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President Nyusi calls for massive voter registration

President Filipe Nyusi has called on all eligible citizens to register as voters for the municipal elections which will be held on 11 October. Mozambican citizens who are 18 years of age or above on the date of the elections and who hold an identity card, passport, or another acceptable identity document should make their way to the registration posts set up in all districts which contain municipalities.

Registration began on 20 April and will last until 3 June. President Nyusi was the first voter to register when the registration post at the Josina Machel secondary school, in central Maputo, opened at 08.00.

“I exhort all my fellow countrymen to join this process, but this has to be up to the conscience of all of us because the democratic process means that we are all able to choose”, said the President, immediately after he had registered, in the company of his wife, Isaura Nyusi.

President Nyusi congratulated the National Elections Commission (CNE) for organising the voter registration, in the midst of many adversities. “You can clearly see that they know what they are doing”, he said. “On average registration took nine minutes, I believe they will consider and improve much more”.

However, reports from elsewhere in the country suggest that registration brigades, unfamiliar with the equipment, are sometimes taking half an hour or more to register a single voter.

Registration relies on 3,192 brigades, working in 4,292 registration posts in the 65 municipalities throughout the country. Besides the fixed brigades, mobile brigades will be installed to reduce the distance between voters' homes and the voter registration posts.

According to data from the National Statistics Institute (INE), there are 9,921,625 potential municipal voters in Mozambique. Voter registration takes place in all districts that contain municipalities, plus Maputo city, which has the status both of a province and of a municipality. 62 districts contain municipalities. In most of these, there is just one municipality. But two districts contain two municipalities: they are Boane (Boane town and Matola-Rio) and Bilene (Macia and Bilene beach).

The INE projections show that the city with the largest population of voting age is Matola (794,195), followed by Maputo (728,946), and Nampula (484,174). The frequent claim that Beira is the second-largest city in the country is quite untrue. It is the fourth largest, with a voting age population of 389,093.

According to the CNE, the total cost of the municipal elections, from voter registration through to publication of the results, is 14 billion meticaís (US\$219 million).

Renamo accused of assaulting staff

A voter registration post in the northern city of Nampula was forced to close on 23 April after two members of the registration brigade said they had been assaulted by monitors from the main opposition party, Renamo.

According to a report on the television station, STV, the incident occurred at a post set up in the Acordos de Lusaka primary school on the outskirts of the city.

In response to the assault, the brigade closed the registration post. Since there was no advance notice of the closure, would-be voters formed a queue in the hope that the post would open. Some of them told the STV reporters they had witnessed the previous day's assault.

The two brigade members said the Renamo monitors attacked them outside the post after they had closed the registration machines for the day. They added that they have presented a complaint against the Renamo monitors at a nearby police station.

One of the victims, Edgar Pedro, said that after closing the machines on 22 April he went with a colleague to present condolences to an acquaintance on the death of a relative. On the way back, they were intercepted by Renamo monitors who accused them of undertaking “clandestine registration”.

“The Renamo men, encouraged by Patricio Daniel, who is a Renamo monitor, attacked us, alleging that we were doing nocturnal voter registration”, said Pedro.

A local Renamo official, Ossufo Ulane, disowned the physical attack – but then said there was no proof that it had happened. He claimed the brigade members “were present where they should not have been, later than the normal time. Only the police should have been there”.

The Nampula district director of the Electoral Administration Technical Secretariat (STAE), Evaristo Alfredo, promised that STAE will investigate the incident. “These are trends that we have been seeing”, he said. “We discourage this type of attitude because we want the registration to occur without any friction”.

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

EDM resumes electricity supply to 70,000 people

The publicly owned electricity company, EDM, has resumed power supply to at least 70,000 people of the 77,000 that were affected by cyclone Freddy, especially in the central province of Quelimane.

According to Luis Amado, EDM's National Director of Power Distribution, the damage caused to the company by Freddy is valued at US\$6 million.

"We have been re-using some materials, at the same time that we are looking for money to reinstall the power system. EDM has been making a provisional restoration", Amado said, cited by the Maputo daily "Noticias". He added that all 77,000 EDM customers in the cyclone-hit zones had been affected. The most critical areas are the districts of Nicoadala and Namacurra, which remain totally flooded.

Work on Temane to Maputo power line to be completed this year

Work on the electricity transmission line between Temane and Maputo, budgeted at US\$500 million, will be concluded by December. The project, which is linked to the 450-megawatt Temane Thermal Power Station, powered by Mozambican natural gas, envisages the construction of a 400 KV transmission line running for 563 kilometres from Temane, in Inhambane province, to Maputo.

