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RAA calls for clearer guidelines on government hospitality and entertainment spending amid concerns of misuse

The Royal Audit Authority recommends the government to come up with clear guidelines on hospitality and entertainment expenses. According to the latest audit report, the government spent Nu 126 M in the last three years. The report raised concerns of misuse which has been there since the first government.

The government spent close to Nu 92 M for hospitality and entertainment expenses. This includes all ten ministries, the Supreme Court, the National Council, the National Assembly and the Cabinet Secretariat. This money is used for hosting, gifting and entertaining guests. It also includes making other official expenses during official tours and visits both within and outside the country.

Some Nu 35 M was spent on discretionary grant by these same agencies. The designated officials use this fund at their own discretion to cover expenditures in their official capacity. This amount is given as and when requested.

Despite having a ceiling of Nu 1.5 M as hospitality and entertainment expenses for Cabinet Ministers and equivalent position holders, additional funds are always given without any issue. In the financial year 2022-2023, the overall hospitality and entertainment expenses increased from some Nu 18 M to nearly 83 M.

The report found excessive and unaccountable spending during constituency visits. Large discretionary payments were made for cash *soelra*, tips, and other unnecessary expenditures like *ghos* and *kiras*.

In one instance, a cook received a cash *soelra* of Nu 30,000. And there were too many instances of cash *solera*.

The report states that *soelra* to drivers and security personnel escorting the ministers is not found necessary since such *soelra* are paid from the government fund.

The *ngyendhar*, *semso*, and cash *solera* or tips were paid from hospitality and entertainment expenses. The report said it should come under the discretionary grant.

The grant is now paid monthly along with the salary.

It is worst when there is no obligation to produce bills and documents to support the discretionary grant. The expenditures that could be met from the discretionary grant are charged to the hospitality expenses. It only becomes an additional income for the one receiving the grant.

The governments have been making guidelines. The authority says it is always filled with loopholes.

Sonam Yuden