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Dhlakama puts conditions on peace talks

The leader of Mozambique's largest opposition party Renamo, Afonso Dhlakama, has once again refused the offer of unconditional talks made by President Filipe Nyusi. According to a report in the daily "O Pais", Renamo replied on 7 March to President Nyusi's latest offer, and once again demanded the presence of foreign mediators in any future dialogue. Dhlakama wants any such talks mediated by the Catholic Church, the European Union and South African President Jacob Zuma. Dhlakama claims that he had contacted all three and had received favourable responses.

President Nyusi has appointed a team to prepare the meeting with Dhlakama, consisting of former Security Minister Jacinto Veloso, former Justice Minister Benwinda Levi, and a member of the presidential staff, Alves Muteque. In his letter to Dhlakama, President Nyusi asked the Renamo leader to appoint, as quickly as possible, a preparatory team from the Renamo side.

However, Dhlakama said that he would only name his team once the foreign mediators were accredited.

The government has always stated that it sees no reason to call in foreign mediators to deal with a dispute between Mozambicans. In the dialogue between the government and Renamo, which ran from April 2013 to August 2015, there were Mozambican mediators – namely prominent academic Lourenco do Rosario, Anglican bishop Dinis Sengulane, Catholic priest Filipe Couto, Methodist pastor Anastacio Chembeze, and Moslem cleric Sheikh Saide Abibo.

Within the ruling Frelimo Party there is a growing feeling that the current situation, whereby Renamo has both a parliamentary group making laws in Maputo, and an armed militia killing and burning in the central provinces, is no longer tenable. In the country's parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, during debates last week, several Frelimo deputies suggested that Renamo be outlawed.

Police find weapons and uniforms in Maputo

The Mozambican police on 7 March raided a house in the outer Maputo neighbourhood of Luis Cabral where they discovered a wide range of weapons, uniforms and communications equipment.

Maputo police commander Bernadino Rafael told reporters he believed that it was from this house that the actions of criminal gangs armed with machetes had been planned and coordinated. "This house was the logistical base for criminals destabilizing neighbourhoods such as Maxaquene", he said.

Among the equipment seized were green uniforms similar to those worn by members of the illicit militia of Renamo, as well as uniforms and other gear that seems to belong to the private security company G4S.

"We are concerned that the equipment found is mixed with uniforms identical with Renamo uniform, as well as G4S

uniforms", said Rafael. He added that the police have asked G4S for an explanation.

Renamo uniforms and propaganda material suggest there may be a link between Renamo and the Luis Cabral house. Rafael recalled that when a group of criminals wielding machetes was recently arrested in Maxaquene, one of them turned out to be a Renamo member.

The owner of the house has gone missing, and the police want to question him about the origin of the material found in the house.

Two murdered by Renamo in bus attack

Renamo gunmen on 5 March opened fire on a bus in the central province of Manica, killing two people and injuring a further eight. The ambush took place in the Honde area, in Barue district, on the main road from the provincial capital, Chimoio, to Tete, and on to Malawi and Zambia.

The bus belonged to the private company Nagy Investments. The attackers shot the driver in the head. He lost control of the bus which careened off the road and only stopped when it hit a tree.

The gunmen continued to fire at the immobilised bus, injuring several of the passengers. The driver died of his wounds, and a passenger died while being taken to the nearby Catandica Rural Hospital. Of the other eight people hit, six suffered minor injuries and were soon discharged. The other two are still undergoing medical care.

Addressing a press conference in Chimoio, the Manica provincial police commander, Armando Canheze, said that because the ambush took place near a position of the defence and security forces, police were able to reach the scene before the attackers had an opportunity to loot the bus.

"A group of seven to ten individuals opened fire against the bus on the stretch between Chuala and Honde", said Canheze. "We are working to neutralize the bandits who are sowing terror in the Honde area. We know that they are on a mountain which they are using as a hideout".

This is the third attack by Renamo gunmen in the Honde region in less than a month. In the previous two attacks vehicles of the defence and security forces on patrol came under fire.

Malaysian experts receive aircraft debris

The Mozambique National Civil Aviation Institute (IACM) on 7 March handed over a piece of aircraft debris to team of Malaysian experts, who hope to establish whether it comes from the missing Malaysian flight, MH370.

The fragment is thought to come from a horizontal stabilizer of an aircraft tail. It was discovered on a sandbank on Bazaruto Island, off the coast of Inhambane province.

The MH370 Boeing 777 vanished from the radars on 8 March 2014. It was on a scheduled flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing with 239 people on board.

When asked about the piece of debris, IACM Chairperson Joao de Abreu cautioned against jumping to the conclusion that it comes from MH370. He stressed the importance of establishing what kind of aircraft it was from.

