

MOZAMBIQUE

How Machel backdates his 'justice'

by José Ramalho



The execution by firing squad in Maputo of ten alleged criminals including a Portuguese national on March 31 is seen as a panic reaction by the Frelimo regime to the escalation of guerrilla warfare by the Resistência Nacional

Mozambicana (RNM) — highlighted by the blowing up of the Beira oil depot (TTP April 6).

The Portuguese Mozambique-born Rui Manuel Nunes da Silva (38) was executed under the February 28 law introducing the death penalty — and he died for alleged crimes said to have been committed in 1976.

Nothing in the 52-article new law says that it has retroactive effect. Five days are allowed for appeal and the People's Supreme Tribunal, which has not been set up yet, has 15 days to give a decision. All this was ruthlessly pushed aside and "instant justice" took its course.

For Portugal, which so far had been following the Christian principle of turning the other cheek to President Samora Machel's slaps, the execution was the drop that made the cup overflow.

Countless Portuguese have been killed, imprisoned without trial, stripped of their rights, persecuted and expelled at 24 hours notice without protest from a government which bent over backwards to humour Machel's arrogance and utter contempt for the former colonial power.

Spurred by public indignation, the Portuguese government delivered a lengthy protest note to the Mozambique embassy in Lisbon expressing "surprise" that its ambassador in Maputo had been denied the opportunity to offer "minimum means of defence" to Silva.

The Socialist Party, which ironically was the prime mover in putting Machel in power and has remained his enthusiastic supporter since the days of Portuguese "instant decolonisation", tabled a motion in Parliament condemning the execution.

But a tougher Social Democratic Party motion calling for the suspension of diplomatic relations with Maputo was outvoted by Socialist, communist and extreme-left members.

To Machel's dictatorial mentality, Portuguese protests came as an intolerable insult. He promptly cancelled a meeting with visiting Portuguese Industry Minister Alvaro Barreto, a symbolic gesture as negotiations with the Maputo regime invariably end with the Portuguese returning home emptyhanded.

Observers fear that the March 31 executions may have been only a curtain-raiser. From now on, they fear, scores of Frelimo prisons and concentration camps will become death rows.