

RAA asks operations of all Karaoke and Live music outlets to be suspended

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The charge is that they are either operating like Drayang or do not have proper licenses

The Royal Audit Authority (RAA) recently did a review of the 7 January 2022 executive order closing the operation of all Drayang in the country. It also looked at the extent of monitoring of karaoke and live music operations by relevant agencies.

The review looked at 59 Drayang which were closed then and paid Nu 84.552 mn in compensation for the cessation of their activities. In addition, eight Drayang owners who wished to switch to other forms of entertainment business like karaokes and live music were issued with new licenses.

However, the review team found that drayang-like businesses are continuing to be operated under the guise and Karaoke or Live Music licenses.

The report said, “The modus operandi adopted by Karaoke or Live Music in soliciting money from the customers were strikingly similar in terms of exposure to risks and vulnerabilities of sexual exploitation. Therefore, the intent of closure of Drayang have failed and the compensation scheme grossly misused.”

The team observed that requests were now made through sale of lottery tickets and women entertainers asking for expensive imported drinks from customers.

It said the lapses are due to weak monitoring from the agencies responsible.

The report said the Rules and Regulations for the Places of Entertainment 2020 is issued by the Ministry of Information and Communication, but the responsibility for monitoring is entrusted to the Entertainment Licensing Committee (ELC) chaired by the Dzungda or Dzungrab in Dzungkhags and Thrompon or the Executive Secretary in Thromdes.

It says the ELCs should be held accountable for the lapses.

In the cases of few licenses in Thimphu it was found that the Thimphu Thrompon had recommended for the issuance of new licenses simply upon obtaining location clearance and forgoing the normal process of routing through the ELC.

Further, the regional office for the MoEA without ensuring minimum technical requirements had issued it based on the recommendation of the Thrompon.

It said there were two Karaoke and Live Music clubs in Thimphu which did not even have valid business licenses for which the ELC is accountable.

The review also found that while the rules were issued by the MoIC the licensing authority was the MoEA.

It says the rules do not provide Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for different entertainment centers which is why Karaoke and Live Music continue to be operated like Drayang and there was no proper monitoring.

It says while the ELC is mandated to ensure compliance there was no ELC as required under the rules. It says the ELC also have to carry out a four step diligence and check process which did not happen.

The RAA report recommends that operations of all Karaoke and Live Music in the country should be suspended under a moratorium and operation should be re-opened only after careful scrutiny of all technical requirements for places of entertainment and upon fulfilling all requirements as per the SOP which needs to be developed.

It says that operations of Karaoke and Live Music without valid business licenses should have penalties imposed and be suspended.

It says the licenses for operation of Karaoke and Live Music to the 8 Drayang owners should be immediately suspended and their compensation recovered and restituted.

RAA has asked for a review of the existing rules and clear definition provided for every type of entertainment center and the MoIC should implement the rules.

It finally says the ELC should conduct strict monitoring of the places of entertainment in their respective jurisdictions and be held accountable for lapses arising from failure to monitor compliance to the rules and SOP.

The former President of the defunct Drayang Association of Bhutan Kelzang Phuntsho said he had heard about a few complaints of some karaoke and live music places having lottery or girls request for expensive drinks, but he said law enforcement is aware and has taken action and some cases may even be in court.

He said due to the Audit report the MoEA has stopped issuing new licenses including to those under process.

He said Live Music should be understood to be live singing and some dancing. He said in certain cases inspectors in a Karaoke even asked the performers to sit and perform and not stand. He said they have approached the Prime Minister and the RAA on the issue.