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Dhlakama threatens consequences should parliament not back proposals

The leader of Mozambique's main opposition party, Renamo, has warned of unspecified "consequences" for President Filipe Nyusi, if the country's parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, does not accept his demand for "autonomous provinces".

Afonso Dhlakama met with President Nyusi on 7 February and again on 9 February in a hotel in Maputo, during which it was agreed that Renamo should present to parliament its proposals for the creation of an "autonomous region" in central and northern Mozambique.

However, divisions have emerged over whether the proposals will be given the backing of the Frelimo parliamentary bench. Dhlakama seemed to believe that President Nyusi would instruct Frelimo to support Renamo's proposals and he is becoming increasingly concerned that this may not happen.

In recent days senior figures from Frelimo have argued against "autonomous regions". For example, Frelimo Political Commission member Lucilia Hama, speaking in the northern port city of Nacala on 20 February declared, "we are in favour of a Mozambique that is one and indivisible, where we are all committed to developing the country and fighting against poverty".

Other Frelimo heavyweights, including Tobias Dias, Veronica Macamo and Eneas Comiche have toured the country, speaking out against dividing the country.

In response, Dhlakama told a meeting in Nampula city that the Renamo proposal "has already been discussed with the President of the Republic", and "if they (the Frelimo leadership) don't give orders directly to the Frelimo parliamentary group to facilitate the bill, there will be consequences".

He added that he would not be opposed to the bill undergoing amendment during the parliamentary debates. If it were shown that one or another article was illegal or unconstitutional, "then I will accept and change it", he said.

It should be stressed that no proposal has yet been drafted, nor has the issue been discussed in parliament. In fact, "autonomous provinces" are not even mentioned in the Renamo election manifesto put before the public prior to the 15 October general elections. Dhlakama only started talking about "autonomous provinces" in January, after Frelimo rejected his call for a "caretaker government", which would have been a coalition between Frelimo and Renamo.

Renamo ends boycott of parliament

All 89 parliamentary deputies from Renamo on 12 February attended the extraordinary sitting of the country's parliament, the Assembly of the Republic.

They had boycotted the first parliamentary sitting on 12 January, in protest against the results of the 15 October general elections, which Renamo described as fraudulent.

Renamo's leader, Afonso Dhlakama, ordered an end to the boycott after agreement was reached, in the meeting between Dhlakama and President Filipe Nyusi, that Renamo will bring a bill to the assembly on the creation of "autonomous regions".

The Renamo deputies all took the oath of office on 11 February, before the Assembly's chairperson, Veronica Macamo. She said their decision to participate in parliament would "consolidate representative democracy".

Renamo now has a completely new parliamentary leadership. The head of the parliamentary group is Ivone Soares, the 35 year old niece of Dhlakama, and also chairperson of the Renamo Youth League.

The deputy head of the parliamentary group is Mario Ali, the rapporteur is Jose Carlos Cruz (once the secretary of the Beira Municipal Assembly), and the spokesperson is Jose Henrique Lopes.

The second opposition party, the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM), has kept Lutero Simango, brother of the party's leader, Daviz Simango, as head of the parliamentary group. The deputy head of the group is Jose Lobo and the rapporteur is Venancio Mondlane.

The leadership of the parliamentary group of the ruling Frelimo Party is largely unchanged. Margarida Talapa remains head of the group, Telmina Pereira is the rapporteur, and Edmundo Galiza-Matos Jr is the spokesperson. The newcomer is the deputy head, Sergio Pantie. Both Talapa and Pantie are members of the Frelimo Political Commission.

This is a condensed version of the AIM daily news service – for details contact pfauvet@live.com

Government adopts five year programme

The Mozambican government on 17 February adopted its five year plan for the 2015-2019 period. It must now be submitted to the country's parliament, the Assembly of the Republic.

Speaking to reporters after the weekly meeting of the Council of Ministers (Cabinet), the Deputy Minister of Economy and Finance, Amelia Nakhare, said the programme breaks with the past by adopting a "holistic and integrated approach".

That is, it does not set out targets sector by sector, but lays down an "integrated programme", embodying the government's strategic objectives, inspired by the election manifesto of the ruling Frelimo Party.

Among the "strategic pillars" of the government programme, Nakhare said, is "development of human capital", which includes education, health, gender issues and investment in the country's young people.

