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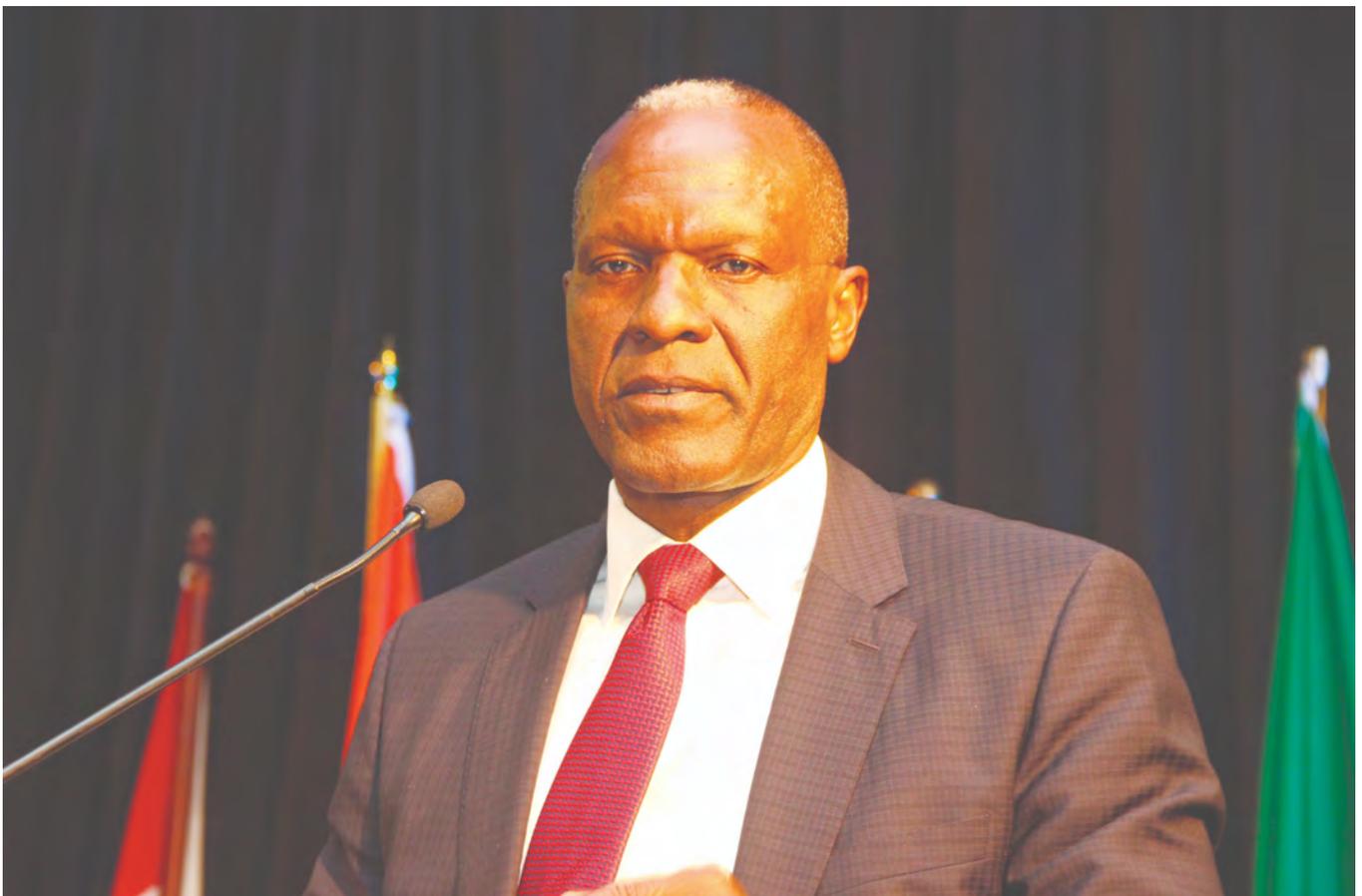
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BySouthern Times -- ⌚ Apr27,2018 -- 💬 0 Comments

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## Magreth Nunuhe

Windhoek – The controversial marine phosphate mining project came under the spotlight again at the Namibian mining industry review last week with the Chamber of Mines intimating that it was a “missed opportunity in the fight against poverty after a moratorium was placed on phosphate mining.

