

Mozambique News Agency

AIM Reports

Report no.524, 23rd February 2016



President Nyusi inaugurates gas-fired power station

President Filipe Nyusi on 19 February inaugurated a gas fired power station, with the capacity to generate 120 megawatts, in Ressano Garcia, on the border with South Africa. The power station cost around US\$200 million, raised by the Mozambican company Gigawatt (owned by Mozambican and South African shareholders). The station has 13 generators, each capable of generating 9.5 megawatts.

The power will all be sold to the publicly owned electricity company, EDM. The Gigawatt power station can supply 24 per cent of the electricity needs of southern Mozambique (excluding the MOZAL aluminium smelter).

With Mozambique's recent economic growth of seven per cent or so a year, there has been a surge in demand for electricity. This cannot be met solely by the power that EDM purchases from the Cahora Bassa dam on the Zambezi. Hence the need for gas-fired power stations, and even for imports of electricity from South Africa. While a gas-fired station can never be as cheap Cahora Bassa power, the price EDM pays for the Gigawatt power is 40 per cent lower than the price of imports from South Africa.

The natural gas is provided by the Matola Gas Company (MGC), and comes from a branch off the main pipeline that carries gas from the Temane and Pande fields in Inhambane province to Secunda in South Africa.

Speaking at the ceremony, President Nyusi stressed that the new power station results from a partnership between the government and the private sector, and bears witness to the importance of public/private partnerships.

"The development of quality economic and social infrastructures is determinant for ensuring the well-being of the population and as a basis for increasing productive activity. It is thus one of the priorities of our governance", said President Nyusi.

Mozambique has enormous energy potential, the President stressed, and the sustainable development of the various forms of power generation can be a source of revenue for the state and a catalyst for industrialisation.

"This undertaking will improve access to energy for domestic, agricultural and industrial consumption, providing greater security of supply, and reducing dependence on outside sources", he said.

The new power station, he continued, is in line with the government's Five Year Programme in its call for diversifying sources of power generation.

Other aspects of the government's energy programme, said the President, include completing a 40 megawatt gas fired power station at Kavaninga in Chokwe district, Gaza province, and beginning later this year another gas-fired station in Maputo City, with a 100 megawatt capacity. At the

same time, the transmission system will be overhauled to end the repeated power cuts in the southern region.

In the central region, the rehabilitation of EDM's own hydro-electric power stations at Chicamba and Mavuzi on the Revue River is scheduled to be concluded this year. Increasing the capacity of the key Matombo sub-station in Tete province is also scheduled for this year, and of the Chibata sub-station in Manica for 2017.

In the north of the country, Nyusi stressed the new 115 megawatt power station that will soon be functioning in the northern port of Nacala, and the stations based on solar power at Mocuba, in Zambezia province (40 megawatts), and at Metoro in Cabo Delgado (30 megawatts).

The chairperson of the Gigawatt-Mozambique board, Castigo Langa, said the new power station "meets the highest international standards". He noted that, under the terms of the Power Purchase Agreement between Gigawatt and EDM, the electricity generated can both be used in Mozambique and sold on to the regional network of the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP).

Mango processing factory opens in Morrumbene

A mango processing factory has opened in the district of Morrumbene in the southern province of Inhambane. According to a report on Mozambique Television (TVM), the facility has the capacity to process 48 tonnes of fruit per year. The mangos are skinned, sliced, dried and vacuum packed.

The factory was built with 7 million meticais (\$150,000) in finance from three Italian non-governmental organisations.

A report published by the Italian NGO Medicus Mundi last year pointed out that in Morrumbene plants are left untrimmed, diseases affecting plants are not treated and little is done to manage and replace old trees with new ones.

It stressed that a lack of processing resulted in seventy per cent of local production of mango and citrus fruits being wasted, with the remaining fruit being informally commercialised. The report concluded that the "malfunctions in the agricultural system are the main cause of severe malnutrition problems, especially at mother and child level".

Gunmen ambush police in Barue

Gunmen of the largest opposition party Renamo injured two policemen in an ambush on 20 February in the Mutamba region of Barue district, in the central province of Manica.

The police were patrolling a stretch of national highway the N7 that runs from the Manica provincial capital, Chimoio to the city of Tete. This is one of the roads which Renamo publicly threatened to block a fortnight ago.

The Manica provincial police commander, Armando Mude, confirmed that two policemen were slightly injured in the ambush which occurred at about 12.00.

He told reporters that over a week ago the police became aware of Renamo movements in Mutamba, and in reaction stepped up patrols along the N7.

Mude said that after this incident calm returned to Mutamba. He dismissed the ambush as mere banditry, and insisted that security along the road is guaranteed.

