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Afonso Dhlakama laid to rest in Mangunde

Afonso Dhlakama, leader of the opposition party Renamo, who died of diabetes on 3 May, was laid to rest on 10 May in his family's cemetery at Mangunde in the central province of Sofala. His 92-year-old father is the regulo (traditional chief) of Mangunde, but he was unable to attend the funeral due to his own ill-health.

The government granted an official funeral with state honours, in line with his status as leader of the party with the second largest number of seats in parliament. A platoon of soldiers from the Mozambican Armed Forces (FADM) accompanied the coffin, draped with the Mozambican flag. At the graveside they gave Dhlakama military honours, firing three rounds into the air.

Prior to the ceremony, the government ensured that the dirt road leading from the main north-south highway to Mangunde was in decent condition for the funeral cortege that set off from Beira on the previous day.

The Catholic priest Father Lipsungo led the religious ceremony, stating "before death, we are fragile, like a flower which exists today, but is thrown out tomorrow because it has withered".

Brief messages were read out from Dhlakama family members, senior figures in Renamo, and a representative of the family of Andre Matsangaissa, who preceded Dhlakama as leader of Renamo. The government was represented at the ceremony by Sofala provincial governor Helena Taipo.

Accompanying Dhlakama's widow and children was Carmo Jardim, daughter of Jorge Jardim, who is godmother to one of Dhlakama's children, Afonso Junior. Other figures from Renamo's past included Ivette Fernandes, widow of Renamo General Secretary Evo Fernandes, and Raul Domingos, who headed the Renamo team that negotiated the 1992 peace agreement, but whom Dhlakama expelled from the party in 2000.

Renamo has appointed Ossufo Momade as its interim leader, and he has pledged to work towards completing the peace deal Dhlakama had been negotiating with the government. At the public funeral ceremonies in Beira on 9 May, President Filipe Nyusi also promised "to continue the process of building peace, together with the new leadership of Renamo, always respecting the legal and institutional framework".

President Nyusi told the Beira crowd that, in his last phone conversation with Dhlakama, the Renamo leader had told him, "Mr President, even if there are difficulties or obstacles, let us never cut the bonds of understanding. The peace process must not fail".

Ncondezi Energy promises competitive electricity

The London-based company Ncondezi Energy on 3 May announced that an initial review of its proposed 300-megawatt coal-fired power project in the western province of Tete shows that there is the potential to deliver a more competitive power tariff.

In a statement, the company said that an updated financial model has indicated the viability of the project and shown that it can approach Mozambique's publicly owned electricity company, EDM, and the Ministry of Mineral Resources and Energy (MIREME) with a more competitive price for supplying electricity.

The Project consists of two 150-megawatt coal-fired power plants which will be fed from the company's open pit coal mine through a two-kilometre conveyor. The company will construct a 92-kilometre long transmission line to connect it to the Mozambican northern power grid.

Ncondezi is currently trying to reach a binding Joint Development Agreement to enable the project to advance to the next stage.

According to its chief executive, Michael Haworth, "although still at an early stage, the preliminary results from the updated engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) and operations and maintenance (O&M) information in the financial model are positive and allude to the potential for delivery of a more competitive tariff to the Mozambican Government and EDM for approval".

He stated that "this also represents a significant milestone in the project development process as the Company did not reach this stage of development with its previous potential partner. The next phase of the partner process is to finalise the financial model by the end of May 2018, confirming a new tariff envelope which can be submitted to MIREME and EDM during June 2018".

Ncondezi plans to eventually expand the project in stages to 1,800 megawatts.

INAE general inspector strikes back at critics

Rita Freitas, the general inspector of the government's National Inspectorate of Economic Activities (INAE), has struck back at her critics, warning that there are people inside the institution "who want to destabilise me".

The media had been invited to accompany the INAE inspectors, and so, through television coverage, Mozambican consumers could see in their living rooms the filth and the vermin that all too often characterised enterprises selling food.

