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Assembly setting up ad-hoc committee for CNE

The Standing Commission of the Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, is setting up an ad-hoc committee that will choose the three civil society members of the National Election Commission (CNE). Under the electoral legislation passed in December, the new CNE will have 13 members. Against the recommendations of domestic and foreign election observer groups, most of these will be appointed by political parties.

The three parties represented in parliament will choose eight CNE members – five appointed by the ruling Frelimo Party, two by the main opposition force, Renamo, and one by the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM).

Two CNE members will come from the legal community – a judge and an attorney, appointed by the two regulatory bodies, the Higher Council of the Judicial Magistracy, and the Higher Council of the Public Prosecutor's Office.

The other three will come from civil society organisations. The law states that civil society bodies may propose candidates for the CNE to an ad-hoc committee set up by the Assembly. From the names proposed, the ad-hoc committee will draw up a short list of between 12 and 16 names that will be submitted to the Assembly plenary.

A secret ballot vote in the plenary will choose the three CNE members, while the three runners-up become supplementary members who will take over if any of the full members dies, resigns or is incapacitated.

The spokesperson for the Standing Commission, Mateus Katupha, said the Committee was “very important since it will advance with transparent rule for the election of the civil society members who will form part of the CNE”.

He expected the Committee's work to take no more than a month. The formation of the Committee was urgent, Katupha added, so that a new CNE could be in place speedily to organise this year's municipal elections.

The government has set 20 November as the date for the elections. Voter registration will take place in all 43 municipalities from 25 May to 23 July. The new CNE needs to be in place before then.

Katupha said that the three parliamentary groups are now appointing their members to the ad-hoc committee. Since Renamo has promised to boycott both the municipal elections, and the 2014 general elections, it would be logical for it to boycott this committee too.

However, Katupha told AIM that Renamo members of the Standing Commission gave no indication whether or not Renamo would participate in the ad-hoc committee.

Government working on electoral sustainability

The Mozambican government is working to make the country's elections less dependent on outside support, declared the Minister of State Administration, Carmelita Namashalua, in Maputo on 4 March.

Speaking at the opening session of a conference on “Sustainability in Electoral Administration: adequate allocation of resources for credible elections”, Namashalua recalled that the country's first multi-party elections, held in 1994 – two years after the end of the war of destabilisation – depended on a high degree of support from the UN.

Over the past two decades, she continued, foreign support for Mozambican elections has declined, and since 2008 the country has used its own resources to organise and administer elections, though it remains dependent on foreign support for technical assistance for the electoral bodies.

“Support from the development partners has ensured that some of the needs generated by elections are covered, but the government has made an effort gradually to cover all the costs involved in electoral administration”, Namashalua said.

However, the Minister argued that the sustainability of electoral administration should not be looked at only from the financial point of view.

That sustainability, she said, “is guaranteed by the electoral bodies who receive full support from the government when it needs to collaborate in such matters as territorial delimitation, administrative organisation and the population census, among others”.

The conference was jointly organised by the United Nations and the European Commission bringing together around 50 electoral experts from across the globe.

In her speech, the director of the United Nations' Democratic Governance Group, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, also stressed that sustainability is not just a matter of money. “Sustainability also concerns broader issues of support from all the democratic and judicial organs of the State during prolonged electoral cycles”.

Japan finances Nacala port development

The Mozambican and Japanese governments signed an agreement in Maputo on 4 March, under which Japan will provide a loan of 889 million yen (\$84 million) for the first phase of the development project for the northern Mozambican port of Nacala.

The agreement was signed by Mozambique's Deputy Foreign Minister, Eduardo Koloma, and by Japanese ambassador Eiji Hashimoto.

The first phase includes dredging the north quay, and expanding and paving the container terminal. This is intended to raise the capacity of the terminal from the current 89,000 to 240,000 containers a year.

The project should also lead to an increase in the number of ships calling at Nacala from the current 75 a year to about 180 a year.

Speaking at the ceremony, Koloma said that improving Nacala port is one of the government's major priorities. He hoped that the Mozambican authorities would be able to count on continuing Japanese support, not only for port infrastructures, education and health, but also for the prevention and management of natural disasters.

For his part, Hashimoto said that the development of the port will contribute towards accelerating Mozambique's development, and will facilitate the trade of landlocked countries such as Malawi and Zambia.

Vale delays expansion

The Brazilian mining company Vale has delayed the expansion of its open cast coal mine in Moatize, in the central Mozambican province of Tete from the second half of 2014 to the second half of 2015.

The company says it took the decision in order to bring the planning of its mining and its logistical operations into alignment, as well as to make optimal use of the resources invested.

