

# NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

## BJP trying to add illegal voters from outside to Bengal electoral rolls: Mamata

**KOLKATA, MAR 31:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday alleged that the BJP was trying to include illegal voters from NDA-ruled Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh in the electoral rolls of the state to turn the poll outcome in favour of the saffron party.

Addressing an election rally in Paschim Medinipur's Chandrakona, Banerjee also reiterated her plea before the gathering to ignore who the TMC candidates in the state's assembly segments were and consider her as the candidate in all 294 seats.

"I was informed by Abhishek (Banerjee) yesterday that he had to rush to the EC office in Kolkata from the middle of his campaign schedule upon receiving information that about 30,000 forms were submitted in a single day to include fresh voters," the TMC supremo said.

"The BJP is trying to include illegal voters from Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh in the electoral rolls of Bengal. They are planning to transport outstation voters by means of railways, as they did in Bihar, and get them to poll in seats of Asansol and Kharagpur," she alleged.

Banerjee's allegation came on a day the TMC supremo shot a strongly-worded letter to Chief Election Commissioner, Gyanesh Kumar, stating that the Form 6 applications, pertaining to "not genuine residents of Bengal having no legitimate connection to the state", are "illegal, unconstitutional and fundamentally undemocratic, reflecting mala fide intent and ill motive".

If the BJP tries to "squeeze in illegal voters from outside"



in Bengal's electoral rolls, people will resist, she said.

"It will not get a single vote because the people of Bengal know that the saffron party has implemented this trick in states like Bihar and Maharashtra and got away with it because the opposition there failed to understand the ploy," Banerjee said at her second poll rally of the day in Garbeta.

She alleged that the BJP had "no respect" for Bengal and its people.

Addressing another poll rally in Bankura's Bishnupur, the TMC supremo claimed, "The BJP is a barbaric party. It tortures Bengali-speaking migrants and shoves TMC MPs in police lock-ups when they protest."

The saffron party is "jealous of Bengali youths' intellect, their professional success, cultural superiority", she alleged.

Banerjee also added, "The BJP leaders hate me because they know, unlike others, I can't be bought over."

The chief minister, while addressing the Garbeta public meeting, accused the saffron party of colluding with the Election Commission and deleting names of women and minorities from

the state's electoral rolls in the garb of the Special Intensive Revision exercise.

"It broke my heart to see the pictures of mothers and sisters belonging to Hindu, tribal, Muslim and scheduled caste communities, as well as elderly citizens, standing in queues once again to appeal before tribunals after their names were deleted from the SIR rolls. SIR means 'sarvanash' (devastation)," she said.

Banerjee claimed that it was her legal challenge before the Supreme Court that made the EC add 22 lakh names to the rolls.

On 18 lakh deletions from supplementary lists, Banerjee alleged, "The BJP and the EC are snatching the citizenship, constitutional and democratic rights of people. We will fight them every inch of the way."

According to the post-SIR electoral rolls, released on February 28, 63.66 lakh names, around 8.3 per cent of the electorate, have been deleted since the roll revision process began in November last year, reducing the voter base from about 7.66 crore to just over 7.04 crore.

In addition, over 60.06 lakh electors have been

placed in the "under adjudication" category, and following judicial scrutiny, the EC has been releasing supplementary lists containing names from that segment.

At the Garbeta rally, the CM claimed that "the BJP would have deleted 5 crore names" from Bengal's electoral rolls had her party not fought back.

"Forget who your TMC candidate is in your respective constituencies, consider me your candidate in all 294 seats of the state," she told the gathering.

Maintaining that the BJP would impose "ban on non-veg food consumption" of Bengalis if it comes to power in the state, the CM said the TMC would thwart the "Centre's attempts to implement NRC in the state through a backdoor" and "its plans of sending targeted citizens to detention camps".

"Beware of the BJP. They will curb your choice of food, as they have done in other BJP-ruled states," Banerjee said.

"There will be no detention camps and no NRC in Bengal as long as we are in power," the TMC supremo added.

