

+ SHASHI THAROOR ON WHO WRITES THE PAST
BJP AFTER BENGAL VERDICT • THE POLITICS OF AUSTERITY

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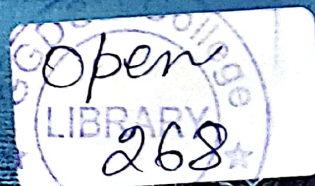
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*A Taste of
the Steppe*

*Guide Me,
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Buddha on the Lake

Divine Detours



Kitsch Is Cool

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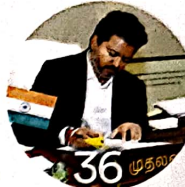


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OPEN MAIL

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LETTER OF THE WEEK

The recent political developments across several states, especially West Bengal, suggest that BJP has entered a new phase of confidence and maturity ('Racing to 2029', May 18, 2026). What stands out is not merely its electoral performance but the way the party has worked to connect with local traditions and cultural identities instead of relying only on slogans or national messaging. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has shown that leadership is also about understanding people in their everyday lives—whether through simple public interactions, visits to places of spiritual importance, or speaking about issues that matter to ordinary families. This approach appears to have strengthened the party's acceptance in regions where it was once viewed with hesitation. At the same time, voters seem increasingly focused on security, development, employment and honest governance rather than old political narratives. BJP's recent gains suggest many citizens now see it as a party capable of combining national vision with regional respect. If this momentum continues, it may reshape political debates in many parts of India.

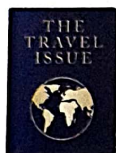
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On the Cover
Gurudongmar Lake
in Sikkim

FALL OF THE LEFT

The Left's defeat in Kerala marks a turning point for CPM and its allies ('Lonely Exit', May 18, 2026). With no state now under its control, the Left faces uncomfortable questions about its relevance in today's political landscape. Once a strong force with deep grassroots networks, it now appears to be struggling to connect with a changing electorate. This loss is not just electoral; it reflects a larger failure to adapt. The party's messaging often feels dated, and its leadership has not kept pace with new political realities. At the same time, rivals have expanded their reach, leaving little room for the Left to recover quickly. The road ahead looks difficult, and unless it reinvents itself, the risk is not just decline but gradual disappearance from mainstream politics. Without a clear reset, this moment could mark the beginning of a long

political isolation for the Left.

Jeevi N Krishnan

VIOLENT BENGAL

The killing of Chandranath Rath, an aide to Suwendu Adhikari, and the fresh wave of post-poll violence in West Bengal once again underlined the fragile law and order in the state ('Blood in Bengal', May 18, 2026). Elections in Bengal have long been marked by tension, but the persistence of violence raises serious concerns about whether the cycle has been normalised. What is worrying is not just the incident itself but the pattern it fits into. Political rivalry continues to spill onto the streets, with little sign of restraint from any side. This creates an atmosphere of fear that goes beyond party lines and affects ordinary citizens. If such violence continues unchecked, it risks becoming an accepted part of

the political process, weakening democratic norms and public trust in institutions.

Sandeep Ghosh

TURNING POINT

The results of the Tamil Nadu election mark one of the biggest political changes in the state's modern history ('Sun Sets on Dravidianism', May 18, 2026). For decades, voters largely chose between two established Dravidian parties, DMK and AIADMK, but this election shows people now want something different. The rise of Vijay and TVK reflects a demand for cleaner politics and a sharper focus on jobs and opportunity. Identity politics and old slogans no longer appear adequate. Tamil Nadu has always shaped its own political future, and this election may prove to be another turning point.

Harini Raman