Like other mining companies in Tete, Vale is entirely dependent on the Sena rail line to take its exports from Moatize to the port of Beira. But the Indian consortium, Rites and Ircan International, in charge of rebuilding the line, botched the job and parts remain in poor condition and highly vulnerable to bad weather.

In February torrential rains and flooding swept away ballast and earthworks from part of the line in the Tete district of Mutarara, forcing a suspension of rail traffic. Unable to comply with its coal export contracts, Vale declared a situation of "force majeure" (as has the other major coal producer, Rio Tinto).

Vale has declared its intention of pushing ahead with ambitious plan to build a new railway from Moatize to the port of Nacala, cutting across southern Malawi, and thus freeing the company from dependence on the Sena line. It is hoped that this railway will be operational as from late 2014.

Vale is also building a new coal terminal at Nacala-a-Velha, on the opposite side of the bay from the existing port. It could handle 22 million tonnes of coal a year. Nacala is regarded as the best deep water harbour on the east African post, and ships of any size can dock there.

At a Maputo seminar on coal and gas recently, the Minister of Mineral Resources, Esperanca Bias, forecast that by 2020 Mozambique could be exporting over 50 million tonnes of coal a year, and would become one of the world's five largest exporters of coking coal. But these prospects will only become a reality, if the current logistical constraints are overcome.

Rainy season death toll stands at 117

The known death toll from the torrential rains and flooding of the current rainy season is now 117, according to statistics released on 4 March by Mozambique's relief agency, the National Disaster Management Institute (INGC).

The INGC puts the number of people affected by the flooding at 246,966, of whom 95,337 were still living in temporary accommodation centres.

The worst hit province is Gaza, in the south, due to massive flooding on the Limpopo River. 45 deaths were reported from Gaza, with 175,693 people affected. 81,155 people were still in the six remaining Gaza accommodation centres on 3 March – mostly at the largest centre, at Chihauquelane, in Chokwe district.

The second most affected province is Zambezia, with 23 deaths and 42,530 people affected. 11,060 people are still living in the 13 Zambezia accommodation centres.

The level of all the major rivers has dropped, although the Zambezi still remains a few centimetres above flood alert level at Caia and Marromeu, on its lower reaches.

Meanwhile the cholera outbreak in Cabo Delgado has spread to Cuamba district in the neighbouring province of Niassa, with 33 cases of cholera were diagnosed in Cuamba.

Cases continue to be diagnosed in the Cabo Delgado provincial capital, Pemba, and the districts of Mecufi and Metuge. In the first three days of March, there were 16 new cases, bringing the total since the start of the year to 704 cases, three of whom have died (a lethality rate of 0.4 per cent).

Huge backlog in court system

The Mozambican court system remains characterized by a huge backlog of cases, according figures released by the President of the Supreme Court, Ozias Pondja.

Speaking in Maputo at the ceremony opening the 2013 judicial year, Pondja said that, at the beginning of 2012, there were 147,195 cases pending in the country's courts.

During 2012, a further 105,348 cases entered the courts, and 102,821 cases were tried. This meant that the backlog increased – 149,722 cases passed from 2012 into this year.

Putting a brave face on this, Pondja said "when we compare the number of cases that entered in the year and the number that were tried, we see the capacity of response of the courts was about 97.6 per cent, which leads us to conclude that the performance in 2012 was very positive".

Pondja admitted, however, that the backlog can only be reduced if the number of cases tried in a year is well in excess of 100 per cent of the new cases that enter the system that year.

Pondja praised the operations of the newly established Higher Appeals Courts, which are taking some of the burden off the Supreme Court. Previously all appeals from decisions of provincial courts rose automatically to the Supreme Court. Now they go to the three regional appeals courts (in Maputo, Beira and Nampula).

Pondja said the Appeals Courts received 1,025 cases in 2012, the first full year of their operation. They heard 479 of these appeals (46.7 per cent). In only three cases were appeals against these decisions made to the Supreme Court. Pondja believed this indicated "generalized acceptance" of the Appeals Courts' decisions.

In his last speech at such an event, the outgoing chairperson of the Bar Association, Gilberto Correia, attacked corruption in the judiciary, and warned that the system is on "the brink of collapse".

Relatives of murdered taxi driver seek justice

Relatives of Mido Macie, the Mozambican taxi-driver murdered by the South African police in Daveyton, east of Johannesburg, are asking the Mozambican government to intervene to ensure exemplary punishment for those who committed this crime.

The brutal murder occurred on 26 February after a dispute between Macie and eight Daveyton policemen over where he had parked his taxi. Macie was tied to the back of a police van, which was then driven for around 400 metres in front of dozens of witnesses. He died of head injuries and internal bleeding a couple of hours later.