According to Marcelino Alberto, chairman of the board of directors of EDM, 85 per cent of the work has been concluded with 20 electricity pylons installed. "About 50 kilometres have been deforested, but the power lines have not been installed yet. This phase should have ended in February but, due to various problems, it was delayed", Alberto said.

In its first phase, the power line will have sub-stations in Vilankulo, Chibuto, Marracuene, and Maputo, crossing three provinces and 13 districts. Alberto added that 236 resettlement houses have been built for families affected by the project, with over three thousand people compensated for the loss of houses and land.

The project is funded with the support of the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the Opec Fund for International Development.

Galinha administrative post electrified

On 13 April, EDM announced the electrification of the Galinha administrative post, in Muanza district, in the central province of Sofala.

The electrification consisted of building 32 kilometres of 33 Kv medium voltage power line from Derunde village to Galinha, and ten kilometres of low voltage line. Five 100 kVa transformers were installed and 150 lampposts for public lighting.

500 new consumers were connected to the national grid. The project was entirely financed out of the Mozambican state budget, costing 113 million meticaís (US\$1.8 million).

Galinha is the third administrative post to be electrified this year. 50 administrative posts have been electrified since 2020. In Sofala province, 31 out of the 33 administrative posts have now been electrified.

An EDM press release added that the company "recognises the preponderant role that electric power plays in national development, by creating conditions to drive the industrialisation and modernisation of the economy".

US to provide training to tackle terrorism

The United States has reiterated its intention to train the Mozambican Armed Forces (FADM) to fight the terrorism that has been plaguing the northern province of Cabo Delgado since 2017.

According to a note from the American embassy in Maputo, citing US ambassador Peter Vrooman, "the American defence department plans to conduct future combined training with the FADM, to combat the spread of violent terrorism". The training, says the document, represents the American commitment to work with Mozambique and its armed forces in the fight against terrorism by training individuals, communities and Mozambican institutions.

"The American department is also carrying out medical training for FADM members who will be indicated to combat in Cabo Delgado. Over 150 soldiers are registered in the courses aimed at assisting injured people", added the American note.

"The activities underway support Mozambique's efforts in order to create a more stable, inclusive and safe nation", concludes the document.

Since July 2021, the Mozambican Defence and Security Forces have been working with the support of a military contingent from the Rwandan Defence Force and the Southern African Development Community Military Mission (SAMIM) to fight terrorism in Cabo Delgado.

Lion trophies seized in Beira

The National Criminal Investigation Service (SERNIC) has seized four teeth and 14 claws of lions in the central city of Beira.

According to the SERNIC spokesperson in Sofala, Alfeu Siteo, the trophies were in the possession of a 38-year-old man. "We questioned Luis [the arrested man] and asked him where he found the trophies. He claimed that he got them from two men, Farias and Azevedo", the spokesperson said, cited in the Beira dally "Diario de Mocambique".

Siteo said that the man has been practising illicit acts for a long time and he has sold the same products to a group of citizens from Maputo. "He is a poacher and he has been involved in other cases", he said, adding that efforts are underway to locate more people involved in the illicit trade in wildlife trophies.

Recently, in the same city, a man was detained by the Police while trying to sell elephant tusks weighing nine kilos.

Fuel prices likely to rise

The Director of Hydrocarbons and Fuels, Moises Paulino, has warned that fuel prices will rise following the announcement by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC+) on cutting oil production by two million barrels a day.

Speaking on Mozambican Television (TVM), Paulino warned that “in the coming months, the situation on the domestic market may change in an unfavourable direction for Mozambican consumers”. He added that the Government is studying measures to minimise the impact of the imminent rise in fuel prices. “We are now concerned with getting solutions. We will review the Fuel Decree to find legal issues that can facilitate the management of this moment that lies ahead”.

The President of the Mozambican Association of Oil Companies (AMEPETROL), Michael Ussene, pointed out on 13 April that, with the price of a barrel of Brent crude on the international market at between US\$83 and US\$84, under normal conditions, a litre of diesel in Mozambique should cost 110 Meticaís (US\$1.7) – which is much higher than the current price of 87.97 meticaís. Petrol should cost about 104 Meticaís a litre, but the current price at the pump is 86.97 Meticaís.

The group of major oil producers, which includes Saudi Arabia and Russia, announced the production cut after its first meeting in person since March 2020. The reduction is equivalent to about two per cent of global oil demand. The production cuts will start in November and the OPEC+ allies will meet again in December.

OPEC and its allies, which control more than 40% of global oil production, are hoping to pre-empt a drop in demand following a sharp economic slowdown in China, the United States and Europe.

Rehabilitation of Machipanda line

The rehabilitation of the Machipanda railway line, which runs for 317 kilometres from the central port city of Beira to neighbouring Zimbabwe, should be concluded by September.

