

~~Scrutiny of records revealed that though the scheme was launched in October 2014 and 1,85,204 IHHLs had been constructed under SBM (G), however, no evaluation study had been conducted in the State to review the implementation of the scheme and initiate course of corrections in areas which required improvement. Audit had also physically verified 375 beneficiaries in selected districts under SBM (G) and 141 beneficiaries of 11 ULBs under SBM (U) and various shortcomings were noticed (as discussed in paragraph 3.11.4.4), which could have been flagged had the scheme been evaluated as prescribed.~~

### **3.11.7 Conclusion**

~~State Swachh Bharat Mission was not set-up as per guidelines. Though Punjab had taken up Mission Swachh Punjab to make it Open Defecation Free by 02 October 2019 and 31 December 2017 under Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) and Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) respectively, as of March 2017, Individual Household Latrines for 94,353 (83 per cent) households and 1,146 Community Toilet/Public Toilet (100 per cent) under Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) and Individual Household Latrines for 2,14,647 households under Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) in the State were yet to be constructed. Thus, the target of making the State open defecation free by 02 October 2019 and 31 December 2017 in Rural and Urban areas appear to be hard to achieve. The matter was referred to Government in May 2017; reply was awaited (November 2017).~~

## **PUBLIC WORKS (BUILDINGS AND ROADS) DEPARTMENT**

### **3.12 Implementation of e-Procurement System in Public Works Department (Buildings and Roads)**

**Threshold limit for e-tendering was not brought down to ` one lakh as suggested by GOI. Various tender provisions in respect of resubmission and withdrawal of bids, opening of single bids in first instance, selection of bid openers, etc. were not mapped in the System. Instances of non-updation of tender status, inconsistencies between bill of quantity and tender summary report and other System related discrepancies were also noticed. Besides, non-secure use of private key for opening of bids, non-segregation of duties, non-execution of agreement with National Informatics Centre, etc. showed weak system control mechanism in the Department.**

#### **3.12.1 Introduction**

The Government of Punjab implemented (July 2010) the e-Procurement System in Public Works Department (Building and Roads) (PWD-B&R) with a view to enhancing transparency in tendering process and non-discrimination amongst bidders. The System also enables free access to tender documents, clarifications, secure online bid submission and access to bid opening event to all from any place on 24x7 basis.

A generic e-Procurement software application, as a part of Mission Mode Projects (MMPs), called Government e-Procurement Solution of National Informatics Centre (GePNIC) was developed by the National Informatics

Centre (NIC) using web and portal technologies along with PostgreSQL as RDBMS<sup>111</sup>. The e-Procurement system (GePNIC) consists of the following processes: Registration (consists of departmental users as well as bidders), publishing of tender, bid submission, tender opening, technical evaluation, uploading of technical evaluation summary, financial bid opening, financial evaluation, uploading of financial summary and award of contract. The e-Payment gateway for online payment of tender fee and earnest money was implemented in May 2016.

The Secretary, PWD (B&R), Punjab is the administrative head and the Chief Engineer, PWD (B&R) is the departmental head, who is assisted by the Superintending Engineers and Executive Engineers at Circle and Divisional levels respectively. Besides, Punjab Roads and Bridges Development Board<sup>112</sup> (PRBDB) is the nodal agency for implementation of e-Procurement System in PWD (B&R).

The audit was conducted to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation of the e-Procurement System in PWD (B&R) with regard to IT controls, mapping of business processes and functioning of system. The audit covered the period from July 2010 to December 2016<sup>113</sup> and was conducted between January 2017 and August 2017. IDEA (Interactive Data Extraction and Analysis) tool was used for the analysis of data, in respect of nine<sup>114</sup> out of 74 divisions of PWD (B&R), Punjab. Besides, records of PRBDB were also test-checked. The data dump provided to audit had 9,823 work items, in total. No assurance regarding completeness of data dump was provided by PRBDB.

