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President Nyusi reaches agreement with Renamo

President Filipe Nyusi on 7 February announced that he has reached an agreement with Afonso Dhlakama, the leader of the opposition party Renamo, which will see the end of the direct election of mayors. As from the municipal elections, scheduled for October this year, voters will elect Municipal Assemblies. The political party that wins the majority of votes will propose the mayor from among the Assembly members.

This agreement will be submitted to the country's parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, which will consider the proposed constitutional amendments.

A similar arrangement is envisaged for provinces and districts. The President of the Republic will appoint the Provincial Governor – but on the proposal of whichever party obtained a majority of votes in the election for the Provincial Assembly. The Governor must be a member of the Assembly. This ends the current situation where the President of the Republic can appoint whoever he likes as Provincial Governor

The constitutional amendments introduce, for the first time, District Assemblies. The party with the majority of votes in the Assembly will propose one of the Assembly members as District Administrator, who will then be formally appointed by the Minister of State Administration.

The provincial governors and district administrators will answer to the provincial and district assemblies. The provincial assemblies elected in the general elections of 2019 will choose governors, but the district assemblies will not be elected until 2024.

Provincial governors and district administrators can be sacked by the assemblies – hence they are at risk of losing their position if they clash with the majority party in the assembly. The President of the Republic may also dismiss governors and administrators, but only in cases explicitly envisaged in the constitution.

Each province will have a Secretary of State for the Province, appointed by the President, and responsible for state functions that are not decentralised to the provincial level. President Nyusi said that the areas not subject to decentralisation include the definition of the territory and its borders, defence and security, diplomatic relations, mineral resources and energy, the issuing of currency, and the creation and alteration of taxes.

President Nyusi said that he and Dhlakama were agreed that Mozambique remains a unitary state, and that all elections must be held on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballots.

The net effect of the constitutional changes proposed is that the only individuals whose names will be on ballot papers in the future will be the candidates for President of the Republic. Every other election will be by party list. Thus, the changes, although made in the name of decentralisation, will have the effect of strengthening the grip of political party machines on Mozambican politics.

President Nyusi's statement, televised to the nation, did not go into many details, which will doubtless be the subject of debate in parliament. For example, he did not say what sort of majority a party will need to propose a mayor, administrator or governor: should it be an absolute or simple majority?

Decentralisation is just one of the two issues debated by President Nyusi and Dhlakama, and by working groups set up a year ago between the government and Renamo. The other is "military matters" – by which the government means the disarming and demobilisation of the Renamo militia, and the reintegration of the militia members into society.

President Nyusi said that consensus was being achieved in this area too, but gave no details. "We are aware that this process is awaited with great expectation by all Mozambicans, including our brothers in Renamo, since it is determinant for an effective peace".

He added that "the spirit of trust, openness and cooperation with the Renamo leader is continuing to prevail", and promised that, in the near future, he will "bring to the knowledge of Mozambicans the steps that will follow in the context of military matters".

President Nyusi praised Dhlakama for his "collaborative role in this common vision which defines as its priority a dialogue and the search for peaceful solutions to political problems".

Reconstruction of Maxixe jetty begins

Transport Minister Carlos Mesquita on 7 February laid the first stone for the reconstruction for the jetty at the town of Maxixe, in the southern province of Inhambane, which was severely damaged by Cyclone Dineo in February 2017.

The jetty is vital for the ferry service between Maxixe and Inhambane city. Although a temporary jetty, made of local materials, was hastily erected after the cyclone, the two large ferry boats that usually carry passengers between the two cities cannot moor at it.

The reconstruction of the jetty should take three months, and will cost 36.8 million meticais (US$605,000), financed by the Japanese government. The contractor is the Portuguese company Teixeira Duarte.

Mesquita also informed his audience that by the end of March the Maxixe and Inhambane municipal councils will receive new buses to strengthen the fleet of the municipal bus company.

Maputo water supply under threat

The Disaster Management Technical Council (CTGC) on 13 February decreed an orange alert in the drought-stricken Umbeluzi Basin in Maputo province. As a result, it has announced increased restrictions on water supply to Maputo and Matola cities and the neighbouring town of Boane

Water supply from the treatment and pumping station on the Umbeluzi River has already been reduced by 20 per cent. As from 15 February, the restrictions could be as much as 40 per cent and will affect around 1.3 million people.

