

## Darjeeling safe for tourists, says Bengal minister

Tourists are now free to visit Darjeeling - the popular hill station of West Bengal - since the unrest there is under control, said Urban Development and Hill Affairs Minister Ashok Bhattacharjee Monday.

'Earlier, I had requested tourists not to visit Darjeeling district this summer due to the unrest by the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) there. But after the May 7 GJM meeting at Siliguri town of the district, the situation in the hills has become normal. The hills are now safe for tourists and there is no reason for us to stop them from visiting Darjeeling,' Bhattacharjee told reporters at the Writer's Building, the seat of the state government, Monday.

In April, Bhattacharjee had asked tourists not to visit the hills anticipating political unrest over the GJM hunger strike to demand organising political meetings and rallies at Siliguri.

The GJM hunger strike started May 1 and was withdrawn May 3 after the government agreed to their terms.

The GJM then called for their first post-strike political meet at Gandhi Maidan in Siliguri May 7.

GJM supporters want complete statehood for Darjeeling in north Bengal instead of a Sixth Schedule status that has granted greater autonomy for the region since 2005.

Gurung, who is presently the president of Gorkha Janamukti Morcha, was expelled from Subash Ghisingh's Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) for 'anti-party' activities.

The central government in 2005 announced the Sixth Schedule status to the GNLF-led Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), which ensures greater autonomy to the governing body.

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