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Talks between government and Renamo resume

Negotiations between the Mozambican government and the opposition party Renamo resumed in Maputo on 18 October with a minute's silence for one of the Renamo negotiating team, Jeremias Pondeca, who was killed on 9 October. After this the international mediating team met with the Renamo delegation. They will meet with the government delegation on 19 October.

Nothing of substance was said to the media. The coordinator of the mediators, the Italian Mario Raffaelli, told reporters that the best homage that could be paid to Pondeca "will be through a joint effort to achieve a cessation of hostilities, as both sides have already said".

As for the discussions, Raffaelli said he could only reveal this after the mediators had met with both delegations.

Apparently the mediators' strategy is to firm up commitments from the two sides separately before bringing them both round the table in a full meeting of the Government/Renamo Joint Commission.

The Joint Commission was originally set up to pave the way for a face-to-face meeting between President Filipe Nyusi and Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama. But such a meeting now seems further away than ever, since Dhlakama, in an interview given a fortnight ago, refused point blank to meet with President Nyusi before signing a final agreement on all the matters in dispute.

The mediating team has been strengthened by the arrival of former Tanzanian President, Jakaya Kikwete. He is one of the mediators chosen by the government side, but was unable to attend previous rounds of talks due to prior engagements.

President pays last respects to Pondeca

President Filipe Nyusi was among the mourners who paid their final homage on 12 October to Jeremias Pondeca.

Since Pondeca was a member of the Council of State, a consultative body that advises the President of the Republic, his body lay in state in Maputo City Hall.

In addition to President Nyusi, who chairs the Council of State, other Council members who paid their respects included former President Armando Guebuza and the Mayor of Beira, Daviz Simango, who is leader of the second largest opposition party, the Mozambique Democratic Movement.

One of Pondeca's eight children, Mercidio Munguambe, in a message from the family, said that Pondeca's death had created "unimaginable sadness".

The secretary of the Council of State, Amine Miquidade, hoped that the murderers would be speedily identified and brought to justice. "We must raise our voices against violence", he declared, "We want to live in a country where we can move around without any fear".

Pondeca was gunned down when he was going for his habitual early morning run at Maputo's Costa do Sol beach. According to the police, four men were seen attacking Pondeca, and they later fled the scene in a Toyota Runx.

Interior Minister Basilio Monteiro told reporters that the police have been instructed to treat the matter as top priority, and to use "all their efforts" to track down the killers.

Pondeca's body has now been taken to his home village in Chidinguele, in the southern province of Gaza for burial.

Police confirm capture of Renamo bases

The General Command of the Mozambican police on 18 October confirmed the dismantling of two bases of the illegal armed militia of the opposition party Renamo in the central province of Zambezia (in Mocuba district) and the northern province of Nampula (Morrupula district).

The spokesperson for the General Command, Inacio Dina, said it was the responsibility of the defence and security forces to maintain public order, security and tranquillity throughout Mozambique. "Because of this, we have dismantled and occupied some of the positions and bases of the Renamo armed bandits", he said.

He promised that the defence forces will continue to close Renamo bases, in order to prevent the Renamo gunmen from spreading insecurity, destabilizing communities and hindering the normal circulation of people and goods along the country's roads.

"This is a process that will continue", he said. "Our desire is that there should exist no hideout, no base, no camp and no point where Renamo armed bandits, or bandits of any other kind, have guns in their hands, and are occupying space from which they create situations of public disorder".

Dina added, the defence and security forces remain stationed at what are regarded as "points of risk" in relation to the movements of Renamo gunmen.

Child murdered in Muxungue

A ten year old child died on 14 October during an attack by Renamo gunmen against the Muxungue administrative post, in the central province of Sofala.

The child was burnt alive inside his parents' house, set ablaze by the Renamo raiders. His father is a local state official, the secretary of the Muxungue Fourth Neighbourhood. The father sustained serious injuries – the gunmen shot him as he was trying to escape.

