MEMORANDUM

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SUMMARY

LANCEMENT DE L'INDICE OBLIGATAIRE AFRICAIN

La BAD et Bloomberg lancent l'Indice obligataire africain: La Banque africaine de développement (BAD) et Bloomberg ont lancé une nouvelle famille d'Indices obligataires africains dénommée l'Afmi Bloomberg African Bond Index (Ababi), annonce mardi un communiqué. Cet Indice Composite calculé par Bloomberg, est constitué d'Indices souverains en monnaie locale, respectivement d'Afrique du Sud, d'Égypte, du Nigeria et du Kenya.

L'Ababi comprend un Indice d'obligations souveraines africaines, constitué des quatre obligations les plus liquides en Afrique et de trois sous-Indices pour les différentes gammes de maturité. Pour être inclus dans l'Indice, un titre doit avoir une maturité restante d'un an minimum et avoir réussi les tests de stabilité des prix.

Selon le directeur du département pour le développement du secteur financier de la BAD, Stefan Nalletamby, le lancement de ces Indices arrive à point nommé, à un moment où les pays africains sont, plus que jamais, à la recherche de financements sur les marchés de capitaux domestiques, indispensables au développement économique.

Pour le chef de produit pour les marchés émergents chez Bloomberg LP, David Tamburelli, 'il y a un besoin évident d'une référence transparente et objective pour la dette souveraine en Afrique. Les Indices sont essentiels pour évaluer les marchés et contribuent en même temps à la liquidité en offrant aux investisseurs un point de référence pour mesurer leur performance'.

En partenariat avec Bloomberg, l'Initiative des marchés financiers africains (Imfa) créée en 2008 par la BAD, étudiera l'ajout de nouveaux pays à un rythme bi-annuel, respectivement aux mois de juin et décembre. Plusieurs pays devraient être ajoutés à l'Indice dès cette année.

L'Imfa a vocation à approfondir les marchés obligataires africains libellés en monnaies locales et à créer un environnement qui permette aux pays du continent d'accéder à des financements à différentes conditions.

En décembre 2014, la BAD et Bloomberg avaient annoncé leur collaboration à travers l'Imfa, rappelle-t-on. (Pana 25/02/2015)

KENYAN GOVT SET TO INSTALL 1,600KM OF FIBRE OPTIC CABLE

Kenya's ICT ministry has revealed that it plans to roll out 1,600 kilometres of fibre optic cables, over and above the current project, during the course of 2015. According to the authority, this is part of the National Optic Fibre Backbone Infrastructure (NOFBI) project.

Once the digital migration is completed in June 2015, the authority stated that the focus will shift to building an ambitious LTE network infrastructure.

According to Ventures Africa, the implementation of the project is expected to ease communication across counties as well as improve government service delivery to the public in such areas as applications for national identity cards, passports and registration of birth and death certificates. The network will span 2100 kilometers across all 47 Kenyan counties.

According to the authority, the project was Launched in 2009 and aims at connecting the entire country to high speed broadband by leveraging sophisticated fiber optic cables reputed for offering super high data transmission rates which translates into extreme speed. (IT News Africa 23-02-2015)

MAURICE: LE GOUVERNEMENT AU CHEVET DES PETITS AGRICULTEURS

Le Premier ministre mauricien, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, a annoncé lundi soir diverses mesures en faveur des petits agriculteurs, lors de l'inauguration d'une entreprise de production d'engrais bio à Mer Rouge, dans la capitale mauricienne. Selon lui, les petits agriculteurs ont été délaissés pendant trop longtemps par l'ancien gouvernement qui a dirigé l'île de 2005 à fin 2014.

'Mon gouvernement va vous offrir une assistance financière afin de vous permettre de faire face à la baisse du prix du sucre sur le marché international. De plus, on va vous donner des actions à hauteur de 35 pc dans les raffineries et autres distilleries, une assistance financière pour vous aider à vous engager dans le commerce équitable et dans l'industrie de la transformation en vue d'exporter vers les pays de la région. Nous allons aussi aider les jeunes à s'intéresser à l'agrobusiness', a-t-il déclaré devant un grand nombre de petits agriculteurs qui cultivent principalement la canne à sucre.

