

Mozambique News Agency

AIM Reports

Report no.514, 16th September 2015



Differing versions of attack against Dhlakama's motorcade

Radically different versions of the events on 12 September involving an attack against the motorcade of Afonso Dhlakama, leader of Mozambique's largest opposition party Renamo, are now circulating, with some casting doubt as to whether the Renamo vehicles fell into any ambush at all – though journalists in the motorcade insist that the attack was all too real.

Thus Sabado Malendza, the administrator of Vanduzi district, where the incident occurred told AIM that what had really happened was a collision between two of the cars in the motorcade.

Malendza said that, while he had not personally witnessed the incident, he had driven past shortly afterwards and had spoken to local people who were eye-witnesses. This part of the road, on the approach to Chimoio, capital of the central province of Manica, is being widened. The roadworks, plus the light drizzle falling that night may have contributed to the collision, he said.

Two cars were involved, one of which overturned, and fell off the edge of the road. Malendza said it was in this accident, and not in a shoot-out, that several members of the Renamo militia were injured. He added that he later found that Renamo had taken them to the Red Cross in Chimoio for treatment.

Malendza was told that the Renamo members fired into the air, not in response to any threat, but to keep other people away from the cars.

Malendza believed there had been no ambush and the story of the ambush was invented by Dhlakama later, "as a justification for his own attacks".

But journalist Andre Catueira, who was in the motorcade, had no doubt that it came under fire. He told AIM that the story of cars colliding and overturning "is out of the question".

Catueira, who writes for the weekly newspaper "Savana" and for the Portuguese news agency Lusa, said that the shots began about three minutes after the motorcade had passed a routine traffic police checkpoint. The shots were fired from bush on a hill, to the left of the road.

The motorcade stopped, and some members of the Renamo militia returned fire. Catueira said the attackers fired a heavier weapon, which he believed was a bazooka, at one of the cars, but missed.

The gunshots hit three vehicles in the motorcade – a Nissan Hardbody, and two Nissan Patrols. Dhlakama himself was in one of the Nissan Patrols. Catueira said that one bullet hit the left door of this vehicle. He was not sure how many bullets hit the other two cars.

One of the cars was immobilised when a bullet punctured one of its tyres. Catueira said the driver of this car was wounded.

Chissano urges Dhlakama to meet president

Former President Joaquim Chissano on 14 September urged Afonso Dhlakama, leader of the country's largest opposition party Renamo, to accept the invitation from the current head of state, Filipe Nyusi, for a face-to-face meeting.

Chissano was speaking in Beira, at a ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of the Catholic University of Mozambique, which was also attended by Dhlakama. The two men, who signed the Mozambican peace agreement in Rome in October 1992, smiled and embraced.

A third actor was present – Daviz Simango, mayor of Beira, and leader of the second largest opposition party, the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM). He chatted happily with Dhlakama – and, for the moment, the bitterness of Simango's expulsion from Renamo in 2008 was forgotten.

Chissano declared that Nyusi and Dhlakama should discuss "those things which seem impossible and inconvenient".

Chissano added that Dhlakama "knows very well that the talks in Rome had as their motto to value that which unites us and minimise what divides us. There must always be one or other thing which tends towards our unity".

During discussions, he continued, it was often discovered that some matters believed to constitute problems turned out to be questions of perception and this too had happened in the negotiations between the government and Renamo in Rome.

But Chissano also thought that under the current circumstances discussions could not be restricted solely to the government and Renamo.

Dhlakama stated he is available for dialogue, but only about "concrete issues". He said Chissano "can take the message and tell my younger brother Nyusi that Dhlakama wants concrete negotiations".

"I've shaken hands with President Chissano on various occasions. I've shaken hands with Guebuza, and I've shaken hands with this new one, Nyusi", Dhlakama said. "I cannot continue shaking hands without concrete things".

"I want peace, I don't want war", he stated. "I always say in my speeches I don't want war, but if they come to attack me, since I have the right to life, I have to defend myself".

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

Two acquitted of libelling Guebuza

A Maputo court on 16 September acquitted prominent economist Carlos Nuno Castel-Branco and journalist, Fernando Mbanze, editor of the newssheet “Mediafax”, of libelling former President Armando Guebuza.

As presiding judge Joao Almeida Guilherme, of the Kampfumo urban district court, delivered the verdict from the panel of three judges, the courtroom burst into applause with cries of “Long live freedom of expression!”

The case arose from a post which Castel-Branco put on his Facebook page in November 2013, severely criticising Guebuza’s governance and calling on him to resign. Two papers, “Mediafax” and the weekly “Canal de Mocambique”, republished Carlos-Branco’s text.

The Public Prosecutor’s office regarded the article as libellous and, since libelling the head of state and other senior political figures is considered a security offence, Castel-Branco was charged under the law on crimes against state security. Mbanze was accused of the nebulous offence of “abuse of press freedom” under the 1991 press law.

