

Airport coal hurdle cleared

SUBHAJOY ROY

Calcutta, Feb. 19: The Union coal ministry has cancelled the allocation of a coal block in Burdwan's Andal that lies underneath the area where the Airport City is being built, clearing a hurdle in the way of the project.

The Left government had acquired 1,818 acres in 2009-10 and given it to Bengal Aerotropolis Projects Ltd (BAPL) to build an airport on 650 acres and use the rest of the land for industrial, institutional and residential purposes.

The location of the Moira-Madhujore block had raised safety concerns as subsidence is not uncommon in sites of coal extraction.

Moira-Madhujore Coal Limited (MMCL), a consortium of six companies that

was allocated the block in 2008, had moved the high court objecting to the co-existence of the two projects.

"We have cancelled the allocation of the Moira-Madhujore coal block in Bengal," said Vivek Bharadwaj, a joint secretary in the coal ministry. MMCL is yet to obtain environmental clearance, one of the criteria the coal ministry considers while reviewing idle blocks.

Sources said 1,729.74 acres of the 2,224-acre coal block fell in the area of the Airport City project. They said 98 acres of the surface needed to be dug for mining.

The decision on de-allocation was taken on February 11 after a central inter-ministerial group of coal, steel, law and power ministry officials reviewed 61 coal blocks across the



The under-construction airport in Andal

country on February 7 and 8.

A BAPL source said the company would "soon apply to the director-general of civil aviation for the licence to operate the airport".

An MMCL official said: "The (mining) project would have given employment to a lot of people and given access to huge natural resources."

A member of the inter-ministerial group said it was "unlikely" that the coal block would be given to any other company for mining. "If it has been de-allocated for safety reasons as an airport is coming up there, the reason will be cited in the future too."