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UN praises Mozambique's gender parity in government

The United Nations has praised Mozambique for achieving gender parity in its government. In a message on his Twitter account, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres wrote “I congratulate Mozambique for attaining gender parity at ministerial level for the first time in the country’s history. Only with the equal participation of women in all spheres can we hope to attain a better future for all”. The same sentiment was expressed in a joint statement from the personal envoy of Guterres to Mozambique, Mirko Manzoni, and the UN Resident Coordinator, Myrta Kaulard.

There are 22 members of the Council of Ministers (Cabinet) with 11 men and 11 women. This parity was achieved with the appointment of the new Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Josefina Mpelo. This post has traditionally been a male preserve, as has been the post of Minister of the Interior. The first woman Interior Minister, Arsenia Massingue, was appointed last November.

The achievement complies with the promise by President Filipe Nyusi in 2021 to improve gender representation in all sectors of the government.

“A year later, achieving gender parity in the Council of Ministers is a historic landmark”, the statement declared. “It is a reflection of the work being done to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women nationally, including through investment in the education of girls, and in fighting against gender-based violence”.

Taking the planet as a whole, only 20 per cent of ministerial posts are held by women. Mozambique joins a group of only 14 countries where at least 50 per cent of ministers are women. It is the third country in Africa to achieve gender parity at ministerial level.

“Mozambique is leading by example in how to build a more peaceful, inclusive and resilient society”, the statement added. “It is showing the world that the pandemic cannot be used as an excuse for keeping gender parity waiting”.

Manzoni and Kaulard said that achieving gender parity is a collective effort. They expressed their willingness to work together with Mozambican institutions and all parts of society to consolidate this historic gain.

Government to slash Mozambique’s debt

Minister of Economy and Finance, Max Tonela, told reporters on 30 March that the government is to slash the country’s indebtedness.

Speaking in Maputo, on the sidelines of the Annual Private Sector Conference, Tonela said the debt is currently 113 per cent of Mozambique’s GDP, and the government hopes to reduce this figure to 60 per cent within three years.

Asked about the sale by the Brazilian mining giant Vale of its coal and logistics assets in Mozambique to the Indian company Jindal, Tonela said there will be capital gains tax to be paid, which the Mozambican Tax Authority (AT) estimates at US\$32 million.

As for the agreement reached between the government and a technical mission from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Tonela said the IMF loan envisaged, of US\$470 million, will be free of interest.

The statement from the IMF mission speaks of reform in the public sector wage bill, supposedly to reduce the pressure on the public finances. Tonela said this will involve consolidating various allowances into the basic wage. Because of the existence of allowances and indexing factors, “the state finds it difficult to forecast the evolution of costs”. So, if an increase of five per cent in the basic wages is decreed, the indexing factors turn it into a ten per cent rise, he claimed.

Consolidating all allowances into the basic wage would allow for better forecasting and better control by the government over the wage bill.

President Nyusi inaugurates Metoro Solar Power Plant

President Filipe Nyusi on 1 April inaugurated the Metoro Solar Power Plant in Ancuabe district in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. The project cost US\$ 56 million of which US\$40 million came from a loan from the French Development Agency (AFD) and its subsidiary "Proparco".

The Metoro complex is the country's second largest solar power station covering more than 138 hectares. It consists of 121,500 solar panels and has an installed capacity to generate 41 megawatts peak (MWp). It will generate 69 Gigawatt hours (GWh) per year, providing enough electricity for 140,000 people which is about 75 per cent of the residents of the provincial capital Pemba.

The electricity will be fed into the national power grid, which is managed by the publicly owned electricity company, EDM.

President Nyusi said that the infrastructure is part of the country's great strides towards the goal of generating an additional 600 megawatts of electricity during his second five year term of office.

He declared that the solar power station will also increase the contribution of renewable energies and mitigate the impact of climate change. In addition, it will respond to the rapidly growing domestic and regional demand for power.

The Metoro energy complex, President Nyusi pointed out, will also strengthen the country's power security and autonomy, and boost the construction of more health centres, schools, water supply systems, and irrigation in the rural areas.

The French Ambassador to Mozambique, David Izzo, hailed the benefits of the project pointing out that it will reduce annual emissions of greenhouse gases by 49,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide, thus making a significant contribution to the fight against climate change.

Izzo stated that under the power project's corporate social responsibility programme, throughout the 25 year operational period, part of the income generated by the power project will be channelled to community projects drawn up in partnership with both the authorities and the local communities.