According to the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the publicly-owned port and rail company, CFM, Agostinho Langa Junior, “It is intended that the infrastructure will boost the Southern African region, in the scope of the SADC protocols, increasing the flow of cargo along the Machipanda Line from the current 600,000 tonnes to 3.5 million tonnes per year”.

Budgeted at US\$200 million, work on the Machipanda line began in August 2019, with completion scheduled for November 2021, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the deadline was extended to September this year.

Langa, cited in the Maputo daily “Noticias” on 21 April, said that the workers involved must speed up their pace.

“A specialised locomotive for the work has arrived and all the necessary materials for its execution are still available, including track alignment machines, wagons, ballast and rails”, he stressed.

Redundancies due to flood damage at Maragra

Over half of the 180 permanent workers at the Maragra Sugar Company, in the southern district of Manhica, may be dismissed in the next few days.

According to a report on Radio Mocambique (RM), the dismissal is due to the restructuring of the workforce and possible temporary closure of the company, following the damage of equipment and loss of sugar cane due to flooding on the Incomati River last February.

“The company is currently undergoing internal restructuring and we are studying the damage caused to the machinery”, said Filipe Raposo, executive director of Maragara. He added that the company “lost 95 per cent of its sugar cane and the damages are estimated at around US\$30 million”.

The other sugar plantations and mills in Mozambique are at Xinavane, in Maputo province, and at Marromeu and Mafambisse in the central province of Sofala.

Renamo dissidents accused of undermining the party

Ossufo Momade, the leader of the main opposition party, Renamo, has attacked those calling for his resignation, alleging that they are seeking to undermine the objectives of the party.

Speaking to reporters in Maputo on 22 April, Momade was reacting to demands made at a press conference in Beira by people calling themselves Renamo generals, who accused him of marginalising former Renamo guerrillas and of secretly working for the ruling Frelimo Party. The dissidents demanded his resignation.

Momade said such demands were “lamentable” – but also “normal” during election periods. As elections approached, “we ought to be united in order to have positive results and take Renamo to power. But every time we are on the eve of elections, these voices appear. This time they appeared just three days before the start of voter registration”.

Asked about the environment inside the party, Momade insisted that democracy prevails inside Renamo. He recalled that he had worked closely with his predecessor, Afonso Dhlakama. “I met President Dhlakama in 1978, and we learnt a great deal from him. If we did not have any internal democracy, then I would never have been appointed coordinator of the party”.

Momade also announced that Renamo will hold a nationwide march, in homage to Dhlakama, who died of diabetes on 3 May 2018. “On 29 April, we will have a national demonstration in memory of our late President, Afonso Dhlakama”, he said. On the anniversary of his death, Renamo would hold a rally in Dhlakama’s birthplace, Mangunde, in the central province of Sofala.

A major problem for the dissidents is that Momade enjoys undoubted democratic legitimacy. He was elected, in a contested election, at a Renamo congress in January 2019. Renamo has promised there will be another congress, and another leadership election, next January.

President Nyusi inaugurates hospital in Buzi

President Filipe Nyusi on 19 April inaugurated a hospital in the Guara-Guara administrative post in Buzi district, in the central province of Sofala.

The inauguration was part of the presidential initiative for “one district, one hospital”, under which the government is working for every district in the country to be equipped with a modern hospital.

The Guara-Guara hospital is part of the government’s response to extreme events – in this case, to Cyclone Idai, which in 2019 destroyed the previous Buzi district hospital, depriving the local community of access to health services.

The new hospital infrastructure, budgeted at €6.6 million, and financed by an Austrian bank, includes an operating theatre equipped with state-of-the-art technology, X-ray services, and a maternity unit with hospital equipment specialised for safe childbirth. It contains 60 beds.

Speaking to the local community, President Nyusi said the new hospital will act as a buffer for Beira Central Hospital, the largest hospital in central Mozambique, which is under immense pressure. He said the current demand in Beira for health services will be better managed with the construction of a new general hospital for the city.

President Nyusi announced that the government’s plans for Sofala include the construction of four more district hospitals. “We are implanting these health units where the population lives, in order to reduce the pressure on the system”, he said. “The hospitals are the most visible component of the health system”.

Medical care is a right enshrined in the Mozambican constitution, President Nyusi added, and hence it was the government’s responsibility to promote public health, by creating the conditions for the expansion of access to health services, and improving their quality.

Currently, Sofala has one central hospital, one specialist hospital, five district hospitals, 135 health centres, and four health posts, to cater for a population of 2.2 million (according to the census of 2017).

Sofala inaugurates US\$2.4 million weather radar system

A new weather radar station, budgeted at US\$2.4 million, was opened on 18 April in the central Mozambican province of Sofala.

