

MPs choose party event over Parliament duty

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MB Subba

Speaker Wangchuk Namgyel is known to be strict with the proceedings of Parliament and a no-nonsense Speaker when it comes to Parliament issues. He has made this known to Members of Parliament after most of them missed an important meeting.

A presentation of the annual audit report 2019 by Royal Audit Authority (RAA) was scheduled in the afternoon of October 5. It coincided with the introduction of Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa's candidate for the Chhokhor-Tang bye-election.

Astonishingly about 17 ruling party MPs, including four ministers that were in Thimphu, chose to attend the candidate launch over the audit meeting.

In total, about 12 National Assembly members attended the meeting. But only two of them—the Speaker and Tashichhoeling MP Dil Maya Rai who attended the meeting as a member of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC)—were from the 30-member strong Ruling Party.

Ten MPs from the 16-member Opposition Party attended the meeting, which is conducted annually by the PAC for MPs to clarify doubts and queries with RAA officials on irregularities reported in ministries and agencies.

It was learnt that some of the MPs failed to turn up despite being within Thimphu without official duty. The lack of interest in the meeting from the MPs has come at a time when some people are questioning what they are up to in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Speaker Wangchuk Namgyel said all the MPs were invited for the meeting while three were either on leave or official tours. He said that he was disappointed with the members' absence as the meeting was part of preparation for the upcoming session.

“This is the first time MPs are absent in mass. This will hamper the quality of deliberation,” he said.

Speaker Wangchuk Namgyel said that the report presentation and discussion on the audit report was very important for fruitful discussion in Parliament.

Kuensel also learnt that the Speaker had taken the issue seriously and communicated his disappointment with the MPs through social media. He had expected about 10 of the MPs to be present at the meeting given that a few could go to the candidate launch.

The Speaker is also learnt to have conveyed to the MPs that their absence had put the RAA, a constitutional body, in an “awkward situation”.

MPs who chose to attend the candidate launch over the audit meeting were Deputy Speaker Tshencho Wangdi of Kabisa Talog, Dinesh Kumar Pradhan from Ugyentse Yoeseltse, Ganesh Ghimiray from Phuentshospelri, Bimal Thapa from Kilkhorthang Mendrelgang, Garja Man Rai from Sergithang Tsirangtoed and Dorjee Wangmo from Sombaykha.

Also present at the candidate launch were Kinley Wangchuk from Athang Thedtsho, Gyem Dorji from Dragteng Langthil, Yeshey Dem from Khamaed Lunana, Jurmey Wangchuk from Drukjeygang Tseza, Tenzin from Khatoed Laya, Ugyen Tenzin from Bji Kar Tshog Uesu, and Ugyen Tshering from Lamgong Wangchang.

Foreign Minister Dr Tandi Dorji, Labour and Human Resources Minister Ugyen Dorji, Economic Affairs Minister Loknath Sharma and Health Minister Dechen Wangmo were also present at the candidate launch.

Those absent the meeting from the Opposition were Passang Dorji (PhD) from Bartsham Shongphu, Dupthob from Boomdeling Jamkhar, Choki Gyaltshen from Maenbi Tsaenkhar, Tshering Choden from Khar Yurung, Ugyen Dorji from Dewathang Gomdar and Lungten Namgyel from Nanong Shumar.

Those either on leave or official tours from the above lists were Tshering Choden, Kinga Penjor and Choki Gyaltshen.

PAC member Choida Jamtsho said that the PAC with three of its members present had met the quorum and that meeting went ahead.

The RAA had presented the report in the morning to the National Council (NC).

NC member from Paro, Ugyen Tshering, also attended the meeting as a PAC member with National Assembly members. He said that 11 members were present in the meeting at NC.

Deputy Auditor General Chimi Dorji led a team from RAA to make presentations on the AAR 2019 to the members of the National Council and the National Assembly.

The deliberation on the AAR 2019 is scheduled to be deliberated during the Joint Session in the next National Assembly session this winter.