President Nyusi lays first stone for Temane Thermal Plant

President Filipe Nyusi on 28 March laid the foundation stone for the construction of the Temane Thermal Plant (CTT), the country's largest power station built post-independence, which will generate 450 megawatts (MW) of electricity in Inhassoro in the southern province of Inhambane.

The ceremony also marked the beginning of construction on the 573 kilometres long Maputo-Temane high voltage power line and the liquefied oil and gas plant that will produce 30,000 tonnes of liquefied petroleum gas annually and 4,000 barrels of light oil daily for exports. The gas and energy projects altogether will cost over US\$1.6 billion.

Addressing the ceremony, President Nyusi stressed that Mozambique's mid and long term vision for the energy sector focuses on increasing generation capacity in the current five year period (2020-2024) by 600 megawatts. Meeting this target will depend on CTT boosting existing generation capacity by 16 per cent. The construction of CTT is scheduled to be concluded in November 2024,

The President explained that "the energy sector development plan will enable the country to simultaneously reach the core objectives of energy autonomy and becoming the paramount stakeholder of power supply to the member states of the Southern African Development Community". He noted that CTT will be interconnected with the transmission networks of the country's three regions (south, centre, and north) and increase the availability of electricity to both domestic and foreign markets.

The President said that throughout the construction phase the project will employ about 700 workers. He also urged the stakeholders to ensure that every household affected by the project is resettled decently and that there should be no repeat of the mistakes of past experiences of resettlement.

President Nyusi added that there are other projects in the pipeline which include the Mphanda Nkuwa dam on the Zambezi, 60 kilometres downstream from Cahora Bassa, and wind turbines in Inhambane and at Namaacha in Maputo province.

Earlier in the day, President Nyusi commissioned the water supply system in Inhassoro town, which is sponsored by the South African petrochemical giant Sasol in partnership with the Mozambican National Hydrocarbon Company (ENH). Budgeted at 190 million meticaís (US\$4.3 million), the system will benefit 14,650 consumers.

Three new judges take office

President Filipe Nyusi on 31 March urged the new judges appointed to the Administrative Tribunal (TA) to fight against corruption and to ensure that cases are dealt with quickly.

The Administrative Tribunal is the body that oversees the legality of public expenditure and is effectively Mozambique's highest audit authority.

President Nyusi was speaking at a ceremony in Maputo where he swore into office three new judges, Amelia Simbine, Nelson Jaque, and Claudio Pene.

Mozambican courts, and particularly the TA, have long been criticised for their lethargy, and so President Nyusi made a point of urging the new judges to speed things up, arguing that "the rapid investigation of a case should not be a favour, but a way of working".

He said the justice system should facilitate the business environment and make the Mozambican market more attractive, competitive, and secure for national and foreign private investment. It should also be prompt in providing justice for needy citizens.

The justice system, President Nyusi added, had to meet the challenges posed by the new financial and asset regime of the decentralised bodies of provincial government. The management of the public funds allocated to these bodies must be monitored, he said.

Among President Nyusi's recommendations was the approval of legal instruments on electronic procedures that could speed up the processing of cases before the TA.

In the context of repairing the damage caused by natural disasters, President Nyusi demanded audits and the implementation of tools adequate to the institutional situation in the country and the world, to halt any diversion of funds.

One of the new judges, Amelia Simbine, told reporters "the fight against corruption is not a task exclusive to the three judges who have just taken office, it is also a challenge for all of society".

Two senior prosecutors sworn in

Attorney-General Beatriz Buchili on 4 April swore into office Americo Letela as Director of the Central Office for the Fight against Organised and Transnational Crime and Amelia Mungambe as Director of the Central Office for the Recovery of Assets.

Speaking at the ceremony in Maputo, Buchili argued that both are experienced prosecutors

"which raises our expectations that they will perform the tasks entrusted to them with responsibility and professionalism".

She added that Mozambique "faces major challenges in fighting organised and transnational crime such as terrorism, kidnapping, drug trafficking, people trafficking, corruption, and money laundering".

According to Buchili, the two newly established offices "will contribute to improving our performance in investigating and prosecuting these complex crimes".

The Central Office for the Fight against Organised Crime, Buchili continued, had been set up in strict observance of the United Nations and African Union conventions against terrorism. She argued that the legal bases have now been created "for a more robust intervention by the Public Prosecutor's Office and by the National Criminal Investigation Service (Sernic)".

