

MOZAMBIQUE: Black market brings floggings, executions

Mozambique has decided to extend the death penalty and to introduce flogging for economic crimes.

Harsh new measures have been introduced in Mozambique in an attempt to stamp out the rampant black-market.

In March the Mozambican Parliament, the People's Assembly, approved amendments to the 1979 "Law on crimes

against the security of the people and the people's state." The effect of this was to widen the scope of offences for which the death penalty can be imposed. Previously the death penalty had been reserved for crimes which had involved loss of life: up till now those who had faced firing squads had been anti-government rebels of South African supported outfits such as the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR), found guilty of crimes such as terrorism, espionage, armed rebellion.

But with the amendments, cases of serious economic crimes are explicitly included as crimes against security and can be tried by the country's Military

Revolutionary Tribunal. The big fish of the black-market (or *candonga*, to give it its popular Mozambican name), now face death by firing squad if they get caught.

Within a month of the amendments' passage through the People's Assembly, the first death sentences under these new provisions were handed down. A week later, on April 9, the executions were carried out in public, in front of a crowd consisting of several hundred Maputo political activists. The occasion was given massive coverage by the Mozambican Press and radio. The intention was clear: the people were to be assured that the state would use the utmost severity against "unarmed bandits" as well as armed ones.

For months now, the government has stressed that the activities of black-marketeers are analogous to those of the MNR rebels. The latter have guns and the former do not — but "both suck the blood of the people," as Maputo mayor Gaspar Zimba put it. They acted in an effective alliance — the same punishments should therefore be meted out to both.

A second effect of the well-publicised executions was a warning to the black-marketeers themselves — they were not to be left in any doubt as to the possible consequences of their activities.

Six people were executed on April 9. Goolam Nabi, a businessman of Asian origin, was found guilty of running a large-scale smuggling operation in prawns (Mozambique's major foreign exchange earner). A train driver, José Maconderero, had arranged the robbery of sugar and maize that his train was carrying from Swaziland to Maputo. He and his accomplices had planned to sell the cargo on the black-market. To rub home the lesson that, as far as the Mozambican state is concerned, there is no difference between black-marketeering and armed banditry, two members of the MNR were sentenced to death at the same time, as were two men guilty of armed robbery and homicide.

Attempts were made to save Goolam Nabi's life. The Islamic community in Portugal wrote to President Samora Machel seeking clemency. The Moslem community in Mozambique sent a deputation to the President. Several embassies in Maputo tried to intervene. Some of Nabi's relatives in Britain contacted British Labour MPs, asking them to take up the case.

Perhaps these efforts might have been more successful had they been made on behalf of all those sentenced to death. But the interventions on behalf of Goolam Nabi alone were interpreted by the Mozambican authorities as "racist and discriminatory," and were turned down.

A second draconian law was published on March 31. It introduced public floggings into Mozambique. Again, the main target of the law seems to be black-

marketeers. All forms of illicit trading will now be punished by flogging in addition to whatever prison sentence the courts may decree. Similarly, flogging is mandatory for all security offences (other than those which carry the death penalty), for child-molesting and armed robbery.

A further clause in the law gives courts the discretion to order flogging for a wide range of other offences, including rape, drug-trafficking and petty theft. The first floggings under the new law were carried out in the port city of Quelimane against two dockworkers caught pilfering.

The law also empowers courts to order or to forbid offenders from living in specified parts of the country. This will probably be used to deport black-marketeers from the urban areas and force them to live, for example, in the sparsely-populated but potentially rich northern province of Niassa.

It is claimed that the new measures have mass popular support (though they have aroused disquiet among at least some of the intelligentsia). Certainly when the daily paper *Noticias* carried out one of its regular spot surveys on this issue it found nobody in disagreement — though some of its respondents expressed hopes that the law would not be abused (and therefore implicitly feared that it might be).

The message both of the replies to *Noticias'* questions and of the speeches at a rally held in support of the new law, was that flogging would be an effective deterrent. Prison sentences alone, it was said, were ineffective — they merely amounted to the state giving free board and lodging to offenders, a sort of rest period in between spells of criminal



Mozambican fishing boats: a businessman was executed for large-scale smuggling in prawns — the major foreign exchange earner

activity. There was great confidence that public floggings would reduce criminality (though it should be noted that the incidence of violent crime in Maputo is relatively low), and would get rid of the black-market.

Of course some black-marketeers may decide that the profit they make is no longer worth the risk (and it is true that immediately after the law was published there were no signs of obvious illegality in Maputo's central market). But others may draw a different conclusion from the same logic and simply put their prices up — they will, in effect, be charging danger money.

In the short-term firing squads and floggings may satisfy popular demands for justice and revenge — but they do not remove the conditions which breed the black-market ●