The N7 is used by people travelling overland from Maputo or Beira to Malawi and Zambia via Chimoio and Tete.

Further east, the police on 20 February introduced a system of convoys under armed escort on a stretch of the main north-south highway (EN1) between Nhamapadza, in Maringue district, and Caia on the south bank of the Zambezi.

This is the second stretch of the EN1 in Sofala province where vehicles can only move safely in armed convoys. The first convoy was introduced on 17 February between the Save River, and the small town of Muxungue.

In both cases, there are four convoys a day, one in each direction in the morning and in the afternoon. The convoys only operate in the hours of daylight.

The Nhamapadza-Caia convoy was introduced after successive attacks by Renamo gunmen against civilian vehicles on this stretch of road on 18 and 19 February. The attacks led to the death of one person, burnt alive in his truck, and injuries, some of them serious, to six others.

The police believe the Renamo gangs responsible for these attacks have bases at Sanzala in Maringue, and at Doro, in Caia.

Renamo major captured

Mozambican police on 20 February in the city of Xai-Xai, capital of the southern province of Gaza, presented to the public a Renamo gunman who was captured during an attack on 17 February against a police post in Mazivila, in Bilene district.

The man, Domingos Jose, is a major in the Renamo militia, who was demobilized in 1994 after the end of the war of destabilization. His arrest is further evidence that Renamo is attempting to recall men who were supposed to have returned to civilian life 22 years ago.

According to a report in the daily newspaper "Noticias", Jose was one of a group of five Renamo gunmen, armed with AK-47 assault rifles, who attacked the police post in an abortive attempt to seize the weapons it contained.

Jose claimed that some of the weaponry would have gone to the central provinces to strengthen Renamo units there, while other guns would have been used to destabilize various socio-economic targets in Gaza.

He said Renamo operations in Gaza are being coordinated by a member of his group still at large, whom he named as Alexandre Munguambe, a resident in Chokwe district.

Jeremias Langa, spokesperson for the Gaza provincial police command, said the attack against the police post was rebuffed. The Renamo group fled, but the police set off in pursuit, during which Domingos Jose was captured.

Development plan for Malawi border region

The Mozambican government intends to carry out an Integrated Development Plan along the border with Malawi to improve living conditions for the people living here, around 6,000 of whom have fled into Malawi, largely due to clashes between the defence and security forces and gunmen of the country's largest opposition party Renamo.

Several government members, including President Filipe Nyusi, held a "reflection meeting" in Maputo on 22 February to discuss the situation of the refugees in Malawi.

Deputy Minister of State Administration Roque Samuel told reporters that, as part of the integrated development plan, "a range of facilities that are still missing will be installed to allow the life of the population to return to normal".

But to do that "there are a series of conditions that should be analysed, taking into account the real reasons for the displacement of these people into Malawi".

The first Mozambicans in the current wave of refugees crossed into Malawi from Tete province in June 2015, and their situation soon became a matter of concern for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

In addition to the Tete refugees, Samuel pointed out that, in the other two provinces bordering on Malawi, Zambezia and Niassa, normal cross-border movement is continuing, as Mozambicans walk over the border to take advantage of the Malawian health services and other facilities.

He added that the great majority of people in areas affected by the conflict with Renamo have not fled into Malawi. "Out of a million people living in the conflict zones, the great majority are still in Mozambique", said Samuel.

The government, he added, is working to normalize the lives of the people threatened by the current crisis.

National swimming coach killed by collapsing wall

The trainer of Mozambique's national swimming team, Frederico dos Santos, died on 20 February when the wall surrounding the Olympic swimming pool in the outer Maputo suburb of Zimpeto collapsed on top of his car.

Ten other people, according to a hospital source cited by Radio Mozambique, were injured in the collapse, including the wife and son of dos Santos, and members of the Mozambican swimming team.

Several other vehicles were also damaged. The accident occurred when participants in the summer 2016 swimming championship were preparing to go home.

The government immediately set up a commission of inquiry to ascertain the causes of the collapse. The Olympic swimming pool was built in 2011 for the African Games held in Maputo. The Minister of Youth and Sport Alberto Nkutumula told reporters he found it strange that a structure built less than five years ago should collapse, while other, much older buildings remained standing.

Nkutumula promised that anyone found responsible for the collapse will answer for the human and material losses.

The incident took place on an extremely hot day in Maputo, with temperatures climbing to over 44 degrees. The scorching afternoon was following in the evening by high winds and rain in and around the capital.

The worst damage from the winds was done, not in Zimpeto, but in Boane district, just outside Maputo, where four people were killed. One of these victims was electrocuted while the other four died when their houses collapsed on top of them. A further 39 people were injured in the storm.