M. Jugnauth a promis qu'il ne laissera jamais tomber les petits agriculteurs 'car ils sont trop importants dans l'économie de l'ile'.

Ces derniers, au nombre de 35.000 en 2006, ne sont qu'environ 15.000 actuellement, tous ayant abandonné la culture de la canne à sucre à cause de la hausse des coûts de production, du manque de main-d'oeuvre et de la baisse du prix du sucre sur le marché mondial.

Pour sa part, Antoine Harel, président de la Mauritius Chemical Fertiliser Industry, entreprise qui produit les engrais bio, a estimé que le secteur agricole mauricien doit devenir productif, rentable et retrouver sa position de solide pilier de l'économie de l'île 'à une époque où Maurice élabore des stratégies pour améliorer son programme de sécurité alimentaire'.

On indique à Port-Louis que l'engrais bio est produit à partir de la culture de bactéries du sol, conçu pour stimuler et libérer des nutriments culturaux essentiels pour une meilleure absorption par les plantes.

Il joue également un rôle essentiel dans l'établissement d'un nouvel équilibre des éléments nutritifs et dans la restauration de la fertilité des sols.

L'île Maurice importe environ 46 000 tonnes d'engrais chimiques annuellement. (Pana 24/02/2015)

ANADARKO PETROLEUM CLOSES WELL IN NORTHERN MOZAMBIQUE AFTER RESEARCH SHOWS NO RESULTS

Hydrocarbon exploration in the Kifaru-1 well, an onshore concession in northern Mozambique, failed to find commercially viable deposits and will be abandoned, announced French company Maurel&Prom, which is part of the business consortium.

Beginning in January, the drilling reached a depth of 3,100 metres, as far as the rocks formed in the Eocene period, through the Miocene and Oligocene zones, said Maurel&Prom, which has a 27.71 percent stake in the project led by US group Anadarko Petroleum (35.70 percent).

After missing the goal of finding a reservoir of hydrocarbons of economic value, the Kifaru-1 well will be "sealed and abandoned" by the consortium, which also includes Wenthworth Resources, with 11.59 percent, Mozambican state company ENH with 15 percent and Thai group PTT Exploration and Production (PTTEP), with 10 percent.

In a statement, the chief executive of Wentworth Resources, Geoff Bury, said that, despite the results "not meeting expectations," the company will continue to work with Anadarko and other partners to "review all the data collected and determine the next step in the exploration phase of the onshore Rovuma block."

In the concession covering 13,500 square kilometres that the group operates in the far north of Cabo Delgado province, four wells have been drilled, called Kifaru-1, Tembo-1, Mocímboa-1 and Mecupa-1.

Until the results of Kifaru-1, previous research showed evidence of the presence of hydrocarbons such as oil and gas in the Mocímboa-1 well formed in the Cretaceous period, according to Wentworth Resources.

The investors hope that the concession will have the same potential as an adjacent concession (Area 1), on the coast of Cabo Delgado, and where reserves of 50 trillion to 70 trillion cubic feet of natural gas have been discovered in deep water.

Also led by Anadarko Petroleum, the Area 1 consortium brings together ENH (15 percent), Indian groups ONGC Videsh (20 percent) and BRPL Ventures (10 percent), Japan's Mitsui & Co (20 percent) and Thailand's PTTEP (8.5 percent).

Exploration of the gas discovered in this concession is scheduled for 2018, according to the most optimistic estimates, and should be achieved by installing two natural gas liquefaction units on the Afungi peninsula, in the border district of Palma.

The initial investment planned for the advancement of the industrial park totals around US$30 billion, to be carried out jointly with the business consortium led by Italian group ENI, which owns the rights to the Area 4 concession, also in deep water.

The final investment decision should only, however, be known in the middle of this year, according to recent statements from ENI's financial director, Massimo Mondazzi, ensuring that it will be one of the most important in 2015. (25-02-2015)

ORANGE LAUNCHES 4G IN GABORONE

According to a Orange Botswana, it has now launched its new 4G service in Gaborone. According to the company, the launch is set to offer a timely boost to the local economy offering firms the opportunity to increase innovation, boost productivity and cut costs, as has been the experience of companies in countries such as the UK, US, Sweden, Japan, Germany and South Africa since the technology was first introduced.