The data relating to the test-checked divisions consisted of 2,381 work items. The attachments/information on the uploads by the departmental officers as well as bidders, were not furnished to Audit (July 2017). The audit findings were discussed with the Secretary, PWD (B&R) and NIC in October 2017 and the replies furnished by the Department have been suitably incorporated in the report.

## Audit findings

### 3.12.2 Implementation issues

#### 3.12.2.1 *Non-execution of agreement with NIC*

GePNIC application was got customized as per requirements of the Department. The roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders i.e. PWD, NIC

<sup>111</sup> Relational Database Management System.

<sup>112</sup> PRBDB was constituted by GOP vide Punjab Act No. 22 of 1998 and notified (July 1998) as an undertaking of the State Government to act as a catalyst for infrastructure development in Road Sector in the State of Punjab.

<sup>113</sup> The PRBDB provided (March 2017) data dump of e-Procurement System up to December 2016.

<sup>114</sup> Construction Divisions No. 1 (i) Amritsar, (ii) Ferozepur, (iii) Hoshiarpur, (iv) Ludhiana, (v) Mohali; Provincial Divisions (vi) Amritsar, (vii) Ferozepur, (viii) Hoshiarpur and (ix) Ludhiana, selected on judgemental basis after analyzing the database.

and National Informatics Centre Services Inc. had been defined in the proposal of NIC which was duly accepted (May 2010) by the Department.

Audit observed that no documentation i.e. agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for customization/implementation of the e-Procurement System was entered into with NIC for procuring its services. In response to an audit query on data backup and archiving of e-Tenders, PRBDB stated (February 2017) that database of the portal was being maintained and managed by NIC. Whereas, the proposal of NIC accepted by the Department vested the responsibility for maintaining data backup archives on the user department i.e. PWD.

The NIC stated (October 2017) that the agreement could now be made in respect of this application as it was being implemented in all other departments in the State as well.

### **3.12.2.2 Business Continuity Plan, Disaster Recovery plan and IT Security policy**

The objective of having a Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plan and associated controls is to ensure that the organization can still accomplish its mission and it would not lose the capability to process, retrieve and protect information maintained in the event of an interruption or disaster leading to temporary or permanent loss of computer facilities. Audit, however, noticed that no such Business Continuity Plan, Disaster Recovery Plan and IT Security policy was formulated by the Department.

The Department stated (October 2017) that the draft IT policy was in process of formulation.

### **3.12.2.3 Segregation of duties and User Access**

Segregation of duties and proper user access is essential in an IT system to ensure that transactions are properly authorized, recorded and that assets are safeguarded. Segregation of duties occurs when one person provides a check on the activities of another. It is also used to prevent one person from carrying out an activity from start to finish without the involvement of another person.

➤ It was seen that only two officers/officials viz. Executive Engineer (EE) and Superintendent or Senior Assistant of the respective divisions had been authorized to access the e-Procurement application, to whom five<sup>115</sup> common roles were assigned. In Construction Division No. 1, Ferozepur, only EE was authorized to access the e-Procurement application. Role of Auditor had not been assigned to any user in the test-checked divisions. Further, the System had no provision to capture transfer details of the officers/officials. As a result, in the hierarchy mapping, the officers remained mapped with the same division even after being relieved. Assigning common roles to all users defeated the purpose of role mapping and accountability thereby causing various inconsistencies in the System, as discussed in the report.

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<sup>115</sup> Procurement Officers (i) Admin; (ii) Opener; (iii) Evaluator; (iv) Publisher; and (v) Generation of Departmental Reports.

The Department stated (October 2017) that these issues would be resolved after conducting a workshop on the same for awareness of the users. It was added that mapping of roles would be looked into and redefined.

➤ As per e-Procurement guidelines of Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY), handing over of private key by one officer to another officer both in case of digital signature as well as in case of encryption should not be allowed. Further, Section 42(1) of the IT Act, 2000 prescribes that every subscriber is to exercise reasonable care to retain control of the private key corresponding to the public key listed in his DSC and take all steps to prevent its disclosure.

