors in the state. These factors undermined the work ethic, and industrial development, and ultimately led to economic stagnation from which the city, and the broader eastern region of India, have struggled to recover.

Also, employment generation is not just in terms of direct employment in big industries but also in forms of development of ancillary and associate industries, which can enable the long-term economic growth of the state. However, the state government under CPI(M) and TMC has not focused on the backward and forward linkages. The TMC government under Mamata Banerjee has no time for such detailed issues. It has preferred to devote its attention more to fairs and festivals, including the much-advertised Bengal Global Business Summits which produced little except photo ops.

E. Poverty Rate

In West Bengal, there are large pockets across the state with high concentrations of poor people. For instance, more than a third of the population in Purulia district lives in extreme poverty. Also, not surprisingly, such pockets are in rural and sub-urban parts of the district, around agricultural croplands and mining belts, in parts that have no industrial activity. Like Purulia, districts such as Uttar Dinajpur, Malda, Birbhum, and Bankura display high concentrations of poor people.

At an aggregate level, while poverty rates are relatively low in districts like Howrah, Hooghly, and Kolkata, near water bodies, where population density tends to be high, a significant number of people suffer from poverty. Rivers and other water bodies offer economic opportunities, such as fishing, contributing to the state's income. But, saturation in

terms of occupational opportunities and low incomes lead to a concentration of poverty in these areas.

Additionally, more than half of the population near forest areas in districts like Jalpaiguri, Malda, Bardhaman, and Purba Medinipur live in extreme poverty. These areas are largely inhabited by tribal or Adivasi communities. Geographical isolation is a common characteristic of many of these areas with high poverty. Limited transport facilities in such areas close to forests result in a lack of easy access to markets and a concentration of poverty.

Poor infrastructure, including inadequate road connectivity and limited educational institutions or hospitals, is a common feature of high-poverty zones across all the districts in the state. Accelerating development in potential growth areas is essential to uplift the poor population above the poverty line.^{lviii}

In 1999-2000, 27% of the population in West Bengal was below the poverty line while the national average was 26.7%. *According to Planning Commission data using the Tendulkar Committee's estimates, approximately 19.98% of West Bengal's population lived below the poverty line till 2022-23 as compared to the poverty rate of India which stood at less than 5%. The urban poverty rate in the state at 14.66% was higher than the national average, while the rural poverty rate at 22.52% exceeded the urban poverty rate by 8 points.*^{lix}

Over the past two decades, around 1.1 million workers, including some high-end professionals but mostly people at the lower end of the workforce spectrum, have migrated out of West Bengal. Until 2010, West Bengal was a state that attracted a substantial amount of labour from outside. The out-migration trend under the TMC rule is a significant unfortunate development.^{lx}

F. Employment Crisis

Under the TMC regime, unemployment in West Bengal rose between 2011 and 2020. Unemployment in the workforce aged 15-59 increased from 2.5% in 2011-12 to 3.6%^{lxi} in 2018-19, and further to 5.3% in the quarter October- December 2023.^{lxii}

In absolute terms in 2020, 8.3 lakh people in rural areas and 6.5 lakh in urban areas were seeking work. In rural areas, 12 out of every 100 individuals in the working-age population, who had completed at least higher secondary education, were unemployed. This proportion was slightly lower at 10% in urban areas. The unemployment rate of the population aged 15-

29 has increased from 10.9% in the quarter October-December 2022 to 14.6% in October-December 2023.^{lxiii}

The situation is particularly challenging for women in the working-age population, with a decline in employment of approximately 8.3 lakh women in rural West Bengal. Despite the proportion of the working-age population engaged in education remaining stagnant at 22% since 2011, this decline in employment indicates a severe shortage of job opportunities in the state. Additionally, approximately 40% of individuals in the working-age population in rural West Bengal are not even part of the labour force.^{lxiv} The labour force participation rate is particularly low in West Bengal. Perhaps, with the dismal state of the West Bengal economy, many have given up on the hope of finding employment.