Police spokesperson Daniel Macuacua said the armed group, wearing Renamo uniform, headed straight for the house of the neighbourhood secretary. They set it on fire, and then shot at anyone trying to flee.

Prime Minister states Samora was murdered

Prime Minister Carlos Agostinho do Rosario on 17 October declared that the government remains convinced that the country's first President, Samora Machel, was "murdered by the enemy of self-determination" – a clear reference to the now defunct apartheid regime.

Rosario, representing President Filipe Nyusi, was speaking at a ceremony to mark the 30th anniversary of Machel's death, held at Mbuzini, in the South African province of Mpumalanga, where the plane carrying Machel back from a summit in Zambia crashed on 19 October 1986.

Accompanied by South African Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa, by Machel's widow Graca and their children, by some of the nine survivors of the crash, and by relatives of the 34 others who died, Rosario laid a wreath at the monument built on the crash site.

The monument consists of 35 steel tubes, one for each of the victims of the crash. They are reddish, symbolising the blood shed at Mbuzini, and the wind blowing through the tubes creates a mournful sound. Parts of the wreckage of the plane have been incorporated into the monument.

The plane was off course when it crashed, and it is widely believed that the apartheid military used a decoy navigational beacon, broadcasting on the same frequency as the Maputo airport beacon, to lure the plane away from its correct flight path. The evidence is not conclusive as the apartheid regime shut down the inquiry into the cause of the disaster, rather than investigate the source of the beacon.

Rosario said, "we Mozambicans express our belief that the truth about the barbaric assassination of Samora Machel will one day be known. For Mozambique the outcome of the dossier on the death of Samora Machel remains a national priority and a patriotic imperative".

Rosario thanked the South African government for its efforts to discover the causes of the crash, and reiterated that Mozambique will continue to work "so that the circumstances of the disaster which claimed the lives of our President and of his delegation may be explained".

He also thanked his South African hosts for the construction of the Mbuzini monument and for declaring it part of South Africa's national heritage, as a reminder "of the sacrifice and of the blood spilled by Mozambican and South African nationalists for independence, peace and equality".

New Mineral Resources minister appointed

President Filipe Nyusi on 17 October appointed Leticia Klemens Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy. She replaces Pedro Couto, who left the job in late September, when he was appointed chairperson of the Board of Directors of Hidroelectrica de Cahora Bassa (HCB), which operates the Cahora Bassa dam on the Zambezi.

At the time of her appointment, Klemens was chairperson of the general meeting of the country's largest commercial bank, the Millennium-BIM. She has also been secretary of the general meeting of the country's main employers' body, the Confederation of Mozambican Business Associations (CTA), and chairperson of the Association of Mozambican Businesswomen. She is deputy chair of the labour policy department of the CTA, and in this capacity sits on the Labour Consultative Commission (CCT), the tripartite negotiating forum between the government, the employers and the trade unions. Klemens is also chairperson of the Mozambican Association of Employment Agencies, and ambassador in Mozambique for the US State Department's African Women's Entrepreneurship Programme (AWEP).

Kenmare reports record production

The Irish company Kenmare Resources, which operates the titanium minerals dredge mine at Moma, in the northern province of Nampula, has reported healthy production in the third quarter of 2016, and a decline in operating costs.

According to Kenmare, the production between July and September was a record and "Moma is on track to achieve record finished product output for the full year".

The mine produces ilmenite (titanium iron oxide), rutile (titanium dioxide) and zircon (zirconium silicate). Its ilmenite production in the third quarter was 243,500 tonnes, 12 per cent higher than the previous quarter, while zircon production increased by 48 per cent to 19,700 tonnes.

The total shipment of finished products in the quarter was 280,800 tonnes, which compares with 190,000 tonnes in the third quarter of 2015.

The main consumer of ilmenite is China and the ilmenite price in China has risen by 70 per cent so far this year, while the mine's cash operating costs per tonne trended downwards over the quarter.

