



Bengal Inc Basks In the Glory Of A Legend

ET BENGAL CORPORATE AWARDS BK Birla, felicitated for lifetime contribution, & super-achievers of Corporate Bengal form a galaxy to pave way for a brighter future



The Award Moment: BK Birla & Amit Mitra

OUR BUREAU KOLKATA

A packed Taj Bengal Crystal Room almost covered as Amit Mitra thundered: "Where are the naysayers?" And then went on to assert that West Bengal is very firmly on the path of economic and industrial recovery with growth so far outstripping national growth rates by miles across parameters like industrialisation, agriculture and man-day loss.

It was a kind of event that Kolkata would be talking about for quite some time: The ET Bengal Corporate Awards. It was organised jointly by The Economic Times and the Association of Corporate Advisers and Executives on Thursday evening. Apart from the odd person, anybody on the city's Who's Who corporate list was present.

Every event has a moment that literally defines it. On Thursday evening, it was when West Bengal's finance, commerce and industry minister handed over the Legend award for lifetime achievement to Basant Kumar Birla. Ramrod straight even at a blessed 93 years, Birla walked up the three steps to the podium to receive the award and the felicitations that followed, even as the audience stood to a man to give the doyen a resounding ovation.

It was a humbling moment for many of them too. "To think of all that he has achieved in his life — it makes me feel so insignificant and we talk of ego!" said an industrialist who preferred to be referred to as one whose business is just



The Birla family

over ₹300 crore! Even Mitra was to confess later how emotional the moment had been for him. "I felt so deeply honoured to present him with the award," he said.

There was almost the entire Birla family present as the legend came down — SK Birla and his wife Sumangala, Nirmala Birla, wife of the late GP Birla, Rajashree Birla, mother of Kumar Mangalam Birla, Jayshree Mohta and Manjushree Khaitan — the two daughters of Basant Kumar — and their daughters Maitree Kandoi and Vidula Jalan along with their husbands.

And, of course, there was Sarala Birla, who said "congratulations" as her husband BK reached her and took the chair by her side. Next up on stage to get felicitated was Sarala Birla herself and as she came down, it was BK's turn to congratulate her.



The Who's Who of Bengal Inc

The awards rained and Amit Mitra gave them all away. Best financial performance was awarded to Ghanshyam Mishra & Sons (sub-₹300 crore), RS Software India (₹300 crore-₹1,000 crore) and Emami Ltd (above ₹1,000 crore). Fastest growing company award went to Vedant Fashions Pvt Ltd (sub-₹300 crore), Flexituff International (₹300 crore-₹1,000 crore) and Srei Equipment Finance Ltd (above ₹1,000 crore). The highest job creator award went to Maheshwari Mining Pvt Ltd (sub-₹300 crore), Apollo Gleneagles Hospital Ltd (₹300 crore-₹1,000 crore) and Himadri Chemicals & Industries Ltd (above ₹1,000 crore). The best CSR idea award went to Bandhan.

Speaking on the occasion, RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group Chairman Sanjiv Goenka said how Bengal is beginning to change, how issues are getting resolved faster, de-

isions getting taken quicker and man-day losses becoming almost non-existent with a proactive administration absolutely determined to speed up the process of industrialisation of the state.

Ambuja Group Chairman Harsh Neotia spoke about how the state government, after overcoming the initial inertia, got its act together. "We expect far more rapid progress and more activity on the ground once the Lok Sabha elections get over," he said. Usha Martin Chairman Prashant Jhawar spoke about the ties that his group has had with BK Birla.

Addressing Bengal Inc, so to say, Amit Mitra minced no words. He said that the government was giving all projects fast-track clearance and rattled off instances where it has done so already. "After taking over charge as industry minister, the state cabinet has passed 10 land allotments from the reservoir of 3,500 acres available in various industrial parks. Land is being allotted through a transparent process. Some 8,000 square feet area for bus terminuses is now being auctioned. Issues relating to projects, if any, are getting sorted out in a jiffy. All these have been possible due to a change in work culture and highest level of transparency being followed at the government," said Mitra.

The state's finances, he said, are slated to improve despite a ₹2-lakh-crore debt and an interest burden of ₹28,000 crore because tax collection "will improve from ₹21,000 crore to about ₹40,000 crore by March 2014". He said some 31 major policy reforms have been taken up recently.



Sarala Birla followed her husband to the stage.
Photos: Subhajit Pal