It was noticed that the private key of officials were used for opening the bids when they were on leave or had retired, in contravention of DeitY guidelines *ibid*. The Department, while admitting the audit observations, stated (October 2017) that such issues could be avoided if Aadhaar validation was introduced in the System.

➤ Bid opener is a departmental official selected by the Department at the time of tender creation, who is authorized to open bids received against the tender, both for technical as well as financial bids. The e-Procurement System contains four options for selection of number of bid openers i.e. 'two of two', 'two of three', 'three of three' and 'two of four'. However, NIC recommended selection of two of four option, as any two bid openers can open bids from the list of four officials configured during tender creation.

As per Standard Bidding Document (SBD) and approval (July 2010) of the Chief Engineer, PWD (B&R), Punjab, only two bid openers *viz.* the Executive Engineer and the Divisional Superintendent of the concerned division were selected as first and second bid openers respectively to open bids. Accordingly, the Department selected 'two of two' option. Audit noticed that due to non-selection of four bid openers, as recommended by NIC, in 579 instances the bid openers were opted from other Divisions/Circle to open the bids instead from the concerned Division, which was not in line with the SBD and orders (July 2010) of the Chief Engineer.

The Department assured (October 2017) that 'two of four' option would be operated in future.

#### **3.12.2.4 Threshold values for e-tendering**

The PWD (B&R), Government of Punjab (GOP) fixed (June 2010) a threshold limit of ` ten lakh for each tender in respect of e-tendering in the Department. Whereas, for the other application (Tender Wizard) implemented in other departments, the threshold limited was fixed (January 2011) at ` five lakh. Further, Government of India (GOI) suggested (March 2015) to bring down the threshold value for e-tendering to ` one lakh in a time bound and phased manner by March 2016 for uniformity.

Audit observed that there was no uniformity in threshold limit among the e-Procurement solutions implemented in the State and the Department did not

take any action to bring down the threshold limit to ` one lakh as suggested by GOI (March 2015).

The Department agreed (October 2017) to bring down the threshold value to ` five lakh. However, compliance to GOI's suggestion was awaited (November 2017).

### **3.12.3 Non adherence to rules**

Analysis of the data pertaining to nine test-checked divisions showed the following deficiencies:

#### **3.12.3.1 Inadequate time for bidding**

GOP notified (July 1996) bidding time of 10 days, 15 days and 21 days from the date of publication of tender notices for the works costing between ` 5 lakh to ` 50 lakh; ` 50 lakh to ` 2 crore; and above ` 2 crore respectively.

It was seen that out of 2,381 tender notices published on the portal, reduced duration for submission of bid to the extent of only three days were provided in 1,116 tender notices (47 per cent), as detailed in *Appendix 3.7*, in contravention of the provisions *ibid*. Of these, in 480 tenders, number of bids received in each tender was less than three. Further, there was gap of one to four days and five to 11 days in 868 and 15 work items respectively between publishing and sale period. Audit noticed that the provisions of the notification (July 1996) were not mapped in the System, thereby giving inadequate time to contractors for bidding. The Department stated (October 2017) that the requisite timelines would be mapped in the System.

#### **3.12.3.2 Opening of single bid in first instance**

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) guidelines<sup>116</sup> prescribe that single bid shall not normally be accepted for the first time, and the same can be considered for acceptance only in emergent situations, that too subject to recording of detailed justifications in support of acceptance with the approval of competent authority. Paragraph 2.67 (3) of PWD Code specifies that should necessity arise of making any change in the specifications after tenders have been invited but before they have been received or accepted, fresh tenders should as a rule be invited. Further, as per instructions (October 2014) of GOP, registered Labour and Construction (L&C) Societies are to be preferred for works costing up to ` 40 lakh.

