

Summarized translations of articles in local media, from Timor-Leste Subscriber News Local and International Media Monitoring

Articles on the 2019 State Budget

Bishop Carmo says state funds should benefit all people

Independente, January 11, 2019

The Bishop of Dili, Dom Virgilio do Carmo Da Silva, has said state funds should benefit all people living in Timor-Leste, as President of the Republic finalizes Friday the final day of the 2019 General State Budget hearing cycle. On December 22 National Parliament approved a US\$2.132 million 2019 budget. President Francisco Guterres Lu-Olo now has 30 days to enact or veto the proposed budget. After a budget consultative meeting with Lu-Olo on Wednesday, the Bishop described the proposed budget as one that delivered “hope,” but that he was concerned by the low 8 percent cumulative expenditure on health, education, and agricultural sectors. Silva said improving the standard of education and health services in Timor-Leste needed better prioritization. He said the government had established several new schools across the country, but many Timorese children were still “begging for education” due to poor facilities and a lack of trained teaching staff. He added that many people lacked access to suitable health facilities and that the agricultural sector needed development in order to provide livelihood opportunities for Timor-Leste’s unemployed. “If we do not prioritize agriculture then people will think it is better to buy rice than make their own rice fields,” Dom Basilio said. In his New Year message, Lu-Olo promised that he would consult with political leaders, parliamentary benches, religious denominations, youth organizations and nongovernmental and academics organizations before making decision that would serve the interests of the state.

Spiritual leaders want Gov’t to invest in productive sectors

Radio Timor-Leste, January 9, 2019 language source: Tetun

Bishop of the Dili Diocese, Monsignor Virgilio do Carmo said it was good if the Government invest more in agriculture, education and health sectors in order to help improve Timorese people’s lives. “Three areas, which we Timorese are concerned about, are agriculture, education and health. It is the fact that we have many schools, but are still lacking many things. And it is also important to invest more in agricultural sector,” he said. Meanwhile, Dili Islamic Leader, Haji Ahamad Ali Ayubi said Timorese Government should not be depending much on the petroleum fund, but it was also good to invest in other sectors in order to generate other revenues. “We, we should not be depending much on the petroleum fund, but we can also invest in industrial sector,” he said.

Academics call on President of the Republic not to veto 2019 OJE

GMN Diario Nacional, January 10, 2019 Language source: Tetun

Academics have called on President of the Republic Francisco Guterres Lu-Olo not to veto 2019 State Budget (OJE) Proposal, saying the veto will worsen the current economic situation due to protracted political deadlock. Academic representatives from Universidade da Paz (UNPAZ), Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa’e (UNTL), Institute of Business (IOB), Dili Institute of Technology (DIT), UNITAL, and UNDIL made the call in a meeting with President Lu-Olo on Wednesday (09/01). “We pleaded with President of the Republic not to veto 2019 OJE and warn him of the impacts of the veto upon Timorese people and President said he would considers all the inputs when making decision to 2019 OJE,” Academics’

spokesperson, Lucas Da Costa told reporters outside Presidential Palace after meeting with President Lu-Olo. He said a 1-year political impasse had left many small companies shutdown their activities and also many Timorese jobless as there were no projects throughout 2018. Early this week, former President of the Republic, Jose Ramos Horta had also warned of a prolonged economic crisis if President of the Republic vetoed 2019 State Budget.

Civil society concerned about small amount allocated for agriculture

Radio Timor-Leste, January 8, 2019 language source: Tetun

Civil society organizations in Timor-Leste have expressed their concerns and criticisms over the Government's policy on the general state budget, which only allocates one percent to the country's agricultural sector. As RTL (the public radio) reported the large amount of the budget is allocated for infrastructure reaching 22% of allocation. After meeting with the president of the republic, Chairperson of Rede Feto, Judit Diaz said it was impossible for the country to diversifying its economy as the budget allocation to agricultural sector in small amount. "It is about the development of the country's economy, the Government does not put the agricultural sector as its top priority. The budget allocated for it is only one percent; meanwhile southern coast mega project is 22%."

Lu-Olo warns low agriculture budget ignores Timor-Leste's rural population needs

Independente, January 9, 2019

The President of the Republic, Francisco Guterres Lu-Olo, has warned the government's proposed 2019 budget fails to consider the needs of the Timor-Leste's poorest rural people, due to its low agricultural sector expenditure. On December 22, National Parliament approved a \$2.132 billion budget for 2019 of which 1 percent is allocated to the agriculture sector. This is compared to 33% for major oil and gas projects, including Tasi Mane and the purchase of Royal Dutch Shell and ConocoPhillips' stakes in the Greater Sunrise natural gas fields for \$300 million and \$350 million respectively. In an address earlier this week in Dili, Lu-Olo said the government's failure to prioritize developing the country's agricultural sector was "very concerning," as it sat at odds to the need to the country's large rural population. Lu-Olo questioned how farming families could make a livelihood and support their children to get an education without recognition and support from the government. Lu-Olo warns many farming families, including veterans, were getting sick as they could not afford nutritious food and lived in sub-standard housing without access to electricity and clean water because of low incomes.

