

## MID-DAY MEAL

### MHRD tells Punjab govt to conduct audit of meal scheme

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THE cash-starved Punjab government has been asking the Union government time and again to contribute a larger share to run the mid-day meal programme in the state. The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) though has asked the state government to conduct a social audit of the programme this year to improve accountability and transparency in its implementation.

Sources said that a social audit of this programme is required as last financial year the school education department had failed to do so. This audit will be done in at least 20 schools in each district by involving the social audit units set up under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). A regular meeting of the district level committees on a monthly basis is also required to be held for proper implementation of the programme.

According to sources, the MHRD in 2017, did not release the central grants of this program for a few months as the state government did not contribute its share. The total budget for the program is ₹291 crore this year (60:40 sharing basis by Union and Punjab government). There are 13.81 lakh students in the state who are being provided mid-day meals in 19,791 government schools.

It is learnt that 42,146 cooks have been employed to cook these meals for the students. An honorarium of ₹1,700 per month for ten months is given to the cooks for their services. Of this ₹1,100 is paid by the state government and ₹600 by the Union government.

The cooking cost for a student of primary class is ₹4.48 per meal, while that of an upper primary class student is ₹6.71 per meal.