Employment will be a top priority, she promised, which would mean greater investment in areas such as agriculture, fisheries and tourism. A further key area was the development of infrastructures, particularly roads and bridges, and the electricity grid.

"It is through investment in infrastructures that support production, such as electricity, that we shall guarantee better performance of the economy", she said. "Hence expanding electricity to the new districts is also a great priority for the government over this five year period".

Further key priorities, Nakhare added, were the sustainable management of natural resources and of the environment. She regarded these areas as critical for wealth creation and the consolidation of economic growth and development.

Consultant appointed for N303 road upgrade

The consultancy company Louis Berger has been awarded a US\$7.6 million contract to provide consultancy services for the rehabilitation of the N303 road which runs through the central province of Tete to the point where the Mozambican, Zambian and Zimbabwean borders converge.

Currently, the 350 kilometre long road is narrow and unpaved. However, the road is due to benefit from a \$350 million modernisation plan. The upgrade will involve widening the road, improving pavements and signage, installing better drainage and building 19 new bridges.

According to the company's manager of operations in Africa, Jean-Pierre Dupacq, "the rehabilitation of the N303 is vital not only for Mozambique but for the region as a whole. The modernised road will greatly boost the local economy, which is mainly dependent on coal mining, by allowing the development of local small scale enterprises along the road".

Louis Berger has been contracted to design feasibility, environmental and social impact assessment, and resettlement studies.

The improvements to the road are being funded through a public private partnership involving the Mozambican government and the Sub-Saharan Regional Pipeline Corporation (SSRPC).

Limpopo railway line reopens

The Limpopo railway line, which links Maputo to Zimbabwe, re-opened to traffic on 22 February after a four day interruption caused by a derailment in Magude district, about 146 kilometres north of Maputo.

The number of confirmed deaths in the accident has risen to two. The second body was found as workers were clearing the fallen wagons from the track on 20 February. Twelve were injured in the derailment, four seriously.

The train was carrying 24 wagons loaded with charcoal, and two carriages in which some 200 people were travelling, most of them charcoal sellers.

The train was travelling from Maputo to Chicualacuala on the Zimbabwean border when the accident occurred. The two carriages and 11 of the wagons derailed.

Two dead in clash with illegal miners

At least two illegal miners died on 20 February as the Mozambican police attempted to disperse the miners at Mavonde, in the central province of Manica, near the border with Zimbabwe.

According to Manica provincial police spokesperson, Belmiro Matadiua, "the police went to the illegal mines of Mavonde to stop the mining, but there was a violent reaction".

He said the police opened fire after the miners resisted the order to leave. "They used rocks, clubs and machetes against the police", he said, "and five policemen were injured".

The police said two miners were killed and one was injured, but the miners themselves said there were three deaths. "Two died at the mines, and one lost his life in the hospital. Many others are injured", claimed one of the miners, Matthew Duke.

The police arrested 80 miners in connection with the disturbances. 56 of the detainees are Zimbabweans.

Licungo bridge reopens to heavy vehicles

The bridge over the Licungo River at the town of Mocuba, in the central province of Zambezia, reopened to heavy vehicles on 18 February.

Pedestrians and light vehicles began using the bridge the day before, but the authorities kept trucks and other heavy vehicles off the bridge until the provisional repairs of the damage done by the massive flood on the Licungo were complete.

The flood waters smashed through the embankments at both ends of the bridge on 12 January. With the bridge down, overland traffic along EN1 (the country's main north-south highway) between the three northern provinces (Nampula, Niassa and Cabo Delgado) and the rest of the country became impossible.

Currently only one lane is operational. The police allow traffic flowing in the south-north direction to use the bridge for a period, and then traffic going in the opposite direction. Motorists are urged to drive slowly and with the maximum caution.

Pedestrians using the bridge have also been warned to take care, since the hand rails have not yet been replaced.

Kenmare halts redundancy programme

Mozambican Labour Minister Vitoria Diogo has intervened to prevent, or at least postpone, mass redundancies at the dredge mine exploiting the titanium bearing heavy mineral sands in Moma district, in the northern province of Nampula.

