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Tanker en route to pick up first Mozambique LNG

The tanker British Mentor is on its way to the northern province of Cabo Delgado to pick up the first-ever supply of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) produced in Mozambique. According to the ship tracking website Marine Traffic, British Mentor is currently heading north of the South African port of Durban. Meanwhile, the Bloomberg news agency reports that it is due to arrive at the Coral South Floating LNG terminal, off the Cabo Delgado coast, on 24 August.

The LNG will be produced by the consortium led by the Italian energy company, ENI. The platform, built in a Korean shipyard, arrived in Mozambican waters in January and is now anchored in Area Four of the Rovuma Basin, some 40 kilometres from the mainland. This is the first deep-water platform in the world to operate at a water depth of about two thousand meters.

Once fully operational, the terminal will produce 3.4 million tonnes of LNG per year. All of its output over the next 20 years has been bought by the British company BP. According to Bloomberg, ENI is already planning to build a second floating platform which could come onstream in less than four years.

The Coral Sul project lies within the Area Four concession and will be the first of three projects to produce LNG in Mozambique. The main participant in Area Four is Mozambique Rovuma Ventures, a partnership between ENI, the US oil and gas giant ExxonMobil and the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), which together control 70 per cent of the undertaking. The remaining 30 per cent is divided equally between the Mozambican state enterprise ENH, Galp Energia of Portugal, and Kogas of South Korea.

The other major venture currently underway is the Mozambique LNG Project using gas from Rovuma Basin Offshore Area One. The French oil and gas company, TotalEnergies, is the operator with its partners coming from Japan, India, Thailand, and Mozambique. When operational, the project will produce 12.88 million tonnes of LNG per year for domestic consumption and export. Progress with this project has been held up following the decision of TotalEnergies in April 2021 to declare force majeure following an insurgent attack near the Afungi Peninsula where the onshore LNG facility will be constructed.

A third development, the Rovuma LNG Project, will use gas from offshore Area Four to produce 15 million tonnes of LNG a year. However, the operator, ExxonMobil, has not yet taken its final investment decision.

President inaugurates vegetable oil factory

President Filipe Nyusi on 18 August inaugurated a new vegetable oil factory in the city of Cuamba, in the northern province of Niassa. The factory is owned by the Niassa Cotton Company (SAN), which is part of the Portuguese Joao Ferreira dos Santos group. Using soya, the factory can extract 7,500 tonnes of crude vegetable oil and 3,000 tonnes of refined oil a year.

President Nyusi told the ceremony that the company would replace imports of vegetable oil with a direct impact on the Mozambican balance of trade. This reduction of imports, he said, “represents greater economic and financial autonomy of the country, and a greater capacity to retain foreign currency, widening our room for manoeuvre in exchange management, which is a crucial element in the stability of our economy”.

Imports of vegetable oil have been a heavy burden on the balance of trade. President Nyusi said that annually Mozambique spends about US\$400 million on importing cooking oil – which is 30 per cent of the import of all goods associated with agriculture.

Cooking oil is one of the goods whose world market price has soared recently, partly because of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which is one of the main producers and exporters of sunflower oil.

President Nyusi put the average rise in the price of vegetable oil at 100 per cent, making this product a significant component of inflation. “Hence, we reaffirm that one of the ways of reducing the cost of living is to increase our production”, said the President, “and to transform our raw materials into finished goods on our territory”.

The President was confident that the new cooking oil factory will simulate agricultural production and employment in agriculture. All producers of oilseeds would know there is a ready market for their production.

The factory would provide a market for about 40,000 producers of soya and cotton. “They are all called upon to provide quality raw material for the extraction and refining of vegetable oil”, said President Nyusi

Mozambique purchases foot-and-mouth vaccines

The Mozambique Veterinary Authority is to import over a million doses of vaccine against foot-and-mouth disease in response to the confirmed outbreak in the districts of Chifunde, Maravia, and Moatize, in the central province of Tete.

The acquisition of the vaccines, to be administered to about 500,000 cattle in high-risk areas, comes at a time when South Africa is dealing with an outbreak of the O strain of the foot-and-mouth disease.

Of the total vaccines being imported, 450,000 are bivalent to respond to the outbreak of the O and SAT 2 strains, while the rest should protect animals from the SAT 1, 2 and 3 viral forms.

