



West Bengal- Forging Ahead

West Bengal Government is determined to pursue a proactive policy for faster industrial development, says Nirupam Sen, Minister-in-Charge, Deptt. of Commerce & Industries.



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Deptt. of Commerce & Industries.

For prophets of doom who had predicted a sharp decline in investments in West Bengal post Singur, West Bengal still remains a destination for investors says Nirupam Sen, Minister – in – charge, Depts. of Commerce & Industries, Industrial Reconstruction, Public Enterprises and Development & Planning in an exclusive interview with Melvyn Pinto.

Sen is also the Chairman of the West Bengal Industrial Development

Corporation Ltd. He has recently taken additional charge of the Department of Power and Non-Conventional Energy Sources.

West Bengal has always had a strong agricultural base. Due to the focus on industrialization, there is criticism that there been a let up on focus in this sector?

When we came to power in 1977, our emphasis was on the implementation of land reforms and strengthen-

ing rural economy. The state invested in irrigation network, development of fisheries and animal resources. Financial assistance to cottage and village-based industries was extended on priority basis.

Among the significant crops that the state produces are rice, where it ranks first in area and production, jute (60 % of the country's output) potatoes (28 %) and of course, tea.

Our Agro-based food processing and horticulture sector is the 5th



largest in the country, employing 16 million workers, accounts for 15% of total industrial output and 3.5% of the GDP.

Our state has the advantage of having six agro-climatic zones suitable for temperate, sub-tropical and tropical horticulture produce. We are the largest producers of pineapple and second largest of litchi in India.

With 1400 approved projects totaling Rs.3000 crore in the food processing and horticulture sector, the state will soon takeover the first position in the country.

Unfortunately, 30% of our produce is lost in the post-harvest phase and we have to address ourselves to the issue of storage and preservation.

Did the withdrawal of the Tatas from the Nano project in Singur hurt the image of West Bengal?

Rather than be despondent, the State Government was even more determined to pursue a proactive policy for faster industrial development.

We have received an all-time high investment of Rs.5,30,000 crore in over 1000 projects in the financial year up to September 2009 and hope to execute more projects, amounting to Rs.1,00,000 crore in the remaining period of the current fiscal.

Where are the growth centres and big ticket investments?

Let me just take the case of one industry. The Iron and Steel industry is undoubtedly the one with the biggest potential. The establishment of Bengal Iron Works at Kulti in Burdwan district of West Bengal in 1870 where the first commercial blast furnace was set up in 1875 heralded the commencement of this industry in the State.

Some of the significant players in this sector are: Steel Authority of India (SAIL) which has two major units, Durgapur Steel Plant (DSP) and Alloy Steel Plant.

Bhusan Ltd. which is growing at 35% per annum with an investment of some US\$ 64 million and has plans to set up more units in the near future.

Electrosteel Casting Ltd, the largest producer of spun iron pipes in the sub-continent and the 5th largest in

the world.

Gontermann Peipers (I) Ltd, the 2nd largest producer of Iron and Steel based rolls in India and largest exporter of rolls from the country.

Vesuvius India Ltd has a 3000 tonnes unit in the state and manufactures specialized refractory for steel industry.

The new units coming up are Jai Balaji Sponge Ltd. and Sri Ramrupai Balaji Steels Ltd with Integrated Steel Plant and Captive Power Plants in Burdwan and Ramswarup Lohh Udyog Ltd. Sponge Iron, Pig Iron, Captive Power Plant in Kharagpur

WBIDC has handed over on February 01, 2010, 505.72 acres of land in Raghunathpur, Purulia District to Adhunik Corporation Limited for setting up an integrated steel plant, a captive power plant and a cement plant.

Bengal JSW Steel promoted by Sajjan Jindal of JSW Steel Ltd is setting up their plant in Shalboni, Paschim Medinipur

What are the other initiatives?

1. The Asansol - Durgapur Development Authority (ADDA) is setting up an Export - Promotion Industrial Park at a cost of US\$ 3 million. The target industries for this park are steel - based, software, electronics, leather, pharmaceuticals, agro-based & other non-polluting industries.

2. An Apparel Export Park at an estimated project cost of Rs. 50 crores is coming up at Uluberia. The Park would focus on integrated units like garment manufacturing units, ancillary units for manufacturing buttons and specialized units like processing or washing units to bring more value addition to the garments manufactured. About 40 units are likely to come creating employment opportunity for 20000 persons.

3. 2500 acres of land has been identified at Guptamoni by WBIDC to set up a Mega Iron & Steel Park.

4. The corporation jointly with Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur is setting up a Biotechnology Park at Dewanmara in West Midnapur district on 60 acres of land.

5. In association with Foundry Association, WBIDC is setting up a

modern Foundry Park at Hawlibagan in Howrah district.

About 200 units are expected to come up with investment of approximately Rs. 1600 crores and generating employment for 30000 people.

6. All India Rubber Association is setting up a Modern Rubber Park at Sankrail. About 250 units will manufacture rubber seeds, footwear, rubber hoses, tubes, micro cellular sheets, Hawai chappals, automotive rubber products etc. and generate employment for 16000 people.

Has your Government moved towards private - public partnership?

We have several such private sector and government initiatives. Bengal SREI Infrastructure Development Limited (BSIDL) a subsidiary of SREI Capital Markets Ltd. (SCML) was formed as a Joint Venture with WBIDC and commenced operations in early 2005 with an aim to facilitate the creation of infrastructure facilities in West Bengal and act as a catalyst for sustainable economic development and industrialization of West Bengal

Hooghly Met Coke and Power Company Ltd (HMCPCL) is a joint venture between Tata Steel Ltd. and WBIDC for setting up a Merchant Coke Oven Plant to generate 0.8 million tones of coke annually in Phase I and also 60MW of power. The envisaged cost of the project is around Rs.1150 crores.

Mitsubishi Chemical Corporation, in association with WBIDC has set up MCC PTA India Corp. Pvt Ltd. The company Manufactures and sells "PTA" (Purified Terephthalic Acid) and the plant is Located in Haldia.

Do you have any message for potential investors in West Bengal?

West Bengal has intellectual capital, low cost of operations, huge domestic market, as well as proximity to the South East Asian markets.

The Left Front Government has always welcomed industry and we have ensured over the past several years a peaceful and harmonious work environment. We are creating a land bank and also a single window clearance system to encourage more investors. ■