

BANDHS IN KOLKATA

Bandhs are a feature in all Indian cities of India including Mumbai. In Kolkata, we have safeguarded the ITS & ITeS industry to these by giving them the status of “Public Utility” services; we are the first state to do so. This puts the IT industry in the same brackets as essential services like Milk, Electricity, and Healthcare. In addition, the government ensures that work is not disrupted by proactively providing stickers for vehicles & other measures (on a as-needed basis).

In the last 6 months only one bandh has happened in the city. People are not ‘fed-up’ and life runs as usual. Overall, the IT & ITeS industry has become immune to Bandhs. Financial Express reported that the city’s IT Industry is completely insulated from bandhs (The article is attached for your perusal)

NEW BENGAL POLICY HELPS CALL CENTRES WORK DURING BANDHS

24 August 2003

Financial Express

Bandh or no bandh, it was business as usual for the call centres in West Bengal. Last Thursday, call centres here continued to buzz with activity despite the 24-hour West Bengal bandh called by a small Left party on a range of anti-establishment issues. Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had told The Financial Express a day before the bandh that he did not expect the information technology (IT) sector to be affected. "We have a new policy for the IT enabled services (ITES) sector that exempts them from bandhs," Mr Bhattacharjee pointed out to this paper. On the whole, the bandh called by the Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI), which is not a member of the ruling Left Front, left offices and roads deserted. The state government valiantly plied government-owned buses, but private transport was scarce. The call centres were helped by the new policy on ITES announced by the state last year, which gave the ITES sector the status of a public utility service provider.

The public utility tag helps the call centres to run their operations as emergency services like hospitals, power and milk supply in case of any external disruption of work. Vishnu Solutions, a Kolkata-based 120-seat call centre, even operated two shifts, for the first time during a bandh. Said Vishnu Solutions chief executive officer Aditya Bajoria, "We ran a half-capacity two-shift operation as some of our employees could not turn up for work. While the government's new policy has helped us to provide services to our US clients, it created a new kind of work environment for the new companies looking to set up their units in Kolkata." Last year, the ITES-BPO super nine Nasscom survey indicated that Kolkata has 29 companies in the ITES business. In terms of competitive advantages in the ITES business, Kolkata was ranked number four among all the major cities of the country. Hyderabad, Kochi and Chennai were ranked above Kolkata. The state government, taking a cue from Nasscom's suggestion that the main issue that needs to be tackled to place Kolkata firmly on the ITeS map is perception and more incentives, came up with the new policy in August-September 2002. The policy offered fiscal incentives like state capital investment subsidy, exemption from consumption tax to remission of stamp duty and registration. Said a spokesperson of BNKe. Solutions Pvt Ltd: "For the first time during a bandh, we ran our 320-seat call centre at full capacity. This was unthinkable even one year back."

