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SADC extends military mission to Mozambique

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has noted the good progress made in the fight against terrorism in the northern Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado since the deployment of the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and decided to extend the mission's mandate with the associated budgetary implications.

The decision is included in the final communiqué from the SADC Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government, held on 12 January in the Malawian capital, Lilongwe. The communiqué also approved the framework for support to Mozambique in addressing terrorism which outlines, among others, actions for consolidating peace, security, and the socio-economic recovery of Cabo Delgado.

The final statement from the summit did not say how long the SAMIM mandate will be extended for – but, according to a report in the Maputo daily “Noticias”, the extension will initially be for a period of three months, with a budget of US\$29.5 million.

Addressing the opening session of the summit, the current SADC Chairperson, Malawian President Lazarus Chakwera, urged regional bloc member states to stick together and ensure that SAMIM remains multidimensional and comprehensive.

He pointed out that the collective mission in Mozambique is paramount and ongoing, and the stakes for all the Member States are high because they are fighting for regional stability.

Chakwera welcomed the comprehensive Cabo Delgado Reconstruction Plan launched by his Mozambican counterpart Filipe Nyusi which seeks to provide humanitarian support to the affected population, including internally displaced persons, and uplift living standards.

Speaking at a press conference after the summit, Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi said the meeting had also dealt with the need to build up the capacity of the Mozambican defence and security forces. He was optimistic about the current military situation in Cabo Delgado and said that all the bases from which the terrorists used to plan their actions are now in the hands of the Mozambican forces.

African Development Bank support for agro-industrial processing

The African Development Bank (ADB) has approved a grant of US\$47 million for Mozambique's Pamba-Lichinga Integrated Development Corridor.

The development corridor, running across northern Mozambique, is a Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zone intended to stimulate agricultural production and help small scale farmers to move out of subsistence farming through providing infrastructure, marketing, and training.

According to a statement from the Bank, the grant will support the first phase of the project which will improve agricultural productivity and agribusiness development in the northern province of Niassa and will focus on institutional capacity, skills, and entrepreneurship to spur growth in the agricultural value chain.

The project will also pilot improved policy and development coordination between the authorities in Niassa province and national departments, especially with the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Commenting on the approval of the grant by the Bank's board of directors, Minister of Industry and Trade, Carlos Mesquita, described the project as a "game-changer" that would transform the economy, promote social inclusion, and foster peace by tackling important factors such as development infrastructure.

The Bank's Country Manager for Mozambique, Cesar Augusto Mba Abogo, highlighted the importance of Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones as a shared facility to enable agricultural producers, processors, aggregators, and distributors to operate in the same neighbourhood to reduce transaction costs, share business development services and increase productivity and competitiveness.

The African Development Bank financed its first project in Mozambique in 1977 and since then has focussed on supporting projects covering agriculture, transport, water and sanitation, energy, communications, mining, and finance.

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

Pequenos Libombos reservoir filling up

The reservoir behind the Pequenos Libombos dam on the Umbeluzi River, in Maputo province, is filling up rapidly requiring an increase in discharges.

The reservoir can hold 400 million cubic metres of water and as of 10 January it contained 350.74 million cubic metres. Water has been pouring down the Umbeluzi into southern Mozambique from Eswatini, where a dam has reached the limits of its capacity.

The director of the Pequenos Libombos dam, Jaime Timbe, told reporters that the dam has doubled its discharges, from 60 to 120 cubic metres a second. It will maintain this level of discharge for 72 hours to create space in the reservoir to receive the water entering from upstream.

The discharges will mean flooding on the lower Umbeluzi and in Boane district the road from the district capital to outlying villages is already impassable.

Nonetheless, the sight of the reservoir approaching near capacity must bring a sigh of relief from Maputo water supply officials as in recent years the problem with the Pequenos Libombos reservoir has been too little water, not too much.

The Umbeluzi is the main source of drinking water for the Greater Maputo Metropolitan Area and when the level of the reservoir fell to below 20 per cent water rationing systems had to be enforced. But, at its current level, said Timba, the reservoir can provide water for irrigation in the Umbeluzi valley and drinking water for Maputo, Matola and the surrounding area for the next four years.