The new facility was funded by the African Development Bank Group (ADB) through the post-cyclone Idai reconstruction programme and will strengthen observation and early warning systems.

Whilst inaugurating the radio station, President Filipe Nyusi explained that “the radar will help to monitor extreme events that the county has been facing. The geographical location of our country puts us in a situation of cyclical vulnerability to climate change with devastating impacts”.

“Cyclone Freddy [which hit especially the central

province of Quelimane, killing 127 people] and the other cyclones that previously hit the country are the most visible and recent examples of an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events”, he added.

According to President Nyusi, the adaptation to the new reality constitutes a sustainable response to climate change. He believed that the relatively small death toll from Cyclone Freddy was due to the existing early warning system, which will now be consolidated by the new radar. “The radar will issue alerts, as well as guarantee the capture and dissemination of information in real-time. This will reduce the vulnerability of communities, saving our economy from negative weather events”, he stated.

The ADB has so far funded the acquisition of 11 automatic weather stations, in the context of expansion and modernisation of weather observation instruments in Mozambique.

More time for commission on district elections

The Mozambican government on 18 April gave an extra month to the “Commission Reflecting on the Pertinence of the District Elections” (CRED) to complete its work.

When the existence of CRED was first announced, it had just 15 days to work across the entire country and deliver its final report. It was clearly not possible to carry out the required consultations in such a short period, and so, at its weekly meeting, the Council of Ministers (Cabinet) extended the time given to CRED from 15 to 45 days.

The full membership of the Commission is not publicly known. CRED is coordinated by former Labour Minister Aguiar Mazula, and its spokesperson is academic Ismael Mussa. The names of no other members of the Commission have been announced.

The two main opposition parties, Renamo and the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM) want nothing to do with CRED. They regard it as illegitimate and have called for its dissolution. They argue that CRED exists only to justify a decision already taken by the ruling Frelimo Party not to hold elections to district assemblies in 2024.

The district elections were included in the constitutional amendments on decentralisation passed in 2018. The opposition parties take the position that, since district elections in 2024 were written into the Constitution, they must be held in 2024.

The Frelimo parliamentary group, however, hopes to solve the problem through amending the Constitution and removing the commitment to district elections. With a vote on such an amendment unlikely before mid-July, Frelimo will certainly be able to muster the two-thirds majority in the Assembly necessary to pass it.

To date, the opposition has not explained what powers district assemblies would have, and how they will be different from the existing municipal and provincial assemblies.

Corruption cost US\$10 million in 2022

Corruption cost the Mozambican state over 617 million meticaís (US\$9.6 million) in 2022, according to Attorney-General Beatriz Buchili. Delivering her annual report to the Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, on 19 April, she said this compared with 303 million meticaís lost to corruption in 2021.

These figures refer to cases of corruption that came to the knowledge of prosecutors, and the real figure could be considerably higher.

“As in previous years”, said Buchili, “public contracting remains one of the areas prone to corruption, given the large financial flows and the volume of transactions involved. It is expressed through the abuse of office, and other acts that are an assault against public probity”. These abuses, she said, lead to “the diversion of public funds and undue accumulation of wealth”. This “can lead to the inefficiency of the State, in that funds intended for socio-economic projects and the development of the country are diverted to serve individual interests”.

A flagrant example was the diversion of funds intended for humanitarian assistance during the Covid-19 pandemic. These thefts occurred in the National Disaster Management Institute (INGD), the National Social Welfare Institute (INAS), and the Ministries of Education, Health and Public Works.

Five cases are being investigated, but have yet to come to court. Buchili did not estimate how much money had been stolen from the Covid-19 funds.

Corruption was also a serious problem in the issuing of documents. Buchili said, “public servants are involved in schemes for the fraudulent issuing of identity cards, passports, visas and residency cards for foreigners”. The fake documents allowed the individuals concerned to claim that they hold Mozambican nationality, and even to vote in Mozambican elections. Even worse, Buchili added, the forged identity documents allowed entry into the country of “individuals who form part of criminal organisations, and whose activities endanger the security and sovereignty of the State”.

The Administrative Tribunal (the body responsible for checking the legality of public expenditure) has obliged 521 public managers to repay 493 million meticaís they had diverted, plus paying fines of 39 million meticaís.

Buchili added that the Central Office for the Recovery of Assets (GCRA) handled 42 cases last year. The goods seized by the GCRA and by other bodies subordinated to the Public Prosecutor’s Office included 30 buildings, valued at 613.4 million meticaís, 12 vehicles valued at almost 20 million meticaís, and other goods valued at almost 18 million meticaís.

The total value of the goods seized was almost 1.2 billion meticaís – a considerable increase on the 2021 figure of 734.6 million meticaís. The purpose of the seizures, said Buchili, was “the economic asphyxiation of criminals”. By preventing criminals from re-investing what they had stolen, the seizures “show that crime does not pay”.

