

Intellectuals to monitor panchayat polls at Nandigram

A team of city-based intellectuals will visit West Bengal's trouble-torn Nandigram region to monitor the situation there till Sunday's panchayat elections are over.

The intellectuals, under the banner of Swajan, will visit the region in East Midnapore district Saturday. They met state Election Commissioner Ashok Gupta Thursday and told him about their decision.

'The pre-poll violence in Nandigram is a hint that the people there are not at all safe during the polls. They will be pressurised and even tortured to cast their votes in favour of the ruling party. Hence we have taken this decision. We will take rounds of the booths to ensure that the democratic rights of the people are not violated during the polls,' artist and member Subhaprasanna told IANS Thursday.

'We have been assured by the election commissioner that we will be allowed to move freely around Nandigram during the polls to monitor the situation,' Subhaprasanna said.

The intellectuals had submitted a memorandum to the state poll panel Tuesday demanding immediate transfer of the Nandigram police station officer-in-charge Debashis Chakraborty, East Midnapore district magistrate Anup Agarwal and police superintendent S.S. Panda to ensure fair polls.

They suggested that the commission form an independent body, without any political affiliations, that will visit the violence-hit areas in Nandigram during the panchayat polls and submit their report to the commission.

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

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