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Over 1,500 Mozambicans flee violence in South Africa

More than 1,500 Mozambicans have fled from the anti-foreigner attacks in South Africa, using their own resources, the government spokesperson, Deputy Health Minister Mouzinho Saide announced on 21 April. Added to these are the 107 Mozambicans who returned from Durban on 18 April in buses made available by the government.

Speaking to reporters after the weekly meeting of the Council of Ministers (Cabinet), Saide said a further 400 Mozambicans were expected to return to the country over the next few days “and all the conditions have been established to receive them decently, and then send them on to their places of origin”.

Saide added that the government, through its diplomatic and consular missions in South Africa, is monitoring the situation. It is assisting those Mozambicans who have taken refuge in accommodation centres, as well as repatriating those who wish to return to Mozambique.

The government sent Deputy Interior Minister Jose Coimbra to South Africa, where he spoke to the authorities and checked the conditions in the accommodation centres.

Saide said the Council of Ministers has instructed the provincial governments and the relief agency, the National Disaster Management Institute (INGC), “to guarantee due follow-up and ensure rapid integration of those returning”.

The government was also appealing for “calm and serenity” among Mozambicans, rather than any retaliation, “since a cycle of violence does not help matters. Violence generates violence”.

The Council of Ministers also received a report on the state of health of former President Joaquim Chissano, who is currently hospitalized in South Africa. While on a flight from Ghana to Johannesburg on 13 April, Chissano fell ill, and was taken to the Pretoria Military Hospital.

Saide said that Chissano is recovering and his current state “is satisfactory”. He denied malicious mobile phone text messages which claim that Chissano is seriously ill.

The government sent Health Minister Nazira Abdula to visit Chissano, and photos of the Minister with a smiling Chissano have appeared on social media.

Kenmare Resources repatriates workers

The Irish company Kenmare Resources on 20 April announced that it has temporarily repatriated South African workers from its dredge mine in Moma district, on the coast of the northern Mozambican province of Nampula.

In a statement, the company explained that it has taken the step as a precautionary measure due to the unrest in South Africa. The company employs 1,391 people, of whom 62 are South African.

Other South African workers in Tete and Inhambane provinces have also been evacuated, after their angry

Mozambican colleagues demanded that they leave. Attacks on South African buses and trucks near the Ressano Garcia border post on 17 April closed the border for several hours, but the flow of traffic had returned to normal by the evening.

The Mozambican authorities have urged that there should be no retaliation for the attacks in South Africa.

Fear of Renamo harms harvest

Fear of armed gangs from Mozambique’s largest opposition party Renamo is inhibiting peasant farmers in Tsangano, in the western province of Tete, from tending to their fields.

At meetings addressed by Tete provincial governor Paulo Auade, the peasants said they are concerned at the recent threats made by Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama which indicate the possibility of a return to war.

They justified their failure to take part in the current agricultural campaign on the grounds of Dhlakama’s threats and the constant movement of Renamo armed men in the district. They regarded this as a sign war is being prepared.

“We are insecure and many of us prefer not to go to the fields, and to stay at home, because we fear that we might run into the Renamo men who have already burnt down houses and kidnapped some community leaders in Chibaene locality”, one peasant told Auade. They said that, when the Renamo armed men pass through communities, they steal food, money and electrical appliances.

Participants at these meetings warned of a possible food crisis, if they are unable to farm, and if they are forced to flee from the Renamo gangs and seek safety elsewhere.

They recalled that in his recent visit, Dhlakama threatened to expel the district administrator and members of the district government. Such threats are forcing Tsangano residents to consider fleeing over the border into Malawi, as they did in the 1980s, during the war of destabilization.

Auade tried to calm his audience, saying that the government is making efforts to bring definitive peace to the country.

“Don’t be afraid”, he urged them. “These threats (from Dhlakama and Renamo) will end one day. Continue to work your fields. Move about as you like, but always try to find out, as far as you can, who is visiting your communities”.

