

Malawi: Dream fades for inland port project

NSANJE: Visitors arriving in Nsanje, the sleepy capital of Malawi's southernmost district, are greeted by a large yellowing billboard announcing: "The dream becomes reality. Nsanje Port opens October 2010." But those who go to the port will find little more than a concrete quay with a couple of dozen mooring posts, and a few fishermen manoeuvring crude dug-out canoes through the murky brown waters of the Shire River.



For former President Bingu wa Mutharika, the construction of an inland port at Nsanje meant linking land-locked Malawi with the Indian Ocean port of Chinde, 238 kilometres away in neighbouring Mozambique, through the Shire-Zambezi Waterway project. The aim was to reduce the high costs of importing and exporting goods by road via Malawi's commercial capital, Blantyre and the Mozambican port city of Beria - a round trip of about 1,200 kilometres.

But Mutharika's enthusiasm for the project was not matched by his counterpart in Mozambique. As Mutharika presided over the official opening of the port in October 2010, flanked by former Zambian president Rupiah Banda and Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe, he had to admit to the crowd gathered to witness the arrival of the first barge that the Mozambican government had called for environmental and feasibility studies before it would allow any barges to navigate the Zambezi River portion of the waterway, which flows through its territory.

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