Increased discharges from Massingir Dam to save harvest

The Massingir dam, in the southern province of Gaza, has decided to increase its discharges in an attempt to save the rice harvest in the Limpopo Valley.

The dam is located on the Elephants River, which is the main tributary of the Limpopo. In principle, the dam reservoir should guarantee water for the large irrigation schemes on the Limpopo in Chokwe and Xai-Xai districts. But ever since its construction in the colonial era, the dam has been plagued with structural problems.

Nonetheless, when Prime Minister Carlos Agostinho do Rosario visited Massingir on 12 February, the director of the dam rehabilitation project, Luis Paulo, told him that emergency discharges, of 27 cubic metres a second, begun on 2 February, sought to meet the water requirements of crops in the Limpopo Valley and thus save this year's harvest.

Cited by Radio Mozambique, he said that the discharges will continue to be made while work continues on repairing the dam's bottom outlet.

The bottom outlet was severely damaged in May 2008 due to bungled work by the French firm Coyne et Bellier, and BKS Consulting Engineers of South Africa. During the accident, pipes in the bottom outlet ruptured. Now a further attempt is being made to repair the outlet.

There are two pipes in the bottom outlet, one of which is now being used to discharge water into the river. According to the managing director of the Southern Regional Water Board (ARA-Sul), Helio Banze, this will increase the time required to repair the bottom outlet.

The dam management says there is no other way to make the water stored in the reservoir available. Because of the drought the water simply does not reach the surface spillways. Staff are watching the situation closely, to ensure that the current discharges do not further compromise the bottom outlet.

United Nations agencies describe the current El Nino as one of the strongest in the past half century. A release issued by the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET) and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) notes that "across large swathes of Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana and Madagascar, the current rainfall season has so far been the driest in the last 35 years".

"Much of the southern African sub-region has consequently experienced significant delays in planting and very poor conditions for early crop development and pasture re-growth", the release added. "In many areas, planting has not been possible due to 30 to 50 day delays in the onset of seasonal rains resulting in widespread crop failure. Although there has been some relief since mid-January in certain areas, the window of opportunity for the successful planting of crops under rain-fed conditions is nearly closed".

Even if there is now normal rainfall for what remains of the rainy season, the forecast remains pessimistic. "Crop water balance models indicate poor performance of maize over a widespread area", the release warns.

But it is most unlikely that there will be a sudden return to normal rainfall. Instead the seasonal forecasts are for "a continuation of below-average rainfall and above-average temperatures across most of the region for the remainder of the growing season".

The release's grim conclusion is that "the combination of a poor 2014-2015 season, an extremely dry early season (October to December) and forecasts for continuing hot and

drier-than-average conditions through mid-2016, suggest a scenario of extensive, regional-scale crop failure".

"This has increased the region's vulnerability due to the depletion of regional cereal stocks and higher-than-average food prices, and has substantially increased food insecurity", the agencies add. "Even before the current crisis began, the number of food-insecure people in the region (not including South Africa), already stood at 14 million, according to the South African Development Community (SADC)".

The FEWSNET estimate of early February is that at least 2.5 million people are now in a critical situation "and require urgent humanitarian assistance to protect livelihoods and household food consumption".

The release warns that "over the coming year, humanitarian partners should prepare themselves for food insecurity levels and food insecure population numbers in southern Africa to be at their highest levels since the 2002-2003 food crisis".

Immediate measures for drought victims

The Mozambican government's Disaster Management Coordinating Council (CCGC) on 15 February decided to take immediate measures to ensure supplies of food and water for 530,000 people in drought affected areas in the south and centre of the country.

The meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Carlos Agostinho do Rosario, follows visits by members of the government to both the drought stricken provinces and areas in the north of the country where torrential rains have provoked floods.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, the Minister of State Administration, Carmelita Namashalua said that, while she did not wish to minimize the floods in the north, currently the most worrying situation is the drought affecting the southern provinces of Maputo, Gaza and Inhambane, and parts of Sofala and Tete in the centre of the country.

The most critical issue is the shortage of food and of drinking water in drought affected areas. The CCGC had decided to tackle these shortages as quickly as possible. Tanker trucks carrying water will be sent to the worst hit zones, and where possible more boreholes will be drilled.

The government had initially allocated 560 million meticaís (US\$12 million) for its contingency plan for the 2015-16 rainy season and the relief agency, the National Disasters Management Institute (INGC) has already channelled 200 million meticaís to deal with urgent needs.

Because of the drought, the disaster management bodies face a deficit of 63 million meticaís, said Namashalua.

"The contingency budget is not sufficient to deal with the situation", the Minister said, "and we would like to recall that hunger kills and kills silently. We are very concerned and we will do everything possible to attenuate the suffering of our fellow citizens".