She also slammed the BJP for releasing a 'charge sheet' against her government last week.

"Why shouldn't the BJP be chargesheeted for deleting lakhs of genuine voters, engineering riots and stopping Bengal's legitimate funds," the TMC chief said in Bankura.

Banerjee said that it was time to topple the BJP-led central government, which, she alleged, has politicised all statutory and constitutional bodies of the country, depriving citizens of their recourse to rights and justice.

## Nalanda University's revival symbol of commitment to re-establish its glory in modern form: Murmu

**RAJGIR (BIHAR), MAR 31:** President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday said the revival of Nalanda University is a symbol of national and international commitment to re-establish its glorious heritage in a modern setting.

Addressing the convocation ceremony of the university here, she said the ancient Nalanda university had established itself as a great centre of knowledge for about eight centuries, and its fall was a very big loss not only for India but for the entire world.

"Its revival is a symbol of national and international commitment to re-establish the university's glorious heritage in a modern setting," Murmu said.



Conferring degrees to the graduates, the President said the students of the institute receive a "shared inheritance" of humanity.

While the degree is their personal achievement, the heritage of humanity they inherit here is a shared one," Murmu added.

She expressed happiness that over half of the graduating students this year com-

prised students from more than 30 countries.

On the occasion of Mahavir Jayanti, the President said, "Lord Mahavir and the Buddha spread the message of non-violence, compassion and love to the entire humanity from this region of Bihar." She also took part in a tree-planting event before the convocation ceremony, and praised the university's commitment towards achieving the goal of net-zero emissions.

"This campus reflects a commitment to sustainability in its journey towards becoming a net-zero campus. Institutions of higher learning must definitely lead by example," Murmu added. (Agencies)

## 'Nation Was Sold A Half-Baked Scheme: Rahul Slams Govt On Smart Cities Mission

**NEW DELHI, MAR 31:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi attacked the Modi government on Tuesday over its Smart Cities Mission, alleging the scheme's objective was never to develop the entire city and the nation was sold a "half-baked scheme", packaged as a narrative of total transformation.

The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said this scheme serves as a prime example of the Modi government's "true modus operandi" — grand announcements, even grander publicity, and zero accountability.

"No city can truly be 'smart' if it fails to provide its citizens with basic dignity — clean water, clean air, and safety. You surely remember the Modi government's Smart Cities Mission — a scheme the Prime Minister never tired of lauding with extravagant praise!" Gandhi said in a post on his WhatsApp channel.

"Now that this scheme is nearing its conclusion, I sought an account from the government in Parliament regarding its actual outcomes. And the truth that emerged can be described as nothing short of a deception: the objective of this scheme was never, in fact, to develop the entire city," he said. The nation was sold a half-baked scheme, packaged as a narrative of total transformation, Gandhi said.

Gandhi pointed out that the questions he asked were — what constitutes a 'Smart City', on what basis was success determined, how many cities were truly transformed and what tangible changes occurred in people's lives.

Gandhi claimed that no



clear answers were received. "We were merely informed that approximately Rs 48,000 crore had been spent, and that 97% of the projects were deemed 'complete'. But if everything is indeed complete, then what exactly has changed in your city? "The reality on the ground tells a very different story: Deaths are occurring due to contaminated water and open sewers; Collapsing bridges and caving roads further expose the magnitude of this failure," he said.

"This scheme serves as a prime example of the Modi government's true modus operandi: grand announcements, even grander publicity, and zero accountability," Gandhi said and urged people to search for their city in the list and judge for themselves.

"Is this truly the 'Smart City' the very dream that was sold to you?" Gandhi said. His remarks come days after he posed questions in the Lok Sabha to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on the Smart Cities Mission (SCM). In his questions, Gandhi asked what is the total amount of funds sanctioned, released and utilised under the Smart Cities Mission (SCM) since its incep-

tion, city-wise; and the details of the measurable indicators used to assess overall achievement of the said Mission at the national level as well as the details of the Mission's performance thereon.