Interviewed in the weekly newspaper "Savana", Freitas said a campaign is being waged against her to protect those who violate public health regulations. She explained that there were individuals who were used to working in a certain way, and their lives were disrupted when Freitas introduced a new dynamic into INAE.

Her enemies have threatened an audit of INAE – but Freitas says she would welcome an audit. "It's human to make mistakes, and all institutions have their strong points and their weak points", she said. "I hope that the audit is held so that shortcomings can be corrected".

Freitas added that there was an "outside hand" also trying to destabilise her work, in order to paralyse INAE's inspections, but she promised to resist this to the end. She did not specify who this "outside hand" might be, but the Minister of Industry and Trade himself, Ragendra de Sousa, has intervened to suspend "Operation Kulaya" – an operation waged by INAE to promote "civic education" of economic agents, particularly about the need to label foodstuffs appropriately, and to ensure that basic foods (including grains, vegetable oil and salts) are fortified with micro-nutrients.

Sousa was particularly irritated at the media presence during INAE inspections. Speaking on 2 May, he declared "we should not take the press on our supervisory and inspection activities. This is routine government work which does not need the presence of the media, and so I have ordered the suspension of the operation because of the way it was being conducted".

This drew a retort from Fernando Goncalves, chairperson of the Mozambican chapter of the regional press freedom body MISA (Media Institute of Southern Africa) who said the Minister was violating legislation on freedom of information. "This is a violation of the law on access to information", said Goncalves. "That law exists to ensure that the public has access to all information pertaining to government activities except that covered by national security concerns. INAE inspections are not matters of national security."

Freitas told "Savana" she did not know why Operation Kulaya had been suspended, since Sousa had not given her any reasons. But the government's own economic programme, approved by the country's parliament, gives INAE a target of 22,000 inspections a year, and so Freitas did not believe she needed any special permission to carry on inspecting. She said it was not her intention to grab headlines, but merely to ensure that Mozambican consumers receive goods and services in a decent condition, in accordance with the law.

Freitas said that in the first quarter of the year INAE inspected 5,626 establishments across the country. 4,526 had no problems, and 586 were given warnings to improve conditions. 463 establishments were fined a total of 24 million meticais (about US\$400,000) and 49 were closed until they implemented instructions from the inspectors.

Many of the fines resulted from the selling of counterfeit goods. Since the fines are the same regardless of the quantity of counterfeit products on sale, business people have complained. But Freitas said that INAE can only implement the law, and Freitas said businesses who feel unfairly treated will have to take their cases to the courts.

Record output in from Vale coal mine

Vale-Mozambique, a subsidiary of the Brazilian mining giant Vale, in 2017 produced a record amount of coal from its open cast mine in Moatize district, in the western province of Tete.

At a Maputo press conference on 3 May, the Vale-Mozambique Financial Director, Marcelo Tertuliano, announced that the company had produced 11.2 million tonnes of coal – 6.8 million tonnes of coking coal and 4.3 million ones of thermal coal. This doubled the 5.6 million tonnes produced in 2016. This increase was largely due to the completion of a second coal processing plant at Moatize.

Total revenue for the year was 97.3 billion meticais (US\$ 1.6 billion), an increase of 122 per cent on the previous year. This was due partly to an increase in the export of Vale's coal, and partly to the exchange rate. The metical appreciated against the US dollar, from around 80 meticais to the dollar in October 2016, to 60 to the dollar for much of 2017. This had the effect of increasing the company's revenue when expressed in meticais.

Vale-Mozambique made a net profit of 66 billion meticais in 2017 – but the company is running at an accumulated loss of 380 billion meticais. The 2017 profits came in the first part of the year. In the fourth quarter it made a loss of 7.7 billion meticais, and, with increased operational costs, this rose to 8.6 billion meticais in the first quarter of 2018.

When the company's chairperson Mario Godoy was asked when he expected Vale-Mozambique to move definitively into profit, he declined to make any prediction, pointing out that many of the factors involved – notably the world market price of coal – are beyond Vale's control.

