

# BJP wins state landslide in boost for Modi

## Victory in opposition heartland of West Bengal strengthens PM's position

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NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party has won a historic landslide victory in an opposition stronghold, boosting the standing of India's leader as he grapples with the growing economic challenges from the US war on Iran.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party was triumphant after official results showed it on course to unseat veteran chief minister Mamata Banerjee of the leftwing

Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal. Banerjee, one of the most powerful women in Indian politics, has run the state for the past 15 years.

By 7.15pm local time, the Election Commission of India website showed the BJP was leading or had won in 204 of West Bengal's 294 state assembly constituencies, up from just 77 at the previous election in 2021.

"The Lotus blooms in West Bengal!" Modi wrote in a triumphant post on social media site X that referenced the BJP's party symbol. The election would "be remembered forever", the prime minister added.

"This is a sweep for the BJP in Bengal," said Rahul Verma, a fellow at the Centre

for Policy Research think-tank. "This means the eastern part of India is now under the BJP's control, which weakens the opposition nationally."

West Bengal was one of five regions declaring election results yesterday. In north-eastern Assam, India's fastest-growing state, early results showed the BJP gaining enough seats to dispense with coalition partners and form a government on its own.

In the southern state of Kerala, a Communist-led coalition appeared to have lost to the main opposition Congress party, putting Marxists out of power in all of India's territories for the first time in decades. The other two elections were won by regional parties.

The victories in West Bengal and Assam strengthen Modi's position as he grapples with economic pressures triggered by the Iran war.

The government has held down fuel prices and ordered refineries to step up domestic production of liquefied petroleum gas, widely used for cooking in India. But the rupee has plunged to a record low as officials warned that higher inflation could hit economic demand.

The West Bengal win followed a bitter campaign overshadowed by changes to voter rolls, which the opposition said favoured the Hindu nationalist BJP.

The election commission removed about 9mn names from the rolls, saying

this was necessary to eliminate duplicate entries and illegal migrants mainly from Muslim-majority Bangladesh. Senior BJP members, including Modi's home affairs minister Amit Shah, had called the migrants "infiltrators".

Banerjee told reporters in Kolkata that the BJP had won "an immoral victory", accusing the electoral commission and Shah of having acted in a way that was "totally illegal".

The victory widens Modi's support beyond his traditional strongholds in the Hindu belt of northern and western India. West Bengal has more than 90mn people and 42 seats, the joint third-largest contingent from any state in the lower house of parliament, Lok Sabha.