Machel's death

SOUTH Africans were shocked to learn of the death of President Samora Machel in an air crash. Although relations between Mozambique and South Africa were deteriorating in recent weeks, there was a time, with the signing of the Nkomati Accord, when it appeared as if they might improve. Now it appears the war is going on as between two countries. It is too early to say whether Machel's death will have any effect on the situation. But its timing and its victories in the north are its own, not anyone else's.

Indeed, even before his death, Machel was found itself in the unenviable position of being charged with helping the rebels while at the same time assuring a cease-fire agreement for the war against guerrilla attacks, and seeking to stimulate such activity, as was available between the two countries.

It would have been quite schizophrenic to have fought against Machel while at the same time being friendly with his regime. Yet it was that kind of madness from which South Africa was said to be suffering. For even though Pretoria itself harbored the widely rejected notion of the activities of the African National Congress, operating from Mozambique, it was clear that the Machel regime's provocation that no signatory would allow its territory to be used for attacks on the other's territory.

Thus relations soured, with South Africa hinting that it might strike at ANC targets as it had before.

At the same time, as a reprisal for a landmine blast near the border that injured six South African soldiers, Pretoria banned further recruitment of Mozambican workers and announced it would send some, once those contracts expired, those who were already here. Yet with all the rancour that had been generat-
ed, there remained a chance that after the death of Presi-
dent Machel was a leader without whom there could be no peace in Mozambique. There is little doubt that his death will intensify; the best scenario as far as South Africa was concerned was for the MNR and Frelimo to come to some form of agreement.

There was always the hope that President Ma-

chel, who had seen Socialism fail and his country dishonorably expelled from the effects of civil war but the effects of economic policies that had failed, would take a pragmatic approach and that at least for the duration of the civil war that would allow for national reconciliation.

Now he is dead — and the future is more clouded than ever.

There are some who will hope that the MNR will now take over the country. There will be others who will believe that Frelimo will remain in power. For the moment, the other Frontline States will be tempted to throw their weight behind the Maputo re-
gime, since it remains to its disadvantage that the war will intensify. It is too early to say what will happen, except that the time is ripe for a change. The uncertainty that will affect Southern Africa as a whole, not just Mozambique.

In the meantime, Machel's death was untimely and further destabilizes the region.

Whatever one thought of his policies, he was a man of international stature and a great leader of his people.

And in order to be a peaceful outcome of the civil war, and a return to good neighbour-
liness with South Africa, it required his prag-
matic approach, so suddenly displayed at Nkomati, to bring this about. Mozambique and Southern Africa will miss him.