

Carriers ready to operate flights, submit EoI

Debajyoti Chakraborty

Andal: Three regional airlines have submitted Expression of Interest (EoI) to operate flights from Durgapur to cities like Ranchi, Patna, Jamshedpur, Bokaro, Kolkata, Bagdogra and Cooch Behar from the Andal airport near Durgapur.

On October 15, the three non-scheduled operators — Pinnacle Air, Spirit Air and North-East Shuttle — have submitted EoI to the state transport department after the progress review meeting of Durgapur Aerotropolis at Kolkata a few days ago. Pinnacle Air has a Falcon 2000 LX and Cessna CJ2+. Spirit Air has a Cessna Sky Hawk and Cessna Sky Caravan while North-East Shuttle operates Dornier aircraft.

At the progress review meeting, transport principal secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay had hinted at the government's keenness to get the airport operation, at least for a test flight, during the investor meet — Bishwa Banga — scheduled in Kolkata from January 7 to January 9, 2015. Though the airport is unlikely to get an operator's license till next March, the test flight with a sub-20 seater plane will serve as a symbolic take-off that chief minister Mamata Banerjee is keen to showcase at the meet.

"We have applied for license to operate Airbus A320 or Boeing B737-800 (category 4C aircraft). The formalities may take a few months, though, the airport will be completely ready for operation by December. We are therefore looking at the possibility of operating a non-scheduled test flight with 18-20 seat aircraft (category 2C) subject to approval from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation," said Partha Ghosh, managing director of Bengal Aerotropolis Pvt Ltd (BAPL) that is developing the Andal airport.

While past editions of the investor meet christened Bengal Leads failed to draw any investment worth note, the government is going the whole hog this time, changing the summit's branding and inviting Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and finance minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam with a busi-



The airport at Andal

ness delegation from the country. With Singapore's Changi Airports International Pte Ltd a significant partner in the airport project with 32.2% stake, Mamata is keen that a flight lands and takes off at Andal to send the right signal to the delegates.

On Wednesday, the biggest hurdle that had kept the airport grounded was resolved at a meeting chaired by labour minister Moloj Ghatak. The ground was cleared for relocation of high tension lines that run over the runway. Unless the lines are shifted to a safe distance as per DGCA norms so that they do not pose a threat to aircraft operations, BAPL cannot get an operator's license from the regulator.

"We will now work full-steam to relocate the towers by December. Thereafter, we will apply for license to operate flights. Hopefully, commercial operations will begin by March 2015," a BAPL spokesperson said.