

## CHAPTER – V

# Department of Science and Technology

### 5.1 Avoidable expenditure on hiring of office premises

**Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) failed to occupy the premises hired from a private agency, for its office for 22 months and incurred avoidable expenditure of ₹8.84 crore towards rent.**

Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) was created by an act of Parliament (January 2009) for promoting basic research in Science and Engineering and to provide financial assistance to persons/institutions engaged in such research. While addressing (January 2010) the Indian Science Congress, Prime Minister had announced that the Board shall become operational by March 2010.

The office and other accommodation for the Board were to be provided on the land allotted to Department of Science and Technology (DST) at Noida. However, as this was expected to take about five years, DST decided (July 2009) to provide alternative accommodation to SERB by hiring built-up space from market.

After three rounds of tendering, SERB finalised (November 2010) an area of 15,953 sq. ft. on the lower ground floor of 'Vasant Square Mall' for its office. As per the conditions of acceptance letter (November 2010), the lessor would provide building in a ready to move condition with all electrical, sewer and other civil amenities available on the date of signing of lease deed. SERB entered into a lease agreement (February 2011) with Suncity Projects Pvt. Ltd. (lessor) for a period of three years at monthly rent of ₹41.09 lakh including maintenance charges and taxes.

SERB entrusted (February 2011) the interior work of the office to National Mission for Bamboo Applications (NMBA), a division of DST, at a cost of ₹1.67 crore to be completed within one month. The interior work was completed by NMBA in December 2011. However, SERB did not occupy the office premises until December 2012 i.e after about 22 months of commencement of rent payment and 12 months of completion of interior works. During the period from February 2011 to November 2012, DST/SERB made a total payment of ₹8.84 crore to the lessor towards rent for the hired office space.

Besides, idle investment of ₹1.67 crore was also incurred on interior works at rented premises.

Audit observed that SERB did not have its own staff and its work was being looked after by DST officers/scientists on dual capacity basis. The Recruitment Rules of SERB were also not notified (May 2013) and out of 24 sanctioned posts, only the post of Director was filled-up (June 2012).

Thus, in spite of the non-existence of regular staff of its own, SERB hired office space and incurred substantial expenditure towards rent.

SERB stated (November 2012) that the furnishing work along with other infrastructure necessary to run an office took more than expected time. SERB added that in the absence of Recruitment Rules, the SERB projects and other related works were executed by the scientists of DST in dual capacity.

The reply of SERB is not acceptable, as the decision to hire office space when hiring of regular staff would not be imminent due to absence of Recruitment Rules of the organisation, was imprudent. Besides, though the premises were ready by December 2011, SERB delayed in occupying the same by one year, until December 2012.

DST justified the delays on account of various reasons and stated (June 2013) that SERB's hired accommodation was being utilised from December 2012 onwards.

Thus, lack of planning and injudicious decision to hire office accommodation in the absence of regular staff and failure to occupy the same resulted in avoidable expenditure of ₹8.84 crore towards lease rent and idle investment on interior work to the extent of ₹1.67 crore.

## **5.2 Inadmissible payment of Transport Allowance**

**Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research irregularly paid transport allowance of ₹69.93 lakh to its employees who were utilising Institute's transport facility.**

Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Bengaluru (JNCASR) was established as a deemed university in 1989 with mandate to promote scientific research and training.

As per Government of India, Ministry of Finance (MoF) orders dated 29 August 2008, transport allowance shall not be admissible to those employees who have been provided with Government transport. Further, as per Fundamental Rule 44, the amount of compensatory allowance should be so

fixed that the allowance is not on the whole a source of profit to the recipient.

Audit scrutiny of the records of JNCASR for the period from September 2008 to February 2013 revealed that 62 employees were getting transport allowance in addition to using the transport service facility that was provided for students and research staff, on payment of nominal amount ranging from ₹75 to ₹350 per month. It paid transport allowance of ₹69.93 lakh to these employees during September 2008 to February 2013.

JNCASR stated (August 2012) that the transport services were meant for the research staff who were not in receipt of transport allowance and the staff who were in receipt of the transport allowance were made to pay for the usage of the transport services and this also helped in utilising the idle capacity.

Audit feels simultaneous granting of transport allowance and utilising JNCASR's transport facilities at nominal rates was in violation of government instructions. Audit further observed that prior to the implementation of the recommendations of the Sixth CPC, JNCASR had been providing the transport services meant for the research staff to its employees without payment of transport allowance. The contention of JNCASR is, therefore, not acceptable.

The matter was referred to DST in October 2012, however reply was not received as of July 2013.

