

Crores lost in badly planned public works: CAG

Chandrika Mago The Times of India News Service

The Times of India (1861-2010); Nov 7, 1999; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Times of India

pg. 8

Crores lost in badly planned public works: CAG

By Chandrika Mago

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Govinda sang it with verve, *It happens only in India*. The office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India may feel that way too, but somewhat wearily, as it details tale after sorry tale in its latest reports.

Take this gem. Eight years after completion, a Rs 2-crore marine aquarium-cum-research centre built at Digha in West Bengal couldn't be made operational. Reason: defective work by the Central Public Works Department (CPWD). This was the first time the CPWD was setting out to build a modern and sophisticated marine aquarium to research the biosphere and expose people to the varied

marine life in captive conditions. It did not see fit, however, to use the services of a marine consultant.

It went ahead on its own, building the centre by 1990. But a major problem showed up in a test run, a year later. The system for drawing water from the intake well to the setting tank, vital for sustaining life in the aquarium was defective.

To make things worse, CPWD had ignored Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) suggestions and used pipes and valves which got corroded by sea water and started leaking. Replacing this meant spending nearly Rs 9 lakh more.

There was more. ZSI then hired a private firm to set right the suction line and intake well. The firm couldn't and went to court in 1995, claim-

ing Rs 8 lakh for the work. Till the CAG report was finalised, the case had not been decided.

CPWD's executive engineer maintained that there was no design defect, but the CAG was not convinced. The position till March 1998? The aquarium had not been used but CPWD spent Rs 15 lakh on maintaining electrical installations. Head to Mumbai for another sad tale. Six years since the Central Public Works Department spent Rs 53 lakh on augmenting water supply to the 8,500 Central Government Staff Colony homes at Antop Hill, Mumbai, the people living there were yet to get additional water.

The CAG report blames "improper planning and lack of coordination" by the CPWD with Brihan-

mumbai Municipal Corporation.

The intentions were good. Since the colony wasn't getting enough water, the authorities decided to arrange for more, with an additional connection from the corporation's water reservoir. Before spending money on the plan, says the report, CPWD should have approached the corporation. It didn't, going ahead and spending Rs 40 lakh to lay pipelines before approaching the corporation.

The corporation then gave its own estimates. Work was formally completed in October 1997. Even then, the resident didn't get the additional water. Apparently "on account of non-completion of certain formalities regarding the releasing and reworking of the time schedule".