Tertuliano said the company's debt fell from 526 billion meticais in 2016 to 456 billion in 2017. But this is entirely an effect of the exchange rate: expressed in dollars, the debt rose (due to additional interest) from \$7.3 to \$7.8 billion.

Vale-Mozambique's initial prediction for 2018 was for total production of 16 million tonnes of coal. But the company suffered heavily from torrential rains in Tete province, and has now scaled back the forecast for this year's production to 15 million tonnes.

All Vale's exports are now using the new deep-water mineral port at Nacala-a-Velha on the northern coast. Vale funded this port and the railway running from Moatize to Nacala across southern Malawi.

Vale used to export coal from the central port of Beira, using the Sena railway. But its contract with the publicly owned port and rail company, CFM, to use the Sena line expired last year, and now its exports go exclusively from Nacala-a-Velha, which currently has the capacity to handle 18.5 million tonnes of coal a year.

The Moatize-Nacala railway is 912 kilometres long, and each coal train consists of 120 wagons (which can each carry 63 tonnes of coal), pulled by four locomotives. The round trip takes 103 hours.

Nacala bay is a natural deep-water harbour that can take ships with a draught of up to 20 metres. Only the largest of supertankers have a greater draught. The port has facilities to store a million tonnes of coal, and its equipment can load ships at the rate of 5,100 tonnes an hour.

Vale states that the Moatize coal is highly competitive and is winning clients away from other suppliers. Among its advantages is Mozambique's relative proximity to key markets such as India, Brazil and the Middle East.

Godoy recognised that, as a fuel, coal is in long-term decline, as countries mothball coal-fired power stations and switch to alternative sources of energy. However, he believed that "the transition away from thermal coal will be lengthy".

Seized tusks were from Mozambican elephants

The 867 elephant tusks seized in a container at the port of Maputo on 13 April came from Mozambican elephants, according to the Minister of Land, Environment and Rural Development, Celso Correia, interviewed in the online newspaper "A Verdade".

It was initially believed that such a large haul of ivory, weighing 3.5 tonnes, may have resulted from the slaughter of elephants in neighbouring countries. But Correia was convinced that many of the tusks came from stockpiles of ivory held in the north of Mozambique. The seizure at the port, he said, "happened after organised crime had assaulted our installations in Niassa province and stolen much of the ivory that was there".

He believed that many of the tusks came from the warehouse of the Niassa Provincial Forestry and Wildlife Services in the city of Lichinga. Thieves had broken into the warehouse through the roof, and had helped themselves repeatedly to the stockpiles of ivory. 85 tusks were stolen in 2016 and 2017, a crime that clearly required the connivance of workers at the Forestry and Wildlife Services.

However, that still leaves the origin of 782 tusks unexplained. Either the theft at the Niassa warehouse was on a much larger scale than admitted, or the tusks came from other locations. A source from the National Administration of Conservation Areas (ANAC), cited by "A Verdade", believed that the other tusks came from the hundreds of elephants poached in the Niassa National Reserve, the largest of the country's wildlife reserves, and perhaps also from district warehouses, including in the southern provinces.

Correia was angered that the courts have not acted to halt environmental crimes. He insisted that in the case of the Niassa theft "people were caught, but the justice system doesn't work. Up until now nobody has been found guilty".

The Minister added that he was unsure whether a Chinese citizen caught red-handed in the possession of 4.2 kilogrammes of rhinoceros horns at Maputo airport on 15 April would serve a sentence in a Mozambican prison. In theory there are now heavy penalties for traffickers in illicit wildlife products. The penalties, not only for poachers but for those who run poaching rings, and for people who transport and store the products, range from eight to 16 years imprisonment. But courts have repeatedly allowed traffickers out on bail, and they have promptly disappeared before they could be brought to trial.

Correia said the Mozambican defence and security forces are on the ground in the Niassa Reserve to protect wildlife, but warned that the task is impossible without the cooperation of Tanzania, which borders on the reserve.

"The Niassa Reserve is larger than many nations, and has an enormous border", said the Minister. "That makes it impossible to do this work without Tanzanian cooperation".

