

CHAPTER III: DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

3.1 Avoidable expenditure of Rs.1.21 crore on hiring of office space

Controller of Certifying Authority (CCA) under the Department of Information Technology hired office space from the Sports Authority of India in August 2001. However, in June 2004, CCA vacated the hired premises and shifted back to Electronics Niketan. CCA incurred avoidable expenditure on rent for Rs.1.21 crore towards hiring of space in excess of prescribed norms and further, there was loss of Rs.44.58 lakh due to non-removal of fixed installation for which approval of Ministry of Finance to write off the amount is still awaited.

The office of the Controller of Certifying Authority (CCA) under the erstwhile Ministry of Information Technology, now Department of Information Technology (DIT) was established in 2001 to implement the provisions of IT Act, 2000. CCA required space for its officers, housing the hardware required to enable its functioning (servers for key generation, National Repositories of Keys, databases, websites and server in the laboratory for Virus Alert Center, Network Security etc.) and a Conference Room for meeting and training law enforcement officers. CCA submitted a proposal in November 2000 to DIT for allotment of about 10,000 sq.ft. of space in Electronics Niketan to accommodate 48 officers/staff against the sanctioned strength of 34, conference room, training facilities, laboratories, strong room etc. DIT allotted 2435 sq.ft. space to CCA in Electronics Niketan and expressed its inability to allot more space. After taking the space allotted into account, CCA assessed that it required another 7050 sq.ft. of space to house its staff and hardware. Therefore, CCA hired 7035 sq.ft. of office space from Sports Authority of India (SAI) at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium (JNS) in August 2001 at a monthly rent of Rs.7.91 lakh for a period of three years.

It was observed in audit that:

- As per the scales of office accommodation for various categories of officers of Central Secretariat, the space requirement for 34 officers/staff works out to 3900 sq.ft. as against 7505 sq.ft. assessed by CCA, which was 3605 sq.ft more than the prescribed norms. Taking into account the actual space available, CCA had incurred an avoidable expenditure of Rs.1.21 crore on the rent of premises hired in excess of prescribed norms.
- CCA incurred an expenditure of Rs.82.75 lakh towards renovation of the hired space at JNS viz., security and interior designing (Rs.63.23 lakh), air conditioners/installation of conditioners (Rs.9.90 lakh + Rs.2.45 lakh),

drainage system (Rs.0.51 lakh) and purchase of EPABX (Rs.6.66 lakh). In November 2003, CCA felt that the space utilisation at the hired premises at JNS had been very poor as only 10 persons out of total 17 deployed staff were occupying the hired space. In February 2004, it was decided to shift CCA's office from JNS to Electronics Niketan. Accordingly, the office was shifted from JNS to Electronics Niketan in June 2004. At the time of shifting, all the necessary infrastructure and moveable items were shifted from JNS to Electronics Niketan. However, fixed installations having book value of Rs.44.58 lakh such as false flooring, full height cabinet, library racks etc. could not be removed. DIT requested Ministry of Finance (MoF) in November 2006 for write off. Sanction for write off was still awaited from MoF.

While accepting the facts, DIT stated in October 2007 that space requirement of 10,000 sq.ft. was estimated in November 2000 for accommodation of the projected strength of 56 officers and space of 7035 sq.ft. was hired in August 2001 from SAI at JNS with minimum functional requirement.

The reply is not tenable, as the Ministry had sanctioned 34 posts (of these, 33 were sanctioned in June 2000, February and August 2001) and the Ministry should have planned accommodation only for the sanctioned posts. Further, CCA was required to hire the minimum space at JNS to accommodate the sanctioned staff till August 2001. It is also relevant to mention here that the sanctioned strength of 34 posts had not increased since 2001-02, whereas the persons in position had decreased from 23 (2001-2004) to 12 (as of July 2007). Regarding non-removal of fixed items from JNS, DIT stated (October 2007) that it might not be possible to remove these items and it would have attracted penalty for the damages.

Thus, hiring of office space in excess of prescribed norms led to an avoidable payment of rent of Rs.1.21 crore and inability to remove fixed installations worth Rs.44.58 lakh.