G. Child Marriage in West Bengal^{lxv}

A recent study on “**Child Marriage in India**” published in the Lancet, a leading international medical journal, highlighted a very worrisome trend in child marriage in India, particularly in states like Bihar and West Bengal. The incidence of such marriages remains alarmingly high in such states. Despite an overall decline in child marriage rates nationwide, West Bengal has failed to address this issue effectively. The study noted a staggering 32.3% increase in the number of girls married as children in West Bengal, representing over 5,00,000 additional cases. The TMC government has singularly failed to address the issue and child marriage remains a persistent challenge in West Bengal.

NFHS-5 (2019-21) revealed that West Bengal has consistently maintained one of the highest rates of child marriage in the country. Significantly surpassing the national average of 23.3%, 41.6% of women aged 20-24 in West Bengal got married before 18 years of age. The efforts of the government, including the formulation of district action plans and issuing guidelines, appears to have produced little in terms of outcome.

Murshidabad, an economically poor district, has especially high rates of child marriage, with 55.4% of women aged 20-24 being married before 18 as per NFHS 5. The district saw an increase from 53.5% as per NFHS-4 (2015-16). Despite this alarming statistic, the TMC government has failed to implement effective measures to curb this practice in the district. Cash incentives and existing laws have proven insufficient, highlighting a lack of political will and a failure to engage with local communities, schools, and panchayats in meaningful ways.

Without a comprehensive social campaign involving all stakeholders and a genuine commitment to enforce existing laws, the grassroots situation is unlikely to improve significantly under the TMC government.

H. Increase in Share of Central Taxes & Grants from the Centre

There is a political narrative in some circles suggesting unfair treatment of West Bengal in terms of central transfers. Central transfers typically consist of two components: the state's share in central taxes and grants from the Centre. Both of these components of West Bengal have increased over the years. Also, it is important to note that more than half (55%) of the revenue receipts of the West Bengal government come from the centre and the state generates only 45% through its own resources. West Bengal has received increasing allocations from the central government over time.

The share of central taxes given to West Bengal has shown an increasing trend over the years, even as a proportion of the state's GSDP. Share of central taxes is governed by Finance Commission awards, and given that the Finance Commission is a Constitutional expert body that has so far escaped any allegations of political bias, the question of possible unfair treatment may be limited to the issue of grants alone. In any case, the share in central taxes for West Bengal has increased from Rs 5,955 crore in 2014-15^{lxvi}, the first year of the Modi Government, to Rs 24,847 crore in 2023-24^{lxvii}. The Central government has given Rs 1,52,544 crore as a share of GST to West Bengal from 2018-19 to 2022-23.^{lxviii}

Share of GST Given to West Bengal (Rs Crore)	
2018-19	27,370
2019-20	27,713
2020-21	26,188
2021-22	32,221
2022-23	39,052

Overall, based on the recommendations of the Finance Commission, West Bengal received Rs 2,85,536.81 crore as its share of the taxes and duties collected by the central government.^{lxix}

Devolution of shareable taxes and duties to the State (Rs Thousand Crore)	
2018-19	55.77
2019-20	48.04
2020-21	44.73
2021-22	65.54
2022-23	71.43

Grants from the Centre result in the increase of revenue receipts of the state. Such grants, despite experiencing year-on-year fluctuations, have shown an overall increase in recent years, even when measured as a proportion of GSDP. When Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister in 2014, the grants-in-aid from the Central Government to the state was Rs 30,777 crore in 2014-15^{lxx}, it increased to Rs 40,821 crore in 2023-24.^{lxxi}

The TMC government in West Bengal alleges that the Central Government is withholding funds for Centrally Sponsored Schemes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY).^{lxxii} It claims that the Union Government owes its funds under MNREGS and PMAY, two centrally sponsored schemes. The Union Government has withheld funds because of procedural lapses and alleged corruption. There were delays in the submission of Utilisation Certificates (UC) of Rs. 2,29,099 crore from 2002-03 to 2020-21 according to the State's Finance Audit Report for 2020-21 by the Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG).

