

CAG gives state poor marks in education

No Primary School Opened In 2003-05

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Mumbai: Maharashtra is way behind its target in ensuring elementary education for children, with the ambitious Sarva Sikshan Abhiyan (SSA) mired in red-tape, corruption and sheer neglect.

The Democratic Front (DF) coalition did not build even a single primary school between 2003 and 2005 in spite of being flush with funds from the Centre. Little wonder that tens of thousands of children below the age of 14 are out of school — by November 2005, this figure stood at more than 1.06 lakh.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has handed the state a poor report card in its report tabled before the state legislature recently.

achieve its desired target has been put on chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh and state education minister Vasant Purke who are chairperson and member of the SSA governing council.

Since its inception in the state in 2002 the governing council, headed by Deshmukh, has not met even once, the CAG report said. "The council was to meet at least twice a year. However, during 2002-05 no meetings were held," the report said.

Neglect by the higher-ups in the state government resulted in under utilisation of the funds, what with a staggering Rs 95 crore remaining unspent till 2005.

With little check on the use of the funds, all norms were thrown to the wind by the Maharashtra Prathmik

Shikshan Parishad (MPSP), the body implementing SSA in the state, which "parked" Rs 148 crore in fixed deposits and earned profit on the "investments".

"The MPSP earned an interest of Rs 7.21 crore during 2002-04 and again between April-November 2005 it parked Rs 3.29 crore in fixed deposits in contravention of guidelines," the report said.

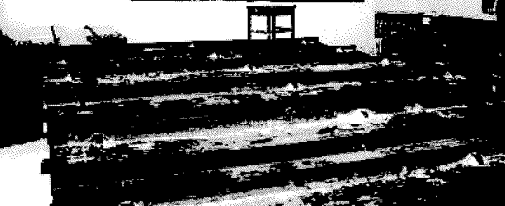
Moreover, despite clear directives to zilla parishads to open savings bank accounts for SSA funds with the State Bank of India, the Nanded zilla parishad credited SSA funds into the District Central Co-operative (DCC) Bank.

"In 2004, school authorities were unable to withdraw Rs 1.47 crore from the DCC as it was in a poor financial condition," the CAG report said.

Worse, there seemed to be little accountability for the money spent under the SSA programme. While the MPSP is supposed to submit utilisation certificates (UC) to the central and state governments within nine months of the close of the financial year, UCs for 2002-03 were submitted to the centre a good ten months late, in October 2004. That's not all. UCs for Rs 4.28 crore received for pre-project activity were never submitted and UCs for Rs 48.54 lakh were not received from 864 schools.

EMPTY BENCHES, UNUSED FUNDS

Year	GOI funds	State funds	Total	Expenditure
2001-02	48.18	00.00	48.18	nil
2002-03	110.00	1990	12990	96.71
2003-04	205.27	89.63	294.90	333.64
2004-05	354.90	83.49	438.39	385.16
Total	718.35	193.02	911.37	815.51 (figures in Rs crore)



Even basic school infrastructure — like buildings, drinking water facilities and toilets — were woefully inadequate, the CAG audit revealed.

There was no fresh enrolment between 2003 and 2005. Children in as many as 370 regions across the state are deprived of basic schooling, with 3.8% of urban blocks and 2.1% villages having no access to schools, stated the survey commissioned by CAG to the Social and Rural Research Institute (SRI). The SRI team carried out random surveys in nine districts, including Mumbai, to assess the impact of the SSA and reported the findings to the Centre.

The blame for SSA's failure to