

MEMORANDUM

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AFRICAN STANDBY FORCE OPERATIONAL IN 2016

South African President Jacob Zuma said Sunday that the newly-established multi-dimensional African Standby Force (ASF) will be ready for action by next year.

The force has ended its three-week training exercises in South Africa with a stamp of approval for its rapid deployment capability for sustainable peace to start operating next year.

Speaking at the closing ceremony of the Amani Africa II field training exercise at the Army Combat Training Centre in the sparsely populated Karoo area of the Northern Cape Province, Zuma said the day is a moment of pride for the African continent, as it demonstrates that Africa is serious about peace and investing in security.

We often proclaim that we want African solutions to African problems.

"Through this exercise, we are demonstrating our desire to solve our problems in the continent, the President said, adding that as part of its Agenda 2063, Africa has committed to silencing the guns by 2020.

Zuma however said for the continent to realise this, it still needed to effectively intervene in situations of crisis in order to stabilise countries when the need arises.

The reality is that some countries in the continent are still experiencing conflict, strife and war. We therefore have a duty as the leadership of the continent to assist sister countries to achieve peace. This is what makes this exercise so important, he added.

The training of the 5,400 troops from several African states, which President Zuma described as historic and a tremendous success, also crystallised cooperation between the AU, its regional economic communities and different armed forces for the purposes of future peace keeping operations.

The force consists of brigades from the five continental blocs Economic Community of West Africa States, East African Community, North African Regional Capability and Southern African Development Community.

The 25 000-strong multinational force will help with immediate and effective responses to crises arising in Africa. Its logistics headquarters will be located in Douala, Cameroon. (APA 08-11-2015)

EU PROVIDES NEARLY €13 MILLION TO SUPPORT FAMILIES LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA

The EU is making its third contribution this year to the Palestinian Authority's quarterly payment of social allowances to poor Palestinian families living in the West Bank and Gaza. This contribution amounts to €12.6 million, and is part of the total EU financial commitment of €50 million in 2015.

Eligible beneficiaries are households living in extreme poverty that are registered in the cash transfer programme of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The programme is designed to provide a basic safety net to the poorest and most vulnerable Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, through cash and in-kind assistance.

The contribution covers nearly 40% of the total cost of providing cash assistance to over 122,000 households living in poverty. Almost two-thirds of beneficiaries are in Gaza, including over 8,100 families who have been added to the programme one year after the escalation of hostilities and its disastrous consequences. (EU Neighbourhood 04-11-2015)

OVER 200 FOREIGN FIRMS TO ATTEND CAMEROON INVESTMENT FORUM

Cameroon's economic capital, Douala will host the first edition of the Cameroon Investment Forum (CIF) on 25-27 November with over 200 foreign companies in attendance, according to the Investment Promotion Agency (API), the organizer of this event.

Of the companies, which have confirmed their participation, 50 come from South Africa, 30 from the United States, ten from Morocco, and other countries such as China, France, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and Nigeria.

This business gathering whose main theme is “Emergence through Investment” will be more internationally-focused, according to API’s Managing Director, Martha Angeline Minja.

“We are wrapping up the final preparations, since all the arrangements for the success of this forum have been taken. This leads us to believe that CIF will be held in good conditions, as an inter-ministerial committee has also been set up to work on this, Mrs. Minja said.

The organizers have revealed that the banking sector, that of the insurance sector and industries will be “well represented” at this major rendezvous major during, the discussions will be centered on ways “to create interactions between domestic and foreign investors.”

ITC also intends to create a framework for cooperation and interaction between the Cameroonian Diaspora, API and public authorities.

The Forum will be an opportunity to “praise the vitality” of Cameroon’s economic operators, in addition to the other activities on the agenda, including plenary sessions, thematic workshops, B2B meetings, and the presentation CIF Awards. (APA 02-11-2015)

S/AFRICAN VP IN IRAN FOR BUSINESS TALKS

South African Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa is in Iran, where he is leading a high level delegation aimed at strengthening trade relations between Pretoria and Tehran, the Presidency said Sunday. The visit, which ends Wednesday, will see the Deputy President and his Iranian counterpart, Es'hag Jahangiri, inaugurate and co-chair the South Africa-Iran Business Council.

