

## Mamata launches reality show to boost entrepreneurship in Bengal

- Snigdhendu Bhattacharya, Hindustan Times, Kolkata
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West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee. (PTI File Photo)

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A mechanism to clean rivers and mobile apps for ordering lip-smacking home-cooked food and tailor-made handicraft items — a variety of innovative ideas will contest for the top prize when 40 entrepreneurs appear in a TV reality show in West Bengal.

Conceived by chief minister Mamata Banerjee to boost entrepreneurship, the show will be broadcast every Sunday evening with former cricketer Sourav Ganguly as anchor. The winner's purse: Rs 1 crore from the state's venture capital fund, besides other assistance.

When a private channel beams the first episode, Egiye Bangla (Bengal stays ahead), on December 6, it will become the first government-funded business reality show in the country. The programme has nine episodes, including the grand finale. The Mamata government believes the show will have a positive effect on the not-so-enviable entrepreneurship culture in the state.

The first phase will feature 40 entrepreneurs. A panel of three judges —Bandhan Bank founder Chandra Sekhar Ghosh, restaurateur Anjan Chatterjee and IIM Calcutta professor Ashok Banerjee — will choose a winner from every episode. The eight winners will appear in the grand finale.

“Earlier, we had a misconception that Bengal’s small enterprises meant handicraft. It is through this programme that we got to know about a wide range of unique ideas that bright, young minds were exploring,” said professor Banerjee, the director of IIM’s innovations section.

Project head Suman Mukhopadhyay was optimistic that the show would be a morale booster for young entrepreneurs. “It is important to note that almost all contestants had the opportunity of going to high-paying jobs but they preferred to make their own way.”

Among the 40 contestants are a group of young graduates from the Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology in Shibpur. They have invented a mechanism to clean the surface of rivers and other water bodies using an inflatable technology. A young man from Bankura’s Bikna village, known for the Dokra craft, has come up with an app to help craftsmen improve designs. He is getting advice from professors at IIT Kharagpur to make Dokra crafts free of lead, a drawback that stops artisans from exporting items.