Health ministry requires more cholera vaccines

The Health Ministry has been facing difficulty in obtaining more doses of vaccine against cholera, because of the huge international demand for this vaccine. The head of the surveillance department in the Ministry of Health, Domingos Guihole, cited in the Maputo daily “Noticias” on 18 April, said the Ministry intends to use the vaccine to protect the citizens of Quelimane, capital of the central province of Zambezia, one of the areas worst hit by cyclone Freddy.

The passage of the cyclone caused severe damage to the Quelimane water supply and sanitation systems, making it difficult for people to follow personal hygiene rules that are crucial in preventing the spread of cholera.

Guihole added that the Ministry also wants more vaccines to control the more recent outbreak in the northern port city of Nacala.

So far, 26,841 people have been diagnosed with cholera, which has claimed 123 lives.

This is the fourth time the health authorities have requested more vaccines. As a result of the previous appeals, the country received more than three million doses of the vaccine.

Guihole said vaccination had been crucial in controlling the outbreaks in the northern province of Niassa, the southern province of Gaza, and in Zambezia and Tete in the centre.

The latest campaign was in Tete, where 491,772 people were vaccinated in Tete city, and the districts of Angonia, Mutarara and Doa.

The health authorities have called for continued preventive measures, particularly washing hands before eating, and after using the bathroom, and ensuring that water is treated or boiled before drinking. They also recommend that anyone who experiences more than three episodes of diarrhoea or vomiting a day should be tested for cholera.

Four trucks seized for carrying illegal timber

Four trucks have recently been seized for carrying illegally obtained timber in the districts of Magoé and Moatize, in the central province of Tete. According to the Tete Provincial Director of the Environment, Marcos Almeida, cited by the Maputo daily “Noticias”, the people involved are now waiting for legal measures in order to be held accountable for their crimes.

Without revealing the exact amount of the wood illegally logged, Almeida guaranteed that the case has already been deposited with the court and its outcome will be known very soon.

According to Almeida, there are 116 forestry operators registered in Tete, who exploit wood in all districts of the province except Tete City, Angonia and Tsangano.

He added that a document from last year pointed out that operators working close to conservation areas “will have to look for other zones to occupy.”

“A group of technicians was sent to help in the demarcation of land”, he added.

INGD Niassa delegate accused of theft

The Mozambican police have arrested Friday Taibo, the delegate of the relief agency, the National Disaster Management Institute (INGD) in the northern province of Niassa, on suspicion of stealing goods intended for victims of cyclone Freddy.

According to the newsheet “Carta de Mocambique” on 17 April, citing Niassa provincial police spokesperson, Mirzo Antonio, the goods intended for the cyclone victims were unloaded at a private house. Allegedly, the thieves intended to sell the goods in Malawi.

In addition to Taibo, the police arrested two other people. One was a personal friend of Taibo, who owned the house where the goods were unloaded, and the other was the driver of the vehicle, who was paid 25,000 meticais (US\$390) for his services.

Taibo said there had been no theft, and the police had just made a “misunderstanding”. The goods were unloaded in Mandimba district and were intended as emergency aid for families living under difficult circumstances in Chimbonila district.

He claimed that the truck set off for a warehouse near the airport in the provincial capital, Lichinga, but broke down on the way. The driver sought assistance and was told to resort to the services of a friend who lives near where the vehicle suffered its breakdown.

Among the products allegedly stolen were sacks of rice and maize flour, vegetable oil and tarpaulins.

India to cooperate in strategic areas

India intends to continue cooperating with Mozambique in “strategic areas”, including the fight against terrorism, pledged Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar on 14 April after a courtesy meeting in Maputo with President Filipe Nyusi.

Jaishankar told reporters that his discussions with President Nyusi “focused mainly on our bilateral relations. India is an important development partner of Mozambique. The President was very happy with the projects that we have implemented, including in railways, agriculture and electricity. So, we had talks about how to expand our development cooperation”.

He said he told President Nyusi that “we will embrace whatever the government of Mozambique regards as priority areas”.

“Today we believe that, after Covid-19, health is a priority and so is water supply. But the great priority is electricity. These are the same challenges that we have in India”, said Jaishankar.

Among the other strategic areas, he listed the fight against terrorism in the northern Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado but gave no details as to how India might contribute to the fight against the jihadists.

His Mozambican counterpart, Veronica Macamo, said that India will support Mozambique in building more hospitals in the districts and training medical staff.

New deadline to fix defects in passenger vehicles

The Mozambican Transport Ministry has given passenger transport operators a further 45 days to fix mechanical problems with their vehicles.

