

MOZAMBIQUE-SA RELATIONS

The ruins of Nkomati

Government's decision to halt recruitment of Mozambican workers in retaliation for Maputo's real or imagined tolerance of continued African National Congress (ANC) and SA Communist Party (SACP) activity on its soil amounts to abrogation of the Nkomati Accord.

It also brings to an abrupt end the talks on renegotiating a labour agreement with Mozambique and, according to Natal University economist Alan Whiteside, contravenes the existing agreement which the Frelimo government inherited when Mozambique became independent in 1975.

Government's move came in the wake of the landmine blast near the Mozambique border last Monday, in which six South African soldiers were injured. The incident was followed with a warning of unmistakable belligerence from Defence Minister Magnus Malan that there would be reprisals. They came with unexpected swiftness.

In a joint communiqué issued last Wednesday, SA's ministers of Foreign Affairs, Manpower, Mineral and Energy Affairs and Home Affairs said a diplomatic note had been sent to Maputo announcing that no further labour recruitment from Mozambique would be permitted.

The ministers said this was a result of the activities of the ANC and SACP "who are responsible for the continuing deterioration of the security situation on the common border with the RSA, and who, according to information ... are still operating from Mozambique."

This development coincided with reports of an intensified Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) offensive which drew an admission from Maputo that four towns — Zumbo and Mutarare in Tete province, Caia in Sofala, and Milange in Zambezia province — had been taken by the MNR. It was the first time Mozambique had acknowledged that control of certain areas had been lost. This indicates that Machel's ragged regime is *in extremis*.

Some South African newspapers, which sometimes accurately reflect the way the SADF is thinking, intimate that the onslaught against Machel's government has become so effective that he may soon sue for peace — and be forced, his sword broken across his knee, to negotiate for a place in a coalition government of "conciliation."

This begs the question how Mozambique, fighting for its very life, can maintain its side of the Nkomati Accord and ensure that its territory, nearly as big as SA's, is not used to launch attacks against the Republic. Of course, that is not Pretoria's problem. Nor is there any evidence that Maputo has asked

Pretoria for forbearance, understanding, or even assistance to overcome its difficulties.

Leaders of the Frontline states — Angola, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Botswana and Mozambique — met in Maputo last weekend to discuss the crisis. At the conclusion of the summit the states accused SA of preparing for "war against the peoples of southern Africa" and that South African commando units had been infiltrated "to carry out acts of terrorism in Mozambique." The South African Defence Force responded to this saying it was "typical of what the defence force has come to expect from such conferences," adding that SA wants to live in peace with its neighbours but will not tolerate terrorist attacks from neighbouring states.

According to Manpower director general Piet van der Merwe, some 70 000 Mozambicans are legally employed in SA. In addition, there may be nearly double that number of illegal workers. By far the majority of the legals — about 51 700 — are employed in the mining industry, with most others working in the agricultural sector in the eastern Transvaal.

In terms of the labour embargo, these workers will be able to work out their contracts. On Monday, Van der Merwe had talks with eastern Transvaal farmers where it was decided that their Mozambican employees would be given the opportunity to apply for temporary work permits until November 30. The permits will be valid for a year.

The black National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has condemned the decision saying it is an "outrageous and unwarranted retaliatory action." Said a NUM spokesman: "This action is purely part of an attempt to defend apartheid in the wake of concerted international pressure against the regime, and is not a solution to the South African question and peace in the sub-continent." The union, which has previously threatened to strike if government were to repatriate foreign workers, is meeting later this week to discuss how it will react.

The Chamber of Mines said it "regretted" government's decision, but that it could "obviously not evaluate the security considerations on which the decision was based." The chamber said it "earnestly hopes negotiations between the South African and Mozambican governments will lead to an early return to normality. A long-standing relationship exists between the South African mining industry and the people of Mozambique and it is hoped that this relationship can soon be restored, to their mutual advan-

tage."

Errol Holmes, general manager of The Employment Bureau of Africa (Teba), the chamber's recruitment arm, said about 1 100 workers who were contracted before the announcement of the embargo would be taking up employment in the mining industry and that a further 1 000 workers whose contracts have been approved would still be coming in.

According to Whiteside, who is an expert on migrant labour, the existing labour agreement between SA and Mozambique provides for up to 60 000 Mozambicans to be employed in the mining industry. Once this level is reached, the numbers can be reduced by not more than 2 000 workers a year. Government's decision clearly breaks this agreement.

Says Whiteside: "It is hard to understand how SA can justify an action that is going to create further suffering and hardship in a neighbouring country at a time when that country was at least prepared to live with, if not like, SA." But a Manpower department spokesman made it plain that security considerations override all others in this case. He said: "It would seem to me that if you have a fire burning, you first put it out and then you worry about getting the eggs out of the kitchen."

The Mozambican news agency, AIM, has estimated that the decision to expel Mozambican mineworkers at the end of their contracts will lead to a loss of about \$50m a year in foreign exchange. This is about a third of Mozambique's foreign earnings. According to AIM, Mozambique's foreign exchange earnings totalled about \$180m last year. Of this, \$57,5m originated in SA, either as miners' remittances or as rail and port dues paid on South African traffic.

AIM reports say the Maputo government has already drawn up measures to find work for returning miners. The programme involves the rehabilitation of certain industries, an increased supply of agricultural tools, guaranteed supplies of basic goods for returning migrants, and the supply of the necessary raw materials to keep essential consumer goods industries functioning. External financing will be needed if the programme is to be implemented, reports AIM. But even with this, it is highly improbable Mozambique will be able to provide employment for returning migrants.

Prospects for a normalisation of the situation hinge on developments in the security sphere. "If the security matters can be cleared up and negotiations take place, that could alter the present situation," says Van der Merwe. ■