Dr. Patrick Benon, the CEO at Orange, said: "Today is a landmark day for our company, the Botswana mobile industry and, most importantly, the country's businesses and consumers as we launch 4G in Gaborone. But this is just the start as our 4G network will continue to grow stronger and wider by the day. We're investing millions in our network to be the first company to offer mobile 4G in Botswana, alongside our existing 2G and 3G networks. Combined with our brand new Orange Shops we have a pioneering and unique offer to customers across the Botswana –superfast speeds on the move and expert service in nearly every major town and village in Botswana."

According to the company, its 4G service comes at no extra cost. However to use 4G Orange customers need to have a 4G capable device and swap their existing simcard out for a 4G simcard.

Global studies into 4G's business benefits reveal that businesses expect 4G to help increase productivity (58%) and boost employee well-being and motivation (38%). The technology will also help firms compete through innovation – 50% want 4G so they can set up an internet connection quickly without having to wait for a fixed line to be installed. This is a boon for retailers wanting to set up a pop-up shop, or builders looking to set up a temporary office onsite. (IT News Africa 23-02-2015)

COAL INDIA LEAVES STATE CONSORTIUM EXPLORING COAL IN MOZAMBIQUE

The Coal India Ltd group (CIL) has decided to leave the International Coal Ventures Ltd consortium (ICVL), founded by Indian state companies to acquire and explore coal assets abroad, according to a statement filed with the Mumbai Stock Exchange.

In a statement, the group said only that the board of directors had decided to leave the consortium, after previously noting that remaining in that group of companies led only to an increase in cost without corresponding benefits.

The consortium was formed in 2009 as a "vehicle which a specific purpose" by public sector steel companies, Steel Authority of India (SAIL) and Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), the largest producer of iron ore, National Mineral Development Corporation Ltd and Coal India with a registered capital of 100 billion rupees (US$1.62 billion).

The news of CIL's departure comes just days after the company told the Platts news agency that in September it would decide on the future of its operations in Mozambique, particularly in Moatize, in Tete province, depending on the quality of the coal mined in this area.

In July 2014, ICVL paid US$50 million to acquire the coal assets of Anglo-Australian group Rio Tinto in Mozambique.

The deal, closed in early October, involved all the mines that Rio Tinto owned in Zambezia and Tete provinces and 65 percent of the Benga reserves (also in Tete) and for which Rio Tinto had paid more than US$3 billion in 2011 to Riversdale Mining. (23-02-2015)

PROPERTY PLAYERS LEAVE BIGGER FOOTPRINTS IN THE REST OF AFRICA

South African institutions, developers and listed-property players continue to expand their real estate footprints into the rest of Africa, creating more opportunities for investors to share in dollar-based returns offered by the continent’s burgeoning retail, office, industrial and residential property markets.

Life assurer Momentum, in conjunction with developer Eris Property, last week announced details of its African Real Estate Fund, an unlisted $250m venture aimed at institutional and high-net-worth private investors. Initial projects earmarked for development include an office complex in Accra, Ghana, a retail centre in Maputo, Mozambique and an office and hotel project in Kigali, Rwanda.

The fund, which has already raised $50m since its inception in January, requires a minimum investment of $1m. The head of Africa investment strategies at Momentum Global Investment Management, David Lashbrook, said the closed-ended fund was a capital growth play targeting a minimum internal rate of return of 18% in dollars net of all fees, over an eight-year lifespan. "We believe that investing in the development of commercial real estate is an exciting way for investors to support and participate in the rise of the African consumer.’’

Momentum follows the likes of Sanlam and Liberty, who have launched similar African property funds in recent years. The tally of JSE-listed companies that are investing in Africa’s brick and mortar markets also continues to grow.

Smaller, retail investors can access sub-Saharan real estate markets through the Stanlib Africa Property Fund, the only unit trust fund in the world to focus on African listed property. The fund is still relatively small at R331m.