The National Director of Livestock Development (DNDP), Americo da Conceicao, quoted by the Maputo daily "Noticias", said the administrative process is concluded and the vaccines are expected to be delivered to the country in the next few days.

"We are acquiring one million vaccines from Botswana in response to the outbreak of the disease, which so far remains confined to some districts of Tete province", he said, adding that, for this purpose, over US\$2 million has been disbursed from the State Budget.

The distribution of the vaccines will take into account the vulnerability of regions to foot and mouth disease, focusing on the border districts of the southern provinces of Maputo and Gaza; Manica, Tete and Zambezia (in the central zone) and Niassa (in the north).

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is evaluating the possibility of strengthening surveillance measures and control of beef imports and derivatives from South Africa, due to the spread of foot-and-mouth disease in the neighbouring country. South Africa has just banned the movement of livestock throughout its territory for 21 days due to the progressive spread of the disease. So far, 116 outbreaks have been confirmed on farms, feedlots, and communal areas in KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, North West, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, and Free State provinces.

In recent months the disease has spread in the southern African region, with confirmed cases in Malawi, Zambia, South Africa, and Mozambique.

Dissidents seek to overthrow Renamo leadership

A group of dissidents from Mozambique's main opposition party, Renamo, has announced its intention to dethrone the current Renamo leadership, and head a coalition of parties that can take power from the ruling Frelimo Party.

The dissident group is headed by the little-known figure, Vitano Caetano Singano. Interviewed by the television station STV, Singano said his movement plans to remove the current Renamo leadership and form a strong coalition of opposition parties capable of defeating the ruling Frelimo Party.

Singano, who was born in Marromeu in the central province of Sofala, said he has been a member of Renamo for 30 years.

"Our leader, Afonso Dhlakama, died (in May 2018) when a coalition had already been approved around a single opposition candidate for the 2019 presidential elections", claimed Singano. He said the extra-parliamentary opposition parties had approached the current Renamo leader, Ossufo Momade, on 11 June 2019 with a letter left by Dhlakama which proposed an opposition coalition around a single candidate for the presidential elections due in October of that year. Singano said the coalition would only be for the presidential election of 2019 and not for parliamentary elections. This is the first time such a latter has been mentioned, and there was no proof it ever existed.

According to Singano, Momade had no interest in tying Renamo to a group of extra-parliamentary parties. "We understood that he didn't want unity, he wanted the dispersal of votes", said Singano. "Since he doesn't want a union, we shall follow the ideals of Dhlakama".

Singano's new party calls itself "Democratic Renamo". He said it was formed "by members who have become fed up with the current image of Renamo". He claimed that the dissidents have support within the Renamo parliamentary group, but "because of the law", they were unable to show their faces.

Singano said his movement has 128 district delegates, and he will prove their existence in visits to the central provinces of Tete, Manica and Zambezia. He said he will formalise "Democratic Renamo" at the Ministry of Justice with the signatures of more than 10,000 supporters. "My target is 20,000 signatures", he said, "and this is possible. On the day that we deliver the documents, we shall call the press to show you".

The Renamo national spokesperson, Jose Manteigas, told STV that Singano had once been a member of the Renamo National Political Commission, representing young Renamo members. But he left Renamo about ten years ago and subsequently tried his luck with other, smaller opposition parties. Singano joined the PDD (Party for Peace, Development and Democracy), set up by the former number two in Renamo, Raul Domingos. But he then moved on to a more significant organisation, the MDM (Mozambique Democratic Movement), led at the time by the Mayor of Beira, Daviz Simango.

Manteigas said that more recently Singano was detained for the illegal possession of firearms. The guns came from an earlier dissident group, the "Renamo Military Junta", which now seems to have collapsed. He claimed that "Democratic Renamo" was set up "by enemies of our party", who regarded Renamo as "an inconvenience".

Singano admitted that his movement's flag resembles the Renamo flag, but he thought this was justified because "we have to value the ideals" of Renamo's first two leaders, Dhlakama and his predecessor Andre Matsangaissa. But Manteigas warned that Singano's use of Renamo symbols and names is illegal, and measures will be taken to stop it.

Supreme Court seeks strategies for fight against poaching

The President of the Mozambican Supreme Court (TS), Adelino Muchanga, has expressed his concern about the persistence of poaching in the country. According to Muchanga, speaking on 18 August in Maputo at the launch of the Manual for Training and Supporting Magistrates in Matters of Combating Wildlife Crime, the numbers are worrying because the poachers have been changing their areas of operation, target species, and modus operandi.

