

Accusations Of Financial Impropriety Pile Up Against Former Tehran Mayor



Documents concerning 20 trillion rials of unaccounted expenditures from the city of Tehran that accrued under former mayor and Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) general Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf have been delivered to the Tehran City Council, a city council member announced February 6.

This amount would have been more than \$55 million at the time and around \$43 million in current exchange rate.

The documents were classified, but City Council Member Hassan Rabati disclosed that some are related to expenses for contractors assigned to implement projects for the city without legal contracts.

‘Now it’s up to the city council to decide the next steps,’ Rabati said.

Some city projects dating back to 2011 were agreed with contractors only orally and without a competitive bidding process, Rabati said. He added that a list of city hall staff accused of violating the law has been presented to the Tehran City Guards Department and the national judiciary.

The alleged malfeasance happened under the watch of the 56-year-old Qalibaf, Brigadier General of the IRGC, who was chief commander of Iran’s police force (1999-2005) before becoming mayor of the capital.

Qalibaf, a conservative, has repeatedly been accused of cronyism and mismanagement of city funds.

This is just a tiny part of what the current City Council alleges went missing from the city’s coffers during Qalibaf’s tenure.

‘A special committee has been formed to investigate the scandal at City Hall that’s being called an ‘Astronomical Property Sellout’ [of state owned assets to entities aligned with the conservatives],’ MIT educated Mohammad Ali Najafi said in his first press conference after replacing Qalibaf as Mayor of Tehran in August 2017.

Najafi delivered a report to the city council on January 14 containing what he claimed were a list of ‘violations’ committed by General Qalibaf while he was mayor.

In his report, Najafi also accused his predecessor and his staff of illegally spending municipal funds on last year’s May presidential elections, suddenly employing 13,000 new personnel, arbitrarily giving away 674 city real estate holdings, and ‘cheating’ in managing an employee savings account.

General Qalibaf was one of President Hassan Rouhani’s main challengers in last year’s election, but dropped out of the race at the final stage, clearing the way for another conservative challenger, the mid-ranking cleric Ebrahim Raeisi.

?More than five billion dollars of Tehran's municipal funds went missing during Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf's tenure as Mayor of Iran's capital city,? said City Council Member Majid Farahani January 15.

A week later, Tehran's Prosecutor-General, Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi, called upon Najafi to immediately deliver the evidence to support his claims.

Najafi has not yet publicly responded to Jafari Dolatabadi's demand.

Furthermore, a spokesman for the judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohsein Ejei, has dismissed Najafi's allegations.

?As a rule, newly appointed officials always love to accuse their predecessors, but they never present any evidence of wrongdoing to the judiciary.?

City Council Member Rabati also says there is a 500-page report on Qalibaf's misdeeds that led to the destruction of Tehran's legendary gardens.

Reports allege that city staff, in tandem with business interests, deliberately stopped watering Tehran's gardens in order to turn them into plots for skyscrapers.

The new revelations coincide with Tehran City Council passing a reduced municipal budget February 5 for the next Iranian year (beginning March 21).

Tehran municipality's budget for the current Iranian year (March 2017-18) is 184.89 trillion rials (\$4.01 billion), and it will be reduced by around 11 trillion rials.

Deputy Mayor for Planning and Urban Development Hojjatollah Mirzaei said the municipality plans to expand its revenue sources beyond construction taxes and duties.

The new sources of revenue, according to Mirzaei, include taxes on municipal services and facilities, state funding, foreign investment, and finance deals, value-added tax, and private sector investment in economically feasible projects.

Source: Radio Farda