Stanlib head of listed property funds Keillen Ndlovu said the listed property vehicles that invest in sub-Saharan Africa had a total market capitalisation of about R10bn only (excluding Mauritius-based Rockcastle Global Real Estate). However, he hoped to see new property listings in Kenya when it adopted new real estate investment trust legislation. (BD 23-02-2015)

PORT OF NACALA, MOZAMBIQUE, PROCESSES RECORD CARGO IN 2014

The port of Nacala, in Mozambique’s Nampula province, in 2014 processed a record amount of cargo, with over 2 million tons and in the number of containers handled, with almost 100,000, said the CEO of Portos do Norte, the port’s management company.

Langa said the port of Nacala, by processing over 2 million tons of cargo and 97,000 containers, reached a new high despite operating under limits due to the ongoing modernisation programme.

The CEO of Portos do Norte, the company that took over the management of the port of Nacala just over a year ago, also said that the results obtained in 2014 were due to an investment of US$3 million in equipment and infrastructure.

The modernisation works at the port, as part of the Development Project of the Port of Nacala, cost US$300 million that are funded by Japan, with completion scheduled for 2017.

The work is being carried out by Japan’s Penta-Ocean Constrution Co Ltd and the contract agreement was signed in January 2014 by representatives of the company and the Mozambican Ministry of Transport and Communications.

The port of Nacala will also be the final station on the railway built by Brazilian group Vale from Moatize, in Tete province, passing through Malawi, to transport coal. (25-02-2015)

HOW THE COCOA MIRACLE TURNED INTO A NIGHTMARE

Abidjan, once known as the Paris of Africa, collapsed into conflict during the tumultuous 2000s, but is rebounding fast. The story of its ascent as one of West Africa's primary hubs, its breakdown through a coup d'état and two civil wars, and its subsequent revival, can all be traced — at least in part — through the urbanisation of one of Africa's most cosmopolitan cities.

Abidjan was not always such a bustling regional centre. Precise data are scarce but some estimates suggest 50,000 people lived in Abidjan as recently as 1950, while others put the figure closer to 150,000, according to the University College London Global Report on Human Settlements of 2003. The government's last official census in 2006 estimated that more than 5-million people live in the metropolitan area. The population is likely to have expanded since.

Many countries in Africa saw rapid urban growth in the postcolonial period. Abidjan's population explosion — and Côte d'Ivoire's large-scale immigration in general — was different. It was done by design, carefully planned by one of Africa's most masterful autocrats, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny.

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LIKE many African countries, Côte d'Ivoire's economy has relied on commodity exports such as cocoa, timber, palm oil, pineapples and coffee since independence in 1960. Côte d'Ivoire could be renamed the Cocoa Coast because cocoa is king.

It overtook neighbouring Ghana in 1978 as the world's leading producer and exporter of cocoa, according to a 2014 report from the Ghana Cocoa Board. This year Côte d'Ivoire is expected to account for 38% of the world's cocoa production, yielding nearly double the quantity harvested by Ghana, its nearest competitor, according to the same report.

Part of this boom was driven by migrant labour, enticed by Houphouët-Boigny. He realised presciently that a large influx of farm labour would create a surge in cocoa production, as Mike McGovern makes clear in his 2011 book, Making War in Côte d'Ivoire. The president proclaimed a new principle: if individuals were willing and able to produce cocoa on vacant land, the plot would become theirs. People arrived in droves, from Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia and Mali. Côte d'Ivoire became known as the "Ivorian Miracle", a testament to its booming economy driven by cocoa.

As migrant labour crossed Côte d'Ivoire's porous borders, some Ivorians from the countryside moved to Abidjan, and some would-be migrant farmers bypassed a life in the fields for a life in the city. By 1978 only one in 10 residents of Abidjan between the age of 15 and 59 had been born there, according to the University College London study. They had moved past cocoa and into Cocody, one of Abidjan's bustling and fast-growing neighbourhoods.

Rapid urbanisation can produce upheavals that are managed far more easily in prosperous times than in periods of crisis. Abidjan is a prime example: Houphouët-Boigny, a master of political patronage, spread the wealth and kept the heat low on simmering tensions, thus ensuring that they did not boil over.