Initially, the director of “Canal de Mocambique”, Fernando Veloso was also accused, but since he is currently undergoing medical treatment in Portugal he was not in the dock. Nor was any attempt made to try him in absentia.

The court analysed in detail Carlos-Branco’s Facebook post – and could find nothing libellous in it. Judge Guilherme said that Castel-Branco had simply been giving his opinion about the way Guebuza ran the country. Other people might find his criticisms uncomfortable, but that did not make them a crime.

Guilherme went through the article almost line by line, looking at all the points the prosecution had found libellous. To the court Castel-Branco’s words fell within the boundaries of freedom of expression, and were protected by the Constitution.

As for the republication by “Mediafax”, if Castel-Branco had committed no crime, then neither had Mbanze by reprinting his post, Guilherme ruled.

The prosecution has announced it will not appeal against the acquittals.

Campaign against cataracts launched

The Mozambican government on 14 September, in the Maputo Provincial Hospital, in the southern city of Matola, launched the fourth campaign against blindness though operating on patients suffering from cataracts.

The campaign will last for five days, and involves simple operations on about 400 people previously diagnosed with cataracts. The patients have been referred for treatment in the Matola hospital from several other health units, notably the Maputo Central Hospital.

The head of the National Ophthalmology Programme in the Ministry of Health, Mariamo Mbofala, told AIM that “each operation lasts for about ten minutes”.

A team of 22 medical staff are involved in the campaign – two ophthalmologists, three general doctors and ten nurses, plus seven doctors from Tunisia, organised by a Tunisian NGO, Nadi Al Bassar. The campaign enjoys financial support from the Islamic Development Bank.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recommended that governments throughout the world should undertake such campaigns. Last year Mozambique managed to operate on about 6,000 people suffering from cataracts.

There are an estimated 240,000 Mozambicans with cataracts, out of a total population of 25.7 million, and

Mbofala admitted that the numbers treated are well below the targets suggested by WHO, and fall a long way short of eliminating the problem of cataracts in the country.

The first campaign of this sort was held in Boane district, about 30 kilometres west of Maputo in 2013. In addition to the campaign, those health units with the necessary equipment and qualified staff operate on about ten patients with cataracts per week.

Government wants alternative north-south highway

Minister of Public Works, Carlos Bonete, stressed on 16 September that the main government effort in his area for the next five years will be to build an alternative trunk road from the south to the north of the country, complementing the existing EN1 highway.

Speaking in the town of Boane, 30 kilometres west of Maputo, at the opening of a meeting of his Ministry’s Coordinating Council, Bonete said that parts of this alternative route already exist. They include the recently inaugurated 240 kilometre road between Chimoio and Espungabera, in the central province of Manica, and the 230 kilometre stretch between Canicado and Chicualacuala in Gaza, in the south.

At the other end of the country, the government will continue work on the road between the northern cities of Nampula and Lichinga. The road is complete as far as Malema, to the west of Nampula, and brigades are now working on the stretch between Malema and Cuamba. Work will begin on the final stretch, from Cuamba to Lichinga, the two main cities in Niassa province, in the first quarter of 2016,

The dangers of relying on just one main north-south road became brutally clear in January when major flooding on the Licungo River in Zambezia province cut EN1 in several places. Most seriously, parts of the bridge carrying EN1 over the Licungo at the town of Mocuba were swept away, and it took more than a month to repair them. During this period the three northern provinces (Nampula, Niassa and Cabo Delgado) were effectively cut off from the rest of the country.

Bonete stressed that the new roads under construction and those that are being rehabilitated will all have toll gates. Motorists must pay to use these roads, so that the investment made can be recovered.

He cited the Maputo Ring Road, begun in 2012 and now almost complete, as an example of the need to recover the massive investment made. The 74 kilometre ring road cost about US\$315 million. Of this amount, US\$300 million is a loan from China which must be repaid. The Ring Road would be paid for by toll gates, but Bonete said no final decision has yet been taken on how many toll gates will be installed.

The Minister noted that of Mozambique’s total classified road network of about 30,000 kilometres, only 23 per cent is paved.

“In recent years the government tarred about 2,000 kilometres of road, which was an enormous financial effort”, said Bonete. “Naturally this effort is continuing and will continue, taking into account the contribution made by roads to stimulating the development of the country”.

One key road undergoing rehabilitation is the highway from Beira to Zimbabwe. This will involve building a second bridge over the Pungoe River, adjacent to the existing bridge, a new junction at Inchope, where the Beira-Zimbabwe road and EN1 cross, weighbridges to control truck cargoes, and toll gates.

Major El Niño weather pattern developing

The British Meteorological Office has warned a significant El Niño weather pattern is developing, which could be one of the four strongest since records began in 1950.

