

THIRTEENTH KERALA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

**COMMITTEE
ON
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
(2011-2014)**

TWENTY FIRST REPORT

(Presented on 13th December, 2012)



SECRETARIAT OF THE KERALA LEGISLATURE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
2012

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On

**Paragraphs relating to Forest and Wildlife Department
contained in the Reports of the Comptroller and
Auditor General of India for the years ended
31st March 2008, 2009 and 2010 (Civil).**

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Composition of the Committee ..	v
Introduction ..	vii
Report ..	1-9
Appendices :	
I. Summary of Main Conclusion/Recommendation ..	10-12
II. Notes furnished by Government ..	13-16

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS (2011-2014)

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Members:

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- ” Roshy Augustine
- ” M. V. Sreyams Kumar
- ” M. Ummer.

Legislature Secretariat :

Shri P. D. Sarangadharan, Secretary
,, K. Mohandas, Special Secretary
,, T. Manoharan Nair, Deputy Secretary
Smt. M. R. Maheswari, Under Secretary.

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairman, Committee on Public Accounts, having been authorised by the Committee to present this Report on their behalf, present the Twenty First Report on paragraphs relating to Forest and Wildlife Department contained in the Reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India for the years ended 31st March 2008, 2009 and 2010 (Civil).

The Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India for the years ended 31st March, 2008 (Civil) was laid on the Table of the House on 23rd June 2009, Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India for the year ended 31st March, 2009 (Civil) was laid on the Table of the House on 25th March, 2010 and Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India for the year ended 31st March, 2010 (Civil) was laid on the Table of the House on 28th June, 2011.

The Committee considered and finalised this Report at the meeting held on 10th December, 2012.

The Committee place on record their appreciation of the assistance rendered to them by the Accountant General in the examination of the Audit Report.

Thiruvananthapuram,
13th December, 2012.

DR. T. M. THOMAS ISAAC,
Chairman,
Committee on Public Accounts.

REPORT

FOREST AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

Idle investment on land and blocking up of funds released for Gandhi Smrithivanam Project.

Failure to acquire the land required for 'Gandhi Smrithivanam Project' resulted in idle investment of ₹ 77.99 lakh on part of the land acquired besides blocking up of ₹ 70.86 lakh with the District Collector, Alappuzha.

Mention was made in Paragraph 3.5.3 (ii) of the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India for the year ended 31st March 1999 (Civil) about the non-implementation of 'Gandhi Smrithivanam Project' sanctioned in 1994 despite release of ₹ 1.54 crore by the Forest Department to the District Collector (DC), Alappuzha for land acquisition. During examination of the paragraph the Committee on Public Accounts was informed by the Government that the DC, Alappuzha had acquired 410.95 acres of land and ₹ 51.42 lakh was spent by DC as per Government Orders (March 1999) for the purchase of 1.02 acres of land and building owned by Small Industries Service Institute, Government of India at Kommady in Alappuzha to house the Administrative Office of the Project. Only ₹ 24.24 lakh was available with the DC for balance land acquisition. The Committee on Public Accounts (2001-2004) in its Forty-fourth Report presented to the Legislature on 19th February 2003 viewed with extreme dissatisfaction the failure on the part of the Department to achieve any remarkable progress in the implementation of the project and suggested that the Department should interact frequently with the representatives of the District/Block/Grama Panchayats and social organisations for the successful completion of the Project. It also urged that no more diversion of funds should be effected for any purpose not directly related to the project.

In November 2005, an additional amount of ₹ 45 lakh was released to the DC, Alappuzha for completing the land acquisition. According to the Assistant Conservator of Forests, Social Forestry Division, Alappuzha (April 2007) the total land acquired for the project was 414.82 acres (cost: ₹ 77.99 lakh) the total expenditure incurred on the project was ₹ 1.30 crore. No further acquisition of land took place due to resistance of land owners in some stretches and the balance of ₹ 70.86 lakh (including interest of ₹ 1.62 lakh) was retained by the DC for three to nine years. The land so far acquired was not taken over by the Forest Department as the land was scattered in bits and pieces and part of land acquired was lying under water. Up to this time the Revenue Department had also not completed the survey and demarcation as required.