As for the Central Office for the Recovery of Assets, Buchili stated that to prove the maxim that "crime does not pay", simply throwing criminals in jail is not enough. "The State must be compensated for all economic and financial losses suffered, and the criminals must be deprived of all the goods resulting from their illicit activities", she stressed. Hence the new office had been set up in line with a law on the recovery of assets passed recently by the country's parliament, the Assembly of the Republic. Buchili called on Mungambe to work closely with other bodies, such as Sernic, the Tax Authority (AT), and the Financial Intelligence Office and pursue all the measures necessary for a speedy and effective recovery of illegally acquired assets.

Since these crimes often span borders, she added, Mungambe and her team must work closely with similar offices in other states.

"We are aware of the human, material and financial limitations that we face", said Buchili, "but we must undertake efforts and create initiatives that allow us to comply with our mission".

She urged Letela and Mungambe to work with "humility, transparency, discipline and a sense of mission", and to motivate their colleagues.

Police seize cocaine at Maputo Airport

The Mozambican authorities on 14 March seized three kilos of cocaine at Maputo International Airport from a South African woman who was returning from Brazil and had Maputo as her final destination.

Mozambique and Zimbabwe create Binational Commission

Mozambique and Zimbabwe on 4 April took the decision to transform their Joint Commission into a Binational Commission which will not only boost bilateral cooperation ties between the two countries but also pave the way for the inclusion of other fields of common interest over the coming years.

The move was announced in Maputo in a joint press statement from Mozambican Foreign Minister Veronica Macamo and her Zimbabwean counterpart Frederick Shava. This followed face-to-face talks between delegations of the two countries headed by their respective Presidents, Filipe Nyusi and Emmerson Mnangagwa.

The Binational Commission will be headed by the two Presidents and meet annually,

In addition, Mozambique and Zimbabwe signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) in the fields of higher education, science and technology, justice, and for search and rescue operations in the event of an air crash within the territory of either country.

In the field of defence and security, Macamo said that cooperation has been running smoothly and has been focused on building the capacity of the Mozambican Defence and Security Forces (FDS) in the fight against terrorism in the northern province of Cabo Delgado.

As for the management of water resources, she indicated that Zimbabwe is an upstream country that shares the Limpopo, Save, Buzi, and Pungoe river basins. Mozambique has a great interest in ensuring the supply and control of water in both the rainy and dry seasons.

Mozambique and Zimbabwe renew electricity supply deal

Mozambique's publicly owned electricity company, EDM, and the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA) have renewed the bilateral agreement for power supply over the next three years under which EDM will provide 50 megawatts of energy to the neighbouring country.

The agreement, signed on 23 March by the chairperson of the EDM Board Marcelino Gildo and the ZESA Director of Transmission and Distribution Howard Choga, renews a contract that expired in December 2021. Under the latest deal, EDM could supply up to 150 MW of non-firm power.

A press release issued by EDM indicates that the two sides have also discussed the possibility of

strengthening bilateral relations, taking into account the ongoing development of new projects to generate and transmit electricity in Mozambique.

Special attention was attached to the Temane Thermal Plant (CTT) which is due to become operational in January 2025 with a capacity of 450 MW.

The two sides also discussed the future Mphanda Nkuwa Hydroelectric Power Station, which will generate 1500 MW. EDM is searching for a strategic investor to finance the construction and operation of the proposed dam, located on the Zambezi River 60 kilometres downstream from the existing dam at Cahora Bassa. The strategic partner, who will be the majority shareholder, will also cover the costs of technical, economic, environmental and market studies of the infrastructure, as well as the construction of the transmission lines.

Migrant workers to register with INSS

Labour Minister Margarida Talapa on 26 March launched a campaign to register more than 28,000 Mozambican workers resident in South Africa with Mozambique's social security system.

Speaking in Johannesburg, Talapa said the target was to register more than 19,000 migrant mineworkers and 9,000 agricultural workers with Mozambique's National Social Security Institute (INSS). She said this initiative will cover Mozambicans working in both the formal and informal sectors of the South African economy.

Those workers who wish to benefit from the INSS will pay seven per cent of their wages into the social security system every month. Talapa told the workers that "this will guarantee your future when you are too old to continue working".

