

Intellectuals meet West Bengal poll panel over Nandigram

Ahead of panchayat polls in West Bengal, a group of city-based intellectuals Tuesday submitted a memorandum to the state election panel demanding immediate transfer of top officials of Nandigram in order to conduct free and fair elections in the trouble-torn region.

The Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) met the West Bengal Election Commission (WBEC) and demanded transfer of the Nandigram police station officer-in-charge, the East Midnapore district magistrate and police superintendent.

'We met state election commissioner Ashok Gupta and other officials. We have requested them to transfer Nandigram police station officer-in-charge Debashis Chakraborty, East Midnapore police superintendent S.S. Panda and district magistrate Anup Agarwal before the panchayat polls, scheduled to take place May 11 in Nandigram,' APDR member Sujato Bhadro told IANS.

He said: 'We gave a suggestion to the commission to form an independent body, without any political affiliation, which would visit the violence-hit areas in Nandigram during the panchayat polls and submit their report to the commission.'

'We, under the banner of Swajan, are ready to take that responsibility. But the EC must ensure that we will be allowed to move freely around Nandigram to monitor the situation there,' he said.

Swajan is an independent body of civil society formed by a number of eminent intellectuals including filmmaker Aparna Sen, theatre personality Shaonli Mitra and painter Subhaprasanna.

The platform has been launched to voice protests against the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M)-sponsored violence in Nandigram.

With panchayat polls round the corner, violence has reared its head in Nandigram once again. At least four anti-land acquisition Bhumi Uchched Pratirodh Committee (BUPC) members and a CPI-M cadre were seriously injured in clashes in Nandigram block-I Sunday night.

The CPI-M supporters also drove out hundreds of BUPC members from their houses Monday, triggering fresh tension in the area.

'We don't think, if this violence continues in Nandigram, people would be able to freely cast their votes in the panchayat poll. We are extremely concerned about the democratic rights of the people living in the area,' Shaonli Mitra said.

The panchayat elections in West Bengal will be held May 11, 14 and 18. Counting would be taken up May 21.

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