3/2013.

Government, however, ordered (June 2008) to hand over 100 acres out of the acquired land to IT Department for setting up an IT park.

Thus, even after 14 years since the sanction of the project, the entire land (600 acres) required for the project could not be acquired and the investment of ₹ 77.99 lakh on the already acquired land (414.82 acres) remained idle. Besides, ₹ 70.86 lakh of the project fund remained unutilised with the DC, Alappuzha.

Government stated (August 2008) that the delay in implementation was due to problems in acquisition of land and was not wilful but due to administrative reasons. Government further added that a new requisition for acquisition of the balance land had already been sent (January 2007) by the Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Social Forestry to the District Collector, Alappuzha and the Project would be implemented in a time bound manner. The reply cannot be accepted because Government had not taken any fruitful action for completion of the project despite recommendations (February 2003) of the Committee on Public Accounts and the project is languishing for the past 14 years.

[Audit Paragraph 4.4.1 contained in the Report of Comptroller and Auditor General of India for the year ended 31st March 2008 (Civil)]

[Notes furnished by Government on the above para is included as Appendix II of this Report.]

The Committee noticed that though 600 acres of land was required for establishing Gandhi Smrithivanam Project, only 400 acres was acquired and out of that 100 acres was handed over to Government for establishing IT park. The Committee enquired whether the implementation of the project could be done with the remaining land and asked the department to review the matter.

2. The witness, Principal Secretary, Forest and Wildlife Department replied that the project was conceived in the year 1993 and was envisaged to establish as a wetland forest in the name of Mahatma Gandhi at Thottappalli, Purakkad area, Alappuzha District, as part of a scheme in the 8th five year plan to establish such memorial forest in the name of great National Leaders and it was pointed out that there had been a great tourism potential in the project. An amount of ₹ 154 lakh was released to District Collector, Alappuzha for acquiring land for the Gandhi Smrithivanam Park from central fund under 'Project Elephant'. To a query of the Committee the witness replied that 'Project Elephant' was a special scheme for conserving and protecting elephants. The Committee was surprised on hearing this and asked how the fund earmarked for conserving and protecting elephants could be utilised for developing wetland forestry. The witness replied that project at Thottappalli contained proposal for rehabilitation of domestic elephants also. The main objective of the project was to include Alappuzha

district in the forest map of Kerala. He also added that though notifications were made twice, land acquisition could not be materialized as the land was lying under water and demarcating the individual sub divisions was a difficult task. The local inhabitants in the area had filed an OP in the court against land acquisition which also delayed the implementation of the project.

3. The witness, Principal Secretary, Forest and Wildlife Department reiterated that the department had acquired 414.82 acres at a cost of ₹ 77.99 lakh up to April 2007 and the total expenditure incurred including expenditure for acquisition was ₹ 130 lakh. He again added that on 5-11-2004, the then Forest Minister held a meeting with the officials on the acquisition of 600 acres of land in between TS canal and NH 47. He pointed out that though the proposed land had access from NH on both sides, it was not accessible from TS canal. Being a wetland forest project, it could not be implemented effectively without acquiring the land lying in between the TS canal and the project site. He also submitted that during the meeting convened on 5-11-2004 it was decided to acquire the said land but in the meeting held on 9-11-2005 decided to acquire only the water logged areas only.

4. The witness, Principal Secretary, Forest and Wildlife Department brought to the notice of the Committee that out of 413 acres of wetland acquired, the Revenue Department handed over 100 acres to IT department for establishing IT park which was later developed into land with separate boundary violating the provisions of the Kerala Conservation of Paddy land and Wetland Act, 2008. But later the proposed IT park was shifted to some other place. He also clarified that now Government had decided to retransfer that 100 acres to Forest Department. The peripheral areas of the proposed site had been earmarked and the patches inside the project area were not acquired completely. The major problem faced by the Government was that the land acquired by the department was scattered in bits and was lying under water and so the survey and demarcation of acquired land was impossible.

