

15 -ാം കേരള നിയമസഭ

4 -ാം സമ്മേളനം

നക്ഷത്ര ചിഹ്നം ഇല്ലാത്ത ചോദ്യം നം. 883

24-02-2022 - ൽ മറുപടിയ്ക്ക്

ഫോറസ്റ്റ് ഡയറക്ടറേറ്റിലെ അക്കൗണ്ടന്റ് ജനറൽ ഓഡിറ്റ്

ചോദ്യം		ഉത്തരം	
ശ്രീ. ഐ .സി .ബാലകൃഷ്ണൻ		Shri. A. K. Saseendran (വനം-വന്യജീവി വകുപ്പ് മന്ത്രി)	
(എ)	ഫോറസ്റ്റ് ഡയറക്ടറേറ്റിൽ അക്കൗണ്ടന്റ് ജനറൽ അവസാനമായി നടത്തിയ ഓഡിറ്റ് റിപ്പോർട്ടിന്റെ പകർപ്പ് ലഭ്യമാക്കാമോ; പ്രസ്തുത റിപ്പോർട്ടിൽ എന്തെങ്കിലും ഗുരുതരമായ കണ്ടെത്തലുകൾ ഉണ്ടായിട്ടുണ്ടോയെന്ന് വ്യക്തമാക്കാമോ?	(എ)	ഫോറസ്റ്റ് ഹെഡ്കാർട്ടേഴ്സിൽ അക്കൗണ്ടന്റ് ജനറൽ അവസാനമായി നടത്തിയ ഓഡിറ്റ് റിപ്പോർട്ടിന്റെ പകർപ്പ് അനുബന്ധമായി ചേർക്കുന്നു. പ്രസ്തുത റിപ്പോർട്ടിൽ ഗുരുതരമായ കണ്ടെത്തലുകൾ ഉണ്ടായിട്ടില്ല.

സെക്ഷൻ ഓഫീസർ

Inspection Report on the Accounts and Records of office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Planning & Development), Forest headquarters, Thiruvananthapuram For the period from April 2018 to July 2021

PART I

Introduction

The Planning and Development Wing of the Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department is mandated with the task of looking after the implementation of developmental projects/works that are funded by State/Central or other agencies. The Wing is headed by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Planning & Development) who is assisted by the Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Finance, Budget & Audit). For administrative convenience, the Wing is bifurcated into three Sections, namely Planning, Audit & Accounts and Statistics Section.

Expenditure details of the Wing for the period from 2018-19 to 2021-21 were as under:

(₹ in lakh)

Year	Establishment Expenditure	Non establishment Expenditure	Total
2018-19	35675.01	21963.64	57638.65
2019-20	37437.07	18353.67	55790.74
2020-21	32466.18	30389.84	62856.02
Total	105578.26	70707.15	176285.41

Audit was conducted from 9/8/2021 to 25/8/2021 covering the period 4/2018 to 7/2021. Audit examined whether the PCCF discharged the functions entrusted to him economically, efficiently and effectively following extent procedures as per guidelines issued by GoI/GoK. Functioning of various internal control mechanisms existing in the Office was also examined. The regularity and propriety aspects were examined based on Kerala Financial Code, Kerala Treasury Code (KTC), orders and circulars issued by GoK and also the general financial principles.

PART II

A-Significant Audit Findings-

Nil

B-Other incidental findings

I Lapse of central assistance

Government of India supplements the efforts of State/Union Territory Governments in prevention and control of forest fire by providing financial assistance under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme 'Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme' (FPMS). The main objectives of the Scheme are (1) to minimise forest fire incidence and assist in restoring productivity of forests in affected areas, (2) to institutionalise the partnership with forest fringe communities for forest protection and (3) to contribute to the larger goal of maintaining environmental stability. The funding pattern for the State of Kerala is 60 per cent Central

share and 40 *per cent* State share. As per the operational guidelines for the Scheme issued by the MoEF&CC, the Central share of the sanctioned amount shall be released in two instalments. Eighty *per cent* of the sanctioned Central share shall be released to the State as first instalment and after receiving UCs and PR of at least 50 *per cent* of the central share released as first instalment, the second instalment shall be released. No release for first instalment will be made for proposals received after second quarter of the financial year and, similarly, no release for second instalment will be considered for proposals received after the third quarter of the financial year.