“We have to exercise sharper vigilance”, said the governor, “and collaborate with the local and government authorities, by denouncing anything suspicious”.

Assembly passes five year programme

The Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, on 14 April approved the government's five year programme for the 2015-2019 period.

All opposition deputies present voted against, but since the ruling Frelimo Party has an overall majority the programme still passed easily. The 137 Frelimo deputies present voted in favour, while the 102 deputies from Renamo and from the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM) voted against.

During the debate, some opposition deputies, such as Renamo's Antonio Timba, claimed there are no specific targets in the programme.

Antonio Muchanga, also of Renamo, complained that the programme set no figures for the wages of teachers, nurses or police, nor did it give any figures for how many police would be trained, and how many would retire over the five years, while Venancio Mondlane of the MDM said that the programme set no target for agricultural productivity, and "relegates agriculture to a secondary position".

For Frelimo, Jaime Neto declared that the programme "expresses the longings of the Mozambican people", and "sets the great strategic priorities for the next five years".

The programme for 2015-2019 contains a large number of specific targets and indicators against which the government's success or failure can be measured at the end of the period.

It sets a target for recruiting 42,500 new teachers, which is an average of 8,500 teachers a year. This will bring the number of pupils per teacher in the country's primary schools down from the 2014 figure of 62 to 57 in 2019.

To reduce the problem of children studying on the floor, hundreds of thousands of school desks will be acquired. The target for the five year period is 700,000 desks, which compares with only 200,000 acquired in the 2010-2014 period. 4,500 new classrooms are to be built by 2019: this compares with 3,500 built between 2010 and 2014.

A new target is added for child mortality. The number of children who die before their fifth birthday should fall from the 2014 figure of 97 per thousand live births to 90 per thousand by 2019. The government also hopes to cut the number of children under the age of five suffering from chronic malnutrition from 43 per cent to 35 per cent.

The number of children who are fully vaccinated should rise from 82 to 94 per cent, and the number of births in health units should rise from 71 to 75 per cent.

The housing target, as the opposition Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM) was quick to point out, is very modest. The state will build just 35,000 houses by 2019 – 7,000 a year. In the previous five year period, the state built a mere 1,922 houses.

The target for the number of plots of land demarcated, with access to basic infrastructures, on which people can build homes, is 200,500, or 40,100 a year. This is fewer than the 313,665 plots demarcated between 2010 and 2014.

The government also clearly accepts that for the next five years most Mozambicans will work in peasant agriculture or the urban informal sector. The target for the creation of formal jobs, in both the public and private sector, is 1,483,562 – which is an average of 296,712 a year. That figure is not much higher than the 273,347 jobs a year created between 2010 and 2014.

According to the projections from the 2007 population census, over 500,000 people are reaching the age of 18 every year, and by 2019 that figure will be over 600,000. At best there will be formal sector jobs for half of them.

Disinformation leads to looting of cholera centre

A mob vandalized and looted a cholera treatment centre in the central city of Quelimane on 17 April after a rumour spread that staff were extracting body parts from patients.

After the death of one of the cholera patients, relatives were misinformed that there were parts missing from the body. The rumour spread rapidly and an angry crowd attacked the treatment centre.

They destroyed medical equipment, vandalized the bathrooms, and stole the furniture and utensils used in the treatment of patients. The mob attacked health workers, who fled and took refuge in a nearby police station.

When she heard of the attack, the Zambezia Provincial Director of Health, Luis Cumba, went to the centre but she too was assaulted, and had to be rescued by families living in the vicinity who took her into one of their houses. Members of the crowd claimed that health workers had deceived the public about cholera, and that the true purpose of the treatment centre was the trafficking in human body parts.

When police arrived on the scene they fired into the air, but this was not enough to disperse the crowd. The situation was only brought under control when a riot police unit was called in, and fired tear gas into the mob.