If it is established beyond doubt that the fragment comes from a Boeing 777, then it must be from MH370, since no other Boeing 777 is missing.

According to a report in the independent daily "O Pais", the three experts who received the fragment are from the Malaysian Civil Aviation Authority, Malaysian Airlines, and the body investigating the disappearance of MH370.

So far the only piece of debris from MH370 recovered is a fragment of a wing that washed up on a beach on Reunion Island in July 2015.

Mozambican caught smuggling heroin

South African police have arrested a Mozambican citizen for smuggling heroin worth an estimated 50 million rand (\$3.2 million). According to South African press reports, this is one of the biggest seizures of illicit drugs in the country's history.

The seizure occurred on 6 March when police stopped a Toyota Prado at the Nkomazi toll gate, on the N4 motorway in Mpumalanga province. A policeman and a sniffer dog inspected the car, and the dog drew attention to the fuel tank.

"The car was coming from Mozambique and heading towards Gauteng province", said Sedibe. The Mozambican driver has been arrested, and was due to appear before the magistrate's court in the South African town of Barberton.

Renamo member murdered in Inhambane

Unknown assailants murdered a senior member of the main opposition party, Renamo, in the southern province of Inhambane, according to a report in the daily "O Pais".

The Renamo member, Aly Jane, went missing on 5 March after he had left a local mosque. Rumours that he may have been murdered began to circulate the next day after his identity card was found on the bank of the Nhanombe River, between the city of Maxixe and Homoine district.

Relatives went to this area on 7 March and carried out a search. Their fears were confirmed when they found Jane's body underneath vegetation. His feet were bound and he had been shot in the head.

New Inhambane governor sworn into office

President Filipe Nyusi on 7 March swore into office the new governor of the southern province of Inhambane, Daniel Chapo. He replaces Agostinho Trinta who resigned after he was elected to Frelimo's Secretariat. Frelimo has decided that members of the Secretariat should be full time.

Before his appointment as provincial governor, Chapo was administrator of Nacala-a-Velha district in Nampula.

New police commander appointed

President Filipe Nyusi on 3 March appointed Major-General Julio dos Santos Jane the new General Commander of the Mozambican police force.

He takes over from Jorge Khalau, who was dismissed on the previous day after holding the post since 2008.

Jane is a career officer from the armed forces (FADM), who was trained in the former Soviet Union. During the war of destabilization he was commander of the Maputo City Garrison, protecting the capital from the apartheid-backed Renamo rebels. He has been credited with successfully preventing Renamo units from infiltrating Maputo.

Although Jane has no prior experience of police matters, he will be working alongside one of the country's most experienced police officers. Jose Weng San, whom President Nyusi appointed deputy commander last August.

290 new boreholes for Manica

The Mozambican government plans to spend 90 million meticals (\$1.94 million) opening 290 boreholes for water supply in the central province of Manica.

The Manica provincial director of public works, Joaquim Jorge, explained that the boreholes will be drilled simultaneously in all 12 districts of the province. The districts that require most attention, however, are Machaze, Gondola, Tambara, Guro and Macossa, which are the parts of the province most severely hit by the current drought.

By the end of the year it is intended that all Manica districts will have new water sources to reduce the distances people must walk to acquire clean water.

Jorge said that Machaze, in the semi-arid south of the province, will receive 20 new boreholes, while other water sources that are currently out of order will be repaired.

There have always been water shortages in Machaze. Rainfall is low and people sometimes walk up to 20 kilometres in search of water or are forced to use to draw their water from swamps.

Due to the drought gripping much of southern and central Mozambique, agricultural activity has been compromised, plunging thousands of Manica households into food insecurity. Some of these households are now resorting to wind fruits and roots to feed themselves.

100 grain wagons destined for Nacala Corridor

The consortium operating the railway line for general traffic along the Nacala Corridor in northern Mozambique has entered into a five year deal under which it will lease a hundred grain hopper wagons from GPR Leasing.

The Northern Development Corridor (CDN) is the concessionaire managing the Nacala port and the railway line that runs to Entre-Lagos in Malawi. To enable CDN to transport grain from Malawi to Nacala it will lease the wagons which will begin to arrive this month.

The wagons are being manufactured in Welkom in South Africa by Galison Manufacturing. The agreement with CDN was signed in October 2015 and all the wagons are due to be delivered by the end of the year.

GPR Leasing Africa is a joint venture between the South African companies Grindrod Freight Services and the Pembani Remgro Infrastructure Fund (PRIF).

Food insecurity could hit 1.8 million people

The number of people facing food insecurity due to the severe drought in southern and central Mozambique is about 166,000, Prime Minister Carlos Agostinho do Rosario told the country's parliament on 2 March.

