

CHAPTER V: DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

5.1 Unfruitful expenditure

Investment on the scheme ‘Experimental Studies on Non-accelerator Particle Physics’ without ensuring experts to pursue research in this area resulted in laboratory equipment and infrastructure worth Rs.1.20 crore not being effectively utilised for last five years, thus rendering the expenditure largely unfruitful.

Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) is a Society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and an autonomous body under the Department of Science and Technology (DST). Audit examination in July 2007 revealed that laboratory equipment and infrastructure worth Rs.1.20 crore fabricated and operationalised in 2002 was not put to effective use even as of December 2007 as discussed below:

IIA initiated research work towards experimental studies in Non-Accelerator Particle Physics (NAPP) in the year 1992, treating this subject as an allied topic of astrophysics. This was stated to be a discipline born out of the interplay of astrophysics with particle physics. NAPP envisaged activities in the area of high energy astrophysics and astro-particle physics at IIA.

IIA, while making proposals for the Eighth Plan¹ (1992-1997) in the year 1991 did not include NAPP in its plan schemes. However, subsequent to joining of a particle physics scientist as Director of the Institute in July 1992, the plan schemes were revised in 1992 to include NAPP. The revised scheme also projected the requirement of at least five scientists/ engineers. However, there was no record of deploying additional manpower in the subsequent years and as such the Director himself, being the sole expert/ scientist in this area, continued to do the research work.

Two major equipment required for this programme were designed, assembled and fabricated in the Institute and became operational in 2002. Similarly, construction of an underground environmentally controlled chamber to conduct high precision experiments using these equipment was also underway when the Director proceeded on sabbatical leave in November 2002 for one year and retired in December 2003. Subsequently, he was appointed as distinguished professor in IIA but remained on EOL and retired thereafter in August 2004. Thus, there was no one left in the institute to carry out the research on non-accelerator particle physics. IIA had incurred an expenditure of approximately Rs.1.20 crore on creation of laboratory infrastructure

¹ Along with the Revised Estimates of 1991-92.

including purchase of equipment. These equipment were lying unutilised since November 2002.

IIA stated in August 2007 that they were waiting for another particle physics scientist to take up the research work and utilise these equipment, otherwise these equipment could be dismantled and utilised for other ongoing research programmes. It further stated in November 2007 that it had lent several components and equipment on loan basis to Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR).

Reply of IIA needs to be viewed in the light of the fact the Director of the Institute was the only specialist scientist in IIA in the area of nuclear particle physics and the activities in this area were included in the plan scheme only after his joining the institute by revising the Eighth Plan. Despite a lapse of five years, IIA has not been able to recruit any scientist who could pursue research on non-accelerator particle physics and utilise the equipment. The lending of equipment to TIFR on loan basis did not justify huge expenditure incurred for the procurement of equipment.

DST stated in December 2007 that with a view to initiate research activities in NAPP, the Institute made attempts by inviting scientists and offered regular positions to several scientists, but only a few joined the Institute.

Thus, investment on a scheme without ensuring experts resulted in non-utilisation of equipment worth Rs.1.20 crore since last five years, rendering the expenditure largely unfruitful.

5.2 Irregular extension of service

Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science made irregular payment of Rs.25.68 lakh towards pay and allowances, excess retirement gratuity and excess pension up to February 2007 to 16 academic staff as IACS extended their services up to 65 years of age instead of re-employment.

Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, Jadavpur (IACS), an autonomous institution of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), was established in July 1876 to cultivate science with a view to foster high quality fundamental research in frontier disciplines of the basic sciences. DST conveyed the approval of the Government to the extension of the University Grants Commission (UGC) package of pay, allowances and all other terms and conditions of service to the academic staff viz. Lecturers, Readers and Professors of the Association in February 1989. Therefore, the services of the academic staff of the Association continued to be governed as per the package prescribed by UGC and the academic staff were to vacate their office upon

completion of 62 years of age. Their service could be retained in the interest of the institution up to the age of 65 years as per the Memorandum of Association Regulations and bye-laws of IACS.

Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD), in July 1998, while revising the pay scales of academic staff, following the recommendations of the Fifth Central Pay Commission, instructed that the age of superannuation would be 62 years and thereafter no extension in service should be given and the superannuated academic staff might be re-employed up to the age of 65 years. MHRD also advised to amend the statutes and ordinances in line with the regulations within three months from date of issue of the instructions. Therefore, as per MHRD instructions, academic staff were to vacate their office at the age of 62 years and were to be re-employed upto 65 years of age, if required. The instructions of MHRD were also notified by UGC in December 1998.

However, IACS did not amend its rules to comply with the instructions of MHRD that were made applicable to UGC and continued to extend the services of academic staff beyond 62 years of age and upto 65 years of age. It was seen in audit (December 2005) that services of 38 academic staff were extended during February 1986 to July 2004, without following the instructions of MHRD. It was further noticed that since the MHRD instructions of July 1998, 16 academic staff had already retired from the services of IACS between April 1999 and May 2005 after extensions from three months to three years after enjoying the undue financial advantage which was extended by IACS by not observing the instructions of MHRD. In the process, IACS made irregular payment of pay and allowances of Rs.12.54 lakh, excess pension of Rs.10.49 lakh and excess retirement gratuity of Rs.2.65 lakh upto February 2007 to these 16 academic staff.

After being pointed out by Audit in January 2006, IACS stated that there was no case of extension of service beyond 62 years after August 2006. However, it did not intimate whether it had recovered the excess pay and allowances which were paid to academic staff who were in service of IACS on that date.

DST stated in October 2006 that it did not issue any guidelines to IACS to follow MHRD's directives in regard to superannuation at the age of 62 years and further that re-employment upto 65 years as IACS was to be governed as per the provisions of the existing bye-laws towards extending the services of the academic staff beyond 62 years. It was, however, seen that the existing bye-laws unambiguously states that for retention of services of academic staff beyond the age of 62 years and upto 65 years, the UGC guidelines would be followed.

Thus, due to non-observance of its own bye-laws, IACS made irregular payment of Rs.25.68 lakh towards pay and allowances, excess retirement gratuity and excess pension upto February 2007 to 16 academic staff for extension of their services upto 65 years of age instead of re-employment. Furthermore, the revised bye-laws proposed by IACS through its Governing

Council, which is pending approval with the Registrar of Societies since August 2006, completely ignores any reference to compliance with UGC guidelines in a marked reversal of stance from existing bye-laws and in contravention to MHRD instructions of July 1998 regarding re-employment of retired academic staff.