Saakshar Bharat is a government of India initiative launched by Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh to create a literate society through a variety of teaching learning programmes for non-literate and neo-literate of 15 years and above. It was launched on 8 September 2009.

It aims to recast India’s National Literacy Mission to focus on literacy of women, which is expected to increase the literate population by 70 million adults, including 60 million women. The Mission goes beyond ‘3’ R’s (i.e. Reading, Writing & Arithmetic); for it also seeks to create awareness of social disparities and a person’s deprivation on the means for its amelioration and general well being. The Central and State Governments, Panchayati Raj Institutions, NGOs and Civil Society need to work in unison to realize dream to create a “literate India”. Saakshar Bharat has been formulated with the objective of achieving 80% literacy level by 2012 at national level, by focusing on adult women literacy seeking – to reduce the gap between male and female literacy to not more than 10 percentage points. The mission has four broader objectives, namely imparting functional literacy and numeracy to non-literates; acquiring equivalency to formal educational system; imparting relevant skill development programme; and promote a learning society by providing opportunities for continuing education. The principal target of the mission is to impart functional literacy to 70 million non-literate adults in the age group of 15 years and beyond. The mission will cover 14 million SCs, 8 million STs, 12 million minorities & 36 million others. The overall coverage of women will be 60 million. 410 districts belonging to 26 States/UTs of the country have been identified to be covered under Saakshar Bharat.

Eligibility criteria for coverage under Saakshar Bharat. - A district, including a new district carved out of an erstwhile district that had adult female literacy rate of 50 per cent or below, as per 2001 census, is eligible for coverage under the Saakshar Bharat programme. In addition, all left wing extremism-affected districts, irrespective of their literacy rate, are also eligible for coverage under the programme. There were 365 districts in the country that had adult female literacy rate of 50 per cent or below. Home Ministry has declared 35 districts as left wing extremism affected districts. However, 30 left wing extremism affected districts also had adult female literacy of 50 per cent or below. Therefore, 370 is the net number of districts that qualify for coverage under the programme. Since 2001, several eligible districts have been bifurcated or trifurcated. This has raised the total number of eligible districts to 410 out of which 35 are left wing extremism affected districts. Programme provides for coverage of only rural areas in the eligible districts.

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Current Status - Saakshar Bharat came into implementation from 1.10.2009 and has been in progress for almost two years now. However, the first set of 167 districts was sanctioned only in last quarter of financial year 2009-10. Districts during 2010-11 were sanctioned only in third & fourth quarter of the financial year. The states have reported that Adult Education Centres have been set up in 75,579 of the 1,09,414 Gram Panchayats. Survey has been completed in 11 states. 259.56 lakhs learners have been identified. As against 56,96,765 targeted teaching learning centers for basic Literacy, 4,02,293 centres have been started functioning covering 25,45,602 learners.

Steps taken to accelerate the pace of implementation of programme Orientation of the State level functionaries – National Literacy Mission Authority has regularly conducting the National/State level orientation workshop for capacity building of State level functionaries for successful implementation of Saakshar Bharat programme. Specific session on various administrative, managerial and implementation agency are being conducted by the subject specific and road map for implementation of the programme has been arrived at in these orientation meetings. The orientation meeting have been conducted into all 24 States covered under SB programme except the UT of D&N Haveli. The orientation of D&N Haveli is proposed to organise in September, 2011. During the quarter ending June, 2011, one day orientation meeting of Saakshar Bharat was held at Bhopal on 11.4.2011 under the Co-Chairpersonship of Chief Secretary, Govt. Of Madhya Pradesh and Secretary, Department of School Education & Literacy. A specific team comprising of officials of NLMA and Directors of some State Resource Centres have been constituted to facilitate the implementation of the programme in NER States.

Review of the States – Regular meetings are being conducted to review the progress of the implementation of the programme and resolving the teething problems. To review the progress of the programme in the State of Maharashtra was held on 24.4.20011 under the Co-Chairpersonship of Chief Secretary, Govt. Of Maharashtra and Secretary, Department of School Education & Literacy. Two days review meeting of Saakshar Bharat programme was held on 6-7 May, 2011 at New Delhi. The meeting was attended by Member Secretaries of SLMAs and Directors of SRCs. The State wise target for Result Framework Document (RFD), creating islands of success in Saakshar Bharat programme through SRC’s additional intervention and plan for proposed literacy assessment in August 12011 were discussed and finalized.
Satyen Maitra Memorial Literacy Awards – The Satyen Maitra Memorial Literacy Awards were given to best performing literacy authority, districts and Gram Panchayats during International Literacy Day celebrations on 8th September, 2010 at Hyderabad. The SLMAs of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka won the award for their best performance in the implementing phase of Saakshar Bharat programme. The award for the districts was given to Gadag (Karnataka) and Jashur (Chhattisgarh) and the Gram Panchayats awards were won by Kollabodanahalli (Dharmapuri district), Koilari (Sarguja district) and Sirli (Korba district).