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PROSPEROUS times, which started at independence, began to fade when cocoa prices declined in the 1980s. The melting pot started to boil over in the 1990s. A perfect storm of three jarring events turned the Ivorian miracle into the Ivorian nightmare.

First, the economy was in a longstanding slide in the early 1990s, brought about by a decline in cocoa prices — plunging from an average of $3,000 a tonne in the late 1970s to as low as $1,100 in the early 1990s.

The well-lubricated system of political patronage did not work as well when the proverbial oil — cocoa profits — started to dry up.

Second, Houphouët-Boigny died in December 1993. He was the linchpin of a system that relied on his personal charisma and patronage relationships. When Mr le Vieux ("the old man"), as he was known by Ivorians, died at the age of 88 after governing for 33 years, the system began to unravel as his would-be successors vied for power.

Third, multiparty democracy arrived at this critical point. While a worthy ideal, the political system's opening to outright competition coincided with economic free-fall, rising social tensions and a contentious succession battle.

These developments heightened tension across the nation. Cocoa farmers failing to make ends meet moved to the capital in search of new opportunities. Internal migration continued from the countryside to Abidjan.

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DURING the era of the Ivorian miracle, tension in the capital ran low. With enough wealth to share, it mattered less who were the haves and who were the have-nots. But in the 1990s the economy contracted and political parties formed along geographic lines.

Successive presidents — starting with Henri Konan Bédié and continuing with Robert Guei and Laurent Gbagbo — sidelined the Rally of the Republicans (RDR) party, representing the northern half of the country, including many migrant families that had come during the boom period.

This political exclusion, combined with the economic downturn and ethnic tensions partly fuelled by religious divides, eventually contributed to a complete transformation of a country and a city that had been the poster child of African development for decades. Between 1999 and 2011, the Paris of Africa would suffer through a coup d'état and two civil wars.

The most recent conflict erupted after the November 2010 presidential election. The RDR's candidate, Alassane Ouattara, a northerner, defeated Mr Gbagbo, the incumbent and a southerner representing the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) party. The FPI refused to accept defeat and conflict broke out shortly thereafter.

Mr Ouattara's militias, backed by the United Nations and the French military, won the war and the presidency. Mr Gbagbo was arrested and is now facing charges of crimes against humanity in the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

Today Abidjan is re-emerging from these civil wars. Over the past two years economic growth has averaged 9%, one of the world's highest rates.

To sustain the progress, however, Côte d'Ivoire will need to repeat what it did so well in the postcolonial period: harness diversity as an asset and ensure that governance can keep pace with demographic growth. (BD 23-02-2015)

ANGOLA STARTS ISSUING MULTIPLE-ENTRY VISAS

In March Angola will start issuing ordinary and tourist multiple-entry visas, the country's Interior Minister, Angelo Veiga Tavares said Monday cited by Angolan news agency Angop.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Consultative Council of his ministry, Angelo Veiga Tavares said the ongoing modernisation process in the Immigration Service had succeeded in overcoming constraints on issuing multiple-entry visas of different types.

The minister also said "Rapid" system would be implemented at Luanda International Airport, that will allow Angolan and foreign citizens covered by the various existing agreements, to cross the border (exit and entry) automatically, in less than 15 seconds. (25-02-2015)

UFM TEAMS UP TO FOSTER ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SUPPORT DIASPORAS IN MEDITERRANEAN

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Agency for International Cooperation and Local Development in the Mediterranean (ACIM) have signed a cooperation agreement to foster entrepreneurship and support investment for diasporas in the Mediterranean.

The agreement acknowledges the key role of the private sector in promoting job creation and investment flows in the region, while recognising the substantial impact that members of diasporas have on socio-economic development, both in their countries of origin and throughout the region.

This action falls within the UfM strategy for private sector development, which aims to involve the private sector in initiatives and projects, with the overall goal of promoting inclusive growth and regional integration in the Mediterranean.

ACIM is an association working to support the setup of businesses and investment in North Africa. (EU Neighbourhood 24-02-2015)

UK INTENDS TO SUPPORT AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ANGOLA

The UK government intends to support Angola in the process of diversification of the economy, with a focus on the agricultural sector, British Trade Minister David Heath said Tuesday in Luanda.