Answering questions about the drought, Rosario warned that the situation could worsen if there is no rain this month, making even moderate harvests impossible. In that case, there would be a scenario of "severe food insecurity", affecting 1.8 million people.

Currently the government is coping with the drought through the funds in the state budget envisaged in the Contingency Plan for the 2015-2016 rainy season, plus money raised in the national solidarity campaign the government has launched, and support from those international cooperation partners. But Rosario admitted that, in the event of a deterioration to "severe food insecurity", the government would have to reassess the situation and "decide what type of intervention or alert should be adopted".

Rosario said that so far over 584,000 hectares of crops are regarded as lost. The impact on livestock has also been serious, with the loss of 4,584 head of cattle.

The drought is partially caused by the El Nino weather phenomenon. This is the anomalous heating of the surface waters of the Pacific Ocean, affecting the circulation of winds and global weather patterns. Rosario noted that the current El Nino is the most intense for half a century.

Rosario pointed out that the drought is regional in scope. Thus seven of South Africa's nine provinces are affected, with the loss of about 90 per cent of their maize production. In Swaziland, 360,000 people could be facing food insecurity by April, and restrictions have been imposed on access to water. In Zimbabwe, the amount of land under production has fallen by 40 per cent compared with last year.

The north of the country has the opposite problem. Here there have been heavy rains and localized flooding. Rosario said there has been no loss of life directly related to these floods, which he attributed to preventive actions, persuading people to keep away from flood-prone areas, and the reactivation of local disaster risk management committees.

The northern rains cut some of the roads in Cabo Delgado and Niassa provinces, but in most cases traffic has been restored, the Prime Minister said.

Cholera outbreaks had been reported in two northern provinces, Nampula and Niassa. Rosario said that, since August 2015, the cumulative number of cases diagnosed was 1,920 resulting in ten deaths.

Phone companies disconnect a million clients

Mozambique's three mobile phone companies (M-Cel, Vodacom and Movitel) on 2 March switched off a million clients for failing to register their SIM cards.

The companies announced the mass disconnect in a joint press release, which also urged those of their customers who had not yet registered to do so as quickly as possible.

The order to disconnect affects clients whose SIM cards were active prior to 28 November 2015. Anyone who acquired a SIM card after that date could only activate it after filling in the registration form.

All new users of pre-paid SIM cards will be registered at the moment of purchase. This means an end to the convenient practice of itinerant vendors selling SIM cards. Instead, new users will have to buy the cards at an M-Cel or Vodacom shop - which do not exist across large swathes of the countryside.

Over 300 arrests for poaching last year

The Minister of Land, Environment and Rural Development, Celso Correia, announced in Maputo on 3 March that during 2015 the Mozambican authorities detained over 300 people in connection with poaching.

He was speaking at commemorations of World Wildlife Day, at a time when the country's wild life is under serious threat. The latest elephant census showed that between 2009 and 2014, the Mozambican elephant population had fallen by 48 per cent (from just over 20,000 in 2009 to 10,300 in 2014). As for rhinos, both African species, the black and the white, are feared extinct in Mozambique.

"There have been noteworthy efforts to reverse the poaching scenario", said Correia. He pointed out that those arrested in 2015 were not just the small fry who pull the trigger or set the trap. The authorities had also detained 20 traffickers in rhino horn and elephant ivory.

He added that the government is currently working on a proposal to increase the penalties for poachers "who are, in reality, environmental aggressors".

Correia said that last year 300 new-born elephants were counted in Mozambique - but 380 elephants were killed in the same period.

"In 2014, we lost more than 500 elephants, and only about 250 were born", said Correia. Thus, although there are signs that the pace of the slaughter is slowing, "the objective is to continue protecting these animals, so as to help their reproduction".

But biologist Carlos Bento believes that Correia's figures are too optimistic. In an interview, Bento said he believed the real number of elephants in Mozambique is not more than 5,000. He said the statistics suggest that an average of eight elephants a day are killed.

He warned against an exclusive concentration on elephants and rhinos, since poachers also attack other species, notably carnivores. Lion and leopards are becoming scarce in Mozambique - poachers shoot them for their skins which are traded on the illegal wildlife market.

Triton Minerals to develop graphite mine

The Australian mining company Triton Minerals, which holds the rights to graphite and vanadium deposits in the northern Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado, announced on 1 March that it is to focus on developing its graphite deposits at Ancuabe.

The deposit is expected to be the source of premium graphite flakes. Triton states that "initial flotation test work of Ancuabe material has returned some of the highest concentrations of jumbo and super jumbo flake graphite ever recorded from East Africa".

The mine has the additional benefit of being only fifty kilometres away from the port of Pemba.

According to the Triton, the company intends to become "a graphite concentrate producer of global significance over the next twelve months, underpinned by its world-class graphite assets in Mozambique".