The police assault on Macie was filmed, and through the Internet the video has been seen all over the world.

The eight policemen involved have now been charged with murder. South African Police commissioner Riah Phiyega has also promised that the Daveyton station commander will be relieved of his duties.

“We are asking for help from the Mozambican government to ensure that justice is done. We don’t accept what happened to our son”, said his father, Jossefa Macie, interviewed by Radio Mozambique.

“Prison is not enough to punish those who murdered my husband”, said his widow, Biuda Mazive. She said that “those who committed this crime will come out of prison, but my husband will never come back”.

Mido’s sister, Hortencia Macie, said he was the oldest son of their parents and, in addition to his own three year old daughter, he had taken responsibility for the orphan children of a deceased brother.

Macie had been living in South Africa since the age of ten. His father had been a migrant worker on the South African gold mines. After his parents returned to Mozambique, he would regularly send food back to them. That lifeline has been abruptly cut off, and relatives in South Africa now wonder who will support Macie’s parents.

Police seek Interpol assistance in arresting Bakhir

Mozambican police have sought help from Interpol to arrest fugitive businessman Mohamed Bakhir Ayoob, wanted in connection with a spate of kidnappings and at least one murder in Maputo.

When the Criminal Investigation Police (PIC) issued the first arrest warrant, on charges of “private imprisonment” and extortion against Bakhir on 15 February he fled the country.

He went first to Dubai, and then onto Hong Kong, where funds obtained from the ransoms paid by the relatives of the kidnap victims are believed to have been transferred.

PIC has now asked Interpol to issue an international arrest warrant for Bakhir. It has also alerted its regional counterparts in SARPCO (Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Organisation).

A second arrest warrant, issued three days after the first, concerns a charge of first degree murder.

Bakhir is believed to have ordered the murder last June of Ahmad Jassat, owner of the Expresso Cambios foreign exchange bureau. Jassat was shot seven times on one of Maputo’s main thoroughfares, 24 July Avenue.

According to sources in the murdered man’s family, Bakhir owed Jassat \$7 million.

Bakhir was arrested on 21 September last year, and the police believed they had a solid case against him, based largely on the testimony of members of the kidnap gang.

But a judge in the city of Matola, Helena Mateus Kida, ordered the release of Bakhir, for lack of evidence.

The police now believe that Kida reached this conclusion because she simply did not have the evidence before her. Key pieces of evidence had been removed from the case file before it reached her – which indicates serious criminal infiltration of the police, of the Matola court, or of both.

The police were able to revive the case in February, because they have the testimony of another detained kidnapper, Romao Daude. He was interrogated on 31 January in connection with the kidnapping of Zainadin Ali, owner of a building firm and a cake shop.

The police believe that Bakhir is not the only mastermind behind the kidnaps – PIC claims that convicted assassin Momad Assife Abdul Satar (“Nini”) is also involved, and has been giving instructions from his prison cell.

Nini Satar is serving a prison sentence of 24 years for ordering the murder, in November 2000, of the country’s top investigative journalist, Carlos Cardoso. He was also sentenced to 14 years for his part in the major bank fraud which siphoned \$14 million out of the bank BCM.

Prime Minister speaks of logistical challenges

Prime Minister Alberto Vaquina declared on 27 February, in the central city of Beira, that the government is committed to adopting policies to develop the rail and port sector in order to transform the country into a true logistical platform.

Speaking at the opening of the seventh Indian Ocean Ports and Logistics Conference, Vaquina outlined the various projects under way to increase the logistical capacity of the Mozambican rail and port systems.

He said that in the south not only is the capacity of Maputo port being upgraded, but a new port complex will be built at Techobanine, in the southern district of Matutuine.

“The Techobanine Port Complex”, said Vaquina, “envisages the construction from scratch of a deep water port to handle very large ships, which will complement the port of Maputo, a railway line linking Techobanine to Botswana, via Chicualacuala (in the southern Mozambican province of Gaza) and Zimbabwe, and an industrial complex”.

The new deep water port, he said, could handle 100 million tonnes of cargo a year. It could become a strategic regional fuel reserve, and would be ideal for exporting minerals from Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Vaquina said that Techobanine port will be ready to begin operations in 2015. It will cost \$7 billion which the Mozambican and Botswanan governments are to mobilise

Vaquina also stressed the rail and port projects in central and northern Mozambique, aimed at solving the logistical problems involved in exporting minerals, particularly coal, and later natural gas.

Currently, exports from the Moatize coal basin depend on the Sena railway from Moatize to Beira.

Several plans have been floated for new railways, and new ports, that will be required if the government is to fulfil its dream of exporting 50 million tonnes of coal a year by 2020.