Kenmare's managing director Michael Cargill commented that the record output of finished product in the third quarter demonstrated the benefits of a stable power supply to the mine and of the increased mining of higher grades of ore. He believed that Kenmare "is well positioned to benefit from increasingly favourable operational and market dynamics in 2017".

In addition, Kenmare has reached agreement with the local community on mining the area known as Monte Filipe in the coming months. This is a sensitive issue, since the area is regarded as sacred – but objections seem to have been overcome with the promise to hold a traditional ceremony in order to ratify the agreement with the community.

French company awarded survey contract

The National Petroleum Institute (INP) has announced that it has signed a contract with French company CGG for the collection of seismic data in three regions, two of which are offshore. The contract involves the collection of 2D data covering 6,550 square kilometres in the Rovuma Basin off the coast of the northern province of Cabo Delgado. In addition, a 3D survey will be carried out covering 40,000 square kilometres in the Zambezi Delta.

According to INP, the programme will involve collecting geological data in the three regions to provide participating hydrocarbon companies with an in-depth knowledge of the existing potential.

Meanwhile, South African petrochemicals giant Sasol has announced that it has concluded its programme to collect 3D seismic data covering 115 square kilometres at its onshore Inhassoro field, in the southern province of Inhambane.

Police arrest machete gang in Nampula

The police on 7 October arrested a gang of three members in the northern city of Nampula, who had specialised in robbing houses and terrifying their victims with sharp implements such as machetes.

Police spokesperson Zacarias Nacute said the arrests followed a tip-off. "The police had been receiving denunciations about this group which the local people call 'nacatana' (from the Portuguese word for a machete)", said Nacute. "We took measures, and we succeeded in arresting this group of people who spent their time robbing homes using the threat of machetes".

Extensionists trained in fruit production

The Mozambican government's Agricultural Development Fund (FDA) has begun training fifty extensionists from the southern provinces of Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane in techniques for the production and management of fruit such as orange and lychee.

The training is being carried out in partnership with the government's Agricultural Research Institute (IIAM). It will give the extensionists knowledge of improved practices and innovations for the establishment of orchards, management of irrigation, and the identification of pests and diseases and their respective methods of control and prevention.

During the two-week training course, the extensionists will also learn more about the production, processing, and storage of fruit, to facilitate access to the national and international market.

The initiative is part of the national programme launched in 2011 to encourage small and medium-sized farmers to increase fruit production. Between 2011 and 2015, the Agricultural Development Fund distributed 204,582 seedlings of mango, orange, pineapple, lychee to fruit producers in the provinces of Maputo, Gaza, Inhambane, Sofala, Zambezia, Tete, Nampula, Cabo Delgado and Niassa.

Magistrates receive training on biodiversity protection

About thirty magistrates are receiving training relating to the application of the law on conservation and the legal procedures to combat commercial poaching and the illegal trade in the country's flora and fauna.

The two-week course in Maputo is organised by the WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF) in partnership with the attorney general and aims to equip the magistrates with an understanding of the best way to implement the law.

Speaking at the opening of the course, Assistant Attorney-General Angelo Matusse called on those attending the event to take account of the seriousness of the issue given the importance of conserving national biodiversity.

He stressed, "this training is not a trivial exercise ... and whose result will not end up as just a report. Our expectation is that this training will serve as a launchpad for a relentless offensive against these crimes".

The director of WWF Mozambique, Anabela Rodrigues, said that the organisers saw the need to train staff in the judiciary for a more effective and efficient implementation of the law on conservation.

She added, "a country that can take care of its fauna in an effective manner is a country that proves that it is organised, that proves that there is order in the country, because it is able to prevent its borders from being vulnerable to criminal gangs".

Earlier this month, Vietnamese customs in the port of Ho Chi Minh City seized about two tonnes of ivory hidden in a shipment of timber from Mozambique.