Analysis of database and its corroboration with manual records in respect of nine test-checked divisions revealed that single bids were received in 415 out of 1,743 work items (24 per cent) in first instance and contract was awarded in these cases. The said CVC guidelines had not been mapped in the System, in

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<sup>116</sup> As referred to in the instructions issued (April 2008) by the Ministry of Shipping, Road Transport and Highways, GOI to the State PWDs and also in the circular dated 15.01.2013 of National Rural Roads Development Agency, Ministry of Rural Roads Development, GOI (under PMGSY).

the absence of which, neither did the System alert before opening<sup>117</sup> single bid nor was there any provision for posting of justification for considering/accepting single bid tenders. Corroboration with manual records in test-checked cases further revealed that for 26 work items, Detailed Notice Inviting Tender (DNIT) amount was revised twice, ranging between 7.15 per cent and 89.60 per cent after reducing the scope of work. The Department instead of retendering awarded the works after negotiating with the bidder on the basis of undertaking for acceptance of reduction in scope of work and DNIT amount, in contravention of the provisions *ibid*. In six<sup>118</sup> out of 26 cases, the revised DNIT amount came down to less than ` 40 lakh, but no opportunity was given to the registered L&C Societies as well as other bidders with lower bid capacity to participate in the tender.

The Department stated (October 2017) that the requisite feature would be incorporated in the System which would allow opening of single bid in first instance only after posting the detailed justification along with approval of the higher authority. It was further added that in cases where scope of work had been reduced before award of contract, fresh tenders would be called for.

### **3.12.3.3 Provision for resubmission and withdrawal of bids**

As per SBD for e-tendering, bid once submitted cannot be resubmitted or withdrawn.

Analysis of database revealed that resubmission of bids in 1,920 work items and withdrawal of bids in 1,018 work items was allowed<sup>119</sup> at the time of uploading tender. Audit noticed that the functionality of resubmission and withdrawal existed in the System as per DeitY guidelines<sup>120</sup>. However, the SBD provisions to which the Department was liable to follow during e-procurement process had not been mapped in the System.

The Department stated (October 2017) that the provision would be got mapped according to SBD so as to avoid such discrepancies in future.

### **3.12.3.4 Short period between uploading of technical bid evaluation summary on portal and opening of financial bid**

Upon completion of technical evaluation of bids by the Tender Processing Committee (TPC), technical evaluation summary is uploaded on the portal after which, the bidder comes to know whether his bid has been technically

<sup>117</sup> Ordinary text or plain text or other data is transformed into coded form by encryption (during uploading of bid); and translated back to plain text or data by decryption (during opening of bid).

<sup>118</sup> Tender reference Nos. (i) 17.8 dated 24.10.2013; (ii) No. EE/Prov/Asr/33/11 dated 22.10.2013; (iii) No. 25 (B) dated 22.10.2013; (iv) No. 25 (D) dated 22.10.2013; (v) No. 25 (E) Dated 22.10.2013 and (vi) No. 25 (G) dated 22.10.2013.

<sup>119</sup> Resubmission and withdrawal in Construction Divisions No. 1 (i) Amritsar (146 & 169); (ii) Ferozepur (313 & 141); (iii) Hoshiarpur (157 & 81); (iv) Ludhiana (148 & 86); (v) Mohali (151 & 80); Provincial Divisions (vi) Amritsar (214 & 94); (vii) Ferozepur (249 & 105); (viii) Hoshiarpur (228 & 106); and (ix) Ludhiana (314 & 156).

<sup>120</sup> A bidder has a right to submit 'modification bid', 'substitution bid' or 'withdrawal bid' for all his bid submissions.

accepted/rejected by the TPC. As per guidelines (May 2013) for evaluation of bids and award of contract under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) in respect of tenders published on GePNIC website, the process of technical evaluation in all cases was to be completed within a period of five working days from the date of opening the technical bids. From 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> day, the period was required to be reserved for receiving complaints, if any, and the resolution of complaints was to be done between 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> day. This can be taken as a benchmark for good practice.