Price of wheat flour set to rise

One of the main food processing companies in Mozambique, Companhia Industrial de Matola (CIM), has announced an 11 per cent increase in the price of wheat flour, leading to fears that the price of bread will now rise, reports the independent newsheet "Mediafax" on 12 January.

CIM announced that a 50-kilo sack of wheat flour, which used to cost 1,800 meticaais (about US\$28 at the current exchange rate), will cost 2,000 meticaais from 15 January. To justify the increase, CIM cited the increase in the world market price of wheat and increased fuel and energy prices.

Mozambican bakers had already been complaining of rising costs, and the CIM announcement appears to make an increase in the price of bread almost inevitable.

However, the chairperson of the Mozambican Bakers' Association (Amopao), Victor Miguel, promised that there will be no increase in bread prices this month. He said Amopao is studying the implications of the CIM announcement and waiting to see whether, as expected, the other milling companies follow suit.

Miguel said that the bakers might increase the price of bread in late February or March when negotiations begin between the government, trade unions, and employers' associations about the 2022 increase in the statutory minimum wage.

AT collects 287 billion meticaais in tax revenue

The Mozambican Tax Authority (AT) collected more than 278 billion meticaais (about US\$4.3 billion, at the current exchange rate), during 2021, which was 105 per cent of the target figure of 265 billion meticaais.

Addressing the opening session of a meeting of the AT Board of Directors in Maputo on 10 January, the AT Chairperson, Amelia Muendane, said that domestic taxes had contributed 204 billion meticaais, amounting to 77 per cent of the total tax revenue, while taxes on foreign trade had raised 74 billion, or 23 per cent.

Muendane stated that taxes on incomes (both the profit tax and personal income tax) reached 104.74 per cent of the target, while Value Added Tax (VAT) collected was 101 per cent of the target. The tax on petroleum activities brought in 124.46 per cent of the target, driven by growing demand for energy following the resumption of economic activity.

On the other hand, the strengthening of internal control systems and the fight against corruption led to disciplinary proceedings against 57 officials: 13 of these were sacked or expelled, 19 were demoted, 14 were fined, four were given public reprimands and seven were acquitted.

As for this year, Muendane declared that the AT plans to reach the annual target of 293 billion meticaais in tax revenue, which would be a growth of about six per cent.

Illicit import racket shut down by authorities

The Public Prosecutor's Office announced on 17 January that it has uncovered a racket whereby customs exemptions worth US\$18.6 million were illicitly issued to import goods supposedly for the benefit of people displaced from their homes by terrorist raids in the northern province of Cabo Delgado.

Key to the scheme was a customs clearance agent who submitted requests for exemption from customs duties for the import of second-hand clothes and printed fabrics that would be donated to the victims of terrorism. But in reality the imported goods were not used to benefit any displaced people in Cabo Delgado. Instead, the documents facilitated the duty free importation of a wide range of goods, including vehicles.

This network of corruption, the prosecutors said, included senior customs staff, customs clearance agents, and businesspeople of Indian, Pakistani, and Lebanese origin.

The members of this network defrauded the Mozambican state of 1.209 billion meticaais (over US\$18 million at the current exchange rate). They invested the money in shops, vehicle sales stands, luxury cars, and the building of hotels, condominiums, and tourism resorts.

Prosecutors have now confiscated some of the cars and other assets acquired, and some of the remaining money.

The note says that charges have been laid against the suspects but does not name any of them.

Maputo study on cutting mother to child transmission of hepatitis B

A study carried out in Maputo has shown that antenatal departments can cut the transmission of the hepatitis B virus (HBV) from mother to child through integrating vaccination at birth into standard procedures.

Published in the Bulletin of the World Health Organisation, the study, carried out by Mozambique's Ministry of Health and Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF – Doctors without Borders) points out that vaccination at birth has been recommended by WHO since 2004 to protect infants from vertical and horizontal transmission. However, it laments that global coverage remains low, especially in low-resource settings.

