

CM's win-win for govt and industrialists

Mamata's land offer to investors

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta: Chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday asked industrialists to take advantage of her government's recent policy in which leasehold plots would be made freehold.

Speaking at Nabanna during a meeting of the industrial promotion board, she said that while this would help the state earn more revenue, industrialists operating out of leasehold land would also become land owners.

"I will request the industrialists and investors, who have set up industries or housing complexes on plots by taking land on long-term lease from the government, to come forward and convert those plots to freehold. This will help you (investors) as you will be the owner of the plots. This will help us because this will give us some money which we can reinvest for developing industries," Mamata said.

The state government recently allowed government-owned companies like WBIDC to convert the plots leased out for the long-term into freehold.

Various departments were also allowed to make the leasehold plots into freehold.

"The main target behind the decision is revenue generation. The chief minister is trying to make full use of the policy so that the state can generate some more revenue at a time when the state exchequer is struggling to run 70-odd welfare schemes," said a senior government official.

As most industries or housing complexes were set up on plots leased out by government companies like

WBIDC or Hidco, Mamata underscored making plots leased out by them into freehold ones.

"The government takes 90 per cent of the market price of a plot as salami while leasing it out for a longer period. Now, if plots are made freehold, companies have to pay the rest 10 per cent of the market price. This will help the state government get a handsome amount," said a senior bureaucrat.

The state government is also planning to lease out large waterbodies located on government land for pisciculture. The government has around 1,500 waterbodies spread over 5 acres of land or more. If these waterbodies are leased out for pisciculture, the government can again earn revenue while at the same time, fish production will increase in Bengal, sources said.

Mamata said her government identified nearly 8,000 acres along the proposed industrial corridors of Dankuni-Raghubanpur and Dankuni-Kalyani.

A source said the bulk was government land.

Senior bureaucrats said these efforts suggest Mamata wanted ways to generate revenue to keep her pet welfare projects such as Lakshmir Bhandar and Krishak Bandhu running.

On job creation, Mamata said: "A total of 1.14 lakh crore will be invested in the MSME sector and this will generate about 41 lakh jobs... The World Trade Centre is set to introduce their office in Calcutta and they will also invest Rs 1,500 crore which will also create several jobs."

She said the next Bengal Global Business Summit would be held in November.

Proposals of Rs 1,400cr to tap tea garden land

VIVEK CHHETRI AND SAMBIT SAHA

Darjeeling/Calcutta: The Bengal government has received 16 proposals entailing a combined investment of Rs 1,400 crore to develop tourism and allied businesses in the tea gardens of north Bengal.

Several tea estates in the Darjeeling hills, the Terai and the Dooars put forward their plans before a government screening committee for examination. Barring four, the rest of the proposals are directly linked to tourism. Put together, the 16 proposals are projected to create 4,571 jobs.

Industry sources have said hospitality chains such as Indian Hotels Company Ltd of the Tata Group, ITC and some

mid-segment hoteliers are in the fray to unlock the tourism potential of tea plantations.

The slew of investment proposals has been made under the Tea Tourism and Allied Business Policy, 2019. The policy allows the management of tea gardens to use "unutilised and fallow land" up to 15 per cent of the estate area and not exceeding 150 acres.

Taj Hotels started a luxury property in the Makaibari tea garden in Kurseong and its success triggered the proposals for high-end accommodations in plantations.

The 16 proposals include one for a hotel from Luxmi Tea Company Pvt Ltd on Chandnuri Tea Estate near Siliguri and another for a resort in the Upper Fagu garden in Kalim-

pong. "I believe there is a good prospect for a hotel. We are in dialogue with IHCL which will manage the property," Rudra Chatterjee, managing director of Luxmi Tea Group, told The Telegraph. IHCL operates the Taj hospitality chain, among others.

Joydeep Majumder, a director of Upper Fagu Tea Estate in Darjeeling, said he planned to build a 60-key hotel on a 50-acre plot. "There are two large and a few medium-sized hospitality chains that showed keen interest in managing the property. A decision will be taken after receiving the government nod and considering the investment required," he explained.

While two proposals have been approved by the Cabinet,



A tea garden in the Darjeeling hills. File picture

10 plans received the green light from the screening committee.

In four gardens, there are plans to set up black and white pepper and medicinal plantations, a nursing school, a hospital, a university and a food processing unit with cold storage.

Of 87 tea gardens in the hills, only two have placed pro-

posals — for tourism.

Most of the gardens that have come up with the proposals are those that ring Siliguri.

The spate of proposals made some stakeholders worried about the future of the tea industry, even as a section recognised the government's effort to support the ailing sector. "We have enough reasons to be sceptical of the proposals. We fear that many tea gardens are now more focussed on furthering other business rather than focussing on tea gardens and tea business," said a planter.

A section of tea planters wants the government to "tread very carefully". "The government has to tread carefully or else, it will be responsible for destroying the indus-

try. We fear some developers are misusing this policy to lay their hands on tea garden land and to secure loans," an industry insider said.

Many planters pointed out that barring a few tourist resorts, most were just doing "moderate business". "With so many tea tourism projects coming up, how can it sustain in the long run," another planter said.