Despite the authorities seizing the ivory, the two countries have been threatened with trade sanctions if they do not take action against the illegal trade in endangered species (specifically rhino horn). The 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in Johannesburg agreed to send a mission to Mozambique and Vietnam to assess the situation on the ground as key countries implicated in rhino trafficking. Based on the results of those missions, there may be a recommendation for trade sanctions if significant progress is not made.

President calls for diversification

President Filipe Nyusi on 14 October stressed the determination of his government to build a more diversified and robust economy which, even in the face of external shocks, can stand firm on the path of structural transformation.

The President was speaking in Maputo at the opening of the Fourth Edition of the International Tourism Fair entitled "Discover Mozambique", which he described as "an essential display of the tourist potential the country offers and the blossoming of new opportunities".

The indicators currently available on the number of tourists visiting the country, President Nyusi said, are far from corresponding to Mozambique's potential.

He believed tourism is "a strategic economic activity can create jobs, generate revenue, and raise taxes through the rational use of limited natural resources".

The President called on tourism companies to develop cultural tourism, which would promote the country's artistic and historical heritage. He also insisted on sustainability and conservation. Tourism, he said, must take into consideration environmental aspects, including the conservation of biodiversity and of the variety of landscapes that Mozambique offers.

Prominent businessman shot in Maputo

Unknown assailants on 14 October shot and seriously injured prominent businessman Omar Faruk Ayoob, owner of the Ayoob Commercial group, on Kenneth Kaunda Avenue in central Maputo. Ayoob was gunned down in front of the United States embassy. Eye-witnesses said the criminals who shot Ayoob were in a Toyota Conquest with South African number plates. At least five shots were fired, one of which hit a car parked near the embassy. Ayoob was rushed to the nearby Sommerschild private clinic, where he underwent intensive medical treatment.

Ayoob is the brother of Momad Khalib Ayoob who was murdered in April 2012 outside a Maputo mosque. The family's misfortunes did not end there. Khalib Ayoob's widow, Reyma Ayoob was kidnapped in October 2014, and spent 22 days in captivity before she was released on payment of a ransom.

Reyma Ayoob was the third member of the family to be kidnapped since her husband's assassination. In August 2012, Ayoob's 17 year old niece, Hina Farouk Ayoob, was abducted, and in April 2014, one of his sons, Bilal Ayoob, was kidnapped. He was held captive for 10 days, and was only released when the family paid an unspecified ransom.

The wealth of this family was publicly exposed when Khalib Ayoob was arrested at Matsapha airport in Swaziland in December 2010 in possession of about US\$ 2.7 million in banknotes, which he had failed to declare. He had exported the money illegally from Mozambique and said he was taking it to Dubai. The money was confiscated by the Swazi authorities. A court case in Swaziland against Ayoob was brought to an abrupt end by his death.

The Ayoob family owns several companies, some of which were extremely shady. One of the Ayoob companies, Niza Lda, achieved notoriety in 2010 when the Tax Authority ordered the public sale of its goods to pay off a debt of 276 million meticaís (about \$7.9 million, at the exchange rate of the time) to the mobile phone company M-Cel.

Niza had been an authorised vendor of M-Cel pre-paid phone cards, but its cheques to M-Cel bounced.

China donates eighty buses

China has donated 80 buses to Mozambique for public passenger transport services. Prime Minister Carlos Agostinho do Rosario confirmed this grant at a press conference in Macau on 12 October marking the end of his participation in the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Forum for Economic and Commercial Cooperation between China and the Portuguese Speaking Countries (otherwise known as the Macau Forum).

He added that part of an earlier Chinese promise of 10,000 tonnes of rice in emergency food aid has begun to arrive in the country.

As for the debt relief announced by Chinese Prime Minister Le Keqian, covering the cancellation of payment due on interest-free loans, Rosario said “we shall also work to ensure that we benefit from this good Chinese initiative”.