Drug traffickers arrested at Maputo Airport

The police have announced the arrests of three people caught trafficking drugs and precious stones through Maputo International Airport.

The largest haul was 12.4 kilogrammes of cocaine found on 6 May in a false compartment of a suitcase belonging to a woman from Sierra Leone who was attempting to catch a flight to Nairobi. A second drugs seizure was 50 ampules of cocaine containing 1.1 kilogrammes of the drug, carried by a Nigerian. The police also detained a Chinese man caught trying to smuggle half a kilogramme of precious stones out of the country.

In the northern city of Pemba, capital of Cabo Delgado province, the police have arrested three in connection with the murder on 27 April of a 26-year-old woman. One of the three men arrested was a police officer caught selling goods stolen from the victim's house.

Inflation drops in April

Inflation in Mozambique, as measured by the consumer price indices of the three largest cities (Maputo, Nampula and Beira) was only 0.43 per cent in April, according to the latest figures from the National Statistics Institute (INE).

Inflation for the first four months of the year was 2.17 per cent, and inflation over the year (1 May 2017 to 30 April 2018) stood at 2.33 per cent.

The main price rises in April were for diesel (5.2 per cent), petrol (3.8 per cent), tomatoes (8.1 per cent), restaurant meals (three per cent), insurance related to transport (22 per cent), and women's dresses (5.6 per cent).

These were offset by significant price falls for other goods, including butane cooking gas (down by 4.7 per cent), charcoal (-2 per cent), coconuts (-21.9 per cent), sweet potatoes (-16.6 per cent), lettuce (- 8.3 per cent), and fresh fish (-1.8 per cent).

The sharpest price rises in April were in Maputo, where inflation was 0.71 per cent. Inflation was negligible in Nampula (0.09 per cent) and in Beira (0.07 per cent).

These figures indicate that the government is on course for meeting its target of single digit inflation in 2018.

World Bank grant for feeder roads

The World Bank on 8 May approved a grant to Mozambique of US\$150 million for the government's Integrated Feeder Road Development project. The money will be used to improve road access in selected rural areas in Nampula and Zambezia, the two most populous provinces in the country.

The World Bank points out that, although agriculture employs about 80 percent of the total workforce and generates about 30 percent of the country's GDP, "its productivity remains low and is constrained by many factors, including limited rural access".

According to the Bretton Woods institution, the average income from farming in Nampula and Zambezia "is three times lower than in the rest of the country due to poor rural access, among other factors ... about 6.5 million rural dwellers do not have access to a road in good or fair condition".

The project will target ten districts in Zambezia and Nampula with high agricultural potential and a total population of around 2.2 million, of whom about 1.5 million live below the poverty line.

The money will not all be spent on tertiary roads. Some will go towards rehabilitating heavily used primary roads, notably the 70 kilometre stretch between the city of Quelimane, capital of Zambezia, and the district of Namacurra.

Some of the grant will go towards government agencies dealing with road safety, including the National Overland Transport Institute (INATTER) and the traffic police, as well as the relief agency, the National Disaster Management Institute (INGC).

The grant comes from the International Development Association (IDA), the member of the World Bank group which provides grants and soft loans for programmes in the world's poorest countries.

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

PM highlights role of community radio

Prime Minister Carlos Agostinho do Rosario on 9 May declared that the expansion of community radio through all localities in the country is an imperative, in the light of the role they can play in accessing information and knowledge, and in the promotion of peace, unity and development in rural communities.

The Prime Minister was speaking in Maputo during a working visit to the government's Mass Communications Institute (ICS), which runs a network of 55 community radios.

Coverage of the entire country by the ICS network, however, will need another 99 community radio stations. At a meeting with the ICS staff, Rosario was faced with complaints about inadequate government funding, low wages and obsolete equipment. The outside partners who once assisted the ICS have reduced their support, and the subvention from the state budget is meagre.

