

# [***India's main opposition party says tax authorities have frozen its funds, weeks before nationwide election***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BBM-P221-JBSS-S0BF-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

New Delhi (CNN) &#8212; India's main opposition party, the Indian National Congress, said Friday that its bank accounts had been frozen by federal tax authorities, just weeks before an expected nationwide election.

Authorities later temporarily restored access to the accounts, the party said, but not before the move drew widespread criticism from the Congress and its allies, who accused the government of conducting an attack on democracy.

Congress Treasurer Ajay Maken told a news conference the accounts had been frozen after an investigation of the party's income tax returns for the 2018-19 financial year. He added that the Income Tax Department had issued a payment demand for 2.1 billion rupees ($25.3 million) in connection to the ongoing probe.

"The Congress party's bank accounts haven't been frozen. It's the democracy that has been frozen," Maken said. "Will there be only a one party system in this country?"

Later on Friday, an income tex tribunal granted the party temporary access to its accounts ahead of a hearing Wednesday, lawyer and Congress lawmaker Vivek Tankha confirmed to CNN.

CNN has reached out to India's Income Tax Department and Finance Ministry, and multiple leaders within the Congress party for further comment.

On Friday, Congress supporters gathered in Delhi's iconic Jantar Mantar area to protest the action, as party chief Mallikarjun Kharge called on the judiciary to "save the multi-party system in this country and protect India's Democracy."

Allies of the Congress party have repeatedly claimed democracy is being stifled in India, with Friday's case the latest in a series of investigations targeting prominent opponents of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Former Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, the scion of a political dynasty that produced three prime ministers, was last year disqualified as a lawmaker, and handed a two-year jail sentence for defamation, in a ruling his supporters say was politically motivated. Gandhi was later reinstated as a lawmaker following an intervention from India's Supreme Court.

Gandhi on Friday said his party will "fight tooth and nail" to protect India's democracy.

"We have never bowed down before dictatorship, nor will we ever bow down," he wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

The Congress party, a once formidable force in Indian ***politics***, has been languishing in the polls since Modi rose to power a decade ago with the promise of economic growth and a prosperous society for all.

The Congress Party attempted to form an alliance of opposition groups in a bid to unseat Modi's BJP in the upcoming election. But that alliance is already starting to see cracks emerge as support for the BJP surges, just weeks before an estimated 900 million Indians are expected to head to the polls.

Often called the world's largest experiment in democracy, the Indian election comes at a crucial time for the country, as it gains prominence on the world stage with Modi presenting himself as a statesman who is cementing the South Asian nation as a modern superpower.

But tensions are running high at home, with minorities feeling sidelined under the BJP's majoritarian Hindu nationalist policies.

In its most recent gauge of voter sentiment, the Congress Party lost three out of four regional votes in key state elections in December, giving a boost to Modi and his BJP.

This is a developing story. More to follow...

By Rhea Mogu, Vedika Sud and Aishwarya S Iyer, CNN

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