Over the past three and a half years the Pequenos Libombos dam's reservoir has shrunk alarmingly. In October 2014, it was 81 per cent full, but by the end of December 2017 it had fallen to 20 per cent. The reservoir is the main source of drinking water for the Greater Maputo Metropolitan Area.

The CTGC has ordered a reduction in discharges from the dam from the current 2.15 cubic metres a second to just 1.5 cubic metres a second. This is to ensure continuity of supply, albeit on a reduced scale, to Greater Maputo, and to avoid the danger of the reservoir drying up completely.

Heavy rains have fallen in Maputo and Matola – but not further upstream in the Umbeluzi basin. The CTGC noted that the weather forecast for the rest of the rainy season (February and March) is for normal rainfall, with a trend to below normal. Thus, the rainy season might end without a significant improvement in the level of the Pequenos Libombos reservoir.

The use of Umbeluzi water for irrigated agriculture has already been banned, with serious consequences for the banana plantations. Now, with the orange alert, the authorities intend to strengthen controls on water use.

CTGCs intention is "to ensure minimum quantities of water for human consumption in Maputo, Matola and Boane until the next rainy season" (which will begin in October). The CTGC will also ensure that the reservoir does not run dry, since that might endanger the integrity of the dam wall.

Attempts will also be made to identify other sources of water for Greater Maputo. Possibilities mentioned in the past have been tapping into aquifers north of Maputo and bringing water from the Corumana dam, on the Sabie River, either of which would require heavy investment.

According to the Maputo daily newspaper "Noticias", the government is considering declaring that the Greater Maputo water crisis is "an emergency situation". This measure would allow the activation of "special financial mechanisms", and rapid access to funds from international organisations to implement mitigation procedures, and extraordinary water distribution actions.

Illegal Ethiopian immigrants repatriated

Mozambican authorities repatriated 53 illegal Ethiopian immigrants from Maputo International Airport on 7 February. All of them were detained in December: forty discovered in the bush in the central district of Gorongosa, and the others were arrested in other parts of the country.

All of them had made the long overland journey from Ethiopia, via Kenya and Tanzania. It is likely that their intended final destination was South Africa.

Some of the Ethiopians said they had been travelling for six weeks. One, said he had paid 90,000 Ethiopian birr (US$3,280) to transporters – a huge sum given the minimum monthly wage in the Ethiopian public sector is 420 birr.

The repatriation was paid for by the International Organisation of Migration (IOM), under a cooperation agreement with the Mozambican immigration service (SENAMI).

Almost 4,000 foreigners repatriated in 2017

The Mozambican state spent over 13 million meticais (US$217,000) in 2017 in repatriating a total of 3,972 illegal foreign migrants, according to the spokesperson for the National Immigration Service (SENAMI), Cira Fernandes.

Addressing a press briefing on 1 February, Fernandes said the number of foreigners repatriated had risen by 46 per cent, compared with the 2016 figure of 2,278

With 871 of its citizens repatriated, Malawi occupies top position in the list of countries whose citizens stayed illegally in Mozambique. It was followed by Zimbabwe with 714 (18 per cent), Tanzania with 322 (nine per cent), and Nigeria with 212 (six per cent).

The main causes of repatriation, Fernandes said were clandestine immigration, overstaying, absence of means of subsistence to justify remaining in the country, and forged passports. Overstaying refers to remaining in the country longer than the period stipulated by the visitor's entry visa, or in the visa waiver agreements. Mozambique has visa waiver agreements with most other members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), including Malawi, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, but the period covered by the waiver is only 30 days (or, in the case of Tanzania, 90 days).

Fernandes said that in 2017 a total of 45,416 Mozambicans were deported from neighbouring countries. Ninety-nine percent of these were deported from South Africa. Compared with 2016, there has been an 18 per cent reduction in the number of Mozambicans deported.