5. At this juncture the Committee enquired the reason for acquiring such a water logged area for the project. The Additional Chief Conservator of Forest (Development) replied that the project was envisaged to establish a recreation park with boating facility and also with dolphinarium encircling mangroves in the periphery. The concept of a water theme park and a snake park were also intended with a view to set up an eco-tourism project in the proposed site. But in the light of the new Act, it could not be implemented. The witness brought to the notice of the Committee that in back water tourism top priority should be given to Liquid Waste Management as the sustainability of the house boats depends mainly on cleanliness and waste management.

6. The Committee viewed with serious concern that the project was an ill-conceived one and remarked that there occurred serious lapse on the part of the Revenue Department in demarcating boundary, specifically identify the acquired land and handing over the acquired land in spite of spending huge amount for land acquisition.

7. To the query of the Committee, whether the lackadaisical attitude of the Revenue Department caused delay in land acquisition, the witness replied that the Revenue Department was helpless in this matter. The outer periphery of the proposed site was fixed by conducting survey of the total station. He added that the land was scattered as bits and pieces and had more than 200 owners. Details of ownership of about 10-40 bits were yet to be sorted out and hence acquisition of such bits was not tenable.

8. The Principal Secretary, Forest and Wildlife Department added that the projects could be implemented only when the land had been handed over to Forest Department. The Revenue Department had handed over only 64 acres of peripheral area even after acquiring 413 acres. He informed that the Forest Department had decided to initiate activities for getting the land in possession of the Department, without any delay.

9. While concluding the witness examination the Committee opined that serious lapse was occurred on the part of Revenue Department in acquiring, demarcating and handing over the acquired land.

Conclusion/Recommendation

10. The Committee observed that the Gandhi Smrithivanam Project sanctioned during the Eighth Plan could not be realised even in 12th Plan period resulting in the expenditure to the tune of ₹ 1.54 crore become infructuous. The Committee views the project as an ill-conceived one and laments the lackadaisical approach of the Revenue Department in acquiring, demarcating and handing over the acquired land to Forest Department in time.

11. The Committee is of the strong opinion that the project could not be implemented as envisaged, and opines that Forest Department should be more cautious and realistic in implementing projects of similar nature in future. The Committee understands that since the enactment of the Kerala Conservation of Paddy land and Wetland Act, 2008 the landscape of the proposed site could not be altered any more. Considering the series of issues involed in the case, the Committee suggests that the Smrithivanam Project

should be terminated forth with and recommends that the entire project should be recasted in accordance with the existing landscape of the area and by maintaining the sustainability of the wetland and by planting mangroves and other suitable plants in order to preserve the entire flora and fauna of the wetland ecosystem and to develop it as a sustainable eco-friendly tourism project.

12. The Committee also recommends that immediate steps should be taken to acquire the patch of land lying between the T.S. Canal and the project site to envisage a separate entry from the T.S. Canal to the site and suggests that the department should not acquire any more land except the patches of land that left unacquired within the project site.

AUDIT PARAGRAPH

Irregular expenditure on engagement of Data Entry Operators and Computer Operators

Engagement of data entry operators and computer operators by the Forest Department against the directions of Government resulted in irregular expenditure of ₹ 33.30 lakh towards wages.

The State Government directed (January 2007) that the appointment of Data Entry Operators (DEOs) and Computer Operators (COs) on daily wage basis should henceforth be made only against sanctioned posts. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests reiterated (March 2008) the Government's instructions and ordered that engaging DEOs and COs in violation of Government instructions would be at the risk and cost of the officers who engaged them. The Chief Conservator of Forests (Administration) and Chief Conservator of Forests (FMIS*) reported (May 2009) that there were no sanctioned posts of DEOs and COs in the Forest Department and training had already been given to the staff in computer work.

Audit scrutiny revealed that in 88 offices under the Forest Department, expenditure of ₹ 33.30 lakh was incurred towards engagement of DEOs and COs on daily wage basis during February 2007 to March 2009.

The appointment of these DEOs and COs on daily wage basis was against the instructions of both the Government and the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests. Thus, the expenditure of ₹ 33.30 lakh incurred on their appointment as of March 2009 was irregular. It was also noticed that the practice was still being continued and no action had been initiated against the erring officers.

