

Govt sleeps as Andhra colleges gobble ₹150 cr

A "TINY" flaw in the Andhra Pradesh government's online system for payment of scholarships to backward class (BC) students has cost the state exchequer ₹150 crore.

A preliminary inquiry conducted by the Backward Classes welfare department has revealed that over 59,000 students have drawn scholarships more than once in 2009-10, taking advantage of the loopholes in the online payment system.

The inquiry report, which was submitted to chief minister K. Rosaiah on Tuesday, also named several prominent engineering colleges around Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy dis-

Panel detects scam in state BC scholarships

tricts, besides well-known corporate junior colleges. These colleges are accused of having withdrawn tuition fee reimbursement several times on the sly.

Each student who is eligible to get scholarship and fee reimbursement is required to open an account in the bank branch allotted to his or her college. The scholarships are then credited directly to their bank accounts. The tuition fee reimbursements are made to the colleges by crediting the amount to the accounts of the managements since they admit the beneficiary students directly without charging any fee.

The government releases the money through an online sys-

By **A. Srinivasa Rao** in Hyderabad

tem after students and colleges furnish their respective account numbers.

The inquiry commission has found out that the government "blindly" made the payments to the same student or college without detecting the mistake. The panel attributed this to the fact that the software designed by the department could not identify the details of the same students having separate accounts in different bank branches or same accounts in the name of different students.

The modus operandi was: the accused colleges, in collusion with the students, opened more than one account in the name of same Class X registration numbers of their students in different banks associated with different branches of the colleges.

Other colleges opened more than two accounts in the name of the same student using false registration numbers.

The state government on Wednesday ordered a probe into the scandal and directed the officials to recover the amount from the students as well as the colleges.

"We can track the accounts of those students who have drawn payments more than once. We are also in the process of identifying the colleges. We believe the state lost ₹150 crore because of the scam to unscrupulous students and colleges," an education department official said.

Sohrab's brother serves contempt notice to Modi

By **Kapil Dave** in Ahmedabad

RUBABUDDIN Sheikh, brother of Sohrabuddin Sheikh who was killed by the Gujarat Police, has sent a contempt of Supreme Court notice to Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi.

He sent similar notices to Gujarat BJP president Purshotam Rupala, his predecessor and Rajya Sabha member Vijay Rupani and Gujarat BJP leader R.C. Faldu.

The notice was for their alleged statements against the CBI, which was appointed by the SC to probe the encounters of his brother and sister-in-law.

The notice was sent on Sheikh's behalf by his advocate Rajesh P. Makad, also a key member of the NGO Jan Sang-

harsha Manch (JSM).

In the notice, Makad said: "On instructions of my client, I have to state and submit that on Wednesday i.e. 25th August 2010, you (Narendra Modi) had while addressing a public meeting at 'MEMCO Char Rasta' specifically alleged that the Congress party had given 'supari' to the CBI to finish you politically."

The notice further said: "(The) public utterance of yours clearly amounts to grave insult to the Hon'ble Apex Court which had directed the CBI to conduct the investigation."

It added that Modi's statements were deliberate and calculated to undermine the SC's majesty and to make the people loose faith in the apex court.

Games ban on BPO cabs

TO ENSURE safe and smooth movement of vehicles during the Commonwealth Games (CWG), the Delhi Traffic Police have restricted the movement of call centre cabs in the city during the duration of the event.

A senior traffic police officer said all BPO managements across the NCR have been asked to suspend plying of their vehicles in Delhi during the Games and encourage their employees to use the Metro.

When the Central Secretariat-Gurgaon Metro corridor opens this weekend, the Capital will have direct connectivity with Gurgaon. Most of the call centres are located there. Noida, the other BPO hub, is already connected with Delhi by Metro.

The move to ban call centre cabs during the Games was also done keeping in mind frequent complaints of rash and negligent

driving by their chauffeurs. Till August, 1,676 cabs have been prosecuted — 153 drivers booked and 796 vehicles impounded — for various traffic violations.

The city's traffic police have repeatedly said managing traffic during the Games will be a challenge. Many roads in south and New Delhi areas would be left with a single lane as the other lane would be reserved for the Games family.

According to traffic police officials, cab operators have been strictly directed to keep their vehicles away from the dedicated lanes. They have also been told to avoid using two-lane stretches like Sardar Patel Marg, Kamal Ataturk Marg, Safdarjung Road and Lodhi Road.