It also notes that WHO recommends simultaneous measures to stop the transmission from mother to child of hepatitis B, HIV, and syphilis (known as the triple elimination strategy) and stresses that “an integrated approach to these three preventable diseases would be an efficient use of resources and would improve the impact in existing antenatal care”.

According to the study, there is a large variation in data on the prevalence of hepatitis B in Mozambique, with research showing that it has been found in 4.5 per cent of women donating blood and in 12.2 per cent of young adults infected with HIV. This compares with a prevalence rate of 15.2 per cent in adult women living with HIV and two per cent for syphilis.

Since 2017, the health ministry has had a policy of implementing interventions against the transmission of HIV and syphilis from mother to child but has not yet added action against hepatitis B.

This was the year when the health ministry joined with MSF in piloting interventions to reduce the prevalence of HBV in new-borns. Between November 2017 and September 2019, it added hepatitis B into the existing screening programme for HIV and syphilis for pregnant women at their first antenatal consultation at the Chamanculo General Hospital in Maputo.

Over seven thousand women took part in the study in the antenatal care and maternity unit and they were followed until nine months after delivery. After screening, it was found that 217 babies were exposed to the virus, and 181 of these received a dose of the vaccine against hepatitis B at birth. At the nine month follow up it was found that only one of the 134 infants tested had the virus.

The conclusion from the study is that nurse-led interventions can be integrated into existing antenatal care departments. As a result, the pilot programme is expected to inform national programmes and policies and will support the adoption of the triple elimination strategy by Mozambique and other low-income countries.

Hepatitis B remains a public health threat worldwide, affecting 240 million people and causing an estimated 650,000 deaths each year.

The risk of developing chronic HBV infection is strongly linked to the age at exposure, varying from

approximately 90 per cent in infants below the age of one to 50 per cent in children aged between one and five, and just five per cent in adults. It is estimated that 367,250 new-borns in sub-Saharan countries are infected with HBV.

In 2016 the World Health Organisation endorsed a global strategy to eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030.

Two judges expelled for corruption

The Higher Council of the Judicial Magistracy (CSMJ), the regulatory body for the law courts, has expelled two judges from the profession for corrupt behaviour, reports “Carta De Moçambique” on 7 January.

The best-known case, decided by the CSMJ at a plenary session held in late December in the southern resort of Ponta de Ouro, concerned Rui Dauane of the Maputo City Court, whom the CSMJ sacked and forced into compulsory retirement.

He was accused of lack of seriousness and honesty and of violating the ethical duties expected of a judge. Dauane was involved in several controversial cases, but the most serious was his release of Edith D'Compta da Camara Cylindo. She was accused of participating in the kidnapping of businesspeople in 2017, but Dauane set her free. According to the CSMJ, he ignored the evidence against her and ordered her release in violation of the Penal Procedural Code. Attempts to re-arrest her so that she could face charges of money laundering were foiled because once released she could not be located.

Cylindo was eventually brought to trial in a separate court, the Maputo provincial court, sitting in Matola, for her involvement in the assassination in 2016 of prominent prosecutor Marcelino Vilanculos.

The prosecution argued that she provided the death squad with information on the movements of Vilanculos. Not only did she follow the prosecutor's car, but she also photographed Vilanculos and gave the photos to the man who led the death squad, Jose Ali Coutinho. According to the prosecution, after the murder, Coutinho paid Cylindo 500,000 meticais (about US\$8,400 at the exchange rate of the time).

Initially, Cylindo was acquitted for lack of evidence tying her to the killing. But the prosecution appealed against Cylindo's acquittal – and won. The appeals court threw out the original verdict and sentenced Cylindo to 22 years imprisonment. Her behaviour, the court found, had facilitated the murder. She had participated in an act that contributed directly to the preparation and execution of the crime.

The CSMJ also expelled from the judicial profession Acacio Mitalage, a judge in the Matutuine district court in Maputo province. He was accused of stealing over 3.7 million meticais (about US\$58,000 at the current exchange rate) from the funds of the Matutuine court.