This body is intended to further reinforce the existing trade and investment opportunities in finance, agriculture and energy, according to the Presidency.

During the 12th Joint Commission held in May, the two countries agreed to elevate and consolidate trade, investment and economic relations and concluded action plans in the finance, trade, agriculture and energy sectors, the high office said.

It added that the two sides will also explore opportunities for foreign direct investment, create trading opportunities for South African investors while identifying skills development and training opportunities for South Africans in various Iranian sectors.

The delegation also includes a sizeable business group, representatives of state-owned companies and agencies such as Eskom, Mintek, the Council of Geo-science, the Financial Intelligence Centre as well as the South African Revenue Service. (APA 08-11-2015)

EU PROJECT LAUNCHES LABEL FOR RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

In order to encourage inclusive investments in the Southern Mediterranean, the partners of the EU-funded project ‘Economic Development through inclusive and local employment’ (EDILE), implemented

under the CBCMed programme, have designed a Mediterranean label to evaluate the actual impact of foreign investments on local economies.

The EDILE label allows to detect and enhance positive investments in four key areas: economic (contribution to local economy), social (respect and promotion of employees), environmental (respect for natural resources) and community (local value creation). The toolkit developed by the EDILE project is currently being tested on real operations with a view to assess the local benefits of foreign investments in Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia.

The projects with the most positive impact on local economies will be awarded the EDILE label during a ceremony today in Marseille, on the occasion of the [Mediterranean Economic Week](#).

The **EDILE project** (Economic Development through Inclusive and Local Empowerment) aims at enhancing the inclusive development of local economies thanks to the optimisation of investment projects. The project provides economic bodies in charge of regulating or implementing investment projects with evaluation tools and guidance which will help them to maximise local economic spillovers such as job creation, subcontracting and environment conservation. Forty actions are planned in Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia under the project.

The **ENPI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme 2007/2013** is a multilateral cross-border cooperation programme funded by the European Union under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument. It aims at reinforcing cooperation between the EU and partner countries' regions located along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. (EU Neighbourhood 04-11-2015)

NIGERIAN BAR ASSOCIATION DISCOVERS MORE THAN 1000 FAKE LAWYERS

The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) says that it has discovered more than 1,000 fake lawyers across the country.

The association's Vice President, Akintokunbo Oluwole, said in Akure, the Ondo State capital in south-western Nigeria during a special sitting of the NBA to mark the opening of the 2015/2016 legal year.

Oluwole said the fake lawyers were discovered after the inauguration of the association's Stamp Policy introduced to curb the infiltration of quacks into the legal profession.

"The issue of quacks has been a serious cankerworm which has eaten deep into the fabric of the legal profession," he said.

According to him, the issue is being addressed frontally by the association, and that the NBA Stamp Policy has been able to revive the system and has increased the revenue stream of lawyers across the country.

"Most importantly, it has improved the authenticity of documents which are now being filed in court registries since all legal documents must now bear the stamps of lawyers to be considered valid," he said. (APA 03-11-2015)

MOZAMBIQUE LEADER ON BUSINESS CHARM OFFENSIVE IN ANGOLA

Mozambique's new President, Filipe Nyusi has arrived in the Angolan capital, Luanda for a five-day working visit which would be characterized by talks with his counterpart, Jose Eduardo dos Santos on more business collaborations between the two Portuguese-speaking countries.

The areas of interest between Mozambique and Angola include energy, construction, tourism, communications, industry and commerce and services.

A statement from the President's Office in Maputo confirmed that Nyusi at the head of a high powered government left for Angola on Sunday accompanied by his wife, Isaura and Foreign Minister, Oldemiro Baloi.

During his visit, President Nyusi is expected to, among other things attend celebrations marking Angola's 40 years of independence, a business forum and meetings with that country's authorities and business people.

President Nyusi's trip to Angola is informed by that country's pedigree in mining and oil exploration.