Development plan for Rovuma Basin approved

The Mozambican government on 7 February approved the development plan for Offshore Area One in the Rovuma Basin, off the coast of the northern province of Cabo Delgado, where a consortium headed by the US company Anadarko has discovered vast reserves of natural gas.

Approval of the plan paves the way for Anadarko and its partners to take their Final Investment Decision on the project.

Speaking at the end of the weekly meeting of the Council of Ministers (Cabinet), the government spokesperson, Deputy Minister of Culture and Tourism, Ana Comoana, said the plan covers the extraction of the gas, the transport of the gas to the onshore liquefaction plants, and the storage equipment, with the capacity to handle six million tonnes of gas a year.

She added that the government estimates that, by 2047 the project will generate revenue for the state of US$30.7 billion, from taxes and profit sharing. In the drilling and construction phase, about 5,000 jobs will be created, although in the operational phase only 1,000 people will be employed.

The total investment required is estimated at US$12 billion, with disbursements starting this year.

Anadarko is the operator and has a 26.5 per cent stake in the project. Its partners are the Japanese company Mitsui (20 per cent), PTT of Thailand (8.5 per cent), three Indian companies, ONGC Videsh (16 per cent), Bharat Petro Resources (10 per cent) and Oil India (four per cent), and Mozambique's National Hydrocarbon Company, ENH (15 per cent).

Anadarko has already begun to negotiate offtake agreements for sale of the gas. In December it reached a Heads of Agreement with Japan's Tohuku Electric Power Company, which has committed to buying 280,000 tonnes of LNG per year for a 15-year period.

The Italian energy company ENI took its final investment decision for the Coral South gas field in June 2017. This is expected to produce 3.3 million tonnes of gas a year. Export of gas from Coral South could start in 2022.

Project linking agriculture to nutrition launched

The governor of the western province of Tete, Paulo Auade, on 5 February launched the “Linking Agriculture to Nutrition” project, an initiative intended to reduce the high rate of chronic malnutrition in the province.

Auade said the government is concerned with the rate of malnutrition, which he regarded as making no sense in a province which is self-sufficient in agricultural production. He lamented that, “both acute and chronic malnutrition remain at levels much above those regarded as acceptable by the World Health Organisation (WHO)”.

The results of the Demographic and Health Survey of 2011 showed a rate of chronic malnutrition of 44.2 per cent. The figures from the family budget survey of 2014/15 showed this had only fallen by one per cent, to 43.2 per cent. The same two surveys showed a barely significant fall in acute malnutrition among children in Tete from six per cent in 2011 to 5.7 per cent in 2014/15.

Meanwhile, an infestation of fall army worm (scientific name: spodoptera frugiperda) is devastating hundreds of hectares of crops in Tete, according to the provincial director of agriculture, Jose Mendonca.

Mendonca said that so far 1,270 hectares of crops have been lost to the pest, affecting about 3,500 peasant households. Fields of maize, sorghum, millet and vegetables have been affected in eight rural districts, and in the green belt around Tete city.

“We recognise that the situation is worrying because the peasants are losing their crops”, said Mendonca. “To halt the spread of the pest, we have allocated pesticides for spraying, with the aid of extensionists who are assisting the farmers”.

This insect pest is not the only threat to Tete agriculture. Mendonca said his department is also worried about irregular rainfall in the south of the province, affecting Magoe, Cahora Bassa, Changara, Marara, Doa, Moatize and Chifunde districts, and Tete city.

Despite the combined threats of the army worm infestation and irregular rainfall, the provincial government believes the situation can still be saved by good production in the fertile north of the province. Here, in the districts of Angonia, Tsangano, Macanga, Zumbo and Mutarara, rains have been falling regularly.

North Korea fishing venture in liquidation

The joint venture fishing company formed between Mozambican and North Korean concerns, which featured so prominently in a report by the US television channel CNN claiming to expose how Mozambique was violating UN sanctions against North Korea, was dissolved even before CNN undertook its investigation.

A report in the daily newspaper “O Pais” on 9 February said that the Mozambican Fisheries Ministry ordered the dissolution of the joint venture precisely in order to comply with UN sanctions against Pyongyang.

