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After the I-PAC raid, West Bengal's political theatre enters a more dangerous act

The ED raid provided the stage for Mamata's "street fighter" comeback, shifting focus from graft to a constitutional clash.

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Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee leads a march in Kolkata on January 9 against the previous day's ED raid on I-PAC premises. | Photo Credit: DEBASISH BHADURI

In West Bengal politics, history repeats itself neither as a tragedy at first, nor as a farce subsequently; it is simply a continuation of a pattern that has become predictable by its occurrence year after year, election after election. The simmering feud between the State government and the Centre bubbles forth to the surface, almost like clockwork, before every important election, making a mockery of the provisions of the Constitution and the rule of law.

This time, the tipping point ahead of the West Bengal Assembly election was the Enforcement Directorate's raid on I-PAC premises and the residence of its co-founder and director Pratik Jain on January 8. The agency has been working as the Trinamool Congress' election strategist since 2019. The episode was followed by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's personal intervention against the ED action. The situation was exacerbated by the ED moving the High court, and subsequently the Supreme Court, against the Chief Minister.

The ED raid in connection with a coal-smuggling case inflamed a situation that was already volatile with intense political jousting between the BJP government at the Centre and West Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress over the Election Commission's handling of the **Special Intensive Revision** (SIR) of electoral rolls. The Chief Minister was seen storming into the I-PAC office, accompanied by top bureaucrats and police officers; she allegedly interfered with the raid. ED personnel appeared to stand by and watch helplessly.