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Closure of Hulene dump within 60 days

The Minister of Land, Environment and Rural Development, Celso Correia, declared on 26 February that the government will announce the closure of the rubbish dump in the neighbourhood of Hulene within the next 60 days. Correia was speaking at a press conference in Maputo a week after the collapse of part of the Hulene dump, which overwhelmed seven houses and killed 18 people.

Correia stressed that the government intends to guarantee security at Hulene, even after the dump has been closed. “A fence will be built around the dump that will prevent people from entering that place”, he said.

For years, the municipal authorities in Maputo and the neighbouring city of Matola have promised to build a new, modern landfill in the Matola neighbourhood of Matlemele, to accommodate the solid waste from both cities.

But Correia admitted that the Matlemele landfill will not be ready for another year. In the meantime, another landfill will be used, but the Minister did not say where. He expected this temporary solution to operate for about eight months until the Matlemele landfill is ready.

Over 120 families who had lived in the immediate vicinity of the Hulene dump are currently receiving assistance at the accommodation centre set up by Maputo Municipal Council in the Ferroviario neighbourhood.

But other families are still living in the shadow of the 50 metre high dump, and are refusing to move, despite the nauseating stench, and the danger of further collapses. They make their living out of scavenging: they scour the dump for anything usable. Some of them proudly told the independent television station STV that they collect plastic from the dump and sell it to Chinese buyers for between five and seven meticais (between eight and 12 US cents) a kilo.

The government wants to resettle them all. “Sixty hectares has been identified for the resettlement of these families”, said Correia. “We know that some families see a source of income in the dump. We are concerned to guarantee that in the new zone they will also have a source of income”.

To ensure that people do not return to the dump, he added, the government is sending inspectors to Hulene.

Meanwhile the Public Prosecutor’s Office has announced that it will take the Municipal Council to court over the Hulene deaths. A representative of the Public Prosecutor told STV that prosecutors are looking at the case in detail to assess whether the council should be charged with criminal, or merely civil or administrative responsibility for the disaster.

President Nyusi discusses military matters with Dhlakama

President Filipe Nyusi on 19 February met with the leader of the opposition party Renamo, Afonso Dhlakama, in the central district of Gorongosa, where Dhlakama has been living since late 2015, to discuss military questions.

According to a press release from the President’s office, the meeting took place at Namadjiwa, 40 kilometres from Gorongosa town.

The two men discussed “military matters, specifically disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration” (of the members of Renamo’s militia).

The release added “we praised the report from the Military Affairs Commission and clarified the steps to be taken in the incorporation of the Renamo officers”. That incorporation, together with the disarming and demobilisation of the Renamo militia “will allow an end to military hostilities and will open a new era for an effective and lasting peace”.

President Nyusi did not specifically mention Dhlakama’s demand that leadership positions in the armed forces (FADM) and in the police should be given to Renamo officers. But he promised that the detailed conclusions on the progress so far will be made public “at an opportune moment”.

The statement concluded with the reaffirmation that President Nyusi and Dhlakama are working closely “to put an end to the armed conflict forever, and to lay the bases for a prosperous and secure Mozambique for all Mozambicans”.

This was the second face-to-face contact between President Nyusi and Dhlakama since the Renamo leader declared a truce on 27 December 2016. The first such meeting was in August 2017. Most of the discussions between the two leaders have been by phone.

In early 2017, two working groups were set up between the government and Renamo – one on decentralisation and one on military questions. The discussions on decentralisation, held secretly and with no input from other political and social forces, led to a series of constitutional amendments, which President Nyusi has tabled before the country’s parliament, the Assembly of the Republic.

Dhlakama had always focused on the election, rather than appointment, of provincial governors as the key aspect of decentralisation. It was therefore a surprise when the constitutional amendments also proposed the abolition of directly elected mayors of municipalities, and the creation of district assemblies that would choose district administrators. Neither of these points had even been mentioned in public before.

The amendments, if passed, will strengthen the power of political party machines. Assemblies will be elected in the municipalities, provinces and districts, and whichever party or group that wins the most votes in these elections will choose the mayor, provincial governor or district administrator.

