



Only 2.5 percent of audit irregularities from 2010-2016 resolved

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Despite the resolution of the past two sessions of the second Parliament to resolve pending irregularities between 2010 and 2016 by June 30 this year, only 2.5 percent of the total irregularities have been resolved.

This according to the Public Accounts Committee is a consequence of inadequate actions taken by the concerned agencies to resolve their irregularities.

The PAC has also conducted 15 hearings after the 11th session of the second Parliament following which Nu 5.3M worth of irregularities were resolved. However, the committee could not conduct public hearings with the dzongkhags, gewogs and few other agencies due to Parliament's tenure coming to an end.

As of September 30, 2018, total unresolved irregularities reported between 2010 and 2016 stood at Nu 1.44B. Of the total, Nu 633M worth of irregularities are either with the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), Office of Attorney General (OAG) or in the court. Seven cases amounting to Nu 12M could not be resolved because the accountable officials either absconded or went missing.

Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering said resolving the irregularities and reviewing pending audit issue must not be left to the five-member committee. He said the government would render its full support to the committee, be it in funding or human resource.

However, he said the PAC should also come out with rigid recommendations for Parliament's approval.

The PAC, he said should segregate irregularities – perhaps some irregularities would be of miniscule impact and a write-off could be considered.

Finance minister Namgay Tshering suggested constituting a committee outside the Parliament to support the PAC and come out with a solution to address issues.

However, the Opposition Leader, Pema Gyamtsho (PhD) said a majority of audit issue were a consequence of "tight outcomes and loose procedures." He suggested the government on granting some flexibility in the procurement rules while revising it.

Even during the first government's tenure, he said a committee comprising of experts from finance ministry and RAA was formed to address pending irregularities from 1982 to 2008. The findings

of the committee were forwarded to the Cabinet, he said adding some irregularities were written off while the rest were resolved.

Yet again, he said pending issues from one year trailed through another and the same issues are now surfacing. “Instead of spending precious resource to address the current irregularities, we must work on measures to prevent such issues,” he said.

Deputy chair of the PAC, Choida Jamtsho said that tripartite agreement between the Agencies, RAA and PAC already exist and strategies to resolve issues were also shown in the past. “But if the concerned agencies themselves don’t try hard to resolve issues while some are with court, ACC and OAG, there isn’t much the PAC can do,” he said.

The two-day deliberation on the PAC review report saw more than 60 members speaking to raise their concerns. Most points however revolved around strengthening the PAC’s role and scope and suggesting strategies to address the issues.

However, the Pangbang MP Dorji Wangdi said that only 2.5 percent of the irregularities have been resolved to date and that the PAC and RAA has only five months to resolve the remaining 97.5 percent and abide by the past resolutions.

He also pointed out that only the RAA has the authority to write off the irregularities, not even the PAC and the Parliament.

As such, he said that the government has an opportunity to sit with different agencies like OAG, ACC, RAA and the judiciary to discuss the way forward. Currently, he said there is a problem because often times ACC forwards a case to OAG only to be dismissed.

That said, he reminded the members to take heed to the RAA’s challenges before placing additional responsibilities. For instance, he said the RAA’s audit coverage is only 53 percent, meaning half of the agencies are unaudited. This is because the RAA, he said has only 167 auditors and the institution itself is facing logistics issues in the branch offices.

With the Prime Minister assuring it full support, the chairperson of the PAC, Phuntsho Rabten said the committee is optimistic to resolve the issues. However, he said that the PAC was asked to vacate its office at the Assembly building and even the PAC’s budget was subsumed in the Parliament’s budget. “On the other hand, we are given an enormous responsibility,” he said.

He indicated that the PAC might require immediate support from the government, as there are several reports to be reviewed for the summer session of the Parliament.

Tshering Dorji