

CHAPTER XII : MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND CULTURE

Asiatic Society

12 Unfruitful expenditure on acquisition of space

The Asiatic Society failed to assess its requirement of space and went ahead to acquire on lease from the Kolkata Municipal Corporation space to accommodate its Publication Department and open an exhibition-cum-sales counter. The space remained for 72 months without use resulting in unfruitful expenditure of Rs 20.95 lakh besides loss of interest of Rs 26.61 lakh.

To accommodate its Publication Department and also to open an exhibition-cum-sales counter the Asiatic Society (Society) approached the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) in June 1994 for acquisition on lease basis 143.978 sq.mt. floor area at the annexe building of the New Market. The Society, however, did not examine the feasibility of accommodating the Publication Department in the proposed location considering the fact that existing space at New Market in the same floor remained partly unutilised. The KMC allotted the space to the Society in July 1994. The Society entered into an agreement with the KMC in March 1995 at an initial one time payment of Rs 14.40 lakh and monthly rent of Rs 20 per sq. mt. from March 1995 to July 1996 and then enhanced rate of Rs 25.50 per sq. mt. from August 1996 onwards. The space was handed over by the KMC to the Society in October 1995.

The Society made one time payment of Rs 14.40 lakh between July 1994 and August 1994. The Society also paid an amount of Rs 7.17 lakh to CPWD in March 1995 for providing electrification and air-conditioning in the space and an amount of Rs 1.66 lakh between September 1995 and June 1996 to a firm for interior decoration. All the works remained incomplete as of October 2001.

The space remained unutilised since the date of taking possession. In November 1998, the Council of the Society decided to dispose of the space as it was not found fit for housing the Publication Department. Besides this it was felt by society that (a) area was bad and poorly lit. (b) No ladies staff were willing to work there due to incongenial atmosphere. (c) The place was not fit for habitation. (d) the Diana shutter which was the entrance to the hall could not be opened easily and required a lot of effort. Accordingly, the

Society in January 1999 sought permission of KMC for disposal of the premises. But the permission has not been received till December 2001. The Society also approached the CPWD in November 1999 for refund of the deposited amount of Rs 7.17 lakh and ultimately closed the work before completion in January 2000 after CPWD incurred an expenditure of Rs 2.09 lakh. Out of the balance Rs 5.08 lakh, an amount of Rs 2.68 lakh has been expended by CPWD on other works of the Society and the remaining amount of Rs 2.40 lakh is yet to be received.

Thus, lack of proper planning and assessment of requirement of space resulted in unfruitful expenditure of Rs 20.95 lakh including undischarged liability of Rs 2.80 lakh towards monthly rent apart from loss of interest of Rs 26.61 lakh. The Publication Department and exhibition-cum-sales counter continues to function from the Society's existing building.

The matter was referred to the Ministry in September 2001; their reply was awaited as of January 2002.