The joint venture was formed on 27 February 2013, between the Korean Overseas Fishing Corporation, with 70 per cent of the shares, and the Mozambican private company PAR Ltd, with the remaining 30 per cent.

The North Korean contribution to the company was two trawlers, the “Susan 1” and the “Susan 2”, currently anchored in Maputo fishing port. The company’s main activity was to fish for deep water prawns, known as “gamba”.

PAR’s lawyer, Adriano Boane, told the paper “we were notified in December by the Ministry of Fisheries, and by 22 December this company was dissolved on the instructions of the government. Right now, the company is in the process of liquidation”.

Boane recognised that there are still North Korean citizens on board the two boats, but when the liquidation procedures were concluded, they would return to Korea. He added that since December the boats have not put out to sea.

PAR believes that, since many foreign companies are interested in fishing in Mozambican waters, it will have no difficulty in finding a new partner once the Koreans have left.

Anti-corruption office registered 1,059 cases last year

Mozambique’s anti-corruption offices registered 1,059 cases of alleged corruption in 2017, the spokesperson for the Central Office for the Fight against Corruption (GCCC), Cristovao Mondlane, told a Maputo press conference on 1 February. 695 of these cases led to charges, and 122 were shelved for lack of evidence. The remainder are still under investigation. But only 155 citizens were detained for corruption offences, 96 of whom were caught red-handed.

Mondlane said that during the investigation the prosecutors were able to freeze bank accounts holding 17.9 million meticais (US$ 300,000) believed to be the proceeds of corrupt acts, and seized a building valued at 23.7 million meticais, plus five vehicles that have not yet been valued.

This is much less than hoped for, Mondlane added. Prosecutors have not been able to seize more, because Mozambique does not have a law on the recovery of assets.

Judges can order the seizure of assets as part of the sentence imposed after a trial – but by then it may be too late and assets obtained through crime could have been salted away.

The provinces with the largest number of recorded cases of corruption were Nampula (187), Maputo City (113) and Sofala (112). Mondlane warned that this did not mean that the other provinces were cleaner – but merely reflected that these are provinces where the GCCC has its provincial delegations.

Most of those charged with crimes of corruption, he said, are state employees who take bribes, who use public resources unduly for their own benefit or that of third parties, who request undue advantages from companies in order to favour them during tenders, or who set up companies in their own name or the names of relatives to compete in public tenders.

Known crimes of corruption in 2017 cost the state at least 610 million meticais – but Mondlane admitted that the true figure could be higher. The GCCC’s perception, he added, is that corruption, far from declining, is on the increase, although he could not put a percentage on this increase.

The major corruption trial impending is that of former Transport Minister Paulo Zucula, former chairperson of Mozambique Airlines (LAM), Jose Viegas, and former Mozambique representative of the South African petrochemical company Sasol, Mateus Zimba. They are accused of involvement in the US$800,000 bribe that the Brazilian aircraft company Embraer offered so that LAM would purchase two of its planes in 2009.

All the paperwork in this case has now gone to the Maputo City Court, Mondlane said, and it was up to the court to set a date for the trial.

A second bribery scandal involved another Brazilian concern, the construction company, which gave a bribe of US$900,000 to as yet unnamed Mozambican officials, probably for the construction of the airport at Nacala, on the northern coast.

Mondlane said the GCCC is still investigating the Odebrecht case with its Brazilian counterparts, and so no charges have yet been laid.

Economy grew by 3.7 per cent in 2017

The Mozambican economy grew by 3.7 per cent in 2017, rather than the 5.5 per cent forecast by the government.

Revealing this figure to reporters on 13 February, at the end of the weekly meeting of the Council of Ministers (Cabinet), the government spokesperson, the Deputy Minister of Tourism and Culture, Ana Comoana, pointed out that it was better than the average growth rate for sub-Saharan Africa (2.7 per cent), and equal to the global average.

Comoana said the balance of trade improved last year, since Mozambican exports increased by 1.9 per cent, while imports fell by 22.8 per cent. The country's net international reserves have risen, and are now sufficient to cover 7.3 months of imports of goods and non-factor services, excluding the imports of the foreign investment mega-projects.