Heath was speaking after a meeting with the Director-General of the Angola Grains Institute, Benjamin Castelo, with a view to studying specific procedures for establishing partnerships with Angolan institutions related to agriculture, energy and mining.

“We are exploring ways we can make this enormous commercial potential a reality,” said Heath, adding that the recent economic progress achieved by Angola increases the need for the country to move towards economic diversification.

The Director-General of the Angola Grains Institute, Benjamin Castelo, said his institution would submit a memorandum including a definition of proposals and a timetable for the implementation of the document. (25-02-2015)

MICROSAVE REACHES OUT TO SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN ETHIOPIA

Amhara Credit and Savings Association (ACSI) is an Ethiopian MFI and a beneficiary of MicroSave’s Action, set up under ACP/EU MICROFINANCE, to “Increase Access to Agricultural Finance for Farming Households through Product Development”.

During the second quarter of 2013, MicroSave led training on market research for the staff of ACSI, where they conducted practical market research on wheat farmers’ financial needs in the Amhara region. A value chain training was then conducted by an agronomist, and followed by a meeting where the participants brainstormed on product features and operational issues. Simultaneously, 4 staff were trained in risk management and the use of a dedicated agrifinance risk management tool.

The input loan product targeting smallholder wheat farmers was thus pilot tested with wheat producers, under a group lending methodology. The maximum loan size was ETB 15,000 (EUR 640), repayable after 10 to 12 months. Loan disbursement was based on issue of a voucher, redeemed for inputs (seeds, fertiliser and advice) at the farmers’ cooperatives. To ensure maximum outreach to the pilot product, ACSI opened 55 satellite offices to add to the existing 15 branches that were offering the product, and hired more staff to cope with the extra workload.

After pilot testing the agrifinance product for 2 seasons (2013-2014), MicroSave helped ACSI refine it to better answer the needs of local smallholder farmers. The loan product is now also available for other agro commodities including teff and maize, with the size of the loan adjusted to the inputs needs. The interest rate has been lowered from 18% to 15%, and the 10% compulsory saving was changed into a partial cash payment of the input.

As of November 2014, the ACSI agrifinance product had reached 36,000 smallholder farmers for a total ETB 76,942,943 (EUR 3,242,350) and recorded a 100% repayment rate. ACSI now intends to roll out the product to more than one third of its branches - covering 50% of districts served by ACSI across Amhara region-, and is also preparing to reach fresh producers. Finally, the MFI intends to deepen its relationships with other agriculture development organisations and state supported programmes in Amhara region, to coordinate support to the agriculture sector and scale up farm input distribution.

MicroSave technical assistance to ACSI also included the provision of a financial education component aimed at improving farmers’ financial management skills. ACSI will implement this component in 2015 and 2016 and intends to progressively rollout the education programme across all its branches.

MicroSave support to ACSI has demonstrated that MFIs can develop effective lending schemes to smallholder farmers, starting with a focus on one value chain before scaling up across the branch network and other agro value chains. (Microfinance EU Programme)

CABO VERDE RECEIVES 540,000 TOURISTS IN 2014

Hotel establishments in Cabo Verde (Cape Verde) in 2014 recorded stays of around 540,000 guests, which was a decrease of 2.3 percent compared to 2013, the National Statistics Institute (INE) said in the Cape Verdean capital, Praia.

INE also reported that in the same period hotels registered about 3.4 million overnight stays, a decrease of 0.6 percent in annual terms.

The United Kingdom was the main country of origin of tourists, or 18.0 percent of the total, and these were the tourists who remained in Cabo Verde for the longest time, with an average stay of 8.6 nights.

After the UK came Germany with 12.8 percent of the total, France with 11.5 percent and Portugal with 11.1 percent as major sources of tourists for Cabo Verde.

The island of Sal is the most popular island for tourists, accounting for about 41.5 percent of the entries in accommodation units, followed by the island of Boa Vista, with 32.9 percent and Santiago with 13.2 percent.

In the fourth quarter of 2014, hotel establishments in Cabo Verde welcomed 153,000 guests, which led to more than 924,000 overnight stays, with increases of 5.6 percent and 0.02 percent, respectively, over the same quarter of 2013. (25-02-2015)

LET MY PEOPLE AGOA, SAYS KIRSH

His financial stature is colossal but, at 83, Natie Kirsh is small and slight.

