

Poll blow: Centre to start releasing funds for construction of rural roads in Bengal

Basant Kumar Mohanty

The Centre has decided to start releasing funds for the construction of rural roads in Bengal after the BJP lost all six Assembly seats in the state to the Trinamool Congress in the recently held by-elections.

Union rural development minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday directed the ministry officials to release the pending amount to Bengal under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna (PMGSY), which is aimed at providing road connectivity to villages.

Besides the PMGSY, the rural development ministry has stopped releasing grants to Bengal under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana Grameen (PMAY-G) for over two years citing irregularities.

Former Rajya Sabha member Jawhar Sircar claimed the rural development ministry's decision to stop funds to Bengal had politically backfired, prompting a rethink.

“The BJP hoped that the decision to freeze funds would give them political dividends in Bengal. But it backfired. That is why the central government was compelled to release the funds,” Sircar said.

Ministry officials confirmed that Chouhan had ordered the release of the pending amount to Bengal under the PMGSY.

A state government official said the Centre had last released ₹343 crore to Bengal to upgrade 144 roads in November 2022. It later cited instances of irregularities to stop further grants. The Centre had also objected to the boards put up on PMGSY roads mentioning Bangla Gram Sadak Yojna.

Sircar said the irregularities cited in the PMGSY, MGNREGA and the PMAY-G were not unique to Bengal.

“Irregularities like opacity in the selection of beneficiaries or similar types of violations are found in every state. I have been in bureaucracy throughout. It is not possible to micro-supervise everything. There will be pilferage even in the best of schemes. But that cannot be the reason to deprive a particular state of grants,” he said.