The latest plan will keep 4,000 vehicles off the city roads every day during the event.

Mail Today

FIGURING OUT THE DISASTER

₹125 cr

was announced as relief by PM Manmohan Singh when he visited flood-ravaged Leh

₹1 lakh

was donated by President Pratibha Patil for rehabilitation of the cloudburst victims

Ravaged Leh stares at cold nights in open

By **Arjun Sharma** in Leh

RESIDENTS of Ladakh are bracing up for an uncertain future, one which could be even worse than the flash floods that killed around 200 people and left thousands homeless.

With winter fast approaching, those who have been rendered homeless in the August 6 flash floods and are staying in relief camps fear more misery.

On August 16, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Leh and assured the people that houses which have been destroyed or damaged due to the flash floods would be constructed within two months.

Locals, though, don't share the Prime Minister's optimism and feel that it would be impossible to complete work post-September in view of the harsh winter.

It would be a herculean task to finish work before that as more than 2,000 houses have to be either rebuilt or repaired.

Residents are apprehensive that if their houses are not rebuilt before winter, then they would be left in the dumps as it would be impossible to live in tents in the freezing temperature. The government had earlier planned to provide prefabricated structures to those who have been rendered homeless. But later it decided to rebuild their houses.

For this, about 2,000 truckloads of construction material need to be transported from Punjab and Srinagar. But with heavy snowfall making the Srinagar-Leh and Manali-Leh highways out of bounds for seven months after September, construction work could be severely affected.

Thus, every passing day is adding to the concern of the homeless. They are waiting for some miracle to happen so that their houses are rebuilt within the time frame.

Mohammad Iqbal, owner of Skiptu guest house in Leh, feels it

would be quite impossible to reconstruct damaged houses in two months' time.

"Moreover, construction cannot be carried out in Ladakh after September due to snow," Iqbal said.

THE government hospital has been restored to some extent while construction of the Leh bus stand is going on at a slow pace.

But the main concern are those living in different relief camps.

P Namgial, former MP and veteran leader of Ladakh, feels it would be difficult to construct houses for so many people.

"Although the administration is actively working on the project to construct homes, winter will set in soon and construction will have to be stopped. Where will these peo-



A building in Choglumsar near Leh that was

ple go then?" Namgial asked.

In fact, labourers are still engaged in removing debris under which several bodies are feared buried. Zorel Lompa, a local shopkeeper said even 25 days after the floods, the administration is busy removing debris and slush.

"Construction will begin only after the slush and debris are cleared. It seems this year, most of the homeless would have to face a harsh winter which will be more deadly than the floods," Lompa said.

Jigmet Tekpa, who is co-ordinating the relief operations in the flood-affected areas, pointed to a sharp rise in the cost of cement and labour charges.

The sudden demand for construction material has shot up the price of cement and each bag is now being sold for ₹530 compared to ₹265 charged in the plains, Tekpa claimed.

His courage helped save 11 lives

TSERING Targois saved 11 lives on the night of August 5, when Leh residents woke up to flash floods ravaging their homes and lives. Later, he worked tirelessly to retrieve bodies from the debris.

But he doesn't like being called a "hero".

Targois, 42, works as a driver with the NGO, Save the Children. That night, Targois jerked awake after a particularly loud rumble in the sky. Soon after, flood waters knocked down the door of his house.

"I knew the situation was bad. But I had no clue just how serious the situation was until I saw a body float right past me as I stepped out of my house," Targois says.

Everywhere Targois looked, he saw flattened houses. His house was one of the few left standing

in Leh town.

"There was water, large boulders and mud all around my home. I made sure my family was safe and then got down to locating neighbours, all of whose homes had been damaged in the floods," he says.

The floating body, however, got stuck between two boulders. Targois was entrusted the job of going to the nearest police station and asking the officers to help remove the corpse.

Officers at the police station, however, were grappling with problems of their own, for the building was filled with water and debris.

"When I went to ask for help, the

station house officer could only shrug helplessly, saying when their building was damaged, how could they help us in removing one dead body?" Targois says.

On his way home from the station around 3.30 am, Targois heard the cries of some children.

"Three kids were buried under the rubble of their house near the bus stand (Leh's central area) and were calling for help. I dug through the mud and somehow managed to pull them out. It was then that they told me that eight



Tsering Targois works as a driver with an NGO.