

CPI-M counts the cost of early election

Firm in its resolve not to compromise on the India-US nuclear deal, the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) is quietly counting the cost of early parliamentary elections.

Party sources say that if the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government goes ahead with the nuclear deal, the Left parties led by the CPI-M would have no choice but to withdraw their support to the ruling coalition. This would reduce the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to a minority in the 545-seat Lok Sabha, leading to possible snap elections, since it is the 60 seats of the Left that keeps the UPA in power.

The CPI-M, which feels the nuclear deal will make India a strategic ally of the US, is weighing the pros and cons of such a move because it does not want to be accused of bringing down a government it propped up in May 2004 while refusing to join it. The CPI-M ended this week a party Central Committee meeting in [Kolkata](#) where its leaders managed to overcome their differences over what to do if the government talks to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to make the nuclear deal operational.

However, the party's final declaration did not specify what the party would do vis-a-vis the government after general secretary Prakash Karat was prevailed upon not to make the CPI-M's thinking public when the Left was in talks with the government on the nuclear row.

CPI-M sources say while the Left strength in parliament would certainly dip after a new election, it would still hold about 45 seats - enough to give it a clout in any government formation in a widely expected hung house unless a dramatic verdict delivers a majority to a single party or coalition.

'We would any way lose seats, nuclear deal or no nuclear deal,' a party insider told IANS. 'There is bound to be erosion in Kerala because we hold 19 of 20 Lok Sabha seats and we will lose seats if the Trinamool Congress teams up with the Congress in West Bengal. This we expect to happen. But the situation will be manageable.'

The sources, however, feel that the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) may emerge a major gainer from elections, winning probably as much as 30 of the 80 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state that it rules on its own.

'We will have to see whether the BSP ends up playing the role of the Left in a post-election scenario,' said the insider. 'In any case we will never give up our opposition to the (India-US) nuclear deal.'

Some party sources feel that it is not yet clear if withdrawal of Left support should logically lead to the government's fall. Assuming that the non-Left opposition brings a no-confidence motion in parliament against the government, the Left could abstain from voting if it does not necessarily want the Congress-led government to go.

A minority government, the thinking goes, cannot operationalise the nuclear deal.

In any case, the CPI-M is clearly not happy with its experiment of propping up the UPA government because it is felt that the political dividends have been minimal.

'We ended up supporting a government that never deviated from rightwing economic policies,' an insider said. 'The government gave us concessions here and there but did not compromise on the larger economic picture. On issues like FDI (foreign direct investment) and SEZ (special economic zone), our many objections were largely ignored.'

'So the anger against the government was building up in the party. With the nuclear issue, it just exploded. We realised that apart from economic policies, we are also losing out on foreign and strategic policies with this nuclear deal.'

'Our own people started asking: 'What are we gaining by supporting this government?' That is why the party reacted the way it did.'

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