Bar Association calls for public discussion on constitutional amendments

The chairperson of the Mozambican Bar Association (OAM) Flavio Menete, on 1 March called for a serious national public debate on the proposed constitutional amendments arising from the negotiations between the government and the opposition party Renamo on decentralisation.

President Filipe Nyusi announced the consensus between the government and Renamo on 7 February, and he then deposited a set of constitutional amendments with the country's parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, to be debated during the parliamentary sitting that began on 28 February. Renamo has insisted on the speedy passage of the amendments, with, the head of the Renamo parliamentary group, Ivone Soares, saying that she hoped to see the amendments passed by late May.

Speaking at the Maputo ceremony opening the 2018 judicial year, Menete warned against treating such serious matters hastily. He insisted there should be a wide-ranging public debate to discuss how the government/Renamo consensus could be put into legal form, "otherwise we would be excluding relevant sensitivities, and run the risk of leaving out factors that might endanger peace".

"If we want to defend the rule of law, in which the broad participation by everyone is fundamental, we cannot accept that Mozambicans are not heard", he said.

Menete pointed out that the Constitution states that draft constitutional amendments should be deposited in the Assembly up to 90 days before the start of any parliamentary debate on them. But these amendments were deposited on 9 February, and discussion of them in the Assembly's Legal and Constitutional Affairs Commission began almost immediately.

Menete insisted that the proposals should only be analysed by the Assembly "after a profound reflection of the matter during the 90 days imposed by the constitution, so that we do not run the risk of adopting precipitate and inconsistent solutions that are likely to generate conflicts in the future".

He warned that certain proposals in the draft text might threaten the country's development. For example, the creation of District Assemblies could prove enormously expensive, given that the country has over 150 districts.

Menete also objected to the impossibility of independent candidates running for mayor in the municipal elections. This is because, if the current proposals are approved, the direct election of mayors will be abolished. Instead whichever party wins a majority of votes in the municipal assembly election will appoint the mayor.

Attorney-General Beatriz Buchili told the ceremony it is urgent that the justice system should promote an environment of peace and of respect for the rights and freedoms of citizens. This was a factor that would stimulate investment.

She demanded the adoption of legal mechanisms that would promote speedy procedures in the courts, promoting an impartial and credible system, which would fight relentlessly against all forms of crime and corruption.

Corruption, Buchili said, is one of the obstacles preventing the correct functioning of public institutions, and constrains the country's economic development. She warned that corruption has sunk roots inside institutions and society.

Corruption had extended its tentacles inside the judicial system itself, she accused, which was often why courts were so slow to deal with criminal cases. "Justice that serves economic and social development presupposes the removal of obstacles, such as the excessive number of procedures and conditions demanded for access to justice", said Buchili.

Over a hundred vultures poisoned in Moamba

A poacher deliberately poisoned at least 104 vultures on 24 February, at Mbashene, in Moamba district, about 70 kilometres north of Maputo. Several species of vultures were killed. According to the National Administration of Conservation Areas (ANAC), 80 were white-backed vultures (*Gyps Africanus*) and 17 were hooded vultures (*Necrosyrtes monachus*), both of which are endangered in Mozambique.

The poacher, 62-year-old Nelson Machel, is accused of putting the poison on the body of an elephant killed for its tusks. The vultures flocked to the carcass and were poisoned.

Machel was found in possession of two elephant tusks and a flask of the poison. He confessed to poisoning the vultures, but denied killing the three elephants found at Mbashene. Several of the birds were mutilated, which suggests the extraction of vulture body parts for use in superstitious rituals.

The Mozambican Environmental Protection police unit (PPRMNA) arrested Machel the day after the poisoning in the Moamba village of Tombine-Sabie, and he is being held at the Moamba district police command.

A wildlife veterinary doctor from South Africa's Kruger National Park, and a vet from the Sabie Game Park, Joao Simoes de Almeida, were called in to help administer an antidote to save the lives of the 17 surviving vultures.

