

French call to make Chandannagar a tourism hub

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Director of French Institute in India, Bertrand de Hartingh has called upon all stakeholders in Chandannagar in West Bengal to chip in to make the former French colony a tourism hub and the West Bengal government has expressed support for it.

"Like Marrakech in Morocco, Chandernagore can be a tourism destination in India if the owners of the heritage buildings are able to refurbish their own properties and manage to get enough support. One possible way will be to invite people from outside to stay in their traditional houses," Hartingh said.

Most of the 99 heritage buildings in Chandannagar which retain French influences are now private properties, he said yesterday at the conclusion of a week-long 'Bonjour India' project for Chandannagar.

Chandannagar, a former French colony earlier known as Chandernagore is located 35 km from the city in Hooghly district. It became independent in May 1950.

A week-long workshop

was held as part of the 'Bonjour India' project to restore the heritage Registry building on the picturesque strand by the Ganga river in the town. It is one of the 99 heritage structures blending the unique Indo-French architectural patterns.

Hartingh said the restoration is "a people's project for which we can bring experts but is built on the participation of the owners (of the buildings)."

About financing, Hartingh said "We want financial support to make plans like restoration of the Registry building actionable." Crowdfunding is definitely an option, he said.

Conservation architect Aishwarya Tipnis, who put together the 'Bonjour India' project and conducted the workshop, said the most striking feature of Chandernagore heritage buildings is that they are a melange of Bengali and French architectural styles unlike other French colonies which have only French architecture. All such old houses which look European from outside have the unique Bengal style courtyard inside.

