

State inks chopper service deal

**OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT**

The Bengal government on Wednesday signed a deal with Bengal Aerotropolis Private Limited to look after the technical aspects of helicopter operations across five destinations in Bengal.

According to the deal, the transport department will pay Rs 5 lakh a month to the company, which is developing an airport in Burdwan's Andal, for professional service related to the upkeep of the helipads' landing and take-off areas and other technical aspects of the operation.

"The transport department does not have the necessary expertise. Nothing can be better than having trained ex-

perts handling technical aspects of flight operations," said transport minister Madan Mitra.

The company — which now manages ticket sales for the chopper service between Calcutta and Durgapur, Santiniketan, Malda, Bahurghat and Haldia — will recruit personnel for the technical services.

"We will recruit a general manager to supervise overall operations of the copter services, a flight co-ordinator and another official. They will ensure that all operations meet the norms set by the directorate-general of civil aviation," said Virender Singh, who heads the airport operations wing of the company.

"There are several areas, such as ground-handling at



A Pawan Hans chopper takes off from the RCTC ground

the helipads and safety of flight operations, that the team will look into."

Helicopter services in the state were started in December 2013 after the transport department signed an agreement with Pawan Hans. According to the deal, the government would pay Rs 50 lakh for 40 flying hours a month to

Pawan Hans.

The chopper service is yet to overcome its teething problems. The helipad near Santiniketan sank under the weight of a helicopter, while the Digha service is yet to take off because of the presence of casuarina trees near the helipad.

Despite such hitches, government officials have chaf-

med bookings have been encouraging. "We have bookings for 34-35 hours a month against the 40 hours allotted to Pawan Hans," a transport department official said. "We will now make the service free of all glitches."

Bengal Aerotropolis, transport department officials said, has a team of around 30 officials that is looking after technical aspects of airport operations in Andal. The second-in-command is from Changi airport (Singapore).

"The president of Changi Airports International will meet chief secretary Sanjay Mitra on Thursday to discuss the Andal project where it is one of the stake holders," said an official of Bengal Aerotropolis Private Limited.