ANAC warned that this incident draws attention to the growing threat of poison used by poachers to kill wildlife. Vultures are a key part of the ecosystem, but are in serious trouble. Some African vulture species have declined by 80 per cent over the past three decades.

Maputo bus fares rise

Maputo Municipal Council on 27 February announced the long-awaited increase in fares for public transport (both for buses, and for the privately-owned minibuses commonly known as "chapas").

As from 5 March, the fare for journeys of up to ten kilometres rises by 43 per cent for distances of up to ten kilometres, from seven to ten meticaís (from 11.5 to 16.4 US cents). For distances of between 10 and 20 kilometres the rise is 33 per cent, from nine to 12 meticaís.

The Council had promised transport operators repeatedly last year that fares would be increased. But it was reluctant to make such an announcement, fully aware that twice in the recent past fare rises have sparked off rioting in Maputo.

The chairperson of the Maputo Association of Road Transporters (ATROMAP), Baptista Mucavele, told reporters that authorisation for a fare increase was welcome – but that the new fares will still not cover the costs of passenger transport. He claimed that studies show the ideal fare should be 25 meticaís.

The transport operators have repeatedly claimed they cannot make any profit unless fares are increased – yet most of them keep their vehicles on the roads.

The government used to subsidise the diesel used by the operators – but last year announced that this type of subsidy is being phased out to be replaced by providing the businesses with new buses at subsidised prices. About a month ago the government delivered 38 buses to the Mozambican Association of Road Transporters which in turn allocated them to operators running routes in Maputo and the neighbouring city of Matola.

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

Freight tariffs on Nacala – Lichinga line reduced

The Mozambican government has negotiated a significant reduction in the cost of transporting goods by rail from the northern port of Nacala to Lichinga, the capital of Niassa province. Previously the operator of the line, the private-led consortium, the Northern Development Corridor (CDN), charged 2,900 meticaís (US\$47.5) per tonne for goods carried from Nacala to Lichinga. This was a major disappointment for Niassa businesses, who claimed this meant it was cheaper to move goods by road from Nacala, despite the poor state of the roads in Niassa.

Indeed, in December CDN announced that goods trains from Nacala to Lichinga would no longer run, because there was not enough cargo going in the opposite direction.

The branch line to Lichinga leaves the main northern rail corridor at the town of Cuamba. Rehabilitation of the 262 kilometre long Cuamba-Lichinga line was completed in late 2016, after years of complete paralysis due to the degraded state of the line.

Passenger services resumed almost at once, but the goods trains were only reintroduced on 16 June. Less than six months later, a CDN manager was claiming there was not enough traffic back to Nacala to make the service worthwhile.

But businessmen in Lichinga said the problem was one of cost, and that they would not use the CDN wagons until the tariffs were reduced. As a result, the Cuamba-Lichinga branch line was only being used by passenger trains.

This was not a tolerable situation, since the whole point of rehabilitating the Cuamba-Lichinga railway was to make the circulation of goods to and from Niassa cheaper.

Therefore, on 27 February, at the end of the weekly meeting of the Council of Ministers (Cabinet), the government spokesperson, Deputy Education Minister Armindo Ngunga, announced that the government had negotiated a reduction in the CDN tariff to 2,150 meticaís a tonne – a cut of 26 per cent.

Bank of Mozambique lowers interest rates

The Bank of Mozambique on 26 February lowered its benchmark interest rates by 150 base points.

A statement from the Bank's Monetary Policy Committee (CPMO), said that the new interest rate, introduced in April 2017, the Interbank Money Market Rate (MIMO), falls from 19.5 to 18 per cent. The Standing Lending Facility (the interest rate paid by the commercial banks to the central bank for money borrowed on the Interbank Money Market) falls from 20.5 to 19 per cent, and the Standing Deposit Facility (the rate paid by the central bank to the commercial banks on money they deposit with it) falls from 14 to 12.5 per cent.

Speaking at a Maputo press conference, the governor of the Bank of Mozambique, Rogerio Zandamela, said that the fall in inflation justified the cut in interest rates. Annual inflation in January (1 February 2017 to 31 January 2018) was just 3.84 per cent. This is a dramatic turn-around from the situation a year ago: in January 2017, the annual rate of inflation was 20.56 per cent. Zandamela was confident that inflation will remain low (less than 10 per cent) for the rest of the year.

