

A sea of turbulence awaits Dr Caetano during London visit

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Dr Marcello Caetano, who arrives in London today on his first visit to Britain as Prime Minister of Portugal, does not look like a person who would want to plunge into a sea of turbulence. A man who has been a professor most of his 66 years, and has written works on constitutional law, and whose manner is modest almost to the point of diffidence is not the obvious candidate for stepping into the glare of controversy as emotional as that over Mozambique.

Dr Caetano, who was Rector of Lisbon University from 1959 to 1962, has been in Britain before on academic visits. This time his visit is not academic in any sense. Though it was meant originally to round off an exchange of pleasantries to mark the 600th anniversary of the alliance with Britain, and his daughter Senhorinha Ana Maria Caetano will be a graceful figure by his side, the whole occasion has become a sensitive test of that alliance, and of the Prime Minister's resilience in public office.

Dr Caetano's diffidence is, in fact, misleading. When questions are thrown at him this week on Portugal's system of government and overseas policy, his answers will not be hesitant. He sees the situation in Southern Africa today as being a racist war against the whites, not against the blacks.

Talking to a group of journalists in Lisbon this month, he said that differences of principle existed between the Portuguese territories and the others in Southern Africa which were criticized in company with Portugal, but all were in the same boat. The aim of their opponents was to expel the white man.

If the existence in itself of a ruling white minority disqualified a country from evolving, or from being given or taking independence, Dr Caetano argued, then the United States would not have become independent; nor would the former British Dominions or Latin American countries.

Dr Caetano has some first-hand knowledge of the territories, beginning with the time when he was appointed Minister for Overseas Territories by Dr Salazar in 1944. In 1945 he spent five months there. He was a member of the Portuguese Government again from 1955 to 1958, and then for 10 years stayed outside the main stream of political life.

In 1969, after Dr Salazar had been taken ill, he became head of government, and seemed at first to be moving away slightly from the long-standing Salazar dictum of "stand fast" both in overseas and domestic problems. Taking "evolution without revolution" as his slogan, he has introduced assemblies overseas with expanded though not full powers.

But as guerrilla and terrorist activity has intensified in Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea—though not at present in Angola—so the attitude of conservative groups in Portugal has hardened.

Dr Caetano has been back to Africa since he became Prime Minister, and he gives no sign of his own faith in Portugal's position wavering. But at a time like this, amid the furor over reported massacres in Mozambique, he knows that there must be some Portuguese who are troubled by a Vietnam-like sense of doubting whether the involvement in Africa is worth it after hundreds of years.

Travelling on the shores of the Indian Ocean, I often paused at Portuguese forts still standing complete on promontory or on coastline, usually as historical relics, but sometimes still in government service in territories no longer Portuguese.

What do they signify nowadays? That question always arose in my mind, and it did so again in Lisbon this month when I saw the larger originals of those forts and mansions.

The birthplace of Vasco da Gama, one of those seafarers, is at Sines, a village on the coast south of Lisbon, and he would be very surprised if he knew what was in store for it. He embarked in vessels of about 100 tons; but now the Portuguese have plans to enable foreign tankers of up to 500,000 tons—and in time even 1m tons—to tie up in a new port at Sines.

This is part of a regional development scheme which is still only on paper, but is a reminder that events are on the move in metropolitan Portugal too. The affairs Dr Caetano will want to discuss in London are certainly not all of Africa. Europe, emigration, and a political election later this year are on his mind.

The clamour, however, will be about Africa, and it will continue after Dr Caetano has come and gone. If the guerrillas' claims to control large parts of the areas have any substance, they as well as the Portuguese will have to help investigations into alleged massacres.

Senior officers and officials in Lisbon say that small areas in Mozambique and Port Guinea are under dual control, but in Angola "not an inch" is under the guerrillas.

It is a murky business. Journalists can do their best as they probe around in the bush, but they cannot spend months questioning hundreds of men and women, as an investigation should. The United Nations, which has spurned invitations from Portugal before, might this time take a hand. Some interesting facts, including the strength of Chinese interference from Tanzania should come to light.

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