* Forest Management Information System.

The matter was referred to Government (June 2009); reply had not been received (October 2009).

[Audit Paragraph 2.5.1 contained in the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India for the year ended 31st March 2009 (Civil)]

13. Regarding the audit observation the Principal Secretary, Forest and Wildlife Department informed that the order restricting appointment of employees on daily wage basis had been implemented in the Forest Department only from 1-4-2008 onwards. The witness pointed out that there was dearth of competent and trained staff in the Forest Department and the conventional typists were incapable of entering data regarding the implementation of Forest Management Information System in the software. The service of Data Entry Operators was essential in the office of the Chief Conservator of Forests (Social Forestry) Kozhikode during the implementation of new projects viz., 'Ente Maram', 'Vazhiyora Thanal', 'Haritha Theeram' etc. Similarly in the Vigilance Cell at the Headquarters as the sanction strength of typists was only two, of which one was redeployed to some other office, additional employees were required to furnish data regarding forest offences and encroached plantations to the empowered committee for that particular periods. In Punalur forest office, post of typist was not even sanctioned. So preparation of action plan in a time bound manner forced the Department to appoint some personnel on daily wage basis to meet with the circumstances. He added that from 1-4-2008 onwards such appointments were completely dispensed with. The Committee concluded that though it could understand the contingency which led the Forest Department to continue with such appointments it could not justify the act of the department in bypassing the orders issued from the Finance Department. Therefore the Committee decided to recommend to take disciplinary action against the delinquent officers. The Committee opined that routine works should be done with the permanent staff only and urged the department to take urgent steps to impart formal computer training to the regular employees.

Conclusion/Recommendation

14. The Committee cannot justify the act of the Forest Department in appointing Data Entry Operator and Computer Operator on daily wage basis bypassing the order issued by the Finance Department in this regard. The Committee recommends the department to take disciplinary action against the delinquent officers and opines that only permanent staff should be entrusted with the routine work. The Committee also emphasizes the necessity of imparting computer training to all the regular employees in a time bound manner.

AUDIT PARAGRAPH

Expenditure on Idle Establishment

Retention of staff in the office of the Tribal Rehabilitation Commissioner without work during April 2005 to February 2010 resulted in infructuous expenditure of ₹ 1.32 crore.

Government of India conveyed (August 2003 and February 2004) in principle (Stage I) approval under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 for diversion of 7693.2257 hectare of Reserved Forest/Vested* Forest land for the resettlement and rehabilitation of landless tribal in the five† districts of the State. The conditions of the approval stipulated that the transfer of forest land should not be effected till the State Government deposited the Net Present Value (NPV), of the forest area diverted, with the Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Agency.

The State Government sanctioned (December 2003 and June 2004) the creation of posts of a Tribal Rehabilitation Commissioner (TRC) and six‡ supporting staff for the integrated development and rehabilitation scheme/works in respect of the tribals to be resettled. However, the State Government failed to remit NPV amounting to ₹ 560 crore (approximately) and hence the project could not be implemented. This resulted in idling of the entire staff. Consequently the establishment expenditure of ₹ 1.32 crore incurred on the office of the TRC for the period from April 2005 to February 2010 was infructuous. On this being pointed out, the department stated (March 2010) that the Government would be requested to abolish the office.

The formation of the office and posting the full complement of staff in June 2004 without fulfilling the conditions for transfer of forest land and its continuance even after absence of work became evident, resulted in wastage of resources.

The matter was referred to Government in July 2010; reply had not been received (November 2010).

[Audit Paragraph 2.3.2 contained in the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India for the year ended 31st March 2010 (Civil)]

* Private Forests vested in the Government under Kerala Private Forest (Vesting assignment) Rules, 1974.

† Kannur, Kasaragod, Malappuram, Palakkad and Wayanad.

‡ One post each of Confidential Assistant, Assistant Conservator of Forests, Ranger, Lower Division Clerk and Peon.