“Participation in this Forum was worthwhile”, he continued. “We exchanged information and ideas. China needs space to put its industries to feed its growth, and for its part Mozambique needs industries to transform its raw materials. This is one of the areas where synergies should be capitalized on”. Rosario invited businesses from China and from the Portuguese speaking countries to invest in Mozambique, taking advantage of its geographical location, which makes it a point of entry for the market of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Inflation rate hit 2.71 per cent in September

Monthly inflation in Mozambique hit 2.71 per cent in September, according to figures from the National Statistics Institute (INE), drawing on the consumer price indices in the three largest cities (Maputo, Nampula and Beira).

This compares with an inflation rate of 1.27 per cent in August, 0.9 per cent in July and 0.76 per cent in June.

Most of the rise in inflation is accounted for by food prices. Thus in September, rice rose in price by 3.8 per cent, groundnuts by 10.4 per cent, cooking oil by 8.2 per cent, live chickens by eight per cent and maize flour by 2.3 per cent.

The accumulated inflation from January to September was 14.7 per cent, and annual inflation (1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016) was 24.92 per cent. Food and drink accounted for the overwhelming bulk of this inflation.

Of the three cities, Maputo showed the sharpest price rise in September, of 3.48 per cent. Prices in Nampula rose by 2.02 per cent, and in Beira by 1.78 per cent.

Above normal rainfall forecast for south

Mozambique’s National Meteorology Institute (INAM) is forecasting above normal rainfall in central and southern Mozambique during the 2016-2017 rainy season. Although “above normal” carries a risk of flooding, this forecast will come as a relief to farmers in the southern and central provinces, who were hit by severe drought this year. The rainy season begins in October and ends in March.

INAM meteorologist Acacio Tembe announced the long term forecast after a meeting between INAM and the Mozambican relief agency, the National Disaster Management Institute (INGC).

Tembe also said that the forecast for the coming months was for below normal rainfall in the northern provinces of Nampula, Niassa and Cabo Delgado.

“We make probabilistic forecasts for three months”, he said, “but what constitutes normal rainfall depends on the region. Each region has its own rainfall behaviour”.

Thus average rainfall in the south and centre of the country is about 400 millimetres in the first three months of the rainy season, but in the north the average is between 900 and 1,200 millimetres for the same period.

Deal signed to sell Rovuma Basin gas to BP

The Italian energy company ENI and its partners in offshore Area Four of the Rovuma Basin in northern Mozambique on 4 October signed an agreement in London to sell liquefied natural gas (LNG) to BP Poseidon, a company fully controlled by British Petroleum (BP).

ENI-East Africa holds 70 per cent of the shares in Area Four. This company is 50 per cent owned by ENI itself and 20 per cent by the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC). Galp Energia of Portugal, Kogas of South Korea, and Mozambique’s own National Hydrocarbon Company (ENH), each hold ten per cent of Area Four.

The LNG will be produced at the floating LNG facility which ENI intends to install above the Coral South gas field.

According to a release from ENI, the contract with BP covers the sale, for a period of more than 20 years, of all the LNG that will be produced at the Coral South facility. This floating factory will have the capacity to produce over 3.3 million tonnes of LNG a year.

The Mozambican government has already approved the contract, but it remains conditional on ENI taking a Final Investment Decision. That decision is expected by the end of 2016.

ENI describes the agreement with BP as “another fundamental milestone for the execution of the Coral South Development Project, following the approval in February of the Plan of Development by the Government of Mozambique”.

The contract with BP gives ENI the guarantee it needs to seek the necessary funding to build the floating LNG platform. That will require investment of at least ten billion US dollars.

Huge reserves of natural gas have been discovered, not only in Rovuma Basin Area Four, but also in the adjacent Area One, where the operator is the American company Anadarko. Between them these discoveries could amount to about 200 trillion cubic feet of gas, which would propel Mozambique to among the five largest producers of natural gas in the world.

This is the first binding contract for the sale of the Rovuma Basin gas.

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