

Darjeeling deadlock: On elusive peace

The 104-day shutdown in the Darjeeling hills called by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) may have been [lifted in late September](#), but peace remains elusive. A host of factors is responsible for this, not least the sparring between the Centre and the West Bengal government over who should determine the next steps. That they are not on the same page was evident in the way the deployment of troops in the region was handled. On October 15, the Union Home Ministry wrote to the State government that it was [calling back 10 of the 15 companies](#) of the Central Armed Police Forces posted in the hills. In response, two days later Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee moved the Calcutta High Court and [got a stay](#). What is more worrying is that the situation on the ground remains tense and fluid. GJM chief [Bimal Gurung is on the run](#). While the announcement to end the shutdown had come from him after the Centre appealed to protesters and offered to talk, the State government has raided his properties, lodged several cases against him, including for misappropriation of funds and triggering violence. It has issued an arrest warrant against Mr. Gurung and declared him a “proclaimed offender”. In an attempt to exploit differences within the GJM, the State government propped up rebel Gorkha leader Binoy Tamang, naming him chief of a new board of administrators to head the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, which had been set up in 2012 as a semi-autonomous body. Mr. Tamang’s elevation has divided GJM followers. Ms. Banerjee has also been holding all-party meetings — the next one is to be on November 21 in Darjeeling — to arrive at a solution, with the GJM represented by the rebel faction.

With peace yet to be restored fully, the Central and State governments need to urgently sink their differences, hold tripartite talks and meaningfully empower the GTA. The economy of the Darjeeling hills has taken a severe hit with both the tea and tourism industries having suffered huge losses and struggling to chart a way out. The tea industry, for example, lost almost all its second flush crop, with losses estimated at 400 crore and counting. With uncertainty prevailing in the hills and winter setting in, there is anxiety over whether the gardens will be ready for the premium first flush crop which is harvested between February and April. Tourists have begun to trickle back, but the peak season is over. With the West Bengal government looking to be in no mood to talk to Mr. Gurung, the political crisis is far from over. It was Ms. Banerjee’s initial statement that Bengali would be made compulsory in the State, including in the hills, that revived the Gorkhaland stir. She later retracted it — but securing the peace will take a more conciliatory attitude by all stakeholders — the Centre, the State government and the GJM factions.

Rajasthan’s ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

END

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](#)

© **Zuccess App** by [crackIAS.com](#)