The initial deadline was the end of March. By then the operators should have fixed all mechanical defects and cleaned up the vehicles so that the passengers were no longer sitting in filthy conditions. But few operators took much notice of this deadline. So, rather than take non-compliant vehicles off the roads, the Ministry just extended the deadline, adding 45 days to the original 60 days.

The National Director of Transport and Safety, Fernando Ouana, cited in the independent daily “O Pais”, said the context did not allow compliance with the 60-day deadline. “The transporters asked for more time so that they could comply with actions recommended”, he said.

One of the Ministry’s demands is that all inter-city buses should be equipped with on-board toilets, but the operators are making excuses not to make the necessary alterations.

“We have some buses with bathrooms, but we’re not using them”, said Castigo Nhamane, chairperson of the Mozambican Federation of Road Transport Associations (Fematro). His excuse was the smell. “For example, a journey from Maputo to Nampula takes three days, and if the bathroom was in use, it would not be tolerable to stay inside the bus”, he claimed. In other words, the bus companies do not want to pay the added cost of keeping on-board toilets clean.

As for mechanical defects, the operators say they are willing to keep buses in good working order – but they claim that the major obstacle is the poor condition of the roads.

The new 45-day deadline for fixing the vehicles is counted as from 27 March. The Ministry warns that operators who do not comply will have their licences suspended and, in the worst cases, may be banned from the roads altogether.

Illicit drugs warehouse goes up in flames

A warehouse in which the police had stored 80 kilos of illicit drugs in the city of Pemba, capital of the northern province of Cabo Delgado burnt to the ground on 14 April, according to a report on Radio Mozambique.

The drugs were 42 kilos of cocaine, 34 kilos of amphetamines, and four kilos of heroin. The police had seized them when they intercepted the vehicle used by the traffickers, a Ford Ranger, in the Cabo Delgado district of Mecufi.

The Pemba fire brigade was called to the scene to put out the fire. The causes of the blaze are not yet known. The National Criminal Investigation Service (Sernic) has promised to make a statement on the incident.

Poaching ringleader arrested for second time

The authorities have arrested for the second time a notorious poacher, Simon Ernesto Valoi, known in the world of crime as “Boss Navarra”. Valoi has been held in a Mozambican prison since July 2022. According to a report in the Maputo daily “Noticias”, Valoi has refused to name his accomplices, who remain at large.

In response, investigators set a trap for Valoi. Pretending to be corrupt, they provided him with a mobile phone through which he could contact his relatives and other members of the poaching ring. Valoi took the bait and, in an exchange of phone calls and messages, he activated his accomplices who had crossed into South Africa, where they killed a rhinoceros.

These phone contacts allowed the Mozambican authorities to round up all Valoi’s associates, accused of being members of the same poaching ring. Valoi’s relatives were also detained, on the grounds that they had assisted the organised crime network.

Valoi was arrested for the second time, even though he is already serving a 30-year prison sentence.

When he was detained in July last year, he was in possession of eight rhinoceros horns, weighing 7.5 kilos, and valued at over US\$470,000.

Bus Rapid Transit project revived

Transport Minister Mateus Magala on 13 April relaunched the project for a BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) scheme in the Greater Maputo Metropolitan Area. The scheme involves creating a network of bus lanes from which all other vehicles are banned.

According to a report in the daily “O Pais” on 14 April, the project is budgeted at US\$250 million and will be financed by the World Bank.

The initial phase consists of constructing new and rehabilitating existing roads. Work will begin in July this year, and should be completed by August 2024. The BRT lanes will only be open to passengers as of mid-2026.

BRT schemes for Maputo have been spoken about for the past decade. Studies were made and routes were designed, but the huge financial crisis, resulting from the scandal of Mozambique’s “hidden debts”, made it impossible to put the project into practice.

Years have passed, and now the BRT has been revived, renewing hopes for better urban mobility in Maputo and Matola cities, and the adjoining towns of Boane and Marracuene.

Antonio Matos, the chairperson of the Metropolitan Transport Agency, said the immediate priority is to improve the roads in the Greater Maputo area. Much of the preliminary work, including environmental impact studies, has already been done, he added. Once the work was completed, Matos said, about three million inhabitants of the Greater Maputo Metropolitan Area would benefit from an improved transport system as of 2026.

The initial BRT route, he said, will run for 22

kilometres. There will be ten terminals along the route, and the buses will carry 124,000 passengers a day. Magala said 120 new buses will be acquired for the BRT. This will add an extra 40 million passengers a year to the current 105 million passengers.

“The neighbourhoods covered will have safer and more resilient access roads”, the Minister said, “including street lighting and renovated pavements, as well as footpaths and cycle paths and drainage systems”.

