

# Denial and Damage Control: What the I-PAC Pause Row Could Mean For TMC - The Wire

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**Kolkata:** In politics, a story often acquires real weight the moment it is denied. That is what unfolded on April 19 in West Bengal, after a report that the poll consultancy firm I-PAC had paused operations in the state triggered an immediate rebuttal from the Trinamool Congress, followed by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's public assurance that those affected would be protected.

On Sunday morning, [Deccan Herald](#) reported that the Indian Political Action Committee, or I-PAC, had asked its employees in West Bengal to stop work and go on a 20-day leave, citing "legal obligations". With polling due on April 23 and 29, the report landed at the most sensitive point in the campaign and set off immediate political tremors.

Within hours, the TMC issued a formal denial. The party called the claim "completely baseless" and said it was a deliberate attempt to create confusion and disrupt its campaign. It insisted that the I-PAC West Bengal team remained fully engaged with the AITC and that campaign operations were continuing as planned. The party also said Bengal would not be "swayed by misinformation or intimidation".

But the matter did not end with the denial. Later in the day, CM Banerjee took the issue head-on at a rally in Tarakeswar, Hooghly, and signalled that the party was preparing for disruption. Without naming I-PAC directly, she said those working for her party were being pressured to leave Bengal.

"They raid us through the ED [Enforcement Directorate] every day. Suddenly, during elections, they remembered all this? They are telling those who work for our party to leave West Bengal. They have 50 organisations. We have only one," she said. "If they are threatened, they will join us. We will give them jobs. I will not allow even one boy to lose his job."

Yet even as the leadership denied any rupture, accounts from the ground suggested that something had shifted.

A young I-PAC ground associate in his early twenties said the first word came through a WhatsApp group on the morning of April 19. The message, he said, instructed them "to stop all sorts of activities on the ground. The official communication would follow soon."

He said he was stunned. "23rd April is the polling day here. We were surprised to get this message and later an e-mail stating the same," he said.

Workers like him earn around Rs 15,000 a month and perform politically crucial work such as door-to-door surveys, local mood assessment and daily reporting to superiors. Another junior worker from a nearby district said he had no explanation for what happened. "I didn't understand what happened. But I am a junior worker and we are the ones who actually do the legwork," he said. He added that he was surprised but would possibly need to wait till the results were announced to understand what was really happening.



Not everyone inside I-PAC, however, claimed surprise. Two associates from Kolkata said they had seen the crisis coming. “I knew it was coming,” one said. Asked why, he replied, “Actually, I-PAC here has become a political unit and it did not maintain the internal transparency that it is able to maintain with other clients.” Another was blunt, “Developing a campaign strategy and dictating campaigns and media activity are not the same. I know that in place of I-PAC in-charge, it is a political big-gun who calls the shots.”

That assessment goes to the heart of Bengal’s present political crisis. Over the past few years, I-PAC has come to resemble the strategic nerve centre of the Trinamool Congress itself. The company has effectively acted as a buffer between the leadership of Mamata Banerjee and her nephew Abhishek, and entrenched local power centres. It allowed the high command to bypass factional pressures, impose discipline and centralise political decision-making. Its role has stretched from surveys and messaging to candidate management, digital mobilisation, booth supervision and real-time election-day coordination.

Former TMC Rajya Sabha MP Jawhar Sircar likened the I-PAC in Bengal to a “parallel TMC.”

“It is unaccountable but its personnel are there in every block, panchayat, municipality, sub-division, district, etc as a shadowy KGB type apparatus. Initially, field functionaries of the TMC were cut up — some were quite hostile — but as politicians they know how to ‘manage’ I-PAC foot soldiers so they can send back good feedback about them. I-PAC must surely be knowing the massive corruption of TMC cadres but Abhishek Banerjee used it as an information gathering organisation and to purge those who were or are not loyal to him. I-PAC must be costing hundreds of crores but as long as it helps the top duo keep their stranglehold on the vast pyramid of the TMC cadres, it is hunky dory,” Sircar said.