Arijit Raha, the secretary general of the Indian Tea Association, however, held out a different view. "Tea industry has not been doing well for some time. The government's decision to allow owners to explore other revenue streams as enumerated in the policy is critical for sustaining financial viability," he said.

Tea estate reopens

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Alipurduar: The Dhekrapara tea estate in Alipurduar district reopened on Wednesday after a gap of over 20 years with a new company taking over the plantation where the number of permanent workers dropped to 288 from 604 at the time of the closure.

The garden had been shut down in 2002 because of wage dues and the resultant protests by the labourers. Although the state labour department had taken a number of initiatives to revive the estate, the work couldn't resume because of legal complications.

Sources have said Bang-

lajhar Tea Private Limited in Siliguri finally expressed its willingness to operate the Dhekrapara garden. Accordingly, a bipartite meeting was held at Dooars Kanya, the district collectorate here, on March 13. "Representatives of the company and trade union leaders were present at the meeting, where it was decided that the garden would reopen today," said an official of the district administration.

When Dhekrapara was closed down in 2002, it had 604 permanent workers. Gradually, the workforce was depleted by labourers' deaths, retirements and engagement in other professions. Currently,

288 workers are getting monthly financial assistance of Rs 1,500 each from the state government.

"It has been decided that the existing 288 workers will be engaged by the new management. In due course, maybe after a couple of months, job applications will be sought from the families of those who are no longer engaged in the garden work," said a source.

The new management disbursed a sum of Rs 1,000 to each of the 288 workers as an advance on Wednesday.

"The labourers will receive wages after every fortnight. A due bonus will also be paid," said the source.

Passenger route revival

SOUMYA DE SARKAR

Malda: The Centre has allowed passenger movement between India and Bangladesh through the Mahadipur immigration check-post (ICP) in Malda after a three-year gap.

From Thursday, movement of people will resume along the route that from Mahadipur leads to Sona Masjid, a locality under Bangladesh's Chapai-Nawabganj district. Senior officials of both the

countries are likely to be present on either side of the border on Thursday as people start crossing the international border again on this route.

"Permission for immigration through the Mahadipur ICP has been provided by authorities. We are putting all efforts so that people can again start using this route," said Nitin Singhania, Malda district magistrate.

On March 15, 2020, the movement of both people and goods through this route

stopped because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Although the border reopened on June 4, 2020, it was only for the movement of goods. Residents of both could not use the route to go to the neighbouring country or return to their own.

However, before the pandemic, around 200 residents of Bangladesh would enter India through Mahadipur daily.

Relief for lawyer in ED case

TAPAS GHOSH

Calcutta: A division bench of Justice I.P. Mukerji and Justice Biswaroop Chowdhury of Calcutta High Court on Wednesday granted an interim stay on a notification asking lawyer Sanjay Basu to appear before the Enforcement Directorate for a money laundering case.

Basu is said to be close to Trinamul general secretary Abhishek Banerjee. ED sources said Basu was being probed for allegedly taking Rs 83 lakh from a deposit collection company. The central agency earlier raided Basu's office and residence and interrogated him.

The ED recently issued a fresh notification asking Basu to appear for further probe, which Basu challenged.

The division bench asked the ED to submit papers that showed Basu's role in the alleged scam. It also directed the ED not to issue fresh summons to Basu or raid his office without its permission. The next date of hearing in this case is March 20.

Protest costs teacher's life

ANSHUMAN PHADIKAR

Kharagpur: A teacher, who was allegedly beaten up on Monday for protesting against reckless motorcycle-racing by some youths in a West Midnapore village, succumbed to his injuries on Tuesday, his death sparking a high-way blockade and arson on Wednesday.

The blockade on NH6 lasted for about four hours, following which villagers of Srirampore in West Midnapore's Debra vandalised the house of one of the accused and set it on fire in front of police.

According to the police, a few youths were racing their bikes in Srirampore on Monday night when Lakshmiram Tudu, 56, a tribal schoolteacher, protested.

Then, the bikers allegedly threw the teacher to the ground and thrashed him.

Admitted to Midnapore Medical College and Hospital on Monday evening with severe injuries, he died on Tuesday evening.

After his death, tribal outfit Bharat Zakat Majhi Pargana



The house of one of the accused, which was set ablaze by villagers in Srirampore, West Midnapore, on Wednesday. Picture by Saikat Santra

blocked a stretch of NH6 near Srirampore on Wednesday.

Tudu was the vice-president of Debra block of Bharat Zakat Majhi Pargana.

His son Rajeev works in the army.

Rabindranath Murmu, state leader of the Bharat Zakat Majhi Pargana, hailed Tudu as their "leader".

Additional SP (Kharagpur) Rana Mukhopadhyay said: "Five persons have been arrested in connection with the teacher's death and a murder case has been filed."

The arrested are Ravi Bhuiya, Arghya Bhuiya, Suman Bhuiya, Suman Rakshit and Bishnupada Dolui.

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL (NIT No.: WBSRDA/RRW/EE-37/1 OF 2022-23) CORRIGENDUM

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL District Magistrate, Cooch Behar

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