
IRAQ PARLIAMENT APPROVES BUDGET ENDING WEEKS OF DEADLOCK

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Reuters

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BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq's parliament approved the 2019 budget early on Thursday after an hours-long vote, ending weeks of deadlock over allocations to different provinces and privatization of state projects.

Parliament did not vote as planned on three cabinet posts that remain empty, however, leaving Iraq with an incomplete government months after a general election.

The budget projected oil exports of 3.88 million barrels per day, up from 3.8 million bpd for the previous year, at a price of \$56 per barrel, an increase from the \$46 the 2018 budget was based on.

Iraq's 2019 budget of 133 trillion dinars (\$112 billion) included payment of salaries for the Peshmerga, the military force for the semi-autonomous Kurdish region, a move that lawmakers said might help ease tension between Baghdad and Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan region.

The 3.88 million bpd of oil exports includes 250,000 from the Kurdish region. Exports from northern Kirkuk resumed after a year-long halt in November.

Iraq's oil exports from its southern Basra fields account for more than 95 percent of the OPEC producers state revenue.

Kurdish lawmakers welcomed the move to pay salaries of their forces, even though these are not under the direct command of the Baghdad government.

We are satisfied with the budget after approving the salaries for Peshmerga and the regions civil servants, Kurdish MP Aram Balati told Reuters.

Last year the budget cut the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Governments (KRG) share from the 17 percent the region has traditionally received since the fall of Saddam Hussein, following a failed bid at full Kurdish independence from Baghdad in October 2017.

Lawmakers from southern predominantly Shiite Muslim provinces had bickered over budget allocations.

The vote had been delayed partly by those disputes and by a face-off between two Shiite-dominated political groupings which still cannot agree on the remaining cabinet appointments.

Lawmaker Mohammed Tamim said the budgets approval would help stabilize Iraqs economy and pave the way for the countrys rebuilding.

Iraqs infrastructure is wrecked after years of war against Islamic State and alleged corruption that has left thousands of people without power and water.

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