

## Nandigram - an embarrassment to CPI-M

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) was isolated Thursday with the opposition, as well as the allies, coming down heavily on it for the violence in West Bengal's Nandigram in which 14 people were killed in police firing Wednesday even as questions were raised about the future of the West Bengal chief minister's reform agenda.

The incident rocked parliament Thursday, leading to repeated adjournments as an isolated Left struggled in vain to justify the police violence in the party-ruled state.

Fourteen locals, who were among those protesting the takeover of agricultural land in Nandigram in West Bengal's Midnapore district for an industrial complex, were killed in police firing Wednesday.

An embarrassed Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), which led the Left Front government in West Bengal, welcomed a Calcutta High Court-ordered CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) probe into the incident, saying that a transparent probe would bring out the truth.

But CPI-M politburo member and Rajya Sabha MP Sitaram Yechury said: 'We are open to any type of enquiry and we think so far only a one-sided CPI-M bashing is being shown - even by the media. We want a CBI enquiry so that the country knows the actual truth.'

'If parliament starts intervening, then what is the sanctity of the rights of the states?' he said.

In a specially convened press conference, CPI-M leader Brinda Karat said: 'The facts should be brought out before the people. We are also interested in that... We are not afraid. Let the truth come out.'

Although the ruling Congress and the opposition were quick to attack the CPI-M, the worst came from its own allies in the Left Front. Describing Wednesday's police action as 'unilateral, tragic and unprecedented,' Communist Party of India (CPI) general secretary A.B. Bardhan said the incident would create a 'deep crisis' in the Left Front.

'It was brutal. The CPI-M should be ready for a discussion on everything. There should be transparency and consultations,' Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) leader Abani Roy said. The Left Front consists of CPI-M, CPI, RSP and Forward Bloc.

The Congress MPs from West Bengal met party president Sonia Gandhi and urged her to take a serious view of the developments in Nandigram. The MPs asked Gandhi to send a senior-level fact finding delegation to the village.

Railway Minister Lalu Prasad said three of his Rashtriya Janata Dal MPs - Vijay Krishna, Alok Mehta and R.K. Rana - would leave Friday for Nandigram to get first-hand information about the incident.

The National Human Rights Commission has also sought an explanation from the state government on the violence.

Both houses were adjourned several times after the opposition and Left parties exchanged heated words while the ruling Congress pointed fingers at the CPI-M-led Left Front for the killings.

'The communists are frauds, they are murderers,' shouted BJP leaders even as Leaders of Opposition in the Lok Sabha L.K. Advani and his counterpart in Rajya Sabha Jaswant Singh sought permission to raise the matter.

Nandigram, just like Singur - another village in West Bengal that was in the headlines after villagers protested the setting up of a special economic zone (SZ) in a farmland - is fast becoming a lightning rod for protests against the communist government's reforms.

Although beleaguered Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said there would not be any going back on the reforms he had initiated in West Bengal, sources among the allies said the CPI-M would be finding it 'hard to pursue its policies unilaterally'.

CPI-M leaders admitted that the incident has disillusioned its grass-root members and the party may have to pay a heavy price for it. 'The communists and police can never join hands against the poor. In Nandigram, it happened,' they said.

'The party may have to pay a huge price for it,' said a CPI-M MP, adding that the party leadership had not able to convince its own cardholders about its reforms agenda.

While the chief minister explained the developments to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh over phone, the home ministry here received a report from the state government on the violence, explaining the circumstances leading to the police firing.

The central government has asked the state to expedite relief measures to the kins of the deceased.

( © IANS / India eNews)