An INSS brigade will now visit South African mines and farms to register those workers who want to join the Mozambican social security system. But since South African companies cannot be registered with the INSS, the workers will join the sub-system that was initially set up for the self-employed.

Contributions can be paid into the system through various mobile banking systems established by Mozambican commercial banks.

The Labour Ministry says it intends to replicate this initiative in Eswatini and in other southern African countries where there are significant numbers of Mozambican workers. The INSS is already paying pensions to beneficiaries resident in Portugal and Britain.

Mass use of cooking gas to remove regional inequalities

President Filipe Nyusi on 2 April stressed that the mass use of cooking gas will not only remove regional asymmetries but also change the mindset of citizens who see it as a luxury product.

Addressing the launch of the National Programme for the Mass Use of Cooking Gas in the administrative post of Anchilo, about 25 kilometres from the northern city of Nampula city, President Nyusi pointed out that “nowadays, the consumption of cooking gas has a very limited expression within the country’s energy mix and is geographically limited to the southern region, resulting in not only regional inequality but also a deficit of supply”.

Mozambique’s annual cooking gas consumption, the President added, is under 44,000 tonnes with an average per capita consumption of 1.4 kilos per year.

The President noted that “we want to set up a national movement to adopt cooking gas as a healthy and eco-friendly fuel and ensure that it is accessible to every Mozambican. He added that the expansion of the use of cooking gas will improve living standards, especially for women who have to collect firewood and produce charcoal for domestic use and income generation.

During the launch, the World Bank announced that it intends to support the programme through a grant of US\$10 million. World Bank representative Zayra Romo praised the initiative for creating direct and indirect jobs.

Romo stated that the programme will be economically viable due to the fact that the country will soon be a major producer of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), as a by-product of the exploitation of the Pande and Temane gas fields in the southern province of Inhambane. This could remove the need to import cooking gas and thus make gas available to the public at an economically acceptable price.

Romo added that “to attain this goal, collaboration with the private sector is extremely important to guarantee efficiency and a reliable supply of fuel so that consumers do not return to traditional solutions”.

Romo believed the programme will have a positive effect on health, particularly for women and children, who will no longer have to inhale noxious fumes from burning wood fuel. By replacing wood fuel, cooking gas will also have a positive effect on the environment by reducing deforestation. Women will also gain time, she

added, since they would no longer have to walk long distances to collect firewood. “Their time can be invested in more productive economic activities that can improve their income”, she said. In addition, children will spend more time at school instead of looking for fuel.

The government hopes that the programme will benefit, both directly and indirectly, about four million people.

President Nyusi also inaugurated a gas bottle filling unit in Anchilo which cost 570 million meticais (about US\$9 million) and is financed by the Ministry of Mineral Resources and Energy.

President Nyusi demands transparent land management

President Filipe Nyusi on 31 March demanded the fair and transparent management of urban land with local communities participating in drawing up development programmes. According to President Nyusi, the priority in managing urban land should be to promote improved living conditions and so the programmes should be made with the population and not for the population.

The President was speaking in Maputo at the opening session of the Second National Urban Forum, taking place under the motto “Urbanisation: a priority for sustainable development”.

“Participatory planning is more than one or two public consultations”, said President Nyusi. “It means involving the local population actively and effectively since they know their environment. It means planning with the public so that when the plan is approved this population can not only identify with its purposes but can also provide support in publicising it and defend it against disinformation”. “That is what inclusion is”, he insisted, “planning with the population and not planning for the population”.

He admitted it has been difficult for municipalities to draw up territorial plans at all levels given their lack of human and financial resources and the speed at which Mozambican cities are growing. But it was also true that often plans drawn up in offices “are not well understood or assimilated by the various local stakeholders because they have not been sufficiently involved in producing them”.

President Nyusi added that special attention should be paid to the dynamics and changes in society so that planning tools are always up-to-date and become closer to realities without abandoning long term projections.

US to donate US\$1.5 billion in aid

The Mozambican and United States governments on 31 March in Maputo signed an agreement under which US\$1.5 billion of aid will be provided to Mozambique over the next five years.

A press release from the US embassy described this as a “Development Objective Grant Agreement” which officially renews the partnership between the Mozambican government and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), “to promote a more peaceful, prosperous, and healthy Mozambique”.

According to the embassy, the agreement focuses on three primary objectives: healthier and better educated Mozambicans; diversified and inclusive economic growth; and increased resilience of vulnerable populations. The five year strategy, it continues, “increases support for northern and central Mozambique to withstand the shocks of natural disasters, violent extremism, and food insecurity”.

