

Bengal races to exhaust funds for more grant

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Calcutta: The Bengal government has laid stress on spending unspent funds received under the 15th Finance Commission as the state has set a target of securing the entire allotment of about Rs 3,500 crore under the head in the ongoing financial year.

“If things fall in place, the state is all set to receive Rs 1,700 crore under the 15th Finance Commission in the next 10 days. If we can spend 75 per cent of the freshly allotted amount after spending the unspent amount by November, we will get another Rs 1,800 crore. The grant is important as the state is not getting central funds under rural development schemes,” said a senior state government official.

But an unspent amount of Rs 2,597 crore received from the 15th Finance Commission between the fiscal of 2020-21 and 2022-23 could pose a barrier to spending 75 per cent of the fresh allotment by November.

“Until the unspent amount is exhausted, the momentum cannot be generated to spend new funds. So, the state has

laid stress on spending the unspent amount at the earliest,” said a bureaucrat.

Sources said the government had set a target of spending Rs 25 crore every day across Bengal in the days to come. Once the new rural boards are formed by mid-August, the daily expenditure target will be increased.

“If the new boards work hard, spending more than Rs 100 crore a day is not impossible. The rural bodies have been asked to focus on roads and sanitisation programmes,” said the source.

The government is eager to get as much funds as possible from the 15th Finance Commission as the state can take rural development projects forward with the available funds in the absence of grants under major rural plans.

As 80 per cent of the finance commission funds are untied, the rural bodies can spend the money according to their choice.

“The rural bodies have been asked to spend 50 per cent of the available funds on developing roads and 25 per cent on sanitisation programmes. This will help us generate

work for the MGNREGA job card holders,” said an official.

The progress in spending the funds over the past seven days is impressive compared to previous years.

The state has spent nearly Rs 111 crore in the past seven days, which is the highest expenditure in a week in the past three years.

According to the estimate available from the state panchayat department, major districts like West Midnapore, Nadia, Murshidabad, North 24-Parganas and South 24-Parganas were yet to gain momentum in the expenditure.

“These districts could achieve only about 30-40 per cent of the daily target set by the department. If they pick up the pace, the entire expenditure of the state can gain a huge jump,” said an official.

A section of the officials said that the major districts could not pick up the pace as rural boards were yet to be set up.

“All rural bodies will be set up by August 16 and it is expected that the new boards will start functioning in a proper manner and issue work orders,” said a source.