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has not provided any satisfactory refutation of the C&AG's charges, including the procedural ones of why she did not answer the C&AG's objections through the proper channel of official consultation between the state government and the C&AG, or the Public Accounts Committee of the Vidhan Sabha or the Vidhan Sabha itself. Her politicisation of the issue has raised more suspicions about possible scams involved in the implementation of the centrally sponsored schemes. There seems to be no evidence of any unfair treatment of West Bengal by the central government in the distribution of grants to states. Instead, with widespread corruption at higher levels of the West Bengal Government, including even in its education and food departments, there seems to be the risk that some of the central grant funds were not utilised for their intended purposes and siphoned off as 'cut money'.

CHAPTER 4

Corruption Chronicles: Unraveling TMC's Scandals

The genesis of the TMC traces back to its establishment in 1998 as a break-away of the Congress. Riding on anti-incumbency sentiments and disillusionment with conventional politics, the TMC seized power in West Bengal in 2011, terminating the three-decade rule of the Left Front. Mamata Banerjee's rise to the Chief Ministerial position was hailed as a triumph of people's aspirations over entrenched political hierarchies. Nonetheless, as the initial euphoria waned, allegations of corruption began to emerge, tarnishing the image of the TMC government.

The TMC came to power in West Bengal promising a transformative era for the state. It had vowed to combat corruption and uplift marginalized communities. Instead, its 13-year long rule has belied all these assurances, and revealed a tenure marred by widespread corruption at all levels of the government and party functionaries who exercise power.

Evasion, silence, defence — the Trinamool Congress response to leaders accused of corruption

In response to allegations of corruption, the Trinamool leadership has always asked the people to keep faith in the party chairperson Mamata Banerjee.

November 09, 2023 01:25 am | Updated 11:39 am IST

Figure Source: The Hindu

One of the earliest scandals to hit the administration was the Saradha chit-fund scam. The Saradha Group, comprising over 200 private entities, deceived millions of investors through fraudulent investment schemes, accumulating vast wealth. It became evident that several prominent figures within the TMC were closely associated with the scandal, facing accusations of collusion and protectionism.^{lxxiii}

Several significant scandals extensively covered by the media that followed are described below.

A. PDS SCAM^{lxxiv}

During the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020, protests erupted across West Bengal over irregularities in Public Distribution System (PDS) distribution. An FIR was filed in the Nadia district. The West Bengal Governor and the Central government criticized the state's PDS. The Ministry of Consumer Affairs expressed concern in a letter to the West Bengal Food Secretary, noting the state's failure to distribute additional food grains under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) scheme, which aimed to provide free food grains and pulses to ration cardholders during the pandemic, in addition to the monthly quota under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).^{lxxv}

The PDS for foodgrains scam involved the alleged illegal siphoning off of rice and wheat, implicating TMC Minister Jyotipriya Mallick aka Balu, businessman Bakibur Rahman, and others. Mallick, the first TMC Minister arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), served as Food and Supplies Minister in the previous TMC government (2016-2021). He was replaced by Rathin Ghosh in 2021 following allegations of a scam. Rahman, closely linked to Mallick, supplied rice and wheat below-mandated quantities to distributors who were supposed to sell them at fair prices through government shops. The surplus was sold in the open market for profit. Rahman revealed to ED officials that profits were divided 80:20, with 20% going to suppliers and 80% distributed among mill owners, government officials, and the Minister's office. Over 100 documents with government office stamps were discovered in Rahman's flat. Jyotipriya Mallick had been replaced by Rathin Ghosh as Food and Supplies Minister in 2021 but had continued as Minister for the Department of Forest Affairs and Non-Conventional and Renewable Energy Sources in the Government of West Bengal in February 2024, four months after his arrest by the ED in October 2023.

