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Gweru MDC-T councillors at each other's throats. Page-10

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Libyan rebels massacre black Africans. Page-11

Speed up budget approval, says Minister

By Staff Reporter

Parliament needs to urgently fast-track the process of debating and approving the national budget every year to give government departments and agencies enough time to implement capital projects within the country's financial year.

Namibia's financial year starts on April 1st and ends on March 31st the next year, but Works and Transport Minister, Erkki Nghimtina, has expressed his worries about the amount of time it takes to approve the budget, a long process that cuts into the programme of the implementation period.

On average, he told the National Assembly, it takes Parliament two and a half months to approve the budget. The longest approval was in 2008 when it took Parliament three months to approve it. This year's budget was tabled on March 8, and the debate is likely to drag on before it is approved.

"I am not sure how long it will take before it is approved and becomes operational," said



Cde. Erkki Nghimtina

Minister Nghimtina. "While I am aware of the 33 per cent continuation budget that is always made available to bridge the gap, I am afraid to say that this only caters for old projects that are ongoing, but not for new projects."

When the budget is approved in June/July, he said, that is the time spending starts. But tenders for procurements of specific goods and services are then called. The Tender Board Act dictates that tenders should run for four weeks, which means that July/August is reserved for running advertisements.

August/September makes up

for adjudication of bids and appointment of contractors. The Minister said that major contracts such as road construction took the contractor up to a month to mobilize resources and establish camps before work could start, which is around September/October, while the financial year ends on March 31st the next year.

"This process leaves the government with only six months to spend the allocated amounts of money to a specific project, especially in view of the fact that December and January each year are Christmas and New Year holidays in Namibia," said Minister Nghimtina.

"The rainy season between January and March disrupts work in case of road construction as we all know. We need to address how we can significantly reduce on the time we spend to approve the budget so that sufficient time is allowed for actual work to be done."

Minister Nghimtina also took issue with the way the budget system was structured, saying that it was "rule-driven" rather than "mission-driven."

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Agribank finances farmers training programme

By Staff Reporter

Namibia's agricultural bank, AGRIBANK, has signed a one-million dollar service level agreement with two leading tertiary institutions and an agricultural organization to train and improve the skills and enhance the competence of small-scale farmers in the country, especially in rural areas.

The two tertiary institutions – the University of Namibia and the Polytechnic of Namibia – will conduct six-months training courses at various locations

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Members of Parliament listen as President Hifikepunye Pohamba addressed a joint session of Parliament – National Assembly and National Council – early this year.

SWAPO MPs commend targeted interventions

By Asser Ntinda

Several SWAPO Party members of the National Assembly have come out strongly backing Finance Minister, Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila, for her balanced budget currently under intense debate in the National Assembly, warding off criticisms from opposition MPs and local economists.

Given the rate at which SWAPO MPs are taking on the opposition in the National Assembly and local economists, and the enthusiasm with which they are backing the budget, the N\$38 billion budget is expected to sail through without major amendments.

Speakers upon speakers hailed the budget, saying that it was well balanced to address Namibia's competing needs. Deputy Information and Communication Technology Minister, Stanley Simataa, welcomed a huge chunk that went to the Ministry of Education, saying that Namibia's competitiveness was severely constrained by lack of human resources.

But while Simataa welcomed increased investment in educa-



Cde. Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila

tion, he warned that judicious utilization of the financial resources provided was likely to be constrained by the continuous lack of a comprehensive human resources development plan, HRDP, according to which higher education and

training institutions should flex their academic offerings.

"I am therefore tempted to reiterate the plea I made last year for the relevant institution to expedite the development of such a plan," said Deputy Minister Simataa. "Procrastinating on such an important matter will certainly be at the peril of our nation."

"In the absence of a national HRDP, I just wonder how we can do justice to the generous allocation made to human capital development. I trust that I am not over-flagging this important issue."

SWAPO Party Chief Whip in the National Assembly, Professor Peter Katjavivi, said that

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