15. Regarding the audit objection the Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Development) informed that the State Government had decided to implement a project for the resettlement and rehabilitation of landless tribals during 2001. For this about 7500 hectares of Reserved Forest was identified and sought for approval of the Government of India as prescribed in the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. The Central Government had advised to appoint a Tribal Rehabilitation Commissioner to supervise the rehabilitation package.

16. The witness, pointed out that the conditions of approval stipulated that the transfer of forest land should be effected only if the State Government deposit the Net Present Value (NPV), of the forest area diverted, with the Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Agency, which was calculated as ₹ 560 crore. So the matter was again taken up to Central Government for granting exemption from payment and had filed an Interim Application in the Supreme Court for the purpose of rehabilitating the landless tribals. The Court authorised Central Empowered Committee to probe into the matter and report after conducting a detailed study. The Empowered Committee reported in favour of our State. The witness continued that in the meantime a Rehabilitation Officer was posted with the intention to design the new office, identify the forest land, design the method of allocation etc. But the Officer was not in a position to implement the project as the land to be transferred was not in possession. Later, State Government decided to wind up the project and the post of Tribal Rehabilitation officer was discontinued with effect from 1-4-2010 as the Accountant General raised objection regarding the retention of staff in the office of Tribal Rehabilitation Commissioner without any work. Regarding the present position of the project, the Committee was informed that Hon'ble Supreme Court in its verdict wanted the Government to implement the project. In the light of the verdict it was decided to revive the project and the post of Tribal Rehabilitation Commissioner.

17. When the Committee enquired about the details of activities of the office of the Tribal Rehabilitation Commissioner, during the period from 2003 to 2010, the Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest answered that in the initial stage they held discussion with several officers regarding the modus operandi of the Project and also prepared a by-law for operating the project under mission model. But the main hindrance in the project implementation was the lack of permission from Government of India for acquisition of forest land. The witness added that the Commissioner's Office functioned at Ernakulam and the staff appointed there on deputation basis were reverted back to their parent department in 2010. The Committee opined that there occurred infructuous

expenditure towards establishment of idling staff and decided to recommend that the project would have to be continued, then only the tribals would get benefit out of it.

18. The Committee expressed its concern over the entire activities so far taken in this regard and enquired the significance of the project. The witness deposed that the main intention of the project was to rehabilitate landless tribals.

19. The Committee then enquired whether the tribals residing in the forest would get the ownership of the land where they were residing. The witness answered that the rights they enjoyed in the land would be continued as per the provisions of the Scheduled Tribes and Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. He informed that the present project was an entirely different one intended to allot one acre land to landless tribals. The Committee then wanted the department to develop a scheme with the assistance of Government of India for the rehabilitation of tribals living in deep forests to the periphery and to ensure them the required facilities to live safely. The witness pointed out that the department had envisaged to implement a project of that nature and a proposal had been sent to Government of India in this regard. He added that Government of India sanctioned ₹ 5.5 crore for the purpose and as an initial phase, ₹ 3.5 crore was released for the upliftment of tribals settled at two colonies in Wayanad District.

Conclusion/Recommendation

20. The Committee observes that the projects aimed for rehabilitating and resettling landless tribals could not be implemented so far and expresses its displeasure over the futile expenditure of ₹ 1.32 crore for the functioning of the Tribal Rehabilitation Commissioner without any project work. The Committee recommends that for reaping the intended benefit to landless tribals the department should revitalize the project at once. The Committee urges the department to develop a scheme with the assistance of Government of India for rehabilitating tribals living in deep forests to the periphery and imparting essential facilities to them. The Committee also recommends the departments to frame a time bound action plan for the new rehabilitation programme.

Thiruvananthapuram,
13th December, 2012.

DR. T. M. THOMAS ISAAC,
Chairman,
Committee on Public Accounts.

