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. 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 Minister Nghimtina. “While I am aware of the 33 percent 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 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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