

CHAPTER IV: WORKS AND MILITARY ENGINEER SERVICES

4.1 Inordinate Delay in completion of works sanctioned for operational military requirements

Construction of an underground operation theatre (UGOT), sanctioned for operational military requirements of a Military Hospital (MH), was delayed by Military Engineer Services (MES) by ten years, thereby denying the facility to the troops in operations. The work was completed at a cost of ₹1.54 crore, after the MH had already moved to a different location. The assets are now lying unutilized.

To avoid any eventuality of the existing Military Hospital (MH) becoming non-functional in case of shelling across the border, necessity for construction of underground operation theatre (UGOT) was felt by Military Hospital (MH) at Tangdhar. The MH had proposed that with a surgeon Specialist, Anaesthetist and Medical Specialist posted with the hospital, the UGOT can be used for providing uninterrupted patient care in case of emergency.

General Officer Commanding of the Corps accepted the necessity on urgent military and operational reasons and accorded a 'go ahead sanction' for ₹ 70 lakhs, invoking Para 11¹³ of Defence Works Procedure (DWP), in July 1999, for construction of the UGOT. The work was to be completed within two years. Regular administrative approval was accorded by Ministry of Defence in November 2004 for ₹ 1.39 crore.

For execution of the work, a contract was concluded by Chief Engineer Srinagar Zone (CESZ) in September 2000 for a lump sum of ₹ 1.25 crore with dates of completion as 26 September 2002. Despite the operational urgency, MES could not complete the project in time. The construction work was delayed due to a number of problems like seepage from floor and walls leading to flooding of operation theatre, which was attributed by HQ Northern Command to poor workmanship by the contractor and lack of proper supervision by MES.

In April 2008, the MH for which UGOT was being constructed was shifted to a different location (Drugmulla) and a forward surgical centre (FSC) of a Field Hospital was shifted to Tangdhar. With this relocation of hospitals, Tangdhar station was effectively without any dedicated hospital, as the FSC was only a detachment of a field hospital. There were no Surgeon Specialist or Anaesthetist posted in the FSC.

¹³Para 11 of DWP is invoked in case of unexpected circumstances which may arise from operational military necessity and make it imperative to short circuit the normal procedure.

Due to continued seepage in the UGOT, HQ Infantry Division constructed (March 2011) a retaining wall and drain up to the depth of foundation to prevent underground water seepage into the UGOT for ₹15.45 lakh. Construction of UGOT was finally completed in June 2011 at a cost of ₹138.68 lakh and handed over to the users in September 2011.

We noticed that while the provision of UGOT was sanctioned by the GOC of the Corps on urgent military and operational reasons by invoking Para 11 of the DWP, yet MES could not complete the work within the stipulated time. The urgent operational work which was stipulated to be completed within two years, was actually completed after 12 years of the sanction, thereby denying the lifesaving facility to the troops in operations. The unit (MH), which had initiated the case for UGOT, *inter alia*, on the basis of available medical specialists, had already shifted out to a different location by that time. The casualties requiring surgical treatment were either airlifted or evacuated by road to nearby hospitals. The FSC which replaced the MH, had neither a surgeon specialist nor any Anaesthetist posted, therefore, the assets worth ₹1.54 crore so created are lying un-utilized.

The matter was referred to the Ministry in January 2016; their reply was awaited (March 2016).

4.2 Non recovery of water charges from Personnel below Officer Ranks

Garrison Engineers responsible for realization of revenue, did not recover water usage charges from Personnel below Officer Ranks at Udhampur, Satwari and Dimapur stations, despite instructions issued by the Ministry. This resulted in non-recovery of ₹ 97.89 lakh.

Regulations for the Military Engineer Services (RMES) stipulate that Garrison Engineer (GE) is responsible for prompt realization of all revenues receipt. Prior to Oct 2003, all paying consumers paid from Defence Services/civil estimates were to be billed for water consumed by them at all India flat rate fixed by Government of India.

In October 2003, Ministry revised rate of recovery of water usage charges for the paying consumers to the charges of prevailing rates of recovery made by local State Jal Board/ water Supplying agency from general public living in adjoining colonies. However, these charges from service personnel were to be recovered at half of the above stipulated rates.

Notwithstanding the instructions issued by the Ministry, we noticed that in Northern command, water usage charges were not being recovered by MES from PBORs at Udhampur and Satwari stations, though the recovery from officers and civilians was being affected. As a result, water usage charges

worth ₹58.81 lakh were outstanding against occupants of 3646 PBOR quarters for the period from 2008-09 and 2013-14. Similar in Eastern command, the irregularity was also observed at Military station Dimapur where water charges were not being recovered. The amount of such recovery for the period from 2008-09 to 2014-15 works out to ₹39.08 lakh.

To an audit query, Assistant Accounts Officer (AAO) GE Udhampur, responsible for raising of bills, stated that non recovery was due to non receipt of return of recoveries from concerned Barrack Stores Officer. GE Satwari confirmed commencement of recovery of water charges from PBORs after same was pointed out in audit. GE Dimapur, however, stated that PBORs were entitled for free supply of water in terms of Quarter Master General, Army HQ (QMG) directions issued on 10.07.2007.

While the GEs at Udhampur and Satwari had accepted the failure in the system, the reply given by GE Dimapur was not factually tenable, as the instructions issued by the Ministry cannot be superseded by the instructions of a lower authority i.e. QMG. Further, even the QMG in March 2012 had clarified that the recovery from service personnel be made as per the MoD policy directives of October 2003.

The case, therefore, reveals that the respective GEs had failed to recover water usage charges from PBORs at Udhampur, Satwari and Dimapur stations, resulting in non recovery of ₹97.89 lakh.

The case was referred to the Ministry in January 2016; their reply was awaited (March 2016).