Angola has accumulated vast knowledge of the exploration and exploitation of its oil reserves, including invaluable insights into public participation and taxation of the industry which it can make available to Mozambique as a potential 'player' in the natural gas area, the statement said.

Beyond minerals and energy resources, Presidents Nyusi and dos Santos are looking to revive cooperation in sectors such as agriculture, tourism and fisheries, where the two countries share great potential.

At the moment, the economic relations between Mozambique and Angola are rudimentary, with trade between the two countries a mere \$ 4.8 million in 2014, having fallen about 30 percent from the previous year.(APA 08-11-2015)

NEW CHAPTER OF MIGRANT CRISIS BUILDS ON MEDITERRANEAN COAST

A new chapter of the migrant crisis is building on Africa's Mediterranean coast.

As the world watches hundreds of thousands of Syrians crossing into Europe from the east, territories north of the Sahara are filling with comparable numbers of Africans determined to make their own entrance.

Migrants from more than a dozen African nations are descending on Morocco, Algeria and Libya in unprecedented numbers, sleeping in abandoned apartments, derelict warehouses and on city streets. Thousands are living in fast-expanding forest encampments, surviving off garbage and stolen water. Here in Morocco's capital, about 50 West Africans en route to Europe live in a derelict squat known to residents as The Titanic because it is large and full of travellers who might not make it. The housemates include multilingual university graduates, former army officers, and even a successful pop singer, who now dine nightly on cheap meals of eggs and stale bread.

Some have been stuck here for years: robbed and tortured by smugglers, shunned by neighbours and sliced by barbed wire on border fences they have tried to scale.

"Here, we're like ghosts. Nobody sees us or considers us, and we're not productive," said Bamba, a university dropout from Côte d'Ivoire, who has failed four times to reach Spain on a blowup boat. "We can't advance and we can't go home.... For us, it's Europe or die."

Behind the wave of migrants crashing into Europe lurks another story. The Mediterranean shore of Africa is becoming a vast waiting room for the record numbers who fall short. In Morocco, new fences financed with billions of euros from the European Union (EU) have made it harder than ever to sneak into the two Spanish enclaves along the shore. Hi-tech, heat-seeking cameras and naval patrols have made it tougher to sail across the thin Strait of Gibraltar separating Africa from Europe.

And yet each year, more young men keep coming. They join the tens of thousands of West Africans already here, many begging or day labouring for the cash to buy a rowboat.

As many as 100,000 African migrants are in Morocco and more than half a million in Libya, data from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) show. The migrants are overwhelmingly young men, determined to inch north.

They are also living testimony to where Europe's counter-immigration strategy falls short.

Increasingly, policy makers in the EU want to pay neighbours like Turkey and Tunisia to erect the fences and controls needed to choke off a new migrant front. In September, the bloc pledged €1bn to feed and shelter refugees outside Europe and to erect new border walls. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has backed a separate and similar €3bn aid plan for Turkey.

Morocco is a testing ground. Miles of spiked, three-tiered 6m fencing around Spain's enclaves here have reduced migrants climbing onto EU territory to 100 so far in 2015 from 2,100 last year.

But they have not persuaded many Africans to go home. In fact, more than ever are coming to try their luck. And as more come, more make it, too: Arrivals in Spain — largely by blowup boat — rose 30% to 2,800 in the first three months of this year compared with the year-earlier period, said Frontex, the EU's border agency.

The remainder are stuck, for the moment, with the sense that their window of opportunity may be closing: An exodus of Syrians has exhausted Europe's appetite to absorb immigrants. Many defy the easy definitions between economic migrants and refugees: Years of terrorist attacks across the Sahara have made it impossible to sort out which villagers are fleeing Islamist insurgencies from those who are running from poverty. Their presence puts Morocco in new and puzzling position. It is a country of neither immigrants nor emigrants, but rather a kind of limbo zone on the edge of Europe.

"Morocco has inadvertently become a country of destination, not transit, and the question is whether this situation is sustainable and where do the migrants go if it's not?" said Arezo Malakooti, director of migration research at Altai Consulting, a research group. "My feeling is: You can't stop it. We're not going to be able to stop this flow."