It also intends “to promote a business environment that allows diverse and inclusive growth”. To this end, the strategy “will assist Mozambique to develop more transparent and accountable public financial management”.

It adds that “the strategy also focuses on building gender equality and increasing economic opportunities for youth”.

US reaffirms commitment to fighting TB in Mozambique

The United States Embassy in Mozambique on 24 March, World Tuberculosis Day, reaffirmed its commitment to assisting Mozambique to eliminate tuberculosis as a public health problem.

An embassy press release said that TB is the fifth leading cause of death in Mozambique and the main cause of death among Mozambicans who are HIV-positive. The embassy noted that Mozambique is now poised to reach the target set by WHO (World Health Organisation) of testing and treating 90 per cent of all estimated TB cases annually.

It added that this year the U.S. Government will invest US\$13.4 million to support continued TB control efforts.

The embassy praised the “impressive results” from Mozambique’s TB prevention and treatment drive, with 90 per cent of new and relapsed TB cases and 88 per cent of patients with TB/HIV co-infection successfully treated.

The release noted that “while some countries saw

significant drops in the number of TB cases identified during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mozambique maintained its pre-COVID performance. Additionally, Mozambique’s patient-friendly decision to provide TB treatment in patients’ homes was a success, with no drop in treatment completion rates during the pandemic”.

Government to reduce chronic malnutrition

The Mozambican government is to reduce the levels of chronic malnutrition among children through increased agricultural production and the availability of good quality foodstuffs, according to Prime Minister Adriano Maleiane.

The Prime Minister was speaking on 29 March at a ceremony in Maputo where he swore into office Leonor Mondlane as the new Executive Secretary of the Food and Nutritional Security Technical Secretariat (SETSAN).

Chronic malnutrition remains a serious public health problem in Mozambique. The latest data suggest that 38 per cent of all children under the age of five are chronically malnourished (alarming though this figure is, it is an improvement on the 43 per cent reported a couple of years ago).

Maleiane called on Mondlane “to strengthen and institutionalise the food and nutritional security coordination structures at provincial and district level throughout the country and strengthen the integrated information about food security so as to capture disaggregated data at all levels”.

He urged SETSAN to promote actions of advocacy for social change and a change in diet, and “to build the capacity of leaders of public institutions and civil society, and media professionals, to deal with matters of food security and nutrition”.

For her part, Mondlane, who works in the Ministry of Agriculture, said she is ready for her new tasks. She stressed the need to coordinate the education, health, agriculture, and fisheries sectors, among others, “in order to find the best response to the food security situation”.

She said there had been improvements in producing fortified and good quality foods, but there remained a great deal to be done. “Rather than just producing food, we must bank on dietary education, because we have areas which produce food in abundance, but continue to face nutritional challenges”, she said.

Mondlane replaces Celmira da Silva, who left SETSAN in February, to take up the post of general director of the National Administration of Conservation Areas (ANAC).

Municipal elections to cost over US\$100 million

Mozambique's National Elections Commission (CNE) on 25 March in Maputo said that the country's sixth municipal elections, scheduled for 11 October 2023 in all 53 municipalities, will cost 9.7 billion meticaís (over US\$100 million).

Addressing a press conference to outline the wide range of activities to be carried out by the electoral body up until polling day, CNE spokesperson Paulo Cuínica told reporters that the process will cost nearly 10 billion meticaís, which will be disbursed by the State Budget.

"Regarding the election cost, for the activities scheduled for 2022 we will spend 3.2 billion meticaís, and next year the budget will reach 6.5 billion. That will be 9.7 billion meticaís altogether to cover the expenses of the whole process," Cuínica stated, adding that CNE wants to ensure that the polls are held in every municipality.

Within the next 60 days, Cuínica said, the CNE will set up its support bodies such as the provincial electoral commissions, followed by district commissions. The CNE will also draw up the time frame for voter registration and the proposal will be delivered to the Council of Ministers, which will publicly announce the dates for registration.

As for the inspection and observation of the polls, the CNE will accredit the election agents of the political parties, national and international observers as well as journalists who will follow the whole process until the proclamation and validation of the results by the Constitutional Council, the country's supreme body in electoral law.