Magnitude of the ₹10,000 crore PDS scam in West Bengal is enormous: ED

On the attack on its officers at Sandeshkhali, the ED said the police had registered mostly bailable and non-scheduled offences; the prime accused in the case is still absconding

January 09, 2024 05:15 am | Updated 09:45 am IST - Kolkata

Figure Source: The Hindu

“The investigation carried out so far indicates that the magnitude of the scam is enormous, and the proceeds of crime received and further transferred and layered by one suspected person itself are suspected to be at least to the tune of Rs 9,000-10,000 crore and out of that, Rs 2,000 crore were also suspected to be transferred to Dubai either directly or through Bangladesh.”

B. MGNREGA

The inception of the MGNREGA in 2006 aimed to offer jobs to rural inhabitants, ensuring a minimum of 100 days of work for every rural individual in India, covering a range of tasks such as pond excavation, house construction, road building, tree planting, and bridge construction. The program operates through local panchayats, where individuals apply for work. These applications are then reviewed by the panchayat and forwarded to the block development officer for work allocation.

RTI queries reveal several irregularities in MGNREGA scheme in West Bengal

The RTI response mentions that the State government has not worked on the recovery of funds which has been spent without following the norms

October 02, 2023 09:46 pm | Updated 10:16 pm IST - Kolkata

Figure Source: The Hindu

The purported MGNREGA scandal in Bengal surfaced following the Central government's directive to link all job cards with Aadhaar. Subsequently, it was discovered that numerous individuals, supposedly employed and receiving wages through the scheme, were either deceased or possessed duplicate job cards issued under fictitious names.

“I began this investigation when I was approached by some people in my locality who told me that their names were being added under the MGNREGA scheme and bank accounts were being created under their name for which they did not give their consent. While investigating the matter further, I found that job cards were created for several dead persons and money was being received for work done by dead people under the MGNREGA scheme.”

- Professor of
Rabindra Bharti University

Union Minister Giriraj Singh stated that the West Bengal government failed to furnish a "satisfactory response" to the ministry's persistent reminders regarding corruption and irregularities^{lxxvi}. Also, the Union Finance Minister disclosed that 25 lakh fraudulent MGNREGA job cards were issued in West Bengal^{lxxvii}, leading to the misappropriation of significant government funds. In February of this year, the ED conducted raids at various locations in West Bengal linked to the MGNREGA scam. The investigation is still underway.

It is important to note that compared to Rs. 58,000 that the Ministry of Rural Development of the central government under United Progressive Alliance (UPA) gave to West Bengal, the BJP-led National Development Alliance (NDA) government under Modi earmarked over Rs 2 lakh crore for the state's advancement over the past 9 years^{lxxviii}. Additionally, the Union Rural Development Minister has announced that during the Modi government's tenure, West Bengal received more than Rs 54,000 crore under schemes like MGNREGA, compared to just Rs 14,900 crore during the UPA era. This underscores Prime Minister Modi's unwavering commitment to West Bengal's growth.

C. RECRUITMENT SCAM

About 9,000 cases of OMR manipulation, where marks obtained by the candidates were manipulated have come to the fore”-

- *Firdous Samim, the advocate who unearth the scam by bringing the recruitment irregularities before the Calcutta High Court*



Upper primary qualified job seekers along with a teacher dressed like West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee stage a protest against teacher recruitment scam and demanding jobs, in Kolkata. File. | Photo Credit: ANI

Figure Source: The Hindu

In 2023, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, on the Independence Day, while criticizing the Narendra Modi government, also talked about accusations of corruption within her own government. During a gathering with her party supporters on the eve of Independence Day, she made a statement implying that mistakes are inevitable for those who are actively engaged in their work. She likened it to the occasional error made by mothers and sisters while cooking, suggesting that such mistakes are natural.