His accent is distinctly South African, despite the fact that he is widely billed as the richest Swazi businessman — second only in terms of wealth to King Mswati — and despite his years of living in the US and London.

In his office in Johannesburg, the only obvious indications of Kirsh’s vast wealth are the eye-wateringly valuable paintings and drawings adorning the walls. His daughter Wendy Fisher, a major art patron, “has almost bankrupted me” with her purchases, he says, laughing.

It’s not a particularly good joke, partly because his wealth is estimated at $8-billion (about R92-billion) — a fortune to which he makes regular and enthusiastic reference.

But it would be silly to get taken in by his sweet looks and bad jokes. Kirsh is rumoured to be blunt, difficult and demanding. It is these traits, arguably, that helped make him one of the wealthiest men in the world.

Kirsh made his first real money in Swaziland when, in 1958, he founded a corn milling and malt business. His attachment to the tiny country was such that he chaired the Swaziland Electricity Board for more than two decades.

He still loves Swaziland, he says, but it’s clear his attachment is purely emotional: “My total turnover from [my] Swaziland [businesses] equals two days’ [turnover from my businesses] in America,” he says.

Kirsh spread his interests in the ‘60s to South Africa and began to dominate the retail and wholesale space through his holding company Tradegro, which owned Checkers, Metro Cash & Carry, Dions, Russells and JD Group.

He then made perhaps his only business blunder.

In the early ‘80s, he partnered with Sanlam in Tradegro. Then the state president, PW Botha, delivered his Rubicon speech, and the South African economy fell off a cliff.

International credit lines to South Africa were cut amid the chaos, just as Kirsh needed financing to fund a serious restructuring programme. Instead of coming to the party, the chairman and the CEO of Sanlam, Fred du Plessis and Marinus Daling, discovered a lacuna in the shareholders’ agreement that allowed them to refuse to get involved.

Faced with a big, expensive and protracted court case in a politically dubious country, Kirsh threw in the towel in 1986.

He went to the US, where he started up Jetro, that country’s biggest wholesale cash and carry company, which now has more than 81 stores nationwide.

The company is colossal, but then so is Kirsh’s appetite for making deals and buying companies.

Kirsh likes property, too, and snapped up a few high-rises in London. In 2011, he sold out of property developer Minerva, netting himself a cool £50-million. To get a sense of the returns, he had bought 29% of Minerva for 15 pence a share at the height of the global crisis in 2008, before selling out three years later for 120.5 pence a share.

But Swaziland is clearly Kirsh’s real love, and he often refers to the country as his “fourth child”.

He has set up major philanthropic programmes to kick off small businesses and put IT equipment into “every high school in Swaziland”.

The whole of Africa needs help, he says, but “Swaziland is small enough for me to make a difference”.

Which is partly why he is so furious right now about the extent to which Swazi business is suffering from the US’s decision to boot Swaziland out of the African Growth and Opportunity Act from January?

The US did this with “no care for the man in the street or the worker in the factory”, Kirsh fumes.

The preferential trade agreement, which was implemented in 2001, allows eligible sub-Saharan countries to send certain manufactured goods to the US duty-fee. The idea was to kick-start export-led growth and economic development in these countries.

It was a bigger boon because the trade agreement was nonreciprocal, so imports from the US continued to generate much-needed income duties.

It wasn’t just about getting African economies off the ground, though — it was also a carrot for these countries to institute democracy, the rule of law and political “pluralism”, among other things.

The elimination of a few child labour practices was also a prerequisite.

The US decision is seen as a bid to whip Mswati’s “oppressive” leadership into line. But Kirsh says it’s had little effect on the king — and a far more devastating impact on the everyday Swazi.

“Up to 30 000 formal sector jobs will be lost” as the effects of the withdrawal kick in, he says.

Since Swaziland’s population is only about 1.3 million, this is the equivalent of many millions of jobs in the US, he says.

Kirsch has been lobbying fiercely to reverse this decision — and although it’s rare that he doesn’t get his way, his efforts to exert his considerable influence have proved fruitless so far.

