

Next Budget Bill Focuses on Iranians' Livelihood Amid US Sanctions

TEHRAN - Mohammad Baqer Nobakht, head of Iran's Budget and Planning Organization, says the budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year that begins on 21 March 2019 has been submitted to the Parliament.

In a press conference to unveil the budget bill to reporters, Mohammad Baqer Nobakht said the government had put a huge amount of energy into developing a "just and transparent bill."

According to Nobakht, the next year's

budget is 12% more than the budget for the current Iranian year (21 March 2018-2019), adding that it would envisage a total spending of around 433 quadrillion rials (\$103 billion) from various sources including taxes, divesting state-run shares and selling oil. Meanwhile, the budget bill expects 27 percent dependence on oil revenues and forecasts 1.5 million barrels of oil sales per day at the price of \$54 per barrel. (Press TV)

(1) Educational...

but today, by the Grace of Allah, the cases are processed on a quarterly basis in the Supreme Court of Afghanistan," said Ghani.

"We are still facing major challenges and obstructions, but I can say with satisfaction that some judgments from within and outside the country, about the national unity government regarding the issue, is not based on justice," said Mohammad Sawar Danish, Second Vice President.

According to IWA, a total of 8,000 face-to-face interviews were conducted with Afghan respondents in 34 provinces of the country, of which, 14% of the respondents said that the legal and judicial institutions are the most corrupt institutions in Afghanistan; 10% said the ministry of education is the most corrupt, while 9% said that the attorney general's office is the most corrupt institution in the country.

"Legal, judicial and educational institutions are named as the most corrupt institutions, but we should realize that we do not have another 17 years, we need to reform ourselves in the next two years, reform the government, reform the system, otherwise, we will face another tragedy," said IWA chairman Sayed Ekram Afzali.

The survey also states that corruption exists on a large scale in Afghanistan's election management bodies - the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC).

Meanwhile, chairman of the IECC Abdul Aziz Aryayee also confirmed the existence of corruption in these areas. Aryayee said the election law is discriminatory.

"Corruption will not be eradicated from Afghanistan unless we consider broad-based and real reforms in our society for undertaking reforms in the election commissions to determine that these commissions work properly," he said.

In addition, Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said corruption is threatening Afghanistan's national security and the issue could impact on international aid to Afghanistan.

"It is time to put frameworks into practice to ensure that anti-corruption laws and strategies bring about real change for Afghan citizens," said Yamamoto.

"Recognizing that the efforts and commitment of the government are yet to impact the lives of many Afghans, the United Nations maintains that corruption must be addressed in Afghanistan as a substantial obstacle to long-term peace and prosperity," UNAMA said in a press release. US ambassador to Afghanistan John Bass said transparency is needed to deter, detect and disrupt corruption.

"Today is International Anti-Corruption Day. The United States and Afghanistan are jointly committed to shining a spotlight on those who would seek to benefit by stealing finances and resources from the people of Afghani-

stan," Bass said.

"Financial transparency and merit-based hiring are key to deter, detect and disrupt corruption. The government of Afghanistan must continue its reforms to fight corruption to improve citizen trust in government. Asset registration by government officials is a critical part of transparency and accountability. The government of Afghanistan has made progress in registering assets, and in Geneva committed to completing the verification process," he said. "Corruption hinders economic growth, erodes trust in government, and impedes peace and security. All parts of government must fight corruption, the judiciary, the legislature and the executive branch," tweeted Bass.

Based on the IWA, the overall amount of money used in corruption in Afghanistan in 2018 is estimated at \$1.7 billion. (Tolo news)

(2) MoF Awaits...

the commission will finish its work soon," said Sadiqi Zada Nili, member of financial and budget commission of the Wolesi Jirga.

An economic affairs analyst, Abdul Wase Haidari, meanwhile work on a number of development projects will face problems if the national budget is not approved ahead of the fiscal year.

"Parliament should approve the budget soon to prevent problems in implementation of development projects," Haidari said.

The Ministry of Finance has allocated AFs 399 billion for the 1398 fiscal year's budget, 69 percent of which has been allocated for the standard budget while the remaining 39 percent has been allocated for the development budget.

According to the ministry, from the AFs 399 billion, AFs 275 billion will be allocated to the standard budget and the remaining will be put aside for the development budget.