As for inflation, Comoana said the average 12 monthly inflation rate for 2017 was 15.11 per cent, a slight improvement on the 15.5 per cent initially forecast. The average inflation for 2016 was 19.5 per cent.

Comoana said that in 2017 the government collected 213.78 billion meticais (US$ 3.5 billion) in revenue, plus a further 20.9 billion meticais in capital gains tax paid by the Italian company ENI on the sale of half its holding in Rovuma Basin Area Four (where huge reserves of natural gas have been discovered) to the US giant ExxonMobil. Revenue was 14 per cent higher than the forecast in the 2017 budget, while public expenditure over the year amounted to 242.29 billion meticais, which was only 89 per cent of what had been planned.

Mocimboa da Praia reopens for international flights

The Mozambican government has reopened the aerodrome in Mocimboa da Praia, in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, to international traffic.

Mocimboa da Praia has the nearest sizeable runway to the natural gas operations in the neighbouring district of Palma, and it is expected that the aerodrome will mainly be used to support the companies processing the natural gas.

In the reopening ceremony on 12 February, Transport Minister Carlos Mesquita said cargo planes will fly into Mocimboa da Praia, and he expected the aerodrome to generate various opportunities for local development. It would also be used to support tourism and fishing, and as a base for any emergency operations in the far north of the country.

The aerodrome was reopened after improvements to its two-kilometre long runway and its taxiways, and to the lighting, signalling and communications systems. The total cost of the improvements was 24 million meticais (US$393,000).

Mesquita also denied that the government is to limit the number of airports open to international traffic. Last year, the idea was floated by airports company ADM that international air travellers should only be able to enter the country at three points – Maputo in the south, Beira in the centre, and Nacala in the north. This would have been a blow to the country's tourism, and would also have seriously inconvenienced business travellers. Mesquita clearly stated, "the government is not going to reduce the number of entry points".

EDM sells electricity to Lesotho

The electricity companies of Mozambique and Lesotho, EDM and LEC, on 1 February signed an agreement in Maputo under which EDM is contracted to sell LEC between 10 and 30 megawatts of power between January and December.

This sale is expected to earn EDM US$7 million, and will pave the way for a further agreement covering a longer period.

According to EDM chairperson, Mateus Magala, "this is not just a transaction, but a development of the relationship between the two countries".

Asked whether it makes sense for a country which is short of power, such as Mozambique, to be exporting electricity, Magala said the company "needs to invest in electricity infrastructure and that's why we sell power".

He said that the poor quality of electricity that causes frequent complaints from consumers is often due to the obsolete state of EDM's equipment. To overcome this problem, new investment is crucial, which was the justification for selling power to other members of SADC (Southern African Development Community), such as Lesotho.

Tankiso Mots'oikha, the acting managing director of LEC, said the contract with EDM was of great importance for Lesotho. "You know that electric current is like blood which revives economic growth, and we are very pleased to receive this Mozambican blood", he added.

Metrobus opens Matola-Maputo service

The integrated train and bus passenger transport system for the Greater Maputo area, known as Metrobus, began operating on 6 February.

Metrobus is an initiative by the private company Fleetrail, which has imported second-hand rail cars from New Zealand. It depends on the cooperation between Fleetrail and the publicly owned ports and rail company, CFM, which is leasing use of its tracks to Metrobus.

Fleetrail currently has four railcars, each with four carriages, and a fleet of 100 buses of varying sizes. Each Metrobus train can carry 540 passengers, all seated. The trains will run all day, unlike the CFM trains, which only run at peak hours.

A Metrobus ticket will cover three components: a bus journey to the rail station in Maputo or the neighbouring city of Matola, the train journey between the two cities, and a second bus journey carrying passengers to their final destination.

According to Amade Camal, the general manager of Fleetrail, a day ticket on Metrobus will cost 25 meticais (about 40 US cents), and a monthly pass costing 750 meticais. This is much cheaper than the original plan of 3,500 meticais per month.

The initial capacity of the Metrobus system is 30,000 passengers a day. But this could rise to 50,000 a day as from June when the routes served by Metrobus will extend to Marracuene and Boane districts.

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

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