In its report, "Big changes underway in the climate system", the Met Office warned that "El Niño is now well underway and is growing in strength. This is likely to have widespread regional impacts and to continue to contribute to raised global average temperatures this year and next year".

El Niño is characterised by an abnormal warming of the surface waters of the Pacific Ocean and has a significant effect on weather around the world.

In Britain it is associated with cold winters: during the 2009/2010 winter the country was covered in snow for weeks with many roads impassable due to ice. In East Africa it is linked to heavy rainfall.

However, in southern Africa the weather could be hotter and drier than normal. In Mozambique, El Niño is associated with drought during what is normally the wettest period - January to March. Drought in these months could lead to severe crop failures. El Niño has been blamed for the serious food shortages in much of southern and central Mozambique in 2002 and for the severe drought which devastated the country in 1992.

The term El Niño - the Christ Child - was first used at the end of the 19th Century to describe a warm current off the coast of Peru at Christmas.

Promotion of industry a key government goal

The promotion of industry, oriented towards the modernisation of the economy, will continue to figure among the Mozambican government's main development objectives, the Minister of Industry and Trade, Max Tonela, declared on 11 September.

Speaking in the southern resort of Vilankulo, at the end of a three day meeting of his ministry's Coordinating Council, Tonela said the industrial drive should also increase exports, create more jobs, boost the value chain of national primary products, ensure the inclusion of local content, and improve the business environment.

Tonela said the government's stress on industry arises from the fact that, over the past five years, Mozambican industry has, on average, contributed 12.3 per cent to the Gross Domestic Product, which is second only to agriculture.

Nonetheless, Tonela lamented that, despite the efforts to develop industry, the performance of the sector is below expectations and many challenges remain.

"The country continues to import a significant part of the processed products which it consumes and exports mostly unprocessed raw materials", he said.

However, recent discoveries of large reserves of natural resources, particularly coal and natural gas, were opening up new prospects for industrial development. He believed that strategies can be developed capitalising on the opportunities provided by the boom in mineral resources.

The Coordinating Council also welcomed the efforts under way to revise Mozambique's Industrial Property Code, in order to simplify the procedures for registering property rights, and to harmonise the code with international instruments.

Tonela stressed the need to increase the capacity to manage economic, financial and material resources in accordance with the legislation in force, and to define strategies that will contribute to the gradual transformation of informal businesses into formal ones.

This exercise, he said, was intended to give greater value to economic agents currently working in the informal sector given their capacity for innovation, creativity and dynamism. It was also necessary to promote an environment of fair competition, and grant greater dignity to the jobs created in the informal sector.

Triton Minerals to make graphite products in Mozambique

The Australian mining company Triton Minerals on 14 September announced that it is pursuing a strategy of adding value to its graphite reserves in the northern Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado.

The company's Nicanda Hill project holds the world's largest known graphite deposit. However, before mining begins it needs to complete a Definitive Feasibility Study (DFS) looking at the viability of the project.

Thus, Triton has carried out an economic study which confirmed the advantages of manufacturing graphite products at Nicanda Hill. It found that producing high value products such as graphite composite material, graphite sheets and foils, spherical graphite and possibility graphene will yield a vastly increased profit margin.

In addition, the company would be eligible for significant tax and tariff advantages that are not available to mining only operations.

According to Triton's managing director, Brad Boyle, "the recent confirmation that Triton can produce a wide range of high quality graphite products places Triton in a unique position to supply a broad and diverse market base".

The company added that the strong support of Mozambique's government will allow Triton to rapidly advance all the projects and operations. It stressed that the strategy aligns with the new fiscal and mining regimes of the Mozambique government and provides Triton the advantage of obtaining a number of development incentives and rebates.

It concluded that it aims to offer the world's lowest cost and most diversified graphite product range together with the longevity of a reliable supply of premium quality flake graphite.

Last week the company revealed that it has successfully produced commercial grade graphene oxide from graphite extracted from its projects in Mozambique. This took place in an independent laboratory in Singapore.

Graphene has been heralded as a "miracle material" for its special properties. It is the strongest material ever measured and has truly vast potential for use in the electronics industry.

Graphene is a layer of carbon one atom thick. It is the best conductor of heat and electricity ever discovered. In addition, it is being studied for applications in spintronics, a field of physics looking at the behaviour of electrons. This could lead to exciting new advances in quantum computing.

The huge potential is enhanced by graphene's flexibility and its ability to be woven into complex structures. Furthermore, it can be added to ink and used to print electrodes.

Graphene also offers a solution to the modern day problem of battery life in mobile technology. Whilst current batteries in devices such as mobile phones and laptops take hours to charge, supercapacitors made from graphene could be charged in minutes and would be much thinner and lighter.

Graphite is highly valued due to its properties as a conductor of electricity. It is used in batteries and fuel cells. It is also used for flame retardants, thermal conductivity additives and sealing materials in high pressure environments.

