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RAA directs DECC to operationalise Taba waste facility within three months

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The Royal Audit Authority (RAA) has directed the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) to finalise and implement a time-bound action plan to operationalise the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) at Taba in Thimphu within three months.

The directive comes after the RAA found that, despite Nu 74.42 million being spent on the original construction contract and another Nu 6.06 million on subsequent rectification works, the MRF has remained non-operational since its handover in April 2025.

The audit finding was issued on June 30 this year. The DECC is required to submit an action-taken report by the end of September.

The RAA states that any further delay could result in avoidable losses to the government.

"If the auditee's response is not implemented, the Director of DECC, Sonam Tashi, shall be held accountable, both directly and in a supervisory capacity, for the lapses," the RAA finding stated.

The MRF was built to support waste segregation and resource recovery for the northern part of Thimphu Thromde.

The Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources (MoENR), through DECC, awarded the design and construction of the facility, funded by the Government of India, to a joint venture of D Lhen Private Limited and APECS, Thimphu, in June 2021, at a contract value of Nu 92.95M.

The facility was to be completed in 14 months. However, the contractor was granted five extensions before the contract was terminated in March 2024 for breach of contract, based on a decision of the Ministry Level Tender Committee.

The remaining works were then handed to the National Housing Development Corporation Limited (NHDCL) as deposit work worth Nu 6.06 million, which was completed in April 2025. Even so, the facility remains shut more than a year later.

A site assessment by the Department of Infrastructure Development (DoID) under the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport (MoIT), conducted in June 2025, found that earlier recommendations to install vibration isolation pads and damping systems beneath machine foundations had not been implemented during construction.

During machine operation, the report noted substantial vibrations across the first-floor lab, beams and columns, with one steel column found to have deviated considerably from its vertical alignment, posing serious structural and safety concerns, according to the RAA findings.

The RAA called for the immediate installation of isolation pads, structural reassessment with dynamic load modelling, and urgent retrofitting of the displaced column before the facility is commissioned.

In its response, DECC told the RAA that the facility had not been operationalised primarily due to technical, safety and location-related concerns that emerged during assessments carried out after the balance works were completed by NHDCL.

DECC said a joint site visit was conducted on May 19, 2026, involving DECC, Thimphu Thromde and DoID, following a directive from the Cabinet Secretariat issued during a meeting on April 29, 2026.

The agencies discussed the machine vibration issue, the facility's proximity to residential settlements in Taba, and potential complaints over noise and odour, and explored relocating the machinery and operational components to Memelakha as a more sustainable long-term option.

Thimphu Thromde informed the team that the Department of Local Governance and Disaster Management (DLGDM) was looking for land to set up a Humanitarian Staging Area centre as part of its disaster preparedness efforts.

DLGDM was invited to inspect the site and expressed interest in using the pre-engineered building structure and administration block for that purpose.

DECC responded that it is now exploring, in consultation with Thimphu Thromde, the relocation of the MRF machinery to Memelakha, subject to the availability of resources.

MoIT indicated that the vibration issue could potentially be mitigated through retrofit - ting measures, including shock absorption systems, if the ma - chinery continued to operate at the site.

However, the team agreed that complaints from residents were likely to increase over time, given the facility’s location within Taba township.

It was also noted that relocating operations to Memelakha would mean residual waste, after material recovery, would need to be transported there for disposal, adding to logistics and transportation costs.

As per the RAA finding, the response did not adequately address the core issue, although project management attributed the delay to concerns identified after the balance works were completed.

The RAA stated that the issues reflect deficiencies in project planning, design vali - dation, construction supervision, quality assurance and the acceptance of completed works.

It said the structural problems, including excessive machine-induced vibration and deformation of structural members, should have been addressed before the facility was completed and handed over.

The audit also found that DECC’s proposal to relocate the machinery to Memelakha and repurpose the existing structure remains at a preliminary discussion stage, without a formally approved decision, technical feasibility assessment, cost-benefit analysis, funding arrangement or implementation plan.

As a result, the RAA said, the intended objectives of the project have not been realised despite the substantial investment already made.

“Although this happened in the past, it is positive that leaders have taken responsibility and are working towards a solution, rather than dismissing it simply because it happened in the past,” said an official from the RAA.

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