

Audit observation halts usage of database management and information system

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Mongar dzongkhag's education sector has not been able to make use of their newly developed dzongkhag education database management and information system (EDMIS) because of an audit observation.

Officials say the system is actually set to be operational.

Called as M-Sherig E-Portal (MoSEP), the idea of developing what dzongkhag education officials call a mega e-portal system was initially conceived during the annual dzongkhag education conference in 2014 after learning that there was no databank to generate a report for the 11th Plan.

The deputy chief education officer, Ugyen Thinley, said the initial idea was purely based on the demand of the hour and participants of the conference unanimously agreed to it.

The dzongkhag lacked financial capacity to hire a consultant and decided to look for a local expert.

Ugyen Thinley said the dzongkhag had approached and requested an ICT teacher of Kilikhar School and sent him to Singapore where the Netlink Company is based and then to its branch office in Kolkotta to collaborate the EDMIS. He was only paid the daily allowances.

However, the Royal Audit Authority (RAA) pointed out 10 observations against the database development, which included a payment of Nu 3.110 million (M) from the overall budget in the absence of its budget provision, it did not adhere to the information and communication ministry's application development and methodology guidelines, not following procurement norms, and not consulting and involving dzongkhag ICT officials.

Audit also pointed out there was no cost estimate, deliverables and timing not determined for the project, payments not released directly to the consulting firm, system not developed and delivered despite huge investment at the time of the audit and payment including charges for hosting the system or server in Singapore, which may lead to issue of ownership, security and sustainability, as well as recurring costs in terms of service charges that may be dictated by the service provider.

Education officials justified that in the absence of an adequate budget to pay to the ICT company for the applications at once, the expert took about three years to develop the system.

They also said there was no separate budget provision for the project and the cost of applications were paid from the dzongkhag's overall budget phase-wise. "The application cost for the whole system was about Nu 2.8 million," an official said.

RAA made its first observation in 2017 and the sought justification for irregularities on July 15 this year.

According to the education officials, in the absence of a separate budget, the budget had to be used from the overall budget and the cost involved was a one-time payment for buying applications from the NetLink company.

The money was also used for paying ICT expert's DSA for visiting the NetLink company's head office and the branch office, and paying a meagre TA/DA for maintaining more than 200 computers and desktops in the schools cumulatively for three years.

Dzongkhag education officials said the EDMIS covers components like document management system for teachers, student management system, student result sheet-offline and online, ECCD and NFE.

They said they were ready to use the system if RAA issued a clearance.

The dzongkhag education officials said all the end-users like school office assistants, administrative assistants and principals of all 48 schools in the district were educated and sensitized on the use of the system during the two-day comprehensive training held at Drametse Central school last month.

“Officials can enter information online and offline and it will be automatically accessible once uploaded,” the deputy chief dzongkhag education officer said. “Unlike the conventional trend where parents and students take big trouble to come all the way to school to collect their result twice (midterm and annual), they can now access it with a click on their computer or cellphones on the system. All they need to know is the student code, which would be provided by the respective schools.”

The chief DEO, Wangchuk, said the dzongdag was also involved in guiding the process throughout the system development and should this go well, the education system in the country and other sectors could replicate it.

He claimed that it was the dzongkhag's asset of the nation built almost at free of service based on the need to provide efficient service delivery and provide accurate information at bare minimum cost. “Besides being user-friendly, one of the prime objective is to go paperless in line with the royal vision.”

According to dzongkhag education officials, the system was well-received during the recent presentation to other sectors in the dzongkhag including the dzongkhag ICT officials.

Tshering Namgyal | Mongar