According to Muchanga, hunting today is no longer for survival, but for profit, a fact that puts strong pressure on nature.

“Associated with wildlife crime are, of course, other related crimes, such as terrorism, corruption, money laundering, and arms and drug trafficking”, he explained. Thus, the new training manual will help to raise the legal-environmental awareness of magistrates and facilitate the prosecution of wildlife cases.

“We understand that it is fundamental that judges be endowed with specialised knowledge and skills in the matter of wildlife crime and this training enables him to act effectively and efficiently,” Muchanga said.

With a total of 86 pages, the manual addresses methodologies on how to train judicial magistrates in matters relating to the fight against wildlife crime.

For her part, the Minister of Justice, Helena Kida, said that the manual contributes to the understanding of the phenomenon, prevention of related offences, and accountability of offenders. Kida pledged to strengthen the legal and policy framework of enforcement to combat wildlife crime locally, regionally, and globally.

“We still witness the death of countless animals every year as a result of human intervention, accidental or intentional, through pollution, habitat modification or destruction, and climate change”, she said. “These factors individually or in combination are leading to ecological imbalance and even the extinction of some species”.

The Minister hoped that the manual will bring proposals for pragmatic and sustainable solutions aimed at improving the interpretation of crimes against wildlife.

CFM invests in Quelimane port rehabilitation

The publicly owned ports and rail company, CFM, has invested about US\$2.75 million in rehabilitating the port of Quelimane in the central province of Zambezia. The investment includes the dredging of the approach channel by the publicly owned Mozambican Dredging Company (EMODRAGA).

The port infrastructure, with the capacity to handle about 650,000 tons of goods per year, has a quay 230 meters long and occupies an area of 48,000 square metres, of which 31,000 square metres are open storage and 5,417 square metres covered.

The Chairperson of the CFM Board of Directors, Miguel Matabele announced the rehabilitation at a Quelimane press conference held on 18 August.

“The route to the port of Quelimane, from the bar, is along a perfectly marked channel which allows navigation 24 hours a day with a lighting system installed along the route. The reopening of the Quelimane Port results from the most recent dredging, financed by CFM”, Matabele said.

Addressing Zambezia businessmen, Matabele said that the port can receive general cargo ships, tankers, and barges with a capacity of up to 20,000 tons and 150 meters in length.

Ukraine may supply wheat to Mozambique

The Ukrainian government has assured Mozambique that it is willing to provide the country with wheat. The guarantee was given in Maputo on 19 August by the Ukrainian ambassador, Liubov Abravitova, after she was received by Helder Injojo, the first deputy chairperson of the Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic.

Ukraine is a major exporter, not only of grain (particularly wheat) but also of sunflower oil.

“The opportunities were always there”, said Abravitova, “but it was the Russian invasion of our country which proved to the world, to Africa and particularly to Mozambique how important Ukraine is for world food security”.

The ambassador added that wheat imports were among the matters discussed in the recent phone conversation between President Filipe Nyusi and his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

She said the meeting with Injojo also discussed establishing ties of cooperation between the Ukrainian and Mozambican parliaments. According to the spokesperson for the meeting, Oriel Chemane, she “expressed the interest of the Ukrainian parliament in setting up a Mozambique-Ukraine league of friendship and cooperation and bringing together delegations of the two parliaments for exchanging experiences and for parliamentary cooperation in various fields”.

Injojo expressed his solidarity with Ukraine for the loss of life and destruction of infrastructures in the current conflict. He called on the two sides to reach a peaceful solution through dialogue. He noted that relations of friendship between Mozambique and Ukraine go back to the days of Mozambique’s armed struggle for independence from Portuguese colonial rule when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union, which assisted the Mozambican liberation movement.

Mozambique is dependent on imports for 90 per cent or more of the wheat consumed in the country. Attempts to boost local wheat production have not proved successful, and nothing more is heard nowadays of the proposal to make bread out of a mixture of wheat flour and cassava flour.

US donates US\$41 million in emergency aid

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has received US\$41 million from the United States government to cover emergency humanitarian aid in Mozambique, particularly in the north, where it is assisting over 900,000 people, mostly displaced from their homes by terrorist raids.

