

Accountant accused of embezzlement

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The Royal Audit Authority (RAA) in February forwarded a case to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) implicating the Regional Immigration Office in Gelephu of misappropriating about Nu 1.8 Million (M).

The accountant was accused of misappropriating funds, making fictitious payments, fictitious claims, and excess payments of travel allowance and daily allowance (TA/DA), double claims of TA/DA and forgery of signature.

It was learnt that the accountant has misappropriated around Nu 1.1M.

The accountant, the RAA report stated, has transferred direct funds from the letter of credit account through ePEMS into the personal savings account. The disbursement vouchers were prepared, verified, and approved and payment instructions were authorised in ePEMS singlehandedly by the accountant.

In the financial year 2021-2022, the accountant transferred a total amount of Nu 719,760 as public work advances and personal advances into his own savings account without approval from the head of the agency.

The office had recruited temporary security guards for checkpoints. Later, the checkpoints were taken over by the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) during the Covid-19 and accordingly, the guard was withdrawn. However, the accountant was depositing the wages of a security guard in his personal account and paid three months' excess of Nu 19,780.

During the FY 2021-22, the office made payment of Nu 848,679 without proper supporting documents and it was deposited into the accountant's personal account.

Similarly, during the FY 2021-22 the office made fictitious payments to three individuals of Nu 71,537 without proper supporting documents.

The Gelephu, regional immigration office had awarded the office building maintenance to Dragon Sales and Services, Gelephu. The expenses on procurement of materials were borne by the supplier. Accordingly, the administrative assistant of the office forwarded the cash memos amounting to Nu 7,830 against purchases of materials for maintenance works to Cluster Finance Service (CFS), Gelephu for reimbursement to Dragon Sales and Services.

However, the accountant had deliberately inflated the cash memo amount from Nu 7,830 to Nu 27,830 and paid the immigration inspector instead of Dargon Sales and Services. The accountant

informed the inspector to refund the money as it was a mistake. The inspector transferred Nu 22,830 into the accountant's personal account after an adjustment of Nu 5,000 which the accountant owed to him.

The accountant claimed TA/DA of Nu 16,250 without going on tour along with immigration inspectors who actually went on tour.

The immigration office to cut costs instituted a system of lumpsum TA/DA payment of Nu 20,000 per month to inspectors deputed at immigration outposts at Panbang.

The CFS, Gelephu had approved the TA/DA claims of immigration inspectors as claimed. After the payments were released, the accountant used to call the inspector to refund the amount exceeding Nu 20,000 explaining that the CFS had mistakenly credited Nu 30,500. The officials transferred the excess amount into the accountant's personal account.

The accountant took advantage of the weak controls in TA/DA disbursement and deliberately made a double payment of TA/DA to officials of Nu 50,092. The accountant then asked the payees to refund the amount by depositing it into his personal account.

It was pointed out that the current practices for disbursement of TA/DA under the CFS, Gelephu lacked internal control in the verification of the claims before final payment.

It was learnt that a sum of Nu 318,000 was directly credited into the accountant's personal account by booking under the pay and allowances and office supplies, printing, and publications.

The disbursement vouchers revealed that the voucher was prepared, verified, approved and payment instructions approved by the accountant alone which was suspicious and warranted further verification.

During the FY 2021-22, the CFS, Gelephu has paid Nu 150,000 to Dragon Sales and Services, Gelephu for the supply of computer and printing items. However, it was found that the administration section has neither placed any supply order as reflected in the cash memo nor the goods received.

The accountant was also made to pay a penalty of Nu 1.8M for unauthorised retention of revenue collection in cash and delayed deposit of revenues in the government's account for five years.