Gandhi also asked what measurable indicators were used for determining whether a city was successfully converted into a Smart City and the number of cities that had met this criteria. He had also asked whether the Government maintains any comparative assessment of cities based on these indicators and if so, the list of ten highest performing cities; and whether any independent assessment has been conducted to evaluate the impact of the said Mission in improving urban infrastructure, sustainability and quality of life and if so, the findings thereof. Gandhi asked whether the government considers the hundred cities selected under the said Mission to be Smart Cities now and if so, the criteria on which such assessment is based.

In his reply, Minister of State in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs Tokhan Sahu said that under the Mission, out of Central Government's allocation of

Rs 48,000 crore, the 100 cities selected under the mission have been able to claim Central Financial Assistance of Rs 47,458 Crore (i.e. 99% of the total Central share allocation for cities).

"As reported by the States/UTs, as on 01.03.2026, an amount of Rs 46,326 crore has been utilized (i.e. 98% of the total Central Financial Assistance released for the cities). Under SCM, a total 8,064 projects amounting to Rs 1,64,811 crore were taken up since inception of the mission, out of which 7,784 projects (97% of total projects undertaken) worth Rs 1,56,159 Crore have been completed and 280 projects amounting to Rs 8,652 Cr are at implementation stage," Sahu said.

The minister further said the objective of SCM was not the development of entire city but to follow an area-based development approach through retrofitting, redevelopment, greenfield development and a pan-city initiative in which smart solutions are applied covering larger parts of the city, so as to create a replicable model.

"NITI Aayog in its report titled 'Evaluation of Centrally Sponsored Schemes in Urban Transformation Sector and Skill Development' published in September 2025, has concluded that the SCM Mission has demonstrated strong relevance to India's Urban needs, with its objectives aligning with national development agendas and SDGs," he said.

Sahu also shared city/UT wise details of Central Financial Assistance claimed, utilised and status of projects under SCM. (Agencies)

## Surjewala Slams Modi Govt Over Price Rise

**BENGALURU, Mar 31:** Congress general secretary and Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala on Tuesday attacked the Centre over price rise, alleging that April 1 has become "a day of loot, rob and fleece" under the BJP-led central government, impacting the lives and livelihoods of people across Karnataka and the country.

Addressing a press conference here, he said the surge in prices of essential commodities, fuel, medicines and services had placed an unbearable burden on the common man, and accused the BJP of using inflation as a tool to "swindle, plunder and burglarise" public money.

"April 1 has become a day of loot, rob and fleece for the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led central government and the BJP," the Rajya Sabha member said.

Surjewala alleged that rising toll collections reflected what he termed as "highway robbery", claiming that the Centre had collected massive



revenues from Karnataka alone over the years.

"Since 2019-20 till today, Modi government and BJP has collected Rs 23,000 crore by pickpocketing the pockets of people of Karnataka alone," the MP said, and said that toll charges would be further increased by about five per cent from April 1.

Citing the Bengaluru-Mysuru highway as an example, he claimed that toll was collected even before completion of the project.

"They collected Rs 900

crore already from only Bengaluru-Mysuru Highway," Surjewala further accused the Centre of burdening patients by increasing the cost of medicines, stating that prices of hundreds of essential drugs would rise from April 1.

"Starting tomorrow, April 1, 2026, Modi government is hiking the price of 900 essential drugs and medicines," the Congress leader said, adding that even life-saving drugs and treatments for diseases such as diabetes and hypertension would be-

come costlier.

Surjewala also pointed to rising input costs in sectors such as construction, petrochemicals and consumer goods, and alleged that the increase in prices of materials like steel, cement, PVC and bitumen would directly hit housing and infrastructure development.

"What will the common man do? Where will he go?" he asked. Highlighting the rise in fuel and transport-related expenses, Surjewala said LPG prices had sharply increased over the years and alleged that airfare and other travel costs were also on the rise.