Thus, Cuínica urged the political parties to submit in due time the requests for accreditation of their representatives. The requests must be submitted at least 30 days ahead of the start of voter registration. Each political party is entitled to request accreditation for two representatives and one alternate for every registration station.

The old voter registration cards will no longer be valid. One of the peculiarities of the Mozambican system is that the entire electorate is re-registered every five years. The voters in the 53 municipalities will be registered before the October 2023 municipal elections, followed by the registration of voters in the rest of the country ahead of the presidential, parliamentary, and provincial elections, scheduled for October 2024.

Cuínica said the CNE will carry out capacity building for the voter registration staff followed by their deployment, with the registration material, at the sites where the registration will take place.

Finnish support for vulnerable children in Nampula

The Finnish government on 28 March pledged to provide €2.5 million (US\$2.8 million) to support poor and vulnerable children in Lalaua, Mogincual, Nacala-a-Velha, and Mozambique Island in the northern province of Nampula over the next two years.

The Finnish aid will strengthen the actions of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare in supporting the National Basic Social Security Strategy (ENSSB) for the period 2016-2024.

One of the main actions to be financed is the Child Allowance programme which will support children under two years of age and their families, through monetary transfers and home visits to deal with multiple vulnerabilities.

The agreement was signed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), represented by Maria-Luisa Fornara, and by Finnish ambassador Anna Kaisa Heikkinen. Fornara explained that the programme began in Nampula in 2017, and in its initial phase it reached 15,345 children under two years of age in four districts. Fornara expressed optimism about eliminating poverty among vulnerable women and children in the four target districts, stating that "we are improving nutrition for more children, and reducing domestic violence".

The programme also envisages monthly monetary transfers of 512 meticaís (US\$8) to caregivers or those who have children under two years of age. Linked to this is the training of parents in good childcare practices.

UNICEF says it is measuring the impact of the programme through a rigorous assessment, and so far "the results have been positive, including a reduction in monetary poverty among the beneficiary households, and improved food consumption among the children, in quantity and quality".

The Finnish ambassador said that gender inequalities contribute to weakening women and girls by increasing the risks of early pregnancies, child marriages, gender-based violence, and limited access to education and economic opportunities.

She said that Finland is also diversifying its support for the education of girls, and the defence of sexual and reproductive rights.

Kaisa said that Finland's development cooperation with Mozambique is budgeted at about €15 million a year, which makes Mozambique one of Finland's major partners in Africa.

Central Bank increases interest rates

The Bank of Mozambique on 30 March increased its benchmark interest rate by 200 base points.

A statement issued by the bank's Monetary Policy Committee (CPMO) said that the Interbank Money Market Rate (MIMO), used by the central bank for its interventions on the interbank money market to regulate liquidity, increases from 13.25 to 15.25 per cent.

This sharp rise follows a period of more than a year (since January 2021) in which interest rates had held steady.

The CPMO justified increasing interest rates on the grounds that the prospects for inflation have deteriorated. What it calls "the rise in geopolitical conflict in Europe", plus natural disasters in central and northern Mozambique, threaten to push prices higher.

"Increasing the MIMO rate", it says, "seeks to maintain control over inflation in the short and medium term, so as to allow a gradual transition to single digit interest rates, in a context of the resumption of the programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the implementation of natural gas projects".

The prospects, the CPMO warned, are for "an acceleration of general and underlying inflation in the short and medium term, mainly reflecting the direct and indirect effects of the increase in fuel and food prices", despite the stability of the Mozambican currency, the metical.

The CPMO put annual inflation in February at 6.8 per cent.

The risks and uncertainties associated with projections of inflation include the conflict in Ukraine since it is not known how long that will last or the scale of its impact. Other uncertainties include the effects of the recent storms on Mozambican prices, constraints on global supply chains, and to what extent the recent fuel price increases will push up the prices of other goods and services.

The central bank remained optimistic about the recovery of economic activity in Mozambique in 2022, despite the likely slowdown in external demand. This optimism results from the easing of the government's restrictive measures imposed to slow down the spread of Covid-19, and the implementation of energy programmes in Inhambane and the Rovuma Basin, off the coast of Cabo Delgado province.

The Inhambane programme refers to the Temane Thermal Plant (CTT), for which President Filipe Nyusi laid the first stone on 28 March. This will be

the largest power station built post-independence in Mozambique, generating 450 megawatts (MW), in the Inhambane district of Inhassoro.