Other initiatives - The Basic Literacy Primer and Bridge Primers in 26 languages were developed by SRCs in consultation with concerned SLMAs and accorded approval by the Quality Assurance Committees of Central Directorate of Adult Education, New Delhi. NLMA came up with new perspectives and new strategy for training that is more direct and cuts down the transmission loss. Under the new training model, Preraks of the Adult and Lifelong Education Centres (ALECs) were to be trained as Master Trainers for providing training to VTs (Volunteer Teachers) as well as for constant guidance in the T-L processes. The Resource Persons (RPs) were drawn under the institutional umbrella of the SRCs, thereby ensuring their availability all through the programme duration. Learning material for training: The best trainers in Adult Education were invited for a National Workshop to identify deficiencies in training approach and design. Based on the recommendations of this Workshop a new strategy was designed. A ‘Source Book’ for training of VTs was developed by the Directorate of Adult Education. Accordingly the training manuals for VTs, MTs and RPs were developed and training programmes were successfully conducted by the SRCs. NLMA approached Institute for Secretariat Training and Management (ISTM) and the Administrative Training Institutions (ATIs), to train an elite corps of 500-1000 Certified and Qualified trainers, who could in turn, train the MTs and the VTs. On NLMA’s request, ATI, Mysore conducted a Workshop for Resource Persons for training needs assessment, and the ATIs have been requested to provide slots for undertaking the training of the elite trainers for Adult Education. An Expert Committee was constituted by the MHRD, Govt., of India to draft the National Curriculum Framework for Adult Education in the context of ‘Saakshar Bharat’ the Central Scheme of National Literacy Mission Authority. The Expert Committee was headed by Dr. Shanta Sinha, Chairperson, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, with JS (AE) & DG (NLMA) as Member Secretary, along with 20 other eminent experts in the field of Adult Education. The Expert Committee submitted its Report which the NLMA, as made clear in the Regional Consultations, would be deemed as an Interim Report, to be put on the NLMA Web portal, inviting stakeholders’ views and suggestions. As an alternative model for imparting basic literacy, Camp Based Literacy Programme with ICT inputs, has been organized in collaboration with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) in six states on experimental basis. The possibility of scaling up of these camps was explored based on outcomes and feedbacks received from the SLMAs and stakeholders. SRCs are taking steps to replicate such camps in larger number, both with TCS as well as another NGO, viz., Tara Akshar. To accomplish the mandate given to the Department of School Education & Literacy to recast the NLM with special focus on female literacy, 22 Task Forces on various aspects of the Mission were constituted to technically strengthen Saakshar Bharat. Hon’ble HRD Minister had an Interactive Meeting with CEOs of major Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and Nationalized Banks. The PSUs and Banks have offered their involvement and collaboration in different activities and programmes of Saakshar Bharat including, adoption or construction of model Adult Education Centres, and/or endowing the Adult and Lifelong Education Centres (ALECs) with all modern facilities for Continuing Education and Skill Development. As part of the CSR, the Container Corporation of India (CONCOR) volunteered to render financial support for setting up of model Adult Education Centres.
Initially, 20 such model Adult and Lifelong Education Centres (ALECs) have been set up in Karnataka. M/s CONCOR have been requested to render further support during 2011-12 for setting up of more model Adult and Lifelong Education Centres (ALECs). An Interactive Meeting was held with nearly 350 Chairpersons of Zila Lok Shiksha Samitis, SLMA Directors and other district level literacy officials.

Innovations- A fund flow mechanism and management system has been specifically planned for SB Programme. This fund flow and management system has been designed with the objectives: providing access to funds to implementing agencies up to village level, for optimal utilization of funds; enhancing transparency and accountability by placing the financial details in public domain; and empowering PRIs by allowing financial autonomy. Institute of Public Auditors of India, New Delhi, has developed an Accounts Manual for Saakshar Bharat which after print has been distributed to concerned agencies. It would facilitate the maintenance of accounts by implementing agencies. A Bank Authorization Module for authorizing funds to SLMA’s, district and sub districts agencies has been designed by NIC and is in operational mode. NIC has developed a Special Planning Tool which has facilitated state level implementing agencies to formulate state plans for the eligible districts for Saakshar Bharat, comprising of all the physical and financial details.