The police have arrested six people in connection with the attack and managed to recover the centre's stolen generator.

Study finds support for Depo Provera

About two thirds of women in the northern province of Cabo Delgado know nothing about contraceptive methods, according to a study released in Maputo on 15 April.

The study was undertaken in the Cabo Delgado districts of Chiure and Montepuez by the NGO Pathfinder International and the Bixby Centre for Global Reproductive Health, in partnership with the Mozambican Health Ministry and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The research was designed to see how acceptable rural women would find the injectable contraceptive, Depo Provera.

The researchers found that although initially most of the women expressed no interest in, or no knowledge of contraceptives, they became enthusiastic about Depo Provera.

Bixby Centre representative Ndola Prata said that, of the 1,432 women involved in the study, 80 per cent expressed satisfaction with this method of contraception. "We observed cases of women who had never before used any contraceptive methods, but with the introduction of Depo Provera, they began to accept the injections", she said.

She believed rural women found Depo Provera attractive because it is long lasting. To avoid pregnancy, one injection every three months is sufficient. A significant minority of the women (25 per cent) said they liked Depo Provera because they could hide it from their husbands, who did not authorize contraception.

Ministry of Health representative Olga Sigauque said the study was important, and comes at a time when the ministry is renewing family planning strategies. She hoped the study would contribute to the effective implementation of Depo Provera in the countryside, and a consequent reduction in the number of unwanted pregnancies.

The study ran from February 2014 to April 2015. Participants were asked to take three Depo Provera injections, and most of them did so - 81 per cent of the women received all three injections.

Agreement on locally assembled buses

Transport Minister Carlos Mesquita on 15 April signed an agreement with the vehicle assembly plant, Matchedje Motors, to acquire buses to improve urban public transport.

Matchedje Motors, built on an area of 20,000 square metres in Machava, in the southern city of Matola, results from a partnership between the Mozambican state and the Chinese company China Tong Jian Investment. With a total planned investment of US\$150 million, the factory was inaugurated in October 2014. The factory can produce a variety of vehicles, including electric scooters, buses and four wheel drive cars.

Mesquita said he was impressed by his visit to the factory, and hoped that buses from Matchedje Motors will eliminate the use of overcrowded and hazardous open pick-up trucks (known ironically as “My Love”) for passenger transport.

The company’s general manager, Song Shengjie, said US\$20 million has already been invested in Matchedje, and he was confident that they will be able to supply the buses.

Mesquita also confirmed to reporters that he has sacked Ana Dimande as General Director of the scandal-ridden Land Transport Institute (INATTER), the body responsible, among other things, for the issuing of driving licences.

He signed the dispatch relieving Dimande of her duties on 14 April, a few days after the independent news sheet “Mediafax” had published details of how Dimande was paying herself a salary of about 500,000 meticaís (US\$14,800) a month.

“Mediafax” reported this violated a directive signed by the ministers of finance and of transport in September last year which fixed the basic wage of the General Director at 168,000 meticaís a month, plus rent, telephone and entertainment allowances amounting to around 33,000 meticaís a month. Bonuses and allowances other than those mentioned in the dispatch were not permitted.

In February, after Mesquita visited INATTER, the institution cancelled 75 of its 81 bank accounts. There had been persistent allegations of corruption in the issuing of driving licences, and INATTER did not explain why it needed such a large number of accounts.

An even more serious measure was a drastic reduction in the number of INATTER staff who can operate the computer system used to issue the licences. Previously 222 INATTER officials had access to the system, but this was now 59.

Mesquita has appointed Ana Paula Simoes, previously Nampula provincial director of transport and communications, as the new General Director of INATTER.

Carriages and buses to be imported from China

The Mozambican government plans to import 70 railway carriages from China by the end of this year, in order to minimize the shortage of passenger transport.

Transport Minister Carlos Mesquita revealed this information on 20 April at a parliamentary hearing on the government’s Economic and Social Plan for 2015, organized by the Agriculture, Economics and Environment Commission of the Assembly of the Republic.