The governor described the performance of the economy in 2017 as "moderate", with a GDP growth rate of 3.7 per cent. He took some comfort from the fact that this is higher than the average growth rate for the SADC (Southern African Development Community) region, which is 2.8 per cent.

One alarming factor is that the Mozambican currency, the metical, is now under strong pressure. The metical declined from 58.92 to the US dollar on 16 January to 61.39 to the dollar

on 23 February. Against the South African rand, the metical fell from 4.78 to the rand in mid-January to 5.28 on 23 February.

Zandamela said the exchange rate pressure reflected "the volatility of the main currencies on the international market", and the greater opening to capital flows envisaged in recently adopted exchange regulations.

The rand has been rising against all other currencies, doubtless because markets had reacted to the fall of South African President Jacob Zuma and his replacement by Cyril Ramaphosa. But, given the large amount of food imported from South Africa, the rise in the rand could increase the Mozambican inflation rate.

Zandamela brushed this aside as "a correction resulting from political change". If goods from South Africa became too expensive, "we will have to buy them from somewhere else", he said.

From the beginning of the year to mid-February, Mozambique's net international reserves declined by US\$96.3 million, due to the central bank's sale of dollars on the Interbank Exchange Market (largely to pay for imported fuels), and to servicing the foreign debt.

The country's international reserves now stand at US\$3.188 billion, enough to cover seven months imports of goods and non-factor services (excluding the imports of the foreign investment mega-projects).

Zandamela expressed concern at the rise in the government's domestic debt (largely through the sale of high interest bearing treasury bills and bonds). This domestic debt rose from 98 billion meticaís in December to 104.6 billion in February.

He warned that this "raises questions of sustainability", since the government could not expect the commercial banks and other buyers to go on purchasing government debt indefinitely.

EDM suffers losses from theft and sabotage

The publicly owned electricity company, EDM, suffered losses of 5.3 million meticaís (US\$87,000) last year as a result of theft and sabotage of electrical equipment in the central province of Manica.

According to the Manica provincial EDM delegate, Eduardo Pinto, 14 transformer stations were sabotaged in order to extract oil. Electric cables were torn down and metallic parts removed from pylons, in order to melt the metal down and make saucers out of them for sale. "This is a lot of money", said Pinto. "which would be enough to provide electricity to hundreds of families".

He stressed that all citizens should be involved in fighting the thefts. "The most important factor is vigilance", said Pinto. "Citizens should sound the alert whenever they suspect any theft, because all of us are harmed by this. Families remain in the dark and many activities come to a halt. So all of us must work together against this evil".

Pinto made his appeal shortly after the police presented to the public six individuals accused of the theft of electrical material in Manica. The six confessed – but said they had stolen the equipment in Zimbabwe, not in Mozambique. They said they sold the stolen goods to a company in Beira.

A police press officer, Mateus Mindu, said that it was denunciation from the members of the public that allowed the police to arrest this group.

"We believe there are more people involved in this scheme", he said. "We are working to arrest them and bring them to justice. But this can only happen if we are all vigilant and report the criminals".

Sweden to continue funding university research

The Mozambican and Swedish governments have signed an agreement under which Sweden will finance the research activities of the country's oldest university, the Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM), for the next five years to the tune of 335 million Swedish crowns (US\$44 million).

A joint press statement issued by the Swedish Embassy and the UEM said that the agreement, signed on 6 February, is intended to develop new masters' and doctoral programmes at the university, and strengthen those that already exist.

The programme will be implemented in collaboration with Swedish and South African universities, and will contribute to training 233 students on masters' courses, 100 Ph.Ds, and 16 on post-doctoral courses.

"The objective", the release said, "is to train and develop research and supervision skills of workers at the UEM and other high education institutions".