A strip of water about 14.5km wide separates the world's richest continent from the poorest. Herons and storks swoop back and forth across the Gibraltar Strait. Humans have rowed across since the days of Greek legend, when Hercules is said to have passed through here, slicing mountains with his sword. Shiploads of Europeans fleeing the Second World War wound up here. Moroccans sailed in the other direction in similar numbers, finding work in France and Spain, until the 1990s, when the wage gap between their country and Europe narrowed.

These days, it is West African men who line Morocco's mountainous coast, waiting to cross. "I've tried twice. Each time, they send me back," said Amadu Keita, a Gambian standing on a mist-enveloped highway. About 300 other West Africans were begging on the same road, watching cars speed toward the resort of Cueta, the fenced Spanish enclave where tourists golf and scuba dive. "We keep trying," he said.

Morocco has struggled to get these people to go home. The government and the International Organisation for Migration have offered them free flights and bus trips back to their countries. But few people are signing up.

Tension with some locals are rising: "They are everywhere. And they make too many babies," complained a woman, living down the street from The Titanic. "What's more, they bring in diseases from their country."

Added another neighbour, a man in his 60s: "One day, we will be submerged in blacks."

To evade police, thousands of migrants have moved into the forests to erect tent cities. Pitched atop a Tangier graveyard, in clear view of Europe's coastline, 540 people from Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Mali have lived for four months in a camp without sanitation, electricity or running water. By day, they beg, forage for food and plot new routes across the sea. At night, they play cards, sew up their shoes, and drum on barrels while singing Rihanna songs.

"Here, we have doctors and engineers. There are people in this camp who could be leaders of our nations," said Newton, a trilingual university graduate from Cameroon. "We want Morocco to understand what we came here to do is to pass through, not to stay," added Kenzo, from Côte d'Ivoire.

Morocco has also tried to assimilate these thousands of young people. Last year, it gave resident permits to more than 17,000 migrants. And yet many of those cardholders keep boarding boats, for reasons that encompass pride, family expectations, financial gain, and the desire to lay eyes on the continent that colonised Africa.

"The situation is so complicated," said Mustapha El Khalfi, spokesman for Morocco's government. "We have a country policy, but we also need a world policy."

Bamba's journey north began after a war in Côte d'Ivoire crashed his father's car-repair shop, in 2011. For 18 months, he moved through the deserts of Mali and the forests of Algeria, a sociology major dropout, sleeping under the stars.

"The war came, the money ran out and we had to go," he said. "It's true I could earn something, but I couldn't make anything of myself there."

Almost 2m tall and an avid soccer player, Bamba arrived in Morocco to scale the 6m-high fences guarding Spain's enclaves here. But he sliced his forearm and he says Moroccan police beat him. So he bought a ticket on an inflatable boat, arranged by smugglers. The migrants, who pilot the rafts, call this method ramer-ramer — French for paddle-paddle. On the first trip, he nearly drowned. On the second, Morocco's navy caught him; on the third, the motor broke down; on the fourth, the person with the boat never showed.

Finally, he ended up in The Titanic, the condemned building packed with stuck migrants.

Some have passed their entire youth here: "All the little kids I knew when I was home have grown up and had their own little kids," said Ali, an Ivorian, who has spent nine years trying to reach Europe. "But look where I live.... I know I made a mistake — I risked it all to come and it hasn't worked out. But it's better that I stay."

Crammed into the derelict building flanked on either side by uninhabited ruins, the men here eke out a living by carrying fruit palettes at sunrise at the nearby market. Everyone here is trying to make it to Europe — and everyone has stories of failed attempts and new plans they hope will succeed.

"We've tried everything and we'll continue to try anything," said the house manager, known as "the chief," as he piled chewed grapeseeds on a cardboard box used as a table. "The door to Europe is closing and we may be missing our chance, but no one is giving up. More come every week," he said.

About an hour later, a young Mauritanian man showed up at the door, fresh from the airport, with a bag over his shoulder: "I just got here," he announced. (WSJ 03-11-2015)

EARNINGS FROM NIGERIA'S NON OIL EXPORTS DIP TO OVER \$260M IN 2Q

The Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Export Promotion Council (NEPC), Mr. Olusegun Awolowo, has said that the country's earnings from non-oil exports dropped by N52.2billion (about \$261million) in the second quarter of this year.

