

Iffco insurance cover for Bengal farmers

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In a unique arrangement with the regional rural banks (RRBs), the West Bengal government has decided to extend insurance facilities to farmers in the 60-70 years age bracket through a tie-up with IFFCO-TOKIO General Insurance, without shelling out any extra money from its coffers.

West Bengal government pays a pension of Rs 500 per month to each farmer above the age of 60 years on a quarterly basis

through post offices.

The government generally spends Rs 300 per year on each farmer as service charge to post offices. Now the state government instead of depositing the pension to the post offices through money order, will deposit it in RRBs, who will charge Rs 200 per year as the transaction cost, thus saving Rs 100 per year on each farmer, which in turn will be given to the insurance company as premium.

Under the "Abasar Sathi Bima Yojna", IFFCO-TOKIO will

provide insurance coverage to the pensioners up to the age of 70, and their spouse in the age group of 18-70, for fire, explosive, damage, riot, burglary and some other natural calamities up to Rs 10,000. The company will also disburse a similar amount of money for treatment of cancer and coronary artery diseases to the farmers.

The scheme will be initially limited to four districts of the state, Purulia, Cooch Behar, Murshidabad and Hooghly.

According to Sanjeev Chopra,

secretary, department of agriculture, West Bengal, the every year four new districts will be added in the ambit of the scheme.

However, the state government has now have a mammoth task of preparing the list of farmers eligible for the scheme, and opening the bank account of the farmers with the three RRBs in the state, namely, Paschim Banga Gramin Bank (PBGB), Uttarbanga Kshetriya Grameen Bank (UKGB) and Bangiya Grameen Vikash Bank (BGVB).

The banks will open a no-frill

account in the name of each farmers. About 43,929 farmers in West Bengal now receive the old age pension from the government.

However, under the scheme, RRBs will be burdened with several charges, including the cost of photographs of the beneficiaries. According to sources, in the first year of inception, RRBS might lose up Rs 100 per bank account. Also, every year, IFFCO-TOKIO will get about Rs 44 lakh as premium, if all the 43,929 farmers are covered under the scheme.