The Chamber, which maintains that phosphate mining and the fishing industry could coexist, said it was a pity that no jobs could be created if marine phosphate mining could not take off even with the most stringent environmental conditions attached to the clearance certificate, which could allow for “an environment conducive for all sectors of the economy to coexist”.

Namibia’s Minister of Mines and Energy, Tom Alweendo, echoed the Chamber’s sentiments saying if phosphate mining and the fishing industry could coexist, “then we should do both” in order to create more employment and reduce poverty.

“We need to find finalisation to this matter,” he said while cautioning that it was difficult to act in one way or the other, as a court case was still pending.

In September 2016, the Namibian government issued a clearance certificate to Namibian Marine Phosphate to extract phosphate in the sea. The company is 85 percent owned by an Arabian billionaire, Mohammed Al Barwani, while well-known Namibian businessman, Knowledge Katti, owns 15 percent, through his company Havana Investments,

However, following an uproar from the fishing industry, environmentalists and the public, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism retracted the environmental clearance certificate two months later, resulting in Namibian Marine Phosphate challenging the ministry’s decision in the High Court.

Environmentalists and fishing companies argue that marine phosphate mining would hurt the ocean’s ecosystem, which could take long to recover natural resources once destroyed, while there is a good reason why this type of activity has not been done elsewhere in the world.

While phosphate mining remains a contentious subject, the Chamber’s President Johan Coetzee, presented a review of the mining industry, saying that the industry grew by 12.2 percent in 2017, from a contraction of 5 percent in 2016.

This, he said, was mainly driven by an increase in the output of diamonds, uranium and gold.

“Despite persistently low uranium prices throughout 2017, uranium production increased by 22 percent in 2017 from 2016 due to new production from Husab Uranium Mine,” he said, adding that gold production continued to improve due to better-than-expected ore grades mined from B2Gold Mine. Zinc concentrate production also increased by 20.86 percent.

However, lead concentrate and refined zinc decreased by 6.37 and 1.42 percent, respectively.

“The Chamber expects continued growth in the mining sector largely owing to an improvement in commodity prices in 2017,” Coetzee said.

He added that renewed appetite for lithium, rare earths, cobalt, zinc, copper and gold has triggered exploration activities and interest in Namibia and in particular, lithium projects have begun to gain momentum in the past two years.

On the downside, Coetzee said the outlook was not without risks as a stronger local exchange rate could potentially offset revenue gains from improved commodity prices.

Some of the highlights of mining in Namibia are a renewed interest in Namibia’s exploration sector, while the future of Namibia’s diamond mining is increasingly being directed to off-shore mining, with the mv SS Nujoma, which was officially inaugurated in June 2017.

On his part, Alweendo said he wanted to see increased investment in the mining sector as it plays an important role in socio-economic development.

“When we do that socio-economic development can have more people employed in the mining sector. We need to explore and open more mines to enhance development in the mining sector,” he pointed out.

He emphasised the need for mining legislation to be sufficiently attractive so that it does not prohibit investment in the sector.

“It is also important to make sure our regulatory framework is clear but also comprehensive and that it is also being monitored and being implemented in a very even-handed manner,” he said.

Alweendo further stressed the need to strengthen value chain management to add value to minerals mined in Namibia.

“We still need to find a solution together, this will build resilience in the local economy,” he maintained, adding that the deterioration in the government’s fiscal position had exposed the sector’s heavy dependence on government.

He said the economy needs to be transformed structurally so that even when there are problems with the fiscs, the mining sector can be integrated into the main sector.

“The value addition committee should finalise its study to see what is possible and not possible. At times we take too long just for us to come back and say it’s not possible, let this not happen,” he said.

The minister also highlighted the need for mining companies to uphold ethics in the sector. The Chamber of Mines also held the Namibia Mining Expo and Conference from April 25 to 26, 2018.

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