

Cockroach leaders freed from detention



PHOTO: AP

Security personnel detain a protester during a youth demonstration demanding the resignation of the country's election chief Gyanesh Kumar, in New Delhi, India, Sunday, Oct. 11, 2026.

AP
New Delhi, Oct. 11

Leaders of a popular Indian youth movement vowed to continue protests Sunday after being released from detention, a day after police cracked down on demonstrations against a controversial revision of voter lists. The movement is demanding the resignation of the country's election chief.

The protests were triggered after authorities removed more than 130 million voters from the list since last year. Critics say the move is politically motivated. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and the Election Commission deny manipulation allegations.

The Cockroach Janata Party's three leaders — Abhijeet Dipke, Saurav Das and Ashutosh Ranka — were freed on condition that they commit "no breach of peace for one year." Ratna Singh, the movement's legal director, said in a social media post. It was unclear what the condition meant or whether it would restrict their participation in protests.

Police boarded the leaders' flight from Mumbai after it landed in New Delhi on Saturday and took them into custody as they prepared to lead a demonstration in New Delhi.

After his release, Dipke called Modi

"an embarrassment to India."

"Never has this country seen a bigger coward and bully," he wrote on X.

Das, a spokesperson for the movement, urged supporters to take to the streets. "A situation has been created where the state is at war with its own citizens," he told reporters Sunday.

Following Saturday's protests, authorities launched a sweeping security crackdown in the capital, detaining more than 2,000 protesters, including several opposition lawmakers. Train services to the capital were canceled, metro stations closed and mobile internet suspended in parts of the city.

Most of those detained were released late Saturday, police said.

Protesters are demanding the resignation of Gyanesh Kumar, the chief election commissioner. Modi's party has said the voter revision is needed to eliminate duplicate and ineligible entries.

The Cockroach movement began as an online satirical campaign this summer after India's chief justice compared unemployed young people to parasites.

Many young Indians embraced the remark, adopting the cockroach as a symbol of resilience.

Protests led by the group forced the resignation of Modi's education minister in July, a rare setback for the prime minister, who has been in power for more than 12 years.