

NCP lawmakers find fault with budget



Lawmakers representing the ruling Nepal Communist Party today expressed dissatisfaction with the fiscal budget presented by Finance Minister Yubaraj Khatiwada yesterday.

Taking part in discussion on the budget for 2018-19 in the House of Representatives, most of the NCP lawmakers expressed their displeasure over, among other things, the Local Infrastructure Development Partnership Programme that replaces the previous Constituency Infrastructure Development Programme and Constituency Development Programme.

Hridayesh Tripathi, who had contested the parliamentary election on the election symbol of erstwhile CPN-UML, said the state mechanism lacked the capacity to spend development budget. He pointed out that the budget had estimated higher recurrent expenditure than development expenditure, and demanded that the government scrap non-budgetary expenditure through International/Non-Governmental Organisations.

Tripathi also urged the finance minister to scrap the Local Infrastructure Development Partnership Programme in its current form, referring to the minister's statement that he was 'caught in a trap' and pressured to put in place the scheme. "We are not asking for donations, but projects," he said.

NCP lawmaker Rajendra Gautam said the Local Infrastructure Development Partnership Programme, which replaces the Constituency Development Programme, should be amended.

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Gautam said the programme should include education and tourism development, besides improving roads, irrigation, drinking water supply and river control.

Another NCP lawmaker Tek Bahadur Basnet said the budget should have been more ambitious. Expressing reservation over the budget completely forgetting the martyrs, Basnet said the annual fiscal estimates just tried to sell dreams.

He said rather than being production-oriented the budget was tax-oriented. He added that it continued with old national priority projects that did not cover around 40 districts though the country had already adopted federalism. "That's why we do not see socialism in this budget," he said.

Another NCP lawmaker Parbat Gurung extended his support to the budget, stating that it covered all areas — from mountains to Tarai.

NCP lawmaker Ram Kumar Jhankri expressed dissatisfaction with Finance Minister Khatiwada's statement that he came up with Local Infrastructure Development Partnership Programme under pressure. "This is not a responsible statement. I do not know what kind of trap he was in while allocating funds for constituency development," she said.

Stating that the previous Constituency Development Programme was an appropriate scheme, Jhankri ruled out any possibility of fund misuse. She said it would be a challenge to implement the budget, stating that recurrent expenditure was higher than capital expenditure in the budget estimate.

Another NCP lawmaker Gajendra Bahadur Mahat, who represents Jumla, said the Local Infrastructure Development Partnership Programme humiliated lawmakers. He said although the allocation of Rs 40 million was good, he termed wrong the provision of formation of the project selection committee including local level representatives.

"This budget has tried to control lawmakers," he said, complaining that the finance minister had put every lawmaker in the same basket.

Mahat added that the budget was city-oriented and ignored remote and underdeveloped places like Jumla.

Source: The Himalayan Times, 1st June 2018