Zambia – Beira goods train to start this month

The express goods train from Zambia to the central Mozambican port of Beira, via Zimbabwe, will start running by the end of September, covering a distance of over 1,000 kilometres, according to Candido Jone, executive director of the central division of the Mozambican ports and rail company, CFM.

Jone told reporters that the first train will be formed of 20 platforms, each holding 12 containers. The train will take two days to move the cargo from Zambia to Beira.

The target, Jone said, is to carry 10,000 tonnes of cargo a month on the express trains. On the down line the trains will carry Zambian copper to Beira, and on the return journey the trains will carry fertiliser back to Zambia.

The trains are “express” in that they will only stop between Zambia and Beira for technical reasons such as changing the crew or the locomotives

President launches vaccination campaign

President Filipe Nyusi on 4 September urged citizens to participate massively in the campaign to vaccinate children against rotavirus to reduce deaths of young children from severe diarrhoea.

Rotavirus is the fourth largest cause of death in the country, according to the health authorities. It is estimated that 40 per cent of the children hospitalised in Mozambique with severe diarrhoea are infected with rotavirus.

Rotavirus is the most common cause of severe diarrhoea among infants and young children - it is estimated that 450,000 children around the world die of rotavirus induced diarrhoea every year.

Effective vaccines against rotavirus are now available, and the World Health Organisation has recommended that the vaccine be included in all national vaccination campaigns.

The vaccination will be undertaken in 1,500 fixed posts set up across the country. By December two doses of the vaccine should have been administered to about 335,000 children.

Presiding over the Maputo launch of the vaccine, President Nyusi said that success will depend on the involvement of parents, siblings and neighbours of the target children, who must be made aware this vaccine can prevent many deaths.

Despite advances in health care in recent years, the rates of vaccination against childhood diseases remain disturbingly low in parts of the country, President Nyusi said. The general level of vaccination is at its lowest (47 per cent) in Zambezia, while in Tete and Cabo Delgado only 58 and 59 per cent of children under the age of five are vaccinated.

The best vaccination rate, 88 per cent, is in Maputo province, with Maputo city lagging behind on 77 per cent.

These routine vaccinations are against diseases such as polio, measles, tuberculosis (BCG), diphtheria and whooping cough. Now the rotavirus vaccine is being added to the list.

The reduction in the level of potentially fatal childhood diseases, President Nyusi said, is key to economic and social development which can only be attained with good healthcare.

Zambia begins importing electricity from Ressano Garcia

Zambia’s power company Zesco on 9 September began importing 148 megawatts of electricity from a gas fired generator based in Ressano Garcia in southern Mozambique.

The gas is extracted from the Pande and Temane fields in Inhambane province and piped to the Mozambique – South Africa border where the British based company Aggreko has its generator. The electricity is then transmitted to Zambia along the existing transmission lines of the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP).

Zambia’s decision to import the electricity is a reaction to a severe power shortage. This is not only affecting citizens, but is also hitting the key mining sector. The economy is already in serious crisis as the price of copper, the metal that contributes nine per cent to the country’s Gross Domestic Product, has dropped to a six year low.

However, the situation has deteriorated even further due to a severe power shortage. In large part this is due to a shortage of water at the Kariba dam on the border with Zimbabwe. This has forced Zesco to cut output from its hydroelectric power station from 500 to 305 megawatts. There are fears that unless the mining companies drastically cut back their power consumption the turbines will have to be switched off in November if the dam falls to minimum level.

President Nyusi inaugurates largest eucalyptus nursery in Africa

President Filipe Nyusi on 8 September inaugurated the largest eucalyptus nursery in Africa in Ile district in the central province of Zambezia.

The eucalyptus trees grown in the nursery will eventually be used to produce paper in an investment by the company Portucel-Mocambique.

The nursery covers 7.5 hectares and has an installed production capacity of more than 12 million plants a year. Currently it employs over 130 Mozambican workers.

Total investment in the nursery was over 300 million meticais (about US\$7.5 million). But Portucel says this is only the start. As the project is ramped up towards production of paper the total investment will increase to over 96 billion meticais (US\$2.4 billion).

This is expected to create at least 7,000 jobs in Zambezia and Manica provinces, where the trees will be planted. The plantations will cover 160,000 hectares in Zambezia and 270,000 hectares in Manica.

The project will take a long time to reach maturity. Portucel’s factory producing cellulose, the raw material for paper, will not be complete until the end of 2023.

President Nyusi said the Portucel forestry and paper project fitted perfectly into the government’s five year programme for 2015 - 2019 and would have “multiplier effects on the Mozambican agricultural and industrial fabric”. The project “will certainly promote the modernisation and industrialisation of our economy”.

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UK	£15.00	£25.00
Europe	£25.00	£40.00
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