Nigeria's Vanguard newspaper report said that Awolowo told the new Comptroller-General of the Nigerian Customs Service, Col. Hameed Ali (rtd), who called on him on Monday in Abuja that the country's non-oil export dipped to N78.2bn (about \$391m) in the second quarter of 2015 from N130.4bn (about \$652m) recorded in the second quarter of 2014, representing 39.25 percent decline.

He attributed the slump in non-oil export revenue earning to the suspension of the Export Expansion Grant (EEG) and the insurgence in the North East of the country.

"The situation is compounded with the non payment of the Export Expansion Grant (EEG) and the insurgency in the North East which is the agricultural basket of the nation.

"The nation is not only losing on the economic front, the lull in the non-oil export is also affecting the capacity of the manufacturing sector to employ, lamenting that in the period under review, the nation lost 50 percent of its labour force.

"The country has taken a dip of 60 percent in oil revenue. For any country across the world, it is huge. However, the challenges we are having in the oil sector are also affecting the value of our non-oil export," he added.

According to him, one of the challenges is the continued rejection of products by foreign importers, which is due to improper documentation by clearing and forwarding agents.

Responding, the Comptroller-General of the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), Col. Hameed Ali, assured the NEPC of the Service's support in removing all impediments to export trade.

On the EEG, which is meant to boost the nation's exports but was suspension by the past administration

due to alleged abuse of it, Ali said that Ministerial committee set up by the past administration would submit its findings to President Muhammadu Buhari for necessary action as soon as the Ministers get to work. (APA 03-11-2015)

CAIRO: ETHIOPIA NOT HALTING WORK ON CONTROVERSIAL DAM

Ethiopia has told a tripartite meeting of Nile Basin countries currently taking place in the Egyptian capital Cairo that it has no intention of halting construction work on its controversial Grand Renaissance Dam. The dam on the Blue Nile River is currently under construction and it is slated for completion in 2017 with a planned 6000 mega watt of hydroelectric power.

Egypt and Sudan fear that the dam once operational will adversely affect their share of water flowing from the River Nile which flows in several countries in north, east, central and southern Africa.

The declaration by Ethiopia's Irrigation Minister, Motuma Mekasa came while irrigation ministers from the three countries were meeting 12 technical experts in Cairo on Saturday and Sunday to discuss feasibility studies meant to assess the potential impact of the dam on Egypt and Sudan.

Ethiopia has repeatedly reassured both countries that their shares of the Nile water would not be undermined by the dam's construction.

Addis Ababa said the dam is meant to plug the gap in electricity demands not only in Ethiopia but in other upstream Nile nations which are divided over the project.

Egypt's Water Resources and Irrigation Minister Hossam Moghazi said the three countries were late in implementing a roadmap they created in August to resolve disagreements over technical studies for the dam.

He added that it was not acceptable for each to operate separately.

The three countries have assigned technical studies to a Dutch and a French firm but said during the Cairo meeting that disagreements among the firms had caused past conference to fail.

Egypt fears the dam will affect its historical right to 55 billion cubic meters of the Nile water, which it secured in a 1959 agreement with Sudan.

Ethiopia and other upstream countries have condemned such agreements as parochial, saying past arrangements had excluded them and overlooked their interests regarding the Nile. (APA 08-11-2015)

SOUTH AFRICA: DAVIES MEAT ASSURANCES DISPUTED BY US LOBBY

The talks with the US over the sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) requirements for the importation of US poultry, beef and pork were substantially concluded, Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davies assured MPs on Tuesday.

However, as has happened on several occasions in the past, the minister's version of developments differs starkly from that of US stakeholders.

Mr. Davies told members of Parliament's trade and industry portfolio committee that SA had sent all its proposals on the outstanding issues to the US last week and was awaiting a response. If there were any final issues, these would be minor ones, which could be resolved in the next few days,

"We are either very close or have concluded the negotiations," he said.

