

## Mamata lays foundation for perishable cargo centre in Singur

Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee Sunday laid the foundation stone for the railway's first perishable cargo centre to benefit farmers in this West Bengal's Hooghly district belt, where she had led a successful peasant agitation against the Tatas' small car project.

The centre is part of Banerjee's 'Kisan Vision' project that provides for setting up production clusters for perishable products like fruits and vegetables and ferrying these to consumer centres in air-conditioned containers by special trains.

Dedicating the Rs.3 crore centre to farmers, Banerjee said: 'This is a pilot project. If it is successful, we will launch similar projects across the country. Among other places where we have plans to set up such centres are Nashik, Mandi, Delhi, New Jalpaiguri, Dankuni and Mecheda'.

Banerjee said every year Rs.35,000 crore worth of fruits and vegetables get decayed due to lack of proper storage facilities.

'We will establish these centres phase by phase. We will create a market for farmers,' the minister said, disclosing that the Singur facility will have a cold storage for 1,000 tonnes of potato and 500 tonnes of other vegetables.

The Kisan Vision project will be implemented in the public-private participation model by Container Corporation of India, a railway PSU.

'You can keep your produce in the cold storages here. And then you can send whatever amount you want to the consumer centre of your choice through the air conditioned containers,' Banerjee told the farmers at the function.

Banerjee also announced that the railways will allot spaces to 16 Below Poverty Line (BPL) families who earn their living from agriculture in Singur to set up stalls.

'They will be provided spaces for setting up small stalls completely free of cost. They can sell items like vegetables, fruits, flowers, fish, or even bakery items. If need be, I will provide money from my monthly salary to them to set up the stalls,' she said.

'It's a free gift from the railways to kisans and agricultural labourers,' the minister said.

Among those who got allotment are Manoranjan Malik, the father of Tapasi Malik - raped and murdered at the height of the anti-Nano agitation with a top CPI-M leader given life sentence for his involvement in the conspiracy.

'It's a reward to these families for their contribution to the movement (against Tata Nano). The papers allocating the stalls will be ready by January when they can start their stalls,' she said.

Succumbing to the intense agitation by peasants led by Banerjee's Trinamool, which demanded that 400 acres of the 997.11 acres acquired by the West Bengal government for the project be returned to the farmers, the auto major shifted their Nano small car Plant from Singur to Sanand in Gujarat.

Badly mauled in the 2006 state assembly polls, the success of the Singur agitation provided oxygen to the Trinamool to stage a remarkable turnaround and the party ended up decimating the ruling Left Front in recent elections.

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