Its importance becomes even sharper in the final days before polling.

At this stage of the election, I-PAC’s booth-management systems are central to tracking turnout, processing ground reports, escalating complaints and coordinating rapid responses. Any disruption in that chain could prove costly. With one director in custody, another reportedly summoned, and the organisation under sustained enforcement pressure, the TMC risks losing the technical and legal machinery it would need at a critical juncture, with the ECI already viewed by the party as openly hostile.

The apprehension among employees appears to have grown in stages. Several said alarm bells rang when top I-PAC figure Pratik Jain’s Kolkata home was raided. On January 8, the Enforcement Directorate raided I-PAC’s Salt Lake office and Jain’s Loudon Street residence. CM Banerjee, who reached the spot during the operation, alleged that the real aim was to seize crucial election-strategy documents. The dispute has since escalated into a legal battle now before the Supreme Court.

The situation became more sensitive after I-PAC co-founder Vinesh Chandel was arrested by the ED on April 13 in the coal scam case. Abhishek Banerjee described the arrest as “not democracy” but “intimidation”.

There is a growing sense that, given the pattern of ED action, I-PAC’s headquarters could face another

raid at any point, making the protection of internal systems, computers and sensitive electoral data an urgent concern. TMC's field surveys, district-wise voter data and candidate calculations are reportedly stored in I-PAC's systems. Seen in that light, the move by I-PAC to halt operations looks less like an abrupt rupture and more like a pre-emptive safeguard.

The immediate concern, however, is operational. I-PAC personnel are directly involved in implementing election strategy across all 294 assembly constituencies. If these workers stop reporting to offices or are unable to continue direct field engagement, the pace of campaign execution could slow sharply.

A former Kolkata Police Commissioner drew a sharp distinction between the public line and the internal reality. "You must have seen that the AITC has issued a statement denying the media reports. Actually, it is trying to keep up the spirit of their workers and voters. This is a nerve-game or pressure tactic. As far as I know, they have halted their activities," he said. "Though they did not disengage themselves as the TMC strategists yet," he added.

A TMC MP sought to cast the entire controversy as psychological warfare. "BJP knew well that they would not win. So, to break our confidence, they are spreading this propaganda," the MP said.

A party functionary from South 24 Parganas struck a more defiant note. "We are ready. Modi and Shah along with Gyanesh Kumar hatched this plan to halt I-PAC activities, but we are fighters. They won't be able to break our confidence like this," he said.

Yet on the ground, the signs of dislocation are difficult to ignore. I-PAC associates have reportedly checked out of their hotels and shifted to other accommodation.

The crisis has broken open at the worst possible time for the TMC, because it comes on top of internal anger over ticket distribution.

Across Bengal, denial of renomination has set off protests by outgoing MLAs and their supporters. That anger is now spilling directly into accusations against I-PAC.

In Purba Bardhaman's Purbasthali Uttar, MLA Tapan Chattopadhyay, who has been denied a ticket, has alleged that [I-PAC sought Rs 20 lakh from him](#). According to his claim, those who paid have got tickets. In Murshidabad's Jalangi, former MLA Abdur Razzak Mondal quit the party after being denied a ticket and alleged that [I-PAC had tried, in different ways, to extract money from him](#).

These remain allegations by aggrieved leaders, not established findings. But politically, they are corrosive. They fit neatly into a growing narrative inside sections of the TMC that I-PAC had become too powerful, too opaque and too deeply enmeshed in ticket distribution and internal power equations.

That is also what makes the current disruption so potentially destabilising.

Publicly, the TMC is still insisting there is no rupture, no retreat and no loss of control. But the sequence has told its own story. First came the report that I-PAC had stepped back. Then came the denial. Then came Mamata Banerjee's assurance that anyone hit by the fallout would be protected and reinstated.

With the Bengal election entering its decisive phase, the real question is no longer whether I-PAC has become synonymous with the TMC's campaign machine, but whether that machine can still run under fire.