Resolution of the disputes are urgent because of the out-of-cycle review under way to determine SA's continued eligibility as a beneficiary of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (Agoa). The act was renewed by the US Congress in June for 10 more years.

Contrary to Mr. Davies' assurances, the president of the Washington-based National Chicken Council, Mike Brown, said that "unfortunately the SPS issues were not yet resolved".

"While progress has been made in several areas, two substantive issues still need to be resolved based on sound science: food safety contamination and animal health certification.

"This issue is not resolved until US chicken products have unimpeded access to the South African consumer as we agreed to in Paris. I would prefer the out-of-cycle review to be completed favorably. But, without resolution of the US chicken issue, I do not believe that is possible."

Mr. Davies strongly rejected claims by Democratic Alliance MPs that the government had been engaged in a game of brinkmanship with the US.

He emphasised that the SPS negotiations were undertaken independently by veterinarians.

He said US trade representative Michael Froman had assured him that the resolution of the "three meats" issues would ensure a smooth passage for SA through the out-of-cycle review.

"SA meets all the eligibility criteria to remain a beneficiary of Agoa for the next 10 years," Mr. Davies stated.

SA was fully committed to the implementation of the agreement reached with the US to permit the importation of 65,000 tonnes of certain cuts of poultry annually free of antidumping duties. The International Trade Administration Commission published draft rebate regulations last Friday.

The outbreak of a highly pathogenic form of avian flu in about 20 US states this year had caused difficulties. There had been no new outbreaks for more than 90 days and once the US formally declared itself free of avian flu it could resume its poultry exports to SA.

The US has been negotiating a trade protocol with SA to cover new outbreaks so poultry exports from unaffected states could continue.

Mr. Davies said these negotiations had been "tough" and prolonged. A supporting health certificate had also been negotiated.

"A poultry trade protocol and a health certificate have been almost completely finalised with some t's to cross and i's to dot in the next few days. SA has complied with all its undertakings to open its market to US bone-in chicken by the end of the year," he insisted.

In June the Cabinet lifted the ban on boned beef from countries that had suffered from bovine spongiform encephalopathy including the US. SA has submitted a draft health certificate to facilitate this US trade.

South African veterinarians have approved a list of pork cuts which could be imported from the US without threatening local droves. A draft health certificate has been submitted to the US. (BD 04-11-2015)

AU TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MISSION TO VISIT LESOTHO

Lesotho has requested the African Union Commission (AUC) to make presentations on the domestication of Agenda 2063 in Lesotho starting from Wednesday to Friday, a statement from the Ministry of Development Planning said on Tuesday.

According to the statement, the objective of AUC Domestication Mission is to build citizens' awareness and popularize Agenda 2063.

The press statement adds that the Mission will also assist in the facilitation of the integration of Agenda into national and sector plans and discuss with stakeholders measures to raise domestic and external resources to finance Agenda 2063.(APA 03-11-2015)

APEX BANK EXTENDS REGISTRATION OF BANK VERIFICATION NUMBER TO NIGERIANS ABROAD

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) has extended the deadline for Nigerian bank customers in the Diaspora to undertake their Bank Verification Numbers (BVN) to January 31, 2016.

A statement by the CBN's Director, Corporate Communications, Alhaji Ibrahim Mu'azu, said that the extension was to enable the customers in the Diaspora complete the enrolment exercise as well as link the BVN with their respective accounts.

He stressed that the extension was only for customers in the Diaspora.

Meanwhile, the CBN had stressed that withdrawals remain prohibited until the holders of such accounts (resident in Nigeria) register accordingly.

"They won't lose their deposits. With the expiration of the October 31 enrolment deadline, the CBN has directed that bank accounts of Nigeria residents without the BVN would henceforth be operated as 'No Customer Initiated Debit' account, until the account holders obtain and attach BVNs to the accounts.

"This means that a customer may not be allowed to withdraw money from his or her account until the BVN has been acquired and linked to the account," the CBN said. (APA 03-11-2015)

ZIMBABWE'S MEGA DAM PROJECT COULD FLOUNDER IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Zimbabwe's planned Batoka Gorge power project on the Zambezi River is expected to generate 2,400 megawatts (MW) of electricity, upward from an initial 1,600 MW, but the worsening power cuts that are being blamed on low water levels have renewed concerns about the effects of climate change on mega dams.