It was noticed that in 194 out of 2,381 cases (eight *per cent*), financial bids were opened in less than five days<sup>121</sup> from uploading the summary of technical bid evaluation on the portal, thereby not giving ample time to a bidder to represent against rejection. The Department assured (October 2017) that sufficient time would be given to a bidder for representing against rejection.

### **3.12.4 Other System related issues and discrepancies**

#### **3.12.4.1 Uploading of status of tender activities on portal**

The results of an analysis of e-Procurement database in respect of nine test-checked divisions are summarized below:

- Status of processing tenders on the portal was not updated in 1,507 out of 1,743 work items (86 *per cent*) pertaining to the nine test-checked divisions.
- Portable Document Format (pdf) versions of non-related documents (documents containing designations of the committee members who evaluated the technical and financial bids, Detailed Notice Inviting Tenders, etc.) were uploaded<sup>122</sup> instead of proceedings of technical and financial committees.

This impaired the objective of the e-Procurement System of enhancing transparency in the tendering process. The Department stated (October 2017) that standard templates would be introduced in the System and it would be made mandatory to choose reasons for rejection after technical evaluation to make the System more transparent.

#### **3.12.4.2 Inconsistency in values of bill of quantity and tender summary report**

Bill of quantity (BoQ) is uploaded along with DNIT by the tender inviting authority at the time of publishing the tender. This is an Excel template in which the bidder has to quote the rates and this forms part of the bid. BoQ comparative chart is generated from the BoQ uploaded by the bidders.

<sup>121</sup> Between 00:00:02:08 and 04:17:47:14 days.

<sup>122</sup> (i) Techsummary\_9308.pdf (2016\_CEPW\_8729\_1), techsummary\_9309.pdf (2016\_CEPW\_8730\_1), techsummary\_9314.pdf (2016\_CEPW\_8735\_1), finance\_9308.pdf (2016\_CEPW\_8729\_1), finance\_9309.pdf (2016\_CEPW\_8730\_1), finance\_9314.pdf (2016\_CEPW\_8735\_1); and (ii) Techsummary\_10196.pdf (2016\_CEPW\_9548\_1).

Test-check of documents available on public portal of e-Procurement System in respect of five test-checked divisions revealed that in 26<sup>123</sup> instances, the Tender Summary Report was depicting incorrect financial bid values or/and bid ranks. The financial bid values and bid ranks were being posted on portal under Tender Summary Report manually and the System was not publishing the same automatically from the BoQ comparative chart. Manual re-entry of data, which is already available in the system entails risk of errors in data capture making the system unreliable.

The Department admitted (October 2017) that in order to ensure data integrity, there should not be any human interface.

#### **3.12.4.3 Absence of functionality in the system for generation of divisional record**

Analysis of e-Procurement database and corroboration with manual records in respect of two<sup>124</sup> test-checked divisions revealed that there was no functionality in the System to generate divisional record (tender register report). The respective divisions were maintaining the tender register manually, in which following discrepancies were noticed:

- A tender<sup>125</sup> was published (February 2013) on the portal wherein bid was received and the technical bid was opened but entry in the manually maintained tender register had been made as “No tender received”.
- In the tender register, under Tender Reference No. 12 dated 16.07.2015, details of some other tender (Tender Reference No. 15 dated 12.08.2015) had been shown. This showed that the manual tender register was not being maintained properly.

In the absence of generation of online tender register report from the System, the chances of missing entries or misleading status in respect of other tenders could not be ruled out and such inconsistencies defeated the objectives of the e-Procurement System.

The Department stated (October 2017) that suitable instructions would be issued in this regard to the concerned. Further action of the Department was awaited (November 2017).

#### **3.12.4.4 Discrepancies in registration of bidders**

The SBD prescribes that each bidder shall submit only one bid for one project/work/package. A bidder who submits more than one bid will cause all the proposals with the bidder’s participation to be disqualified.

