

CPI-M routed in Nandigram, Singur panchayat polls

West Bengal's ruling Left Front Wednesday maintained an overall lead in the elections to the local self-government bodies, but the front's dominant partner Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) suffered defeat in several districts, including the troubled areas of Nandigram and Singur, as officials counted the votes.

The front suffered a severe setback in East Midnapore district, besides suffering losses in North 24-Parganas and South 24-Parganas districts. In Midnapore, the CPI-M lost control of the zilla parishad or district council, the top tier of the state's panchayat system, for the first time after an uninterrupted reign of 30 years.

The Nandigram region, which saw violence after protests against the government's abortive bid for land acquisition for a chemical hub, comes under East Midnapore.

The main opposition Trinamool Congress, which spearheaded the agitation in Nandigram, made a clean sweep in the area, besides making impressive gains at Singur in Hooghly district, another flashpoint where the party had mobilized farmers against land acquisition for Tata Motors' small car project.

According to reports till afternoon, the communists' citadels of Burdwan, Purulia and Bankura remained intact, but the ruling coalition was engaged in a neck and neck race with the Congress for control of the zilla parishads (or district councils) in Murshidabad and Malda districts.

During the last elections in 2003, the Congress had won the two zilla parishads, and the Left Front emerged victorious in all other 15 districts.

The CPI-M suffered a further dent in its image as three of the incumbent zilla parishad chiefs, owing allegiance to the party, bit the dust in North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Nadia districts.

In Nandigram, the Trinamool Congress trounced the front in the gram panchayat or village council and panchayat samiti polls, besides winning all the four zilla parishad seats in the area.

At Singur, the Trinamool won by a bigger margin than five years back, but it failed to stretch its gains to other parts of Hooghly district, where the front triumphed.

In North 24-Parganas, the Congress and the Trinamool Congress together were ahead in 27 Zilla Parishad seats, while the front led in 25.

The Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool was also putting up a stubborn fight in South 24-Parganas largely due to its tie-up with the Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI), but the front looked poised to retain control of the zilla parishad.

Nearly 37.5 million rural voters in West Bengal cast their votes at 37,000 polling stations in the panchayat elections held May 11, 14 and 18.

About 51,000 successful candidates will take charge of different positions in the decentralised rural governance that covers over 38,000 villages and rural areas.

West Bengal's three-tier panchayat system comprises Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad.

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