Beira municipality claims ownership of coastal protection plans

The mayor of the central city of Beira, Albano Carige, on 12 April insisted that the city’s coastal protection projects and the rehabilitation of its drainage are plans of the municipality, and not of the central government.

Speaking at a press conference in Beira, Carige pointed out that these projects have been in the municipal plans since 2008. He was reacting to declarations by Public Works Minister Carlos Mesquita, who visited Beira on 9 April to monitor implementation of the coastal protection and drainage projects.

Carige said that, within two months, a contractor will be selected who will build the coastal protection scheme. The initial work is budgeted at US\$120 million, of which US\$30 million are currently available.

Carige said the Minister’s statements were intended to give the impression that the two projects come from the central government. So Carige called a press conference to make it clear that the projects were designed and developed by the municipality. “They are our projects, and they have been in our master plan since 2008”, he said. “They form part of our vision of the coastal security of Beira up to 2035”.

Carige showed the journalists a document from 2019, after cyclone Idai had torn through Beira, which included a reformulated coastal protection project, costed at US\$90 million.

“We contacted several partners, and the government of Holland guaranteed US\$30 million”, said the Mayor. On the advice of the Dutch authorities, Beira Municipal Council looked for other funds elsewhere and secured a further US\$30 million – US\$15 million from the World Bank, and US\$15 million from the German Development Bank, KfW.

Carige also denied that it was the central government that would build a second retention basin, as part of the rehabilitation of the Beira drainage channels. “The government is not building the second basin. It’s following the project of the municipality. We are projecting seven stormwater retention basins to mitigate flooding in Beira and avoid water-borne diseases”, said the Mayor.

He added that the coastal protection project includes restoring and strengthening the sea wall, and restoring the cordon of dunes around the city, planting vegetation to hold the sandy soils in place. Carige hoped this work will be done in 18 months.

Two charged with drug trafficking and money laundering

The Maputo provincial attorney's office has laid charges against two individuals, one a Mozambican citizen and the other a Tanzanian, who are accused of drug trafficking.

A press release on 13 April from the attorney's office said that the two face charges of drug trafficking, money laundering and criminal conspiracy.

The investigations, said the release, showed the two were part of an international trafficking ring, which transported, stored, and sold drugs inside and outside Mozambique. Their activities targeted South Africa in particular.

The two were arrested after a denunciation of illicit drugs in a house in Boane municipality, about 30 kilometres west of Maputo. At the time, this house was being rented by a foreign citizen, believed to be the leader of the group, whose whereabouts are currently unknown. Drugs were stored in the house, and the vehicles used by the gang were parked outside.

During these investigations, two other foreign citizens were arrested in a house the gang had rented in the central city of Quelimane. This house was used to store drugs temporarily after they had been unloaded from small boats on the coast of Zambezia province. One of the two men arrested in Quelimane later escaped from a Zambezia prison.

The Mozambican suspect was arrested at his home in Tchumene neighbourhood, in the southern city of Matola. The police believed that he controlled the fleet of vehicles used by the gang.

The police seized 22 cars and trucks used by the gang, 16 in Maputo and six in Zambezia. They also seized two small boats and 9.65 million meticaís in cash (US\$151,000).

The prosecution has sent the case papers to the Maputo Provincial Court, which will set a date for a trial. The Central Office for the Recovery of Assets (GCRA) is investigating the finances and property of the gang.

ENH's debt rose to US\$3 billion in 2021

The debt of Mozambique's publicly-owned National Hydrocarbon Company (ENH) and its 10 affiliated firms continued to rise sharply in 2021, despite efforts to liquidate it.

According to a document released recently by the company, the total loans recorded in December 2021 were US\$3 billion compared with US\$2.9 billion recorded in 2020.

"ENH's debt continued to grow in 2021, even after, in the same year, specifically in February, the Group settled US\$38.4 million with the European Investment Bank, borrowed to finance participation in the gas transportation project through the acquisition of part of the capital of the Mozambican Pipeline Company (ROMPCO) joint venture, which manages the pipeline

that pumps natural gas from Inhambane to South Africa", reads the document.

Because of the high debt, the document explains, the total liabilities almost swallow the Group's assets, as ENH's liabilities are US\$3.2 billion, and total assets are valued at US\$3.5 billion, down from US\$3.3 billion recorded in 2020.

Between assets and liabilities, the difference is only US\$300 million. Nonetheless, in 2021, the Group collected US\$48 million in profits, compared to a negative US\$15 million recorded in 2020.

"From the debt, the highlight goes to the financing of the natural resources exploration assets in projects installed in the Rovuma Basin, to an amount of US\$2.9 billion, equivalent to 188.7 billion meticaís, which includes capital, interest and exchange rate differences, representing the costs incurred up to 31 December 2021", says the document.