In the Rovuma Basin, the first of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects, is expected to start production and export in the second half of the year. This is the floating LNG platform operated by the Italian energy company, ENI.

The CPMO also noted an increase in domestic public debt, which rose from 220.6 billion meticaais (US\$ 3.45 billion) in December to 242.3 billion meticaais in March.

Oil companies bid for new licenses

At least 13 oil companies have delivered bids for the prospection and exploration of hydrocarbons in Mozambique, in response to the sixth licensing round for exploration and production concessions launched by the Mozambican government.

A news report by Radio Mozambique (RM) states that companies such as ExxonMobil and Total Energies have delivered bids, as have the two Russian companies Rosneft and Novatec. Other oil giants that have placed bids include the Italian company ENI; the Chinese companies Sinopec, CNOOC, CNPC and Petro China International, Qatar Petroleum; the South African Petrochemical company Sasol; ONGC Videsh from India; the Irish company Discovery Exploration; and Aiteo from Nigeria.

The tenders cover 16 areas along the country's coastline which include five in the Rovuma basin in Cabo Delgado province, which is already known to contain vast deposits of natural gas. Seven areas are off the coast of Angoche in Nampula province, two are in the Zambezi delta, and the remaining two are in the south of the country in the delta of the Save River. Taken together, the 16 areas cover 92,000 square kilometres.

Gombe death toll over 53

At least 53 people died and over 75,000 houses were destroyed or damaged during tropical cyclone "Gombe" which hit the northern Mozambican province of Nampula on 11 March, according to the preliminary results issued by the Emergency Operational Committee (COE).

The cyclone destroyed 29,556 hectares of various crops in the districts of Monapo and Rapale. Livestock breeders also lost cows, goats, pigs and 4,500 chickens.

Fishermen reported the loss of 133 fishing vessels and five water reservoirs were destroyed.

Japan pledges US\$5.2 million for sustainable development

The Japanese government on 24 March announced a grant of US\$5.2 million which will “support Mozambique on its path to sustainable development, as well as the humanitarian response to the crisis in the north of the country”.

The Japanese aid will be implemented through international organisations including United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the International Federation of Red Cross Societies (IFRC).

According to a press release from the embassy, the aid “will allow the international organisations selected to strengthen and increase their support to the Mozambican government in matters of sustainable development and the humanitarian response for internally displaced people and their host communities affected by the crisis in northern Mozambique”.

Japan will grant US\$4.9 million to assist displaced people and host communities with a further US\$300,000 for “promoting responsible business conduct in Mozambique, with particular stress on the promotion of due diligence in matters of human rights in global supply chains, and in leveraging the Guiding Principles of the United Nations on Business and Human Rights”.

President visits new tourist resort

President Filipe Nyusi on 18 March stressed that tourism remains one of the government’s main approaches to ensure diversification and competitiveness of the country’s economy, and also to create jobs and improve livelihoods.

President Nyusi made the remarks when he and visiting Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa inaugurated a luxury tourist resort, the Montebelo Bay and Resort, located at Ponta Milibangalala in Maputo National Park, about 50 kilometres south of the capital. Rated five stars, the resort cost US\$92 million, has 51 rooms, and employs a hundred people directly.

President Nyusi said that the tourism sector has been recording sound growth and Maputo province has been making a great contribution, although it has not yet exhausted its capacity. He noted that Maputo province has 471 tourist resorts and Matutuine district, where Milibangalala is located, houses 167 of them.

The tourism sector was severely affected when international trips came to a halt due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Aware of the need to boost the tourism sector, the Mozambican government has

adopted a wide variety of measures to boost its recovery. The measures, President Nyusi pointed out, include a resilience and recovery plan for the tourism sector 2022-2024, staff immunisation, and the quality label named “Pro Limpo”.

“The tourism sector has demonstrated resilience, whenever there are adverse situations which caused losses,” President Nyusi declared, adding that data from the World Tourism Organisation show that in 2021 international tourism recorded a moderate recovery.

Polio vaccination surpasses target

The Health Ministry on 30 March announced that it has surpassed the target set for vaccinating children under the age of five against polio.

The target for the first phase of the campaign, in the northern provinces of Niassa, Nampula, and Cabo Delgado and in the central provinces of Zambezia, Tete, Manica, and Sofala was to reach 4.2 million children between 24 and 27 March.