The US aid will allow the WFP to reinstate the delivery of a complete humanitarian basket of goods and services to 900,000 people. Since April, the basket had been reduced by half, when the WFP was running out of money to face the crisis in Cabo Delgado province.

The WFP deputy director in Mozambique, Pierre Lucas, confirmed the additional aid in an interview with AIM. “Due to the recent contributions from the United States, the WFP will once more be able to offer a complete basket of foodstuffs, from October to December, to avert a humanitarian crisis”, he said.

But much more will be needed to feed people displaced by the jihadists next year. Lucas said a further US\$43.5 million will be needed by March 2023 to guarantee emergency assistance to the neediest people in northern Mozambique, “Without additional new funds, we shall run out of money in the first quarter of 2023, precisely at the start of the period of shortages, when the food reserves become exhausted” he added.

Recently the Japanese government donated US\$3.9 million to the WFP in Mozambique to tackle food insecurity in communities affected by drought in the south, and households displaced by violence in the north.

According to a release from the Japanese embassy in Maputo, US\$2.4 million will support the WFP in providing food and humanitarian assistance to over 35,100 people displaced by the jihadist violence in Cabo Delgado, and the remaining US\$1.5 million will respond to the overall food security crisis caused by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Renamo military base in Montepuez closed

A thirteenth Renamo military base has been closed under the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme, agreed by the government and Renamo as part of the General Peace Agreement of August 2019. During the closing ceremony on 17 August, 444 former guerrillas were demobilised in Montepuez district in the northern province of Cabo Delgado.

According to Renamo’s figures, only three bases remain to be closed.

As with the entire DDR process, the decision to close the base was jointly agreed upon by the government and Renamo, with field activities overseen by the Military Affairs Commission and the Joint Technical Groups set up by the two former belligerents.

According to a statement from the UN Secretary-General’s personal envoy to Mozambique and Chairperson of the Contact Group between the government and Renamo, Mirko Manzoni, “with this

development, the DDR has reached 77 per cent of its intended beneficiaries”.

“We commend the continued positive collaboration between the Government and Renamo”, said Manzoni. “The disarmament and demobilisation phase of the implementation of the Maputo Peace and National Reconciliation Agreement is drawing to a close, and efforts to support reintegration must continue”.

According to Manzoni, peace in Mozambique brings benefits to all sectors of society, and all stakeholders can contribute to peace. “The stabilisation of the security situation in Cabo Delgado over the past year has made today’s achievement possible, and the closure of this base gives renewed hope that peace and stability are returning to the region”, said Manzoni, stressing that it is also a reflection on the country’s peacebuilding model, through national and regional solutions.

Manzoni concluded with a pledge that the United Nations remains committed to supporting the people of Mozambique in building a more prosperous future.

Most of what is politely referred to as Renamo’s “residual forces” were concentrated in the central provinces of Manica and Sofala. It comes as something of a surprise to learn that over 400 ex-Renamo guerrillas were living in Montepuez. There are no reports of this group taking part in any military activity since the first peace agreement was signed in October 1992.

SADC extends military mission in Cabo Delgado

The countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on 17 August renewed the mandate of the SADC military mission in the northern province of Cabo Delgado.

According to the final communique from the 42nd ordinary summit of heads of state and government of SADC, held in Kinshasa, the “report on the security situation in the province of Cabo Delgado” was analysed and the extension approved.

The summit “commended SAMIM Personnel Contributing Countries (PCCs) for their solidarity and sacrifice in supporting the Mission and expressed condolences to the governments and families of the nine (9) deceased SAMIM personnel who died in the theatre of operations”, the communiqué added.

Parts of Cabo Delgado province have been plagued by terrorist attacks since 2017. There are about 800,000 internally displaced people due to the conflict, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), with about 4,000 deaths according to the ACLED conflict registration project.

Since July 2021, an offensive by government troops with Rwandan support, later joined by SAMIM, allowed for the recovery of areas where terrorists had been present, in northern districts, near Tanzania, notably the districts of Palma and Mocimboa da Praia.

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

Nearly 350,000 hectares of land revert to the state

The Ministry of Land and Environment has over the last 12 months taken back nearly 350,000 hectares of land which had been granted to users who then allowed it to lie idle. "In the period under review, 658 plots were inspected, corresponding to an area of 373,737 hectares, of which 348,535 will revert to the State, due to non-compliance with the agreed land use plans," said the Minister of Land and Environment, Ivete Maibaze.