These are the concession contracts for exploration and production projects in Area 4 Offshore of the Rovuma Basin signed on 20 December 2006 between the Mozambican Government, ENI East Africa and ENH, and also in 2006 for Area 1, between the Mozambican Government, Anadarko Petroleum Corporation and ENH.

Over 50 law officers dismissed

The president of Mozambique's Supreme Court, Adelino Muchanga, revealed on 11 April that over 50 law officers have been dismissed from the public administration for being involved in illegal practices over the last five years.

"It is not a secret for anybody. We have been facing cases of professionals with bad behaviour, we have colleagues whose conduct has deviated from the norms", Muchanga said, in the central city of Beira, at the opening of a National Meeting of Law Officers and Court Assistants.

Muchanga stressed the need for a code of conduct to guide law officers in their work. "The number of officers dismissed has reached a total of 57 in the last five years. The servant of justice must give relevance to ethical values since they are crucial for the construction of the rule of law, which assures individual and social rights, freedom, security, well-being, and equality", he said.

He added that vacancies in the justice sector must be occupied by people with humbleness, empathy, maturity, and wisdom.

"When a citizen goes to court, it means he has no other options to solve his problems", Muchanga added. "It means he wants a solution from the court, that's why we must know how to handle the process from the beginning".

For her part, Teresa Coutinho, President of the Mozambican Association of Law Officers (AMOJ), said "the code of conduct is crucial for the sector. We will start to work on creating a code, taking into account issues of professional ethics."

Target of over 17 million tonnes for marketing campaign

President Filipe Nyusi on 12 April launched the 2023 agricultural marketing campaign and announced a target of more than 17 million tonnes of assorted crops.

Speaking in Chiuta, in the central province of Tete, President Nyusi stressed that the success of the campaign would depend on the coordinated action of all those involved – including farmers, agro-industrial companies, suppliers of inputs and equipment, transporters, and the financial sector.

“We are calling on all these stakeholders to continue valuing agricultural production, generating income for rural households, which is our ultimate goal”, he said.

President Nyusi pledged government support for production, through agricultural mechanisation, technical capacity building, and the provision of credit for producers on favourable terms.

The President put real economic growth in 2022 at 4.15 per cent, driven by the agricultural sector. This growth was achieved despite two cyclones (Ana and Gombe), and excessive rains that affected 80 districts, causing the loss of 36,000 hectares of crops. Despite this, there was a 15 per cent increase in grain production in 2022. The increase in vegetables was 19 per cent, in oilseeds 18 per cent, and in pulses, eight per cent.

The major contributor to agricultural marketing in 2022 was the northern province of Nampula, with over five million tonnes marketed, which was 28 per cent of the total.

In all, 17.945 million tonnes of crops were marketed in 2022, an increase of 16 per cent on the 15.457 million tonnes of 2021.

This increase, said President Nyusi, was driven by factors such as the implementation of the government’s flagship agricultural development programme, “Sustenta”, the introduction of the Rotating Marketing Fund and agro-processing value chains through the World Bank’s Catalytic Fund. Mozambican industries were able to absorb almost two million tonnes of raw materials from the country’s agriculture.

As for export crops, President Nyusi said that 8,809 tonnes of raw cotton were exported, valued at US\$14 million. 142,673 tonnes of unprocessed cashew nuts were exported, bringing in a revenue of US\$52 million. The export of macadamia nuts reached 2,910 tonnes, valued at US\$14.5 million.

New management of LAM takes over

The international commission headed by the South African company “Fly Modern Ark”, chosen by the Mozambican government to help revive Mozambique Airlines (LAM), formally began its work on 18 April.

Transport Minister Mateus Magala presented the team on 13 April to the current managers of LAM, who will work together with “Fly Modern Ark” for up to a year.

Cited in the Maputo daily “Noticias” on 18 April, Magala said that as yet there is no specific number of aircraft that “Fly Modern Ark” will allocate to its operations in Mozambique.

Magala believed that, once the team was on the ground, it would be easy to determine the resources needed. He said that one of the purposes of the new rehabilitation strategy for the national airline is to reduce its fares. “Generally, the reduction of fares is a function of economies of scale and efficiency”, he added. “Certainly, this has to be linked to good management within a favourable civil aviation regulatory environment. We intend to achieve this quickly so that passengers can benefit from greater access to our LAM”.

The South African company will bring its own planes and equipment to help improve the management of LAM, which is effectively bankrupt.

According to Magala, the decision to put LAM under new management follows an assessment carried out last year, with the support of the World Bank.

Privatisation of LAM was ruled out, largely because of its debt burden of around US\$300 million. Instead, the government has opted to bring a private company into the management of LAM, but without compromising its essence as a public company.