APPENDIX I

SUMMARY OF MAIN CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

<i>Sl. Paragraph No.</i>		<i>Department concerned</i>	<i>Conclusion/Recommendation</i>
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1	10	Forest and Wildlife	The Committee observed that the Gandhi Smrithivanam Project sanctioned during the Eighth Plan could not be realised even in 12th Plan period resulting in the expenditure to the tune of ₹ 1.54 crore become infructuous. The Committee views the project as an ill-conceived one and laments the lackadaisical approach of the Revenue Department in acquiring, demarcating and handing over the acquired land to Forest Department in time.
2	11	„	The Committee is of the strong opinion that the project could not be implemented as envisaged, and opines that Forest Department should be more cautious and realistic in implementing projects of similar nature in future. The Committee understands that since the enactment of the Kerala Conservation of Paddy land and Wetland Act, 2008 the landscape of the proposed site could not be altered any more. Considering the series of issues involved in the case, the Committee suggests that the Smrithivanam Project should be terminated forth with and recommends that the entire project should be recasted in accordance with the existing landscape of the area and by maintaining the sustainability of the wetland and by planting mangroves and other suitable plants in order to

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
			preserve the entire flora and fauna of the wetland ecosystem and to develop it as a sustainable eco-friendly tourism project.
3	12	Forest and Wildlife	The Committee also recommends that immediate steps should be taken to acquire the patch of land lying between the T.S. Canal and the project site to envisage a separate entry from the T.S. Canal to the site and suggests that the department should not acquire any more land except the patches of land that left unacquired within the project site.
4	14	„	The Committee cannot justify the act of the Forest Department in appointing Data Entry Operator and Computer Operator on daily wage basis by-passing the order issued by the Finance Department in this regard. The Committee recommends the department to take disciplinary action against the delinquent officers and opines that only permanent staff should be entrusted with the routine work. The Committee also emphasizes the necessity of imparting computer training to all the regular employees in a time bound manner.
5	20	„	The Committee observes that the projects aimed for rehabilitating and resettling landless tribals could not be implemented so far and expresses its displeasure over the futile expenditure of ₹ 1.32 crore for the functioning of the Tribal Rehabilitation Commissioner without any project work. The Committee recommends that for reaping

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
			<p>the intended benefit to landless tribals the department should revitalize the project at once. The Committee urges the department to develop a scheme with the assistance of Government of India for rehabilitating tribals living in deep forests to the periphery and imparting essential facilities to them. The Committee also recommends the departments to frame a time bound action plan for the new rehabilitation programme.</p>

APPENDIX II

ACTION TAKEN NOTES ON C&AG REPORT

- | | |
|--|---|
| I. (a) Department | .. Forest and Wildlife |
| (b) Subject/Title of the Review Paragraph | .. Idle investment/Idle establishment/Blockage of funds |
| (c) Paragraph Number | .. 4.4.1 |
| (d) Report Number and Year | .. 31-3-2008 (Civil) |
| II.(a) Date of receipt of the Draft Paragraph/Review in the Department | .. 4-7-2009 |
| (b) Date of Department's Reply | .. |
| III. Gist of Paragraph Review | .. Idle investment on land and blocking up of funds released for Gandhi Smrithivanam Project |
| IV.(a) Does the Department agree with the facts and figures included in Paragraph ? | .. No |
| (b) If not please indicate the areas of disagreement and also attach copies of relevant documents in support | .. Documents attached |
| V. (a) Does the Department agree with the Audit conclusions | .. No |
| (b) If not, please indicate specific areas of disagreement with reasons for disagreement and also attach copies of relevant documents, where necessary ? | .. The land acquired (415 acre) are scattered in bits and lying under water and the land is not demarcated. The proposal has already been given to the District Collector, Alappuzha to complete the land acquisition. The relevant documents are attached. |

REPLY ON COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL FOR THE YEAR
ENDED 31ST MARCH, 2008

As per G.O. (Ms.) 54/94/F&WLD dated 15-11-1994, Government had accorded sanction for acquisition of 600 acres of land to set up a Smrithivanam in the memory of Mahatma Gandhi in Purakkad Village of Ambalappuzha Taluk in Alappuzha. The funds for acquiring land for the establishment of Gandhi Smrithivanam has been paid to the District Collector, Alappuzha by the Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) during the year 1993 (54 lakh), 1995 (50 lakh), 1996 (50 lakh) (thus a total of ₹ 154 lakh). Out of the proposed 600 acres of land to be acquired, 415 acres has been acquired utilizing an amount of ₹ 77,99,120. An amount of ₹ 50,41,240 has been paid towards the cost of 1.02 acres of land and building at Kommady, Alappuzha, to house the office of the Assistant Conservator of Forest (SF), Alappuzha and ₹ 1,00,834 has been spent for the registration of the said property. The total expenditure is ₹ 1,29,75,888 (including the other expenses of the Revenue Department).