It was seen that multiple users were having common e-mail IDs and mobile numbers for correspondence (delivery of e-mails and SMS alerts). As many

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<sup>123</sup> Construction Division No. 1 (i) Ferozepur (11), (ii) Hoshiarpur (1), (iii) Ludhiana (3), Provincial Division (iv) Amritsar (8) and (v) Ferozepur (3).

<sup>124</sup> Provincial Division (i) Ferozepur and (ii) Hoshiarpur.

<sup>125</sup> Tender Reference No. 16 dated 13.02.2013.



as 51 common e-mail IDs were used by 146 users where the System transmitted mail messages on these IDs. Similarly, in 18 work items, SMS alerts to two or more bidders (bidding for same work) were sent on the common mobile numbers.

In seven (out of nine) test-checked divisions users registered as bidders appeared to be related to each other directly or indirectly<sup>126</sup> via common e-mail IDs/mobile numbers/PANs. During analysis of bids table, 100<sup>127</sup> works were identified where two or more bidders having common e-mail IDs/mobile numbers/PANs had submitted bids for the same work. Out of these 100 works, bids in respect of 86 works<sup>128</sup> were technically or/and financially accepted by TPC.

The e-procurement System had a functionality of generating reports on cartel bidding. However, Audit did not come across any case where the bids were rejected on the basis of this report on Cartel bidding.

The Department stated (October 2017) that the specific cases would be looked into.

#### **3.12.4.5 Other discrepancies**

Data analysis of e-Procurement System in respect of nine test-checked divisions showed the following discrepancies:

- Analysis of login session details revealed that session ID 111888 was missing from the table. Further, in two instances (IDs 2658 and 86721), IDs generated by the System had timestamp earlier than that of the ID just preceding them.
- System creates a unique ID for every bid being submitted by the bidder. Analysis of bids table revealed two gaps in IDs (ID 4766 and 9007).
- Data analysis revealed that three bids (ID 3262, 9068 and 17623) were placed after the bid closing date and time. However, only one BID ID 17623 was generated by the system. The bid submission closing date/time was 04 August 2015 at 13:00:00 but the bid was placed on 04 August 2015 at 13:00:10. Further, the said bid with ID 17623<sup>129</sup> was considered and the work was awarded in this case. Reasons for this though called for from PRBDB, were awaited (November 2017).

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<sup>126</sup> Let there be three bidders A, B and C. The bidders A and B have same mobile numbers; and A and C have same email IDs. Though B and C have different mobile number and email IDs, they are related indirectly via A.

<sup>127</sup> Construction Division No. 1 (i) Amritsar (7); (ii) Ferozepur (27); (iii) Hoshiarpur (10); (iv) Ludhiana (1); Provincial Division (v) Amritsar (11); (vi) Ferozepur (37); and (vii) Hoshiarpur (7). In 100 works, 37 bidders were identified as directly related and 63 bidders as indirectly related to each other.

<sup>128</sup> Bids for 11 works were technically rejected and in three cases, bids status was blank in the System.

<sup>129</sup> Work Item Ref No. 2015\_CEPW\_7664\_3.

- The System did not check the validation of e-mail IDs and mobile numbers entered by the users in the registration details, as dummy or invalid records in respect of e-mail IDs<sup>130</sup> (18 records) and mobile numbers (372 records) were identified in the user master.
- The digital signature stamp was not recorded in any of the corrigendum/addendum and other documents uploaded by the Department and the bidders respectively.
- There was no check available in the System to control duplicate user creation in case of departmental user, as user master had duplicate records where different User IDs had been allotted to the same user. Five users were identified with multiple User IDs.
- Fourth character of PAN can only be from the prescribed characters (A,B,C,F,G,H,L,J,P,T,K). It was seen that PAN details in 40 out of 3,502 records were invalid/blank. There was no check available in the System to validate PAN as per the prescribed format.
- The date of birth of the departmental users entered in the System had not been validated, as in four cases<sup>131</sup>, the same was found as incorrect on corroboration with manual record. Correct date of birth is required to deactivate/block user post-retirement.
- There was no provision in the System for enlistment of vendors, so as to categorise the vendors based on past performance.