On 17 February the Irish company Kenmare Resources, which operates the mine, announced compulsory redundancies that would cut the work force by up to 20 per cent. Kenmare justified this on the grounds that it must cut costs to offset the fall in the world market process of the minerals it mines (ilmenite, rutile and zircon).

This means that about 300 workers would lose their jobs. The trade union committee at the mine protested vigorously, and contacted the Nampula Provincial Labour Directorate.

However, on 19 February Vitoria Diogo met with the Kenmare representative in Mozambique, Gareth Clifton. She persuaded the company to halt the compulsory redundancies.

The company had been sending out letters giving workers 30 days notice of their impending dismissal. The distribution of these letters has been temporarily suspended. The company agreed to put the redundancies on ice until the next round of negotiations between the management and the trade union committee, scheduled for 24 February.

Kenmare says that in 2014 it managed to cut unit costs per tonne of minerals produced by 14 per cent. But this was not enough to offset the decline in prices.

In 2014, Kenmare produced 1.29 million tonnes of heavy mineral concentrate (HMC), a 13 per cent increase on the 2013 figure. The production of the main mineral mined, ilmenite, rose from 720,100 to 854,600 tonnes – an increase of 19 per cent. Rutile production rose from 4,000, to 6,100 tonnes (a 53 per cent rise), while zircon production increased from 31,400 to 50,800 tonnes (62 per cent).

But this was not enough to return the mine to profitability, which the company blamed on the international market, particularly the decline in demand for ilmenite from China. However, Kenmare expects Chinese demand to bounce back later in 2015.

Syrah Resources signs agreement with Chalico

The Australian based mining company Syrah Resources has announced that it has signed a binding agreement with China Aluminium International Engineering Corporation (Chalico) covering over a third of Syrah's planned production from its Balama graphite and vanadium project in the northern Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado.

Under the three year deal, Chalico will buy 80,000 tonnes of graphite per annum at the prevailing market price. In addition, Chalico will have the exclusive distribution rights in China and Hong Kong.

According to Syrah, the forecast price is expected to be between US\$1,100 to US\$1,600 per tonne between 2015 and 2019.

This binding offtake agreement paves the way for Syrah to raise the funds to construct the mine. Previously the

company had stated that it was confident that the plant can be developed for less than a hundred million dollars.

Syrah also stated that the results of negotiations with other potential partners will be announced in the near future.

In May 2014, Syrah signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the British company Asmet for a five year offtake agreement to supply between 100,000 and 150,000 tonnes of graphite per year at a price of a thousand dollars per tonne.

There is a world-class deposit of graphite at Balama, along with vanadium. Analysts expect the demand for graphite to increase in line with the development of electric vehicles and other battery-reliant devices.

Graphite is a form of carbon that is highly valued due to its properties as a conductor of electricity. It is used in batteries and fuel cells and is the basis for the "miracle material" graphene, which is the strongest material ever measured, with vast potential for use in the electronics industries. Graphite is also used for high quality steel production.

President Nyusi meets Cholera Emergency Group

President Filipe Nyusi on 19 February met with the Emergency Group on Cholera, which briefed him on the current state of the cholera outbreaks in Tete, Nampula and Niassa provinces.

Among the group were the Ministers of Health and of State Administration, Nazira Abdula and Carmelita Namashalua, and the director of the country's relief agency, the National Disasters Management Institute (INGC), Joao Ribeiro.

President Nyusi said that, given the country's accumulated experience of cholera outbreaks and how to deal with them, there was no justification for Mozambicans continuing to die from this disease.

"Because we are a serious government, committed to the cause of the people, we cannot afford allow a single life to be lost when we can save that life", he declared.

The latest statistics from the Health Ministry, presented at the meeting, show that the number of cases of cholera has reached 2,903, with 31 deaths. The worst situation is in Tete, where there have been 1,328 confirmed cases and 19 deaths. In Nampula there have been 1,017 cases and four deaths, and in Niassa 558 cases and eight deaths.

The Health Ministry has been working with UNICEF and with the World Health Organisation (WHO) to set up cholera treatment centres, and to guarantee supplies of clean drinking water in cholera-hit areas, particularly Tete city.

The Health Ministry has stressed the need to take the measures to prevent and cure cholera into the communities, notably the distribution of oral rehydration salts "in order to speed up the treatment of people who are not yet very ill, so as to reduce the risk of serious illness and death.