The MoF figures show that 51 percent of the budget will be funded by foreign aid while 49 percent of it will be funded by national revenue.

The MoF last week said that so far this year, government's budgetary units have spent almost 75 percent of their development budgets.

The MoF spokesman Shamroz Khan Masjidi said that by the end of the year, development budget spending will reach at least 80 percent.

He said that this year, government has managed to collect over 174 billion AFs from domestic revenues which also surpasses the previous year's target.

Masjidi said that along with an increase in budget spending this year, government has been able to increase revenue collections from domestic resources by 14 percent compared to a year before. (Tolo news)

(3) Afghan...

the exhibition would help local entrepreneurs display their products and enable foreign buyers to meet their procurement needs from Pakistan.

Kashif stressed the need to enhance the trade volume with Afghanistan, which dropped from

New Zealand Police Find Body They Believe Is British Tourist

WELLINGTON, New Zealand - New Zealand police said Sunday they found a body they believe to be that of missing 22-year-old British tourist Grace Millane.

Police said the body was in a forested area about 10 meters (33 feet) from the side of the road in the Waitakere Ranges near Auckland.

Tourist Grace Millane has been missing since Dec. 1, and failed to

contact her family on her birthday Dec. 2.

On Saturday, a 26-year-old man was charged with murder in her case after he was detained for questioning. He is due to make his first court appearance on Monday. Millane was on a planned year-long trip abroad that began in Peru. She arrived in New Zealand last month and was last seen entering a central Auckland hotel with

a man on the evening of Dec. 1. Detective Inspector Scott Beard told reporters near the crime scene in the Waitakere Ranges that police believe Millane's body was taken to the area in a rental car that was later left in the town of Taupo. Police spent several hours searching the area, which they cordoned off and where they put up a tent, before making the announcement. (Fox News)

\$2.5 billion to \$500 million in a few years. (Pajhwok)

(4) Trump Administration...

other munitions on Afghanistan in the first nine months of this year, more than in any of the past five years, according to U.S. Central Command.

Taliban officials have said for years that their objective is for U.S. troops and other foreign forces to leave Afghanistan. Increasingly, that appears Trump's objective, too - a confluence that in theory could leave room for a deal.

Trump said last month he is cautiously optimistic about ending the conflict, but added that it's "a little bit too early to say what's going to happen."

Setting an April target date for peace talks is similar to the approach President Barack Obama tried unsuccessfully - and was sharply criticized for by Trump - when he set a 2014 deadline for ending U.S. involvement in most combat operations and withdrew all but 5,500 troops.

Obama's plans to lower U.S. troop levels further were delayed amid worsening security. Trump then reversed the drawdown when he accepted a Pentagon recommendation shortly after taking office to send more than 9,000 military personnel back in.

Trump has said privately he regretted the decision, as the military situation has shown no signs of improving, officials said.

Without continued U.S. military backing, American commanders say, the Afghan military would collapse quickly. The dependence has left the government in Kabul with few good options if Trump threatens to pull out U.S. forces to pressure it into a deal with the Taliban. (Tribune News Service)

(5) Afghanistan Suspends...

An Afghan official said Keramuddin Keram, the powerful head of the Afghan Football Federation and five others had been suspended but added that the investigation is still ongoing to find more details.

Officials representing Keram did not immediately respond to phone calls and text messages seeking comment.

The Afghan Football Federation issued a statement, calling the allegations "groundless" and said it would fully cooperate with any probe.

When the allegations first surfaced, a spokesman at FIFA, the world football federation, said it had a "zero tolerance" policy on abuse and was looking into the Afghan case.

Ranked as one of the most dangerous countries for women, allegations of sexual contact outside marriage can have deadly consequences in Afghanistan. Victims of sexual harassment are often extremely reluctant to come forward for fear that they will be accused of adultery. (Reuters)

(6) Senate Asks...

"Allowing the fence on Duran Line is something the people of Afghanistan have to decide and the nation will never give their land to someone else," he said. Political parties' inclusion in peace talks:

Earlier, the Grand National Alliance said President Ashraf Ghani

wanted to keep the peace process under his control in case it went successful, adding the conflict in Afghanistan was not linked to the government, but the government was a part of the crisis.

Fazal Rahman Orya, a senior member of the grand alliance, said the president before announcing his 12-member team for peace talks, had assured political leaders in meetings that their suggestions would be considered, but no member of the political parties was included in the current team.