In addition to expelling Mitalage, the CSMJ has remitted the case to the Public Prosecutor's Office, for criminal proceedings against him.

INGC ready to respond to flooding

The Mozambican government's relief agency, the National Institute for Disaster Risk Management (INGC), has confirmed that it is ready to intervene in the event of floods during the current rainy season.

Interviewed by Radio Mozambique, INGC chairperson Luisa Meque, on a visit to the southern province of Gaza, praised the level of readiness of the teams set up to act in the event of flooding in Chokwe district.

Gaza, she said, is organised with the positioning of search and rescue teams, early warning equipment, and the availability of tents, boats, and other logistical requirements.

"In the places visited, we noted some dikes that need maintenance to prevent water from reaching Chokwe city if there is any flooding", said Meque. "But in general, we are working at a good pace in terms of monitoring the province".

Meque encouraged staff of the Emergency Operational Committee (COE) to ensure that appropriate conditions are created to prevent flooding similar to that which occurred in 2000. That was the year of Mozambique's worst post-independence floods, when every major river in the south of the country burst its banks, causing hundreds of deaths and massive destruction. Gaza was particularly badly hit, with the entire Limpopo Valley underwater.

Meque also noted the high level of interventions undertaken by the Gaza provincial government to reduce the risk of natural disasters.

At this stage in the 2020-2021 rainy season, torrential rain had already inundated some parts of Gaza, "but we note that this year those areas are not inundated", said Meque, "which means we are controlling the water storage system".

The Mozambican rainy season begins in October and ends in March the following year. January and February are usually the wettest months.

So far during the current rainy season, storms and heavy rains have affected over 47,000 people. But most of these (over 26,000 people) are in Maputo city, where the failure of the municipal council to provide a decent drainage system means that every year low lying neighbourhoods are inundated.

HCB plans to produce 14,228 gigawatt-hours in 2022

The company Hidroelectrica de Cahora Bassa (HCB), which operates the Cahora Bassa dam on the Zambezi River, in the western province of Tete, has announced that it plans to produce 14,228 gigawatt-hours of electricity in 2022.

A press release from HCB said that this target takes into account planned stoppages for maintenance and the rehabilitation of the generating facilities.

In 2021, HCB produced 14,990 gigawatt-hours, which was 6.2 per cent higher than the target planned for the year, but two per cent lower than production in 2020.

The availability of water should be no problem for HCB this year. As of 31 December, the level of the Cahora Bassa reservoir was 320.01 metres above sea level – which means that the reservoir was 72 per cent full.

Record year for Kenmare Resources

The Irish company Kenmare Resources on 13 January reported that last year it produced record levels of titanium minerals and zircon at its mine at Moma, on the coast of the northern Mozambican province of Nampula.

During 2021 the mine produced a record 1.12 million tonnes of ilmenite, which was a 48 per cent increase on 2020. It also increased the output of zircon to 56,300 tonnes, a thirty per cent growth over the previous year. Rutile production was up by 48 per cent to 8,900 tonnes.

The company also set a record for safety at the mine with no time being lost due to workers being injured during the year to 6 January 2022.

The benefits of the increased production were boosted by higher average prices for all of its products during 2021 due to strong demand and low inventories of ilmenite in the global supply chain.

The company's results might have been even better had it not been hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Kenmare, in the first half of the year there were personnel shortages, including of senior management, which impacted on ilmenite production.

From the second half of December onwards many employees were affected during the country's fourth wave of the pandemic. Kenmare reports that the number of employees in isolation on-site following a positive test result rose as high as 326 on 6 January 2022 but this has since reduced to 168 on 11 January 2022.

By the end of the year, 96 per cent of the company's employees had received two doses of the Covid-19 vaccine, and 12,000 doses were donated for local people.

The company's achievements in this difficult period were noted by Managing Director Michael Carvill, who commented, "I would like to thank all of our team for contributing to this fantastic result, particularly in light of the huge challenges we experienced from Covid-19 in the first quarter".