Mesquita said the new carriages will strengthen the fleet of carriages on the Sena line, which runs from Beira to the Moatize coal basin in Tete province. With more carriages, the frequency of the passenger trains can be increased, and each train will draw more carriages.

He added that this year the government will also import 300 buses from China. Eighty of these are a gift from the Chinese government, while the rest will be purchased.

Cooperation agreement signed with Spain

The Mozambican and Spanish governments signed an agreement in Maputo on 15 April, under which Spain is to grant €46.55 million (about US\$50 million) for development programmes in Mozambique.

The agreement was signed by Deputy Foreign Minister Nyeleti Mondlane and by Spanish Secretary of State for International Cooperation Jesus Manuel Gracia Aldaz.

The agreement falls under the Partnership Framework Programme between the two countries. The grant is intended to cover the areas of health, food security, rural development and decentralization, agriculture and education.

The money is to be disbursed over a three year period (2014-2016), and indeed the first instalment was disbursed last year in building the Malaria Research Centre in Manhica.

Kidnapper sentenced to 22 years

A court in the southern city of Inhambane on 14 April sentenced a man named as A.S. Mabica to 22 years imprisonment for kidnapping a businessman of Asian origin last year.

According to the report on the trial in the Maputo daily “Noticias”, Mabica and three others kidnapped at gunpoint the businessman, a shopkeeper named Parkachandra (but better known in Inhambane as Gindolo), on 18 August 2014.

The gang bundled Parkachandra into the back of a Toyota Chaser and drove him to the nearby Tofo beach. However the kidnapping went badly wrong – in less than two hours the police located and freed Parakachandra and arrested Mabica.

The Inhambane kidnap gang consisted of six people. Mabica’s five companions, named as Alberto Langa, Clopas Ndimande, Faduco, Gito and Alex, are still at large.

The court found that the gang met when they were all serving sentences for other crimes in the Maputo top security jail. When they were released, they embarked on careers as kidnappers. Between 2012 and 2014 Mabica took part in ten kidnappings in Maputo and the neighbouring city of Matola. In these abductions he was part of a group led by Jose Omega, who is also still at large. The abortive abduction of Parkachandra, was the first case of kidnapping reported from Inhambane.

The court found Mabica guilty of kidnapping, the illegal possession of firearms, and membership of a criminal association. He was sentenced to 22 years imprisonment and ordered to pay Parkachandra compensation of 90,000 meticaís (US\$2,650).

Prime Minister lays first stone in water project

Prime Minister Carlos Agostinho do Rosario on 15 April laid the first stone for the construction of a water supply system in the neighbourhood of Intaka, in the southern city of Matola.

The entire water project will take five years to complete. It is budgeted at 1.5 billion meticaís (US\$44 million), under a financing agreement signed with the French development agency (AFD). The contract is for 212 million meticaís, and is to be completed in a year.

Rosario urged the Chinese contractor to comply with its contractual deadlines, and the local authorities and the public in Intaka to monitor the work, to ensure that the contract is indeed completed within a year.

The Minister of Public Works, Carlos Martinho, said the water supply project will benefit not only the 5,000 residents of Intaka, but at least 87,500 people in other parts of Matola, and neighbouring districts.

Two arrested over Cistac murder

The Mozambican police announced on 13 April that they have detained two suspects, believed to have taken part in the assassination on 3 March of constitutional lawyer Gilles Cistac.

The spokesperson for the Maputo City Police Command, Arnaldo Chefo, named the two men as Lucio Manuel and Arsenio Nhampossa, and said they both had criminal records.

Cistac was gunned down in broad daylight outside a café in central Maputo on the morning of 3 March, and died in Maputo Central Hospital a few hours later. Eye-witnesses said he was shot from a passing car carrying four people.