In the past two months, the country's energy utility has increased power rationing, with rolling power blackouts being experienced for up to 20 hours across the country per day.

Zimbabwe has for years relied on hydroelectricity, and is one of a number of African countries that are banking on hydropower to spur economic growth, with multibillion dollar dams expected to generate thousands of megawatts.

While there is no timetable of when construction of the 3 billion dollar Batoka Gorge Dam will commence and whose eventual economic dividend will only be realised after a decade of construction, it will add much needed energy in Zimbabwe where power generation stands at around 1,600 MW against a national demand of 2,200 MW.

Officials say on completion of the Batoka hydropower plant, the country will be a power exporter.

However, the long running power crisis has stalled economic expansion and has in fact forced the closure of major companies, the latest being Sable Chemicals, which was this month switched off the national grid in what energy minister Samuel Udenge said was part of short-term strategy to avail energy to other sectors.

But the switch-off forced the country's sole fertiliser plant to shut down operation and left more than 500 employees jobless, company officials say.

The company owes the power utility 150 million dollars.

According to Minister Udenge, 80 per cent of Zimbabwe does not have access to electricity, and the Batoka Gorge hydropower plant, a joint project with Zambia that will draw water from the Zambezi, a transboundary water body shared by eight countries, is expected to boost power production and bring electricity to remote rural areas.

Early this month, Minister Udenge told parliament that the Zambezi River catchment area was affected by rainfall the patterns of other countries.

"Water is still flowing into the Zambezi River from the north, but we are drawing more water than what is flowing in, hence the continued decline in the water level," Udende said, explaining the reduced power production.

It is these concerns about low water levels that have experts worried, with questions being raised about whether mega dams are viable investments in the long term, citing climate uncertainty and concerns about reduced run-off that would affect dam water levels and ultimately reduce power generation.

In fact, the worsening power crisis in both Zimbabwe and Zambia is being blamed on low water levels at the Zambezi river.

Researchers at International Rivers, an organisation that looks at the state of the world's rivers and how local communities can benefit from them, warn that the big dam projects could be rendered useless in the long term because of climate change and reduced run-off.

They favour smaller dams for localised power generation, but smaller dams also cost money which Zimbabwe does not have.

Last year, the climate ministry announced that the country will be constructing more dams to cushion the county against climate uncertainty, at the same time advising heavy industrial electricity consumers to construct their own power generating plants.

In the absence of these private power generators, the Batoka Gorge Dam is being touted as the ultimate solution to the longstanding energy deficit despite warnings that the project could present its own problems as it does not address climate-related future realities.

Peter Bosshard, Interim Executive Director of International Rivers, says the Zambezi river basin, the location of the Batoka Gorge Dam, has one of the most variable climates in the world which will increase the dam's hydrological risks.

"The (UN's) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that the river (Zambezi) may suffer the worst potential climate impact among eleven major African river basins," Bosshard told IPS.

"Multiple studies have estimated that streamflow in the Zambezi will decrease by 26 to 40 per cent by 2050," he said, adding that "in spite of these serious predictions, the proposed Batoka Gorge Dam has not been evaluated for the risks of climate change."

But Hodson Makurira, a senior hydrologist at the University of Zimbabwe does not agree.

"That would be an oversimplification of a complicated and highly uncertain projection of future events," he told IPS.

"The same climate change predictions are forecasting an increase in extreme events, droughts and floods. You would (then) want to capture as much flood water as possible through increased storage. That would cushion you against periods of low flows," Makurira said.

"Nobody knows the exact magnitude of reduction in flows due to climate change so it may still make economic sense to build dams," he told IPS.

Bosshard said the dam project's feasibility study dates from 1993, "and climate change considerations have not been integrated."

"The project is based on historical streamflow data, which do reflect future realities. Investors, financiers and tax payers should be aware that the studies for this multi-billion dollar project seriously over-estimate its economic viability," Bosshard said.