But she said the government thought that, by carefully assessing the requirements in each place, and with the support of internal partners, it would be possible to overcome the budget deficit.

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

Water shortages worry Maputo provincial government

Water shortages, caused by the drought hitting southern and central Mozambique, are seriously worrying the Maputo provincial government.

Speaking in the provincial capital, Matola, at the opening of a session of the Maputo Coordinating Council, the provincial governor, Raimundo Diomba said it is urgent to identify alternative sources to guarantee a continued supply of drinking water to the public.

“It’s no news to say that there’s been a lack of rainfall, but we cannot allow citizens to lose their lives because of water shortages”, said Diomba. He called on the government authorities and their partners to join efforts to mitigate the effects of the drought.

“The amount of water available is declining”, warned Diomba. “The Corumana dam (on the Sabie River) should produce electricity, but it cannot do so because the reservoir is only 39 per cent full. The question is – how do we overcome this problem?”

He urged all partners who are able to sponsor the opening of boreholes to do so, in order to meet the current requirements for drinking water for people and for their livestock.

Vale claims Moatize strike is illegal

The Brazilian mining giant Vale has defended cutting the wages of its Mozambican work force, and claims the strike they called in response to the wage cut is illegal.

The strike erupted on 16 February when workers at Vale’s open cast coal mine at Moatize, in the western province of Tete, discovered that Vale would no longer pay them the part of their wages known as the “Variable Remuneration” (RV). The RV in question refers to 2015.

Vale argues that this is a bonus, rather than part of the wages. A press release from the company says that the RV “is an additional payment which Vale grants to its workers throughout the world as a premium resulting from positive and extraordinary results attained by the company. This remuneration is defined based on the profits generated and the performance of the workers during the year”.

The release says the decision was taken that no RV for 2015 would be paid to any Vale workers, anywhere in its global operations, “because the company did not achieve the minimum financial results required to trigger the payment”.

The release blames this on the falling prices of the minerals produced by Vale, including coal. It also claimed that there is a quarterly summary of the company’s results, which is shared with the work force so that they know about the company’s situation and the strategies it is following. However, the Moatize strikers say they were taken by surprise by the announcement that the RV would not be paid.

Although it regards the strike as illegal, Vale says it is “keeping open its channels of communication with its staff, in coordination with their trade union and with the government”.

Scottish Secretary promotes Aberdeen/Pemba partnership

The Secretary of State for Scotland in the British government, David Mundell on 15 February met with Mozambique’s Minister of Industry and Trade, Max Tonela, on the first day of his visit to Mozambique.

During the meeting in Maputo, the British minister promoted the partnership between the Scottish city of Aberdeen and Pemba in northern Mozambique.

Aberdeen is located in the north east of Britain and is considered by many to be the oil capital of Europe, built on its experience of serving the North Sea oil fields. The city council and local chamber of commerce have worked to promote links with Pemba, the hub for the natural gas industry in the Rovuma Basin.

According to a press release from the Scotland Office, “the Aberdeen - Pemba partnership will use Aberdeen’s experience to inform Pemba’s development. By doing so it will open up opportunities in consulting, supply chain, logistics and training for British companies, particularly those based in Scotland”.

The British government has supported the initiative through awarding Aberdeen city council a grant of £120,000 (\$174,000) from the Foreign Office to help draw up the action plan for the Pemba hub.

Mundell commented, “this initiative will not just help protect existing jobs and businesses – it is a chance to develop new opportunities and markets and create new sources of employment for people in the North East and Scotland as a whole”.

He added that the cooperation “will not only benefit Scotland, but will be of great help to Mozambique, allowing Pemba to take steps towards becoming a world-class gas hub along the lines of Aberdeen”.

The then Mozambican President, Armando Guebuza, visited Aberdeen in July 2013, where he addressed a conference on the emerging gas and oil industry, and urged Scottish businesses to invest in Mozambique.

During his visit, Mundell also promoted the best known Scottish export, Scotch whisky.

LAM appoints new board of directors

A meeting of the shareholders of Mozambique’s publicly owned airline, LAM, has appointed Antonio Pinto de Abreu as the chairperson of the company’s board of directors.

Antonio Pinto de Abreu was the deputy governor of the Bank of Mozambique until he stepped down on 26 January. He takes over from Silvestre Sechene who had been in the post since June 2014.

Also appointed to the board were Helder Julio da Silva Fumo, Carlos Vasco Siteo and Faizal Abdul Gafar, along with non-executive directors Renato Matusse and Paulo Negro. LAM has just two shareholders – the Mozambican state with an 80 per cent stake, and the workers and managers of the company who hold the remaining 20 per cent.

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UK	£15.00	£25.00
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