But the situation is far more complicated than some silly mistakes in the kitchen. The alleged corruption cases involved prominent figures from her own party, the TMC. For example, there was the West Bengal School Service Commission recruitment scam which involved tampering with the answer and mark sheets of thousands of candidates appearing for competitive examinations to be recruited as teaching and non-teaching staff in government and government-aided schools. It involved the state industries minister and general secretary of the TMC, Partha Chatterjee, who was taken into custody on 23 July 2022. On the same day, a large amount of cash and jewellery was also seized from the residence of the actress Arpita Mukherjee, known to be a close associate of Partha Chatterjee. More senior TMC leaders like MLA Manik Bhattacharya, who was the former chairman of West Bengal Board of Primary Education (WBBPE), and MLA Jiban Krishna Saha were implicated in the scam

and arrested in early October 2022 and April 2023 respectively. Numerous officials from various boards and councils within the State Education department have been arrested for their suspected involvement in the corruption scandal. Additionally, suspended Trinamool leaders, including Santanu Kundu and Kuntal Ghosh, were also under scrutiny.



Figure Source: India Today

In February 2024, officials from the ED conducted raids on an office and three residential flats belonging to a prominent builder known to have close ties with former West Bengal minister Partha Chatterjee. These premises were located in Naktala, situated in the southern region of Kolkata. According to an ED spokesperson, the builder is suspected to have played a significant role in alleged irregularities related to the recruitment process of primary school teachers in Bengal.

Despite the arrests and the commencement of FIRs, there is an ongoing outcry from the public, wherein thousands of job seekers are mobilizing on the streets of the city, actively engaging in protests, orchestrating rallies, and conducting spontaneous demonstrations near key metro stations and major intersections. These actions serve as a clear manifestation of the widespread discontent and frustration regarding the purported corruption and its far-reaching consequences. As already mentioned, the situation has got complicated by the Kolkata High Court ordering the cancellation of appointments of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff in West Bengal government-sponsored and aided schools, and declaring the selection process as "null and void". However, the honorable Supreme Court gave relief to teaching and non-teaching staff members from immediate termination, with the next hearing scheduled on 16th July 2024.

D. ROSE VALLEY CHIT FUND SCAM

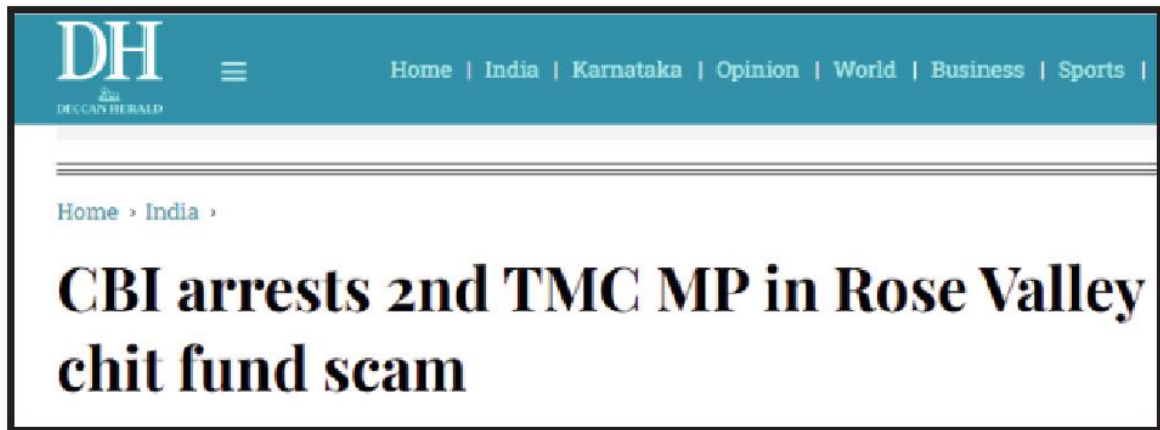


Figure Source: Deccan Herald

The Rose Valley financial scandal, also known as the Rose Valley Chit Fund Scam, was a Ponzi scheme. It was a massive financial fraud amounting to around Rs 17,000 crore, which unfolded after the collapse of the Rose Valley Group in the state of West Bengal. This scandal not only rocked the financial landscape but also raised questions about the involvement of influential political figures and money laundering.^{lxxxix}

