

BENGAL BECKONS

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A POSITIVE

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APPROACH

THE WEST BENGAL GOVERNMENT HAS INFUSED A FEELING OF ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH ITS VARIOUS INITIATIVES

It's a little more than three-years-old and the West Bengal government has done well in initiating a number of changes for the betterment of the state. Be it a sharp increase in budgetary allocation in several departments or introduction of innovative schemes and initiatives, the government has put the state on the fast track.

According to sources, the initiatives taken during this period "are tailor-made to rocket the state to the pinnacle of success" in every field. These also include the initiatives of the forest department and the labour department among the many others.

As per figures available, the total recorded forest land in the state stands at 11,879 sq km, of which 7,054 sq km is reserved forest, 3,772 sq km is protected forest and 1,053 sq km is unclassified state forest. This constitutes 13.38 per cent of the geographical area of the state. Almost 34 per cent of the total forest area, consisting of 15 wildlife sanctuaries, five national park, one biosphere reserve and two tiger reserves, is under the Protected Area Network.

On its part, the forest department has plans to focus on three priority areas that include:

- >> Protection
- >> Man-animal conflict and
- >> Plantation.

Says N C Bahuguna, principal chief conservator of forests and head of forest force, West Bengal, "There was a shortage of staff but now, there is provision to recruit 250 forest officers and

208 forest guards."

"An allocation of around ₹ 70 crore from the state fund and the rest from the central fund, around ₹ 200 crore has been earmarked for spending this financial year towards various activities and development of forests," says Bahuguna.

With focus on core areas such as eco-tourism and soil conservation, the department is set to give the state forests a definite character. "There are provisions for development of eco-tourism and we are working on them," adds Bahuguna.

As one of its latest initiatives, chief minister Mamata Banerjee is set to inaugurate the foundation of the North Bengal Wild Animal's Park, Siliguri on Thursday, July 17. As part of the project, the Gajoldoba wildlife safari will be a unique initiative where "people will be in cages while animals will be roaming free".

LABOURWISE: As part of its efforts, the state has also bagged the credit of restoring work culture in

Bengal that had deteriorated in the past. According to reports, the state government has brought down the loss of mandays due to strikes from 172.2 to 0.65.

The various activities and schemes undertaken by the West Bengal Labour Welfare Board, under chief minister Mamata Banerjee's guidance, includes revision of minimum wages in all scheduled employments; ensuring the rights of contract labour engaged in government departments, improving the physical and emotional well-being of the employees so that it increases their efficiency at work etc.

Employability of job seekers is being enhanced through skill-development besides tapping opportunities of overseas employment. In a bid to make life easier for the labourers of North Bengal, the North Bengal Regional Labour Office is being built at Siliguri's Dagapur Complex.

(Inputs by Irene.Saha@timesgroup.com)