

Social Sector

11

Govt spent ₹28cr on ads outside city

TEAM TOI

New Delhi: The Comptroller and Auditor General of India not only found that the Aam Aadmi Party government in Delhi spent Rs 28.7 crore on advertisements outside the capital in a single campaign during its first year in office, but also that some contents of the publicity material violated the Supreme Court's guidelines on acceptable matter in such ads.

CAG's audit report said on Friday that the ads released outside Delhi last year, constituting nearly 86% of the total expenditure of Rs 33.4 crore, were "beyond the responsibility" of the Delhi government.

Between February 14 and 17, 2016, the government published advertorials in 26 national and 37 regional newspapers in 14 states. Nine television clips were approved for telecast on 89 channels, including regional ones, between February 15 and March 1, while seven radio jingles were broadcast between February 13 and 19.

The government had explained that the ads were released outside Delhi because there was "immense potential to promote tourism, trade and retail businesses...the achie-

vements made in critical sectors such as health, education, etc were highlighted to attract businesses, best talent, best doctors to the national capital".

CAG, however, didn't find the explanation tenable since the TV clips and jingles depicted the said achievements not as those of the government but "of a political party". Besides, the ads were "not linked to GNCTD's constitutional and legal obligations towards the citizenry of NCT of Delhi".

The audit report listed ads worth Rs 24.2 crore released in this period as not conforming to Supreme Court guidelines. While the print and television ads referred to Delhi government as "AAP government" and "Kejriwal sarkar" or as "AAP", some of them also carried pictures of Delhi ministers in violation of the court's guidelines.

The government has argued that "Kejriwal sarkar" was simply "a nomenclature used by the public... to refer to Delhi government".

CAG also hauled up the state government for its decision to set up Shabdarth as its in-house advertisement agency, saying the objective of reducing the cost of official publicity hadn't been achieved.

'CAG is indulging in politics'

New Delhi: Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has accused CAG of becoming a political tool in the hand of the Centre. Reacting to the CAG audits that accused the government of having wasted public funds, Kejriwal said: "Earlier the CAG used to unearth 2G scam and irregularities in power companies. We are disappointed that the CAG is doing politics. We know why the CAG is doing this. I think CAG has been named in some wrongdoings which is why it is doing this."

Kejriwal said CAG should restrict itself to carrying out audits and leave politics to politicians. "We had requested CAG to conduct a 10-year audit of the Delhi Commission of Women, but instead it audited only the two years of Swati Maliwal. What is the friendship between CAG and BJP? I want to ask CAG to stop doing politics and do just audits," the CM said.

He added that he had written to CAG, asking it not audit only the advertisements of Delhi government but also those of other states. "However, CAG has chosen to focus only on Delhi government," he said.

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