The District Collector, Alappuzha has acquired approximately 415 acres of land in Purakkad Village of Ambalappuzha Taluk (based on the title deeds of the land owners as the survey could not be done till now and also the land is water logged) by utilizing an amount of ₹ 77,99,120 out of ₹ 154 lakh released to the District Collector by the Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife). Over and above this, an amount of ₹ 50,41,240 has been utilized towards the cost of 1.02 acres of land and building at Kommady, Alappuzha to house the office of the Assistant Conservator of Forests (Social Forestry), Alappuzha and for the future Smrithivanam Administrative Office. An amount of ₹ 1,00,834 was spent for the registration of the said property. The total expenditure was ₹ 1,29,75,888 including certain other expenses of Revenue Department. The balance amount available with the District Collector, Alappuzha is ₹ 24,24,112 out of ₹ 154 lakh released to him earlier. In addition to this ₹ 45 lakh has been transferred from the District Collector, Thiruvananthapuram to the District Collector, Alappuzha (the fund which was available with the District Collector, Thiruvananthapuram for land acquisition for establishment of Agasthyavanam Biological Park).

Thus, at present, an amount of about ₹ 70 lakh is available with District Collector, Alappuzha for acquisition of the balance land of 189 acres (This amount may however, not be sufficient amount for acquisition of entire requiring extent of 189 acre).

For the acquisition of balance area for Gandhi Smrithivanam Project, the Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Social Forestry has already given fresh requisition to the District Collector, Alappuzha vide letter

No. SW2.2356/01 dated 2-1-2007 in the requisite form, along with the list of the areas. Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Social Forestry has already pointed out to the District Collector, Alappuzha that the amount required for survey of these areas could be taken from the amount already available (about ₹ 70 lakh) with the District Collector, Alappuzha. About 44 land owners (possessing an area of 45.87 acres) have expressed their willingness for purchase through negotiation. However, the acquisition process has been pending with the District Collector, Alappuzha and no further acquisition has taken place.

The land acquired so far (415 acre approximately) are scattered in bits and lying under water. The survey and demarcation of such acquired land has not been done by the Revenue Department and therefore the same has not been handed over to the Forest Department. As such no land has been handed over to the Forest Department. The reason is that survey and demarcation of the acquired areas has not been done by the Revenue Department. Also, in view of the fact that the land is not demarcated, it cannot be said that the acquisition process of those 415 acres has been completed by the Revenue Department and ready for handing over to the Forest Department. In these circumstances, it will not be correct to say that the Forest Department has not taken over the areas as pointed out in Audit Report.

As per G.O. (Ms.) No. 20/2008/ITD. dated 3-6-2008 Government has ordered to allow 100 acres of land for the development of IT Park from the land acquired for the Gandhi Smrithivanam by the Revenue Department.

The Forest Department has already given proposal to the District Collector, Alappuzha to complete the land acquisition. Therefore it cannot be said that there is no proposal for completing the acquisition as pointed in the Audit Report.

The Forest Department handed over the fund to the District Collector, Alappuzha from 1993 to 1996 (total of ₹ 154 lakh) for the acquisition of land for establishing the Gandhi Smrithivanam. An amount of ₹ 77.99 lakh has been utilised by the Revenue Department for acquisition of 415 acres (approximately) of land. These lands are in scattered bits and lying under water. The survey and demarcation of these areas have also not been done by the Revenue Department and thus it could not be handed over to the Forest Department. In the situations explained above, it is necessary that the land should be acquired in a compact block including those inter-spersed developed land bits, which have not been acquired yet.

In the circumstances, it is clear that there is not wilful delay on the part of Government in implementing the scheme. The delay occurred is due to the problems raised in the acquisition of land. Hence it is requested to kindly drop the paragraph proposed for inclusion in the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.