It says much that Kirsh, a famously private man, has broken his silence to lash the US for what he considers an ill-considered move.

Which isn’t to say he hasn’t courted controversy in the past — perhaps an inevitability for a man of his means.

For a start, his 24% of Israel-based Magal Security Systems — the company that makes perimeter intrusion detection systems used in 75 countries — has been massively contentious.

Since 2002, Magal has worked with the Israeli Ministry of Defence to install detection systems along 150 km of the country’s “apartheid wall” in the West Bank.

Kirsh also made headlines in South Africa last year when he handed over “tea and biscuit money” to marry Dr Mamphela Ramphele’s Agang party to Helen Zille’s DA.

The sum he gave was a drop in his ocean, but the subsequent high-profile divorce between Ramphele and Zille made waves across South Africa’s political waters. (BD 22-02-2015)

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION: SWITCH-MED PLANS EVENT TO SHARE AND SCALE UP INNOVATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The EU-funded programme SWITCH-Med (Switching to more sustainable consumption and production in the Mediterranean) will organise its first Action Network Event on the theme "Towards Productive, Circular and Collaborative economies in the Mediterranean" to be held in Barcelona from 28 to 30 October 2015.

The event will feature parallel tracks, each focusing on the role of specific actors including industries, entrepreneurs, civil society organisations, big companies and financing institutions.

The event will host an Award on Eco-design funded by the Catalan government. The award includes a Euro-Mediterranean category to which companies, professionals and entrepreneurs from the region will be able to submit their proposals.

The **SWITCH-MED** sustainable consumption and production programme aims to promote a switch of the Mediterranean economies towards sustainable consumption and production patterns and green economy, including low emission development, through demonstration and dissemination of methods that improve resource and energy efficiency. It also seeks to minimise the environmental impacts associated to the life cycle of products and services, and, as opportune, to promote renewable energy. (EU Neighbourhood 24-02-2015)

SHORTS

Angola - Foreign currency import/export
By means of BNA Order No. 1/2015, of 29 January 2015, the import/export/re-export of foreign currency, including travelers' cheques, by banks may be carried out without BNA's prior approval, although the operations must be notified to BNA in accordance with Annex I and II of the Order.

Angola - Limits to exposure to foreign exchange and gold risk
The regulations on limits to exposure of BNA-supervised financial institutions to foreign exchange and gold risk were recently updated by BNA's Order No. 2/2015, of 29 January 2015, which entered into force on the same day. The Order establishes that, as a rule, foreign exchange exposure is limited to 20% of statutory own funds for borrowing and lending operations, including off-balance sheet items in its calculation, which may result in liabilities in, or indexed to, foreign currency and gold, further stipulating that foreign exchange and gold risk must be tallied in national currency, using the average exchange rate for that day.

Suicide bombings at bus stations in two major commercial centres in northern Nigeria have killed at least 27 people, police and hospital sources say. Nigeria's President Jonathan Goodluck blamed militant Islamist group Boko Haram for the bombings. (© EU, 2015)

In a live TV interview with *Rai Tre*, HRVP Federica Mogherini discusses the situation in Libya, warning there is a *"perfect mix"* ready to explode. She confirms the real risks for Italy from the ISIS *"franchising",* and outlines the diplomatic role played by the Italian government to keep dialogue open. Italy has had *a "leading role"* in dialogue, she says. Ms Mogherini says that a *"single talking-partner"* is needed in Libya. (© EU, 2015)

In an interview with *Ouest France,* Maud Arnould, advisor to Commissioner Neven Mimica, explains why the EU proclaimed 2015 the year of development. She claims that this is aimed at informing all EU citizens about what Europe does in the world, and notably in emerging countries. Indeed, Europe is the world's main provider of funds for development, with close to 50 billion euros allocated each year. The EU signs contractual agreements with African countries for the implementation of cooperation programmes for a period of seven years. (© EU, 2015)

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND COMMUNICATIONS

Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda -
http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2015/pr1572.htm

Ghana, South Africa - http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/cat/longres.aspx?sk=42737.0

Gabon - http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/cat/longres.aspx?sk=42736.0

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