UEM students and researchers, it adds, "will work in research teams to provide knowledge and solutions to multi-faceted development problems identified by the UEM in five areas". These are population and health; agriculture, nutrition and food security; natural resources, environment and climate change; technology and innovation; and education, culture, good governance, ethics and human rights.

Sweden has supported the UEM since 1978, and the university's Vice-Chancellor, Orlando Quilambo, cited by the release, said the Swedish support "has contributed considerably to training teachers and researchers, equipping laboratories, and improving the research environment".

"With the institutional capacity created, thanks to the support of partners and donors, including the Mozambican government, the UEM is striving to embrace new challenges, and scale new heights", he added.

Swedish ambassador Marie Andersson de Frutos said that Sweden's own development and competitiveness "are based on scientific research and innovations. Based on this, Sweden has a long and successful partnership with the UEM going back 40 years".

Swedish support, she added, "will continue contributing towards building the research capacity of the university and of the country in general. Collaboration with the UEM seeks to build institutional capacity to ensure that research of a high standard is undertaken at the university, and that Mozambican scientists can produce knowledge that covers the country's essential needs".

Portugal donates speedboats to navy

The Portuguese Defence Ministry on 19 February donated ten speedboats to the Mozambican navy, under the military cooperation agreement between the two countries.

This was the first act covered by a new agreement signed in Maputo earlier in the day by Mozambican Defence Minister Atanasio M'tumuke and his Portuguese counterpart, Jose Azeredo Lopes.

The ten speedboats cost €40,000 (US\$50,000) and each can

carry a maximum of five people. Speaking at the ceremony, M'tumuke said this support consolidates the existing bilateral cooperation in the military area. He said the boats should assist the navy, particularly in moving equipment to and from larger vessels.

"This is a gesture that continues cooperation which began in 2012", he added. He stressed that the presence of Mozambican soldiers undergoing training in Portugal, and of Portuguese instructors in Mozambican military academies shows the interest of the two countries in boosting military cooperation.

Lopes said the speedboats will contribute to Mozambique's maritime security, and were an expression of common values, notably the obligation "to protect each of our countries from the increasing threats and challenges that we are facing in the 21st century".

Anadarko to sell LNG to French company

The American oil and gas company Anadarko Petroleum on 20 February announced that the consortium it heads, exploiting the natural gas resources in offshore Area One of the Rovuma Basin, in northern Mozambique, has entered into a long-term Sale and Purchase Agreement (SPA) for liquefied natural gas (LNG) with Électricité de France, S.A., (EDF).

Under this agreement, the consortium (known as Mozambique LNG1 Company Pte. Ltd) will supply EDF with 1.2 million tonnes of LNG a year for a period of 15 years.

According to Anadarko's Executive Vice President Mitch Ingram, "EDF is one of the world's largest electric utilities, and reaching this SPA continues to validate Mozambique LNG's position as a competitive long-term LNG supplier and as one of the world's leading greenfield projects".

"Mozambique LNG", he continued, "is unique in its ability to supply LNG to a variety of geographic locations to serve its customers, and this SPA gives us flexible access to Europe, which is one of our key strategic markets. The EDF sale is included in the portfolio of sales of more than five million tonnes per annum for which we have agreed key terms, and we continue to advance additional off-take arrangements".

The LNG for the deal with EDF will come from the Golfinho and Atum gas fields located entirely inside Area One. The gas will be processed in two plants (known as "trains"), that will be built onshore, on the Afungi Peninsula, in the district of Palma, in Cabo Delgado province. The total capacity of these two trains, Anadarko says, will be 12.88 million tonnes of LNG a year.

The Area One consortium consists of Anadarko with a 26.5 per cent stake, Mitsui of Japan (20 per cent), PTTEP of Thailand (8.5 per cent), the Indian companies ONG Videsh, Beas Energy Rovuma and BRPL Ventures Mozambique (10 per cent each), and Mozambique's own National Hydrocarbon Company (15 per cent).

Anadarko will not be the first company to liquefy and export Mozambican natural gas. The Italian energy firm ENI and its partners are building a floating LNG facility directly above the Coral South gas field in Rovuma Basin Area Four, which is expected to export its first LNG by 2022.

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