

## Left parties in Bihar to agitate for land reforms

The Left parties in Bihar plan to launch a state-wide agitation against the Nitish Kumar government's 'failure' to implement land reforms in the state, an official said.

'The left parties will launch an agitation to expose the Nitish Kumar government's failure to implement land reforms to protect the interests of the land mafia,' Jalaluddin Ansari, convenor of the Left Coordination Committee (LCC), told IANS Sunday.

Ansari, a former MP of the Communist Party of India (CPI), said a resolution was adopted at the LCC meeting to launch a statewide agitation to 'expose the Bihar government's double standards'.

The Left's move comes a week after the Nitish Kumar government developed cold feet to implement the much-publicized land reforms in the state.

Ansari said that Left parties would hold a maha-dharna (protest) here Dec 16 to mobilize support for its agitation.

The CPI's base has eroded in Bihar in the last two decades. It once used to be a major political force with strong support in rural areas.

The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) has just a few pockets of influence across the state.

Last month Chief Minister Nitish Kumar assured the upper castes that their lands were safe and his government has no plans to enact a new law to protect sharecroppers.

Ansari said big landholders and land mafia opposed the land reforms proposed by the D. Bandopadhyay Commission report, and had forced Nitish Kumar not to implement the commissions's recommendations.

'Nitish Kumar put off implementation of land reforms to placate the land mafia with an eye to next year's state polls,' Ansari said.

Ansari said Nitish Kumar, Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad and Lok Janshakti Party chief Ram Vilas Paswan were equally to blame for non-implementation of land reforms. 'All three have misled and ignored the landless people,' he said.

In Bihar, members of the upper castes, particularly the powerful Bhumihar and Rajputs, own large tracts of land in rural areas till date despite the rise of backward castes since 1990.

In July, the D. Bandopadhyay Commission on land reforms suggested the state government bring in a new act to protect sharecroppers, besides capping the land ceiling and computerising land records.

Soon after the commission report, a powerful lobby mostly comprising of upper castes and some backward caste people, opposed the move to give land rights to sharecroppers.

It is said that upper caste people voted against Nitish Kumar in the by-elections last month to teach

him a lesson on the issue. The ruling alliance (JD-U and BJP) got just 5 seats, in comparison to the opposition RJD-LJP alliance bagging 9 seats. The Congress won 2 and the BSP and an independent one each.

Nearly 40 percent of Bihar's 83 million people live below the poverty line, the highest in India, according to a World Bank report.

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