Triton has a graphite and vanadium asset at Balama North which it describes as "world class". However, the statement makes clear that in 2016 the focus will be on Ancuabe.

Graphite is a form of carbon which is highly prized for 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.

Manager of Export Promotion Institute sacked

Minister of Industry and Trade, Max Tonela, has sacked the General Manager of the Export Promotion Institute (IPEX), Celia Candrino, and sent a dossier on IPEX to the Public Prosecutor's Office, according to a report in the newssheet "Mediafax".

Candrino has been accused of abusing IPEX funds, particularly the money intended for the annual Maputo International Trade Fair (FACIM).

According to the sources contacted by "Mediafax", Tonela took his decision after receiving the report from a commission set up to investigate complaints raised by IPEX workers. The investigators concluded that Candrino had misused the funds of the institution and had violated the legal principles governing the use of public money.

The Minister sent the Commission's report to the Public Prosecutor, so that criminal proceedings can be initiated if Prosecutors believe there is sufficient evidence to charge Candrino.

Tonela appointed the Chairperson of the IPEX Board, Joao Macaringue, to take over from Candrino. For the time being, he will be both chairperson and general manager of IPEX.

ENI receives approval for development of Coral gas field

The Italian oil company ENI has received the go ahead for the first phase of the development of five trillion cubic feet of natural gas from the Coral gas field in northern Mozambique.

The company's Development Plan received approval from Mozambique's Council of Ministers (Cabinet) when it met in Maputo on 23 February.

ENI is the operator in offshore Area Four in the Rovuma Basin and it is estimated that 16 trillion cubic feet of gas is located in the Coral field, which lies about 80 kilometres off the coast of Cabo Delgado province. It plans to install a Floating Liquefied Natural Gas (FLNG) facility to produce 3.4 million tonnes of LNG per annum.

The approval of ENI's Plan of Development is an important step towards the company making its Final Investment Decision (FID). That should take place later this year enabling construction of the FLNG to begin. The project has already received its Environmental Licence.

ENI also discovered gas in the Mamba field which straddles Area Four and neighbouring Area One (operated by the US company Anadarko). In December, the two companies entered into a unitisation agreement for the use of this gas, which will be processed onshore, on the Afungi Peninsula in Palma district.

ENI is the operator of Area Four with a 50 per cent indirect interest owned through ENI-East Africa, which holds 70 per cent of the concession. The other 20 per cent held via ENI-East Africa belongs to the Chinese company CNPC. The other three partners, with ten per cent each, are Kogas of Korea, Galp Energia of Portugal, and Mozambique's National Hydrocarbon Company, ENH.

Xtract Resources receives approval for Manica gold project acquisition

The British based company Xtract Resources has received approval from the Mozambican government for the acquisition of the Manica Gold Project from the Australian company Auroch Minerals.

The Manica Gold Project is situated four kilometres north of the town of Manica, near the Zimbabwe border. The main deposit, known as Fair Bride, is estimated to hold 923,200 ounces of gold. However, mining will recover just three grammes of gold for every tonne of material processed.

Under the terms of the sale, Xtract will pay Auroch just under ten million dollars in cash and shares and take on the responsibility for a further million dollars worth of debts.

The sale will also result in Xtract Resources paying the Mozambican Tax Authority (AT) \$700,000 in capital gains tax.

According to Xtract's chief executive Jan Nelson, "we are delighted to have received approval from the Mozambican mining authorities and to conclude the acquisition of the Manica gold project. This signifies the next step in Xtract's transformation from a small-scale miner to mid-tier gold producer".

Agreement signed on Cabo Delgado – Gauteng pipeline

The South African company SacOil Holdings on 1 March announced that an agreement has been signed in Johannesburg which paves the way for the construction of a 2,600 kilometre gas pipeline from the Rovuma Basin in northern Mozambique to Gauteng province in South Africa.

To be known as the African Renaissance gas pipeline, it would also deliver gas to Mozambican towns along the pipeline's route.

The agreement was signed by Mozambique's National Hydrocarbon Company (ENH), SacOil, Profin Consulting, and the China Petroleum Pipeline Bureau (CPP). Profin is described as a Mozambican private sector consortium, while CPP, according to a SacOil release, is "a leading Chinese and international pipeline construction company that will bring a wealth of technical expertise to the pipeline project".

The CPP will finance and carry out the pre investment studies. It will also secure seventy per cent of the project's budget from Chinese financial institutions. Other investment will come from Mozambique and South Africa. It is estimated that constructing the pipeline will cost \$6 billion.

The CPP is affiliated to the China National Petroleum Company which holds a twenty per cent stake in Offshore Area Four, situated in the Rovuma Basin off the coast of Cabo Delgado province. The Italian company ENI is the operator of Area Four, which holds an estimated 85 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

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