Ilmenite and rutile are used to make white pigments for paints, paper, and plastic. Titanium can be extracted from these ores and used to manufacture metallic parts where light weight and high strength are needed. Zircon is used for abrasive and insulating purposes.

Police arrest Maputo drug dealers

The Mozambican police have announced that an operation against drug traffickers on 8 January resulted in the arrest of two of the main suppliers of illicit drugs in the part of the city so notorious for drug trafficking that it is commonly referred to as "Colombia".

This area is part of the "military zone", so-called because former members of the armed forces live in many of the houses.

The spokesperson for the Maputo City Police Command, Leonel Muchina, told reporters on 10 January that “we launched an operation in that area and we detained two individuals who are main drug suppliers in so-called Colombia”.

When the police moved in to make the arrests, they came under attack from other people whom they believe are also drug dealers. This forced the police officers to open fire to disperse the attackers.

Muchina also announced that the police have detained a member of a gang specialising in armed robbery against vehicles. The suspect was in possession of a pistol, and the police are now hunting down other members of the gang.

Covid-19: positivity rate gradually falling

Health authorities reported on 16 January that the positivity rate among people tested in Mozambique for the coronavirus that causes the Covid-19 respiratory disease has continued to decline.

The positivity rate (the percentage of those tested found to be infected by the virus) fell from 29.03 per cent on 13 January to 24.15 per cent on 14 January, to 22.15 per cent on 15 January, and to 20.18 per cent on 16 January.

According to a press release from the Ministry of Health, since the start of the pandemic 1,182,617 people have been tested for the coronavirus. In the previous 24 hours, 284 people tested positive for the virus. This brings the total number of people diagnosed with Covid-19 in Mozambique to 219,081.

The Ministry release reported a further four deaths from Covid-19.

1.49 per cent inflation in December

The expected hike in Mozambican prices in December did not materialise, despite the festive season. According to the National Statistics Institute (INE), citing the consumer price indices for the three largest cities (Maputo, Nampula and Beira), inflation in December was only 1.49 per cent.

The major price rises during the month were for fresh prawns (24 per cent), coconuts (17.9 per cent), live chickens (13.3 per cent), onions (16.8 per cent), tomatoes (10.9 per cent), and fresh fish (2.1 per cent).

The price of a few goods declined – hair gel by 1.6 per cent, refrigerators by 1.1 per cent and motorcycles by 2.2 per cent.

Inflation from January to December was 6.74 per cent, mostly due to rises in food prices, and is less than the government’s overall target of below ten per cent.

Fishermen denounce smuggling of kapenta

Fishermen who catch the small fish known as “kapenta” (the local name for the Lake Tanganyika sardine), in Cahora Bassa lake, in the central Mozambican province of Tete, have denounced the smuggling of the catch to neighbouring countries, according to a report in the Maputo daily “Noticias” on 5 January.

Besides the smuggling, there are reports of excessive use of harmful fishing gear which threatens kapenta with extinction. The high demand for the small fish has led to an increase of fishermen and buyers from countries such as Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of Congo at the dam.

In the dead of night, resorting to small wooden vessels, the smugglers paddle along the Zambezi from Zumbu district, where the river enters Mozambique until they reach the lake, where they then start their unlawful activities.

Zumbu district Administrator, Lucas Muidinngui, said the smuggling of kapenta has a harmful impact on the local economy, but the district has no capacity to halt the movement of smugglers, especially because they chose to move at night.

The head of the Fisheries Department in Tete, Piedade Malizane, confirmed the smuggling and added that it also includes dried tilapia, locally known as “chicoa”, which is very much sought after by businessmen from the involved countries.

“The smuggling of kapenta and tilapia is not only harmful to the economy of the province but also of the country in general. There is no human and material capacity to ensure a full inspection of the product, especially in Zumbu and Maravia districts, which lead to Zimbabwe and Zambia,” Piedade said.

Between January and October 2021, Tete exported legally 124,000 tonnes of kapenta to South Africa, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and DR Congo which generated almost US\$257,000 in revenue.