He further criticised the hike in postal charges, saying, "the speed post rates have gone up by 34 per cent." Demanding accountability, he said the Prime Minister and BJP leadership must respond to the issue of inflation before seeking votes in various states, asserting that the continued price rise was adversely affecting every section of society. (AGENCIES)

## CAG report flags 'excess expenditure' in maintenance of embassy-related properties in Beijing

**NEW DELHI, MAR 31:** A CAG report for the year ended March 2024 has flagged "excess expenditure" in maintenance of some properties linked to the Indian Embassy in Beijing, China, according to an official statement issued on Monday.

Report No. 36 of 2025 of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India for the year ended March 2024, Union Government (Compliance Audit — Civil & Commercial), was tabled in Parliament on Monday, it said.

The report covers significant audit findings arising from the "compliance audit" of financial transactions relating to 29 ministries (excluding Union Territories without legislatures) and five constitutional bodies under the Union government secretariat.

The CAG said that though the Embassy

of India in China incurred "significant expenditure" on repairs and maintenance of 16 residential units constructed in 2011 in the New Chancery Premises, six units had become uninhabitable within 10-13 years.

"Delay in carrying out necessary comprehensive repairs/renovation of these six vacant units resulted in avoidable rental outgo of Rs 3.22 crore (up to February 2025)," it said.

The mission also continued to pay heating charges for the Old Chancery Premises, which was not in use since 2014, leading to "wasteful expenditure of Rs 74 lakh during the period 2015-16 to 2024-25," the statement said.

Additionally, the Embassy of India in Copenhagen, Denmark, had "not adhered to the rental ceiling fixed by the Ministry of External Affairs" for leased accommodation for its officials, resulting in excess ex-

penditure of Rs 99.12 lakh, it said.

The statement further said that a "delay" by both the Embassy of India in Tel Aviv, Israel and the Ministry of External Affairs in undertaking pre-acquisition activities and according administrative approval and financial sanction for acquisition within the extended timeline led to the "termination of the deal and thereby, rendered expenditure of Rs 92.01 lakh towards professional/legal services associated to pre-acquisition activities unfruitful".

The audit body also noted that the MEA "retained the unutilised space at Akbar Bhawan, New Delhi for 15 months without formalising pro-rata licence fees" with the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC), resulting in "excess expenditure of Rs 27.43 crore towards licence fee for unutilised space".

## BSP Govt Essential For Effective Implementation Of Reservation: Mayawati

**LUCKNOW, MAR 31:** BSP chief Mayawati on Tuesday said effective implementation of reservation policies for Dalits, tribals and backward classes is not possible without a "Bahujan government", while accusing ruling governments of weakening these provisions.

Addressing a meeting of party office-bearers at the BSP state office here, the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister alleged that both central and state governments were making reservation "ineffective and inactive".

"Without a government of the Bahujan Samaj, it is impossible to implement reservation with the right intent and policy," she said, strongly criticising what she termed as dilution of constitutional safeguards meant for marginalised communi-



ties. According to a BSP statement, Mayawati also hit out at the government over what she described as reliance on "hollow slogans" instead of addressing pressing issues like unemployment and poverty.

She stated that the situation of "roti-rozi" (livelihood) in a large and economically backward state like Uttar Pradesh was worsening, while governments were at-

tempting to address people's hardships through "rhetoric and promises".

"It is unfortunate that governments are trying to tackle hunger, poverty and unemployment through slogans and announcements," she said. The BSP supremo stressed that "self-reliance cannot remain just a slogan" and must be implemented with sincerity to ensure employment for all and improve

the lives of the Bahujan community.

She also questioned whether excessive dependence on the private sector could lead to true self-reliance, calling for serious deliberation on the issue. Highlighting rising prices amid global developments, including tensions in West Asia, Mayawati said increasing costs of fuel and essential commodities were aggravating the problems of the poor and working classes.

She urged the government to take effective measures to control inflation and prevent a crisis similar to demonetisation and the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayawati further said that development in the country was not inclusive, alleging that it was limited to "a handful of ruling elites" and did not benefit the larger population.