The minister was speaking on 17 August in Mossuril district, in the northern province of Nampula, at the opening of a meeting of the Coordinating Council of her ministry, which is taking place under the theme "For sustainable management of the land against the impacts of soil degradation and climate change."

According to Maibaze, the Government remains committed to strengthening the security of access, use and possession of land for all citizens, including communities, individuals, and national and foreign investors. "The land plays an important role in development processes, productive and social actions, and the mitigation of climate effects", Mabaize said, adding that land is a scarce and precious resource, which should be distributed, managed, and used in the interests of all generations.

Regarding the environment, the minister said that the soil erosion situation "continues to be an increasing concern". "From 26 critical areas of erosion recorded in 2006, the number has more than doubled, rising to 57 critical areas by 2022. This scenario, aggravated by the soil degradation situation, highlights the negative consequences of the fact that the Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Soil Erosion (2008-2018) has not been effectively implemented", she said.

Maibaze said that progress in the fight against drought and desertification can be achieved with the participation of all parties, including the government, public institutions, private businesses, research institutions, academia, and local communities.

"Respect for the nature in which we live is imperative at a time when we know that climate change is here to stay and we need to face it. It is time to put a stop to land degradation in our country", the minister declared, stressing the importance of Land and Territorial Planning, Biodiversity Conservation, Climate Change, and Forest Management.

Cocaine seized at Maputo Airport

The Mozambican authorities have arrested a citizen from Ivory Coast at Maputo International Airport after cocaine was found in his luggage. According to a spokesperson for the National Criminal Investigation Service (Sernic), the drug was hidden inside 15 electric torches.

The Ivory Coast citizen, who has not been named, denied that he was the owner of the luggage in which the drug was found. "I'm very surprised and angered because I don't know how they put a bag in my name in

with my other belongings", he told reporters. "They said I had three bags and that's what's on the ticket, but I don't recognise it. I only brought one bag. So, I'm confused and I don't know what to do".

This was the second drug seizure at the airport in less than a month.

Government relaxes entry visa rules

The Mozambican government on 16 August announced new immigration rules intended to attract more tourists and investors. These will be submitted for approval to the country's parliament, the Assembly of the Republic.

Announcing the proposals to reporters at the end of the weekly meeting of the Council of Ministers (Cabinet), the government spokesperson, Deputy Justice Minister Filimao Suaze, said the changes in the entry visa regime are part of the "economic acceleration measures" recently launched by President Filipe Nyusi "that will place the private sector at the centre of economic transformation and development".

This package, Suaze continued, aims to speed up improvements in the business environment, enhance the country's reputation as a safe destination, and create favourable conditions for attracting new investments.

As part of this relaxation, he said, the government "approved the revision of the norms of the regime for granting visas to foreign citizens who wish to visit the country, do business, or invest in Mozambique". This includes transforming the simple short-term tourism visa into a mixed tourism and business visa. That visa will be valid for 90 days, rather than the current 30.

The period covered by a temporary residence permit for investors will be extended from one to two years if the amount of the investment is at least US\$500,000. For an investment of US\$50 million or more, a temporary residence permit will be for five years.

The new regulations give the government the power to entirely waive entry visa requirements for citizens of countries which are not believed to present a serious threat of illegal immigration.

Suaze did not name these countries, but the independent newsheet "Mediafax" appears to have obtained a list. According to "Mediafax", visa waivers will cover citizens from all member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and all members of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP). In addition, the visa exemption scheme will cover visitors from Germany, the United Kingdom, Rwanda, Indonesia, India, Japan, and Australia.

Suaze said the government will introduce an electronic system for visa applications. Instead of visiting Mozambican embassies or consulates in person, those wishing to visit the country can end their application online and pick up the entry visa at the border. "This procedure should take a maximum of five days," Suaze said, adding that "the government sectors linked to migration and tourism are working to ensure the effectiveness of this platform in the shortest possible time".

Thirteen cases of polio confirmed

The number of confirmed cases of polio in Mozambique has risen to 13, according to Domingos Guihole, head of the Department of Surveillance in the Ministry of Health, cited by the television station, STV.

