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While commodity prices on the international market have not fared well this year, Zambia has continued to record high grade copper on an annual basis.

Coupled with falling commodity prices, the country has been grappling with power outages which to some extent have led to challenges in the mining sector.

But against all odds, Zambia has continued to raise the bar in as far as the production of quality copper is concerned.

Zambia, Africa's second largest producer of copper, generates 4.5 per cent of the world's high grade copper annually.

Globally, the nation is the world's seventh largest copper producer.

The country has been mining copper for over 80 years with operations being focused mainly on the Copperbelt Province.

The attention is however slowly shifting to North-western Province which has also recorded tracks of copper, with a variety of grades.

Copper output in Zambia, was recorded at 710,000 tonnes in 2015 compared to 708,259 tonnes the previous year.

Statistics indicate that the country's copper production increased last year, despite the power challenge and the falling copper prices on the international market and this has been attributed mainly to the coming on stream of Kalumbila Mine, owned by First Quantum Minerals (FQM).

Mines and Mineral Development Minister Christopher Yaluma says the copper industry is still firm and a key player in the Zambian economy even as the industry faces tax

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changes, falling prices and an acute power deficit.

Mr Yaluma says the future of the copper industry in Zambia still remains firm and key, though production is low due to low copper prices, which is currently at US\$4.932 per tonne

He notes that in 2015, copper production stood at 710,000 tonnes and this year, there was hope that it would increase further with the coming in of new mines.

"The future of the copper industry in Zambia still remains firm and key, though production is low due to low copper prices.

And we will still depend on copper, so what we are doing is to ensure that we do not let the industry fold because of low copper prices which we have seen as now going up.

Mr Yaluma projected that this year copper production might increase to 800,000 tonnes.

"In 2015, copper production stood at 710,000 tonnes and this year, we hope with the new mines which have come in and those that are not producing to the fullest, we might harness beyond 800,000," he says.

He said the Government had put in place various initiatives to ensure that operations in copper production were sustained.

Government was also helping out the mining companies which were failing to pay their mineral royalty taxes, so that they can defer the payments in order to sustain the industry.

"We are also helping out mining companies which are failing to pay their mineral royalty taxes, so that they can defer the payments in order to sustain the industry. What will happen is when the prices go up, we will again see new investors coming in to invest in the mining industry," he says.

Mr Yaluma says Governments goal was to provide an enabling environment and encourage open dialogue with investors.

He is of the view that the mining sector will have performed beyond what anyone could have projected with the country already seeing production increase.

The Chamber of Mines of Zambia (CMZ) communications manager Talent Ng'andwe said the increase of copper production last year was mainly on account of the 32,952 tonnes of copper which Kalumbila Minerals contributed when it came on stream in February.

Mr Ng'andwe says the contribution of Kalumbila Mine was a plus, not only to the mining industry but the economy as a whole.

Reuters recently reported that China's copper arrivals hit a record in March, pushing up total imports by 30.1 per cent in the first quarter from last year, after price differentials between domestic and international markets favoured imports in previous months.

Arrivals of anode, refined copper, copper alloys and semi-finished copper products reached 1.43 million tonnes in January to March.

Imports were at a monthly record of 570,000 tonnes versus the previous record of 536,000 tonnes in January 2014.

That rose 35.7 per cent from the Lunar New Year holiday month of February and 39

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per cent higher from a year earlier.

March imports also reflected that importers had scheduled more shipments for expected seasonal demand in April and May.

Zambia's copper industry still looks bright.

Mining, being the backbone of the country, with vast mineral wealth and a strong focus on infrastructure, Zambia remains a great place to invest.

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