The MoEF&CC vide sanction order No. 22/2019-20/FPD dated 19 December 2019 conveyed the administrative approval of the APO submitted by the Department for the financial year 2019-20 of the FPMS under CSS at a total cost of ₹ 630.51 lakh on 60:40 percent cost sharing basis as Central share and State share respectively. The Ministry also conveyed the approval of the competent authority for sanction of ₹ 302.64 lakh (80 percent of the Central share) and net release of ₹ 256.80 lakh as release of first instalment of the APO 2019-20, after adjusting unspent balance of ₹ 45.84 lakh of APO for 2018-19 in respect of the Scheme.

Out of the Central release of ₹ 302.64 lakh, only ₹199.24 lakh of Central share and the matching State share of ₹ 132.82 lakh were utilised under the Scheme during 2019-20 and an amount of ₹ 103.40 lakh remained unutilised. Hence the Department requested (July 2020) the MoEF&CC to revalidate the unspent amount for the financial year 2020-21. APO for the Scheme for the year 2020-21 for an amount of ₹ 1,986.21 lakh was also submitted to the Ministry for approval. The Ministry revalidated (August 2020) the unspent balance of ₹ 103.40 lakh for utilisation during the financial year 2020-21. The Department requested (October 2020) the Ministry to approve the APO for 2020-21 and release of fund without the submission of utilisation certificate for the revalidated amount. However, the request was turned down by the Ministry and informed the Department to submit the UC, progress report and photographs of work carried out of the revalidated amount for release of fund. The Department submitted the UC only on 9 February 2021, during the fag end of the financial year. In response, the Ministry informed (15 February 2021) the Department that the funds could not be released during the financial year due to non-availability fund.

Thus, delay in submission of UC for the revalidated amount resulted in non-approval of APO for the financial year 2020-21 and lapse of Central grant.

On this being pointed out, it was replied that components having larger share of funds were those related to core fire protection activities which can be implemented only during forest fire season, which starts more or less in January and ends in May each year, and other components can be implemented only during the period just before the start of forest fire season. It was also stated that no deliberate lapse on the part of the Department in submitting the UC for the revalidated amount and it was purely on technical issues.

Outlay for the APO 2019-20 was ₹ 630.51 lakh, whereas for 2020-21 estimated amount of APO proposed was ₹ 1,986.21 lakh. From this it is evident that the scheme suffered a setback due to lack of fund during 2019-20. Even though GoI insisted for submission of UC for release of revalidated amount and for approval of APO 2019-20, the Department failed to take timely action in the matter. Thus delay in submission of UC resulted in non receipt Central assistance of ₹ 103.40 lakh of revalidated amount and the Central assistance for 2019-20.

II Lapse of NABARD RIDF

As per the revised guidelines issued by the State Government vide GO No. 26/2018/Fin dated 23 February 2018 for NABARD RIDF projects, the administrative departments required to

submit the DPR, checklist, etc., to the Finance Department before 30 September each year for consideration of NABARD.

As per the decision in the review meeting of high value projects chaired by the Chief Secretary held on 26 February 2019, tentative allocation for the Forest Department under Tranche XXV (2019-20) of NABARD was ₹ 30 crore, including State share. It was also decided in the review meeting that in the case of Forest Department, special attention should be given to elephant hospitals and elephant old age homes while proposing projects under the NABARD RIDF XXV 2019-20 to protect elephants suffering from physical ailments and other age related issues.

The Department submitted to Government DPR of six projects for approval and sanction under Tranche XXV (2019-20) of NABARD RIDF. However, no project was approved/sanctioned under XXV of NABARD RIDF during 2019-20 due to reasons given below:

Sl No	Name of project	Reason for rejection
1	Establishing Rehabilitation Centre for Tigers and Large Carnivores at Puthur	Delay in submission of recommendation to NABARD
2	Construction of Forest Station Complex in Wayanad District	-do-
3	Sports Infrastructure Facilities at Forest Training Institute, Aripa	The project proposal does not fit into the scope of the eligible activity under RIDF
4	Infrastructure Development in Parampuzha Campus, High Range Circle, in Kottayam District	The components of the project do not satisfy the criteria stipulated by NABARD
5	Establishing Veterinary Hospital Complex at Puthur	-do-
6	Boundary Consolidation of Forest Areas in Palakkad	The Government vide letter No. D1/128/2019-FWLD dated 24 October 2019 directed the Department to furnish the DPR, land availability certificate, check list prepared in PRICE software for considering under NABARD Tranche XXV. However, no further action was seen taken by the Department.