Given the scale of the fraud, the Supreme Court in 2014 directed the CBI to investigate the scam masterminded by the Rose Valley group, with a focus on potential money laundering activities involving prominent individuals.^{lxxx} The investigation led to the arrest of two members of the Lok Sabha belonging to the TMC -- Sudip Bandopadhyay and Tapas Pal -- by the CBI in 2017. While Bandopadhyay secured bail after enduring 136 days in custody, Pal, a well-known actor in Bengali cinema, remained in judicial custody for approximately three years. Tragically, Pal passed away in 2020, just months after being granted bail.^{lxxxi}

Reports revealed that the Rose Valley group had established a network of 27 companies purportedly for conducting chit-fund operations. However, only a handful of them were operational. The scheme enticed unsuspecting investors with promises of high returns ranging between 8% and 27% on their investments across various states.^{lxxxii}

In essence, the Rose Valley financial scandal was not merely a case of financial mismanagement but also of exploitation of trusting investors and of the potential complicity of influential figures in perpetuating such fraudulent activities. In May 2023, the ED took

action by filing a supplementary charge sheet in the Rose Valley chit scam case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

E. CROSS-BORDER CATTLE SMUGGLING CASE

A covert operation led to the unearthing of illicit transportation of numerous cattle from West Bengal to neighbouring Bangladesh across the state's border. The smuggling included smuggling large cattle breeds from Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, as well as smaller ones from West Bengal, fetching Rs 40,000- 90,000 per animal. Notably, cattle from northern states which were bigger commanded higher prices compared to the smaller-sized ones from West Bengal.

When the Border Security Force (BSF) seized the cattle, they were required to document the seizure. However, the CBI detected inconsistencies in these records. These irregularities suggested that the animals were misrepresented as smaller than they were, thereby reducing their value during auctions conducted by the BSF and Customs officials.

Reportedly, only specific traders with alleged connections to government officials were allowed to purchase cattle at reduced prices during these auctions. Subsequently, these traders would smuggle the bought cattle into Bangladesh. It is alleged that for each sold cattle, the smuggler Enamul Haque would make payments to involved government officials, who would also receive a share from the bidders.



Figure Source: Firstpost

The case came to light in 2018 following the apprehension of J D Mathew from Kerala, who was a government official in West Bengal. In September 2021, the CBI filed an FIR against six individuals, including Satish Kumar, a BSF commandant from 2016 to 2017, as well as the mastermind Enamul Haque and other smugglers. The FIR alleges that during Kumar's tenure, the BSF seized over 20,000 cattle, yet the vehicles transporting them were not seized, and the perpetrators remained at large.

The ED arrested Haque in February 2022 and Satish Kumar in April 2022. Subsequent investigations revealed a network involving BSF officers, smugglers, Bengal Police, and political figures. The ED's charge sheet implicated TMC youth leader Vinay Mishra, his brother Vikas Mishra, and Anubrata Mondal in the case. Mondal's involvement came to light following Kumar's arrest. Mondal's bodyguard Saigal Hossain was arrested by the CBI in June 2022 after he failed to provide satisfactory explanations for his substantial assets. Communication records indicated frequent contact between Haque and Hossain, suggesting Mondal's connection to the main accused. Anubrata Mondal, a prominent TMC figure in Birbhum known as the "*Bahubali*" and "*Kesto Da*" among supporters, wielded significant influence in the district. He is credited with popularizing the TMC slogan "*khela hobe*", a veiled threat at violence, which played a pivotal role in the party's triumph in the 2021 West Bengal Assembly election against the BJP.