But for Minister Undenge, who is increasingly under pressure to solve Zimbabwe's energy crisis, neither financing nor climate change will stop this ambitious mega dam. (IPS 03-11-2015)

MOZAMBIQUE POWER UTILITY HIKES PRICES

State Mozambican Electricidade de Mocambique, EDM, has hiked up its tariffs as of 1 November advance notice, APA observes here on Friday.

Clients first heard about the hike through an interview given by EDM commercial director, Sergio Parruque, to the private television station STV late on Thursday.

Parruque said that domestic consumers who account for 92 per cent of EDM clients will pay an extra U\$01.3 cents per kilowatt/hour (kwh) and the general tariff for trade, offices, public institutions and companies rises by U\$00.04 cents per kwh.

The tariff for low voltage agricultural electricity users, and the social tariff for low income households who consume less than 100 kilowatt/hours a month remain unchanged.

Parruque did not give the percentage price rise and EDM's prices had been frozen for five years.

The last price rise, of 13.4 per cent, was in 2010 and it coincided with increases in the prices of several other goods and services, notably bread, and this wave of price rises led to serious rioting in Maputo in September 2010. (APA 06-11-2015)

MALAWI CENTRAL BANK RAISES BANK RATE TO 27 PERCENT

The Reserve Bank of Malawi (RBM) has raised the bank rate by two percentage points to 27 percent from 25 percent last month.

RBM governor Charles Chuka said Friday that the bank had taken the approach of adjusting the rate upwards following the decision by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC).

"The central bank, through (the) MPC, decided to raise the bank rate in view of the persistent high inflation, depreciation exchange rate as well as uncertainties in food prices and wage demands," he said.

Inflationary pressures continued in September 2015 as headline inflation reached 24.1 percent from 23 percent the previous month, while food inflation also rose by 0.5 percentage points due to the after-effects of the decline in agricultural production for the 2014/15 season, he said. (APA 06-11-2015)

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLICANS JOIN MARCH IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL ARMY

Hundreds of people marched through the capital of Central African Republic on Wednesday, including members of the country's transitional council, to press for the national army to be rearmed, witnesses said.

The march was guarded by security forces and United Nations (UN) peacekeepers and is the latest sign of pressure for the restoration of the army, which was sidelined when rebels from the Seleka group took power in 2013.

Interim President Catherine Samba-Panza appealed to the UN peacekeeping mission on Monday to return arms confiscated from the army to allow it to help keep the peace. Ms Samba-Panza became president in January last year when the Seleka rebels left power under international pressure.

She said UN peacekeepers had failed to halt violence and called on the UN and the International Criminal Court to sanction political leaders behind the unrest.

About 90 people have been killed in the capital since late September in attacks on civilians by Muslim and Christian militia groups.

The unrest contributed to a decision by authorities to delay presidential and parliamentary elections to December 13. The violence has caused Pope Francis to hint that a trip to Bangui he planned for November 28-29 could be cancelled.

The majority Christian country plunged into chaos when the Seleka seized power, prompting reprisals by mainly Christian militias called the Anti-Balaka. The national army was disarmed after soldiers were accused of participating in Anti-Balaka violence. (Reuters 03-11-2015)

MALAWI: MUTHARIKA INAUGURATES ROAD CONNECTING THREE NATIONS

Malawi President Peter Mutharika on Tuesday inaugurated a 13.4 kilometer (km) Lilongwe City West Bypass road which is part of the Nacala Corridor.

The multinational Nacala Corridor connects Lusaka in Zambia, passing through Malawi to Nacala Port in Mozambique.

Speaking in the capital Lilongwe, President Mutharika said the road will facilitate the easy movement of

goods and people without congesting the city of Lilongwe thereby reducing travel times and operating costs.

"The road also promotes development activities like Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) among the communities living along its corridor thereby reducing poverty," he added.

The road has been largely funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB) to the tune of \$22million.(APA 03-11-2015)

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Fernando Matos Rosa

fernando.matos.rosa@sapo.pt
fernando.matos.rosa@skynet.be