Entire NABARD RIDF Tranche XXV for 2019-20 of ₹ 30 crore, including State share was lapsed and, thus, the Department was deprived of developmental activities to the extent of that amount.

III Arrears of revenue pending collection

As per the records, arrears of revenue due to the Department as on 31 March 2020 was ₹ 320.40 crore, of which ₹ 210.73 crore was outstanding for more than five years. Age wise break up of arrears of revenue was:

Periodicity	Amount (₹ in crores)
Outstanding for more than five years	210.73
Outstanding for four to five years	15.30
Outstanding for three to four years	21.18
Outstanding for two to three years	21.93
Outstanding for one to two years	25.08
Outstanding for one year	26.18
Total	320.40

It was also noticed that the arrears of revenue as on 31 March 2020 comes to 127.42 percentage of the total revenue collection of the Department for the financial year 2019-20, which was ₹ 251.45 crore.

Out of the total arrears, ₹ 304.59 crore was due from public sector undertakings of the State and Central Government. Amount due from individuals, private companies, etc., was ₹ 11.51 crore.

Status of arrears of revenue pending collection as on 31 March 2021 was not seen updated so far, though the Wing was to monitor the revenue collection by the Department and reports the same to Government, which shows laxity in the follow up for collection of arrears. Sixty percent of total dues was outstanding for more than five years. The Kerala Revenue Recovery Act enable the State to recover the dues with utmost expedition and without undue expenses.

IV Lapses in Internal Control

1 Delay in updating details of vehicles in VEELS software

Government of Kerala, Finance (IT Software) Department vide Circular No.91/2019 Fin. Dated 21 November 2019 had directed to update the details of vehicles and drivers of all Government Department in VEELS software before 31 December 2019.

Finance (IT Software) Department vide circular No.59/2020 dated 22 October 2020 had issued the following instructions:

- i) Budget allocation & month/item wise expenditure should be updated in VEELS software
- ii) From financial year 2020-21 onwards monthly usage of vehicles should be updated
- iii) Further it is clarified in the order that proposals/budget provision in respect of vehicles will be considered only if all details are updated in VEELS software

On scrutiny of records produced to audit it was found that out of the total number of 546 vehicles, details of 303 vehicles were not yet linked with VEELS software as such no budgetary support would be available to Department vehicles which will adversely affect the efficiency of protective mechanism as well as allied activities.

2 Arrears in internal audit and clearance of paragraphs

Internal audit is intended to examine and evaluate the level of compliance with the Rules and procedures so as to provide a reasonable assurance on the adequacy of internal control. Effective internal audit system is a pre-requisite for the efficient functioning of any department.

An Internal Audit Team headed by two Junior Superintends was functioning in the P&D Wing at Forest headquarters to conduct internal audit of various units of Forest Department. Internal Audit Reports of various units approved by the PCCF (P&D) were send to the Office concerned for compliance.

During scrutiny of records relating to the functioning of internal audit, Audit noticed the following:

1. As many as 995 paragraphs pertaining to the period from 2000 were pending clearance in the Internal Audit Reports relating to the field offices.
2. No internal audit has been conducted during 2020-21.
3. Department has so far not prepared a Manual for internal audit.

4. No action has been taken to strengthen the internal audit despite heavy shortfall in conduct of internal audit and in clearance of pending paragraphs.

Delay in taking up of audit and in clearance of paragraphs defeated the purpose and objective of internal audit to bring out the omissions/irregularities for the prompt remedial action and to avoid its recurrence.

PART III

Follow up on findings outstanding from previous inspection reports:

No previous IR pending.

PART IV

Best Practices: No remarkable best practices were noticed during audit.

PART V


Acknowledgements:

The facilities extended to the Audit Team for the smooth conduct of audit is acknowledged herewith.

Officers-in-charge:

Sl No	Name Shri	Designation	From	To
1	Devendra Kumar Verma, IFS	PCCF	7/8/2019	3/3/2021
2	D Jayaprasad, IFS	PCCF	3/3/2021	Continuing

The Report has been prepared on the basis of information furnished and made available by the Auditee. The Office of the Principal Accountant General (Audit II), Kerala, disclaims any responsibility for any mis-information and/or non- information on the part of the Auditee.


For Deputy Accountant General/AMG III