He said improving the lives of Timor-Leste's rural poor by helping develop the agricultural sector was "key to changing people's lives." Over 67% of Timor-Leste's population lives in rural areas and are largely dependent on agricultural for their livelihood, according to World Bank statistics. After technical editing, the proposed 2019 budget will be sent to Lu-Olo, who will have 30 days to promulgate or veto the budget. National Parliament voted 40 votes in favor and 25 against for the budget. Speaking at the end of the budget debate, Prime Minister Taur Matan Ruak, declared the 2019 budget as "a turning-point budget because it centers on a more active role for the State and of the country in the development of our natural resource." During the Alliance of Change for Progress (AMP) coalition government's 2018 election campaign its leaders said it would prioritize health, education, agriculture and access to clean water. Collectively these sectors receive one eighth of the 2019 budget expenditure.

Horta warns of another financial crisis if President vetoes 2019 OJE

Independente, January 9, 2019 Language source: Tetun

Jose Ramos Horta, former President of the Republic, is sounding a warning bell about another economic crisis in 2019 if the incumbent President Francisco Guterres Lu-Olo vetoed 2019 State Budget (OJE) Proposal. On December 22, National Parliament approved a \$2.132 billion budget for 2019 of which only one eighth of the proposed budget allocated to agriculture, health, education, and access to clean water. The government has allocated 33% percent for investment in the petroleum and gas sector, including Tasi Mane project and the purchase of ConocoPhillips and Shell's shares in the Greater Sunrise gas consortium for \$350 million and \$3000 million respectively. On Tuesday after participating in the Timorese Government and Timor-Leste's Oil and Gas' Chief Negotiator Xanana Gusmão's explanation on \$2.132 billion budget ceiling to parliament which includes budget to buy out ConocoPhillips and Shell's stakes in Greater Sunrise gas fields, the Noble Peace Laureate said the opposition parties and the President should have been cleared from any confusion regarding the budget's large amount and supported the government's plan. "I sat there and listened to the explanation from Brother Xanana and it was very clear, I don't see any reason why parliament members could not reach consensus to vote unanimously to support 2019 OJE and why President of the Republic could not support the process," Horta told media at National Parliament yesterday.

He added the government's plan to develop Greater Sunrise gas fields was a national matter, therefore, every entity should support the policy. He hoped with all the explanations from the government and the chief negotiator at National Parliament, President of the Republic would make a good decision to promulgate 2019 OJE to prevent a protracted economic crisis in the country. Last week after receiving the 2019 State Budget Document from National Parliament, President Lu-Olo said he was sad the government's proposed budget failed to address Timor-Leste's productive sectors and the needs of the people.

2019 State Budget: Lu-Olo is sad allocation to productive sector is nominal

Independente, January 7, 2019 Language source: Tetun

Timor-Leste's President Francisco Guterres Lu-Olo is sad the allocation of 2019 State Budget to productive sectors such as agriculture and tourism is very little. Lu-Olo made the comment after reading the documents of 2019 State Budget which National Parliament submitted last week. "It is sad that 2019 State Budget does not put agriculture sector in priority," Lu-Olo told media in Komoro, recently.

The Chief of the State said success in agricultural sector depended on government's policy since this sector still had many problems that needed to be addressed to facilitate farmers to increase their productions to boost economic growth, but it was a pity that the government did not put this sector in its priority this year. Just on 8 percent of the proposed \$1.83 billion state budget for 2019 is allocated for investment in education, health, agriculture, and food security. The government has allocated 21 percent for investment in the petroleum and gas sector. On agriculture and food production, 1.5% of the 2019 budget is invested. Education received 7.7%, health 2%, and investment in clean water and sanitation 1.1%. During 2019 State Budget discussion in parliament last month, Prime Minister Taur Matan Ruak said the government would put a "large budget" in 2020 to increase productivity in other sectors.

President Lu-Olo to veto 2019 OJE or not, it is his competence, Noe says

Suara Timor Lorosa'e, January 7, 2019 Language source: Tetun

National Parliament (PN) has submitted 2019 State Budget (OJE) to President of the Republic Francisco Guterres Lu-Olo before Christmas and President of the Republic has 30 days to learn the budget before promulgating it. PN President Arao Noe said it depended on President of the Republic whether to promulgate 2019 OJE or not because it was his decision. "We just submitted 2019 OJE to the President on December 24, 2018 and President needs time to learn the budget and it is President's competence to promulgate or veto the budget," Noe told media on Friday (04/01). Noe said 2019 OJE was US\$1.8 billion as it included budgets to buy out ConocoPhillips and Shell's shares in Greater Sunrise consortium, therefore, if President of the Republic vetoed the budget and wanted parliament to cut the budget for the buyouts, parliament was ready to cut it and adjust the budget.