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MUMBAI: Only one-third of the funds released by the Union government under the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) have been utilised in Maharashtra so far. What is more, there have been several instances of irregularities in implementing MPLADS, which entitles every MP to recommend development works up to Rs 1 crore in his or her constituency every year.

These lapses have been highlighted in the latest report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG).

The Union government released over Rs 214 crore under MPLADS for the period from 1997 to 2000 but only Rs 73 crore has been utilised so far, according to the CAG report for the year ending on March 31, 2000. The report was tabled in the Maharashtra legislature during its winter session, which ended last week.

In certain cases, funds had been released by the Union government although the MPs concerned had failed to send any recommendation. As a result, the funds could

not be utilised. The MPs concerned represented Dhule, Raigad, Jalna and Mumbai.

While irregularities took place in the districts, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), too, was no exception. The civic authorities kept MPLADS funds in a current account with the State Bank of India. Thus, no interest could be accrued from it. Moreover, contrary to the guidelines, funds from the account of one MP were diverted to the account of another. Until 1998-99, the BMC did not maintain individual revenue and expenditure accounts for individual MPs, the report has pointed out.

Meanwhile, a typographical error played havoc in Dhule. The collector released Rs 9.94 lakh against an estimate of Rs 1.94 lakh. The public works department, which received the funds, kept quiet and the collector, too, did not bother to demand a return of the funds even after three years.

District collectors of Beed, Pune and Satara went a step further. They invested Rs 5.76 crore of MPLADS in small savings schemes to achieve their targets for the year 1999-2000.

Under the guidelines circulated

for utilisation of the funds, it was expected that works sanctioned by appropriate authorities should be completed within one or two working seasons. But CAG discovered that the works were behind schedule by 24 to 48 months.

Another lapse highlighted by CAG was the delay in getting sanctions for the works. The guidelines prescribed that all sanctions should be accorded within 45 days of the receipt of a proposal. A random check of 32 cases from three districts showed that there was a delay of 45 to 365 days in sanctions.

The BMC again committed a major irregularity. A Raiva Sabha

member recommended a dozen works in Mumbai, totally costing Rs 37.45 lakhs. The collector of Mumbai sanctioned the works on March 6, 1996, but cancelled them on the same day. The reason for the cancellation is not known. However, the BMC went ahead, executed the works and withdrew the funds from the account of another MP, claiming that it had done its job. When the cancellation was brought to its notice, the BMC argued that the collector's order to cancel the works was received by the ward officer concerned on June 26 whereas the works were executed by June 16. The matter is still unresolved.