

OVERVIEW

In the course of discharging its functions, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is, inter alia, responsible for acquisition and maintenance of properties owned by the Government of India (GOI) in India and abroad. Of the 164 Missions/Posts abroad, government owned chancery buildings were at 77 places, residences for Ambassadors/Head of Missions at 83 stations, 159 flats for officers at different levels at 37 stations and 451 other residences at 30 stations. Other chanceries, embassy residences (ER) and residences for officers and staff were located in rented buildings. In addition, MEA also oversaw the construction, maintenance and hiring of properties housing its headquarters and subordinate offices within India.

The entire system of management of properties by MEA was characterised by delays both in acquisition and construction of properties abroad as well as in India. Although the Public Accounts Committee and the Standing Committee of Parliament on MEA had recommended that MEA should take steps to minimise the expenditure on rentals, the delays on the part of MEA/Missions/Posts resulted in such expenditure actually increasing over the years. MEA did not utilise the capital outlay for public works and housing in full and reported substantial savings under both the heads.

MEA failed to acquire land at two stations abroad on reciprocal basis. It could not commence construction on 14 plots of land abroad and six in India for years together owing to delay in finalisation of pre-construction requirements. MEA also could not redevelop/reconstruct properties at three stations abroad. Four government owned properties were also lying vacant awaiting disposal. Two properties were purchased but their titles have not been got transferred to the Government of India even after a lapse of more than 10 years. Out of 230 flats constructed in India after investing Rs. 21.17 crore for housing the officers and the staff of MEA, 180 were lying vacant.