Therefore, he said political parties did not recognize the delegation to represent the nation.

Senator Rahmatullah Achakzai said: "The Taliban have more issues with political parties than the government and that's why we want inclusion of political parties representatives in the delegation."

Others lawmakers also demanded inclusion of political parties in the negotiation team.

Situation in Pashtunkot district: Gul Mohammad Rasouli, a lawmaker from Faryab province, said some families had been besieged by the Taliban in Sar Houza area of Pashunkot district and they were dire need of help. He said so far some elderly persons and children had lost their lives.

Senate Chairman Muslimyar asked security institutions to take steps for breaking the Taliban siege in the area and rescue those trapped. He also called on the Taliban to allow the besieged families to fetch home essential items. (Pajhwok)

(7) Russia Opposes...

visit Moscow.

The four Taliban representative have been under travel ban by the United Nations General Assembly and that according to Saikal, the representative should have travel ban exemption for their trip to Russia.

"While the Moscow meeting was a development, it occurred in a manner that contradicted the principle of transparency as four Taliban members out of five who traveled to Moscow, did so without a travel ban exemption from the United Nations Security Council Taliban sanctions committee," said Saikal.

According to Saikal, Afghanistan welcomes all efforts for peace but any such efforts must be founded on Afghan-led initiatives.

Reacting to Russia's representative critics on the text of the draft, Saikal said the draft's text reflect the international community's efforts for supporting Afghan people.

Russia has warned that if the UN without considering the realities in Afghanistan make a decision regarding the country, efforts for ending war will deadlock and the UN will lose reputation. (Tolo news)

(8) 6 Rebels Killed...

and Mullah Bashir Separately in the same district, three Taliban gunmen were killed and five others wounded in a clash with security forces, the police chief said.

The Taliban also claimed killing eight soldiers and wounding several others in Arghandab clashes. (Pajhwok)

(9) Mazar-I-Sharif...

Pakistani practice and businessmen would have direct access to Afghanistan made carpets.

He said the Mazar-i-Sharif-Europe Air Corridor would provide work opportunity for people in addition to paving the way for products manufactured in Afghanistan to be sold at higher price.

Meanwhile, businessmen in Balkh said they were counting hours and minutes for the opening of the Mazar-i-Sharif-Europe Air Corridor as they believed the facility would help accelerate business activities.

Haji Ghausuddin, representative of Rashid Khalid Business Company, said the opening of the Mazar-i-Sharif-Europe Air Corridor would help improve trade ties with the European countries.

He said currently the main problem of Afghan businessmen was no access to European markets. He said the expansion of trade linkages would positively impact the economy of Afghanistan.

But Shah Zamin, owner of Safar Company in Balkh, believed exporting goods through air corridors was expensive and least profitable. He said the government should concentrate on land routes.

He said sea routes were most expensive option for trade globally followed by land routes.

Currently Afghan businessmen dispatch their exports through Kabul and Kandahar airports to international markets. (Pajhwok)

(10) Iran-Made...

Ghulam Sakhi Roghliwanai, police chief of Paktika province said security forces in the province face a lack of weapons and ammunition.

This is not the first time that Afghan security officials claim they have seized Iranian weaponry from the Taliban. Before this, the United States displayed Iranian weapons that, according to them, were recovered from parts of Helmand province and from areas close to Kandahar airfield.

Last month, the United States displayed pieces of, what it said, were Iranian weapons deployed to militants in Afghanistan and Yemen.

Brian Hook, the US Special Representative for Iran, told reporters the Iranian threat is growing and warned of an "accumulating risk of escalation" in the region if the United States fails to act.

"Today we are unveiling Iran's Sayyad-2 C surface-to-air missile which you see behind me. This missile was designed and manufactured in Iran and the writing in Farsi on its side translates as 'the hunter missile'. The conspicuous Farsi markings is Iran's way of saying they don't mind being caught violating UN resolutions," Hook said.

"Fajr rockets have also been added to the display and are located next to the anti-tank guided missiles. These weapons were recovered in Helmand, near Kandahar airfield, by the Afghan National Army from the Taliban. Iran has been providing material support to the Taliban since at least 2007. These same rockets have been used by Hamas in the past," he added. (Tolo news)