The gas discoveries in the Rovuma Basin, off the coast of Cabo Delgado provinces, indicate reserves of at least 150 trillion cubic feet. Exporting the gas, in the shape of liquefied petroleum gas (LNG), will require a custom-built port on the northern coast of Cabo Delgado.

“We are aware that many challenges lie ahead in order to improve the logistical conditions in Mozambique”, said Vaquina. “However, we would like to assure you that we will work on each challenge with determination until we find the most adequate solution”.

Fraud investigations spread to Finance Ministry

Investigations into the massive thefts uncovered in the Ministry of Education suggest that the fraudulent scheme must also have involved staff of the public accounts department of the Finance Ministry.

The investigations undertaken by the Central Office for the Fight against Corruption (GCCC) are also looking at the public accounts department, since no Ministry can pay wages without that department authorizing the payment.

So somebody in public accounts must have checked the wages sheets that the Education Ministry sent for authorisation every month. In other words, officials in the financial department of the Education Ministry could not have committed the fraud on their own.

The fraud took the form of submitting a duplicate, fictitious wages sheet in addition to the real one. The money was then transferred to bank accounts controlled by those who were running the fraud.

It is far from clear exactly how much money went missing. The initial denunciation, in an anonymous letter sent to the media, was that two million meticaís (\$66,500) was siphoned out of the Ministry's coffers every month.

Education Minister Augusto Jone told reporters that the fraud had begun in 2006, and involved around 144 million meticaís. But on 20 February Ministry spokesperson Eurico Banze, addressing a press conference, put the amount stolen in 2012 alone at just five million meticaís.

A key figure in the scheme is a man named Sende, who was responsible for drawing up the monthly wages sheets, and for coordinating with the public accounts department and with the Ministry's bank.

When the fraud was discovered in December, Sende vanished from sight.

Aid donors not honouring pledges

Mozambique's dependence on foreign aid fell sharply in 2012 – largely because aid donors did not honour their promises.

According to Finance Minister Manuel Chang, the 2012 state budget envisaged that 41.4 per cent of expenditure would be financed by foreign grants and loans. But in the event, much of this promised aid did not turn up – the figures are now in, and they show that foreign aid covered just 27 per cent of public expenditure.

It is widely believed that among the key factors in the contraction of foreign aid are the international financial crisis, and the sovereign debt crisis in the euro zone.

Some of this shortfall was compensated for by the state raising more taxes than forecast – nonetheless the end result of broken donor promises was that total expenditure in 2012 was 137.9 billion meticaís (\$4.6 billion), rather than the 163 billion meticaís planned.

The government was thus forced to save money – and one of the areas cut was debt servicing. According to Chang,

speaking on 21 February at a seminar on public expenditure in the southern city of Matola, debt servicing was only 89.2 per cent of what had initially been programmed. Nonetheless, this was still a real growth of 16.8 per cent in debt payments when compared with 2011.

Chang warned that “although the public debt remains within the parameters of sustainability, we should strengthen our capacity to monitor indebtedness and increase our rigour in contracting new debts”.

The National Director of the Treasury, Maria Isaltina Lucas, spokesperson for the meeting, said there remain serious problems in obtaining full data on the foreign aid component of budgetary execution.

“Some projects are written into the budget while they are still under discussion with donors”, she said, “and the money is disbursed, not in the amounts envisaged, or not in the same financial year”.

Chang also called for a review of the way wages are paid and controlled in the state apparatus. He said he was particularly concerned about overtime payments, and the way in which new workers are recruited for the state.

He added that the state faces a major challenge to increase the provision for key sectors such as education, health, security and public order.

SADC region is stable - Salomao

Despite conflicts in some of the members of SADC (Southern African Development Community), the southern African region is basically stable, SADC Executive Secretary Tomas Salomao told a Maputo press conference on 5 March.

“We live in a stable region”, he said. “We have peace, stability and security. This does not mean that we face no challenges, but these are challenges located within our efforts to maintain peace and stability inside our various countries”.

But Salomao recognised the complexity of the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where SADC has decided to deploy a neutral intervention force of about 4,000 men in a joint initiative with the United Nations.

On 24 February, 11 southern and eastern African countries signed in Addis Ababa a framework agreement for peace in the DRC, under which all the signatories pledged to refrain from supporting Congolese rebel groups.

But none of the various Congolese rebel militias were present at the signing, and subsequently fighting has broken out between two factions of the M23 rebel movement.

While the conflict in the eastern DRC is the most critical problem facing SADC, other political problems the organisation faces include elections in Madagascar (which remains suspended from SADC following the 2009 military coup), and the constitutional referendum in Zimbabwe, paving the way for presidential and parliamentary elections.

This is a condensed version of the AIM daily news service – for details contact aim@aim.org.mz

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