Announcing the results of the first round of the campaign at a Maputo press conference, the National Director of Public Health, Quinhas Fernandes, said that 4,833,352 children under the age of five had been vaccinated. All seven provinces surpassed their targets, with coverage rates varying between 107 and 117 per cent. The greatest success was in Tete where the target was 496,924, but 580,980 children were vaccinated.

The first round involved 46,000 people - vaccination staff, supervisors, coordinators, mobilisers, independent monitors, drivers, and other logistical personnel - and cost US\$3.4 million.

Fernandes recognised the efforts made by the vaccination brigades in Nampula and Zambezia who had to cope with the enormous difficulties caused by Cyclone Gombe and the flooding of major river valleys that came in its wake.

He praised the parents and guardians in the target provinces “not only because you recognised the importance of vaccinating your children, but also because you took your children to the vaccination posts or opened the doors of your houses to allow our brigades to carry out this activity”.

The Ministry launched the campaign because a case of polio was detected in Malawi on 17 February, and two cases were detected in northern Mozambique (in Cabo Delgado and Nampula). The Ministry says that the second round will also target the northern and central regions. The date for this round, and the target group, will be announced shortly.

Trial of former Labour Minister

The Mozambican Public Prosecutor's Office on 15 March demanded that former Labour Minister Helena Taipo, and her ten co-accused in a major corruption trial, should repay, in full and with interest, the 113 million meticaís (US\$1.8 million) which they allegedly stole from the state coffers.

At the start of the trial, held in a courtroom in the Maputo municipal district of Katembe, the prosecution laid out in great detail how the corrupt schemes are alleged to have operated. According to the prosecution, Taipo was at the top of the pyramid of theft. It was she who had supposedly organised a series of operations whereby the Mozambican state was swindled out of well over 100 million meticaís. She is facing charges of embezzlement, abuse of trust and illicit participation in business.

Below the former minister, three names of senior Labour Ministry officials appear on the indictment – Anastacio Zita, the Director of Migrant Labour at the time of the alleged crimes, Jose Mondlane, the head of finance in the migrant labour directorate, and Pedro Taimo, who was once the Labour Ministry's representative in South Africa, dealing directly with Mozambican migrant mineworkers and their pension funds.

The prosecution claims that Taipo and the three officials dealing with migrant labour controlled the fees paid by South African companies for the recruitment of Mozambican labour, and the bank account into which were paid funds for future pensions, and unclaimed wages. As from 2014, they began to help themselves to this money. The first of these scams was organised by Taipo herself, said the prosecution. She claimed that six million meticaís were used to organise an event – the event turned out to be fictitious but the money was not. Taipo was assisted by one of her co-accused, Baltazar Mongoi, who falsified documentation for the event.

Taipo then spent five million meticaís of state money to build a house for her daughter in Muaivire, in the northern province of Nampula.

This was money that was supposedly spent on building a technical block in the Alberto Cassimo Institute for Professional Training and Labour Studies (IFPELAC), in the Nampula district of Malema – work that was never done.

In this scheme, Taipo was assisted by the owner of a Nampula building company, Sheng Zhang, and his manager, Dalila Lalgy, who provided false documents.

Taipo authorised the use of 21 million meticaís for purposes that had nothing to do with the Labour Ministry, such as the acquisition of an electrical pump and various agricultural inputs. In this, she was assisted by Hermenegildo Nhantave, an official in the Agriculture Ministry, to whom she paid 375,000 meticaís.

Money was also used to organise parties, and to buy baskets of goods to be offered as presents at Christmas. Taipo also obtained 50 bicycles to be distributed in Nampula. She was assisted by a member of her staff, Sidonio Manuel, to whom she paid 200,000 meticaís.

The prosecution also accuses Taipo of authorising a series of administrative acts, with no legal basis, under which contracts were simulated with various types of services (such as building companies and printers). The suppliers would over-invoice for their services, and Taipo and her accomplices allegedly skimmed off the amount over-invoiced.

Among the source of the money taken were accounts holding wages for Mozambican miners that had not been claimed.

"As public servants, you had the task of dealing with the social insertion of the miners", said the prosecuting attorney, Armando Parruque, "but instead you took the miners' money for the interests of your families, and simulated contracts which never benefitted the miners".

Taipo denies all the charges. Her lawyer accused the public prosecutor of "distorting the facts in order to incriminate her". All the authorisations signed by Taipo, as Minister, he claimed, "obeyed all the administrative procedures".