These cases were detected during the first and second rounds of polio vaccination earlier this year. The number of cases could increase because a further 35 suspected samples are awaiting testing in a reference laboratory in South Africa.

Guihole said that, during the vaccination process, “when the teams visit a house, one of the questions asked is whether any child in the household has experienced paralysis in a limb, or cannot move his limbs normally, or was born healthy, but with the passage of time became unable to move his limbs”.

If the answer to any of these questions is positive, the health professionals examine the child, and, if the child meets the criteria, a date is set to collect a sample for laboratory testing.

So far most of the samples tested have proved negative for polio, but this is no reason for complacency. On the contrary, Guihole thought surveillance should be stepped up to prevent any possible spread of the disease. “We are working with the communities, strengthening the message that the polio virus could be circulating here”, he said, “and if there are any cases that arouse suspicions, they should inform the authorities, because the current situation is worrying”.

Of the 13 confirmed cases, four are from Tete province, from the districts of Moatize, Changara, Magoe and Tsangano. The other nine cases are from Cabo Delgado, Nampula, Zambezia and Manica provinces.

On 15 August, the Malawian health authorities detected another case of the wild poliovirus in a child, believed to be a Mozambican.

Mozambique was declared free of polio in July 2016, but the disease reappeared in May this year.

Rehabilitation of 5,000 kilometres of roads planned

The Mozambican government plans to pave or rehabilitate about 5,000 kilometres of road in the centre and north of the country by 2024, using funds from the European Union and the World Bank, according to a report in the Maputo daily “Noticias” on 15 August.

The EU is disbursing over €124 million (US\$126.5) for this programme, while the World Bank has made US\$110 million available. The funds will also cover the associated bridges and drainage systems.

There is not yet any date for the beginning of the rehabilitation work, since consultants are still being hired.

The roads covered by this programme mostly link agricultural production zones to urban consumption areas. The roads mentioned in the “Noticias” report are in Nampula, Niassa and Zambezia provinces.

Annual inflation reaches almost 12 per cent

Mozambique’s annual inflation rate has reached almost 12 per cent according to the latest figures released by the National Statistics Institute (INE).

Based on the consumer price indices for the three largest cities (Maputo, Nampula and Beira), the INE calculates the monthly inflation in July at 0.62 per cent. This pushed inflation in the first seven months of the year to 7.1 per cent. The main components of this inflation were food and non-alcoholic drinks, and transport.

Annual inflation (1 August 2021 to 31 July 2022) was 11.77 per cent, ending all hopes by the government and the Bank of Mozambique to keep inflation this year to less than 10 per cent.

The items that contributed most to inflation in July were liquid fuels – the average price of diesel rose by 10.9 per cent, petrol by 4.3 per cent, and butane cooking gas by 18.6 per cent. Other significant price rises were for fresh cassava (up by 22.4 per cent), tomatoes (three per cent), fresh fish (1.3 per cent), and bread (one per cent).

The prices of a few foodstuffs came down – notably cabbage (down by eight per cent) and coconuts (3.8 per cent).

Of the three cities, Nampula had the sharpest July inflation rate of 0.94 per cent, followed by Maputo (0.59 per cent) and Beira (0.25 per cent).

The annual inflation rate has been rising remorselessly this year – up from 6.67 per cent in March, to 7.9 per cent in April, 9.31 per cent in May, 10.81 per cent in June, and now 11.77 per cent.

This is the highest annual inflation rate since August 2017, when the rate hit 14.13 per cent.

Prime Minister calls for increased use of renewable energies

Prime Minister Adriano Maleiane on 10 August instructed the National Energy Fund (FUNAE) to continue implementing programmes and projects for the mass use of renewable energies.

This, the Prime Minister said, is intended to contribute to achieving one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely ensuring universal access to electricity by 2030.

Speaking at the ceremony where he swore into office the new chairperson of FUNAE, former Deputy Transport Minister, Manuela Rebelo, Maleiane said that when it set up the Fund the government’s goal was to promote the use of renewable energies through implementing photovoltaic, hydroelectric and wind power solutions.

Another FUNAE task is to expand the network of petrol stations in rural areas.

“FUNAE is contributing to increased access to electricity in the countryside, which is benefiting communities, households and small local economic undertakings”, the Prime Minister added.

Containers of illegal hardwoods seized

The Mozambican authorities in the city of Pemba, capital of the northern province of Cabo Delgado have seized 63 containers full of precious hardwoods that were about to be illegally exported to China.