Cistac was a naturalized Mozambican citizen of French origin who had lived and worked in Mozambique since 1993. He was a lecturer at the Law Faculty of Maputo's Eduardo Mondlane University and had worked as an adviser to various ministers and to the Administrative Tribunal (the body that oversees the legality of public expenditure).

Straight after the assassination, President Filipe Nyusi gave instructions to the Interior Ministry to hunt down and arrest the murderers as quickly as possible. The Attorney-General's Office set up a special team of prosecutors and police to investigate the murder.

President pledges Mapai dam will be built

Residents of the Mapai administrative post, in the southern province of Gaza, on 12 April asked President Filipe Nyusi to ensure that the new government continues to build the roads and dams planned for the area.

President Nyusi was visiting Mapai, which is in the arid district of Chicualacuala, adjacent to the Zimbabwean border, as part of his "open and inclusive presidency" in Gaza.

At the Mapai rally, residents called for the construction of the Mapai dam, a water supply system for Mapai town, and an electricity substation. They also wanted completion of the road running parallel to the Limpopo River, from Chicualacuala to Canicado which was interrupted for lack of funding.

President Nyusi assured the Mapai rally that all projects under way will be concluded. "Just as I promised during the election campaign, all the projects in hand will be continued", he said. "I know that there are problems of water shortages in the Mapai and Pafuri administrative posts, and in Chicualacuala town. We are working to solve this problem".

"With the dam we shall produce electricity, and we shall solve the problem of flood control", said the President. "There is already a bank which is prepared to lend the money to build this dam, and the government is working on the matter". He hoped that construction would begin during his five year term of office.

As for the Chicualacuala-Canicado road, President Nyusi confirmed that lack of funds forced an interruption in the work. But the government was working to resume work on this roads, and also to build a road from Mapai into the neighbouring district of Massingir.

Despite its water problems, Chicualacuala district supports a substantial herd of cattle. There are almost as many cattle (40,000 head) in Chicualacuala as there are people (44,000), and President Nyusi indicated the government's readiness to support an increase in livestock production in the district.

Before the rally in Mapai, President Nyusi visited the Massingir dam on the Elephants River, the main tributary of the Limpopo, where he inaugurated the dam's auxiliary slipways.

CFM income rises by over forty per cent

The Chairperson of publicly owned ports and rail company (CFM), Victor Gomes, on 8 April announced an increase of 41 per cent in the company's operating income. He told a meeting of the CFM Council of Directors in Maputo that income had risen from 1.867 billion meticaais (US\$54.6 million) in 2013 to 2.625 billion meticaais in 2014.

The company's financial result (before tax) was 2.917 billion meticaais, an increase of 18 per cent on the 2013 figure of 2.482 billion meticaais.

The amount of cargo handled in the port terminals run by CFM (i.e. excluding those leased out to private companies), was 5.8 million tonnes. Since most of the terminals are now run by private concerns, this was only 17 per cent of total cargo handled in all the ports. The figure was an increase of three per cent on the cargo handled by the CFM terminals in 2013.

As for the railways, the lines run by CFM moved slightly more than four million tonnes in 2014, an increase of 31 per cent on the previous year.

"Given these encouraging results, we accept the challenge to ensure that our company continues to register these levels of growth, so that we can contribute to the development of our country", said Gomes.

Among the major projects underway, he continued, are the rehabilitation of the northern port of Nacala, and the construction of the railway from the Moatize coal basin to Nacala, running through southern Malawi, now nearing completion.

Also underway are the improvements to increase the capacity of the Sena line running from Moatize to the port of Beira, and the reconstruction of two bridges on the line from Maputo to South Africa.

But Gomes warned that CFM faces an unfavourable international situation, particularly due to the fall in the price of coal, one of the main commodities handled by Mozambican railways and ports.

He noted that, over the past five years 24 coal companies have closed in the United States. Even China, the main destination for Mozambican coal, is reducing its use of coal. Coal consumption in China fell by 1.6 per cent in 2014.

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

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