

New stance gives wing to Andal dream

Mamata To Visit ₹12,000-Cr Airport Today, Likely to Name It After Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam

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Andal (Durgapur): Exactly five years after Mamata Banerjee's strident opposition to farmland acquisition drove away the Nazru car factory from Singur in Howrah, the mercurial politician who is now the state chief minister will anoint an airport city project at Bardwan's Andal that is being developed on a land parcel twice the size of the abandoned Tata Motors site.

The CM is scheduled to visit the newly-developed airport on Thursday — the first such privately built greenfield facility in the region — and christen it Kazi Nazrul Islam Airport after the Bengali poet, musician and revolutionary. Singapore airport developer Changi is a stakeholder in the project.

Mamata's visit is all the more significant because it marks her new and pragmatic approach on private investment and land acquisition. Till as recently as a year ago, her government was at odds with the airport project being developed on land acquired during the Left Front regime, leading to fears that it may get shelved midway.

Incidentally, acquisition for the 1,630-acre land spread across 11 mozgas of Andal began in De-

cember 2008, barely two months after the Nazru plant's exit. And while the farmers' resistance to farmland acquisition at Singur and Nandigram attracted the global media and catapulted Mamata's political career to a sharp ascent graph culminating in her victory, the acquisition at Andal went unnoticed as land owners willingly sold their infertile plots to pursue an urban dream.

In fact, those who gave up land became rich overnight. Already employed with SAIL, ECL or the Railways, most of them not keen in agriculture were happy to part with their land for a lucrative pay. As 73-year-old Nripati Bakshi of Khandra pointed out, people living in the vicinity of Durgapur have always wanted urbanisation and the benefits that come with it.

"Unlike people in Singur or Nandigram who are dependant on land, we have worked in industries and our children are employed there now. Cities and factories are a reality for us, not some pipe-dream," explained 55-year-old Dhiren Mondal of Dhanakshikhandra.

Mamata, who drew flak in the first 34 months in power for acting more like an opposition leader than a CM, seems to have adopted a refreshingly new approach post August 2, 2013 when she wooed India Inc in Mumbai.

TAKING FLIGHT

Aerodrome reference code | 4C with CAT-1 operations

Separation distance | Maintained for category 4E

Runway length | 2,500 metre × 45 metre

Expandable to | 3,315 metre

Taxiway | 230 metre × 23 metre

Apron area | 8,000 sq metre

Passenger terminal building | 5,850 sq metre

Planes that can operate | Boeing 9-737, Airbus A-320, ATR, Bombardier, CRJ, Cessna, Fokker



A day before the CM visits the airport in Andal, preparations are in full swing

Consequently, the airport city project at Andal is now palatable. In a bid to woo airlines, Mamata announced a waiver of sales tax on aviation turbine fuel for Andal, Bagdogra and Cooch Behar air-

ports, shortly after the hard sell in Mumbai. On its part, project promoters Bengal Aerropolis Projects Ltd (BAPL) has allowed the state government through West Bengal In-

dustrial Development Corporation to allot 20% of the 660-acre industrial park and provide preferential allotment to IT firms suggested by the state at the 150-acre IT park.

With work on the airport nearing completion, the focus will soon shift to the city in the making that will develop as a satellite township to both Durgapur and Asansol. The 660-acre airport is the nucleus of the airport city project that will also house an integrated township and an industrial and logistics hub. The township with certain residential blocks, hospitals, schools, markets, hotels, sporting venues, shops, offices and retail centres.

The Aerropolis project is expected to draw investment of Rs 12,000 crore and provide 40,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities. When complete, it will be home to nearly 15,000 people.

Bengal Sriati chairman Hemant Kanoria felt the airport would go a long way in establishing the second city in Bengal. "Most major states including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala and Karnataka have multiple tier-1 cities. But in Bengal, there is only Kolkata. The potential for a second metropolis exists in Asansol Durgapur. The new airport can be the catalyst. We are investing in lifestyle apartment complexes, row house township, a world trade centre and commercial developments in Asansol and Durgapur because we believe it is poised to take the next big leap," said Kanoria.

We are planning to set up a three-star hotel with 60 rooms in the first phase in Durgapur. The country's first airport city should accelerate development and encourage more investment. As hotels follow business cycles, infrastructure development will spur manufacturing and the services sector. New hotels will create a win-win scenario for the corporate traveller as the region has the potential for increased room inventory

— Kenneth Scott | OIA, PRIDE HOTEL

The airport will trigger all round progress of the area and increase IT-based industries. It will also open new vistas in health tourism and lead to more superspecialty hospitals.

The Mission Hospital has already taken land in Aero City to set up its next mega hospital project. Once the airport kicks off, it will bring about sea change in the area's health sector

— Dr Satyajit Bose | CHAIRMAN, MISSION HOSPITAL

The chief minister upgraded Asansol-Durgapur twin towns to a metropolitan city on September 1, 2011. We now have a police commissionerate for Asansol-Durgapur. The only thing that lacked was the airport. Now that the airport is up and ready, it will give a huge boost to hospitality, health and IT sectors

— Rajendra Prasad Khaitan | MEMBER, FEDERATION OF SOUTH BENGAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRIES

I was born in Asansol and had to travel across the country and all over the world on business. Every time I had to return home, the one thing that I sorely missed was an airport.

Not just me, thousands of executives working in the region had rued the absence of an airport. Once flights take off, they will be relieved and encourage more executives to take up positions in the belt

— Ujjwal Upadhyay | CEO, EMTA COAL LTD

The greenfield unit of IISCO Steel Plant (ISP) will start commercial production in a few months. It will be one of the most hi-tech integrated steel plants in the country. The plant is expected to alter the area's socio-economic scenario. The arrival of Andal airport at this juncture will give the economy a bigger boost.

— Narendra Kathari | CEO, IISCO STEEL PLANT