According to the television station STV, the containers held 1,000 cubic metres of blackwood (pau preto), a hardwood that may not be logged or exported. They were detected by the Environmental Quality Control Agency (AQUA) on 27 July when 20 of the 63 containers were about to be exported. Investigations revealed that a further 43 containers were in Montepuez district, in the Sain Funer Timber yard, which operates with a licence from the Chinese-owned company, Miti.

The customs service and the Cabo Delgado provincial attorney's office confirmed that they are investigating the circumstances leading up to the attempt to export forbidden timber.

Miti is the company which in 2021 forfeited 13,000 cubic metres of illegal timber to the State, which had been seized at its yards in Muxungue and Sena in the central province of Sofala. That timber was sold at public auction, and the company was fined 29 million meticais (about US\$453,000).

Pemba port has been used previously to export timber illegally to China. In December 2020, 76 containers were exported from Pemba to China. On that occasion, the Chinese authorities cooperated and the timber was recovered and later sold at auction. Nine people were arrested in connection with this case, including a Chinese citizen and several Pemba customs officials.

President asks if district elections are feasible

President Filipe Nyusi on 10 August insisted that there must be further reflection on the viability of holding elections to district assemblies in 2024, as proposed in the decentralisation package adopted in 2018.

Speaking in the northern city of Nampula, at the opening of a national conference on decentralisation, the President said participants should be free to discuss the pros and cons of holding the district elections. He stressed that he was not giving any instructions but was asking people to look deeper into the matter.

This is the second time President Nyusi has asked for a reflection on district elections, to predictable howls of outrage from the main opposition party, Renamo, which points out that the district elections are in the Mozambican Constitution.

Last May, at the end of a meeting of the Central Committee of the ruling Frelimo Party in Maputo, President Nyusi invited all political parties and civil society organisations to reflect on the feasibility and sustainability of pushing ahead with district elections in 2024.

There are currently 154 districts (and rather more if urban districts are included). Nobody has yet calculated how much the district assemblies will cost.

They will certainly complicate national elections.

Voters will already be faced with three ballot papers in 2024, for the presidential, parliamentary, and provincial assembly elections. Adding a fourth, for the district assemblies, would inevitably lengthen the time taken to count the votes and declare the results. Even discounting the possibility of deliberate fraud, tired polling station staff, working from 05.00 in the morning, are bound to make more mistakes, if the count is extended deeper into the night.

Just as with the municipalities and the provinces, the district assembly elections will be organised on a party list basis. The head of the list of whichever party wins will become the new district administrator. The administrator heads a district government, known as the District Executive Council, which answers to the District Assembly.

The Constitution says nothing else. The powers of the District Administrator and the District Executive Council are to be fixed by laws which do not yet exist.

Even the size of the district assemblies is not yet known. But it seems certain that they will provide hundreds, if not thousands of new jobs, with wages and allowances adding to the pressures on the state budget.

Those new jobs give significant powers of patronage to the political parties participating in the elections, and doubtless, this is why Renamo is so insistent that the elections should go ahead.

President Nyusi told the Nampula meeting that decentralisation is an irreversible government commitment, although he recognised that it is an unfinished process. "The misunderstandings, overlaps, and even involuntary frictions should be taken as part of a new process and should not create nightmares for us", the President said. There have now been two decades of decentralised governance, and so President Nyusi believed that "decentralisation is not imposed by itself, as it arises to meet the needs of local communities and there is no perfect model".

He thought that credible decentralisation "contributes to greater administrative efficiency, transparency, and citizen participation, and expands the possibilities for democracy, good governance, and local development".

The constitutional amendments of 2018 on decentralisation were "a historic milestone", he claimed, but they did not constitute "a finished model".

"Mozambicans should not be afraid to correct what could be better", stressed President Nyusi. "It is up to Mozambicans themselves to accept, believe, perfect, and improve this model with a cool head, humility and serenity, always keeping in mind that decentralisation is not finished."

"Where there is decentralisation there must be peace and harmony so that we can develop", he added. The last three years of governance in Mozambique, "are part of an embryonic journey of decentralisation that has allowed lessons to be drawn and challenges to be identified for strategies that include innovations, drawing on national solutions to Mozambican problems and seeking inspiration from other places when necessary".