The Department stated (October 2017) that the discrepancies pointed out by Audit would be looked into. Further action/reply of the Department was awaited (November 2017).

### 3.12.5 Conclusion

The objective of implementing the e-Procurement System in PWD (B&R) to enhance transparency in tendering process and non-discrimination amongst bidders was not achieved satisfactorily. In order to maintain uniformity, threshold limit for e-tendering was not brought down to one lakh as suggested by GOI. Adequate time was not provided to the bidders for submitting their bids and for redressing grievances against rejection of technical bid. Various tender provisions in respect of resubmission and withdrawal of bids, opening of single bids in first instance, selection of bid openers, etc. were not mapped in the System. Functionality available in the System for generating reports on cartel bidding was not used or customized to detect possible cartelization amongst bidders. Instances of non-updation of tender status, inconsistencies between bill of quantity and tender summary report and other System related discrepancies were also noticed. Besides, non-secure use of private key for opening of bids, non-segregation of duties,

<sup>130</sup> Having incorrect domain.

<sup>131</sup> User ID-3717, User ID-3285, User ID-1178 and User ID-309.

non-execution of agreement with NIC, etc. showed weak system control mechanism in the Department.

### **3.13 Unproductive expenditure on idle staff**

**Non-adjustment of idle staff of the Mechanical Circle, Patiala, its three Divisions and nine Sub-divisions, in other wings of the Department rendered the expenditure of ` 46.91 crore incurred on salary of the staff and office expenses, unproductive.**

The Mechanical Circle, PWD (B&R)<sup>132</sup>, Patiala, along with its three Mechanical Divisions and nine Sub-divisions, was established in 1973 and tasked with the procurement and distribution of new machinery and repair of government machinery. The Circle had two stone crushers, six hot mix plants, two diesel pumps and one foundry shop, which were used to supply/issue material to the contractors as per the practice in vogue at that time. Besides repair of government vehicles in its workshops, the Circle also supplied bituminous macadam and pre-mix carpet material for laying of roads. In July 2004, PWD dispensed with the practice of issuing material to the contractual agencies from the stores of PWD. Henceforth, the contractual agencies were to arrange material at their own level i.e. the works were to be executed on through rate basis.

Test check of the records (July 2017) of the Superintending Engineer, Mechanical Circle, PWD (B&R Branch), Patiala (SE) showed that due to introduction of through rate system, the assignment of work to hot mix plants for preparing and supplying material to the contractors, and procurement and repair of machinery had been stopped. As a result, the workshops had been left with no work and the two diesel pumps and the foundry shop had been shut down, thereby rendering the entire staff deployed on these works idle after 2007-08.

The SE informed (June 2011, March 2012, July 2012 and January 2013) the Engineer-in-Chief, Punjab PWD (B&R Branch), Patiala and the Secretary to Government of Punjab, PWD (B&R Branch), Chandigarh that the services of staff deployed in the Mechanical Circle/Divisions/Sub-divisions could be utilized gainfully in other wings of the Department. In view of the complete idling of the staff of the Mechanical Wing, the SE again sent (May 2014) a recommendation to the Chief Engineer (Headquarter) Punjab, PWD (B&R Branch), Patiala for converting the Mechanical Circle into Quality Control Cell or attaching it with the Technical Advisor to the Chief Minister, Punjab as the three<sup>133</sup> divisional offices under the circle were spread across the entire State which would facilitate checking quality of works, wherever required. Since the officers deployed in the Mechanical Wing were Civil Engineers, they were fully competent to perform the quality control duties. However, no action either to adjust the staff in other wings of the Department or to allot any work had been taken so far (November 2017) and the staff posted in the Mechanical Circle/Divisions/Sub-divisions continued to remain idle.

<sup>132</sup> Public Works (Buildings & Roads) Department.

<sup>133</sup> Mechanical Divisions at (i) Ferozepur; (ii) Jalandhar; and (iii) Patiala.