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PUSH FOR TOURISM, GLOBAL LINKS, SMALL FIRMS: PRITI SUREKA

First woman to head 125-year-old chamber

DEBRAJ MITRA

Calcutta: More international flights from Calcutta and Bengal's projection as one of the best tourist destinations are on the wish list of the first woman to lead a 125-year-old business chamber.

"A lot of infrastructure development is taking place in the state. Acceleration of infrastructure through connectivity to international destinations will help. We need more international flights. We need more carriers to travel anywhere, which is an essential business requirement," said Priti A. Sureka, who was appointed the president of the Merchant Chamber of Commerce and Industry in September.

Priti is a key member of the core advisory team of the diversified business conglomerate Emami Group. An alumnus of the Harvard Business School Advanced Management Program (AMP), she is a whole-time director of Emami, the flagship FMCG company of the group.

Her wishes for the city would echo with many. The

volume of travellers from Calcutta to Europe and the US has increased compared to a few years prior; however, there are still no direct flights available from the city to these locations.

On Tuesday afternoon, Priti spoke to Metro about her presidency of the chamber and more.

She also spoke of the "tremendous scope" of the state as a global tourist destination.

"As a state, we have a lot of natural beauty. We have a lot of scope to be a better tourist destination. Mamatadi (chief minister Mamata Banerjee) has done a tremendous job in the inclusion of Calcutta's Durga Puja on the Unesco list of intangible cultural heritage.

"To be building such a public art spectacle in three to four months is a thing in itself. Think of Coachella (Valley Music and Arts Festival, in California), Tomorrowland (annual electronic dance music festival in Antwerp, Belgium), or the Oktoberfest (in Munich). They draw so many tourists from all over the world. Durga Puja is capable of doing that. It is not only the

duty of the government. It is also the duty of the people who live here," she said.

The state government is "trying its best" to promote industry in Bengal, she said.

Many say much more could be done.

"We love Bengal. We (Emami) are a group that has stayed in Bengal. Our roots are not only in Rajasthan. They have spread to Bengal as well. Like a banyan tree, the long primary and tertiary roots are here too," she said.

Priti loves to read and spend time at the Rabindra Sarobar Lake. "That is my favourite place. I find sitting by the lake very calming," she said.

Inclusive chamber

Asked how it felt breaking a glass ceiling, she said she was more concerned about the responsibility that came with it. "For me, it is more responsibility and purpose that come with the role."

She wants a more inclusive chamber, especially catering to the needs of small businesses. "I plan to make the chamber more inclusive by accommodating smaller businesses as well. The big



Priti A. Sureka, president of the Merchant Chamber of Commerce and Industry, at Emami Tower off EM Bypass, on Tuesday. Picture by Bishwarup Dutta

and small businesses should work together. The bigger businesses already have the infrastructure and access.

It is the smaller businesses that lack them. I want the chamber to cater to this need," she said.