

Bengal polls, future strategies dominate CPI-M meet

The party's defeat in key districts of West Bengal in the local body polls this month and its dilemma over its approach to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's coalition government dominated a meet of the top leaders of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) Thursday.

According to party sources, the first day of the party central committee's meeting saw heated debates over the reasons behind the CPI-M's debacle, especially in Nandigram region and Singur where party members have clashed with protesters against land acquisition for industry for over a year.

While a section of the leaders argued that the police firing on protesters in Nandigram led to the party's humiliating loss there, others including those who support West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee did not agree. They pointed out that the organisation's failure at the district level also contributed to it.

The CPI-M-led Left Front suffered a severe setback in East Midnapore district, besides 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 West Bengal's Panchayat system, for the first time during its uninterrupted 30-year reign of the state.

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

The central committee directed the state unit to study the results in detail and submit its report within a month. The top leadership will discuss the report in its next meeting.

The CPI-M leadership has also initiated discussions over its future strategy, especially with regard to its approach to the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

The party leaders admitted that the CPI-M-led Left parties, which support the UPA government from outside, are in a dilemma over their next step.

"The Left was of the view that it would not be able to continue its support till the government completes its term. We cannot afford going to elections after supporting this government for its full term," a senior CPI-M leader said.

However, the communists are now confused over the next step as the Congress indicated it would like to complete five years in power.

"The Central Committee will have to advise the party on how to tread in the near future," said the leader.

The central committee's discussions will continue Friday.

The CPI-M is expected to toughen its stance against the government's economic policies and its impending move to hike the fuel prices.

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