F. CASH FOR QUERY SCAM

On December 8th, 2023, Mahua Moitra, a Member of Parliament representing the TMC, faced disqualification by the Ethics Committee of Lok Sabha due to her involvement in the cash-for-query scandal. This event was notable as it resulted in Moitra, a former investment banker aged 49, being suspended from her parliamentary duties. Moitra admitted to sharing her online login credentials with Darshan Hiranandani, a businessman acquaintance, allowing him to submit pre-approved questions on her behalf for presentation in the Lok Sabha.^{lxxxiii}

Moreover, Hiranandani confessed to providing Moitra with extravagant gifts and financing the renovation of her official residence. He also admitted to directly posting questions on her behalf using the Parliament login credentials provided by Moitra. These revelations were disclosed through the Apostille method to the consulate general of India in Dubai, a process used for certifying documents or statements originating from foreign jurisdictions. The Ethics Committee regarded these allegations with serious concern.^{lxxxiv}

Sharing Parliamentary login details disturbs national security, says panel on Mahua Moitra expulsion

The TMC leader was accused of giving her login credentials to businessman Darshan Hiranandani to post questions against the Adani Group.

Figure Source: Scroll.in

The Ethics Committee's report highlighted that the Ministry of Home Affairs explicitly cautioned against the accessibility of certain documents on the members' portal, emphasizing that they were not intended for public viewing. Among these were draft Bills shared with members before their official release. The committee expressed concerns that sharing passwords could result in these drafts reaching individuals with hostile intentions toward the country. Specifically, it pointed out an instance where the Jammu and Kashmir Delimitation Bill, 2019, was circulated prematurely, illustrating the risks associated with unauthorized access. The committee warned that compromised passwords could expose the system to severe cyber threats, potentially leading to its complete dysfunction, thereby disrupting the Indian Parliament's operations. Furthermore, it noted that malicious actors might exploit such vulnerabilities to introduce fabricated materials into the system, posing a threat to national security through the dissemination of false documents or narratives.^{lxxxv}

The decision of the Lok Sabha Ethics Committee was supported by a comprehensive 500-page report, which confirmed Moitra's facilitation of an offshore businessman in accessing her parliamentary login to ask questions on her behalf. The report emphasized that Moitra's actions not only violated parliamentary ethics but also posed a threat to national security. At the time, the Lok Sabha Ethics Committee was chaired by lawmaker Vinod Kumar Sonkar, with Vishnu Datt Sharma, Sumedhanand Saraswati, Aparajita Sarangi, Dr. Rajdeep Roy, Sunita Duggal, Dr. Subhash Bhamre, Ve Vaithilingam, N. Uttam Kumar Reddy, Preneet Kaur, Balashowry Vallabhaneni, Hemant Godse, Giridhari Yadav, P. R. Natarajan, and Kunwar Danish Ali as members.

‘Cash-for-query’ case: CBI searches premises linked to Mahua Moitra

The Lokpal had asked the CBI to probe the cash-for-query allegations against Mahua Moitra and submit a report within six months. Moitra is set to contest the Lok Sabha elections 2024 from Krishnanagar.

Figure Source: The Indian Express

In a recent update as of March 2024, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) commenced searches at Mahua Moitra's residence in Kolkata and other pertinent locations as part of its ongoing investigation into the cash-for-query scandal. Subsequently, the CBI lodged an FIR against the former Trinamool Congress MP in connection with the case. These actions were initiated following directives from the Lokpal, subsequent to the receipt of findings from the agency's preliminary inquiry into allegations made by Lok Sabha member Nishikant Dubey against Moitra. The Lokpal directed the CBI to conduct a thorough investigation encompassing all aspects of the complaints within a six-month timeframe and submit its findings for further review.