The Ministry points out that, although cholera can kill in a matter of hours if left untreated, "when treated, the recovery rate is very high, hence the importance of people seeking medical help as soon as they suspect that they have been infected".

British aid to support training and jobs

The British government has launched two new programmes to give opportunities to Mozambicans, particularly women and youths, to obtain new jobs, improve their training and increase their incomes.

The new programmes were announced by the British Minister for International Development, Baroness Lindsay Northover, on her visit to Mozambique.

One of the programmes will provide £17 million (about US\$26 million) for professional education, combined with support for job-seeking intended to help at least 5,000 young Mozambicans. The training will be directed towards sectors with a major potential for job creation such as construction, agro-business, forestry and industry.

The British government will spend £14 million on the second programme, aimed at supporting women's economic empowerment. This is intended to encourage the recruitment of women and retaining them at work.

The objective is to help 10,000 young women in the urban areas to improve their income and job opportunities "so that they have greater control over their lives".

These new programmes will also support efforts to combat child, premature and forced marriage, by providing girls with alternatives "so that they can take an active part in the economy and emerge from poverty".

"Fighting against child marriage is not enough", said Northover. "We need to work with the Mozambican government to ensure that women have other choices and are included in opportunities in the economy".

Moody's expects floods to cut growth

The international ratings agency Moody's on 9 February stated that the heavy rains and flooding that have hit the centre and north of Mozambique are likely to cut between 0.2 and 0.5 per cent from its 2015 forecast of 7.5 per cent growth in GDP.

About 160,000 people were severely affected by the flooding in the central province of Zambezia with the reported death toll reaching 159.

The agency outlined the scale of the destruction, pointing out that "continued rainfall has caused severe damage to the Zambezi and Licungo River basin regions' infrastructure, especially in Zambezia province to the north where almost twenty per cent of the country's population resides. Damage to roads and bridges has cut access by land to almost seventy per cent of Zambezia province. Downed power lines and electricity towers have left several parts of northern Mozambique without power. Water and sanitation facilities, regional telecommunication systems as well as thousands of houses are damaged".

It pointed out that the insurance sector is relatively underdeveloped, leading to "a sizable portion of the

damage bill for public infrastructure falling on the government".

The analysis also highlights the resulting problems caused by delays to investment in the extractive industries and the development of the Special Economic Zone in Mocuba district in Zambezia.

In addition to slower growth, the analysis also points to an increase in government deficit and debt.

Anti-poaching unit seized 180 guns last year

The Anti-Poaching Unit of the Gorongosa National Park in central Mozambique in 2014 seized 180 homemade guns and removed 3,300 snares and traps.

The Administrator of the park, Mateus Mutemba, declared on 5 February, when signing an anti-poaching protocol with the Portuguese Entrepasto Group, that he is worried by the fact that an industry manufacturing these lethal artefacts is still thriving in the area.

Unlike what is happening in the Niassa Reserve in the far north, so far there is no record of military firearms being used to decimate wild life in Gorongosa. "But we don't make a great distinction between weapons of war and home-made guns", said Mutemba, "because they all have the same purpose, which is to kill our animals, and to threaten the life of our wardens while they are doing their job of protecting the Park".

Home-made guns could be very powerful, he noted. Last year one of the locally manufactured firearms which Park wardens had seized was powerful enough to bring down an elephant. In 2014, the park lost three of its elephants to poachers.

At the ceremony, the Entrepasto Group donated US\$125,000 to the Anti-Poaching Unit. The protocol covers a five year period, with Entrepasto disbursing US\$5,000 per year.

The aim of the protocol is to increase the effectiveness of patrols, covering even the most remote areas in the park. The Gorongosa National Park covers 4,000 square kilometres in Sofala province, and is located at the southern end of the Great African Rift Valley.

Policeman jailed for releasing poachers

A Mozambican police officer working in the border services in the southern province of Gaza has been sentenced to a year's imprisonment for extorting a large bribe from a group of poachers and then releasing them.

Giving his monthly press briefing on 12 February, Bernardo Duce, the spokesperson for the Central Office for the Fight against Corruption (GCCC), said that the policeman and two members of a private security company intercepted the poachers in January, and accepted 400,000 meticaís (US\$12,230) to release them.

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