Delivering a message from all the workers, ICS staff member Belmiro Timoteo said "the financial difficulties are reflected, above all, in the work of the journalists, who, for lack of funds, cannot travel regularly to the various districts of the country, where they ought to be gathering and researching in depth the news and other information of interest to the rural communities and to the public in general".

Much of this meeting took place behind closed doors, but at the end Emilia Moiane, director of the government press office (Gabinfo), told reporters that Rosario had given Gabinfo and the ICS 15 days to produce a matrix of answers to the main concerns raised by the workers, which were regarded as legitimate problems.

Cahora Bassa produces more power than forecast

Despite low levels of water in the Zambezi River, the Cahora Bassa dam, in the western province of Tete, generated more electricity than planned in the first quarter of this year.

According to Hidroelectrica de Cahora Bassa (HCB), the company that operates the dam, between January and March Cahora Bassa produced 3,433,504 megawatt-hours of electricity. This was 1.61 per cent more than was planned for the period.

There was less rainfall than hoped in the Zambezi basin in the 2017/2018 rainy season. As a result, on 15 April (the day HCB regards as the end of the rainy season) the elevation of the reservoir behind the dam was 320.04 metres above sea level. This is four metres lower than the desired elevation. This means there has not been enough water to run the Cahora Bassa power station at full capacity. Throughout the period, Cahora Bassa has used only four of its five giant turbines, each capable of generating 415 megawatts.

HCB says it is "continuing to observe and analyse meteorological and hydrological information for eventual adjustments". The company adds that it is accelerating capital expenditure to restore and modernise its equipment in order to ensure that it remains "operational and efficient, in accordance with the installed capacity, over the long-term".

Charges brought against timber smugglers

Prosecutors in the northern province of Cabo Delgado have charged the Chinese-owned company MOFID (Mozambique First International Development Ltd) with contraband, involving the attempted illegal export of 47 containers that were found to contain 1,125 logs of various species of precious hardwoods.

The crime was discovered well over a decade ago, on 17 January 2006. On the basis of an anonymous tip-off, the authorities opened the containers that were stored in the port of Pemba, the provincial capital, waiting to be exported to China.

The Cabo Delgado provincial attorney's office has not explained why it took so long to bring charges in such an open and shut case of trafficking in timber.

It has long been suspected that senior officials were involved in the looting of Mozambican forests, and facilitated illegal logging, much of it done by Chinese companies. This attitude has changed under the current government, which has slapped an outright ban on all exports of unprocessed logs.

The Minister of Land, Environment and Rural Development, Celso Correia, has spearheaded a drive to clamp down on environmental crimes. In last year's "Operation Trunk", around 150,000 cubic metres of illicitly logged timber was seized from timber yards across northern and central Mozambique.

Malaria deaths fall

The health authorities say they have improved the effectiveness of treatments against malaria, leading to a sharp drop in the number of deaths from the disease, despite an increase in the number of malaria cases. The statistics from the Ministry of Health show that the number of malaria deaths fell from 2,467 in 2015, to 1,685 in 2016, and to 1,114 in 2017.

Speaking in Maputo on 25 April, on the occasion of World Malaria Day, Health Minister Nazira Abdula, explained that the fall in the number of deaths was due to speedy medical intervention in the health units, better diagnosis and greater effectiveness of the anti-malaria treatments.

The number of malaria cases, however, had risen steadily, from 6,418,526 in 2015, to 8,520,376 in 2016, to 9,981,277 in 2017. Thus between 2016 and 2017 the number of diagnosed malaria cases rose by 17 per cent, while the number of deaths fell by 34 per cent.

The rise in malaria cases "is a matter of great concern to the Mozambican government", said Abdula. Her ministry, she said, is banking on rapid diagnostic tests and artemisinin combination therapy. The tests and the medicines are now available down to community level, said the Minister, allowing village health workers "to diagnose and treat simple malaria cases, thus reducing the number of serious cases, mortality and the consequences caused by this disease".

United States Ambassador Dean Pittman told the ceremony that this year the US government will support Mozambique in the acquisition and distribution of over 1.6 million mosquito nets.

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