G. SANDESHKHALI VIOLENCE

Shahjahan Sheikh, a leader within the TMC, has wielded significant influence spanning from Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas to Malancha in South 24 Parganas. He was widely regarded as the party's most prominent figure in the area, with involvement in various sectors including bheris, brick kilns, transportation, and vegetable markets.

Shahjahan entered politics in 2003, inspired by his uncle Moslem Sheikh's involvement with the CPI(M) and subsequently got elected as panchayat pradhan. Despite the Left's electoral setbacks, he and his uncle maintained their stronghold in the region. In 2013, Shahjahan aligned himself with the TMC, breaking away from his uncle and from the CPI (M). Building his faction within the party and fulfilling various roles within the TMC hierarchy, Shahjahan continued to expand his influence and business ventures. Shahjahan's contributions were instrumental in the party's electoral successes. Such was his influence in the region that in 2021, he renamed a market after himself.

While there were several cases against his name, from assault to even murder, Shahjahan operated with impunity. He was accused by residents of extortion, land grabbing and sexually exploiting village women over several years. Shahjahan was arrested by the local police only

on 29th February 2024 after 55 days. There were serious allegations for the first 55 days, Shahjahan Sheikh was protected by the TMC government.


There was widespread condemnation of this delayed arrest of a suspect who as a TMC leader inflicted physical, mental, and emotional torture on the Sandeshkhali protestors, notably women. These women victims had been demanding the arrest of Sheikh Shajahan for days. What began as an ED raid on the ruling party's local strongman's house morphed into a wider movement against alleged land grabbing, systematic sexual assault, and the misuse of power by the ruling TMC in the area.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India, taking suo motu cognisance of reports appearing in the media about the incidents in Sandeshkhali, stated that these indicate “prima facie violation of human rights shocking the conscience”. The critical observations of all these individuals and institutions — the governor of West Bengal, the National Commission for Women, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, the Kolkata High Court, and the NHRC — unfortunately made no impact on the government of West Bengal. The state government and its law enforcement agencies were, on the face of it, derelict and negligent in the performance of their duties. The police had all the resources to apprehend the accused and there was no question of jurisdictional constraint. It is just that they were not prepared to arrest a notorious criminal for fear of offending the TMC leaders.

Shahjahan's widespread influence had facilitated electoral gains for the party in the region. In several media reports, after his arrest, his body language in police custody clearly portrayed that the state machinery and ruling TMC government had been constantly supporting and protecting him.

It is quite distressing to ponder why Mamata Banerjee, the current Chief Minister of West Bengal and a vocal advocate for women's empowerment in governance, finds herself under scrutiny for allegedly providing protection to Sheikh Shahjahan and failing to address the persistent allegations of violence perpetrated by certain members of her own political party.

What happened in Sandeshkhali in West Bengal is indeed troubling. It highlights the importance of addressing systemic abuse for land grabbing and violence against women. The lack of sympathy within the party ranks for the women who were abused and the dismissive attitude of TMC spokespersons towards these allegations only exacerbates the problem. TMC's Kunal Ghosh's comments, particularly regarding the appearance of the victims, were



utterly insensitive and demonstrated a disturbing normalization of violence and discrimination.^{lxxxvixxxvii}

In the wake of the "Me Too" movement, the silence on social justice issues begs the question: where's the consistency in advocacy!!

With new allegations surfacing, like the abduction and trafficking of a young woman, accountability is paramount. It is not just about molestation, but the mental, physical, and emotional harm inflicted on women. Sandeshkhali sheds light on deep-rooted issues of lack of socio-economic development, gender violence, and power dynamics. Addressing these demands more than legal action; it requires robust and sustained development by improving the state's physical and social infrastructure. Only such development will bring societal change to uphold gender equality and human rights.

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Public Policy Research Centre PPRC

**PP66, Dr Mookerjee Smruti Nyas, Subramania Bharti Marg
New Delhi- 110003**

T: 011-23381844 E: contact@pprc.in W: www.pprc.in

 PPRCIndia  @PPRCIndia